

Jason and the Astronauts

JOHN HEILMAN

RED ANVIL PRESS

OAKLAND, OREGON

Copyright © 2008 John Heilman

All rights reserved.

One

The Trip South

Bruce called it their “junket.” It was spring break, and the two snowbirds from New Jersey were migrating to the forests of Brazil. For Nick Casperson it could be a career boost. His observations at the SETI Center two weeks previously might be earthshaking.

A more mundane explanation was probable. It may have been a piece of “space trash” overcome by the earth’s gravity, causing it to depart the orbiting graveyard of senescent satellites and plunge into the forest. More likely still it may have been a meteorite, a chunk of rock stripped from a comet.

Nick was drawn to the dramatic when it came to long-shot expeditions. At heart, he was an explorer. He had followed the Roswell story since childhood. The scientist in him scoffed at the tale, but the dreamer in him tugged at his curiosity. Those in search of extraterrestrial intelligence use science for their job, but like Verne, Bradbury, and Asimov at times they stray into a fictional world, for the sake of self-preservation.

Bruce Bonner had been his friend since kindergarten. Like binary stars they were tethered to each other, now teaching as colleagues at the same college. Nick asked Bruce to accompany him on the junket. Bruce’s charm and easy manner were qualities that complemented his more serious companion. Their relationship was free of the encumbrance of competition or envy. They shared a wordless understanding and mutual regard that was almost symbiotic.

Nick understood Bruce’s vulnerabilities, including his ongoing bout with discipline. He also knew that the forest would attract Bruce like a bee. Where one might stop for the sights, smell the roses, and dally in the excursion, the other was clearly serious, goal-driven, and worked to a schedule. It was as if each needed these traits in the other, for team balance. It had been this way from the point of memory, growing as boys into classmates in the schools of anthracite Pennsylvania, then to fellowship, as men.

Physically, they weren’t at all close. Nick was the rounder of the two, from the face down. He was of moderate height and medium build. He sported a sand-colored brush haircut. His person in fact exhibited no distinguishing feature. He was average in appearance and could easily pass unnoticed in a crowd, and usually did. He shunned attention, as well. Bruce was half a foot taller than his expedition leader. His angular attractiveness carried from his face, literally to his feet. His sleekly delineated muscles enhanced a carriage that was both confident and flexible. He was athletic. His hair was

dark brown and full. His lips were relaxed and the subtle squint of his brown eyes suggested a hint of sarcasm behind his relaxed manner.

Officially, Bruce was an instructor at the college. His biology labs were popular with students, and his sense of adventure had stretched the chancellor's permissiveness. In fact, his relationship with Throckmorton was strained, and it was only through Nick's insistence that Bruce was included. To travel with his friend, and perhaps help him make a significant discovery would be reward enough. To spend nine magical days in the paradise of a diverse Brazilian rain forest had been a lifelong dream.

Something violent happened on the plateau north of Manaus, the capital city of Amazonia and the world's former rubber Mecca. The region did not lie on that part of the so-called Ring of Fire, known as the Pacific Rim, where the Nazca and South American plates meet along the west coast of South America. An earthquake was unlikely. Besides, the Survey's seismographic recording showed neither P nor S waves characteristic of quakes. Instead, the record suggested a surface shock as the initial disturbance, with ripples followed by blips, indicating fallout. Whatever it was, it had set off the sensors that comprise the Geological Network in South and Central America. Bruce impishly remarked it might have been Chuck Yeager breaking the sound barrier for the Brazilian Air Force. He saved that for Nick, after finishing his interview with Throckmorton. Nick appreciated it was impossible to examine in detail the records of every geologic event around the globe, particularly in remote spots. The oceans swallow up most extraterrestrial matter. His own interests were tuned both to the radio universe and to highlighted data garnered from the U.S. Geological Survey.

What riveted Nick's attention most was a report from the huge radio telescope at Arecibo, Puerto Rico. The Garden State Observatory and its Center devoted to the search for extraterrestrial intelligence was located on the Jersey side of the Delaware River watershed in the mountains. The Center possessed a twenty-inch optical refractor and a small radio dish with which it participated in the all-sky survey known as the Argos Project. The Center also had access to data from the SETI Institute in California.

The institute provided data from three radio observatories: the Very Large Array in New Mexico, Arecibo's huge stationary dish in Puerto Rico, and the 2.3-acre moveable Greenbank dish in the mountains of West Virginia.

The mysterious finding that evening in March was a fleeting signal picked up at Arecibo. Its Doppler analysis showed a "blue shift," indicating the source was moving toward the earth at a velocity of around Mach 3. The 10-kilohertz signal was picked up virtually at the same time as the shockwave in the Brazilian forest was recorded. Were the two observations connected? Were they coincidental? Was one an artifact? Were they both artifacts? Double skepticism was wagered against the miniscule chance of a historic event.

Nick's fascination with Roswell had inspired his interest in the U.S. Geological Survey and earth surface events. He felt he wouldn't have much competition for this hunt, since most scientists scoffed at the idea of alien visits to earth. They made the argument of distance, and it was compelling. The universe was thought to have a radius of 10 billion light-years. Over two hundred planets had been discovered, orbiting stars fifty to two hundred light-years away, suggesting there were millions more. The star 61 Cygni was

only ten light-years away. Flying a spaceship with current technology at a cruising speed of ten miles a second, or 1/18,600th the speed of light, it would take two thousand centuries to get to this star. We'd have to find a wormhole or develop a speedster that would close in on c , the speed of light. Our modern spaceships were jalopies, in comparison.

But maybe others had solved this limitation. If they've come, they likely hadn't spotted our signal. Our calling cards aboard the Pioneer and Voyager probes had now gone thirty light-years' distance, give or take a few billion miles. Our oldest radio broadcasts had traveled out roughly ninety light-years. Frank Drake, the father of radio astronomy, predicted a half-century ago that many planets existed beyond our solar system. This had now been confirmed. Physicist Enrico Fermi once asked over lunch, "Where is everybody?" He was referring to life that was both intelligent and technically advanced. Nick and hundreds of searchers like him still asked the same question. Search methods were improving with the pace of computers, doubling in capability every eighteen months. The Kepler space telescope slated for launch in 2008 would continuously look at one hundred thousand stars for the transit of an earth-sized planet. Still, it was a frustrating enterprise. A secret part of Nick was ablaze with confined anticipation.

It had been with some urgency that Nick approached the grant committee. The college accelerated their passport and visa processing. Vaccinations were arranged. The handling of paperwork was streamlined, and Nick agreed to complete his expedition within a narrow time frame. With competent guides using rivers for transport, he promised to produce some answers at the end of the nine-day spring break.

The travel agent for the college set up the itinerary. It involved a red-eye Varig flight from Miami to Rio de Janeiro. The following morning they would fly into the old delta town of Belem and meet their first host, a man called Raphael De Sanctos. Raphael was the owner operator of the Para River Transport Company and would fly them to the interior city of Manaus, where they would launch on the massive Rio Negro, with their second guide.

In its short history, the college had sent only two other faculty members to South America for research. An anthropologist once pawed around Machu Picchu for Incan remains and a poli-sci don had spent some time studying the origins of Chile's constitutional government.

The packing crate required two men to carry it. They checked the crate and their duffels through to Belem, on northern Brazil's Atlantic coast. Bruce's part of the gear was Spartan. To his minimal clothes list he added a three-piece fly rod. He had done this, mindful of once when he curbside checked his new graphite on the front end of a fly-in fishing trip to Canada only to have it pilfered, leaving him with only the memory of its impressive action. Bruce carefully tracked the duffels and crate into the hold on this first leg.

Once they were airborne Bruce signaled a neatly dressed stewardess. She waved off a nearby male attendant and appeared next to Nick, who occupied the aisle seat. She leaned over the space between them, causing Nick to sink back in his seat.

"May ah help you, sir?"

“Yes, you may. Can you please see to it that we have as much quiet as possible? The professor here is trying to study his charts.”

She smiled as she looked at Nick and the map spread across the empty seat. Then she turned and puffed up a pillow for an elderly woman across the aisle. Nick shot a quizzical glance at Bruce.

“Bruce, old man, don’t kid around with these people. You’ll scotch the whole trip. Flying these days is a serious thing, in case you’ve never flown before.”

“I know her Nick. She’s got a fine sense of humor.”

The man diagonally across the aisle turned and smiled faintly at both of them.

“You’d better know her very well.”

The prim stewardess returned.

“Mr. Bonner, would either you or the professor like a newspaper?”

“Would you happen to have *Vogue*, or *Mademoiselle*?”

“Ah am so sorry...no, but there are some fashions featured in the *Airline Magazine* in that pouch in front of you. If you need anything, just push that little button, up there. Oh, I’m sorry, Professor...”

She turned to attend a woman with a fussy child.

“Okay, Bruce, you’ve impressed me. Your reputation is probably international. By the way, what’s her name, and how long have you known her, if I may ask?”

“Christine. We chatted while I got held up in first class and you were stashing your carry-on. I went over the routine with her then. Told her you needed peace and serenity.”

“Thanks for your consideration. And she just played along?”

“Without fee, Kemo Sabe. Lighten up. I don’t want you to burn out, the first night.”

“Roger, Tonto.”

Bruce winked at Christine when she shot by en route to the galley.

Nick settled in to his review. The sector maps of the forest wilderness north of Manaus to the Venezuelan border included topographic relief, seasonal rain data, the names of rivers, parks, and escarpments, as well as general locales of indigenous peoples. Nick had looked over the inventory several times. It included a two-man tent with mosquito netting, sleeping bags, plastic sterile bottles for taking specimens and samples, two army collapsible shovels, a core sampler, survival kits, a half dozen disposable waterproof cameras and batteries plus Nick’s digital, rain gear, Dacron pants and aerated long-sleeved shirts, wide-brimmed hats, waterproofed and worn-in hiking boots, lots of sunblock and insect repellent, trail mix and dried fruit, a chart depicting regional poisonous snakes and frogs, Bruce’s fishing gear, a simple dictionary of Portuguese terms, a satellite transponder telephone, antibiotics and a first aid kit with anti-dysenterics, Tylenol with codeine pills, chloroquine, and a record of their recent vaccinations. The friendly folks at the local Public Health Department had dutifully shot them up with vaccines against cholera, yellow fever, hepatitis A, and typhoid.

Somewhere over the Smokey Mountains Nick fell asleep and Bruce began reading the book Nick loaned him. When they deplaned in Miami, Bruce was careful to assure Christine they had a most pleasant ride. She invited them both to fly her friendly sky again.

During their layover at Miami International, Bruce bought some polarized sunglasses, the kind that accentuates greens and yellows of the forest. He had used them while fishing once. For him they provided a poor-man with a cheap psychedelic experience, especially when accompanied with music. Bruce also brought his iPod. A swingman's hat bearing the logo of the Royal Flying Doctor's Service finished out his shopping spree at MIA. He drooped the hat around the back of his neck.

"Nice hat. Where did you find it?"

"It's from the Land of Oz."

"Have you brushed up your Strine?"

"Hey, for our next trip we can visit that satellite tracking station on the mountain out there in Alice."

"Let's make the best of this one first. I have just one request, so far."

"Yes, Professor?"

"Give the ladies a break on this trip, Casanova."

"Alrite mate, but the shielas are out there just the same. Do you know what you are asking, Monsenior?"

Nick nodded and rolled his eyes.

The flight to Rio was bumpy. Bruce read further into Tomlinson's *The Sea and the Jungle*. It was a little-known book that Nick plucked from his explorer collection. It had been written by a man who took his own dare. In 1909, he quit his newspaper job in Wales, kissed his wife and kids good-bye, and boarded a coal-loaded steamer bound for the remotest outposts of the upper Amazon. After three years of high adventure, he returned and resumed his former life. His family had remained in place. Nick assigned it neither as a hint, as Bruce had no family, nor as an endorsement of wanderlust. The autobiography contained a valid description of the region, and perhaps things hadn't changed that much. Bruce made heady progress before the chardonnay overtook him.

Nick was careful to keep a clear head. He mused most of his waking hours. He thought of the Roswell incident. He had written a paper about it in grade school, where it was then better received than any reference might bring at the college, today. The story had made a big splash at the time, before astronomers knew as much about the size of the Cosmos. He had once attended the annual alien jamboree in Roswell, which had become the "Groundhog Day" of the Southwest.

No matter which version one accepted, something crashed out there in the desert of New Mexico, in 1947. When a cowboy reported it to the town's sheriff, who in turn reported it to the military, things quickly got dicey. The Army condoned off the area and secrecy set in, big time. Two debris fields said to contain strange materials were officially attributed to a downed weather balloon. Nick knew that the Japanese during WWII sent seven

thousand high-flying “vengeance balloons” across the Pacific in the trade winds. A few hundred of these bomb-fitted balloons hit the U.S. and Canada. This was kept secret at the time to avoid providing feedback to the enemy. It was too much of a stretch to promote the idea that one of these descended after floating for three or four years around the earth.

The military promoted the weather-balloon version of the story and had stuck to it right up to the present. Project Mogul was a better explanation. This was an attempt to monitor Soviet nuclear testing using a string of constant altitude balloons with sensors. This wouldn’t explain the embellishments that grew up around the more dramatic version—the mortician who claimed the Army asked him for preservatives and inquired if he could make some caskets forty inches long. But it might explain the ultra-defensive posture by the military. The large-headed alien figures made popular on page and screen originated from a cartoonist’s rendering at the time. Then there was “Brownie’s” story. Brownie was a military guard who had been there and “told all” before he died in London many years later. The lack of a “the straight story” frustrated Nick. He hoped he could come up with definite and unequivocal answers this time, for the college. If asked about their mission, he instructed Bruce to simply say they were on a science project to collect meteorite fragments.

Nick’s thoughts shifted over to Vera and Jason while Bruce slept. Nick had never spent much time away from Vera and this would be the record. He wondered about his wife’s growing concern about Jason, their son. She had received a report from one of his teachers. The teacher said Jason was prone to “lecturing” the class. When Jason was confronted, he referred to the First Amendment. Jason cited something one of his father’s colleagues told him at his eighth-grade graduation party: “It’s not plastics anymore, young man. Plastics are here to stay. You’ve got to focus these days on context!”

Jason figured this to mean it was not enough to ask “the what” of something that was said, or printed. You had to know who said it, and why. In other words, use your noggin’ and stay skeptical. Don’t fall for a bunch of jive from anyone, and keep your brain in shape. Don’t use drugs. Nick was pleased enough with this and thought Vera was a little too sensitive. Jason’s mind was awakening and he was simply flexing his mental muscles in his classes. Nick felt that was a good thing, as he dozed away in the solitude of his thoughts.

Sunlight flashed across the aisle and roused them both. The sight of Rio’s harbor was breathtaking and unique. A towering statue of Christ stood high over the mountainside favelas. These makeshift dwellings, in turn, overlooked the metropolis that spread out to the sea below. Sugarloaf Mountain rose out of the surf, and tiny cable cars moved slowly to and fro, buffeted by blasts of wind blowing in from the sea. Sunbathers and swimmers spanning every shade of brown contrasted with the crystalline white beaches that rimmed the city.

Their transport to Brazil was a miracle when set against the ardor of pioneers and seafarers of old. Here was a new country, in a new continent. They would catch their flight to Belem in a few short hours and another adventure would unfold. They cleared immigration with ease, presenting their passports and certificates from the college with a

letter from the Department of the Interior in Brasilia. The letter spelled out the “rules of engagement” should they enter a national park.

Their flight to Belem was turbulent, once again. During the flight a European-looking man in a white silk suit accidentally splashed his coffee onto Nick’s notebook while swiveling out of the seat in front. In a quick and embarrassed exchange he produced an embroidered handkerchief, only to be trumped by Bruce’s bandana. Taking quick note of Nick’s maps and journal, the man handed over his card and apologized. Nick made light of the matter and smartly planted the card in his wallet but not before he glanced at it after the gentleman passed. Santiago Rus was a merchant and dealer in gemstones who lived in Santarem, a town upriver in the interior.

Belem was an old colonial city named after Bethlehem. It lay on the edge of Guajara Bay in the vast Amazon Delta. Each day here at the equator brought the same amount of daylight. They would have nine days, each with more than twelve hours of illumination. It was now late in the afternoon. The weather here was reported in terms of inches of rain, rather than the customary seasons they were used to at home. The rainy season was due to the Antarctic Current as it collided with warmer water masses to the north. Fortunate for their purpose, they had arrived on the back edge of the wet.

The plane banked for landing. They were awed by the sight of muddy tentacles of the Great River, reaching out to sea. The tidal bore was visible as the South Atlantic collided with the Amazon’s effluence. The vast forest to the west filled their view like a green ocean. They nodded to Rus as they stepped into the air of their new world...air that felt like a furnace, and breathed heavy, like a steam shower. At the baggage depot Bruce spotted a sign marked Bonnier & Caspin below the name Para River Transport. The sign was held high by a rotund little man. He was wearing sandals, white poppers, and a blue silk shirt. His trousers encompassed a robust girth and were doubly supported by red suspenders and a caiman-hide belt. A straw fedora crowned his jocund face. His teeth were highlighted by a gold-plated incisor, which flashed as he alternately spoke and smiled. As they approached, he seemed to bounce with satisfaction at such a ready meeting. He pumped their arms with gusto and introduced himself as...“Rawwfe...el.” He led them to a platform where they waited for their crate and duffels. He waved continuously at vendors and guards as he talked nonstop in a curious blend of broken English and Portuguese. He seemed to talk to himself, to his guests and to the host of porters in a continuous flow. The gear arrived unscathed, and the three men transported the complete inventory to the company’s Rover.

Raphael drove into the town, passing a government complex. He came to a sprawling market next to the port. A flotilla of dugouts and riverboats loaded with jute, cane, coffee, fruits, and nuts from the interior was moored along the causeway next the huge square. Ocean freighters loaded with timber and ore shared the waterway with native farmers and merchants. Bands were playing patriotic songs and lively dance music. Belem’s Carnival was a few weeks away, and the musicians were tuning up. The esplanade leading into the market was peppered with jugglers, minstrels, clowns, hustlers, and pimps, in addition to the gathering crowd.

Raphael double-parked his transfer and winked at a traffic guard. He escorted his charge into the marketplace. His short stature was no impediment to his tilted progress toward a

bistro on its far end. Confidently, he pushed his way through to the bar and signaled the waiter, barking out orders. He knew his patrons were hungry. Bowls of feijoada—black beans and pork stew—were quickly provided along with pao de queijo—cheese rolls. The bartender arrived with a pitcher of capirinha. The two travelers waited for Raphael's signal before they ate. Bruce took a thirsty rip at the limejuice laced with sugarcane liqueur. Their host was unable to suppress a laugh. He quickly pointed to the Hotel Cabral, where they would stay this night.

The next half hour was comprised of short stabs at small talk punctuated with serious eating. Travel generates a curious hunger. Nick checked his watch. Raphael had reserved their room and offered to help them check in. Bruce opted for another drink and told his mate he would be over in an hour or so. Nick suggested a curfew for his friend. He reminded Bruce they would have to have their wits in the morning. The two parted in the square with a fraternity handclasp. Nick disappeared with Raphael into the growing mass of celebrants.

Bruce attempted to walk toward the boats, now bubbling with commerce. The music was building, and a trumpet seared the left side of his brain as a band passed in the opposite direction. Suddenly people of all hues were dancing and singing. The scent of mango and hibiscus perfumed the air. He thought he caught a whiff of orange blossom floating through the mélange. Toucan and parrots were beginning to settle in the trees. He felt like he was being pulled toward a little park that now made itself visible. Fairly buzzed, he managed himself with grace. His angular fitness and easy carriage attracted as much interest as the whiteness of his skin. He had slipped his wallet into a zipped compartment so that a pickpocket would have to strip him to profit.

The atmosphere was ecumenical. A gibbous moon hung in the sky. A string of riverboats lined the dock and an Andean band close by soothed the warm air with rhythms from their woodwinds and percussives.

For a moment Bruce felt like he was rising, almost flying. He found a spot on a park bench and sprawled himself in the glow of this new world. He closed his eyes and tried to sharpen his hearing and sense of smell.

After an undetermined time, he became aware of a large dark-skinned man sitting at the other end of the bench. He was speaking Portuguese and waving his arms in the air, as if addressing a political rally. Feeling the full impact of the capirinhas now, Bruce tried to swing himself off the bench and onto his feet. He nearly fell on the grass, partly because his leg had fallen asleep. He sat down again and concentrated. The half-sleep on the flights was catching up and the newness of the place was slowly sinking in.

He fell asleep for an unknown period and when he awoke the sun had dropped below the trees. He was sure he would remember the hotel. He thought he remembered having it pointed out to him. Surely, if he went back to the bistro it would all fall into place. He closed his eyes again and listened to the rhythms. When he opened his eyes after a while, a pretty Brazilian girl in her late teens was seated where the old man had been. Her head was turned toward him and she was smiling.

A group of girls were dancing the bossa nova in front of the bench and speaking to each other amidst the very audible music. They were entertaining the two on the bench. Bruce

turned again to admire the girl. Light from the lanterns bounced off her dark eyes. Her innocence captivated him. Surely the mirth of her friends had been purchased with prankishness. She signaled him to dance with her and the girls laughed. He smiled back at her. The echo of Nick's admonition pierced his mind. He then leaned over and kissed her hand. He got up carefully and bowed graciously to the chorus. The girls stood still, a bank of frozen expressions. He made his way to the hotel after only once retracing his path. There was a key for him at the desk.

Two

Up the River and Into the Woods

Nick's alarm clock chimed in the sixth hour with gusto. He had awakened, chipper and springy a half hour before, not missing the lost two hours of longitude. He had showered. Bruce required the blare of his radio in the morning. As he tried lathering with cool water, he answered cryptically Nick's tepid questions about the jubilee the night before.

Nick had already dressed and readied his duffel before realizing he'd left his watch in the bathroom. It was one of those all-purpose waterproof types. Out of habit he protected it from water. It displayed the phases of the moon and the dates and times of eclipses. Raphael was due in the lobby in thirty minutes. When Nick offered Bruce an aspirin he was advised: "Never before shaving." In minutes, Bruce had slapped on some light clothes. Nick checked the room thoroughly before they made their way to the lobby.

Raphael was reading a newspaper when they arrived. His garrulous nature had not abandoned him. Raphael briefed Nick on the plans for the day while Bruce explored the hotel gift shop for some cigars and his own bottle of aspirin. For breakfast they had bacon, cornbread, mango, and guava juice, after which they settled their accounts. They hoisted their duffels and met the new day, which happened to be Sunday.

The three headed for the battered and track-worn Rover. The morning air was torpid, alleviated at times by a breeze. Raphael spirited them through back alleys and side streets where the city was still quiet. Soon, Raphael was on the boulevard to the airport. It took twenty minutes to reach the hanger. They pulled up to the vintage DC-3 that would convey them upriver. It was adorned with a large decal on the fuselage that read Para River Transport. Raphael perfunctorily surveyed their packing list and performed a mental X-ray on the crate, making especially sure the men had their bags. Several porters loaded the three items as the two novices from New Jersey prepared to board. To the idle of the radial engines, the porters positioned and locked the mobile stairs. Raphael barked out something he had neglected to tell Nick at breakfast. Two more passengers would be joining them on their flight into the country.

Bruce pointed out a small oil splotch on Nick's shirt collar as they ascended the movable steps. Before embarking, Raphael surveyed the equipment presently being loaded by a forklift. It was bound for Santarem, their only stop on the way. After taking their seats, Nick went over Raphael's earlier conversation with Bruce.

Raphael had told Nick he had spoken earlier with their guide, Jaro, in Manaus. Jaro had been in contact with the Indian Service so he had an understanding of their target destination. They would be ferried up the great black river in motorized boats. Hopefully, they would reach their site by midday Wednesday, D-5. They might have chartered a

flight into the national park and carried small packs to the site, but that would have taken as much time and the walk was more strenuous than Jaro's option. Besides, Jaro thought the river trip worth the experience, by itself. The waterways were more easily navigated at the end of the rainy season.

Raphael cut the port engine. Shortly afterward, a distinguished-looking gentleman entered the bay. He greeted the two foreigners in a terse manner and found a seat across from them. He looked a little out of place on this modified cargo carrier in his tailored suit and sunglasses. When the man changed glasses to read a paperback—something about an elaborate heist of a famous painting—Bruce recognized him as the man who spilled coffee on their last flight. The man glanced up at Bruce and smiled faintly before returning to his read. As usual, Nick wasn't focused on social recall. When Bruce tried to signal Nick of their acquaintance, a woman with café-au-lait skin, and wearing a red dress entered and without a word or expression sat next to Señor Rus. Bruce took her for a model.

Raphael had customized the DC-3. Its seating mimicked that of a passenger train, with two groupings of four, pairs facing each other. There was a lot of leg room and space for a small table that could be anchored to the floor. The remaining space was designed for light cargo. A series of cages welded to the interior struts and fuselage were situated fore and aft, for balance. Nick surmised the arrangement probably wouldn't pass U.S. safety standards, but Raphael clearly made it work for his purposes.

Bruce was curious why the fashion set was flying on Raphael's cargo plane. Nick obliviously busied himself with his journal. When he finally recognized the man as Rus, Nick said hello. He was intrigued by the man's change in demeanor. Could this man who just smiled and buried himself in his book be the same person who offered his card so officiously the day before?

Four hours of sleep and three aspirins had helped chase the cobwebs from Bruce's head. His mind was still swimming with memories from the warm-up to Carnival. In his reverie, his eyes drifted toward the lady sitting diagonally across and facing him. She avoided eye contact and seemed blind to her fellow passengers, including the jewel merchant seated next to her. They all sat like pieces of chess, before takeoff.

After the machinery was loaded, a porter glanced at their seatbelts before joining Raphael in the cockpit. The next minute was filled with roar and vibration as they lifted to twenty-five hundred feet. Raphael headed the aircraft west on a 260-degree bearing. The fingers of the delta below seemed to stretch to the ocean like a giant hand. In a few minutes the mighty brown Amazon itself came to view. As they gained altitude it could be seen cutting a huge swath into the expanse of green that lay in front of them like an infinite carpet. Expectations soared as yet another leg of their journey opened.

Now cruising, Raphael's voice scratched over the intercom. His chopped English from the day before had given way to a more polished form. His memorized travelogue was underpinned by the hum of the engines. Raphael pointed out the power projects and manganese mines below. He said his land was rich in metals—iron and copper, gold, tin and chrome. Diamonds could be found near the Orinoco up north. With this, Rus shifted in his seat. These, with other precious gemstones and fine hardwoods, helped make up for the lost rubber trade. He mentioned how the Dutch had pirated a few rubber plants away

to the East Indies. They were lucky to have picked trees that were free of the blight. The theft was bad for Brazil. “They even survived that big explosion at...ah, what you say...K Krakatoo!”

Raphael laughed at his own pronunciation. He paused and invited anyone who cared to, to visit him in the cockpit. The gentleman remained glued to his paperback and the sultry woman didn't flinch. Nick was caught up in a compendium of recorded meteorites. Bruce accepted the invitation and entered the captain's space through what seemed like a hanging shower curtain. As Bruce studied the landscape beneath, Raphael resumed his animated talk.

He spoke of Brazil's exotic hardwoods and the caiman in the south. He interjected pointed references to rice, tobacco, and cotton plantations as they came to view. Several were antiquated and belonged to history, and Raphael knew that history.

As this lively captain spoke, Bruce became aware of the immense monotony of the emerald world below. He thought of field studies done by researchers who hauled themselves into the canopy, that last bastion of the forest, to study its panoply of life. Each species had adapted to this aerial world, so completely different from that of the forest floor. Such research wouldn't be like hanging out at Walden Pond, where a fellow might occasionally go into town for a hot meal. He and Nick would soon be underneath this canopy, merging with an even grander range of life. He'd spent a lot of his youth in the woods, but this would be something different.

They followed the general vector of the river. Bruce saw evidence of logging, and only one burned-out swath he'd heard had been rampant. He pointed it out to Raphael.

“Ah, yes. Planning to grow corn for the eth...the eth...”

“Ethanol?”

“Yes, for mix with gas.”

Bruce knew enough about energy to mutter to himself, “What a waste.” How much energy will it take to do that? he wondered. The trees down below were one hundred and fifty to one hundred and eighty feet tall. Without taproots they were precariously perched in topsoil that was only a few inches deep. He recalled the Rio Summit held two decades before and the hand wringing then over the fate of the forest. The activity of the loggers, legal and illegal, combined with slash-and-burn methods were said to consume this wonderland at an alarming rate. This had been scrubbed from the popular mind of today, replaced perhaps by the dreaded drumbeat of global warming. It had been said the tenuous soil of the rain forest could only stand a few years of this before it became useless, lost forever to recovery or reforestation. Bruce was aware of the more recent observation that these cleared lands indeed did reproduce their forests and that young trees absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere faster and to a greater extent than older ones. Bruce mused how clever nature was to have young trees soak up an incremental portion of carbon dioxide, which made up less than five percent of all greenhouse gases. But the corn for ethanol thing had not been well thought out, and people from south of the border would surely have their corn supply reduced, with a huge and deleterious impact on a staple food.

There were those, as the “Antman,” O. E. Wilson, who claimed that thousands of species were going missing each year, though nobody could name or describe them. Depending on assumptions, estimates varied dramatically. Nature had a history of losing and keeping species. Think of the dinosaurs. Then think of the crocodiles. And new species were being found all the time. George Carlin, in a classic humor skit, pointed out that ninety percent of all the species that ever lived were extinct and that man wasn’t around for most of them.

Bruce had read the latest estimates that about ninety percent of this rain forest was still intact, despite claims of daily fires the size of several football fields, taking hundreds of acres. There had always been fires. A small amount of sunlight penetrated to the forest floor through the openings overhead. This led to a greater support of subcanopy species, including medicinal plants. Patrick Moore, formerly of Greenpeace, now of Greenspirit, became a debunker of shaky science, and so with Philip Stott, who wrote *Tropic Rainforests: Political and Hegemonic Myth-making*. Bruce kept such heretical ideas to himself at the college, precarious as his reputation was with the authorities. He tried some of these ideas out on Raphael and the cherub simply smiled.

“What about the Indians? What are their issues?”

Raphael cleared his throat vigorously and held out his hand with fingers spread apart.

“Five meel...lion!”

“What?”

“Five hundred years ago. Today, there are maybe...five percent. You know...the conkeestidore, the dis...ease, and the slavree...like in your country. The guvment is taking better care of them today yes...but, what ’appened to them...it was bad. Their kul...ture got lost and they were pooshed, like in your country. Today they are treated like...a...en...dangered—

“Species?”

“Yes. Jaro works for the FUNAI...the Indian Pro...tect...chun Ser...fice. He knows the tribes and I am sure he will tell you more. For the next days he will be working for you. He and his team will take goot care of you both.”

“Are the people friendly?”

“Yes. But some just want be left alone.”

“I am no missionary, Raphael. Thank you. You’re a swell tour guide and pilot.”

Bruce’s voice dropped a little...with “and pilot.” He returned to his seat.

“Professor, if you want a thrill, you should visit the cockpit. For no other reason than to check out the altimeter.”

“The altimeter?”

“The needle never lifted away from zero.”

“Well, so far we seem to have avoided the mountains.”

“The copilot was sleeping the whole time I was there. And the air-speed indicator was wavering between one hundred and twenty and two hundred miles per hour. Raphael didn’t change anything as far as I could see. And the radio console looked pretty dusty.”

Nick raised his brow. “Say no more, scout! We’ve booked this flight. Unless, you want to bail out now and wind up down there, eh?”

“We’ve booked it. We’ll do it.”

Bruce looked over again at the stylish woman in red. She was still into her magazine, but a faint smile lay on her mouth. She was stuck in the same section as when he went to the cockpit. As she shifted in her seat her skirt cut an inch above her knee. Bruce had started his field observations as a teenager, on the way women manage their hemline. There were other variables to this subtle question of whether a woman knew she was being watched—the eyes, the mouth, the casting of gestures. He had failed to develop a law as reliable as Newton’s on gravitation, since women were as different as the cultures and the codes of dress. Girls today, Bruce knew as a new breed and a bit sluttish in this regard. They brandished their various cleavages, along with body medallions and tattoos, and they advertised the most unimaginative expressions on their tee shirts and sweaters. This was as unheard-of when he was growing up as was pride in an out-of-wedlock pregnancy. It simply was not sensuous for him, and in fact it was a girlish turnoff. What was sensuous to him was the way the woman across the aisle shifted toward him swinging her legs across the meridian, with a glance and a smile tossed in for good measure. What did that mean? Bruce fastened his gaze on her face for a swift right moment; then she quickly reengaged with the magazine. Just then, the silent man closed his book with a slap and reached over and put his hand on her knee! She turned to him and put her hand on his hand. Bruce’s mental computer crashed.

At that moment, the DC-3 banked sharply and began its descent. Its four passengers looked up, reflexively holding on to their armrests. A good-sized town then came to view. Santarem was the largest town between Belem and Manaus. Bruce bet Nick that Raphael had interpreted the signals from the small tower now in view the same way he inspected the crate—by telepathy.

The landing was smooth although Raphael’s jabber could be heard all the way to the dock. The copilot woke with the landing and mutated into a porter. He was standing aft when they came to a stop. He nodded profusely as all occupants prepared to deplane at the captain’s bequest. The gentleman and the mysterious lady were the first to exit, nodding a farewell.

As they moved toward the airport’s cafe, Bruce asked Raphael about them.

“Oh...that is the mayor of Santarem. He often rides with us. Likes to stay out of the public.”

“And the lady?”

“That’s his wife.”

“But they didn’t speak to each other the whole...”

“They often...eh, what you say...?”

“Spat?”

“No, ah...play the part. She is an actress. She caught your fancy, señors? She tries to do that. I've seen it before, many times.”

“We met him on the flight up from Rio and he was very friendly...even gave us his card.”

“Yes. He was a businessman on that flight. He changes when he becomes ah...the mayor flying into his city. There are cut meats in there, and tapioca and a good fish soup. While you get a bite, I will help Kam unload pumps. They will go to the big soya plant here. Had some flooding a few months ago and they want to be ready for November, in case...you know. Enjoy your meal, Señor Bruce.”

Nick started to feel slightly pressed. He promised the college that the trip would not encroach upon his teaching schedule. He had calculated a flex-day for contingencies, but it looked like their schedule was tight from start to finish.

Excluding the flight down, they had eight days to complete their mission and be back home. The connections so far had gone without a glitch. Raphael was a bundle of energy, and his pace befitted a man of northerly latitude. Bruce was steady and they both felt healthy and in control. The unpredictable had been minimal so far. Still, the schedule allowed no wiggle room. For Nick, missing a class was unheard-of. As they ate lunch, Bruce left his companion to his thoughts.

In thirty minutes they were in the air again. Nick calculated the time to Manaus to be three hours. They would meet their guide Jaro and soon after, start up the Rio Negro. Hopefully they would spend their third night somewhere close to their target. A lot depended on the accuracy of the impact site as recorded on the Service maps.

Bruce revived his reading of Tomlinson, and Nick's thoughts turned to the expedition of Lewis and Clark. The Corps of Discovery had worked its unwieldy keelboat against the swift waters of the Missouri. The oarsmen found relief on the Pacific side of the Continental Divide when they made the transition to white-water specialists, much to the amazement of the Indians of the Columbia River Valley. They stayed at Fort Clatsop for a long, wet and dreary winter, to the detriment of Lewis's mood. They were far more isolated than he and Bruce would be in this forest. Nick then thought of Teddy Roosevelt one hundred years later, and a hundred years ago. Teddy Roosevelt was a bear for adventure. He joined an expedition to find the source of the Amazon. They charted and tackled the River of Doubt all the way from Paraguay to its confluence with the Madeira, from which they finally entered the Amazon itself. They lost canoes and men, one of whom killed another before fleeing into the forest in a state of madness. Almost everyone on the expedition suffered malaria, hunger and exhaustion, including the former president and his son. TR's coleader, his “Clark,” was Colonel Rondon. Rondon was a “phenom” when it came to survival and self-deprivation. He later became Brazil's first director of Indian Protection. Weakened and dispirited, Roosevelt could barely speak as he addressed the New York Explorer's Club upon his return. Nick's thoughts turned to the present. He hoped he and Bruce would have something to report while being in good enough shape to do so. He checked his watch. Two hours had passed. He was looking forward to the river, and the woods.

Raphael's voice came over the intercom, fussily this time. He had become lonely with nobody to talk to. The sudden report jolted Nick from his daydream and interrupted Bruce's photography of the scenes below. Raphael told his two passengers that their guide Jaro was a Xingu aborigine. He assured the two that Jaro was the most reliable guide he knew of for upriver excursions.

They were now a thousand miles from the Atlantic. The Amazon was larger than any flowing water they had ever seen. It originated from the eastern slopes of the Andes and picked up tributaries like the River of Doubt all the way to the ocean. The great river was known as the Solimoes before its confluence with the Rio Negro at Manaus. The black river drained the Brazilian Highlands from the north. From the point of their contact, the two giants resisted mingling with each other for fifty or so miles. A line of separation between the muddy Amazon and the river carrying decayed black humus could be best appreciated from the air. The Amazon's drainage of the upper continent of South America was made possible by the rains, which came from evaporated water from the Atlantic, delivered by prevailing winds. This ancient water cycle lived on.

After landing in Manaus, Raphael spotted Jaro at the gate. He waved with his hat and shouted, while directing Kam to grab a helper for the crate. Raphael profusely introduced Jaro to the expeditioners. He seemed in no hurry to make the trip to Belem with the return load. Aware of their tight schedule, Jaro stretched a map across the hood of his cruiser. Nick was immediately at his side, and Bruce leisurely surveyed the surroundings. Jaro spoke terse but clear English.

"Some Yanomami came to our station on the river a couple weeks ago. They spoke of great thunder and shaking...right about here."

Jaro used a sliver of bamboo to point to the spot on the map. Bruce joined them after Raphael leaned in to catch Jaro's report.

"Should be able to get up there and back by Friday. We could take small plane to national park, but closest landing strip would mean two days' walk. That would be much. Same with pontoon plane. Better go by water as far as we can, instead. I agree with Raphael. You will want to see this river from water level. You've looked down at water enough, eh? Our ferries have covers in case it rains and the forest is a giant umbrella."

Raphael piped in.

"Para River Packing will be here by midafternoon on Friday waiting for you, gentlemen. Good wishes. Ah, Señor Nick, please guard Señor Bruce from the Jamarikuma Kingu."

"The who?"

"The Amazons. People have been looking for them for years. I think Señor Bruce has the best chance to find them."

Raphael jiggled and shook as he strode toward the loading dock.

"He'll be safe, Raphael. They're not his type."

Bruce was unmoved, although he appreciated Nick's levity.

Jaro drove to the wharves and two smiling boys loaded the gear into one of two fourteen-foot long snubbed-nosed metal boats. These were the “ferries” Jaro referred to, and each sported a 20-horse outboard motor.

Before launching, they made a stop at Jaro’s home. It was built from capirona wood and was supported on stilts. Jaro pointed to a watermark halfway to the first level, saying only, “November.” They climbed the entrance ladder. The interior was decorated with dyed ceramics and a ring of toucan feathers. Hanging on the wall was a bow and a quiver full of arrows, a blowgun, and a woodwind instrument the size of an English horn. Jaro’s wife provided cooked fish, manioc porridge, and several bottles of Brazilian beer. A man from the Indian Service arrived shortly afterward and conferred briefly with Jaro. He was a distant cousin of the famous Colonel Rondon and was greeted by the same name. He brought satellite maps with him. Like the gentleman mayor, he presented Nick with his card.

Jaro addressed the group. “Eat well. We will be pushing hard to make first camp, ninety miles upriver. We have fruit and bread on board, with drinks. We hope you like smoked meat. The boys will be on the lookout for catfish and cappies along the shore. Tomorrow, we move our stuff to two canoes with smaller motors and do forty more miles on river before we cross over into a stream. I have been told there will be map or sign at first camp. We will do some heavy walking in the forest. Your hiking boots will come in handy. We will spend the second night in forest. You met our helpers Tai and Betta at wharf. They will come with us. They can be trusted and they are good workers.” Jaro embraced his wife and two little girls who appeared from the other side of a hanging blanket.

They drove to the wharves where the ferries were idling, gassed up and fully loaded. The contents of the crate had been carefully placed into waterproof packs. These and the duffels had been placed into the second boat, which also was stocked with four five-gallon cans of gas, and charcoal. The lead boat had an ice chest containing Brazilian Skol, soft drinks, bottled water, fruits, and cold cuts. Jaro had registered with the Interior Navigation Service and his park permit was pinned to his fishnet vest. Against the current they would be able to make maybe fourteen miles an hour. As they waited, gathering swarms of flying insects engulfed them. Once under way, they seemed to drop off and the air cooled a little. The port of Manaus slowly faded as they motored northward. Jaro occasionally turned to them from the helm. He kept the riverbank a few hundred yards to starboard, paying close attention to the ore and timber barges in the central channel.

The river abounded with four boats. Manaus, along with the headwaters in Peru, were favorite points for travelers interested in the rain forest. The snarl and dangling detritus of the igupos stood as witness to the ravaging waters of earlier torrential rains. Jaro brought a box of shear pins in case a prop met up with a floating vine or limb. As they slowly ascended the river its traffic thinned. In three hours, individual huts and camps on the bank took the place of whole villages. The dissonance in the pitch of both motors was mesmerizing.

It was midafternoon when Bruce applied a generous dousing of sunscreen to his torso, limbs and face. He had slipped into shorts and was the only one to do so. He winked at Nick who sat midships and gave a thumbs-up from the stern. Bruce sipped from a can of

Skol and savored an avocado. He gazed back at Tai and Betta in the second craft. Betta was hauling hard on the inside of their wake, barely keeping up with Jaro's pace. Holding a three-forked gig in hand, Tai studied the surface of the black water. Both locked onto Bruce's optimistic gaze and smiled. Bruce dubbed them Stanley and Livingstone in the privacy of his fancy. He kept an eye out for manatee. He was thrilled when Jaro pointed to three pink dolphins that followed them for a few hundred yards. Flocks of egrets and heron were spotted in the matted grasses near the shore. The kingfishers were larger than any he had seen as a boy scout on the Delaware. Their size matched the great river. It would be nice to travel as far as the Branco or the Orinoco that drained the Guiana Highlands. This evening they would put out somewhere upstream well before the confluence of these rivers.

The rest of the afternoon passed as the sun fell behind the tree line. The temperature dropped only a few degrees. Jaro stuck to his wary search for driftwood and debris. It would be dark after nine and they would need more of the luck that had graced them so far.

Nick thought again of Vera. It gave him a sense of comfort knowing how she would be spending her weekend. He had spoken with her by phone when he got into the hotel in Belem. She had an exacting day at the institute, where she worked in crime research. She could content herself watching forensic and real crime shows on TV. During their marriage he had been away from her once, during a three-day conference. He thought of how his next few days would be even more different from their everyday routine. He wished she were here to share this experience with him. He had asked about Jason, and she was pleased to tell him that there were no letters from school and that he seemed content. Nick didn't ask any more about their son. He knew Vera would have things in hand. He resolved to think a little more of this over these next days. He would spend some more time with his son when he got back.

As evening slowly descended, the two men shifted between their two environments. It was one thing to sail halfway around the world, or trek across a great landmass where each day was but a sliver. But the magic of aviation to infrequent travelers was overwhelming. Now, they were back to trek-speed. In what seemed like a couple of hours, they had been forcing their way against the mighty river for six and a half. They had refueled twice. Bruce had used up half the disposable cameras already. He spent two of them focusing on Tai's attempt to spear a catfish during one of the refuelings. The fish was sunning itself on the surface and swam under at the instant Tai hurled his spear. Bruce would try to save the remaining frames for selective shots of what lay ahead.

The lights of the ferries reflected on the water. They were at full throttle when a sudden deceleration startled them. Jaro was turning now. He pointed to a small cabin barely visible at the forest's edge. This Indian Service outpost became more apparent as they closed on it. The cabin was open to any of the indigenous peoples in the region. These included the Ticuna, the Yanomami, and the Macuxi. Various renegade groups also roamed the forest, living a semi-nomadic existence. These groups lived harmoniously unless one pushed another's territory. Their small numbers did not stress the land.

They secured the ferries to a rudimentary pier and carried their stores to the cabin. The cabin was uninhabited. Jaro entered it cautiously after knocking to be sure they were

alone. He spotted three old kerosene lamps and ignited them. A note had been affixed to a wooden table with a knife. It bore a simple drawing that showed the stream they would take in the morning. Some figures were scribbled on the paper. After studying it Jaro carefully placed it into his belt pouch. Whoever left the note had some exposure to the Service, and to elementary schooling.

“Are you two up for a twenty-mile hike tomorrow?”

“Only with small packs and cold Skol.”

Nick let Bruce’s quip stand.

“Please have some smoked agouti. It is very tasty and full of energy.”

In a few minutes Jaro pointed out the latrine outside before walking about the crude cabin spraying insecticide. Nick used the small wooden table and one of two stools to make an entry in his journal. After testing the lone rocking chair, Bruce stepped outside and smelled the river in the steamy air. He soaked up the language of the forest from its watery edge. The throaty gurgle of the river against the bank every now and then was interrupted by a boat horn from far out in the body of the river. In less than an hour during which each went his own way, they regrouped. Jaro snuffed out two of the lamps. They tried sleeping, but only Jaro could block out the deafening shrieks of howler monkeys. As the two men thought of their jaunt on the river, they slowly adapted to the sounds of the forest. Exhaustion finally swept them into unconscious sleep.

Dawn ushered in with an unfamiliar reveille. A staccato of monotones pierced the cacophony of a waking aviary. Crescendos and decrescendos crossed each other without order or seeming reciprocity. This was D-4 and the target must be reached by D-5 if they were to properly record and sample their find and return on time.

Tai and Betta went swimming in a slack pool before breakfast. They arrived with two eight-inch piranha on a gig. Nick and Bruce watched as one deftly cleaned the fish while the other built a fire to roast them. The fish was a delicacy. Bruce felt the irony in eating the carnivores. Despite Tai’s reassurance and his own ripeness, Bruce put off a dip in the pool.

After the hearty start Bruce promised he would approach McDonald’s back home and see if he could talk them into a McPiranha breakfast. Nick chuckled and Jaro just looked at him. They broke camp after cleaning up and disinfecting the latrine. The boys pumped fuel from the underground tanks into the canisters, while Jaro made his entries in the cabin logbook. The boys transferred their cargo to two canoes they retrieved from a shed behind the cabin. They side-rigged the canoes with smaller motors they brought with them. It took all their combined strength to lug the blunt-nosed boats and motors into the shed, to be secured for their return trip.

By seven, the expedition was back on the river with Jaro and Betta at the helms. At eleven, they reached an island across from which Jaro knew a creek flowed in from the west bank. It was here they would tack across the great river but not until they went another mile or so. Jaro instructed them the day before in the use of life vests, and before the crossing, he reinforced the safety message. He led the tiny flotilla on a diagonal, pointing up into the wind and biting into the breakers. The little motors groaned as they met the full force of the moving water as it coursed through the central channel. In the

distance, a freighter slowly approached from the south. Laboriously, they made their way across the lakelike body of the river. The crossing took most of an hour.

Jaro employed a navigational trick whereby he slipped the smaller craft into the mouth of the stream using the force of the current. This was a perilous maneuver. The speed of the current, added to the thrust of the motors, gave them full control, but it also cut down on their chance to make corrections. Timing was key and their guides were good at such maneuvers. Jaro coordinated the attack on the stream from his perch on the front boat. They slipped into the mouth of the tributary as planned. Nick and Bruce responded with a cheer. For the first time they detected a smile from Jaro. Jaro shared his maps with Nick, perhaps feeling the triumph of the moment merited optimism.

“This stream is high enough so we can make it to take-out point. Let’s pray no portage with this much pack.”

The trees protected them from the sun’s direct glare. Still, the rising heat was becoming oppressive. They maintained their speed at five mph because of the low-lying branches and the meandering course.

“Look at that!”

Bruce thought he spied a lungfish but didn’t have his camera in hand. In his excitement he went on to tell Nick about it. Some biologists felt it was the prehistoric link between amphibious and land-based life. Eons of mud and silt pressed its ancestor to convert the buoyancy bladder into a lung, rich with capillaries. The thing could stick its snout above the surface and breathe air! It also developed legs with fingerlike appendages. Bruce coveted a shot of one of these sucking air.

The squawks of parrots and macaws could be heard over the grind of the motors. Turtles were seen bathing on rocks. Some were hundred-pounders. Bruce finally spotted a small green anaconda at the water’s edge. Blue morpho butterflies flashed their brilliant iridescence in the woods as they caught rare patches of sunlight. Now with repetition, they were becoming attuned to the variety of life that surrounded them.

The insects were more troublesome than when they were on the river. Both newcomers applied a generous dose of DEET to their skin and Nick tried a facial cream. Bruce lit up his first cigar. Someone told him that tobacco smoke was a good repellent. If this proved not to be so at least they were prepared for a victory celebration. The native boys now were in the second canoe and seemed oddly immune to the bugs.

An hour after entering the creek they sheared their first drive-pin, probably from metal fatigue. Betta replaced it in less than two minutes. After nearly four hours Jaro bypassed some rapids through a narrow channel carved in the rock. Above was a large tangle of mangroves where a bank willow bowed over the stream like a bridge. Jaro was sure this was the take-out point as designated on the map at the cabin. He estimated they had traveled close to twenty miles.

They were now on the southern escarpment of the Jau National Park. Knowing that the indigenous people sometimes borrowed things, they hauled their unloaded canoes out of the water. They removed the motors and chained them together using a bicycle lock. They covered the motors and packs with mangrove branches. They tied the canoes together and to a tree and used rocks to sink them from sight.

“Let’s hope these are here when we return. If not, we’ll have to call for help with satellite phone. Picking up satellite from here would be challenge. Maybe Señor Bruce can climb the tallest tree.” There were times when Jaro’s humor veered into thin air.

Jaro reminded them to put on hiking boots before starting on a course north-by-northwest. The park’s perimeter was sparsely defined with a sequence of markers. Each contained a sensor that linked to Landsat 7. Global positioning provided location points in this vast wilderness. These were used for medevac of sick aborigines, pending the construction of a ring of helipads. Such were the best-laid plans of the Indian Protection Service.

Some people in government were opposed to any interference with this population. These were the purists. The purists believed in complete isolation as protection, given their limited immunity. They championed the preservation of indigenous ways, as a curator might care for a museum. On the other side, some felt the miracles of modern medicine should not be withheld. Health care workers were regularly tested for communicable diseases. They felt, after all, that trauma, envenomation and appendicitis still occurred in remote places.

The expedition slowly made its way for the first time by foot along the floor of the mighty forest. The solemnity and magnitude of their new world suggested a Gothic cathedral. Slivers of sunlight penetrated the canopy overhead as though it were daylight piercing stained glass. Soon they were immersed in the magic of the place, so full of the music of life. Bruce wondered how much of this surround-sound escaped the theater through the shroud overhead.

Jaro’s calculation of their hike was only an estimate. Every hour, Bruce took samples of the biome under his feet. Whatever beetle, cricket, ant, centipede, egg, nutshell, blossom, husk or seed he scooped and bottled would amount to a biologic time capsule. He might be able to impress Throckmorton just a little with his collection. And there was always a chance he might come up with an original. He would likely need affidavits from Jaro, Raphael’s persuasiveness, and the full weight of their official papers at Customs, in order to take these organic samples back to his lab.

Nick’s earlier anxiety of having to chop through heavy undergrowth with machetes was largely put to rest. The vegetation under the canopy was inversely related to the sunlight that got through. Where sunlight penetrated as a result of a lightning strike or the demise of a senescent giant, the space that opened was quickly challenged by varietal new growth. Banana and figs, bougainvillea and towering violets, tentacles of myrtle and roots of creeping lianas reached down from live branches to fill up the space. Machetes were required for such dense thickets if a detour could not be found. The two sinewy boys were excellent choppers. They had been spared the need for portage and possessed strength in reserve.

Jaro led them in single file as they reentered the forest. He was followed by Tai, Bruce and Nick, with Betta in rear guard. The two up front had just finished a vigorous chop and stopped to take a short breather. Nick was searching the scene with his camera when Betta’s voice jarred the air.

“Señor Bruce, be still please. Muta, Muta, above!”

Nick heard the whirling of a machete pass by his right ear and hit something overhead making a sound somewhere between a thud and a slice. On a tangle of vine had rested a six-foot long bushmaster, or what was now left of it. The front third had been severed free and fell to the ground. The head was biting randomly and the viper had difficulty steering itself with its truncated and bleeding body. They all moved in carefully to witness this curiosity. Betta said the snake was too close to Bruce to allow Nick to snap a picture in the wild. Only Betta knew it was pointed in Bruce's direction, probably calculating Bruce's position from his infrared image. One bite would have overwhelmed any antivenom Jaro had in his pack. Besides, this most dangerous of snakes was a multiple biter. Nick took pictures of the huge two fangs as they closed repeatedly onto the lower jaw. Its blanketlike brown coloration and dorsal ridge were identifying markers and would help with the story back home. Jaro and Betta carefully finished off the viper. Bruce took a long drag on his canteen before shaking Betta's hand.

To now, they seemed to progress without hazard. The large and powerful jaguar usually remained invisible and the smaller ocelot was even shyer. These cats had been heavily poached and their numbers had decreased. Since one time when these animals were plentiful, humans were generally safe. Jacare were found to the south in the wet grasslands of the Pantanal. Unlike the African crocodile or Australia's "saltie" these gators did not stalk humans. Jaro told them in the rare event of a migrant happening to get its teeth on a leg or an arm, not to move. They couldn't taste, and if you didn't put up a fuss, they would let go. Jaro also warned against picking up any of the brilliantly colored little frogs. Tree frogs were okay. He reserved mention of the fer-de-lance, now that they had met the bushmaster. The smaller fer-de-lance was one of the most deadly pit vipers on the continent, but it usually moved away if unmolested. Their guide thought of capybara, agouti, monkeys and fish, as they would need another high calorie meal that day.

Bruce reviewed this list mentally as he walked. The animals didn't worry him. He recalled the film, *The Emerald Forest*—the curious but true story of a little boy named Tommy who was taken by the "invisible people" while his American father worked on a hydro project. After ten years' search by his parents, he was finally found. By then he was fully assimilated and chose to stay with his adopted tribe. Bruce wondered if they were being watched.

During a rest stop, Jaro revealed to Nick the remainder of the message left for them at first camp. There were rumors according to Ticuna tribesmen that the disturbance in the forest had produced a state of agitation among a nomadic group of natives who were close enough to be impacted physically or, at least, emotionally. No one knew if they had interpreted the event as a visit from a god, a heralding of the end, or some other portentous happening. By accounts, it had initially scattered and disorganized them. Nick acceded to Jaro's judgment that the expedition would be safe in any case, but he wondered to himself why he hadn't been given this info at the camp.

They enjoyed timely snacks for lunch—peanut butter, fresh and dried fruits, energy bars and juices. They slowed toward midafternoon. Soaked with sweat, they moved across a generally flat but gradually rising terrain with some outcroppings. The insects had become burdensome again and at times, downright oppressive. DEET and cigars afforded small benefit. Still, they lathered themselves regally with any and all repellents they had.

They came to a mild rise and ascended it. Jaro knew he had been here once before. He recognized a jagged break in the ridge. He suggested they pitch camp at the base. He figured it was another ten miles to the marker, and if they started early in the morning, they would have time to complete their study at the site. The two newcomers welcomed the plan and the anticipated mosquito netting. Two small tents were quickly erected. Bruce scouted out a languid brook only a short distance from this second camp. It held a pool deep enough to simulate a tub. Everyone in the party enjoyed the heavenly reprieve, and the water was cold, indicating the presence of a spring. Bruce planned to return to the place at nightfall.

Jaro dispatched his two assistants to hunt. They were skilled fishermen on the river, and Betta had shown his accuracy with the machete earlier. Their hunting skills would become manifest in time. Tai and Betta disappeared into the forest with a spear, a bow, and a quiver full of arrows. Meanwhile, Bruce tried to figure out if there was a way to scale one of the mammoth trees to get closer to the canopy. Could he find a partially fallen giant, caught as a diagonal in the forest? His dream remained unfulfilled. Unlike in the north, the swift decay and consumption here made such trees rare.

Early explorers had little understanding of the stratified nature of life in the forest. At its top a sun-bathed paradise of flowers known as bromeliads drew water from small pools nestled in the cups of vegetation. This aerial world teemed with insects and frogs, snakes, birds, monkeys, sloths and a host of unknown species living out their parasitic or symbiotic existence.

The native boys returned in a half hour carrying the kill of a juvenile wild boar skewered on a pike. There were hushed questions from Nick for Jaro about hunting rights, licenses and protection (of the pigs). Jaro assured him that there were indeed restrictions but as an authentic aborigine, Tai had unlimited rights to hunt. In addition, the boar was one of the most destructive animals in the forest and even hampered farmers. For this kill, Tai would be considered a hero by his people. In addition, and most pertinently, they all would enjoy fresh roast pork this evening!

They rotisserieed their prize on a spit above a charcoal fire and turned it into a delicacy. The fruits were slightly overripe by now and the juices were warm. Bruce overcame this minor inconvenience with a bottle of warm Skol. They boiled water for their canteens and reserves for the next day. Each man carried and drank roughly a gallon in a day. Jaro made judgments about the water in the streams. The flow was not great, which increased the chance for picking up an animal-borne pathogen. So far, there had been no fever or dysentery in the group. Some furtive singing and dismaying attempts at poetry capped the meal. They buried their waste and they would carry out their refuse on the return trip.

After dinner Bruce rose from the campfire and motioned to the boys. He had his three-piece fly rod in hand. He pointed in the direction of the swimming hole. Jaro and Nick winked at each other as the three set off with a flashlight. The boys sat down at the edge of the water and watched in amazement as Bruce put his sport to action. The natives knew all about gigging with a spear. One had to allow for parallax. Here was Bruce, with this odd three-part stick that he waved in the air in a curious fashion, its lazy line flying above the water, back and forth...back and forth...Tai and Betta had never seen a fly rod in action. They watched for a while...back and forth...nothing happened. As they

wondered if Bruce was just exercising or playing, suddenly there was the sound...twap! The line was momentarily taut before landing on the water.

The boys watched with saucer eyes and open mouths. Bruce used a Blue Butt to catch his prey, itself a predator. Back home he was considered the local expert on bats. He had a sizeable collection, certainly not the scope of Novak's at Yale, yet respectable. Bats had become fascinating to him in his spelunking days. Students at the college called him the "Batman" on account of his infamous lab on echolocation, as much as his quaint automobile.

This evening he would enrich his collection. The fisher bat, or *Noctilio leporinus*, was already a member of his collection, neatly preserved in a bottle back in his lab. Inspiration for many of Hollywood's alien creatures, this was a bat that swooped down to the water surface with outstretched talons in readiness for surface-feeding fish. It transferred the fish into its cheek pouches on the way back to the cave. He might have also landed the frog eater, *Trachops cirrhosus*. There was also the omnivorous *Phyllostomus*. But the insectivorous specimen that dangled and fluttered at the end of Bruce's line was none of these. He couldn't identify it. Maybe, just maybe, he had an original. Bruce put it to sleep with an ether capsule and placed it into a jar after injecting it with a preservative to block self-digestion.

The fire was smoldering when the three returned. Jaro and Nick had retired to their tents. Bruce eased into the tent, trying not to awaken Nick.

"Have any luck fishing, Bruce?"

"I caught a bat. I'm not sure of the species, but it's a microchiroptera."

"I'm certainly glad to hear that."

"I had this thought about Jason out there, when I was fishing."

"What?"

"He would like to be here with these boys, having this experience. What a great kid."

"Thanks, Bruce. I thought the same about Vera a while ago."

"She's a great kid, too."

The next morning they enjoyed some berries and bananas, warmed over pork and purified water. By noon, they had walked to the vicinity of the marker. Unbeknownst to his companions, Jaro followed a trail at the base of the ridge to its western end. The Park Service had subtly blazed it. He made this same trip in the past when checking the sensors.

Jau National Park was Brazil's largest, at 5.6 million acres. It was pristine and almost completely undeveloped. Nick's permit included the proviso that his survey would be mainly photographic and limited in terms of harvesting only specimens pertinent to his expedition. He hadn't said anything to Jaro about the radio-signal coincidence. This was such a long shot that he felt justified in not sharing it. Jaro knew the Brazilian government was in the process of mounting a more comprehensive survey of events in the park. Nick was required to share his findings at a later time with the Interior

Department in Manaus, to which Jaro would also report. These were part of the scientific agreements between the United States and Brazil.

Jaro was unable to use his satellite-based locator the day before. He was able to use it now, at noon. With this they could geo-position themselves within a few hundred yards from the marker. Jaro was also in possession of satellite photographs provided by Rondon, from the Service. These had matched well with reports from the Ticuna tribesmen.

They fanned out in three columns about fifty yards apart with the boys at each flank and with Jaro, Nick, and Bruce at the center. They wheeled on a gradual circular path using whistles to space themselves. Three short signals indicated a finding, presumably a marker or a crash site. Using this technique they were able to locate the marker. The impact site was estimated to be about two miles from the marker, north-by-northeast. For this they separated themselves by twenty yards and marched in the same three-column formation, using their signals. After walking three miles with the aid of a pedometer they came up blank.

At Jaro's suggestion they wheeled toward the west. Then they wheeled south. After an hour, they heard three blasts from a whistle. It was Tai. They made their way as he kept up a steady chirp. They spotted some tree crowns that had been wedged into the forest. They made their way slowly through the snarl of what used to be a grove of mature king mahogany. It was now an uprooted tangle of snapped and charred wood. It took them another half hour to make their way to the edge of the impact crater. Nick's heart was pounding from a combination of exertion and excitement.

"I promised Vera I would try to get through at Discovery-hour, if the satellite will let me. Last time we chatted was Sunday evening. She said she would be waiting at home on D-Four and D-Five, for a triumphant call!"

"Professor, I brought along a bottle of bubbly in my backpack just for this occasion!"

"A grand thought, Meistro."

They climbed up the outside of the rim of freshly heaved earth and rock. They looked onto a ground depression the size of a large New Jersey dairy barn.

"Clearly a crater, an external impact. As the charts suggested this was not a tectonic event. It's not like Arizona's, but it must have been a terrific jolt. We'll take a complete photographic survey before we begin our search for fragments. Bruce, can you find the magnetometer in Betta's pack? Hard to believe a couple a hundred of these smack the earth every year, mostly in the ocean! I'd say most of this baby vaporized before contact, but enough was left to cause this," as he swept his hand before the site.

"There have to be remnants lying about. After pictures, we'll run the magnetometer around the inside of the rim."

Jaro and the boys stood awestruck. They were looking around the crater and behind at the trees that had been blown away from the center. They had seen pictures of explosions on television. Betta wondered why—a blast like this in such a place in his own land.

Nick finished with the photography after thirty minutes. A dozen small sterile plastic containers were retrieved from the packs. Of course, there would be contamination from

the earth itself, post-impact. The fragments would contain carbon, or iron and nickel combinations depending on their origin in the solar system. The analysts these days also carefully looked for fossils. There was nothing so far to suggest an alien mishap. There was a big difference between a meteor slamming in at 4,000 mph and an out-of-control spaceship. The visitor that slammed down here didn't go skipping off into the forest, either. They looked for foreign materials while they measured the depth and circumference of the crater itself.

Nick slipped several suspicious materials into containers using sterile gloves. Some material registered a magnetic field, which increased their likelihood of being meteorite fragments. They had planned to complete their mission in time to start back this same day. They needed to be efficient in their use of the remaining daylight. After they all had a drink of Bruce's warm once-sparkling wine, Nick retrieved the satellite telephone from his knapsack. Nick fumbled excitedly at the buttons. He pointed the phone to a spot in the sky he had calculated as Iridium's position. His fingers trembled as he pumped the digits and waited. They all gathered around Nick and watched him as he listened intently.

"Hello...hello...Vera...Snooks, is that you?" Nick looked around, slightly embarrassed. "That's a little name we have...Vera! Vera, we've arrived! You won't believe where we are standing right now. Bruce and our guides are here with me, in the jungle, on the edge of a crater."

At that moment Bruce tapped Nick on the shoulder.

"Hold, just a second, Bomber."

"Yes...we're here. We've made it without a glitch, Vera. Our mission is—"

Nick grinned in appreciation of her joy and laughter. He turned and looked at his mates, all of whom were staring straight ahead.

"Can you still hear me? The call is breaking up. Vera, can you hear me?"

From their elevation on the inside rim, they looked across the crater, and standing on its opposite rim, watching them were a dozen painted figures holding spears and staring back.

Jaro calmly exclaimed, "The Harmony People."

"Look, Vera, we have visitors. Don't worry. Our guide knows them. I'll call you again, soon."

Vera didn't answer.

"Can you hear me, Vera?"

Still, no answer.

Three

A Day in School

Jason stood before the mirror this morning and examined his face scrupulously. The zits didn't bother him. He was fascinated with the oval shape of his face, his high forehead, and his prominent ears. His ears seemed to stick out more than they should, and the left one more than the right. He figured he only knew himself from his mirror image. Others

knew him from what he looked like straight on. It was really his right ear that stuck out more. It was funny, nothing is as it seems. He took some flack for his ears at school but he was trying to think more about what lay between them. He was short too. It would be nice if he grew soon. He figured out if he was ever to attract a girl friend it wouldn't be his looks that fixed the deal. They were de-emphasizing manhood in the culture anyway, so maybe it wasn't key, not to be a hunk. He was thinking of taking a model of a Y chromosome to school and presenting in Health Class as an endangered species. The magic of this chromosome had recently entered his awareness.

Jason started the day by reassuring his mother. As usual, her son was patient and logical. Jason reminded his mother of the debate this afternoon. He suggested she stick to the schedule and drive. It was her turn.

It was two days after she spoke with Nick when he was at the crater site. She had an odd sense of foreboding after the call and had settled into bed with a rare nightcap. She had not heard anything since. The last few things he said did not come through well, but she thought she heard the syllable "vis." Was it a vision, the visibility, a visitor? She had tossed most of the night and felt exhausted this morning. She knew it would take him at least three days to return.

Today Jason walked the mile and half to school with his friend Artie. Vera and Artie's mother had discussed the safety of state Rt. 17 and concluded that the boys would be safe together. Jason's dog Taser walked with them from Artie's to the end of the street.

With a curt calling out of his name, followed by the word "Back!" and a sharp handclap, the dog spun around and loped home.

"Gee, Jason, that's neat. Did you train him?"

"Uncle Bruce did."

"I like your Uncle Bruce."

"Me too."

"Is he really your uncle?"

"No, he's a growing-up friend of my parents, well, mainly my dad. He takes me to the movies sometimes when my parents are busy. Once he even helped me with my homework."

"Homework, ugh. I didn't get mine done."

"What are you missing?"

"My trig problems."

"Mrs. Crystal-Jones won't be too tough on you for that."

"I didn't finish my history project either."

"What is it?"

"The Underground Railroad. I thought there was a railroad underground somewhere...before I started to read about it."

"What's your topic, Jason?"

“President Lincoln.”

“You’re s’posed to pick a black person.”

“How can you talk about Black History without talkin’ about President Lincoln?”

“I know Prince thinks President Clinton was our first black president...maybe you could talk about—”

“Lincoln. It’ll be about President Lincoln.”

“We already did Black History week a couple of months ago.”

“Yeah, Artie, and we’ll probably do it again before summer.”

“I wanted to do the Great Dreaded Scott, but Tracy picked him.”

“You mean Dred Scott, the slave?”

“Yeah, that’s the dude.”

“I don’t know why we can’t use a text that has all the history in it. I mean, what if you or I were Chinese or Irish?”

“Then we could read from a Chinese-American or an Irish-American history book.”

“I don’t think they have those. You know, when Martin Luther King gave his big speech on his dream he said you shouldn’t even take notice of skin color, just pay attention to character. Seems like someone has put that idea in mothballs.”

Artie didn’t respond, so Jason started up again.

“So why didn’t you get your trig problems done?”

“I was too tired. Besides I couldn’t understand them,” Artie said.

“You should ask me to help you,” Jason replied.

“The law of tangents. Ha! My uncle thought it was a bill before Congress.”

“Kosmo?” Jason asked.

“My mother says he’s one of a kind.”

“I’d like my mother to meet him sometime,” Jason said.

“He doesn’t go out much,” Artie replied.

“Why?” Jason asked.

“He just likes hangin’ around in his room upstairs, researching and reading and stuff. Mother told me not to ask him about his past. It upsets him, she says.”

“Hey, do you have stage crew today?”

“Yeah, you should come and see, Jason.”

“How’s the set coming?”

“Our stage is so cool. That turntable is a great idea,” Artie replied.

“Pretty expensive gift from somebody. They say he got into acting and went to Broadway or someplace”.

“It helps the crew set up the next scene behind the curtain. It gets crazy though. We have the Gibb home and the Webb home done already. And the headstones too. We’re working on the park scene, and the church. How’re you guys doin’ with the lighting?” Artie asked.

“Look! There goes Buffo...in his Corvette”.

“Big man on the team. I wouldn’t want to tackle him. I thought you were going to call him Buffo the Hunchback, Jason.”

“He doesn’t like me much as it is. Says I talk too much. I think he was looking over at you, Artie.”

“Not the way I wanted to start my day.”

“His locker is just down from me. He doesn’t much like me. Says if it wasn’t for my mouth and my ears, he wouldn’t mind me that much”.

“He’s more bluff than bite, Jason.”

“The lighting. Yes. Well, we’re working on the lighting. It’s tricky. We want Emily to look like a spirit, you know, when she comes back. You have to make her stand out someway and still look like a spirit. In the film we watched, everyone just walks through her. That’s not so easy on stage. We’re working on a hologram, but Mrs. Craft says we might not be able to pull it off.”

“Wow. Do you s’pose life was like that in Our Town a hundred years ago?”

“Not this town. Maybe in Grover’s Corners. Life was a lot simpler then, I bet,” Jason replied.

“If you could, would you come back after you die?” Artie asked.

“I wouldn’t want to hang out with those spirits up there in that cemetery. They’re weird. I’d do anything to get away from that scene”.

“Abby is really good as Emily”.

“She’s great. She talks to me,” Jason said with satisfaction.

“More girls talk to you than talk to me.”

“I haven’t been counting.”

The school guard waved to them to cross the street. The oldest part of the high school was built thirty years before, and looked it. Its yellow brick didn’t exactly go with the artificial stone façade of the new addition, and five years after the addition, they were still crowded. Heating and plumbing were a constant challenge with Maintenance, who joked about chewing gum, baling wire, and duct tape. The roof was recently patched up for the prom. Rosegard did boast of its new football field however, with extended bleachers and a new track.

“I’ll meet you for lunch.”

“Look, Artie, I can work with you in study hall. We can get your trig done.”

“You’re a real bud.”

Jason headed for his locker. He saw Buffo walking toward him. He always tried to put Buffo a little on the defensive.

“Saw you in your Vette this morning, Buffo.”

“Look, you little prick, I don’t want you to hold up class in Prince’s room today with all your fine points! I got football practice ya hear, and I don’t like bein’ late.”

Jason wanted to tell him if he had paid attention the first time he took Prince’s class he’d be in the eleventh grade by now, but he didn’t.

“Far be it from me to stand in the way of your football career.”

“I swear if you try to take over that class, I’ll pick you up by your ears and bounce you ’til you break.”

“I hear ya.”

Chorus was always a hoot for Jason. Mr. Cleft had a fetish for patriotic songs. He threw in spirituals and show tunes from time to time. Cleft projected enthusiasm and his smile was as inspiring as his baton. The kids really liked him, but there were a couple who thought he was too patriotic. The zeroes who jerked him were constantly frustrated because Cleft was always a step ahead of them. Jason and Artie called the troublemakers in school “zeroes.” Repeat offenders would get a chance at a solo audition before the ensemble. If they balked, they got a chance to write a composition, and if they still balked they mysteriously disappeared from Chorus. Benign as he appeared, Cleft had his methods.

Study hall rolled around before trig class, and Jason got permission from the teacher to help Artie. Most kids performed homework during this period, and the teacher kept an assortment of magazines on hand for those who completed or even shunned their studies. Spitballs were forbidden, but the teacher didn’t screw all the way down on the discipline, hoping to avoid trouble. This often backfired.

Prince billed his class America’s Histories. He designed the year’s course around twenty themes, each taking between one and two weeks to discuss in class. His theory was that the school year was a text, and each week or two, a chapter. The chapters were negotiable to the extent that the kids selected topics for their own concentration. The kids liked the format because it had an elective element, and it was a good prelude to Rosegard’s “AP” offerings. In fact, some thought it superior to the advanced placement history course that Mr. David Stroyer taught. They called him D. Stroyer.

Prince started with Origins of Democracy. The kids got to choose from the expanded list: The Age of Discovery, The Colonial Experience, Friction and the Break with England, The Declaration and the Constitution, The Founders, The New Government, Washington’s Life and Times, Adams and Jefferson, Jackson and the Indian Question, Slavery and Reparations, Immigration, Polk and the Mexican War, Leading up to the Civil War, Lincoln and the Civil War, Black History, Manifest Destiny, Reconstruction of the South, Industrial America, The Robber Barons, The Melting Pot, TR and American

Imperialism, Women's Suffrage, The Twenties, The Great Depression, FDR and WWII, The Fifties, The Cold War, JFK, The Civil Rights Movement, Nixon and Watergate, Viet Nam, Twenty Inventions, The Eighties and Reagan, The Clinton Years, The Bushes and the Mid East Wars. They had to have at least five from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, and each kid would pick from the leftovers and make a report to the class. Prince saw it as a democratic experience.

Tracy was confident to the edge of sassiness in announcing her choice. When she took her place at the front of the class to read her piece, she might have been the teacher, standing straight and tall. She chose the Dred Scott Decision of the U.S. Supreme Court:

“Dred Scott became the most famous slave in America. He was a product of slave breeding. He was born on a plantation in 1795. Dred Scott lived two years in Illinois and two more in Minnesota with his first owner. When he was almost thirty he was taken to Missouri and sold to a doctor. He became his owner's barber and servant. When the doctor died and his widow moved on, Dred was left in St. Louis and was hired out for simple tasks. Slavery was illegal in both states by state law and the laws of Congress. He was persuaded by his first owner's son to sue for his freedom because he had lived for four years on free soil. The lower state court granted him his freedom, but the Missouri Supreme Court reversed the decision and made him a slave again. The case reached the U.S. Supreme Court and Justice Taney, a Democrat from Maryland and a slave owner himself, ruled that the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were never intended to include Negroes. In other words, no slave could become a citizen, or sue in court. Slaves were merchandise and belonged to their owners. This ruling caused great concern in the north and the west because these states thought that slavery would be forced down their throats. The ruling was a huge political mistake. The ruling fired up Mr. Lincoln and helped the Republicans.”

“And Tracy, just when did Justice Taney's ruling come down?”

“In 1857, Mr. Prince.”

“Yes, and just in time to throw gasoline on an issue that would lead to a great conflagration. Does anyone know what issue and conflagration about which I speak?”

“Slavery and the American Civil War, sir.”

“Yes. Did you have any help with that, Tracy?”

“No, sir.”

“Good job, Tracy. Now, Mr. McFee, I believe you have something to tell us about the Underground Railroad.”

Artie was caught off guard.

“Ah...the Underground Railroad...I've read about it and have part of it written.”

“As long as you hand it in today. What can you tell us now?”

Artie looked sheepishly over at Jason.

“Well, the Underground Railroad was a way for slaves to escape the South with the help of people who were against it...slavery, that is. I guess Judge Taney would have shut...the Railroad...down.”

Artie looked over at Jason, again, as if to implore his rescue, and continued. He then discovered some notes in his back pocket. “These people who spoke out about slavery were called ‘abolitionists.’ They were often Quakers and Methodists and Presbyterians. And of course, there were free black people.”

The class sat silently. Jason sat in rapt attention.

“As many as twenty thousand slaves were helped this way. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 allowed for the capture and binding of a runaway, without a trial...it allowed them to just send the slave back to his owner, no matter how long he was free. So, you had the Underground Railroad going in one direction, and the Fugitive Slave Act going in the other...”

“Very good, Mr. McFee.”

Artie looked over at Jason, who was sitting with his hands folded and both thumbs pointed up.

“Now, Yvonne, how are you coming on Uncle Tom’s Cabin?”

Yvonne seemed shy in class. It was odd because she was at least a year older than anyone and her physical maturity for most would have engendered confidence.

“Well, Mr. Prince. I read a book review.”

A burst of chuckles spiked and ceased just as quickly.

“You’ll all get your chance, folks, so be careful. Well, what is the plot of the book, Yvonne?”

“Iz about Uncle Tom, who gets sold so’s his owner, Mr. Shelby can pay a debt. Shelby throws in a young boy named Harry for good measure...I don’t think it was Harry Belafonte.”

A sound like a partially blocked sneeze broke though from the back.

“Please go on, Yvonne,” Prince admonished sternly.

“Harry’s mamma Eliza grabs her boy and takes off wif ’im. Dey goes acrossed a river and head for de railroad Artie was talkin’ ’bout. Two guys with dogs sets out to capture Eliza and Harry. Uncle Tom does some good things and gets bought by a nice man. The man later gets stabbed and his wife sells Uncle Tom to Simon La...La...”

“Legree.”

“Dat’s him. He treats him real bad and Tom gets sick, too sick for Mr. Shelby’s son to buy him back. Meanwhile a couple of Mister...Mister...Legree’s slaves also escape and day all gets togitha in Canada.”

“Do you know who wrote the story, Yvonne?”

“Stowe?”

“Harriet Beecher Stowe, that’s right. And you can imagine, from our discussion today, how that book may have fired the flames against slavery in 1852.”

“It was good propaganda.”

“Who said that?”

“I did, Mr. Prince,” replied Jason.

“It was propaganda and for a good end.”

“Yes.”

Yvonne broke in.

“I don’t know why Uncle Tom gets such a bad name today. He was just a slave who tried to do his best.”

“His critics think he should have resisted more, instead of resigning himself to his fate. They thought he gave in too easily.”

“Today, if you seek the American dream, you’re an Uncle Tom.”

“Jason, it’s Yvonne’s presentation. You’ll get your turn.”

“Do your parents know you chose this subject, Yvonne?”

“No.”

Prince reached into his hat and pulled out Jason’s name.

“Jason, your turn has magically arrived. What have you chosen for us today.”

“Mr. Prince, I have selected the topic Slavery and Abe Lincoln.”

“Well, nobody can say you dabble lightly. It’s an awfully big topic, isn’t it, Jason?”

“I just want to say a few things.”

“The floor is yours.”

“Our great president in a way inherited a problem that it seems had been too large for all the presidents and Congresses before him. First, I’d like to ask the class how many feel that the transporting and breeding of African people for the purpose of slavery was a terrible thing...put your hands up.”

Everyone raised a hand.

“Now, as I say a few things, I want you to think about how long slavery had been around and whether you think it exists today. The slavery we think of is the capture and later breeding of African Negroes for work in England, the Caribbean Islands, and America. In time, several issues grew up around this sorry practice: slow emancipation, resettling, compensation to slave owners, whether it—that is slavery—would be allowed in the new territories. Mr. Lincoln thought a great deal about these side issues, but he knew slavery itself was wrong morally. He spoke to the issue in his run-up to the presidency. He really stirred the pot when as president, he proclaimed emancipation of the slaves without any authority to do this. He did know his proclamation would recast the Great War in moral terms in the eyes of the world. Lincoln wasn’t guided by polls. His principles guided him.

But he was a shrewd politician. The politics of slavery determined whether new territories would be slave or free. This was tied to the issue of states rights...to decide for themselves...compared to being dictated to by the Federal Congress. The more free-soil states there were, the more the slave-based Southern states felt isolated, with less representation in Washington. This led to something that Lincoln knew would destroy the country—secession. That's when states break away from the Union. So, even if we all agree that slavery was a terrible thing, it's worth knowing some of the history."

"Do you have more, Jason?"

"Yes, Mr. Prince."

"Proceed then."

Jason read from his notes.

"Let's look back to the time of the Founders. They had just created a new nation with a new government. In a way, they were paralyzed by the fact of slavery when they wrote the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. No place in these documents is the term slavery used. These documents stated that all men were created equal and were endowed with unalienable rights—rights that came from the Creator and nobody else. These included freedom. Why then, you might ask, the 'disconnect' between these lofty ideals and the permission of slavery. It's one of those shady mysteries that make history worth studying. Many of the Founders owned slaves themselves. Their revolt from Mother England, you'd think, must have changed their views. In his will, Washington provided that his slaves be freed after his wife died. Hamilton was a staunch antislavery man and played a role in New York's eventual outlawing the use of slaves. John Adams hated slavery and never owned one. Benjamin Franklin was a master of timing. He uttered a ringing condemnation of slavery and soon after, he passed into the next world. But the Virginia planters, including Jefferson and Madison, were curiously fuzzy on the subject, making statements on both sides of the issue. And they kept their slaves. The Founders knew that several Southern colonies would not join the Union if a movement to abolish slavery were undertaken. They compromised and wrote Article One, Section Nine into the Constitution. It forbade Congress from passing any law that abolished or restricted the trading of 'such persons as are presently imported' until the year 1808. During this twenty-year grace period, this 'peculiar institution' increased in practice and numbers, mainly in the South."

"Wrap it up soon, Jason."

"The pressure cooker couldn't contain the slowly mounting heat, as we all know. Leading up to Lincoln's presidency and the American Civil War seventy years after the country's founding, there were many compromises. The Missouri Compromise of 1820 allowed Missouri and Alabama to come in as slave states, while territories north of Missouri, plus Maine, would be free. The Wilmot Proviso later stated that all lands that came to the country through the U.S. Mexican War would be free. It was never passed, but it led to the Free Soilers and later to Lincoln's Republican Party. It also led to the Compromise of 1850. The five parts of this compromise were: California will be free; the territories of New Mexico (including present-day Arizona and Utah) could decide the issue without federal intervention—this was called 'popular sovereignty'; the slave trade (but not

slavery itself) would be abolished in the District of Columbia; Texas, as a slave state, would receive compensation for giving up some western lands; and a strict new Fugitive Slave Act was created, requiring U.S. citizens to assist in the return of slaves.”

“Okay, Mr. Casperson. Do you know about the three-fifths compromise? The Constitution counting a slave as just three-fifths of a regular person! What about that?”

Yvonne nestled in her seat with Prince’s declaration.

“Yes. That compromise was all about taxes and representation in the Congress. Up to the Civil War, in terms of representation, the South benefited over free states from the ‘slave vote,’ even if it was a fraction. If the Constitution had counted the slave as a whole person, instead of the fraction, the South would have been in a stronger position to promote slavery in the new states. Seen from today’s perspective, it seems ridiculous to count a person as a fraction, but the provision helped contain the institution of slavery compared to a whole vote. Besides, the issue went away with the Thirteenth Amendment and the abolition of slavery...except for the poll taxes and other shenanigans promoted mainly by one of our political parties.”

Yvonne looked at Jason with an expression born of both skepticism and bewilderment.

“How much longer, Mr. Casperson?”

“Not much. Senator Stephen Douglas introduced the Kansas-Nebraska bill in 1854, which repealed the Compromise of 1820 in favor of popular sovereignty of all states. This wasn’t strong enough for the abolitionists, including the fanatic John Brown, who felt that slavery might spread all the way to the Pacific. Lincoln admired Brown’s commitment but thought his methods insane. Prior to and even during his presidency Lincoln had no authority to abolish slavery. The South strongly felt this. But Mr. Lincoln let his sentiments be known. In a campaign speech in New York, he said, ‘Can we allow it (slavery) to spread into the National Territories, and to overrun us here in these Free States? If our sense of duty forbids this then let us stand by our duty, fearlessly and effectively...Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us to the end dare to do our duty as we understand it.’ Lincoln spoke from his heart, from core values. Nor was he afraid to invoke the Creator. The country wasn’t offended when he did.”

“All right, that was very stirring. Is that your presentation then?”

“Just a final thought, Mr. Prince. President Lincoln didn’t set out to create a legacy. He certainly wasn’t afraid to use the power of his office to the fullest...some say even beyond, for what he believed. He could stand before anyone and argue. He suffered as a martyr. He and his wife Mary lost two children. He suffered for all those men who fought, on both sides. Isn’t it a wonder that in times of grave national strife, our soil produces just the right man? How is that?”

“Very moving, Mr. Casperson, but we need to hear some more—”

“Just a conclusion then, Mr. Prince.”

Before Prince could respond, Jason went on.

“And so, the great issue fell to the great man. It took a great war at a very late hour to resolve this grave problem. America took the hard look, at long last, and cleansed this

blight from her soul with the blood of six hundred thousand of her young men. Had he lived to guide the Reconstruction of the South, the Civil Rights struggle throughout the next century may have been easier. But history goes in one direction and for a purpose. As long as man desires to dominate man, the world will see slavery. And we do. Slavery persists in Africa today, as it did and does with the dictatorships. Trafficking in humans for forced labor, sex, and prostitution effects one million people a year. If you sacrifice your curiosity, or sell your body for pictures or pleasure, you, too, are a victim of slavery.”

“Okay, Jason, that’s a long conclusion. We’ll have to stop you there.”

As Jason took his seat he looked at Buffo, who was staring menacingly back at him. But the most menacing stare came from Yvonne. This puzzled him, because she seemed receptive of his speech, right up to its conclusion.

Mr. Prince fetched another name from the hat just as the bell rang. Kids flew out of the classroom, chasing the lunch line in the cafeteria. On the way down the hall, Jason and Artie saw Buffo just ahead of them. Jason caught up.

“Time for practice yet, Buffo?”

“Don’t push your luck, farthead!”

Jason sat with Artie over lunch. Abby and her girlfriend sat at the end of the table. Buffo came over while Jason was eating his tapioca. Buffo slammed his fist on the table, and a blob of tapioca bounced up onto Jason’s nose. The cafeteria immediately silenced. Buffo then lifted Jason up and held him over his head with one hand under Jason’s belly button, spinning him like a propeller.

“You’re going to get tapioca on your head, Buffo, if you keep doing that.”

“Put him down, you brute!”

“Just playing with him. Don’t get your knickers in a twist.”

Buffo smiled menacingly at the kids who stared as he let Jason down clumsily among the chairs.

Jason stood up, unhurt and unfazed.

“Here, this fell out of your pocket. Jason held up a tiny Bible and offered it to Buffo.”

“Yeah, my mother wanted me to have that. I don’t need it.”

“I’ll keep it for you.”

“Yeah...you do that.”

Buffo shuffled away, uttering a low growl.

“What a shivering A-hole!” Abby said

“Abby, don’t bother yourself,” Jason said.

“Aren’t you going to report him for that, Jason?” Abby asked.

“I didn’t get hurt.”

Four

The Debate

Vera Casperson made time from her work to transport her son and his friends to school events. Her schedule at the Princeton Center for Crime Study (The PCCS) was flexible compared to Nick's. She had taken two days off from work. She was almost stir-crazy, waiting for a call she knew was unlikely as only two were "scheduled," and her efforts to reach her husband had been unsuccessful. She chose to take her turn, as Jason advised. Normally, she shared the task as driver with other mothers and might have asked one of them to sub for her. But she relished this assignment as driver. It put her in contact with the mix of emotions and range of conversation of one of most fascinating and frustrating creatures on the planet—the evolving adolescent. She knew her responsibilities at the wheel, but she could multitask. She could be a fly on the wall, visibly unmoved by the banter.

This Friday afternoon she would pack the four debaters from Rosegard High into her Volvo and transport them to Larchfield. Jason was a member of the team but this day he and Ollie drew a bye. The task fell instead to Melissa and Stockton. The Debating Forum was created by a group of mothers with heady kids who weren't into sports. The mothers got some credit with the PE department, arguing that debating was exercise for the mind. Unlike the kids, these mothers de-emphasized winning and losing, seeing more value in the exercise itself.

