

# **OBERON 'S GIFT**

by  
Richard Dante

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OBERON'S GIFT  
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**OBERON'S GIFT**-a Political Fantasy  
by Richard Hardaway

PREFACE

To counteract the gloom and doom of the daily news--here's an upbeat alternative: Blessed with a wee bit of magic and his own considerable abilities, George Bertram Potter (No relation to Harry) enters the picture and ultimately pours light and joy into the dark corners threatening mankind. Accompanied by his beautiful wife, Lydia, their son George Two, and his nanny, Liza Cooper, Good ol' George sets out to right the world's wrongs and bring sense to government turmoil. Though OBERON'S GIFT may at times seem bizarre and a bit over-the-top, that's part of the fun of this feel-good tale. After a brief bumpy beginning, poli-sci major George Potter meets the amazing Oberon, the leprechaun, and he's off and running! Once you are caught up by the good fairy's spell in the first chapter you'll be hooked. So Read On...and Enjoy!

ONE

The rusty, dusty VW Bug roared and clattered down the night-quiet streets of old Oakland. It was two A.M. After squeezing through three yellow lights and blatantly running a red one, the small car swerved into the circular drive of the Amos Plunkett Memorial Hospital; and came to a screeching halt in the white passenger zone at the front steps.

The driver side door flew open and a tall, black-bearded, long-haired young man in faded jeans and a sweatshirt with cut off sleeves, leaped out and rushed around to the passenger door. A pretty blond with a pained expression emerged. Her bulging camel coat did nothing to hide the fact that she was extremely pregnant. The girl groaned softly as the young man grabbed an old shopping bag from the back seat and gently, tenderly almost carried the young lady up the steps, through the glass and brass doors and into the hospital lobby.

The young man looked wildly around for a moment until he spied the admittance desk in the far corner. The girl bent forward and moaned: "Hurry, George! Please!" He seated her carefully on one of the couches and ran to the desk.

"Please!...my...Lydia...she's...she's about to have a ...baby!" he stammered desperately.

The thin-faced, gray haired woman seated at the desk looked up. In his haste, George had neglected to comb his hair and beard. With his scruffy appearance and

worried, wild-eyed look, she must have mistaken him for an escapee from the mental ward upstairs. Her startled expression was magnified by the thick-lensed glasses she wore. Then a flicker of distaste touched her face. Hippies! her look seemed to say.

She stood up, stepped to the counter and smiled as she glanced at Lydia across the lobby. Her lips smiled only. Her eyes still held the same coldness.

“Yesssss...of course,” she hissed at George. “You do have the one hundred dollar admittance fee, don’t you?”

George turned white. “Admittance fee?--Hundred dollars?” came his choked reply. “I don’t...”

“Well, we can’t admit her unless you can pay the fee. Hospital policy--this isn’t Community General, you know.” She spoke with a condescending tone, slowly and distinctly as though Lydia had all the time in the world, when actually the young lady was nearing the critical three-minutes-between-contractions stage.

George’s own sympathy pangs were coming even closer together and he wasn’t sure he could stand much more of the old gal’s total indifference. George looked over at Lydia. She was holding herself and looking at him with such pleading eyes, he wanted to throttle this bitter old woman who was keeping his girl from the attention she needed.

“I...I just don’t have it.” he said hopelessly.

“Then I’m afraid you’ll have to take her to Community.” she said, obviously enjoying their discomfort.

Lydia groaned loudly, and the woman, exhibiting no concern whatsoever, gave the girl a look of impatience.

“Wait a minute!” cried George, grasping at straws. “How about the pink-slip to my car?”

The woman narrowed her eyes at him for a moment before she spoke. “Well...that is highly irregular, but I think it has been done in the past. Yes--if that’s the best you can do.”

George turned on his heel and sprinted for the car. In the glove compartment he found the pink paper. It was fresh and new. He had received it only day-before-yesterday. He’d scraped up enough from his tutoring to pay for the car, the only thing he owned except for the clothes on his back.

He ran up the steps and back to the desk where the sour-faced old biddy waited with outstretched hand. She flinched slightly as their hands touched. Then she studied the document for a few moments and nodded. She pressed a button. A nurse came from another room. Without a word she saw what was needed and quickly brought in a wheelchair. The nurse, at least, showed some compassion for Lydia. Clucking like a mother hen, she and George helped Lydia into the chair. George hooked the old shopping bag over the handles of the wheelchair and said apologetically: “Uh...her things. She might need them.”

Lydia gave him an adoring, though pained look as he kissed her. The nurse flashed him a friendly smile, turned the chair around and pushing it ahead of her, trotted off down the long white hallway.

George blew a kiss after them

“Young man,” croaked the woman at the desk. “You still have to fill out these papers and sign them.”

George gave her a piercing look and glanced back down the corridor. Lydia was out of sight.

He filled out and signed the papers without bothering to wade through all the fine print and legal mumbo jumbo. He felt a bad case of writer's cramp coming on before he finished filling in the blanks and signing his name, George B. Potter, again and again. All the while the unkind woman looked disapprovingly down at him.

"There now, That's just fine," she said with her best cold smile as she gathered the forms together. "You will please wait in there!" she commanded as she pointed a bony, yet well-manicured finger toward a doorway clearly marked, Waiting Room.

"How long does it take?" asked the dazed young man.

"Oh really! Don't you know anything?!" asked the woman, her short supply of patience at an end. "It could take minutes. It could take hours--sometimes even a day," she grumbled.

George turned and slowly walked away from her toward the waiting room.

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He paused in the doorway and surveyed the small, well appointed room. Much of it was in shadow, yet here and there pools of light illuminated comfortable looking leather couches and chairs. There was no one in the room. He had his choice of parking places, so he selected his corner and waded across the plush carpet to an inviting leather armchair. As he plopped himself down into it, he felt his weariness take over.

Most of good ol' George's friends and professors thought him to be, clear of eye, steady of hand, resolute of purpose, tried and true, and serene of spirit

Actually, and few people knew this, deep within his rather impressive, sturdy frame also beat the heart of a lover and poet. But that was when he was possessed of all his faculties. At the moment, he was none of the above. His exhaustion and the events of the past hours had driven out his usual cool, leaving him just a bit dizzy and dopey. A list of confusing thoughts coursed through his momentarily befuddled, though usually intelligent, sensitive mind:

One: Whoever kept the timetables upstairs must have goofed it, he thought. Lydia's premature labor had sent poor George into a state of dazed panic. He'd glimpsed frightening visions of himself trying desperately to deliver the baby enroute, in the VW. Needless to say, he was relieved when his hopelessly ill-qualified help was no longer required.

Two: The impending blessed event had foiled his own secret scheme to become a husband before he became a father. He loved Lydia and wanted the baby, but now it looked like marriage would be after the fact. The truth was, he'd been caught off guard and hadn't even informed Lydia of his matrimonial plans. He could see his peers laughing at him for his pangs of conscience. Well, darn! He had old fashioned moral standards and was determined to set the date as soon as Lydia was able.

Three: Then there was the little matter of money. He'd been unwilling to risk a run to the University clinic and had rushed her to this, the closest hospital. It looked pretty elegant and expensive. He'd already hocked the VW, and wasn't sure he'd ever get it back. Maybe he could borrow a few bucks from the University Student Fund.

Four: And, what about their plans for his career? George had just completed his master's thesis in political science to the praise and plaudits of the faculty judges. They

enthusiastically advised him to go on for his doctorate. Sorry folks...his entry into the political arena would have to wait. He had a real family to take care of now. First a job, then he'd see about working out a study schedule.

There, that was better. He'd rationalized his problems into a neat package and heaved a long sigh of relief. Everything would work out. It always did.

He glanced over at the collection of publications stacked neatly on the table next to him. George had read the newspapers already. As a devoted student of the political scene, he liked to stay informed.

He rummaged around under the newspapers and smiled. Now here's something of real interest! he thought as he extracted the latest copy of Playboy. He hadn't seen one for a long time--couldn't afford the price. He thumbed through it and skimmed an interview with the House Majority Leader. It was informative, and as usual, just a bit provocative.

He closed his eyes for a moment and tried to clear the drowsy fog that was creeping into his consciousness. He forced his eyes open and continued to thumb through the magazine. Another overpowering urge took him and he yawned a big, self indulgent yawn. He shook himself. He must stay awake! No use. His efforts were in vain. The power of sleep overtook him and he fell into a fitful slumber. His unkempt, dark beard and full mustache fluttered slightly in the breeze produced by his deep even breathing. In fact, the elegant surroundings clashed sharply with the scruffy appearance of George Bertram Potter, BA, MA, U.C. Berkeley Class of '82.

The hospital quiet was broken only by the soft chiming of the call bell and the whisper of crepe soled shoes as nurses scurried along the corridor outside.

Suddenly, an unexpected sound jarred him awake. His magazine started to slide from his lap and he made a grab for it, then sleepily spread the centerfold across his knees. A voluptuous Miss April offered him a sultry smirk. He was about to give her a groggy grin in return, when he was startled by the sound of someone clearing his throat, and realized he was no longer alone. George peered over the edge of the centerfold and focused his eyes on a puddle of light on the plush carpet nearby. Standing in the puddle was a pair of very shiny, very green, patent leather shoes.

The remarkable shoes impelled him to look further. He allowed his eyes to travel upward, where he next took in sharply creased, bright green trousers, followed by a smartly tailored matching vest and suit coat. Then a pale green shirt came into view, adorned with a green-on-green polka-dot tie. The tie was held precisely in place by an enormous, glittering, green-jeweled tie tack.

Finally, his eyes came to rest on the most extraordinary face he'd ever seen! The pointed, bright red-orange beard went perfectly with a halo of flame-colored hair. the face was wreathed in a merry smile and the twinkling green eyes were the same hue as the mans dapper, three-piece vested suit. His eyes were separated by a pointed nose that turned up slightly at the end. The trim little man was rather short, thought George; less than five feet tall.

The two men studied each other silently. George couldn't take his eyes off the amazing little gentleman. The man in green continued to smile as he surveyed the graduate student in the chair. He raised an eyebrow and said to himself, So this is our candidate? He could see he had his work cut out for him. The young mans disheveled appearance wasn't very encouraging.

At last the little man broke the strained silence.

“Good morning, George Potter,” he said softly, with just the hint of an accent.

George was naturally surprised the bizarre little fellow knew his name and stammered. “Who...who are you?!”

Little Red Beard drew himself up to his full height and made a slight bow.

“I am Oberon, the Good Fairy,” he said proudly.

George bristled and growled at the man in green, “A fairy, eh? Buzz off man. I’m not interested!”

“No, no, George,” said the stranger with a high piping laugh. “You misunderstand my meaning. I am the real Good Fairy. We’re sometimes called leprechauns”

This was too much for George. “Oh, come on now!” he scoffed. “There’s no such thing!” Then all of a sudden a small chill went through him. He’d just noticed something else about his visitor. The red-bearded man cast no shadow. Stranger still, this Oberon character seemed to create his own light. A mysterious aura of green radiance shimmered about him. George blinked his eyes and rubbed them. He ran a hand through his hair and scratched the back of his neck where the hair had begun to rise.

Impossible! Maybe he had been studying too hard. Yes, that was it. And he decided he’d better have his eyes examined in the morning.

The little man’s smile faded and his face registered disappointment. “You mortals! We offer you the world and still you doubt us. I suppose you want proof?”

George said nothing, but was even more perplexed when the little man reached for his inside jacket pocket and withdrew what looked like a golden pointer, one of the collapsible kind. The strange little fellow extended it to its full length and made a few practice passes through the air above George’s head. The tip of it sparkled and gave off a strange greenish light. Finally, the leprechaun turned the tip downward and touched the paper image of the Play-Girl-of-the-Month, who lay well exposed in George’s lap.

George watched with fascination, and gave a start when the buxom young lady stretched her arms, yawned, and looked up at him with such a come-hither glance, he blushed. Since George hesitated to join her between the satin sheets on which she lay, the delightful creature reached up with her tiny hand and touched his cheek. Still he didn’t move, so she gave his cheek a tweak. He flinched slightly and she reached up and kissed him tenderly. Oberon the Good Fairy, watched all this impatiently. At length he waved his wand again, and with that, the nude girl returned to her page and two dimensional form.

George continued to stare in awe at the magazine. His mouth hung open.

Suddenly George scowled at the leprechaun. “Now hold on a darned minute! You’re messing with my mind. That was a very clever trick, but I think you’re nothing but a hypnotist!”

Oberon groaned inwardly, Why are some mortals so skeptical? At first glance, he’d hoped for an easy victory, But appearances can be deceiving. Initially he’d seen only a scruffy student sitting before him. One who seemed to have none of the requisites of world leadership. He smelled clean enough, but looked rather shoddy. Yes, Oberon had at first decided, a genuine hippy in patched jeans; and at first glance seriously lacking in the brains department. Still, he’d read the committee’s spy report. and Potter’s brilliant master’s thesis. Presumably, hidden in the deep recesses of the young man’s rough

exterior was a heart and mind filled with grand ideas and potent emotions. It was the ultimate goal of Oberon and his fellow beings to help bring those internal forces to the surface and project them to the world. That would come later. This initial visit with the candidate was merely to show him anything is possible with a little push and extra will power. Just now he'd caught a promising glimpse of the young candidate's true colors in his extraordinary blue eyes. He'd been warned this George Potter was more than usually rational, realistic and logical--potentially a tough nut to crack. Oberon realized two powerful wills now filled the room. The leprechaun only hoped he was up to the challenge. He had to win. The subject must accept the first wish or the game was over.

Close your mouth, George," snapped Oberon. "It's time to get down to business."

George looked up and clapped his mouth shut.

"Do you believe I am who I say I am, George?!" Oberon demanded.

"Sorry, I'd like to believe...I really am trying...but..." stuttered the student.

The leprechaun sighed a resigned sigh, "Well, at least you're making an effort, I guess this is as good a time as any to explain why I'm here."

George nodded uncertainly as the little man continued.

"George, have you ever wondered why it is, every few years, a unique human being makes an appearance on earth? Someone, who by sheer will and personality, is able to change the course of history?"

George furrowed his brow and shrugged his shoulders

"Surely you don't think it was mere chance that produced Alexander the Great, Elizabeth I, Napoleon, Winston Churchill, Abe Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Mao Tse-tung, Gandhi, et cetera, ad nauseum. The list goes on and on, but I think you get the idea." He could see a vague glimmer of understanding come into the still dubious young man's eyes.

"You see, George, it's a little game we Good Fairies play. When it gets dull here on earth, we like to stir things up. Every once in a while, just for the fun of it, we select someone. Our candidates are carefully screened. They must meet certain qualifications." He waited for this to sink in, then pointing a finger at George, he said very positively,

"This time, George, we've selected...YOU!"

Again George's jaw began to dangle in disbelief.

"Here's how it works," continued the man in green. "We grant you three wishes. I'm sure you've heard that one before. Whatever you want, though we sometimes make a suggestion or two." Oberon, the leprechaun warmed to his subject as he saw excitement begin to show in George's face. "Then we just sit back and see how you turn out. That's the best part of the game. You can imagine the wagering that goes on back home. It's a gamble. Oh, we've come up with some real lu-lu's, That damned German paperhanger was a source of great embarrassment to us. All in all, though there have been some outstanding successes!"

"Are you really for real?" squeaked the graduate student.

You said you'd at least try to believe, George," admonished Oberon.

"I've tried...but it's all so unbelievable!"

Concerned that he might lose this young man, and thereby lose the wager, he resignedly continued his sales pitch.

“Listen, George, and this is important! The way we play our game is crucial. You do get three wishes, but to make the game more interesting, the rules committee instructs us to dole out the powers one at a time. Surely, you can see how this adds to the suspense.”

George nodded vaguely.

Oh brother! groaned the leprechaun to himself. Then he continued. “Tonight you get your first wish, Then, after this meeting, I will show up periodically to grant the other two. Get the picture?”

Still not totally convinced, George grunted in assent.

“The rules committee also retains the right to revoke the remaining wishes if our candidate becomes difficult or causes trouble, as in the case of the aforementioned dictator. Also, if necessary, they may suggest a wish, if the chosen fails to come up with something. You must see how all this could make the game more exciting for both the candidate and the folks back in Neverneverland”?

George replied, “I guess....”

Hoping he was finally getting through to his subject, the leprechaun made a final plea.

“George, this is the chance of a life time! Don’t pass it up!”

Fearing ostracism by the committee or lost points in the game if he failed, the good fairy gestured desperately toward the centerfold still draped over the young man’s lap.

In his exhausted state, George finally decided the only way he was going to get some peace was to give in to the bizarre little man’s unbelievable arguments. Then, maybe this Oberon character would leave him alone.

“Okay...Okay. What do I have to lose?” he murmured giving up and giving in.

“Nothing”, agreed the relieved Oberon, “and you have so much to gain! Now”, he urged, “ How about that first wish?”

Still pretty sure he’s dreaming, George thought for a moment before answering.

“Well...face it. I’m a poor starving student. I had to hock the VW to get Lydia into this snooty hospital.” He blushes. “And though I love the heck out of Lydia, we’re not even married. The rent is way overdue on our little dump, and now, with a growing family, we need a bigger place.” He paused and cleared the fog from his voice. “If any of this madness is possible, I guess my first wish has to be money. I’m not greedy, but a few thou right now would sure come in handy.”

Though Oberon cringed at the young man’s stubborn doubt that fairies exist, he came back with, “Wealth, yes, that’s usually the first wish.” He waved his wand over George and some sparkles slid down the young man’s cheek. Though he felt the tingle, he really didn’t feel any different. Perhaps riches had to grow on one.

“Well, George, that’s your first wish. We’ll meet again. How soon depends on you.”

Oberon eyed the young man in the chair and wondered just what sort of choice he and his brothers had made. He knew the human spirit often contains that elusive spark of greatness. It lies hidden within the deep recesses of the mind. Though it may yearn to break free, it’s usually stifled by life’s petty responsibilities or destroyed by everyday frustrations. All it really needs is a little encouragement. Oberon and his brethren had furnished the first measure of fuel, now with any luck, they could ignite their candidate with the prime ingredient--Opportunity! The Good Fairies planned to put George’s



political and language skills to good use later, but wanted to have a little fun with him first.

Oberon concentrated his extraordinary mental powers on his subject.

“George, I read in your thoughts that your only concern is for your Lydia and the boy-child who is going to enter this mad world in...” The leprechaun checked his green-glowing, digital watch. “...in exactly five minutes and twenty seconds.”

George caught the Good Fairy’s meaning and beamed from ear to ear.

“A boy? Oh boy!” He yelped.

“Yes, a boy,” Then a thought apparently struck the amazing Oberon. “Oh...before I forget. You are going to come into a wee bit of money almost immediately. When you do, your common sense will dictate you only spend it for the welfare of your new family. Use the money wisely, George, but don’t be afraid to take a little gamble.”

“So, that’s it. Good-by, George and good luck!” the little man in green concluded, as he waved the wand one last time over the young man’s head.

This time George’s eyes became heavy and his head bent forward as he fell into a deep sleep. He seemed to float in the darkness for a long time. Then a blinding light cut through the black--a bright spotlight. The light was followed by a whole panorama of sights and sounds that came sweeping through his mind: A voice singing a clear high note; roaring, screaming applause; banners waving; crowds cheering. The visions went on and on, though they may have been only moments in actual time.

## TWO

The dream-pictures and voices danced and leaped through his brain, until another sound violated his sleep. It came from far outside the fantasy world in which he swam. Somewhere, in the distance, someone was calling his name.

“Mr. Potter! Mr. Potter, please wake up!”

It was a long way back, but George finally roused himself and looked into a vaguely familiar, friendly face. The mass confusion of the preceding hours came back to him: The panic stricken moment when Lydia announced she was in labor; the fear they’d never make the University clinic in time; and their last minute dash to this high class private hospital. There was the instant regret when the night clerk turned out to be the reincarnation of the Wicked Witch of the West, who refused them asylum without a deposit, while Lydia moaned in pain. A moment of inspiration had prompted George to offer the pink slip to his old VW. The crone had practically cackled with malevolent glee as she accepted it, then grudgingly called the nurse who now smiled so warmly down at him.

“Yes...y--es. Lydia?” George croaked. “How is she?...Th...the baby?”

“Your...um...ah...wife is fine, and you are the father of beautiful eight pound boy,” smiled the nurse.

“A boy? Whoa!” breathed George.

George’s heart was so full of new-father pride he didn’t bother to correct his and Lydia’s marital status.

“Are they okay? May I see them now?!”

“They’re both fine--just fine.” the nurse thought for a moment before she continued. “Well, ordinarily I’d say you should let your...ah...wife rest. But she came through labor well. She’s a healthy girl and recovered quickly. I guess it’ll be all right if you don’t stay to long. Just take this hall to the end and turn left...room one forty-five.”

George missed her amused, slightly disapproving look as he thanked her. Resisting the impulse to run, he hurried down the hallway, quickly found the number and pushed open the door.

George entered the small room and saw Lydia sitting up, bolstered by pillows on the adjustable bed. She held a small creature in her arms who was sucking and smacking at her breast.

The soft light from the lamp fell across the bed and Lydia appeared to him like a vision; like a madonna in an old painting, all white and pure.

“Oh wow!” he exclaimed in a whisper.

Lydia looked up and smiled at him. “George, come and meet your son.”

George walked hesitantly, almost reverently to the bed and knelt beside it, without taking his eyes off the miraculous pair.

He gazed at the tiny creature she held--so shriveled and wrinkled and beautiful. The tiny fingers were clenched and the eyes were closed in secure ecstasy as he sucked. George’s own eyes misted over and Lydia could read his feelings. She took one of George’s hands and pressed it to her lips.

“Big George and little George, she whispered.

“Lydia,” he replied softly. “I love you so much!”

They stayed like that for a long time until the tiny boy-child finished his breakfast and fell asleep. The nurse came in and took the baby away.

George sat on the bed and Lydia took him in her arms as she had the baby. She kissed him and laid his head on her soft bosom.

Suddenly, he started to chuckle and Lydia squirmed uncomfortably. “George, stop that”

Your beard...it tickles. What’s so funny, anyway?”

“Oh, just a dream I had. One of those fabulous, incredible dreams that never come true.”

Distracted from what he was saying by her own thoughts, she whispered hesitantly.

“George?”

“Uh huh.”

“I hope you won’t be angry, but I didn’t know what else to do.”

“What’s that, Love?”

“Well, ah...I think we agreed that if the baby turned out to be a boy, we’d call him George, after you. That was okay, but I had to give a last name too...and, I...I gave him mine!”

George sat bolt upright and choked out. “Why Lydia?! Why did you do that?!”

He could see tears welling up in her eyes.

“We...we’re not married, and it’s legal to give the mother’s maiden name,” she sobbed.

“Now, wait a minute--married or not, our son's going to have my name, and besides...”

“Oh, George,” she interrupted, smiling through her tears. “I just wanted to hear you say it. I wasn’t sure. They said we could change it to your name if we did it before the records went out.”

“What do I do?” he demanded, a little irritated at the adorable girl on the bed.

“Just ring for the nurse,” she said, smiling as she handed him the buzzer cord. She still

wondered if he might change his mind, but he took it and pressed the button without hesitation.

The nurse came in immediately. She looked as if she knew why she’d been called and gave Lydia a wink.

George said in very positive tones. “The child’s name is George Bertram Potter the Second.

The nurse smiled, went over to where George sat and gave the surprised graduate student a kiss on the cheek.

“Of course that’s his name. I knew it all the time.” Then in a more serious tone she added. “I think it would be best if you let Lydia sleep. Why don’t you go next door and have some breakfast? You should be able to see your family again in an hour or so.

“I am a little tired, George,” sighed Lydia. “Maybe you should let me rest for a while.”

George nodded with an understanding grin. He had important decisions to discuss with Lydia but decided they could wait a while longer. He gave Lydia a gentle kiss and turned to the nurse.

“You said there’s a place to eat next door?”

“Yes, the Happy Pancake. Out the front door, turn left and it’s a half block down.”

“Thanks, I guess I could use some breakfast,” said George. He patted Lydia’s knee and she took his hand.

“George...I love you.” she whispered as he got up to leave.

George made his way through the lobby. Old Witchie-Bitch Looked up, gave him her best look of disgust and returned to her paperwork. George was too full of the wonder of fatherhood to let her dampen his spirits.

As he walked happily out into the early Oakland dawn and down the steps he had to resist the impulse to skip the half block to the Happy Pancake.

The eatery was one of the usual fast food outlets, prefabricated of pseudo-wood, glass and plastic. George pushed the door open and was greeted by a rush of food smells tinged with the odor of rancid fat. He was so hungry, he didn’t even notice the sign in the window inviting all comers to: Play Breakfast Bonanza and Win up to Three Thousand Dollars!

### THREE

George stepped up to the counter and was greeted by a sleepy eyed young lady. Dressed in an orange and yellow uniform, her name-tag read--Agnes. As she wiped her perspiring face on her sleeve, she did her best to give him a weak smile.

“Yes sir, may I help you?” she said.

George ignored her question for a moment. He was so proud, he had to announce to her he was the father of a brand new baby boy. The young lady showed a great lack of enthusiasm at this bit of news.

George thought, Probably get a lot of new fathers in here, Then added aloud. "The hospital recommended your establishment as an excellent place to partake of some sustenance."

The girl gave him a blank look, thought for a moment and then made a stab at a reply.

"S--Susti-nuts?" she stuttered. "I don't think we have that on the menu," and glanced at the list on the wall behind her.

"Oh, sorry," smiled George at her discomfiture. "Well then, how about something for breakfast. What do you suggest?"

It was obvious the poor girl was reluctant to make decisions. Her weak smile faded and she scratched her head as she thought for a moment.

"How about some Happy Pancakes, scrambled eggs and sausage?" she inquired tentatively.

"Whatever you say," replied George. He was starved and willing to try anything.

"Fine, sir, If you'll just have a seat, your food will be ready in a few minutes."