It was good to read and think about such issues as guns and gun control, man and global warming, the pros and cons to belonging to the United Nations, the validity of the term "gay marriage," and a host of other button-pressing issues of the day. Of course, such issues received less attention in our pop culture than predictions of play-off contenders, the suspicious death of a wealthy former bunny girl, a celebrity pop-tart who cut off her hair for arcane reasons, the disappearance of a high school girl on a vacation island, or whether O. J. was guilty, again. But such "newsworthy" subjects were less conducive for the exercise of debate, which was supposed to explore heady pros and cons. Furthermore, the political issues, squirmy as they were, might impact more lives more deeply, than the populist sensationalism that was selected for consumption and sale.

The assigned topic for this day's debate was capital punishment. Melissa and Stockton had each prepared to make his or her case, one in favor, one against.

Ollie and Jason, as tenth graders would observe and maybe have a chance to contribute to the rebuttal of Larchfield's case against.

For such a ponderous subject, the students were lighthearted on the way to Larchfield.

"Mrs. Casperson, Jason told us his father was in Brazil, in the jungle. Is that so?"

"Well, Melissa, yes, he and a colleague at the college are there on a project."

"Jaguars and ocelots?"

"What was that, Stockton?"

"The big cats down there in South America...Jason told me. Maybe Mr. Casperson will bring one home."

“Oh, Stockton, I think he’ll leave the cats lie where they are.”

“Maybe a stuffed one.”

“Oh! Gracious, no.”

“I saw at the zoo where the Siberian tigers are disappearing. People hunt them.”

“Then it’s up to the Siberians to arrest the poachers and stop it. It’s also not wise to tease them, either.”

“Now, Jason, be nice to Ollie.”

“I wasn’t offending Ollie.”

“You didn’t offend me, Jason. Did you mean poachers?”

The chatter ceased for a moment as Vera approached an intersection.

“Uncle Bruce told me he’s going to bring home some bats. I saw his collection once in his classroom. Did you ever see them, Mother? You all should see his car. He calls it the Batmobile. He took me for a ride in it once. It’s a cool car, isn’t it, Mother?”

“I’ve never been in your uncle Bruce’s car Jason and I haven’t seen his bat collection.”

Vera achieved the inside lane as conversation lulled for a moment.

“How was your day in school, Son?”

“It was okay. Mr. Edwards didn’t call on me today. He always tries to stump me.”

“What do you mean?”

“Oh nothing. We just have a little thing going.”

“Mr. Edwards picks his nose...I saw him do it.”

A gleeful round of snickers filled the wagon.

“Boys, now that’s not nice.”

“Sorry, Mrs. Casperson,” Ollie offered with contrition.

“Hey...look over there, that’s the guy who’s in the play...you know...he’s a senior. He play’s the main guy...ah...”

“George.”

“Yeah, George...and that girl he’s with plays the girl he, I mean George, marries...Emily, I think.”

“Our Town! We did that when I was in high school many years ago. Are you in the play, Melissa?”

“No, ma’am, my mom says debatin’s enough.”

“I like being on the lighting crew. Artie’s on the stage crew, you know, Mother”.

“No, I didn’t know that.”

Jason paused and looked around at the others.

“Hey gang, we all know what capital punishment is, don’t we?”

“Getting the death penalty for a capital crime.”

“Good then, just so we’re on the same wavelength.”

The earlier talk only intensified Vera’s concern for her husband. It was now D-7 and he was so far away. He and Bruce were scheduled to return before next week’s classes started. Amidst these thoughts she deftly turned into the Larchfield High parking lot. She caught the sight of a large woman walking swiftly toward the car. The woman was motioning for them to park behind the gymnasium.

“Debate Team?”

“Yes.”

“We’re right in here. Just come in and we’ll show you the way.”

The team from Rosegard filed out of the car as if on their way to a cremation. They walked to a small conference room at the end of the gym. Larchfield’s team was seated at a long table. Melissa and Stockton took their place across from two students of the opposition. A disarmingly tall and austere man rose and requested the students to announce their names and grade levels. He introduced himself as a retired judge who volunteered to mediate the session.

After the customary greetings and introductions, the judge explained the theory and the rules of debate.

“Welcome, young ladies and gentlemen. This is a new program and we hope you like it. As you make your presentations today, for and against capital punishment, remember to stick to your point. The main thing here is to try and marshal your thoughts so that everyone who hears you understands what your position is. The view you express this afternoon doesn’t necessarily have to be a hardened one that you hold all your life. In fact, it may even be a soft view that you hold only for the purpose of your present argument. It is important for you to listen, so that you can make a good rebuttal. Good listening will help you in life, and as you grow older you may realize that good listening is one mark of success. One presenter from each team will argue in favor of capital punishment, and one from each will argue against. Each presenter will have five minutes. After five minutes you will hear the buzzer. Following these four presentations, each of you will have an opportunity to deliver a one-minute rebuttal of anything said by the opposing team. You are encouraged to make a statement of rebuttal. I will send each of the debaters a commentary on how I thought you did, and where you might improve. Your mothers have agreed to this...that is...my being a critic. It’s also important for you to be able to accept criticism. You won’t get a grade or score from me. As you know...or at least, I hope you know...the topic today is capital punishment. The bathrooms are over there, and the water fountain is on the other side of that door. Now, are we ready to start?”

The absence of questions might have heralded complete understanding, or total confusion. The kids actually were preoccupied with their thoughts, but most got the idea he had said something of significance.

“Hearing none, shall we begin?”

Melissa started: “I am in favor of capital punishment. Capital punishment means putting a person to death who has committed a very serious crime, usually murder or treason. The prospect of capital punishment causes people to think twice before they commit a crime that might lead to their own end. This is called dee-terrence. If an actor...a person who commits a crime...is sentenced to capital punishment, and if the word got out about it, it would dee-ter a future ‘perp,’ ah, actor...someone from committing that same crime.”

Melissa fumbled for a chart. She had made several charts.

“This chart shows that the homicide rates have been dropping in the U.S. since 1990. This can’t be because people aren’t reporting it, ’cause we tend to find bodies all the time. And when we find a body, folks usually get excited about it, and it gets all over the news. So, it’s not like rape, where many victims don’t want to come forward and report the crime. It is very hard to measure and record a prevented crime because not many criminals come forth and say what they wanted to do, but decided not to.”

Melissa paused. The other side sat motionless. Melissa felt like she was on a roll. She fidgeted with her sweater, which had crept up to her midriff with her arm movements.

“So why then have there been fewer killings? I would propose it might be because more and more states have allowed capital punishment over this same time period. Did you know that capital punishment was suspended in our country between 1973 and 1976 by the Supreme Court because of the Eighth Amendment. It talked about ‘cruel and unusual punishment’? Also, someone came along and said, ‘Hey, I know how to make this smooth and inoffensive. I can use an anesthetic and follow it by a lethal injection. Then it wouldn’t be cruel and unusual.’ Hundreds of thousands of Americans use anesthetics for surgery and it’s not considered cruel and unusual. And just think of an innocent person, alive one minute and dead the next, say from a heart attack. Would that be cruel and unusual, do you think? How many states now permit capital punishment? The answer is thirty-eight out of fifty. So, I propose there is a cause and effect between increased use of capital punishment, deterrence, and a drop in the homicide—”

Buzzzzzzzz.

“—rate.”

Melissa sharply gathered her charts and notes and returned them to her brief case.

“Okay, Melissa. Now, who, for the home team will argue against?”

“I will.”

Mindy was a tall shy girl. She commenced in a quiet voice.

“I would like to say that capital punishment is wrong. Thou Shalt Not Kill, is a commandment. A commandment is bigger than an amendment. We must break the cycle of violence. Violence begets violence. Have you heard Reverend Jackson on this? Who is man to sit in judgment of another man? Judge not, that ye be judged. You can’t be pro-life and for capital punishment, can you? Guns are bad, ’cause most murders involve guns. We have to take away all guns. Don’t we come down to the level of the killer, when we kill? Doesn’t it cheapen the life of the one who shoots the criminal? Isn’t that why they use many shooters with blanks, and only one with a bullet, so no one will know? Isn’t that why they have a machine to push on the syringe?”

Mindy sat down, trembling. Her eyes were focused on a point in the middle of the table.

“Is that all you wish to say?”

“Yes, Your Honor.”

“All right. Who, then, from the home team will argue for?”

Anthony rose and addressed the seated with a circumferential glance. He was husky, darkly handsome and looked like he'd rather be playing on a sports field somewhere. He read from a script.

“We are living at a time in human history when the idea of personal accountability is becoming obsolete. We have ‘no-fault’ this and ‘no-fault that.’ We have been brought up as though all that matters is ourselves. We are content to lower the bar on our performance, so that more of us receive the notion that it’s the effort that counts, not the performance. ‘It’s the thought, stupid,’ not the deed, they seem to tell us. Another thing they leave out. Crime is optional. You don’t have to commit a crime. There are plenty of poor, downtrodden, abused, unloved people who choose not to commit crimes. There are deeds that go beyond the pale...the boundaries of behavior that must be weighed in the balance, deeds where a decision has to be made on the basis of the deed alone, not on circumstance or motive, so that society might be protected. There should be a consequence for committing a heinous act, and there are acts that should disqualify a person from society. By committing such an act, one deserves the consequence. The philosopher Kant spelled out the notion of fair dealing among free individuals. That for a person to be free, it is necessary his behavior not limit the freedom of others. When a person commits a heinous crime, he gains an advantage over all others in society, by taking advantage of their forbearance not to interfere with his rights and freedoms. Justice mandates that the equilibrium be restored. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes concerned himself with the potential for the citizen’s taking justice into his or her own hands, should the system fail. But it is Justice herself who makes this demand...that for Society to survive, it must place a value on an individual’s life. Where the evidence identifies the calculating murderer and where there are no mitigating factors, then the consequence, the balancer, should be the murderer’s life. Anything short of this, reduces the value of life itself.”

The judge looked at Anthony and asked, “Is your father a prosecuting attorney?”

Anthony said, “Yes, sir.”

“Please have a seat, Anthony. All right then, may we hear the case against, from the visiting team.”

Stockton chose to stand up. Perhaps it was because he was lost in the chair.

“I would like to offer an argument against capital punishment.”

The judge set the timer.

“I would like to amplify Mindy’s point that we do not have the right to lower the hammer on people who have gone astray. But more importantly, they are human beings and have certain rights. They deserve a defense. They deserve a chance at rehabilitation. They deserve a chance at redemption. Now of course, if the facts of the case are proven so that

it would be a risk to society to return them to that society, then life imprisonment is in order. You know, the Puritans used to place people in stocks and display them in the public marketplace for the sake of humiliation. That practice was abandoned once it was determined to be inhumane. Humiliation is hardly the platform for redemption. Instilling anger and hopelessness cannot bring about a positive change in a human heart. We all need a measure of dignity. The compacts of civilization—for instance, the Magna Carta and the Constitution—all prescribe such. And so, mostly so, with the morality that flows from the Word of God, the Scriptures.”

“Well, young ladies and gentlemen, we have heard some very good statements from both teams.”

Vera smiled at her counterpart at the center table. She then looked over at both Jason and Ollie, who were listening intently.

The judge said, “Now you have been listening to your peers, on both teams. Each of you has a minute to rebut something you’ve heard in any of the three other presentations. We’ll start with the visiting team.”

Melissa passed.

Stockton adjusted his tie and cleared his throat.

“I wish to present a second argument in favor of capital punishment. It has to do with ‘just deserts.’ It would be better if we used the term capital consequence, instead of capital punishment. We reward people for good behavior. We give them prizes and we honor them. We tend to think of pain, when we think of punishment.”

Mindy went next.

“For de-ter-rence to work the potential criminal has to have the feeling that there will be a consequence. Some never get caught. You know that Hollywood and many current writers search to portray the perfect crime. The perfect crime becomes the standard. Sometimes the police screw up, or there is a mistrial and the perp gets off. Sometimes the defense simply outwits the prosecution, and the truth gets lost. Sometimes there is a plea bargain, or some reduction of penalty to put pressure on someone else. Also for de-ter-ance to work, something bad has to happen to the perp. He or she can’t just wind up in a place where they get better food than they would have gotten, or they can exercise every day or use a library, play ball, have visits and all. It can’t be a life that’s better than the one they had before, you know. All these things reduce the deterrence of capital punishment, by offering kind of a lottery in terms of getting it easy, or getting off.”

Anthony stood up and stated that it was not at all clear that the drop in murder rates was due to the reinstatement of the death penalty. He referred to Freakonomist Levitt’s recent book alleging that the drop really coincided with the time frame that the abortion movement got rolling, fifteen to twenty years ago, the time frame when unwanted kids might otherwise have been around to commit the crimes.

Stockton popped up and said that it could be demographics alone...that crimes tended to be committed by young people...and the wave of baby-boomers had long passed. Without counting abortions, family size had dropped, and the number of young people had shrunken in comparison to former times when the number of young people was

higher. Bodily crime rates per one hundred thousand population would be expected then to be less. There is no need to rationalize abortion as the reason for the trend of reduced crimes against the person, as Freakonomist Levitt had done.

“Well Stockton...we won't count that, since you already expended your rebuttal chance.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well then. We have had a very good round here. I think this program will turn out as a positive experience.”

After a round of handshakes and a show of sportsmanship, they gathered themselves and within ten minutes they were motoring back to Rosegard. The kids were stimulated now and no sugar was involved. Banter about the different presentations filled the air. It had practically killed Jason to be left out of the debate.

“Hey, I've got the answer, so that everyone can agree. Give the perp a choice. It's capital punishment, or it's a life of useful work where you pay your own way. Then, you have at least one chance for redemption through hard work, just in case God is holding His idea on the subject. Some of these people just want to go out as hellish and ghoulish as they can, so they shoot up a classroom and plan to be taken out in the process. Heck, some people halfway around the world think they will achieve paradise if they just blow themselves up, along with a lot of others. Homicide, I reckon is a first cousin to suicide. So give them a choice. Right, Mother?”

“Well, I hadn't thought of—”

“And, to the commandment...Thou Shalt Not Kill. The Lord wants us all to live, so that we can be...well, the best we can be. If someone is on record stating that he wants you dead, and he follows up on it with deeds, then you are not obliged to turn the other cheek. The Lord does not want His people to be killed. We're all His people. So, if you don't like capital punishment, then give the killer a choice—his own life behind bars or his own death. Right, Mom?”

“Well, I'm driving right now, Son, and I didn't follow everything you said. So, when we get home I'd like to talk more.”

“I've also got the answer to the deterrence problem.”

“What is that, Jason?”

“Well, Mother, if you want to talk about real deterrence, then take the next guy who kidnaps, abuses, and kills a little girl, or a little boy, and do this: Get the DNA proof it was the guy who did it, so there's no mistake. Then, after the trial that convicts him, make the sentence one of proportion. Give him the chimp sentence.”

“The what?”

“Put the guy in a cage with a rogue chimp and telecast it. They are about three times stronger than a man, about the same proportion as a man, to a child. They can be very brutal.”

“Jason, shame on you! What are you thinking?”

“It’s a thought experiment, Mom. I was just thinking about true deterrence. That would be a true deterrent. Don’t you agree, especially if you televise it so that all the future molester killers can look on.”

Jason looked over at Melissa who was wide-eyed.

“Jason, nobody would watch a thing like that.”

“Are you kidding, Melissa? They watch people eat bugs and crawl in goop and other revolting things on the reality shows. People dig that stuff. Hey, if you knew you were going to have a round with an ape that outweighed you three to one, you’d pay attention, whether you had a conscience or not. I think one or two televised sessions of that would do.”

“But it simply would not be permissible. It flies in the face of law and civility.”

“Of course, and because of that we will continue to hear in the news about the deeds of these grizzly humanoids that look like Homo Sapiens. I call them Homo Dissemblens.”

“Homo Dissemblens...what, what is that?”

“Oh, they are creatures that look like human beings except that somewhere along the way they either lost or never developed a conscience. They fool us with their outward appearance, while the predatory parts of their minds take over their inner selves. They lack that voice within that most people have—that voice that curbs our worst thoughts, the ones owned by the devil. They learned the laws often can’t be enforced, and many of the courts and judges are so lenient, and gun ownership is under fire, that deterrence no longer figures in their calculations. So, my solution is to revive Deterrence, since H. D. no longer operates by Conscience. It’s a thought experiment, Mother.”

Melissa piped up. “Jason, I know you are against abortion. I heard you say it in class. How can you be so much for life on the front end, and be in favor of death, on the back end?”

“Well, I just proposed a pro-choice solution for the convicted killer. But the point is the two are not comparable—apples and oranges.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, the embryo, or fetus, or neonate, or tissue mass, or whatever term you like is alive and totally innocent. No choices have been made. His or her whole life is yet to come. Society slices the pie into degrees—first degree, second degree, involuntary manslaughter, and all that. But for the willful killer for whom the evidence is clear, it puts a value on a human life. If a human life is worth ten years in the slammer for such a killer, then the value of human life has been discounted. That’s what Mr. Q says.”

“Who’s Mr. Q?” Vera asked.

“A radio talker, Mother. Besides, what is life, anyway?”

“Breathing and heartbeats?” Vera replied.

“It’s a sequence of choices that lasts on the average for around seventy years, isn’t it?” Jason said.

“Well...”

“We choose our way to crime, don’t we. Committing a crime is optional, you know. We also choose our way to the next world, which ever one we earn,” Jason said.

They returned to Rosegard in silence.

Five

An Evening with Dad

Nick returned from his Brazilian adventure on the ninth day, a Sunday. He arrived disheveled and exhausted, late in the evening. Vera ran from the bedroom and embraced him as he dropped his duffel on the living room floor. She almost knocked him over. He limply laid his arms over her shoulders and gazed into her searching eyes. He gently pulled her head into his chest and uttered, “It’s been a long time, hasn’t it?”

The gap from their last communication in the forest to this moment had fueled her anxiety and fired her imagination. The spectrum of her dread included an unthinkable thought, namely that she had lost him forever. She did not appreciate the poetry of such a loss, the loss of a man, her man, whose innermost thoughts she knew roamed the realm of exploration. She had played out in her mind the challenge of finding him somewhere in the heart of Amazonia. The logistics of that challenge had been daunting for her. She was more physical with him now than he’d remembered. Though he responded to her hugs and kisses and the hungry find of her hands, he seemed slightly out of touch. After a long embrace amidst her sighs and squeaks, he plopped himself onto the couch. He looked around briefly, as if to study his whereabouts.

“Nick, my darling, are you all right? Why didn’t you call me on your way home?”

“Yes, yes, Vera, I’m all right. We had a difficult flight home...missed our flight in Miami, had to catch the next one...I can’t say, exactly...please forgive me.”

“You must be exhausted. We can talk about your discoveries in the morning. Meanwhile, my husband, let us get to bed. I want to be your wife.”

“That’s very sweet, Vera, my wife. I must sit here for a minute before I hit the shower. Perhaps a glass of wine.”

“I can help with both.”

They laughed together. She disappeared briefly to place a bottle of Sauvignon Blanc in the freezer. He shed his clothes in the hallway that led to the bathroom. The wine was cool when he appeared in the buff, rosy and warm. They got a little buzz together. They pleased each other intensely in bed and he slept like a stone. He awakened with slobber on his pillow and sheet marks on his face and body.

At his first movement, Vera headed for the kitchen to make breakfast. He appeared with the sound of the blender.

“How did Bruce do on the trip?”

“He was in his element.”

“I know you want to tell me all about it, but before I go to work I just want to know. You said you were standing at the edge of a crater. It was a meteorite, then. Wasn’t it?”

“Ah, yes, yes. A meteorite. We collected enough samples to find out what kind and maybe its origin.”

“Are you disappointed?”

Nick didn't answer.

“Nick, are you disappointed?”

“With what?”

“With your findings.”

“Oh, no...no, no.”

“Honey, you slept so soundly I didn't want to wake you. You have a light teaching schedule today, right?”

“Right. But we have to make our report, and take care of our samples and gear.”

“Honey, I tried to get today off, but you know we have that seminar today and I have to take part in it.”

“Of course, dear.”

She held him tightly and squeezed him as hard as she could. He squeezed her back, smiled and said it was good to be home.

The house was quiet after Vera left. Jason had left an hour earlier for school. Nick didn't know his son had waited for him to wake up but decided to postpone his greetings for later. Taser sat on the kitchen floor and watched Nick eat bacon and eggs. Vera even put out some mango juice, in recognition of Nick's journey. The dog wagged his tail at the crunch of the bacon.

After breakfast, Nick made his way up to Jason's bedroom. The room was considerably neater than Nick remembered his own being when he was his son's age. In the middle of the hexagonally shaped room was Jason's computer, flanked by bookshelves. Nick thought back to the night he and Vera had come in late and their son awaited them, eye's sparkling, having just read an ad for a computer that had caught his fancy. He and his wife decided to forego buying an IRA then and instead feed their son's burning desire.

Jason had supplemented his system with earnings from his paper route. His cumulative investment resulted in a 2.0-gigahertz dual CPU and a 200-gigabyte flash drive, which he toted in his backpack for use at the library. Jason used a cable Internet connection and open-source products for his word processor and spreadsheets. He was awash in information.

Jason's bookshelves contained many notebooks. Nick browsed through a few. They were filled with jottings from his son's excursions into the Internet. Two of the notebooks were labeled From Kosmo. Nick refrained from invading this private zone. Bookshelves on one side of the computer contained a small library. In addition to Robinson Crusoe, Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea, The Jungle Book, The Sea Wolf, and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Nick was surprised to find Lord Jim, Crime and Punishment, and Pilgrim's Progress, not that he had read all these himself. The bookshelf on the other side contained some history books on America. He had a copy of Johnson's Modern Times

and a row of used books, including McCullough's 1776, Catton's The Civil War, Tuchman's Guns of August, and a rag-eared set of Churchill's memoirs on WWII that was missing book number four. Another shelf contained old videos on Lewis and Clark, the U.S. Mexican War, and The Spanish American War. Next were worn biographies on Churchill, Reagan, Lincoln, FDR, Washington, Jefferson, and Franklin. Nick surmised his son fetched most of his booty from a used-book site on the Net.

Charts of the solar system and galaxies stretched across the ceiling, along with a world-history timeline. A small aquarium sat in the corner with a sticker on the side that read, Darwin's World. It harbored some newts, green turtles, snails and neon tetras. Nick knew his son was always buying neon tetras. A rocky outcropping above the waterline covered an underwater maze that shielded the fish. At least Jason gave them a chance. Framed copies of the American Constitution and the Declaration of Independence occupied the space above the headboard. This visual menagerie contained no sports figures, rock band icons or girls.

The many-faceted room was decorated with posters on each wall, except for the wall with a window. Nick surveyed the Poet's Corner, with a picture of Shakespeare next to which was Jason's photo. Also featured were pictures of Whitman, Frost, Dylan and Joel. Nick walked deliberately around the room, as if caught in the web of his son's intellect.

The Patriot's Corner contained a miniature of a mural in the Pennsylvania State Capitol where the Founders and Lincoln could be spotted amidst a large gathering that symbolized America. There was a small print of Washington praying at Valley Forge and a photo of Churchill and FDR forging the Allied Alliance on HMS Prince of Wales. Next came the Polar Explorer's Corner. Here, his son had chosen pictures of Shackleton, Amundsen, Scott, Peary and Rae, each with short biographical sketches. The two Martian explorers, Spirit and Opportunity, completed the Explorer exhibit. Perched on the next wall were the Notably Restless. This wall harbored pictures of Socrates, Luther, Paine and of all people, Kosmo. Lastly, came the title: Modern Heroes, Requiring No Worship. One line of photos featured Bruce, Kosmo and to Nick's surprise, himself! Also shown were Bill Cosby, Reverend Peterson, J. C. Watts, Thomas Sowell and Walter Williams. A host of radio talk-show personalities, including Mr. Q, were featured next to a picture of a beacon.

After completing this impressive circuit and standing at the doorway to his son's room, Nick wondered where his son came from. Surely the repository contained in two sets of DNA was beyond human imagination. A fleeting thought shot through his brain...was Jason really his offspring? He dismissed the preposterous thought as quickly as it had flitted into his mind from somewhere. Perhaps the boy was an alien being. Nick's muffled laugh at his own flight of fancy sounded like a drop of water on a hot plate.

The days in Brazil had given him some time to consider how little he knew Jason. Vera chose to hold off for a few days telling Nick about the Debate Team experience. The reconnaissance of his son's bedroom had given him more than a few hints. He thought of his wife in this matter. To Vera, Jason wasn't behaving like a boy of fifteen. Instead he was becoming a pedant, all too willing to take on an unseemly range of topics. Nick appreciated without sharing his wife's concern that Jason was becoming unnaturally fixated on projects that flowed from Artie's uncle Kosmo. Clearly, Kosmo was a star in

their son's universe. To Vera the boy was too uninhibited for someone his age, or really anyone. It wasn't that she grew up with the antiquated notion that children should be seen and not heard. It just seemed that he couldn't possibly be qualified to speak on all that he attempted to speak about. When she called him on it, he referred to his First Amendment Rights, which was cute, up to a point. She knew her son was unusual, but she still worried about the unknown.

On the other hand, there was a lot about the boy that was admirable. He was open and highly approachable. He was kind and considerate. They had no worry about some silent, sullen personality full of hidden venom or vitriol about to be unleashed on the classroom. He definitely knew the difference between Good and Evil. His harshness seemed focused on the latter.

Nick resolved to ask his son up to the observatory this evening. He made it a mission to try to know Jason better and to expose himself more to his boy, so that if Nick were to keel over tomorrow, Jason would have some direct memories. Nick had prepared dinner for Vera, so they might all eat together. Father and son could get an early start on driving up to the mountains. Vera was thankful that Nick had taken a renewed interest. Perhaps the meteorite represented more than matter from space.

They swept across the farmland of north-central New Jersey in Nick's Chevy. The Appalachian foothills lay to the northwest. Up in the mountains, sequestered from ambient light, a twenty-inch refracting telescope beckoned them. The small towns on the plains below had not grown to the point that light pollution had contaminated the observatory.

Nick spoke of the Center with his son. The telescope was equipped with a camera. Sequential photos of binary star systems were used to teach students how all heavenly bodies were swung around a common center of gravity, how everything in the universe was in motion relative to everything else. The observatory was only ten years old, but they had access to photographic plates taken at other locations over the span of a century. From these they could detect small perturbations in the orbiting stars, suggesting the presence of planets. This might be a good spot to orient a radio telescope in search of an intelligent signal. Sometimes, a single star was seen to wobble considerably for no apparent reason. This might be presumptive evidence for a companion Black Hole. Certainly, this was not a good place to look for life.

The observatory was supplied with collections of photos taken by the space-based telescope Hubble. Free of the atmosphere's smudge, the Hubble was able to see galaxies in their vivid disc-shaped or globular forms scattered throughout the Cosmos. What defined an "Astro" student was the sense of wonder such images produced. Nick told Jason of the planned launching of Kepler in 2008. Kepler would look at over a hundred thousand distant stars continuously, searching for transits by earth-sized planets.

Some of Nick's students studied computer tapes sent for analysis to the Center as part of Berkley's SERENDIP IV's Whole Sky Survey. If Jason got interested, he might become a SETI-at-home geek and hire out his screensaver to process data.

As they drove north, Nick caught Jason's silhouette out of the corner of his eye. Jason was looking at the dashboard.

“Not quite the same machine as Uncle Bruce’s, eh?”

“Yeah. But Uncle Bruce’s machine is made for him. You have the machine that’s right for you, Dad.”

“Well, it runs and for two hundred and twenty thousand miles she hasn’t complained all that much. Besides, she’s nearly reached the moon.”

“Then you have to get back.”

“Yes, well that might be a challenge.”

“I’m glad you’re back, Dad, safe and sound.”

“Thanks, Son. Were you worried?”

“No. Mother was, but I knew that you and Uncle Bruce would come back okay. Mother was really making me nervous.”

Nick appreciated his son’s faith in things.

“Say, Jason, now that we are fellow travelers, I wanted to get some idea of...well...how things are going...say, at school.”

“Oh, school. Well, it’s okay. I’m passing. But sometimes it’s strange.”

“How so?”

“Well on Tuesday we had this discussion in health class. They had some people there who had this debate.”

“On what?”

“Well, there were these people from...something called ‘SEEKUS,’ or maybe it was ‘SIECUS.’ They told us that abstinence doesn’t work.”

“Abstinence?”

“From sex, Dad.”

“Uh, oh, yeah. Well, what...what the...what the heck did you think?”

“It works for me.”

“What works for you?”

“Abstinence. I think for all their effort, marriage and abstinence won the debate.”

“That was your health class? Who the hell...who was there to talk about the other side?”

“They didn’t have anybody scheduled. But Melissa’s mother heard about it ahead of time, and she walked into the class halfway through. She told the Health teacher she was going to give her daughter a tape recorder if they continued with that lesson. That’s just it. I think most of the kids know it’s not fair and balanced.”

“That sounds a lot different than the health class Bruce and I had back in Pennsylvania.”

“The school is like that.”

“Like what?”

“Always trying things out on us.”

“Well, I’m going to talk to your mother and we…”

“No sweat, Dad. I see it. Say…how is that meteorite you brought back from Brazil? When will the tests be done on it?”

“You’re okay then…ah, yes, well…that chunk of rock has been cut and diced, and boiled and checked out for radioisotopes and fossils and stuff like that. Jason…let’s talk more about—”

“Do you know about the meteorite called ALH 84001?”

“How do you know about that?”

“I follow some space stuff on the computer.”

“You do?”

“Yes.”

“Yeah, it probably was from Mars, one of a few from there.”

“Yes, and they found it on the ice in Antarctica. They say it was blasted off Mars’s surface by another meteorite and went into orbit around the sun for millions of years before crashing onto the ice about thirteen thousand years ago. Amazing, how they know that!”

“It’s from radioisotopes. They also found some little tubules that might have been microfossils.”

“Canals?”

“You know about Schiaparelli then, and how he used a telescope to describe the channels there, which he called ‘canali.’”

“And Lowell later, who thought he saw canals. That suggested intelligent life up there, on Mars. Right, Dad?”

“As it turned out, there happens to be a huge difference between canali and canals.”

“Yes.”

“And there’s a big difference between water and intelligent life.”

Just then, Nick knew that he and his son shared a common wavelength. They both got quiet.

Nick thought about *The Martian Chronicles* by Ray Bradbury. “There was a time when Martians captured our imagination. H. G. Well’s *War of the Worlds* was broadcast over the radio as a news report by another man named Wells in 1938. It demonstrated how radio could fire up the human imagination and the panic that followed. The Mariner spacecraft thirty years later got good pictures of Mars on a fly-by mission. These pictures showed rifts or riverbeds that suggested water once flowed on the red planet. These pictures helped in the planning for the Viking Landers of 1975. The Vikings sampled the soil for signs of metabolism and life. None of these missions found canals or direct signs of life. In 2003, two rovers called Spirit and Opportunity landed on Mars. They exceeded

expectations and sent back clear evidence of sediments like hematite, and erosion—signs that water flowed sometime during the history of the planet. Because there now is evidence that water once flowed on Mars, the planet qualifies as ‘habitable.’ There it was: Two planets next each other in the same solar system that have or have had one of the key conditions for life. Think of the number of solar systems there must be. We have discovered over two hundred planets, although none are hospitable by our earthly standards. Space is a big place and we’ve only touched the numbers.”

“I’ve heard of the Drake Formula.”

Nick looked over at his son, as if he was reading his mind.

They entered the observatory grounds through the main gate. Nick waved his security card before the sensor and the gate slowly cranked open. The road meandered to and fro in a lot of switchbacks to the summit. Two cars were parked in the lot.

“The grad students are here.”

They entered and found Jessica at the telescope and Brian at the computer.

“Hello, Professor Casperson! It’s good to see you. When did you get back?”

“Yesterday, Brian. Thank you. I thought I’d bring my son Jason up here for a look.”

“We’ve heard Jason is good at science.”

“You have?” Jason wondered how he had heard that.

“Brian, while I talk to Jessica about her project, why don’t you go over the Drake equation with Jason.”

Nick moved toward the telescope, as Brian drew Jason to a blackboard. Brian grabbed a piece of chalk, and he looked Jason in the eye and whispered. “Do you really want to hear about the Drake formula?”

“Sure.”

“Okay. Here’s a short version. Anytime there is a real big number in a formula, it’s going to have a real big influence, unless there is a canceller. Right?”

“Right.”

“It’s like E , for energy, equals m times c times c again, or mc squared.

Jason smiled and wiggled in his chair.

“Since c is the speed of light, or one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles in a second, it really gets to be a big number when you square it, or multiply it by itself. And m , or mass, is a positive number, and even though it’s the tiny mass of an atom, you still wind up with something very large indeed. Right?”

Brian nodded to Jason, who nodded back.

“You get a whole lot of energy. Have you heard of Hiroshima?”

“Yes.”

Nick glanced over at them as he spoke with Jessica.

“Well, the Drake equation is similar in this way. Unlike the simple energy formula, Drake’s is very fuzzy. As scientists like to say, it’s not ‘elegant.’ We know there are four hundred billion stars in our little Home Galaxy...the Milky Way. Right?”

“Our Town?”

“Yes, in a way. We have a pretty good idea of the diameter of the Milky Way and the density of stars in it. But one star isn’t the same as another. Let’s say we toss out the low-energy brown dwarfs, the young stars, and the plentiful binaries because they have unstable orbits and they cast bad weather. How many stars that are left are main sequence yellow dwarfs—small stars that actively convert hydrogen to helium, like our sun? Let’s be conservative and say there are only one billion of the four hundred billion that are like our sun.”

“It’s what Professor Drake asked years ago.”

“Exactly. What percent of these sunlike stars have planets? When Drake posed this question, he knew of only one with planets. About two hundred and fifteen planets have been located in the last ten years, and the number grows. None are as small as Earth. The first extrasolar planet was found in 1995 by two French astronomers. This hot Jupiter-like exoplanet is associated with star 51 Pegasus, and gets a little b for its name—51Pegasus b. With its discovery, Marsh and Butler, at Berkeley, California went back over their decade-long collection of search data, and when they expanded their ideas about orbits, size, and composition, they found several planets they overlooked hidden in their trove. To date these exoplanets are not very hospitable. Some have winds that travel a thousand miles per hour. Some are made of hot gases. One has water as dense as ice. Another receives bursts of killing radiation from a close-by pulsar star. There is another law that says our technology doubles in power every year. With our space-based telescopes—Hubble in 1990, Kepler planned for 2008, Webb hopefully around 2012—with their planet-finding technology, we will be able to get better estimates still. Let’s wing this a bit. Let’s say that half of sunlike stars in our galaxy have planets. See how fuzzy this is?”

“That gives us five hundred million.”

“Now, we ask how many of the planets in any one system are suitable for life? From the example of the only solar system we know, one, possibly two, are.”

“Father said that Mars once had flowing water.”

“Bingo! Do you like Pluto?”

“The dog?”

“The planet, or ex-planet, if you like.”

“Sure.”

“Then let’s say two of nine planets are candidates for life in our little solar system. Of the hundred and thirty or so moons we know only a few are candidates for life. We know there is a very narrow habitable zone in our system. You’ve got to be situated just so, relative to the sun, and you’ve got to have water. Let’s say the answer then is three bodies that are suitable for life in our system, when you throw in all those moons. What’s your next question?”

“How many actually have intelligent life?”

“Correct. Let’s say one percent. You could say one hundredth of one percent if you like, but let’s say one percent. And the next question?”

“How many have intelligent life that can send a signal?”

“Very good! Drake called it the degree of intelligence necessary to develop a technical civilization capable of sending a signal. Let’s make that also one percent. In other words, one percent of the intelligent planets actually develop the ability to send a signal. Would man have survived the dinosaurs had that meteorite not struck the earth? Give me a question, Jason.”

“What if they are advanced, but they are isolationists?”

“Indeed, they have to want to communicate. Professor Drake assumed if you were intelligent with advanced technology, you probably would be sending and trying to receive. But the formula allows for an isolationist set. It also allows for a group more interested in travel than communication. It simply asks, what fraction is into sending and receiving. Compri?”

“Yes.”

“The last factor deals with the average lifespan of these advanced civilizations. How many civilizations were sending such that we might get the signal, out of the total number that had existed over time? Remember, the idea here is that if we were to get a signal from a star system one hundred thousand light-years away, the diameter of our Home Galaxy, we would be witnessing events one hundred thousand years ago, for them. We wouldn’t know about them in terms of our today. We would have to send them a signal, which would take one hundred thousand years to reach them, to complete the call.”

“That’s a pretty boring phone call.”

“Yes, it’s a lot like a whole lot of lightbulbs going off. It may be that for some other solar system that happens to be ten billion years old, intelligent life with technology may have existed on three planets, each for ten thousand years before they died out. Recognize here that our technologic civilization has existed for about a hundred years. It’s like three lightbulbs burning, and then dying.

“And let’s say one percent of all technological civilizations that ever existed are alive and sending today. Drake grants that our lightbulb is on, at least for now, and he allows the time span to complete the call.”

Jason had been jotting some numbers down. He fell quiet for a spell. “Here it is: One billion selected stars times point five, times three, times point zero one, times point zero one, times point zero one which comes to fifteen hundred presently communicating civilizations in our solar system.”

“Yes, and we were conservative in our estimates. It’s a very inexact formula for sure, but it makes you think. With such a large number in front, you can juggle the smaller ones and still come up with a good-sized end result. If you apply the formula to the universe, the number goes into the billions.”

“I hope Professor Drake lives to see it born out.”

“Just remember, from the mountains of West Virginia his Project Ozma in 1959 allowed him to listen to two stars with a single channel and an eighty-five-foot antenna. He got really excited when he picked up what he thought was his first intelligent signal. It turned out to be a U-Two spy plane, which was a secret, of course. This was the first of thousands of false signals in the history of radio astronomy. We are now on the leading cusp of our technology. Maybe someday, we’ll place a probe on the far side of the moon where it would be shielded from all the radar and satellite transmissions that interfere today, like the light that pollutes our optical telescope viewing.”

Jason said he was following our unmanned planetary explorers. He said he would volunteer for a ride to another planet, if he had the chance.

Brian resumed, saying that it took two to communicate and that we’d have to assume some stability on our end. He thought that the dangers presently at play in the world detracted from popular support or even knowledge of SETI. Jason asked him if we could nuke an asteroid. Getting an affirmative, he then asked Brian if he thought we had visitors from outer space.

Just then they heard Nick speaking about a ball of fire and rolling thunder. They both paused for a moment and looked at the sky.

Brian resumed.

“Very unlikely, unless they have spaceships that can do a pretty good chunk of the speed of light. Until we develop such a ship, we’re going to have to remain status quo here on earth. And with all the dangers, including nukes and global warming, our stability is in question. Jason, do you know how the world would change if we received a signal from life out there?”

“Biggest news since Jesus. Kosmo said the Soviet Union always hoped for such a discovery. Thought it would make their efforts to refute religion easier.”

“Kosmo?”

“Somebody I know. Kosmo also says global warming is a hoax.”

“Well, there are a few questions. Come on, young man, let’s look through this telescope at some places in the Milky Way where they’ve found planets. First though, let’s look at the moons of Jupiter.”

As Brian walked toward the refractor, Nick’s voice bubbled over again. Nick had been quietly reviewing Jessica’s project. The recent discovery of signs of liquid water geysers on Saturn’s inner moon Enceladus was important. This tiny moon, one of Saturn’s forty-seven, recently had come under review as a “habitable” candidate, but its temperature—200 degrees below zero—was a qualifier. Jessica was working on spectrographic measurements of this moon in an attempt to know its chemical makeup. As he quietly looked over her data, Nick suddenly blurted: “It wasn’t just a rock! It was a visitor, from somewhere. We’ll find out where. Some people think it’s a visit from the gods, you know.”

Nick spoke as though his listeners were sitting in the upper level of an amphitheater.

“Ever hear of the Nogata meteorite? Fell right through a Shinto shrine. The people thought it was a godly visit and left it in place. People have melted them in a forge you know. The Buddhists made daggers from them and those daggers possessed mystical power. The Indians refused to help Mr. Berringer out there in Arizona, you know. All he wanted was to show them that the big crater was from a meteorite and not a volcano!”

The students and Jason stood in stunned silence. The professor was known for his self-control. He was a notably soft-spoken man and was careful about expressing opinions. This spontaneous outburst was as though he stepped away from his character for a moment.

Jason walked over to his father.

“Dad, I’ve had a great time. I think we should be heading home. It’s getting pretty late.”

Jason nodded to Jessica and he looked back at Brian and said, “You should come to our Science Fair at school, Brian.”

Nick was silent as they descended Observatory Hill. Soon they were on the highway. Nick seemed lost. Jason watched two headlights approaching in their lane and looked over at his father who didn’t seem to notice.

“Dad, look at this car up ahead!”

Nick swerved out toward the berm enough to let a sports car squeeze between a pickup and their Chevy. Two horns blasted away. Nick hadn’t touched the brakes.

“A fire ball and rolling thunder!”

Jason was trembling.

“Uncle Bruce would have flashed him a message and gone after him with dancing headlights, maybe even give him the skunk treatment.”

“This is not the Batmobile.”

“Father, I was thinking of that whole thing of transmitting and receiving. People transmit and receive each other, don’t you think? Sometimes their receivers are not tuned properly. Not on the same wavelength. Sometimes they receive a message that was not intended. Sometimes the message sent doesn’t match with the intention. To understand the message, you must understand the sender. In other words, your receiver has to be tuned not only for the message, but also the sender.”

Nick was now more attentive.

“That’s interesting.”

“What if Drake’s equation one day was born out and graduated from theory to reality. What if we got an intelligent message from the so-called aliens? What makes us so arrogant to think we can know the mind of God? ‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways, My ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts higher than your thoughts.’ That’s from Isaiah.”

“You are reading from the Bible?”

“A kid loaned one to me at school. What if there was a constant sender of helpful messages, ones that could save us. What if those messages went unreceived. How do we get properly tuned?”

“Huh?”

“Father, can I turn on the radio?”

“Sure, Son.”

Nick was still trying to figure out what Jason had said. Jason turned to a sports-talk station. He listened as a caller discussed a contract extended to a pro football player. The caller knew the player’s age, previous injuries and performance stats. He knew the player would be a free agent at the end of the season, and with the newly imposed salary caps the question of offering him a competitive contract was the question. The team’s owners and coaches had to figure whether he fit the team’s mold, how to use the draft, the trades and the free agency. The caller clearly was a student of the game.

“Wow, that caller really knows his football. He said he worked at the docks. Who’d ever think a stevedore could be a business tycoon in disguise”, Nick commented as he looked over at his son, with a thin smile.

“Escapism. We need it, even if we work the docks. You can’t be serious all the time, Dad.”

“Yeah, well that’s okay, as long as you latch on to some of the earth’s gravity and hold your orbit. Otherwise, your escape velocity might send you on a lost journey and forever.”

“Let’s both hope they keep that in mind when we take our year-long flight to Mars, Dad. I’d sign up for the Devon Island training camp, if you would.”

Nick turned to his son inquiringly.

“Watched all about it on the History Channel.”

Six

Awards Night

The college was nestled on the high plain between the coast and the Delaware Water Gap. It originated fifty years earlier as a “normal school,” a school for teachers that eventually closed. The land had been clipped off the edge of a defunct mental hospital. The hospital was closed after the advent of phenothiazines—a class of medicine that had such a therapeutic effect on residents that they could become outpatients. Such progress left the landscape around America with a cluster of ultra-clinical, blocky, unimaginative and empty buildings, a happy marker of a bygone era.

The growth of the Big Apple over the last half-century paradoxically brought with it an increase in commuters. The press to the suburbs and beyond brought people of all kinds—professionals, bankers and investment gurus, advertisers, entertainers, service providers, factory and dock workers. It wouldn’t be long before the education-minded began lobbying their representatives to release the obsolete campus for a proposed new college. Among the emigrants from the big cities were educators. Many still had some

steam left and looked for a refreshing experience. As teacher's colleges gave way to departments of education in larger schools, the College of Arts and Science of Northern New Jersey, or CAS/NNJ was born. And so, a parcel of land with its austere architecture became available for this new and humble beginning. It was a win-win affair, an application of eminent domain without forced resettlement. Nick Casperson joined the faculty in the mid-nineties, and his friend Bruce was hired as an instructor the following year.

Awards Night was the brainchild of the college's first president, Dr. Arbuckle. He had been a master at building esprit de corps within the faculty. He prized and supported them and during his decade-long tenure, the college grew to five hundred students, as the scope of course offerings expanded. He had championed a renaissance that called for the vigorous use of bulldozers. Institutional red bricks of the former Muse of Therapy were pushed to the west into a large pile and sold off at an alarming rate. A few ponds and an arboretum served as a barrier between the old and the new.

Formerly planted century oaks and maples lent serenity to the new grounds. The core buildings were faced with an artificial sandstone façade at about a tenth the cost of stone. The school was no Ivy League university and made no pretensions in being such.

Arbuckle dreamed of producing a "solid educational product" to promising kids from the region. The dream included an affordable and reasonable stab at the growth of the mind through the college's bachelor programs in the arts and sciences. Arbuckle had been able to instill a healthy sense of pride in those who "delivered the product." His uncontested success attracted new beacons. His policy excluded taking federal grants. This gave him more latitude with the curriculum. A sense of fulfilled mission and the allure of new challenge perturbed his orbit and caused his escape, but not before his reputation was firmly in place. He was succeeded by Throckmorton, who to the search committee, seemed likely to perpetuate Arbuckle's legacy.

This year's Awards Dinner would be held at the new Mariner's Center in Perth Amboy. It was a hefty drive from the college, but there was a reason for choosing the Center. The small port town was located at the mouth of the Raritan River and had an up and down history. From its colonial past as capital of East Jersey to the arrival of factories, shipping links and ethnic groups that worked them, the town never fully blossomed. It even had been a resort town in the 1800s and again in the early twentieth century. Following the Great War, it fell back. Businesses moved out, the waters became polluted, and schools deteriorated, as new immigrants arrived with less opportunity and less adaptability than in the past. In the 1990s though, tax incentives were put in place as the waterfront area undertook a makeover. Arbuckle was from the town and had been taken with this initiative. He recognized the symbolism of pride that must underwrite all such enterprises, and in his mind, must flourish across the land. He trouped his drama students here once a year for an evening of fun and support, humble as it was. It was so like him. His successor, Throckmorton, wasn't about to sack a good thing.

Vera had seen to it that the dust on Nick's tux would not make an appearance this evening. She asked him to try it on for size, before dry-cleaning. He absentmindedly assured her it was just fine. She didn't treat him like a child though. He could look as he wanted, but he wouldn't be dusty. Indeed, he looked quite handsome this evening. Vera

decked herself out in a blue satin gown. She kept herself in prime form with careful dieting and regular exercise. She had taken care to see that Jason might attend, since his father would receive an award. Vera had an inkling that Bruce might also receive recognition. She asked Nick if Bruce was bringing a guest.

“Some girl who works at the travel office. Her name is Juliet.”

“What is she like?”

Nick hadn't seen her. He assured Vera she would be a “looker” though. The five of them reserved places with a couple Nick knew from the faculty and Vera's friend Rebecca whose husband taught English at the college.

It was dusk when Vera pulled into the portico of the Mariner's Center. Nick always deferred to her to drive when they took her car. Besides, his Chevy was “tired” and a flailing connecting rod fifty miles from home was not a cherished thought. Vera's car was more suited for the evening anyway. Two valets were preoccupied with the car in front of them. It was the Batmobile. Bruce and his date stood and watched with bemusement as the two teenage boys walked around Bruce's wheels, gawking in admiration.

Juliet tugged at Bruce's arm imploringly. She quickly pointed to Vera, behind the wheel in the car behind.

“Boys, I see we're holdin' up the line. Park the car as far from a light as you can. It's nocturnal and feels more secure in the shadows.”

Bruce and his date waited at the entrance while the Caspersons checked in with the remaining valet. Bruce introduced Juliet first to Jason, then to his “fortunate” parents. Juliet was striking and friendly. Her charm and responsiveness were appealing. Nick had been right. Bruce would be seen this evening in the company of a beautiful woman. Juliet stood smiling, standing close to Bruce. Her white taffeta dress stood out against his dark blue suit.

“Your lovely companion advances you, Bruce.”

“Well thank you, Professor.”

Vera and Juliet smiled at each other as their men exchanged pleasantries. Vera complimented Juliet on her jacket. It matched her auburn hair. Juliet's face was expressive and her deep hazel eyes were attentive. She moved with confidence, yet she underplayed her sparkle.

The men were delayed at the coat-check, where they waved at and quipped with colleagues. The Center's foyer was decorated in a gallery style that featured contemporary American landscape paintings. These caught Juliet's eye, and she and Vera started on a summary tour of the art. Jason deferred and waited for his father and Uncle Bruce. Nick was signaled by Throckmorton and excused himself. Bruce took Jason over to the buffet to have a look at the seafood.

“Think you'd like to eat a few of those this evening?”

“Are they oysters?”

“*Ostrea edulis*. Blue points. Ever eat one?”

“Raw? No, Uncle Bruce and I don’t want one.”

“Think Taser would like one? We could put some peanut butter on it for him.”

“Look at the fish!”

“Where do you see the kitchen?”

“No, over there, the aquarium.”

As they walked toward the aquarium, a cocktail hostess approached.

“A Chablis for yours truly, and for Robin here, a cola, not diet.”

Nodding affirmatively, Jason approached the aquarium that ran the length of the hall leading to the dining room. It contained a mélange of brilliant marine fish and mollusks. As they ogled, a squid came into view.

Another hostess offered them hors d’oeuvres.

Bruce heard a subtle birdcall he learned in his scouting days. It had to be Nick. As he turned, he spotted his friend standing with the ladies. Nick motioned that it was time to assault the buffet. An exquisite variety awaited them: shrimp, scallops, oysters-on-the-half-shell, clams, chowder and bisque and jambalaya, lobster thermadore, flounder stuffed with crab, salmon, steamboat roast beef, roasted potatoes, buttered broccoli, an array of salads and desserts including strudel, ginger cake and mixed fruits.

They took their assigned table of eight as the president welcomed them. They were graciously invited to enjoy the evening on behalf of CASNNJ—pronounced “Cass Nedge.” They were encouraged to indulge their palates and replenish themselves as appetites dictated. Awards were to be made during the dessert. The washrooms were located...over there. The college was indebted to the chef and the staff...and so on.

“It’s a shame Janet couldn’t be here this evening.”

“PTA, Vera. She takes that pretty seriously. Besides, we don’t have a good handle on our son’s participation in class.” Lever looked at Jason fleetingly when he related this, as other glances followed. Even though Ben Lever went to a different school, Vera wondered if her son’s shenanigans at Rosegard High were widely appreciated.

“Umm...have you tried the chowder?”

“The boy is a sports fanatic, and sometimes I think that’s all that matters to him.”

This time, Nick and Vera looked at Jason for a longer second.

“My favorite sport at school is dodge ball.”

“Jason, I didn’t know you played dodge ball.”

“I’m really good, Mother. They have a hard time hitting me with the ball ’cause I’m too quick.”

Jason smiled at Bruce.

“Some of the kids don’t like to play dodge ball. They don’t have to ’cause there are other things to do. They’re talking about dropping it.”

“Nick, we’ll have to take the lad up to a Giants game some Sunday.”

“We’ll put it on the schedule, Bruce, while they are still hot.”

Lever nodded approvingly.

“The prime rib is wonderful.”

“So is the salmon.”

“I hear we’re going to be offering some new courses next year.”

“You know, the ole boy is from Antioch.”

The conversation ceased briefly.

“Charlie, how is your research coming?”

“Spending a lot of time in the libraries. It’s interesting since one of the brothers was an expatriate.”

“Oh...what’s the title of your paper?”

“The James Brothers, Cross Links to Parallel Lives.”

“Frank and Jesse?”

“No, Bruce. Henry and William.”

“I apologize.”

“Think nothing of it.”

Juliet laughed aloud.

“Would anybody like more wine?”

Lever waved off the waitress.

“Bonner, you’ve got a good eye for the milder sex.”

“Lever, Juliet may seem mild, but she has her convictions, not to speak of her talents.”

“Putting aside the convictions, what are your talents, sweetheart?”

“I play classical guitar.”

“My there, isn’t that interesting. How long have you played, may I ask?”

“I’ve been taking lessons since I was a child.”

“Do you play professionally?”

“No. I work with high school students on making smart choices. My position depends on a grant. I also work part-time at a travel office.”

Bruce interrupted.

“So how are things with the Levers?”

“Janet just visited her mother.”

“Where does her mother live?”

“Sarasota...she just had a small stroke.”

“Sorry to hear that.”

The high-pitched clack of a knife tapping a glass interrupted the conversation.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, Honored Educators and Guests...The College of Arts and Sciences of Northern New Jersey extends its welcome. Before we get to the awards this evening, I would like to mention some new courses to be offered in the fall.”

Throckmorton gazed around the room with a wide grin, the full height of his teeth showing. He paused ceremoniously.

“We are competing for an ever larger pool of applicants, and we must adapt our curriculum to that reality. Next year our History Department will round itself out and offer a course in Third World Figures and Studies, taught by Naomi Fugart. Also, Economics will offer a course entitled Marx—Economist, Scientist, or Poet? to be taught by Emil Sparks. Finally, Lassi Lusack will teach Gender Issues in Modern Times, courtesy of the Sociology Department.”

A medium round of applause went up.

Jason nudged his mother.

“Who is Marx?”

Bruce overheard.

“It’s not Groucho or Chico, you can bet.”

Juliet nudged him.

“And now, for the awards. We would ask each recipient to make a concise statement about his or her motivation for the achievement, and his or her particular sense of fulfillment. Please update us on formal publications and/or professional recognition.”

For the next twenty minutes Throckmorton passed along certificates of achievement in such diverse projects as Neutrino Oscillation, Twentieth-Century Forgeries of Classical Art, and Recent Revelations on the Underground Railroad. All recipients were present and came forth to define their projects and what sparked their interest. There was no discernable order to the president’s sequence.

Nick was expressionless when his name was called. At first he didn’t seem to hear his name announced.

“Go ahead, Dad. Your turn.”

Nick looked at his son and snapped to. He walked toward the president’s table amidst clapping and a few whistles. After accepting his award, Nick addressed his colleagues.

“This spring I organized a field trip to northern Brazil to hunt down a mysterious event. From both radio astronomy and seismographic sensors something happened out there in that wilderness, north of Manaus. I had the good company of my longtime friend and

associate, Instructor Bruce Bonner. My expectations included several possibilities. If the radio signal had any connection with the disturbance in the forest, it would raise the ante. After several days on boats, followed by tracking and hacking our way through the rain forest, we came upon our quest. We are indebted to our Brazilian guide Jaro and his two young helpers for getting us there...and getting us...out of there. When we arrived at the site, we looked around...there was no sign of..."

Nick paused and all heads leveled.

The pause broke the cadence of his report in a way that pulled everyone's eyes toward him. Ten seconds seemed like ten minutes to Vera. Nick regained his composure and proceeded.

"Anyway, we set about photographing the site and collecting our specimens. From appearances, it was clear that this was not a typical meteorite crater. It knocked over trees like the one at Tunguska in Siberia, but unlike that one, it didn't scorch them. We figure it was a lot smaller, maybe three feet in diameter. If so, some of it vaporized from friction with the atmosphere before impact, leaving a smaller remnant to hit the earth. What we were seeing was a rudimentary crater. This was kind of a 'tweener,' between a blower and a driller."

A few chuckles rippled through the group.

"When it exploded in the air, it must have scared the hell out of every living creature in the region. It was probably an iron/nickel meteorite from the asteroid belt. The metals we recovered were scorched, some even melted. The fragments are being analyzed presently for fossils and signs of life."

Nick stopped speaking at that point, as though he had finished his recitation. This time twenty seconds passed, but no one intervened. It looked like he was searching for his next connection.

"I know this wasn't another Roswell, but there is something missing. Something...something very important."

In the silence that followed Nick again had everyone's quizzical attention.

"We must go back, and find it! We must go back!"

Throckmorton stepped in.

"Thank you, Nick Casperson, for this compelling report."

He handed Nick a certificate which he received absentmindedly with a handshake that was timid and an expression that was vacant. As Nick walked back to his table, taking lanky strides and looking down at the floor, a slow and building applause commenced. He plunked himself down at his seat. Vera grabbed his hand and looked at him with laser eyes. Neither said anything. He was in his own world and she knew it.

While his friend was receiving his award Bruce developed an acute awareness of what was missing, when it came to his part of the expedition. He had searched high and wide for the soil samples he had taken in the forest but they had vanished. He was difficult to embarrass but for the life of him he couldn't recall passing through Brazilian immigration

and wondered if they had been confiscated. This mystery embarrassed him so that he had spoken to no one about it. Still, he had come home with his bat.

“And finally, we would like to honor Mr. Bonner...oh, ha...some poetry there. I believe he also came back with his own find. Bruce...”

Bruce was genuinely surprised. He was admiring his guest when he was summoned, for what, he did not know. Juliet looked at him intently and grabbed his arm.

Nick looked up at him.

“Go ahead, Bomber. Get your due.”

Bruce strode easily to Throckmorton’s table. He surveyed the room and its fifty-odd occupants. He looked over at Nick.

“As Nick said, he asked me to come along with him. I packed my fiberglass fly rod, figuring I might catch something down there on the water. On our last evening, Stanley and Livingston and I...I mean our guides, Betta and Tai, went fishing. I put a Blue Butt and a number ten filament line onto the water surface, hoping that a fishing bat might hit it. Instead, I caught an insect eater that so far as my search has shown has never been catalogued. So it may be a new species...well, not really new...but, let’s say to date, undiscovered. I will continue to search to see if this represents an original entry to the Order Chiroptera. If so, it’s a little chunk of fame for the college. Thank you, President Throckmorton.”

Bruce studied Nick on his way to the table amidst applause. When he arrived at the table Nick was smiling and on his feet extending his hand.

“How are you, brother?”

“Recovered. That was a little embarrassing.”

“Don’t sweat it.”

Throckmorton announced this concluded the formal part of the evening. Sweet and customary good-byes were dispensed, and the dinner party mingled as they slowly filed toward the exit. On the way out, Vera looked at Nick with extra attention. She said she was worried about him. He told her that ever since he had returned from the trip, he had a strange foreboding that something was missing, something was left unresolved, but he couldn’t put his finger on it.

Jason told his father he promised Bruce he would write a paper on Marx. He would pretend it was a college paper. Nick smiled and so did Vera. Bruce and Juliet saw Nick and Vera to their car and waved as Vera drove off.

Both valets arrived next with the Batmobile. Bruce told them their tip was the mere experience of seeing this amazing machine, as he slipped one of them something Juliet could not identify. On the way out, Juliet said she thought Bruce looked very dashing up there at the president’s table. Bruce looked over at her, raised his brow and puffed out his chin. She asked him if she might say something out of honesty. He consented. She told him that his paisley tie wasn’t the best choice. He told her that of all his ties it had the least number of food stains on it, and that being a paisley would hide whatever stains it

had. She just as playfully conceded. She then asked about Nick. Bruce had no idea what had happened.

When they got back on U.S. 206, Bruce noticed that Juliet had turned herself toward him and her dress was ruffled up over her knee. She told him it was clear he was very close to Nick. When Bruce didn't respond, she said she hoped the relationship with Nick was just friendship.

"Wha...? We've known each other since we were tots back in the Pocono's. We grew up together, laughed together, and at times cried together. It's just a matter of mutual trust."

Juliet was reflecting on that when Bruce seemed to become slightly agitated.

"Did I say the wrong thing?"

"This cowboy behind me is so close, I can't see his lights!"

"Just let him go by. Don't respond. You can't tell what some people are on or if they carry a weapon."

"I'm trying to, but he must think he's going to hump the Batmobile!"

"Just drive the same speed, and he'll get tired and move on."

"I think the son-of-a-bitch has an agenda! I think maybe he's the Joker..."

"Bruce, don't be silly."

"No kidding...ah, yes, he's pulling out now...ah...sweet Juliet, could you please push button number nine over there."

"Button number nine?"

"Yes, push it now please."

"Your wish is my command."

"Oh...perfect my dear...perfect."

"I'm confused. What is button number nine? Ooo...do you smell a skunk?"

"I do, my dear, I do. We must have run over one back there."

Bruce was smiling sardonically as he asked her what she wanted to do. She said she was tired and wanted to turn in since she had to work the next day. Noting it was their second date, she promised to come to his place for a drink next time. She thanked Bruce for a lovely and rich evening and for the opportunity to meet his friends. She congratulated him on his biological discovery and said if he went back to the Amazon to take her with him. Bruce smiled as he turned toward her apartment.

Seven

Kosmo's Conspiracies

Jason called his dead-end street "the Hood." There were six other homes, whose styles varied widely. It was as though a band of architects had stood at the end of the street and each had cast his favorite style into the lot. A ranch, several frames, and a full stone original made up the array. The house at the end had partly burned as a result of decayed

wiring. Its halting restoration was assisted through meager contributions from neighbors in the “Hood.” A retired and widowed university professor resided next to the Casperson home. He was notable for his invisibility, protecting his lawn against Taser the dog and putting off invitations. The couple on the other side had moved in from the city. They had a smile and salutation for everyone. They followed their success to this comfortable suburb, riding high on their unwillingness to “stay on the plantation.” They described their move as a stab at the “American dream,” and after saying it, they laughed.

Lately, Jason had been spending time at Artie McFee’s place. The McFee family lived across from the partly burned house, which also bordered Highway 17. Artie was in several classes with Jason and his mother encouraged their companionship. They rode the school bus together, when they didn’t walk.

Besides Artie, the chief draw at the McFee’s was Kosmo. The previous week Mrs. McFee unburdened her life history to Jason. Mrs. McFee’s husband Elmo died from a heart attack several years before. Elmo McFee had met his bride-to-be in Europe in the ’70s. He had been stationed in West Germany during the Vietnam War. At that time, Elmo McFee met Rousha Koskovitsh, who was born in postwar Germany to Ukrainian parents. Jason took notes as Mrs. McFee described her life. She hadn’t noticed his note taking. Her story was complicated, and Jason knew there had to be lessons.

She was living with her uncle in Cologne, Germany when she met her future husband. Her parents earlier had been able to escape the Nazi Wehrmacht, which in the 1941 invasion posed as liberators of the Ukraine. They had less luck when Stalin’s Red Army passed through a few years later en route to Berlin. Stalin surely would have sent them to the work camps, for having been contaminated by Nazi fascists. Artie’s maternal grandparents managed to move west, outpacing the press of the Red Army for a while.

Artie’s grandfather was intercepted by the Russian NKVD when living underground in Poland. He was never seen again. Artie’s grandmother was helped to what became West Germany, after Hitler’s empire fell. She succumbed soon after reaching Germany, but not until she gave birth to Artie’s mother.

Kosmo was living in Lithuania when he was conscripted as a young teenager to serve in the Red Army. He got wind of his own endangered status after the war, although he had no idea what he had done. Desiring to join his younger sister, Rousha’s mother, he escaped from his own army and headed for Germany. He took his time and stayed in Poland for a while. He arrived just after his sister died.

Rousha and Elmo came back to New Jersey in 1976. Kosmo came to live with them in the eighties. Artie, an only child, was born in the nineties to parents who were not thinking of childbearing, his mother forty-five, eight years younger than her husband.

This day that Jason came to see Artie, he was not home. Jason accepted Rousha’s hospitality, as usual, and had a snack. She invited him to meet her uncle, thinking they might strike up a friendship, which would be good for Kosmo. Jason knew Artie and Kosmo were mutually cordial, but Artie wasn’t too interested in his great uncle’s obsessions. Jason had never seen Kosmo, and Artie had mentioned him only once. He was a recluse, absorbed by his own projects. Jason accepted the invitation with a little trepidation. Rousha yelled up to Kosmo.

“Zhure, zend za lad up.”

The ascent to the third level was achieved by means of a spiral staircase. The old man’s habitat reminded Jason a little of his own secluded room. When he entered he saw the old man seated in his easy chair, reading. Piled around him were stacks of newspapers. From a sweeping glance Jason spotted the Times, the Post, the Journal, the Globe, the Weekly Standard, Newsmax, and assorted monthly letters and pamphlets. There were boxes of marking pens on a table next his rotating chair. Bookcases full of political readings and opinion fleshed out his room. He was surrounded by print, more print than anyone could possibly read, let alone assimilate. His image was enshrouded in a halo of pipe smoke, and shown through like a ghost. The room was a pulmonary nightmare, and an impossible firetrap.

The lanky sage pivoted in his swivel chair and peered at his cautious admirer with eyes hidden beneath an overarching brow. He wore sweatpants and a long-sleeved cotton shirt. His words came from somewhere within an ill-kept silver beard that bore tobacco stains.

“You zen are Artie’s friend...I’d zay...eh...?”

“Yes, my name is Jason. You sure have a lot of newspapers.”

“Yes, and I half zat little computer, over zere. I bet you have...eh? Makes it easier, you know. I find vas es ’appening in your country...here in ze print first. Do you know vas es ’appening...to your country, young man?”

“Well, I know there is a lot of bickering and complaining....”

“Ah! Bicking and complaining!”

Jason wondered if “bicking” was a contraction for “bitching” and “bickering.”

“You, my boy, may not ’ave ze country your parents vant you to have unless you catch ah...ze point...you know.”

“The point?”

“I grew in Lithuania! My grossvater vas a Cossack. He fought in za var between Japan and Russia. Blood vas shed, and things ver clear. He had a large scar on his vace, right here.” Kosmo pointed to his right forehead and cheek. “He vas in ze cavalry and fought vis ze sword.”

Kosmo reached for a paper on the floor in front of him. It was a list:

The Twelve-Step Program Aimed at the Destruction and Impeachment of President George W. Bush.

1. Enron
2. Abu Ghraib & The Qur’an Flush at Gitmo
3. The 9/11 Report
4. Dan Rather and the Air National Guard Records
5. Yellowcake and Joe Wilson
6. The Outing of Valerie Plame, getting Karl Rove

7. Katrina
8. Axing Bush's Staff and Cabinet
9. Bush Lied about WMD, and "People Died".
10. Spying on Our Citizens
11. Nancy Pelosi Becomes the Executive
12. Firing the U.S. Attorneys

Kosmo explained to Jason that there were many more attacks that had been planned and executed against the president than those contained in his list. He predicted there would be more than one nebulously written tell-all book by a dismissed member of the Bush administration. He predicted after close investigation, it would be discovered that the Leftist publisher of at least one of them had been funded by anti-American George Soros. Kosmo joked about ghostwriters in the sky.

Kosmo used this Twelve-Step approach because of its familiarity in other spheres. He explained that these categories and subjects had been injected into the public's consciousness by the mainstream media. He said "Main Meedeia" with emphasis. It was Kosmo's belief that these subjects were brought to light as part of a "wag-the-dog" ("vag-ze-dog") conspiracy, meaning that they were purposefully sought out and distorted, often invented and spun for propaganda purposes by the enemies of the president. This complicity of the Main Media in service of the cabal against him meant that the president, flawed as all presidents before him, had a two-front war on his hands.

The "news" wasn't something that unfolded spontaneously as much as it was a product of selection, revised and revived, in an attempt to create an intended effect with reader-voters. Kosmo, as a former citizen of a Communist state was sensitive to this. The readership, Kosmo told Jason, was not curious enough. Many readers did not see the need for investigation, second source verification and filling in deliberately left out facts. For instance, the Hollywood allegation that American forces had been responsible for six hundred thousand innocent Iraqi deaths was a preposterous lie that went without challenge. Propagandists relied on a lazy readership.

Retractions, apologies, and follow-up information were sparse in the Main Media. Kosmo asked Jason if he noticed how often news stories seemed to "lose traction" and dissipate. This was no accident. It was as though someone was dipping his hand into a bucket of mashed potatoes and tossing a handful against a wall every now and then to see what stuck. If something didn't stick, the wall was washed clean, and a new handful followed. Every now and again they would throw the same handful again! Couple this with biased polling and bogus voting, and you could go a long way toward creating the "reality" of "Print World," often mirrored and reinforced in "TV-World." Such validation often caused the perpetrators themselves to believe their own pulp, only to be cataclysmically surprised when the Heartland rejected their manipulations.

It was the "vag ze dog" thing, Kosmo said, clearly referring to Wag the Dog, a film in which Levenson, DeNiro, and Hoffman either offered a strategic pearl or tipped off America as to what was happening. All that was needed was what Kosmo called an "audience of automatons." These were the mind-numb "useful idiots" Jason had read

about, people who soaked it up and repeated it. Jason was beginning to wonder if public education had prepared this audience, through the constant hammer in lieu of original and investigative thinking. Kosmo said a favorite saying was “all politicians are crooks,” or “politics is such a turnoff,” as if politics did not enter every facet of a person’s life. Meanwhile, behind the scenes, those for whom politics had become a religion plotted furiously.

Jason listened attentively as Kosmo explained in contorted phrases and odd pronunciations his concept of how Marxism was spreading in America, with the assistance of this complicit Main Media. It was the second reference to Marx Jason had heard recently, and he decided to prioritize his look into this historical figure. Jason had never heard such thoughts before. Yet the old man seemed to sound reasonable. Jason began to understand the mounds of newspapers in his midst. He also trusted this curious old man from Eastern Europe, since Jason harbored his own share of forbidden thoughts—thoughts that were unpopular, both at school and in the simple commerce of conversation, in the freest country on earth.

Kosmo told Jason about Pravda, the Soviet “paper.” He pointed to the floor when he said paper. He told Jason that Pravda had been owned outright by the Communist Party. The first Pravda was started by Trotsky. As Lenin took control, it was taken over by him and so on down the line of Soviet dictators until August 22, 1991. Stalin used it to highlight the show trials and denunciations of his perceived opponents. Boris Yeltsin shut down the Soviet Communist Party and seized its property, including Pravda. Similarly, the “paper” Izvestia, was an organ of the Supreme Soviet and specialized in the Communist version of foreign affairs.

Kosmo compared this frontal delivery of propaganda in the Soviet Union to the more subtle and clever collusion in America between the Main Media and its darling party, unrelated to the traditional Democrats, now better described as Socialist Liberals. The platform of this new Socialist Liberal Party was to do whatever necessary to damage the president, the presidency, and the president’s party for the blunt purpose of taking over power. This new Marxism, Kosmo felt, was at the root of the Culture War in America. This vast left-wing conspiracy kept the appearance of “working within the system.” It employed nefarious means such as stealing elections, the illegal channeling of funds, straw votes and false polls, propaganda, character assassination and dirty tricks. Their attempt to focus on the vast right-wing conspiracy was a shining example of the Law of Projection. It would take talk radio, to define the inverted worldview of the Socialist Liberal Party.

The quest for truth itself was in jeopardy. It was within this context that Kosmo gave Jason his twelve-point list. Kosmo told him to research each item, and then supplied a list of readings. It was Jason’s research of Kosmo’s list that Vera found in his room a month later.

Jason’s notes showed he had given it more effort than school ever might demand. The Enron scandal of 2002 had prompted Time magazine to call for an opinion poll. The Main Media all but convicted Vice President Cheney of a crime because of “a conversation he had with Enron officials.” Enron gradually oozed off the Main Media pages for one reason. It turned out that Enron officials were much more involved with

Bill Clinton and Al Gore than with President Bush or VP Cheney. The issues involved the Kyoto Treaty and environmental policies that would benefit Enron. Jason found this information in *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Global Warming and Environmentalism*, by Christopher Horner, pages 194–199. Also, the CEO of Enron was indicted (not pardoned by the Bush administration) for conspiracy, fraud, and lying. This handful of mashed potatoes hadn't stuck.

Jason found the story that told of a Qur'an, the Islamic book of worship, being flushed down a toilet at the Guantanamo Bay Detention Facility in Cuba. Newsweek printed the story on the account of one source. It was false, and the story was slowly retracted and gingerly apologized for, having caught U.S. military personnel in the middle of the violence that followed.

The Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse in Iraq at the hands of U.S. military personnel led to worldwide accusations of torture. It paved the way for a senator from Illinois to liken our troops to the Nazi Gestapo, Soviet KGB, and Pol Pot. It inspired a senator from Massachusetts to say, "The cruel practice of torture had infected the ranks of the world's finest military." This was followed by an attempt to limit non-torturous methods used by the military as part of a war-funding bill—the Defense Appropriations Bill. Jason took the time to review the alleged torture at Abu Ghraib on Wikipedia. What he found was abuse. Certainly, there was no justification for the forced nudity, naked triangles, sex acts, and hooding. A wide range of court marshals of those involved spoke strongly against the military's condoning such abuse. Still, there were those who believed Americans were torturers—Americans, the liberators of Europe in Kosmo's lifetime! Jason felt that the good senators should be reminded of how we invaded Iraq. It was done "surgically," in an effort to avoid "collateral damage," unlike the necessarily ruthless bombings of Germany and Japan sixty years ago, or even the "carpet bombing" of Kosovo in the nineties. This surgical tactic, out of concern for innocent people, likely bought more American casualties than the more traditional and brutal approach would have.

According to Kosmo, the main reason for drumming up the question of torture was to besmirch our good fighters and our current war effort against those who have killed us and have declared their desire to kill us. Most importantly, it was done to tie up the president and impair his ratings. It led to Senate investigations, dilution of our intelligence operations, offers to provide killer combatants with constitutional rights, enhanced prison conditions including overfeeding, prayer rights, libraries and exercise.

All this, while the same complainers ignored the enemy's acts of beheading, bombing innocent civilians, mistreating hostages, violating Geneva conventions, teaching children to hate and explode themselves in the midst of innocents. The damaging and exaggerated stories were also aimed at "getting" the defense secretary, who would eventually resign. Such blind hatred camouflaged the reality—that at the time (before the surge) a lot of the frustration with the war was based on a desire to fight it more vigorously, not withdraw. Most American's, Kosmo said, were dead-set against another Viet Nam. The president's enemies had an ongoing habit of misjudging the will and intent of the American people, perhaps because they grew to believe their own story.

Next, Jason read the 9/11 Report. Its “fair and balanced” nature came into question. It was not indexed, so it was difficult to look things up. He took notes. It became clear that Kosmo’s theory had merit. Kosmo claimed that the purpose of the report was to spread responsibility for the Islamist 9/11 attacks on the U.S. equally between the Clinton and Bush administrations. It was purported to be an instrument of learning, aimed at prevention. But the more Jason looked at it, the more the conclusions seemed jaded. The report said nothing about the delays suffered by Bush in forming his administration brought on by Gore’s court challenges to the 2000 election results. The report contained a great deal of information about Islamist terrorists, and outlined under “operational opportunities” a profound lack of communication between the CIA and FBI. Yet, it did not make reference to the “Gorelich Wall,” set up by the Clinton administration. This wall had been constructed so that all intelligence rose vertically to the White House. Why? If this unprecedented restructuring of the intelligence and investigatory branches had been seriously investigated, Assistant Attorney General Jamie Gorelich, the reputed architect of that wall, would have been sitting on the other side of the panel. There were other Clinton partisans on the panel as well. One of these was Richard ben Veniste. He had represented Barry Seale, the drug smuggler on the back end of the Iran-Contra flights that came into Mena Airport in Arkansas when Clinton was governor. Ben Veniste came across as an apologist for the Clinton failures to “find” and do something about bin Laden. Jason read Richard Minitzer’s book *Finding bin Laden*, and there was a heap of difference between it and the commission’s version of the opportunities for Clinton to apprehend or neutralize bin Laden before 9/11. The subsequent burglaries by Clinton’s National Security Advisor Sandy Berger deserved at least a postmark, if not a sentence.

Berger stole highly classified documents from the National Archives and destroyed some of them. These are felt to have contained information on Clinton’s handling of the Al-Qaeda terror threat. Kosmo said this should have led to a subsequent redacting of Berger’s testimony. It also threw into question the former president’s rendition of his own actions. The complete refusal by the commission to even consider the involvement of Hussain Hashem Al-Hussaini, a self-professed former Iraqi soldier, in the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 was a mystery.

The case was clearly spelled out by reporter Jayna Davis in her book, *The Third Terrorist*. This evidence for Saddam’s complicity in terrorism against the U.S. would have solidified one part of President Bush’s argument for invading Iraq. Kosmo was baffled as to why the Bush administration, Clinton’s FBI, and the 9/11 Commission ignored this well-developed story of Iraq’s involvement in the 1995 attack on our country. The commission’s lack of response to information on Mohammad Atta as contained in the classified military intelligence program known as Able Danger was equally puzzling.

CBS’s Dan Rather and three others got fired over a story about George Bush and the Air National Guard. It was taken from a shady source, backed with bogus (forged) documents, and it was timed for the 2004 presidential election to damage the incumbent president. Further, an arrangement had been made for this specious source to meet with a member of the campaign running against Bush. It was described as “a product of zeal” by the president of CBS, who issued an apology. Kosmo felt zeal had much to do with

Rather's enmity toward the Presidents Bushes. In this case, the mashed potatoes bounced off the wall.

The Yellowcake fiasco was tied to the Valerie Plame story. It was a hard story for an ordinary reader to follow because it seemed to make no sense. You had to follow it for years. It was a story aimed at creating some general notion that the president and his people, including VP Cheney and key strategist Rove, had done something wrong. Neither turned out to be the case. In fact, even the one man convicted, an aid to the VP, had a strong case for appeal. (He eventually received a sentence commutation from the president.) The damage however was done. The Bush administration had been wounded and that was all that mattered.

There were so many questions:

What qualified Joe Wilson to go to Niger to investigate President Bush's claim that Saddam had sought yellowcake uranium for his WMD project? Why had this claim been attributed solely to Bush ("he lied, people died") when British intelligence developed it and stand by it today. Why did Mr. Wilson lie about his own report to the CIA in his book *The Politics of Truth*, when he swerved to say publicly and to the CIA that Iraq had indeed attempted to purchase four hundred tons of uranium in 1998 or 1999? Was Wilson "triangulating"? Bush's own later reversal that there were no WMDs only flew in the face of evidence and showed how seductive the drumbeat could be when he permitted himself to be converted. Why didn't the president make more of the fact that five hundred tons of yellowcake uranium was discovered at Saddam's al Tuwaitha nuclear weapons development plant south of Baghdad, in April '03? Churchill would not have missed this opportunity. Did Wilson tip off his anti-Bush bias when he said he'd like to see Bush's adviser Rove "frog-marched" out of the White House in handcuffs? When the bipartisan Senate Intelligence Committee said that Wilson lied when he claimed his wife had no role in his assignment to Niger...did that report cause his wife to reconsider her book and movie deals? If Mr. Wilson was a Bush-hater, a liar, and a schemer, what and who then was his wife? His wife was Valerie Plame, a looker and an employee of the CIA. Among other reports, Jason read *Stratagem*, by Bill Sammon.

Next, the public was treated to a riveting story about how an undercover (covert) agent of the CIA had been outed. It was a crime to reveal the identity of a covert agent of the CIA. The only problem was that after virtually all the main news agencies for years printed stories about the outing of Valeria Plame, the prosecutor in charge finally announced that no one would be charged with outing anyone. Clearly, this was a case of trial by press, except in this case, the person who supposedly outed Ms. Plame wasn't being tried. It was particularly bizarre, since the prosecutor did not indict nor was anyone convicted of revealing the identity of a covert agent. Since Plame was known as the agent, the only conclusion that might be drawn was that she was not covert. This, of course, was widely known, as both she and her husband had previously made reference to her working for the CIA. Lots of people knew it. But, because the story had been concocted that the Bush administration had outed her in retaliation supposedly for her husband's attempts to discredit it (the administration), someone had to pay. It would be Mr. Libby...not for outing, but for lying, not the kind of lying like "I had no sexual relations with that woman" (distinctly refuted by the blue dress), but the kind of lying that came from raking over reams of testimony in an attempt to find a failed recollection. Then call it perjury!

So, Jason had questions for Prosecutor Fitzgerald: Why did he sit mum for two years on the fact that it wasn't anyone from the Bush administration who outed Plame...indeed the prosecutor knew that Plame had been revealed by Richard Armitage.

Armitage was a former member of the Department of State and opponent of the Iraq campaign (see Human Events, Sept. 18, 2006). Armitage told this Plame tale to Robert Novak, a reporter who honored the privacy of his source. Had anybody suggested investigating U.S. Prosecuting Attorney Lawrence Fitzgerald in regard to mishandling this convoluted and sorry affair? Was Scooter Libby a sacrificial lamb offered up as a token to the attack dogs on the Left? Was this justice?

It was difficult to tell how many people actually believed that Hurricane Katrina or the damage from it was the president's fault. There were also people who thought our government detonated the World Trade Center, and there were people who believed the dykes in New Orleans were bombed! Now, Kosmo felt those were red-blooded genuine conspiracy theories! Jason went to Popular Mechanics for a nonpolitical account. It turned out that while the Main Media focused on the bumbling of FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the article went on to say "the response to Hurricane Katrina was by far the largest—and fastest—rescue effort in U.S. history, with nearly one hundred thousand emergency personnel arriving on the scene within three days of the storm's landfall." The success of the rescue effort was huge. Computer simulations of a Katrina-strength hurricane (Category 3, max wind speed one hundred and twenty-five mph) had estimated a worst-case scenario death toll of more than sixty thousand people in Louisiana. The actual number was 1077 in that state. The accounts of anarchy, killing, and raping in the Superdome, as reported by the Mass Media, not only were fictional, but they actually impaired the relief efforts. Instead of the two hundred reported dead in the Superdome, there were six—four from natural causes, one suicide, and a drug overdose. Evacuation efforts for the most part worked (1.2 million out of 1.5 million, in half the estimated time). Many didn't want to leave. Only 86 of the Gulf's 4000 drilling rigs and platforms were damaged or destroyed, most of them, old and fixed. Category 5 Rita followed and knocked out 125 more. Refineries were hit harder, but recovered rather quickly. Federal insurance, unlike the privates, did not question repetitive losers. Taxpayers across the country were paying for people who chose to rebuild time and time again in the path of hurricanes. The hurricane that struck the "Big Easy" was one story. The same hurricane also hit Mississippi. That was an entirely different story.

Katrina approached over shallow water and caused a large storm surge that was more injurious to New Orleans than the hurricane itself. This led to a lot of comments about the levies. Floodwall failures mainly occurred when the surge exceeded twenty-five feet and overtopped the structures. There were reports of inadequate sheet-pile floodwall length, but when some of these were pulled, this was not corroborated. The Corps of Engineers had since restored levees at a cost of \$1 billion. The 2006 hurricane season was mercifully quiet. Hurricane Katrina, says PM, should not have surprised anyone—not the federal agencies, not the local officials, and not the residents who for years had been told they lived on a vulnerable terrain. PM suggested not building coastal again, but if one was so bent, PM supplied references on how to build a hurricane-resistant building.

The case of Cindy Sheehan was a sad and pathetic one. Kosmo had it scribbled in on his list, but had crossed it out. Apparently, he felt it too pathetic to include as a plot against the president.

While Vera read this, she shuttered. Was her son being “radicalized” by the man down the street? Yet Jason seemed calm and rational outwardly.

The anti-Bush forces could only be satisfied with taking out some of his team, including Ashcroft, Rumsfeld, Rove and Gonzales. As John Conyers periodically waved his resolution for impeachment, depending on how the “vag ze dog” winds blew, the Dark Force had to be satisfied with only “collateral damage.” One psychiatrist recently said that Bush had a personality disorder because he seemed unaffected by the constant barrage coming his way. The psychiatrist apparently hadn’t heard of Providence, the belief in which may well be the reason Bush haters hate Bush. None of these men committed any crimes, but they likely grew tired of the attacks. What honor, to be known as the party of character assassination!

The WMD question represented a clever contortion. The weapons of mass destruction were but one of the reasons Bush cited in his UN speech for invading Iraq. By focusing on WMDs a deliberate attempt was made to have people forget the full content of that important speech.

When the president went before the UN prior to invading Iraq, he spoke of four reasons. There were the twelve years of unfulfilled resolutions, the latest being Resolution 1441, which offered Iraq a final opportunity to comply with the many disarmament obligations set out previously. It became clearer in time, why China, France and Russia, all Security Council members, wanted an extension of the compliance period. The media criticized the president for not being able to build the broad-based coalition that his father was able to build prior to the First Gulf War. It was because many nations, including France, had been bribed by Saddam in the oil-for-food program that the UN oversaw. Over sixty nations had under-the-table deals with Saddam. They had no desire to have documents discovered in Iraq that proved this. The Main Media made little of this, however. UN Secretary General Annan retired in disgrace, as his own son was involved in the scandal. In essence, President Bush put teeth in the edentulous UN and was hated for it. No good deed goes unpunished.

The second reason we invaded Iraq was because of Saddam’s atrocities toward his own people. Remember, the world was shocked at the findings of the Nazi death camps when the Allies took control? Saddam idolized Hitler and his methods. He and his sons used acid vats, wood chippers, hungry lions, stinging insects, gravity (by pushing people off buildings), hungry dogs, and other unspeakable techniques to brutalized and control the people. The boys would pick out girls in the crowd and from schoolrooms for their pleasure. One newswoman made a slightly tinged comment about Saddam’s wife and had her tongue removed. Shiriiah law allows for a raped woman to be stoned to death and for hands to be cut off for stealing bread.

Kosmo contended someone needed to be the world’s policemen in cases like this. The UN was corrupt, and other nations would not take courageous steps. He said we should have gone into Rwanda, just like we went into Kosovo. Why didn’t we? Was it lack of oil, or was it the color of the skin of those being slaughtered? Why were so many able to

overlook such evil? Why was it none of our business? Whose business were such atrocities?

The third reason we went into Iraq was because Saddam supported terrorism. That he possessed WMDs—and virtually every politician said he possessed WMDs—while supporting terrorism made for an untenable combination. Saddam himself was a WMD whose reign of terror in his own country would have pleased Stalin. He retaliated brutally after we encouraged his people to rise up against him during the first Gulf War, then abandoned them. He used nerve gas in his ten-year war with Iran. In his book *Saddam's Secrets* Iraqi Air Force general Georges Sada said at least one hundred and eighty-eight thousand Kurds were killed in 1988. The number of mass graves found up to year 2006 was 275. U.S. Marines in April 2003 discovered a rusted remains of an old Boeing 707 in a camp in Salmon Pak, twenty miles south of Baghdad, where the fine points of hijacking were taught. Sada described Saddam's plans to hit Riyadh, Saudi Arabia with chemical weapons. Had he succeeded in Kuwait, Saddam was prepared to strike Israel with rockets, followed by two airborne assaults using nerve gases Tabun and Sarin. Sada's description of Israel's long-range radar dissuaded Saddam. Saddam sent \$25,000 gleaned from the tainted oil-for-food program to the Palestinian families who martyred their children in suicide bombings. The dictator spoke of the use of "proxies" according to Sada. The dictator said that care should be taken so that proxies might not be traced back to Iraq. If the Iraqi agent Hussain Al-Hussaini of Oklahoma City fame was ever officially recognized, the case for the use of proxies, would have been established. Shortly after Saddam was pulled from a spider hole on December 13, 2003, Libya's dictator Qadhafi announced his country was giving up its nuclear weapons manufacturing program. When the IAEA went into Libya to verify, uranium hexafluoride and a cache of centrifuges were discovered. A veritable "supermarket" of nuclear ware was uncovered, with Iran and Libya producing; with China and Malaysia supplying; and with German, French and Russian scientists assisting Iraqi engineers in the enrichment process.

Sada reported that when an irrigation dam ruptured in Syria on June 4, 2002 President al-Assad asked Saddam for help, and a lightbulb went off. The UN inspection team led by Hans Blix previously was unable to locate WMDs. His team had been infiltrated with informants who tipped off the upcoming inspections. Now, Saddam could ship them out to Syria. Sada witnessed reconfigured Boeing 707s and a 747 being loaded with WMDs including chemicals and Iraqi assistants. Satellite images in early 2003 showed convoys going into Syria and Lebanon's Bekaa Valley. In the wake of 9/11, American politicians and the media became obsessed with intelligence failures—"who knew what and when?" Why not listen to the intelligence of General Georges Sada, the leading military advisor to Saddam, who depicted in his book not only the WMD story but also the depth of evil that gripped his commander?

General Franks in his book *American Soldier* stated that while clearing Fedayeen barracks, they discovered three hundred brand-new, state-of-the-art, never-used chemical-biological protection suits and masks. They also found several hundred field-syringe injectors filled with the nerve gas antidote atropine and two decontamination vehicles. A yellowcake-uranium cache was discovered at the Tuwaitha Nuclear Research Center in July 2004, in Iraq. Two months before that, twenty tons of Saran gas was intercepted in Amman, Jordan. It was to be used to kill twenty thousand people in

Jordan's capital. Syria was felt to be the origin. Gee, Jason wondered. How did Syria get such a quantity of poisonous gas? Saddam had WMDs, period! He had used them in the past. He wanted proxies to use them in the future. He supported terrorism. Can anyone believe if he had used them on Americans, there would not be outcries to have endless investigations as to "who knew what and when"? Enough already! Maybe someday a railroad car loaded with some horrific chemical would be discovered in the sand. If so, it likely wouldn't be reported because it would help the president's cause.

It was clear to his mother that as his "assignment" progressed, her son's descriptions became more animated.

A leader of the opposition party recently bragged that he had helped kill the Patriot Act. The Patriot Act had been enacted into law by a wide margin in Congress, a little over a month after the September 11 attacks. The Act contained provisions to enhance security against terrorism, enhance surveillance, thwart international money laundering and terror financing, protect the borders, remove obstacles to the investigation of terrorism, provide for victims and public safety officers and families, enhance information sharing, strengthen criminal laws against terrorism, and improve intelligence. But the mood changed as time went on. Its critics became concerned with the dispensation of so much authority to the executive, as to infringe on the liberties of our citizens.

Old Kosmo understood. He said our jihadist enemies did not adhere to any convention or reason and should not be granted citizen status. Although it was difficult to find an American who had unfairly been treated by the Patriot Act, Kosmo had his questions about what was happening in the halls of government. The provisions of sunset provisions and reauthorization votes made sense to him, since the Act might be abused by corrupt officials. The provision to protect our borders seemed especially reasonable. The so-called sneak-and-peak provisions requiring the imprimatur of a Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) court judge made some sense as long as it didn't emasculate the president in fulfilling his constitutional duties to protect our citizens. The sneak-and-peak aspects of programs already in use such as Echelon and Carnivore were not specifically addressed in the Patriot Act or its revisions.

Nixon's reputed intent to use the IRS against his enemies would have been repulsive. Any such abuse should be investigated and roundly punished. Private and confidential information on political opponents should be protected by all means. The snafu of nearly one thousand FBI files accidentally landing in the hands of anyone predisposed to dirty tricks should not have happened. As the facts came out, Filegate could hardly be characterized as a mistake. The Martin tapes of the Gingrich/Boehner conversation that went through Jim McDermott to a newspaper was a violation of privacy, was it not? Linda Tripp won her case against the Department of Defense for releasing her confidential files in the Lewinsky matter. After all, Tripp was protecting herself, as she was being asked by Lewinsky to lie. This vindictive act of releasing personal files must have come from someone at the top. That represents governmental abuse. The leaking of information on our secret detention facilities and our eavesdropping techniques was injurious to America's security and to our undercover agents. Since only members of government could have known this information, such leaks represent governmental abuse and harm the safety of the country by informing the enemy. Kosmo was very touchy about governmental abuses. Although the Patriot Act might deserve a careful tweaking,

Kosmo appreciated we were at war. Sometimes we had to give up some of our rights, like the right not to be searched in airports.

When Vera finished reading these pages, she was trembling. Her son had clearly addressed Kosmo's Twelve Points, but his tone was so out of keeping with his pleasant demeanor and outward presentment. Here, in his writing, he was so sure of himself, so opinionated. Yet, she knew him as stable and composed. At times he seemed even celestial. As a mother might feel, he was a good boy. Was he coming under the spell of Kosmo, this clever man from another world, who seemed to have an agenda himself? Kosmo was clearly steeped in just about every conspiracy that swirled above the pot we call "the news."

It was all so complicated. One could drown in this uncertain brew. Maybe it was better to pull back. She was fearful that her son might become confused. She was hesitant to search his room, his desk, and dresser. She examined her responsibilities as a parent and did it. She resolved if she found anything "incriminating," she would enter his computer, but she presumed innocence. It was inconceivable that he would be harboring a gun. She decided to confront him about his new interest in Kosmo's teachings and see how he reacted.

She was waiting for him when he came home from school. She told him she had come across his "assignment" to flesh out Kosmo's Twelve Steps Aimed at the Destruction and Impeachment of President George W. Bush. He asked her how she liked it. She said she was afraid he might become too opinionated for a boy of fifteen. He told her that the truth should never be feared. She told him the truth could be a tricky thing. He told her however elusive the truth might seem it was very important to search it out.

She decided to sit tight for now and be the good mother she was. She would follow the course of her son's thinking as best she could.

Eight

Some Enchanted Evening

"Did you enjoy the duck, Juliet?"

"It was lovely, and you...Bruce? Your beef?"

"Red meat for the rowdy."

"Can you be rowdy?"

"Oh, I was rowdy once."

"I thought the salad was the best of all."

"So you're a salad saver."

"Just the recipes. Diced beets and apples on a bed of greens, with walnut bits and a whiff of vinaigrette. I've jotted it down."

"I'll bet you're a wizard in the kitchen."

"I must have you over next time. I can do a Beef Wellington that Arno in the city would envy. Just for your information."

“That’s a deal, schweetheart.”

Juliet caught his eye and smiled.

“Look, we have some options if you like. We can catch that new Nicholson film at the Cinema Mart or we can go back to my place, have an aperitif and listen to some music. Besides, I made you a lemon tart.”

“You mean torte?”

“That was not a slip of the tongue!”

“I’d probably pass.”

“Me too...but at least I’ve got some good ice cream.”

“You are going to blimp me.”

Bruce paused. “What do you mean?”

“Turn me into a blimp.”

“How?”

“By overfeeding.”

“Oh, hardly with one dessert, my dear.”

“Really. I have to be careful. If I miss a couple of days of exercise and have just one dessert, I’m in trouble.”

“Just don’t skip the exercise. They say that takes discipline.”

“If you’re telling me you don’t work out, you’re risking your credibility with me.”

“Weight has never been a problem.”

As they gazed at each other, the chef appeared and stood obsequiously at Bruce’s side.

“We have been honored to have you and your lovely friend as our guests this evening, Professor.”

“You are most gracious, Emil.”

Bruce rose and placed his hand under the chef’s elbow as he introduced him to Juliet.

“She’s a fan of yours, already. You’ve inspired her with that salad.”

“Wonderful. We will be most happy, to have her visit our kitchen.”

“How generous of you. You are so busy. Perhaps when it is a bit less—”

“Nonsense. We look forward then to your return,” Emil interrupted.

“Soon, I’m sure,” Bruce assured with finesse.

As they walked toward the exit Juliet turned slightly, and spotted Bruce waving to several couples.

“You must come here often.”

“I paid the chef to make that appearance.”

Juliet looked at Bruce's eyes.

"I can never tell if you're serious. Who were those people you waved to?"

"I make it a point to wave at anyone who stares at me, in this case, us."

"You would make a great politician."

"Argh! That would be worse than exercise."

Bruce took her arm as they descended the steps of the Stone Mansion. They walked to the parking lot. She waited as Bruce opened the door on the passenger's side. Bruce had dated women who took offense at chivalry. He liked a woman who was comfortable being a woman. He handed her the clip for her seat belt. In a moment, he slid in behind the wheel and interrogated the security system by punching a code on the number matrix in the console. A screen lit up and read "no intruders."

"Nobody even touched her while we were having our dinner."

"Her?"

"Call her what you wish."

"What do you call her?"

"Dart."

"Like a dart you throw?"

"No, for d' Artagnan."

"But he was a man."

"That's why I don't call her d' Artagnan."

"Bruce, you're leading me in circles."

"Oh...don't I wish."

"You seem pretty attached to your...ah...Dart. What would you have done if someone had touched her?"

"I can set her so she signals me first. Then I can play the audio message, or go to the red flashers. If that doesn't blow them off, the siren follows. If they still hang around, two flares go straight up from just behind the cockpit. If all that fails, then we take prints and call the family...you know...Da Fam.ill.ee."

"You're very protective."

"Jimmy Hoffa once touched her and look what happened to him."

Juliet instinctively looked around.

"You've surely got a lot invested in your car."

"What's your fancy, Juliet?"

"You make the choice."

"What kind of music do you like. I've got Connick. I've got Billy Joel. And I've got Ten Thousand Bare Naked Ladies."

“Bach.”

“Did he write any romantic stuff?”

“For me, he did.”

“Well, whatever you like...I’ve also got k.d., Natalie, Sting, and even Lucio. My collection stretches back to Little Richard and Bill Halley...whatever you want. Might even dig up a little Rachmaninoff, since you like the romantics.”

Juliet looked over at him curiously, as if moved by the last suggestion.

“Don’t you have some acid rock, to go along with the tart?”

Bruce was drawn to the timbre of her voice. Men, movies and magazines all paid tribute to the more recognized hallmarks of a woman, whether clad, half-clad or unclad. To him, a woman’s voice could be her most endearing, certainly her most enduring, quality. It wasn’t something men spoke of, but he was sure it was crucial in the long run.

If the quality of a woman’s voice could be an aphrodisiac, her laughter could be a symphony. For some, it could also be plain phony. A woman’s voice might be mellifluous or it might be grating. Most were located somewhere toward the center of that spectrum. For Bruce, silicone might best be used on the vocal cords. For him, the occasional shriek or scream was more than offset by a man’s blasphemy. He had never met a woman with melody in her voice, and harmony in her heart. Juliet’s voice allured him and her laughter engulfed him. He was getting to know her heart. Her emotions might take a lifetime to understand, but he really liked her voice, and he thought he was getting to like her heart.

“Tell me more about the Batmobile.”

“It’s an adaptation. I couldn’t afford the Lincoln Futura which was used for the film. Besides, it wasn’t a production car. So I went for a ’54 Hudson Hornet. Found one in decent shape about ten years ago. I got some friends to chop and modify her. It would take an hour to describe all the special features.”

“Like, for instance, it can imitate a skunk?”

Bruce looked at her. She’d figured out one of Dart’s prized accessories. Smart lady, he thought.

They tooled along with the windows down. The air was fresh and the setting sun outlined the mountains to the west. Smoke from a smelting plant farther south dissipated over the ridges. Juliet’s hair was blowing and she didn’t seem to care. As they made their way to Bruce’s apartment, he had enough insight to pour some of Bocelli’s arias through the Batmobile’s unique sound system.

As he eased into the garage, Bruce again punched the button that activated the car’s security system. Once parked, they entered the back of the building and rode an open lift four levels to the top. As the doors telescoped open and shut, they clacked, and the echo fell into the elevator shaft. At this, Juliet’s sense of circumspection was aroused. How well did she really know Bruce? She had two dates with him, the last on the evening of the awards. She had been taken with his playfulness and apparent honesty, but that evening ended curiously. Something mysterious had intervened. Perhaps she was

watching too much Court TV and CSI. Now, she had been swept into his apartment quite oblivious to caution. She trusted her instincts the first time, and her curiosity about what had happened was part of the reason she chose to come back.

Contrary to his customized automobile, his apartment had no elaborate security as far as Juliet could tell. Bruce took her hand and showed her his kitchen. It was admirably ordered and equipped with an array of cookware that hung over an island. Off the side of the kitchen was a sizable living room with a western exposure. As she surveyed it, Bruce caught her attention.

“Here’s my secret.”

He opened his frig. It was well stocked with low-fat milk, fresh vegetables, yogurt, eggs, berries, some fresh salmon and chicken fillets, power drinks and lo-cal dressings. A bowl of fruit sat atop the counter.

“Oh, so that’s how you do it.”

“You don’t see an exercise machine anywhere do you?”

“I don’t see any hamburger, either.”

“Beef only when I eat out, and only on weekends. Otherwise, I fall asleep from liver coma when I’m teaching...not the best thing, you know. Well, I exaggerate.”

Juliet looked quizzically at him and walked into the living room. She admired the plush cream-colored carpets. She carefully removed her pumps. Large black fabric sofas bordered the room, forming two right angles. Soft illumination from two art deco iron floor lamps seeped out beneath conical shades. A bay window framed with black drapes admitted the last light of the fading sun. The walls were hung with two landscape paintings and a large digital blow-up of the rain forest. A separate panel of track lights brought the artwork to life. The photo featured Nick, Jaro and the two guides—Tai and Betta—Stanley and Livingston, to Bruce. All held machetes and smiled robustly when Bruce triggered the shutter. All were visibly covered with bubbles of sweat, attesting to the high pixel resolution of Nick’s camera.

Bruce put his arm around Juliet’s waist.

“Let me show you the rest of my palace.”

He walked into the bedroom.

“This is the king bedroom.”

“It looks more a queen.”

“It is a queen. But it’s for the king. Bath, over there, and a second bedroom around the corner.”

“You have a very nice little habitat here Bruce. Your taste is exquisite, or did you have help?”

Juliet said this while backing up toward the living room.

“Were you expecting thatch, or perhaps wattle and daub?”

“What?”

“Ah...it’s a way of building, I noticed in Manaus.”

“Someday, you’ll have to take me through that trip from beginning to end.”

“Would you care for a Drambuie, or perhaps Amaretto?”

Bruce opened a mobile cabinet. He placed the bottles on the coffee table and turned its lazy Susan slowly, presenting an array of liqueurs for her review.

“Oh, my.”

She surveyed the fare.

“You have a coffee liqueur. That would be nice, with a little ice.”

On the way to the frig, Bruce deftly fingered a remote. The Celtic strains of McKennett rose magically as if out of a mist. It was the lead track of a mix he’d made.

Bruce returned from the kitchen and handed Juliet her aperitif. He sat down on the carpet with his legs folded and looked up at Juliet sitting on the sofa. She had trumped him and tucked her legs parallel under her as only women can do.

“Bet I can guess your height to the nearest half inch.”

“Bet you can’t.”

“Five five and a half.”

“That’s very close. You must have practiced a lot.”

“When I said good-bye to you after the night at the awards the top of your head came right up to the tip of my nose. Remember, you thought I was smelling your hair.”

“I remember.”

“I was measuring you.”

“Oh, Bruce, you sleuth. Well, did I measure up”?

“Yes, and more.”

She smiled at him.

“Bet I can guess your weight.”

“Never mind on that,” she teased.

“One eighteen.”

“Close, but no comment. You’re in personal territory.”

“I like discovering.”

Juliet looked over at the console, which she appreciated as the source of the fine music.

“Do you play this often?”

“Only for special guests.”

“I’ll bet you’ve made several recordings then.”

“Well lately I’ve been very introspective. Trying to get a little focus.”

“Do you mind if I ask you something personal?”

“So, it’s okay if you get personal?”

“Never mind.”

“That’s impossible. How can I never mind?”

“I’m puzzled that you’re not married. Have you ever been?”

“Just what I was going to ask you. No. Never. You’re looking at me funny. Don’t worry, I’m wired according to man-specs.”

“I had no doubts there.”

“There’s a guy in the department that was married for twenty years. One day his wife told him she’d wanted to go to law school all her life. Not a word about this, mind you, for twenty years. He later found out she voted exactly opposite to him, even though she registered in the same party. Then he started to listen to her on the phone, and she starting talking about stuff he never heard of...with a phony laugh, to boot. He realized she was somebody completely different than he thought, and then he found out she was filling their two kid’s heads with garbage...and that was the end of that, for him.”

“But that’s just one example.”

“Oh, I know. But it can happen. A lot of guys say the key is a good-lookin’ woman. I say the key is an honest woman.”

“So what is it? No honest women, or no such thing as love.”

“It’s rare, wouldn’t you agree?”

“So you’ve sworn off the idea of marriage.”

“It would have to hit me like a train. I’m not goin’ looking.”

“It’s really none of my—”

“That’s okay. Hey, I’ll share all the gore.”

“So what do you like?”

“Teaching the kids, especially lab. I listen to the pundits on talk radio, so I can keep up with Jason. He’s very informed, in case you haven’t noticed. Do you listen to talk radio?”

“I listen more to music radio, but yes, sometimes.”

“So how about yourself? You ever been married?”

“I was married once, very young, very naïve.”

“Kids?”

“No. It was my last year in high school, and I picked the wrong guy to be my boyfriend. He introduced me to a lot. First it was marijuana; then it was alcohol, then...cocaine. Thank God there wasn’t crack then. I was one of the lucky ones. Well, my boyfriend at the time...I called him a boyfriend then...he started bullying me soon after the first time because I wasn’t sure if I wanted to go ahead with it. That was something I couldn’t

abide. So we split, and I had to report his threats to the police. Gradually, he faded out of the picture. That was a long time ago.”

“Did he abuse you?”

“Once. So I left. Somehow I was able to leave. My parents were supportive and immediately got me help. They were surprised ’cause I was doing pretty well in school. A lot of parents are in denial. Heck some are even on drugs themselves. Wouldn’t want to be teaching in school today.”

“So where does your love of music come in?”

“As a salvation.”

“Go to church?”

“Rarely, but I’m not really strong one way or the other. I could go to church.”

Bruce paused.

“Nick and I somehow avoided the drug scene.”

“You and Nick? How far back do you go together?”

“From kindergarten on. Vera was in the grade behind us. He is what is known as the consummate straight arrow. I was the shifty running back on the football team, so there were always plenty of girls around.”

“What about your parents?”

“My father died when I was young and my mother became ill. So I didn’t have as much parenting as I probably should have. Maybe that’s why Nick and I welded. He couldn’t be a father, but he was a rock-solid friend, and we never had a rift.”

The conversation lulled. Some lyrics floated over them.

She’ll promise you more than the Garden of Eden

She’ll carelessly cut you and laugh while your bleedin’

But she’ll bring out the best and the worst you can be

Blame it all on yourself ’cause she’s always a woman to me.

“I love Billy Joel.”

“An American icon. He’s done the national anthem, with all of his songs.”

“I like your pictures.”

“Painted by a man back home. He fixed car engines for a living, but he was like Thoreau. He lived in the woods and would disappear for weeks. You’d have to wait to get your engine fixed. When he got tired of replacing head gaskets, he’d paint. I walked a lot in the forest, too, when I was young. There were plenty of them up around those coalfields.”

“Is that your picture?”

“Yes. But I cheated. I used Nick’s camera. I took it in an opening where a giant tree had fallen. We reached the meteorite crater just after that. We had been slogging hard using machetes to cut through the vines and dangling roots. Then, we came upon this clearing.”

“I was impressed with your discovery. At the awards.”

“You mean the bat. Well yes, it was a feather in my cap. Anything that can help me stay at the college as a teacher...”

“Someday, I want to hear about that trip from start to finish.”

Bruce looked up at her. “You’ve said that once before. Yes, someday I will honor your request.”

“Sit up here with me. You make me feel like a queen down there, like you’re genuflecting or something.”

Bruce leaned forward and placed his broad hands on her calves. He massaged them up and down, gently. She let him.

“Someday I’ll tell you all about it, but there’s a gap that I need to get straight. I’ve talked to Nick about it and he feels the same. We’ve got to sit down together and go over our notes.”

Bruce leaned back and looked up at the ceiling. He seemed lost for a second.

“What is it, Bruce?”

“I’m not sure. Something missing...haunted...something, something...”

Juliet watched him, with a combination of both concern and curiosity. Then she became aware of the words, floating in the room just then...

Some Love is just a lie of the soul

A constant battle for the ultimate state of control...

Bruce snapped back.

“Do you know, Juliet, that women are in control. A man thinks when he has seduced a woman that he has some sort of control, but he’s been led or encouraged, or at least not discouraged. I’m not talking so much about pussy-whipping...I’m just speaking from knowledge...the poor guy is—”

“Bruce!”

She looked at him intently.

“Are you into porn?”

“Hell, that’s a spectator sport. I play the game on the field. I mean they are so far ahead of guys, you know, on the understanding of the whole deal, not only sex, but the whole enchilada...”

“Bruce, you seem so different. Are you all right?”

Bruce was smiling, but he looked at her as though looking through her. It was as if he was in a trance, somehow seized by some unseen power.

“You know, guys just go around sometimes staking out their territory. They’re like a dog, pissing. We just think if we can plant our seeds in every crack and crevasse on earth—you know what I mean—we can take over, dominate the whole thing. It must go back to the bull moose, or Big Daddy elephant or something. I mean it can take over a guy’s mind, like a goddam drug or something.”

“Have you had a little much to drink?”

“No, no, it’s not that.”

Bruce’s mind had suddenly switched gears, and it was like he had no brakes. It bothered him. He started to have flashbacks, a slideshow of women he had known intimately. It was what he supposed a seizure would be, although he never had one. It was impossible to talk through it, or to suppress it. And yet, he was conscious.

“I know this is not you. Well, it’s a different ‘you,’ perhaps. Bruce, there is something going on, but I don’t know what. I’m going to get some ice water for you, and we’ll sit here together on the couch until I’m sure you’re all right.”

“That would be nice, Juliet. That would be really nice. I think I got randy or something, something just came over me.”

Bruce flopped facedown on the couch.

Juliet returned with some ice water and held it to his mouth. He bolted it down. He took out the ice and put it under his shirt.

“This is as much a mystery to me, as it is to you, Juliet.”

She sat down and put his head on her lap. He looked up at her.

“Are you all right now, Bruce?”

“Yes.”

“Can you drive?”

“I’ll put ’er on auto cruise.”

“Now, Bruce, darling, you’re going to take me home. This is not a good time for either of us.”

“But of course, my dear.”

Nine

Guns, Mother and Apple Pie

“Why don’t you collect baseball cards, Jason?”

“I don’t follow baseball, Mother.”

“Most boys collect baseball cards, don’t they?”

“Are you saying you would like me to be like most boys? What if I’m a special edition?”

“What do you mean, a special edition?”

“I’m a boy, Mother, one of a kind, like everyone.”

“I’m sorry, Jason. I didn’t mean to get pushy with you. It’s just that I was looking around your room the other day and—”

“And?”

“It’s a very interesting place. You have a lot going on inside your head I think.”

“No baseball players up there. Or any sports players, really. Do you think I’m one of those crazies who pops off and goes on a rampage?”

“Of course not.”

“Were you looking for a gun?”

“I don’t think you’re the type to have a gun.”

“I don’t have one yet. But I will. Do you know they pulled ole Buffo in to the office just because he mentioned the word ‘gun’ before class started.”

“That’s a concern, Son. You have to check out the context of that comment.”

“The context? Father told me that his father, my grandfather, who I never met, use to take his rifle to school. It’s a Right and it’s clearly spelled out in the Second Amendment. We should all have a gun, as adults. And we all need training on how to use one.”

“Why do you say that?”

“You know that university where the shooting occurred?”

“Yes.”

“They probably feel ashamed and wounded that it occurred there. But they shouldn’t, terrible as it was. Their only mistake was in announcing that the campus was gun free. When you announce that your home, store or school is gun free, you put a bull’s-eye on everyone. That’s what Mr. Q says.”

“Mr. Q?”

“In an open society like ours you will never stop these things completely. There are always going to be madmen. Madmen walking around in an open society are a danger. The only answer is self-protection.”

“But he used a gun.”

“He could have strapped an explosive on himself. It’s not the gun. You’d be outlawing cars, scissors, matches, crossing streets, surfing, bad thoughts, all kinds of choices.”

“These guys always use guns. And guns were made to kill with.”

“Mr. Colt’s revolving pistol was only an improvement, an advantage. It was going to come, like tanks, planes and trespassing. If you check the record, most killers have been stopped by people with guns. But you don’t hear that part of the story very often. You have to ask yourself, why? I can’t believe some people are so brain dead, they don’t get it.”

“Get what?”

“Why we don’t hear of the defensive use of firearms in the news? The governor of Pennsylvania said once he never heard of a defensive use of a firearm. He’s either in a cocoon or he’s a dupe for the anti-gun movement. I heard it on Mr. Q’s show.”

“Mr. Q again.”

“Yes, he’s on the radio. He says when you hear that the anti-gunners have come and confiscated his, you will know he’s dead. He calls the Second Amendment the reset button for the Constitution.”

“Oh, Jason! How long have you been listening to that?”

“He just got a slot on WWNJ. And he’s spreading out on XM radio, too.”

“But the Second Amendment talks about the militia.”

“Mother, a ‘well-regulated’ militia meant a well-drilled militia. The militia was made of ordinary citizens. The Bill of Rights is about individual rights and was drawn up because many felt the new government had too much power over the individual. A much longer list was eventually trimmed down to the ten amendments and was championed by the Republicans of the time—like Madison and Jefferson. Would it have made sense to describe the creation of an army in the middle of this list of individual rights? ‘The right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed’...how much clearer can it be? There are no words before or after that that can change the meaning of that phrase. It’s dominant. Beats those bills that Congress makes. They’re as big as telephone books, like President Reagan showed once.”

“Well, some of the courts have taken a different view of—”

“Yes, especially those courts with judges who were appointed by presidents who believe the government can solve all of man’s problems. The Declaration talks about unalienable rights, ones that come from the Creator. Governments made from men derive their just power from the consent of the governed. The Founders were pretty touchy about people having their rights taken from them, whether by a dictator or an overzealous government. In fact, the Constitution was framed in a way that reflected their distrust of government. What could people do if their arms were taken from them? Historically, this is the way that dictatorships begin. That’s why the Founders specifically talked about the right to bear arms. Beware of any argument that frames the issue of the right to bears arms in terms of hunters or hunting. The Second Amendment has nothing to do with hunters.”

“Well, there’s certainly no need for an automatic weapon, like an AK forty-seven.”

“Not unless you’re confronted by a government agent with an MK five submachine gun, like Elian Gonzales was. A twenty-two wouldn’t help much there.”

“But those people were directly challenging the government.”

“Exactly. It was a challenge to a secret agreement between Castro and President Clinton. What has happened with Elian? After years we finally got a follow-up. He’s a pawn for Castro, as most people knew he would be. But it’s not a free story. It’s contrived. It’s kind of like not hearing about how a gun was used to stop a school shooting.”

“Well, I suppose you may have a point on that.”

“You know, there is a culture in today’s world that raises its kids as a militia. Some kids are selected out to be their martyrs, for the glory of meeting Allah. They skip baseball cards and grow up with AK forty-sevens. What choice do these kids have? They’re enslaved.”

“My Goodness! I was just talking about guns.”

“I was speaking about minds. Mother, if you tried to gather up all the guns there were in the country and melt them down, you would fail. You don’t think some madman intent on shooting up a classroom or a mall is going to volunteer to turn in his heater, do you? You wouldn’t get them all. Then you would have fewer left for defense. That mass killing at the university proved that police couldn’t protect them. And they can’t protect us either. So, who is going to protect us from these madmen? Also, if the government confiscated guns there would be a civil war. A lot of people think every gun control law is un-Constitutional, and there are still a lot of people who believe in the Constitution. Gun control favors criminals who would have the guns while law abiders wouldn’t. It’s been pretty well shown that criminals don’t obey the law.”

“But what about accidental deaths?”

“Do you know about Kennesaw, Georgia? A law was passed there in 1982 that required every household to have a firearm and ammunition plus free instruction on the use of the firearm. Of course, they excluded established criminals and conscientious objectors. Violent crime and household burglaries dropped dramatically, even though the population tripled. There were no injuries to children since the law was passed. You don’t hear about that very much from the media either. Violent crime rates have increased in countries that have disarmed the public at large.”

“Where was that again?”

“Kennesaw, Georgia. It shouldn’t be surprising. If you or I were a burglar, or a rapist, or a killer, wouldn’t we think twice if we knew that our victim packed heat? If we knew that it was illegal for him to have a gun, or that the law will punish him for self-defense, we would be more likely to commit the crime against him, wouldn’t we?”

“The bullets should be in another place, and the guns should be locked.”

“Mother. That’s a recipe for disaster. What’s needed is common sense if there are kids around, and education. Since England went soft on gun ownership, do you know that crime rates there are rising and in some categories have passed up the U.S.? Australia has had a similar experience. Twelve months after gun owners were forced to surrender over six hundred and forty thousand guns at a huge cost, they have seen a rise in homicides, assaults and armed robberies. In the state of Victoria, homicides with firearms rose three hundred percent.”

“Those statistics are questioned.”

“Sure they are. You know Professor John Lott and his book *More Guns, Less Crime*. He started out trying to find out if a correlation between crime and local gun laws existed. He looked at the municipalities across the U.S. and showed that where carry-permits and gun ownership is permitted, some version of the Kennesaw experience holds.”

“His statistical methods, and coding procedures have been questioned. He’s a shameless self-promoter.”

“Sure he has been criticized. Just look at the number of upside-down articles you see in the media...confiscate all guns, and then we all will be safe...but it doesn’t work, and Lott showed it. They try to put it on guys like Dirty Harry and John Wayne, but those guys are heroes! Rosey gets twenty times the publicity that Lott gets, with her demand that you and I give up our pistol. Her bodyguards are packing. Is that hypocrisy or what?”

“Oh, Jason. We have a violent society. We are being laughed at, and scoffed by the Europeans.”

“Mother, the twentieth century has been the most violent one in history. We haven’t had anything close to fifty million die at the hands of a dictator, even considering our darker moments of slavery and the Indian wars. We saved Europe. Don’t worry about what the Europeans think.”

“But we are so disliked around the world.”

“Yes, by the liberal international press, but not the people in general. Just like the CMM, here at home.”

“The CMM?”

“Complicit Main Media. That’s what Kosmo calls them.”

“I’m just against the proliferation of arms.”

“Do you believe the manufacture of arms around the world can be stopped? It would be like stopping gravity. The prohibition of alcohol in the twenties and thirties in the U.S. didn’t work. Yes, it would be ideal to keep guns out of the hands of madmen. Unfortunately, it’s impossible, and if it were possible, it’s not verifiable.”

“The deterrent effect of guns has been exaggerated.”

“That’s a statistic that is hard to track. It’s like trying to quantify the number of cancers that are caused by second-hand cigarette smoke. It’s too hot, too political. The governor who told Lott he didn’t know of a single defensive use of a gun was the same guy who went to Florida to help get the military votes disqualified in the 2000 presidential election. You’ve got to know the source, who said what, and why. It’s the law of contexts.”

“You’re a skeptic, you know.”

“You have to be, don’t you, Mother. You’ve got to preserve your sanity. Look, the real question is what can we do about the incidence of madness. It’s the madness, not the guns. Do you know how many people die from auto accidents?”

“But a car gets us from point A to point B. Cars serve a purpose.”

“How about a saved life? How many miles are equal to a life, then?”

“That’s not the point.”

“Then the point is that guns save lives, and it’s our right to own them and defend ourselves. Just like it’s the government’s number-one duty to protect the country. Don’t

remove the cars. Remove the drunks and the dangerous. Remove the vicious criminals. Protect society. Don't turn them loose the way some of these pinheaded judges do. They ought to keep score on the judges, one strike and you're out."

"What do you mean?"

"Just like you don't often hear that American's have been killed by jihadists."

"What jihadists?"

"John Mohammad, for one. He was the guy who with Malvo shot all those people in the Washington DC area. What did the victims have in common? They were Americans. Then there was the guy that went wild at the mall in Utah, and the guy who drove his car over people in San Francisco. Happens pretty often. The Fort Dix Six and the boys who came close to blowing up JFK. Do you notice that the CMM called Mohammad and Malvo 'gunmen,' instead of jihadists. Just like they call the drivers of SUVs who have accidents 'SUVs'? Do they call people who commit crimes with a knife, 'knifemen'?"

"It's just a convention."

"It's the madness. That's what we've got to get a handle on. Why would the media glorify the last wishes of that madman at the university? The media didn't kill those people, but they may have thrown gasoline onto the next incendiary mind...and for what? For our right to know the inner sanctum of depravity? I've got enough of that to deal with on my own without their help. Or, for the purpose of sales—the right to make money? What about the families of those victims? Don't they have a right to mourn outside of the spotlight? Just tell us about it once, and move on."

"Well, of course..."

"You've got to highlight some of the positives. Mr. Q says they should bronze the door that the Israeli professor used as a barricade and create a memorial to him. His courage dates back to the Holocaust."

"Really?"

"Guns have been around since before Colt. But the madness is increasing. And you can't take the easy way out and say the madness comes from a tough childhood, or sexual abuse, or being bullied at school. These have always existed. What you need to ask is, what has brought about the erosion of conscience? There have always been sociopaths like Jack the Ripper (whoever he was) and H. H. Holmes, alias Herman Mudgett. But there haven't always been Harrises, Klebolds or Chos. Do any crime experts in America know what it is in our society that makes that little voice inside disappear in some people...that little voice that informs us as to what is right and what is wrong? And why do some choose wrong? Is there anything we have done as a society that has devalued human life? Have we lost our moral compass as a society? Did a lonely, bitter, and hateful life come under the influence of some subtle or incendiary influence? Was it simply the lure of a congregation of people to an inverted mind? Go for the record in Demonic Hall! Had 'the culture of death' come into the picture? Do English courses in such topics as Transsexualism, Feminist Pedagogy, Marxism, Deconstructionism, and The Self-Justifying Criminal in Literature, for instance, tip the scales of order and logic toward oblivion? Does useless and abysmal inversion of the rich matter of literature serve

any educational purpose, Mother? These are questions worth asking, as Ms. Shlafly has. Who pays attention to such questions? Certainly not the CMM.”

“I’ve heard of her. Now you’re on complex ground.”

“But it’s ground worth tilling. Here’s a thought. If some madman tries this again, and no hero emerges with a firearm, because, God forbid, they have all been banned, then take a lesson from the story of Flight 93. Since there are crazies out there, and since we are at war, it might be reasonable for every American to prefigure the Beamer challenge—‘Let’s roll!’ That would have changed the whole dynamic, don’t you see. The shooter, once in a dominant position with his gun, loses control when everyone charges him. Turn the tables on him. He doesn’t get to execute his evil plan. His aims are changed and his killing field reduced. Most importantly, he’s beaten at his own game. We’ve all got to think about this. Stop denying, I say. A person would go to the other world knowing he or she saved some lives. Such a Flight 93 response might even act as a deterrent to a would-be killer. It might even make for an uplifting story, for whatever that’s worth.”

“I’m not sure we have many with the amount of courage it takes for the Flight 93 response.”

“Most of our national reservoir of courage is fighting for us overseas right now, but don’t be a skeptic, Mother. If I were old enough to take up arms against our enemy as part of our volunteer armed forces, I hope you would be incensed at anyone who said, ‘We support our troops, but we oppose this war’. You would Mother, wouldn’t you?”

“Wouldn’t I what?”

“Wouldn’t you get really ticked off at such nonsense, when I chose to put my as..., my life on the line?”

“Yes, of course, Son.”

“Let’s have a piece of that apple pie you made.”

Ten

Touching the Bases

“I’m not sure this is a good idea, Bruce.”

“What idea?”

“My being with you. It seems like the last two times something happened that I don’t understand. Maybe I bring out all your personalities.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, on the night of the awards...and I was proud of you and your discovery...on the way home you got pretty excited about some guy who was tailgating. You had me push a button on that consul...on the dash, I don’t know, number five, or nine, it doesn’t matter. And then you said you ran over a skunk. It was like you changed. That silken self you showed me turned to sandpaper.”

“There’s something I’ve got to tell you.”

“Yes?”

“ I didn’t run over a skunk.”

“I know. Then there was last week.”

“I know and I’m really sorry about—”

“No, don’t be sorry. Just think of it through my eyes. You were sitting on the floor in front of me, and we were listening to music—”

“Billy Joel.”

“Well, see, you remember. Something came over you. I’ve been racking my brain...was it me? Did I say something, or do something?”

“It wasn’t you, sweetheart. I’m still trying to figure it out myself.”

“Do you use drugs, Bruce?”

“Only a drink or two, and not very often.”

“Have you ever seen a shrink?”

“Hell no!”

“Do you have more than one personality?”

“Well, we all change moods, don’t we...but no, you didn’t do anything. I wasn’t troubled about anything. We were sailing along...together...on, like you say, a beautiful pacific ocean and I was feelin’ really smooth and happy. Yes, I remember, all right.”

“I’m at a loss. I didn’t like the feeling though. It frightened me a little. I wouldn’t want to make a commitment to someone and then find out they have some disorder they didn’t tell me about.”

“I wouldn’t do that to you. I care for you too much. I wouldn’t do that to anyone. Does my kidding around bother you?”

“No. I like your humor.”

“Do you think Ted Bundy could have gotten into a dating service?”

“Sometimes, Bruce, you can push the envelope, you know.”

Juliet leaned back into the corner of the couch. Her dark eyes were fixed on his and searching. He surveyed her shapely body and his eyes rested on her mouth. She was an eye-contact person and he was a mouth-watcher, at least with her. Her voice came out of her mouth. She was just sitting there, again with her legs tucked under her in natural comfort. How could women do that?, he thought. Her skirt crossed well above her knees. Her arms spread beckoningly across the top of the couch. She was more relaxed now. She smiled and leaned toward him. Her caution slowly evaporated. The lovely fullness of her breasts seemed more apparent as she leaned toward him. Women were good at that. Hell, he thought, who else could do it? They were also capable of swift visual intake while a man dotes. It was a quality that helped put them miles ahead of any situation with a man.

“I only have one personality, although I’m not sure people with more than one know about it. I don’t even think I’m moody. Do you think you should see every facet of a person before you decide to get serious?”

“You speak of yourself as though you are a gemstone.”

“Well...”

“There are some things a person doesn’t choose, you know. You want me to give you my analysis, so far?”

“Shoot.”

“I think you are a lot smarter than you give yourself credit for. I think you deliberately underestimate yourself. I think you protect yourself with your wit. You enjoy tossing curveballs. It gives you a certain command. I’d like to know more about why you do this.”

“So would I. Meanwhile, tell me your favorite love scene, from the films.”

“You mean Hollywood?”

“Yes.”

“For me, it was the conversation between Cary Grant and Eva Marie Saint...their characters that is, was it Roger and Eve, on that train in North by Northwest. Really sexy yet it was just innuendo, not even shockers by today’s standards. Shows you don’t really need shockers. How about you?”

“I rate that scene in The Right Stuff where Chuck Yeager has this sensuous conversation with that hot-looking woman in the bar, within earshot of the new pilots...the astronauts. She turns out to be his wife. That’s not so novel. Remember...when the Sundance Kid stalks that house and surprises Kathryn Ross’s character? All of us in the audience think we’re about to witness a crime...and she asks him, why he was so late?”

“Was hoping you weren’t going to say Basic Instinct. You’re a movie buff, then.”

“Speaking of Eve, now there’s a girl with a lot of personalities.”

“Not that Eve. See, you did it again.”

Juliet propped herself up on her knees and faced Bruce directly.

“You know my all-time favorite? It’s not an oldie.”

“Titanic?”, she guessed.

“No.”

“Year of Living Dangerously?”

“Close. It was Last of the Mohicans. Day-Lewis as Hawkeye, out there under the stars explaining the creation myth to Alice. How it ‘stirred her blood’! You’ve got two hours in a film to pull off this transformation in a woman, from skepticism, even repulsion for this ‘savage,’ to submission, then passion and finally love, as symbolized by their standing together with Chingashgook, the last of the Mohicans, on that cliff at the end, after Uncas was killed. You could feel her change through these states...you could see it. They only have a couple of hours in a movie you know. It’s not like a book. In the fort, she raises her eyes to his. ‘What are you looking at, sir?’ ...and Hawkeye says, ‘I’m looking at you.’ She smiles in that reserved way, and he gives her a full grin back and bang, that’s it! She couldn’t help but reciprocate. Wow, that sensuous scene in the fort

that followed soon after, with the music and the dancing in the background. That's what it is all about you know, reciprocation."

"Not seduction?"

"That's the most luminous part of reciprocity."

"You've got it all down, don't you? That scene must have moved you. Wait, who brought this game up?"

"I did. Funny, how we have these inner lives."

"You mean fantasy?"

"And discovery. Is that so for a woman?"

"Some women, surely. But you must remember, women were not trained to be discoverers. They were protectors."

"What do you mean...were?"

Juliet looked down and nodded her head, with her eyes closed. Their eyes finally met and Bruce grinned. Whatever protective shroud she possessed was dissipating rapidly. She was warm and inviting. He reached out and placed his hands under each arm and drew her toward him. She didn't resist. Then he kissed her, and she returned the kiss unreservedly.

"You're not going to tickle me to death are you?"

"No, but I'd like to love you to death, or at least to where you need to be resuscitated. I would revive you and do it again."

"Oh, Bruce!"

They both stood up. She pressed herself against him, and he embraced her and kissed the top of her head, then her forehead, then her lips.

"Let me make you feel like a queen."

"I think you have a queen's bed, in there."

Bruce led the way, holding her hand.

"Wait. I want to watch you."

Bruce had already shed his sandals and his trousers. He lay with his shirt partly open, propped up against the headboard. His effulgence broke through his boxer shorts. The room was illuminated only by the faint light of dusk that seeped through a lone window. Juliet's silhouette darkened as she turned toward Bruce. She slowly unbuttoned her blouse. As she pulled her bra up over herself, her breasts plopped out and jiggled. Bruce's work in the orchard of love had left him with many images. Her areolae were dark and her nipples tense. She slipped her skirt and panties off clumsily, and laughed a little nervously.

"Please do that again."

"What are you talking about?"

“You strip down so nicely.”

“I’ll think about it, later.”

She crawled up on him and kissed him. She gently handled him. He felt her body tremble. He put his hands on her buttocks and plied them rhythmically. Then he encompassed her torso with his large hands, just under the rib cage. The sexual venture for him was systematic, yet always with its variations.

“You know, I think you’ve got a twenty-four-inch waist.”

“How did you...”?

“Cause I’m a hands-on guy. I want to kiss your lips.”

She kissed him.

“All of them.”

“Oh, Bruce.”

In a split second he was lying on her and his mouth undertook the polar expedition he knew so well.

“Oh Boy! Oh Boy!!”

His attention brought whimpers, followed by the exhortations of climax. He rolled onto his back and looked at her. Her eyes were closed as she savored the pleasure of his titillations.

“Do you like my compass?”

“Huh?”

“It’s pointing to the north star.”

She took him in her hands and gently felt the head of his penis, as if recording the tactile record in her mind. Then she kissed him and took him into her mouth. She popped up.

“I’m not very good at this.”

“You’ve got a 4.0, so far.”

“You’re beautiful, Bruce.”

“And you’re lovely.”

“And you are gorgeous.”

“And you are playful.”

They laughed.

As he entered her, she wiggled; then she embraced him with her legs. Their movement was slow and she concentrated on his full stroke.

“Sometimes you can feel a laugh down deep.”

They laughed again.

In a split second he put his arm behind her and spun her under him.

“That was impressive. You’re strong, too.”

“It was a wrestling move.”

“Are you going to pin me?”

“You’ve been taken down, sweetheart. You’re in a predicament, and there is no escaping.”

“Bruce. Oh, Bruce! Ooh Ooh...”

“Hold on, sweet Juliet.”

He was under her now, and she pulled her knees up and sat on him. She shook her hair free of her face. Her expression was intent.

“Never before with a red-haired girl?”

“Like Earl in the backseat, makin’ it for the first time with a red-headed girl. Only you’re Bruce.”

Just then it started to happen. A mysterious force took his mind. A cascade of images appeared and ran through in a slideshow of carnal romps. He was vaguely aware of the faces, the bodies, the sounds, the smells, the movements, the exhortations. It was overwhelming. He tried to think of Juliet, his classroom, his Batmobile, the Amazon, but nothing could stop the show. He knew if she became aware of his apparent obsession, she would quit. He had strength enough to flip her over again so that he was on top. He placed his head next to hers and remained silent. He hoped she would take it to be the release of orgasm, or the afterglow that followed. The images kept coming, and repeating. Faces, lips with wandering tongues, breasts...small and taut, full and robust, always luring and irresistible; hair, sparse and luxuriant, light and dark; the aromas of arousal...fishy—“pink” as Bruce knew it, musky, strong and “purple”...he was always amazed at how these scents of a woman vanished with the beginning of the act itself...evanescent airborne pheromones. Bruce knew the anatomy of women. Franklin, in a lurid moment was reputed to have said, “All cats are the same in the dark.” Bruce reckoned he knew more about electricity! His own field surveys had led to the discovery of enormous variation. Juliet was oblivious to the slideshow in her lover’s head, which had faded, only to revive again. The trailer contained an image of an airline hostess, a young girl dancing in a marketplace, and a tight-skirted vixen sitting next a well-dressed man, shifting herself provocatively. It was humiliating for him to not be in control at this moment.

It was curious that although he couldn’t stop the images—perhaps they were hallucinations—he was still able to think, and he knew this was something different than the fantasies he’d had in the past. He knew that some seizures could trigger certain areas in the cerebral cortex on their electrical revel through the brain. These so-called association areas were the repositories of images or sounds, such as a triumphant sport moment or a moving piece of music. But he’d never had seizures, as far as he knew. In his study of women, he had come to the conclusion that the act of sex could be many things. It was a combination of anticipation, willingness and pleasure, flowing back and forth, a physical trust amidst possible danger, indulgence and occasionally, love. He was good at breaking down a woman’s resistance when he set his mind to it. It seemed at this

moment his seductive passion had spilled over as a breastwork becomes unable to hold back the flood. Had Don Juan undergone such trials? Now, he was an automaton. His brain had been taken over by some alien force he couldn't understand. Had the Prince of Darkness invaded his mind?

“Oh, Bruce. You are wonderful.”

“Just relax, sweetheart. Let's just lie here like this.”

He thought just then she was perfect. They lay wordlessly embraced for the time it took to decelerate.

“What is this consuming thing, Lust, after all? And how it does fly with Love. Methinks the One dost well with the Other, whilst the Other tumbles so, in wild free fall.”

“Which play is that?”

“Sweetheart, that was a Bonnerism.”

“Amazing.”

He buried his head next to hers. She hugged him. Gradually, the show became fragmentary and faint. Finally, Juliet's smiling face came into focus. He guessed the whole sequence lasted five minutes, but he couldn't be sure. She lay with her eyes closed. As he disengaged, he kissed her and rolled onto his back.

She cuddled up to him, and threw her leg over him.

“The poetic biologist. You amaze me. I don't think I can get dressed and then repeat getting naked, you know.”

“I'm a patient man. I'll wait till the next time.”

“Pretty confident, 'eh.”

Bruce had turned the bedside light on partway through their odyssey. Juliet turned it off in their silence together. A few minutes passed.

“Bruce, I noticed you have a tattoo. You don't strike me as a man who would have a tattoo.”

“I never got a tattoo.”

“Maybe you weren't sober.”

“Sober? I would never have a tattoo.”

“And such a quaint place. Don't you believe me?”

“Okay, where is my tattoo?”

“Right there.”

She touched the border of his pubic hair.

“What the hell!”

Eleven

The Science Fair

Mr. Orb taught Earth Studies and he made the assignment clear. Each student could pick a subject to research and illustrate for the “Roadside Presentations.” It was his special touch for Parent’s Night, when teachers and parents discussed the progress of the kids. Half the gym was turned into a walking arcade. The open part was available for light refreshments, donuts and commingling. Each of the teachers had a stop, not so much a confession booth as a place where mostly mothers might find out in privacy about how their sons and daughters were doing. Vera was on hand. She was interested in her son’s response to not being a participant this evening. Her husband had a date with the observatory.

The high school offered the customary array of hard sciences, such as chemistry and physics. Orb’s focus was environmental studies, and he cared greatly for Mother Earth. Each student in grades nine through twelve was expected to work up a project. If a student didn’t have a clue, Orb kept a hat-full of topics just in case. He was usually able to direct a dozen or so students to things like feeding the world’s population, global warming, the hazards of pesticides and biotechnology, the wonder of organic foods, upcoming water wars, the erosion of the coral reefs, the endangered ozone layer, lost species, urban sprawl, sustainable growth, and so on. He stood ready to coach his positions to the unwary. Each science class elected four projects for the fair. The Science Fair was Mr. Orb’s brainchild.

Jason jumped into the project with enthusiasm. He was not so intimidated by Orb that he blindly followed the recommended reading list by itself. He tapped into a variety of source work and discovered multiple points of view. He then discriminated, based on the source, its objectivity and the play of common sense. As it turned out, Jason’s take was often at odds with Orb’s party line. He sometimes felt as though he was being isolated in class, suggesting he had influence. His own project, showing that the wealthiest nations do best in cleaning up the environment, hadn’t been selected. It didn’t stifle him. His sense of inquiry was spurred further. Several kids came to him for help. To Jason, his First Amendment Rights were both sacred and threatened. If he assembled with other students, it wasn’t to overthrow the regime, but more to highlight a diversity of view.

The first stop in the arcade was Jeremy’s. Both of Jeremy’s parents were present for Parent’s Night. Jeremy was an honor student in the eleventh grade and was surely bound for college. He read recently that the U.S. would soon post its population at 300 million. He chose to research and illustrate the issue of feeding not only Americans, but also the world.

Mr. Orb contended the world’s famine was caused by population increase combined with limits of food production. Jeremy knew that feeding the world’s population was a different issue than keeping Americans fed. Jeremy appreciated that although the subject of hunger invariably got talked about at election time, it was a tough sell at the same time Americans were repeatedly warned of the obesity epidemic. He looked into it. Researchers who tried to find the incidence of hunger in the United States often had to look up the subject of “food insecurity.” In America, there were school lunch programs, food stamps, the Salvation Army and shelters, safety nets of all sorts. Jeremy wondered if a kid in America became hungry, it might be time to investigate the parents, parent, or substitute, or the circumstances at home. If drug addiction played a role, where food became a secondary goal, then Jeremy suggested taking on the problem of drugs, since it

was primary in that case. Whatever it was, it was not a time to listen to the hunger pushers whose *raison d'être* was hunger itself. If hunger was felt in America, and surely there were cases, it certainly wasn't because of famine. For these thoughts, Jeremy knew he'd be called callous, insensitive, maybe even a bigot or fascist. But these were questions he considered legitimate, and he picked this as his project.

Mr. Orb rode a bike to and from school. His focus on fitness, coupled with his pigtail floating in the wind, made him noticeable. He loathed waste and in a recent class, he spoke of chemical commodes. He finished by discussing single square targets. At this, Jeremy told Jason later they might be okay for a vegan, but not for Michael Moore. Jeremy later approached Jason about his project and Jason put him onto the writings of the first formal student of human population—an Englishman named Thomas Malthus.

Malthus published his theories in the late 1790s, when the new United States was testing the realities of nationhood under its indispensable leader and president, George Washington.

Malthus took a pessimistic view of man's future and predicted that human population growth was geometric. As such, it would always outstrip the production of food, which Malthus thought was arithmetic. Jeremy's poster started with an example of arithmetic progression (1, 2, 4, 8, 16...) compared with geometric or exponential progression (1, 2, 4, 16, 256...). He affixed tiny images of wheat and cows to the former, and humans, to the latter, at least up to the number 16. Malthus missed living at a time that would eventually come—namely when affluence inversely impacted the size of the family. Affluence came with the generation of wealth. Nor could he foresee the miraculous advances in agriculture. The Malthusian crowning statement was found in his *Essay on Population and Principles of Political Economy*. According to this mild-mannered Englishman, the world's population would become limited by its food supply, which in turn would produce widespread famine and starvation. Malthus, of course, did not live to see what happened to the world's population a century later. In 1900, it grew to 1.6 billion, up a lot from 1800. And in 2000, it was 6 billion! The United Nations Population Division calculated the figure 7.5 billion for 2050. Something had clearly gone awry with these gloomy predictions. We were still here.

Sure, there had been famines in the world, such as the Potato Famines in Ireland in the 1840s and the Dust Bowl in Oklahoma when topsoil was carried away in the wind in the 1930s. There had been ominous famines in Africa due to regional factors, such as warlords using food distribution as a strategy for control. There also had been disease epidemics; some perhaps aggravated by starvation. And there had been wars. Yet, the world's population continued to grow.

Even though two centuries proved the Malthusian assumptions wrong, a Nobel prize-winning professor at Stanford resurrected them and wrote the best seller, *The Population Bomb*. It brought him fame and prizes, but not the Nobel, which was awarded to the other Paul Ehrlich who worked on the cure for syphilis. As recently as 1968, Paul R. Ehrlich wrote "A nutritional disaster seems likely to overtake humanity in the 1970s or 1980s! Due to a combination of ignorance, greed, and callousness, a situation has been created that could lead to a billion or more people starving to death. Further, before 1985 mankind will enter a genuine age of scarcity...accessible supplies of many key minerals

will be nearing depletion.” That was what he said. This, of course, was a variation on the Malthusian principle except that now, human greed, ignorance and callousness had been brought into the equation.

Orb embraced such notions, simply alleging the time wasn't right yet. Ehrlich may also have underestimated the effect of the Chinese birth containment policies and Margaret Sanger's birth-control pill, which had been designed for eugenic purposes. In other words, according to Orb, Ehrlich and Malthus would be right sooner or later.

Jeremy pondered all this. There had been greed, ignorance and callousness all right, and there still was. Jeremy thought of the callousness the UN had showed the Tootsies in Rwanda for instance. That policy certainly led to some population control. The UN and later the U.S. tried to intervene in Somalia over a decade ago because a warlord would not distribute food to people who were starving there, and a small war resulted. The U.S. came out badly because of the ignorance of our leaders, then. He thought of greed and how Saddam Hussein bribed UN and governmental officials in countries that resisted the U.S.'s intervention in Iraq. He thought of Kim Jong-Il, North Korea's dictator, building up his arms and nuclear program, while millions in his country were eating tree bark and grass. There sure was greed and callousness, all right.

Jeremy's display was a pie chart that showed something his mother told him she had been told when growing up. It showed a pie with a piece cut out of it, sitting next to the pie. She had been told she had to eat her piece of pie, because people were starving in China.

This “true/true, unrelated” truism had changed in a generation. Jeremy showed a second pie chart. It demonstrated that today, there was the feeling if you had a second piece, you were greedy and someone somewhere would be deprived. This was the zero-sum game that Malthus and, just a few years ago, Ehrlich embraced. And it was embraced by Orb today.

America had become a cornucopia as a result of its free market system, which even former Communist states were taking up presently, in deference to “centrally planned economies.” Instead of one threatened pie, the U.S. had created many, or if you like, one ever-growing pie, so there were many more slivers to go around. The real facts were, if you ate the second piece, you might become fat. It was then just a matter of equating being fat with greed, which Orb also believed.

Jeremy realized that not only were both Malthus and Ehrlich, separated by two centuries, dead wrong, so was Orb! The fact that he, Jeremy, was alive and supplying a demonstration for school in 2007, was proof enough. He decided to add a placard entitled Things You Ought To Know, without consulting Mr. Orb. Jeremy had set about finding some answers, with Jason's input. Jeremy's chart contained a list:

1. The rapid population growth in the twentieth century is due to people living longer, more than to a birth explosion. The world's fertility rate (births per woman per lifetime) fell from 5 in 1965 to 2.7 in 2000. Sure, China has its bureaucratic solution for family size, but the family itself determined the downsizing in most of the world.
2. There is little relationship between population per square mile and wealth, as measured by GDP (gross domestic product) per person in the countries of the world. Affluence

correlates with a decrease in fertility rate and an increase in longevity. Affluence is on the rise around the world. It can be even better.

3. Malthus had his formula a bit backwards. Human population growth is not geometric. Food production data is available now, and food production over time comes closer to being geometric than arithmetic. The Watts steam engine had not yet been applied to agriculture in Malthus's day. Mendel's studies of plant genetics lay in the future. The proven impact of herbicides and pesticides, of hybridization and designer crops through transgenic methods—a host of innovations collectively known as the green revolution came much later. What Malthus did see in his London was dirt, squalor, and poverty. Perhaps his pessimism was predictable. But to stand in the twenty-first century and carry that same pessimism is a puzzling thing.

4. Many of our natural resources are increasing instead of becoming scarcer. Jason read Ronald Bailey's book, *Global Warming and Other Eco-Myths*, Lomborg's *The Skeptical Environmentalist*, and the writings of Julian Simon, otherwise known as the Doomslayer.

Jason made his notes available to Jeremy: The Doomslayer was a professor of Business Administration at a state university. He had become frustrated with the way antiquated and patently false ideas were so easily peddled and embraced in our society. Since childhood, he had been driven by his love for data and factual information. He also abhorred being corrected, when he knew he was right. He was repelled by what became known as the "Litany."

The Litany went like this: The earth is dying, we will be dead and species are dying. We are wasteful, and our air and water are deteriorating. Forests and farmlands are disappearing, cities are sprawling, we will run out of food and we must cut back, do with less, contract our way of life. Above all, we must feel guilty. Doomslayer Simon set about disproving every one of these gloomy statements with his own charts and facts.

Perhaps the best known of Professor Simon's triumphs was his bet with the famous Professor Ehrlich that the minerals of the earth were not becoming scarcer. He got Ehrlich to agree that price (adjusted for inflation, and stripped of taxes) should correlate well with supply (scarcity) of a commodity. Simon got Ehrlich to make a bet. They would pick five agreed-upon minerals not controlled by the government and compare prices in 1980 and 1990. They agreed on chromium, copper, nickel, tin and tungsten. Each would pay the other the sum of the combined difference of the prices. As it turned out, each mineral cost less ten years later, and Ehrlich paid Simon \$576.07.

How could there be more copper, for instance, in 1990 than 1980? The answer was found on Jeremy's last chart:

5. Copper continues to be mined at a faster rate than we consume it. Consumption is down due to the substitution of fiber-optic glass in place of copper wire. Copper recovery is also on-going and it can be recycled. And so, with the other elements.

Several parents stopped to review Jeremy's display with interest. Jeremy answered questions as he was able. When Orb breezed by and caught the full measure of the exposition, he asked Jeremy if he had any help with the material. Jeremy answered that a kid on the stage crew had offered to help him. Orb was about to ask for a name, when Jeremy's father interjected.

“Pretty compelling story my son Jeremy tells there, eh Mr. Orb?”

“Yes...yes...well of course.”

With that a few other parents chimed in as Orb made his way to the lemonade.

The exhibits had been arranged in a mazelike array, using partitions on wheels borrowed from the cafeteria. The next two demos were on air and water quality.

Orb had given the two students information on several topics. These included acid rain, the Valdez oil spill, the move from lead to MTBE (methyl tertiary-butyl ether) as an octane-enhancer in gasoline and the case for moving from MTBE-treated gasoline to ethanol, Silent Spring and DDT, Love Canal, the asbestos story, the Three Mile Island disaster, and various legislative acts concerning air and water safety.

The two students, Les and Chip, combined efforts and posted a display with a one-two punch. They called it Environmental Issues. It was long on graphics and short on text.

The first half of Part A showed a map depicting lakes and streams in the northeastern United States, shaded from red to pink. The color indicated the pH, or acid content. Forest defoliation, assumed to be due to acid rain, was depicted in shades of purple. A chart showed the two culprit gases, sulfur dioxide (SO₂) and the oxides of nitrogen (NO_x). When they reacted with water in the air, they formed two strong acids, sulfuric and nitric. These were the acids of acid rain. The gases originate from coal-burning power plants and to a lesser extent, cars and trucks. The acid rain scare of the 1980s projected the loss of forests in industrialized countries and led to policies that cleaned up the air quite nicely. Burning low-sulfur coal in power plants reduced sulfur emissions. It also reduced the caseload of asthma and bronchitis, through reduced morbidity and mortality.

The second half of Part A started with a blowup of a microscopic picture of an asbestos fiber. It served as the centerpiece of the display. Asbestos was shown as a silicate, mined from the earth. It was resistant to chemical and thermal breakdown and as such found its way into thousands of useful products. Les had drawn a large arrow that pointed to the fiber, and next to the arrow was a list of some of these asbestos-containing products—pipe and furnace materials, millboard, textured paints, brake linings, floor tiles, fire-resistant insulation in buildings. Another large arrow pointed away from the fiber, to a list of the three diseases, two of which were cancers. The third disease was a scarring of the lungs known as asbestosis. Of the several types of asbestos fibers, chrysotile was said to be the most dangerous. It was long and spearlike, and it could be breathed straight into the depths of the lungs the way a three-pound spear can be thrown farther than a three-pound toolbox. Life-long city-dwellers had more asbestos in their lungs than farmers. This was from the slow accumulation of deteriorated brake linings. So, the amount inhaled multiplied by the duration of exposure bore a relationship to toxicity and disease.

On the flip side of these two displays were two others, policed by Chip. They were labeled Part B. The first half of Part B showed the cover of Rachel Carson's book, *Silent Spring*. This book appeared in 1962 and laid the foundation for the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) and eventually, the environmental movement. Carson showed the formula for DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane), with the following little summary: A German chemist first synthesized DDT in 1874. In 1939 Dr. Paul Muller independently

produced DDT and discovered that it quickly killed flies, aphids, mosquitoes, walking sticks and Colorado potato beetles. It was first used in Italy in 1943 against louse-borne typhus. Muller won the Nobel Prize in 1948 for his work on DDT. Peak usage occurred in 1962.

In her book *Silent Spring* Carson stated: "The most alarming part of all man's assaults upon the environment is the contamination of air, earth, rivers, and sea with dangerous and even lethal materials. This pollution for the most part is irrecoverable; the chain of evil it initiates not only in the world that must support life but in the living tissues is for the most part irreversible." She also warned that besides wreaking havoc on nature, for instance, thinning bird shells and thereby leading to a "silent spring," the increasing use of synthetic chemicals would cause a cancer epidemic among humans. Forty-five years later, many still believe such things even though cancer incidence is decreasing, but not because DDT production stopped.

The second half of Part B told of the Love Canal story. By this time the students had tired in making their display. It featured only photos of residents protesting in the 1970s. Jason had helped them with the following research:

The Love Canal had been started as a hydroelectrical project by William Love, in the 1890s. The canal would harness the waterpower generated by the drop between the upper and lower Niagara River, bypassing the Falls. Only a small part of the canal was constructed. It was sold to the city of Niagara Falls at auction in 1920, and the City commenced using it for waste disposal for its petrochemical industry. In 1942 a subsidiary of Occidental Petroleum expanded the use of the site and in 1947 acquired the land. In 1952 the space was filled to capacity, so it was backfilled and closed. Later, the land was sold to a school board, with a description of the chemical site and a waiver of legal responsibility. A school was built on the site. The City of Niagara Falls developed adjacent lands for housing and sold them without warning the future residents.

Residents later complained of odors and substances that appeared in their yards. Residents became amateur epidemiologists, and claims of excessive sickness and cancers were made. The EPA in 1980 did genetic studies that initially were interpreted as showing chromosomal damage in residents. President Carter declared a state of emergency, and the Congress created a superfund so that eight hundred residents could be relocated. The EPA sued Occidental Petroleum, who agreed to pay \$129 million to the residents in 1995. The site was cleaned up after that by a Canadian company.

Orb preened as parents emerged from the maze praising these displays. There was more talk of the Science Fair than there was about how a son or a daughter was doing in school. He overheard one mother speak of the three-part display. He asked if she meant the two-part display. She said that that was good enough, but Part C was even better. Orb turned and walked into the maze until he came to Environmental Issues, catching the boys off guard. Part C had been set up without his knowledge. It was entitled Did you know?

Mr. Orb read over the additional part of the display.

The truth about asbestos:

1. The diseases caused by asbestos exposure occurred mainly because little was known of the hazards when the worker was exposed. Yes, there were cases of negligence, but they were the exception. Usually thirty or so years elapse before the diseases from asbestos manifest themselves. The documented exposures occurred largely during WWII in the shipbuilding navy yards and in the fifteen or so years that followed the war in the construction industry. Gradually, it became known that to be dangerous the asbestos fiber had to be of a size and shape as to be “respirable,” that is, breathed into the lungs. Proper masking and ventilation could trap or capture the suspended fibers, which made working with it relatively safe. Not everyone exposed to asbestos developed disease. It had to do with duration, dose and personal resistance. On this basis, asbestos claims today should be on the decline. However, the Hamilton Consulting Group in May of 2002 stated there were more than two hundred thousand legal cases pending at that time, and the number of people expected to file injury claims could possibly reach 2.5 million. How could this be?

2. Professor Lester Brickman of the Cardozo Law School provides the answer. He presented in the August 2002 issue of the Civil Justice Forum (#40), a whistle-stop tour of what he termed “Asbestos Litigation Land.” He compared the excesses of this litigation to the robber barons of more than a century ago, only far more profound. Eventually, even the robber barons were reigned in. The LA Times on 1/27/02 stated the economic toll of asbestos could run as high as \$200 billion, more than the war in Iraq to date, or September 11th, or Hurricane Andrew. The Wall Street Journal, on April 25, 2002 stated that at least sixty companies that used or sold asbestos products have declared bankruptcy. Professor Brickman stated that trial lawyers follow the pockets of the companies, and adjust complaints accordingly. People with simple X-ray markers of asbestos exposure, with no disease, are encouraged to make claims. The trial lawyers have opposed tort reform measures. Radiologists who read X-rays for plaintiff lawyers often over-read the findings. It is estimated that around 65 percent of claimants with no disease or dysfunction receive awards. Liability has been passed on to “successor” companies. Jury awards are extravagant (in the millions) sometimes when there is no disease at all. Effective hourly rates for plaintiff asbestos lawyers range from \$1,000 an hour to \$25,000 an hour. Plunder and pillage are alive and well when it comes to asbestos litigation.

3. In January 1999, USA Today estimated the cost nationwide of asbestos removal at \$50 billion. The need to remove intact asbestos is being reassessed. It’s pretty late, thanks to the trial lawyers. Only if asbestos is crushed or violently disturbed so as to turn it into a respirable form is it dangerous.

4. Asbestos is a cheap and effective, chemically and thermally inert material. If respirable and inhaled it is dangerous; if not, it is safe. Is it true that asbestos was banned during the building of the World Trade Center and was used only up to a certain level? If so, might this have had a bearing on the collapse of the tower(s)? If so, did Atta know this? After asbestos was banned were the heat shield materials used for the Columbia shuttle inferior and if so, might this “environmental protection” have actually cost astronaut lives? Jason stored such subjects in his mind, for a future conference.

5. How did science lose control of this issue, and how did fear become the driving force in the asbestos story?

What you should know about acid rain:

1. All natural water bodies are slightly acidic. The term “acid rain” refers to the additional acidity due to 1) sulfur (SO₂), as a free gas and when attached to smoke and soot, as particles (PM_{2.5}) and 2) the oxides of nitrogen (NO_x).
2. The particles to which SO₂ is attached are associated with respiratory illness, and the aggressive efforts to reduce this component in the UK and the U.S. through the use of catalytic converters, smoke scrubbers, taller smokestacks, use of low-sulfur coal and diesel fuel, for instance, has helped reduce both acid rain and respiratory disease. The NO_x concentrations have also been reduced. The particle concentration in air in the U.S. plummeted from 100 micrograms per cubic meter in 1957, to slightly above 20, in 2000. There was a drop in SO₂ (million tons) from a high of 28 in 1975 to 17 in 2000. NO₂ dropped from 54 to 34 in the same period. There were drops in carbon monoxide, ozone and lead (dramatic) in the same time frame.
3. The impact of acid rain on forests was overestimated. Defoliation is a nonspecific phenomenon. SO₂ and NO₂ actually act as free fertilizers and promote tree growth. The National Acid Precipitation Assessment Program (NAPAP) measured the effects of varying acid rain levels (up to ten times average U.S. levels) on several types of seedlings over three years. The trees grew just as fast, in some cases faster with moderate acid rain levels.
4. Developed countries can maintain and increase industrial productivity while at the same time, through a combination of technical advance and environmental precaution, continue the dramatic cleanup and maintain an acceptable and healthier water and air quality.

Most parents found this message as refreshing as they found the true asbestos story shocking.

Some of them went back into the maze for more. They found the next poster, under display #3. It read as follows:

The Tragedy of Rachel Carson:

1. In the book *Silent Spring* the author supplied anecdotal tales of people who had used household insecticides and chemicals and subsequently came down with awful cancers. The cause-and-effect relationship was later judged by scientists to be shaky. She predicted a doomsday scenario in which an epidemic of cancer would result because of our use of “chemicals” (as if the world is not made of them). Professor Ehrlich jumped aboard and in 1969 predicted the American lifespan would drop to forty-two by the 1980s because of an epidemic of cancer caused by modern chemicals and pesticides. Al Gore stated because of Rachel Carson, he became interested in the environment. In fairness, there was an established history of environmental abuse, with industry dumping its effluent waste into rivers and the carbon skies of Pittsburgh. The Cuyahoga River in Cleveland once caught fire in the 1960s. But Carson was not using the best of scientific methods. TV show hosts, newspapers, and those searching for the limelight helped her become famous. Junk-science and apocalyptic prophesy got married at the Rachael Carson Chapel.

2. The clear and present danger of her predictions led eventually to the banning of DDT, the most effective mosquito killer known. With its proper use, the incidence of malaria in South Africa became almost zero. Because of its ban, malaria incidence has skyrocketed in recent years. The World Health Organization estimates that malaria infects 300 to 400 million people in a year and kills more than a million. Because of the horrendous results of the ban, countries are going back to the use of DDT. Nets are good if you want to stay netted all the time.

3. Contrary to the claims of a future cancer epidemic, the prevalence and incidence of cancer in recent years has dropped. Perhaps this is due to the decrease in polycyclic hydrocarbon inhalation by a shrinking number of cigarette smokers. Cigarette smoke, although causal for lung and throat cancer, is associated with increments in most of the two hundred and fifty-plus known cancers.

4. Our springs are as filled with birdsongs as when there was DDT. It takes huge doses of DDT, far above spraying concentrations, to thin the shells of eggs. Many studies show no effect from DDT at all. It turns out that there are a lot of things that cause thinning of eggshells, as demonstrated with controlled studies such as those conducted at Cornell University. These include the size of the bird, dehydration, decreased illumination, predator intrusion, exposure, phosphorus deficiency, calcium deficiency, to name some.

5. In Pittsburgh, in October 2006, they renamed the Seventh Street Bridge, the Rachel Carson Bridge. Government buildings, wildlife sanctuaries, and parks have been similarly named. The ban on DDT that her book inspired has also brought about a form of population control.

Some of the environmentally sensitive had had enough. Rachel Carson was, for them, an untouchable icon. They came out of the maze and sent out a search party for Mr. Orb. Their eyes were wild with hurt and rage. When they found him, they asked if he'd seen the second Carson exhibit. He was at a loss for words. Yes, he'd seen it, and secretly hoped others would miss it. He knew he couldn't tear down the tent, as it were, especially since some parents were complimenting him warmly on the fair's balance and educational value. He reentered the maze. This time, he noticed a button at Jeremy's station. He found out it was used to signal the others to cover the back sections, upon his entry into the maze.

The last display in this section showed a picture of Jack Webb of Dragnet, saying, "Just the facts, ma'am, just the facts on Love Canal."

1. Contrary to popular belief, nothing happened in that canal that had to do with love. The canal was named for Mr. Love.

2. Nobody wants to live on a pile of chemicals, especially if they haven't been warned. The initial chromosome report set off a firestorm in the media. Elevated rates of cancer, birth defects and miscarriages were widely claimed. It was only later that the EPA came out with the report that the chromosome study was poorly conducted and of no value.

3. The New York State Department of Health also did not find elevated rates of any cancers among former Love Canal residents. These reports did not receive wide news coverage.

4. Many chose to stay there and in 1990 a new development began. A link fence separates the chemical zone from Black Creek Village, the new development. This was one of the first “leaks” of an incomplete story to the media joined with a hyped overresponse. If you say “Love Canal” to someone, it fires up a mental image—like “Watergate,” “Iran-Contra” and “McCarthyism.” The desired effect was achieved, despite the facts.

Orb read this with rising frustration.

The next subject was Global Warming. Amanda, working with Pete, did a splendid job. Jason also helped.

Amanda’s first graph showed how half of the sun’s energy that reached the earth’s atmosphere actually penetrated to the earth itself, in the form of long infrared (IR) and short ultraviolet (UV) wavelengths. The earth’s surface expelled the major portion of the sun’s energy in the form of thermal (IR) energy—the invisible energy one felt standing next a campfire. On the electromagnetic spectrum, IR was located just down from microwaves, which were used for cooking.

Some components of the atmosphere were “greenhouse gases.” The most important was water vapor in the form of cloud droplets (H₂O). Others included carbon dioxide (CO₂), nitrous oxide or “laughing gas” (N₂O), methane (CH₄), and halocarbons (“CFC’s”). All these absorbed the earth-reflected IR radiation. This absorbed energy warmed the air, which reemitted energy in all directions, including back to the surface of the earth. This bouncing back and forth of IR between earth and atmosphere was called the “greenhouse effect.” Greenhouse gases were said to act like a blanket. Without the natural greenhouse effect, the surface of the earth would be much colder on average. The term “global warming” through heavy and constant media reinforcement had come to mean the increase in surface temperatures due to increase in the greenhouse gases. Lately, the term had mutated to “climate change,” to take into account all fluctuations, Jason guessed.

But, there were a growing number of scientists who believed either that warming was mainly due to solar activity or was not a major problem, or both. They had been called “flat-earthers” and “pseudoscientists.”

Even former Greenpeace member Lomborg (*The Skeptical Environmentalist*, 2001) who recognized the greenhouse effect and global warming, said: “It will be far more expensive to cut CO₂ emissions radically than to pay the costs of adaptation to increased temperatures,” and “Since the Kyoto Protocol will have negligible effects on climate change and the exorbitant cost of implementing it (\$150 billion/year) represents a colossal waste of resources, it would be better to spend \$70–80 billion/year on health, education, clean water and sanitation in the Third World.” For this, he had been called the “Antichrist,” and has been compared to Hitler. Jason saw this as an example of the Law of Intensity. Since the advocates for reduced energy use, particularly in industrialized countries as the U.S., had chosen to place their microscope on carbon dioxide, a few facts were in order.

Carbon dioxide came from combustion of coal, gas and oil, plus deforestation and other land use changes. It also was an exhaust from human and animal metabolism, and was expelled by the lungs. CO₂ acted as plant food, and this “fertilization” effect was often omitted from the IPCC models.

The ocean contained huge amounts of carbon in coral and algae, and dissolved CO₂. The atmosphere was limited in its capacity to carry CO₂, and about 2 percent of all CO₂ was in the atmosphere. Carbon dioxide made up 0.038 percent of the earth's atmosphere, compared to 0.028 percent before the Industrial Revolution, amounting to a 31 percent increase in atmospheric CO₂ in the last two hundred and fifty years. In *Junk Science*, Milloy stated, "Humans are responsible for about 3.4 percent of the CO₂ emitted to the atmosphere annually, mostly from the burning of coal, oil, and natural gas, and the production of cement; the rest comes from natural sources such as volcanoes, the outgassing of the oceans, and the biosphere. Humans are probably responsible for about 2.5 percent of the total greenhouse effect." No reports of bodily injury so far for Milloy, for having stated this.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), instituted by the United Nations, stated in its 2001 report: "There is new and stronger evidence that most of the warming observed over the past fifty years is attributable to human factors." There has been criticism of that document. One of the IPCC scientists admitted an attempt to "get rid of" the Medieval Warm Period. It had been fully recognized by most climate scientists in the past, and was even included in IPCC's earlier report in 1990. The reason for this attempt to rewrite history was that most researchers believed that during this warm period, one thousand years ago, much of the earth was substantially warmer than today.

The IPCC introduced the infamous and much repudiated "hockey stick" graph that Mr. Gore still showed at his talks. It depicted temperature change over the last one thousand years. It showed a flat fairly static line with a terminal uptick, suggesting that warming had been recent and therefore likely due to man's industrial phase. Two statisticians however asked for the data behind the graph and after some difficulty were able to analyze them. (True scientists share data, in their quest for reliability.) They found many statistical and design flaws. For instance, there was an overreliance on recent bristlecone pine growth, which likely related to the increase in CO₂, a major plant food. Also, in the 1990s hundreds of measuring stations, most of which were in cold regions of the USSR, were closed with the dissolution of that "republic." This would abruptly change the average and help to produce the terminal uptick artifact of the "hockey stick" graph, not to speak of the "urban island heat effect."

Pratt said in his paper *The Global Warming Scare*, which Jason found on the Internet:

There is no linear relationship between changes in atmospheric CO₂ levels and the global mean temperature. At the end of the 19th C the amount of CO₂ discharged into the atmosphere by world industry was 13 times smaller than now, but the climate at that time had warmed up, as a result of natural causes, emerging from the 500-year-long Little Ice Age (1300–1850). During the 20th C, atmospheric concentrations of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases rose steadily, but average surface temperature rose over much of the globe between 1910 and 1940, then fell between 1940 and 1975 despite a more than threefold increase in CO₂ emissions, and has been rising since. The idea of CO₂ increases causing temperature increases was abandoned in the 1940s precisely because global temperatures had not even remotely matched the 1 degree C predicted by the theory.

Pratt then went on with many more studies showing the disconnect between temperature and carbon dioxide concentrations.

Singer suggested a reverse effect: namely, the release of huge reserves of dissolved gas from cold ocean water as it warmed and mixed, which may take four hundred to one thousand years. He challenged the notion that earth's temperature was driven mainly by CO₂ in the atmosphere since superimposition of the two curves showed a lag in the opposite direction, namely that temperatures rose first, followed then by a CO₂ increase. This version, combined with Pratt's version of "no linear relationship" and the Warm Alarmist's version that CO₂ caused atmospheric warming certainly amounted to a lack of consensus on this question.

Some held that when the scientific journal *Nature* published the IPCC report it revealed a fault in its peer review process. *Nature* refused to publish the critique of the flawed graph, eventually published by the National Academy of Sciences, which accepted virtually all the hockey stick criticisms. Some members of the IPCC scientific committee resigned, saying that the IPCC report was primarily political in nature. Jason found this information in Christopher Horner's *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Global Warming and Environmentalism* (which focused on the politics of global warming), Singer and Avery's *Unstoppable Global Warming Every 1,500 Years*, and Pratt's *The Global Warming Scare*, (2006).

Gone from Mann et al's infamous 2001 hockey stick graph were the Medieval Warm Period (950 to 1300, warmer than today and at the beginning of which Viking farms existed on Greenland) and the Little Ice Age (1300 to 1850, during which the climate became colder, the Vikings moved on, Londoners ice skated on the Thames in winter and folks crossed the Baltic Sea from Poland to Sweden on sleighs).

Pratt said "We are still emerging from the Little Ice Age, and this is an important factor behind the moderate rise in temperatures since the late nineteenth century." He also acknowledged, "In general, civilization has tended to flourish during warm periods, while cold periods have brought more drought, famine, disease and wars." Mostly, the Medieval Warm Period and the Little Ice Age showed that temperature fluctuations occurred without man's, or Mann's, input.

The concept was Galileo's, but George Fahrenheit in the early 1700s made the first mercury thermometer. If one preferred satellite and balloon temperature data over surface data from urban areas where heated concrete contributed, then the earth had increased in temperature over the past century less than the latter methods suggest. Measurements of atmospheric temperatures told a different story than the surface temperatures to date. Using both weather balloons and satellites, temperatures had fluctuated, but there had been no or little average change over the last thirty years, except for a spike in 1998 felt by Lomborg and others to be related to El Niño. Balloons and satellites could be used to crosscheck one another and their figures were concordant. The atmosphere should mirror the surface temperatures to some extent. Satellites could sample the atmosphere over oceans and difficult-to-access land sites, such as rain forests and mountains. Most felt this to be more representative than the limited sampling of surface temperatures.

If one favored cities as sites for our measuring, it was possible that the heating up of concrete by the sun might be as important or more so than the burning of fossil fuels

(State of Fear, Crichton, pp. 404–429). The directly measured atmospheric temperatures showed very little global warming. In other words, if the atmosphere showed little or no change when directly measured, and the surface temperatures showed a significant rise, then knowing the greenhouse effect, there must be an alternative explanation.

One possible explanation might be a lack of consensus, which was common in science. During the twentieth century the temperature rose 0.45 degrees C according to AccuWeather, 0.5 degrees C according to the U.S. National Climate Data Center, and 0.6 degrees C according to the IPCC. Wikipedia quoted the satellite data as showing a rise of 0.12 to 0.22 degrees C/decade since 1979. Another source cited satellite data that showed a rise of 0.034 degrees C/decade over the same time frame. Lomborg said weather balloons showed an average of 0.029 degrees C rise/decade.

Perhaps the most important reason was that the rise in surface temperatures was not due primarily to the greenhouse effect. An increasing number of scientists were abandoning the Man-Made Global Warming Ship.

In their book, Singer and Avery documented a fifteen hundred–year cycle of global warming that was unstoppable. Our solar system was 4.5 billion years old. Man’s appearance if taken, for instance, from the time of Australopithecines, occurred over 3 million years. In the last sixty or so years, mankind jumped into the “energy age.” The energy age might be defined as when the means to transportation and personal mobility, heating, cooling, electricity and the whole spectrum of what most of us, with even more joining in, enjoyed and strove for as “the standard of living.” The standard of living had been made possible through the use of coal, fossil fuels, nuclear, hydro and geothermal forces, with a touch of solar / wind power thrown in. There were a whole lot of years in the record of earth’s thermal history that did not belong to the energy age. The “energy age” represented but a blink in a decade when it came to earth’s climate history.

Since meteorologists and thermometers weren’t around to measure this expanded time frame, how was the increasingly more acceptable fifteen hundred–year climate cycle recognized? The data came largely from “proxies” for direct temperature measurement. “Proxies” yielded information on a much larger slice of this missing span of time. One big discovery came from two ice core samples from Greenland a thousand miles apart.

They contained radioisotope information that compared favorably with a seabed core drilled from the Atlantic ten years earlier. The isotopes carbon-14 and beryllium-10 vary inversely with solar activity. The deeper the sample, the older the information represented. The researchers discovered there had been a climate change cycle of roughly fifteen hundred years give or take five hundred, where temperatures of the earth rose (sometimes “quickly,” over a decade), leveled off, and fell.

Literally hundreds of scientists had corroborated this cycle from proxy studies all over the world. These included seabed core samplings taken from the Sargasso Sea in the Atlantic, looking at one-celled organisms whose oxygen isotopes told of sea surface temperatures. Radio isotopes from fossil pollens and algae from cores taken in Antarctica’s Vostok Glacier and the Atlantic Coast of Africa had shown the fifteen hundred–year cycle, as had rocky bits dropped into the sea from melting glaciers, sampled from the lower North Atlantic and cave stalagmites taken from the Arabian Peninsula. Such samplings could look back twelve to thirty thousand years at the

temperature record, and deeper taps had led to projections of the so-called Dansgaard-Oeschger fifteen hundred-year cycle (named after the Greenland tappers) going back a million years.

There were no fifteen hundred-year solar energy cycles known, but there were two cycles of solar activity with periodicities of 88 years (Gleissberg) and 210 years (DeVries-Suess). Superimposing these two periodicities illustrated a harmonic cycle that fit nicely with the earth's climate cycle of 1470 years. A person could combine this solar cycle with the cycles of earth's orbital configuration (one hundred thousand years), the cycle of the degree of the tilt of the earth's axis (forty-one thousand years) and its wobble, or precession, on that axis (twenty-three thousand years), and could begin to get the picture of a complicated system. It was far more complicated than the unidimensional CO₂/temperature model with arbitrary factors tossed in or left out.

This said nothing of the mechanism whereby high or low solar activity lead to the earth's climate cycle. Singer et al stated that the mechanism included both the solar wind-cosmic ray-low cloud seeding interaction and the "ozone amplifier" effect. Low clouds reflected sunlight and cool the earth. The charged particles of the solar wind shielded the earth from galactic cosmic rays. Cosmic rays ionized particles and molecules which seeded the growth of low cloud water droplets, as demonstrated by Shaviv, in 2005, when he plotted low cloud cover against cosmic ray decrease. The Danish SKY laboratory study also supported this.

Accordingly, periods of low sunspot activity should be associated with clouds and cooling of the earth. Singer pointed out that landscape paintings done during the Little Ice Age show clouds. Singer also referred to "ozone amplification" mediated through UV. The sun-climate hypothesis said that tiny variations in the sun's irradiance were amplified into major climate changes on Earth by at least two factors: 1) cosmic rays creating more or fewer of the low, cooling clouds in the Earth's atmosphere; and 2) solar-driven ozone changes in the stratosphere. Clouds could be coolers by blanketing the sun out. Clouds could be warmers, as water vapor was a greenhouse "gas." If they opened up and dissipated, the blanket was locally removed, and the heat from the earth beneath could "vent" or escape. Clouds needed further study. If it could be shown that clouds were environmentally "smart," and formed and dissipated through feedback loops so as to regulate heat, then perhaps the book should be re-titled *The Earth in Balance*.

We were living in a period of abnormally high solar activity—the second half of the twentieth century saw the highest sunspot numbers in the past 1,150 years. High solar activity usually lasted fifty to one hundred years. Some predict we would enter a cooling period in about a decade, whose effect could be greater than Kyoto's. Jason wondered about the current intense propaganda push, for instance, the use of children as pawns in a tick-tick ad as though the bomb of global warming was about to go off, or the fierce attempts to force children (and parents!) to see the Gore film *An Inconvenient Truth*, without proper scientific counterpoint. Was the push an all-out effort to get the carbon fines and sanctions going by the time the sun-earth cycle began its cooling phase in order to be in a position to take credit for the drop in temperature? Said another way, without a global taxing body in operation, when the cooling started, this political movement would suffer and possibly die, bringing about some other income redistribution scheme,

preferably also on a national basis. This rush to press this Marxist scheme on the industrial nations of the world pulled along with it several misleading claims:

1. Polar bears were drowning in significant numbers:

This was based upon finding four drowned bears over a month after an abrupt storm. The twenty-five thousand of them today would surely suffice to ensure their survival through this sun-powered period of warming we were now experiencing. Dr. Mitchell Taylor, leading polar bear biologist said, “Of the thirteen populations of polar bears in Canada, eleven are stable or increasing in number (Pratt). They are not going extinct or even appear to be effected.” If the warming lasted, it may come down to strong swimmers and good adapters, but that was nature’s way, wasn’t it.

2. Mount Kilimanjaro’s snow was melting:

Kilimanjaro’s glacier began to recede around 1880, well before the greenhouse gas era. It receded in periods of both warming and cooling, even regional cooling. The “snows” (ice) were not melting; they were sublimating because there was less moisture in old Kili’s air (it took both cold temps and moisture to make ice), probably because of deforestation and land use change in the area (Horner).

3. The Arctic ice was melting:

Although Alaska was warming, some glaciers had been receding since just after the Little Ice Age, some remained stable, and some were growing. There was no evidence the glaciers shrunk faster during the CO₂-enriched twentieth century (Pratt). You couldn’t have both global warming and global cooling at the same time and you really shouldn’t cherry-pick your glaciers.

4. The ice in Antarctica was melting and the collapse in 2002 of the Larson-B ice shelf (the size of Rhode Island) was an ominous event:

Only the Antarctic Peninsula was warming; an anomalous finding that could not be explained by anthropogenic factors. From 1992 to 2003 the East Antarctic Ice Sheet gained mass (from snow accumulation) faster than the western ice sheet lost mass, yielding a new increase in Antarctic ice (David et al, 2005). Also, the ice mass in the Arctic grew substantially last winter. (NASA and CBC)

5. Although the 2007 IPCC report predicted a 14–43 cm sea-rise in the period from 1990 to 2100, Gore upped the ante and spoke about a twenty-foot rise within our own lifetime.

There was no credible evidence of an impending collapse of the great ice sheets. There was fairly good data on the ice mass balance changes and their effects on sea level. A combined ice-loss-sea-level-rise equivalent of 0.05 mm per year during 1992–2002 had been measured. At that rate it would take a full millennium to raise the sea level by just 5 cm (Zwally et al). (Growing ice naturally calved. Also, when floating ice melts, it didn’t raise the sea level.)

Horner said, “President Clinton instructed his ambassador to sign the Kyoto Protocol but never pushed or asked the Senate to ratify it.” The U.S. Senate so far had chosen not to ratify a treaty that would damage the U.S. economy as Kyoto would and exempt much of the rest of the world which Kyoto did. President Bush had been blamed primarily by European heads-of-state for not signing a treaty that had already been signed. President

Bush said we needed more information before taking draconian steps to a problem we didn't understand. Meanwhile Europe's CO₂ emissions from fossil fuels continued to rise beyond targets, as same-source CO₂ emissions in the U.S. steadily declined. It would be interesting to see if Japan's and Spain's taxpayers paid the recently impressed multibillion-dollar fines that had resulted from their having fallen short of the unrealistic and impractical Kyoto standards.