George took a table near the window and the girl called back his order to the assembly line. He was the lone customer in the place when Miss Agnes came over to pour him a cup of coffee. He thanked her and sipped his coffee as he looked out at the awakening city. The streets were still in deep shadow, but the sky to the east was brightening and people were beginning to scurry about, hurrying to work or hustling to get ready for the day.

George saw none of the early morning bustle. His mind was full of other things: His new family, his new responsibilities, and Lydia. Lydia! What a terrific girl she was! What a beautiful life they had together! He thought about how they'd first met--on the UC Berkeley campus.

The dirty window he was looking through dissolved away and he was projected back to that moment one and a half years ago. It was a hot day, he remembered. He'd headed for his favorite tree, brown bag in hand. The tree was off the main traffic patterns and he usually had it all to himself. But, today there was a girl sitting under his tree--a beautiful girl!

He stopped a short distance away. She was concentrating on a text book as she absently munched a sandwich. The girl didn't see him at first, so he had a chance to study her. George had never been so impressed by the mere look of a girl before. She was very pretty, yet there was an open honesty in her face that was different from the flighty breed of coed he knew.

There was no doubt about it. He had to meet this girl. Several devious plans seeped through his mind, but he discarded them. He didn't want to rush her. That might scare her off.

Then he saw her paper bag lunch and remembered his own. It wasn't much of an excuse for conversation, but better than none. He moved closer to her, and clearing his throat, made a profound opening statement:

"Hot," he said, mopping his brow.

The girl looked up.

Would you look at those baby blues?! he observed to himself as their eyes met.

The girl said nothing and George plunged on with his suave, though one sided conversation.

“Do you brown-bag often?” he inquired.

She nodded, but still said nothing as she went back to her book..

He pursued his quest. “It’s a very warm day. May I borrow a bit of your shade?” It was damned warm, but the girl seemed cold and indifferent toward him. She didn’t seem to want him around at all. It was embarrassing. He could feel the blood creep up under his beard as he blushed. He hesitated a moment, then with a burst of determination, decided to go ahead and sit. It was his tree, after all.

She didn’t react to his move, but he had the distinct impression she was on her guard. Was he that creepy looking?

It was true--her first impression of George wasn’t as favorable as his of her. With his long hair, black beard and clean but scruffy shirt and coveralls, he looked like a hippy--the genuine article.

Later, he learned that she was from the midwest where hippies were rare, and she’d heard strange tales about them. Her parents narrow minded attitude and exacting code of behavior also affected her first impression of him.

They didn’t say much to each other at first, but finally George took the bull by the horns and began a monolog about his field--political science.

Soon she began to see more than his rough facade. There was a modesty about him and an easy sense of humor the made her feel comfortable in his company. She could see that he was attractive under his beard. His finger nails were clean and clipped and he sat close enough for her to smell the fresh soap scent about him.

At last, just before the buzzer rang for the next class period, she spoke. Wonderful words flowed from her lovely lips. He’d been waiting anxiously for her to speak and any sound she made would have been music to his ears. He learned that she was at UC Berkeley to study journalism and this was her first semester.

Politics and Journalism, thought George. How ironic. The two often went hand-in-hand to support one another, or they worked from opposite poles in a tug of war. In any case, hand-in-hand or as opposites that attract, he was sure they had much in common. George was determined to find out how much.

As they gathered their books and collected their litter, George asked if they might meet again for lunch the next day. She didn’t answer, but she didn’t say No; only gave him a long look and pretty Mona Lisa smile she walked away toward the English building.

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“Oh, sir?” George was awakened from his reverie by Miss Agnes motioning to him from the counter. “Your breakfast is ready.” He paid for the meal with his last bit of change.

“Sir,” she said as he turned to go back to the table. “Don’t forget your Bonanza Game coupon. You could win.”

George took the small card from her. "Now what's this?" he muttered to himself as he sat down. He looked at the card absently and tossed it on the table.

George wolfed down the breakfast without noticing the pancakes were a little soggy, the scrambled eggs dry and too scrambled. All he knew was it was filling and soon he felt better. Several other breakfasters came in while he ate. He barely heard them order: Happy Pancakes, eggs, sausage, etc.

Finally he lost interest in the cold plate before him, and found himself staring at the contest coupon. He picked it up and turned it over. There was a square black patch on the back side.

The counter girl leaned over his shoulder to refill his cup.

"Yes, sir. You just rub the coating off the black window there," she instructed.

"Like this?" he asked as he began to rub his thumb over the area she indicated.

"Yes. See, it's starting to come off."

He could see that his thumb was beginning to turn black as he rubbed. Suddenly a dollar sign appeared, followed by the numeral three.

The girl leaned in closer. "Sir, I think you've won something!" she exclaimed with mounting excitement. People around them stopped eating and turned to stare.

Then, as George rubbed, a zero was uncovered. He kept rubbing--then another and another...until George and the girl could plainly see a dollar sign, a three, and three zeros.

The waitress squealed. "Ooooooh, hot damn, sir! But it can't be! Why we've never had a...wait here...don't go away. Let me get the manager!"

George continued to rub as the girl ran to the back of the restaurant. Several of the Happy Pancake customers came over to watch. Perspiration broke out on George's forehead as he worked. Finally, he stopped and looked again. All the black was gone; transferred to George's thumb and fingers. But there, in a neat red frame on the card, George, as well as those standing behind him, could clearly read:

**YOU HAVE JUST WON THE \$3,000 BREAKFAST BONANZA--  
CONGRATULATIONS!**

People crowded closer to make sure. Then they gave a hoot and a holler, clapped George on the back and congratulated him. The winner sat staring silently at the card. He didn't hear the commotion going on around him. Across his mind flickered the image of a dapper little man in green with a red beard. He also saw visions of Lydia with the baby in her arms.

At length, the breakfasters quieted down, rushed back to their tables and began to rub off their own coupons. There were a lot of disappointed groans in the now crowded room, but from one corner, someone yelled:

"Hey! I won ten bucks!"

"Be with you in a moment, Sir," came a new voice from the back of the Happy Pancake.

A sandy-haired, freckled-faced young man was being practically dragged to George's table by Miss Agnes.

"Look! Look for yourself, Mr. Kelly."

The newcomer leaned over George's shoulder and studied the card for a moment.

“Well, gollleeee! You’re right Aggie. He’s won the big one all right. Congratulations, Sir!” Freckles grabbed George's free hand and pumped it vigorously. “Boy, wait ‘til they hear about this downtown. You’re our first big winner!”

George looked half dazed as he turned toward the manager who was now shoving some papers in front of him.

George was used to filling out forms and now he signed right on the dotted line.

“And this form is a release so we can use your name and picture in the newspapers and on TV,” beamed young Freckles as he placed another paper in front of George.

The winner, who was feeling just a little out of phase, murmured as he signed, “Newspapers?...TV?”

“Yes Sir, This is big news!”

At last George regained some of his composure and asked. “What time is it?”

“Seven o’clock, Sir.”

At last it hit him. He’d just won Three Thousand Dollars. Thinking of his new family he realized this could make all the difference in their future.

“I’ve got to tell Lydia,” he said aloud, jumping up and handing the coupon to young Frec.

“No, sir, you keep that. Bring it back at ten thirty and I’ll have your check for you.”

“Thank You! Thank you!” stammered George as he started for the door. His knees were all wobbly and he couldn’t feel the floor under him. Suddenly he was running...running back toward the hospital. He dashed into the hospital lobby, shouting,

“I won! I won!”

Old sour face Witchee-Bitch looked up from her desk in dismay. “Sir, Please be quiet! “This is a hospital.”

George’s yell was quickly reduced to a whisper.

“I won! I won!” he chirped.

The old biddy still had his pink slip, but he decided to deal with her later. Her had to see Lydia first.

He hurried to Lydia’s room only to find her asleep. Torn between his desire to tell her about his good fortune and her need to rest, he stood for a few moments looking down at her. He thought she looked angelic with her long blond hair spread out on the pillow. There was a faint smile on her lips. As he looked at her, she stirred, opened her eyes and gazed sleepily up at him.

“Hi, Honey, she said, stretching and yawning. “Oh, I had such a good sleep. What have you been up to?” She sat up and patted the bed next to her. George sat down. Hardly able to contain himself, he handed her the card.

“Lookee, lookee, Lyd. Look what your ol’ Dad’s brought you,” he said with a big, boyish grin.

Lydia squinted at the card, reached for her glasses on the table, put them on, and studied the winning Breakfast Bonanza coupon. “What does it mean, Georgie?” she asked with a puzzled frown.

“It means I just won Three thousand dollars at the Happy Pancake,” he beamed.

For a moment she didn’t get his meaning until she read the contest rules on the reverse side of the small card. She clapped her hands together in amazement and laughed.

“It can’t be true!” she exclaimed.

“But it is...and here’s how the whole thing came about.” With that he told her about Little Red Beard.

“Oh George, you have such a vivid imagination. Sounds like another of your crazy dreams. You’ve worked too hard to finish your master’s thesis, that’s all,” she patted his knee.

“I think it’s given you hallucinations.’

George deflated a little. “But it seemed so real. Guess you’re right though--just a dream. But the contest money is real enough Lyddy It’ll help pay the hospital bill and I can get our car out of hock.”

“Yes darling of course,” Lydia replied, pulling him down to her for a big kiss.

He wriggled loose and gave her a pinch. “Here, girl enough of that. We have serious things to discuss. There’s a pressing problem that must be rectified.”

“What’s that Georgie,” she asked with a puzzled frown.

“It’s high time we got married,” he replied with mock seriousness.

“I don’t see why,” Lydia replied, but joy filled her when he spoke the words. All along, the thought had gnawed at her perhaps it would be better for them to give the child up for adoption. She knew it would be impossible for her now that she’d held little George Two and nursed him. Yet the truth was, they weren’t married. Though they had discussed it, time and nature had gotten away from them. Perhaps now George should dump her and go on with his career.

“We need to marry for the boy’s sake,” George went on with a straight face. “Because he needs a father...” he saw her face fall and added with a big grin. “And because I love the heck out of you and need you so much?”

Her heart leaped as he kissed her tenderly. At last she was sure George really loved her as she loved him--with all her heart; and this wasn’t just another college romance that had gone too far.

Lydia squeezed his hand. “Yes, and I suppose our folks need to know they are grandparents.”

“Won’t this frost ‘em?!” laughed George. “Tell ya what, honey, why don’t we plan the wedding for a week from today...next Saturday. That way you and George Two should be strong enough. I’ll send your folks and mine telegrams, asking them to be here on the twentieth.”

Lydia squirmed a little, then gave a wicked little laugh. “This’ll give my parents a kick right in their mid-Victorian pants. George, they don’t even know about you, let alone little George. You’d better put my name on the telegram and don’t mention the baby. One shock at a time. I love my folks, but they’re not going to understand any of this.

They talked for a while, planning their future and how they’d use their new wealth. Two hours went by and another nurse came on duty as Lydia and George talked. The new nurse frowned at George and said, “Bath time, sir. I’m afraid you’ll have to wait outside.”

“Oh, man!” exclaimed George. “What time is it?”

“Ten-thirty, sir.”

“I’d better get going then. Gotta pick up our money.” He gave Lydia a kiss and rushed past the astonished nurse.



When he arrived back at the Happy Pancake, a small crowd had gathered on the sidewalk. A van was parked at the curb. On its side panel, giant letters stated the vehicle belonged to Channel Two. An obviously bored cameraman with a TV mini-cam balance on his shoulder was standing to one side. A pleasant looking young man stood near him with a microphone in hand. He was studying the toe of his shoe; checking its shine in the morning light. Miss Agnes was coyly trying to get his attention, but he ignored her.

Meanwhile Freckles, the Happy Pancake manager, was deep in conversation with a short, bald headed man. The spectators looked on with mild interest, wondering what it was all about.

George glanced in through the windows of the eatery. He could see it was empty. Too late for breakfast and too early for lunch. He stood with the onlookers for a few moments and viewed the scene. Then Freckles caught sight of him and called out a greeting.

“Mr. Potter, we were getting worried.”

He motioned George over to meet the bald headed man who turned out to be Happy Pancakes Bay Area public-relations man. He made a big fuss over George.

George Potter was the first big winner in Happy Pancakes first contest, and this was indeed an historic moment!” George thought they were overplaying it a bit, but smiled and acted out the part of an excited winner as best he could. The P.R. man was very proud he’d been able to round up so much media publicity in such a short time. He introduced George to the newsman, who kept repeating he wasn’t sure this story would get on the news. George got the impression that Channel Two carried a big chunk of Bay Area’s Happy Pancake advertising budget and they were only covering the story to keep their client happy.

The newsman coached George on what to do and how to stand. The cameraman faced them into the morning sun so they had to squint. Freckles went through the motions of presenting George with a check as the man pointed his camera at them. The newsman smiled a toothy grin and asked George how the whole thing came about. George was tempted to tell them about little Red Beard but, Lydia’s skepticism and his own common sense had reduced that whole episode to a dream. His good luck was just that, and nothing more.

Finally the show was over and everyone scattered. The Channel Two crew packed up their gear and left. the P.R. man snapped a few pictures and he took off. The spectators lost interest and went about their business. Freckles and Miss Agnes congratulated him again, then went back inside to get ready for the lunch bunch. This left George standing by himself on the sidewalk. At last he looked down at the check in his hand. Sure enough it was for three thousand dollars! His mind started spending it so fast he got the sinking feeling it wouldn’t last long. But it would be a big help...that was certain. First, he had to do something about the car and the hospital. He leaned through the doorway of the Happy Pancake.

“Could you please tell me where I might find the nearest bank?” he called after the retreating figure of ol’ Frec, the manager.

“Oh, of course, Mr. Potter. There’s one right around the corner. Just have them call us if they have any questions.”

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George hurried to the bank, entered and rushed up to the nearest teller. She took his check and looked at it without expression. "Let me confirm this, Mr. Potter. Just a precaution. It's for your own protection, you know."

George nodded. the girl went to the phone at the back of the bank and he supposed she talked to Freckles. She nodded, hung up the receiver and returned to the window with a smile.

"Yes indeed, Mr. Potter! Everything is in order and congratulations! How do you want the check handled? Perhaps you'd like to open an account. We're having a contest and I could win a trip to Hawaii."

George thought for a minute while the girl continued to beam at him eagerly. Finally he said. "Yes--I don't have an account anywhere. Never had any money to put in one. Let's see...I'll open an account for twenty-seven hundred; and take the balance in cash. I've got a few expenses I gotta take care of right away."

"Checking or savings?" asked the girl, earnestly.

"Oh, checking I guess. It won't last long enough to make any interest anyway."

The girl made out the necessary forms and George signed them. Then she counted out the three hundred in cash. He inspected the pockets of his old jeans for holes and carefully folded the money away in the watch pocket. He turned to thank the teller, but she was already helping another depositor.

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George hurried back to the hospital and found Lydia still asleep. He had plenty to do anyway. First he settled accounts temporarily and got his VW out of hock.

He went out to where he'd parked the small car. He got in and was about to put the key in the ignition when he heard a voice at his elbow.

"Say, Bud!"

Startled, George turned to see a man leaning on the second hand VW as if he owned it. He reminded George of a caricature of a used car salesman. Dressed in an outlandish, wild plaid jacket with yellow trousers, his hair was plastered to his head and a giant cigar stuck into his slash of a mouth, he looked pretty sinister, but too flamboyant to be a real crook. Nonetheless, George was immediately put on his guard.

"Yes...Yes--sir?" George stammered at the bizarre looking character.

"Say, Bud," the man repeated. "I saw ya dis mornin' at da Happy Pancake."

George's reaction was to reach down and put his hand over the money he'd stashed in the watch pocket.

"I know ya got money burnin' a hole in yer pocket," continued the man as he took the cigar from his mouth and studied it for a moment. Then he fixed George with the steadiest look his shifty eyes could manage and leaned closer to the student.

"A lot of folks would like to help ya part wit dat roll," he continued. "Don't get me wrong. I ain't one of 'em. I got a real proposition for ya."

Oh sure! thought George with a frown.

"Ya ever play da horses, Bud?" the man asked.

“No, I don’t believe in gambling. You never win in the long run,” was the student’s ready reply.

“Au contraire--au contraire,” smiled the man. “You’ve heard of the Irish Sweepstakes? You’re a lucky guy. Look at this morning. Ya won three thousand buckolas. Wit luck like dat

you could easily win da Sweepstakes--A million smackers!”

“You’re selling Sweepstakes tickets.” stated George, flatly.

“That I am, Bud. I just know I got the winning one here somewhere.” He shifted the cigar to the other side of his mouth as he pointed to the book of tickets in his hand. “I can feel it in my bones, and I’ll sell it to ya for the low price of five bucks a ticket.”

A bell went off in George’s head and once again he could see the red bearded face of the little man in green. Remember, George, be wise with your money, but don’t be afraid to take a little gamble. Oberon, the leprechaun’s words echoed in his mind. He saw the red beard thrust toward him as one of the little man’s green eyes winked.

“Gosh, was it only a dream?” said George aloud.

“Wazzat, Bud-- a dream?” he went on. “Sure it’s a dream, A dream come true of you should win.”

George thought of Lydia back at the hospital and he thought of George Two. They needed money badly, a larger home, diapers, baby food, doctor bills. His conscience was torn between Oberon’s advice and his own good sense. Still, if the little guy in green wasn’t a dream--and if this was a chance to win a million dollars. Decisions, decisions! But after all, this was his lucky day, or was it only luck? Oh, what the hell!

Finally the face of the man in the garish plaid jacket came back into focus. “You okay, Bud?” he asked with a puzzled frown.

“Oh, s...sure, fine. Give me ten tickets,” sighed George.

“A fine investment, Bud. Ten tickets, that’s only fifty buckolas. Sure you wouldn’t like to buy more? You can afford it, and it would better yer odds.”

“Just ten, please,” replied George impatiently. Those fifty buckolas would buy a lot of baby formula and he was already regretting his decision.

“Okay man, here are your tickets. Just make out the stubs, give me the cash, and I’ll be on my way.”

George signed his name, gave his current address and then reluctantly peeled off fifty dollars. He handed the ticket halves and the money to the man. He got an empty feeling in the pit of his stomach as he watched the man fold away the money and put it in his money belt. Turning to leave, the man called over his shoulder. “Well, good luck, Bud. Don’t call us, we’ll call you.”

George watched the man disappear around the building and looked at the ten stubs in his hands, numbers X-222-4378-2190 to X-222-4378-2200.

He looked at the sweepstakes tickets for a moment; suddenly feeling discouraged. Why had he wasted a perfectly good fifty dollars on these most probably worthless tickets? Then from some where, he thought he heard a familiar voice with a soft accent say:

Don’t worry George. Remember, we’ve selected you!

The voice in his brain startled George and he decided he was having delusions, just as Lydia had said. Lack of sleep and sitting up all night probably.

A bit angry with himself for his foolishness, George tossed the tickets into the glove compartment.

## FOUR

He glanced at his watch and growled, "Tempos Fugit!" He had a lot of things to do before the hospital released Lydia and little George Two the next morning. Fired by his new responsibilities, George came back to life; his brain once again on full power. "Time to get organized," he said to himself, grabbing his old clip board from the back seat. He clamped on a fresh sheet of paper and made a list, checked it twice, then muttered "Time's a wastin'!" as he shifted the VW into gear and raced out of the parking lot. He had a plan, if only the three thousand bucks held out long enough to put it into action.

First he needed to pay the back rent. He drove to their old apartment. But when he tried to get in he found his key no longer fit. "Oh, oh," he worried. "I was afraid of this." Putting on what he hoped was his most apologetic expression, he knocked at the manager's door. After what seemed an eternity, he was greeted by a grumpy, shave-creamed face.

"Oh, there you are, Potter!" the manager grumbled through the foam. "I was about to dump your junk on the sidewalk and put your room up for rent!"

"Sorry Mr. Jenkins. I realize the rent's way over due and I mean to rectify the situation immediately. Also I'd like to pay for an extra week." He explained about Lydia's being in the hospital and the new baby. "Sorry, but we'll need to find a bigger place."

The manager attempted to smile through the lather and proceeded to wipe it off with a towel. "Oh, so she finally dropped it eh?..Uh...Congratualtions," he muttered flatly. "Come on in." Georg entered the rental office and whipped out his checkbook.

The smile faded, "A check eh? is it any good?"

"Sure is!" George laughed triumphantly. "I just won the Happy Pancake Bonanza." He made out a check for the past rent plus seventy-five dollars for the extra week. "Is that OK?" he asked, handing the slip to the now pleased and appeased manager. Children and pets weren't usually allowed in this normally all student apartment building. However, the university was between sessions, and the man was so relieved to get Potter's back rent, he decided he could afford to make an an exception. Fortunately the Potter apartment was out back, so the squalling brat wouldn't disturb him. He gave George a new key and wished him good luck.

"Thanks for being so understanding," George smiled. "Now I've gotta run!"

Leaving the manager looking suspiciously at his check, George stopped at the apartment. The new key fit, and he grabbed an extra pair of old overalls and a few other necessities. Looking around the small room, only confirmed that he and Lydia had been so much in love, they hadn't noticed how tiny it was. They only saw only a cozy love nest. With the arrival of the baby, came the dawn. They really needed more space.

From the stand outside he got a free classified, and shuffling through the rental section he spotted an ad in his price range. Oh, boy! It was located in West Oakland, so

he couldn't expect much. In fact, he wasn't sure he really wanted to raise his family there.

Since he'd taken on his scholarship to UC Berkeley a few years back, he'd become familiar with the Oakland/Berkeley area of East San Francisco Bay. Greater Oakland was sometimes called the Brooklyn of the West. It was made up of a mixed bag of contrasting districts. Some of the far west side, near the harbor, was a notorious slum with a high crime rate. The upper east side was made up mostly the opulent homes of the wealthy. In between there was Downtown and pockets of borderline neighborhoods. He hoped at least for borderline. After all, the rent was cheap, and he needed to save money. Also, it wasn't far from the campus. He called the number in the ad. With the landlady's promise to meet him there, he took off for the West Side.

West Oakland was about as he remembered it; so he wasn't surprised when he found the basic house, situated in a basic, ethnically mixed neighborhood. Children of all colors played along the street. However, he was glad to see the area wasn't as dismal as some. The small wood sided house in question looked fairly respectable. Nothing a coat of paint wouldn't cure. He knocked on the screen door and was greeted by a smiling African American. She was somewhere in her early forties, a majestic woman obviously dressed for house cleaning, She wore a faded cotton dress and her hair tied in a bright colored bandana. A duster was held in one hand.

"George Potter?" she asked. in a warm, lilting contralto. She pushed open the door as he nodded, returning her smile. "I'm Liza Cooper, and with luck, your new landlady." She added. With a glance out at the street she chuckled "Welcome to elegant West Oakland!"

She apologized for the shabby condition of the living room. "I'm afraid the prior tenants didn't do the place any good. I've been trying to whip it into shape, but it's going to take a few days. Hope you can wait"

While they talked, Liza Cooper gave George the tour. Apparently she'd started her cleanup with the kitchen and single bathroom and they looked okay. Then she took him out to the large back yard. It was a bit overgrown, but green. "And there's a push mower in the garage," she suggested hopefully.

She also volunteered that she lived next door, was a childless widow, and kept busy with volunteer work. In response, George told her his dilemma. She was understanding about his and Lydia's unmarried status and overjoyed about the baby.

"How wonderful, a baby boy!"

"Could be a bit noisy." offered the student.

"In West Oakland?! Crying babies? Not possible." She laughed a deep mellow laugh. "Besides I love children. None of my own, more's the pity, but I do a lot of baby sitting." she pulled herself up proudly. "Reasonable rates--excellent service," she said with mock seriousness.

There was no resisting Liza Cooper's outgoing personality and George decided the place was a good choice in spite of the location. Pretty sure Practical Lydia would agree, he decided to take it. To seal the deal, George quickly outlined what he planned to do to upgrade the two bed-roomer. As he spoke, he scribbled notes on the clipboard list. The landlady, impressed by George's enthusiasm and efficiency, realized the eager young man could do much for her rental, and waved the last month's rent/cleaning fee.

Thanking her profusely, he paid for the first month and moved on to the next item. He groaned as he saw his list of to-dos was getting longer.

## FIVE

Driven by new purpose, the young father became a whirlwind of activity. Determined to complete his many tasks before next Saturday's wedding deadline, he pushed the VW bug to its limits. The hospital's executive management had been more understanding than their witchy night clerk and had returned the pink slip in exchange for a time arrangement to pay te bill.

George moved Lydia and baby George Two back to their temporary quarters in the tiny one room-one bath pad. Then he was off and running, To save money he shopped for furniture at the Salvation Army and was able to find enough sturdy pieces to make-do. At a department store, he opened an account, bought a queen size mattress, a bassinet, baby bath, and other essentials suggested by the helpful sales lady. Arranging delivery to the new place, he called some school buddies who agreed to pitch-in to help the class leader in exchange for aid with their theses.

Brushes and rollers a-flying, the crew managed to repaint inside and out, and gave the tiny house a certain curb appeal George hoped would please Lydia. Liza , his new landlady was delighted.

The wedding plans included a reception; and to save money, George had decided to hold it in the back yard. As he mowed the lawn his thoughts turned to the magic of the week. Was Oberon for real? Incredible as it all seemed, he'd like to believe in little Red Beard, but in the glare of broad daylight he had to agree with Lydia. He'd been delusional and his own good luck was responsible for all that had happened. Still, he couldn't have done any of it without the Happy Pancake winnings.

Though he wanted to spend all his time with his new family; he was so busy, he only managed to sleep with them; and only when the baby wasn't crying to be fed or changed. While he was away, he left it up to Lydia to arrange for their simple wedding on Saturday.

At last, all was ready, and George moved his family into their new home. Fully recovered, Lydia laughed as she gave him a big hug and kiss. In her eyes, the newly painted edifice was perfect. She went from from room to room, admiring the clean paint smell, the worn but serviceable furnishings, and the flowers George had purchased for her home coming

"Georgie," she whispered. "What a surprise! It's just wonderful!"

Finally settled in, and following a trip to the grocery store, Lydia prepared their first dinner at the new place. George was anxious for Lydia to meet their extraordinary neighbor and landlady, and with Lydia's blessing, he invited Liza Cooper to dine. The neighbors bonded immediately and it was love at first sight for baby George Two and warmhearted Liza.