For folks who rejected the notion that they were sheep to be led, google The Great Global Warming Swindle and delve into the growing body of politically untainted scientific evidence. For absolute confirmation there was growing consensus against the idea that man was responsible for global warming, one could tap into Global Warming Petition Project on the Internet (seventeen thousand signatures; nine thousand PhDs as of May '08; could they all be "flat-landers"?). The CMMs neglect to highlight this as major news was a testament to their arrogance and disdain for regular Americans, who would be asked to sacrifice for no reason other than handing power over to the control freaks. The growing desperation of the proselytizers for man-made global warming was heating to ridiculous proportions. Maybe we would figure out a way to privately fund true scientific research.

Samantha did a poster on the Ozone Layer.

It became known in the 1970s that ozone in the atmosphere was being depleted by chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs). These chemicals were used as refrigerants, as spray can propellants and in foam-blowing devices. Because they were stable, they hung around long enough to get blown by the winds in storms into the stratosphere, despite their molecular weight being greater than that of air or nitrogen.

Sunlight broke the various CFC molecules down, freeing up atomic chlorine and bromine. Like Pac-man with its targets, one molecule of CFC could react with and take out thousands of ozone (O₃) molecules (two O₃ molecules get converted to three O₂ molecules). Lightning did the opposite. Ozone blocked UV light, so with ozone depletion more UV reached the earth than before. It turned out the depletion was more at the poles of the earth than elsewhere, but it occurred in the atmosphere over populated areas too. UV caused sunburn and skin cancers, as well as cataracts. The serious skin cancer was melanoma, fortunately the least common. These cancers took decades to show up. It also could damage fisheries and agricultural plants.

The ozone story, although a part of the GHG story, was simpler. The facts about ozone were clear enough to bring about a rational global remedy. International cooperation forged in Vienna and later in Montreal, led to the halt in production of halon and CFCs by 1996. As a result it was said the ozone shield would be "healed" by 2060. The overall estimated cost of these protocols according to the EPA of Canada was \$225 billion (in 1997 U.S. dollars). This was less than the cumulative costs of caring for incremental melanoma patients who died, cataracts, and crop loss. This was an example of how science could logically direct policy, provided there was an agreed-upon degree of certainty, such that politics was minimized.

Pete used a mobile blackboard for his subject. On the front side was the Litany—the commonly held view put forth by the "Alarmists"—namely that the earth was headed for disaster at the hands of man, that the seas would rise, and chaotic weather, famine,

drought, and death would come. Gore predicted it in a decade. Most Alarmists warned it would come by 2050, if we didn't take immediate action. The message of the Litany had an apocalyptic tone similar to Ahmadinejad's version of the coming of the twelfth imam. Except with "the Litany," we had ten years.

Pete was aware of the predictions of modern-day Malthus, Paul Ehrlich. He was aware of Carson's prediction of a silent spring, and Danson's prediction that the oceans would be dead by now. In the same vein, he picked for his project, an analysis of global warming. He depicted the "trade-off" picture on the reverse side of Amanda's demo, and he used Lomberg and Horner as sources of supportive material. Pete's father was a stockbroker, and Pete had some advance notion of trading, selling short, futures and hedge funds.

The Kyoto treaty was aimed at rationing energy use through global government. Some would have added the phrase "under the guise of saving the environment." Such skeptics felt the environmental movement, though noble in purpose at its inception, had in the past decade become overrun by Marxists. After the dispersal of the Soviet Union, for instance, Gorbachev founded Green Cross International, a supporter of the Earth Charter. He became a member of the globally oriented Club of Rome. Globally oriented big business, including oil companies, had positioned for gains as well.

Besides Enron, several other companies including BP (British Petroleum, now "Beyond Petroleum"), Duke-Cynergy, DuPont, GE, Morgan Stanley to name a few, had taken "clean energy" stands and lobbied themselves into a positive position vis-à-vis alternatives such as wind, hydrogen, nuclear and other "clean energies." Altruism sometimes wasn't what it seemed.

Much was being made of the "moral question" of "doing nothing" about global warming. Pete located more than one reference that suggested the gains for initiating one of several bills would be miniscule in terms of reducing warming, but huge in terms of cost. Competitive Enterprise Institute scholar Marlo Lewis reasoned in 2005 that the original McCain-Lieberman proposal (S139 referred to as Kyoto Lite) would reduce the American GNP by \$1.35 trillion over twenty years. In a best-case scenario, by 2050 it would reduce GHGs by 31,399 tons and avoid a warming gain of 0.04 degrees C. The worst-case scenarios' figures were 16,928 and 0.023 degrees C, respectively. All the figures were smaller in the second version of the bill (Kyoto Extra Lyte). Some of the man-did-it people say it would take many Kyotos to produce a significant change.

The cap-and-trade scheme said for an industry or a person to "legally" emit CO₂ (aside from exhaling), they would need to pay for that activity with government rationed "credits" (while also paying, of course, for fuel and taxes, with money). If someone had more credits than he needed, he could sell them to someone who needed more. Except for nuclear, low CO₂ fuels were more costly or less efficient than fossil fuels, which produced more CO₂. Critics of the cap and trade scheme said it was a way for someone to get rich and someone else to pay a hidden tax.

Mr. Gore recently revealed an example of his "carbon-neutral" lifestyle. Up until 2003 he received royalties on a zinc mine on his property. He flew in a private jet and to offset this pollution and the energy consumption in his three homes (fourteen thousand-plus square feet) he paid for carbon credits to a firm, it turned out, he partly owned!

Mr. Gore was a former vice president, Academy Award winner, and recent Nobel Peace Prize winner. He was the foremost spokesman of the dangers of global warming. He said unless we act now, catastrophe would hit in ten years. He was not a scientist. He was quite literally an evangelist, despite not having done well in divinity school, earlier in his career. He brought a full court press, indeed a Blitzkrieg campaign on the subject of global warming. True scientists were skeptical of this rigid approach to an obviously complicated issue. They saw a heap of politics in it.

Huge amounts of government grants were directed to this area, and many of America's public school children were well on their way toward having the global warming scare thoroughly inculcated into their brains. But, in this land of freedom, a divide was forming. True scientists had respect for the scientific method. They would repulse an attempt to force an issue when the facts either weren't all in or didn't match. It was hard to know about consensus or the lack thereof, if speaking out might jeopardize one's livelihood. This had already occurred with a few state climatologists.

Pete advocated finding out the answers instead of jumping to some system of global regulation that forced wealth away from the free market into an artificially created one, using "credits" and hidden taxes.

Was the purpose to take measures to slow the rate of global warming, or was the purpose to slow the American economy and provide an opportunity for prophets to profit? Was global warming the new alchemy—a method to convert carbon into gold?

Aside from the fact that man probably accounted for something like 10–15 percent of the problem, reducing wealth creation was probably not the answer in any event. Pete was pretty sure what was really needed were improvements in the quality of life, particularly in underdeveloped or developing countries. Wealth creation was necessary for people to live satisfying and healthy lives. Pete was clearly a skeptic, and he believed the best thing that could be done, while we continue to try to understand the problem, was to allow developing nations to become more independent via the use of free markets and Capitalism. This would require energy, as "allowed" by Kyoto. Developed countries, including the U.S., had proven that affluence enabled both the finding of new energy sources and methods, as well as cleaning up the environment.

After all, Orb was a personal example of efficiency. At least he put his money where his mouth was. It was difficult for Mr. Gore and most Americans to cut back when the benefits of doing so were still not clear. If just one of the presidential candidates, in addition to citing incandescent lights, more insulation, turning down the thermostat, solar heating, hybrid cars, single squares—all of which are okay except the last—would have said, "I will be known for nuclear power," then Pete felt, we had the right person!

The other displays in the gym that evening included such topics as water shortage and the upcoming water wars; lead, mercury and arsenic levels; synthetic chemicals; crossbreeding and transgenic plants; "organic" growing and farming, and other timely and controversial subjects, many of which had been snatched from Orb's grab bag.

Three representatives from the community at large had been invited to act as judges. One worked in a local research lab. One was a pharmacist. The third taught at a university. Two of them were quite impressed with the Science Fair and found several of the exhibits

most interesting, particularly the back panels. The professor, however, was shocked by Amanda and Pete's retort to what he saw as the unequivocal threat of global warming. He registered his displeasure with Orb.

Orb now had knowledge of Jason's influence if not signature on most of the displays that referred to "The Litany." Orb had invested his teaching career as an activist for the earth. As such he saw many of the issues handled at the fair, as settled positions and was devoted toward the evangelization phase. He knew he was only a foot soldier in this long march. His place was in the classroom. Comrade Gore and others would lead the way. Orb also understood he had to do something about Jason.

Twelve

Bruce and the Afternoon

Vera was attending a conference at the institute, and Nick was catching up at the observatory. Saturday mornings were a welcome respite from school for Jason. Recently, school had become a drag. He had so many thoughts racing around in his head, and yet it felt like he was being led on a leash. One teacher told him he was just right for a classroom of one. The night of the awards, he teased out of his uncle Bruce a promise to take him to a movie, and he chose Spiderman. He'd heard some girls talking about it at school. One of them thought it was about Good. Another bonus for Jason was a ride in the Batmobile. If he were lucky, he would be able to talk Uncle Bruce into stopping by the college to check out the Bio lab. And just maybe, he might find out more about the trip to Brazil. His father hadn't talked about it as much as Jason expected he might. Ever since the evening at the observatory, Jason was wary of bringing up the subject. Uncle Bruce was a free spirit and always an adventure, and this time Jason had assigned himself to an "Intel" mission.

Jason was playing with his dog Taser when the Batmobile eased off Route 17 into the cul-de-sac where the Casperson house was located. He spotted the velvet black antique Hudson as it turned off the highway. Its chromium grill caught the attention of Professor Skyles, who lived in the second house and was putting out his trash for recycling. The grill featured a sun-glistened figure of a bat in-flight. Skyles gawked as Bruce slowly tooled up the dead-end street. Bruce waved. Skyles turned away quickly, as if to shun a pedestrian instinct. For Bruce, curiosity was a starting point. It was the grist of his profession after all. If kids had no curiosity, where would they be? Bruce was one of those drivers who knew what was going on around him. He might be a Bio instructor in a small college, but he was equally devoted to the highway and the etiquette required. Driving was a democracy, and there had to be rules beyond the basics. And rules needed to be enforced.

Taser always recognized the Batmobile. A Jack Russell Terrier was known to be "wired." When Bruce was spotted, the dog closed in with the speed of a hound. He'd been trained to stay on the sidewalk.

As Taser shot by, the retired professor muttered something and made a furtive lurch for him and the dog crossed over. The dog followed the Batmobile on the opposite side of the street from the old man, all the way to the loop where Bruce parked at the curb. Taser jumped straight up, keeping his toenails off the satin black paint. He licked the air and

barked a single salutation to Bruce. The dog had been trained to confine his bark to total strangers in the house. Bruce waved at Jason, who returned the gesture. Bruce spoke a command from his open window, and followed with crucial clicks and whistles.

“Taser, run the circle!”

With this, Taser bolted for the corner of the Casperson house and disappeared. In three seconds the dog reappeared on the other side, bearing down on his commander. The terrier leapt onto the front seat through the open passenger window, panting and wiggling, in complete delight at his own obedience. Bruce hopped out and the dog followed. Skyles pretended not to take notice, now from the shadows of his awnings. People paid to witness the feats of a master animal trainer. The puzzling thing was that Bruce never trained as a trainer. His knack with animals came naturally. He referred to it as “animal magnetism.”

“Come up to my room Uncle Bruce and see my new charts.”

“Okay, Jason, but the movie starts in twenty minutes.”

Jason ran with Taser up two flights of stairs and in to his bedroom.

“See, here, on this wall. The mammals of South America. And see...here...the bats!”

“Oh, yeah.”

Bruce studied the chart and briefly surveyed the other information tacked on the walls and ceiling of the boy’s bedroom.

“This is great but we need to move on, kid.”

“Can we bring Taser?”

“Where will he stay? I don’t think they sell tickets to dogs.”

“In the car, Uncle Bruce.”

“I haven’t trained him to stay in the car. He might set off an alarm or something.”

“He won’t. He’ll listen to you if you just tell him.”

“Has he done his thing?”

“Dad forgot to let him out so he used his box in the basement.”

“His box?”

“Don’t you remember, Uncle Bruce? You trained him, as a backup.”

“So I did. That crazy canine is part cat for Gosh sake! What the heck, bring ’em along.”

They tooled down Rt. 17, drawing much attention. Taser was in the backseat, pressed against the door, with his muzzle poking out the window. He breathed as much air in as he could, almost panting. His cheeks ballooned and his eyes were half-closed.

“Dooya know want he’s doing back there, Jason?”

“He likes the air outside better than the air inside.”

“Yeah, he sure does. And he’s taking it in at fifty miles an hour. A dog is a smelling machine you know, sort of like a shark is an eating machine. You can bet he’s cataloguing all the perfumes in the neighborhood. They’re going into his brain like a turbocharger pumps oxygen into a carburetor. He’s probably lit up like he’s on LSD.”

“What?”

“Never mind. I’ll close the window just a little. He’s likely to jump out in a fit of ecstasy.”

They arrived at the theater just in time to miss the previews. Bruce found a parking spot in the lot next the theater. He activated the security system. The tiny antennas on all fenders were now engaged. The Batmobile was essentially encased in a continuous infrared signal. One interruption usually meant an admirer. A persistent vibration of Bruce’s pocket receiver signaled a more sustained event, like an intrusion. A recorded message automatically played from underneath the rear panel. The You’re being watched recording usually sufficed. Bruce could activate the alarm, siren, or flare sequence from his pocket control if the signal persisted. Only once had there been an attempted theft that had gotten through all three warning layers.

The theater was half filled, and half of these were kids. The movie was engaging enough that the chatter and text messaging during the beginning soon faded. One hundred and thirty-two minutes passed quickly. On their walk back to the car, Jason thanked Bruce for taking him. Taser was jumping around in the backseat, as they approached.

“I liked that movie.”

“What did you like about it, kid?”

“Well that boy, Peter Parker, had to make a choice. His choice involved sacrifice. The easier choice was Mary Jane, ’cause she clearly fancies him, first as Spiderman, and later as Peter. The heavier choice was to do Good, to protect people from the evil of Norman Soros...or was it George Osborn? He remembered what his uncle told him.”

“Yes, and what did his uncle tell him?”

“With great power comes great responsibility. You don’t hear that word much.”

“Power?”

“Responsibility.”

Bruce looked over at Jason. He wasn’t sure he could sum it up any better as a college teacher.

“Uncle Bruce, I wrote my paper on Marx like I promised. The paper led me to Lenin. And Lenin led me to Stalin.”

“You’ve been busy since I gave you that assignment. Did you say Stalin?”

“Yes. Why don’t you ever see any movies about Stalin? We’ve gotten so much of Hitler, and yet Hitler admired Stalin. Even set up a pact before he double-crossed him and attacked.”

“Well, how would you describe Stalin in ten words or less.”

The boy thought for a while.

“Paranoia, gulags, executions, famine, terror, power, deception, show trials, mercilessness, and...egotism.”

Bruce remained silent for a moment.

“I’m impressed, Jason.”

“It doesn’t do justice to the millions of innocent people who owe their deaths to him. I think that the level of evil might even be too much for Hollywood to handle. They give us their ghosts and cannibals, their serial killers, their demons and omens, their Hannibal Lechters, Damians and Exorcised. They give us aliens, creatures from the deep, carnivorous dinosaurs, locusts and their versions of Halloween or Friday the Thirteenth. They give us slavers, Klansmen, and Nazis. They give us the mob, dirty cops, corrupt preachers, the Joker, and their Osborns. But Stalin is too much for them. I found out about this so-called man of steel from PBS’s *Russia’s War: Blood Upon the Snow* and from Johnson’s *Modern Times*.”

“Jason, when do you get the time to...?”

“I don’t know what it is. It’s not that they aren’t capable of making films about Good. Take *October Sky*, *Apollo 13*, *The Great Raid*, and *Spiderman*. They’re all good films and they’re big sellers. Maybe playing too many roles messes up the brain so that good guys become bad guys, and bad guys become heroes. Hear about that kid that went into a mall and shot up a bunch of people...said he wanted to become famous. Why don’t they make a picture about Dante’s *Inferno*, instead of *Dante’s Peak*? Our national life has become a giant movie. Our president, flawed like the rest of us, is the bad guy as are our soldiers, to some. The president and our soldiers are defending us against a declared enemy—they are fighting for our freedom and we just take it all for granted.”

“Not all of us.”

“Too many. Those who blow up and decapitate innocent people, promote and reward suicide missions by children have been attacking us now for decades, maybe centuries—these guys get a pass. Why doesn’t *Rambo* go to Iraq or Afghanistan? I think it comes from not knowing the true nature of evil, because it’s too scary. Scarier than *Scary Movie*, even.”

“Is that from *Kosmo*?”

“Not really. Hey, Uncle Bruce. Tell me about the Batmobile. I think there’s a big story there.”

Bruce recognized the deftness in the boy, not wanting to discuss his sources. He went ahead and told the boy the story of the Batmobile.

“I bought the car from a friend back in Pennsylvania. It was built in fifty-four and was a winner at the NASCAR Pocono Racetrack. She’s got a three-hundred-and-eight cubic-inch flathead six with two single-barreled carbs that sit on a dual-intake twin-H manifold. It’s a bit pokey compared to today’s engines with their electronic ignition and fuel injection. It was really loud till we got her muffled down. You already know about her special features, don’t you?”

“Tell me about them.”

“We’ve got a bank of six headlamps that pop out when you retract the bat motif. These are in addition to the regular pair on either side. I can call in six more, for reinforcement, if some high beamer ignores the message. Two of them are wired up to dance, if necessary.”

“Dance? Like the police have?”

“Well...yes. I don’t often have to use the dancers. Some high-beamers approach from behind.”

Bruce spoke like a WWII warbird pilot describing a dogfight over the Channel.

“In case the message board on the marquee doesn’t get their attention, button number nine usually does the trick.”

Bruce pointed to an array of numbered buttons on the dash.

“Try option one.”

Jason pushed the option button number one, and the sound of a motor inside the panel behind the seat could be heard.

“That’s the marquee going up top. Now hit message four.”

Jason did.

“Now it’s flashing the request...please dim headlights to the driver behind.”

“Okay, say he doesn’t take the message.”

“Hit option number eleven.”

Jason did, and he could hear the pop of the trunk lid.

“Number eleven pops the trunk wide open. We’ve got a fourteen-inch halogen airport beacon mounted in the trunk, in case the message board on the roof isn’t enough. The marquee up there can convey a whole range of messages, which can also be displayed in mirror image on the front. These include things like please dim lights; please turn on lights; turn signal on; please use turn signal; it’s your turn; please don’t tailgate; you’re in passing lane; please don’t litter, it’s my road too...and so on.”

“Cool!”

“My favorite lesson is here, button number fourteen. Go ahead, kid, push it.”

Jason pushed it and a loud recording of screeching brakes could be heard.

“Makes a hell...a heck of a racket out there. It’s for those people who have difficulty seeing green lights and walk in front of you anyway. Some aren’t paying attention, but fourteen is for those who think pedestrians are king. It’s not good to use around colleges, or in places where pedestrians have the right of way, of course. If you don’t know who I’m talking about, you will when you start driving. Makes them jump like a jackrabbit. If someone is being a roadass, I’ve got the fixer. It’s button number nine, right here. No, don’t push it!”

Jason withdrew his finger.

“What?”

“Nine activates a small canon located in each door post, one long push for port, one short push for starboard. It shoots out a little pearl full of perfume I call skunknell number nine. Really slows them down or makes them find another road.”

Bruce took driving seriously. A reflective decal on the trunk read Caution, Bruce’s School of Driving.

In fifteen minutes they reached the college. Bruce let Taser out and pointed to a large oak at the edge of the campus.

“There, Taser.”

It was as good as done. Taser finished and bounded back into the backseat.

They entered the back of the Biology Building. Bruce gave a hand signal to the janitor who was running a floor scrubber. The janitor told Bruce he placed a box inside the room. The lab was smack in the center of the building. They entered the lab and the story of life itself jumped out at Jason in the form of posters, charts, models and specimens. It was his first visit to the lab.

Bruce cut open the box carefully. It was marked Fragile and This Side Up. The box looked like the instructions had been obeyed. With gloves he removed several wafers of dry ice and three tins with clamp tops. He checked the contents. Lifting two lobsters from one tin, Bruce exclaimed, “Homarus Americanus. As long as they wink, they’re fine.” The other two tins contained seawater and kelp, in addition to some large clams and shrimp in brine water bags. Bruce placed the specimens in a large saltwater tank, so they would be ready for Monday’s lab. He assured Jason he wasn’t going to teach a cooking class. Instead, it would be devoted to the locomotion, feeding and self-protection of three inhabitants of the ocean.

Jason examined a 3-D model of DNA—the famed double helix. A group picture of Watson, Crick, Franklin and Wilkins accompanied it. As he walked around the lab in awe, Jason noted a chart showing a sperm and an egg joining to form a zygote.

“Wow! A zygote!”

Jason’s mind turned to perhaps the next Lucas film...Return of the Zygotes. The next placard displayed cell division, right up to the early embryo. The frames in between showed the endoderm, the ectoderm, and the mesoderm folding and twisting until magically—poof—an embryo resulted! He wondered how a human fetus emerged at the end of this mysterious assembly line. Jason promised himself to search the latest scientific journals to find out more about how this happened—the actual mechanism. Next, a picture of Charles Darwin was seen hanging on the wall—the biologist who shook the world up with his Descent of Man and his Origin of Species. A horizontal chart followed the picture. It depicted on the top panel a series of apes, ending with Homo erectus. Along the bottom panel was a timeline for the sequence of proto-man—Australopithecus, Homo habilis, Homo erectus, and finally Homo sapiens. Jason asked if he could insert a picture of Uncle Bruce at the end of this chart next to the query Have We Discovered the Missing Link? Bruce’s silence did not deter him. After a spell, Bruce drew attention to his bat.

“I’m working my way around, Uncle Bruce. What a great lab!”

Next, hanging from the ceiling was a model of a cell. It was three-dimensional. It was a generic cell, not really a differentiated one like a neuron or a muscle cell. Its nucleus and mitochondria could be seen through its transparent membrane. Messenger RNA molecules were seen on their way toward the ribosomes where proteins were built. Lysosomes and Golgi bodies were also labeled, and seen magically suspended in the cell sap, known as cytoplasm. It was like a little city, Jason thought—self-contained, self-protected and going about its business. Just next to the bat collection was a chart on the vertebrates, and another on the invertebrates. Someone had penciled in Republicans on the latter.

Bruce’s collection of preserved bats was at the back of the room. Bruce stood there with a pointer stick in hand, when Jason arrived.

“Is that it, Uncle Bruce?”

“Yes, this is the bat. I have been looking all over the Internet. So far, it’s one of a kind. We’ve got permission to call it *Chiroptera Bonnerensis*.”

The bat was encased in a translucent plastic box, suspended from the ceiling. The taxidermist had done a fine job depicting the specimen in flight. He had used the support of fine stiff wire.

This prize bat was surrounded by an array of twenty different other species, some perched upside down on little shelves, some hugging the wall, and some similarly suspended from the ceiling.

Bruce spoke softly.

“Jason, I caught this bat in Brazil...with two young Indian boys who were not much older than you. It was a wonderfully steamy night, and I used my fly rod. Those guys never saw a fly rod. That bat, right there, hit an old worn-out fly I had just off the water surface. I can still hear it...twapp!”

Bruce turned around. Jason had retreated to one of the charts. It was the one on Evolution. Bruce walked back and stood next to him.

“I don’t get it, Uncle Bruce. In our school they are making a big thing about something called ‘intelligent design.’ They are making it out as something different than evolution.”

“What do you mean?”

“Don’t you think sometimes we are presented with false choices?”

“There is no way Evolution is the same as Creationism.”

“Is creationism to the Creation the same as magnetism is to magnets?”

“What?”

“I just think that the language is being fiddled with, don’t you? I mean a Creator...would create everything, then and now, wouldn’t He. I mean you can’t pick and choose what you want the Creator to have created. If there is no Creator, there is no creationism and there is no intelligent design, unless you think intelligence can just happen and not be

created. And if there is no Creator, there are no unalienable rights, no right to life, liberty or the pursuit of happiness. Right?"

Once again, Bruce was stopped by one of Jason's questions. He recovered.

"The radio-dating and fossil record is hard to deny, Jason. It takes us back millions of years. This stands at odds with the literal—"

"Do you really believe that the Bible is saying it all occurred in seven days, and that that magical week occurred a few thousand years ago? Uncle Bruce, do you really believe that the very first woman was made from a bone?"

Bruce paused with this, too.

"Some people believe that."

"Other people believe the Bible is the Word. Do you think God would choose man's narrow and literal sense to teach us? Or would He speak to us in a larger language. Do you think the Bible is a textbook on history or ancient places? Or could it be a map, a source book for understanding so that a person might find his way in the real world with real guidance?"

"I'm not quite sure what you're talking about, Little Sage One, but I'll assign a reading project for you. Read *Inherit the Wind*."

"I've seen it. You simply can't deny evolution. Yes, and what if God created evolution?"

"You know I can't do that."

"Yeah, but it doesn't mean you can't believe it."

"Well, there are scientists who are believers, for sure. And there are some who are not."

"And I bet they keep searching for that missing link, but they'll always be a little unsure. They haven't really defined 'man,' have they?"

"Yeah, he's got a bigger brain, and a thumb that does this...and he walks upright, and he can solve problems and use tools."

"But I bet it won't be anthropology that finds Mr. Link. Wonderful as it is, science is limited to the study of nature. Maybe man is defined by something or things that are not grounded in nature. Science won't be able to measure and weigh the human soul, will it? Why couldn't the Creator be standing there when He has Mr. Link evolve from let's say an ape, or let's say that *Australopithecus* back there, whichever you want. And, Shazam! The Creator inserts a human soul at that point on the evolutionary line. Then you have Man! You have a brand-new Being. The new species—Man. Man can search for and find God, and Man can choose between good and evil after that loss of innocence, that bite from the apple. Or Man can choose to try to ignore both. If he tries this though, he risks going into a moral wormhole."

"Did you just think of that?"

"Then you also would have a being that evolved physically from something before. If there really is a Creator and He creates everything, then it seems He would have created magnetism, and gravitation, and light, and all the laws of the physical world, as well as evolution, the main law of the biological world."

“I can see that.”

“This choice between the Creator and Evolution then is a false choice. The Creator and Evolution, or science for that matter, are not at odds with one another. The real question then is, is there a Creator? I’m working on that. Uncle Bruce, did you ever hear of Blaise Pascal?”

“A French mathematician.”

“Yes. And philosopher. I’m working on him.”

Jason walked back to the chart that showed the developing embryo.

“Uncle Bruce, do you believe that science will explain how this happens?”

“Well, Jason, my newly discovered student, I can see I will have my hands full with you.”

When they returned to Bruce’s car, they noted the window was halfway down and the dog was gone. Bruce spun around and examined the quad. He spotted Taser sitting at the base of a small lone maple tree. A squirrel clung to a top branch, eyes glued to its tormentor in a silent standoff. Bruce had trained the dog to chase squirrels and chipmunks, but only on the Casperson property. Vera knew they molested the birds at her feeding station, and it took about five minutes training for Taser to find this latest pleasure. Had that dog wound the window down? Bruce whistled and the terrier darted for the car.

Traffic had become congested as they headed for Jason’s home. Bruce was staring into his rearview mirror at a young driver who was tailgating him.

“Push button number one, then message number two, Jason.”

The marquee slowly poked above the roofline and the Do not tailgate signal flashed.

“The batteries must be getting low. The kid showed no sign of learning.”

“Okay, Jason, watch this.” Bruce pulled a microphone under the dash and spoke into it. Bruce’s voice could be heard loud and clear, “Back off, bro!”

The youth was laughing by now. Bruce could do nothing to get the young driver to back off. The kid flipped the bird at Bruce.

“That son-of-a-bitch! back off, you bastard! I’ll slow down and when he passes, I’ll unload the canon on him!”

Just then the kid turned onto a side street.

Jason had never heard his uncle Bruce swear before. The dog just then jumped into the front seat with them.

As they cruised up into the cul-de-sac an elderly couple was sitting out on their front steps. They smiled and waved, admiring the Batmobile as Bruce idled by, ignoring them.

By now Nick and Vera were home.

Thirteen

Marx and the Boys

Jason promised his uncle Bruce at the Awards Celebration Dinner he would do some research on Mr. Marx. He recalled the muffled groans and quips Uncle Bruce drew from the other professors at their table. Jason concluded Groucho, Harpo and Chico were from a different family than the man President Throckmorton said influenced a third of the world. In his search for material, Jason came across an expression from Irving Berlin:

The world would not be such a snarl,
had Marx been Groucho, instead of Karl.

How was it, Jason wondered, that he didn't know about this historic figure? He'd better study up and get the lowdown on Mr. Marx. He was sure Kosmo had some references. He would also hit the encyclopedia, tap the Internet, and visit the library.

For the project, Jason pretended he was in a college. He would sharpen his writing skills, so that when he got to college he'd have a head start. This was what he discovered:

Marx was born into a large family in Prussia, Germany of Jewish parents. Although his parents both were descended from scholars in Judaism, because of prevailing anti-Semitism, Marx converted to Protestantism. He had his six children baptized. Later, he shucked the Church altogether, saying, "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people."

Marx spent his early life alienating himself from the governments in Germany, France, and Belgium, for inciting ideas and tactics based upon what he would term the "dialectic." (Jason would discover later that the term went back to ancient Greece, and meant "the argument.") As a journalist, Marx wrote for and edited revolutionary and anti-Capitalist newspapers. With Frederick Engels, he wrote *The Communist Manifesto*, which told of a coming class revolution. This fairly ticked off the governments of those countries mentioned, who hounded and pursued him to the point of his leaving.

In 1849, he moved to London with his family. He spent the next thirty-four years in the British Museum researching for his famous *Das Kapital*, a three-part, one-thousand-page unscientific diatribe about the dialectic. After Marx died, his friend Engels published the last two volumes of *Das Kapital*, using Marx's scribbled notes.

The dialectic referred to the class struggle between Capitalists and land-owning classes—namely, the "bourgeoisie," with the peasants and the workers—namely, the "proletariat." Marx's dialectic was an adaptation from the philosopher Hegel, whose thoughts influenced him as a student. Marx stated that Capitalists were responsible for all evil, and from the revolt (rising) of the proletariat would come redemption. Marx's religious instinct thus transformed to the world of economics. In his scheme of things the laws of "historical dialectics" were so powerful that individual leaders were of little consequence. Jason wondered if this meant that folks like Lincoln and Churchill had little impact on their times? Marx apparently didn't believe in how some seemed providentially to rise to the challenge of their times.

The notion that Marx was not a scientist, despite his claims otherwise was supported by historian Paul Johnson, in his book *Intellectuals*.

There seemed to be little evidence that Marx pursued objective knowledge through careful evaluation of evidence. It seemed more apparent that he had a preconception with this “dialectic”—the class struggle, as the engine for all history, and that he selectively sought material to prove it. There was little evidence that he ever visited a factory, a mill, a mine, or an industrial workplace of any kind. He did not directly familiarize himself with the working conditions he so vehemently condemned. If he was genuinely interested in the working people, how could this be? Jason wondered. He was essentially deskbound the last half of his life, literally caught up in his own world.

Reminded of Throckmorton’s announcement of the new course at the college, Jason felt if not a scientist, then Marx might have had a poetic streak. He wrote poetry to his wife Jenny, and he wrote of the oncoming class struggle in apocalyptic terms: “We are the apes of a cold God,” he said. He had God saying, “I shall howl gigantic curses at mankind,” and from Goethe, he quoted, “Everything that exists, deserves to perish.” He alleged, “History is the judge, its executioner the proletariat.” It was gloomy, but it was poetic.

Marx believed that society was on the verge of collapse. He set about his ideological feat with preconceived conclusions: a) The laborer was a perpetual and necessary victim. b) The owner was a perpetual and necessary villain. c) Profit was inherently evil. d) Ownership of land by the bourgeoisie was evil and land must be owned collectively. e) Productivity to Marx was not corporate, but national. f) His theory never fully comprehended the generation of wealth. The example of dividing an ever-growing pie was not anticipated in his static view of things. g) God must be excised from the formula. Jason wondered if such surgery might lead to spiritual insanity. In sum, Marx approached his task with a great deal of preconception that might just have been flat wrong!

Were one to magically interview the curator of the British Museum he would say all he ever heard from Mr. Marx for thirty-four years was, “Hello.” Marx rarely bathed, wore filthy clothes, and was plagued by carbuncles. He had an unbecoming habit of saying, “I will annihilate you.” It was reported he read to and played with his children, several of whom died in squalor. Marx never tried for a job. Johnson documents that Marx fathered an illegitimate child by a servant girl provided to his wife Jenny by her family. He never recognized this son, Frederick. Jason got the feeling that Marx was perhaps the most famous misanthrope this side of Ebenezer Scrooge, prior to the latter’s redemption. There was no evidence he was ever visited by any of the Christmas ghosts.

His bookishness, combined with an absence of practical knowledge, may have contributed to his missing the mark when it came to Capitalism. He often cited Engels’ book on pre-Capitalist conditions for his illustrations. The book took no account of the trajectory of improvement in place at the time, such as the enforcement of the Factory Acts. His works were filled with inaccuracies and errors many of which the historian Johnson researched with great care.

Eventually, Marx became an anti-Semite. He saw the worldly cult of the Jew as huckstering, and he saw the Jews’ worldly god as money. But he, himself, rarely tended to his own finances. He subjected his family to abject poverty and was quite happy to take Engels’ offerings of money and later his inheritance for his own subsistence.

If truth wasn't a motivator for him, what was? The content of his philosophy, suggested Johnson, sprang from "Marx's taste for violence, his appetite for power, his inability to handle money, and his tendency to exploit those around him."

Raymond Aron, French political philosopher and journalist, said in *The Great Debate, The Opium of the Intellectuals*: "Far from being the science of working class misfortune, Marxism is an intellectualist philosophy which has seduced certain groups of the proletariat. Far from being the immanent philosophy of the Proletariat, Communism merely makes use of this pseudoscience in order to attain its own end, the seizure of power."

Having discovered the fraudulent nature of Marx's pronouncements, several larger questions emerged for Jason. How had whole countries fallen for the failed notion that the workers of the world would rise (revolt)? How—along the continuum of reality and its distortion, of truth-based knowledge and propaganda, of wisdom and foolhardiness—how, along these continua could the teachings of such a pathetic figure serve as a basis to propel a whole people on a tragic course of exploitation instead of freedom?

Jason supplied two answers to the question. First, was a grizzly opportunist named Lenin. Of course, the second, was a subjugated people, first by the Czars, then by their very "liberators." During Marx's life, he was frustrated that England and the industrial nations of Europe never saw "the rising of the Proletariat." In fact, it took Lenin years of adroit maneuvering and secret police activity to bring it about in Russia, using both her serfs and her industrial workers. Such was the element of "fertile ground."

Marx never knew Lenin, who was born in 1870 as Vladimir Ilich Ulyanov. Jason found in the encyclopedia the statement: "It is difficult to find anything in Lenin's childhood that might have turned him onto the path of a professional revolutionary." The same article went on to say all five of the Ulyanov children who reached maturity joined the revolutionary movement, which was not uncommon in tsarist Russia. Also, his beloved brother Aleksandr was hanged for his involvement in a plot to assassinate Czar Alexander III! Lenin also turned to atheism early on in his life.

In *Modern Times*, historian Johnson traced the rise of Lenin in his chapter on despotic utopias. He was an exceptional student and topped out his law exams. He taught law before being expelled for "illegal activities." He was won over by Marx's writings and converted to Marxism in 1890. He was sent to Siberia for three years for revolutionary activities, including importing seditious books. He created the Bolshevik faction of the Social Democrats and made himself master of it. His language was filled with the verbs of violence—flame, leap, ignite, goad, shoot, shake, seize, attack, blaze, repel, weld, compel, purge, exterminate. He was at odds with other Marxists. Johnson questioned whether he even was a Marxist. Trotsky called him a Robespierre, a terrorist dictator. He was accused as "one man against the party, he is ruining the party." Another said, "Instead of argument he uses bloodletting for those who disagree with him." Yet another alleged, "Lenin's victory would be the greatest menace to the Russian Revolution." He was called a "Social Democratic Tsar," and the natural successor to the Russian throne. The German Marxist Rosa Luxemburg in 1918 said, "The proletarian revolution needs for its purposes no terror, it hates and abominates murder." Years later she and several colleagues were murdered.

In 1914 Lenin went underground and moved to Switzerland from which he returned to Russia in 1917 in his late forties. He was given safe passage through Germany, provided he didn't stop over to speak with trade unionists. Czar Nicholas II abdicated the throne a month before his return. The Romanov family was placed under house arrest in western Siberia and was transferred to the Ipatiev House in Ekaterinburg. Believing a fake promise of abduction to save them, and with the "Whites" closing in, the Bolshevik "Reds" paramilitary arm known as the Cheka shot the entire family to death. They buried and burned the remains according to journals and modern DNA evidence. The Cheka took its orders from Lenin.

Lenin was driven by a sense of domination and power, well beyond any notion of justice or improvement of his fellow Russian. He didn't step up on a soapbox and exhort the workers to unite. Russia then was composed of over 100 million peasants and perhaps 20 million traditional laborers.

He took an antiwar stance during World War I into which the peasants were being sent. He blamed everything on the "imperialists," and took advantage of hunger and anger by promising food and land. He put down the Kronstadt Mutiny, namely a list of demands by the naval garrison at St. Petersburg. For this he used young army cadets, backed up by armed Bolshevik thugs, who in turn were backed by the Cheka (secret police). He needed, as with all Communist regimes, a secret police. He organized the workers committees, or soviets, into informant groups who tattled on the less inspired. He organized his movement not from the workers originally, but through a "vanguard elite" composed of the intelligentsia—members of his own class whom he trusted. He probably never stepped on a farm, or, like Marx, into a factory.

The Cheka soon swelled to two hundred and fifty thousand agents focused on "counterrevolution and sabotage." Whereas the last Czars had executed seventeen people a year on average, the Cheka averaged one thousand per month for "political offenses" alone. It arrested, tried, sentenced, and punished its victims. No records were kept. It set up concentration and labor camps—the beginning of the more robust gulags that came later under Stalin. Shooting on the spot before spectators became a common tactic of terror. If he paid workers with printed money or streetcar tickets, it was for control. "Let there be a flood of blood for the bourgeois."

Lenin called for the purging from Russian land of all kinds of "harmful insects." These included homeowners, teachers, parish councils, and choirs, priests, monks, and nuns. Pretty soon the persons became superfluous. What mattered was the upbringing, the education, or the profession of the soon-to-be "former person."

Lenin died of a series of strokes in the early 1920s, but not before he made Josef Stalin party secretary. Stalin made it his business to supervise Lenin's health at the end and diminish his influence. As a young bureaucrat, Stalin would postpone for a few years his own upscale killings and show trials. In these matters, Stalin made Lenin look like an apprentice.

Not only had Jason promised his paper for his uncle Bruce, another event inspired him to pursue this subject—a subject usually relegated to the dustbin of history. Jason, as a sophomore, was not eligible to belong to the History Club, nor would he be a welcome addition, he correctly perceived after his near takeover of Mr. Prince's class. He knew

Prince probably had spoken with Stroyer about him. So he chose to listen in on the club from the reconnaissance of the closet. Jason had once heard Mr. Stroyer make a statement at the History Club that caught his attention. Stroyer claimed that Lenin was a revolutionary, like our Founders were revolutionaries. That was when Jason knew he had to look up Mr. Lenin and try and find a true accounting of the man.

After developing his profile of Lenin, Jason realized such a statement was based on either a lack of knowledge of history or an intentional attempt at revision and propaganda. He felt Stroyer was not ignorant of the subject he taught in the high school. Why, then, would he wish to equate one of the monsters of history with Washington or Jefferson? Surely, the Founders risked prompting a revolution they felt was necessary. Were this break with Mother England to fail, they would hang together rather than separately, as suggested by Franklin. Surely, by signing the Declaration of Independence, they were signing their own death warrants for treason should they fail—a far cry from the activities of the power-crazed Lenin. Surely, they became irascible in the Philadelphia heat during the Continental Congresses of 1774–76, but they didn't resort to terror! Washington arrived in his military uniform from the French and Indian War, and it became clear who was to lead the revolt in the field, but he didn't bring along a firing squad! Hancock was surely peeved at John and Sam Adams for supporting Washington as the clear choice of commander-in-chief, but Hancock didn't try to rub anybody out!

After the Revolutionary War, as the new governor of Massachusetts, Hancock didn't show up at the Constitutional Convention. They drew up the seminal document anyway. Madison studied practically every government in history, as he and Hamilton wrote the rationale for this new one in the form of the Federalist Papers. Jefferson, a Republican, would come to despise Hamilton and the implied power of the federal government. Dirty politics would estrange him from John Adams, who felt it was he who really inspired the Declaration through his impassioned advice to the colonies to write up their own constitutions. Dr. Rush, years later, helped patch their friendship back together. They kept it at the level of coolness, not revenge.

Jason asked himself more than once, How could Stroyer place such criminals as Lenin in the same phrase as our Founders, human as they were?

In fact, Jason came to the conclusion that the Russian people had been truly victimized, literally for centuries. How Marx might be considered today as anything but a failed ideologue or at most a tragic figure with a misshapen idea escaped Jason. His economic ideas couldn't sell in the real world without a dictatorship and a secret police to bolster them. Any student, Jason felt, who was treated to a course in Marxism as a viable economic system or Marx as an originator of grand ideas should sue for damaged goods and have his course tuition returned. He heard Mr. Q say that on the radio.

Fourteen

Kosmo's Universe

Jason ran into the house with Taser close behind. He was carrying a notebook under his arm as he flew up the stairs in front of his mother.

“Hi, Mother.”

“Son, where are you going in such a hurry?”

“I’ve got some terms that Kosmo gave me. We are building a glossary together. He calls it ‘The Deconstruction of Terms.’”

“The wha...? Come down here and let me see it.”

“It’s no big deal, Mom, it’s just a little project.”

“Bringgg...it here, Jason.”

Jason handed the folder to his mother.

“What is this? A bunch of terms and scribbles. What’s this? Pro-choice versus pro-life is a ruse?”

“He means it should be either ‘pro-choice’ or ‘anti-choice,’ and ‘pro-life’ or ‘anti-life.’ Said in reverse, “anti-abortion” or “pro-abortion,” but the way the issue is framed, it’s a...what does Kosmo say...it’s a falze dygotomy.”

“Dichotomy.”

“Yes. It sounds better saying ‘pro-choice’ instead of ‘pro-abortion.’”

“Let’s see. What are some other items here...homophobia?”

“That’s an example of an invented word, Mom. Literally, it’s supposed to mean someone who is against homosexuals because they are afraid. You could simply see that male and female go together. Don’t you agree, Mother? I mean if you look at the canals, the tubes, and the appendages, you kind of get the idea that they kind of go together, don’t you.”

“Well, of course, Son...where did you come up with...never mind. You shouldn’t reject someone because of their sexual pre—”

“I’m not rejecting anyone, Mother. I have gay friends at school. Everybody deserves to be loved. What people do in private is up to them, as long as there’s no crime. As for acting responsibly, that’s a given, straight or gay, right? But it’s not about the privacy issue, unless you’re talkin’ about my privacy. It’s just silly to call someone afraid because they don’t like the agenda. Why do they talk to kids in school, younger and younger, about this issue?”

“Is someone pushing you?”

“Sometimes at school you get the idea that...well, they tell you it’s okay to search out your feelings, find out who you are. They will supply films and have people speak to us in case we’re confused. Last week they had gay-pride day. When you got to school you found out that wearing jeans symbolized support of gay pride. A lot of kids came to school in jeans and didn’t put them on at home with that in mind.”

“What! I had no idea. Are there records of this?”

“Not unless some student is taping it. They feel it’s their right to take over for parents, Mother. You know, ‘It takes a village to raise a child.’ Well, the village turned it over to the school. Dad never talked to me much about this before this week, but Uncle Bruce listens to me.”

“Do you use chat rooms like ‘My Space’?”

“I’m too busy finding out the truth. Kosmo is, too. We’re a team. I’m fine, Mom. I’m not mixed up or confused about myself...but I’m on a hunt to find out about what is being done.”

“Being done?”

“To our minds.”

“I’ll have to speak with your father.”

“According to this line of thinking a person is either a homophobe or gay. If you were gay, you’d be a homophile, I guess. You could be a heterophile, or straight, but then you could be called a homophobe, couldn’t you? If you were a heterophile, then you must be a homophobe. Get it? And if you were a heterophobe, you’d be gay, wouldn’t you? What about just being a regular person? It’s all about groups. In the effort to simplify things, and just take the individual as an individual, they make it more complex. An individual also has to be a member of a group. Then he sacrifices his individuality, doesn’t he? It’s Mr. Q’s Law of Paradox.”

“What’s that?”

“Liberlism always produces the exact opposite of its stated intent.”

“Well, your Kosmo character may be making things too complicated.”

“That’s why he’s working on his political glossary. According to the logic of these activists, if I were an atheist, I could be called a ‘faithphobe.’ There may be people who are afraid of religion. They’re probably the ones who are trying to separate people of faith from observing their religion except behind church doors. But I’ll bet most atheists are not afraid of what I believe. How can you be afraid of something you don’t believe? I bet most of them understand that their freedom to not believe is the same as my freedom to worship. Maybe what they worship is atheism. Doesn’t matter. It’s only when they tell me where and when to believe. Mother, when did the ‘public square’ come into this argument? When did school become the public square?”

“Well, there are God-fearing people, Jason.”

“Yes, and they are believers. Look here. Kosmo has ‘hate crimes’ on the list. Kosmo says that this whole idea is an effort to separate crimes not so much for legal purposes, like manslaughter and murder, but for political and social purposes. He remembers the show trials.”

“Show trials?”

“The Communists. He lived in Russia. He says the next step is ‘hate speech,’ and the step after that is ‘hate thought.’ Certain speech will be outlawed, even though we have the First Amendment. Today, they just send you off to ‘sensitivity training.’ Is the day coming when the courts will decide if you had hate in your heart when you say something stupid? Why not just let ostracism and ridicule come into play, like in the past? Self-esteem shouldn’t trump everything. That’s just common sense.”

“You sound like you remember the past.”

“Kosmo does. Soon we will be a bunch of automatons. We will avoid controversy, or any conversation that might engage our emotions. God forgive us if we blurt out a crime. It’s the deed that should count. The problem with making speech or thought crimes is, who does the assessment? It doesn’t much matter if the guy who kills you hated or didn’t hate you, does it? If someone murders you, is your death somehow more tragic if the perp hated you? We already have the idea of intent in there now, don’t we? Kosmo says those who want to change our whole society have invented these terms. What’s the opposite of a hate crime—a love crime? What is that? Kosmo says this is just a way to gum up our values and our system of justice. It’s a way to label and to distort what is really going on.”

“How so?”

“Mathew was a homosexual boy who was killed by ‘straights’— and the story was covered heavily by the news. But Jesse was abused and raped for two days by NAMBLA members and his death was almost ignored. The news covered Mathew’s murder over Jesse’s, ten to one. In both instances, they were rapists, torturers and murderers.”

“Who is NAMBLA?”

“The North American Man Boy Love Association.”

“My goodness!”

“We learned about slavery at school, and how it was allowed to grow into the cancer it did, before Dr. Lincoln excised it. Consider Roe versus Wade, abortion on demand. Just because nine men and women in black robes deemed it legal, that didn’t make it moral. Remember, these fetuses, or ‘viable tissue masses’ as they say, are not terrorists out to kill us, or heinous criminals who have committed unspeakable crimes. These are innocent victims whose lives have been mercilessly snatched. How do we know that of the forty or so million souls, we haven’t scraped away an Einstein or an Eminent? How about Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness?”

“You’ve been thinking a lot about this.”

“Take ‘partial birth abortion.’ That’s got to be a cruel and unusual punishment, by any measure. Doctors tell us it’s medically never indicated. Kosmo thinks abortion is the scourge of the twentieth century, like slavery had been in previous centuries. He thinks we will someday cure ourselves of it, but it has had an impact on how we value human life. Kosmo says the issue will someday go back to the states, just the way the states became involved in the compromises over slavery. He says the majority of Americans would vote against it today, if given a chance. He says ‘the issue is the tissue.’”

Vera Casperson listened to her son attentively. She took a seat at the kitchen table.

“There are those who cloud the issue by saying we don’t know when life begins. Have you seen those pictures? The other day a one-pounder went home from the hospital after a spell in the neonatal unit. But what if we’re not supposed to know when life begins. Maybe the only One who is supposed to know for sure is the Creator of that life. Okay then, so we say we don’t know if it’s life. Some feel it is, and some feel it isn’t. You’ve got groups again. Shouldn’t we accommodate both sides and say it’s not a question of being legal or not, it’s a question of morality. One takes responsibility for his or her

choices. That's called morality. We have the privilege to choose, which is what makes us human and defines each of us as individuals, in the end. We are free to believe or not believe. We are free to conceive or not conceive, to abort or not abort, to adopt or not adopt, to leap from a bridge or stand our ground. We have freedom, and that freedom stretches over a broader terrain than that contained in this false dichotomy. Kosmo says you don't have to harvest stem cells from an embryo either. He says, 'a rose is a rose is a rose.' Some old woman said that once. He says, 'a stem cell is a stem cell is a stem cell.' You don't have to finish off a fetus to get a stem cell. You can get them from lots of places."

"It's still the law, Son."

"For now."

"But there were awful things a woman went through in the past."

"That's when it was illegal. It shouldn't be illegal either. Certainly, in the twenty-first century abortion will be available no matter what. You're talking about back-alley abortions with coat hangers. We heard about that in school. Ain't no way. We've been there, done that. Besides morality, the second question is, who pays for it? You could set up a fund for 'family planning' from the taxes of those who support it. Just check it off on your tax return like you check off on your driver's license whether you want your organs donated. Simple."

"Not so simple, I think. But we'll see if we can put this on for the Debate Team, and you, young man, will be the first discussant."

"Well, as it is now, abortion divides the country. If you can be a conscientious objector to war and not serve, you should be able to be a conscientious objector to abortion and not fund. The efforts by the president's opponents to block his choices for the Supreme Court were all about the abortion issue. They don't relish the idea of abolishing Roe versus Wade. Kosmo says Roe versus Wade was bad law anyway, and a lot of law professors say the same. There is no confidentiality or privacy clause in the Constitution. Kosmo says we should put the question out of its misery and take it to a direct vote by the people, state by state. Why should the people in black robes tell us something is legal when it's immoral to at least half of us? Are they going to 'legalize' adultery someday?"

With this Vera just looked at her son. What's this? she thought. A fifteen-year-old boy talking about adultery! He had so many opinions on things that seemed so out-of-bounds. What was he doing thinking about such things? she asked herself. Why was he into stuff that he couldn't alter anyway? What was he trying to do?

"Let's see what else Kosmo has on that list. Oh yes. The Vast Right-Wing Conspiracy. I remember when Hillary Clinton referred to this on the morning TV show years ago."

"Kosmo says that was an example of Mr. Q's Law of Projection. It is a favorite tactic. He says...accuse the other guy of what you're doing. Not that there is anything like a Vast Left-Wing Conspiracy or anything! It's done to put their opponents on the defensive. Kosmo says there are certain terms that are thrown around that are meant to take you off your argument...terms like bigot, fascist, and Nazi. See, here on the list, he defines these clearly."

Vera glanced at the list her son held before returning her eyes to his. “The idea is to substitute name-calling and talking-points for rational thought. Not only do they have a strategy to divide us, they also have one to close the American mind. Kosmo says it’s a combination of the Law of Projection and the Law of Distraction.”

“Who are ‘they,’ Jason?”

“The America Snatchers is what he calls them. There is one word for them.”

“I don’t think you should spend so much time with Kosmo, Jason.”

“Why? Because I learn from him? He’s a lot more interesting than Mr. Prince, Mother. Mr. Prince gives us his subjects to discuss. Have you heard of the so-called illegal eavesdropping they say is happening in America, and do you know the Fourth Amendment?”

“Of course.”

“Kosmo says it’s another projection. The image they attempt to create was that our president is engaged in illegal activity when the government takes the step of intercepting Al-Qaeda calls, even if the call was rerouted by satellite to our country. That’s the number-one responsibility of government...to protect us. Sure, Grandma might be trying to call Ayman al-Zawahiri, but it’s a long shot. It’s also nothing like Echelon was. Certainly it’s not a search or a seizure. This is not ‘domestic spying,’ which is another favorite term the America snatchers use. This part of the Patriot Act represents a commonsense approach to gaining info on our enemy! It’s like the Enigma machine was in World War Two.”

Jason paused.

“Did ja ever hear of Project Echelon, Mother?”

“No.”

“Project Echelon was used by President Clinton during his presidency. It looked in on telephone calls, e-mail transmissions, all forms of electronic messaging, between our citizens. It should have produced shrill protests because it was domestic spying, even though it was an old program. Kosmo says the Kennedy wiretaps on Martin Luther King tried to catch him in a pecca...a pecca...”

“Peck of trouble?”

“Peccadillo.”

“Jason!”

“And do you really believe that the Martins just happened to pick up the Gingrich-Boehner phone call on their CB radio while driving down the road in Florida? Oh, the call supposedly had to do with Gingrich violating House Rules on Ethics. Do you really believe this senior couple had a tape recorder wired into the scanner they bought at Radio Shack? The tape was turned over to U.S. Representative Jim McDermott, who was a ranking member of the House Ethics Committee, and who soon thereafter stepped off that committee. You remember him. He’s called ‘Baghdad Jim’ because he went to Baghdad to speak with Saddam, our enemy. Mr. McDermott in turn gave that tape to the New

York Times and two other outlets. Kosmo and Mr. Q think it was Clinton's NSA that recorded this conversation in the first place, even though the Martins were fined for their illegal act."

"Where did you learn—"

"Kosmo. Remember, Mr. Gingrich engineered the 1994 Contract with America that so hurt the Democrats. He could outdebate them at every turn. They had to figure out a way to get him out of the government. The Appellate Court ruled in Mr. Boehner's favor that the tape was recorded illegally by the Martins. Although Mr. Boehner was willing to settle for ten thousand dollars, Mr. McDermott chose to fight on the basis of his First Amendment Right to pass it along to the three news outlets. He lost his case and had to pay Mr. Boehner one million dollars.

"But the whole truth never came out. Remember, Mother, if you don't know the whole story because it wasn't covered by the CMM, it doesn't mean it didn't happen."

"This is what you heard from Kosmo?"

"And how can someone call our president a Nazi? That's just a tribute to ignorance. A Nazi was a member of the National Socialist German Worker's Party. The Nazi Party was led by Adolf Hitler in Germany in the 1930s right up until he shot himself in a bunker in 1945. Mr. Q says that to be a moon-bat, the first step is to stand on your head so that you see the world upside down. The second step that confirms you're a moonbat is when you tell the rest of the world they're wrong."

"Mr. Q?"

"A radio guy. He does a show with his sidekick, Rose."

"You mean the rose, that's a rose, that's a rose?"

"Not this Rose."

"You don't believe in our war in Iraq, do you, Jason?"

"Not only do I believe in it, I think we had no choice. We are now winning the Battle of Iraq, but the Democrats, supported by the Complicit Main Media, won't tell you this. They say just the opposite. With facts to the contrary staring them in the face, they say we're losing, that it's a war that cannot be won, that it's a quagmire...to borrow a term that helped defeat us in Viet Nam. This is very troubling. Anyone who seriously thinks this way should not be trusted with our national security, our economy, anything really."

"Is that what this Mr. Q says?"

"Precisely. These America snatchers won't tell you about our successes, because they've staked their political future on a weakened, even defeated America. If we lose in Iraq, our standing in the world will plummet, and not only will our national security be injured, no one will listen to us again. Nor should they. The future of freedom in the world, despite the hits we take from the liberal press around the world, depends on a strong America. We have been at war now for well over ten years with these Islamo-Fascists. If you doubt they are fascists, look here at Kosmo's definition."

Vera once again briefly glanced at the list.

“People want the war to be over, and so do you and I, Mother, but the enemy doesn’t. Better get used to a long haul here. This is just a battle. Call it the Battle of Iraq. It’s one that we must win. We’d better be prepared for another attack on us at home. The America snatchers here at home have increased that chance. Kosmo and I are now looking at the story of Churchill, Mother. It’s history repeating itself.”

“Ward?”

“No, Winston.”

“How much time do you spend with Kosmo, Jason? You’re often going down to see Artie. Do you see Artie, or do you see this Kosmo?”

“Lately, Artie hasn’t been around much. When he’s not home, I check in with Kosmo.”

“What’s the story on this Kosmo. How old is he and what is his home country?”

“He’s a Lithuanian. Is that how you say it? He was drafted into the Russian army, you won’t believe...somewhere around the age of thirteen. He’s very touchy about the subject of Communism, having grown up in it. He says when President Reagan helped scatter the USSR by crusading there for religious tolerance, that that was as much a turning point as the Berlin Wall coming down. Gorbachev, like many, found his new identity in the environmental movement. It became clear to them early on that they weren’t going to beat us militarily or economically. Instead, they would beat us from within. They would become the America Snatchers. Have you seen the forty-five declared goals of the American Communist Party set forth in 1963, Mother?”

“No, I haven’t.”

Jason had the list in his hand. “Look here:

“Number Three: Develop the illusion that total disarmament by the U.S. would be a demonstration of moral strength.

“Number Four: Permit free trade between all nations regardless of Communist affiliation and regardless of whether or not items could be used for war. Have you heard of ‘China Gate,’ Mother?”

“China Gate? Well, yes.”

“Number Eleven: Promote the UN as the only hope for mankind. We see a film on the UN at school at least once a month.

“Number Fifteen: Capture one or both of the political parties in the United States.

“Number Sixteen: Use technical decisions of the courts to weaken basic American institutions by claiming their activities violate civil rights.

“Number Seventeen: Get control of the schools. Use them as transmission belts for Socialism and current Communist propaganda. Soften the curriculum. Get control of teachers’ associations. Put the party line in textbooks.

“Number Twenty: Infiltrate the press.

“Number Twenty-one: Gain control of key positions in radio, TV and motion pictures.

“Number Twenty-four: Eliminate all laws governing obscenity by calling them ‘censorship’ and a violation of free speech and free press.

“Number Twenty-five: Break down cultural standards of morality by promoting obscenity in books, magazines, motion pictures, radio and TV.

“Number Twenty-seven: Infiltrate the churches and replace revealed religion with ‘social’ religion. Discredit the Bible and emphasize the need for intellectual maturity, which does not need a ‘religious crutch.’

“Number Twenty-eight: Eliminate prayer or any phase of religious expression in the schools on the ground that it violates the principle of ‘separation of church and state.’

“Number Twenty-nine: Discredit the American Constitution by calling it inadequate, old-fashioned, out of step with modern needs, a hindrance to cooperation between nations on a worldwide basis.

“Number Thirty: Discredit the American Founding Fathers. Present them as selfish aristocrats who had no concern for the ‘common man.’

“Number Thirty-one: Belittle all forms of American culture and discourage the teaching of American history. Kosmo says this is where ‘multiculturalism’ comes from.

“Number Thirty-two: Support any Socialist movement to have centralized control over any part of the culture—education, social agencies, welfare programs, health, and so on.

“Number Thirty-six: Infiltrate and gain control of more unions.

“Number Thirty-seven: Infiltrate and gain control of big business.

“Number Forty: Discredit the family as an institution. Encourage promiscuity and easy divorce. Do you watch the sitcoms much, Mother?

“Number Forty-one: Emphasize the need to raise children away from the negative influence of parents. ‘It takes a village...’

“Number Forty-three: Overthrow all colonial governments before native populations are ready for self-government. This has happened in Africa a lot.

“Number Forty-four: Internationalize the Panama Canal...better yet, turn it over to a Communist country. President Carter did this and he received the Nobel Peace Prize.

“Number Forty-five: Give the World Court jurisdiction over nations and individuals alike. Think all this is from fantasyland, Mother? Kosmo says it’s from the America Snatchers...the cultural Marxists.”

Vera sat dumbfounded.

“Where did you find that list?”

“It’s in the Congressional Record—appendix, pages A34–A35, January 10, 1963. Kosmo found it on the Internet. It’s a bit like Hitler’s Mein Kampf, isn’t it, Mother? Obviously, in 1963 they didn’t see far out enough to think of the environmental movement. The Communists certainly didn’t know much about the environment. Next time someone asks, just who are these Leftie conspirators you are so afraid of, you can trot this out. Then you can call yourself a Leftphobe. The first step in this takeover attempt is to bring

about the ‘loss’ of the language. The next step is to accept your assignments. I’ve got an incomplete list in my bedroom and my name isn’t McCarthy! These people are very serious about their assignments. While you work and live your life, these people chip away at America.”

Vera sat quietly on the couch.

“Goldberg, in his book *Liberal Fascism* said, ‘The constant manipulation of the language to keep conservatives and other non-liberals on the defensive is a necessary tactic for liberal politics.’ Here, Mother. Here’s Kosmo’s Political Glossary. I’m going to take Taser out for a walk.”

Jason plopped Kosmo’s Glossary down on the table, spun himself around and left by way of the back door. It was as close as Vera ever saw her son on the edge of control.

Kosmo’s Political Glossary

(Guide to the Deconstruction of Terms, or the Reconstruction of deconstructed terms, whichever preferred)

Cycle of Violence—There is no good or evil, violence just goes around in a circle.

Reproductive Rights—In addition to the “right” (choice) to abstain (from sex), the “right” (choice) to use contraception, and the “right” (choice) to conceive, this “right” (choice) is usually reserved for the advocacy of “safe and legal abortion,” which ironically not only brings an end to the potential mother’s reproduction in this case, but certainly makes impossible the eventual reproduction of the fetus (unborn child, viable tissue mass?).

Hate Crime—Another layer added to Crime, so that public opinion might be conditioned. Example: A marine in uniform was beaten with baseball bats in the state of Washington. Although this was a hate crime, perpetrated by those who hate our military, and therefore our country, it wasn’t called a hate crime. This illustrates the arbitrariness, therefore “usefulness,” of the term.

Hate Speech—“Any opinion or speech showing intolerance to any person, race, creed, ancestry, ethnicity will not be tolerated,” said one liberal. It’s a direct affront to one of our foundations, the right of free speech. The purpose of this extra layer of “criminality” over our existent criminal code is so that victims and oppressors might be more clearly (and arbitrarily) defined as part of the new agenda.

Vast Right-Wing Conspiracy—A projection and diversion used by the Vast Left-Wing Conspiracy in an attempt to deflect attention away from what the Left is doing. It’s an example of the Law of Projection. (Mr. Q’s Law of Projection, simply stated, says ‘if they accuse the other party of doing it, it’s what they are doing.’)

Bigot—Literally, one fanatically devoted to one’s own group, religion, race, or politics, coupled with intolerance toward those who differ. In today’s world, the term is often used liberally and indiscriminately by the intolerant, when facts or logic are not on their side. In this context, it not only illustrates the Law of Projection, but also the Law of Distraction.

Fascism—Any program for setting up a centralized autocratic national regime with severely nationalistic policies; exercising regimentation of industry, commerce, and

finance; and using rigid censorship and forcible suppression of opposition. Such regimes have been carried out by Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Mao, Castro, and Chavez. The origin, history, and application of the term can be found in Goldberg's *Liberal Fascism*. (Calling President George W. Bush a fascist, for instance, is absurd. The simple fact is, Bush has been so tolerant of his opposition that he has lost some of his own supporters, and one psychiatrist even labeled him "mentally ill" because of his blandness to criticism. Read about President Wilson and his response to criticism to get a better idea of fascism.)

Extremist—One who advocates or resorts to extreme measures, particularly in politics. The term today has been shifted to a negative connotation, referring to people who act from principle. People who act from moral and religious principles are often referred to as "extremists" in an effort to shift the political spectrum. The intention of this subtle conditioning is to suggest it's better to be "middle of the road," "moderate," "nonjudgmental," and thereby more malleable to change or propaganda.

Ideology—Ideals, principles, ethics, morals, doctrine, creed, credo, faith, teaching, theory, philosophy, canon, conviction, persuasion. It refers to a system of ideas and ideals, especially those that form the basis of economic or political theory and policy. Had there been no ideologues, there would have been no American Revolution, no Constitution, and no United States. The term "ideologue," as applied to one who disagrees with the labeler often carries a negative connotation akin to "extremist," "fascist" or "bigot." An ideologue might say, "I know my ideas are good for you; forget about yours." (This would make him an elitist, as well.) How does one make sense of all this? Just think of good ideologues with good ideas and bad ideologues with bad ideas. Admittedly, this might be difficult for a "relativist."

Intelligent Design—Divine Providence without directly mentioning God. Although labeled by some as "junk" or "pseudo" science, it's best characterized as an official recognition of a directive supernatural force which lies outside science, since science is the study of the natural world. Atheists in colleges and administrations invariably link intelligent design to those who hold to the literal sense of scripture, which is most easily shown to be at odds with science. For a lucid discussion of this oft-confused subject, read about "evolutionary theism" in Dr. Collins' *The Language of God*. To some, it's the best synthetic answer to the fundamental questions of man. One of those fundamental questions is: When we start out on our personal journey to explain life and its meaning, do we require that everything be provable to our senses and that everything fall within the power of man to fully comprehend? Or do we allow for the fact that man has his flaws and that it might be possible he may not be able to prove, even grasp everything that exists. Indeed, might the premise of man's omniscience be a wee tad arrogant?

Homophobe—A label often applied to someone who has any reservation about homosexuality, particularly homosexual activism, for any reason. It is a label designed to intentionally simplify, divide, and polarize.

Patriotism—A term that used to mean love of country and a willingness to sacrifice for it. Today, for some, it connotes a willingness to sacrifice a president who is defending the country, and the country that has been so safe and free.

Creationism—A term that denotes a belief in a Creator who created the earth in accordance with the literal translation of Scripture, a record that stands at odds with

evolution. Because the majority of people who believe in the Creator are not literalists, the so-called Creationist/Evolution dichotomy is a false one, as applied to believers in general. Dr. Collins, one can easily believe in both, as put forth in Dr. Collins' definition of "evolutionary theism" as described under "intelligent design".

If one sees the allegorical sense of the Word, one can easily believe that the Creator created not only mankind but everything in the world, including evolution, as a means.

Bashing—A term devised to discourage people from considering the reasons for a criticism. In this sense Bush-bashing is different from Clinton-bashing. Being a cowboy or a Christian is not equivalent to lying to a grand jury, having your law license taken away, or taking money from the Chinese for a political party in return for technical and military secrets. ("Bush lied and people died" is a half-clever but unconvincing projection for which there is no proof. Read Sada's Sadaam's Secrets, and the Congressional Record.)

Diversity—A nice-sounding term used to expand upon the "melting pot" metaphor often used to describe America. It is used, however, to disguise the current trend to pit one group against another. In other words, it is another way of both disguising and embracing "groupism," which is divisive by design. There is nothing intrinsically excellent in the pursuit of diversity, but the pursuit of excellence often leads to diversity. (Diversity and multiculturalism are first cousins.)

Loyal Opposition (on the Battle for Iraq, that some call "the Iraq War") —a palatable-sounding term for some ex-presidents, ex-vice presidents, ex-first ladies, and members of the party that opposes engaging the Battle of Iraq. It is a comfort zone from which to register antipathy toward current national policy both at home and in foreign counties at a time of war and to the detriment of our troops. The term "Treason" carries a harsher ring.

Right-Wing Christian Fanatic—A term that refers to a person who believes in God, the individual, and the exceptionalism of the Founders and the government they "founded," understanding that the Founding Fathers also believed in the Creator.

Left-Wing Liberals, Progressives, and Socialists—Those who hold the opposing view, that the State (government) is best suited to solve all problems and that God's place, if He has any place at all, is behind the pulpit and not in the lives of the people, as supporters of the "coordinated state." (As an extension of this, they believe in the UN, multiculturalism, moral relativism, and the need to limit or eliminate American sovereignty and military strength.)

Illegal Immigrant—Someone who has come into the country, illegally. The terms "undocumented aliens," "guest workers," certain "asylum seekers," for instance, are used as subterfuge and distract from the fact of illegality. Such terms downplay the act of breaking the law at a time when our people rightfully demand and require border security. To ask what percentage of illegal immigrants break the law is nonsensical.

Gay Marriage —An oxymoron, and a nonentity. Marriage is defined in terms of a man and a woman.

Separation of Church and State—A phrase once approximated ("a wall of separation") by Thomas Jefferson in a letter to the Baptists in which he supported the freedom of an individual to worship without the influence of the state. The phrase is not contained in the

Constitution. The Constitution specifies that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibit the free exercise thereof. The Founders did not fully anticipate that the Supreme Court would someday create laws. The term is used today to invert the “Establishment Clause,” which addressed and forbade State religion. The Founders were ever mindful of the crimes and excesses of the Church and monarchs of Europe, often carried out in the name of religion.

To Be Swift-Boated—This refers to the record put forth by John Kerry’s Swift Boat mates, as to the veracity of his version of his service in Viet Nam. To Kerry and his ilk, to be “swift-boated” means to get sandbagged or surprised by an erroneous story. To those in witness and who differed with Kerry’s report, the term refers to the impact of truth on falsity, which in his case, lost him an election.

Environmentalist—A term originally used to denote one who holds respect for and interest in the preservation of the environment. It has now become something quite different—a political action group, for instance, one aimed at accepting the hoax of man-made global warming. It suggests there is a group of people who desire pollution, who don’t care a hoot about the environment, while the great majority of Americans do not pollute and do care about the environment. This is probably why we have been so successful in cleaning up our air, water and land. Leftist and radical environmentalists rarely are concerned about pollution in countries other than the U.S., which more than suggests their political orientation.

Peace Activist—A term used for people who want everyone to drop arms and pull out of armed conflict, irrespective of the cruelty, cunning, or treachery of our foe. In other words, “peace activists” take no heed of history and refuse to discuss the historical record. The record is that victories won over the world’s despotic utopians by free peoples have the best chance for lasting peace, unless slavery and dictatorships are considered peaceful. Peace activists imagine an opposite group whom they view as “war activists” despite the fact that well over 99 percent of Americans do not want war. These facts make “peace activists” look more like anti-victory advocates.

Smart Growth and Sustainability—clever-sounding terms that appear in the United Nations’ Agenda 21 adopted in Rio in 1992. Agenda 21 is a “comprehensive plan of action to be taken globally, nationally and locally by organizations of the United Nations System, Governments, and Major Groups in every area in which humans impact on the environment.” It takes authority out of the hands of elected officials and places it instead in the hands of “appointed stakeholder councils,” reminiscent of the old Soviets. The term sustainability sounds neat, but it always refers to a governmental, bureaucratic or global program. One never hears of sustainable marriage, sustainable gun ownership, sustainable private property, sustainable freedom to worship, for instance.

Racial Profiling—A pejorative phrase for a commonsense approach to a group whose behavior has defined a reason for special consideration. An example might be to consider Muslims as the larger group into which fit Islamo-Fascists. The declaration of war on America by the latter would qualify as one of those behaviors. Nobody profiles “Jihadist” Muslims other than themselves.

Social Justice—Considering that man is imperfect and life unfair, wouldn’t it be nice to smooth things out by making things more equal. But how might this be accomplished?

By redistributing income through the government? By forcing lending agencies to take on bad risks, so that we can all share in the American Dream? By crippling the oil companies' capacity to meet demands by levying windfall profit taxes instead of increasing supplies? The trouble with this approach is that a) It never solves the problem, because we interfere with the market process. b) We create dependency, by which people are deprived of the learning and good that comes from making mistakes. c) Government becomes bigger and more onerous, as the voluntary sector shrinks. People don't give to hurricane victims because they think of social justice. They give out of a sense of charity and a willingness to vicariously put themselves in the same position as the victims. The problem is, who gets to decide what is "just"? The upper 50 percent of income taxpayers in the U.S. pay 99 percent of the tax. Is that "just"?

Right-Wing Dictator—An oxymoron. The Right Wing is associated with personal liberty and personal responsibility. The Right Wing believe in the Constitution—"Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness." The Left Wing has always been infatuated with dictators, from FDR's Brain Trust, the members of which visited Stalin's Russia and Mussolini's Italy, up to modern-day liberals, who adulate Castro, Ortega, and Chaves for the power and control they exert over their people.

Root Cause—To be differentiated from "cause." Why did that boy shoot up the high school? The "root cause" was because he came from poverty, or he was abused by a priest when he was young. (Not that a lot of people who came from the same background didn't shoot up the school.) This intentionally glosses over the real cause—namely that he lost his conscience through a deprivation of moral influence or through the conquest of his soul by evil.

Discrimination—Use to refer to the exercise of judgment. The term has been hijacked not only for its application to the negative, but also to help create the victim class. When the Boy Scouts refuse to allow for gay scoutmasters, they aren't discriminating, they are exercising common sense. When people object to transgender bathrooms in college, they are not discriminating against anyone except those who wish to break down our moral and family fabric. They, of course, will cry "discrimination"!

"Addiction" to oil—Instead of recognizing that oil is the life-blood of the world's present economy, the term "addiction" to oil has sprung up. Addiction implies harm. What does oil harm? Why the planet, of course, so say the globalarmists. Is it possible that instead of being a "fossil fuel" (compressed animal and plant life) oil is continuously produced deep in the earth through an "abiotic" process? We better not be addicted to all the benefits and products of oil—aviation; plastics and home products of all types, from boats to lipstick; blacktop highways; agricultural fertilizers, for starters.

To Vera, the list might grow with each day and each distortion of events and renditions. Kosmo's list was a "living document."

She sat in silent bewilderment. It was interrupted by her son's return and Taser standing at her side, wagging his tail. The canine had little to consider. He was such a lucky dog.

Fifteen

The Meeting

When Vera received the letter from the high school principal, a hundred questions came to her mind. The letter seemed deliberately noncommittal. Several of Jason's teachers wished to sit with her and discuss her son. She wondered why she hadn't been informed of any problem at Parent's Night. She appreciated the fact that Jason had unusual study habits. He would do his homework immediately after coming home. He always seemed to have time to spend on the Internet each evening. He was not one of the top students, but he carried a solid B average. Both she and Nick felt he could do better, but they also felt he would probably "kick in" in earnest after another year of self-discovery. Perhaps his teachers had spotted his innate brilliance and had some special advice. Or, perhaps his teachers had simply spotted some trends that she herself had come to notice and wanted to work with her in correcting them. Her background in criminology opened up a range of possibility. Sometimes it accounted for excessive and unwarranted analysis. She understood this about herself.

Jason was invited to attend the meeting if he wished. Surely if there were serious trouble they wouldn't invite him, would they? When she revealed the letter to him, she received no additional clues to the answers she sought. He couldn't be hiding anything, certainly. Although she didn't actually search his bedroom, on her many visits there had been no signs of a nefarious venture—no signals of secret plans or plots floating about. Such thoughts were ridiculous. She chided herself for even thinking them. It could be something quite innocent. Maybe his assertiveness had become a problem. Had his candor betrayed him? These were personality questions. The teachers were trained to deal with different personalities, yet she fully understood the necessity of discipline in the classroom setting. Surely, he hadn't expressed his views on guns at school. Had he espoused the influence of his newly minted mentor Kosmo to one of his teachers? Likely, they just wanted to ensure he didn't stray and take to his own path at the expense of the curriculum. She sensed no discontent with school beyond the usual harmless chatter levied at kids and teachers most susceptible to caricature. Every time he engaged in this she restrained him because it bordered on disrespect.

Jason waited for his mother in his homeroom. She had timed the bell just right. Vera approached her son with a smile.

"Shall we go and talk with Mr. Parchment?"

"Sure, Mom."

They walked together to the principal's office. A mass of kids high on dismissal blocked their way. They arrived at 3:30 exactly and knocked. The man himself greeted them. Parchment seemed comfortable as he introduced himself.

"Do you care for coffee or tea, Mrs. Casperson? Soft drink for you, Jason?"

"No thank you, Mr. Parchment," Vera replied, gazing at her son who showed no sign of unease.

"No thank you, sir."

"Please step into our conference room then."

Without any further explanation, they were ushered into a side room in which three men were seated at a table. None of them rose from their seats. Their collective countenance was clearly detached and a bit cool.

“Mrs. Casperson, I believe you have met Mr. Prince who teaches Social Science.”

Vera nodded.

“And this is Mr. Stroyer of our History Department, and Mr. Orb who you know teaches Environmental Studies.”

“I don’t think I’ve met Mr. Stroyer before. Pleased to both meet you and see you again, gentlemen.”

“Jason has been attending the History Club.” Stroyer said this in an emphatic manner, as he fixed his eyes on the boy.

“I didn’t know Jason attended the History Club.” Vera looked at her son quizzically.

Jason smiled at her and said, “I really like the History Club.”

“Well, I believe we appreciate how busy we all are, so I’d like to get to the point without further ado. These teachers have some concern about your son, Mrs. Casperson. There have been times when his behavior has been...curious...well, at times perhaps even disruptive...is this correct, gentlemen?”

“He hasn’t been talking about guns, has he?” When Vera said this, she wished she could kick herself. It just came out.

“Why do you ask, Mrs. Casperson?”

“I don’t know exactly. He has a friend who owns some guns.”

“Guns?” All three chorused in unison.

“Oh, my friend Artie has an uncle—Kosmo. He has a German Luger from the Second World War. He also owns a deer rifle, a Springfield 3006. He showed them to me once.”

After a pause, Parchment proceeded.

“No, we don’t think Jason has any propensity toward violence, Mrs. Casperson. Today’s meeting is not about guns. Is this correct, gentlemen?”

They managed a muffled assent.

“Someday, I’m going to have a gun.”

Prince and Orb turned their faces to one another and their eyebrows flickered.

“Jason, it’s best right now just to listen.”

“Just remember Kennesaw, Mother.”

“Kennesaw?”

“Kennesaw, Georgia, Mr. Parchment. Jason has worked up a little dossier on the town. But, please, let’s get on with the business at hand. We haven’t even heard what your teachers wish to tell us.”

“We do have a zero-tolerance policy at our school when it comes to guns, Mrs. Casperson.”

“Of course. Please pardon him, Mr. Parchment. Sometimes he’s very expressive. He calls it his First Amendment Right.”

Parchment stifled a smile.

“Too many opinions for the tenth grade,” Prince blurted.

“We’re not saying Jason is a bad kid, Mrs. Casperson. It’s just that he sometimes forgets there are other students in the classroom. I believe Mr. Stroyer has a story to tell.”

Parchment looked over and nodded to the history teacher. All heads turned to Stroyer’s end of the table.

“Last week while I was having my History Club, we heard a ruckus in the closet. We opened the door and Jason was standing in there, eavesdropping.”

“What day was that?”

“Thursday, in the afternoon, Mrs. Casperson.”

“Jason, was that the day you said you were staying over for play rehearsal?”

“Yes, Mother.”

“Did you lie to me?”

“No. I stayed for play rehearsal. We do the lighting at the beginning. Once I get my directions, I learn them. Then the actors go on. No sense hanging around to hear them learn their parts.”

“What, then, were you doing in the closet?”

“I’m picking up on important stuff. Stuff I might need to know about when I go to college. Stuff like American Imperialism and the Peace Movement. Things that I can read about and study with Kosmo.”

“If he wants to join the club, Mrs. Casperson, he should just ask.”

“But I think if I were in the club, the discussions wouldn’t be the same, Mr. Stroyer.”

“Do you think we would change our topics for you, Jason?”

“Do you give grades for being in the club, Mr. Stroyer.”

“Certainly not. Why do you ask?”

Jason didn’t comment on what was common knowledge in the school. If Stroyer liked what you said in class or “in club” as he put it, it might be good for a better grade. If he didn’t, the opposite might be the case.

“Well, the most disturbing thing Mrs. Casperson is this.” Stroyer presented copies of a page full of questions.

“We found this sticking out of Jason’s pocket when he was invited to come out of the closet. At our previous meeting we had been talking about how important immigrants are for the country.”

Everyone now looked at Jason.

“This page was posted on the bulletin board outside my office a few days after our last club meeting. It attracted quite a bit of attention. Jason even signed it.”

“Of course, I did.”

“Quiet, Jason.”

“Yes, Mother.”

Stroyer distributed copies of the questionnaire by flipping them onto the middle of the table.

This was the questionnaire:

A Quiz for the Interested, Sponsored by the Institute of Universal Inquiry

Two Good Things: Immigrants and Profits, But Only If They’re Legal

Please answer T for True, F for False, or U for Undecided.

“Undecided” requires that you will search for the answer.

1. Most Americans are both pro–legal immigration and opposed to illegal immigration.

T ____ F ____ U ____

2. Mexico supports policies that encourage illegal immigration to the United States, yet Mexico has severe laws that punish those who come into Mexico illegally.

T ____ F ____ U ____

3. The Heritage Foundation recently published a study that showed the taxes paid by a household headed by immigrants without a high school diploma averaged \$10,573 in 2004, and government expenditures (school, medical, education, aid, defense, cost of incarceration, etc) averaged \$19,588 per such household. The same report said that in 1960 immigrants were equally likely to have a high school education as nonimmigrants, but that in 1998 immigrants were four times more likely not to have a diploma. The same report also said in 2004 there were estimated to be 11 million illegal immigrants in the United States (the Census Bureau counts 90 percent of them), that 50–60 percent of illegal immigrants lack a high school diploma and of the estimated 4.5 million low-skill households, 41 percent are headed by illegal immigrants. The same report stated that by 2014 the net cost (benefits minus taxes paid) to the taxpayer for low-skill immigrant households will approach \$1 trillion/year.

T ____ F ____ U ____

4. The statement that “undocumented workers” (illegal immigrants) are necessary because they do work that Americans won’t do is a triple ruse because a) it would be fairer to say “that Americans won’t do for \$3/hr,” b) they are increasingly being employed in higher-paying jobs that American’s would do, and c) if one looks at question #3, they are receiving more than their wage in benefits.

T ____ F ____ U ____

5. Mexico's revenue from illegal immigrants sending money back is second only to its oil revenues.

T _____ F _____ U _____

6. The answer to what percentage of illegal immigrants are criminals is the same as the percentage of bank robbers who are criminals—100 percent.

T _____ F _____ U _____

7. Stopping the flow of people crossing our borders with Mexico and Canada illegally is a key part of homeland security at a time of war and should be done ASAP by any means necessary (fence, unmanned aircraft, enforcing laws, beefing up border guards, etc.).

T _____ F _____ U _____

8. The ATZLAN movement, supported by racist groups such as La Raza and MEChA, is aimed at increasing the numbers of voters of Hispanic background who will ultimately vote for secession of Southwestern states, including California, from the United States. The following three facts are necessary for the movement to eventually succeed: a) racist indoctrination through public schools, b) offspring of illegal immigrants becoming citizens of the U.S., and c) backing by Marxist groups.

T _____ F _____ U _____

9. The present pathway to legal immigration is unnecessarily cumbersome and lengthy and encourages people to break the law.

T _____ F _____ U _____

10. The Founders envisioned their new nation to be one of laws, not of powerful men.

T _____ F _____ U _____

11. The immigration issue represents the best example to date of the gulf between politicians of both parties and the American people. As such, it will be a key issue in the 2008 presidential election.

T _____ F _____ U _____

12. One reason there has been precious little progress in stopping the flow of illegal immigrants is the fact that the concept of a North American Union modeled after the European Union has been discussed at high levels, without the input and consent of the American people.

T _____ F _____ U _____

13. One reason there has been delay in solving the problem of illegal immigration is based on political motivation. One of our political parties is the party of dependency, and the more unskilled, dependent people that come to the United States, the more potential voters that party sees and caters to. One party feels rightly or wrongly that accommodating illegal immigrants through an amnesty plan will win votes from those so accommodated, but they underestimate the degree of disaffection such a policy would generate with legal citizens.

T _____ F _____ U _____

14. Those who favor a porous border with any adjacent country also favor the loss of American sovereignty, since a country loses its identity when it loses its borders.

T _____ F _____ U _____

15. It is predictable that those who favor secure borders and the deportation of people who are here illegally will be called racists, bigots, and extremists by Marxists.

T _____ F _____ U _____

16. Immigrants who came legally to America over the past century and a half did not come to create “a melting pot” or “diversity.” Instead, these were the by-products of their coming. They came because of economic opportunity, religious freedom, or to escape the burdens of the country of their origin—persecution, famine, and lack of freedom.

T _____ F _____ U _____

17. The notions of “diversity” and “cultural equality” were devised specifically as a means to introduce the idea of “multiculturalism.” “Multiculturalism” is a means toward diluting the value and accomplishments of Western culture and has Marxist roots. There has been no more generous or welcoming country in the world than the United States.

T _____ F _____ U _____

18. Most Americans believe in the importance of assimilation—speaking English, learning U.S. history, and serving in the military, for example. It is understood that learning English will enhance a person’s ability to succeed financially in the United States, which should be a goal.

T _____ F _____ U _____

19. The Berlin Wall was built to prevent escape rather than prevent invasion.

T _____ F _____ U _____

20. The wall between Israel and the Palestinians has succeeded in reducing suicide attacks by 75 percent.

T _____ F _____ U _____

The sounds of pages flipping and slapping were heard as the assembled readers consumed the questionnaire.

“This is a push poll!” Orb announced.

“It’s meant to be a provocative instrument, designed to stimulate inquiry. If you are undecided on any question, then you have to commit to finding out. There is no score for ignorance or even getting them all right.”

Parchment looked directly at Jason. “Now Jason, did you come up with this...ah...questionnaire?”

“Well, Kosmo and I worked on it together. I just reported what Mr. Stroyer said about the subject to Kosmo.”

“Kosmo?”

“Please proceed, Mr. Parchment”, said Vera.”

Stroyer piped in, “Not only this, Mrs. Casperson, but the kids started stuffing completed questionnaires under my door! The questions were checked true on almost every item.”

Vera paused and smiled briefly at Stroyer, looking down at her son.

Orb chimed in.

“Your son entangled himself in the Science Fair. He influenced the exhibits of the other kids. It’s clear that he has an agenda that confronts our goals here at this school.”

Orb’s voice had a cut to it, as if he had been personally wounded.

“I heard from two other mothers that they really enjoyed the fair. I know I had a nice time. I was surprised I wasn’t approached that evening about my son. I was led to believe he had no problems.”

Prince spoke next.

“The other day Jason went on about his notions of diversity. He pushed his own interpretation of di...ver...sity in the class, to the point where we ran out of time!”

“Just what is your idea about diversity there, Jason?”

Prince shot Parchment a poisonous glance.

“Well, I had help from Kosmo on this one, too. He says the Diversity gambit is just a way of shifting traditional thinking away from the individual to groups. You can size up the other person. You can find out to some extent whether you respect the other person, and whether you want to associate or not. The other person in a way is a record through his or her decisions. These define the person. Groupism, or identity politics, changes all that. And diversity is code for a bunch of groups.

“Groupism?”

“The individual tends to get lost in groups. Groups allow for their own identities, which used to be called stereotypes. Kosmo says you hardly ever hear that word anymore. If someone in a group becomes offended, then the whole group responds with outrage or a plea for a new set of rights. In order to have a victimized group, there has to be an oppressor. The oppressor is usually an individual. It takes a lot of courage for an individual to stand up to a group. Also, a group is more easily manipulated by politicians. All they have to know are the buttons that work best for the group, and they have advisers to tell them. According to group theory, I am a member of a group. I will grow up to be a member of the main offender group—white European males. But that’s not the main reason for groupism.”

Parchment looked back at Prince for a response.

“What, Jason, is the main reason?”

“Groups don’t have souls. They don’t regenerate. Individuals can overcome their victimization. Groups are forbidden to forgive.”

“Mr. Parchment, can we get on with it. I don’t know how all this fits into the moment.”

“Yes, Mr. Stroyer.”

“It’s our opinion, Mrs. Casperson, that your son might benefit from an evaluation by a professional. Sometimes a lot can be done for attention deficit problems, medications you know.”

“Do you believe my son has an attention deficit disorder?”

“Well, we’re not sure, Mrs. Casperson. We are suggesting that Jason’s behavior sometimes gets in the way of his learning, and the learning of others as well. We think for his sake he should be evaluated. Perhaps you could discuss this with your husband and get back to us. The school contracts with Dr. Greene, who is a specialist in adolescent behavior. Otherwise, we might have to bypass potential help and consider placing him in a special class. Also, there are medications, you know.”

Vera groaned audibly.

“It’s okay, Mother.”

“I certainly will discuss this with Nick...the boy’s father.”

“Thank you so much for coming, Mrs. Casperson.”

Vera rose and took Jason by his arm. She exited the conference room in a manner that left the teachers wondering whether it was they or her son who would feel the heat of her irritation. Jason turned around and said good-bye as she pulled him through the doorway. No words exchanged until they were satisfactorily belted into the Volvo.

“Jason, what did you think of that?”

“Well, first, I think they weren’t very nice to you. Second, I think our Quiz for the Inquisitive really got their attention.”

“Got their attention!”

“Yeah.”

“Do you think your father and I want you to have to see a psychiatrist?”

“It’s okay, Mother. One of my classmates sees Dr. Greene. She really likes him. She says you can talk to him. I’m looking forward to it. I think maybe I can learn something.”

“Oh, dear God.”

“Do you want to hear about profits, Mother?”

Vera just shook her head as she slowly pulled out of the school parking lot.

Sixteen

A Visit with Dr. Greene

Dr. Nathan Greene was a curiously small man of almost elfin proportion. He was an inch shorter than Jason, and his hairless head reflected the recessed lighting in his office. As he moved about, he appeared at times luminous. His smile conveyed kindness, and his voice was lower and softer than might be expected from such a tiny man. He looked literally like an old boy. His size and his manner were a balm for the easily intimidated.

Vera had pushed to have the appointment moved up. She didn’t want the issue of Jason to languish on the collective agenda of teachers who clearly had critical feelings. When Dr.

Greene appeared a few minutes after Jason's appointment, they felt both impressed and relieved. He presented himself in an entirely different way than the teachers had during Parchment's meeting. Jason had lightly termed that meeting, "The Inquisition."

One of the walls in the reception displayed a wealth of certificates attesting to board certifications and course attendance. A framed diploma from the Board of Adolescent Psychiatry hung next to its counterpart from the Board of Neurology. The opposing wall exhibited an array of prints. In the few minutes Jason sat waiting, his eye caught the Lion of Narnia, a Tolkein gallery and a montage from Star Wars—R2D2, C3PO, Luke, the Princess, and Hans Solo. A separate print showing Darth Vader surrounded by the imperial storm troopers. This completed the collection. A dry sink displaying a vintage Lionel engine under a Lucite cover also captured Jason's attention. Soothing strains of New Age music oozed from hidden speakers.

Greene thanked both parents for coming with their son. He asked them to make themselves at home while he and Jason chatted for thirty minutes or so. Afterward, he would have a word with them. There were plenty of magazines, and the secretary would be happy to find a beverage for them.

"Thanks, Dr. Greene. Son, just go along with the doctor and have a good talk."

"Sure, Dad."

As he was ushered in to the doctor's conversation room, Jason gave his parents a thumb's-up. This smaller interview room was fitted with a large desk, two upholstered chairs, and a plush carpet. It was a welcoming environment. Neutral tones were set off by a Sargent print of Lily, Lily Rose. Subtle track lighting could be adjusted from shadowy to bright with a handheld control.

"Please select a seat, Jason."

Jason selected the closer easy chair.

"Now, Jason, do you know why you are here today?"

"Some of my teachers have issues with me, and they think I either need a medication or special classes because they question my attention."

"Oh, really?"

"Surely, they spoke with you."

"Well, I needed to ask you. This is between you and me, now."

"I like that."

"I'm just going to ask you a few questions. These are standard, so just answer them as well as you can, and don't worry. Before we get started, I want you to try to remember this sequence, so please concentrate. Blue...four...truck...pig. Got it?"

"Yes."

"Did you choose that shirt to wear today?"

"I wanted to wear my Batmobile shirt, but Mother wanted me to wear this."

"Batmobile shirt?"

“My uncle Bruce’s car.”

Dr. Greene squinted as he smiled.

“Oh, wait. Is he the cruiser with the marquee on top?”

“That’s him. Did he give you one of his lessons on the highway?”

“Well, I must have missed that. Jason, do you think you have a problem with your attention?”

“No.”

“Do you get bored?”

“No. I sometimes can’t keep up with all the interesting subjects.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, like Mr. Stroyer’s History Club. When he says it’s a foolish war, he never mentions all the reasons we went to war. He never mentions how all those reasons have been proven correct. It’s almost as if he doesn’t want you to know about this. I also helped some of my class on Mr. Orb’s Science Fair. When we started to read together, we found out so much that didn’t seem to fit the teacher’s point of view. And every time you find one fact that doesn’t fit, it seems there are a whole lot more to discover.”

“I was told you have an interest in guns.”

“I told them that Kosmo had a few guns, and when I got old enough, I was going to buy a gun, so I could protect myself.”

“Kosmo. Who’s Kosmo?”

“He’s Artie’s uncle...well, his great uncle...I think. He showed his guns to me.”

“Artie. Who’s Artie?”

“Artie’s my best friend. He’s in real trouble.”

“How so?”

“I know he uses drugs.”

“What kind of drugs?”

“He told me about OxyContin. He keeps talking about ‘ice’ and his teeth look different, like the coating is coming off. His eyes look dark, and he’s been losing weight, I think.”

“Well, I’m sorry your friend has this problem.”

“I’m going to help him.”

“Oh, how?”

“Is that a model of a human brain on your desk?”

“Yes, it is.”

“Can I show you?”

“Yes.”

Jason reached over and carefully disassembled the plastic model. It was composed of twenty or so interlocking pieces of various colors. He carefully lifted away the cortex in pieces. "This bundle here, it allows the right brain to speak to the left brain, and vice versa, I think."

"The corpus callosum, yes. Two hundred million fibers."

"There are places in here for emotions, aren't there?"

"Yes."

"And I think there are whole libraries of associations and memories in the areas that I just lifted away. What we see and hear initially get recorded here, in this little hickey, before getting filed away in that library..."

"Yes. It's called the hippocampus. We have two, one on each side."

"And judgment and decision-making may be located mainly...here."

"Yes."

"And the senses have their special filing areas—vision here, things we've heard, over here...even stuff we can't find at first..."

"Well, yes."

"And there's movement and coordination."

"Jason, I am aware of the functions."

"I'm going to show Artie this model, or one like it. I'm going to tell him that his whole brain is going to have methamphetamine stamped in it, every part of it, unless we can get it scrubbed clean."

"I thought you said it was OxyContin."

"He told me that. I think it's Meth, or it's both. I've told Artie's mother about his problem, and she is looking for a detox center. He gets it at school, I'm sure. His mother has searched her cabinets for OxyContin. She's got an inventory on all the medicines. I told him I care about him. I don't want to watch his soul die. We are friends, and I told him I trust him. You can't be friends without trust."

"Why is Artie so important to you?"

"I'm trying to save myself. Sometimes I know I am pretty harsh. I'm also trying to help a girl in our class, but I can't tell you about that."

"Be careful. Jason, let me ask you...do you get along with the kids at school?"

"Yes."

"Every one?"

"Well, there's just one. He's a bully, but I think that will change."

"Has he ever hurt you?"

"Not yet. But he will."

“Are you so sure?”

“I know it’s coming.”

“You can see this coming?”

“Yes.”

“Do you hear voices or see things?”

“No, Doctor. I’m not psychotic. Let’s just say that my intuition tells me that we are headed for some trouble.”

Doctor Greene paused.

“Do you want a drink of water or soda?”

“No thank you, sir.”

“Now, Jason, I want you to repeat that sequence I gave you.”

“Blue, four, truck, pig...it’s all about dopamine, isn’t it?”

“Memory?”

“No, how methamphetamine injures the brain.”

“Yes. Jason, tell me how you feel about yourself.”

“Me?”

Doctor Greene nodded.

“Well, I know I’m different. But I tell myself we’re supposed to be different from one another. We’re supposed to be individuals, and if we’re individuals, we have to look different from one another. How many variations to a face can there be, with six billion of us.”

“Do you feel like you are an individual?”

“I’m not an ant. Sometimes I feel like they want us to be ants, all pulling for the purpose of the group. Oh, it’s fine if we join a group voluntarily, so that we can offer our individual strengths. Ants don’t join a group. They are a group.”

Jason paused as he seemed to see something.

“Dr. Greene, that’s what drugs do. They rob the addict of his or her individuality. In this case, you just join a group of victims and surrender your soul. You might as well be an ant.”

“Well, tell me, how are you different?”

“My ears.”

“Is that important?”

“I’m learning to wiggle them. Some of the kids think it’s funny. Mother doesn’t though.”

“You are good at deflecting questions through humor.”

“To answer your question, no. The shape or the size of a person’s ears aren’t important, so long as they work.”

“Then what’s important?”

“Well, besides not allowing yourself to become a victim, the most important thing is what you do. Kosmo says to know a person, watch what he or she does, over time. A person can fool you for a while, but all people do what they love. And what they love is who they are. And all people have faults and foibles. That’s why we shouldn’t worship any man.”

“Where did you learn that?”

“From Buffo’s little book.”

“Who’s Buffo?”

“He’s the bully at school. He says I have big ears.”

“Buffo gave you a book?”

“Yes, he loaned me a little Bible that his mother stuffed in his pocket. He gave it to me at school when it popped out onto the floor.”

“I can see, Jason, your grades in school are pretty good. Do you have any problems or questions about school?”

“No. I just hope they’re telling us the truth.”

“The truth?”

“About all the stuff they are teaching. I hope they’re doing the best they can do. Kosmo tells me things that are different sometimes. It’s like that candidate for president says...there seem to be two Americas. There is the America that can hold her head high and be proud. And there’s that America that slinks around making you feel bad all the time. Which is the true America? Kosmo is helping me to find out.”

“Do you feel confused at times?”

“Well, when I do, I work hard to correct it. I go and find out when things don’t make sense. I asked Mr. Orb about global warming...about how the scary models haven’t held up, and about cherry-picking cold years for the baseline to get the results you want, about the planets Mars and Neptune warming up, and about the growing list of scientists who are stepping off the global-warming train. He just doesn’t answer, or he repeats himself. It’s as though either he doesn’t understand or he wants everyone to buy something that isn’t true. But what if global warming is a big hoax? This is scaring the kids, Dr. Greene. And Stroyer...Mr. Stroyer, I mean. He tells the History Club that the president knew ahead of time that 9/11 was coming. I even heard him say that there were explosions inside the buildings. He even says that the reason the jihadists hate us is because we’re the bad guys. He’s our teacher, Dr. Greene. He’s supposed to be teaching the truth, isn’t he? When someone says there is no absolute truth, I have to ask myself, how does he or she know this? That sounds more like a belief, than a fact. When it comes to beliefs, we shouldn’t teach them as facts. We should debate them. That’s what I want to do. Facts

shouldn't be ignored, either. Should they be teaching beliefs in school? And should they be leaving out facts? Kosmo says the CMM leaves out facts all the time."

"The CMM?"

"The main media. Kosmo calls it the complicit main media. They don't tell you the whole story about the Fort Dix Six, because they like the idea of sanctuaries for jihadists posing as asylum seekers. They went right along with President Clinton in covering up the shoot-down of TWA 800 because the truth would have hurt his reelection chances. They showed zero interest in the fact that Commerce Secretary Ron Brown, in addition to having been on a plane that crashed, curiously had a bullet hole in his head. They have totally ignored Jayne Davis's story about the third terrorist in Oklahoma City, and they will never put the names Sandy Berger, Able Danger, and the 9/11 Commission in the same article. Do you know how many times President Clinton passed on Sudan's offer to yield up bin Laden?"

"You certainly seem to have the scoop. How have you come up with this stuff?"

"Kosmo is helping me. It's all in books and on the Net. These aren't just points of argument. These things are either true or false. They are not relatively true or relatively false. They are not beliefs. If they are true, then the American people have been lied to and treated as slaves, as if they don't deserve to know the truth. If they are false, then shame on the perpetrators of falsehood. President Lincoln made sure to describe ours as a government, for the people, as well as of, and by, the people."

"Well, yes...of course. But histories differ according to interpretation."

"Yes, but when you teach something and you have an agenda, you should declare it."

"I'll agree to that. Jason, do you have any trouble getting things done?"

"Not when I'm convinced doing it is worth it."

"Do you have any interest in going to college?"

"I wrote a college paper for Uncle Bruce. It was on a man named Marx."

"You do a lot of extra work for people."

"Uncle Bruce teaches biology in college, when he's not driving his Batmobile. We have a lot of good talks together."

"I'm sure he does other things, too."

"You know, I'm a little concerned about my father and my uncle Bruce. Ever since they went away to South America on a field trip something is different about them."

"Now that just might be important for you."

"In that model there, is there a center for love?"

"There are many types of love."

"Well, I guess I mean by love, those things that drive a person, from the inside. The things that eventually define a person."

“You may be getting close to the soul with that. The soul hasn’t been located just yet. Probably, the anatomist will be holding hands with the philosopher for that task.”

“I read that a man named Willis was the first to peel away the skull from the brain, so that it could be seen as a whole. This was about three hundred and fifty years ago. Before that, they just sawed across bone and brain and made a mess of it. Once they discovered this odd organ inside the head was connected to the rest of the body, they started thinking the soul might be located somewhere inside the brain. Before that, they thought it might be in the heart or the liver.”

“Yes, I’ve read about that, too.”

“Doctor, I know you can’t speak of other cases with me, but I have a question.”

“Yes.”

“If a person’s behavior changes, and there is reason to believe it’s due to a chemical, does that mean the chemical is a neurotransmitter?”

“It would have to be a neurotransmitter or something that would interfere with a neurotransmitter. But it would have to cross the blood brain barrier.”

“What’s that?”

“We’ll talk about it at your next appointment.”

“I was hoping I could come back to see you.”

“Sure, as long as you like. Did you think we were going to talk about your soul?”

“Well, no. But I heard my dad say to my mother every time he sees the doctor, he just hangs up his hat and his coat and his modesty, goes into the room and lets the doctor lay his hands on him and probe every orifice.”

“Orifice?”

“Well, yes. And today he told me that it’s different when someone probes your mind. It’s even more intimate than when you hand over your body to a strange doctor, he said.”

“That’s pretty wise of your father.”

“I’m learning about him.”

“Jason, just one last question. How do you feel about today’s interview?”

“It was fun. There’s so much to learn.”

Dr. Greene emerged from the interview room in a half hour with his patient leading the way. He spotted Nick and Vera sitting next to each other, now in a crowded reception. He invited them both into the small room, suggesting Jason wait in the reception.

“Professor and Mrs. Casperson, you have a most unusual son. I can assure you that he does not have any problem with attention. In fact, he exhibits the opposite...he’s almost hyper-attentive, and I wonder if his teachers can keep up with him. He has a robust sense of curiosity. He does seem to show a strong attachment to this...ah, Kosmo character.”

“Yes, that concerns us,”

“Actually, Doc, my wife more than myself.”

“Well, we’re not sure of Kosmo and his impact on Jason.”

“I don’t think it’s of any great concern, but if his grades suffer, you may have to investigate that relationship and perhaps curb it. He is open about it and seems balanced.”

“So, you think Jason is normal then.”

“Well, Jason is exceptional. I will write a report to Mr. Parchment, his principal. Meanwhile Jason asked if he could come back to the office. I told him that would be okay. Would that be okay with you?”

“Well, if you think it’s called for.”

“We’ll make a follow-up appointment. Good day to you both.”

“Thank you, Doctor, for evaluating Jason.”

Seventeen

Reading and Writing History

From his clandestine spot in the janitor’s closet, Jason had heard a lot. It had been difficult to write in the dark, so he’d made an effort to develop a mental list of questions while eavesdropping on the History Club. It seemed Mr. Stroyer preferred to “pick” at America’s faults and misadventures during his meetings with the students. He overlooked her good deeds and ideals. His whole vantage seemed slanted. Jason wasn’t the only kid who had sniffed out the same bias. Stroyer’s first name was David. This was why they called him, “D Stroyer.”

Jason really liked history, both from what he heard at school, which stimulated his inquiry, and from what Kosmo told him, which seemed more balanced. He set about writing a “paper” on history, as he had done with Marx. He knew there was a built-in variance in the report of history. People genuinely saw things differently. But in addition to this, the story was often slanted for a given effect. Kosmo called this “propaganda.” It was a term that sounded harsher than “spin.” Surely, this was not new. Caesar wrote The Gallic Wars as an unchallenged reporter, for his own advantage as both victorious general and aspiring politician. There was no news media as such then, but in the end Julius Caesar still got the dagger.

With the help of Kosmo and radio hosts in the New Media, including Mr. Q, Jason discovered that propaganda was rife in America. Sometimes it was painfully overt and sometimes it went “under the radar.”

“Current events” were the grist out of which the leavened product of history was produced. There were those who held to the theory of repetition. With constant and exaggerated hammering of a lie, distortion or exaggeration, a “current event” might be helped along its way toward becoming “history.” The constant drumbeat that there “were no weapons of mass destruction” eventually stuck, after several years of blind repeating by the CMM to an uninformed populace that took it as pabulum, even when virtually everyone in the government said the opposite and the evidence went the other way—Saddam had them, he used them, and he shipped them out to Syria on planes and trucks, as per General Sada’s account in Saddam’s Secrets. The repetition was so effective that

even the president of the United States started to repeat it! The aberration at the Abu Ghraib Prison, instead of a footnote would become a chapter, because of the deliberate exaggerations by the CMM.

The buzz and whirl surrounding events as they unfolded often dealt with the “Who?” “Why?” “When?” “What?” and “How?” of the journalist’s creed. But the recent polished form of manufactured news made these simpler questions more complicated, as depicted in *Wag the Dog*, Kosmo’s favorite film. “Why?” a thing happened, for instance, had to be expanded to “Why had it been chosen to be news?” or better, “How had it been made into the news?” Such questions might be applied, for instance, to the story of the elderly Martin couple who taped the Gingrich-Boehner conversation from their CB radio, then turned it over to Congressman McDermott who in turn gave it to the *New York Times*. Similarly, the same questions might be asked about the Berger theft and possible destruction of National Archive records that reflected Clinton policies, so important for the 9/11 Commission.

The “Who?” sometimes had to be traced back to deep and misty sources, often when records had been stolen, redacted or falsified. Information was sometimes withheld, such as the leak of Valerie Plame’s name by Deputy Secretary of State Armitage. Choosing the news to report was not the whole game. Choosing what news to create had been elevated to an art form, and Kosmo developed his Twelve Steps around the theme.

The notorious “Cover-Up” as a technique, so heartily injected into the public mind under the rubric “Watergate,” had been around at least since McCarthy’s time. Jason was familiar with Evan’s blockbuster *Blacklisted History*, an account of how McCarthy’s Red Scare in the 1950s was factually based. Evans spent six years scouring newly uncovered documents (Venona files, FBI records, informants’ testimony, and heretofore secured committee proceedings) to tell how Senator Tydings’ Committee, the Truman Justice Department, and the Eisenhower administration obfuscated the truth that hundreds of active Communists, improperly vetted and moved from venue to venue, had infiltrated the Executive Branch, the Departments of State and Treasury, the Army, and the Foreign Services. They had significant impact on policies in China, Yugoslavia, the Pacific and the USSR, which paid them, as did U.S. taxpayers.

The Cover-Up had also become commonplace during the 1990s. A whole host of “current events” in the late ’80s and ’90s had been only fleetingly covered, or ignored altogether by what Kosmo called the “Complicit Main Media.”

This was done of course, in an attempt to keep them from becoming history. The Clintons complained their’s was the most scrutinized presidency in history. This was the Law of Distraction in action. The list of people and events that should have been covered in more depth could fill a book. It included such names and events as Broderick, Lezner, Pallidino, Parks, Dale, Foster, Brown, Young, Huang, Chang, Trie, Schwartz, Mena, BCCI, Filegate, Rose Law Firm Records, Obstruction of Justice, Troopergate, Chinagate, The Grand Escalante Staircase, Eschelon, Carnivore, and on and on. The CMM had shunned half-decent coverage of these.

With the advent of The New Media, such as talk radio led by Limbaugh, TV’s Fox News (Murdoch) and the non-Gore Internet, the ability of the CMM, led by the Networks, NPR, and the liberal press to wool-over people had been countered and diminished. Fact

checking had actually increased and the potential for a more informed public had been enhanced.

Events once “current” either made it to the ash heap or the lexicon of history. Who decided? With the passage of time they might conveniently be forgotten or even “blacklisted.” On the contrary, they might become “history.” History always bore the imprint of the historian. Could “history” become a reality without the historian? If no one was in the forest to hear the falling tree, had it made a sound? If you attempted to determine both the momentum and position of an electron, you necessarily disturbed what you were attempting to measure...hopefully, it was different for a historian, who must believe first that “something happened,” and that it was possible to find out what without disturbing the facts.

There were the slanters like Stroyer, and there were the straight-out revisionists, like those who saw some of our Founders as white European slave-owning oppressors. For this type of historian who sits perched in his own time, to have owned slaves meant they had no redeeming qualities.

There were those who looked at events from today’s frame of reference when making a judgment. If a historian chose to step into the area of judgment, a perfectly human thing to try, he or she was best served to employ “historical perspective.” They must make their mind jump back to the time at hand. As we posit ourselves in the present, we must ask what was known and what was not known at the time? Known by whom? If an event happened and nobody knew about it, might it eventually become history? Could we share the perspective of what our historical person knew when he or she acted?

The assassination of President Kennedy occurred in November 1963. It was history to Jason, but for his parents, it was a memory, and a vivid one at that. About 70 percent of Americans who lived then became skeptical, even cynical, about the official version they had been told. As the evidence and testimony had been reexamined, many Americans were upset that the people, whose president was taken from them and whose rights were so carefully addressed in the Constitution, had not been dealt with in an honest fashion. Someone knew the facts, and in this case it wasn’t O. J. Jason often fancied a machine that could be held up to a person’s head, and all that a person knew about a given event could be extracted and written down. A knowledge extractor. What a time and money saver that would be!

There were those who denied the existence of the Main Stream Media, and certainly a complicit media. Larry King was one. He was like J. Edgar Hoover when it came to organized crime...“What organized crime?” Beck once asked King who he would like to interview that he hadn’t after fifty years in the business. King answered...Fidel Castro. “How so?” asked Beck. “Because if you’ve been in power for fifty years, you must be doing something right,” was King’s response. Huh? Beck mercifully left it there, but the question someday might be asked of Larry: Do you suppose if 90 percent of the writers and reporters in the media vote for and contribute to one political party, it might have an impact on their reporting? Or, perhaps a question like: Do you suppose the prisons, the torture, the famine, the dumping of criminals...things like these...may play a role in Castro’s holding on for so long? King seemed eerily detached from reality. Perhaps that was his forte. Was it his age? Was it simply an uncanny degree of naiveté?

It had been estimated that 90 percent of those who worked for CNN, CBS, NBC, NPR, ABC, and most of the big city newspapers, voted for Democrats. Let's have a look at the New York Times. The New York Times had always had a liberal bent, but under its CEO and publisher, Sulzberger, it had engaged in the full-fledged exercise of propaganda for the sake of helping one political party and hurting the other, to hell with the interests of the country.

Equally important as its liberal bias was what it didn't find front-page newsworthy or newsworthy at all—things like Reid's shady land deals, Jefferson's attempt to freeze bribe money, Al Gore III's problems with drugs, the criminal records of Clinton's pardons, the huge influx of revenue into the federal government as a result of the president's tax-rate cuts, low unemployment coupled with low inflation, the Live Earth concert flop, the growth of Himalayan glaciers, the success of the Surge in Iraq (until it became an undeniable reality), the all-time low popularity rating of Congress, the loss of Kilimanjaro's snow due to sublimation (not melting), the increase in polar bear population, or the kidnapping of a total now of seventy Americans across the Texas border at Laredo. Of course, there would be an article or two that was on target, for the purpose of "plausible deniability." The ACLU would occasionally defend a Christian for the same reason. The "Gray Lady's" circulation drop was probably due as much to the bias in leaving stuff out, than to the bias of propaganda. If you left stuff out, some people would think it didn't happen.

When people tapped into the alternatives, they were surprised. They said things like, "I didn't know the Vikings grew grapes on Greenland a thousand years ago." They find out that Mars, Jupiter, and Neptune were getting warmer, in addition to Earth. They were surprised to hear Mr. Q report that some guy named Howard (was it Dean?) called the governor of Kansas after the tornado blew away the town of Greensburg and instructed her not to call the president yet. While people were crawling around trying to find their children, the party hacks needed time to figure how to play the tragedy to their advantage. All those potential rescue vehicles were in Iraq! When Mr. Q broadcast the story, he received threats of a lawsuit from the DNC. They were hollow threats, because he had evidence to support his claim and no suits were filed.

By leaving out, or de-emphasizing real-world stories, the way was left open to shape, to sway, to write without a sense of proportion. Consider the spate of articles about supposedly marginal practices at Guantanamo Bay, despite the fact that some of those released wanted to come back, that many were gaining weight, no Qur'ans had been flushed, and a Congressional mission found no abuse. Yet, the CMM glossed over or ignored the beheadings, live skinnings, the roasting and serving of children to their parents by our grizzly enemies in the Mid East. America's enemies at home were attempting to produce another Viet Nam in Iraq and bring about surrender, on President Bush's time. This time they would fail, as they had partnered with the wrong side of history and because the facts of our current success in the Battle for Iraq in the War against Islamic Fascists, were emerging.

Unlike the government-controlled media in Communist states, America still had a free market system, which permitted those who chose to dig deeper for the facts, to do so. A well-informed society was more immune to the effects of propaganda. Given this, Jason wondered if there might be an agenda to decrease the level of education and sense of

inquiry, by supplying simplistic and frankly wrong answers, as Kosmo had suggested. The New Media was a thorn in the side of the Complicit Main Media. The emergence and success of this alternative media had injected life back into the free access to information. It boded well, unless we got an ELP for president, who likely would reintroduce the Fairness Doctrine which President Reagan rescinded in 1987.

The so-called Fairness Doctrine was one of those many things that sounded good, but had for its primary purpose to stifle the free market access to news. Although the New Media tended to tap into opposite viewpoints more than the CMM, the requirement of providing equal time for the opposite view, at the risk of losing a license, was a different thing. It was unfair, coercive and ran counter to the free market system that had been so successful in every other sphere of our life when tried. The Fairness Doctrine artificially fortified modern liberal thinking that, if left alone, couldn't compete in the marketplace of ideas. The Fairness Doctrine was kind of a head start program for bad ideas. If implemented, it would take us one step closer to the Soviet model of state-controlled "news." Of course, relativists would claim there was no such thing as the objective reporting of history, or of events, current or otherwise. Unfortunately, there were monumental events in America's history that might be contorted to support such a view, not the least of which was the murder of JFK—pick your version. A more dated event was what historian Ellis called the most famous duel in America's history. Despite the fact that four men were present when Burr mortally wounded Hamilton (the combatants and their seconds), there was no agreement on the facts surrounding the two pistol volleys separated by a few seconds that occurred in July, 1804 on a ledge above the Hudson. There were the Burrists who claimed Hamilton fired first and missed. There were the Hamiltonians who claimed Burr fired first and hit Hamilton in the side, causing Hamilton's pistol to discharge as a reaction, despite the time between shots. To confuse further, Hamilton cautioned his second to be careful with the pistol, thinking it hadn't fired. Contrary to the stage play with many endings, depending on how the audience voted, something happened at Weehawken, New Jersey that morning. Sometimes, in the jumble of advocacy and perceptual difference, that something became a matter for dispute. Thanks be to DNA identification! To some, Everyview was the multicultural solution. In Everyview, all views were equally valid (except those that went against the agenda). Do such relativists teach in journalism programs? Okay, then, if that were the case, are they required to read Atlas Shrugged in addition to The Prince?

Still, Jason was haunted by the notion that there was a set of facts which best described an event, whether they could be totally assembled or not. Sometimes one had to connect the dots the best way possible, do the best with the evidence at hand. Such was the backbone of our jurisprudence system, for the sake of concluding "beyond a reasonable doubt". Although Jason was intensely skeptical, he was not a cynic.

Jason recently watched a film series that was described as the "Great American Story." It was about the life of Abraham Lincoln and was based on "Lincoln's statements and the statements of those who knew him." The events were said to have "actually happened." As Jason watched it, he was impressed with its seeming credibility. The quality of the production spoke for itself. This underwrote another maxim for him. When you listened to someone or something, you must also judge the source and the reason for the

expression...of the film, the book, the lecture, the broadcast, the slot on TV or radio. In other words, not all sources were credible, if you were looking for the truth.

It was all about those contexts again, and agendas often came into play. It wasn't enough to know the story, you had to know who produced it, and why, as well. Michael Moore in his movie *Rodger and Me* highlighted the alleged inaccessibility of GM CEO, Rodger Smith. In fact, Moore had two interviews with Smith that he failed to acknowledge. Moore's movies dealt with real people, but he rationalized his misrepresentations by saying we lived in a fictitious world. His followers apparently had a low requirement for credibility. Moore was a relativist. Fiction and reality blurred in his mind, and the result was *Fahrenheit 9/11*, *Bowling for Columbine*, *Sicko* and more of the same. For those who still believed that there was a reality out there, and that finding it in the name of truth was a worthy venture, "history" should be important and tampering with it as it unfolded (propaganda) or after it had aged (revisionism) was a disservice to those attempting to discover and understand it.

Sometimes perceiving the recurrent lessons of history could be an exercise in subtlety. The sixteenth century gave the world Galileo Galilei. His love of Euclid led him to the study of mathematics, after a fling with medicine in Pisa. Perhaps his first encounter with the flaws of Aristotle occurred when he experimented with falling bodies. The latter said that heavier things fall faster than lighter ones. Galileo's experiments showed the effect of air resistance, but spoke for constant rate of fall, regardless of mass. This made him unpopular in Pisa, at age twenty-one. He ultimately became known as the founder of experimental physics, but it was his telescope that made him famous.

In 1609 he was distracted by a new Dutch curiosity called a spyglass. He immediately saw its military role. He set upon improving the prototype. He ground his own lenses from Venetian glass and improved magnification by a factor of twenty, over unaided eyesight. The doges (dukes) of Venice could now detect and monitor the approach of a ship well ahead of its arrival, a true advantage for a seafaring empire.

Galileo naturally turned the instrument to the heavens—the sun, the moon and the stars—and the world changed, particularly his. In time, he described the roughness of the moon's surface and its phases. He described the fixed stars (points of light, without borders) and "wandering stars" (the planets Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn). His discovery of "four planets"—really moons—revolving around Jupiter inspired his book *The Starry Messenger*. He gave a copy of the book, along with a telescope, to the Medici prince and supporter, Cosimo II. The phases of Venus argued for motion of at least one planet around the sun. His discovery of sunspots was later attributed by critics to lens defects.

Galileo's discoveries secured his position and brought him a higher income as philosopher in the Medici court. He manufactured as many telescopes as he could and published in the vernacular, instead of Latin, to spread the word as widely as possible. He was mindful of Copernicus's more guarded work on orbital periods of the planets, which underpinned the concept of heliocentrism—the idea that the sun stood at the center of the universe (the solar system). The more measured Copernicus published *De revolutionibus* shortly before his demise. Aristotle, and later the Ptolemies, held pre-telescope ideas. They held that the heavens were immutable (didn't change), the celestial bodies were

spheres (smooth, not pocked, mountainous, rifted or spotted), and the earth not only didn't move, it was located at the center of the universe. This was the teaching of the Church.

The Edict of 1616 declared the Copernican system a heresy. None of Galileo's books were blacklisted, though those of others were. Cardinal Bellarmine warned Galileo that Copernican notions were contrary to Holy Scripture and that he must "not hold, teach or defend them in any way." Should he fail, he would receive an injunction, and should he fail to heed the injunction, he would be imprisoned. Pope Urban VIII's initial warmth to Galileo cooled.

Galileo never "broke" from the Church and confined his writings to scientific inquiry. His writings *On Sunspots* and *Dialogue on the Two Chief World Systems*, Ptolemaic and Copernican were seen as a violation of his injunction in 1616, seventeen years before his trial in 1633. He stated he had no recollection of an injunction, and some historians felt the document had been planted in his file. The *Dialogue* was blacklisted, and he was forced to recant his position. In lieu of imprisonment, he was allowed to live out his life under house arrest in Arcetri where his two daughters were cloistered.

With Kosmo's help, Jason saw a reflection of Galileo's story in modern times. Since the fall of the USSR and its Communism, it hadn't taken long for the notion of "global warming" to become a threat. As recently as the 1970s and 1980s many were concerned about global cooling.

Jason's work on the Science Fair at school put him in this frame of mind. He was impressed by the total lack of flexibility, indeed the un-American stance of the proponents, the pushers, of this idea that man was warming the earth. He'd heard the edicts of Al Gore, and Jason's tenth grade class had been unceremoniously trotted out to see *An Inconvenient Truth*. Joseph P. Kennedy II recently called the top three radio-talk personalities "traitors" for their views on the subject. That would have been bad, except that traitors today were coddled. One trip on Mr. Kennedy's jet put as much carbon in the air as a year's worth of driving for the average Joe. These radio guys were just reporting what the Warm Alarmists wouldn't...namely that the "jury is still out" on global warming, and the whole process of jumping to conclusions may be drastically flawed. The models, the baselines, data gathering, conflicts of interest because of grants, and refusal to tolerate the views of others, brought to mind The Inquisition, and the mistreatment of Galileo.

Jason thought, Gee, we have a whole generation of school children who have not only been taught that global warming is occurring, but more recently, is due to man. In parts of England, it had been decided to dispense with "meaningless subjects" such as Churchill, Stalin, Hitler, Gandhi, Elizabeth I, Henry VIII, for instance, and focus on "relevant issues" like global warming. This would put history into the Black Market, which just might be a good thing. Weathermen and weatherwomen found their jobs in jeopardy in the U.S. if they dared waver from the Alarmist line. It took a principled scientist to thumb his or her nose at a grant and do the right thing. Might it be, as Singer implied, in a few years we would all be saying, "It's the sun, stupid!" It took over three hundred and fifty years for Pope John Paul II to apologize for the Church's treatment of Galileo.

Sometimes people set their energies to work right after an event. Did they write for catharsis? Did they want to set the record straight while the coals of controversy were still simmering? Did they just want their view to at least be on hand for some future reader or writer? Sammon, in *At Any Cost* wrote about the scheme to take Florida in the 2000 presidential election. He documents how the CMM reported early the close tallies that favored Gore, and held back reporting the results that favored Bush. This had the effect of discouraging voters in the earlier time zone in western Florida. Also, efforts were made to disqualify the military vote, and people were hired to question the elderly so as to inject doubt about the “butterfly” ballot. This led to a close vote, but just missed the intended theft of the election. This then led to a Supreme Court decision, which favored the real winner. A lot of hullabaloo followed, fueled by wild exhortations of the Sharpton variety and soft monotonous restatements of the NPR kind, but the facts were spelled out by the credible Mr. Sammon.

Then there was General Sada’s book *Saddam’s Secrets* in which he described personally witnessing the transportation of WMDs out of Iraq. Why would he write this book to tell an inaccurate account of the WMDs? Writing the book was a risky thing to do. Jason read the book and took General Sada as a credible man.

There was a lot of “missing history,” and some of it was recoverable. It would dribble in, eventually. An example of this was the bullet hole in Commerce Secretary Ron Brown’s head. Jason knew this because Kosmo heard Kathleen Janosky describe this on Mr. Q’s talk radio show. Kathleen Janosky was the photographer at the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology, where they took Mr. Brown’s body after the plane crash in Yugoslavia. While taking pictures of the X-rays of Mr. Brown’s skull, she noted a circular hole around 45 caliber in width, in the back of his head. It was accompanied by the characteristic lead “snowstorm” inside the cranium.

When she brought attention to it, film was confiscated, X-rays were retaken with less voltage, and she was quarantined. Jason asked himself, as with Sada, why would this person jeopardize herself if the story was false?

Stroyer was always talking about American imperialism. Jason vowed to himself his next “paper” would be about America and her imperialism. He would first make a study of imperialism in general, and then focus on America. Stroyer was always talking about the Native Americans, slavery, and America’s wars. Jason thought of the temptation to just take what was told to him at face value. It would be much easier that way. Then he would have time left over to do other things. But Jason soon discovered, this was what he really wanted to do. Then he thought of sheep. Then, he thought of slavery. Finally, he thought of Man. He chortled to himself: “Hey, hey...Ho, ho...West Civ...You Stole the Show!”

He would be sure to post his ditty outside Stroyer’s classroom.

Eighteen

Going Camping

On the heels of the meeting with Dr. Greene, Jason’s parents searched their own memories from that period of their lives, and found them fragmentary. They were composed of times of fun, times that weren’t fun but from which they grew, and a not-forgotten humiliation or two. Although Greene’s persona and assessment were reassuring

to her, Vera still felt the sting of Parchment's meeting. Her discovery of Kosmo's Twelve Steps in her son's bedroom, though of interest, left her inquisitive about the mental whirlwind that must be inside Jason's head.

In this state of dismay, she suggested to Nick they take some family time together and go on a weekend camping trip. It wouldn't be long before Jason reached that turning point in a parent-child relationship known as "college." Their relationship would never be the same after that. This weekend would be a time to be together, a time their boy hopefully would remember with fondness. They did not hesitate to invite Bruce and Juliet.

The small caravan moved northwest from the edge of the Piedmont into New Jersey's lesser-known Highlands. The Caspersons were in the lead. Bruce and Juliet trailed a few cars behind. Nick caught the image of the Batmobile from time to time in his rearview mirror. It would take a couple of hours to drive up Route 15 past Lake Hopatcong to the mountains north of the Water Gap. Vera had helped her husband pack her wagon snugly with pup tents, sleeping bags, charcoal, a big frying pan and griddle, cheap plastic plates, rain ponchos, folding chairs, a football, a Frisbee, and some warm clothes for the mountain air. The coolers were stocked with ground beef, franks, fresh fruit, eggs and bacon, lettuce, tomatoes, juices and beer, plus their private necessities. Nick brought his camera, compass and topographic maps. Vera planned to finish *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*. Nick hoped to get into a book about underappreciated explorer John Rae and his discovery of the fate of the Franklin Expedition. His thoughts had turned toward the explorers lately, a fascination he'd had as a youth. Vera noticed this and thought it was simply a spin-off from the Brazil expedition.

Bruce brought a couple of fly rods and an assortment of dry flies. He promised fresh trout for Sunday's breakfast. Not a camper, Juliet brought a small case with clothing options and a "dilly bag" flush with sun screen, insect repellent, a hairbrush, fragrances and personal items. She also brought along one of her classical guitars. She left her custom-made Spanish instrument safely locked up at home.

For Bruce, the weekend promised adventure and feminine companionship, something he sorely missed on his junket with Nick. Among his several anticipations was hearing this fascinating woman play her guitar. She had carefully rationed this part of herself.

Still, the recent revelation of the tattoo was on his mind. It was embarrassing on its own, but more disturbing still was to have it discovered in that manner and be totally unaware of its presence. Its origin was to him as mysterious as was her growing trust in him. Juliet sensed his preoccupation and chose not to disturb it. She was a step ahead of him much of the time, which certainly fit with his theories. In his quest for answers, his mind naturally turned to the Amazon. He could account for all but one day of that trip. The black hole in his recollection was that period that immediately followed their discovery of the crater.

"Did you ask Artie if he wanted to come along, Jason? You know he is always invited."

"Artie told me he was hanging around home because his uncle wasn't feeling well, and his mother was out."

"That's too bad...you mean Kosmo?"

She shot a quick glance in Nick's direction.

“Yes. He’s been staying up, not sleeping, smoking, reading, listening to the radio...not taking care of himself.”

Nick and Vera gazed out at the increasingly rural setting.

“Odd that Mrs. McFee wouldn’t look after her uncle.”

“She’s out looking for places for...”

“What, Son? Are they planning a move?”

“I think I wasn’t supposed to say anything. She’s looking for a treatment center.”

“Well then...I hope her uncle gets better. How is the play at school coming? Is it ready for performance?”

“The push is on. It opens next Friday.”

“Makes things hectic to have the high school play so close to graduation.”

“It’s a busy time anyway. The kids are all revved up and can’t study anyway.”

“Hope that isn’t the case with you.”

“No, Mother.”

“Hey, I think Bruce just pulled over,” Nick interrupted, as he craned his head up to the rearview mirror. His view was partially obscured by several cars between.

“I can see blinking reds and blues, but there’s something else. Oh, wouldn’t you know. I think he had his marquee in the teaching mode. He must have been signaling one of his highway lessons to another driver...maybe a forgotten turn signal or a tailgater. He’s going to have to come up with something good for that highway patrolman. We’ll just pull over and wait for him, while we put on some music.”

Nick reached for a CD, while Vera thumbed through a news magazine. Jason asked if he could go back and help Bruce. Nick replied that Bruce would be along before Jason could make the trek.

In a minute, the Batmobile whooshed onto the asphalt pull-off in front of them. In a blink, Bruce was at Nick’s window.

“The trooper was curious about my marquee. In fact, he said he’d never seen a car like it. I asked him what specific motor code I violated. After he checked me out on the computer, he came back and wrote me out a warning, something about distracting other drivers. I prayed he wouldn’t spot the bank of headlights behind the retractable grill.”

“I’ll bet there’s a code for that.”

“Well, I can take the lead if you wish, Professor.”

Nick quickly glanced at Juliet who sat expressionless.

“No, Bomber. I can take point. Watch yourself.”

Bruce shot a thumbs-up as he retreated to the Batmobile. Juliet waved to them through the back window and Vera returned the gesture.

“I don’t think he heard you when you said you would lead. Stay with him, if you can.”

“You should see all the gadgets Uncle Bruce has in that thing! It’s fun to ride with him.”

“Yes, Jason, we can imagine,” his mother nodded.

“One of these days he going to try to teach the wrong dude,” admonished Nick.

“He has bulletproof glass.”

Vera looked at Jason with a startled expression.

Traffic was surprisingly light for a sunny Saturday afternoon. On weekends, coastal New Jerseyans not bound for the beach often flooded the highways west in search of a change in pace and scenery. A paradise of lakes, forests and mountains adorned the northeast sector of the state, all the way into Pennsylvania. The Pocono’s, Lake Wallenpaupack and hundreds of square miles of remote parklands provided a playground for “Freshies,” as Bruce saw himself. “Salties” sought the shore with their boats in tow amidst dreams of running blues and stripers. “Salties” maintained almost instant contact with one another when the fish migrated. Still others made their way to the casinos. Bruce called them the “Oilers.” No one asked why he called them this.

“Should I tailgate him with my high beams on?”

“Don’t you dare,” admonished Vera, looking up briefly from her magazine.

Nick smiled. It was all he could do to keep up with Bruce, who had resumed a speed exactly fourteen mph above the posted limit.

They passed placid meadows and dairy farms. The sweet air of spring poured through the open window. Smoke from the mills and factories to the south generally blew out to sea. The ambience of recently fertilized fields periodically jolted them. Apple orchards and meadows dotted with dairy cows and wildflowers moved by as their kaleidoscope slowly turned. Mixed forests of hardwoods and conifers gradually came to view and reminded Nick of the scouts. Nick asked his wife if she remembered the weekend they all went up to the Promised Land and got lost. How could she forget? Jason was lost in the backseat with his electronic game.

Within an hour, and after resuming the lead, they were on a macadam switchback that took them into the Kittatinny Mountains. Waterfalls were still swollen from the midweek rains and in some places splashed out onto the road. After they arrived at the campground office, they all got out and stretched their legs. Nick registered and paid the fee, knowing Bruce would reconcile later. After picking up a few bundles of cordwood, the ranger gave them a printout of warnings on climbing and loose rock, fire care, permissible swimming spots, use of the privies, animal-proofed trash cans, and behavior of rabid animals. Nothing new here, for old scouts.

The ranger reminded them of black bear mother sows and their cubs, and offered cowbells to the hikers. Nick and Bruce both appreciated this could be a danger surpassing any they had in Brazil, except maybe the bushmaster episode. Vera surmised some naïve camper must have wandered between a mother and her cubs. The fire danger was marked as a three on a scale of five.

Their campsite was situated in a stand of birch. The smell of a wood fire was in the air but couldn’t be pinpointed. Essentially, they were alone. The babble of a nearby stream

added a nice touch to their weekend idyll. The stream dropped into a small canyon, and by and by, found the Delaware.

After parking, Bruce and Juliet were off to check out the waterfall. This was the second time Nick and Vera had seen Juliet and they liked her easy manner and hearty spirit. She seemed sincere. They knew Bruce would be wary of pretense. They both perceived a subtle change in Bruce and had talked about it. They had met several of his lady friends in the past as they came and went. Bruce was especially boyish in her presence.

Jason worked methodically with his tent. Refusing aid, he finally secured it by himself. After looking around he told his mother he thought Taser would have really liked the camp, too. Vera assured her son that their dog was almost as happy to be in a kennel for the weekend. Jason wanted to know how she knew that. Nick started a wood fire and timed the charcoal grill to accommodate the return of the explorers. An hour later the two emerged from the forest, laughing and holding hands.

“Hail there. Have you completed your survey, Colonel Washington?”

“I believe when Washington got to New Jersey he was a general, sir. We did see signs of a Delaware war party.”

“Probably hunting down the tricksters that ran the Walking Purchase,” retorted Jason.

“The Walking Purchase?”

“Jason is referring to some early treachery, pulled off by William Penn’s relatives on the Delaware people, Juliet.”

“Sometimes your son scares me with what he comes up with,” Vera said, looking at Nick.

Bruce informed Nick it was the allure of the sizzling burgers and franks that pulled them from the woods. Bruce walked over to inspect Jason’s tent while Nick tended the barbeque.

Juliet and Vera prepared the heavy pine picnic table that was located in the center of camp. They decorated it with a red-checkered tablecloth. They conversed in quick semi-silent talk the way women do. Soon, the table was replete with plastic cups, dinnerware, stainless knives and forks, condiments, buns and napkins. They magically created a vegetable salad. A bowl of chips appeared. As they tidied up the table, their men appeared. Nick carried a plate filled with grilled franks and burgers. Bruce gently covered Jason’s neck with his hand as they converged on the feast before them. Their appetites had been stimulated by the trip, the making of camp, and now, the smell of charcoal and beef in the smoke from the grill.

The early evening air was cooler as dusk was defined. Some clouds appeared in the west. Bruce served as wine steward, requesting preferences for white or red. Jason held out an empty cup. Without hesitation they passed the food and no one was shy with portions.

“These burgers are all medium to medium well, and the franks have been sterilized, folks. I can cook ’em harder if you like.”

No one fussed, as they hummed their approval.

“Wait! We must have a round of toasts.”

With this announcement, Nick stood and looked around the small assembly, holding his plastic cup of wine in front of him.

“I propose this toast to our togetherness at this lovely moment in this pristine place. God bless this place. God Bless America.”

“And I toast the insectivorous bats who will make our stay more enjoyable.”

“Oh, Bruce,” Juliet sighed as she glanced at Vera.

“It’s something they do, Juliet. They call it the contest of provocative toasts, or something like that. They started it in high school. And that was before Monte Python.”

“I propose a toast to the eventual discovery of the biological in space.”

Bruce retorted, “And I toast the aliens who undoubtedly are mingling with us now. Hail to Roswell!”

“Speaking of New Mexico, here’s to Los Alamos and Oppie’s grand martinis.”

Vera was slightly astonished. This was as improbable an utterance for her husband as was “God Bless America.”

“All right folks. It’s time to take nourishment,” Nick concluded.

A slight breeze blew across the camp.

Both women spoke of going for their sweaters just as the breeze hushed.

They all laughed.

“And here’s to President Reagan and his grand ash heap of history.”

“Jason, where did you get that?” Vera interrogated.

“Uncle Kosmo said it. He practically worships President Reagan.”

“Kosmo again. Kosmo this, Kosmo that. Well, he’s not your uncle.”

Looking squarely at Vera, Jason retorted “He’s Artie’s uncle and he said—”

Bruce interrupted, “Professor, once again your grilling skills came through. These vittles are as good as that peccary you grilled downunder.”

“Ah, yes. Tai helped with that. That boy was good with his spear, wasn’t he? Stanley...well...Betta wasn’t much of a slouch either. Those guys knew about parallax without knowing about the physics, if you get my drift.”

As good meals slaked stout appetites, the banter came to a halt. The breeze kicked up again and the ladies departed for their sweaters. They broke the silence with their return.

“There’s more food...and there are cookies in that bag.”

“Uncle Bruce, please pass the cookies.”

Nick got up and tossed some more wood on the fire. A sharp gust of wind carried the sparks in the opposite direction. Nick followed them cautiously as they extinguished themselves in the air.

Bruce looked at Nick intently as he resumed his place.

“Have you heard from the lab in Houston, Professor?”

“They sent me a preliminary report. They wondered why the specimen hadn’t been frozen. Can you imagine? Trying to take a refrigerant into that forest, encasing the specimen, and getting it out frozen? Anyway, there was no fossil evidence, and the analysis so far looks pretty mundane. Iron—octahedrite. From the spectro, no organics.”

“Just what we predicted. Right, Juliet?” Vera asked puckishly.

“You know, Bruce, something’s been on my mind. I kept a pretty vigorous journal, but there is a time frame missing.”

“Wait, let me guess. The day following our find?”

“Precisely. I can recall clearly speeding down the river all night and the next day, with Jaro at the helm, pushing like crazy.”

“He sure was a good guide and hunter. You had to get used to his reserve though. He became more incommunicative when we were in the forest. Did you notice? He said nothing on the way back, at least that I can recall. At first I thought it was just that he knew we had to get back because of our schedules. But I’ve become curious, almost haunted there’s something more. You know what I mean?”

“Yes. And, do you remember Betta at all, on the trip back? Was he with us? Tai was, I know.”

“I’m not the journal writer you are, but mine too skips any note of the trip from the meteorite strike back to the boat. My memories are vague. It’s bothered me.”

“We need to talk about this and put our heads together. Right now, I offer a toast to a great if not mysterious adventure.”

“Roger to that, Bruce. Have you picked out your fishin’ hole for tomorrow morning?”

“Spotted some beauties, didn’t we, Juliet? In a pool, up there, in that ravine,” Bruce said, as he pointed.

Vera and Juliet had been following the conversation with great interest. Roused from her concentration, Juliet responded, “Yes...oh, yes...the trout. Beauties. Rainbow, didn’t you say?”

“You should have seen Bruce fishing for bats down there in that jungle, Juliet.”

“I would have liked to have been there, at least for some of the time.”

Bruce looked over. “That would have been nice.”

Vera smiled. She too was pre-occupied with the little tid-bit of conversation that passed between the two men. The memory lapse was disturbing enough, but the non’chalance about it was even more of a concern. She would track it later.

Nick stood up.

“I’d like to toast Throckmorton and his new push—The Gender Studies Program!”

Vera and Juliet looked at each other expectantly.

“Professor, save your toasts for tomorrow.”

Vera shot a glance at the wine bottles. They were each half empty.

By this time Jason had pulled up one of the portable chairs next to the fire and was roasting a marshmallow on a green stick.

“Come on, Vera, let’s clean up.”

“Good idea. I’d like to get some reading in before it gets too dark.” Vera looked into her husband’s eyes as she rose.

Juliet went to the Batmobile and retrieved her guitar. She sat on a blanket upwind from the trailing smoke, while tuning it. Bruce sat on the grass across from her, defying the occasional sparks and shifting wisps from the fire. Vera smiled at Juliet momentarily, breaking from her read. She looked off toward the trees and noted Nick standing at the edge, binoculars in hand, trying to get her attention. He silently signaled her that he was going to have a look at the gorge beyond the camp. She signaled back something to the effect that he should confine himself to the viewing—no climbing. Sixteen years of marriage had forged this understanding in pantomime.

The familiar strains of Yesterday floated across the camp. Juliet played with ease and her musicianship became instantly apparent. Though he knew she played and gave lessons, she had kept the depth of her artistry from Bruce to this point. Bruce moved. He leaned back against a tree and watched her. Her concert next took them to Danny Boy. She played with such facility that it engendered a sense of ease in her listeners. To Bruce, she was a virtuoso. She sang the reprise and her alto voice was rich and sonorous, as her speech was soothing. She finished and proceeded to retune her guitar. Vera applauded.

“The Londonderry Air was exquisite, Juliet.”

“Thank you, Vera.”

“Was that song about a London Derriere?”

“Just ignore him for that, Juliet.”

“I’m learning,” Juliet bounced back, playfully rolling her eyes. “Here’s one for you, Bruce.”

She played a stanza of Sweet Betsy from Pike and they all had a hoot.

At this point Vera put her book down. Intently studying the campfire, Jason listened to the music and conversation together.

“Where did you study, Juliet?”

“At the Curtis.”

“Oh...yes.”

Vera assured Juliet of her gifts as she cast a glance over at Bruce. He looked like he had discovered an angel. As musicians did, Juliet paused and drew within herself. The chatter receded, respectfully. After a half-minute she softly announced, “Two Cantatas from Bach,” then proceeded to play the Arioso and How Joyful Is My Heart, in a medley. When she concluded they heard the rumble of thunder in the distance.

Bruce said it was God applauding.

“That’s as good as catching bats, isn’t it, Bruce?” asked Vera.

“Tis better than catching any simple mammal. Ah, poor fellows, deprived so the organs for that special sounding, they’ll never know such aerial bliss, they just as soon a serpent’s hiss, amidst such vibes they go on found’ring, and amiss.”

“Where did you learn that?”

“Delightful, my dear. Now I must go and find my partner out there in the midst, before the storm strikes.”

Bruce jumped up and started for the forest where he had last seen Nick. Juliet sat in amazement.

“Bruce has always had that ability, since high school...to come up with doggerel like that.”

“He’s a poet. It’s such a rush. Were you in high school with him?”

“We were all in school together, back in Pennsylvania. I was a year behind them. He was so popular and the girls swarmed after him. He was the star halfback.”

“Did you and Bruce...I mean, were you two an item?”

“Oh, I had a crush on him, but I think he always saw us a friends, especially after his best friend started to get interested in me. No, it’s always been a friendship, close for sure, but nothing more. Part of it is that all three of us shared so much. We used to come up to the mountains on school trips. Those two were inseparable. We had a lot of clean fun together.”

The winds were picking up now and Vera and Juliet felt a few drops of rain.

After a second thunderbolt, the two men appeared at camp’s edge. Nick spoke up.

“When I was at the office, I checked the weather for this weekend. There was a slight chance of rain up here, but I interpreted the maps to show the weather mostly moving north of this camp. Perhaps we should secure the tents and be ready for a storm, anyway. We can sit around the fire until it hits. I have been informed I’ve missed a wonderful concert. Am I in the doghouse, Juliet?”

“I will play more if you like. Perhaps tomorrow morning you will hear Sleeper’s Awake. But now we have to make sure we secure everything from the weather and mind the tents.”

A longer roller seemed to come in from the north. It put an exclamation on Juliet’s advice.

“Are we safe here?” Juliet whispered to Bruce.

“Yes, we are far enough from the trees. If it gets severe, we have the vehicles.”

“Well, folks, it’s too dark now to read, so I think I’ll turn in. Jason, are you all right?”

“Yes, Mother. I was just thinking about that fire.”

“What, Son?”

“Well, you have wood...that’s made of cellulose right...and then you ignite it. You end up with smoke, ashes, and heat. A chemical reaction where matter is mostly turned into energy.”

“Yes, Son. Fire has been around a long time.”

“See that smoke there. It drifts up into the atmosphere as particles and cools the earth. The cellulose breaks down and forms carbon, oxygen and hydrogen. Carbon combines with oxygen to form carbon monoxide and carbon dioxide. Carbon dioxide they say is a greenhouse gas, which heats the earth. It’s kind of a mixed bag, isn’t it? The energy comes out as heat and light. Right now, we can really use the heat, Mother. Just think how heat has helped the world, how much energy and wealth comes from heat. Uncle Bruce told me that most of the world manages its forests so that wood is a renewable resource. The trees over there might be smiling, using the carbon dioxide and ozone as food. And when we all go to single squares, there will even be more trees. There’s kind of a cycle here.”

“Amazing.”

“It’s the carbon cycle. It also contains the carbon dioxide cycle. But fires can also be destructive. We’ve got to prevent our country from going up in flames. We’ve got to be the firefighters. And the light there. We can see and read by it if we try. If heat represents love, then light represents truth.”

“And just what is love to you, Son?”

“Helping.”

“Are you helping someone?”

“Yvonne.”

“Who’s Yvonne?”

“She’s a girl at school. I know she’s put herself up for sale on the Internet.”

“You’ve promised me you don’t surf—”

“I don’t.”

“Your father and I want to trust you. We don’t want to lock—”

“You don’t have to. I know this and I’m going to convince her she has worth beyond that. What will she tell her kids? She’ll have to move to another country and try to reinvent herself or something like that.”

“That’s probably something she’s going to have to figure out on her own. Best for you to stand down, maybe?”

“Maybe. Good night.”

Jason stood up and headed for his tent.

Vera looked sheepishly over at Juliet.

Juliet whispered to Vera, “Does he always think?”

“He’s hard to keep up with sometimes.”

“We’d better put these chairs in the car so they don’t blow away.”

Darkness was creeping in and the head of the storm had drifted farther to the north. Bruce and Nick were off checking the tents’ anchor pegs. It didn’t take long for the campers to disappear under the flaps. Though the rain was sparse, wind gusts and thunder held their interest for a while. Nick announced from his tent that sunrise would be at 0558, and there was a fire tower about a mile away for the adventurous. There was silence. The tents held through the night. Bruce first checked Juliet who was sound asleep next to him. He then checked his watch. He beat the sun by two minutes. He kissed Juliet’s forehead. She barely roused.

“Do you hear me, Juliet?”

“Sort of, but I’m still asleep.”

“Sleep as you will. I’ll have us a string of trout for breakfast.”

She rolled toward where she last knew him and opened one eye. Bruce was gone. She slept on. In an hour or so, she heard the crackle of fire and looked out to see Nick and Vera making a pot of coffee on the grill.

She threw on her jeans, a shirt, and a sweater and wandered into the dewy camp in her bare feet. After warm greetings and a brace of black coffee, they talked of their plans for the day and commented on the evening before. Jason was still sleeping soundly. While Nick tended the fire, Vera asked Juliet in a low tone if she was able to sleep through the storm.

“Not much, but it wasn’t the storm.”

The two women sheepishly nodded at one another.

“Vera, I’ve got to get a shower, you know, a real shower.”

“Yes. I do, too. We’ll drive down to the office. The showers are in the same building. Get your stuff, and I’ll meet you at the car.”

Vera signaled to Nick what they were up to. Juliet assured them that Bruce would have some fresh trout for them for breakfast.

“Take your time, ladies.”

The camp was quiet when Bruce arrived with his string of trout. The embers in the stone fireplace kept the coffee hot and clued him to the fact that Nick was around. He checked the tent. Juliet was gone. He noted that the Volvo was also gone and surmised they all had gone to the showers and washrooms. Jason appeared in his pajamas.

“Here, young man, help me fillet these fish.”

“Wow, four of them and they are big ones. Rainbows!”

Just as they finished breaching the fish with Bruce’s patented mix, the car returned. Juliet and Vera stepped out and walked toward the grill where Bruce was carefully laying the fillets into a frying pan.

“That looks wonderful, Bruce. Have you shown your catch to Nick?”

“I thought Nick was with you.”

“No, we left him here when you were fishing. Look, I’ll check the privy. If he’s not there, he’s probably out with his binoculars somewhere.”

Vera returned. “It’s not like him to just take off like that. He didn’t sleep well last night. He kept mumbling about the ice and the snowfields, the natives and the traders, as though he were on one of his polar expeditions or something. I thought he was dreaming, but it seemed to go on for much of the night. I didn’t really sleep. He’s been doing this lately.”

“Look, you two and Jason go ahead and have breakfast. Don’t worry and don’t wander. I’ll just have a look over in that gorge. I have a feeling that’s where he is.”

Bruce quickly was out of sight. They could hear him whistle, a shrill high tone that Nick would know from their childhood. “Hey, Nickie boy!”

Neither of the women ate much. Jason was on his second fillet, and with eggs, toast and juice, showed no signs of slowing. Fifteen minutes passed, with no sign of the men. They resolved to sit tight as Bruce instructed. Nick probably just went for a short exploration and likely became absorbed with something. Still, Vera was caught between the emotions of fear and frustration, as she tried to keep her wits. If it hadn’t been for his strange ramblings, she wouldn’t be as concerned. They tried to make small talk, but it sputtered and stalled. In a few minutes, Bruce appeared with his arm around Nick’s waist.

“I found him standing at the base of that slope, over there.”

Bruce nodded toward the slope.

“There was a lot of talus rock on the slope, and it looks like he may have fallen in it. I checked him carefully, but he was kind of wandering around, so he probably hasn’t damaged his spine. But see, he has an abrasion on his face and the side of his neck...there and his legs had some scratches on them. He doesn’t seem to be able to tell me what happened. He was talking about going farther north, and ‘joining with the other party.’ He’s clearly confused. I think we have to get him to a hospital, for a checkup. From here I’d say Stroudsburg. Wouldn’t you, Vera?”

“Oh my God! Yes. We’d better get going. Nick! Nick, Honey! Are you all right?”

Vera held her husband’s hand as she attempted to speak with him. He just stared at her and smiled, taking her hand reactively. Vera started to cry softly.

“Nick, can you hear me?”

Nick looked at her and said, “I’ll be back in maybe a month. We’ve got to find out what happened to them.”

Vera kissed him on his cheek and neck. As she did this she noticed a nickel-sized area of discoloration above the hairline behind his right ear. She had never seen it before.

“What is this? Is he bleeding here?” She inspected it intensely. “Oh my goodness! I don’t know what’s happening. We’ve got to get some help! Let’s just grab the important stuff now. Someone can come back and clear camp after we find out what the hell is going on.”

“Okay, I’ll lay him down in the back of the Batmobile. He’s perfectly cooperative and there is room. Jason can come with me, and you two follow in Vera’s car. We’ll head for

the hospital in Stroudsburg. It's less than an hour. Meanwhile, let's all settle down. He's walking and he's talking, and those are two very good signs."

Bruce surveyed the camp quickly and doused the waning fire. Within a few minutes they were headed southwest, leaving the camp with the appearance it was occupied. Bruce picked up speed as the road gradually straightened. Once on the highway Bruce activated the dancing headlights, hoping to catch the attention of a trooper. After all, they were the "safety patrol." He regretted his siren wasn't working. He activated the marquee which slowly appeared above the roofline. The electronic message "emergency" flashed on and off. The message produced variable effects and when passing a driver who was unwilling to move over after Bruce's warning flash, he blurted out an exhortation over the PA system. Vera and Juliet could only hear the blur of his voice. They were having a challenge keeping up with him. In short order, he attracted a New Jersey state trooper who pulled him over. The women pulled in behind. After a short conversation, the trooper pulled in front of him, and they all proceeded to Stroudsburg with police escort.

Nick casually got into a wheelchair provided by the emergency people. He asked, "What's this?" and then commented, "Well, you're all so thoughtful."

Bruce and Vera quickly related the history to a triage nurse. As a head injury case, Nick was taken directly into the department. While Vera registered her husband, Bruce filled in a young doctor. Juliet accompanied Jason in the waiting area. They sat, wondering, for what seemed like an eternity though it had been fifty-five minutes.

Finally, a more seasoned looking doctor appeared. Except for a state of confusion that now was passing, the exam was negative save the abrasions and a curious mark on Nick's scalp. An MRI of the brain and spine showed no fractures or internal signs of trauma—bleeding, swelling, or laceration. The doctor intimated they were lucky he hadn't fractured his spine. Since he had been walking around that might have been catastrophic.

He systematically went through the list of possibilities with Vera. He mentioned encephalitis and meningitis, and the need to do a spinal tap. He asked about possible use of addictive substances, or exposure to toxins.

In his opinion this was an acute delirium and not a psychiatric illness. Vera mentioned the two glasses of wine the night before. Nick never abused alcohol, so delirium tremens was not on the list. The doctor reported that occasionally people simply suffered a limited form of amnesia where they could not recall a period of time. This was usually accompanied by confusion. It was as though the short-term memory tape recorder suddenly turned off. He said Nick may have sustained a concussion from the fall.

This lucid presentation of the possibilities both frightened and enlightened Vera. At least the doctor seemed knowledgeable. Before concluding, the doctor paused and said that the skin discoloration under the hair on the back of the head was curious. It did not appear to be a pigmented skin lesion, but a biopsy would tell. That could be done later. It didn't look like bleeding, or envenomation from an insect bite. It looked like it had a design in it, which suggested it was a tattoo.

Vera explained that Nick had been acting strangely over the past few weeks and at times seemed a little confused. She harkened back to Awards Night. Jason then said something about Nick's behavior at the observatory, but downplayed it. Nick had always loved

stories of exploration, and lately he talked as though he was inside the stories. He did this today, in fact.

“Well, he should have a brain wave test to exclude a seizure disorder. We took a toxic blood screen, but you say he has no addictions or drug abuse history...”

“Not at all, Doctor,” Vera said emphatically, this time.

“In cases like this, because the answers are not clear and his mind is not working properly, we’d like to keep him overnight before we discharge him to his own physician. It’s just a precaution, Mrs. Casperson.”

“I suppose that makes sense. We can find a room here in town.”

“Good. I know I threw a lot at you, and I’m not sure you heard it all. That tattoo on his scalp is curious. You didn’t know about it?”

“A tattoo? Nick never had a tattoo,” Vera replied, with definition.

Juliet overheard the doctor’s comment this time. She took Vera aside.

“We need to talk, Vera.”

Bruce offered to return to the camp and pack the stuff into his vehicle. It had plenty of space. Jason opted to ride along with him. He would return to the hospital, and after visiting hours, they would look for a couple of rooms in town. In the meanwhile, the two ladies had their talk.

Nineteen

Solutions

Vera and Juliet talked over lunch the day after they returned from the camping trip gone awry. The twenty-hour observation period fortunately was uneventful and Nick’s mind cleared a couple hours after reaching the hospital. Their guys were stable, for now. Still, the future was uncertain. The women agreed to join forces in order to help solve the riddle and oversee their men’s recovery, since it appeared the men shared the malady, what the hell ever it was. Vera shifted into the role of protector, as her family became threatened. She also had some knowledge of forensic science. They had all been so healthy. Vera appreciated that Nick lost his autonomy during these curious spells. Some unknown force from within, or outside, seemed to overtake him. This would be abhorrent to him she knew, if he had insight. As he had lost this capacity for self-assessment, she resolved to take it over knowing he would approve.

Juliet had no such obligation, working within a newly formed and unconsecrated relationship. She might have decided to “cut and run” from a situation she did not comprehend. Instead, she followed her feelings to help a man she had come to see as valuable and good, beyond his compelling physicality. Also, she had come under his spell. She was romantically involved at this point, and didn’t want to leave.

The predicament of their loved ones forged a team out of these quite different women. The discovery of tattoos came as a shock for them both. Nick derided “body art” often enough for Vera to know he had been shanghaied or subdued by some means. She had never seen him inebriated. He had asked Vera many times, in the witness of such folly,

why anyone would wish a permanent record of a whimsical moment. He had said he couldn't equate a tattoo with Mt. Rushmore. That was the way Nick saw tattoos. Bruce rejected the report of his tattoo up to the moment when Juliet audaciously pointed it out. She described his reaction to Vera. He actually jumped, and yelled, "What the hell!" as if he had a swarm of fire ants marching through his pubic hair. His reaction spoke for a definite unwillingness on his part. In other words, in both cases this was not a parlor job. The whole thing had turned into a "crime scene investigation." The tattoos went unappreciated for an unknown but considerable period, and the case had obviously "cooled."

Vera's knowledge of forensics prompted a sudden insight. Juliet had fully shared her discovery of Bruce's tattoo with Vera, for the greater good. When it became known that the tattoos contained the same pattern and colors, the chance of their being coincidental and spontaneous skin lesions evaporated. So much for the melanoma theory. When they discovered that each tattoo showed a tiny orange flower blossom, set on a crimson background about half the size of a postage stamp, they knew it was time to consider organizing another trip to Brazil. The mutual report of amnesia following the meteorite discovery begged for reconstruction of these events.

Vera was moved by her son's cool approach to the problem. He had so many questions now for Dr. Greene, whose diploma in neurology shined in his memory. There had to be a connection between the tattoos and the change in behavior. If that fact were so, the only connection between the tattoos and the behavior had to be the bloodstream. Some neurologically active chemical in the tattoo would have to have seeped into the bloodstream and circulated to the brain. When Jason put it this way, Vera thought of cancer. Instead of cells sloughing away from a tumor and penetrating the bloodstream, here it was a mystery molecule. The tattoo must have acted as a source and reservoir. Vera had been content with the idea of a sample biopsy at first, but now she wanted to have the whole tattoo removed. They made arrangements for Nick and Bruce to see a dermatologist.

Jason saw the situation as another "homework assignment". He had previously mentioned his concern about Artie at his first appointment with Dr. Greene. After his father's mishap, Jason admitted to his mother what had really occupied him while he was staring into the campfire in the mountains.

Changing of elements and some correspondences of heat and light were not his main thoughts. He really was contemplating some changes he'd noted in his father and his uncle Bruce. Of course, he didn't know the details about his uncle Bruce's mark, but when he heard that Bruce also had a tattoo, he referred to the whole scenario as "the Brazilian curse."

Unsavory as the prospect seemed, they would have to go to President Throckmorton and make their case. That case would be that two faculty members were suffering an unusual and episodic behavioral change. Throckmorton probably would suggest psychiatric evaluations. This would be a logical first step if it were just one of them. They were prepared to point out the illogic of two stable men—well, Bruce might be a question mark for Throckmorton—simultaneously losing their bearings because of psychiatric

causes. There had been some chatter at the college about the new president's intransigence.

Jason moved up his meeting with Dr. Greene when a cancellation called in. He had been reading up on brain chemistry in his efforts to understand Artie. Greene's background was strong in the chemistry and pharmacology of the brain, although he was familiar with the older analytical methods and didn't shy away from "psychotherapy" when called for. His understanding of the latter was "good listening" with points of advice through suggestion, avoiding any semblance of a lecture. Greene had come to like Jason personally. He was willing to humor the boy at least for a while—enough to steer his reading. He found Jason's curiosity highly attractive, but he knew at some point he would have to terminate the office visits.

Jason did not discuss his father's predicament with Greene directly. He asked again where "love" resided in the brain, and the best that Greene could do was to refer to the "the limbic system," as the residence of the emotions. Love clearly carried emotional components, but there were cognitive and rational parts as well, and nobody had ever really found a "love center." Greene's response to such challenging questions was to ask Jason about the question itself. The conversation would usually turn back to Artie.

Jason asked about hallucinogens, addiction and epilepsy. He learned how cocaine got into the synaptic space—the place where the natural neurotransmitters such as dopamine, carried the message from one brain cell to the next. Cocaine blocked the normal "uptake" of dopamine and norepinephrine, another transmitter, causing them to repeatedly stimulate the postsynaptic nerve, bringing on the infamous "high." With cocaine the "high" was followed by depression and exhaustion. These were so noxious and unpleasant that the person avoided them by seeking more cocaine. Once started, this downward cycle was almost impossible to break without help. The stimulant methamphetamine caused damage to these wonderful synaptic connections. For the immediate rush the addict was willing to trade off a case of brain-rot in return.

Jason questioned such fatalism. Why trade a future for a moment? Jason knew the health of the brain was crucial in order to have a successful life. For all our culture's emphasis on fitness, looks, and weight control, it was the brain that really counted. Jason understood that this wired bag of chemicals had to be in top shape in order to navigate the perilous journey of life. This was partly behind his revulsion for propaganda. He considered propaganda a poison, like drugs. His motto was to get a good education and keep the brain free of pollutants.

Someday Jason would like to market to all the taverns and dives in the country anti-splash rubber urinal aprons on which was printed in block letters: Piss on Drugs. He knew he'd be a millionaire. It was just how he felt. He had to get Artie into a program and get him sober. He had to help Artie save his soul from slavery.

He learned that hallucinogens like LSD (acid) and PCP (angel dust) caused an excessive release of serotonin. This could distort the normal processing of information that came to the brain from the five senses. There could be mixing, such as the hearing of colors. They could distort. He recalled a picture of Dali's liquid timepieces. There could be exaggerations. There could be good trips and bad trips—trips with terrifying perceptions.

Presumably, the library of experience was unveiled more or less at once, instead of the orderly retrieval that accompanied rational thought or the magical selection that contrived the imagination. But the whole thing was a crapshoot. Mainly, drugs could damage neurons. Reestablished connections to the wrong places might produce an unwanted rewiring of the brain. In some cases, there could be flashbacks—uninvited replays. Taking hallucinogens was a pretty sure way of compromising perception. Perception was so necessary for the exercise of reason and judgment, and both of these were indispensable for a balanced life.

Jason heard how native people often used plants in their religious ceremonies, seeking closer contact with the spirits that defined their lives—lives far different and supposedly less complex than those found in “modern society.”

The episodic nature of his father’s disorder led to the question of seizures. He knew his father and Bruce were not shooting up, or snorting anything. He knew his father’s pipe tobacco hadn’t been spiked. Besides, Uncle Bruce didn’t smoke. It was reasonable to assume some active substance was contained in the tattoo. Somehow, it affected the brain in an episodic fashion, like a seizure or a flashback. This implied a spillover or threshold event. Some seizures were due to a structural lesion such as a scar from a stroke or fall, or from a tumor. If no structural cause could be found and if momentary toxins or chemical disturbances were excluded, it was called epilepsy.

The living brain was a highly controlled and ongoing array of electrical transmissions across the sheaths of hundreds of millions of nerves at the same time. A seizure was literally the takeover of this process from a point source or focus—an electrical storm that seized the brain.

Often preceded by an aura or premonition, they were accompanied by a disturbance in consciousness or abnormal movement, depending on the route and pattern of the storm. There may also be eye rolling, tongue biting, excess respiratory effort, and loss of control of bladder or bowel function, any of which was very disturbing to those in witness. There were clear differences from this picture, and the “Brazilian curse.”

Jason, of course, was unaware of the lurid lapses Bruce experienced during intimacies with Juliet. But he had noticed that Bruce had become “radical” on the highways. Normal inhibitions seemed to be missing. Lately, he was excessive beyond his simple recipe for road etiquette. Several times while driving, he showed aggressiveness to the point of being obnoxious—the very behavior the Batmobile was conceived and designed to combat. Also, Jason had observed that his father seemed to get carried away with stories of exploration, including his own.

Comparing notes, Vera recently found her husband sitting on the floor in his study at home surrounded by his books on Arctic exploration. He was reciting to the bookshelves the expeditionary history of the North Pole, as though standing before an audience. He rambled on about the travels of Hudson, Frobisher, Franklin, and Rae, and he mixed it with the great debate over the first to reach the North Pole. Was it Peary or was it Cook? He stopped at one point in his recitation to announce that Amundson had navigated the elusive Passage. She knew Nick loved these stories as examples of perseverance and heroism. Vera admitted to hearing more exploration stories recently than she had heard in her sixteen years of marriage. They had increased after he got back from Brazil. Both

Vera and Jason noted these beloved tales had lately taken on a quality that blurred the line between real life and the life of the mind, including fantasy. At such times Nick's "reality testing" seemed impaired. Yet delusions, extreme religiosity and paranoia—characteristics that helped define psychiatric illness—were absent. What seemed to have happened instead was that the things Nick enjoyed and pursued over his lifetime had become magnified to an uninhibited and overt dominance.

When Vera reflected Jason's observations to Juliet, the answer to her personal questions about Bruce became clear. She surmised Bruce, as an unattached, attractive, even desirable man, likely housed a lush repertoire of sexual experience in his mind. If this had driven him at a time in his past, might not some substance bring forth this fountain of experience without invitation?

She wasn't a prude in this. Like most women, she knew that if they had genuine love, she would reign supreme over his sensuous library if she showed it. The releasing influence of this secret neurotransmitter might also explain his hyperactive zeal for highway etiquette, since this was a passion as well. What kind of substance might enhance what one loved? Whatever it was, she figured it was not your ordinary aphrodisiac.

Between these episodes or rather, outbursts, the two men seemed normal. Indeed, Bruce had brought to Vera's attention that on the morning of the fall when he found Nick sitting on the rockslide, he was muttering something about a "lost tribe." Nick apparently had left camp in a fit, on a mission to locate a haunting blank in his memory. At this moment he was not his disciplined self. A disciplined person could choose to think about something, devote study time to a subject, pursue a hobby or cast a restraining force on runaway thought. Might a chemical, on the other hand, ablate the higher controls and galvanize one's thoughts, whether they be prurient or redeeming? It wasn't so much a matter of the capitulation of one's will, since one's will was already invested in this area of dominant love. The mysterious essence instead acted as a catalyst. It was a type of addiction, where the addicting substance did not become the quest. Instead, the marquee of the interior mind lit up for all to see. It was as though true innocence, changed by that foray to the center of the garden, was on careless display in the museum of everything. It was as though the loves that inhabited their interior selves shown on their faces and in their behavior.

Jason suggested to his mother unless Nick and Bruce clearly deteriorated, it might be reasonable to simply observe them in the haven of their privacy. If they worsened, then perhaps going the psychiatric route made sense. Maybe this Brazilian curse would be self-limiting. If the malady was caused by a biochemical agent, that agent might eventually be metabolized or excreted and leave behind no damage. It was a lot to hope for, but it was possible. The human body was resilient.

The team would meet regularly and report their observations. For objectivity, Vera and Juliet agreed they should spend time together, so that the women might also check on subtle changes in the other's "best friend." The advent of summer made the plan feasible. Nick still had work at the observatory, including some evening classes with "astro" students. As instructor, Bruce's commitment was less. Vera would take a leave of absence from her work at the institute. Juliet would look in on Bruce often, and for a brief moment considered moving in with him.

Nick and Bruce both made it clear they were fuzzy about what happened after their arrival at the “target” in the forest. This was evidenced by a gap in both their journals. Jason recalled his father mentioning gaps in Lewis’s journal, when he went with Clark and the Corps of Discovery in search of the Northwest Passage. In that case, the gaps were probably due to profound fits of depression.

It wasn’t difficult to locate the two journals after they got home from the hospital. Jason and the two women sat down and poured over them for clues. In this, Jason proved himself to be the superior sleuth. He catalogued every name recorded by each and he looked for any referring notes. Bruce’s handwriting was the more challenging. Jason generated the following list of characters:

1. A man named Santiago Rus was described as a pleasant, well-dressed businessman whom they met briefly on the flight from Rio to Belem. He had presented his official card showing a phone number and address in a city named Santarem, which listed his occupation as jewel merchant. The business card was found in a pocket inside the cover of Nick’s tract. Curiously, in Bruce’s more cursory record mention was made of a mayor named Rus. His sultry wife took up more space. Juliet was amused to read his comments.

2. Raphael de Sanctos, owner/operator of the Para River Packing Company had met the two in Belem and transported them by air to Manaus. Raphael was variously described in both journals as colorful, full of glee, peripatetic (by Nick) and a loose cannon (by Bruce) in his entry describing his visit to the cockpit. Nick’s notes described the itinerary, which in turn contained Raphael’s address and contact information.

3. Jaro, a Xingu guide, took them to the target site in Jau National Park. Both journals contained several comments on Jaro. Jaro came into the picture as a condition put by Nick. Nick had specified that Raphael make arrangements for a suitable guide in Manaus, since he was much closer to this context than the college’s travel agent. Raphael came through, big-time. Jaro might presumably be reached through Raphael. When questioned, Nick retained a vague memory of the location of Jaro’s home.

4. Bruce’s journal described Betta and Tai, referring to them as Stanley and Livingston. His notes focused on their exploits with spears and machetes. Nick described two native boys who worked for Jaro, without naming them.

5. Vera caught the reference in Nick’s journal to a meeting with a distant relative of Colonel Rondon. She recalled Nick’s mentioning Rondon as Teddy Roosevelt’s companion and fellow leader on the River of Doubt expedition. The meeting with Rondon’s great nephew took place at Jaro’s house before departing on the black River. Nick’s record mentioned that this Rondon worked for FUNAI—the Indian Service—that his great uncle had founded. He provided the satellite maps they would use for their expedition.

Nick had left a copy of the itinerary with his wife with instructions to be on hand for his calls. She recalled nothing exceptional about their conversation when he called from the hotel in Belem. Nick had said he was tired and Bruce was out in the square taking in the locals. Things were on schedule and their agent Raphael was friendly and colorful. The satellite call from the meteorite site was still fresh in her mind. The transmission had been fuzzy and faded in and out. She distinctly sensed Nick’s excitement both from the tone of

his voice and his calling her “Snooks.” He had called her “Snooks” three times in their marriage, all three at times of high excitement. On this call Nick did most of the talking. She remembered him telling her that it was definitely a meteorite. The word “champagne” came through ...a nice touch from “crazy Bruce.” The last word she thought she heard sounded like “visit,” immediately before she lost contact. Knowing her husband’s interest in the Roswell story, she asked him about the “visit” when he returned. He didn’t elaborate on it, so she put it aside. She took it as a reference to the meteorite. She saw he was overjoyed to be home and felt if it was important, he would tell her later. At the Awards Dinner he had recounted their step-by-step approach to the target site. Again, when she probed him later at home, he was vague about the content of the satellite call, replying only “how could I forget it.” She wondered if there was an element of retrograde amnesia that came along with the tattoo.

Their journals mentioned various porters and servants. Bruce included a comment about the allure of the beauties in Belem’s market, referring to them as “Amazettes.” There were no other apparent “players” in the combined record. Bruce stated in his barely legible scrawl that his “partner” was in the hotel at the time of his excursion into the market square during pre-Carnival festivities.

Unless tattoos could leap through walls, the hotel room was not likely the “crime scene.” The two explorers were in each other’s company it seemed about 98 percent of the time. The tattoos had to have been implanted when they were together, which, of itself, didn’t narrow it down much. The fact of their shared amnesia did. Since the target was a meteorite and not a spaceship full of Tattoo Shooters from Omega Centauri, the “visitors” Vera now figured held the key.

They made appointments for Nick and Bruce to have skin biopsies. Jason came along with Vera to the dermatologist’s office. The doctor stated that a few punch biopsies of the tattoo would be sufficient. One would be sliced by a very thin microtome and properly fixed and stained, that the dermis might be examined microscopically for pathology. The biopsies would likely prove the rational conclusion that the “lesions” were tattoos. One or more specimens would be sent to a forensic lab for chemical analysis. Vera made and won her case for total excision without giving the whole of her reasoning. Both she and the well-intentioned dermatologist were about to be inundated by her son.

Jason proposed that the substance, or chemical, had become attached onto certain “importance” receptors in the brain. It was during his second meeting with Dr. Greene that he learned more about what happened in the synaptic cleft—the junction between nerves, where one nerve “spoke” to the next. This line of thinking led to another series of questions. These questions got a boost from Jason’s banter with Greene and his mother, who was not a hard scientist. Would this mental condition be permanent? Would it gradually fade as the mystery molecules drifted back into the circulation where they could be carried to the metabolic dumpsters—the liver and the kidneys? Might they be outcompeted at the synaptic receptors by normal molecules and become moot? Would they be mopped up by the janitor cells of the brain? Would the condition progress, for instance, like Alzheimer’s Disease? Would the effect spread out over a larger portion of their mental life? Might a “wait and see” approach be acceptable, like what was done with lab animals, in order to observe the “natural history” of the curse as it unfolded? Would they regret not taking preemptive action? What actions were available to them?

The answers to these questions led to an uncomfortable conclusion. If contacts with the cast of characters on the list generated from the journals did not produce a clear and reassuring grasp of these issues, they would have to speak to Throckmorton with a view toward a return trip to the forest.

If two members of the faculty had been incapacitated, the president of the college must be told. Presumably, he would feel some obligation to pursue a solution. The involvement of the president would require the consent of both Nick and Bruce, since they were competent and lucid, at least most of the time.

With the assistance of the travel agent, calls were made. Raphael was predictably irrepressible. Vera's inquiry about Jaro and his two guides prompted him to report he'd heard that Jaro was a week overdue from a guided trip to Angel Falls. One of the young helpers went with him, but the one that never returned from the trip with Señors Nick and Bruce had not been heard from. The gem merchant, alias mayor, could not be reached. He was in Europe. After many calls over several days, they were able to reach the Amazonia Division of the Indian Protective Service. They spoke with Rondon. He suggested that the College dispatch a representative from its Anthropology Department to Manaus. Rondon himself would meet that person and his team. Unlike his great uncle, Rondon was not quite as fastidious about leaving the native people in isolation, particularly if there was something to learn. In the case of the Harmony People there was definitely something of more than academic interest. This was all he would muster over the phone. His tone was low and he sounded secretive. At the end of their conversation, Vera and the travel agent looked at each other. Who were the Harmony People? There was no mention of them in the journals.

Propelled by Rondon's suggestion, they requested a meeting with President Throckmorton. He was able to meet with them before leaving for his vacation in the Ozarks. Nick and Bruce didn't attend. They knew that Nick wouldn't go without Bruce, and they knew that Bruce was still on a probationary status because of one of his lab demonstrations.

That lab touched Throckmorton directly. It dealt with echolocation in the common brown bat. Temporarily disabling the bat's receiver organ with wax usually led to its "grounding itself" without incident. Bruce's demonstration had been a hit with the students each year, but last year's episode ended with the bat flying into the cleavage of a girl in the front row. She happened to be Throckmorton's niece. Despite presenting Bruce with his award, Throckmorton viewed him through a jaundiced eye. There had been a brief flap with the animal rights people to boot. Bruce's solution was to avoid as much as possible any contact with the president. Vera, Jason and Juliet felt they could represent the issue effectively and fairly as proxies.

Jason sensed the irony to be acting as a consultant to a college president on behalf of the most important two men in his life while he himself was on a type of probation at his own high school.

They met in a conference room connected to the president's office. Jason was getting used to these settings. Vera presented the dilemma. Both men had returned from a deep corner of the earth, acting on behalf of the college and their own careers. It seemed as though they brought back more than a piece of extraterrestrial matter and a rare bat. The

biopsy results were presented. They confirmed what Jason, Vera, and Juliet had concluded and showed basically normal skin into which had been placed various pigments, characteristic of a tattoo. The forensic studies were in progress. Vera had been able to locate a forensic lab through her work. They had been told there was a fifty-fifty chance that a culprit chemical might be identified.

They told Throckmorton of Rondon's suggestion of another expedition. That expedition should be aimed at solving a puzzle first, but it had potential for much more. It might put the college on the anthropology map. They had secured the willing backing of a reliable official and guide in Brazil. Vera led the discussion with the president up to the point of his response.

"How can we be sure that more of the faculty won't become afflicted? We have to be careful, you know."

"We have the sense that Rondon will take precautions that this won't happen."

"But you say that several of those people have disappeared down there. We couldn't afford to lose more of our faculty."

"Well, this is why it is so important to figure out what is going on. Whatever happened or is happening has apparently affected several people."

"This will be expensive, you know. Did you say one of the people affected was Instructor Bonner?" He emphasized "instructor."

"Yes. The other is Nick Casperson, my husband."

It was clear that Throckmorton was processing one part of the story at a time. Jason chimed in with his mother's consent, and spoke of the tattoos.

"Yes, of course. You say, young man, that you think there is a mind-reinforcing chemical at work?"

"Yes, sir. It doesn't seem like an addiction in the usual sense, since there seems to be no drug-seeking behavior. It seems that it acts to reinforce what my dad and uncle Bruce like or love, and causes them to act on it."

Throckmorton looked quizzical, placing his hand to his chin.

"This could be very interesting, indeed. A will-enhancing substance! We will look into this after I return from my vacation."

"President Throckmorton, I don't think we can wait. It will take time to make the arrangements. We should get started now. We don't know what is going to happen to my husband and Bruce. A few days ago my husband was speaking to a horticulture group during a luncheon at the Yacht Club in Perth Amboy. He was explaining why we have seasons, using his rotisserie model. In an instant, he was off on the Viking and Mariner spacecrafts, leaving the ladies and me confused." Vera's voice broke slightly, as she said this. "This is very frightening!"