The next step, and a potentially painful one, was meeting Lydia's parents at the airport the next day. Lydia had led them to believe they were only coming to meet a brilliant grad student she was thinking of marrying. They assumed their obedient

daughter was taking into consideration the marriage was subject to parental approval. If they gave their okay, the couple would marry the following day.

George had bravely volunteered himself and the VW Bug to take on the challenge. Neither was looking forward to the arrival. Lydia's folks were conservatives from the midwest, bigoted and by no means tolerant of hippy types like George. Most harrowing of all, they were totally unaware their pure and chaste daughter had given birth to an illegitimate grandson!

## SIX

The summit meeting at the airport had been anything but warm. In fact, George's first meeting with Lydia's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan Miles, had been greeted with a real cold snap in spite of the warm Spring day. Lydia stayed home to give them more room in the tiny VW Bug, and now her parents were neatly folded away in the back seat. Their luggage was divided between the front passenger seat and the small trunk.

They rode in stoney silence and George could feel their eyes boring into the back of his neck...a neck now showing above the collar of the dress shirt he wore. Lydia had trimmed his hair as short as campus styles would permit. His beard was neatly trimmed also, and he wore his only suit and a tie for the occasion. All their preparations had apparently been for naught. It was obvious Lydia's folks still branded him as some sort of undesirable creep who was stealing away their chaste daughter.

George glanced in the rear view mirror and caught Mrs. Miles' glacial stare. Ginny, was her first name--for Virginia or Ginger, he couldn't remember which. She's kinda pretty. thought George--like Lydia, or she would be if she wasn't making such an effort to retain her scowl. She wore a pink suit and little white hat. Looks like a strawberry-marshmallow sundae, George chuckled to himself.

They finally arrived at their small rental and George parked the VW in front. Seeing the house through his passengers eyes, he realized the house and the neighborhood surrounding it, would not pass inspection. The dreary scene was accompanied by the raucous sounds of fat mommas with pendulous breasts, screaming at their children.

George went around and removed the luggage so the Miles' could get out. Mr. Miles untangled his long limbs and clawed his way out with a grimace of pain. George moved to help Mrs. Miles, but the old man nudged him aside and gave his wife a hand.

When they were all standing there in the sparse grass of the parkway, George could see the Miles were shocked by the conditions surrounding the home he planned for their daughter.

George looked at the place. He'd been so proud of all the work he'd done in such a short time. He'd cut the weeds and he and his friends had added a coat of paint, but he could see by the wealthy Miles' smug expressions it must appear pretty shabby.

"Come on in," he invited with the bravest smile he could muster.

Just then Lydia came hurrying from the house. "Mommy, Daddy!" she exclaimed.

For a moment the faces of the Jonathan Miles' warmed a little at the sight of their lovely daughter running to meet them. Then their expressions changed as they grumbled and gave her perfunctory hugs and kisses.

Come on, folks, thought George. After all she is your only daughter.

If Lydia was disappointed by their greeting, she didn't show it. Instead, she took her father's hand, put her arm around her mother's shoulder, and guided them toward the house. George was left with the luggage.

"Just the night case, if you please Mr. Potter. We'll be staying at a hotel," Mrs. Miles called back over her shoulder.

"Well, at least Mother Miles finally spoke to me," George muttered to himself.

He had a time getting at the night case. It was at the bottom of the pile in the trunk. He removed it, put everything else back and locked the car. This wasn't the world's safest neighborhood. Covetous eyes were already evaluating the expensive matched luggage.

When he finally entered the living room, Mrs. Miles was talking to her daughter a mile a minute and George could see Lydia's chin quiver slightly. Her father stood by, nodding gravely.

"It's not too late, daughter," was all George heard, because when the screen door slammed behind him, Mrs. Miles clapped her mouth shut. All three turned, and the future parents-in-law glared once more at George, while Lydia looked at him helplessly and shrugged.

At that moment a high pitched cry came from the back of the house, followed by a squalling sound.

"Wazzat?" yelled Mother Miles.

"Oh, just the baby," answered Lydia. "George, I've told you about slamming the screen door. It shakes the whole house."

"The...the...baby?! chimed Ginny and Jonathan Miles together.

"Yes, come and see, said Lydia with a worried smile.

Well, this is it! thought George, resignedly.

They moved toward the back of the house and down a dark hallway where Lydia opened a door into a darkened room. The wailing sound suddenly grew much louder.

Lydia moved to the window and opened the drapes a little. Sunlight flooded the room. Her parents eyes were drawn to a bassinet in one corner. Small arms and legs could be seen sticking up and waving about. The crying changed in pitch. Lydia moved to the bassinet, picked up the child and held it lovingly to her bosom.

"Hello, George Two," murmured Lydia lovingly. "My, my, Georgie Porgie's little butkin is all wet."

"George TWO" squawked the elder Miles' together.

"Of course. Your grandchild." Lydia was warming up to her performance. "Little Georgie, say hello to your grandparents--Grandma and Grandpa."

Ginny Miles gave a short screech and began to topple. George was standing behind her and caught her as she fainted dead away. Jonathan Miles gathered his wits and pulled his wife from George's grasp.

"You over-sexed pervert--you've already defiled my daughter! Don't you dare touch my wife."

George was stunned by the whole scene. He could see that Old Man Miles had murder on his mind, but right now he had his hands full of Old Lady Miles.



“Daughter, you pack your bags and come with us. Bring that brat with you!” screamed Jonathan Miles. “We’re taking you home. We can dispose of his bastard on the way.”

Lydia’s eyes flashed sparks as she stuck out her pretty chin, squared her shoulders and let her father have it. Mrs. Miles came out of her stupor just in time to hear the whole thing.

“How dare you?! How dare you come into my home and speak to my future husband like that?! It was George’s idea to invite you to our wedding. He was the one who had the courage to send the telegrams!” Lydia was furious now and she spoke with great intensity, in a low biting tone that cut through the animosity that filled the room. Her words slashed at them with more power than if she’d screamed them.

“I love him and he loves me. George Two is a product of that love and I am not going to give up either of them! And you are coming to our wedding tomorrow, or you will never see me again!” she concluded and the room reverberated with the power of her anger.

The Miles were stunned by the speech of their once obedient and docile daughter.

“Mother, I think he’s made one of them women’s’ libbers outta her.”

“Shocking!” squawked Ginny.

“George, take my loving parents to their hotel.” Lydia said with tears choking her voice. “We are getting married tomorrow at two o’clock. George has made special arrangements to pick you up, so please be ready by 1:30!” She turned away and George could see her shoulders shake as she held the baby to her.

He went to her and tried to comfort her. “Oh, get them out of here!” she screamed, shaking his hands from her shoulders.

George was a little hurt by her rebuff, but he thought she was probably justified. After all, he’d gotten her into this mess. He turned to look at her parents. At the moment they were completely at sea. Lydia’s tirade had taken the wind out of their sails. They turned and went down the hall. George followed them and gathered the night case as they walked out of the house and back to the car.

## SEVEN

As a special treat, George had splurged on a chauffeured limousine to carry Lydia, little George, both sets of parents, Liza Cooper and himself to the wedding. At the time it seemed an impractical expense. However, the VW was not a practical alternative. Nonetheless, even with George’s father, Henry, sitting up front with the driver, the limo was crowded. Though it was obvious Lydia’s parents felt they deserved such treatment, they did not appreciate some of the company. During the short ride to the park, they sat as far away as possible from Liza Cooper and their illegitimate grandson. In spite of the obvious coldness of Lydia’s parents, Liza maintained a cheerful attitude as she held George Two

What a hell of a wedding day this was going to be! thought George, looking around at the guests. Upon arrival, the limo party joined the others gathered under a huge oak tree awaiting the minister who was going to perform the ceremony.

Lydia's parents were still glaring at him. Nothing new there. But they were dividing their animosity between George and his parents, who had just arrived that morning from Los Angeles. The Miles seemed to blame the Potters for bringing this monster into the world.

Mrs. Potter was embarrassed and would like to give her son a good talking to. She was disappointed in him and had mixed emotions about his new family. She'd taken to Lydia instantly and the baby was adorable. But she was confused about the relationships. Right now her grandson was a bastard, and their future daughter-in-law was sweet, but must have loose morals to have let this happen to her. Then there was the matter of her own son. He seemed to have turned out to be some sort of sex fiend. Surely things couldn't be as bad as they seemed, she thought. She'd taken a Mydol to calm her nerves. Maybe she would view things differently after the wedding.

The only one who was taking it all in stride was George's father, Henry Potter. The dock worker could see everyone was taking the whole thing too seriously. He tried to keep a straight face and hold back the laughter that welled up inside him. He really would like to take his son out for a beer and have a good laugh over this comedy he was witnessing.

Henry could read the Miles like a book. A couple of well-to-do throw backs to the turn of the century. Oh, that's right, they're small town midwesterners--same thing. Even his wife was a little shocked by the premature grandson. But then, she'd been a virgin when he married her. He'd been so anxious to get into her pants, he'd given up his wild bachelorhood for a roll in the hay. But their life hadn't been so bad. She was a pretty good old girl. They had Georgie to show for it. He was proud of his intelligent son; proud of his new grandson and beautiful future daughter-in-law. He caught Lydia's eye and gave her a wink. She smiled back bravely. So what if they weren't married, that was all going to be fixed in a few minutes. Ah, here comes the preacher now.

A young man with a black jacket and a backward collar came up with apologies for being late. Jonathan Miles was glad to see the clergyman. Seemed to make things better. Maybe his daughter's good name could be salvaged after all. The preacher did have rather long hair though, he decided.

Lydia smiled at the holy man. She was relieved to see him. She had thought all this might be a great joke on her parents, but they were taking it harder than she'd imagined. Her mother appeared to be in a state of perpetual hysteria, and was making everyone nervous. This was her wedding day and she wanted it to go smoothly. About twenty of their school friends were standing around shuffling their feet. They looked uncomfortable. They couldn't care less about George and Lydia's marital status, but were appalled at the fuss the older generation was making over the little menage-a-trios.

The Man was here, however, and now the ceremony could proceed. They gathered under the big tree. Birds sang and butterflies flitted among the flowers. It was a perfect day for a wedding. The bride and groom stood with the minister on a slight rise. The rest of the party stood behind them. The maid of honor was Lydia's best friend and George had asked his father to be best man. It made the stevedore proud to stand there with his son against the rest of them. Lydia didn't bother to ask her father to give her away. He was out of it as far as she was concerned.

The simple ceremony proceeded smoothly. The minister had a pleasant speaking voice and was able to give the old words new meaning. George glanced at Lydia. She wore a simple dress with flowers in her hair and held a small bouquet. Gosh she's beautiful! he thought.

The young minister came to the part in the ceremony where he asked, if there was anyone who had any reason why these two should not be joined in Holy Matrimony. George could imagine Mom and Dad Miles squirming behind him, but they kept silent.

At that moment, from far off, he heard someone calling his name: "George Potter? George Potter!"

He looked beyond the minister to the far edge of the park, where he could see a man running their way.

"Finish it!" George said to the minister through his teeth.

The minister apparently hadn't yet heard the voice calling from behind him and went on to conclude the ceremony.

"...and I now pronounce you man and wife."

George had been watching the approaching man and hardly heard the last words of the ceremony.

"George?...George?" he heard Lydia beside him

"Huh?" he asked, glancing at her.

"Aren't you going to kiss me?" She had a puzzled look on her face. She hadn't heard the man either, and he was hidden from her view by the minister.

George gave her a nice husbandly kiss just as the man came running up to them.

"George Potter?! Is there a George Potter here?" He panted.

"Yes, I'm George Potter," volunteered the groom, a little perturbed the ceremony had been disrupted by this stranger.

"Mr. Potter, am I glad I found you! You couldn't have heard yet. I'm from the San Francisco Examiner and I want to be the first to congratulate you!"

"I didn't know the Examiner went in for flower-child weddings," allowed George.

"No...no...Listen. I want to congratulate you. We just got it on the wire. It took some quick sleuthing, but I found you first!"

The guests had all gathered around and were gaping at the excited young reporter. He looked like a crazy man. He was panting and perspiring, but looked triumphant.

"What a scoop!" he bellowed.

Lydia could stand it no longer. "What are you talking about?!"

The reporter reached for George's hand, and the groom extended it almost as a reflex action.

"Mr. George Potter, let me be the first to congratulate you. You have just won the Irish Sweepstakes!!!"

They all stared at him blankly. What's that! The Irish what?!

"The Irish Sweepstakes."

"That's right...ONE MILLION SMACKOLAS!"

There was a short screech from somewhere, and out of the corner of his eyes, George saw Ginny Miles collapse. She aimed for her husband's arms, but the old man just stood there dumfounded and Ginny missed him. She hit the ground with a thud, rolling a bit as she hit. Her legs went straight up in the air; exposing slip, panties, garter

belt and all. Her legs hung for a moment then dropped to the turf. Ginny Miles was out cold.

No one paid any attention to the unconscious mother-in-law. They were all dancing and jumping and shouting and hugging George and Lydia. Lydia was crying and George was smiling so hard his mouth hurt. The guests formed a circle and began to dance around the couple. Finally Lydia dried her tears and looked up at George who was hugging her close.

"The little man in green, George?" she whispered in disbelief.

"Or maybe I'm just damned lucky. I won you didn't I?!" he grinned and gave her a more-than-husbandly kiss.

The crowd quieted and the reporter got his story and picture. He promised he wouldn't tell anyone where they were and congratulated them again. They revived Mother Miles as the rest of the crowd left for the house. George gathered his extended family, and ushered them back into the waiting limousine.

## EIGHT

The Celebration on the way home in the limo was a riot. Even Lydia's parents were smiling. They actually spoke to Liza Cooper and wanted to hold the baby. Finally George sobered a bit and asked for quiet.

"Listen. A million bucks may sound like a lot of money here in 1983, but it also means a lot of income tax." He smiled sadly at his listeners. "Oh, we can probably get by on it, as long as we don't try to live too high in the stratosphere. However, I think we can at least splurge on a case of good champagne. Driver stop at the next liquor store!"

When they finally pulled up at the house, most of the crowd had already arrived. Besides the parents, George and Lydia had invited their university friends, and a couple of professors. Lydia's girlfriends were busy setting up the buffet and a couple of coolers full of ice and refreshments. There was lots of beer and wine plus George's respectable champagne. There were paper plates, plastic utensils and disposable wine glasses. Hot dogs and burgers were grilling on the BBQ and someone was tossing a huge salad.

Normally it's the responsibility of the bride's father to provide the wedding feast, but on first meeting, the groom's father, Henry Potter, had seen his daughter-in-laws parents were in no mood to encourage this marriage. Now, of course, with the promise of a rich son-in-law, they'd changed their tune...a bit late to provide anything. Though his son, George, had arranged for a bakery to deliver a fancy cake; it had been Henry, who'd stopped at a supermarket that morning to purchase the food and a big assortment of drinkables.

As afternoon wore on into evening, the crowd was enjoying itself and there were many toasts to the bride and groom: George's father started it all off with a toast about how much he admired these brave young people who had defied convention. He wished them much happiness.

Suddenly a toast came from an unexpected quarter. Jonathan Miles made a half try at an apology and started to blubber. He could see now he had misjudged this fine young man. This new millionaire, George Potter.

Mother Miles stood next to Lydia. She'd apparently made a full recovery and was holding the baby and crooning a lullaby. When she finished she handed George Two back to Liza Cooper with her most tolerant smile. Taking a slug of beer she put an arm around Lydia. Then turned to look at George and said, "George Potter, I am so proud of you. I can't think of anyone I'd rather have for my Lydia."

Lydia smiled at her new husband and gave a little shrug.

A couple of the George's friends were talented musicians and were encouraged to entertain. They did so, and were so well received, George, who'd become a bit tiddly on champagne, also volunteered to sing. Lydia cringed as George fumbled with his old guitar. The rare times he'd tried to serenade her had been pretty painful. Finally tuned up as well as his tin ear would permit, George began to sing, and the listeners began to groan. He struggled through one dismal song and ended on a real clinker.

As he did so, he suddenly saw a familiar figure off in back of the crowd. A little green suited gentleman with a red beard. Oberon had his fingers over his ears, and grimaced as if in pain. There was a smattering of polite applause for George's effort. After all, he was the groom, a millionaire, and their host. But after the token gesture, the crowd turned back to partying.

Obviously distressed, Oberon grabbed an embarrassed George by the elbow and steered him away from the crowd. "No, No, no, George!" growled the leprechaun, "This simply won't do! We have important plans for your future and the committee back home is not pleased with this performance!"

The dazed young man glanced around nervously until Oberon assured him leprechauns could not be seen or heard by mortals unless permitted. Dragging him into the empty kitchen, the Good Fairy continues his harangue.

"Oh you can sing, George! You sing like a bird...I want to say a crow, but the voice itself is not that bad--a pleasant though flat little baritone. In any case, after much pleading on my part, the boys back home sent me over to offer the second gift. We can hear, deep down inside you there are some vague musical qualifications, and you do appreciate real music. It's unfortunate, you haven't the resources to create any." Oberon paused for a moment and gave the young man a discouraged look "I lost a lot of game points during your caterwauling and though it's almost too soon after the first wish, we've decided it's high time for your second one. I think we must bless you with perfect pitch, and a true sense of musicianship. I'm afraid this time you have no choice in the matter. It's our decision you take Musical Talent."

Still unsure if all this magic stuff was true, or if this leprechaun was merely a champagne delusion, George hesitated. He loved music, but wasn't sure his political future really required it. Still as Oberon had stated, He had no choice in the matter

Seeing the doubtful look on the young man's face, the enchanter reassured him "George, You'll love it. Look what we did for Brahms, Beethoven and the Beatles?"

Maybe, just maybe, thought the leprechaun, with a bit of effort from this young man, they could eventually add George Potter to their list of musical successes.

"Uh...Okay, I guess so" he acquiesced

Just then a giggly couple came out into the kitchen.

George looked around nervously.

Seeing the new bridegroom/father, they laughed, "Hey daddio!"

“Don’t worry, George...only you can see me.” Oberon reassured him again, as he waved his wand over the bridegroom. Sprinkles swirled around George’s head. He suddenly felt a sort of giddy euphoria and grinned.

To avoid a bout of overconfidence Oberon cautioned him, “We can’t do it all for you.” Oberon added “You must make an effort before talent takes over. A good music teacher and some poetry studies would certainly help. Goodbye for now. and good luck!”

With that, the leprechaun waved his wand at the ceiling and followed the sparkle cloud up and out into the night.

A bit bedazzled and befuddled George returned to the party. He sheepishly apologized for his music as he walked unsteadily through the crowd. They all smiled and clapped him on the back. with their assurances.

“It’s Okay, Georgie! Just too much good champagne!” Raising their, glasses, they once again toasted the new bride and groom.

In Liza Cooper’s ample arms, George Two giggled and gurgled as his mom kissed his dad.

## NINE

The sports coupe droned its way across the great bridge in the direction of the city. The driver looked east toward the the metropolis. It was a spectacular day. The blue of the sky and green of the bay were cut by the jagged white slash of tall buildings. The steel cables that supported the bridge gave a stroboscopic effect to the bright scene beyond. The flickering panorama lulled the driver, and he was only half aware of the traffic that moved beside him. George thought of many things. Today was the first anniversary of his marriage to Lydia. He thought back to how the incredible year had started. That day, had also been beautiful, but it hadn’t started out that way. The wedding itself had been a near disaster, yet he had to smile at the memory of how it turned out. Wealth had certainly given him a whole new image in the eyes of his in-laws. He had to admit he was glad to see them go home.

The year that followed had passed like a dream. However, after the euphoria of instant wealth had worn off, he and Lydia regained some of their perspective. Their win made them minor celebrities for a few days, but in a week or so, most of the world had forgotten about them. Not everyone, though. The get-rich-quick schemers still beat a pathway to their screen door. Even before they could get out of the West Oakland neighborhood, a pageant of unsavory characters paraded through their tiny living room; each with a wonderful idea of what the Potters should do with their money. Many were obvious con artists--both male and female. Others were smooth as silk as they outlined marvelously plausible pathways to greater riches through wise investments.

George and Lydia were pulled this way and that, and the temptations were great.

Finally the million dollar cashier’s check arrived, and with it a man from the IRS with a reminder. The taxes would have to be paid--a substantial amount.

Uncle Sam couldn't have reared his ugly head at a more perfect moment. His arrival sobered the young couple and they made plans to escape the money sharks who swam about them.

They moved into a high security apartment building and locked their doors. Liza Cooper was glad to rent her two houses and move in with them. As good friend, house keeper and George Two's nanny, she became indispensable. She only allowed immediate family and good friends inside, and they were not encouraged to stay long. George and Lydia were planning their future.

Through his new banker, George investigated and retained a respected tax lawyer, and a reliable investment broker. The four of them sat down and mapped out their strategy.

Deferred tax payments would allow the young investors to use their big cash clout to make more money while paying off the government. The majority of the money was invested, but George held out a hundred thousand dollars or so just for fun. He sold the VW and bought a sports coupe and a nearly new Mercedes sedan. .

As the months passed, the Potter investments did astonishingly well; almost as if they were charmed. Their money doubled, tripled and continued to multiply.

The wealthy George and Lydia Potter were sensible young people who would normally avoid a show of wealth. But, now they were rich and could indulge themselves a little.

The apartment they had was nice, but they wanted something more permanent. A place in the country where George Two could have a dog and pony when he was old enough.

Several prominent architects were contacted and each submitted sketches. The mansion was to be built on a piece of property high on a hill in Marin County. Construction, landscaping and decorating would take two years.

As George turned the car up California Street he found himself tapping out a rhythm on the steering wheel. Musical thoughts had been bugging him for weeks, as tunes buzzed in his head. Driving up the circular drive of their high rise apartment building, he wondered about this new obsession. Not exactly annoying, it had begun to distract him from his primary goal, a doctorate in Political Science; it was such a distraction in fact, he'd brought books home to study over the weekend.

The doorman helped him gather his materials, and load them into the elevator. George thanked the man and assured him he could handle everything at the top.

In their tenth floor apartment, he stashed the books behind one of the potted palms. He'd dive into them later. He was about to put the guitar there also, but thought better of it. Lydia, George Two and Liza Cooper were out shopping so he had the apartment all to himself. In the living room, his eyes caught his reflection in the mirror over the fireplace and he moved toward the image. He studied himself. Not much change. His beard and hair were neatly trimmed a little closer and his clothes were of better quality, but the same George Potter still stared back at him. He smiled at his reflection and could feel the laughter welling up inside.

"Hello, Monsieur Nouveau Riche!" he said with a chuckle.

He still held the battered guitar case. He looked around for a place to hide it. Amazed how their living quarters had improved in just a year. The scarred old case really looked out of place among the elegant furnishings. He started to set it down on

the coffee tale, then held it up in front of him as a memory suddenly flickered through his mind. So many miracles had happened he'd almost forgotten.

"Musical Talent!" the little man had told him at their wedding reception. "The second wish is Musical Talent." George looked again at the old case and shook his head. No--ridiculous!,

But he had wished for wealth and look at this apartment. He most certainly was rich. Maybe...

just maybe the red bearded Oberon fellow hadn't been a champagne fantasy.

George hadn't touched the guitar since his wedding day. The case he held was a bit dusty and he felt like he was defiling this beautiful room with the ancient dust of his past. Hesitantly he opened the battered, dilapidated case. One of the hinges was broken and the other looked like it was about to give way. The instrument itself wasn't in much better condition. It was a gift from his father on his sixteenth birthday. It was used merchandise even then and George had hauled it around from one pad to another for years. He'd taken a couple of lessons when he was in high school. They hadn't helped much. He could still barely accompany himself if the tunes were in the key of C--or at the most in F. Any more flats or sharps were out of his territory. He gently lifted the old instrument out of its case. He wavered for a moment and almost put it back. He had a lot to do and there really wasn't much time to mess around. He looked down at his fingers. He couldn't even see his calluses. Soft as the hands of baby George, he thought to himself. If he could still play at all, it was going to be a painful experience. He left the metal strings open and gave them a twang.

"Oh man--bad vibes," he said aloud, cringing at the sound. The old box was way out of tune. He fumbled with it for a few minutes and at least got it in tune with itself. He was surprised that he could define the pitches so well. Usually it sounded to him as if it was a bit sharp or flat, but he could never tell which. He struck a G chord--the sure test. For the first time in his life it actually rang true.

George reached down into the old case and drew out a tattered song book. There were only a few songs in it he could play. He turned to one of his old favorites and began playing the accompanying chords. They were simple and basic, but at first he felt unsure and awkward. He stuck with it and soon it all started to come back to him. He tried a good ol' reliable strum: Down-down-up-down-up-down.

"Hey! Not bad!"

Like riding a bicycle, you never forget how. That also seemed true with his old guitar. He flipped through the dog-eared old book, picking out a few phrases from this song and that. He'd never been able to play some of them before. Now, although he hit a few clinkers, his playing was one hell of an improvement.

He decided to try a song. George picked one he knew and liked. He smiled ruefully to himself for a moment, remembering the last time he'd performed it. How he'd butchered it at the wedding reception. He wondered what was going to come out as he fixed an eye on the open book, took a deep breath and struck the opening chord. He started to sing the first line of the chorus, but before he could finish the opening phrase, he stopped. Something was wrong. This wasn't his voice. For one thing, the notes were normally almost too high for his meager range, yet now the sound came out clear and right on key. He didn't slide up to the first note or almost crack as he sang. His voice was stronger, too. He started over and sang the whole verse. Goose bumps broke out



on his arms. Maybe resting his voice all these months had been the reason, or, and he hardly dared think about it...what had really happened at their wedding reception?

He sang the song all the way through. By the time he finished his heart was pounding and the hair on his neck felt like it was standing on end. He couldn't go on after that. He felt too good. George put the old guitar back in its case and stood looking out the picture window at the city. He simply couldn't get over the feeling of warmth that had surged through him while he sang.