"All right, Mrs. Casperson. You can be assured that the college will underwrite another expedition. I appoint you to work with our agent to arrange it. I will speak with Professor Hopkins, the chair of our Anthropology Department. I will press the issue with him. I

believe he is in good health, and that he will jump at the opportunity. This could be big for the college.”

Vera was getting the feeling that the priorities were reversing, but that was okay. She finished by mentioning the satellite call. She was sure the visitors were the Harmony People and Professor Hopkins would do well to figure out how to deal with them, should they become...let's say, dissonant.

Twenty

The Cast Party

The meeting with Throckmorton had gone better than anyone expected. Plans were under way to send another party to Brazil, this time with a focused and complementary purpose to the first. Both Vera and Juliet seemed satisfied, and Jason felt elated and productive this evening. There had been no recent aberrant episodes from either Nick or Bruce. Perhaps Jason's thesis that the Brazilian curse was “self-limited” may pan out. Jason was feeling a little uninhibited himself this evening of the cast party. To top it all off, Our Town had come off with only a hitch or two. The lighting and stage crews were also invited, as well as the main players. They had been referred to this year as “ancillary crew” instead of the “little people,” like the previous year.

Artie didn't seem himself to Jason. Jason came over early to watch TV with Artie and spend a little time. They tuned to a show on a modern marvel—the military tank. Artie's mom had gone to the ER with a flu bug, so she told her son. As usual, Kosmo was planted in his room upstairs.

Artie had trouble concentrating on this innovation of Churchill's. It was created to hop trenches and roll over barbed wire on the Western Front in WWI. Jason asked him if he'd like to go to the cast party at a senior's house. The party had been billed as a warm-up for the prom. They could walk a mile and a half up the highway. Artie asked if Buffo was going to be there. Buffo, for his heft and lifting power, had been a sporadic member of the stage crew. Jason had no idea. He asked Artie why he was concerned about Buffo. Artie didn't answer. Jason told Artie they could just be frogs in a corner and wouldn't be noticed, since the cast was composed of juniors and seniors.

“I guess we could, Jason.”

“Artie, it'll do you good. You might make a friend, and she might be very sweet.”

“Ya, don't hold your breath.”

“If you're worried about Buffo, he abuses me more than he does you. I'll wiggle my ears at him and he'll forget you. Besides we'll have strength in numbers.”

“I'm not afraid of him.”

“The best way to avoid peer pressure is to pick your peers with care.”

“I want you to come along with me, for sure.”

“Just keep in mind what it is to be a friend.”

“What do you mean?”

“I've got to let my parents know where I am.”

“Don’t you have to ask if you can go?”

“They trust me. How is your uncle Kosmo? What’s his latest project?”

Before leaving the house Artie yelled something up to his uncle. They walked to the end of the cul-de-sac to turn onto Highway 17 when Jason noticed his terrier, Taser, by his side. He clicked his fingers and pointed to their house at the end of the street. The dog dutifully loped in a homeward direction.

“Uncle Kosmo? I dunno, he’s in his own world. My mother is really his niece you know. He’s like a double uncle to me.”

“A great uncle, I think. It’s like a cousin once removed.”

“He’s removed, all right.”

“I really like him from the times I’ve talked with him. He really keeps up on stuff. Do you talk to him much?”

“He’s strange. He’s always spouting off about politics.”

“So?”

“It makes me feel uncomfortable.”

“Stupid?”

“Thanks. It’s just that I don’t know what to say around him.”

“Hey, just try him. I do. He really wants to tell you stuff. You just have to be interested.”

“That’s a trick. I feel like he wouldn’t be interested in anything I have to say.”

“That’s the way you’re supposed to feel. We’re not supposed to be interested in politics, ya know.”

“What? Did he tell you that?”

“Heck no. I was just kidding.”

“Hey, did you hear our club did pretty well at Trenton?”

“Youth in Government?”

“Yeah. Got four bills passed. Only twenty in the whole state passed. I heard Buffo even got his bill passed.”

“Buffo wrote a bill? What was it? A bully protection act?”

“You’ll never believe. He figured the State could make a lot of money if they put a tax on the earnings of prostitutes. Build new highways and sports stadiums. Things like that.”

“And prisons, too? How did the girls on the team like his bill?”

“They practically barfed. I think they thought the governor would veto it. I guess he was a chauvinist too, like Buffo.”

“Good word!”

“It was Jenny’s.”

“Hey, I learned the capitol of every state.”

“Okay...what’s Wyoming’s?”

“Double-u.”

“Wise guy.”

Just then, a yellow convertible honked as it passed. A burly guy in a black shirt leaned across the open window and yelled, “Someday you guys will be allowed to drive.”

“Was that Buffo? There’s your answer. Bet he’s going to the party. Didn’t even stop.”

“Be thankful for that.”

“How many kids do you think?”

“I dunno, but if there aren’t enough to hide him, I’m coming home.”

After they walked over a mile, the boys arrived at the side street they wanted. The first house on the circle was throbbing with the party in full swing. This neighborhood was more well off than theirs and stood at the outside edge of Jason’s afternoon paper route. The party house was a two-story Tudor with an attached solarium. The beat of the band soon overtook them. Their high school possessed a rich supply of music makers.

“This is Fitzwater’s house. I deliver papers here. Mrs. Fitzwater always waves and she usually has cookies. She’s really nice.”

“Look, over there, at that yellow Corvette. The plate says Buffolo.”

“Dare you to replace it with Buffoon.”

“What’s a buffoon?”

Billy Fitzwater was holding forth on the porch with a half-dozen jocks. A few girls unabashedly positioned themselves in the huddle and a few held back, on the periphery. Jason saw Yvonne among them.

“Hey look. Sophomores sighted out there. Welcome aboard. Let’s have a cheer for the sophomores! C’mon in Jason. Who’s your friend?” Billy asked.

Artie begged Jason not to introduce him.

“Three cheers for the lighting crew!”

A cheer went up from the porch.

“Just go in. The food’s laid out on the dining room table and the drinks are right here...well, soft drinks for you guys are in the kitchen.”

Another cheer went up.

“Hey, you’ve got that little dog,” Billy said.

“Yeah. Taser.”

“You should have brought him.” Billy turned to his admirers. “That little dog will bring your paper to your door, if it’s snowing.”

“Yeah. My uncle taught him that.”

The music was more penetrating now. A neighbor came out on his porch and glared.

“Whad ya say?”

“My uncle taught—”

Billy turned to a girl who was talking to him.

“Come on, Jason, let’s get a soda.”

They walked into the tall foyer. They were immediately immersed in a sea of taller students. Jason didn’t spot anyone from their class, except Yvonne, on the porch. They edged their way to the kitchen and dug through crushed ice in a cooler box retrieving two sodas. Artie moved ahead of Jason and found a kid at the end of the living room.

“Hey, I know you from the play,” a girl blurted in a loud voice that barely got through.

“You’re the one who shines the light on me. I’m one of the ghosts.”

“Yeah. You move too fast out there, and I have a hard time keeping up.”

Some girls sitting on a couch appeared to giggle, but the music was too loud to know. The one that recognized him was still pointing at Jason. They spoke to themselves. Whispering was futile. After a few seconds, all but one eyed and smiled at him. They were nice enough. One of them was trying to speak on a cell phone. She ended up yelling into it. She moved so he could sit down on the couch, but he just stood there and looked at her. Just then, Buffo appeared at the kitchen entrance. He was in black, like Johnnie Cash, and wore a gold chain around his neck.

The girls winced as Buffo came over to address Jason.

“Hey, squirt, where’s your buddy?”

“He went thataway,” Jason pointed.

Artie had disappeared.

“You kidding me, squirt?”

“Saw ’em with my own eyes.”

Buffo pushed his bulk into the room, surveying the crowd from a higher vantage. The music died back and the girls were chirping. Some kids danced in the game room. Some of the dancers spilled out onto the carpeted living room. They wobbled and wiggled to the amplified whine of a guitar. The drummer was in a fit with his snares and clappers, and pretty soon the sound was deafening again. Some jocks were walking around with foam at the top of their paper cups. Two of the girls on the couch were now on cell phones. The one at the end was staring at Jason with a vacant smile. He noticed another girl on an opposite couch who also was speaking on a cell phone. Were they speaking with each other? Jason thought this was pretty funny. A pot of pandemonium with more girls than boys, and the girls had found a solution. The dancers were now slowing and their navigation was improving.

Jason caught a glimpse of Artie across the hallway. He jumped up and attempted to pursue his friend, who just as fleetingly disappeared into a bedroom. When Jason finally pushed through, the door was locked.

“Artie, what are you up to in there?”

“What do you think I’m doin’. I’m in the bathroom!”

“I’ll be in the living room with those girls sitting on the black couch. Need to talk to you.”

There was no answer. The chaperones for the party were supposed to be the school’s play director and her husband, in addition to the Fitzwaters. Problem was that Billy Fitzwater hadn’t conveyed this obligation, let alone the fact of the party itself, to his parents. They were out for the evening. The director’s husband bowed out at the last minute. This left one chaperone—Mrs. Craft—English teacher and director of Performing Arts. She was presently engaged in the game room with the players who played the parts of Emily and Mrs. Webb. Billy had taken it upon himself to expand the party considerably beyond the cast. Mrs. Craft, in her new role, was simply overwhelmed. And she had no acquaintance or rapport with many of the kids.

She periodically broke off to make quick inspections of the living room but did not venture into all the nooks and crannies of the Fitzwater home. She was outflanked by her charge. The party evolved under her nose. It was not a good situation.

The recorded music was now pulsating, as the band took a rest. Mr. Fitzwater had wired his place to capacity and Billy was playing the part of disc jockey. A surround-sound array of speakers of all ranges fortified by a base woofer now tested the frame of the house.

We are America right now...

There has got to be a better way

They dissect everything we say

To try and make us feel this way...

The girls on the couch seemed to laugh in unison, except for the closest one who was again looking at Jason.

“What are they laughing about?”

“One of them is talking about her prom dress. Another is talking with Samantha.”

“Samantha?”

“Ya. She’s in the bedroom over there, on the other side of the game room.”

“What!”

“She’s dissipated.”

“What is she doing?”

“Let’s just say, it’s like that president once said. It’s not really sex.”

“Do you have a cell, yourself?”

“No. I’m not that bored.”

“Can you find out the number and get a hold of one of your friend’s phones for me in a few minutes.”

“Probably.”

“Do you have any lipstick?”

“Yes, but what...”

“Look, I’m Jason and I want to...”

“My name is Jill.”

“Hello, Jill.”

“I just want to leave a message for my friend. Where is the bathroom that we’re supposed to be using?”

“The powder room, off the game room, in there.”

She dug into her little pink purse, as she spoke uninterruptedly.

Forever Young...I want to be forever young

Do you rea...lee want to live for...ever,

for...ever and ever.

He was off to the powder room after she passed him the lipstick. Fragments of sentences floated through as he pushed through the raucous kids. He tuned his ears as he made his way.

He heard something about a teacher who assigned math problems on a field trip. Another girl spoke of a teacher who told her she didn’t have enough material to cover her top, so she made her put on a sweater. A more succinct conclusion summed up yet a third, as a witch!

“You know you like her as a teacher.”

“She’s still a wit—”

“Ah gee. Eddie’s in there throwing a football between the lights over the pool table.”

“They call that threading the needle.”

“Who’s catching?”

“Bert.”

“Who’s he showing off for?”

“Rhonda.”

“I’m going to drop out of the History Club...Stroyer’s getting stranger each meeting...”

“Darcy broke her wrist in field hockey...”

“No kidding. Oh, that will really steam her...”

After a few minutes Jason emerged and caught sight of Artie sitting on the floor, with his back propped against the wall. He was smiling vacuously at the singers and dancers.

“Artie, I think we’d better head home pretty soon.”

“C’mon, let’s stay a while longer.”

“C’mon yourself, let’s say good-bye to those girls over there on the sofa.”

Helping Artie up, they made their way through the jungle of rhythms.

Artie was a little unsteady as he gathered himself off the floor. He seemed to revive with the jostling and bumping. They wove their way through the mass. The couch tomatoes were now mostly dancing with each other. Jill sat alone at the end where she had been, watching Jason and Artie as they approached.

“Is he all right?”

“He’ll be fine.”

Jason handed her the lipstick.

“Did you get the phone and the number?”

“Yes. I jotted it down for you.”

She handed her girlfriend’s cell to him with the scribbled number. Jason made a call. The phone rang several times.

“Samantha, is that you? Look, the Fitzwaters are back early. Their car has been spotted at the end of the street.”

“Oh shit! Who is this?”

“Officer Krumpke. Good night.”

Jason handed the phone back to Jill, after disconnecting.

“Jason? Are you the one they are talking about at school?”

“What do you mean?”

“The smart kid who listens in on the History Club, and who challenges Orb and Prince, in class.”

“I’m not sure that’s so smart.”

“I have an idea for you. You ought to think of raiding the costumes and fit yourself out in caricature. You could stand outside school and give a speech, if they won’t let you speak in class.”

“Jill, that is a great idea!”

Just then one of the footballers blurted from the other end of the room.

“Buffo, did you write that?”

“Huh,” responded Buffo, who was now leaning against a recliner.

“In there...have a look. On the underside of the toilet seat.”

Buffo rose and staggered into the powder room, as the babble eased off.

“Jill, you are an imaginative girl. It’s been nice meeting you.”

A disheveled couple emerged from the back bedroom, just as Buffo shrieked.

“Okay, who’s the sonnofabitch who wrote that on the toilet seat with lipstick?”

“Wha’d they write?”

“Some wiseass wrote...Buffo says piss on drugs...Okay, who did it?”

“Was it written on the rounded part or the flat part?” yelled one of the guys.

A roar of laughter rose as the two sophomores eased toward the front door. Yvonne had migrated into the foyer, as the blithe spirit she had been in the play. Jason whispered to her between songs and she turned away quickly. They saw Billy Fitzwater huddled over a female form in a dark corner of the porch now that the live band returned.

“Great party, Billy...it’s our bedtime now.”

Billy grunted a curt good-bye. A light drizzle met their faces as they stepped off the porch and made their way onto the dead-end street.

“Hey, what’s going on? What’s the big hurry?”

“I’ll tell you later, Artie. We’re going to have a little talk while we walk.”

Artie was able to walk on his own now. Jason placed himself between the highway and Artie and put his arm around his friend.

“I feel we could fly home, right now.”

“What were you doing when you disappeared on me?”

Artie didn’t answer.

“Artie, are we friends?”

“Yes.”

“Then what were you doing?”

“You’re not going to tell my mother. You’re my friend, Jason.”

“We are going to talk later about friendship, Artie. What was it?”

“It’s not illegal.”

“What, then.”

“Just a prescription pill.”

“What?”

“Oxy.”

“Where did you get it?”

“Some kid gets it out of his mother’s medicine cabinet.”

“What did you pay?”

“It’s not an illegal drug, Jason!”

“Were you going to find me and offer some to me?”

“I looked for you, for a time.”

“Do you think I would have taken it? How long, Artie?”

“No big deal, Jason.”

“Look, you’re going to screw up your hippocampus.”

“My what?”

“Your tape recorder. Your brain, man! It’s something you’re going to need, you know. It comes in really handy when you try to put life together.”

“Put life together?”

“Life and all the stuff they tell us. To make sense of it. Do you want to be a stick or a tree? Are you addicted, Artie?”

“No. Hey, is that the Fitzwater’s car, there at the light?”

“Don’t change the subject.”

“I use it sometimes.”

“Where do you get it?”

“Can’t tell you.”

“I’m going to make sure you get back home. For how long, then? We’re going to talk about what we’re going to do about this.”

“You’re not going to tell my mother, are you?”

“So, you want to be a taker do you?”

“What’ya mean?”

“A taker. A dipper. That’s not good for you, and it’s not good for me either, you know. Remember. We’re friends. Some people in this country want you to be dependent, you know. Do you want to be a slave?”

“What do you mean, slave? Slavery went out years ago.”

“Not for you, it didn’t.”

They walked in silence. When they arrived at the McFee residence, Jason looked at Artie and asked if he needed anyone to be with him. “Not necessary,” was Artie’s response. Jason asked if he had any stuff in the house. Artie said no.

“Just one more question before I leave, Artie.”

“What?”

“Is Buffo your supplier?”

Artie just stared at him.

Twenty-One

Masquerades

When Buffo threatened to pin Jason up by his ears at the locker, he tipped off more than the insecurity that fed bravado. Buffo seemed especially edgy that morning, to Jason. Buffo had had a row with his mother before school. When she discovered pills and a list of names in his coat pocket, he refused to explain it, and she started to boil. As a single parent, she felt a heavy responsibility for her son. Contrarily, at this flash moment with his mother he absolved himself of any responsibility, and she lost control. He had grown more rebellious in recent weeks, but his overt nastiness to her was something different. He usually was sullen and quiet. In the heat of their encounter, she invited him in pointed terms to leave the house and not return until he straightened out. When he bolted to gather his things, she stuffed another tiny Bible into the same coat pocket that had concealed the “smoking gun” of his nefarious dealings. When he discovered it on his way out, he tossed it back to her.

“You already gave me one of these a couple weeks ago. How many do you have, for Christ’s sake!”

Jason was apprenticed to Kosmo in the art of connecting dots, of putting two and two together. He could never forget Buffo’s spinning him by one arm and one leg, propelled like a rotor blade in the cafeteria before what seemed like the whole student body. Buffo’s bullying slipped by the authorities that time. With only Jason’s pride hurt, it was not enough to drop on the principal or even his mother. Jason recalled the curious events at the cast party. He thought Artie was clearly one of Buffo’s patrons. Artie’s silence was the tip-off to the puzzle. Later, when Jason confronted Artie when he was sober, Artie admitted to Jason he had fallen behind on his payments and Buffo made the mistake of extending him credit. The supplier hadn’t shown the same charity to Buffo and he was feeling the squeeze. Buffo had been reminded of what happened to a seller in a neighboring town. The drive-by shooting and wounding had made the news. It was then that Buffo became edgy and recalcitrant.

Many kids turned a blind eye to this dangerous scenario and didn’t wish to get involved. Jason wasn’t one of those. He was about to confront Buffo when a fortuitous thing happened at school. The stage crew had taken over the auditorium that afternoon to strike the set. The clamor of drills and hammers made shouting necessary. Mrs. Craft redeployed to the gym. She would make her final comments and retire the production with a somberness that suited a eulogy.

Artie had done his best to avoid the bully up until then. This afternoon Buffo was bent on locating him even if it meant making a scene. Buffo caught sight of Artie cowering at the far edge of the circle of kids when the director was called out. He practically bowled over some students who stood between them, audibly threatening to “settle accounts.”

It wasn’t clear how many within earshot understood the threat. A couple of girls tried to talk Buffo away from his escalating temper. He faced them with a fiendish smile that froze Artie, among others. It would be Buffo’s perfect moment. He would show the girls the magic of his martial art, and at the same time put a defining kick on his victim. One of the girls screamed out that he belonged in a cage. It was the verbal jab that acted like gasoline for a red-hot ember. As Buffo spun to deliver a swivel kick on Artie, he saw in a millisecond Jason’s image instead. Jason had placed himself as a shield for his friend while Buffo acted for the girls. Charged up with adrenalin, he couldn’t brake his kick.

Jason absorbed the blow in his left upper belly. The blow produced a sickeningly hollow-sounding thud, as its shock rattled Jason's lungs. The kick was specifically designed for close combat in Southeast Asia. It was meant to separate the spleen, often swollen from malaria, from its artery. If this was accomplished, the result often led to shock, even death. Fortunately, Jason's spleen was normal and safely tucked up under his protective ribcage. Still, the force of the lethal kick incapacitated him and he fell, gasping with breathlessness and the pain of a fractured rib.

A volley of screams and shrieks arose from the girls. Boys that weren't gawking looked around to see if the director had returned. Buffo recoiled in amazement, if not horror, at the sight of Jason writhing on the gym floor. Buffo had missed both marks—his intended target and his wished-for image of physical finesse. Only the most grizzly would find his antics appealing and only one boy smiled. Equipped with enough conscience to approach Jason, Buffo knelt down beside him and they exchanged whispers. Artie had gone down like a domino behind Jason, but in an instant righted himself and was now kneeling at the other side of his friend. After an eon of agony, Jason gradually was able to catch his breath. With tears dripping from his cheeks, he whispered to Buffo, "I've still got your little book, and I'll keep it for you." In less than a minute, Buffo had been surprised three times.

By the time Mrs. Craft returned, many kids had hightailed it out of the gym. When she asked what had happened, Jason filled in the silence with an accurate description, without reasons. He said he was okay and not to make much of it. His left chest cage was pretty tender, but he stifled the grimace. As the remaining kids thinned out, the director ordered Buffo to stay in the gym while she called an ambulance using her cell.

Jason smiled as the paramedics secured him to a stretcher. His mother met him at the emergency department. Imaging and scanning studies showed no evidence of enlargement or overt bleeding of his spleen.

Jason was admitted for observation. They typed and cross-matched his blood just in case. His blood count and vitals remained stable. Had his spleen been bruised, its removal occupied a spot on the decision tree. It was not considered vital, but the spongy organ was part of the immune system. Jason kept both his spleen and his sweet demeanor.

Jason told his parents later he had no animosity toward Buffo. Contrasted with his mother, he didn't see Buffo's action in terms of an assault. Nick stayed back, knowing that his wife would take this up with the school for what it was. Jason's recuperation at home lasted about as long as Buffo's expulsion. He deferred reading the latest Harry Potter, to press his own conjurations. While he patiently took note of the healing force, Jason hatched a plan that would capture the services of the brute.

When Artie came to see him, Jason marshaled their friendship for the purpose of his plan. He told Artie he didn't mind "taking a bullet" for him, if something worthwhile came of it. Artie offered to help pay Jason's hospital bill, seeing as how if it weren't for Jason, Artie might be in Jason's place, or worse. Jason pointed out that he chose his own actions and he accepted the consequences. When Artie asked Jason if he or his parents were going to press charges on the attacker, Jason said only that Buffo had shown remorse. Jason recalled Jill's suggestion at the cast party. She had said if they muzzled him in the classroom, he should borrow some duds from the cache of costumes and set himself up

outside the school on a podium. The idea of his own speaker's box in the Hyde Park of the school's grounds appealed to him. To a kid with a Poet's Corner in his bedroom, it sounded like a splendid idea. During his convalescence he developed the plan further with Jill by phone.

Jason had heard both Kosmo and Beck say we in America were living in a "circus world" where the truth had been turned upside down. So he set his imagination on a path of exploration. Some might see his plan as an irreverent probe at the authority of the school, "civil disobedience" at most. Jason saw his plan more in terms of free speech. For his first soapbox escapade he would use the antiquated playground. It had been shut down because some kid had gotten hurt on the bars there, and there had been a lawsuit.

When it seeped out in the cafeteria that some kid posing as "Uncle Sham" was giving a speech outside, the word spread. Jason had dressed himself in a blue topcoat with wide lapels and trousers made from the remnants of an American flag. He sported a red bow tie on a white shirt and a blue stovepipe hat with white stars on it. He wore a mask of a long-faced, narrow-eyed curmudgeon with high cheekbones and a long white beard. Buffo stood slightly left and front of the speaker with his arms folded. He stared at a fixed point in the gathering that was under way. Most everyone had heard of the viscous kick laid on Jason. The tale had spread around the school like wildfire and even students who lived in a cocoon heard something of it. The juxtaposition of the two boys seemed bizarre to the kids who came to hear the caricature.

"I want you!" Uncle Sham shouted, pointing to the small group as he balanced himself on a wooden crate. "I want you to willingly suspend all disbelief as you listen. Hold your judgment, so that you might in the end tell what is entertainment and what is reality, the words of an ancient mariner or those of a soothsayer."

With that, a dead silence settled over the old playground.

"One man who wants to be our president tells us there are two Americas, and he didn't mean North and South. He promises to put the country back together, into one America. What does he mean by two Americas? He is telling us there are the rich and there are the poor. He's going to smooth this all out". Jason was thinking of Marx and his theory of class envy. Marx never spoke of dreams, possibilities or refinements. "That candidate tells us he even went to work for a hedge fund, so that he could learn more about the poor. He says he's going to solve the problem of poverty by taxing the rich and redistributing their wealth. He doesn't understand economics. He tells us that America is awash in greed, yet he lives in a twenty-eight-thousand square-foot mansion."

A few snickers floated away from the small but growing collection of students. Jason reached for his Uncle Sam banner.

"But I say, there is only one America! Those are the people, rich, medium and poor, who believe in Her! It doesn't mean that they can't have complaints, or that they don't want to improve things. It doesn't mean that they shouldn't be critical at times. God knows, I'm critical at times. But I'm tryin' to help. When, in your heart you want America to fail in the world, or become a Socialist state, a nation full of dependent people, then you have crossed the line. When you seek to repress freedoms—not rights, but freedoms—the freedom to express ourselves, the freedom to worship or not, the freedom to seek

happiness and life itself...then I say this is not constructive criticism, or refinement...this is traitorous to the sum notion of this great land!"

A few cheers bubbled up cautiously, from the kids.

"I say America has her enemies. Those who are hell-bent to tear down her great pillars, and turn her into something she's never aspired to—a welfare state, a second-rate nation, a discarder of our roots and ideals, a sacker of the Constitution—then, I say, you are not an American!"

Jason wasn't using a bullhorn. He was using a small microphone and two amplified speakers. He mustered a groveling voice as best he could. He glanced skillfully at notes he nearly memorized, notes he had spread before him on his makeshift podium. He skillfully exchanged banners as the content of his message wove in and out. He looked over at Buffo, who stood menacingly at his side with his arms folded. Protected so, Jason went on with his harangue.

"So, yes, ask which politician wishes to unite Americans with her enemies. Then you will know which American is misinformed. He or she assumes to know what's best for you, yet he or she promises a new and better America! Ask about our enemies. If it's 'Big Oil' or the pharmaceutical companies instead of those who have declared their wish to kill us, then you know you've got a Socialist on the line. Just hand over your independence to them, and follow. Instead of running those plays that got us to the championship, this candidate wants us to follow him or her on some new venture. He or she is smart enough to pick out the open man or find the running lane, without a practice or a playbook. I ask, which country is better than America? If they know one, I ask, why don't they move there? But just how does one pull together those who believe in what America has stood for with those who are dedicated to changing her? Unite in change? I say Bull Feathers!"

One kid made a move for the podium and Buffo countered. Jason went on.

"Let me tell you a bit about political parties. In this upcoming year, we will be electing a new president who just might try to mollify America's enemies. We're all tired of the arguing, right? Why can't we all just get along? Which magician do you think will pull this off? Even the great communicator, the so-called Teflon president, Ronald Reagan, was belittled and hated by some. To this hollow promise, I say Bull feathers! I don't want to be givin' away my country so that we can have a peace that won't last."

Just then, a petite girl put up her hand and said, "I met you at a party, but it wasn't a political one! Remember me?"

Jason, now as Uncle Sham, looked down at the small group and spotted Jill.

"Yes, I remember you. I hope I can count on your vote."

"Not if you're Uncle Sham!"

Some laughs rippled among the otherwise silent listeners, now grown to a few dozen.

"Just wait then."

Jill smiled as she gazed around. Jason then paused to adjust his hat. It was a bit small and tended to drift atop his cranium despite the chinstrap. Now, he read from his notes.

“Let me tell you of the political parties that have grown up in our great country. There have been new parties and ‘third’ parties all through our history. President Jefferson and his Republicans were nervous about the strong central power favored by the Centrists, even though that power was necessary for our brand-new nation. The United States even then needed its sovereign identity in order to deal with the rest of the world. So his buddies, Madison and Mason framed the Bill of Rights, the first ten Amendments to our Constitution, which gave more liberty to the individual. Each of these amendments today is under attack. Please ask yourself, Why? Our second president, John Adams, witnessed the battles between Jefferson and Hamilton. He thought their venom uncivil, especially in Washington’s second term when it touched ‘His Excellency,’ himself. Adams became skeptical of the party system. Adams thought the political parties stood between the people and their government. When Democrat Andrew Jackson was elected, he rejected the style of aristocratic presidents that went before him. As champion of Democracy, he literally opened up the White House to the masses. Mr. Lincoln, once a member of the Whig Party, helped establish the new Republican Party. The Whigs preferred the power of Congress to Jackson’s strong Executive, until they fractured and died as a result of their stance on slavery. Lincoln’s New Republicans brought a clear antislavery message. Then came the Know Nothing Party. They were negativists and their anti-immigrant, anti-Negro, anti-Catholic views sealed their fate. The Mugwumps came later. These were Republicans who objected to their candidate’s corruption. They split the vote and allowed Democrat Grover Cleveland to win the election. Teddy Roosevelt created his Bull Moose Progressive Party when he broke with President Taft and the Old Republicans. This helped Democrat Woodrow Wilson become president. The same thing happened a century later with Ross Perot and his Reform Party. Perot’s votes allowed Bill Clinton to be elected with forty-three percent of the popular vote. Consider Eugene Debs, the four-time candidate for the Socialist Party in the early twentieth century. He changed the name from ‘Democrat Socialists’ to the ‘Socialist Party of America.’ In one of these elections he received six percent of the votes, said to be the all-time high in America’s history for a Socialist candidate. But this figure refers only to declared Socialist candidates, not the secret ones that exist today.”

He paused to catch a breath, and went on.

“In 2002, there were fifty-nine members of Congress who belonged to something called the Progressive Caucus. Their secret motto is to bore into American values from within, using our own institutions. They seek change all right. And then we have the RINOs—Republicans in Name Only—people who repeatedly vote against their own party, behind the façade of individualism. And we have old-time Democrats, even today—people like Z. Miller who claims his party left him, and J. Lieberman who though liberal on many issues, was discarded by his own party for his pro-Iraq War stance when his party was out to destroy the president. So much for that Party’s tolerance. So you see, kiddies, political parties are not carved in stone and some of them chip away at the Constitution.”

The number of listeners had tripled since Jason first stepped onto his box. So far they were orderly, in Buffo’s presence. Jason turned to page two of his notes. Kosmo’s influence oozed forth.

“Today in America, what we used to call the Republican and Democratic parties have each morphed into something different. In our parent’s time these two great parties at

least held the same goals, if their methods for achieving them were different. The Democratic Party was the party of John Kennedy, or JFK. Today, President Kennedy would be considered a conservative, or traditional American. The Democrat back then, Hubert Humphrey, used debate, rather than slander, dirty tricks, and triangulation to counter his opponents. The Democrat, Henry ‘Scoop’ Jackson, was said to be a Cold War anti-Communist. The Democratic Party has morphed into an Extreme Liberal Party. I call them ELPs.”

The ELPs are beholden to and being driven by the enemies of America. There was a time when the term ‘liberal’ meant broad or open-minded, standing against authority, or orthodoxy. In fact, our Founder’s were liberals. They wanted a big change from the British monarchy and Parliament that dominated them, even if it meant revolution and the possible loss of everything they had, including their lives. Over two centuries of our country’s history the term ‘liberal’ has evolved into something quite different. Today’s liberal is also oriented to change. But the change they have in mind runs counter to our founding ideas. This is why not one of them wants to be called a liberal, publicly. They call themselves ‘Progressives,’ instead. Don’t be confused by the shift in terms. They want bigger and bigger government which always translates to the loss of common sense and individual freedom, despite the ever-present promise of more rights and programs. They seek to compromise the sovereignty of America to some combination of nations, or global organization. They seek control over the people in general and in particular, their opponents. They achieve this by weakening our economy through taxes and degrading the individual by confiscating his land, limiting his self-protection, directing his health care, and constraining the exercise of religious freedom. They achieve much of this through the courts, today. This is why they are so full of obstructions when it comes to the appointment of Supreme Court justices. They go far beyond their constitutional role of ‘advise and consent’ as spelled out in Article Two, Section Two. They seek the dependency of the people by discouraging self-reliance, the quality that virtually built America. They tend to promote the cult of some grand human, as was the case with Lenin, Hitler, and Mao, and they ridicule one who kneels humbly before the Supreme Being. They oversee speech through codes, with their idea of ‘hate speech.’ They seek to oversee thoughts through propaganda, as delivered by the complicit main media and the so-called Fairness Doctrine. The ELPs work desperately behind the scenes to remake America, while her productive people work to strengthen her. They see themselves as ‘agents of change.’

Jason watched as one kid asked another who Lenin was.

“They walk the tightrope between the American people whose votes they need, and the special interest groups, whose money they need. They couch the dream of their Socialist journey in terms of peace, the environment, and the children. They do this to position themselves to call their opponents warmongers, polluters, and callous. Yet, unwon peace, propaganda, and abortion kill in this dangerous world. This is their sophistry.”

With that, many of the kids looked at each other. Jason could hear one of them ask another what “sophistry” meant.

“The world has pretty much gotten rid of kings, at least the kind who rule. This leaves two other forms of government. One is the form where the people have Rights that are

unalienable—Rights that flow to the people from the hand of the Creator. The other form is where human rights are granted by the government through rulings and decrees, always with the result of reducing the freedom the Founders envisioned. The first form sees power that comes from the Creator, and flows to and through the individual. The second takes power from the people, for itself. Those are the two possibilities. For America to adopt the second what is required is a revolution, either by arms or the slow decay at the hands of worker bees that patiently chew away and consume our values. To retain the first requires educated people who know both the Constitution and the folly of man-worship. Beware the wolf in sheep's clothing. It was our Founders' wish to limit the size and power of the government."

Jason had been switching labels as he spoke. This time he switched from "Sham" to "Sam," when he mumbled something about wolves in sheep's clothes. He stopped and wiped some saliva away from his mouth. Outside the classroom, he wasn't used to making such long-winded speeches, but now he was playing the part of a politician.

"If you think I'm ticked off with only one party, I introduce you to the other major player—the former Republican Party. I call them WIMPs today—the 'We're Into Manacles Party'! You know what manacles are? To be manacled is to be handcuffed, fettered, or restrained! They get elected, and then they go silent. They transform. Lately, they've joined their opponents to also become champions of big government. They go soft on the issues that got them elected, such as the war with our enemies, the economic rationale of lowering taxes, supporting life and the family, recovering fossil fuels, and cutting illegal immigration. Those who place their faith in them with their votes wonder later about the Beltway Malady. These WIMPs pass beyond the Beltway into the black hole of Washington where their brains go soft and their tongues go still. They become spectators in the arena when they were elected to fight the bull. The people who elected them ask: Why does this happen? Are they afraid of what the Complicit Main Media will write of them? Do they think the CMM will take their words out of context, or refer to them as intolerant, or as bigots, racists, or fascists, for a stance that opposes the ELP agenda? Do they really believe the biased ELP-driven polls and sit on the political fence, instead of acting on principle? Do they genuinely have a jelly spine? Are they just as power corrupt themselves? Do they expect talk radio to carry their cross? Have they been blackmailed? What's YOUR guess? Are they under some sort of mind control that takes hold like a space alien, when they fall into the black hole of Washington? Have they been muzzled as a result of the Clinton White House's acquisition of those confidential FBI files? What is it? Why do they give up their power? Are they consummate pragmatists? They know the game. They get elected on the values of the American people; then they transform. Even Blue Dog Democrats learned this trick in the last election."

As he spoke, Jason changed banners with facility. When he spoke of Socialism he reached for the Uncle Sham banner, and he replaced it when he spoke of American values. Jason knew there used to be a time when the media considered itself a "Fourth Branch," whose duty it was to challenge the lies of politicians, in service to the American people. His mentor, Kosmo, was familiar with the Communist press, and the old man saw a version of it emerging in America. The Communists knew that when something was repeated over and over, many people became less discerning and accepted it as the way the world was. If this was done with enough terms and concepts, then a substitute reality

could be constructed, a wonderland that stood in the mind, instead of facts and true history. Kosmo understood that the constant pounding of false dichotomies and distorted definitions laid the ground for such a wonderland. This was the impetus for his political glossary. Such commissions against language and logic were coupled with omissions, so that you could almost tell what was going right with the country by what was ignored by the Complicit Main Media—the astute neglect of covering any news that might counter the attitudes and opinions being molded. The ELPs’ plan was to create this false reality in the minds of those who grew weary of politics and therefore became less inquisitive, yet still had a vote that could be rounded up. These pithed subjects were “useful idiots.” Kosmo saw the CMM as a unique propaganda machine, carefully honed for the American political scene. It churned up one distraction after the other and kept tossing aluminum strips in the way of Truth’s radar beam. The agenda of a former political party had become the unrelenting struggle to destroy its opponents, with the assistance of the CMM. The health and stability of the country had become superfluous. Although there had been cover-ups throughout our history, this transformation accelerated with the Clinton White House. That administration had specialized in the “politics of personal destruction.”

Jason knew that that administration had devolved into a damage-control center designed to minimize the effects on Bill Clinton’s legacy created by his moral lapses and his unwillingness to fulfill his duty as president—such as losing bin Laden and treating a war as a crime to be investigated by the FBI. Similarly, despite the rhetoric that extolled ‘experience’, Hillary Clinton’s second-term in the White House, now chronicled and stored at the Clinton Library, was centered almost exclusively on controlling the “bimbo eruptions.”

Kosmo was convinced that “Conservative” (traditional American) Talk Radio, Fox News, a handful of newspapers, and some Internet bloggers, had found their success by filling the void left as a result of the CMM’s skillful neglect of much of the real news. These had become the “New Media.” The unpopularity of the ELPs in Congress dropped well below President George W. Bush’s and mirrored a drop in the CMM’s market share of their respective newspapers and networks, both radio and TV. The free market, so feared by ELPs, had acted as a remedy, by bringing out neglected stories and views. They yielded up an “alternative” view of America that was more real. ELPs referred to such views as those of “extreme right-wing fanatics.” This itself was a “triangulation,” so said by Mr. Q. These so-called extremist views were really the views of mainstream Americans, and the notion itself was designed to make normal people feel self-conscious. Mainstream Americans had simply grown tired of the deliberate slanting of events by the CMM and chose instead to tune in to the more accurate and balanced news outlets. As the CMM was made up mostly of ELP sympathizers who rarely challenged the inconsistencies and hypocrisies uttered by their favored politicians, the whole mess to Kosmo, was incestuous.

“And so I say to you...we have three major parties in America...two of them are political and are out of touch with you. You are America. You are the third party. Now some candidates speak of change. Well, let’s just think of that. There is change for change sake. That’s silly, isn’t it? Then there is change in the wrong direction—change toward Socialism, the nanny-state, less individuality, greater dependency. Finally, there is

change in the right direction. How about a candidate that calls for this change: Let's go after the fossil fuels we have! We shouldn't have to kiss up to the Saudis, or to OPEC. And certainly any attempt to sue OPEC for our woes is laughable. Oil today is at one hundred and thirty dollars a barrel! It's more feasible than ever to recover it. We've got trillions of barrels of oil in shale on federal lands out west. Half the world's oil shale exists in western Colorado and eastern Utah and seventy percent of that is on federal land. Oil shale contains kerogen, which can be converted into fuel with the use of water. The Green River Basin could yield two trillion barrels of oil from this source. At our current consumption of twenty million barrels a day, this amounts to two hundred and seventy years' worth, at present rates of use. Heat that huge deposit up with microwaves and say goodbye to OPEC forever! There's a rumor that the largest cache of crude oil yet discovered in North America sits in Montana and the Dakotas, waiting to be tapped. And what about that environmentally friendly coal in Utah that was placed off-limits by President Clinton in 1992 through the creation of the Grand Escalante National Monument? The photo-op with him and Gore was taken at the Grand Canyon because a lot of folks from Utah likely would have made themselves a nuisance at a ceremony dedicated to the removal of one trillion dollars of coal deposits from their economy. Why did President Clinton undertake this unconstitutional act, you ask? He did it to pay back the Riady's (Mochtar, and son James) who helped funnel Chinese funds for the Democrats in 1996, and who also happen to own in Indonesia the second-largest deposit of low-sulfur coal in the world."

Jason thought of pointing out that 70 percent of the state of Utah was federal land. How about selling off all federal land except the national parks and using the proceeds to retire the national debt? Now that would be a Change! Of course, that bill would have to include a balanced budget amendment, to keep Congress from spending us back into debt. But he didn't say it here on his Park Stump, for fear of swerving off track. He went on with his main message.

"The Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) contains untold reserves of oil. Only eight percent is being considered for development. There is no downside to the animals and the people there overwhelmingly favor exploration. The Alaska pipeline is in place and running at less than half-capacity. And what about the two hundred trillion cubic feet of methane hydrate, a source of natural gas, located under the Atlantic, available for U.S. use? Why should we allow ourselves to be paralyzed by environmentalists when our air and water is cleaner today than any time in our industrial history? Add nuclear power to the mix, and we've got energy coming out of our ears. Once we demonstrated we could clean up the environment, the America-squeezers became concerned about species extinction and our 'addiction' to oil. Most recently, we hear about man-made global warming due to carbon dioxide. This is a hoax and more and more scientists are stepping off this boat. The carbon credit scam is being investigated for what it is. The Warm Alarmists want us to make these concessions soon, because when the sun cycle reverses and the earth's temperature begins to drop, they want to be able to say it was due to our reduction in use of fossil fuels. I say, use it up as long as it's profitable to do so. We can go to work on hydrogen fuel, batteries, wind and gerbil power, in the meantime. The best stimulus for these developments will be the gradual unavailability of fossil fuels in a few hundred years or so. Remember, kiddies, we put a man on the moon. Now that's a 'change' from what you've been told, isn't it?"

The gang of kids had leveled off now and stood silently. Jason searched the notes that supplied his impassioned speech, and went on.

“How about this for another ‘change’. How about a presidential candidate who actually knows about economics? I ask you, how does taking money from a rich person and giving it to a poor person stimulate the economy? Oh, yeah. It’ll get spent, but no jobs will be created and no product produced. I ask you, have you or your parents ever received a paycheck signed by a poor person? How does federal confiscation of the profits of an oil company help anybody? That’s all based on envy, you know. And besides, it’s snapshot economics. It’s promoted so that we think in terms of groups, not individuals. That’s not American. Real people are moving up the economic ladder all the time. They rise out of the poorest quintiles, into the fourth and third. Sure, some fall back, but the net effect is that our poor people are further ahead than they used to be, and far ahead of the world’s poor. What better country for that to happen? What do you want? You want everybody to be equal economically? Show me one country where that has ever worked? After years of having cheap oil, the price we now pay at the pump has come up close to what the rest of the world pays...how does taking part of their profits help them drill new wells and build new refineries, so that the supply of oil will go up and the price will come down. How about letting them go after the oil under our ground for a change. Can you name any other country in the world that puts its own resources off limits? They will need capital to do this. Yes, it’s called Capitalism and Capitalism has done more to advance the human condition than anything you can name. Oh, and by the way, those who live without envy may just be the richest. I seem to recall reading somewhere about coveting being a sin.”

Jason was pleased to note a few heads nodding approval in his audience. While he was speaking, one kid started to heckle. Buffo shifted to his side of the makeshift podium and stared at the would-be disrupter. The heckler stopped.

“And taxes! I think Mr. Mellon said it first. He was the secretary of the treasury about a hundred years ago. He said, ‘Reducing tax rates increases tax revenues.’ Can we find just one politician who will interrupt another when the other speaks of ‘raising taxes’? Can we find just one politician out there who points out the difference between raising tax rates and raising tax revenues? Raising tax rates will bring in more revenue for a while, until it stifles the economy. In *The Forgotten Man*, Shlaes said that FDR helped prolong the Great Depression into the late 1930s by raising taxes. Taxes above a certain level—around twenty-five percent—begin to be counterproductive. So why do the ELPs keep saying things like, ‘We’ll have to pay for the tax cuts’? Anyone have an answer?”

There was no response.

“Could it be that they want control of your money, and more importantly, you? Could it be they think it’s their money and they know best how to spend it? This is why they must keep the myth alive that it’s good to tax the rich, which you will agree with, until you start succeeding and enter that bracket. I mean, you all want to become rich, don’t you? This is not a matter of doing your share. In 2006, the top five percent made thirty-three percent of the total income and paid over fifty-seven percent of the total federal income tax. And let’s not hear about greed. I’ve got figures here that show Americans are the most generous people in the world. Just remember, government doesn’t produce wealth.

It simply redistributes wealth through its bureaucracy. Let's break this habit of swapping taxpayer money for your vote. Let's give the taxpayer one and a half votes and the non-taxpaying recipient one vote. Now there's a real 'change' for you."

As he was saying that, Jason morphed from "Sham" to "Sam."

"Over and over again, Mr. Mellon's maxim has been vindicated in a bipartisan way. Democratic president JFK cut tax rates and that act increased tax revenues. President Reagan did the same, and they called it 'Reaganomics.' George W has done it and revenues have far exceeded predictions. This is why you don't read about it in the CMM. We need to make tax cuts permanent. In fact, we need to chuck the IRS and go with the Fair Tax. This would stimulate the economy like crazy, make our exports competitive, and flush many lobbyists out of Washington. We could reassign one hundred and twenty thousand IRS agents to the Mexican border! But what we really need to do, in addition, is enact a balanced budget amendment. The reason we run deficits, aside from trying to keep the New Deal alive, is that Washington can't control spending. Politicians can't say no!, especially when it's other people's money they are spending. We need to turn our greatest asset—the free market—loose on our unfunded liabilities such as Medicare and Social Security; we need to hold these politicians to a balanced budget! The comptroller general, a nonpolitical fellow, says our unfunded liability today amounts to fifty-three trillion! To cover this in a one-shot deal would require four hundred and forty thousand dollars extra from every household in America! We've got to control this in the next five years if we are to avoid frightening away foreign buyers of our national debt. If they bail out, or if interest rates go up, it's sayonara to the economic security of the country. We don't need any new programs in Washington! We need fewer. The prescription drug program will cost eight trillion more in the future! The president gets a D from me, for that."

Some cheers broke through.

"By the way, we have the best health care in the world right now. That's why people come here from all over the world for health care. Balance the budget, no new governmental programs, turn the market loose...now there are changes, right? We need Change all right...Change in the right direction...if our kids are going to have it as good as us."

"Right!" yelled a kid down in front.

Another shouted, "Free health care for everyone!"

"How about an America with complete religious freedom? That would be a 'change'. As Madison and Jefferson saw the matter, this means that we allow everyone to worship the way he or she wishes. There are atheists, and there are believers. Each has an obligation to leave the other in freedom, to believe, or not. If any religion is featured in the classroom or the school, then all of them should be featured. One shouldn't be neglected, and another celebrated. Say no to that. If political speechmaking from a pulpit is forbidden, then this should go for Democrat candidates in black churches as well. It makes little sense to drive religion back behind church doors, since the Founders all believed in a Creator. Why make policy today as if there isn't a Creator? If one believes in a Creator, then He created everything in front of the church door. Since there are so

many more Americans who believe in a Creator than don't, it's silly to ignore this majority belief, isn't it? Where's the democracy in that? Just don't allow the state to establish a religion, including atheism. Our Founders had the right idea about God versus Gov. They favored small Gov. They said it like this: Our Gov shouldn't establish a state religion and our people should be able to worship the way they choose. The two clauses are inseparable."

Jason turned the page.

"Leconte said that 'the great accomplishment of the American Founders was in convincing establishment elites that fostering all religions would lead to political and economic prosperity, just as intolerance would guarantee decline.' Who then, I ask, is dedicated to the decline of the great accomplishments of the Founders? How about, instead, a candidate who says he or she will reduce the size of government and increase the idea of personal accountability? How's that for 'change'?"

The kids seemed to perk up with the mention of the Founders. They had been taught so little about these people, yet they sensed their importance. Jason paused and lifted a bottle of water from his pack beside him. He surveyed the kids from right to left, as he drank freely. He'd been talking fast during the lunch hour, and his throat was parched. He resumed his speech after a healthy swig.

"And how about removing the corporate tax so that fewer jobs go overseas. The tax gets passed on to the consumer anyway. How's that for 'change'?"

Just then Jason looked in the direction of Jill. She was now wearing a Hillary mask.

"You there, Senator Clinton. I know you hate the big corporations. You blame Wall Street for making those sub-prime loans, but it was the government who pushed them to do it. Sure, there are crooks in the corporate world. Take Enron or Global Crossing, for instance. Adam Smith spoke of self-interest in a free market system as a force that drives the provision of goods and services. As a free people, Americans are the most generous in the world. Still, most people who produce something resent being coerced to turn over their earnings through taxes, where they have no say in how it is spent. Many people see that as a form of confiscation, which is immoral. To see corporations as evil is a Marxist idea. How many of you out there are aware that in 2003 the U.S. Treasury Department lost account of two thousand five hundred million dollars...yes, twenty-five billion dollars! This means that twenty-five billion was spent by someone, somewhere, for something in our government, but auditors have no idea who, where, or for what! Does the CMM ever report that to you? If it had, would you remain as quiet as you are now?"

"No!" came her retort.

Jason checked his hat, to make sure it was Uncle Sham's.

"And, how about we soak the rich and enact a twenty-eight percent capital gains tax?"

A couple kids yelled, "Yeah!"

"But wait a second. Think of this. Over half adult Americans have a stake in the stock market through investment plans. The rich have lots of ready cash on hand. Do you think the rich are going to sell their stocks to put their kid through college and risk paying a twenty-eight percent tax on their gain? Or do you think they will just write a check, and

avoid the tax? Who do you think gets hurt most by a capital gains tax? And do you really believe corporations pay taxes? No, no, no. The tax just rolls over into the price of the product. You pay corporation taxes! Just think what would happen if we cancelled corporate taxes. Capital would flow back into the U.S. and factories would spring up all over! Government doesn't create wealth. Government only redistributes it, and when it does, it screws up the economy! It's that Law of Paradox again. As Mr. Q says, 'Liberalism always generates the exact opposite of its stated intent.'"

A few muffled groans rose from the group.

"Who do we have here? Ladies and gentlemen, we are privileged to have the great senator from New York in our audience. Senator, since you are not apt to have real questions asked of you by the CMM, and since you won't appear before those who will ask you about matters that the people should hear, I'd like to ask you a few now. Would that be all right?"

Jill, as Hillary, stood ramrod straight and answered in a sharp voice, "Fine. Fire away, I'm the most qualified person to answer them."

"Would you agree that with your election, the country would again come under the Clinton copresidency, as it did when your husband was president? A lot of people feel yours is not so much a traditional husband-wife relationship as it is a mutual pact with a political aim...what would you say to that?"

"My husband has vast experience in world affairs and I wouldn't hesitate to ask his opinion on any matter."

"Okay, then. Well, what about being commander-in-chief in a time of war. You and your husband have the lowest favorability rating with our military of any president or candidate for president since they've been measuring it. How do you see yourself being more acceptable as commander-in-chief in the eyes of those you would ask to defend our country and our freedom with their lives?"

"I support the troops! I'm on record for saying so—"

"Well, there were quite a number of scandals you may recall. But I'm going to ask our students here to look them up. Besides, I think I see Mr. Stroyer coming now."

The students looked back as Stroyer made his way toward Uncle Sam.

"There was so much I was going to ask you about—Hill Raiser Hsu, Riady and Huang, Dale and Foster, the Rose Law Firm billing records and the Grand Jury, Secretary Brown and Juanita Broderick, the Healthcare Task Force and the commodities deal. There is so much yet to cover. But you wouldn't have answered anyway. You would have changed the subject, I bet. Can I ask you just one question, Senator?"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha...just don't pick on me."

"What about the records just released from your previous administration. What about that memo the senator from West Virginia sent you advising you to consider character assassination...well he called it 'opposition' research...for anyone who opposed your health care plan in 1993? Is that what Craig Livingstone and the nine hundred FBI files were all about in 1996? And, hey, what about hiding that Douglas standard back in 1973

that countered your idea to deny Nixon legal representation during his upcoming impeachment?”

“Ha, ha, ha, ha! I’ve always been a Yankee fan.”

They looked back and caught Stroyer’s gaze after conferring with some of the kids. He scowled at them as they disappeared around the corner. They laughed, as they walked around the block together.

Twenty-Two

Cookies

He wasn’t sure, but he thought his mother wiped a tear away from her eye while standing in front of the oven.

“What kind of cookies are those, Mother?”

“Sour creams. Your father loves them.”

“What’s the occasion?”

“Occasion?”

“I’ve seen you bake cookies once in my life.”

“I’m trying to please your father just now. And, baking can relieve stress for some—”

“Are you stressed, Mother?”

“Well, yes. Juliet told me that Bruce had an interview with a magistrate the other day.”

“What for?”

“He chased a car for reckless driving and he used those dancing headlights.”

“And?”

“It was a plainclothes police officer, in pursuit.”

“Oh gosh! Uncle Bruce has stepped up from being ‘Instructor’ to ‘Professor Emeritus’ of Highway Etiquette. Looks like the stuff hasn’t fully left him?”

“The stuff?”

“The chemical. It’s not time to panic though.”

“Well, this time he picked the wrong hombre. In addition to the whopping fine, he had to agree to take down those headlights. I wonder when this curse will lift. I wonder what’s next in store for your father.”

“It will all pass in time, Mother. We just have to be vigilant. Dad and Uncle Bruce will survive.”

“You seem so confident for your age.”

“We need problems.”

“We need problems?”

As Jason reached for a cookie, something slipped from his pocket and fell on the kitchen floor.

Vera diverted her attention from the oven.

“What do you have there, Jason?”

Jason reached down and picked up the pocket-sized Learning Bible.

“Where did you get that?”

“I’m keeping it safe for Buffo.”

“For Buffo? Did he give it to you?”

“Kind of. He said I could keep it for him. I think he was about ready to burn it. He said his mother made him take it with him when he left.”

“Last fellow I’d expect to be carrying around the Good Book.”

“And he’s a bully on the mend.”

“A bull? He’s a goddam crim—oh, Jason...excuse me. He’s a criminal, for what he did.”

“He had a bad moment.”

“So, you offered to take his little book into your trust. What are you going to do with it?”

“It’s not going to waste, Mother.”

Vera harvested the final batch from the oven before looking up at her son. She paused before reaching for the spatula.

“Your father and I have not been as thoughtful as we might have been.”

“What?”

“There is no reason you should not go to church, just because we don’t. If you want—”

“Maybe later, Mother. Right now I’m satisfied just to read the church.”

“You seem to read an awfully lot. What have you found so far?”

“What you’re doing there...is a good.”

“Thanks. I’ve only made these twice.”

“Oh, they are good, yes. But you would like it if someone made you a batch, right?”

“Sure.”

“Then Father’s a neighbor.”

“A bit more than that, I think.”

“If our lives are a rolling sequence of choices, then that is what defines us, wouldn’t you say.”

“Well, I suppose.”

“Billy Joel said once in a song, it’s only our mistakes that we can claim as our own.”

“I like his songs.”

“If our choices are fueled by our loves, and our loves are who we are, then our choices define us. Maybe one day each of us will stand before our Maker and tell Him our loves, even though He already knows. He cares about who we are at that moment rather than about our past. He’s not into character assassination. That’s His infinite mercy.”

“You got that from the little book?”

Jason just looked at her.

“Well, I’m not sure I like what your father is becoming these days.”

“It’s not so bad, you know, Mother. He loves exploring. That’s okay, isn’t it?”

“He also has been talking some at night about going up north to train for that Martian mission. Some island. That’s not too comforting, you know. And Bruce, with that crazy car of his.”

“Uncle Bruce loves me, I know.”

“Ah, your uncle Bruce. A work in progress, I think.”

“The thing is, they’re not in freedom. This jungle juice could be dangerous because it seems to freeze your mind in place. It’s as though it hardwires the brain with the old pathways, and blocks the new ones. Dad and uncle Bruce are powerless in a way, right now.”

“Well, I guess that’s one way to see it.”

“It’s the way I choose to see it. I should be allowed to see it like this, right?”

“Of course.”

“Somebody else might see it differently, and he should be allowed to have his views too, so long as his views aren’t hurting or endangering someone. But there’s the rub. If my views offend him, or if his views offend me, that’s tough. The Constitution doesn’t guarantee we won’t be offended. The real question goes beyond our personal beliefs. The real question deals with what actually is? And this doesn’t depend on the definition of ‘is,’ either. What exists? We might damage ourselves if we got off the path, don’t you think?”

“Well...yes.”

“Ever hear of Pascal?”

“Yes, I’ve heard of him. That’s something people take a whole lifetime trying to figure out, you know. And not everybody figures it out.”

“Figures what out?”

“What is.”

“Exactly. And they should be left in freedom, as much as possible. It gets us back to those unalienable rights—life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. These are rights that flow to us from the Creator, instead of from man. Kosmo says this kind of freedom is under attack today.”

“How so?”

“He says just about every law, regulation or program, restricts us. A lot of people are up to here with regulations. They keep pouring them on...where and when to smoke, what to eat, how to speak, how to think, how large the flush, where to pray, no more aerosols, no more DDT, no more transfats. Pretty soon they’re going to strike ‘endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights’ from the Declaration. If I were running for president, I would promise to reduce the number of laws and regulations. I would downsize this government. There’s got to be an argument somewhere, sometime for persons being responsible for themselves. Don’t you think?”

“Society would run amuck without laws, Jason. You’ve been listening to that Kosmo again.”

“You will always have law abiders and you will always have law breakers, no matter how many or few laws there are. Some people think the more laws, the fewer breakers, but I’m not so sure. You have to be able to enforce the laws fairly and uniformly, unless your goal is simply to have control over people. There are ways to reduce the number of breakers, without more laws.”

“Example?”

“Suppose if Jack the Ripper had lived in America in the twentieth century instead of England in the nineteenth. Take the case of the snipers Mohammad and Malvo, and just think of the publicity Jack would get today. The networks would bring us up to date several times in a day. The airwaves would be filled like it was a lot more than a penny novel, as the story unfolded, or didn’t. We’ve seen it over and over, with O. J., the J. B. Ramsey murder, Laci Peterson, the Holloway girl that disappeared. We are treated to the dismal mindset of Hollywood starlets. I’m not saying these stories are not newsworthy, but one report and maybe a weekly update would be better for us than all this excess and voyeurism. Gossip isn’t good for our humanity.”

“Well, maybe so.”

“To heck with the assertion it’s what we want to hear about. So much on the air is not what I want to hear about. I want to hear the details on Islamist fanatics bent on blowing up the JFK Airport or attacking Fort Dix. I don’t think Paris Hilton or Lindsay Lohan are going to attack me soon. I want to know if Obama has any friends that I’d like? Is there just one? I’m kind of tired hearing about what it is I want to hear about. It’s like being told, ‘We must stop with the investigations. It’s time to get back to the people’s business.’”

“Well, Son, your solution to put the kidnappers—”

“Kidnapper-killers.”

“Okay...whatever you call them...to put them in a cage with a rogue chimp. That frightened me.”

“It was a thought experiment. It was aimed at the idea of deterrence, Mother. So often we’re told that deterrence doesn’t work. That would work. The reason deterrence hasn’t worked is that it’s never been tried, really.”

“How can you say that?”

“It would save the lives of little girls and boys and even the lives of the would-be molester-killers. Do you think they can be talked out of their intentions? They ask over and over not to let them out of prison. This society has got to be a little tougher on evil.”

“You’re sounding like a Puritan, Jason. Thinking about evil is not the first thing on people’s list to think about, you know.”

“But it’s always there, always scouting out our weaknesses, like ole Wormwood, with his uncle, Screwtape, in the wings advising him. My remedy is just the thing for those who lack a conscience.”

“Wouldn’t you be interfering with his freedom then?”

“Yes, but for a greater good—the saving of lives. If some predator appears out of the fog like a regular human being, he or she can fool us, let alone a little kid. Most of us get an idea when we observe patterns of behavior, but that comes with experience. Besides, these dudes pop up as friendly strangers. As adults we can get a hint when the creeper comes around and what he’s up to, so that we can call for help before we get trapped.”

“The police?”

“Higher up.”

“Do you really believe that?”

“I think we are surrounded by the agents of good and the agents of evil every moment of our lives. We have to invite the Goods in, but the Bads are always lurking around a corner in our mind, looking for a crack in our spiritual armor. It’s important to remember that when the Goods are on hand, the Bads bolt as if the Goods are a magnetic force. In that world opposites repel. The Bads can’t stand being close to the Goods.”

“Heaven and Hell, then, for you.”

“Any other view is going to pull us off the path. It’s funny how people think heaven is up there and hell is down yonder.”

“Well, what then?”

“Too often we think of them as destinations finally reached at the end of our lives. But what if they’re really states that engulf us every moment.

“States?”

“States whose influence is right here, right now, competing for our souls from the moment we leave childhood and begin to make choices for ourselves. Maybe it’s when things are looking grim, or there’s a bit of a struggle, like now with Father and Uncle Bruce, when the greatest advance is possible.”

“You found all that in the little book you keep for Buffo?”

“It doesn’t say it directly. But the Bible, I’m convinced, is about the person who reads it. That’s why there are parables and allegories. There are as many forms of good, or of evil, as there are people’s intentions. It’s why man is capable of the most wonderful and the most sinister things. I don’t think they’ll ever find a center for good, or a center for evil, up here, do you, Mother?”

Jason pointed to his head. Vera thought for a moment of how a neurotransmitter molecule had lit up her husband's favorite thoughts. She had to agree with her son on this one.

"I looked in your books. It's hard to find a definition of the criminal mind. It's because the individual defines it, don't you think. Back in the Ripper's day they were equally perplexed. They examined brains of criminals, trying to find a smoking gun. They even examined the eyes of a prostitute he killed, hoping to find the Ripper's image seared somewhere inside them. But they didn't find Jack's image, and they couldn't see any anatomic difference in the brains of criminals. Phrenology, the idea that the shape of a person's head was important, also went out of style. You know, Mother, I hope Professor Hopkins doesn't find that chemical."

"Oh yes, that substance!"

"Just think of a molecule that erases a person's ability to hide or not hide his or her thoughts, so that her or his inmost and favorite ones rise to the surface and unleash behavior that reveals the person. No degree of language could shield the inner self. The part of the psyche that stands between our innermost thoughts and what we choose to present to the world gets cancelled. There is a place where people immediately sense each other, but it's not here. Here, a substance like that fiddles with our freedom. "

"I suppose. I must admit, I'd never thought of it like that."

"Take kids who are raised in a box, like Hitler's Jungvolk, or the children in the Mid East who are shown cartoons that glorify the killing of Jews and Christians. Wouldn't want that stuff falling into the hands of their mentors."

"Well...yes."

"Ever notice how the mentors never volunteer themselves for the suicide missions. They prefer instead the role of slaver. To save their religion, good Muslims need to speak out. The clock is ticking on their religion."

"You sound disturbed about this question of evil, Jason."

"I'm disturbed that so many of us are afraid to face it. It's what makes us different from plants, trees, frogs, and puppy dogs. If everything were done for us, if every decision we made came out perfectly, where would we be as humans? It sounds like it would be wonderful, but strange as it seems, we would grow tired of an infinite string of unchallenging days. Sooner or later, we would crave an obstacle or a struggle."

"Still, it would fine, for a while. So, what about your friend, Pascal?"

"He was very good at math and physics and he thought about religion. In his book, Thoughts, he puts forth his famous wager. It consisted of a simple matrix that contained four possibilities: Either God exists or doesn't exist, and either a person believes or doesn't believe. He goes on to show that when you add up all outcomes, it's wise to believe even if God doesn't exist. Of course, it's not a proof. It's more of a game of logic. There's more to faith than an algorithm."

"An algo—"

“A sum of choices. In fact, if we were able to prove undeniably that God existed, it would be counterproductive, since it would take away our freedom and remove the faith that saves.

“It’s all beyond me, Jason.”

“Mother, that’s the essential question of life and it fits best the essence of America—choice. Anyone is free to be an atheist. Atheists have countered with their own criticisms, as might be expected. They ask, ‘What if you choose the wrong god to believe in, one who is vengeful and resents your choice?’ In raising this, they choose to make God in man’s image, by rejecting the loving God of the New Testament. This is always a risk, thinking of God from man’s point of view. To think man can get into the mind of God, when He’s looking over six billion souls here and maybe on other planets, well that’s not only foolish, it’s arrogant. Why would the Creator not love the object of His creation? That would be a pagan god, not God. One is free to be cynical, but Pascal put cynicism in the two squares on the left. It didn’t make sense to Pascal that God was cynical. Besides, wouldn’t we want to be nice to a cynical god.”

“I guess so.”

“At school they tell us to beware of making judgments. But that’s a recipe for blind acceptance, which injures our freedom. Consider the passage in John when Jesus spoke to the mob in the company of the woman who had sinned. He said, ‘He who is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone.’”

“Yes, and—”

“It’s not the full quote, but it’s the one preferred by ole Wormwood.”

“How do you know that?”

“Because He also said, ‘Go and sin no more.’ Her life wasn’t up yet. She had a future in His eyes. That’s how much He loved her. That’s the pact of Christianity, isn’t it? ‘For your Love, I’ll keep trying to make myself better.’ They always leave that part out. Wormwood can’t stand that part. Man was created in God’s image.”

“That always confused me.”

“What. Father, the Soul. Son, the Body. And Life, the Spirit that flows between them?”

“Are you thinking of the ministry, Jason?”

“I was in Uncle Bruce’s lab the other day. He had a picture of the gametes getting together to form a zygote.”

“What in the world?”

“A sperm and an egg, getting together to form an embryo. It’s a miracle every time, and it’s good. Do you think science is ever really going to explain how that little person forms from those two packages of DNA? Science can watch. Or, just when does it become a person, for that matter. There is a reason why we are not certain of some things. Science is pretty cool, but it has its limits. I think I’m going to be a historian, Mother. I’m going to search for the Golden Fleece, here on the earth.”

“History. Now that’s not exactly a pure science, is it?”

“No, but you can make your mark. It’s amazing how the writers of history vary so much in their interpretations. Current events are history, you know, right off the hotplate of happening. They can be buried. They can get twisted. They might be justly reflected. Did you know that America has liberated twenty-five million people in Iraq, twice? Once, from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein, and more recently from the atrocities of Al-Qaeda. That’s what Mr. Q says. America accomplished this through the strength and bravery of our warriors, who believe in this country. A famous football coach said once, ‘That’s a good thing, not a bad thing.’ The main media doesn’t tell us about the good things. Often, they don’t even tell us about the bad things. They tell us what they want to tell us. Now that the Surge is succeeding, the battle for Iraq has largely disappeared from the news pages. It returns when there is a fresh bombing. But Kosmo thinks History will judge the president as either good or great, now that Iraq has been won, the benchmarks achieved, and Al-Qaeda is on the run. His administration’s purpose was forged by Nine-Eleven. His bold initiative to bring freedom to a key state smack dab in the midst of the world’s largest problem – fanatical Islam - will go down as a coup in world events unless we get a pacifist as next president who is willing to throw it all away. And as a few economic indicators go south, all of a sudden we’re in a recession even if we didn’t have two quarters in decline, which defines recession. The economy has been strong enough to withstand a war, the home loan fiasco, and Congress’s contrived gasoline shortage. The hyper-spending in Washington, unless curbed, will hurt our children, for sure. Why create false crises in the press when real ones lurk down the road? Some people say the writers of current events are simply confused. Kosmo says they’re complicit.”

“Well, making a living from being a historian is a tough row to hoe.”

“It’s all about judgment and choices.”

“Well, my mind is a bit challenged right now, Jason.”

“That woman had a choice to live the first half of the Golden Rule and she found her way to it. You’re living the second half, helping your neighbor with the thought of those cookies. Even if it’s Dad. See, we’re set up as individuals.”

“Try this one. Be careful. It’s hot. You’d better take good care of that little book.”

Twenty-Three

Return Trip South

Throckmorton honored his promise. He approached Bart Hopkins, head of the Anthropology Department and presented the problem. Hopkins’s colleagues had innocently and methodically entered a rain forest and emerged with more than they bargained for. Throckmorton asked Hopkins to walk into the same environment and take a stab at filling in the missing part of the record. He would skip the meteorite and the bats and concentrate on the Natives.

Nick and Bruce gave permission that allowed Throckmorton to supply some details of their aberration. The two explorers were given to periods of acting out their inner fascinations. They were momentarily robbed of normal inhibition and balance, so it seemed. It would have been unthinkable, even for this new president, to ask one of his staff to enter a world that might alter him without obtaining his informed consent.

Hopkins would have a competent guide who was dedicated to his safety. The president said twice that, fortunately, the symptoms seemed to be abating after a few weeks.

These considerations turned out to be of low priority to the anthropologist. He was ecstatic about the opportunity. Hopkins knew and respected Nick within the faculty family. Nick was considered to be one of the better teachers, not only from student reports and graduate school acceptance rates, but also from personal interaction. Hopkins didn't know Bruce. He knew only that Bruce had a reputation for being independent and he was renowned for his automobile. As an ambitious researcher, Hopkins saw there might be a few discoveries for him lurking in that forest. He could use the service of a botanist, but he was unable to entice his department mate. Unlike Nick Casperson, Hopkins would have no partner to fortify his dedicated probe. He was assured he would receive the best help the college could offer.

The travel agent worked closely with him. Using Jason's list, contacts were made. Hopkins would retrace the exact itinerary of the maiden trip. He would fly to Manaus with Para River Transport, with Raphael de Sanctos as captain. In Manaus, he would rendezvous with Rondon at the Tropicalis Hotel. They would fly by helicopter to a site close to the last sighting of the renegade tribe. From early on in the planning to the successful arrival of Bart Hopkins in Belem, three pieces of luck fell into his pocket.

First, Jaro finally returned to his home with Tai. This happened just after Vera called and failed to reach him. Vera had a limited conversation with Jaro's wife instead, who knew little English. From her depressed tone and chopped phrases, Vera concluded she didn't know her husband's whereabouts. A day after this telephone call, Jaro appeared. It was three weeks after he was due back from an upriver safari.

Jaro's wife couldn't convey all that she knew. Hopkins would later find out that Jaro and Tai had abandoned their Highland River Excursion on its third night. They had left five members of an explorer's club surprised and dismayed. When abandoned, the club was encamped on the banks of the big river, so their rescue was straightforward. They signaled a coal barge and were taken down to Manaus.

A captain who abandoned his ship not only faces a court trial but also was doggedly hounded by gossipmongers. Jaro believed his career as a guide was over. His indiscretion and the news of this forbidden act circulated like wildfire among the guides of the town. Unlike "Lord Jim" he did not seek a new and redemptive life. He came home to his wife as if nothing were amiss.

Jaro accepted Rondon's invitation to meet. Most helpful was Tai's agreement to come along. Rondon framed his questions carefully and was able to tease some critical recollections from them both. He focused particularly on the time between finding the meteorite and their breakneck trip down the great river. Tai's recollections were more lucid than his employer's. Rondon would file a formal brief with the Indian Service based on this interrogation. He would also make the report available to the new professor from New Jersey. Rondon's inclusion in Hopkins's team could be crucial to its success.

So what happened in the time immediately following their celebration on the rim of the crater? Jaro remembered Bruce popping open the warm champagne. It gushed out like a geyser and after a fit of laughter, they each imbibed an ounce or two in their moment of

discovery. Jaro recalled Nick making the call at the time. Amidst the relief of having finally arrived, the irony of the bubbly escaping put them all in a gleeful mood. It was cut short by their next sighting. A ring of native people materialized like ghosts out of the steamy forest. Tai recalled Nick's expression while he spoke to his wife, pointing the strange telephone toward the sky. It was at the moment of this second discovery, Tai heard Nick use the word "visitors."

Rondon gently pushed Tai for the narrative of what followed. Jaro translated, and as he did, his own sense of curiosity seemed to ignite. The treasury of Tai's report was the second piece of good fortune and the firsthand account was valuable to Hopkins when later related.

In their paints and feathers, the natives were not hostile. The few who carried spears never threatened. Instead, their expressions conveyed wonder, if not welcome. In this rapidly congealing context, it might be asked who then were the authentic visitors? The real visitors might have been taken as demons that brought misfortune and disease, or the very gods they celebrated in their rituals. Slowly it became apparent that these people viewed their newfound visitors as gods, somehow connected to the great disturbance that likely terrorized them.

Tai described for Rondon how their leader raised his arms skyward and brought them down in a sweeping manner as if to describe the crater. Tai's report had them being escorted to their camp, with Jaro's willingness. The party had packed their samples and taken their photos, which oddly did not include the natives, so spellbound were they. The camp was located a "long run" from the crash site.

Tai's memory was undimmed. After arriving in a makeshift village, amidst shouts they hoped were approving, a ceremonial dance got under way. Drummers beat drums made of animal skin stretched over hollowed trunks. Others blew crude wooden whistles and a few plied a variety of percussive instruments. Dancers surrounded them, moving in and out, weaving their bodies in patterns that mesmerized. In the light from a large fire, the chief and his council appeared. A shaman stepped toward them.

Jaro's memory for these events was fuzzy, but it was not the utter void of his former clients, Nick and Bruce. He acceded to Tai's rendition. Tai went on with the story, animated and wide-eyed. He and his mate Betta, had not been directly included in the ceremony. Apparently, they were not considered members of the celestial party. Betta became the more frightened of the two, and slipped off into the forest. He was not pursued, further evidence this was not a captivity. In fact, there had been no signs whatsoever of dominance or control. Tai stayed in the camp and observed from the sidelines.

He talked of the shaman who wore a brilliant feather vest. His body was painted a subdued array of yellows (ochre) and reds (iron oxides), and his eyes were circled with black (probably a bitumen). The men were covered with a modest loin fabric made of hide. The women were naked. By Tai's estimate the tribe numbered around sixty, including many potbellied children.

As the evening wore on, Tai made an important observation. Every member of this tribe had one or more tattoos located on his or her back or torso! Tai discovered this after what followed the dance.

The painted shaman signaled a squat little man who presented an array of powders and potions. The newcomers, including Jaro, were all given wooden cups. Betta fled into the forest by this time and Tai, staying back, was not offered the drink. The host held a cup as well, and encouraged all to drink heartily of its bitter mix. In about fifteen minutes they were all on their backs, either asleep or unconscious. Once subdued in this manner, they were stripped and laid out straight. Jaro and Nick were made prone. The medicine man then set about the task of carefully applying tattoos to these “gods” before them. Jaro’s tattoo was placed on his back at waist level.

The final and third stroke of luck was that these nomads, known as Harmony People, had relocated in the vicinity of one of the Service’s helipads. Their pattern was to establish a camp until their whereabouts was discovered and then move on. Rondon had heard of them, but had never interacted. He knew they had broken away from the Yanomami to the north because they had a falling out with the parent group. The Yanomami sachem preached war and revenge. To the sachem all misfortune, including disease and death, came from spirits inspired by his tribe’s enemies. Rondon believed that the internecine conflicts with rival groups were based on previous hostilities and territorial disputes. Fishing, hunting, and harvesting rights when infringed resulted in vengeful behavior. These differences motivated the renegades to break away from the parent group. They focused on survival and living together, rather than revenge. Some did not see them in a favorable light. Rondon’s knowledge of the Yanomami group from which they originated, along with other Indian reports, helped him develop a profile of the nomads.

The Harmony People improved their lot through isolation. Their good fortune and benefaction came to them from the gods. They expunged the demons from their society through their isolation, and hostile members were ostracized by vote. Isolation also protected them from the demons that brought on such curses as hepatitis, measles, and influenza from the outside. They believed they received favorable treatment from the gods even for indigenous problems such as malarial and postpartum fevers, which they couldn’t distinguish.

The potions and dances were meant to flush the demons from afflicted tribal members who exhibited fever, inanition, and delirium. They had abandoned the cremation ceremony in which the ashes of the deceased were mixed with a banana stew and consumed. Instead, they hoisted the deceased off the forest floor, avoiding in-ground burial at all costs.

The transcontinental jaunt and connection with Belem went easily. Raphael was waiting for Hopkins at the terminal. They climbed aboard the fully loaded DC-3. He absorbed Raphael’s nonstop air-tour for four and a half hours, being the sole passenger. They met Rondon in the lounge at the Tropicalis. Raphael dutifully dropped his card and wished them great success. The two discussed the reports of Jaro and Tai, now two days old. Rondon had recorded it, with permission and translation. The next day they would pick up Jaro who would escort them to the indigenous people. Hopkins felt he had a major

head start, having heard the recorded testimony and Rondon's research on the Harmony People.

Jaro agreed to join Hopkins and Rondon, feeling downcast at his recent disgrace. He could not convince Tai to return with them. Tai had been in contact with Betta, who was still hiding out in the outskirts of the city, shaken by the earlier events upriver. Jaro hoped to serve as emissary, perhaps buying Rondon and Hopkins greater access to their elusive subject. However their probe might be received, they both welcomed Jaro's presence as an advantage.

Hopkins was interested mainly in the ways and customs of the people. This included identification of botanicals used in their ceremonies and rituals. If he could identify the plants, maybe even the chemicals they harbored, it might be big for the college, and for his own career. Besides, the possibility of formulating a molecular antidote might help his colleagues, should they continue to be plagued.

Rondon was not concerned about Jaro's leaving his latest expedition. From Tai's report, Jaro too had consumed the mystery potion. When Rondon was told the plight of the first two professors, it became clear to him that Jaro had not acted dishonorably, as the rumor circuit had it. Likely, Jaro had been affected by the same agent that "cursed" Nick and Bruce—the same agent that brought Hopkins to the forest. Rondon would put in a good word officially for Jaro, whom he implicitly trusted past and present.

Jaro's memory revived as they flew north. When he "deserted" the Explorer's Club, he tracked into the forest from the northwest on recognized trails. He recalled stumbling upon an abandoned nomadic camp in a state of exhaustion. Delirious from dehydration, he was able to find a stream in time to revive himself. He searched in vain for the tribe for two days before trekking back to the big river. There he hitched a ride and headed downriver. His compulsion to rejoin the vagabonds had waned since his return to civilization. It was as if he had awakened from a dream. He cautiously weighed the pros and cons before agreeing to another encounter.

Jaro's wife discovered his tattoo after their report to Rondon. Jaro showed his mark to Rondon and Hopkins, who now could count three—all roughly the same size, coloration and floral design. Jaro told Hopkins he had experienced strange mental states since his trip with Professor Casperson.

The compatibility of the three of them was reassuring. They might require a bond exceeding that of guide and patron on this trip. Rondon was more reserved than both his two companions. Jaro's mood alternated between pensiveness and expectation. Hopkins kept his own journal, scribbling long entries now aimed at purpose more than random observation. After three hours in the air, the helicopter landed southeast of the Jao Park just after noon. Rondon did not tell how he knew the locale of the tribe. Jaro knew that FUNAI made infrequent but regular reconnaissance flights and plotted visible camps and campfires.

They made contact on the morning of the second day, after a long hike the day before. Jaro was recognized by the chief and was greeted with manifest favor. Jaro introduced his companions who were at first skeptically examined. They clearly were not linked to the visit from the gods. They breached the protective xenophobia the tribe adopted.

Although Jaro was Xingo, he knew some of the Yanomami language. He mediated an understanding that Hopkins would be permitted to stay with the tribe and study it until its next move in a few days. This was considered a great coup given considering the earlier caution. The three explorers would dissolve into this newfound culture with the understanding they preferred no refreshers when it came to tattoos.

The tribe had past contact with white men, before their exodus from the parent group. The village was composed of a series of lean-tos made from bamboo and small saplings woven together with vines. They possessed a few machetes and hatchets, which made their tasks infinitely easier. Hopkins set about identifying individuals, so he might follow their daily routines. Some of the men in the tribe fished, using baskets and spears. Some hunted and brought in tapir, alligator, monkey, wild boar, and game birds, from which both flesh and feathers were harvested. Some made dugout canoes, and others made arrows, spears, and blowguns. Some harvested peach palm fruit, using scissor-shaped ladders, and others made the same ladders. Some smoked the meats, and some boiled the meats, so that no blood was visible. Some harvested the plants of the forest, and used them as hallucinogens, medicines, or sources of pigment.

On the second day, Hopkins observed the tattoo artists applying their skills to other tribal members. He noted the fading images of tattoos that were similar to Jaro's, and from description, those of his colleagues. Tai's earlier report of the soporific drink clearly incapacitated those who might have resisted a tattoo, but here was a whole society perfectly willing to have their marks applied repeatedly. Jaro was not able to decipher a clear explanation of why Nick's party had been subjected to this ritual, except that they may have been seen as gods and, as gods, were seen as a powerful presence. Their residence with the tribe might bring good things, including protection. Maybe, it was thought the tattoos would make them permanent members. If they were gods, they couldn't be coerced. Hopkins knew this was all conjecture. Efforts to elaborate this through Jaro's limited translations only led to more questions.

After three days of meticulous tracking and observing, Hopkins came to a more refined conclusion. Every one of these people was a specialist, if not a "superspecialist"! The fishermen who used baskets to catch fish did not use spears. Those who lashed the bamboo together did not cut the bamboo, and people who brought in the bark of the hallucinogenic plant, later identified as a variety of *verola elongata*, pretty much confined themselves to its location and harvest. The women who wove baskets did not make the feather vests or headdresses used in the ceremonies. It was becoming evident that this tattoo society had learned how to reinforce the tasks necessary to maintain it.

By periodic reapplication of the botanicals, certain behaviors were reinforced. Here was a society of workers, each having attained an expertise in his or her craft, making a contribution to the whole. Were these "talents" or "loved activities"? Was this a way of taking a blank slate and grafting on to it a behavior that served the group? Such dedicated behavior had been described before in the biological realm, in bees, ants and termites. He was unfamiliar with this in the anthropology literature. He had read Plato's Republic and was familiar with other utopian notions of "the perfect society."

To focus completely, to the exclusion of life's routine, was what defined the savant. Specialized behavior in humans usually came about through chosen training and

vocation, directed by innate aptitude and passion. In contrast to the boredom that often visited the assembly line, the people here were smiling and exuberant. One didn't get the impression they stopped off at their local tavern to blow off steam. It was as if these people loved what they were doing and couldn't get enough of it! Likely, this was why they were called the Harmony People.

Hopkins wondered, maybe they were just putting on a show for their visitors. This had occurred in places like East Berlin or China, under Communism, when Westerners were shown commissaries or agricultural communes that were, in reality, showcases, off-limits to their own people. Maybe their pristine life had necessarily been disturbed by the very presence of outsiders—the behavioral equivalent of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, which stated that by the very study of elementary particles, one changed their interactions. In our society, our infatuation with "job creation" for the sake of the job instead of the worker sometimes was a recipe for boredom, maladjustment, or absenteeism. What worked better was wealth creation, as a function of productivity, where "jobs" comprised an integral part of that design. Hopkins wanted to check on the rate of ostracism, but that would elude him.

If genuine, here was evidence the human mind was primarily focused on producing or providing something. For all he knew, this task-oriented society may have placed such activity above reproduction or ceremony. These people did not seem like ants or bees in their demeanor, however difficult it was to discern the attitude of an ant. Even the Antman from Harvard had never described a smiling ant. Hopkins knew he would have to stay a lot longer to figure out if the inhabitants of this place started as if they had a tabula rasa, a blank slate onto which their roles would be branded, or whether they had a choice in their eventual "vocation." Maybe it was mostly a matter of familial privilege or lottery of some kind. It occurred to Hopkins that these people were very balanced within their own culture. The "multitasked" mind of a Westerner when corralled into one pen might deteriorate like that of a rat in a blind maze. That was, if rats had minds.

If the tattoos were involved in the behavior, as it appeared they were, then the repeated application was an encouraging observation. It implied the lack of permanence, maybe the return to a "former self." Perhaps with repeated application, the "former self" faded into a memory. If the tattoos started in youth in the Harmony Society, the former self may be more elusive. If these musings and hypotheses were so, Nick, Bruce, and Jaro most likely would return to their balanced selves once the active ingredients of their onetime tattoos dissipated. As Hopkins thought more about it, the scarier it became. There was a lot of controversy about cloning. Was this a form of behavioral cloning through environmental manipulation?

Hopkins photographed the process and the utensils they used for tattooing. He had read up on the art before his departure. Although the tattoo went back two thousand years to Nubian and Egyptian mummies, the Europeans' first contact with tattoos came from the American Indians and Polynesians. James Cook first mentioned the word "tatu" after contact with Tahitians. The early methods were far removed from the machines used today, whose needles move thousands of times a minute. These Indians in Amazonia used a wooden plate with tiny perforations made in a floral pattern. They strapped these plates of variable size onto the recipient and used tiny quills that had been filled by capillary action to inject the essences and pigments through the design into the skin. The

beauty of the tattoo was secondary. Perhaps its primitiveness was the reason for the need for repeated applications.

When Hopkins disclosed his observations to Rondon, the latter became even more serious. He called for a closed session with the anthropologist.

“Do you know what this means, Professor?”

“It means that we might have a Noble Prize on our hands.”

“Not for taking home someone else’s discovery. No, my good professor, we must leave this here. Do you understand the potential for such a chemical, whatever it is?”

“But it could be used for the Good.”

“And it could be used to condition school children. It could be used to produce Manchurian candidates. In other words, it could be misused. It could fall into the wrong hands. It is safe enough, right here.” Rondon waved his hands in front of him. “These people are locked into their own existence. This is where this plant, or substance, must remain.”

“But, this is a potential breakthrough on brain function!”

“Should we be interfering with the flow of nature? Should we be tinkering with the capacity to choose?”

Hopkins had met his match. At this moment, career and reason clashed. He had come into the interior of Brazil in search of a full explanation. Yet, he discovered more than he expected to. What Rondon was saying could not be dismissed. Rondon was dead serious, and his mood left no doubt that the plant would stay. Hopkins would leave behind in this forest a magnificent find, perhaps a tool for discovering more of the chemistry of willfulness and motivation. But he was trapped. He had the feeling in speaking with Rondon that if he stayed, it wouldn’t be good. If Hopkins wanted to leave later, he’d have to find his way home by himself. He was not comfortable with that thought, either. It wouldn’t work to attempt to smuggle some out. He had watched Jurassic Park several times. The question even went to whether he would publish what he knew. That might lead to another expedition, and the very opposite of what his logic was telling him. He would honor Rondon’s wish. The antidote would have to be time, and they had plenty of that.

Twenty-Four

Empires

Jason bit off a chunk of D. Stroyer’s mantra with the History Club and knew he had a large assignment. Stroyer never hesitated to tell the kids about the United States being an imperialist nation. Jason wasn’t quite sure of the definition, but the term had been tossed about with a sneer. “Imperialism” seemed to convey more than Webster’s entry when Jason looked it up. On the surface it meant “extending authority by acquiring territory or by the establishment of power and influence over other nations.” By this reasoning, a superpower automatically would be imperialistic by virtue of influence. Given this reasoning, Jason wondered, if a nation didn’t wish the taint of being thought of as “imperialistic,” it might be best to remain second-rate. But then again, a nation driven to

create an image before other nations likely was not destined to superpower status. Principles held for nations as with people, thought Jason.

When Jason read more, he came to understand the fluidity of the term “empire.” He knew there had been evil empires. Historian Paul Johnson referred to them as “despotic utopias.” The most recent included Hitler’s Third Reich and Soviet Communism.

Other empires, like the United Kingdom, advanced the members of a commonwealth until the itch for independence evolved. For the most part, the move for independence came with forced accommodation and painful repression, such as in the case of India, but all-out war occurred only with the case of the American colonies. Oddly, the UK and the U.S. remained tight partners in the world today, but it had been the American Colonies’ War of Independence that taught her former mother country some valuable lessons when it came to empire maintenance and disassembly. The latest war aimed at the UK’s empire maintenance was a limited but modern one, involving missiles. It occurred as a result of a miscalculated invasion on the part of Argentina’s military government on the South Atlantic Islands, including the Falklands, and brought a swift and supported response from Britain’s Prime Minister Thatcher. If it was a territorial dispute, it was one that was settled decisively in three months without the involvement and indecisiveness of the UN, or any other outside bodies. No time was left for mediation.

New York had gotten its nickname the “Empire State,” because of its vast wealth and resources. Is there a government or people in the world that wouldn’t be happy to have vast wealth and resources? Jason wondered. Isn’t this the basis of the politics of envy espoused by Marxists? Most historians recorded the settling of the New World occurred at the expense of Native Peoples. Stroyer talked about this a lot as well. Jason put this on his list and would have a look at the American Indians later.

Ever since he took a look at Marx, Jason was taken with the need for independent study. One might easily allow oneself to be spoon-fed history, but it was perilous to the understanding, and it inhibited reading. In other words, passive intake led to idleness. Spoon-fed pabulum smothered the sense of inquiry and closed the mind. Utopian ideas that at first glance seemed worthy were discovered usually to have failed in the application. There had been many attempted models between Plato and Marx.

Marxism, which aimed at “social justice,” virtually always gave way to totalitarianism. Jason vowed to find out why. Kosmo knew why and said it was the reason the U.S. Constitution was such a jewel. Yet, with all this Jason would discover that the U.S., in her youth, had felt her oats. The terms “gunboat diplomacy,” “treading softly while carrying a big stick,” and even “manifest destiny”—were part of our heritage and deserved study. But first, he would have a look at some unequivocal “empires.”

When he dug into the subject, he found that half of all history dealt with imperialistic or power moves, one nation upon another, if you also throw in war. Notable movers and shakers included the Persians, the Greeks, Alexander, the Romans, the Ottomans, the Hapsburgs, and the Holy Roman Empire, and the British. He would start with the latter-day despots—Hitler and Stalin—with their destructive experiments, Japan with its Imperial Navy, and Soviet Communism. He would finish up with the oldest and most recent threat to the world—radical Islamism, with its fanatic interpretations, coercion, terror and violence, and present-day efforts at the reincarnation of the Muslim Empire.

Strangely, none of these had caught the eye of Stroyer who held a Zinn-like focus on America and her faults, which he freely sprinkled on the History Club and in his classroom. It was as though he was partially blind. Jason wondered if it was his intense prejudice, or was he a fraud? When a kid raised one of these other empires, Stroyer remarked that America, after all, must “be held to a higher standard.” But this seemingly noble view too often translated to selective forgetting of much of the world’s history. Comparative history wasn’t so much a course, as it was the result of broad study. At least “comparative history” was a more discernable discipline than was “human geography.” Jason asked whether there was a deliberate move to not teach history in some schools, like his. When history was either channeled or discouraged, might it be so that her lessons be left undiscovered? Few of the kids had knowledge, and even fewer had questions. Where was the education in that?

Those bent on distorting America’s image seemed to lose sight of scale and magnitude. Scale and magnitude could only be appreciated with a broad and comparative knowledge. The alternative would be an Alice-in-Wonderland view of reality, rich with rabbit holes and relativity. Although America’s record was far from perfect, selective forgetting was one of the hallmarks of blind utopianism.

Jason first read *The Prince*, Machiavelli’s prescription for invading and conquering other states, republics or monarchies, be it through the use of arms, colonization or “princely occupation.” Machiavelli was anything but a utopian. In *The Prince*, he seemed to be calling for a unified Italy through the application of raw power. Some have questioned if *The Prince* was a satire, as Machiavelli’s discourse on Livy’s history of Rome stressed political morality. Kosmo told Jason that Castro had a copy of *The Prince* in his library, though few felt he was much into satire.

Jason started on his quest knowing he would eventually take a hard and honest look at his own country. He would try to be fair and keep scale and magnitude in mind. He had no ax to grind that he could identify. Still, he’d been told it was impossible to be completely objective. He knew the Pledge of Allegiance and could sing the National Anthem, and he didn’t feel like he was an “extremist.” Further, he liked doing both. He heard the rumor that the music teacher at school was coming under scrutiny for his patriotic sentiments. Jason was also open to the quaint notion that America, on balance, might possibly have a good record. The net result of power might possibly be enhancement and enrichment instead of carnage, plunder, and slavery.

Memorizing dates could be a boring exercise. History taught lessons, if we stayed tuned. The Marxist view of history, namely that it determined itself through class struggle, required a close look at who was fostering class separation and who was adding fuel to the struggle. He’d learned that from Kosmo, so perhaps he did have a preconception going into his project. The idea that class struggle and envy determined the totality of history was an idea suited best for molding the minds of an illiterate people.

Selective forgetting was not the same as the necessity of limiting one’s scope. The great historians must have combed through mountains of material before they distilled it into what they wanted to say. Jason would have to choose from hundreds of empires. He would leave out the Biblical peoples—the Hittites and the Assyrians, for instance. He would tackle Henry V’s imperialistic thrust into France some later time. The recurrent

border wars between nations, such as Chile and Argentina or India and Pakistan were perhaps imperialistic, but belonged to a different category. His outline would include history's more grandiose and unambiguous examples of imperialism.

The notion of "historical perspective" required knowledge of the times. To sit back and judge by today's standards the events and decisions of the past without casting them into the context of their time was also a temptation and a sign of laziness. To be able to transport oneself in time was not easy, except maybe for the reader of romance. It required learning. Wouldn't it be a grand exercise to write down one's impressions of a current event, then bury it without waiting to hear from the pundits, the polls or the fallout from the future? Dig it up later and see how right you were. In other words, no Monday-morning quarterbacking, no equivocating, just making assessments based on core principles at the time. The game would be called, "Be a Leader." If we were required to play this game, we'd have more humility across our land.

An apt example of the need for historical perspective was President Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 to end World War II. As controversial as this became, one must take one's visions of incinerated human flesh and the blast-flattened landscape of Hiroshima, add them to the later understanding of future radiation effects on all proximate life, and put it all in a mental box. These images and understandings were appropriate deterrent influences for the subsequent use of nuclear weapons. Nagasaki followed three days later because Emperor Hirohito could not convince the militarists to surrender after Hiroshima. For Truman, the purpose of these bombs was to end the war. They did. He could have invaded Japan and sustained huge loss of American lives, perhaps one million. It was also estimated an invasion would spell the loss of between 10 and 20 million Japanese. He could have forewarned the site but was afraid that American POWs would be placed in the drop zone. He could have chosen a demonstration island, but a "dud" would have been counterproductive. So he made his choice and stayed with it.

The Hiroshima uranium bomb exceeded the expectations of the scientists and politicians who worked on the Manhattan Project. The feverish pace and dedication to the project almost bound them to the bomb's deployment. The Alamogordo explosion in July of '45 had vaporized the drop tower and turned eight hundred yards of desert sand into glass. It was a powerful weapon, they knew then. What President Roosevelt knew years earlier vis-à-vis a letter written him by Einstein and cosigned by nuclear scientists Fermi and Szilard, was that Hitler had been working on a nuclear fission device. Germany's premier rocket scientist von Braun later confirmed this after escaping to the American side with secret papers and a slew of scientists after Hitler started to use his A-4 space rockets (V-2s) as vengeance weapons against London. The Einstein letter led to the birth of the Manhattan Project. An initial expenditure of \$6,000 grew in four years to \$2 billion. Professor Oppenheimer and General Groves led the project. It was very likely that nuclear weapons would have been developed by another country since nuclear physics was a hot subject and a war was on.

A second example of the need for historical perspective was the story of the Japanese internment camps during WWII. These camps had been widely criticized from today's perspective. President Roosevelt took the step, for security purposes. Japanese spies and saboteurs had infiltrated the Western states in substantial numbers. Was this "racial

profiling” or was it protecting the country? Our present queasiness over “profiling” only encouraged anti-American venom and planning in the many Wahhabist mosques in our own country. Would Lincoln, Wilson, or FDR have stood for radical proclamations in our mosques? Such questions turned the clock in the opposite direction, and were termed “hypothetical.” Then there were the dicey questions that avoided time altogether—what would (does) Jesus think of global warming?

When Germany declared war on the U.S. four days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the Axis Powers solidified. America’s isolationist sentiments vanished on December 7, 1941 with our declaration of war on Japan. At that time, Germany was further ahead than Japan on its path of domination, so America had to fight two enemies simultaneously. The European theater took precedence. FDR knew of sabotage in the U.S., and he knew of balloon bombs floating over the west coast from Japan. He chose to keep these out of the public eye. He needed to do everything he could to secure the nation at the time. Our Congress today had been so queasy over the question of interfering with freedom when it came to our own security that it is considering a ban against listening in on terrorists’ phone calls and had been woefully slow to block illegal entry into the States. Yet, economic (taxes) and religious (“separation of church and state”) freedom found far less scrutiny. FDR made his decision at a time of war, and patriotic Japanese Americans were understandably upset and hurt. Still, it would be interesting to imagine how filmmakers and retrospectivists would have played the game, Be a Leader.

Kosmo, with many Americans, understood that border security at this time of war with Islamists was part of our defense. He knew when the next attack occurred in the U.S. from Islamic killers, someone would trace a perp or two back to an illegal border entry, and great shrieks and cries would be heard from the pacifists. At that time we would once again witness the politically motivated and counterproductive finger-pointing that had so repulsed our citizenry. But this time, we would know the problem should have been fixed. Yet, we dallied. It would be another “Who knew what and when did they know it?” charade. Jason wondered how anyone could consider America to be an imperialist country when we allowed ourselves to be invaded by millions of illegal immigrants.

Jason looked first at Japan’s history. The initial American encounter with Japan had little of military character. The role of gunboats in the mid-nineteenth century was to protect Americans such as merchants, consuls, and missionaries, not to entrench American power. Even U.S. naval officer Mathew Perry’s visits in the 1850s were diplomatic in nature. Peace and friendship with this mysterious island people was sought for trade purposes and two ports were opened. Safe haven for the shipwrecked and supplies for whalers were two provisions included in Japan’s first treaty with the U.S. The signing of the first treaty was capped with a feast. Isolationism gave way to more treaties and dealings with the West.

The reign of the shoguns—warlords—was followed by the restoration of the Emperor Meiji in 1867. During the reign of the Meiji in the late 1800s, the Japanese mingled with and mimicked the ways of the West. Japan modeled her army after the Prussians and her navy after that of Great Britain. Compulsory education was fashioned after that of France and Germany. Scholars went abroad to study Western science and languages.

The constitution of 1889 provided for a parliament (Diet) and an emperor, seen as both sovereign and divine. The emperor, nonetheless, answered to a ruling clique. The ruling clique ended in 1912 with the death of the last Emperor Meiji. This was followed by a succession of unbalanced god-kings, eventually ending with Hirohito.

Despite a measure of religious freedom in the late 1800s, eventually Shinto became militarized as the state religion. Truman installed General McArthur as a benevolent overseer after Japan's defeat in WWII. The Japanese were shocked to hear their emperor's voice on the radio. While much of the government's infrastructure remained intact and a constitutional monarchy was put in place, the figurehead emperor, Hirohito, in 1947 was required to renounce divine authority. So ended the merger of church and state.

Jason searched for the factors that led Japan to turn imperialistic. Anti-Japanese racial sentiment was manifested in the rejection of a "racial equality clause" at the Paris Peace Conference after WWI. Also, America and Australia had restrictive immigration policies. These in addition to some broken trade agreements led to resentment of the West in the half-century prior to WWII. The population rose by one million each year and stretched Japan's agriculture. Economic depression hit in the late 1920s. A climate suitable for the rise of a military government came about as a result of these and a draft was introduced. The military took control of the government in the 1930s. Political parties and the parliament earlier had little power, but this changed under the weak Emperor Taisho. Within this environment, an imperialistic larva hatched and grew into a full-fledged monster.

Japan had "conflicting interests" with China over Korea, and the Sino-Japanese war of 1894-5 had gone badly for China, which lost Taiwan to the Japanese. The triple intervention of Russia, France and Germany forced Japan to return territories. This added oxygen to her imperialistic embers. New "conflicts of interest" with Russia over Korea and Manchuria led to the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5, which went badly for Russia. Korea was annexed in 1910 and Japan's influence in Manchuria grew to the point of occupation by Japan's Kwantung Army. Japan bombed Shanghai in 1931. She withdrew from the League of Nations in 1933 over criticism for her actions. A second war with China broke out in 1937 with occupation of and atrocities against the population of coastal China. In 1940 Japan occupied French Indochina (Vietnam) and joined the Axis powers, Germany and Italy, straining relationships with the U.S. and Britain. An oil embargo by these two countries was said to have inspired territorial designs on the oil-rich Dutch East Indies. Now on her imperialistic downslide, Japan took the fateful step on December 7th, 1941 of bombing the American fleet at Pearl Harbor in a surprise attack.

The next ten weeks saw the surrender of Singapore, the Dutch East Indies, and the Philippines to the Japanese. After Pearl Harbor, Admiral Yamamoto uttered his famous portent, "I fear we have awakened a sleeping giant and filled her with a terrible resolve." The women (Riveting Rosies) were a big part of the behemoth that produced in America's factories the largest arsenal in history.

That resolve was unprecedented in military history and supplied contemporaneous Allied forces in Europe as well. By the time of the Battle of Midway, the giant had awakened. Military instructors remembered the lessons Chief Pontiac passed down in his war against

the British and Colonials following the French and Indian War. Hitting selected forts while isolating others, the savvy chief's tactics were applied two hundred years later in the Pacific. Using the tactic of "island hopping," the noose slowly tightened on Japan's home islands.

Jason learned the names of the battles. Elated by early victories, Japan sailed her navy to New Guinea and the Solomon Islands in May '42 to prepare for an assault on Australia. Doolittle's bombing raid the month before demonstrated to Japan we could surprise, too. Japan's plans were stymied in the Battle of the Coral Sea. Aircraft launched from carriers Lexington and Yorktown won the day. The Lexington was lost and the Yorktown badly damaged, but the Japanese were turned back. Having broken Japan's radio codes, we dealt a decisive blow to her Imperial Navy at Midway. They lost four carriers along with their naval superiority. We lost the refitted Yorktown. After a brief occupation of the Aleutian Islands off Alaska, there followed the battles at Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands and Rendova, New Georgia, Bougainville and New Britain, in New Guinea. After many months of fighting, American and ANZAC forces prevailed. We hit several of the Marshall Islands, including Kwajalein Atoll in January '44. Saipan in the Marianas, Tinian and Guam were painfully taken, and victories in Palau and Peleliu set up the retaking of the Philippines. Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands had to be taken as a base for the Marshall Islands campaign, which in turn was key for the step to the Marianas. The marines took Tarawa after severe losses. There followed the Battle of the Philippine Sea at Leyte Gulf and Luzon, and the famous "Marianna Turkey Shoot." This enabled McArthur to retake the Philippines.

The campaign in the Pacific would be given a boost following VE (Victory in Europe) Day, May 8, 1945, with Germany's surrender. The sulfuric volcanic island of Iwo Jima was taken late February '45 after five weeks of the most intense fighting yet. Japan turned suicidal at Okinawa where she used kamikaze pilots and took her highest losses at one hundred and eighty-five thousand! Okinawa was to be the last stop before the land invasion of Japan.

The success of the testing of the first atomic bomb was reported to President Truman while he sat with Churchill and Stalin at Potsdam in July following VE Day. Four days after "Little Boy" was detonated over Hiroshima, and two days after "Fat Man" was used on Nagasaki, the Japanese government announced it was ready to accept terms. VJ Day was August 15, 1945.

With Japan's defeat, America's resiliency and military strength was unquestioned. After she defeated her mortal enemies, America demonstrated her generosity and goodness. Hirohito assumed full responsibility for Japan's wartime actions and in addition to renouncing his divinity he stated that the Japanese were not superior to other races and were not fated to rule the world. These words shocked the people, but they made possible the American occupation. General Tojo and others were hanged, and the Japanese military was disbanded. Government support for the official Japanese religion, Shinto, was discontinued. Under the old Meiji Constitution, the people had been excluded. Political power had flowed from the hands of militarists who were close to the emperor. McArthur promoted the Founders' idea that the state existed for the people. A democracy was created with new election laws, civil liberties, and women's rights. Industrial wartime monopolies were broken up. Educational reform and labor unions were

encouraged. In essence, America exported the seeds of the fruits of her own successes to Japan under McArthur's husbandry. This made for a very favorable trade balance indeed!

America occupied the cleared ground until those seeds bore the fruit of this new democracy. Another "sleeping giant" was about to be awakened—postwar industrial Japan. This awakening was stimulated further with a supercharged free market system. The free market system flowed from and found compatibility with all freedoms, including religious.

Jason and his friends had never heard of Deming. W. E. Deming was a statistician-mathematician and physicist-engineer who introduced a new set of management principles to Japan in the 1950s. The ideas revolved around quality instead of cost. Teach skills on the job and make things better, continuously. If you could instill this in the workplace, then waste and cost would automatically go down. Eliminate slogans, numerical goals, ratings and fear. Cooperate in a win-win way to improve the product and relationships. This was almost utopian, Jason thought.

Japan's postwar reconstruction ended in 1953. She then embarked on a twenty-year period of growth averaging 9.7 percent annually. Led by the automobile, the parade was joined by radios, TVs, cameras, watches, later by jets, robots, tools, semiconductors, calculators, computers, energy systems, and rockets. Although she faced excessive governmental regulation today and competition from South Korea and China, Japan had shown the capacity to adapt to a changing world. She was a thriving democracy and economic power and an important partner for the U.S. in the sensitive diplomacy of the region. The lessons of Versailles may have helped direct the workable postwar reconstruction of Japan.

After Japan's story, Jason's mind turned toward the other half of WWII and Hitler's crazed experiment known as the Third Reich. (Italy's stab at empire, under the fascist Mussolini ended early and had to be propped up by Germany.) Hitler had stated his purpose for all who could read. During imprisonment for anarchy in 1924, he dictated to his friend Hess his political ideology and plans for the "racially superior" Aryan people. Hitler was a consummate racist. Pure Aryan stock was to rule the world. Hitler felt he had to start by eliminating the "racially impure," particularly Jews. Although he loathed Communism, he admired Stalin for his "methods of eliminating dissidents." In fact, if you weren't of "Aryan stock" you were on Adolf Hitler's hit list, as he was later to demonstrate.

Key factors in Hitler's so-called parliamentary takeover were the humiliating terms of the Treaty of Versailles following WWI, the economic depression of the 1930s, and Hitler's oratorical skill at producing a scapegoat in the minds of the German people. The paramilitary SS and Brownshirts stood close by to muscle in the proper frame of mind, should there be any doubt about the way things were to go. Only a few statesmen, chief among them Winston Churchill, at the time put Mein Kampf and the messages of Hitler's oratory together. It was a vision from the darkest chamber of hell of what was to come. For his prescience, Churchill would be termed a "warmonger." Irrationality, it seemed, would always be with us.

Hitler tested his neighbors by seizing the buffer zone set by the Versailles Treaty known as the Rhineland. Unhindered, he then took control of Austria, his native country, in

1938. Six months later he convinced British PM Chamberlain that it would be a good idea to carve up Czechoslovakia, with Nazi Germany taking control of the part known as the Sudetenland. This “policy of appeasement” was, of course, later criticized and former president Jimmy Carter and Barack Obama, among others, were emerging as modern Neville Chamberlains. In his post-presidency recognition of terrorists, by laying a wreath at Arafat’s grave, Carter had proven to be even a worse ex-president than president. Senator Obama, with no set preconditions, as candidate for president was willing to talk with an enemy who had expressed his own Mein Kampf.

This enemy was “the tiny country” of Iran’s current president, Ahmedinejad. When Jason read of der Fuhrer and his appeasers before he unleashed the blitzkrieg of his Wehrmacht on the countries of Europe, it was hard not to see a parallel. The Iranian president’s insistence on developing nuclear energy, coupled with his stated desire to eliminate Israel, represented to Kosmo and Jason, a major replay of history. Jason thought of the ineffectiveness, even complicity of the United Nations with Saddam Hussein and the corrupt Oil for Food program. After listening to Kosmo, Jason felt the UN would be of no substantive help with this new Hitler-like figure. Either Israel or the U.S., hopefully with rational allies, would have to take the necessary steps to prevent the implied and planned nuclear war that “President Tom” saw as the apocalypse of the twelfth imam. Were we being lulled with the bizarre notion that oil-rich Iran needed nuclear energy? The deterrence of mutually assured destruction didn’t apply as it had with the USSR before Reagan’s Star Wars proposal. Iran’s president had more of a kamikaze view of things.

In its invasion of Poland in September of 1939, the blitzkrieg combined speed as a multiplier, with plenty of force. With this invasion, Britain and France declared war on Germany. After a quiet winter, the German war machine (Wehrmacht), with the same speed, invaded France through Holland and Belgium, flanking France’s defensive Maginot Line. The British Expeditionary Force was rescued by sea at Dunkirk, hopefully to fight another day. Leaving England as the lone free resisting country in Europe, Hitler decided rather than a land invasion first, to instead bomb the island kingdom to submission. The Royal Air Force, with skill, daring, and radar neutralized Hitler’s plan to first destroy the aerodromes. Churchill was voted in as a war Prime Minister. Nighttime bombing raids on Germany sparked Hitler’s ire, and he began bombing Britain’s cities in return. This allowed the RAF to recover and win the dogfights over Dover. The devastating bombing of Germany’s manufacturing, aircraft factories, and fuel depots also helped to win the Battle of Britain. As the war progressed, the bombing expanded to most of the cities, with huge civilian losses on both sides. The city of Dresden had become another example of historical perspective. Wars were terrible, and should be fought for victory, not stalemate. This required the application of “asymmetrical” force. A war fought with the notion of proportionality was never won. Jason thought of Sherman’s March through Georgia. Could anyone not believe that to defeat Hitler’s mighty arsenal fueled by the Nazi cult, it would take a destructive force beyond description?

Simultaneously with and under the cover of the war, Hitler commenced his extermination program. He had been an admirer of Stalin, undoubtedly for the latter’s ability to achieve his own Machiavellian goals. Hitler started with his “euthanasia” program. In 1939–40 the program was designed to exterminate the incurable and chronically insane. About seventy thousand Germans were eliminated. From this he graduated to the “total” and

“final” solutions to “the Jewish problem”—“the planned biological destruction of the Jewish race in the Eastern territories.” This genocide officially started in March of ’41 with shootings following military action. More efficient was Zyklon-B gas without warning markers. Most people (except Iran’s Ahmedinejad) knew the names Auschwitz, Belzac, Treblinka, Sobibor, and Dachau. Of the 8 million-plus Jews who fell under Hitler’s thumb, 5.8 million were murdered.

Some people alleged it was Hitler’s ill-conceived decision to move on the Eastern Front that saved the world from Nazism. Some said it was the Battle of the Atlantic, against the U-boats and German battleships. Others said it was the declaration (December 11, ’41) and persecution of war on Germany by the U.S. One thing was for sure. The world was in mortal danger. Up to America’s entry against Japan, then Germany, strong isolationist sentiments prevailed. To that point, FDR had agreed to Lend Lease as a method to supply Great Britain and later Russia with war material and machinery. We didn’t start WWII, and Kosmo had plenty of evidence showing we didn’t start the Holy War of the Islamist Fanatics either.

Hitler had signed a “nonaggression” pact with Stalin. Russia provided grain, oil and minerals in return for promises of favorable territorial concessions. When Hitler signed the pact, he undoubtedly was planning his invasion of Russia. It was a matter of time. Hitler’s invasion went beyond the military, however. His plan called for the eventual colonization of the East, after annihilating non-Germanic peoples. He would create “lebensraum” or living space for his favored Aryans. This imperialistic venture would not require assimilation. As historian Paul Johnson states, Stalin and Hitler acted almost as lone agents in this monopoly game, with the world at stake. The empire of the Third Reich lasted a little over a decade.

Stalin had been warned of Hitler’s impending invasion by Churchill, the American Embassy, and his own Intelligence. When informed by telephone of the dash of Hitler’s tanks in the early morning hours of June 22, 1941, Stalin went into a silent funk. The call from Soviet Chief of Staff Zhukov was “dropped,” not on account of the phone service but by the Man of Steel, himself. It took Stalin eleven days to regain composure and address his country. The great battles of Moscow, Stalingrad, and Kursk went with huge captures and losses, and turned the tide against the German forces. So did the fiercest winter in decades. The siege of Leningrad lasted 900 days and caused 1.5 million Russian deaths alone. It highlighted the heroism of the Russian people.

The Soviet Union sustained 10.6 million military losses and 11.5 million civilian losses due to the war. When WWII was all done an estimated 62 million people had died, 37 million civilians and 25 million military. The U.S., with its 132 million population put 12.5 million service men and women into action, losing over four hundred thousand. England committed nearly 6 million to service and lost over two hundred thousand, in addition to sixty-two thousand civilians. Stalin, like Hitler, had his own “war within the war” program, against his own people. It was said, Lady Astor once asked Stalin when he was going to stop killing people and he answered, “When it is no longer necessary.” During Stalin’s collectivization program, the “elimination of the classes” period from 1929–1936 alone accounted for 10 million Russian men, women and children meeting “unnatural deaths.”

Solzhenitsyn wrote *The Gulag Archipelago*. The trilogy refers to thousands of square miles of real estate in the Siberian wilderness to which hundreds of thousands of Russians were sent, including dissidents, those “in-the-know,” widows and orphans of the purged, peasants and anyone who fell within Stalin’s ever-expanding paranoia, for labor and calculated death. From *The Gulag Archipelago*: “In 1937, fellows, it was that way all across Siberia to the Kolyma, and the big bottleneck was in the Sea of Okhotsk, and in Vladivostok. The steamships could transport only thirty thousand a month, and they kept driving them on and on from Moscow without taking that into account. Well, and so a hundred thousand of them piled up. Understand?” Jason wondered if those who organized annually to anguish over Kent State had ever read Solzhenitsyn. Jason thought of magnitude and scale.

The activity of Lenin’s Cheka (secret police) in 1917 was embryonic compared to the scale of the Gulag. On February 22, 1918 Lenin authorized a Cheka order to “seek out, arrest and shoot immediately” a whole series of categories of enemies, “speculators,” and political opponents. This amounted to thousands...“Let the bourgeois drown in their own blood.” Stalin took these policies to an industrial degree. By 1937 Stalin could kill anyone, anyway he wished. He dispatched three thousand senior police officials and public prosecutors. He killed thirty thousand military officers, including 80 percent of the colonels and generals. Most were shot within twenty-four hours of arrest. He “purged” the party of most all those who were members before he took control of it, possibly one million. Two of one hundred and fifty members of the Leningrad 17th Party Congress were spared. Jason got these figures from Johnson’s *Modern Times*.

The Soviet NKVD, the secret police that came after the Cheka, emulated, cooperated with, and outperformed the Nazi Gestapo. During the 1942–45 Nazi heyday, there were more work and death camps in the Soviet islands than the SS operated in Eastern Europe. Attempting to live in these places was perhaps worse than death itself, and Solzhenitsyn’s own account of his eight-year captivity graphically described the starvation, sixty-below F temperatures, pestilence, inadequate clothing, sixteen-hour workdays (and nights), lack of sanitation, dead bodies hidden in order to get extra rations, and the trumped-up political charges that served as a vehicle for internment, if not interment.

In the West there were plenty of Stalin apologists. In fact, in America many liberal Democrats of the 1930s saw in Stalin’s Russia the world’s new promise. One ambassador said, “To suggest the evidence for the trials was faked would be to suppose (in Stalin) the creative genius of Shakespeare.” A pro-Soviet intellectual from Cambridge regarded the Gulag as the necessary price for Russian modernization. Would Steinbeck have been so high on collectivism, had he known the grizzly facts of the Gulag and the purges? The Soviet press was controlled by the Party, and there was only one party—the Communist Party (CP). Kosmo knew, in America today, the press was largely controlled by one of the political parties, as his Twelve Steps demonstrated. Still, we have alternative news outlets, at least for the present, Jason thought.

At the time of publication of Johnson’s *Modern Times* in 1991, there had been no official atonement by future regimes for these atrocities. Johnson said this was because Russia’s future leaders were all involved—Premier’s Malinkov (1953–6), Khrushchev (1956–64), Kosygin (1970s), Brezhnev (1964–82). Then followed Gorbechev and Yeltsin, who presided over or at least witnessed the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. Now Putin,

president of the Government of the Russian Federation and former KGB boss was said to be unenthusiastic about erasing the Soviet past. He supported symbols and references to the history of the period. Putin was now creating a controlled (“stable”) society and projecting, once again, America as a culprit. It was the familiar formula. Unlike Communists in the U.S., he didn’t incriminate the free markets and low tax rates that had helped revive his country. He also supported our enemies, like Saddam’s Iraq and Ahmedinejad’s Iran.

Jason was putting together a history within which he would examine his own country. He was planning to read up on slavery; the Indian Wars and treatment of the Native Americans; our expansion from east to west known as Manifest Destiny; the U.S. Mexican War, said to be Polk’s War; and the Spanish American War that took us to Cuba and the Philippines. For now, he must have a look at the Marshall Plan, Soviet expansion into Eastern Europe, and NATO.

The Marshall Plan was first unveiled at the June ’47 Harvard College commencement. The idea was this: Those nations of Europe devastated by the war were encouraged to submit to the U.S. their own versions of the help they needed. Twenty-two nations responded. Stalin vetoed help for Czechoslovakia and Poland, as well as East Germany, now that they fell to Communism. The program started in July of 1948 at the cost of \$10.2 billion in ’48 dollars. (America’s total cost for WWII was slightly over \$288 billion—slightly over \$2 trillion in 1990 dollars—or \$2,000 per capita in 1948 dollars.) Jason thought of it. Four hundred thousand brave men had given their lives so that the rest of us might remain free from some arbitrary bullet, slave camp or dictator. He now had a glimpse at “the ultimate cost.”

As with rebuilding Japan, the Marshall Plan, Point Four Aid, and the subsequent containment of Soviet expansionism during the Cold War were American initiatives. The greatest of all Allied initiatives of course occurred on June 6, 1944 on the west coast of France, but Jason deferred that story for another day. The Marshall Plan placed U.S. influence in Europe, but it was hardly an imperialistic one. Not so in the increasingly suspicious mind of Stalin, who in the late 1940s was devoting 13.8 percent of the USSR’s GNP to the military, versus America’s 6–7 percent. When President Roosevelt made the promise that America would be out of Europe in two years, Stalin salivated at this announced “exit strategy.” The Cold War probably commenced then. At the Yalta Conference, Stalin promised free elections for Poland, and then installed a “Soviet-style” government. The Allies had decided to let the Russians make the final attack on Berlin in view of the huge cost in human life the Red armies had suffered at the hands of the Nazi’s eastern thrust. Stalin, unlike the U.S. and Great Britain, had never been concerned with the loss of lives of his fighting force. Perhaps this was a concession wrangled by Stalin at Yalta with an ailing Roosevelt. But it was part of his plan to establish the Soviet Bloc right into Germany. The decision put the military might—some 2 million Soviet soldiers—across the face of Eastern Europe.

A few years after the savage battle for Berlin, the familiar specter of show trials occurred in Bulgaria and Hungary, followed by Soviet control. Tito in Yugoslavia matched Stalin’s ruthlessness and stemmed his expansionism. With this Eastern Bloc, Russia threatened the rest of Europe. With America’s initiative, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization was formed. It was comprised of twenty-six North American and European

countries dedicated to the preservation of safety and peace through political and military means. NATO certainly couldn't be termed an imperialist venture, any more than the military bases the U.S. subsequently set up all over the world, welcomed by all except Communists.

At this point, his survey of imperialism acquainted Jason with some of the most vicious examples, ones that employed slavery beyond serfdom, death camps, genocide and extermination, torture and terrorism, deliberate and unprovoked instigation of war, untold destruction and misery. And these occupied our latest century! Some viewed this as evidence for the decline of Man. Jason also saw in it a shining example of courage, charity and resolve, man at his best. He took it as confirmation of the ever-present battle of Good and Evil.

He now turned his attention to a few of the earlier empires, those of the Greeks and the Romans. He had heard that the Greeks and the Romans were the foundations of Western civilization. One time Jason heard Stroyer talk of Western civilization as a bunch of "dead European white guys." Jason thought he mustn't have heard much about the ancient Greeks.

So how did the Greeks build and conduct their empire, and what did they do that laid the foundation for "Western Civ"? Greece sat on the northern edge of the Mediterranean Sea. Its vitality benefited through a blood mix of invaders with indigenous folk during its Ionian Age, 850–500 BC. Having overthrown their kings, there was an early impetus to create a civil society. The geography, like that of Italy, was conducive to the political "city-state"—relatively isolated and independent societies ruled early on by a council of nobles. Located on a great sea, and constrained by mountains and soil that wasn't very fertile, the pressure grew for more land to feed the rising population.

Athens's seaport (Piraeus) became a center of commerce, and Greece changed from an agrarian to a commercial society as a string of colonies evolved in the Mediterranean Basin. Factories sprang up across this empire, and the supply of raw materials increased. Agriculturally, Greece would eventually specialize in grapes and olives. This contact with diverse manners and customs probably contributed the spark that would later ignite the supreme achievement of the Greeks during their Golden Age in the fifth century BC—the capacity for critical thinking. Another key element of the Greeks was their innate wish to explore the governmental cycle.

A merchant class evolved from its commerce and competed with the landed aristocrats. The workers or peasants also became dissatisfied. It seemed this was fertile ground for the rise and acceptance of a "tyrant." Unlike the modern despots, this classical tyrant was not a dictator, at least at first. He learned to work with the merchants and garner the people's support, consulting their wishes and allowing limited participation in government. Once the tyrant wore out his welcome, a liberal group or class known as an oligarchy might take over. This had been the cycle.

As they experimented with government, a brand-new form evolved—demos (the people) kratos (power). The first such democracy followed the reign of the tyrant Pisistratus, ending in 527 BC. Pisistratus had the support of the lower class partly because he seized the land of the nobles and reallocated it. (Hello, Castro and Chaves!) He also initiated a building campaign, held festivals, and encouraged the growth of a middle class by

encouraging commerce. His son and successor Hippias became despotic, and an Athenian noble named Cleisthenes emerged to lead the first revolutionary movement devoted to the rule of the people. Organizing around villages, “thirdings,” and tribes, Athenian citizens (adult males) formed the Council of Five Hundred. It was an administrative body of the Athenian state and steering committee of the Assembly to which all citizens were entitled to go and vote on large issues, such as war.

This direct democracy strongly influenced our own “representative republic.” A century later, Aristotle would survey the forms of government of the two hundred-plus city-states in his encyclopedic approach to all things. Madison was a modern-day Aristotle when it came to researching history’s forms of government. John Adams was also a consummate student of government. The Greek Democracy was based on the notion that any Athenian citizen could handle any governmental task. Citizenship was not conferred on foreigners, slaves or women. There were no parties, professional politicians, or bureaucrats, as such. These citizens-in-service were paid for their one-year term. Citizens were guaranteed freedom of speech and expression, the right to bear arms, and trial by jury. They did not enjoy freedom of religion, which was state imposed. They were expected to serve on juries and as militia in the military. To be a citizen, one’s grandparents had to be born in the homeland.

Citizenship conferred certain equal liberties—liberty from foreign domination; the right to govern themselves under their own laws; the right to live as one chose, within the law; economic freedom or the luxury of living in a free market economy with the opportunity to become wealthy. Tolerance was the order of the day and different lifestyles were accepted. Patriotism was promoted for the best of reasons. The city-state was worthy of their love.

This was a unique type of government for the times, a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. But there were some faults, as there would always be, when viewed from today’s perspective. These included the use of slavery, the treatment of women as a subclass, and the failure to congeal over two hundred city-states into a federation.

The Founders of America studied ancient Greece and Rome when they wrote our founding documents. Still, it took our own leaders a long time to resolve the issues of slavery and suffrage. Yet, the Greeks provided a monumental basis for what was to become “Western civilization.”

Some felt that the survival of the Athenian city-state was paramount to the development of critical thinking. Survival involved repelling her enemies. The Persian Empire under Darius the Great in 498 BC attempted to subdue the Greeks who lived in Asia Minor. Athens sent a small contingent of troops to help in the fight against Darius. He remembered this and eight years later sent an army of twenty-six thousand seasoned veterans, including cavalry, armed infantry and archers. On the Plains of Marathon they met nine thousand Athenian citizen-soldiers, supplemented by another thousand from the city-state Plataea. The Greeks were organized into hoplites, or heavily armed infantry with spear, sword and breastplate. Through superior tactics and sheer bravery, the Athenians won the battle. A messenger made the twenty-six-mile run to Athens to deliver the news.

Athens's pride and confidence swelled in a way that might be compared with the winning of a Super Bowl or the achievement of a Renaissance renewal project. Ten years later the despotic king Xerxes, Darius's son, returned to conquer Greece, again with overwhelming military superiority. Though Thermopylae was the better known for the bravery of the Spartans under Leonidas, Xerxes was defeated at the land and naval battle of Salamis in 480 BC. The Greek trireme with its three levels of oarsmen proved too much of a match for the Persians, whose empire waned afterward. Also, the Carthaginians were repulsed in their attacks on Greek city-states in Sicily. It was said or implied, most notably by the playwright Aeschylus in his play *The Persians*, that freedom would win over despotism. When Herodotus, the father of history, read of the Persian Wars in Athens, he was showered with gifts. The period of safe haven that followed these threats allowed for a unique climate in which one of the world's great coalescent achievements occurred.

Absent a home dictator and threat from abroad, many great thinkers immigrated to Athens. Athens, like America, had become the place to be. Jason could not find any statements on the immigration policies, and there was no Statue of Liberty, but it was probably pretty lax. The Greeks championed personal liberty. There was no word for it in the languages of the Egyptians or Sumerians, and we know of the strict rule of the Persian kings.

When we think of Greece, we think of philosophy—the love of knowledge. Thales had formalized the philosophic approach through his rational inquiry of the subjects, man and the natural universe. Hericlitus talked of flux, or change, possibly anticipating the theory of evolution. Democritus suggested that material things were made of smaller units, which he called atoms. Xanophanes challenged belief in the gods. Zeno captured the essence of skepticism. These personalities had little knowledge base upon which to build their speculations, and few instruments for scientific measurement, but they opened the door.

Those intellectuals who poured into Athens during the benevolent reign of the imperialist Pericles were called sophists (wise men). They were paid teachers who taught the art of rhetoric, or persuasive oratory. This was seen as a science, a tool for educating. It was not the same as sloganeering or demagoguery. Rhetoric in today's political glossary was something different than what the Greeks meant. What they were referring to was something like the Gettysburg Address, or Pericles' Funeral Oration commemorating Athens's soldiers who died during the war with Sparta. They challenged the political and moral values of the day. Man was their subject, not the gods. Pericles was a friend of Anaxagoras, who taught that human reason was the most powerful force in the world. Jason was working on his concept of brain protection when he read this. Jason's program consisted of two parts, one to pursue—true education, and one to avoid—pollution, by which he meant drugs and propaganda.

It was expected of the citizen to not only partake in the democracy, but also to attend the dramatic performances of the theater. Drama was also seen as a liberal art, and the tragedies of Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles not only told stories about mythology, but also probed the issues of the day. They aroused the feelings of fear and pity in the audience and aimed at purging these emotions.

The Greeks gave us sport, competition and the games that have become so much of the American lifestyle. We have been inspired by the grace, sweat and effort of the athlete. We have been moved by the winnings (and losings) – in the game, in the business and in the betting. We have experienced the release of victory and the sag of defeat, as both athlete and spectator.

Art and architecture reflected the pride and inspiration that came to Athens. Phidias was the architect of the Parthenon. Sculptures of bronze and stone showed advanced techniques. Though reduced from the grandiose to human size, these were well beyond the Egyptians and established standards followed ever since. Greek sculpture can be traced from the static to the more natural and free forms, reflecting the ideals and attitudes of life in the city-state. The Parthenon frieze was the most famous bas-relief in the Western world, appreciated for its natural human figures.

The literature of Greece included the epic poems the Iliad and the Odyssey, the lyric poem, the pastoral ode, drama both comedic and tragic, history, the philosophical dialogue and satire (Aristophanes). The Romans introduced the prose novel, later. Homer converted the story of the Trojan War to poetry, centuries after it supposedly occurred. The Iliad was a member of the Great Books today and was committed to memory in Homer's day. Historians Herodotus and Thucydides recorded the wars with Persia and Sparta, respectively.

The greatest teacher in Athens was a short, sloppily dressed man with a large head and buggy eyes who walked about with his students and challenged them with questions. He didn't see himself as a teacher, but rather a searcher for wisdom, responding to his calling and knowing he was not wise. He didn't take pay and although he had a family and a home, one wouldn't know it. He didn't much participate in the political life of Athens, and his ever-present questioning created unease with such notables as Pericles and Sophocles. Ultimately, Socrates was tried for corrupting the youth and believing in one god who did good, certainly a divinity different than the gods of Athens. He had also taught two pupils who later were seen as traitors in Athens's war with Sparta. He was tried and sentenced to drink poison hemlock. After an eloquent "apology," really a self-defense, he calmly drafted off his sentence. In *The Dialogues*, Plato described his mentor's teachings and methods. Plato's *Republic*, a utopian account of the ideal State, would ground him as a founder of modern philosophy. Plato's approach was abstract rather than scientific as he departed from the natural philosophers. Plato founded a school for learning, a sort of college—the Academy.

Plato's most famous pupil was Aristotle, who in turn would found his own school in Athens—the Lyceum Institute. He would become Athens's "Renaissance man," and would systematize and organize all the branches of knowledge then known, including not only politics and logic, but also botany and zoology. He founded the first research library that later passed to the Ptolemy's of Egypt. It became the core of the great Library of Alexandria. Aristotle was not a citizen of Athens. He was called to the court at Macedon by its king, Philip, to tutor his young son Alexander.

Much later, Aristotle retired from his school in Athens at a time when Macedon dominated Greece. The people of a weakened Athens, racked as she was and defeated by Sparta in the Peloponnesian Wars did not look on Aristotle with favor.

Athens's Empire was primarily maritime and commercial. She had fought when necessary against the Persians, with magnificent results, but her achievements were cultural and intellectual in the interwar periods. Later and perhaps unnecessarily drawn into war with Sparta, with disastrous results, the power shifted for a short period to Sparta.

Like Athens, Sparta sought territory to relieve a food shortage. Instead of colonization, she invaded neighboring territories and put the conquered peoples to work producing food. This led to a serf (helot) revolt, which required years to overcome. Since that time Sparta devoted most of her "GNP" to the military. Practically everything pointed to the military. This included training boys after age seven in military schools, belonging to military clubs though age thirty, culling out weak infants, and training girls to be hardy and fit to produce strong lads. These policies produced a culturally deprived society that ultimately failed to sustain itself as a superpower.

Thebes, another city-state ascended for a short time and subdued Sparta, due to some innovative changes in military tactics. By today's war college teachings it seemed rudimentary, but the flanking maneuver had been invented! Jason wondered if this was akin to what the jump shot had done for basketball. After a period of mastery, Thebes declined, and Athens regained some power, but for a generation in the mid-fourth century BC, no city-state dominated. In fact, the city-state was beginning to lose influence in terms of self-sufficiency. Sensing this, Philip II of Macedon made his move. He had learned the military tactics developed by Epiminondas of Thebes, but he combined cavalry with his marching phalanx. This was the finest military machine, prior to Rome.

Philip planned to pull all of Greece together and challenge the Persians. He would be the king of this new Greek-Macedonian Empire. He accomplished this largely through the failure of the city-states to unite against him, and defeated the opposing Greek forces in 338 BC. The loss of independence was a bitter pill for the Greeks. Having subdued the city-states of Greece, Phillip was not a popular man. He was assassinated when his son Alexander was twenty.

Now entered the world stage perhaps the greatest commander of all time. For those who attributed his success to luck and the highly trained army left behind by his father, his greatness was missed, his youth unappreciated, and his never having lost a battle ignored. Aristotle taught Alexander for three years. The man-boy learned art, literature and music, and at sixteen he returned to his father's royal palace where he was exposed to the arts of war. As the new king Alexander was brave, adventuresome and inspirational. If he had too much wine, he could be pompous and boastful, but he was young. He was charming and possessed a conversational gift. He also possessed a sense that he was divine. He dressed like, trained, suffered with, and passed time with his soldiers. He led from the front and took major risks but felt safe. He suffered wounds from most of the day's weapons.

With his army of thirty-five thousand men, he looked east to Persia to begin his conquest. His army lived off the land. Accompanying the army were wagons, herds of animals, his court, female fans of the soldiers, merchants, traders, poets, intellectuals, surveyors, and a historian (a relative of Aristotle). Alexander wanted to free the Greeks who had come under the rule of Darius III. After crushing a Persian force at Granicus, he set out for

Darius himself who had left Babylon to meet him. They would meet at Issus, on a two-mile-wide plain in 333 BC in a battle that turned history. Outnumbered six to one, his infantry of thirty thousand and cavalry of five thousand met two hundred thousand Persian foot soldiers and ten thousand Persian cavalry. Both sides had slingers, archers and javelin throwers. The Persians were mainly defensive, with their armor, spears and round shields. Alexander's men had pikes twenty-feet long, which could penetrate three rows deep into the Persian phalanx.

Alexander was a master of deployment and decision making. He countered Darius's cavalry to a standstill with his own. Then he lined his own infantry on one side of a shallow river across from the larger Persian line and took his elite cavalry to his enemy's left flank and broke it. Darius fled, leaving his wife, mother, and family in the royal tent. The Persian archers and infantry commenced a wild retreat, stampeding their own and suffering losses to the pursuing Greeks. Alexander had his dead soldiers buried with their arms the next day, and he visited the wounded. He saw to it that their families back in Greece received tax relief. He did these things at the age of twenty-three. Rather than chasing the fleeing enemy, Alexander marched south and secured the eastern Mediterranean ports, cutting off supplies to the Persian navy, neutralizing it. He went all the way to Egypt where he founded Alexandria. Then he turned east and spent the next five years expanding his conquest.

Aristotle had taught him the known world extended from Spain to India and Alexander wanted it all. Aristotle also accepted Zeno's stoicism that looked upon the universe, man and society as the handiwork of a divine being. This may have had an effect on the prodigy king. He treated Darius's family with chivalry, even marrying his daughter, yet he ruthlessly destroyed his opponents. Enemy soldiers and cavalry rank and file who could not be turned around to follow him were either crucified or sold into slavery. He placed noblemen as provincial governors, and maintained conquered territory. He established Babylon as the capitol of his emerging empire. He caught up to Darius at Gaugamela where he whipped him again. Darius was later murdered by his own military.

Alexander was twenty-nine when he finally reached India. By this time his men were weary, homesick, and disheartened by the monsoons, so he marched back to Babylon. With war wounds, fever, and the possibility of having been poisoned, he suddenly died in June of 323 BC at the age of thirty-three. After Alexander's death, the empire fell to internecine fighting among the generals and ultimately divided. Alexandria, in northern Egypt, became the center of the Mediterranean world. Democracy and the city-state were replaced by an imperial state. A rival on a similar path to empire was brewing on the other side of the Mediterranean.

Rome's city-state started as a tribal settlement in the ninth century BC at a crossing point on the Tiber River in Italy, several miles from the sea. Her armed forces reduced surrounding Latin states, including the Etruscans, to subjects and they created a class-based republic that evolved through the "conflict of the orders." Eventually, patricians (the wealthy class) passed laws, elected magistrates other than tribunes, declared war, and bore arms. Plebeians (commoners) had less power. They served in the militia and used strikes to achieve more equality. A plebian tribune could veto an act he judged injurious to his class. In time both factions would serve in the "comitia centuriata," the ancestral senate. Two magisterial consuls with veto power over each other provided "imperium,"

or military command. They presided over the *comitia centuriata*. Over the next few centuries, taxing bodies, censors, legal codifiers, and other bureaucrats helped flesh out a government and by 287 BC the legislative plebian assembly had equal importance with the elective patricians. This was the world's first republic.

First and foremost, Romans were warriors. The Pax Romana that underwrote dominion over her peninsular neighbors was achieved militarily, with a sense of taking them in, more than raw exploitation. As the range of conflict and conquest expanded through Greek colonies in Sicily to powerful Carthage, the fighting became vengeful and brutal. The wars with Carthage lasted sixty-two years and were economically bittersweet. In these wars whole navies were lost and rebuilt. War elephants were driven across snow-capped mountains, and new military tactics such as drawbridges with which to board enemy ships were invented. In the end, Carthage became a subject of Rome. She ceded Spain, paid war tributes, gave over her fleet, and agreed not to declare war in Africa without Rome's consent. With victory came confidence. Over the next one hundred and fifty years Rome conquered the known world from the Caspian Sea to Spain, to North Africa, Gaul (France), Greece including Macedonia, Turkey, and Asia Minor. The new units of imperium became provinces, with praetors as governors who were granted absolute rule. Self-government was absent, armies were forbidden, taxes were levied, and tax farming (bribes, plundering, corruption, money-lending) became an underground economy. In time, Rome's Senate became exploitive.

Julius Caesar defeated the Gauls and his personal rival, Pompey. As statesman, he brought peace. After conquest he deftly tamed local chieftains, extracted tribute, and let them live as they would. He returned to Rome and ruled as a monarch without title. He wanted to make Rome and Italy less important in the Roman world and break the "clubs" in the Senate by having it represent the whole empire. He took power from magistrates and reduced the assembly to a ratifying body. He controlled the military and directed foreign and financial policies. He lamented that Alexander accomplished in thirty years more than he foresaw for his own military life, illustrious as it was. Julius Caesar was assassinated by members of the Senate in 44 BC.

The Roman Empire began with the administration of Caesar's adopted son Octavian. Later known as Caesar Augustus, he defeated Antony at Actium in 31 BC. Augustus ruled for forty years. Initially he maintained the semblance of a constitutional government and shared power with the Senate. His provincial administration was excellent and he was wiser than Julius Caesar. He built an efficient civil service, and eliminated tax farming. Unfortunately, there was no mechanism in place for succession. Without an elective process, hereditary dynasties not infrequently brought forth persons, if revealed, most would agree were unfit for office.

Rome was known for her law, an outgrowth of the administrative and technical problems posed by its expanding domain. She was known for her building and use of arches and vaults in amphitheaters, bathes, and public buildings and her empire-connecting road system. Her classical language, Latin, and a rich literature had been inherited. Her military organization was second to none, as were her explorations and violence in government. Not least, she provided the sociopolitical framework within which Christianity would become rooted and eventually flourish. Oddly, Rome would not be famous for philosophical thought, education, or instruction of its populace, technology

and industry, a press, or growth of a middle class. Through her expansionism, she assimilated the Hellenistic world of Alexander and the achievements of the Greeks. Augustus explored Rome's own golden age in literature—Virgil, Horace, Ovid, and historian Livy. Portrait sculpture and painting would adjust its Greek influence. Rome would not engage science beyond building and engineering. She held the same gods as the Greeks, but gave Latin names to them. Rome was organizer more than creator.

As Rome conquered and expanded, she ultimately became a multicultural center, and people of different races, customs and languages poured into her city limits. She became cosmopolitan. She also took on slaves from all corners of her empire. They worked in households and businesses and could be freed by their owners. The society was patriarchal, and the father even decided whether an infant child should live or not. Though they fought as Romans, soldiers in the field sometimes became attached more to their commanders than Rome itself. Sulla turned his forces toward Rome. Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon in defiance of the law, and Vespasian marched into Rome to advance a civil war for his own advantage.

As the conquered territory grew in size, becoming greatest under Trajan, the loot piled up as the wealth of the provinces transferred to the rich landowners of Rome. In the words of Gibbon, "The most remote countries of the ancient world were ransacked to supply the pomp and delicacy of Rome." The fur-wood from Scythia; amber from the Baltic; carpets from Babylonia; corn and grains from the western Mediterranean; silk, pearls and diamonds from Bengal; silver, gold, and aromatics from where they might be found, all came to Rome. Possibly, her economists had no grasp of the notion "balance of trade." The bathes, the wine, and the sex supplied Epicurean pleasures at home, while an army of four hundred thousand was stationed on the desolate frontier. Early on, the soldiers were farmers and only later became professionals.

The Romans were a bloodthirsty people. Wars were common, whether foreign, civil or ones in the royal family. During the Republic, the Gracchi brothers between 133 and 121 BC proposed land reforms that would favor small landholders at the expense of more affluent senators. They both died at the hands of the Senate. Julius Caesar was murdered. The imperial house of Caesar Augustus was full of intrigue and violence, as depicted in I, Claudius. The peace that attended his reign came with a price. He exiled his daughter Julia for licentious behavior. He exiled Ovid for his erotic writing. He lost one-tenth of his legions to barbarous Germanic tribes in AD 9. By the time of his death in AD 14 he had neutered the Senate and become paranoid. Peace had marked his forty-year reign, but Judea was a tinderbox, Egypt was trouble, and Germany and Britain remained untamed.

Augustus's stepson Tiberius became the next Caesar. He established himself as a general, but politically remained in the shadows until succeeding Augustus at age fifty-five. Not wishing to be emperor, he tried to mimic the style of Augustus but was seen as insincere. Tiberius went downhill after the death of his mother in AD 29. He had been forced to divorce his wife whom he loved and to marry his mother's choice. Tiberius handed over more and more responsibility to a friend—a duplicitous and ruthless Praetorian Guard named Sejanus. Tiberius retired to Capri leaving the affairs of state in the hands of Sejanus and generally took on the airs and attitudes of a lowlife. Later, rumors that Sejanus had killed Tiberius's son caught Tiberius's attention. He ordered the execution of Sejanus. Tiberius died at age seventy-seven. Such was the life of one emperor of Rome.

The lives of Caligula and Nero were also rich with horror. In between these was the mocked and deformed Claudius who came to be respected and revered for his humane approach.

Plots and scandals were commonplace during the reign of the Caesars. To us these intrigues sound like the stuff of soap operas, but these people considered themselves gods. Christ's thirty-three-year life in Judea and the movement that followed did not occur in a vacuum, but the tenets of Christianity were not officially accepted until Constantine in the third century AD. Killing was a sport, and three hundred years of gladiatorial shows—using captured Brits, Moors, Scythians, Negroes, Christians, and criminals—tainted the Roman civilization. The Western Roman Empire lasted about five hundred years and succumbed to the invaders from central Europe. Constantine, the first Christian Roman Emperor granted the Christians rights and removed the capital to its eastern site in Turkey. This eastern capital, Constantinople, lived on for almost a thousand more years, falling to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

The next great empire that Jason chose for his study bore on today, perhaps in an arcane way. For opposite reasons he chose to reserve for a later study, the Han Dynasty of the Chinese, which seemed distant and vague. On the contrary, Kosmo had told him stuff about the Muslims and their empire. Prior to Mohammed, Arabia was composed of nomadic tribes, the Bedouin, and a more settled coastal people. The Roman Empire at the time of Trajan stretched across Arabia, to the city of Petra. The Romans called the desert Arabs "Saracens." They included Christians and Jews.

Mohammed, "the praised one," was born into poor circumstances in Mecca, Arabia, in AD 570. His father died before he was born, and his mother, when he was six. He was raised by his grandfather and later by his uncle. His uncle was a merchant in this important commercial city, located on the eastern trade route. Mohammed spent time as a trader and he became part of a non-nomadic tribe based in Mecca. At the time, the tribes worshipped separate gods in the form of stones and trees, and the merchants of Mecca found it profitable to support such idolatry. His tribe profited from their shrine, the Kaaba. It housed a black stone, probably a meteorite, and became the main attraction as a point of pilgrimage.

Mohammed went to work for a wealthy widow, Khadijah, whom he married when he was twenty-five and she, forty. Now more comfortable, he devoted himself to meditation, often in a nearby cave. He lost interest in money, trading, even home. His wife would become his first disciple. He thought about man's cruelty and injustice, and he thought about God. Although he probably couldn't read or write, he was aware of both Christian teachings and Judaism. There were a lot of despairing people in his midst, because the regimes of the Christian church were corrupt and failing. Most converts were previously Christians; the Jews resisted. He became convinced of a future life for those who believed. Hellfire awaited the unbelievers and idolaters. Claiming to be a prophet, his mission grew slowly and he suffered abuse. He recanted his teachings, but later he reversed his recantation. He became convinced his god was the only true god, whom he called Allah. When he was around forty years old Mohammed underwent an epiphany. He felt he was called to be a prophet of God while meditating in the cave. He said the angel Gabriel appeared to him and addressed him as the last in a long line of prophets. The angel commanded him to recite the word of God to the Arabs in their own language.

Mohammad asked what words to recite and Gabriel provided them. They became the first words of the Koran, or Qur'an, the foundation of the religion of Islam. The contents of the Qur'an were revealed to Mohammed in segments during the remaining years of his life. The Qur'an would not be translated for thirteen hundred years into a language other than Arabic.

It had been stated that the Qur'an, like the Bible, delivered mixed messages. Though written in Arabic, now with translations into many languages, it was said to be the very Word of Allah. On one hand it railed for terror to be cast into the hearts of disbelievers, their abode be fire and evil come to the unjust. On the other hand, some said Islam preached toleration. The simplicity of the religion broadened its appeal.

Mohammed's belief in (one) God made him a polarizing figure. His private teachings turned public. His idea of Allah, the One to whom man must direct his obedience and for whom we were all equal, did not go over very well with some. His veiled criticism of mercenary motives and call to care for the poor also made him unpopular. When his wife died, an uncle committed his tribe to protect Mohammed, but that ceased when the uncle died. After ridicule, abuse, and an attempt on his life, he made a decision to move to a garden oasis 220 miles to the north, a city that would eventually be renamed Medina (City of the Prophet), where he would be relatively safe. The year of his flight to Medina was called the Hegira, 622, and later was chosen as the beginning of the Islamic era.

In Medina, he built a mosque, where he prayed daily. His personality seemed to change. In addition to prophet and lawgiver, he became a general now devoted to "conversion by the sword." He directed "holy wars" against those who refused to convert, and he often attacked the Meccan caravans. Mohammed, with the aid of his friend and ardent follower Abu Beker, used diplomacy, treachery, compromise, and ruthlessness to extend the teachings from Allah. Jason read from Washington Irving's *Mahomet and His Successors*, written in the mid-nineteenth century, to get an unvarnished flavor of the empire-building techniques of the prophet. Conquered tribes, mostly Jews, were often given a four-month reprieve to convert. Barring conversion, the other options usually were tribute (at the least, a bribe, and at most, a form of slavery), or death. Medina and Mecca repeatedly attacked each other. Mohammed decided to march on and subdue Mecca with thirty thousand men. This time he preferred conversion and the casting away of idols to the bloodbath he might have delivered. He returned to the Kaaba where he destroyed all the pagan idols, except the black stone he believed had been sent by Abraham, who in turn had been willing to sacrifice his own son to God. Mecca became the center of Muslim worship ever since.

The Muslim religion was simple and today there were roughly 1.2 billion of them in the world. Its five pillars included the one and only god, Allah; daily prayer, five times; charity to the poor through a communal trust fund; fasting during the ninth month of the Islamic year, known as Ramadan; and an annual hegira or pilgrimage to Mecca and the holy shrine. There were no priests, but there were officers of the mosques, known as imams. God, or Allah, was seen as the creator and sustainer of life, who was just and merciful. The religion held harsh teachings against lying, stealing, and adultery. It admonished one to treat slaves kindly. It permitted a man to have four wives (Mohammed in his life may have had as many as twenty-five). It preached judgment after death. It saw Jesus as a prophet, not as God.

One of the problems of Islam was that Mohammed left no mechanism or instruction for succession after his death at sixty-two. There followed a schism, between Shiites who believed the prophecy passed through Mohammed's son-in-law and his descendants, and the Sunni's who believed it passed through the caliphs from Mohammed's tribe.

With the Byzantine Empire of Heraclitus extended and exhausted with the wars against Persia, there was little initial resistance to the Muslims. Syria became a friend and supporter of the movement and Damascus became a major center. The Muslim Empire, within 125 years of Mohammed's death, extended to the Atlantic through Spain, through Mesopotamia, Persia, and Egypt, to Turkey and Armenia, and to the Chinese border. Christians in Jerusalem were permitted to pay a tax in lieu of converting.

Unlike Alexander, the Muslims did not win every battle on their way to empire. The Byzantines successfully defended Constantinople, the center of the Eastern Roman Church in 718, against Islam. Charles Martel defeated the Muslims in 732, stopping their advance into southern Europe. Kosmo told Jason about Crowley's book, 1453. With historical precision it described the Ottoman takeover of Constantinople, when Mehmet II defeated Constantine XI, who gallantly died at the wall. The book portrayed the "manifest destiny" of this vital step for the Muslims. Perhaps most important was the Battle of Vienna in which the Muslim Ottoman Turks were defeated by a coalition of the Hapsburg Austrians and the Poles under King Jan Sobieski. It occurred on September 11, 1683. This prevented a Muslim advance into central Europe. With subsequent European explorations and the effects of the World Wars, the Islamic Empire shrank drastically from its prior glory.

It was clear that the once-magnificent Islamic culture had not adapted well to modern times. One theory held that into the vacuum of failed adaptation crept an appeal to return to Medieval times, using fundamentalist philosophy and political regression. Where the Islamic culture stood ahead of Europe in the Dark Ages, today the battle was between freedom and the sword.

Once, the Islamic culture strove to improve upon the mathematics of India, including geometry and trigonometry; the science and chemistry of Coptic Alexandria and Persia; the philosophy of Greece; the medicine of a time when in Europe medical practice was forbidden by the Church. Great universities were founded. Paper had been adapted from the Chinese. Textiles, pottery, dyeing, sugar production from cane, and horticulture all fell within the scope of Islam at its zenith.

Mohammed was ignorant of history and drew little knowledge from previous civilizations, leaving no scheme for a stable government. Unlimited autocracy grew out of the conquests. A group of Wahhabi fanatics today were attempting to resurrect the former imperial power.

The Wahhabists viewed their religion in terms of a death cult and they taught hatred and intolerance. As seen from previous examples of crazed emperors, a scapegoat was required—a Great Satan. As had Hitler and Mao before them, they controlled the news and madras schools and outlawed (or burned) books of enlightenment in an attempt to shape the culture.

Of late, the culture had failed to develop in a civilized way. It apparently had been handed off to those who found glory in death, surely not the intent of most Muslims. Some encouragement may be taken recently with Iraqi civilians turning against this suicidal movement to help their countrymen and liberators in the fight against Al-Qaeda. This could only be happening as a result of the resolve of the president of the United States, and on this particular score Jason gave him (Bush) an A! Kosmo was certain if we pulled out, as the ELPs wished, history would indict those who were willing to sacrifice our brave men and women to a cause they preferred to lose and capitulate to those sworn to destroy us.

The terror brought by these international networks was not grasped by many in the West who either were unwilling to have their leisure disturbed by reality or who simply could not grasp the nature of evil. Perhaps there were those who truly wished harm to our troops and our country, by supporting the enemy. They cast about aimlessly, labeling our defenders with terms that were nonsense, terms that should properly convey to the barbarous Islamists.

Jason had spoken with Kosmo about the Islamist war against America and the West. Kosmo felt this War—call it the “War on Terror,” WWIII, “Prelude to Armageddon,” “The Islamist Holy War,” whatever was wished—continued to elude most Americans for many reasons. Kosmo made a list of a number of episodes in the last few decades that in his mind showed irrefutable evidence for declared war in the U.S. by radical Islamists. That the U.S. government and Complicit Main Media chose to recognize only some of it was for him a curiosity. The notion that by our defending ourselves we were creating terrorists made about as much sense as saying you supported the troops, but not the war. Simply not tenable!

Kosmo’s list, carefully researched and put together, lay in the following. To some these were merely conspiracy theories, but Kosmo was very careful about which conspiracies he picked out to be true. He knew someday each of these so-called conspiracy theories would be fetched from the dustbin of revised history, cleaned of the varnish and whitewash, and restored to a level of accuracy that would call the Law of Intensity down on them. This happened with Blacklisted History (Evans), At Any Cost (Sammon), Saddam’s Secret (Sada), Liberal Fascism (Goldberg), and The Third Terrorist (Davis), to name a few. Jason wanted to grow up to write his own book.

Kosmo’s list:

Islamic militants stormed the U.S. embassy in Tehran, Iran on November 4, 1979 and seized sixty-six Americans. This paralyzed the Carter administration for over four hundred days, during which a futile attempt at rescue failed. The hostages were released moments after Reagan became president.

On October 23, 1983 truck bombs blasted our embassy and our marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon killing 241 servicemen. Reagan pulled our forces out.

On February 26, 1993 the World Trade Center was bombed, using a mix of urea, nitroglycerine, sulfuric acid, aluminum azide, magnesium azide and bottled hydrogen, with some cyanide thrown in for aftereffects, plus diesel fuel. This was an Al-Qaeda operation headed by Ramzi Yousef, advised and partly funded by his uncle Khalid

Shaikh Mohammed. Yousef came to the States in 1992 under a false Iraqi passport, accompanied by Mohammed Jamal Khalifa, Osama's brother-in-law. Khalifa was arrested after arrival for having bomb-making instructions in his luggage. Khalifa was later released, and Yousef was given a hearing date and took up residence in Jersey City. Yousef got in touch with the blind Muslim cleric Sheik Omar Abdel-Rayman by cell phone and was introduced to his collaborators in a Brooklyn mosque. After the explosion, four conspirators were captured and sentenced for life. One led them to Yousef's apartment where bomb materials were found, as well as Khalifa's business card. Yousef escaped to Pakistan shortly after the blast. Khalifa was arrested after the explosion and deported to Jordan where, after a trial, he was acquitted. The blind cleric Abdel-Rayman, likely the mastermind who possessed a list of NYC landmarks, was sentenced to life. At the trial it became known that an informant had tipped off the FBI as early as 2/6/92 of a plot to bomb the towers. These phone conversations are in the hands of the FBI. President Clinton did not come to NYC to visit the site of the bombing. Andrew McCarthy's recent book *Willful Blindness* discusses the first WTC bombing and the failure and futility of prosecuting war as a legal approach to crime.

On April 18, 1995 a massive fertilizer (ammonium nitrate) / diesel fuel-laden moving van blew up the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City. Despite initial descriptions and calls for John Doe II (Hussain Al-Husaini, according to Jayna Davis as described in *The Third Terrorist*), the case was concluded as the vengeful act of Timothy McVeigh, whose truncated trial led to swift execution, and Terry Nichols, a farmer from Kansas now doing life. Presumably, they were avenging the Branch Davidian raid at Waco, which occurred on April 18, 1993. Much has been written about the inadequacy of the federal investigation of the Oklahoma City bombing; the FBI's stonewalling and refusal to review evidence in the case, such as Nichol's training with Ramzi Yousef in bomb-making in the Philippines (established from phone and passport data, as well as a direct informant); and witnesses who identified Timothy McVeigh with Hussain Al-Hussaini shortly before the bombing. Al-Hussaini operated a property management company a few blocks from the Murrah Building and employed a cadre of alleged Iraqi ex-soldiers seeking asylum in the U.S., most of whom disappeared after the explosion, following a period of jubilation. Al-Hussaini himself fled the city and wound up at Logan Airport in Boston. That two presidents show no interest in an obvious connection of the Oklahoma City bombing with Mid Eastern terrorists is more than puzzling, since the connection makes even more sense in view of Saddam's recently translated papers. Some of the people who say we all should read Jayna Davis's courageous account *The Third Terrorist* are James Woolsey (former CIA director), David Schippers (former chief investigative counsel of the House Judiciary Committee for the Impeachment Trial of President Bill Clinton), Frank Gaffney (former assistant secretary of defense), Larry Johnson (former State Department deputy director of Counterterrorism), Dan Vogel (former FBI special agent), Dr. Constantine Menges (former special assistant to the president for National Affairs and National Security intelligence officer, CIA), Gregory Copley (editor of *Defense and Foreign Affairs Strategic Policy Magazine*), and radio personalities Glenn Beck, Ken Hamblin and Michael Medved, based on interviews with the very credible reporter/author.

The real outrage, Kosmo felt, was that the American people had been and were taken for chumps. It was okay to bamboozle them (us) and overlook key elements of what actually

happened...to what purpose? To alter the history of the country for the record, to cover someone's collective ass? It didn't seem to matter that our safety and that of the country, were at stake, Kosmo concluded.

The suicide car-bombing of the Khobar Towers, in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia in June 25, 1996 by Hezbollah, one of Iran's agents of terror. The main target was American, but British, French and Saudi troops were also housed there.

The August 7, 1998 bombings on American embassies in Nairobi, Kenya killing 224 people and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania killing at least 11, by Al-Qaeda. The Clinton administration was absorbed with the Monica Lewinski affair at the time and did not interpret this as an act of war, but rather as a criminal act. The FBI placed Osama bin Laden on the Ten Most Wanted List. America responded with some cruise missile strikes and arrested four "perps" who were tried in a NYC court and given life with possible parole. Saddam Hussein officially praised Osama as "an Arab and Islamic hero" and Counterterrorism Official Richard Clarke asserted Osama had been offered asylum by Saddam.

The October 12, 2000 attack on the USS Cole while refueling at a port in Yemen, killing seventeen sailors. The mastermind Jamal al-Badawi escaped a Yemeni prison with twenty-two others, half of whom were felt to be Al-Qaeda operatives.

The major attack on 9/11/2001 on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and some other intended target in the capitol using fully fueled, heavily booked commercial aircraft as missiles. This was the first encounter by terrorists with American civilians determined to take them out, even if it meant sacrificing their own lives (Flight 93). This attack was of such a scale and frontal nature that the country for a while became galvanized against the enemy. With the eventual politicizing of our struggle against evil for the purpose of party control, selective forgetting set in and has worked to aid and comfort our enemy. Were our country to have remained united in our condemnation of this enemy, liberation of the Iraqi people would have taken less time, we'd have a shorter list of casualties, and we'd be closer to pulling out our troops.

It was clear there were people living in America who wanted us to fail. The template of Viet Nam had been pulled out and dusted off once again by these appeasers. Jason promised himself he would examine more closely just who the appeasers were.

But what about less recognized attacks on America, which resulted in the killing of innocent people? Kosmo kept a list of these as well. This list was constructed with Kosmo's second most favorite movie in mind, Gibson's Conspiracy Theory.

What about TWA's flight 800, for instance? On July 17, 1996 a 747 jumbo jet bound for Paris exploded shortly after takeoff from Kennedy International, with the loss of 230 people. The official explanation given by the FBI and National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) was that one of the fuel tanks sparked and exploded. James Sanders wrote two books on the subject. Then-retired Naval Commander William Donaldson posted an open letter on the Internet on April 5, 1999, a follow-up to an earlier incomplete report to Congress. His letter was addressed to executives of Boeing and TWA in which he, as an expert aviation crash analyst, put forth evidence that the explosion was due to a missile, and the government participated in a cover-up.

In this open letter, Commander Donaldson stated he could prove TWA 800 had been shot down, likely with a MANPADS (man portable air defense systems), otherwise known as a shoulder-fired rocket. At the time of his letter, twenty-six civilian aircraft around the world had been taken down with these devices. Surrogates from rogue states had access to MADPADS in Mid Eastern weapons bazaars. The top-of-the-line Chinese Vanguard was an upgrade of U.S. Stinger technology that had been transferred to the Chinese in the early 1990s. The Clinton administration knew the Iranians had some of these. Clinton had unilaterally imposed the Iran/Libya Sanctions Act in 1996 and Iran considered it an act of war. The Iranian Supreme Council approved attacks on American targets and invited terrorists from nine countries to Tehran after the sanctions. Soon followed the Khobar Towers attack, and three weeks after Khobar, down came TWA 800, hours after a warning in London and Washington.

The commander describes how the Justice Department suppressed evidence for a missile. The FBI had videotape of an earlier shot that was fired from Long Island and missed its target, around the same time as the Khobar bombing. By September the FBI had compiled reports from witnesses that were compatible with a MANSPAD missile engagement. A trawling fisherman had dredged up a missile-ejector can in October and tossed it back into the sea thinking it junk. His recollection of it fit closely with pictures and an actual can shown him by the FBI later in November. According to the commander, this should have prompted the FBI to suspect they might be dealing with the longer-range Chinese Vanguard or Russian 16/18 missiles.

A \$5 million trawling operation started in November and ended abruptly after a phone call in April 1997. The FBI supervised civilian scallop boats twenty-four hours a day. These trawling operations were flawed. They did not account for the expanded range of the Vanguard. They did not take into account the radar signal of a possible escaping boat in their trawling and failed to identify the boat. The same officials claimed the surface radar signal was a helicopter traveling at thirty-six knots. The black boxes, both without operating “pingers,” were discovered outside the debris fields on a hard sandy bottom.

When the boxes were first interrogated by the FBI, presumably to find out if there was any evidence for a missile, Boeing and TWA officials were not present. A private salvage company with top equipment was ordered to stand down by the navy, and five days elapsed before the bodies were recovered. Finally, the commander had in his possession the FBI Trawler Operations Manual and Orders, left behind on one of the trawlers. It contained directions to hide from Boeing and TWA key parts, if found—the missile ejector can, a fuel pump from the aircraft, and the missile battery cooling unit.

A piece of wing had dimples with central holes in it, indicating something passed through from the outside. It never resurfaced. Last-second events on the flight data recorder indicated that the jet was hit by an external pressure wave. It was erased from the tape with the claim it was a leftover record of another flight, but the binary form of the record will not be yielded up for analysis. Had the facts been revealed before the November elections the commander stated, it would have injured Clinton/Gore chances. Commander Donaldson died in 2001 from cancer.

Kosmo had obviously boned up on this story. He felt skeptical of the government’s defensive behavior, coupled with the unlikelihood all the witnesses were lying, and for

what purpose? It didn't look good for the Clinton administration. The misprision of felony homicide, as stated by Commander Donaldson, amounted to either a "high crime" or a "misdemeanor," more likely the former.

The trouble with cover-ups like these, Kosmo felt, was that they made people paranoid. If people felt their government wasn't leveling with them, they might conveniently be labeled "conspiracy theorists." Kosmo knew he must be one of these. But no label could make up for the unrequited deaths of those on board.

Kosmo found Sander's report on the Internet. In it, Sanders told of how he and his wife were illegally arrested and tried for having samples of seat fabric tested for missile fuel residue. A NTSB official, who had the right to analyze them himself, gave these samples to Sanders. The seats near impact contained a red residue that tested through a private lab differently than seat glue or seat materials. They tested positive for rocket fuel residue (nitrates). The results from a sample given to CBS, which then was handed over to the government (FBI), had, to date, not been released. Sanders's phone records were illegally seized and evidence disappeared.

The Commander and Sanders had access to over one hundred witnesses who had been on boats, aircraft and land, in a 360-degree array from the TWA 800 aircraft at the time. They overwhelmingly claimed to have witnessed an ocean surface-to-air "flarelike" phenomenon close to Flight 800 moments before the explosion. The FBI took the investigation out of the hands of the NTSB. The witnesses were declared off-limits to the air-crash investigators for two and a half years. Their testimony was later ridiculed, slandered and libeled by government officials. Also, evidence of a surface radar contact, compatible with an escaping boat about three miles from TWA 800 at explosion time, was ignored at first. The NTSB blocked the analysis of the cockpit voice recorder for missile presence and velocity data. Immediately following the explosion, a voice from the past, Pierre Salinger, former press secretary for JFK, called from Paris and alleged it was a navy missile—a mishap. According to the commander, a much better known official, thinking the Olympics in Atlanta to be a likely target, informed an FBI command post supporting the Olympics that TWA Flight 800 had been downed with shoulder-fired missiles. This was then president, Bill Clinton.

Kosmo also told Jason about Egypt Air flight 990. It was piloted by two Egyptians and went down close to Nantucket in October 1999. Was it a suicide/homicide? A transcript revealed the Egyptian copilot repeating the words, "I place my trust in God," eleven times, as the plane lost three miles' altitude in less than a minute. Was it a forerunner of those to follow within the decade? Was it an explosion or a malfunction? Some on the Net made the case for the intervention of an alien being! The family of the copilot and the Egyptian government took strong issue with any suggestion that this may have been a deliberate act. Has there been a conclusive statement yet?

How about American Airlines Flight 587 that went down over Queens, New York killing 265 people two months after the September 11 attack? The tail, later analyzed to be structurally sound, was seen to detach in midair. No explanation was offered by the government. Was the tail unduly stressed due to the pilots' adjusting to turbulence? Richard Reid, a British citizen of Mid Eastern descent, later to become known as the "shoe bomber," was arrested on December 22, 2001 for attempting to ignite an explosive

in his shoe on a flight bound for Paris from Miami. Zacarias Moussaoui, the twentieth hijacker from September 11th, stated in his trial that he and Reid intended to hijack a fifth airliner and crash it into the White House. Might Flight 587 have been a case of a shoe bombing?

Kosmo also recalled the sniper John Muhammed, a member of Nation of Islam, who approved of the 9/11 attacks. He and his brainwashed accomplice, Lee Malvo, killed thirteen and seriously wounded three in a shooting spree in the Washington/Baltimore area in October of 2003. What did their victims have in common, besides being American? Can we be comfortable with the analyses of the government, given the defensive and strange behavior of its agencies, for instance, the FBI and NTSB, in the TWA 800 case?

It is difficult for our leaders to tell us we are engaged in a “Holy War” for Empire, but is there any doubt of this? In the interests of maintaining stability and controlling alarm there may be reasons to withhold some things from the public. The downside is that people become comfortable and it’s harder to convince them of the reality—that we are and have been, at war with radical Islam for decades.

Peters tells us of two types of terrorists—the practical, and the apocalyptic. The former want to change society, not destroy it by “jump-starting the Book of Revelation.” The apocalyptic think they are avenging the Crusades, in the name of Allah. There have been no recorded instances in history where the Hitlers, Stalins or Husseins have been turned around by diplomacy or soft talk. They had to be countered, beaten, or captured after their diabolic plans produced untold death and suffering.

As he set upon his study of the world’s empires, Jason discovered not only that they varied but also about half of human history was cast in their midst. Jason wondered, as with a rich person with a charitable heart, maybe a superpower might be best positioned to do good things in this world.

Maybe, the capacity to generate wealth and power was not all bad, contrary to Stroyer’s view. By managing the Cold War and hastening the collapse of the Soviet Union, the United States sat atop the order of nations in terms of wealth and influence, with all the animosity and envy this attracted. Of course, there were always the fence sitters who waited and watched to see which side to favor or join. And, there were the critics who relied on the words of others. Indeed, if only one superpower remained in the world, might it be something like a Super Bowl Champ, defending its honor against other teams who were “gunning” for it .

Jason considered that rainbow array—the United Nations—so evidently anti-American and anti-Semitic. Just maybe, Jason wondered, there were good nations and bad nations, depending on the leaders and the governments, just as there were good individuals and bad individuals, depending on conscience and behavior. Maybe, as with people, a nation could get better. If a nation were akin to a person, and a person could improve, then for a nation to be judged, it mattered when things happened, in the course of time. This meant that something done five hundred years ago and condemned by today’s standards was different than if the same were done fifty years ago. If history provided a classroom, then there had to be a penalty for not paying attention. Since there were no perfect persons,

indeed, if people were purposefully made to be imperfect, then there could be no such thing as a perfect nation, as nations were made up of people.

What then were the attributes that preserved nations? Could nations get better with time, instead of declining? Notwithstanding a person's opportunity and capacity to turn himself around, it became clear to most reasonable thinkers that the First World War, the War to End All Wars, was a painful simplification. Why? Because, as with mankind, there would always be the threat to the civilized world of evil nations run by evil people whose sole aim was to conquer and control. In some cases this lust for land and power spilled across borders. Jason thought of the corollary, namely that if the world was to survive, there had to be a powerful force for Good, even if things were not always peaceful and stable. Since meeting Kosmo, Jason wanted to be a historian.

With such thoughts whirring in his cap, he set out to research America's so-called imperialism. He would decide later whether to turn his "voluntary paper" into Stroyer for comment. He needed to know about the exertions of other nations or civilizations, first. There were so many questions. Why had some empires lasted longer than others? What happened to a good nation if it squandered its power and influence?

Had history ever yielded an example of a utopia—a place where power was meaningless and happiness was unlimited, except in folklore or fairy tale?

He'd recently heard the phrase, "He was a citizen of the world." What did that mean? Weren't we all citizens of the world? Didn't global warming affect us all—or was it just one class that could feel the heat? If so, wouldn't it have been better to say, "He was a world-class elitist"? At school, Stroyer was always tossing around the terms "diversity" and "multiculturalism." How very drab, Jason thought, were there ever to be a "one-world" government to oversee everyone and everything. "Nationalism" he thought, had gotten a bad rep and worse rap. There seemed to be a movement afoot to break down borders. But to Jason this didn't solve the issue of the Hitlers or the Stalins of the world. In fact, such rainbow notions may actually play into the hands of would-be dictators.

Jason had finished with his study of empires. The world's history was replete with the actions of empires, but his survey was enough for now. Now, he was better prepared for his follow-up study of what he was hearing at school. His next project would address the question: Is the United States of America an imperialistic nation?

Twenty-Five

The Search for American Imperialism

Having researched the more illustrious empires, Jason felt ready to look at America. Stroyer's words stuck in his mind: "The United States is the biggest imperialist in the world." Stroyer placed the sweeping statement in the present tense, but to support his hypothesis he harped on past adventures. It seemed to Jason the teacher had no sense of evolution, or development.

Compared to the hefty thousand-year-old Roman Empire, our Republic, though the most long-lived republic in history, might be but a young adult. Yet, American Capitalism and her free market system, imperfect as it was, had produced the most measurable advance for her people (some argue, for the world), recorded to date. Mr. Q had stated,

“Capitalism is the solution to the human condition, and in deed, has outperformed any other economic system.” Jason couldn’t think of America in a vacuum.

Jason traced the roots of this success through the Greeks, the Romans, the Europeans and the UK, to the one remaining superpower, a chain known as “Western Civilization.” Jason would follow the socialist impulse of modern Europe, as well as her attempt at casting off national identities by creating an economic federation. He would also follow the impact of her “de-Christianization.” Jason asked himself the real question, “What is the present health of the U.S. as a nation, and, more broadly, can this country withstand the malevolent intent of its enemies?”

The health of our nation was a complex question because it took in things like the quality and moral fiber of her people; the educational goals exerted upon her children, whether it be to condition their attitudes or to equip them to think; the willingness of her people to concede their standing as individuals and entrepreneurs to a state of dependency, a form of slavery. John Adams put it this way: “We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge or gallantry would break the cords of our constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our constitution is designed for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for any other.” Incidentally, Adams, like Franklin and Hamilton abhorred slavery.

The cataclysmic failure of the Nazi regime was due to its infestation with racism and domination from the time of its birth. The Communism of the USSR was said to have blown up a decade and a half ago, but Russia’s leader today clearly had a different vision of that history. Lots of people around the world had been enamored with the utopia of Communism, which never worked because an elitist ruling class always emerged and the state became the deity. In other words, human freedom became its price, which always capped its performance. Those in love with power and control never admit this. Kosmo contended that with all her past successes and gaffs, the United States of America was “the world’s last best hope,” in the words of Lincoln. The lessons were worth Jason’s study, and he would next read Bennett’s history, titled in Lincoln’s phrase.

Stroyer’s words hovered in Jason’s mind: “We destroyed the Native Americans, nothing short of ethnic cleansing.” Even though that term hadn’t been born until much later, Jason wondered how this could be. He borrowed a copy of Josephy’s Five Hundred Nations from the school library and dove into it. He also watched a few episodes of PBS’s Native Americans. Josephy told the story from the Indian’s point of view, cataloguing the mistakes, injustices and cruelties of the “white man” dating all the way back to Columbus. Fair enough, but he wasn’t about to bear the burden of guilt of five centuries. He wasn’t even sure there was anything his father might do that would make him feel guilty. Any suggestion that he should feel guilty over the actions of the early explorers was manipulative, and carried no argument for him.

The “white man” came into the lands occupied by these “native” peoples. The Indians of the New World were descendants from original hunters who crossed a “land bridge” from Asia probably in “waves,” during Ice Ages fifty and ten thousand years ago. The thought crossed Jason’s mind, might the Indians have been “white men” before they became “red men”?

Columbus, ever the navigator/discoverer and never the statesman/colony builder, intended to find a new route to the spices and fragrances of the East. After years of postponement, he finally convinced the Spanish monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella to pursue this more streamlined trade opportunity for Spain, after their triumph over the Moors. Important for the king and queen was the fact that by sailing west they bypassed Muslim pirates.

The kind and compliant Carib tribe fell prey to the coarser motives of their visitors, who claimed their habitat on behalf of Spain. The Spaniards also took great interest in the little bit of gold that bedecked their hosts. The harvest of four voyages from 1492 to 1506, most notable for seamanship and discovery, was tainted. The colonies, Navidad and La Isabela, from the first and second expeditions, went poorly. Those left in charge abused the people by imposing gold tributes and outright subjugation. This led to bloodshed and a permanent rupture of earlier trust.

Josephus claimed there were four million Indians in the Caribbean Islands, before Columbus arrived. He stated that fifty years later, there were only a few hundred. Pulitzer-winner Morrison, in *The Great Explorers*, puts the pre-Columbian figure at two hundred and fifty thousand. The decimation, however great, came about through disease, murder, suicide, and overwork through slaving. Jason applied a touch of historical perspective. This was the fifteenth century and Columbus was working for the authors of the Spanish Inquisition.

When Cortez met the Aztecs a quarter-century later theirs was the greatest empire in North America. The Aztecs had migrated from a north region known as Aztlan. Over the span of one hundred years they subdued the Olmec, Teotihuacan and Toltec peoples, creating vassal states that paid tribute to the capitol Tenochtitlan, later to become Mexico City. Cortez enrolled into his army the men of these disgruntled and oppressed tribal states—states weary of the Aztec slavers and tax collectors.

The armored Spaniards, with musket and sword, first practiced their warfare on the unsuspecting Cholulan tribe who were no match for them. Montezuma allowed the Spanish to cross the causeway into his city, Tenochtitlan. The Europeans were astounded at the social organization, art, temples and pyramids. The native people were equally taken with the Spaniards' armor and horses, whose teeth suggested they ate humans. The Spanish, in turn, were shocked at the human sacrifices they witnessed in the Aztec temples. Emperor Montezuma's fatal error was to ply Cortez and his men with golden ornaments. Gold fever struck again, and battles ensued. Montezuma was taken hostage and later killed (by either the Spanish or the Aztecs) and the great city was burned. The Spanish prevailed and Mexico became a colony of Spain. The Mexican Indian languages and cultures continued to this day. The conquistadors Pizarro in South America and DeSoto in the southeastern part of present U.S. replicated these abuses.

As Jason read this, he wasn't surprised. His search was more specifically directed to how the peoples who resided in what was to become the U.S. were treated. Virtually every civilization had had a nation atop it. Nations were made of men, and every man who ever lived, including Nietzsche, was caught in a battle between good and evil. Besides, this was a long time ago. The real question for Jason had to do with whether a civilization, or,

in this case “The West,” and more directly, his country of citizenship, had improved with time.

Josephy’s treatise contained a litany of failings of the discoverers, colonist settlers, and governments in their dealings with native peoples. These included a patronizing attitude toward the Indians; the spread of disease, including smallpox, tuberculosis, typhus; using Indians as slaves; the wanton destruction of the buffalo herds; trading for fur a list of materiel that carried consequence. These included guns, gunpowder, hatchets, knives, needles, mirrors and whiskey—a substance to which the native people seemed unduly susceptible—one “that made them dizzy” in their treaty negotiations and led eventually to dysfunction on a grand scale. Josephy told us the net effect of such interchange disrupted their way of life and their harmony with the land. On the other hand, the Pueblo capture of horses from retreating Spanish forces in the late 1600s laid the basis for the transformation of Plains Indian culture. The “dog days” gave way to “horse days” and buffalo jumps became far easier. Life took a nomadic turn and aggressive operations became more common.

Jason took an interest in the territorial wars. It seemed all humans carried in their genes an expansionistic tendency. “Manifest Destiny”—the push west by white settlers as the country opened up—surely displaced and angered the native peoples. The urge for territory did not reside solely in the whites. Jason read other sources to learn of intertribal warfare. Some of these people were stronger, fiercer and more bent on conquest than others.

Montezuma’s conquests over weaker groups bore testimony to this. Sipes, in his *The Indian Wars of Pennsylvania*, related how the Iroquois dominated and massacred the Eries, the Wenro and the Black Minquas, before the European arrival. The Huron joined the Iroquois in the mid-1600s but later related to the French, while the Six Iroquois Nations linked with the English (a subplot of Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*). The Blackfoot and Hidatsa’s Sioux, who admittedly had gained guns in their trading, pushed the Shoshones into the western mountains. Had the guns made them aggressive, as suggested by Josephy, or did the guns simply facilitate their aggressiveness? The Pawnee were said to be “traditional enemies” of the Sioux. The cliff-dwelling peoples known as Anasazi, or Pueblo, predated the advent of the “white man.” They were agriculturally based, and clearly went to great pains with their architecture. It was difficult to imagine why they built such elaborate homes on the faces of cliffs, except as a measure of defense.