"Well, well, Georgie Porgie. Isn't daddy in fine voice today?"

George turned to see Lydia standing in the doorway with Liza who was holding George Two. There was a strange look in their eyes. He walked over and put his arms around his family. A great feeling of love flowed through him as he looked down at them, and though he struggled to keep them back, he could feel tears well up in his eyes as he bent to kiss them.

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The next morning, George crept into the living room and took out the old guitar case again. This time he withdrew and held the instrument almost reverently. Would it still be there? The ability--the feeling he'd had the day before? He began to play and found new strength and dexterity in his fingers. He sang the song again and could feel every nuance in the meaning of the lyric poetry.

As he finished the song, he heard a sound behind him and turned to see Lydia standing in the doorway. She was smiling, but tears were running down her cheeks.

"George," she breathed. "That was the most beautiful thing I've ever heard."

George set the guitar back in the case and she came running to him, put her arms around him and held him close.

"George, what is it? What does it mean?" she asked as she kissed him.

"I don't know yet. I've certainly never felt anything like it before. Whatever it is, I want to know more."

## TEN

In the weeks that followed, George and Lydia made several decisions about the future. They found themselves with time on their hands, and the wealthy young couple agreed, that to continue to grow, they must continue to learn. So when the fall semester rolled around, they left Liza to watch over George Two and returned to Berkeley.

Lydia went on with her journalism studies and George took a couple of graduate courses in Poli-Sci while he researched a subject for his doctor's thesis. He wanted to do something different; something profound and of use to future generations, and would not be filed away to gather dust in the university archives. Also he wanted to create a basis for a political career. As he delved into the areas of sociology, psychology and economics, the glimmering of an idea touched his mind, but it seemed to come to him from a long way off.

He was also very involved with his new found talent. In order to do both his research, and follow his musical bent, he was forced to organize every minute. He

drove himself to study and do research for his thesis, yet nearly all his waking hours found his fingers itching to pick up his guitar and play--a new guitar now, the finest money could buy.

He was ravenous for more knowledge about music, singing and songs. He studied for a few months with a renowned San Francisco guitarist. His technique grew by leaps and bounds until he was playing in the league with Chet Atkins, Roy Clark and Lorendo Almiada. Finally his teacher advised him to keep his money; he could teach the young man no more.

George auditioned for a famous voice coach, but the woman told him his natural talent exceeded anything she could teach him. George took his natural talent home and practiced by himself, or for his biggest fans, Lydia and Liza.

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During class breaks he and Lydia met under their favorite lunch tree, and while she leaned against his shoulder or lay with her head in his lap, he would play and sing for her. She never tired of this and never could quite believe the wonderful sounds were coming from her ol' George.

Of course the campus abounded with folk singers holding forth to small groups of groupies under nearly every tree. Once in a while one of them would come by and squat down to listen to George.

"It really moves me, man," they'd say, and there was a look of awe in their eyes as they went away.

George played and sang quietly for Lydia alone and few people stopped to disturb them. The other students could see they were very much in love, and though the passersby would like to stop, they felt like they might be intruding.

As George finished each song, Lydia would sigh or touch his lips with her fingertips or even be moved to kiss him lightly.

Yet George wanted to write his own songs. He seemed to be driven to it. In the back of his mind, words and pictures began to plague him, as well as the ever present notes of music. Often he would pause in his studies to jot down the moving thoughts that came rushing through his mind in a great torrent. He filled one notebook after another with the word-thought-images. He even studied a little about poetic form, iambs and pentameters and such, so he could

write down his poetry--poems he planned to use as lyrics for his songs.

On a dare from Lydia, George took his notebooks to the dean of the literature department, an irascible little old man who had written several respected books on the field of poetic criticism and had published reams of poetry.

At first, the old man was impatient with the young man. He didn't want to be bothered with the amateur scribbling of some struggling student. George thrust his notebooks on the old gentleman with such determination, the dean finally consented to look at them when he had time.

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One evening when George and Lydia were deep in a game of chess, George's mind wandered off the into the realm of music, and Lydia took advantage of his

preoccupation to put him in check. Just then the phone rang. Liza answered and informed George there was someone on the line, but the man was babbling so incoherently, she couldn't make out the name. It did sound urgent, however.

George took the phone and was finally able to make out that he was talking to the venerable old poetry critic. The professor was so excited, George wasn't sure what he was talking about. At last he asked the old gentleman to calm down, only to learn that his own poetry was the reason for the caller's excitement.

"Some of the finest imagery...such emotion. A bit rough, but I've never read anything like it. Magnificent! Must get together and polish the form."

The old man raved on and on while George beamed and nodded. Lydia sat fascinated, watching her husband's reactions to the one-sided conversation, until George finally got in a promise to see the professor the next day and said "Good night."

When George told her what the old man had said about his writing, Lydia was jubilant.

"I told you, George. I told you! I knew you had something--something wonderful!

Oh

George, I'm so proud!"

She hurried around to his side of the game table and gave him a big hug and a kiss. Then she looked over and studied the chess board for a moment before she moved her queen.

"Checkmate!" she said with a laugh.

## ELEVEN

With the immediate problem of writing down his extraordinary lyric poetry solved, George next set about learning how to write down the music that filled his head. Pulsating rhythms and unusual melodies poured through his brain. Often, He would sit and listen to the recordings he'd made by humming the tunes into a tiny cassette recorder he always carried with him. If only he could put the melodies down on paper. This would not only give him a permanent, tangible record, but would make it easier to purge his mind of the obsessive sounds that distracted him from more academic studies.

The next Spring he found an opening in his schedule and added a basic class in composition and counterpoint. He'd already discovered he possessed perfect pitch. This helped him to quickly absorb the the principles of notation, and within weeks he was actually able to write down the music as well as the words of his songs. Lydia and Liza enthused over them, but George suspected they were a bit biased. He was proud of his works, but knowing that one has a distorted view of ones own creations, he wasn't sure of anything until his mid-term in the composition class.

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The brightly lit room was arranged like an arena. Curving rows of student desks, about seventy of them, formed concentric arcs that where set upon risers, so the spectators could all have a clear view of the performing area below. The room was

sparsely populated with students this morning. There were only about twenty scattered across the expanse of seats. Eight o'clock classes were not popular and most of the students sat slumped, bored and sleepy as they tried only halfheartedly to concentrate on what was happening below.

The performing area contained only a piano, a stool and the instructor's desk. Behind it sat a discouraged Dr. James Lawrence Ph.D. He looked almost as dejected as the class. This was the first time he'd required them to perform their own works. It was a sort of mid-term examination and he could see the grading curve was being destroyed by the poor work presented so far. One feeble art song had been sung in a quavering soprano by Miss Twitchel in rather bad French. His head still rang with the contemporary piano sonata that sounded like jackhammers on pavement. And those were the best of a pot pourri of nearly a dozen numbers to which these hallowed Berkeley halls had been subjected this morning. Thank God the hour was almost over. Time for just one more. Well, this was just basic composition. Hopefully things would improve as the semester moved along. He picked up the next piece of music.

Ah, George Potter, he said to himself as he looked at the neatly hand printed manuscript. Now, here was a student to watch! The young man's stuff was almost too good to be true. Some pretty inspired music combined with extraordinary poetry. He'd almost suspected plagiarism, but as he glanced over to where the young man sat, he was impressed by the smiling, alert face in the otherwise disinterested sea of dozing students.

"Mr. Potter will you please entertain us?" he demanded aloud. There was considerable irony in his request to be entertained. This morning had been a bust so far and he'd hoped for better.

George nodded, removed his guitar from its case and descended the two rows from his seat to take his place near the stool. He glanced at the empty music stand and then up at the drowsy faces before him. He could see nothing but terminal disinterest.

"Won't you need your music, Mr. Potter?" asked the professor, extending the piece of notation paper toward the student.

"Thank you, sir, but I wrote it. I should be able to get through it without any help." That was refreshing, actually knew his music; the words too! thought the music instructor.

George began to play. His fingers flew over the fret board in an intoxicating new rhythm that made the students sit bolt upright in their seats. Hey! Here was something worth listening to.

Then George began to sing. It was a joyous song that struck them and rocked them with its happiness and optimism. They loved it and began to clap. Dr. Lawrence wanted to dance!

At last, a student worthy of my teaching! he shouted to himself.

There were several verses, but the song was so exciting and the words so intelligent and inspiring, when George finished, his audience just sat there for a moment, dazed and then disappointed the celebration was over. Next they were up and hurrying toward him. The period buzzer sounded, but they didn't even hear it. They clapped him on the back and congratulated him. Though some were envious, they all admired his talent. This George Potter had something. Now they could all see it.

At last the instructor reminded them that the bell had rung, and they reluctantly hurried from the room. George was putting his guitar away as the instructor spoke to him.

“George Potter, this is a red letter day for the music world! I can sense it!” He was almost rubbing his hands together with delight as he approached the young man. “Do you happen to have any more songs like that, Mr. Potter...may I call you George?”

“Of course, sir. And yes, I try to write one song every day or so. I have about fifty. Your class has been a great help to me. The tunes and words were there in my head, but you showed me how to write them down.” George snapped the latches on the guitar case and turned to leave.

“George, I just remembered something,” Dr Lawrence added eagerly, as if he was afraid to part with his new discovery. “There’s a rally next Tuesday at two. The student council asked the music department to furnish some entertainment. I think you’re ready for something like that. You’ll have to go through the audition process, but in your case that’s just a formality. Would you help us out? Just one or two songs?”

George hesitated for a moment. Performing before this small class was one thing, but thousands of university students!? That was something else entirely.

The instructor could see George was a bit overawed by his request.

“Look, I know you can do it. You should do it; for yourself and for the school.” The professor had a far away look in his eyes as he continued. “There was something about the way you sang that song. You have an extraordinary gift. You shouldn’t hide it.”

George fidgeted for a moment. He glanced down and seem to study the label on his guitar case. then he looked up as he spoke. “Sir, if you think I can do it, I’ll be glad to give it a try.” he answered finally. He could see the older man was delighted.

“Good! Good! Come by Tuesday morning and we’ll go over the program together.”

## TWELVE

George stood to one side of a large platform. The stage faced the stadium seats, which were filling fast. The occasion was the University of California’s Founders’ Day. The program would include a few speeches and much entertainment. There was a rock band on the bill preceding George.

Professor Lawrence came hurrying up. He was a little out of breath. His huffing and puffing could have been from the exertion, or his excitement. The music instructor had heard George’s songs that morning, two new ones, and he couldn’t wait to see the reaction of the crowd.

“How’re you feeling, George?” panted the instructor.

“Got butterflies, sir, a whole flock of em!” George mumbled.

The stadium wasn’t entirely full, but the program started on time. Several thousand spectators, students and faculty, had turned out for the colorful event, and more were arriving.

First, a group from the drama department enacted a vignette depicting the founding of the university system. They received a modest amount of applause. Next, the president of the university made a short speech describing the growth of the institute of

higher learning. There were several other speeches, including one by the student body president, who subtly asked for a few changes in future school policy.

Following the speeches came more amateur acts, and the rock band was introduced to scattered enthusiasm from their fans. The band played several numbers and the crowd was very appreciative. A few students even started dancing on the track and in the stands. At last the band excused themselves. There were loud groans from their followers and a few students got up to leave.

Then it was George's turn.

The student body president gave a short introduction:

"Here's a guy who caused some real excitement at the auditions. I give you, George Potter!"

George felt something like a heavy stone in the pit of his stomach. His legs went all wobbly as he struggled up the steps to the stage. There was some polite applause, followed by a wave of fidgeting as he fumbled with the tuning. He'd already tuned it, but now the G chord sounded out of whack. Perspiration broke out on his forehead. Someone in the crowd began to clap in rhythm and the assembly took it up: The unmistakable sound of impatience.

From his left he heard Dr. Lawrence trying to get his attention.

"George? The instrument's tuned just fine. Now, go ahead and sing! Just like you did this morning."

George had been a little concerned he'd be nervous, and perhaps his nerves might affect his performance. He also wondered if the audition had just been a fluke, that maybe his blood sugar had been high that day, but as he looked across at the thousands of students and faculty in and entering the stands, he got the same flush of emotion he'd felt days earlier. As he took his place before the microphone, a strange energy seemed to radiate from his chest. It was as if the crowd was feeding him with power, and because this audience was so much larger than the audition committee, the feeling was even more overwhelming.

Finally, George began to play the intro. The music became a tangible part of him, and he closed his eyes for a moment as he began to feel the pulse of it. The guitar was plugged into the sound system and as the intricate rhythms sounded across the big stadium, the crowd quieted. They'd never heard such playing! It had a great beat, but was different somehow. The sound got right down into their blood and they began to sway and clap to the music!

Suddenly, George felt a sharp pain in his chest, and he had to stop playing. He bent forward to relieve the pain. Apparently his audience thought he was bowing and there was some scattered applause. Then the feeling inside him started to swell. The crowd sat like statues. There was only the sound of the campanile chiming the half hour.

At length he started to play again and could almost hear the relieved sigh that came from the stands. It was upon him once more; that same expansive euphoria. He felt it grow until he thought he could hold it no longer. He sensed singing would relieve the pressure, so he began to sing. Emotions came swooping in on him like a fragrant whirlwind. The swelling within continued like some marvelous benign cancer as the feelings that filled his mind and heart poured out of him and flooded across the cinder track; up and around the students in the stands.

He'd never experimented with drugs, but he'd read about them, and it was as if he'd received some marvelous hallucinogenic injection. It flowed through him and he experienced something intangible; like his soul separating from his body and moving out toward his listeners as he sought to imbue them with the emotions that filled his mind. He could only feel he had enormous power over them, and he became drunk with it as he moved out and rocked them with the positive meaning of his song.

As he seemed to float closer and closer to them, he could see clearly their rapt expressions, their eyes glued to the singer before them, their lips slightly parted. Here was a voice and message they had never heard before, and he reached out and touched them, embracing them in a mantle of sound. They sat transfixed until the song ended. Then there was a peaceful silence, and no one heard the bell ringing for the next class. They heard only the echo of the song and the singer.

At last it began--the applause. Slowly at first as if in disbelief, then building to a crescendo that rocked the stadium. They roared and whistled and stomped, and begged for more! More! More of George Potter!

George was almost in tears from the flow of adulation that soared over him. He could see Lydia in the front row and she was crying and laughing with happiness. Wait! Was it only his imagination? He thought he also saw, sitting next to Lydia, a little red-bearded man in a bright green warm-up suit. Oberon, the leprechaun, was grinning from ear to ear as he gave George a big thumbs-up salute!

As the applause died, George pulled himself together, struck a thundering E minor chord and began to sing and play again. The audience quieted immediately and sat down, listening in spellbound silence to the phenomenon on the stage. This time it was a quiet ballad, so beautiful there was a rustling sound across the stadium as handkerchiefs and Kleenexes were applied to weepy eyes.

When he finished they stood and saluted him with applause even stronger than before. George bowed and bowed. Then he prepared to leave the stage.

"No! No!" they cried in one voice.

"More! More! We want More!"

George didn't know what to do. A delegation of hundreds of students poured onto the field and toward the platform, their hands reaching up to him; calling to him; pleading with him to give them more of the uplifting experience. It was better than pot, LSD or any drugs they could imagine, and they wanted to keep the high they were on.

He blushed, plugged his guitar in again, and went back to the microphone. He sang for them; song after song of love, happiness and a world filled with the wonders of hope and fulfillment. And they sat there in the stands or on the track listening or standing to applaud him all the early summer afternoon. Classes were forgotten as he sang on and on. Some became quite burned in the warm sunshine, yet they were oblivious to everything but the singer on the platform.

Eventually the sun began to sink beyond San Francisco Bay, and a magnificent sigh escaped from the crowd as the student body president came forward and asked them to please let George Potter have some peace.

As Danny descended from the stage, the crowd rushed out to envelop him. They lifted him up on their shoulders and carried him in triumph around the field like an olympic champion. Near him in the mob he could hear Dr. Lawrence calling out to him, but he couldn't make out the words for the cheering crowd. Finally they set him down

and the crowd slowly dwindled away. Many hesitated as they left the field, looking back one more time at the amazing singer. Lydia came up to him and held him. She could see he was exhausted, but there was a look of great joy in his eyes.

“George, I love you,” she whispered. “And from what’s happened here today, so does everyone else.”

Dr. Lawrence was standing nearby. Next to him stood a handsome, sharply dressed young man. The crowd had gone and only the four of them were left on the field. The music instructor came up to George and Lydia, and the blond haired young man followed.

“George, here’s someone who wants to meet you.” There was a look of total admiration in the professor’s eyes.

“George Potter, this is Paul Connor.”

Even in his exhausted state, George realized he was shaking hands with The Star Maker, the hottest impresario in show business. Both the singer and his wife also realized they’d seen him before, on the Late Show. Twenty years earlier, Connor had been a major child actor. He’d starred in many films; singing, dancing and charming his way into the hearts of America. As he grew older and reached the awkward stage, movie parts came few and far between. Instead of becoming discouraged, Connor turned his energies to helping others. His connections and show business moxie pushed many talented performers to stardom.

“Extraordinary talent,” exclaimed the young man. “Extraordinary!” Paul Connor’s voice was soft but positive.

“Didn’t I tell you he was special?!” enthused the professor.

“You did! You certainly did, but I never expected anything like this!” exclaimed the talent agent.

George introduced Lydia to the two men as they moved off the field together.

George was too frazzled from his performance to make more than brief replies, but somehow arrangements were made for them to meet with Connor over breakfast the next morning. Though the young agent didn’t say it in so many words, he’d not only been impressed with George, but even more so by the crowd’s reaction. There was no doubt Paul Connor, Star Maker, had plans for ol’ George.

## THIRTEEN

George and Lydia awoke at nine AM with a yawn and a warm embrace. Lydia sighed, stretched and said. “Are you going to call Paul Connor?” she purred from the crook of his arm.

“Sure, I guess so. You suppose he was sincere about making your little daddio a star?”

“Darling, you are a star, whether the world knows it or not. He did seem pretty sure about you yesterday at the rally.”

He gave her a squeeze, then rolled out of bed and picked up the phone book.

“It’s gotta be in here somewhere,” he said leafing through the book. “Ah, here it is. Fairmont Hotel.”



He sat on the edge of the bed. Lydia slithered across to him and snuggled against him as he dialed and asked the hotel operator if Connor was awake. He was assured the young impresario was already up and making calls to Los Angeles. His line was clear and the operator dialed his room.

“Hello, Mr. Connor...uh...Paul. This is George Potter. Are you hungry? Breakfast in forty five minutes. We’re almost next door in the Nob Hill Towers. There’s a button on the mail box. Right! See you in a half hour.”

He replaced the receiver and unwound himself from Lydia’s embrace.

“Move it dahlin’ He’ll be here in a demi heure.”

She groaned, yawned, and put on her robe, while George called Liza on the intercom to order breakfast. A little over a half hour later the foyer buzzer rang and Liza admitted the agent. Over breakfast Connor quickly got down to business.

“George,” he began. I’ve already talked with Dick Baum of NGM records this morning. I told him about you, and frankly he doesn’t believe you exist. He demands proof positive. Do you suppose you two could fly down to Hollywood with me on Monday to show him your stuff?”

George’s eyes were shining. “You sure work fast, Paul. What do you think Hon.?”

“I don’t think it would hurt to skip a class or two for such a worthy cause,” Lydia answered with a grin. “Now, however, if you gentlemen will excuse me I need to get ready for school. The impresario rose slightly in his chair as Lydia left the room. After Lydia had gone, Connor studied the young man who sat across from him in silence.

“You’re an attractive son-of-a-gun,” said the young talent executive finally. “But, I tell you what. Would you consider...ah..your beard? It’s a beauty, but it hides your face. The general public likes to have everything exposed. Or as much as is decent.” He hesitated a moment. “Is there any chance you’d consider shaving it off?”

“My beard?” asked George with a puzzled look on his face. “Well, I don’t know. I’ve had this beard for years, but...Well, okay, I’ll shave it off if you think I should.”

“It may be curiosity on my part. I’d like to see what you really look like, and believe me, I know the public. They’ll want to know the same thing. There will be a public. You can be sure of that, George!”

The two sat talking for a while. Paul outlined the steps to George’s career as if he was already famous. In the eyes of the young entertainment industry leader, George was already on top, though the actual moment was still months away. It was almost as if he could read the future.

Then the two men fell silent and Paul sat staring at the grad student across from him. The look unnerved George a bit, and as if he could see he was making his new protégé uncomfortable, Paul Connor smiled and excused himself.

“Please ask your wife to pardon my lousy manners, but I really have to run. I’ll have the plane tickets sent over this afternoon. We’ll take the Monday nine A. M. United Flight from SF International.”

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The following afternoon George and Lydia spent some time playing with George Two. Then, as they put him down for his nap, George grew thoughtful.

“How do you think I’d look without my beard?” he asked with a grin.

“Oh George, you’re not going to shave it off?! I love your beard! I’ve never seen you without it.”

“The man wants it off. I think it’s time I shaved it off anyway. I can always grow it back. Come on. Let’s see what the ol’ boy looks like shorn.”

George took scissors to the bathroom. Lydia followed him. He began to cut away the beard and could see Lydia’s pained expression reflected in the mirror. When he had the beard as close as he could with the scissors, He checked his progress.

“What a bum,” he observed, rubbing the dark stubble. Lydia grinned a sad little smile at the tragedy that was taking place. He washed his face then applied lather and steamed his beard in a hot face towel for a couple of minutes. He reapplied lather and began to shave with a twin blade. It took a little time; the stubble kept clogging the razor.

Finally he wiped away the last of the lather, turned toward his wife and gave her a tentative little smirk.

“Well?” he asked.

She stood there for a few moments just staring at him, not saying anything, like he was some kind of freak.

“What’s the matter?” he asked, glancing back at the mirror.,

“George,” she said, her eyes widening with amazement. “You’re absolutely adorable!”

“I am?” he asked her reflection.

“Yes! Absolutely...absolutely adorable! Give us a big smile,” she demanded softly.

George turned and gave her a big toothy grin.

“My God, George! I can’t believe it! That smile! It’s dazzling! Makes my orbs ache. You make Donny Osmond’s smile look like he’s frowning.”

George stood there grinning and she stood there looking for a while, then she added: “But something is odd; or at least different. I’ve only seen snapshots of you without your beard, but somehow you’re not the same. In those pictures you weren’t...well...so ostentatious, I guess that’s the word.”

She tilted her head to one side as she studied him.

“Your teeth--that’s it! I thought there was something. Lately they seem to be bigger and whiter. What have you been doing to them?”

“I don’t know...nothing. I really hadn’t noticed. The beard hid a lot of things. But I think you’re right. George bared his teeth, made a buck-toothed-beaver face and lisped,

“Mah teeth ya thay? Hathen’t ya heard that moht big tharth hath big teeth?!”

She laughed as he winked at her. “And what about the sparkle in your eyes?” she exclaimed.

“You like?” he asked.

“I like!” she agreed enthusiastically.

“Gee, if you say so.” he said looking into the mirror and giving himself a big grin. “I am kinda cute at that.”

“Oh you!” she laughed. Inside, however, she had serious new feelings. She already adored ol’ George, but this New George?!... Funny, but it was almost like she was falling in love all over again with the charming man in the mirror.

He grabbed her playfully and gave her a big, lingering kiss. The embrace went on and on, and when they finally moved apart she gave him that special look of hers.

“I know,” he breathed. “Me too.” He took her hand and they smiled at each other as they walked back into their bedroom.

## FOURTEEN

Paul Connor glanced out the port beside him. The 747 was making a wide curving arc as it started its approach into L.A. International. They were over the coastline and Connor observed the Pacific was sparkling blue-green in the morning sun. The beach communities and even Smogville itself were brilliant in the sunlight. The day was so clear and bright, the city dazzled the eye. There were still a few shabby corners to the old town, but it was home and L.A. looked beautiful to him.

Connor chuckled to himself. The entertainment capitol of the world was making ready to receive her new King. He looked over at his protégé. My god what a transformation with the beard gone. The unveiling had revealed an extraordinary being.

He's gorgeous! thought the impresario. Even if he could barely carry a tune, he had more going for him than most of the current pop idols. Connor watched the reactions of the stewardesses who served them. When George looked up to acknowledge the stewardess who brought his coffee, he gave her a smile and the girl almost dropped her tray. She struggled to keep her composure, but it would be an understatement to say the singer had made an impression on the young lady. Potter had the kind of handsome, good guy face that drew people to it. It was a rare blend of ruggedness with just a hint of sensitivity. Later, Paul saw their stewardess at the far end of the passenger compartment whispering behind her hand to her compatriots and looking their way. The agent almost broke out laughing when each gal came by on some pretext or other to get a closer look. Each went away with that ooo-la-la look on her face.

Yet George Potter seemed oblivious to all the admiration he was receiving.

Modest, too, Connor observed. That may not last.

George was concentrating on the notation sheets he held on the portfolio in his lap, busily jotting down notes and words. From time to time, he'd lift his left hand slightly, and move his fingers as if he was playing the frets of an invisible guitar. His eyes would stare blankly ahead for a few moments, his lips parted; moving as if forming words. Then he would return to his composing.

He's got it all. Looks, humility, charisma and musical genius! thought Connor. George Potter, you are going to be my greatest achievement!

He glanced at Lydia who was sitting between them. He really liked George's wife. She was a very pretty girl with long naturally wavy blond hair that rested on her shoulders. She had a peaches and cream complexion that really didn't need make-up. Her eyes, studying the Newsweek she held were a blue that matched the expensive pantsuit she wore.

Connor suddenly felt the pang of a new emotion go through him as he looked at the young couple. Oh, shit! Not again! He recognized the symptoms. He was becoming just a little jealous of Lydia, the wife of his new star.

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Connor's chauffeured limousine carried them quickly from the airport into Hollywood and to the door of NGM records.

"Before we go in, I've got to tell you a little about Dick Baum." cautioned the young impresario. He's a unique human being. That much you and he have in common, George. He's a business genius and can spot real talent in a minute. But he always keeps his cool, so don't expect a great outward show of enthusiasm. You can tell when he's impressed though. Just watch his cigar.