Following the dark age of intertribal warfare in the East, a peacemaker brought a new vision, so said the myth. The Native American needed a clear speaker, so he asked Hiawatha to help frame the case for confederacy. The Hodenosaunee League (Iroquois Nation) was born. Its democratic model later impressed Franklin and Jefferson and contributed to the founding plans for the colonies.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, England and France fought for control of trade in the New World in a struggle that came to be known as the French and Indian War. Young Colonel Washington realized that the French alliance with the Indians had to be broken. Indian had to be set against Indian, if Mother England was to prevail. At this time the colonel was on His Majesty’s payroll. One time, a French officer insulted the powerful

Seneca chief Half King during a parley for alliance. In another incident, Half King was plied with whiskey in an attempt to compromise his meeting with Washington. As mentioned, most of the Iroquois in the Ohio Country lined up with the English, as did Mohawk Chief Hendrick in New York. During the French and Indian War, the Indians found themselves in a position of having to pick the winner.

After Braddock's defeat by the French and their Indian allies just east of Fort Duquesne (Pittsburgh) in July of 1755, the Indians gained confidence. Their raids terrorized the settlements and led to the building of a string of forts eastward across Penn's colony and to a change in the colony's pacifist Quaker government. The Delaware chiefs Shingas and Captain Jacob kidnapped 150 English, including women and children. They were kept prisoners in Kittanning, a native village forty miles northeast of the Fort at the Forks of the Ohio. The raids culminated in Colonel John Armstrong's counteroffensive in September, 1756, known as the Battle of Kittanning. This dramatic surprise attack on the Indian village virtually ended the terror raids to the east. It was a great story, one unlikely to be made into a motion picture by the makers of *Dances With Wolves*. General Forbes took Fort Duquesne in 1758 and the English began their string of victories over the French.

The battles and atrocities between the Indians and the settlers, backed by the U.S. Army, slowly moved west. The Miami and Shawnee in the Ohio Country scored over a U.S. force led by St. Clair, a friend of George Washington, now president. Little Turtle and Blue Jacket, aided by a young scout named Tecumseh, led an army of one thousand from fourteen tribes and soundly defeated St. Clair. It was the largest battle loss of an American force at the hands of the Indians. It dwarfed, for instance, Custer's defeat at the Little Big Horn River in Montana, nearly a century later. This victory was countered at Fallen Timbers on the Maumee River in August 1794. Here, Mad Anthony Wayne defeated Blue Jacket's allied force, thus ending the organized Indian resistance in the Ohio country.

The great Tecumseh used fiery oratory and set about building a coalition to stop the settlement of Indian lands. While Tecumseh was galvanizing the southern tribes—the Creeks, Chickasaws, and Choctaws—his brother Tenskwatawa made the error of prematurely attacking a military force led by Indiana Governor Harrison at Prophetstown on the Tippecanoe River. The Indians were dispersed. Tecumseh took note of the defeat. He later offered his services to the British in the War of 1812 and was killed at Thames River.

President Andrew Jackson had been the hero of the War of 1812 against the British. But he was as hard on the southern Indians as he had been on the British. He personally overruled Supreme Court Chief Justice Marshall, who wrote that the states (in this case Georgia) had no jurisdiction over the tribes (in this case the Cherokee), who in turn enjoyed a relationship with the federal government, as “a ward has to a guardian.” Jackson, with the Senate, challenged Marshall's ruling and initiated The Removal Act, which culminated in the Trail of Tears. Most of the Cherokees, the Chickasaws and the Choctaws were marched west at bayonet point, to the Indian lands of Oklahoma. The Removal Act also applied to many northern tribes.

Atrocities raged on both sides for a century across the new country, amidst the relentless displacement of Indians. Josephy failed to include in his work the Sioux uprising across the state of Minnesota in 1864 in which an estimated eight hundred “whites” were killed. President Lincoln intervened to reduce the number of executions of captured Indians, much to the chagrin of Minnesotans. When his slim margin of victory in the 1862 election was pointed out to him, he stated he couldn’t justify hanging people for votes. Some felt later, the incarcerations were worse than death itself.

The bloodiest and most ruthless massacre of Indians occurred at Sand Creek, Colorado Territory in 1864. Cheyenne chief Black Kettle had committed to peaceful relations with the U.S. Fur traders, missionaries, settlers under the Homestead Act, railroad and land speculators, and gold miners, tracked through the hunting lands of the Arapaho, Sioux, Kiowa, Cheyenne and Comanche. They drove away game, skinned buffalo, polluted water and brought disease. Eight weeks after what appeared to be a peaceful parley with Americans, near Denver a force of Colorado volunteers following Colonel Chivington rode into the sleeping camp of Black Kettle. They killed and mutilated more than one hundred and fifty Indians, including women and children. Four years later, Custer led an attack on Black Kettle and one hundred peaceful Cheyennes at the Washita River, in Oklahoma.

The push west was about land. The Oregon Trail was more of a nuisance, but the Bozeman Trail cut through the hunting grounds of the western Sioux. Chief Red Cloud fought against the Bozeman Trail and a treaty was signed at Ft. Laramie in 1866. The treaty stated that the trail could be used if the buffalo were left alone. The U.S. Government built a series of forts along the trail. This disturbed Red Cloud who said, “If you steal the trail, I will fight you.”

The Cowboy and Indian films of the 1950s became a Hollywood staple. The part that was left out was the widespread attempt to herd the Indians onto reservations after the buffalo were nearly eliminated and their horses reduced. Of course, they resisted this policy and their leaders were arrested. The strategy shifted.

The U.S. Army’s campaign to decimate the Plains Indians got off to a bad start. The campaign included Powder River, Rosebud, Warbonnet Creek, Slim Buttes, Cedar Creek, Dull Knife Fight and Wolf Mountain. General Custer’s force was soundly defeated at the Little Bighorn River in Montana by a force led by Sitting Bull, joined by Crazy Horse, Two Moons, and Chief Gall, the Hunkpapa Sioux Commander. When the news of Custer’s defeat reached the 1876 Chicago Centennial celebration, it had a dampening effect. The defeat of General Custer was a grand moment for the Plains Indians, but it was a moment that sealed their fate.

Another treaty was signed in 1868 in which the Sioux agreed to move into the Black Hills of South Dakota, which was a sacred place. The use of the land would be absolutely reserved for them. No persons, except government officials, could pass over or settle in it. Also, all military posts and roads would be closed in ninety days. Then gold was discovered. At issue now was not only land itself, but the long promise of getting rich by mining that land. The U.S. government made an offer to buy, and Red Cloud asked for six hundred million dollars. The figure was extraterrestrial for the time. Jason wondered if the figure more accurately presaged the take of present-day casinos! Along with a

counterproposal, President Andrew Johnson declared the Indians hostile. Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull had elected to not participate in the treaty.

Then the Holy Spirit became involved. A holy man named Wovoka predicted an apocalyptic end of the earth followed by the revival of the “old culture.” He did not advocate violence, but he introduced the Ghost Dance Religion. He preached the avoidance of the white man’s way, especially alcohol. He discouraged mourning and suggested prayer, chanting, meditation and dancing. This Indian Gandhi welded the spirit of the Plains Indians. Soon the Ghost Dance Religion mutated to a violent form. It was claimed that the Ghost Shirts would protect the wearers from bullets. The new religion spread across the northern Plains and understandably concerned U.S. officials. The dance was banned on the assigned Lakota reservations, but Short Bull and Kicking Bear defied the ban.

The infamous Seventh Cavalry (Custer’s former command) herded the Sioux into camps at Wounded Knee Creek on December 29, 1890. In the tension, a shot was fired, and several hours of shooting followed. One hundred and fifty Indians were killed and fifty wounded. It was the last battle/massacre involving the U.S. and the American Indians. What followed instead was an attack on the culture itself. The schools at Riverside, California and Carlisle, Pennsylvania were construed to convert the Indians into members of the prevailing culture. The schools were later considered to be a miserable failure.

As opportunities and the generation of wealth in the opened land grew, the treatment of the Indians deteriorated even further. It became clear to Jason that “Manifest Destiny” might easily be interpreted as a catch phrase for imperialism. Jason concluded the real problem lay in broken treaties. He thought if the treaties had been honored and the people left to their ways, much of the fighting and atrocities may have been avoided. But, the issue was moot. History moved in one direction. Jason looked at some of the treaties.

The infamous “Walking Purchase” was one of the first, and Jason had brought it up at the camping trip. William Penn’s son produced an agreement with the Delaware people that ceded all land west of the Delaware River for as far as a man could walk in a day and a half. Several well-conditioned men, at a half-run and with slashers ahead on the path, were able to claim nearly seventy miles in thirty-six hours, a tract the size of Rhode Island. Another example was when The Continental Congress Committee on Indian Affairs brushed aside a treaty that was signed at Fort Stanwix in New York. As a result, the Iroquois were forced into smaller tracts. When treaties were not honored, the “promised land” invariably shrank in size, often into “reservations.” Treaties dealing with the Northwest Territory (land west of the Alleghenies) were often signed by the unqualified or incompetent, often intoxicated. The Greenville Treaty, signed a year after the Battle of Fallen Timbers, provided \$20,000 for Indian losses in return for turning over large parts of Ohio, and what would later become Chicago and Detroit. The Greenville Treaty Line was not adhered to by the westward-moving settlers. The Treaty of Rabbit Creek dispossessed the Choctaws and sent them packing to the Indian Territory.

The Northwest Ordinance, enacted by Congress in 1787 stated: “The utmost good faith shall always be observed toward the Indians; their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent; and in their property, rights, and liberty they never shall be invaded or disturbed unless in just and lawful wars authorized of Congress; but laws

founded in justice and humanity shall, from time to time, be made, for preventing wrongs being done to them and for preserving peace and friendship with them.”

Jason considered the issue of the land. Tecumseh had chided: “Sell a country! Why not sell the air, the clouds and the great sea, as well as the earth? Did not the Great Spirit make them all for the use of his children?”

Although the Indians were said to have lived in harmony with the land, many tribes were clearly territorial and hierarchies developed with the use of force. One of the lessons Jason learned, was that freedom was deeply entwined with man’s relation with land. Clearly, their way of life did not include the deeding of lands among themselves and their land was taken as treaties were violated. The twentieth-century Communists understood the significance of privately owned land. They confiscated it from their own people in the name of the state.

The Indians were the descendants of the original hunters who migrated from Asia. History was full of immigrations and emigrations. Some were peaceful, and peoples assimilated. History was also replete with examples of conquest, dislocation, even disappearance of cultures. Queen Elizabeth and the other monarchs of Europe hardly could have been expected to say to their proxy explorers, “Wait...you report there are people there already? Then, you must come back home, immediately.” Such a command would be even less likely if the lands contained gold, silver or tobacco, to take back to their regal sponsors. Might the Louisiana Purchase or the purchase of Alaska (Seward’s Folly) have been declared null and void because people were already there? And what about the giant Russian territorial grabs of Peter the Great and Ivan the Terrible? Certainly the history of the world would be unrecognizable by these standards, and most of us wouldn’t care, because we would not have existed!

The broken treaties were a symptom of an even greater misconception. The red man was seen as a “noble savage.” Franklin ironically used the term when introducing himself to the French. The term connoted both an air of supremacy, and fascination. The reception and spectacle of Pocahontas and other Algonquins by Londoners and their king, James I, was one of fascination. Centuries later, Cooper’s novels were widely translated and read throughout Europe in a quest to better picture these noble savages.

The term “ethnic cleansing” meant different things to different people. Pushing Indians from “promised lands” into reservations and deliberately stripping them of their culture by breaking the chain of their traditions and sending their children to the Indian schools, if not “ethnic cleansing” in the modern sense, was at least a cruel practice and a failed idea. To Jason, it was necessary to find out the facts, and lay them on the table. Hughes, an art critic turned social historian, did just that when he courageously wrote *Fatal Shore*. This was the story of Britain’s transportation of its criminal class to Australia. It included descriptions of hunting down and exterminating aboriginal people. In Van Diemen’s Land (Tasmania), they were hunted to the last individual. Hughes laid the record bare, for the sake of balance, perspective, and scale. Only by excavating buried facts and adjusting glorified stories might history teach.

Jason was not above asking hypothetical questions for the purpose of better understanding. What might have been done differently? The Lewis and Clark expedition had gone exceptionally well. The Corps of Discovery had contact with a variety of Indian

groups, some friendly, some not. Most of these tribes had previous contact with fur traders. During the twenty-nine-month expedition there was one skirmish and one fatality. Paternalistic as the president's message was, the Corps of Discovery was only passing through, which worked in their favor. President Jefferson saw the importance of beating the Spanish and British out of land claims in the uncharted west when he quickly agreed to purchase the Louisiana Territory from the cash-hungry Napoleon.

With the Indians in flight westward, might the settlers of the expanding new country have pursued the most enlightened policies ever conceived by a "conquering culture"? As author of the Homestead Act, might the U.S. government have had enough foresight to carve out large land grants for the Indians complete with mineral and oil rights, allowing them to keep their culture(s) in parallel with the emerging America? Exceptional as that might have been for its time, historian Ellis tells us in *American Creation*, it almost happened, or at least it became a priority for President Washington in 1790.

The first president, concentrating on the national debt, cabinet appointments, and international relations, was convinced by one of his most trusted cabinet secretaries, Henry Knox, to devote attention to the Indian question. Knox was a Boston bookseller who was made artillery commander during the War of Independence. Ellis described him as a "charter member of the band of brothers" who became the "conscience" of the Revolution. He wrote the president saying the question of the new nation's relations with the Indians must be clarified. The Constitution's only mention of the Indians rested with Article I, Section VIII's provision that "Congress shall regulate commerce with foreign nations, and among the several states and with the Indian tribes." Knox saw the Indians as foreign nations. Article II, Section II stated that the Executive had the power to make treaties, with the advice and consent of the Senate. He convinced Washington that only the federal government, and not the states, had the authority to deal with the Indians and that the exterminative strategy of Indian removal east of the Mississippi went counter to the ideals of the Revolution, smacking heavily of European imperialism. Further, upon his review of the treaties, he concluded they all had been violated and a very deceptive practice had become entrenched which would not reflect well on Washington's administration. On a lesser and pragmatic level, having weighed together with his commander the risks and benefits of military actions (and inactions) for seven hard years, he knew a pan-Indian revolt could cost the new nation a prohibitive \$15 million / year. He convinced the president to put aside other issues and pursue an "enclave policy" east of the Mississippi. The agreement emphasized equal treatment, mutual consent, the fostering of agriculture with the hope of eventually reducing the size of the enclaves, and federal protection against settlement by the colonists. The terms would be binding in perpetuity. How best to achieve all this, and with which tribe? they wondered.

The Creek Nation stretched from Georgia into Alabama and Mississippi and resembled the Six Nations of the Iroquois, with its alliance with the Chickasaw, Choctaw and Cherokee. Besides, these tribes were actively trading with the British and Spanish, so winning them over would deliver a double benefit.

As it turned out, the major impediment to the plan resided in the person of Alexander McGillivray. Only one-quarter Indian through his mother, he was considered a full-blooded Creek by his constituents. He was physically unremarkable, even frail, and bravery wasn't his calling card (he once hid from battle and scalped a dead man). He was

known for his intelligence and cunning, educated in the classics and spoke English, Spanish and Creek. He acted on his own behalf, playing all parties against each other—whether it be the offers of the American government against those of the Spanish, in terms of bribes, rank or deals, or the federal government in its case against the state of Georgia, which supported the land-confiscating Yazoo Companies. He held almost dictatorial authority over his own people in managing trading rights, and he owned slaves. Though selected as the prime negotiant, he was strongly anti-American, perhaps as a result of his loyalist Scottish father having his land confiscated.

After a humiliating parley at Rock Landing, Georgia, at which McGillivray toyed with less crafty representatives from the U.S., Knox convinced Washington to meet him personally at the capitol in New York City. The pageantry accompanying the maverick leader and his entourage of twenty-seven painted chiefs resembled a royal reception. It included dancing, singing, parades, gun salutes, and a visit with Knox in his home followed by a meeting with Washington in the presidential mansion. McGillivray believed the new republic to be fragile and not likely to survive. Secretary of State Jefferson, fresh from France, supported the enclave idea. The Treaty of New York was passed 15 to 4 (both Georgia delegates voted nay), and was consummated with an Indian handshake and peace pipes. Though no document had been preserved, the commitment was colossal. A tract larger than Alabama was to be preserved and protected, and a new trading partnership was promised, thereby displacing Spain. The chief was made brigadier general with a healthy stipend, which he later used to bargain with the Spanish during the Treaty of New Orleans, where he denied any alliance with the U.S.

Two years after the Treaty of New York, all hopes for a peaceful arrangement evaporated with the unchecked march of settlers westward. Washington felt he failed. A pan-Indian alliance never materialized, nor did a Creek-Spanish tie. The cool-handed Creek leader died at the age of thirty-four, perhaps from syphilis, alcoholism or some other combination.

If intentions were important, as seemed the case with ELPs today, then America should get an A for effort in this. Unfortunately, accomplishment was what truly mattered. Perhaps the government today was playing catch-up. Some say too little, too late. The question of reparations had sharpened the further we get from the events themselves. Though history was still running its course, Jason wondered why this might be. Because of the stability that derived from her founding documents, America had enjoyed a continuous system where the courts today can entertain such dated questions. The Sioux, for instance, had brought their case for retaining the Black Hills before modern jurisdictions and had steadfastly turned down offers of monetary settlements. It seemed clear to Jason that such things as casinos and commercial fishing rights were thinly disguised attempts at reparation. In Indian schools on reservations today, a cultural revival including customs and language, was underway.

Jason turned his attention to another American venture that possessed the trappings of imperialism. This was the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846–48. Democratic President James Polk wanted certain territories in the west, territories that passed on to Mexico following her successful break with Spain in 1821. These included present-day Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, Utah and California. Efforts to purchase Texas went back to John Quincy Adams when Mexico vehemently rejected an offer for \$1 million. Years

later, Polk continued the offer to no avail. Mexico's new republic, created in 1824, encouraged settlement in these northern territories. About twenty thousand people had immigrated into the area, mostly from the United States. Stephen Austin's father received what was known as an "impresario grant" in return for supporting the Mexican government. At one point, eight thousand people lived on Austin's land. The Mexican government, sensing trouble ahead, closed the border to further immigration and skirmishes ensued. The friction cast resident Indians against Mexican and U.S. settlers.

In 1833, a charismatic but inconsistent figure led a coup against the Mexican government, suspending its Constitution and declaring himself dictator. His name was Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna. He took a different approach to the rebels up north. In 1836 he led a siege on the Alamo Mission. A few days later, he attacked Goliad, a fort south of San Antonio. All defenders of the Alamo were killed. At Goliad, a U.S. force of 330 surrendered with the understanding they would be treated as POWs. They were executed. These massacres led to the rallying cries "Remember the Alamo" and "Remember Goliad," which figured prominently in future events. Texas declared its independence from Mexico on March 2, 1836, becoming the Lone Star Republic.

Sam Houston's defeat of Santa Anna at San Jacinto on April 21, 1836 led to one of his many exiles and his repudiation by the Mexicans. The independence document drawn by the leaders of the Republic of Texas cited several issues: the usurpation of the federal government of Mexico in favor of a military dictatorship; the failed promise of constitutional liberty and republican government; the fact that the affairs of Texas were decided far away and in Spanish; denial of the right to bear arms and trial by jury; the requirement of becoming Catholic, i.e., lack of religious freedom; and lack of public education. The election of Polk, combined with a strong sense of "Manifest Destiny," prompted Congress to support the annexation of the Republic of Texas to the United States.

The government of Mexico resented the annexation movement. Failed attempts to buy California and write off Mexican debts to U.S. citizens in return for accepting the Rio Grande as Mexico's northern border didn't help relations between the two countries. These last propositions were part of "Ambassador" Slidell's negotiations with Mexico. Mexico was especially aggrieved at the U.S. Army's march to the Rio Grande, considering it a territorial infringement. The Mexicans put the border at the Nueces River while the U.S. put it farther south, at the Rio Grande. Mexico saw the efforts of Slidell as an insult, did not recognize the annexation, and claimed the U.S. Army, under General Zachary Taylor, had marched into her country. With memories of Goliad and the Alamo still fresh, Polk's persistence led to the declaration of war by Congress between the U.S. and Mexico. It was overwhelmingly favored at first, though there was later vacillation. Jason thought this a very good reason to win wars quickly.

As the war progressed, protests increased. Frederick Douglas, a former slave turned abolitionist, opposed the policies of the slaveholding president. In 1847, U.S. Congressman Abraham Lincoln put forth his "Spot Resolutions" calling upon President Polk to demonstrate the spot where "Mexicans had shed American blood on American soil." This was partly political, as Polk was a Democrat, and the new Texas Territory would likely embrace slavery. Nonetheless, Lincoln voted for supplying the army. Daniel Webster resigned as secretary of state over the Mexican War. The quaint recluse, Henry

David Thoreau, adopted “civil disobedience” as a method of protest. Despite the protests, in time more voices came forth to favor expansionism. Walt Whitman’s writing turned patriotic, even jingoistic. The pendular thrust of opinion eventually swung toward westward expansion into New Mexico Territory and California.

General Zachary Taylor reported that hostilities commenced when Mexico’s Army of the North clashed with the U.S. Army of Observation a few miles from present-day Brownsville, Texas. The Mexicans placed a siege on Fort Texas, which they claimed had been built in Mexican Texas. As a result, in May of 1846 the Battle of Palo Alto ensued. The U.S. prevailed because of the tactics of Major Ringgold, who sustained fatal wounds. He used light “flying artillery” to outmaneuver the heavier version of the opponent. The Mexicans withdrew to Resaca de la Palma to fight the next day and were routed again. This time they made a disorderly retreat to the Rio Grande and some drowned. The U.S. forces commandeered their maps, ammunition and silver.

By the end of June, the war of the border dispute was sweeping west. Polk’s offers to purchase New Mexico territory and California were soundly rebuffed by the Mexican government. Major Stephen Kearny was sent with an expedition to seize New Mexico and California for the U.S. He used diplomacy to pave the way. Surveyor William Emory accompanied Kearny to Santa Fe, then San Diego, and created the maps that would later be used in building transcontinental railroads.

Captain John Fremont with his wife at his side was sent out over the Oregon Trail to California. He carried orders to defy the Mexican authorities and threw his support behind a group of dissidents near Sonoma who created the short-lived and unofficial Bear State Republic.

Mexico had but a slight hold on its colony in California at this time. Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo was director of colonization and became frustrated with the distance and unresponsiveness of his government. In 1836 he was promoted to commandant general of the “Free State of Alta California” after a revolt against California’s governor. Although prohibited by Mexican law, he welcomed the first American immigrants to travel overland to California. He was jailed during the brief tenure of the Bear State Republic. Following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, after the war he chose to become a citizen of the U.S. and remained on what was left of his estate. Most of his land was taken and his home, La Casa Grande, near Sonoma was burned. Ultimately he was left with 228 acres, two horses and a cow. Reparations to him were meager, and he turned his heart to the study and commemoration of the mission period and history of California. Mexicans who chose to remain and take U.S. citizenship often made sacrifices for their decision.

Failing in his attempts to purchase Mexican territories, Polk concluded his aims required open conflict. There was vocal opposition in Congress before the war. Recruiting offices were flooded, funds were appropriated, Ringgold was lionized in song and ballad, jingoistic writing flourished, and the U.S. prepared for its first assault on a foreign country. The assault would contain two components—one by land and one by sea.

The Battle of Monterrey, September 21–23, 1846 pitted General Pedro de Ampudia and the Mexican Army of the North against Taylor’s seemingly invincible Americans. Casting aside orders of General Santa Anna, who had just returned from exile in Havana, Ampudia made a stand. Instead of retreating to Santillo and forming a defensive line, he

and his impatient army chose to fight at the fortress town of Monterrey. It was here that Saint Patrick's Battalion (San Patricios) turned over to the Mexican side. The Texas Rangers took the hill to the west, where cannon had been placed, and later engaged in urban warfare when the fortress was breached. Trapped in the city square, Ampudia was forced to surrender and Taylor negotiated a two-month armistice that infuriated President Polk when he heard about it. Despite retreating with their weapons, many Mexican fighters were disheartened at their inability to win with superior numbers in a fortified position. After the battle, most of Taylor's men were sent to the Gulf Coast to be commanded by General Winfield Scott. Taylor interpreted this as an attempt by his political opponent, Polk, to deny him the status of military hero. He defied orders to stay put and marched farther south toward Santillo.

Meanwhile, Santa Anna had parleyed with President Polk over a solution, including land purchase. Many of his countrymen didn't trust him, but he was charismatic and seemed to be the only one who could rally the people. After seizing power and spurred by the fall of Monterrey, he raised an army of twenty-five thousand and marched north, exposing his army to cold, hunger, thirst and exhaustion. Five thousand deserted. Santa Anna received intelligence on the transfer of the bulk of Taylor's force to Scott and decided to surprise the distracted Americans.

Ampudia attacked Taylor's now-diminished force once again, this time at a mountain pass at Buena Vista, south of Santillo. The Mexicans were countered by the Mississippi Rifles, who were later reinforced by the Indiana Hoosiers under the command of Jefferson Davis. Ampudia called for a cease-fire, just long enough to permit trapped Mexicans to escape. The next morning, to Taylor's amazement, the whole army had vacated the battlefield. In retreat, a large part of the Mexican army and cavalry were routed. Those not killed or wounded, went AWOL.

Bolstered by Taylor's most seasoned troops, General Winfield Scott landed in surfboats at the gulf city Vera Cruz unopposed in March '47, before the "fever season." General Morales concentrated his army within the walls of the fortified city and made himself a ready target for U.S. siege guns. After twelve days and six thousand seven hundred shells, Morales surrendered.

This time, Santa Anna marched his army from Mexico City to Cerro Gordo on the Vera Cruz/Mexico City Road. Scott, on his two hundred and fifty-mile trek from the coast into central Mexico knew he couldn't be supplied from the rear. Many soldiers carried a book entitled Conquest of Mexico, written by William Prescott. It described the experience of Cortez and his mobile army living off the land on their march to the capital city.

The Battle of Cerro Gordo went in favor of the U.S. Thanks to the surveillance of Robert E. Lee, U.S. forces discovered a way around their opponent and used a flanking maneuver to surprise Santa Anna. The Mexican commander was so taken off guard that he rode off without his artificial leg, later taken by his enemy as a trophy. Scott moved on to Puebla, seventy-five miles from Mexico City. The people of this second largest city did not resist and looked upon his army as a curiosity.

Polk had assigned a diplomat, Nicholas Trist, to travel with Scott to act as negotiator. Trist handed Scott a sealed proposal for peace to be delivered to the Mexican government. This incensed "Old Fuss and Feathers" (Scott), who believed that armistice

was a military matter. Several written exchanges went back and forth which were laborious in that Trist's letters were often fifty pagers. Complicating matters, the Mexican government had passed a law making it treason to negotiate with the United States.

There was growing paranoia in the Mexican capital. Guerillas and the people exchanged blows, feeling each supported the Americans. Santa Anna, while believed to be the only one capable of raising and sustaining an army, was suspected of secretly negotiating with the U.S. This less than illustrious commander, in and out of exile, was irrevocably connected to the fate of his country. He might have dissolved the Congress and taken complete control, but he avoided outright dictatorship. Civil rebellion was rife in Mexico then, and the government tottered often. General Santa Anna would not concede to U.S. demands, however. He prepared to defend the capital, ancient Tenochtitlan, fabled city in the Valley of Mexico.

Scott marched his army of ten thousand for two days at two miles' elevation. On August 10, 1847 he looked down on the city of three hundred thousand below, surrounded by marshes and lakes, protected by gates and causeways. He would have no reinforcements. Santa Anna had pulled together a defense made from remnants of his army and craftsmen armed with flintlocks. He stationed them strategically around the city, placing seven thousand at El Piñon, a hill that overlooked the National Road to Vera Cruz to the east. Scott brilliantly turned his army to the south, bypassing the hill. This maneuver prompted Santa Anna to turn his army to the south, close to a seemingly impassable deposit of sharp volcanic rock known as the Pedregal.

General Valencia, Santa Anna's political rival, disobeyed orders and marched out to meet the invading Yankees. Robert E. Lee, on the night of August 19, using a lamp and the illumination from lightning bolts took thirty-five hundred troops over the rock, and surprised Valencia's rear. Lee made another circuit for reinforcements, an effort that Scott called the greatest feat of courage in the war. Santa Anna stood by and watched, without reinforcing Valencia, who was beaten to retreat with a loss of 700, and 814 captured, including 4 generals. The fleeing Mexicans were chased to the Churubusco River.

The main U.S. army was caught in a withering crossfire between a monastery and a bridge. The barrage slowly lost steam, as munitions waned. Santa Anna sent in wrong-sized bullets! It was here that some more of the San Patricios Brigade went over to the enemy. Scott later executed them at Chapultepec Castle. After three hours of hand-to-hand fighting with bayonet, the U.S. prevailed, with one thousand casualties. The Mexicans lost ten thousand, with three thousand taken prisoner.

In the days that followed, Santa Anna sent a peace envoy, which bought him time. Many had fled Mexico City. Santa Anna offered his position to anyone who would take it. No one came forth. Trist met with four Mexican commissioners. The temporary peace was doomed, since territorial concession had been outlawed. Scott demanded total surrender and the peace effort broke off.

The Battle for Mexico City was three pronged: the capture of Molino del Rey—a mill that was thought to be a cannon foundry; the taking of the military academy at Chapultepec Castle; and the penetration of the city proper through the Belen and San Cosme Gates.

The mill was taken in two hours of repeated charging by thirty-five hundred troops, with a loss of eight hundred. No cannon were found. Many of the ten thousand on the other side were lost here at the mill. After fourteen hours of artillery fire on Chapultepec Castle, five hundred volunteers known as “the Forlorn Hope” used ladders to climb into point-blank fire. Santa Anna rode around issuing orders, but was not effective. Here, the heroic boys of Chapultepec sacrificed themselves and became a legend. The Stars and Stripes were raised, and remaining members of the San Patricios Brigade were executed. On September 13, the gates to the city were breached. Resistance was not as fierce, although thousands of prisoners released by Santa Anna threw rocks at the invaders. Mexican aristocrats were more frightened by the prisoners than by American troops. Santa Anna fled this time to Jamaica, and a new government took over.

The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was negotiated with the help of Trist, although President Polk had fired him. Communications were slow. All parties at the scene in Mexico City wished Trist’s participation, and by the time his sixty-five-page letter reached Washington (and got read) an agreement was under way. The talks lasted two months. Upper California and New Mexico were ceded to the United States. The Texas border with Mexico would be the Rio Grande River (known also as the Rio Bravo). Mexicans could stay on the land, and choose citizenship with either country. Mexico would be paid \$15 million. Some U.S. senators called for the annexation of all of Mexico! As it turned out, about half would constitute the settlement. On May 30, 1848 the Mexican Congress approved the treaty. The treaty was signed in Washington after that. Polk had kept his word. He died three months after watching Zachary Taylor be sworn in as president. Trist privately expressed a feeling of shame. Later in life, Ulysses Grant called it an unjust war.

Jason now knew of the U.S.-Mexican War. None of his classmates knew of it, to his knowledge. Jason had a feeling, listening to Kosmo, that a clear exposition of this part of his country’s history might come in handy someday. It was not a cut-and-dried affair.

Mexico’s own history has been fraught with rifts and convulsions. The Spanish conquest in the sixteenth century led to colonization efforts under the Hapsburgs, headed up by Guzman and Coronado. The War of the Spanish Succession replaced the Hapsburgs with the liberal Bourbons who followed more enlightened views and who brought science and political reform. Napoleon’s imprisonment of the Spanish king in 1808 included provisions for a constitutional monarchy in Mexico, with a degree of representative government. Mexico’s revolutionaries faced down the Spanish captain general, and the Mexican Empire came into being in 1821. It lasted three years. A constitutional republic was born in 1824.

Two groups, Centrists and Federalists, vied for control. Federalists favored limited government. The era of Santa Anna and the Texas and Mexican Wars followed, with governmental instability. The war with the U.S., though painful and humiliating, had a congealing effect on the country and helped it define its goals under a reform movement. A new Constitution was drafted in 1857 that pointed to more rights and freedoms for the people, but religious communities and the military rejected it. Two governments, one conservative and one liberal, came into being, one in the capital and one at Vera Cruz, which operated the customs house. Then an even stranger thing happened. With the U.S. engaged in civil war over secession and slavery, the French chose to intervene in Mexico.

The liberal Mexican government had run up a huge debt to Britain, France and Spain and in 1861 suspended those payments. Britain and Spain bowed out, after initially planning to intervene. The French sent a force to Vera Cruz. With this, a third foreign power marched its army on Mexico City!

Napoleon III succeeded, and placed two puppets on the Mexican throne—the Hapsburg Maximilian and his wife Charlotte, whose job it was to ostensibly bring peace and stability to Mexico. It didn't happen. At the end of the U.S. Civil War, the U.S. government pressured France to vacate Mexico. In 1867, Maximilian and his generals were executed by the new Mexican president, Juarez. With them, so died this latest stab at empire at the hands of the French.

Juarez's presidency emphasized education, rebuilding the shattered economy, and de-emphasized the role of the church and the military. Jason found the following statement in the encyclopedia (EB): "In an era of goodwill engendered by the sympathy and aid the U.S. had extended to the Mexican cause, the claims of the two countries against each other were settled by peaceful arbitration." Juarez was reelected in 1871, but died suddenly in 1872. He was an honored figure in Mexican history, and brought his country through great travail.

Porfirio Diaz followed Juarez. Diaz was a poor Indian from Oaxaca who had distinguished himself as a general in the military. He was a Republican who stood against the French intervention. He carried on much of Juarez's program until the political revolution of 1911. During his tenure, order and progress were emphasized, sometimes over personal liberty, and one of his slogans was, "Bread, or the club." Gradually, criticism was not tolerated and foreign influence (mainly French) followed international investment in the Mexican economy. A middle class evolved. The military revolution of 1911 led to the replacement of Diaz. The revolution lasted thirty years. Here was what happened:

The revolutionary leader Madero was elected president, and Diaz left for Paris. The counterrevolutionary Huerta had Madero and his vice president killed. Huerta assumed the presidency, and revolutionary fires burst out again. U.S. President Wilson wanted to oust Huerta. He landed troops at Vera Cruz, and they occupied the port!

Refusing to recognize Huerta, Carranza formed a loose alliance with Pancho Villa, leader of a bandit army. Huerta was unseated in 1914, by Carranza. In the vacuum that followed, Zapata and Villa fought Carranza's forces. Zapata was killed in 1919, and Villa, in 1923. Under Carranza, a new Constitution took form. Quite unlike the U.S. Constitution, it emphasized the major role of government in formulating social, economic and cultural welfare. It contained vast plans for free, secular and compulsory education. It saw private property as nearly sacrosanct, except that its Article 27 allowed for "social utility of the land." Subsoil resources were nationalized. Minimum wages were put in place and the price of labor was protected. The operation of the free market was limited. The president could deport foreigners at will and social reforms were slow to come.

Then Carranza was killed. Obregon became president and later stepped aside for Calles. Cardenas followed Calles. He nationalized foreign oil ventures and reduced exploration of this major future resource. In 1940, Camacho became president. During WWII, Mexico declared war on Germany when a couple of her tankers were destroyed by the

Nazis. Mexico's main contribution to the war effort was in providing natural resources to the U.S.

President Harry Truman was the first U.S. president to visit Mexico. He visited on the centennial anniversary of the Battle of Chapultepec in 1947. Truman acknowledged Mexico as a good neighbor and formulated a policy, officially denouncing any stronger nation invading a weaker one, for the purpose of conquest. He was well received. The notion of a weaker nation invading a stronger one, by means of weakly enforced immigration policies, probably had not occurred to him.

Jason wondered, "How does a Mexican kid describe the history of his country?" He began to understand the wonder of his country's Constitution, and how lucky he was to be a citizen of the U.S. Clearly, there had been ups and downs in our relationship with Mexico over the last one hundred and sixty years. Amazingly, Kosmo knew some of this, and Jason studied it independently, as he had done with Marx. Kosmo wondered if the lack of enforcement of our immigration laws with Mexico might represent a clandestine attempt at reparation for past grievances. Perhaps the same might be said for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Clinton administration's \$20 billion bailout of Mexico's economy in 1992. One could only wonder at the G. W. Bush administration's reluctance to enforce immigration policies. Were we that dependent on Mexican oil? Had we figured the Hispanic vote correctly?

Kosmo felt strongly about the illegal influx of people from Mexico. It was a matter of security, in a time of war. It was a matter of law, in a country that espoused the role of law. And it was a matter of economics. Kosmo knew he would be thought by some, a "racist" or a xenophobe for such thoughts. He would respond by saying he was an immigrant, and a legal one at that. He certainly was not against immigration. He had told Jason that illegals were not a race or an ethnic group. In fact, Kosmo referred to himself as an "illego-phobe." As it turned out, Kosmo's thinking was in line with the majority of Americans, including the foreign born. This had been demonstrated by the people's recent repudiation of amnesty programs supported by both the president and many in Congress. Kosmo thought there had to be a better way. What about streamlining the process of legal immigration? What about requiring, for the benefit of the immigrant, the learning of English? It was difficult to get ahead in a country without knowing its language, or assimilating, beyond the purpose of making money.

Mexico's second largest source of income, next to oil revenue, was money sent back by Mexicans in the U.S. For the Mexican government to export its poor and receive revenues in turn was a win-win for her, at the expense of the U.S. taxpayer. The American taxpayer had supported and was supporting 12 to 20 million illegal people with programs, education, health care, safety nets and for some, prison accommodations. The Heritage Foundation calculated this expense at \$2.6 trillion over two decades. At some point, one must think of the children, who hopefully would grow up to be taxpayers one day.

The current rule that a child born to an illegal immigrant in the U.S. automatically became an American citizen, in Kosmo's view, was a recipe for major demographic change. If current fertility rates continued, it was certain that a future majority of people with Mexican ancestry would live in much of the American Southwest. From recent

demonstrations on the part of La Raca groups, such as MEChA and Aztlanders, it was clear that strong sentiment existed for a new Aztlan separatist movement.

Jason thought of the future and several questions came to focus. Would this New Aztlan—California, Arizona and New Mexico— become a totally new country, or would it rejoin with Mexico, the country they left? What about the one hundred and sixty or so years of history in between the U.S.-Mexican War and now—the settlement and development, treaties, state visits, aid, agreements and understandings? The La Raca movement had emerged after the 1960s. What had been its catalyst? Would such a movement, once numbers for the vote for secession was achieved, wait for a soft president to be elected? Might the Congress with its growing number of socialists go along with such a movement or might another Lincoln rise from our soil and preserve the Union?

Kosmo held that the proponents of big government wanted as many dependent people in the country as possible. Such people usually voted for the party that promised them the most. It was another example of trading taxpayers' money for votes, under the guise of compassion. As more and more people prosper however, dependency shrinks, so big government pols have to conceive of new ways to bring in a fresh supply of dependents. Kosmo had been called cynical at times, but he knew he was a realist and sometimes reality was cynical.

Jason had considered two parts of our history that were tarnished with the elements of imperialism. He would check out the third—The Spanish-American War. The story deserved scrutiny and occurred at a time when Great Britain, France, and Russia were urging their own empires. The U.S. risked being left behind.

Having fought at Antietam, President McKinley did not wish war, but he did want a presence in the Caribbean and a naval base in Cuba. Teddy Roosevelt was Secretary of the Navy and later became McKinley's vice president. T.R. was bullish on the idea of a strong and forceful America. We had recovered from the crash of 1893 and our economy was strong at the beginning of the twentieth century. The western frontier was closing and expansionism abroad appealed to many. The Spanish Empire was in tatters, following her own civil wars. All that was left of Spain's empire was Cuba and Puerto Rico in the western hemisphere, and the Philippines and Guam halfway around the world.

The Spanish were given less respect than Great Britain or France. Cuba, just to our south, was suffering from Spain's high taxes, lack of representation, slavery and corrupted administration. Cuba declared independence in 1868 and the ten-year struggle with Spain that followed had cost her two hundred thousand lives, ending with a decisive military defeat. Slavery was abolished and a degree of representation was allowed, but high taxes on sugar plus trade restrictions caused the independence movement to revive in 1895. Jose Marti, who became a martyr, and Maximo Gomez both rose as inspirational and tactical leaders. In a "Viva Cuba Libre" spirit they welded the races and classes in the insurrection and spoke of a republic.

In 1896 Spanish General Weyler, known as 'the Butcher,' commenced a "reconcentration" policy. He pulled thousands of rural workers out of the country and placed them in camps, in towns, and in cities. Tens of thousands died of hunger and disease. The American consul general reported that in the whole island four hundred

thousand innocent women and children had been reduced to the condition of wild animals. The insurrectos under Gomez deliberately wrecked the \$30 million sugar industry hoping this would force American intervention. American newspapers, like Hearst's New York Journal, portrayed Weyler as a villain. The King of Spain was fourteen years old. Both he and his mother, the regent queen, were not as vulnerable to such characterization.

The refurbished American Navy was about to flex its muscles. The pocket-battleship Maine was sent to protect American interests and appeared in Havana Harbor on January 25, 1898. Before the 1896 revolt U.S. trade with the island amounted to \$100 million a year, and \$50 million of American capital had been invested in Cuba. On the night of February 15, the battleship blew up with the loss of 266 officers and sailors. America rallied around the battle cry, "Remember the Maine!" (In 1950 the U.S. Navy ruled that the loss was caused by a boiler accident, but the heat generated at the time by the press over the incident inflamed the desire for war with Spain.)

President Cleveland had earlier held to a noninterventionist policy. McKinley ran on a policy of Cuban independence while pursuing diplomatic means. A letter from the Spanish delegate in Washington calling President McKinley a "weak crowd pleaser" found its way into Hearst's paper, and this didn't help the diplomatic effort. Up to that point McKinley prepared for war, investigated alternatives, and hoped for peace.

The regent queen of Spain was highly impressed when McKinley's request for "forceful intervention" from Congress captured \$50 million for national defense without one dissent. The national mood was galvanized.

Teddy Roosevelt quit his job as Secretary of the Navy to join a volunteer cavalry. Frank James, ex-outlaw brother of Jesse James, volunteered to lead a regiment of cowboys. Hearst, who despised McKinley, failed to get a requested commission from the president, so he created and assigned himself to a floating news center stationed off Cuba. Lafayette College released its male student body for the effort and Cornell offered course credits to volunteers. William Jennings Bryan, Democrat candidate for president, served as colonel in a Nebraska regiment. The president called for two hundred thousand volunteers and a million came forth. Three Black battalions were sent into the fight. With civil rights of Blacks in shambles, some questioned why they would fight on America's behalf. Cowboys, Indians, and Yankee aristocrats volunteered for the Rough Riders, sparing the military the need to train for horse and rifle. Roosevelt described it as a "splendid little war."

The Spanish-American War—the war between America and Spain—lasted ten weeks. Staging itself in Florida, a highly disorganized army of fifteen thousand sailed for Cuba, taking seven days to reach the port of Daiquiri. Ten thousand were left behind. The army landed and off-loaded between June 20 and 25, 1898. On July 1 and 2, the Spanish blockhouses at El Caney and the San Juan Heights were captured. Images of Teddy Roosevelt leading the Rough Riders captured the imagination of graphic artists. His image as war hero would later help in his presidential elections. Gatling guns completely unsettled the Spanish troops, who retreated amidst their fire. The American Navy in Santiago Harbor sank all the Spanish ships but one.

General Nelson Miles took the Spaniards by surprise by landing in pro-American western Puerto Rico instead of San Juan. This tactic disorganized the Spanish force stationed there, which was routed.

On July 17, formal surrender was offered, and the Spanish flag was replaced by the Stars and Stripes. The Cuban rebels were excluded from the settlement proceedings. They were perceived as unfit for self-government. Twenty-three thousand Spanish soldiers were returned to Spain at U.S. expense.

Cuba was in America's backyard. The Philippines were distant and mysterious. We had virtually no knowledge of its people. According to historian Ambrose, this was a recipe for disaster. The Spanish had colonized and ruled these islands since the 1500s, but the sugar, hemp and tobacco brought little revenue to Spain. Trade with China was more significant.

Emilio Aguinaldo led the insurgent movement in the Philippines. Spain knew she couldn't wage a war in the Philippines while her resources were in Cuba. So Spain sued for peace and offered money for Aguinaldo's exile to Hong Kong. He accepted the money, while doubting the promised reforms.

Commodore George Dewey was ordered to invade Manila. On May 1, almost two months before the landing in Cuba, the U.S. Navy's Asiatic fleet steamed into Manila Bay and sank all eight of the Spanish ships present. Spain surrendered by noon. Dewey fetched Aguinaldo from Hong Kong and promised support for the revolution. The latter believed the Americans would support the insurgent government, but McKinley saw it differently. He felt the U.S. presence in the Philippines brought with it a long-term commitment, "Obligations which could not be disregarded..."

The Platt Amendment made Cuba a protectorate. It defined an "exit strategy" for American troops. It also mandated trade conditions, land sales, and treaty agreements in favor of the U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt repealed the amendment in 1934; only U.S. rights to Guantanamo Bay remained.

In the Philippines there were no agreements, and the insurgents, once again, were granted no representation at the Paris Peace Talks. Spain handed the Philippines over to the U.S., and \$20 million changed hands. (Andrew Carnegie offered to pay this, himself.) The U.S. Senate ratified a treaty that "legitimized" the acquisition of America's first colony. One critic stated, "Dewey took Manila with the loss of one man, and all our institutions."

A war with insurgents broke out in the Philippines and lasted three years. Atrocities on both sides took place, and those committed by the greater power tended to be on a larger scale. It took sixty-three thousand American troops, forty-three hundred American deaths and an estimated six hundred thousand Filipino deaths on Luzon alone, to conclude this unenviable chapter. The bad news from the Philippines was suppressed. (News also of the ravages of malaria, yellow fever and dysentery in Cuba among American forces, was suppressed.) William Randolph Hearst reversed his hawkish stance. Aguinaldo, upon capture, recommended acceptance of the U.S.

Thirty-five years of U.S. rule followed. With a view toward self-government crystallizing through the course of various American administrations, education improved while

economic opportunities lagged. A Commonwealth arrangement was inaugurated on November 15, 1935, which retained U.S. jurisdiction over defense and foreign affairs.

The Japanese attacked the Philippines on December 8, 1941 and commenced a regime of heavy suppression and cruel occupation. During WWII, one million Filipinos died at the hands of the Japanese imperial forces. With the return of McArthur on October 20, 1944, the islands were liberated. The Philippine Republic was born on July 4, 1946, adopting much of the U.S. Constitution.

Cuba's history after the Spanish-American War involved a succession of dictators who practiced graft, corruption and selective suppression. These included Gomez, Batista, and Castro. America had relations with the country during the first two, Gomez and Batista. We severed them with the coming of Castro, and Communism. Under Castro, Cuba became a threat to the U.S. During President Kennedy's administration, satellite photographs showed Soviet missiles on Cuba. They were pointed at American cities. This led to the showdown known as the Cuban Missile Crisis, which in turn brought us close to nuclear war. Russia's Nikita Khrushchev said they (the Soviets) got what they wanted—the withdrawal of airbases from Turkey, and a promise not to interfere with Castro. In return, the missiles were hauled back to the USSR.

Castro had been given good grades, from inflationary graders, for his health and education policies. But literacy rates were not the same as education or the freedom to read what one wished. As for health, despite the hemisphere's highest abortion rate, the infant mortality rate was twenty-fourth on the list. Health care had actually worsened under the Castro regime. Further, torture, imprisonment, and execution had been shown unequivocally to be bad for one's health.

Thousands of political dissidents had been executed—there was no precise count, as Castro himself was the Department of Justice. It was felt tens of thousands had been imprisoned or tortured. According to *The Black Book of Communism*, written by French scholars and published in English by the Harvard University Press, fourteen thousand murders by firing squad had occurred. The Cuba Archive project put the death toll of the Castro regime at one hundred and two thousand.

As singular dictator controlling the news and policies, dissent aimed at the government was not permissible. Jason thought if this were the case in our country, nearly half our people and their political leaders, according to the polls, would be imprisoned or worse. Perhaps this was why Castro had as much support for his policies among his people as he has—there were few dissenters left. Of course, he could generate pictures of waving “enthusiasts”! Castro was a student of Hitler and his tactics, and he carried a copy of *Mein Kampf* with him until he learned it.

As owner of nationalized industries, Castro was said to be worth around \$550 million. He was not a “Capitalist.” He was a “confiscatist,” as was his friend Chavez in Venezuela. Income distribution did not occur in Communist countries. Foreigners who visited Cuba were shown a country that was off-limits to many of her own people. Photo-ops were maintained for visitors from the West, hyped as the norm. As for imperialistic ventures herself, Cuba had as many “advisors” (agitators and insurrectionists) in Angola and Ethiopia, as America had troops in Viet Nam.

It was always a worrisome thing when the leader of a country wore a military uniform. Some people found in Castro a revolutionary icon, a people's hero. To possess and maintain this bizarre viewpoint all that was needed was a) an ignorance of the history lessons of the twentieth century, and b) an unhealthy dose of denial. Perhaps the number-one lesson of the last century was that you couldn't lift the platitudes of Karl Marx off the page into the real world of government without curtailing freedom and imposing dictatorship. Denial was found in people who'd had freedom all their lives and who lacked the imagination to mentally place themselves in one of about three hundred countries in the world. As an Eastern European, Kosmo was sensitive to the culture war now gripping the beacon and bastion of freedom.

Jason thought about America's experiments with imperialism. It was valuable for his understanding to investigate her ventures over a century ago. There was no question in his mind that America had had her imperialist historical phases. There was nothing on the scale of the despotic utopias of Europe in the past sixty years. Great efforts were expended in academe to keep alive the myth that America today was imperialistic. Elements of the main media had characterized our efforts to defend ourselves in the present war as "imperialistic." The extreme element of the Left had concocted propaganda that we went to war for oil, or on behalf of a company that serviced oilfields. Why then hadn't we taken the oil, or major oil revenues, to help pay for our expenses, or lower the price of gasoline? Saddam Hussein attempted to kill George Herbert Walker Bush in Kuwait a few years before. How was that for a reason to invade Iraq? Jason felt, not a bad one. It was just that there were about six or so other reasons that were even more compelling. Crackpot assertions by the Left, such as the false statement that there had been six hundred and fifty thousand civilian casualties in Iraq, were necessary to feed the notion that America today was an imperialistic nation.

When Jason delved into history as he had done with Marx, he found complexities beyond the simple chant. He found that many of the BAFC ("blame America first crowd") did not know much about history, or they often held one-sided views, as though blinded in some way. The issues of balance, magnitude and scale, came into view for Jason.

Jason took a crash course through Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*, an encyclopedic seven-hundred-page condemnation of Capitalism, "big" business, the ruling classes (it was very class oriented) and the history of the American government, from the Founders to the present. Jason was curious as to how the professor described the Marshall Plan, an unparalleled example of American generosity. Zinn described it in terms of U.S. interests alone. As a "zero sum gamer" he apparently never heard of win-win arrangements where the oppressor/victim paradigm was absent. Zinn's treatment of WWII was a war that he questioned as "a people's war" versus a war of imperialism waged by industrialists. Jason could predict which it was. After a short paragraph in which Zinn capsulated Hitler as "unspeakably evil," Zinn launched into a cascade of every debatable act in every conflict the U.S. engaged. He concluded that we should have solved every civil rights issue extant in our great country, as though taking on a force bent on enslaving the world was a sidelight, in order to justify the glory and honor of the Allied effort. In his chapter on Socialism, Zinn refers to Sinclair's *The Jungle*, published in 1906, leaving the horrors of Lenin and Stalin for some other record. In the book, immigrant Jurgis Rudkus spoke of, in Zinn's words, "how beautiful life might be if

people cooperatively owned and worked and shared the riches of the earth.” In his comments on Reagan, Zinn mentioned the missile sent into Qaddafi’s bedroom, the invasion (liberation) of Grenada and the Iran Contra Affair. (The latter was an attempt to thwart Communism in Central America, undertaken without Reagan’s knowledge.) All of these were worthy enough, but Zinn failed to mention the “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall” milestone. Where was the balance in that? Jason’s message to both Zinn and Lennon (John, this time) was: “It’s been tried over and over, and it doesn’t work! If there was ever an example of social Darwinism, it was Communism. The powerful rise to the top, and suppress the less powerful. That was the real class warfare. It was the Law of Paradox, in action.

Jason was thankful that a million of his countrymen and women were stockholders, through their plans and investments. This way they could share in the productivity that still shone through the storm clouds. He was grateful for the wealth of food and the absence of hunger in his land. He thought of the choice of goods and services made possible by the free market system, and he thought of innovation. Uncle Bruce told Jason that about twenty years ago people were dreaming of a wristwatch capable of producing an image of someone in a different place, never dreaming then of text messaging, Internet access, photography, and a telephone all contained in a sliver of electronic wizardry. Jason was thankful for foresters, who looked after our forests; and for florists, who saw flowers for their color and beauty, absent “plant’s rights” when they “decapitated” them for their arrangements; and for the husbandry of animals by folks who understood their care and breeding, as well as the value of food. He thought of the finest health care system in the world, advancing and unrationed, even sampled by foreigners from every corner of the world. Emergency health care was available to everyone, including illegals. He thought of the charity and philanthropy of all types - how we gave \$240 billion in 2003 to churches, hospitals, victims of natural disasters here and abroad, to the person who lost his or her home to fire, to children with cancer, to true victims of all stripes. He thought of our voluntary organizations—firefighters, auxiliaries, charities—who set out to help others, and how the giving strain ran in the blood of most Americans. He thought of the long list of inventions and innovations from which Americans and the rest of the world has benefited. He thought longest of our warriors who had sprung from the soil of “nuclear families” and faith, and who believed in America in a way that was once common, in a way that could not be measured—what was an arm, or a leg, one’s sight, or one’s life, worth? They offered themselves so that we might go on with our jobs, our games, our parties, and our pleasures, as if there were no war, anywhere. He thought of how unfair it was to lobby for their (premature) return home, when it was they who had made the choice. Jason wondered how it might be if this country were so bereft of nobility and so burdened by its past, why were people coming here in droves, and breaking in illegally. And why were the perpetual blamers so reluctant to leave?

It was often heard that America “can’t be the world’s policeman.” Yet, it was dictators that accounted for 85 percent of the world’s problems. Jason wondered how great it would be if some monster came up out of the depths or in from space...a monster with a special appetite for dictators...so we could have peace on earth. Until then, we might have to rely on the liberating power of Freedom. What better nation to offer this opportunity than...

No, Mr. Stroyer, America is not an imperialistic nation.

Twenty-Six

Dinner with Kosmo

Vera felt little need to invest much domestic capital on her culinary skills. Her sense of romance did not include the kitchen. She knew that Nick liked a “rotation” of meals—a provender with enough variety to satisfy, without experiment. Nick ate more from necessity than pleasure anyway. Besides, more often than not he looked forward to his projects at the observatory and the limited menu kept him on schedule. Her son was like his father here. The boy rarely made requests. He too seemed preoccupied and although snack food was available in her home, her son’s taste for it was uncommonly spare. He was a normal teenage boy in that what or how much he ate seemed to have no effect whatever on his lean physique. His mother spared him the dish cleaning exercise that came so naturally to Taser. Simply, the preparation and taking of meals was not an elevated experience in the Casperson household. It was natural for Vera to feel concerned over what to place before their special guest this evening.

Vera was the prime mover for this evening and Nick acquiesced to her wishes. Bruce and Juliet were invited, perhaps as a buffer to a potentially challenging evening. The two women had bonded through the common travail of their men. For comic relief, they referred to it as “the change,” in mock reference to menopause. As frightening as the extreme behaviors had been, they seemed to be fading. So were the skin pigments that heralded the strangeness.

Jason’s hunch that his father and Uncle Bruce would gradually return to normal was uncanny in Vera’s eyes. She was pleased to have such a prescient son, but she still had her doubts about his direction. The Science Fair had won Jason extra recognition, but a couple of the teachers clearly objected to his clandestine methods at countering Mr. Orb’s “science” lessons. She was reassured by Dr. Greene’s opinion that Jason was not suffering from any attention problems. Quite the contrary, to Greene the boy seemed unusually motivated to ferret out a range of understanding that far exceeded his age and contrasted sharply with “the teachings” of some members of the faculty. Jason’s recent performance in the school’s playground had inspired a letter from Mr. Stroyer. With her son’s future in mind, Vera decided finally to invite Kosmo for dinner. With Nick’s help she would explore the idea that perhaps her son should take a break from his private tutelage, for the benefit of all concerned.

When Jason invited Kosmo for dinner, he tossed out a subtle probe for the old man’s food preferences, as instructed by Vera. The matter-of-fact response...“meat and botatoes”...seemed easy enough.

Jason recalled Kosmo’s fleeting reference once to his term in a Russian work camp when he was young. Perhaps “meat and botatoes” was a delicacy for him. Perhaps it was the quick equivalent for chateaubriand and potatoes au gratin. Whatever it meant, Vera would do her best.

When Jason escorted the svelte octogenarian from the McFee house to his own, the neighbors who had never seen him waved silently, or simply stared. Except for a slight osteoporotic crouch, Kosmo walked with confidence and purpose. Having only heard of

the stolid hermit from her son, Vera didn't know what to expect, other than that Artie and his mother could not be with him. Her preconceived image of Kosmo was jolted when Jason opened the door. Vera had envisioned him more roguish and less genteel in appearance, on the basis of Jason's reference to his pronouncements. She had fashioned a stereotype of a cranky recluse. To her surprise, he left his curmudgeonly variant back in his garret.

The dignified guest sported a dark maroon military jacket with brass buttons and two silver bars over a cavalry insignia. The perfect fit was matched by neatly pressed tan-colored trousers and cordovan shoes that reflected the ceiling lights. Kosmo's sartorial splendor was tarnished only by a trace of cigar smoke that broke through his heavy cologne.

Jason introduced Kosmo all around. He, in turn, greeted each of the gathered party with a smile that revealed teeth so miraculously white it was as though he had shined them. Kosmo met each greeting with a polite bow. His face bordered on emaciation, and his dark sunken eyes made lucid contact with the eyes of his greeter. His full smile and the well-worn wrinkles that framed his welcoming eyes carried genuine warmth and calmed his hostess.

Nick showed his guest to the living room and offered a choice of seating. Vera placed a plate of shrimp and mushrooms filled with crabmeat on a table next to him, as the old man nestled himself into the corner of the sofa. To the request for drinks Kosmo was quick to respond with, "Vodka on ice." Bruce and Juliet waited for Kosmo to take his place before they settled into theirs, Juliet between them. Kosmo glanced smilingly across at Bruce who was nestling a bottle of beer in one hand and Juliet's hand in his other. Standing next the fireplace, Nick looked on with gleeful anticipation. He had never seen Bruce hold a woman's hand before.

Nick was aware of Vera's stir over the meal and her concern over selecting the propitious moment to raise the topic of Kosmo's influence on her son. For her, there was the question of intellectual captivity and how it might be straining Jason's relations with some of his teachers. She would be careful not to suggest there was anything jaded or prurient in her son's fixation with this quaint Lithuanian. Nick had advised her the moment would arise naturally if allowed to, and not to push for it. As these contexts took shape, Taser shot into the room and looked as though he was about to jump up onto Kosmo's lap. The old man laughed aloud, but held his hands, palms out, as Vera appeared with his vodka. Bruce calmly instructed Taser with an audible command and series of clicks and hand signals. The dog dutifully walked to the end of the room and sat, watching Bruce intently. Jason followed the dog and pulled up a chair, much to the amusement and amazement of everyone, especially Kosmo.

"You, zir, hav' a goot vay vit 'em, bote! I've zeen ze tricks you do vis zat dog. You know how to be ez mazter...ez commander." Kosmo said this, waving a pointed finger at the ceiling. Everyone laughed, as the atmosphere warmed. Juliet looked at Bruce with a smile, waiting for his response.

"You just need to know what makes a dog tick. And you reinforce it. Give Taser a cracker, Jason." Bruce looked over at Vera, as if to confirm her approval.

“A dog’s tick?”

“What’s on his mind. Remember when Christopher Walken played the part of the exterminator. He said, ‘You’ve just got to get into the mouse’s head.’”

Nick and Juliet laughed.

“Ah, yes. Zen like-a Pavloff. I’ve zeen zat dog yump through the vindow off yor car. You train ’im zis, huh?”

“He knows there is a big bowl of puppy chow on the front seat.”

“Zum car!”

“Well, it’s being modified right now, as we speak.”

“Modi...?”

“Changed, turned back into a normal car. The magistrate gave me the project as a homework assignment.”

“Ha ha, yez, I zee. Zat car eez one zat catches a berson’s eye, all hright.”

“Well, we brought the ‘Rhu’ tonight.” Bruce smiled to Juliet, then to Nick, as Nick subconsciously put his scotch on the mantel while he checked his jacket for his pipe.

“What shall we call you?” inquired Vera.

“Pleeze...gall me only, Kosmo.”

“Our son talks about you a lot.”

“Ah...ha, ha...your zon, Jason! A vehry goot boy, a vehry smardt boy. He reads...oh my how zat boy reads. But eeh doss more. Eeh poots et all togetter. Eeh tinkz verhy well, you know.”

Kosmo moved his hands back and forth, fingers opposed, as though he were squeezing an imaginary ball when he said this. Meanwhile, Jason had gone to his bedroom for something.

“Eeh questions! Eeh sees! Eeh knows about Freedom, about America!” Kosmo’s face blushed with these assessments. It was clear he was proud of his protégé.

Vera glanced toward Nick as she said, “Sometimes he lets his schoolwork slide.” She headed toward the kitchen on the heels of this statement.

“Vat you say...slide?”

“He sometimes doesn’t get it all done,” followed Nick.

“Oh...oh, oh...and vit zat mind of eez.”

“Well, he can be very serious about other things.”

“Yez.”

Vera came from the kitchen at the same moment that Jason returned. She made her announcement.

“Please come to the table, while it’s still hot.” She looked at Nick and raised her eyebrows in a gesture of uncertainty.

“Bring your wine, sweetheart.” Bruce helped Juliet up by taking her arm. Nick noted this gentlemanly show and raised his eyebrows so that only Bruce might notice. They all stood and waited to see if Kosmo needed assistance when he sprightly sprang to his feet. The table was set with heirloom china and silverware handed down to Vera by her mother. The sight of prime rib au jus caused Bruce to wipe a drop of saliva from the corner of his mouth with his handkerchief. Bruce looked around to see if anyone noticed. He saw that Kosmo caught it. “Pavlov, at work again”, Bruce muttered so Kosmo might hear.

This brought a grin and a nod from Kosmo. “Yez, indeed. Lovely!”

“Indeed, indeed,” said Nick as he offered his services to his wife, who assigned the seating to him.

Vera drew attention to the creamed asparagus and scalloped potatoes. She instructed her son to begin passing them around. The boy started the vegetable salad and fresh sliced bread. Vera correctly figured that a “meat and potato man” might like bread and butter as well. The need for vegetables was inescapable. It had been part of her upbringing.

The meal commenced as well as it might, given the omission of saying the grace and the mix of personalities. A manifest lull in conversation signaled their hunger.

Kosmo was seated straight across from Nick.

“A vine, vine meal, zo vee are blessed zis evening.”

“Oh, thank you, Kosmo.”

“If I might ask, Kosmo, when did you come to America?”

Kosmo paused for a moment, savoring the last morsel in his mouth. Straightening against the back of his chair and riveting Nick with a serene gaze, “In nineteen and feefty, Almozt zirty yearce ago,” He said it as though he expected the question and he pointed his finger upward as he said it.

Everyone remained silent, sensing more was to come.

“I had ezcaped from ze camp you zee in Bel...arus near ze end of ze Great Var. Zee security tere vas down, as Shtaleen vas trowing everyvon, yunge and olt, into ze vront. Ven you ezcape, you not run away like people tink. You run straight into zhos who vouldt shoot you. Zay don’t expect zat ven zey are koming at you and evryvon else is running away. At zat time, a lot of con...fuzion. Zo, I chust kept on vit zee running, right ento Poland, eating vat I coud, chust staying alive. Germany now vas in Roushann hands and I could speek Roushann and my own Lithwania, also zome Jerman. Zo I just kept mofing, until I got into Belchum...ah...zat’s enough, for now...”

The old man looked around at the frozen faces before him. He was pleased that no one tried to break in or change the subject. He chose to proceed.

“I came to Amerika, to New Yorrk, many yearce later. You may tink my unevorm is Lithuanian, or Roushann, but etz Polish. But dat eez anoter storee. Zen later even I leaved vis my brotter’s dotter...and laader ven ze boy vas born, vis her boy, Artie. Poor Artie.”

“Poor Artie?”

“Yez, Artie.”

Jason piped in. “Artie’s my friend. He and his mother have a clinic appointment tonight. Dr. Greene helped.”

After a pause that pierced the air, Vera spoke.

“Jason told me you have a glossary of political terms.”

“Gloss—?”

“He calls it his ‘list,’ Mother.”

“A list, then.”

“Oh yes...a leest of tings about poleticks...definicions and understandings, yes. Your zon has helped me vis ze languitch, and ze spelling. Eeh vants ze list, for his schoole. You Amerikans are so, so, ah...”

“Naïve, innocent?”

Nick looked at Vera, expressionless.

“Well yes, ennocent about zeez tings. Where I leaved before, zee State vass olways playingg vit ze mind. Zey ran ze news and zey tried to control ze ideas. Zame here, only deeferent. Here eet’s a co...co...op...”

“Cooperation?”

“Yez. A co-op. Inzted of zee state, et’s a mono...a monopoly of one party pooting out vas et calls ze news...et’s ze main zstream news. Jazon calls zem ‘ELPs,’ you know, for exdreme lieberal party members. Ze main media ez nindee perzent ELPs. Zat makes et a gomplicit main media, Jason calls et za ‘CMM’. In zis, he ez like Jonathan Svift, you know, vis his Lilli Putans and zhose horzes called Houynums, or zometink. Ave you zeen Mizter Goldberg’s books on ze Bias and on ze Arro...gance. Mizter Goldberg ez getting some of eet, but not all of eet. He doesn’t zee zat et all fits together as an Uber-plan. Verst, you have to get ze people prepped up vis zee languitch and ze terms. Zen you have to divide zem into groups zo you blay ze bolitics. You pit zem against each otter. Zum folks gust go into a stup...a stup...”

“A stupor?”

“And you haf tings like ze show trials now going on in ze Kongress wer dey gather up all ze oil men and grill zem as ef the prices was dere fault, ven ze whole broblem goes to ze Kongress eetself, for not bermitting drilling and revining ze huge rezerves wright here in Amerika. Vat you call it, boy?”

“The Law of Distraction.”

“Yes! Ze, dat boy ez something! Zen you have to have zee Main News egnore vat is really happening, vile ze ELPs feed in zhere version of vat es appening. Et’s called Vag ze Dog, eh?”

“Example?” asked Vera.

“Exza—?”

“Go on.”

The old man paused, and looked over at Jason.

“Are you zure you vant to talk about—”

“Yes, please go ahead.”

“Vell zen. In World Var Two, ze head of prop-a-ganda for Japan, Tojo maybe, kept tellink ze beople how ze Amerikans vere being viped out, in zhere march up ze islands. Ze Japanese beople vere duped into tinkink zey vere vinning zis var, until ze leettle vite boxes vis ze ashes of zhere zons ztarded jowing upp. And Mizter Goebles dit ze zame tink vis ze Jerman volk, telling zem zat se Allies vere gettink vipped by ze Wehrmacht, ven really, ze Allies and lately ze Roushanns vere on ze doorstep to Berleen. Mizter Heetler vas out of gazz, vis his lies by now, zo he goes pop in some bunker somevere in Berleen. But, ze CMM in Amerika does ze propaganda in reverze. Et doesn’t tell ze goot tinks that are done, or ze goot news, but instead et tells you made-up stories of bad tinks, and ignore goot tinks, like vinning in Iraq, and ze goot econ...econ—” Kosmo looked at Jason.

“Economic indicators.”

“Zee, ah dat boy! Mizter Goebles vould be proud, and you can bet our enemiez reprint anti-Amerikan stuff in zhere propaganda news, eh?”

Jason piped in. “Speaking of our enemies, have any of you heard of Acorn?”

“Acorn?”

Kosmo turned to Vera and congratulated her on the fine dinner.

“Et’s ze Azzosiation of Kommunity Orgeenizations for Revorm Now.” He emphasized “now.” “Ez a large collection of groups who, who special...” Kosmo looked at the boy. Jason was now holding an index card, from which he took his cues.

“Kosmo is saying that this outfit known as Acorn is a nonprofit mix of around eighty organizations, run by the Rathke family. Money flows in from dues of around two hundred thousand members. Roughly half belong to unions like the Service Employees International. Acorn receives grants from taxpayers through the government. These grants trickle through its complicated network in a way that baffles the IRS. Their budget in 2006 was around thirty-seven million dollars. Some think the money goes to build their companies, or to their attacks on Walmart. Some think the money has gone to political candidates like Ted Kennedy and Jesse Jackson in the past. They mounted a Dump Reagan campaign when he tried to cancel their public funding. Acorn shakes down corporations the way Jesse Jackson does. They operate ‘social justice’ radio stations, community TV, a magazine, a home mortgage company, tax counseling, left-wing

schools, a consulting firm, a law/lobbying firm, and a furniture store. Their big specialty, though, is voter mobilization through something they call 'Project Vote.' They registered over a half million low-income and minority voters in 2006, deploying more than four thousand workers to do so. These workers often complained of safety concerns, late pay, neglected labor laws, and union-busting tactics, when it suits Acorn. One of their favorite tricks is to bus in large numbers of people to emergency departments of a target hospital. Obama worked for Acorn."

"You are vbery vbery lucky in Amerika to 'ave a vote."

"Kosmo says that Acorn is an Enemy of America."

"Why do you say this, Jason?" Vera asked.

Jason looked over at Bruce and Juliet. Bruce was smiling at him and Juliet's mouth was partly open with anticipation.

"Acorn is most famous for voting fraud. Seven of its members just got hit with felony charges for their role in over seventeen hundred fraudulent voting registration forms in the state of Washington. That state doesn't require any identification before voting, so people could have voted using those names. The governor of New York tried for a motor-voter program in his state, before his, ah, embarrassing little predicament. Kosmo says it's one step closer to phony citizenship and a pathway to the American wallet."

All eyes shifted to Kosmo who sat as though he were at a commencement speech.

"All a person has to do is sign an affidavit saying he is who he says he is. Surely, with the half million—or is it now a million illegals in New York State—Acorn will probably move in, big-time. Lots of opportunity here. The amazing thing is that this supposedly noble effort to increase the overall vote always seems to benefit Democrats, hardly ever Republicans. Washington's latest governor suddenly shows up with 133 extra votes on the third recount. Mr. Fund describes this anti-American activity in a recent Wall Street Journal opinion. He shows proven examples of double voting, felons voting, and votes by dead people in places like Mississippi, Missouri, and New Jersey. Every American who loves his country should know about Acorn. Their activities need to be reported and they should have their tax-funded grants removed. Thanks be to the New Media in America, that we know anything about them at all."

Julia looked at Bruce and said, "I never heard of Acorn."

Bruce advised, "Just stick with the kid here, and you'll learn."

Vera asked her son how he became so interest in Acorn. Jason reported he had been given the assignment to identify four of America's enemies. She asked if this was a school assignment. He looked over at his mentor and replied, "Not really." He saw that his mother was a little agitated. She had a habit of folding her hands when she was on the verge of losing it, which was not often.

"Mother, I can also tell you about Roger Baldwin, the Communist. He went to visit Stalin in the '30s and was impressed by the shining light of this new state. He wasn't disgusted enough later with the purges, show trials and executions to be disenchanted. He founded the American Civil Liberties Union—the ACLU. They're the folks who protect the right of foot-washing in public places, but fight to expel Jesus from the schools and 'public

square.’ Every now and then they take on a case that seems like it’s actually supporting American values, but that’s what Mr. Q calls ‘plausible deniability.’”

“Mr. Q?”

“That radio guy I keep telling you about. They look like they’re interested in individual freedom and Americanism every now and then, so that they can continue their relentless assault on the backbone traditions of family, religious expression, and freedom, here, in America. And you know Code Pink. Do you know there are people high up in our own government who are taking steps to see that we lose the Battle of Iraq. That’s not a matter of a difference of opinion. That’s the activity of an enemy.”

“Be careful, Jason.”

“Mother. Am I being recorded here in my own home? There are people entrenched in Washington, at ‘State,’ for instance, who want America to lose her greatness. And, there’s the United Nations. These are the internationalists. They don’t want America to be a strong, let alone a sovereign, nation, anymore. They think of us as imperialists. I made a study of that, Mother. Yes, we’ve had imperial flings in our past. But we were not good at imperialism. Nothing like the Brits, who had the most durable modern empire of all. And, we certainly are not imperialists today. French President Sarkozy got it right when he called us liberators in his speech to Congress. Still some of our teachers sow seeds of doubt and shame in the classroom, to their discredit. The world needs us, Mother, just the way we are! The world needs our leadership. There will always be need for a strong American president. If I were president and I knew someone in the Congress, or in the mosques, or in some sanctuary or hidden camp was plotting against our national interests, I would sign them up to my subsidized emigration policy. And anyone who would spit on our soldiers, I’d have water-boarded on the spot!”

“Jason!”

“Mrz. Casperzon. Ze boy is joost concerned. In zis country, at least now, you are ztill free to talk about zuch tings. I’ve been in a place vere you would be taken out by ze KGB and zent away to a place vere your vamily vould never zee you again. Joust vor exprezzing yourzelf, zere like zat boy deed. A place vere you get your mind turned around, you know, wis sixteen-hour vorkdays and blenty of bropaganda en between. Berhaps eet ez time zat we zpeak about zumsing else, zo zat our fine hoztess might be more at comvort.”

Vera calmly smiled at Kosmo and asked if everyone had enough to eat. Nick quietly helped her clear some dishes.

While she was in the kitchen, the old man turned to Juliet and laid down the pearl of the evening.

“Gust von more ting. Everyvon is asking vy ze ELPs can be zo ztupit vis zere silly zuggestions—no energee bolicies, speak vit enemies, tax to death, spend zo et hurts ze children in ze future, zeese tings. ELPs, vaschists ze are called vant a grisis. En a grisis et’s easier to poot in ze brogram—you know, like Heetler vis his Halocaust during var var two, Stahlin vis his var on ze Roushann beople during bote vars, and FDR vis his New Deal, zay gootbye to leemited government, during ze Great Deepression. Zay vant a grisis.” Juliet just stared at Bruce, whose face was frozen.

Vera reappeared from the kitchen with an apple pie and Nick followed behind with plates and ice cream. She suggested they retire to the living room for their dessert.

The change in scenery was welcomed. The dog was waiting for them in the living room and wagging his tail, as they filed in with their pie and ice cream. They all laughed.

“Zo, you zee, Bruce, your zpell lasts only an hour or zo.”

“He loves pie and ice cream.”

“Jason aze told me ov your travels to Brazeel.” Kosmo looked at Bruce, then Nick. A moment of silence followed his deft attempt to launch a new subject.

“Well Kosmo, I had the good fortune to accompany the professor on a mission of his making. With help, we went deep into the heart of Brazil and I have many fond memories of most of it. But there grew to be a hole in my recollection, even in my thinking. Gradually, I lost a part of my mind. I lost the ability we all have, to protect our inner thoughts. My inner self kind of went on display, for the outside world to see. This may be okay for the next life, if there is”—Juliet nudged him—“but it doesn’t serve us so well here on earth. Sure, it would be nice if, as they say, ‘what you see is what you get.’ But here, I’m convinced you have times you need to hide yourself, you know. I almost said ‘here on earth.’ I’m beginning to sound like a believer.”

Bruce looked over at Juliet, who was smiling at him. He went on. “Some even say that one of the functions of language, beyond communication, is so that we might deliver before others a more acceptable version of our inner self. Well, however honorable it might be that both selves are in harmony, when that shield is lost, yes, when you can’t fool the next person, then freedom—I mean the kind that invests the soul—is compromised. And when freedom is compromised, we become less human, and more like an animal.”

“Yes, Uncle Bruce!”

All heads turned to Jason.

“Nick and I picked up something out there in that forest that we didn’t count on...it wasn’t some piece of material from our solar system. It wasn’t some unclassified species. It went well beyond the dyes and wooden instruments used by the Tattoo People that our friend and colleague Bart Hopkins brought back. And, yes, it was wise to leave the neurotransmitters behind, with those simple people who knew how to use them. So when the lad here talks about mind-control going on at his school, I’m all ears.”

“That’s what Buffo said.”

“What?”

“That I was all ears.”

Laughter momentarily interrupted the gathering focus of Bruce’s thoughts.

Kosmo smiled as he surveyed the group. Bruce continued.

“But here’s the rub. In the process of my illness...and it must have been an illness of some kind...several wonderful things happened to me. I’m told this amazing young man...he only looks like a boy...took up the case and pushed for the return trip. This led to

the solution of what had essentially infected his father and myself. Rather than an organism, it was a chemical. In the meantime, I happened to fall in with a wonderful woman, who for some reason believed in me. Into the emptiness that went with the sense that something key was missing in my life...something new arrived in that void, as if by design. It was a mixture of feelings I've never felt before. The feelings that came into me, when this lady here beside me, who trusted me...I cannot fully explain. I hope I'm not sounding like some gushing teenager here. And I sure as hell hope it's not some pharmaceutical hangover!"

Vera sighed. Bruce smiled at Juliet. She put her arms around his neck and kissed him.

"I can't speak for my pipe-smoking companion there, but this altered state of mind brought me into a new life. I don't remember it all, but I feel a sense of freedom and completeness. I walked through a wilderness of uncertainty. It was like I made my exodus, from my former self. And I had a partner in it."

Juliet wiped a tear from her chin.

"My friend over there spends a lot of his time looking for life in out-of-the-way places."

Kosmo turned his gaze toward Nick, and the others followed.

"Yes, like those five planets now known to orbit star Fifty-five Cancri."

"Fifty-five what?"

"Cancri. It's slightly cooler than our sun and forty-one light-years away. Its fifth planet was just discovered. It's seventy million miles from the parent star. Some people are pretty excited about this because it's another solar system. And as we speak, the sky-spies are looking for a moon in our own neighborhood that might be large enough to hold on to liquid water. Liquid water is the key for life."

"We know, Dad."

"By the way, does anyone care for a glass of that good stuff?"

Vera quietly slid off to the kitchen.

"Zo, vee zee zat Bruce here haz found a new life vit zee beaudevul young ladie. I can zee zat, all right. And ze profezzor here ees zpying in ze zky for life out zhere. Eet vil be von great desgovery, venn et appens, and eet vill appen, I'm zure. Our main rezponzibility ez to ztay alive, unteel zen. Et von't be global varming zat takes us. Zatt is a great vary tale, as your zon vill tell you. Et vill be to keep ze nukes out of ze ands of ze bomb trowsers in Iran or Nord Korea, or whoefer...some vacko group. Profezzor, you could avoid all zees. Would you be villing to make a leetle treep to Mars, eh?"

Vera returned with the ice water and Nick caught his answer before he uttered it. Deep inside him, he had always harbored the wish to make that one big expedition. He had mentioned it once to Vera and she became so upset that he squelched it up to now.

"I'd first have to have a long and hard conversation with my partner over there with the ice water."

"I'd go with my father, if he went. I'd like to do my job here on earth first."

"Your job?"

“I want to be a writer of history, Mother. I want to search out the truth in history. Do you realize that many of us have been fed an alternative version of our country’s history. Mr. Stroyer is only the tip of the iceberg. Kosmo has bugged me to understand history. Sinclair, even though he was a Socialist, wrote *The Jungle* and it led to changes in the meatpacking business in Chicago. Dickens’s novels helped change the labor laws for kids in England and Swift fired up the Irish against their oppressors. I’ve done some work on Marx, and found out he left out over half the story. I’ve looked at America’s past and it’s mixed, but when you factor out the deliberate attempts to bury the good and exaggerate our errors in most of the reporting, you see America is trying to improve the world with her liberating foreign policies and her free market economics. And every time they try to tell you free markets don’t work, you have to strip away the taxes, the regulations, the lawsuits, and the protections. Heck, if you put weights on the legs of a racehorse, would you say racehorses can’t run? I want to write about the greatness of our country, the things that Mr. Zinn and Mr. Stroyer overlook.”

Vera was touched by her son’s passion.

“If I’m wrong, I’ll step on that spaceship with you, Dad. Maybe the Golden Fleece of Truth is out there somewhere, since it seems so hard to find here on earth.”

At this moment, Kosmo let out a faint groan and stared vacuously into the room.

Bruce was the first to be on his feet.

“Kosmo, are you all right? Nick, grab his pulse!”

The old man began to smack his lips and seemed to recover from his mysterious lapse.

“Berhaps I’fe been too much of an influenze on zee boy. Berhaps he needs to take a rest from my mezzages.”

“Perhaps, we should call it an evening, right, Vera? We’ve enjoyed it very much, and we will look forward to more meetings with Kosmo. Jason, when you walk Kosmo home, please take the dog for a walk with you.” Embraces were shared all around.

“Sure, Dad. Will you two still be here when I get back, Uncle Bruce?”

“Depends on when you get back, Jason.”

Afterword

It turned out that Vera’s dilemma was moot. Nobody could figure out why Taser sat in the McFee’s front yard and wouldn’t move. The dog continued to stare at the window on the third floor. When Kosmo was discovered that next afternoon in his garret, he was seated in the same chair where Jason usually found him, only this time he was lifeless. Both of his arms draped over the sides of his recliner, and his pipe lay on the floor, stuffed with fresh tobacco. He was dressed in the uniform he’d worn the evening before. It was as though he had seated himself in the warmth of afterglow, and his heart stopped.

Jason did not go back to Rosegard High the following year. Instead, he enrolled in an experimental school that Dr. Greene suggested to Vera. The school was a “contract school.” A three-way-signed contract cemented the student, the parents, and the teacher(s). The student would try his hardest to learn, and care for his brain. The teacher would teach an agreed-upon course, from texts and a curriculum previewed and

consented to by parents. Parents promised to stay interested in their son's or daughter's progress in learning. No funds were accepted from the government and no input from the Department of Education would be taken. Sports and theatrics, recognized as key ingredients for social development, had to be found elsewhere. The tuition was reasonable. The faculty consisted of teachers in their prime who wished to get out of the public system, even if it meant a cut in pay. Unlikely to find another job in the public school system and often at the twilight of their careers, this was a welcomed soft landing onto the runway of retirement. They found more than compensation in the enjoyment of teaching a classroom full of responsive kids.

The meteorite, other than being composed of iron (most were stone), yielded no unique astronomical feature. The forensic analysis of the skin samples did not yield any intact molecules. Some phenyl ring remnants not part of normal skin may have been the residue of a neuroactive chemical. Bruce's bat made it into the manual of newly discovered species, thus serving to cancel out one of the extinguished variety, in the name of balance.

Bruce and Juliet got married in the fall of the next year. They found the special formula for their happiness. They loved each other and had come to sense a guiding force in their marriage. She was not interested in Bruce's past, nor was she oriented in changing him into someone he wasn't. She trusted him from the beginning, and he gave her no reason to waver in her trust. He discovered her more and more as a person, and found more and more to discover. They laughed a lot, together.

Nick and Vera grew more secure in their marriage. Nick's temporary transformation as a result of the "Brazilian curse" frightened Vera to her roots. She grew from it, perhaps with the anchor of her son. She discovered that she had gotten into a groove in her life, and had become comfortable in a superficial sense. Nick focused his love for exploration in the search for extraterrestrial intelligence. He discussed his ultimate expedition with Vera—his dream to check in to a spacecraft bound for Mars, if that opportunity arose. Vera did not rule it out. She comforted herself with its unlikelihood, but she prepared herself in advance for that day, as best she could.

Artie eventually came off drugs with support from his mother. She was more disrupted than Artie at the loss of her uncle. Jason kept up with Artie, and Artie, ironically kept track of Buffo. Jason returned the "little book" to the onetime bully on the last day of school.

Before Jason left Rosegard, Yvonne told him that Prince tried to get her to complain about him in class. Her complaint was to be put in the form of harassment. She did not follow through with Prince's proposition because she knew Jason was only trying to improve her self-worth. Instead, she honored Jason by telling him of the scheme. This was the final straw that cemented his decision to move on. The last he heard, she hadn't been able to cast off the lure of money. Jason lost track of her.

Jason went to college and graduate school, where he studied history. He would shoot for a career in teaching and writing, and would specialize in rebalancing revised American history wherever he found it, as one part of the reconstruction of American culture. Jason remembered Jill's help and upon being invited back to the tenth high school reunion, looked her up. He was glad he did.

He continued his pursuit of the Golden Fleece—the Truth—and never lost track of those who loved him.

Acknowledgements

The publication of *Jason and the Astronauts* marks the end and the beginning of an improbable journey. I will spare the reader the reasons behind this book, but there are several. Some are personal in nature, and some have to do with catharsis, given some of the trends in the country today.

There are twists and turns in such a venture. Small utterances and sprites from the past played their part. Some of these may seem slight, obtuse, even petty, and I beg the reader's indulgence for a moment.

Perhaps the most penetrating comment I ever received in college was a note on a Humanities paper: "Your ideas are good, but where did you learn to write?" That velvet harpoon must have snagged me. As a transfer student, I missed the rigorous tutorials in this basic art that first-year students had imposed upon them. Oscar Wilde was said to have spoken in perfect sentences. For me, the perfect sentence has been elusive, but somehow with the help of many, I was able to reach a sense of having "finished."

AA, a former college suitemate with publishing experience, showed interest in a manuscript I wrote twenty years or so after college. Its style was affected, and although the ideas were good, the writing wasn't. He offered to put it in the hands of DB, then president of the American Philosophical Society. The comments of the latter were very pointed, not encouraging and written on a form of tissue paper I was unable to identify. A bishop, WP, once looked me in the eye and told me I had "an unusual way of writing." That's all he said, and I was reluctant to ask him to expound. SM, the chief pathologist in the hospital where I practiced, upon reading an editorial I had written for a medical bulletin, told me that I'd "missed my calling." It seemed like a double-edged compliment. Once, after I complained of something Al Gore had done, a close relative, DH, told me I would have done the same thing. Aside from a few basic human functions, I knew there was nothing I shared with Al Gore. How best to express that, I wondered. To be fair, that same relative gave me a guide to writing, which I took as a charitable act. HR, head of a publishing company, two decades ago wrote especially encouraging words although the manuscript I submitted (totally unrelated to *Jason*) was not accepted. Once, I wrote a piece on alternative medicine for a religious monthly and without intending so, created a firestorm across a good part of its worldwide congregation (and praise from the rest). The editor of that publication, DR, has maintained a long correspondence and interest in my writing projects, for which I am grateful. The ability to provoke is at least something! I cannot name all the sprites whose encouragements were so necessary for the lonely act of writing.

More palpable are those who contributed materially to this book, and to whom I offer my gratitude. Author, NC, gave me many tips and insights into the writing process. Author and pastor, EM, offered encouragement and direction on the elusive path toward publication that often confronts the novitiate. BH helped me with his knowledge of computers and accessories. JH helped with his knowledge of astronomy. CH formatted the manuscript for me. I am thankful to my wife Dawn who, as a chemistry teacher in high school, offered insights into the mindset and rituals observed by the adolescent

student, although she takes no responsibility for the activities of Jason's peers. Her fastidious proofreading and criticism helped make up for that lost class so many years ago. I'd like to express gratitude to my publisher, David St. John, for his support and the immediacy of his encouragement and kind words. Lastly, Jason simply would not have materialized without the influence of radio-personality and wit, Jim Quinn (Mr. Q), of the Quinn and Rose in the Morning show, a very successful and growing syndicated radio product, also broadcast by satellite.

I am particularly grateful for health, stamina and answered prayers. JH

The author is a retired physician who resides with his wife in western Pennsylvania. Between them they have seven children and thirteen grandchildren. This book is dedicated to those past and present who have risked and sacrificed life, limb and peace of mind in their opposition to the sword in defense of freedom.