Connor led them into the impressive building that housed NGMs offices and studios. The trio stood inside the lobby for a moment and took in the bigger-than-life posters of some of the worlds greatest pop recording artists. Connor then ushered them to the reception desk that sat like an island in a sea of deep red carpet. The receptionist recognized Connor immediately and pushed a button that connected her with Dick Baum's secretary.

"You may go right back, Mr. Connor. He's expecting you."

As they moved by her, the receptionist gave George an admiring look and resisted the impulse to sigh. George carried his guitar and portfolio as he followed Paul and Lydia down a long wide hallway.

Baum's secretary waved them on into the office of a short baldheaded man with an immense cigar thrust in his mouth. He got up from his chair and seemed to move almost resignedly around the desk to greet Connor.

"Paul, what is all the excitement about?" he growled good-naturedly from the side of his mouth as he looked at the young couple with the Star Maker.

"Dick, this is Lydia and George Potter. Potters, meet Dick Baum."

The men shook hands and Baum motioned Lydia to a chair, but kept George standing and walked around the singer, as if appraising a statue.

Finally Dick Baum stepped in front of George. His round cheeks hollowed out for a moment as he took a big drag on his cigar. The tip glowed almost white hot. Then he stuck out his lower lip and sent a jet of white smoke shooting straight up toward the ceiling.

Lydia was fascinated. George was spellbound. Paul Connor was delighted! So far, so good!

"He looks okay, but can he sing?" demanded the recording executive.

"You want to hear for yourself? I refuse to have my word doubted for another moment!"

Snorted Paul Connor with mock indignity. "George would be so kind as to show Doubting Dick here your stuff?"

"Hold on a minute," interrupted the recording executive as George started to remove his guitar from it's case. "Let's do this up right. I think studio three is vacant. Let's hold the audition in there."

Lydia and Paul could see this strictly-business-man was beginning to soften. George, however, remained a bit awed by the little man.

Baum escorted them to a spacious recording studio. An engineer was puttering around, apparently setting up for a session.

"Charlie, would you mind helping us with a little audition?" Baum asked the man through another puff of smoke.

“Sure, Mr. Baum--ready in a jiffy!”

George was directed to a stool and a Telefunken mike was lowered into position. Another mike was placed near the mouth of his guitar. George watched all the preparations with great interest and then thanked the sound man as he made a last adjustment and said:

“Good luck, kid!”

Dick Baum had taken Paul Connor and Lydia into the booth across the studio from George, and they were seated in plush chairs behind the engineer. The sound man asked for a mike check and George played a few chords and smiled as he went la, la, la into the microphone that was practically touching his nose.

George could see they were rolling a tape on him. It gave him a moments qualms, but when the engineer pointed to him, he began to play the intro of the new ballad he'd composed on the plane. He played and sang of forests and lakes and the beauty of the world. He closed his eyes through the last part of the song and could actually see the sights he told about in his song. He played a rising arpeggio as his voice went up and up and ended the song as if whispering into infinity.

There was a heavy silence following the song. He opened his eyes and looked toward the booth. They were all standing and Dick Baum was puffing like steam engine going up a grade. Connor was watching the smoke cloud and suddenly he grabbed the little recording executive and the two of them tried to dance a polka, but the engineering booth wasn't quite large enough.

The engineer was beaming from ear to ear and gave the singer a big thumbs up!

Lydia, Baum and Connor came out into the studio and rushed up to George. Lydia kissed him, Connor hugged him and Dick Baum puffed until he almost scorched his lips, the cigar burned so close.

Connor was the first to speak. “Come on Dick--spit it out! He's fabulous--right?!”

“Right, Right, Right!” agreed Baum. “Where'd he get that song? I can't tell which I liked best. The song or the singer--guess they're all one!”

George was grinning. “Just a little thing I knocked out on the plane.”

“He has a suitcase full of them,” Lydia offered proudly.

“Then let's get together with the legal department and get things rolling,” Dick Baum was almost smiling. Later, Connor told the he'd never seen the recording executive so excited about a performer.

“Paul, one suggestion,” Baum offered the Star Maker with an appraising glance at George. “I think you might get him some acting lessons. When Hollywood gets a load of your

boy, he's gonna need 'em”

## FIFTEEN

Old Mrs. Minor looked around at the crowd that packed the auditorium. She adjusted her glasses and settled back. The old lady hadn't missed a Mike Griffin show in years. The host and guest comedians made jokes about her perfect attendance. She enjoyed the notoriety, but most of all, she loved the show. She adored the show

biz razzle dazzle, a throw back to those glorious days of vaudeville. She'd been a hooper in the early years; danced in the chorus of many a hit Broadway musical. Now she enjoyed the vicarious applause and glitter of America's most popular variety show.

Tonight there was an added pre-show tension in the air. She could feel the excitement. Something special was in store for the studio audience and the nation who would view the show the next night.

Back stage, the usual last minute panic was having its effect on everyone. The assistant producer was particularly excited as he placed the first performer in position. He seemed to sense here was a future star of the first magnitude. The rehearsals had brought the entire cast, crew and orchestra to their feet when this George Potter performed. He couldn't remember when there had been such a flutter over a newcomer.

The warm-up was over and the countdown began. The video tapes were rolling. there was the cue for the overture, a dance number with the Troy Devane Dancers. The opening dance was followed by a short scene change that would be edited out later. There was a fanfare and a voice from somewhere announced:

"And...Now...HERE'S MIKE GRIFFIN!"

The applause signs flashed and the audience responded. Mike Griffin smiled and welcomed his audience. He listed the stars who were to appear.

"...But first, ladies and gentlemen, we have a young man who is making his first appearance anywhere. He has not been heard on record or radio, or been seen on television, stage or screen. But he will be...believe me...he will be!"

During the introduction, George stood a little nervously off in the second set. Behind him, on the cyc, a spotlight formed a crescent moon and there were tiny twinkling lights for stars. Blue plastic sheeting was blown by fans to represent the ripples on a lake. George was wearing a simple white silk shirt and tight white pants. He stood in the shade of a giant plastic weeping willow.

He could barely hear the host intro, but then the expectant applause began and the orchestra took up his introduction. A historic moment was unfolding. As in rehearsal, George stepped from under the willow. He was playing a guitar completely inlaid with white mother of pearl to match his costume. he played and smiled and sang one of the songs from his first, yet unreleased album. It was a song that was both happy, the sad. A song that made one think, and consider the condition of all mankind. The voice that flowed through the crowd pulsed with feeling.

Mrs. Minor felt all goose bumpy. My goodness, what a voice! What a song! What a face! She thought to herself. A face that every woman, child and many men would love. The face belonged to George Potter. She glanced around her the rest of the audience sat transfixed as he sang, a dazzling flame that burned so brightly on the stage before them.

When the song ended, the audience sat spellbound in silence for several long moments.

Another pause that would have to be edited before air time. They they jumped to their feet, almost as one. Screaming, whistling, hollering, crying for the George Potter who bowed and blushed and smiled. That Smile! He was simply adorable!

Mrs. Miner's eyes were shining with tears as she stood applauding with the rest of the worshippers. Never in all her hears as a Mike Griffin devotee had she seen or

heard anyone like George Potter. Yes it was an historic moment and she was proud that she was there to share it.

Mike Griffin stood to the side of the stage as the applause went on and on. The audience screamed for more. The ovation would have to be cut down later if they would have to eliminate one of their other acts. Mike Griffin didn't care. He was absolutely beaming with pride as if he had been the one who had discovered this new, future ruler of American hearts.

As the waves of applause poured over him, George felt a surge of love and happiness. This was it. This was where he belonged! At length, Mike Griffin shook George's hand and motioned for him to leave the stage. After a while they were able to get the audience calmed down enough to continue the show.

Word leaked out and George's performance was reviewed in all the major papers the next morning, before the program was aired to the nation. It was rating month and the result of the advance publicity was unprecedented. That night, the Mike Griffin show grabbed the highest ratings in its history.

By Sunday morning, the whole country was buzzing with news of the new singer. Those who had missed the show were chided for their misfortune. Radio stations were deluged with requests for song by George Potter. Most of the D.J.s had never heard of him, and on Monday, N.G.M. records was flooded with requests for demo records. The record stores suffered a similar fate. From teenyboppers to grandmothers, mobs jammed the stores, screaming for records by George Potter.

"Who is George Potter?" some wanted to know. The public demand added to the pandemonium at N.G.M. Night crews were put on in the pressing plant to work around the clock in order to fill the orders that poured in. Within a week there was little doubt in the minds of Americans that George Potter was the new King of show biz. D.J.s were forced to play at least one Potter selection for every other artist they featured. If they didn't, their listeners would spin the dial to a station that was playing one of his new songs. There were solid hours set aside to play the entire disc. Local advertisers bid extravagant sums to sponsor George Potter Hours.

In the meantime, George and Lydia sat in Paul Connor's living room and listened to Paul take one call after another requesting George to appear coast-to-coast again. Manufacturers wanted his endorsement for their products and Hollywood was calling with film offers. Finally Connor had to install a switch board with young ladies to filter the calls. Outside, fans clamored at the gates for a glimpse of the new idol.

## SIXTEEN

Impatiently, John J. Prentiss jabbed at the intercom for the umpteenth time and shouted into the box. "Miss Lovely, what the hell is taking so long to get me Paul Connor?!"

"Please Mr. Prentess, we're doing everything we can. The lines are jammed," came the reply.

THE NBC vice-president winced and put a hand to his stomach as he groaned in desperation. "Keep trying, Miss Lovely. Keep trying!"

He switched off the intercom and reached with trembling hand for the right top drawer of his desk. He extracted a bottle of Mallox. He didn't even bother to measure-- just opened the bottle and took a healthy swig of the chalky liquid. He made a face and returned the bottle to the drawer, then lay back in his high back chair and tried to relax. Impossible! He'd barely slept since Saturday night; since he'd seen this George Potter on ABC's Mike Griffin Show. NBC's Friday night was slipping and he needed a summer replacement that would bolster the ratings and hopefully keep at least the puny audience they had.

Never before had he been struck by a performer like Potter. The young man possessed the most electrifying personality he'd seen since Elvis, and Potter appeared to have a lot more going for him than the swivel hipped rock star.

Printess watched his family as they watched Potter. His wife was all ga-ga and the younger Printess', a teenage boy and girl had completely flipped over the singer. They'd been talking about nothing else all weekend. They and their friends were already forming a George Potter fan club.

Printess himself might have discounted the response of the young singer if he hadn't felt the same way. The new find was a spellbinder if there ever was one. He was a throwback from those great revivalists who could mesmerize their congregations. George Potter came across the television like no entertainer before him. His charisma poured forth and enclosed the viewer in a private world of enchantment. Printess laughed, then winced again at the sharp pain in his stomach. It was almost as if Potter was some sort of faith healer with poetry and music and with the soothing, inspiring power of his voice. Printess recalled how he'd felt during the several hours following the Mike Griffin Show. The pain in his stomach had been forgotten. His children had been almost respectful; a miracle in itself. That night, he and his wife had enjoyed a tender scene reminiscent of their honeymoon.

The next day the kids had gone out to buy all the George Potter records they could find. This time, dad was treating, which surprised the hell out of them. But none of the record stores had any records by the new sensation.

Fortunately, one of the reviewers had mentioned that this George Potter was the newest discover of the star-maker, Paul Connor. All weekend he'd tried to get the NBC policy makers together for a meeting. He'd been in the business long enough to know that the other networks wouldn't let any grass grow when it came to such an obvious money maker as Potter. Unfortunately, everyone with any NBC clout was incommunicado.

Finally at this morning's eight o'clock meeting, he'd played back the Minimax video tape he'd made of the future super star. Then he'd demanded one million dollars to get the ball rolling. NBC needed Potter, must have Potter or they were all doomed to oblivion!

He'd painted a gloomy picture of what would happen if someone else got their hands on the boy. It was his greatest sales pitch, he smiled at the memory. He'd been positively inspired. God, now if he could only get through to Connor. he groaned and was about to reach for the Mallox again when the phone on his desk rang. He made a lunge for it sending himself and his chair crashing to the floor. Finally he righted everything and grabbed the phone.

"Heh...hello," he gasped, "P...Printess here!"



The voice at the other end sounded youthful and exuberant. "John--John? that you? this is Paul."

"Great Hercules! it's about time," Printess said struggling to get back into his chair. "I'm not going to mince words, Paul. You haven't sold that boy to anyone else, have you? Don't you dare say you have. I have a razor blade poised at my jugger vein!"

Paul laughed. "Jesus, John, don't do anything desperate! I know George is the greatest thing since the hydrogen bomb, but he's got a long life ahead of him. There should be enough to go around."

"You have sold him...you bastard! Ohhhhhhhh!" he grabbed for his stomach and his secretary rushed in with a glass of water and a pill which Printess gulped as the water from the glass splashed down his thousand dollar Pierre Cardin suit.

"JOHN? John, you still there? came the voice from Los Angeles.

The executive groaned, "Yes, but not for long."

"I sold Potter for on special on ABC. That's all. CBS called, but as usual can't get their shit together with any kind of a deal. What are you offering?"

"You know how conservative the top brass are here. I could only scrape up six programs to the us started. 1984 Summer replacement.

"How much in the buckola department?" demanded the voice on the other end.

"Money...money...money. Is that all you can think of?"

"Right...right. How Much?"

"The turds upstairs would only kick in one millions dollars for this experiment. I had to convince them the kid was worth every nickel."

There was a barely audible gasp from the other end as Connor tried to keep his cool. There was a short pause before he replied.

"I'd call that damned imaginative wheeling and dealing!"

"Look, Paul," Continued John Printess. "You and I know you've got the hottest property of the decade...possibly the century. IF the guys upstairs had any sense at all, I could have got them to commit to a ten year contract, at least. That would have been imaginative. But, imagination is one thing they lack. That's why they hired me, and that's why I have to hire George Potter.

"I just want to make sure when this contract expires, I get first crack at the next one. I know the price will go up. Just hope you don't get too greedy. At least put NBC in position for first negotiations."

The executive could tell his young star making friend was more than satisfied with the deal.

"You can count on it, John. I speak for George Potter when I say we appreciate your confidence in his talent."

"Just try to get your butts to New York next week so we can get the ball rolling. June is just around the corner" added the NBC executive. The pain in his abdomen was already beginning to subside and he gave a sigh of relief. He wished there was some way he could retain his cool and not flip his wiggeeo every time a crisis like this came up. The voice on the other end of the line was saying.

"we'll be in your town next week to see Guinness of ABC. Now how about a lunch meeting to kick things off?"

"How about a reception for Potter with the brass? They might be more willing to fork over the money if they could see their new star in person>"

“Okay then...Tuesday at five P.M. your time. See ya!”

Paul hung up and his businessman’s face turned to a little boys, similar to the child star still seen on TV’s late show. Grinning broadly, he leaped and capered around the room.

The handsome couple on the leather couch laughed to see this contrast in personality which made their friend so much fun too be with. In fact, to live with. They were staying with Connor until they could rent a suitable place of their own.

“You’re in George,” laughed Connor. “They are all fighting for you. CBS will be next. Last and too late as usual. But wait until contract time. You can bet we can name any figure we want.”

George and Lydia watched the agent finally come to rest on the arm of the chair opposite them. They were new and green to all this show biz business, they hardly knew what he was talking about. They already had plenty of money so couldn’t get overly excited about making more

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They entered the large NBC reception room to the friendly accompaniment of clinking champagne glasses. Paul Connor stepped back and took Lydia’s hand, allowing George to Precede them into the room. The singer wore a white vested suit with a white on white shirt and tie. The room fell silent for a moment as everyone turned to stare. there was a wave of murmured approval from the executive wives, and though the urbane New Yorkers tried to hide it under a veneer of indifference, their eyes betrayed the obvious excitement the young man’s presence brought into the room. John Printess hurried forward to receive his quests.

“George Potter--this is an honor, Sir! Congratulations on your instant success.”

George beamed and blushed slightly which brought another murmur from the matrons in the room. This George Potter was really lovable.

Printess led the Potters around the room and introduced them to NBCs top brass. Connor trailed behind. He already knew most of them, from the chairman of the board down to a vast assortment of vice presidents, wives and husbands. All came under the charm and charisma of his new protégé. Finally Printess led them near a small platform where a guitar leaned against a stool. George needed no more than this suggestion. He took up the guitar, checked if for tune and sat down on the stool. To the accompaniment of soft guitar chords, he made a simple speech, thanking them for their confidence in him and for this warm reception. Then he began to sing. The crowd moved closer, though George’s voice had great carrying power, even when he sang pianissimo.

He finished the song and there was not a sound. Not so much as champagne glass tinkle or chink of ice. This strange phenomenon of silence was to follow every song he would ever sing in public. His listeners were literally entranced. It was almost like hypnotic therapy--this mystical, magical euphoria that bathed every soul when he sang. Then the moment would pass and the applause would come. Slowly at first, then it would build to a crescendo of adoration. It always embarrassed George a little, this power he had over people. Yet it was an integral part of him, like the fingers that played his magic melodies.

## SEVENTEEN

The ABC Special became broadcast history, and when George move on to NBC, the network welcomed him with open arms. The new weekly TV hour was an immediate success. NBC's Friday night ratings soared as more and more people tuned in and turned on to George Potter. As his popularity increased, critics, sociologists, psychologists and philosophers made great attempts to air their opinions of the new phenomenon. They could rhapsodize, fantasize and try to analyze, but few could criticize the new show biz wonder. He was beyond description. Beyond the fallibility of mere words. They were sure he must be only human, yet he seemed to loom larger than life.

Was he another Elvis? That comparison seemed weak and lacked credibility. Elvis' image had been mostly sensual--a mere sex symbol. George Potter was more than that. True, woman of all ages adored him to distraction, but nearly every man and boy also admired him for his homely wisdom and the optimism he projected in his songs.

The religious hesitated to call him, Messiah, though there was a quality in the message of his songs, speech and behavior that made them wonder.

Poets compared him to Sandburg, yet that description lacked strength, since the weight of Potter's word-images were more profound than any poet in memory.

Most of the public saw it immediately. The simple truth was. George Potter was Love!

That was what he preached, but in such a way his message became an epidemic that spread through every heart and mind that heard him.

His music? That was easier for the critics to put a finger on.

The millions of music fans, realized he had brought with him a revolution in music, just as Elvis and the Beatles had done before him. He combined the best qualities of folk, soul, rock, disco, country and classical and fused it into a new style for his generation.

Some tried to describe his voice. Perhaps the most concise analysis was written on the cover notes on the back of his first album: George Potter's voice has that natural quality everyone can relate to, but it has a great difference that sets it apart from any voice before him. His wide range gives his singing extraordinary flexibility He can spin husky whispered high notes in triple pianissimo or his voice can cut like surgical steel. His lower register may thunder like brass or caress like woodwinds. It is a unique instrument belonging to only one unique person--George Potter!

It was an amazing yet human voice, but it was only a vehicle for his thoughts and ideas. the means with which he could project his philosophy to the world; the poetry that could caress the soul or persuade the listener that all was not as hopeless as it seemed.

People clung to his ideas. This was a generation that was immersed in a gloom of pessimism that had been touched by the dehumanizing plague of automation and affluence. They had lost the ability or desire to create.

Another thing that set George apart was that people listened when he sang. The idols of the past had always been drowned out by the clamor and hysteria of the crowds

who adored them. At a George Potter concert, the crowd might go wild in anticipation; might wax hysterical when he made his entrance, go into ecstatic glee when he finished a song or even clap to keep time when it was appropriate. But mostly, they listened.

The power of his personality flowed out into the waiting audience, and over and around them. They reached out and took him and devoured his delicious dreams with their minds and hearts. Within them, his visions created a soothing balm of peace and tranquility, a glimpse of a better world there within their grasp. The songs might be a joyous celebration of love and happiness that lifted them up and carried them, or he might sing of beauty and hope. Whatever the song, whatever the dreams and wonders they saw in his mind; they listened, they responded, they worshipped.

TIME MAGAZINE--June 29, 1985. Just what is a George Potter? an interview with James Arden.

The new show biz phenomenon, George Potter is currently the brightest burning meteor in our galaxy of stars. So bright does he blaze that he has eclipsed even the memory of the legendary Elvis. There is a big difference between our new idol and the late swivel-hipped singer. By some miracle, he has in the short year of his success, lifted the low spirits of this country and nearly every English speaking being within range of our satellites, to a new height of optimism.

Critics are unanimous in their praise of his talent. The big controversy being--How does he do it?!

No one knows for sure, but most people feel very strongly about George Potter. we interviewed hundreds of George Potter fans from every walk of life, and here is the general consensus of opinion.

Q. What happens to you when you hear George Potter?

A. George Potter is the best prescription a doctor can give. Makes me feel wonderful. Like a new person.

Q. Who is George Potter.

A. He's the greatest guy in the world!

Q. What do you think of George Potter?

A. Love 'im...love 'im!

Later we interviewed the star himself, along with his lovely wife Lydia in their home In Marin County.

Q. George, it's been said that your greatest gift is communication with your public. How do you do it?

A. Jim, that's a question I can't really answer. I don't understand it myself. All I know is that just before I start to sing or speak, I get this big delicious pain in my chest. It's like my heart is going to burst. It scared hell out of me at first (Laughs) I thought I was having a heart attack. But when I start to sing, the feeling is fantastic. Like flying. It just seems to pour out of me. It know it sound weird, but the great feeling I have must somehow transmit itself to the folks who are listening. It's a strange and wonderful emotion. At least to me it is.

Q. What do you think it is, Mrs. Potter?

A. I think it must be Love. George is a very loving man, but the love he gives his publish has got to be the greatest love in the world. It takes a lot out of him. After a performance he sometimes sleeps for twelve hours.

Q. How do you write your songs, George?

A. Well, you know, I was a political science major in college. I try to keep up with everything that's going on in the world. Unfortunately, these days nearly all the news is bad.

It depresses me and I know what it must be doing to the morale of the public. I try to take the negatives of the news reporters and turn it around to show the positive side.

Q. How do you do that?

A It's like Lydia said. I guess it's love I project into my songs. I try to convince my audience to love themselves, their family and their fellow beings. It works for me...I just hope I can make it work a little for the people who tune in.

And that's George Potter. I'll admit I was already a fan, but I expected to meet a cold, impersonal star. I found George potter to be warm, humble, intelligent and dedicated to the course he's made for himself. The big job of making people happy. I guess I caught the epidemic, too. The epidemic of Love...called--George Potter!

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As the weeks of Summer wore away, more and more people discovered George potter. NBC's Friday night summer replacement drew the largest audience in history, according to Neilson and ARB. The fact was, the other stations might just as well have shut down during the Potter show. No one was watching them.

Competing networks suffered a big turnover in top brass that Summer. Buck-passing became the order of the day as vice-president blamed vice-president for the failure to sign up the new superstar.

They couldn't wait until NBC's limited contract ran out so they could get a crack at America's newest obsession.

Via satellite, most of the English speaking world was watching, too, as week after week George Potter dazzled them with his personality, wisdom, and talent. It wasn't just his singing that drew them, though that was extraordinary. The thing that pulled them to the tube each Friday at eight, was what he said in his songs and the way he could project his ideas and emotions to his viewers.

Many couldn't decide which they liked best. The portion of the program where George sang to them, or toward the end of the show when the singing was over. Then he'd put down his guitar or banjo, sit on the edge of the stage and just talk to them. His philosophy was an extension of his poetry. He could put into words what most people just thought about. He would speak on different subjects each week. Sometimes it might be love, or against prejudice and bigotry. Or he'd speak to the children, perhaps to encourage them to do better in school and to honor their parents.

Sometimes he spoke of the government. He never criticized, but only suggested. He had the rare ability to cut through the smokescreen of bureaucratic mumbo-jumbo surrounding an issue and get to the heart of the matter. Often he would weigh both sides of an argument and show the best way to a logical conclusion. He gave his talks with uncanny clarity so every age group and mental ability could grasp what he said, and always with a light sense of humor that gave them an avenue of hope.

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At the end of that summer, the major networks fought like cats and dogs to get Potter. NBC won again with the largest single TV contract ever drafted. George went on with the same format--singing and talking to the people.

He continued to analyze and suggest. His ideas rang true in the hearts of the great majority. He was becoming the nation's conscience and its morale officer. In some quarters of government, they feared the benevolent power of persuasion he had over his audience.

The people listened to George Potter; quoted him, and some even acted on what he said. Amazing as it may seem, a few of his rather radical ideas were put to use. Sometimes people pressured the government to carry out his suggestions, or often some politician, hoping to curry favor with his constituents, would put a bill before Congress, based on one of Potter's suggestions. A few of them even became law.

Although he may have seemed young to the older generation, there was no credibility gap.

He appeared to be the only clear thinker they had.

## EIGHTEEN

George stood holding his guitar and bowing to the enthusiastic crowd. Most of the White House audience, led by the President, appreciated George Potter's talent. There were a few who disagreed with the philosophy of his songs, but applauded the young man who beamed at them from the platform.

"Let's give George a break, folks" announced the President, over the fading applause. "One more request and we may wear out our welcome. Perhaps he'll sing a few more songs later." These words brought on another wave of approval.

The East Room was packed; the warm bodies exuded the mixed fragrances of expensive perfume and after-shave. George wiped his brow and leaned his guitar next to his banjo. Then he stepped off the platform to his waiting fans. Many came to shake his hand. He was growing used to the adulation, but from the nation's leaders, it seemed almost as overpowering as his first concert. He could see Lydia talking to the President's wife, Mrs. Duffy. They both looked his way and smiled. The First Lady nodded her appreciation and Lydia blew him a kiss. George felt a hand on his shoulder and turned to see the President smiling at him,

"Just great as always, George!", beamed Warner Duffy. They'd met for the first time just before dinner, but like most everyone else in the country, the President felt he knew George Potter on a first name basis. "George, could I speak to you privately for a few moments?"

asked the President.

"Of course, Mr. President." answered the singer.

The President led the way out of the crowded room, through a throng of dotting fans who called out to George as they passed. The Chief Executive took his guest down the long hall to the Oval Office. The President opened the door, switched on the lights and

stood back to let George enter first. George Potter saw the legendary room for the first time.

Warner Duffy motioned George to a couch and went to a bar hidden near his desk. He poured himself a drink and turned to George.

“Coke?” he asked, knowing George seldom drank.

“Perfect” returned to the young man on the couch and handed him a glass. The President continued to stand as he sipped his own drink. He looked down at George for a few moments before he spoke.

“George,” he said finally. “You’re a student of the political scene.” He hesitated, then looked the singer straight in the eye and asked. “Tell me George. How am I doin’...as President, that is? The truth now.”

George looked up at the President before he spoke. He had made a study of Warner Duffy. Here was a man who looked every inch a president. Tall, graying at the temples, sometimes stern, but with a twinkle of humor in his eyes. Duffy was a good man, with all the best intentions in the world. He honestly wanted to bring about the changes the nation so sorely needed. But, he had one tragic disability. Warner Duffy was a liberal martyr, who had been thrown to a conservative Congress. They sat on every bill he initiated and his hands were tied. The President stood waiting for George’s answer, The smile faded from his eyes and the shoulders that stood so square and confident two years ago, drooped a little. George smiled to himself. Even presidents have dandruff.

Finally, George spoke, weighing his words carefully. “Mr. President, I’d say, with the congress you’ve been saddled with, you’re doing about the finest job any human being could be expected to do. It’s an impossible chore at best and you are getting no support from Capitol Hill.”

“Oh, then you noticed,” answered the President, with a sad smile.

Then he sat down next to the singer and looked into the glass he was holding. Maybe Warner Duffy lacks the elusive X factor or charismatic leadership, George thought. Only a few in recent history had it. Churchill, FDR, Hitler--Kennedy maybe. As with most presidents, the office had taken its toll and the man next to him already looked tired and old. His ego trip to the the White House had turned to bitter vetch, a bite that was now difficult to swallow. History would remember he’d been one of the presidents of the United States, and not much more.

The President leaned toward George. “I know I can confide in you George. It’s damned lonely up here on top and I invited you tonight, not only to commend you on the wonderful morale building job you’re doing for the nation, but to confess something. It’s damned discouraging, this job of mine. Fact it. I think Congress passes more of your bills than they do of mine. How do you do it? The people seem to listen to you when they won’t pay any attention to me.”

George tried to smile at the saddened man next to him. “Maybe you should take up the guitar, Mr. President,” joked George. Then he spoke seriously. “I think they listen to me because I can’t do them any harm. The government confuses them and their suspicious. But, I do think most of them can see you’re trying to help them. Perhaps they’re just a little disappointed your unable to do more.”

The two men sat silently for a moment. the the President smiled. “Well, only two more years to go. I guess I can mark time ‘til then. I’ll just keep plugging away at those

bastards on the Hill.” The president stood up as he continued. “Meanwhile, I might as well enjoy some of the fringe benefits. Who else in the world could have George Potter come into their home and sing for them?”

George stood up next the President and as the Chief Executive looked into George’s face, the singer could read the President’s gratitude in his eyes.

“George, how about one more song for my guests?” he asked as he led the way from the Oval Office.

“De-lighted, Mr. President,” came George’s ready reply. He was glad the responsibility of soothing the President’s crushed hopes was over.

They reentered the East Room together and the crowd turned toward them as the President announced:

“George has kindly consented to sing again. I think you’ll all agree Cross Country would be appropriate.”

There was a wave of consenting replies as George returned to the platform and picked up

his guitar. “Let’s make it a sing-along then,” he laughed.

The enthusiastic crowd agreed. Cross Country had become such a patriotic classic that one Senator had initiated a bill to have it replace the Star Spangled Banner as the national anthem. His argument had been. “It’s a lot easier to relate to today...and one hell of a lot easier to sing!” The bill didn’t pass, but it did get a lot of votes.

George began to sing. It was a simple song that told of a great country that was in trouble, but to paraphrase Voltaire, it was still: The best of all possible worlds!

“If you doubt what makes it great...then take a trip...Cross Country!”

The crowd joined in and as they sang, they stood up--even the President and First Lady. The black tie crowd sang and as always the song brought a glimpse of better days to come.

When the song ended, the evening ended, but on an upbeat note of Hope!

## NINETEEN

The couple in the bed were bathed in a soft, warm light. The young man was half sitting, half reclining. They were apparently naked. The lower half of the young man’s body was covered only by a sheet,. The lovely auburn-haired girl lay on her back, her ample bosom just hidden by the covering. George Potter lowered himself to one elbow and gazed rapturously into the girl’s eyes. Their faces were very close. With one finger, he gently brushed a tendril of dark red hair from her forehead as he whispered, tenderly:

“Love is the most wonderful gift one person can give or receive from another.”

“Then this is our bargain?” she breathed.

“Yes--a beautiful bargain,” he replied as she touched his lips with her finger tips and then moved them to the dimple in his cheek.

“Will you please seal that bargain with a kiss?” She begged softly.

Her arms went up and around his muscular shoulders and into the mass of his dark hair as he gathered her in his arms, and slowly very slowly lowered his head until their



lips touched. They seemed to respond to the stimulus of their kiss and the passion of their embrace increased--until from somewhere--suddenly...

"Cut! and Print! Great job kids!"

George and the girl in the bed slowly disentangled themselves from one another's arms and George sat up. He looked sleepily toward the director, crew and guests who were gathered around and behind the big Mitchell Panavision camera. The onlookers, those lucky enough to be present on the closed set, gazed back at the couple on the bed with mixed reactions. Some were vicariously excited by the realism of the performance. Others admired the beauty of the characters. And some were impressed with the acting ability and compatibility of the couple before them. Lydia was there too, smiling a strange smile. Paul Connor stood near by with an odd look on his face as he stared at the two on the bed.

The tableau was disrupted again and the director got up and stretched.

"Just terrific, Stephanie and George," he enthused. That was the last shot, folks. The shooting is finished. Now it's in the able hands of the editor. I've got the feeling it's gonna be a good one. I'd say we can all look forward to award time.

"Whoopee," yelled someone from the lighting grid and everyone from the script girl to the head grip gave the stars and director their heartfelt applause.

After giving the girl a playful little peck on the cheek, George slid out of the bed. She looked like she would have preferred more, but smiled at him as he got up. He was wearing a bathing suit. He stood on the far side of the bed and blushed slightly as he thanked everyone for their help.

"And now I believe the generous Paul Connor has prepared a small feast of celebration," he concluded, pointing to a white covered table to one side of the studio where caterers were laying out elegant canapés, hors d'oeuvres, shrimp, lobster, steaks and other gourmet goodies. Champagne corks began to pop as everyone moved toward the food and drink.

A wardrobe lady hurried forward with a silk robe as the girl rose from the bed. She seemed oblivious to the fact she was exposing her wares.

"Here, Miss Doros. Put this on before you catch your death," she said while he helped the actress cover herself.

Stephanie Doros hardly noticed or acknowledged the woman's assistance as she followed George Potter with her eyes. She made a wicked little grin when George reached his wife. She watch Lydia place a warm robe around him and show him to his slippers nearby. Lydia commented on his performance with a wry smile.

"You certainly put a lot of feeling into that scene, George. I'm sure everyone noticed that your swimsuit look a little lumpy too, sweetie," she commented with a mild wifely growl.

George blushed once more and gave her a kiss and a squeeze. "Well, you know what the critics have been saying about your ol' dad? 'George Potter shows great promise as an actor.'"

They both laughed and followed the others to the table.

One by one the crew came up to George and Lydia and commended him on his performance, even the most hardened, old lighting grip. The ones who had seen many great performances through the years had to tell George how impressed they were with his work, and how much they enjoyed being a part of this new picture. He thanked

them all. He and Lydia smiled at each other. She was so proud of him that she gave him a squeeze every now and then, just to make sure he wasn't a dream. She wanted to make sure this amazing George Potter was really her man.

The party went on for some time. Everyone was talking about the business they all loved. The champagne had loosened them up and the party was a real success. A few toasts were raised to the stars of the movie and George acknowledged them modestly while Stephanie Doros seemed to accept them as her due.

Stephanie was just short of being bombed. But something was troubling her. Every once in a while, her agent would whisper in her ear and they would look toward George and Lydia. Stephanie's robe had fallen open more than was necessary, and once again she advertised the products of a healthy childhood on an Iowa farm.

Suddenly, she jumped up on the buffet table, just missed putting one foot in the caviar tray. She swayed slightly and her speech was slurred as she addressed the party.

"Lishen up and lishen up good," she said and then tossed off the rest of her champagne. Everyone turned to look at her. Her beautiful, long, auburn hair fell half over her face and the robe was open, leaving nothing to the imagination.

"I got thish 'nouncement to make," she continued, apparently forgetting everything she had learned about proper diction. "In about eight months we're gonna have another big premiere."

The members of the crew turned to look at one another. What was she talking about? Was she going to have a baby? Whose? they asked themselves. Stephanie wasn't married--at the moment.

"Thash right. I'm gonna have a baby. HIS baby!" she screamed out the last as she pointed a wavering finger in the direction of George Potter. "George Potter's baby!"

With that she started to laugh hysterically and lost her balance. Her agent hurried up and grabbed her as she fell, laughing into his fat arms.

The crowd gasped and looked toward the singing idol. His jaw was at half-mast as he stood gaping at the departing actress who was being carried out in hysterics by her agent.

"George...George?" shouted Lydia, trying to get his attention. Paul Connor came over and looked into George's face.

"George, what is all this?"

Lydia could take it no longer. Everyone was staring at them. Was it true? Her George? She suspected, but couldn't believe. George was her whole life. She was struck by conflicting emotions. Finally she could stand it no longer and grabbed her purse, turned on her heel and ran from the sound stage. George ran after her, his robe billowing out behind him. She was in her car and away before he could reach her, and he had to go back to his dressing room to get his keys before he could follow.

It was a long race up to their rented, pink palazzo in the heights of Beverly Hills. George had some difficulty getting into the house. The doors were barred from the inside. Finally he found a French window that Lydia had missed. He pushed it open and rushed up the stairs, past the maid who merely shrugged as he hurried past her.

He found the door to their bedroom locked and gave it a swift kick. The house was fairly new and the door gave easily. He found Lydia sobbing on their bed.

“Lydia, Lydia...I’m innocent. I love only you. You should know that!” he pleaded , sitting on the edge of the bed as he put a hand on her shoulder.’

She shook it off.

“Bull shit!” she exploded. I know that half the world thinks you’re some sort of god, but immaculate conception is out of vogue! You either did it or you didn’t!”

George sat there for a few long moments, looking down at the distraught form on the bed.

“I am disappointed,” he said finally. There was a tone of infinite sadness in his voice.

“Disappointed?!” shouted Lydia turning over to look at him. “What do you mean disappointed?”

“Disappointed that you have so little faith in my love for you,” he replied, his words choked with emotion. she could see tears welling up in his eyes.

She lay on her back, looking up at him as he continued. “Ya know, it’s funny,” he said smiling through his tears. “The other day, Paul said something about me being a universal sex symbol.” He shrugged and wiped away his tears with the back of his hand. “Some sex symbol.

You’re the only one I want to have sex with. You satisfy everything I need. Everything I want. I love you with all my being and you are as much as I can, and or want to handle. I don’t think I do such a bad job in the lovemaking department, do I?” He waited for an answer and could see her expression change as he spoke to her.

“Well, that’s about as often as I can get it up. It may not look like it, but I work pretty damned hard for this meager living we have and I don’t have much energy left to go romping in the sack with every Stephanie Doros who comes along, and there are plenty of them as you well know. You are the only one I will allow to have the doubtful pleasure of my puny bod and you should have more faith in me.” He finished the speech and she could see his eyes were misting up again.

“Oh, my poor darling,” she said, moving to him and putting her arms around him. “Of course I believe you . It’s just that I do get a bit jealous of ol those broads pawing you all the time. When that bitch made her little announcement, it was just too much. Please forgive me. I love you so. I couldn’t bear for you to be angry with me.”

He laughed and pulled her to him to kiss her.

“Weeee!” squealed a little voice nearby. Lydia and George looked to see George Two, who was now three, crawling toward them. They parted as he crawled to a spot between them. Then he turned over and looked up at them with a cherubic, dimpled grin.

“Hello mommy, Hello Daddy,“ he giggled

Lydia and George both roared with laughter as they gathered the little boy to them and showered him with kisses. They looked at one another and knew that if ever such a crisis struck again, there would never be any doubt about their love for one another.

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The next morning, the newspapers were full of the new scandal. Headlines screamed:

GEORGE POTTER PATERNITY SUIT!!, GEORGIE DID IT!! was the summation of the statement released by that little darling, Stephanie Doros, at her press conference following the scene at the studio.

Paul Connor arrived with a pile of papers from all over the world, all screaming similar headlines and stories in twenty languages. He took a long look at his client.

“Georgie, Georgie, Georgie,” he clucked.

“Oh come on, Paul. You never let me out of your sight,” chided the star. “And when I’m not with you, I’m under the protection of this little vixen here,” he added giving Lydia a squeeze. “You think maybe I did it during one the love scenes on camera? I mean, I’m not that good.”

Paul put his hands on his hips and laughed at the picture conjured up by George’s comment.

“Okay, you win. Oh me of little faith. Thank god for the South American tour. You leave day after tomorrow and stay away until we find out what this Doros bitch is up to. The latins are broad minded and if our advance reports are correct, they love you dearly. I’m not sure what your American public is thinking. I expect most will take your side on this.” He moved over and sat on the pile of newspapers. “You need a vacation anyway. That’s what this tour is supposed to be. A minimum of shows...only three a week, and a maximum of rest... or...uh...” he looked at them with a sly smirk...”whatever you two have in mind. I’m sending Liza and George Two along to chaperone.”

“Ohhhh,” groaned the two on the couch, and all three laughed.

“I just about have everything packed,” chimed in Lydia

“Rio, here we come! Olay!” shouted George, jumping up to do a tango step!

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The departure was covered by every newspaper in the country plus many from other lands. Reporters and cameramen descended on them, en masse, along with thousands of fans. All screaming at once. They didn’t seem to care whether he was guilty of adultery or not. They still adored him. There was so much screaming he couldn’t have answered the reporters even if he could hear their questions. So he just smiled, waved with one hand, holding one of Lydia’s with the other as she looked adoringly up at him. A police cordon gently moved people aside to give them access to their chartered 707.

At last in the quiet of the luxurious cabin, they looked out and both of them together, smiling through single port made such a picture of wedded bliss that everyone began to wonder just what Stephanie Doros was really up to.

The Potters waved happily as the big plane taxied away down the runway. Off to south America, and their first real honeymoon. They left the whole mess in the hands of George’s able attorneys.

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Except for a few in George’s vast following who were envious of the Doros girl’s close proximity to their idol, men said or thought. “Good for you, George!”

The women blamed the girl for entrapment. Many wished it was she who was carrying the King's child. For weeks the news carried the sensational story. the publicity was staggering as the public kept tabs on the scandal's progress.

Finally, George's attorneys forced the reluctant girl to have an examination by a doctor of their choosing, and found though Stephanie Doros was certainly no virgin, she was also certainly not pregnant. It was all a hoax. A well-planned publicity stunt which had almost worked. Unfortunately for Miss Doros, George Potter returned to the United States, the chaste Lancelot and hero his fans had always thought him to be.

The courts were not amused by the devious strategy. Stephanie, her doctor, her attorneys and agent were locked away for a few months on perjury charges and when the girl got out of the clink, she was bundled off to Italy to do spaghetti westerns as her penance.

George's movie with Stephanie Doros was not only a huge financial success, but a critical one as well. It was his third film and he and Connor had produced it themselves. This time it wasn't a musical, though of course they did have to include a few token songs. The public demanded it.

It had an excellent story with an outstanding script which allowed George to show the full range of his acting ability. The critics were unanimous in their praise and he was nominated for an Oscar.

The Potter clan was on tour at Academy Awards time. Lydia watched the program with Paul Connor while George rehearsed with the orchestra.

They were disappointed, and reports also indicated the disappointment of the rest of the nation when an aging western star won instead of their beloved George. Most rationalized the older man was a sentimental favorite who won more on longevity and endurance than acting ability.

## TWENTY

The new house is nice, but not really my style, thought Paul Connor. He'd preferred the tinsel, baubles and bangles of the Potters' San Francisco penthouse. He had to admit, however, the new split level ranch house was just like George and Lydia--friendly, comfortable and big hearted. It wasn't so huge one could get lost in it, but there was plenty of room to afford the occupants and their guests elbow room and privacy. The sturdy mansion was constructed of wood and field stone to blend beautifully with the wooded grounds. There were little hidden corners all over the estate where each could be alone to meditate and unwind from their taxing schedules. There were stables with a handful of fine horses and George had a small building to himself, that housed his gymnasium and music room. Basically the place was designed for fun and relaxation, something they all needed.

At the moment, George, Lydia and Connor were gathered in the book lined study. Paul now spent more time in the Potter's Marin Country home and at the San Francisco recording complex than he did in his own Hollywood or New York apartments. George's career had become nearly a full time job, but Connor still had other prominent stars under contract. They also made demands on his time and he did a lot of jetting about in the Potter Corporation Leer.

Connor loved the Potters. They were the only family he had. Lydia was like a sister to him. He loved George Two like a son, and of course, he loved ol' George. But then, so did much of the world .

Connor paced back and forth as he listed the stops he'd be making on George's second world tour. Lydia, wearing enormous horn-rims, acted as recording secretary and took notes. the King lounged next to her as he paid close attention to what Paul was saying.

"We make our first stop in London, as we did on the first tour. Then on to Paris, Madrid, Rome, Athens, Casablanca, Dakar, Luanda, Johannesburg...."

"Hold it...hold it!" George broke in with a look of concern. "I know I always give you carte-blanche to take us where and when you think best, but I was sure after last year, we agreed to avoid South Africa like the plague. That whole episode was damned embarrassing and one of our greatest mistakes."

Paul tried to mollify his friend. "Come on George, it wasn't your fault. How were to know those damned white Johannesburgers would refuse ticket sales to the blacks in order to have enough seats for themselves? Damned intolerant of them!"

"If you recall," George added. "We took a lot of of flack from the State Department, United Nations and the White House. I really don't mind criticism of my musicianship..."

"Now who could find fault with that, Georgie?" chided Lydia playfully.

George gave her a pat on the knee and went on. "It's when my belief in human nature is shaken--that hurts. I just don't want a repeat performance.

"Then you're going to love what I've done," paul replied. "We're not appearing in Johannesburg proper. I've arranged for an appearance in an open air amphitheater north of the city. Only the Bantu's and other blacks and those of mixed blood are invited. I don't think the whites will dare show up there. Antiapartheid feeling is still running high and they wouldn't dare cross the color barrier."

George Jumped up and hugged his agent. "Damned fine planning, Paul," he laughed. "We'll snub those white bigots and give 'em some of their own medicine. The irony is perfect!"

Still chuckling at the huge practical joke they were going to pull on the South African whites, George sat down and Connor continued to list their itinerary until he would up the trip with a last stop in Sydney, Australia and the long hop home.

"...and that's about it. The advance publicity and sales team have just submitted their report. The path is clear. Our BTD is Friday at fourteen hundred hours. That put us in London at one P.M. on Friday.

Lydia stretched, yawned and stood up. She hugged her two men and said. "Let's get crackin'! It's time to start packin'!"

## TWENTY-ONE

The 707 taxied slowly toward the terminal, almost as if it hesitated to stop there. On the sides a red, white and blue stripe ran from the nose to the towering tail which was emblazoned with the initials G.P. There was a face peering out every port on the terminal side. Apprehension was written each as it took in the scene.

The Potter party had grown used to mammoth demonstrations at each stop on the world tours, but this one was certainly different, and each felt mixed emotions at the pandemonium taking place beyond the police cordon that held back the thousands of screaming Johannesburgers.

Actually, there were two demonstrations. Each sharply contrasted the other in color, purpose and tone. To the right banners waved and bounced as they announced: YANKEE GO HOME! BUZZ OFF GEORGE!, PISS ON POTTER!, and epithets of similar ilk. The banners were borne by screaming whites who shouted obscenities. As the plane rolled slowly toward them, they began to throw vegetables of questionable freshness along with eggs and missiles that were unrecognizable and suspicious. The missiles fell short of the plane, but gave the passengers the impression that this group, at least, wasn't too happy with ol' George.

On the left, an even larger crowd waved and screamed. Their banners read differently:

WE LOVE YOU GEORGE!, WELCOME POTTERS!, COLOREDS WANT GEORGIE! Their cries echoed the love and adulation of their banners. And those who yelled and hollered and stomped in anticipation of seeing their idol were black in contrast to the whites who so resoundingly denounced the pop star.

The plane stopped some distance from the crowd. Both factions pushed forward, but were held back by the determined police force. The mobs waited impatiently, yet there was no apparent action from the plane; no move was made by the passengers to disembark.

Inside the plane a quick strategy conference was being held between George Potter, Paul Connor, Lydia and the band members.

"Maybe if we just ran down the steps and rushed to the colored group, we'd be safe," suggested one of the players.

"We could slide down the escape chutes," offered another. "That would be faster."

"I dunno," mentioned the King. "They're only throwing vegetables and such right now. Who's to say they won't toss a bomb or take pot shots at us if we show ourselves. I think we should wait and see what happens."

"Hey George, take a look at this!" called Lydia as she pressed her face to the port beside her.

The other passengers rushed to their respective ports to learn why she was so excited. From the colored crowd an ominous group was advancing toward the plane. A large party of natives, who looked like they were dressed for battle, ran at a steady lope toward the aircraft. In one hand each carried a spear, in the other, a shield. Behind them other blacks drove the passenger ramp toward them. This was followed by a dusty sedan and several old army trucks.

The natives hurried to the forward exit hatch and stood aside to allow room for the ramp. When it was in place, the tribesmen moved in and their overlapping shields form a tight protective wall around the steps. The spears stuck out like the quills of a porcupine. At last the exit port opened slowly and a face peeked out. It was the flight attendant. She pushed the door open and a familiar figure stepped on to the landing platform. It was the King himself, George Potter.

He was dressed in a white tropical suit and wore his Panama hat cocked at a jaunty angle. Completely ignoring the crowd of whites to the right, he bowed and waved to the

wildly cheering group on the left. Both crowds redoubled their efforts to drown out the other. One side screaming their love, the other their hate.

A black official called up to George from just beyond the cordon of natives.

“Please hurry, Mr. Potter. This situation looks dangerous!”

George didn't hesitate, but ran down the steps and into the protection of the raised shield and spears. Lydia and Paul were close behind, followed by the members of the band and their stage manager, Johnny Dent.

After the passengers were within the confines of the living fortification, the war party moved to the sedan and completely surrounded it to allow George, Lydia and Paul to enter the small car in safety. Then the group moved on to one of the trucks. More natives from the truck helped form a wall to protect the musicians. All gathered around it to allow the band members to climb aboard.

Johnny Dent stayed behind with a group of natives who helped him unload the instruments, sound equipment and lights from the plane, and load them into the second truck. Then the entire caravan moved off, took a wide berth around the white dissenters and slowly made their way through the black crowd. George and Lydia leaned far out of the sedan to shake the black hands that were thrust eagerly toward them.

The caravan made its way through the crowd and hurried through the city streets where they were alternately cheered and condemned by the blacks and whites. Along the streets huge banners announced the white nationalists displeasure with the famous pop hero.

Finally the small convoy was out on the open highway and moving through the industrial section of Johannesburg.

Lydia gasped at the gigantic hills behind the city...hills of hues from white to beige. Their host, newspaper editor, John Ngwadi explained that Johannesburg is the largest gold producing center in the world and the mines go over a thousand feet into the ground under the city and surrounding countryside. The hills are heaps of waste from the giant smelters. His people are the miners. Bantu tribesmen. Mostly Zulu like their war party welcoming committee.

The caravan moved on into the rolling grassy countryside. They came at last to a small valley a few miles outside the city to the north. There the visitors were shown to a tribal encampment situated in a clump of silver trees within the mile high valley. The convoy drove into a clearing surrounded by native dwellings and were greeted by another crowd. This time composed mostly of women and Children. The younger men, explained their host, were away at the mines and would be home at nightfall. As the guests descended from their various vehicles, they were greeted by cheers and laughter. From the background came the unmistakable sound of George's singing. Again the newspaperman gave them the reason. The black radio station had declared this to be George Potter Day, and was playing only songs by the American pop star.

An ancient black gentleman in native dress came forward. Despite his obvious age, he stood tall and erect; a proud man who barely leaned on the staff he carried in one hand. The newspaper introduced the old man to the Potter party.

“I'd like you to meet George and Lydia Potter, Paul Connor and the rest of his congregation, Chief. Folks, this is Chief Ngogozi, the leader of these people.”



George and Lydia bowed slightly in respect and the old man extended a firm handshake. "Welcome George and Lydia...Mr. Connor, we are exceedingly pleased you are able to join us today." Smiling, he acknowledged the rest of the party.

The old man spoke beautiful Oxford English and leading the way he motioned for the party to follow him.

They moved on to an area before an impressive dwelling that must be the Chief's palace. All of the buildings were constructed of the ubiquitous grass from the five thousand foot high meadows; liberally mixed with mud and baked under the South African sun. The Chief's house was decorated with flower garlands and woven mats of dyed grasses.

He indicated for them to sit under one of the silver trees which shaded the area. Cooking fires blazed in the distance and it became obvious the visitors were about to partake of the Zulu Chief's hospitality. The setting was rustic but the food was served on Dresden china accompanied by an excellent silver service.

The Chief explained this was his summer home. He lived in a brick mansion in Transkeai during the winter months. The guests were hungry and consumed the food with great relish. Lydia commented favorably onto delicate flavor of the main meat course.

"I'd hoped you'd like it, Mrs. Potter. That's Rock Python, a great delicacy in these parts."

Lydia who could eat anything and was always willing to try something new and exotic, smiled and returned to her lunch. George, likewise, but Paul Connor who had a delicate stomach winced slightly. He'd eaten nearly all of his serving and placed his plate carefully in front of him on the mat. The Chief laughed merrily and the rest joined in.

After they had finished their lunch, the Chief suggested a siesta before moving to the performance site. He also mentioned a small snack before the show. "Leftover Python," laughed the Chief with a glance at Paul Connor, who blanched slightly.

Johnny Dent asked the Chief if he could pass on the siesta. He'd like to get his equipment out to the site and set up. The Chief nodded and clapping his hands ordered the driver and several natives to accompany the stage manager and his grips.

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George and Lydia slept under an outdoor canopy where two native children stood guard to whisk away the flies. They awoke refreshed and George was raring to go. The sun had begun to settle toward the rim of the hills and he wanted to check out the equipment, and warm up. The chief treated them to goat cheese, crackers and milk as well as fresh tropical fruit, before they left for the performance area. He told them:

"It's only a couple of kilometers from here. We'll join you as soon as the men return from the mines and have had their supper."

Lydia, George, Paul and the musicians boarded a truck and were driven quickly to an area where the hills formed an enormous natural amphitheater. Paul counted the imaginary house.

Well over a hundred thousand! he thought. Actually no tickets would be sold. The Bantu and colored association had paid handsomely to bring the star to entertain.

George, much to Paul's chagrin, had returned most of the money to their Native Relief Fund.

John Dent had set up the portable stage at the high end of the natural basin. There were already several thousand natives in attendance. They'd arrived early to get good seats. Small cooking fires dotted the area where they prepared their evening meals, and a mixture of tantalizing smells wafted on the soft afternoon breeze.

George's party drove directly to the stage area and each went to his position. There was normally no power at the site, but the entertainment committee, headed by their newspaper friend, had contracted a concrete bunker be built behind a hill and had installed a powerful gas generator. The bunker would muffle the sound and protect the power source from sabotage by malicious whites.

Someone sounded an A on the electric piano, and the group tuned up. While John Dent checked the sound equipment, the band went through several numbers. George held himself back. The rarified air would mean he'd need all his energy for the evening's performance. Still, the famous voice floated across the amphitheater and the natives applauded enthusiastically.

Everything was in readiness by the time the sun went down, leaving a full moon to light the amazing spectacle in the hills of South Africa. Great crowds had been arriving all evening. Most had walked many miles to be there and by seven-thirty, the great basin was jammed. Near eight o'clock, a strange thing happened. In spite of any language barrier, the natives began calling George's name. It wasn't impatience which prompted this, but reverence. An almost religious chant spilled forth from the crowd as they sang out in various Bantu dialects: "George Potter...

George Potter..."

Precisely at eight the stage was flooded with light from the mercury vapor lights. A bright-colored spot swept the stage area as the eight piece band broke into Potter's theme song...Cross Country. When the singer stepped onto the stage, the amphitheater rang with wave after wave of cheering, clapping, stamping applause.

The crowd quieted immediately when George began to sing. It was a new song dedicated just to them. It told of their oppression under apartheid rule, their new freedom, and the promise of better things to come. Where possible, the singer translated the words into the most popular Bantu dialect as he sang of a return to their pride in themselves, and their resolve to rule their own country. Spies for the current government brought back news that George Potter had preached sedition and rebellion.

George sang on and on into the night and the natives sometimes sang and danced along with him. In the open area beneath the stage, Zulu warriors performed dances of life and love, for it was certainly love that filled the natural amphitheater that night. Love for George Potter, and love for heir own race...the proud Bantu.

At last the program ended. George was tired but happy, and Lydia laughed through her tears while the tribesmen gathered about her husband and the rest of the band and carried them around the great open theater to the cheers of the of the many thousands who filled the place. It was a great night! One of the greatest of George's career.

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The Potter party departed unmolested from Johannesburg, South Africa. The white government, however, canceled the Potters' Visas with the ultimatum that they could never appear in that country again as performers, or even as visitors.

Minorities throughout the world applauded their actions in South Africa while audiences from London to Sidney applauded their performances. Several reigning potentates pinned medals on George, while the the U.N. and White house sent him special accolades, praising his fight for racial equality. The only ones who really grumbled were the leaders in Cape Town and Pretoria, the twin capitols of South Africa. But they were too late. The wheels had already been set in motion and would soon lead to black supremacy in their country.

George was a firm believer in the saying: Idle hands are the devil's work shop, and spent his travel time composing a new album based on the inspiring and profound things he'd seen and heard during his trip. He did idle away a few hours with Lydia in the private, on-plane boudoir. They didn't fool anyone into thinking they were just sleeping in. The crew, musicians and Paul Connor knew what was going on behind closed doors, during the long flying mornings. The crew said nothing but smiled and relished their secret.

To avoid missing any grammar school George Two had been left at home with nanny Liza Cooper during this tour. It ended with a triumph in Australia. Their return to San Francisco was met with crowds of reporters and fans. Tired and happy to be home with little George and Liza, there was no respite. George and Paul immediately went to work on the new album.

## TWENTY-TWO

The last clear, ringing high note died away and the triax speakers were silent. The small group seated in the big studio was also speechless; still under the spell of the voice and the songs they'd just heard. At last the blond-haired man in the control booth pressed the talk-back switch and broke the silence.

"Then I think we're all agreed. Nothing less than fabulous!" he said with a broad grin.

The musicians in the studio nodded enthusiastically, got up and went to the man on the high stool at the solo mike. They clapped im on the back saying: "George, you've heard it before, and here it is again. You are the greatest!"

From the talk back speaker Paul Connor spoke again. Though their was emotion in his voice, he tried to keep it businesslike.

"Okay then. The bunch from Nashville and L.A. will be in town Monday morning, so let's all try to make it here by one. You guys have a good weekend. Great job tonight!"

George nodded and shook hands with the drummer and the bass man, patted the piano player on the back and said sincerely. "Yeah, thanks men for keeping me going tonight."

Just then, Darf Turney, the sound engineer put his had in and added. "Damned fine job, boys, see ya Monday.

"Thanks Darf, sounds great as always. Have a good one!" came their replies.

The musicians and the engineer said a few words to each other as they moved out of the big studio. George packed his guitar and straightened the music on the stand. He glanced up to see Paul looking at him through the control room window, an odd smile on his lips. George winked at him and made a sign to say: How about a drink?

Paul nodded and they met at the doors leading from the recording complex. Paul was still smiling as he turned off the lights and locked the studio. He put a hand on George's shoulder as the two men walked down the hall to George's office.

The office suite was big and comfortable. It was paneled in warm solid wood and there was soft carpeting under foot. There was a massive desk. Large leather chairs and couches made up the rest of the furnishings. Paul went to a large picture window as George opened the panel that hid the bar and small kitchen.

"Want something to eat?" George asked the young man at the window.

"No, thanks, just a double," was Paul's reply.

George splashed bourbon over ice and fixed himself a watered down version of the drink he'd prepared for Paul. Then he carried the drinks to the window. Paul took his with a nod of thanks and they stood silently sipping their liquor as they looked out across the terrace at the night lights of the city. San Francisco was covered by a thin blanket of fog that diffused the lights beneath it and the covering glowed and shimmered with many colors. Above the cloud, Coit Tower and a few other buildings stood guard over the bay.

"God, you were great tonight!" said Paul finally. "That voice is even better than last time, and your new songs are going to set the world on it's ear."

"Thanks, Paul, I hope so," sighed the singer. It always felt good when Paul praised him. They were about the same age, but Paul had been in the business a lot longer and his opinion was one of the most respected and sought after in the contemporary music field.

"Oh-eee--a little tired tonight," George breathed. "That took a bunch out of me." He moved over and flopped down on the end of a long leather couch.

"I can well imagine," replied the star-maker. "Maybe we should have taken a break after the tour before tackling this album," added the man at the window. There was a strange catch in his throat as he spoke and George studied him carefully for a moment before he asked:

"Paul, is there something bugging you? You haven't been yourself lately."

"Matter of fact, I do have a little problem, but I didn't want to bother you with it," Paul replied in almost a whisper.

"Oh, come on! What are best friends for? Get over here and tell me all about it."

As he moved to the couch, Connor glanced at the singer. There was a pained expression on the talent agent's face.

"I...I don't know where to begin," he said with a slight stammer.

"How about at the beginning?" George suggested with a concerned smile.

Paul sighed as he sat down on the opposite end of the couch. He seemed to struggle for a moment to find the words. He leaned forward and not looking at the singer, he rolled the heavy glass between his hands. Then he started to speak--slowly at first, then with gathering speed as if he wanted to get it all out...to purge himself of the thing that plagued him.

“Once upon a time there was an idol, the whole world worshipped,” he began. “Most could only adore this deity from a distance. One worshipper was more fortunate, however. He had the great good luck to bask in the glory of this being’s living presence. Unhappily, his good fortune had one fatal drawback. You see George, the close proximity to his idol brought with it the inevitable....”

Paul Connor paused for a moment and took a long drink from his glass. His hand trembled slightly, causing the ice to rattle--the only sound in the room. The singer waited for him to continue.

“Then...then the worshipper...” the words caught and Paul bent forward convulsively: squeezing the glass as he wanted to shatter it. George watched his friend struggle as he tried to rid himself of the demon that apparently raged within him. Puzzled by this outpouring of emotion from his friend, the singer tried to ease the way.

“Paul, just say it” Whatever it is you want to tell me, just say it. It’ll make it easier. I’m your buddy, you know I’ll understand.”

“I doubt even you will understand this.” Paul continued. “I’ve rehearsed this a bunch of times, but I’m making a botch of it. Listen, you know I admire you for your talent, your brains and your looks. What you don’t know is how much I admire you. There’s a word for it.”

He paused for a moment as if gathering the courage. “It...it’s... the most beautiful word in any language.”

The star-maker avoided the singer’s stunned expression. George sat slumped against the cushions, gazing at his friend. The fact that Paul loved him was really no great surprise. They all loved one another. Lydia, Paul and himself. They’d formed an almost idyllic menage-a-trois, yet George had always assumed the relationships were clearly drawn. He loved Lydia and his son as he thought a husband and father should. He loved Paul as if the if his friend was his benevolent, fun-loving older brother. Paul was actually only three years older than George, but no matter, he imagined Paul reciprocated the feeling.

Paul certainly made their lives interesting. Despite the fact he was no longer a youthful movie star, he remained strikingly handsome and with his fair coloring, some of George’s public thought Paul must be Lydia’s brother. Together; Lydia, George and Paul had once been referred to as those three beauties, a left handed compliment from an overzealous critic. Paul worked like a man, but he played like a boy. He was full of little pranks and an endless store of jokes and show biz anecdotes that kept them all in a state of mirthful hysteria. It was no wonder there were times when George or Lydia got the urge to give Paul a hug. Why not? Theirs was a very loving family. Lydia thought it was cute the way George and Paul got on together--a pair of real cutups.

Their life together was perfect, and though George might be considered the star, a major part of their lives revolved around the personable young man who sat so dejectedly on the other end of the couch. George wondered now if that life would ever be the same. He still wanted Paul to be his good friend and loyal mentor, therefore he was faced with a great dilemma. How to keep his friend without seriously hurting him.

“Paul, I’m trying to understand how you feel. I may seem pretty naive at times, but I certainly know how important love can be. Look, you and Lydia and I all love each other. Perhaps when something happens when someone lives, plays and works closely

with someone they really like and respect--something that's bound to generate an excess of affection for that person."

"I was afraid this would happen the moment we met." Paul struggled on. "And as I got to know you better, it just got worse. All this talk of brotherly love you spout constantly can be very addictive. I tried to think of you as a friend...like a brother. Good luck with that! They say it takes all kinds to make a world. There are the so called normal or heterosexual ones like you and Lydia, and there are the others. I guess I'm one of those. I never made it any secret that I'm gay. It's just a part of me and there is no denying it. Unfortunately, being around one of the most extraordinary beings on earth, has become impossible for this other."

George sat silently, not knowing how to respond. Lydia had suspected what Paul was saying, but hoped nothing would come of it.

"I see only one way out...actually there are two, but I enjoy life too much to resort to the alternative. Since my feelings for you have become so difficult for me to control, there is nothing left for me, but to say good-bye and move on.

"No Paul...we need you, and you're too important to us..."

"Please let me finish," Paul interrupted. "I've been rehearsing this for weeks and if confession is good for the soul, mine certainly needs confessing. Face it. You don't need my help any more. I've spoken to Lydia about it; without going into any details, of course. But I think she'd be willing and able to take over the agent business. Lydia is certainly better qualified than anyone I know. I have other clients who really need my help. I should stop neglecting them and get back to work. If there are any major problems, I'm just a phone call away. I hope you and I will remain friends and see each other often."

Though he didn't want to admit it, George could finally see the point of Paul's argument.

Though he loved Paul like a brother, there was no way he could return the physical love Paul was apparently alluding to. He put a hand on his friend's arm as he responded.

"You know Lydia and I both love you. You're part of our family--possibly the most important part. To lose you seems impossible. Couldn't you find someone else to fill the void you seem to have?"

Paul stood up and moved away. "That's part of the plan. You've been a positive influence in the love department and I need to get out there and find someone. There's a new singer I've taken under my wing. I'm not sure, but he might be the one. He's no George Potter, of course, but possibly an adequate substitute. I need to get back to New York and check him out."

Paul could see tears welling up in his friend's eyes as George replied "Paul...I don't want to lose you, but if you are determined to go through with this, I can only wish you the best. We get to New York often. I just hope we can see you from time to time."

"Now don't feel rejected," Paul interrupted. "I'm still producing this album, so I'll be around for a few weeks, before I go.

"And don't forget, Mr. Money Bags," George laughed, "You are still vice-president of Potter Incorporated. With all the moolah pertaining there-to."

Ignoring the last, Paul stood up and turned away from the singer. "Now, take your gorgeous self out of here and go home to your true love."

Knowing Paul was right about a parting of the ways, he struggled up and went to his friend. He put a hand on Paul's shoulder. "Darn it to hell! Why did this have to happen. Everything was so perfect. I'm sorry, Paul, maybe your right." But one thing, you're still a member of our family and Lydia and I don't want you to be a stranger."

Paul turned and gave George a hug and a smile. "Sure thing. Now get along home. I'll see you on Monday."

George glanced at his watch and realized it was late and Lydia was probably worrying.

He grabbed his coat, and turned one more time to look at Paul.

"So long, ol' friend!" George said with feeling, then turned and headed for the elevator.

## TWENTY-THREE

The musicians had been rehearsing for three hours with only short breaks for coffee and sandwiches. The engineers had ample time to set up and check microphone levels. Now the musicians sat and chatted together, or toyed with their instruments. A few were noodling through some particularly difficult passages. They had come from L.A. and Nashville to celebrate, in music, what would undoubtedly prove to be another platinum record. The last three albums had topped the three million mark in sales. After playing through the orchestration charts several times, they were convinced this would be the biggest hit yet. These were men who know their business. They were all virtuosi in their own right, excellent at sight reading and so adaptable, their own individual styles could be molded into one--the inimitable style that was George Potter.

But George Potter was late, and George was never late. Finally there was a rustling of activity at the studio door and George's publicity director, Tod Perkins entered followed by George. In the sound booth they saw Paul Connor, who was acting as project producer and Lydia, George's wife. The new arrivals looked unusually serious, and though George greeted them, his grin lacked some of its usual dazzle. In the booth, Lydia gave Paul a sad smile and a hug. They exchanged a few words and Connor shook his head. In the studio George spoke for a few moments with the conductor; then went to his stool, unpacked his guitar and moved to the microphone.

"I'd like to go straight through all twelve selections. Tod tells me you have been rehearsing for hours and I appreciate that. Knowing you are all tape ready, right now. I know this is a bit unorthodox, but I'd like to get the feel of the whole album before we really settle down to the nit-picking."

As usual with George Potter recording, there were no overdubs, no gimmicks, just the pure unvarnished truth. George nodded to them and after a few more words to the director He took his place in the solo booth. Some noticed his hand trembled a bit as he picked up his guitar and took his position at the microphone. Then, without warning he sneezed. He sniffed slightly as he adjusted his headphones. He asked for an A, tuned his instrument and gave the engineers their voice levels.

Finally George nodded to the leader through the glass and they were off. It was a great arrangement and George forgot his own personal problems as he concentrated on the task of giving the maximum interpretation to the words he sang.

The first song went without a hitch and so did the ten that followed. The group was playing as one, and George was singing even better than ever. They were all flying down a common groove and could feel this was going to be a really important recording event. The twelfth cut went nearly as well as the others, but George felt uncomfortable with one of the high notes. At last the twelve songs were on tape and George came out of his booth to join the others for the playback. George pointed at Paul Connor who gave the signal to roll the tape. George sat next to the conductor with the charts spread out in front of them. George sneezed again and blew his nose.

They all agreed the cuts were extraordinary for a first run through. George made only a few notations to be worked out.

“Okay, lets print it and go home.” One of the Nashville men joked after the eleventh selection.

Then came the spot that had bothered George. The high note came and went. A couple of members glanced over at George for his reaction. He laughed.

“Boy, what a clinker.”

Some of the men smiled and shrugged. The conductor commented: “I thought it gave the line more character.”

“Come on. Don’t rationalize. A bad note’s a bad note.” George came back. Glancing at the clock over the control room window.

“Let’s take a dinner break. If you could all be back by eight-thirty, I’d like to workout a few things before we really get down to work tomorrow. You guys are sounding absolutely the finest,” George added. “If only ol’ George’s pipes hold out, I think we’ve got another winner.”

They started again at about nine o’clock. Most of the musicians preferred to work in the evening. They were night people and did their best performing during the late evening hours. They started on cut twelve. George managed to get through it okay, though still claimed he was having to strain a bit for the high note. There was talk of changing the key, but that meant rewriting the entire arrangement. No one could hear anything less than his usual excellence, so he decided to let it go for now and concentrate on the other numbers.

They worked for about an hour. Suddenly George’s voice cracked completely on a high note. He tried to do a pickup on the segment and his voice wavered again. This time he tried to clear his throat and they started the song from the top. He sang two phrases and the famous George Potter voice began to sound fuzzy. The engineers came out to check the George’s mike. The musicians looked toward the solo booth. They could see George inside and he didn’t look too happy. He assured the engineer the equipment was fine. Someone offered some throat spray, but George declined.

“Guess we’d better call it a night, men,” he croaked. “Let’s see what tomorrow brings. It’s getting late anyway.”

Lydia and Paul came out of the engineering booth and Lydia hurried up to George. She looked very concerned, Perspiration had broken out on the singer’s forehead. She touched his face with her hand.

“George, I think you have a temperature. You’re going right home to bed.”



Paul said nothing, but registered his own concern as he gave Lydia and George goodnight hugs. Lydia got his coat and wrapped him in it. She barely gave him time to wish the musicians and engineers goodnight before she hustled him out of the studio and homeward bound, where she bundled him into bed. He seemed to be coming down with something. So much had happened: a rigorous world tour, this business with Paul, just plain hard work. So he had agreed with Paul, they should have taken a rest before launching into this album. Totally exhausted, he slept for twelve hours and when he awoke, the first thing he saw was his favorite sight...the face of his wife smiling down at him. He reached out his hand to her and opened his mouth to speak, but nothing came out. He tried again. This time there was a faint cracking sound, but nothing that could be defined as speech.

Lydia touched his cheek and pushed him back into the pillows. "I've called the doctor, darling. You just rest," she ordered trying to hide her concern.

Their doctor arrived within an hour and gave George a thorough examination.

"He's very run down. I'm not surprised with his schedule. He has a mild virus which has, I'm afraid, settled on his larynx. It's laryngitis," the physician concluded as he deposited his instruments in his black bag and led Lydia out of the bedroom.

"He, and especially his voice will need complete rest for a couple of weeks. Here's a prescription," he said, handing Lydia a small piece of paper. "Antibiotics. That will take care of the infection, but he will have to be completely quiet for a couple of months. No singing--no speaking, not even a whisper, if he wants to keep that voice of his. I'll want to see him at the clinic next week, but I'm sure we'll find severe straining and irritation to the vocal folds. This can only be cured by complete silence. He'll have to write everything down or communicate with sign language, semaphore or what have you," smiled the doctor. "But, he must not use his vocal chords. Further strain on them could cause permanent damage."

After the doctor left, Lydia returned to George's room. She thought for a few moments before she broke the news to him. He tried to answer her but she placed her fingers to his lips, gave him the doctor's diagnosis, and brought him a pencil and note pad. He wrote:

"Call Tod. Cancel taping. Pay everyone a bonus and send them all home. The album will have to go as is. Vacation Time!"

They smiled at each other and she patted him lovingly on the head before she went to make the call. For a while at least, she would have her man all to herself.

For the next few days Lydia waited on him personally. Feeding him by hand and coddling him, enjoying his quiet gratitude. The whole episode served to reinforce their great love for one another. From time to time he'd look sad, and she knew he was thinking about their friend. Paul came in for a silent visit and talked at length with Lydia. "If this had to happen to our George, it couldn't have come at a better time. You're sure you don't need my help with the details?" Paul offered.

"Paul," she replied. "I've watched you in action for a couple of years, and though it won't be easy, I think I can manage."

Paul gathered up the personal items from his suite and arranged to have them shipped to his New York apartment. Then he bid a fond farewell to his adopted family and moved across the bay and into the Potter Complex where he could oversee the final production of the album.

The infection and fever passed and George felt strong enough to get out of bed. He was a

model patient, however, and respected the role of silence imposed on him by the doctor. He and Lydia decided to take advantage of a generous standing invitation of some friends with the French ASCAP office, to recuperate at their chateau in the south of France.

## TWENTY-FOUR

The warmth, quiet and beauty of the pastoral French countryside did much to bring back the old George Potter. He swam every morning in the heated pool in the chateau gardens. His tan deepened and he began to compose again. The sound of his guitar rang out for hours each day. Lydia and his hostess enthused over the excellence of the new melodies. George brought in a young man from Paris and they worked on a set of French lyrics which captured the nuances of the English.

A month of silence had gone by when George and Lydia left George Two in Liza's capable care and made the journey to Paris to see the specialist recommended by their doctor. Examination showed the vocal chords were mending, but it would be a few more weeks before George could speak or sing again. They were disappointed, but resigned. George and Lydia were enjoying their quiet vacation and were in no hurry to return to recording sessions or a new movie that awaited George's attention.

Love doesn't required speech. This they discovered as they walked together through the woods and meadows, or communed with one another during the long, balmy nights in a great feather bed. One in which, they were told, a French king had once held a rendezvous with a highborn lady of the region.

They also enjoyed George Two's progress. At age three, he was into everything, while

Liza kept him under control. He sat fascinated while George composed. He tried to touch the instrument and his dad let him pluck the strings every one in a while. Lydia laughed as little George even tried to sing some of the notes.

"George, when you're over the hill, the crown prince can take over your throne." she joked.

The weeks of silence were also weeks of growth. It gave George time to study. To prepare for the time when he would regain his voice, he honed his French. He had an ear for language and his minor in college had been the French language. It was still the international language in some circles, and his knowledge of French, English and more recently his few courses in Russian and Chinese broadened his multi-lingual talents. He concentrated on the French because he wanted to record his new songs in that language and would soon be able to practice on his host and hostess.

He used the Paris newspapers as his text and was proud he didn't have to consult his French-English dictionary often. Even though he knew the journals to be politically oriented, and many of them tinged with socialism and communist propaganda, he found in Europe he was able to get a better perspective on what was happening three thousand miles away at home. Most of the same problems still plagued the United States. Inflation, Unemployment, fuel shortages. The United states often appeared to

be a perfect model of what a country should not be. He found his head filled not only with songs, but ideas based on his political and social studies.

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One day, a bored and mute George Potter sat twiddling his thumbs. Lydia was helping George Two with his reading, and Liza Cooper was in Paris shopping for gifts for friends back home. With nothing to do, George Potter decided to take advantage of the ravishing French weather and go for a walk in the woods near the chateau. Though he was forbidden to use his voice, his whistler was OK, and he decided to work on a new tune. Ambling along through the beautiful fern filled forest he suddenly came to a small clearing. He stopped abruptly and quit whistling. In the center of the open space stood a stump in a pool of dazzling sunshine. Standing on the stump was a familiar figure. Dressed in a smart forest green hiking ensemble, his red orange hair tucked under a green cap, was Oberon, the Good Fairy.

“Good morning, George! Long time no see!” greeted the leprechaun.

Startled, George’s mouth fell open, but he clamped it shut and pointed to his throat.

“Yes, George,” acknowledged the amazing little man. “We know all about your loss of voice, but no matter. I can read your mind and we can converse subconsciously.” Oberon closed his mouth and suddenly, in his head, George heard the Good Fairy say, “This is it, George, the moment we’ve all been waiting for! The time when I grant you the third and final wish. It’s why we chose you...for your political training and brilliant mind. You’ve had your fun in show biz. We enjoyed watching your frolic about and loved your wonderful songs. But all that’s over.” Oberon withdrew his collapsible wand from his back pack and waved it over George’s head. A great shower of glitter poured down and almost covered the political science Ph.D.

George coughed, grabbed for his throat, and screeched a high pitched note in the key of C. As a flood of euphoria flowed through him. Worried, he stared at the leprechaun.

“It’s okay, George. Your voice is fine. And hopefully this rest gave you time to think about your true calling. It’s time for you to get out of show business and change the world! Your mentor at the university, Dr. Whitman, will meet you on your return. Listen to him!” advised Oberon. “He had your doctorate thesis published and it’s moving up the best seller charts. The time is ripe once again for an entertainer to enter the field of politics!”

With that, the Good Fairy waved his wand over himself and sailed off through the trees and up into the sky.

George, finally convinced of the little man’s existence, pulled himself up, took a deep breath and opened his mouth. Out came a clear high note that echoed through the forest.

As he thought about what Oberon had said, he wondered. Was it really his turn at the world's helm? His natural modesty made him deny he had the ability to turn the tide of history. Yet perhaps this was his destiny. The world was in trouble and he was determined to help as much as possible. Humbly, he had to admit, because so many had stated it, perhaps he was the most well known person on earth. But an entertainer?? How could he turn that notoriety to his advantage as a leader? It all seemed far fetched, and maybe just a bit hard for his public to accept.

Now that his voice was back he discussed it with Lydia. She was a bit biased; sure he could do anything set his mind to. She suggested he send his old friend a telegram. Perhaps his mentor could give him an answer. George kept in touch with Dr. Bernard Whitman, his old professor at Berkeley. They'd visited each other often since George left school and discussed the problems that faced the U.S. and the world. After George achieved show biz fame, the retired professor once mentioned the U.S. could use a real leader--someone the people could look up to. The old man still admired his former star student. He could see Potter had all of the prerequisites: brilliance in Political science and related subjects, a vast following and a bonus...the charisma needed to achieve success in these days of instant video communications.

More than once during one of their quiet debates he had turned and looked directly at George, saying:

"Potter, when are you going to get out of this trivial show biz bullshit and get down to the serious work of politics?!"

George could see the old man clearly, puffing away slowly on his pipe, with one critical eye on his student. Was what he was doing just trivia, then? George began to see that perhaps the old professor was right, and he felt a small pang of guilt. He'd been so wrapped up in his own glittering, tinsel success, he's lost perspective on the troubled world around him. Maybe his temporary loss of voice was an omen--the tuning point.

George took Lydia's advice and wrote to his old friend:

"Ready to get out of show biz. World in trouble. Can I help?" -- George

The answer came immediately;

"It's about time! U.S. Senate primary in eleven months. Hurry back. Let's get to work!" -- Whitman

George smiled at Lydia as he handed her the telegram. She read it, laughed, put her arms around him and kissed him

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The Potters returned to the United States was kept comparatively quiet. They told no one about their return. George had let his beard grow and was nearly unrecognizable. Flying business class they kept to themselves. Though their stewardess was suspicious, she kept it quiet and the plane landed at LaGuardia without fanfare. He and Lydia, George Two and Liza stepped into the waiting limousine and found a surprise waiting for them. Inside they found a familiar smiling face, wreathed in a white beard and hair; eyes that twinkled at them. He wasn't a tall man and was what used to be called portly. He held the stump of a pipe in his teeth...and the smoke it

encircled his head like a wreath. Dr. Bernard Whitman, Ph.D. dean emeritus of the U.C. Berkeley Sociology department.

Lydia gave the old man a big hug. "Dr. Whitman! How thoughtful of you to meet us."

She gave him a kiss and a gentle tug at his beard. The old man giggled and shook George's hand warmly. George introduced Liza and George Two. The two men smiled at each other for a moment before the older man spoke.

"Lydia, my dear, I'm afraid I had a selfish motive for meeting you. Retirement has been a drag and the prospect of launching George into the sea of politics was such a tantalizing project. I just couldn't wait to get started.

As the limo moved through the city. George and Lydia listened with full attention to what the old man was saying.

"It's a shame you're too young for President. I took a little poll on my own and you'd be a cinch to win.

They all laughed at the prospect of thirty year old George as President of the United Starts, though it had been in the back of their minds all along. George considered the prospect with some trepidation and great respect while Lydia thought of George's eventual presidency as the next logical step.

"But, first things first," continued the venerable Dr. whitman. Six years as Senator will give you the seasoning and moxy you need to handle the big job. Let's just hope the country lasts that long," he smiled wryly. "The nation hasn't been in such trouble since twenty nine. I'm not sure you can do much as senator. The country needs someone to hold it together. Someone to get to get it over this crisis. What we really need is a dictator. I hesitate to say that, and of course even the suggestion mustn't go beyond this car, but the only salvation is a totalitarian government with a benevolent genius to run it." He shifted his pipe to the other side of his mouth and gave the singer a grin. "I found your doctor's thesis contained just the right amount of political smarts and glimmerings of brilliance in sociology and economics. With a little guidance, you'll do just fine. Lord knows the county will be behind you and that's the main thing."

Though flattered by Whitman's speech, George, interrupted. "Dr. Whitman, Thank you! That sounds great! However, I do have a couple of items to take care of. Show Biz leftovers--We can probably work on both. The projects shouldn't take much more than a month and then I'm all yours."

After making plans for professor to move in with them at their Marin county home when they returned, they dropped him at his hotel and went on to their planned meeting with Paul Connor.

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They were immediately ushered into Paul's well appointed office.

"Hey, Georgie! Lydia!" he exclaimed on seeing the two of them. He rose from the deck and went around to hug his friends. They both returned his affectionate greeting.

"Sit...sit...sit." He grinned. "Well, how's the old voice, your majesty?"

"Great, Paul. But I may not need to sing for my supper much longer.

"Yes, I heard rumblings about the senate seat. That'll be a change."

"I'm looking forward to it." George responded. "The country's in a bit of trouble. Remember, before you pushed me into show-biz, I really wanted to do politics."

"Listen, I read your thesis. Great stuff!...a lot of good ideas." Paul chuckled "A best selling author! And our last album just went platinum. You really are riding the high wave, my man. We really ought to celebrate."

Lydia interrupted the joyful reunion.

"Paul, what I want to celebrate is how well you look. The last time we saw you, you seemed pretty down."

"Oh, yeah. Well, Since George tells you everything, I'm sure he told you why I decided to leave the comfy confines of Potter Inc.. All that love stuff, finally got to me and I couldn't deal with it any longer"

"But, you're only one of millions who love my Georgie. Lydia responded.

"Yes, that was the problem. He was Your Georgie, and I wanted him to be Mine! It was that Old love that dares not speak it's name thing...if you know what I mean. I don't think I ever fooled anybody."

Lydia smiled, "Paul, you know it didn't matter that you're gay. We love you the way you are."

"Well, none of that matters any more," Paul laughed. "I found a replacement."

George and Lydia looked at him questioningly.

"Well, if not a replacement, a damned good alternative Remember, George, when I told you I thought there might be someone else? There certainly is! My latest protégé' He's a country singer. Not a hick from the sticks. The kid's smart. Has a master's in physics from Texas Tech. and a lot of talent. We hit it off right away." Paul paused to let this sink in. "I know what you're thinking. He's grateful for my help. It's more than that. This is the kind of emotion one can't fake. And wait 'til you hear his name. Arnold...uh... or Arnie Ardor. The name says it all. He's full of passion all right. We both are!"

George and Lydia gave each other a look and Paul realized, in his enthusiasm, he may have said too much.

"Anyway, my life is finally on track and I'm happy as a clam." He moved to his desk and sat down, suddenly all business. "Now what's this about a new album...and this one en francais?"

"Paul, we're so glad for you! Arnie sounds like just the one to fill that void in your life."

Lydia nodded and George took a relieved breath. "But we have another project for you, if you're available. To act as producer on this French and English album, I'm working on. Twelve chansons in French and English are written and just about arranged for our usual music group."

"Sure, George! Let's do it. I just finished up Arnie's first album and the timing is perfect. I assume we'll work out of the S.F. complex.

"But of course, mon ami." George laughed. "Not sure our public is ready for such an album, but I am. It will probably be my last.

"George, I think you could do an album of la, la, las and it would go platinum. When do we start?"

"Right away. I need to get this one in the can ASAP so I can get on with campaigning. Maybe you could help me with that."

Paul laughed, "Wait a minute, monsieur, now that you're on the road the the presidency, you won't need my show biz merde any more. Good thing actually, with the all-consuming George Potter career to manage, I have sorely neglected my other clients. I'll miss the glitz and glamour, but it's high time I got back to the delightful grind of promoting other talents. Thanks for the gesture, George, but under the circumstances, it might be better to let the past rest for a while. This afternoon, I'll start calling the boys in Nashville and L.A. to set up the recording session." He paused and taking his coat from the rack added. "But right now, let's go to lunch!"

## TWENTY-SIX

The Potters' return to Marin County was followed by the arrival of special guests Paul Connor and his new friend Arnie Ardor. Work on the new George Potter album in French and English moved along quickly. The recording, production, and promotion of the album caused a sensation worldwide and sales soared. Connor and his friend bid the Potters a fond farewell and returned to New York.

George canceled his bid for another starring movie role and with new house guest Dr. Bernard Whitman, settled down to run for U.S. Senator from California.

"I seem to remember you do or did have a certain genius, George." laughed the professor. And a great talent in the political science, sociology, economics field. Your doctorate thesis shows glimmerings of brilliance. And many are now reading and quoting it. With a little guidance, you'll do just fine. Lord knows the country will be behind you, and that's the main thing."

George Potter's campaign for Senator was one of the most unusual in history. The moment he announced his candidacy, donations began to pour in. George decided to turn back all donations over five dollars. He didn't want to be obligated to anyone. Actually, he paid for much of his campaign out of his own pocket. He even formed his own party..."The Friends of the People".

"Sounds a little Pinko", growled the opposition. Actually, George's opponents quivered and quaked at the prospect of running against so popular a candidate. They grasped at straws. They made light of George's show business career, How could this singer know anything about Politics? The good Dr. Whitman conducted the campaign like a symphony orchestra. He had George's Doctor's Thesis published in installments in Newsweek. The hardcover and paperback were already high on the New York Times Best Seller list, but the Potter Campaign Committee wanted his profound ideas for the country to be common knowledge. No one paid any attention to the opposing parties. The months that George was away had been filled with long gloomy days. Now he was back and happy days were here again! Their George was back, and in spite of the heavy yoke of inflation and unemployment that plagued many of them, George could make them laugh and hope again. George was there and that's all they cared about.

George's TV campaign showed him singing his own jingle, high on a windy hill as he smiled and beamed from the tube. That's what they wanted from him. The face of

hope. There were really no concrete campaign promises. Everyone was pledging better days. A return to the economy of the forties and fifties.

It would have been redundant for George to make the same promises. His message spoke of this still proud country with the same great people. He alluded vaguely and modestly to the need for new leadership. He didn't criticize or even mention the other candidates in the race for senator. It was almost as if they didn't exist. In fact, in the hearts of most Californians, the other senatorial candidates weren't even considered.

George's mammoth campaign rallies were unusual in the extreme. They were more like those happenings at Woodstock or the great revivals of old. Songfests is how they were described by the press. George sang some of his new songs, but mostly it was a grand sing-a-long of his old favorites. The same songs that had inspired the multitudes before. George's voice still had the magic power to project the philosophies contained in his songs. The rallies were uplifting experiences for all who attended or viewed them on television. Everyone went away feeling better about themselves and the condition of their lives. They loved George Potter all the more.

He got so much free publicity, since everything he did was news, the Equal Time regulation was screamed into every station manager's ear from the Oregon Border to Mexico. No amount of ballyhoo on behalf of the opposing candidates did the least bit of good. The polls predicted it months before the election: Therefore, it was no surprise when George Potter walked into the Senate seat with the largest vote plurality ever recorded.

The campaign workers at Potter headquarters in the Fairmont on Nob Hill came unglued following George's acceptance speech, and their celebration shook the old town like the earthquake of 1906.

A few stood back and surveyed the scene with jaundiced eyes. They said in sage prophesy; "Now that they've elected George Potter what can he do for them?" Still no one listened. George Potter now belonged to the people. Ol' George was the man of the hour.

## TWENTY SEVEN

"...and that concludes the old business, gentlemen," said the chairman.

A few gray heads nodded while one grumbled. "Doesn't appear to conclude much of anything, if you ask me." This was greeted by several "Hear! Hears" and an "amen".

Senator Thomas Courtman of Minnesota, Chairman of the Committee on the Nation's Economy, leaned back and surveyed the members of the groups. They were a rebel bunch--every one dedicated to the same cause; to do something about the inflationary spiral and its resulting effects. Something had to be done and quickly. Prices were skyrocketing beyond the public's buying power, business were feeling the pinch of too much supply and not enough demand. Many had filed bankruptcy.

These men wanted desperately to help. Of course, there were those with selfish motives. These sensed their survival in politics was in peril--that they might be tarred and feathered if they didn't perform some miracle soon. Many looked discouraged, tired



and old. All except one. The junior Senator from California, George Potter. Tom Courtman cast an eye on the young man who was as usual busy scribbling in one of the brightly colored, spiral notebooks he always carried in his attaché' case. A really likable young man, thought the chairman. Even more delightful, if possible in person than the singing star the world knew.

The rest of the group were taking a short break. Talking among themselves' some had lit fresh cigars and the already close atmosphere was in for another barrage of smoke. The chairman rose.

"Gentlemen, your attention!" he tapped persistently on his glass with the stem of his pipe.

The committee members turned to face him again, curious there could be anything left to cover. They'd been over the same ground so many times, yet were no closer to a solution than when they'd begun. In the past months they'd discussed every avenue, interviewed all the nations most prominent economists, even some from Europe. None had agreed on a solution; most had agreed there was none.

"Gentlemen," continued the chairman, now that he had their attention. "Our young friend from California met with me early this morning for breakfast. He has a most interesting proposition; a theory that may sound harebrained and may contain the faint odor of sedition. It is an interesting idea, however, and I'd like you to hear it." He turned toward the young Senator. "Senator Potter, if you would be so kind."

The older man sat down as George, blushing, stood up. "Th...thank you, Mr. Chairman," he stammered slightly. Amazingly, though he could speak before thousands, even millions of people, he felt a bit awed by the group who now gave him their complete attention.

He paused a moment to gather his composure and hooked a thumb into the watch pocket of his vest, as he looked over the twenty distinguished leaders who sat in front and to each side of him. Over five hundred years of political experience sat at the long table and he wondered for a moment what the hell he was doing there in such heavy weight company. Finally he flipped open the red spiral notebook in front of him, and after consulting the neatly outlined notes for a moment, he began:

"Fellow Senators, I've sat here along with you for the last months and listened to the discouraging parade of views from every prominent economist in this country and others. Even a green-horn like myself can see we've come up with a big fat zero."

Several of the senators nodded assent and muttered under their breath.

"Along with the millions of people outside this room," he went on, "I have been studying the economic problem for years."

"Between concerts, George?" chuckled one old man.

"Exactly, Senator Burney, between concerts," smiled the young man.

"Some of us are lucky," he continued. "We needn't be concerned about where our next meal is coming from, but there are millions eating dog food or worse and being happy to get it. As long as we are here, being paid far too much by some of these same people, we'd better try to come up with a solution."

"But I digress. The chairman mentioned my harebrained scheme. I think we can all look at where the inflated dollar goes, and without too much investigation, see there is one party getting a bigger slice than he deserves. He doesn't manufacture, nor does he reap, but he does rape the public and even the producer and the retailer. There 's

such a narrow margin of profit these days, there is no longer any place for his kind. You all know I'm a mild kind of guy, so you know my feelings when I refer to some of these individuals as leeches.!"

Several of the senators at the long table puffed on their cigars, and nodded when George pronounced the name, they echoed him."

"The middleman!"

Some snickered at the chorus of echoes and others snorted.

"George, that's common knowledge. What is this idea of yours? It's almost time for lunch and I'm craving some middle-manned, overpriced grub."

There was general laughter at this sally.

"you've hit it squarely, Senator. Over-priced because the middle man and even the speculators, often take ten to twenty percent of the price of the goods and pocket it. Now I think something should be done about this."

"Right George, we agree to all you've said so far, get on with it." growled the Senator from Tennessee.

George paused a moment and took a deep breath before he went on. "I guess I'm hinkle-pinkling around to get up courage enough to lay this on you. Well, here goes. The middleman does perform an important function--distribution. My only complaint is that he's getting too much for his services. I propose gentleman, that the government becomes the middleman.

There were some loud groans from the assembled senators. Someone offered the label, "Communism!" Another, "No--Socialism!" Several wanted to hear more of what George proposed and shushed the others into silence.

"Yes, I realize it does smack of tampering with private enterprise--that it sounds a little socialistic--even illegal. But look, gentlemen. Is inflation legal? Is unemployment legal? Is starvation legal? Is suicide legal?!"

He had them, they were listening to a man. Cigars smoldered untouched in the ashtrays as they concentrated on his words

"I think you can see the utopian simplicity of the government getting into these distributorships. We'd keep the clerks, dispatchers, drivers; all the personnel necessary to run each operation. The only one who would have to go would be the boss. We could pay a fair price for his equipment and facility, but nothing more.

"The distributor goes out to pasture, or, if we think we can trust him and find him valuable, we can hire him back at a reasonable salary to run the operation. Our peacetime army can certainly be employed to help out. My statistics show that most of these operations can be operate on one to three percent. They'd pay for themselves and still show a profit.

The men in the room were dazed by the audacity of the plan. But most could see its validity.

George's eyes were shining as he concluded, "The beautiful thing about the plan is that the agricultural distribution centers alone would, even at three percent, show enough profit to pay the subsidies that are such a drain on the tax bite. I see the result as a substantial reduction in most prices and a slight reduction in taxes. Buying power would increase, demand would increase, jobs would increase, economy improve.

"But George, aren't you forgetting the Supreme Court? Even if we could get this through both houses and the president, they'll label it as illegal."

George's eyes were burning bright now with determination.

"I repeat, gentlemen. Is inflation legal? Is unemployment legal? Is starvation legal?!" and he shouted the last. The entire group jumped to their feet and cheered.

"Damn you, George Potter. You're one hell of a politician, and I mean that as a compliment!" one shouted over the noise.

The door opened a crack and the committee secretary peeked in.

"Thank you, Miss Carter. Just a bit of frivolity. Please guard the door and don't let anyone in. This is definitely a closed meeting.

"Well George?" asked the chairman, turning back to the young Senator. "What's the M.O.?"

"I've anticipated Supreme Court interference and I think an old fashioned stump campaign is in order. I think we should go out and tell the people what we propose. See what their reaction is. If we offer a unanimous mandate, the Court can't stand against us even if we have the change the Bill of Rights!"

One very old senator rose unsteadily from his chair. He'd remained quiet through the entire proceedings with his eyes closed. Everyone thought he was sleeping but he'd listened to every word; studying and weighing the arguments one by one. Many of the others were hoping for his endorsement.

"George," the old man began. "I've listened to your ideas. They are interesting we all admit, and I pronounce them sound--radical, but sound," There was a rustle of agreement from the others. "I am a Republican," he admitted, "and a damned conservative one. But by God, I think it's high time for some radicalism. Therefore, I would like to place in nomination the name of George Potter as the one to take this message to the people. The people love him. They'll listen, and they'll act on what he says. We all know his power over the populace. Many of us fear it. Myself, I'm too old. My ambition is gone. George is no longer a threat to me."

He spoke pointedly as he glared at several senators seated at the table, then smiled at the young man who was in his second year as Senator. "The people need George Potter...the next President of the United States!"

For a moment they all thought the grand old senator had had a lapse. That he'd gone senile and in his inconsistency had wandered of the subject. At last they realized he was right. If George Potter could pull this off, there was nothing to keep him from the Presidency, if he wanted it. Many of them applauded. Some left the room with darkened brows. Concerned for their own futures. But most agreed with the old man. The nation needed George Potter!

## TWENTY-EIGHT

While George stumped the country, preaching the new doctrine of the U.S. Mercantile Distribution Service, lobbyists howled in Washington.

George spoke to anyone who would listen, and that was nearly everyone. He spoke to consumer groups, ladies club teas, the Rotary, Lions and university students. The news media flocked to his assemblies, because as always, whatever George Potter did

was news. He appeared on TV, Radio and in newspapers and journals. He was quoted on every street corner.

Supporters of the now beleaguered middlemen tried various tactics, but failed miserably. They just didn't have a leg to stand on.

The country listened and the country nodded in agreement with George Potter, Senator USA. He even composed and sang a little jingle on a thirty second TV spot that was paid for by consumer and other supportive organizations. If there was one thing the nation loved, it was to hear George sing. They listened and when he asked them to write their congressman and senator in support of the U.S. Mercantile Distribution Service, they did so. Almost to a man and woman, (Some children, too). The mail flowed into Washington--the greatest deluge in history. Congress had no choice. It was a mandate from the people. The Potter Proposal was pushed through with all possible speed and George hurried back to Washington to help implement the plan. He was made chairman of the M.S.D. Bureau. Secretly, George felt that one more bureau was much too much, but this one was his baby and he believed in it.

Suddenly, as he had expected, there came great rumblings from the Supreme Court. The new Law is unconstitutional! George Potter is tampering with the free enterprise system. The middlemen and speculators smiled for a moment, but not for long. Again the mail poured into Washington, this time through the hallowed portals of the Supreme Court and nearly drowned the crotchety old men in their stately judicial robes.

The country cried--BULL SHIT! We're tired of paying through the nose. Out with the middleman and speculators--the government was elected by the people to protect us from such leeches!

The great judges recoiled in terror and acquiesced. If the entire population wanted it, there was nothing they could do and the Proposal became the law of the land.

With George pushing and pulling in Washington, the transition was made smoothly with a minimum of fuss and expense, something entirely new in government. The U.S. Mercantile Distribution Service became a reality. The middlemen and speculators quit smiling and retired. The people sighed a sigh of relief as prices dropped to sensible level.

George had done it--their George Potter! He was the hero of the day, of the year, of the century! He was still the most popular person on all the polls and they waited anxiously to see what he would do next. Letters poured into his office and he kept tabs on the basic contents of them; the wishes of the people.

During the next three years, George came up with some great ideas. Some were lulus!

He crossed and recrossed the country many times in grass root campaigns for new proposals. Nearly all of them became law. George made a lot of friends, and most certainly a lot of jealous enemies.

Finally, it was the fifth year of George Potter's senatorhood: The Presidential Election Year! It was no surprise when George Potter's name was put forward as a possible candidate. The people had been talking about it since the first Potter Proposal for the M.D.S. They had been keeping an eye on George, as they always had. He was not only the greatest entertainer of the decade, he had also become one hell of a statesman.

“Why not good ol’ George for President?” the question was on everyone’s lips. And when he received thousands of telegrams, letters and phone calls begging him to run, he didn’t hesitate to announce his candidacy. When the announcement came on nationwide television, many of the hopefuls lost hope and most of them backed out of the race.

Why Bother? ol’ George would most probably walk right into the White House. And, that’s just what he did.

NOTE TO READERS: We’re all aware we are stretching credibility and constitutionality with much of the story. Still, most of the ideas were suggested by researching such thinkers as Eric Hoffer and others. In any case please remember George is an extraordinary being in his own right, pushed along by a wee bit o’ magic. It’s a fantasy and we hope these liberties are really just a part of the far-fetched fun.

## TWENTY-NINE

The Oval Office buzzed with soft conversation as the morning light filtered through the window and bathed the six men lounging around the coffee table with its warmth. They talked, joked and sipped their coffee. Only one was silent, the seventh man who sat behind the desk. The President of the United States toyed absent-mindedly with his coffee cup, only half aware of the others in the room. He looked relaxed. Then a smile came to the still young, handsome face. He set his cup down and rose from the chair. The rest of the men in the room fell silent and all eyes turned toward the man who now moved from behind the desk and came around to sit on the edge of it.

He smiled the famous smile and spoke: “Good morning gentlemen. I’m glad you could all make it this A.M. Especially you Grove,” He was referring to Grover Cleveland Brown, the African American Vice-President of the United States. “Grove, you’ve been wanting something big to work on and I’ve been saving this one for you. It’s the biggest! Because today, we are going to take up the subject of Welfare.

The others in the room looked a little puzzled. The Vice-president smiled a little uncertainly and leaned forward in his chair to pay close attention to what George Potter was saying. George had something profound up his sleeve and the V.P. wanted to know more before he started to worry.

“I have become increasingly perplexed about the condition of the unemployed these last few years,’ Potter continued. “The sad truth is, gentlemen, a good percentage of this country is made up of lazy loafers!”

“The dead ass syndrome,” offered Presidential Advisor, Chuck Preston.

“Exactly,” agreed the President. “And we have encouraged it with our permissive welfare system.”

Ivor Gustafson, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare cringed slightly. Ol’ George saw the reaction and reassured his gray-haired friend. “Not your fault, Ivy. It’s just the nature of the beast. The fact remains, however, this country is becoming a welfare state. That’s what really bothers me. History has shown that a welfare state is

a weak state. Look at the Roman Empire. Toward the end of that power's influence, nearly half its people were on the dole. They became soft and lazy. That's already happening in this country. It's time to reverse the process. Get everyone working again. I think, in the long run, they'll appreciate it. Now here's my plan."

The group in the room leaned forward. This ought to be a good one!

"My idea is nothing if not radical and I'm sure some of you are going to suggest I have my head examined. But please, do me a favor. Hear me out. I think it's the only solution."

The President began. "Now, there are many out there who are legitimate welfare recipients. There are others, however, who for one lame excuse or another are taking a free ride. I know you'll agree that it seems unjust for the working tax payers to support these nonproductive drones." The others in the room nodded to a man.

"Many of them have lost their jobs, have been fired or had to quit because of some minor disability, and refuse to work because they are either over or under qualified for the jobs they're offered. I'm referring to women as well as men, now"

He paused to pour himself another cup of coffee. Paul Bossman, the Secretary of Labor offered his cup and the President filled it, too.

"I think it's time we cut off welfare to all those except the most desperate cases and even those should be investigated thoroughly.

"But..." interrupted the Vice-President.

"No Buts," smiled the President. "Until I've finished."

The Vice-President began to look worried, but settled back to listen; chastened by the President's gentle reprimand.

"You're afraid they'll starve or rise up against us," continued the Chief Executive. "I've been investigating this plan of mine since my senatorial days, and I know it'll work."

"Across this country of ours there are many vacant army camps and other empty government facilities. I propose we hire some practical engineers and decorators. Turn all of these places into habitable quarters for the welfare community."

"Concentration Camps?!" yelled Martin Treadway, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

"No, Marty--Welfare Farms," corrected the President. "I think nearly all the welfare recipients can be put to work. We can even hire the handicapped. They are taking a heavy toll on the country and it's time they helped out. Look--first we get all the unemployed carpenters, builders, farmers together to set up the camps. We reclaim the land and make it productive. The men and able women can work the farms. We'll create small factories to manufacture clothing, small tools and such--make the communities self sustaining. Those who are not so able, can run the nurseries, kitchens and do the laundry, mending, etc."

Some of the men in the room began to see the value of what the man before them was saying. There were mixed reactions.

"Wow! what a fantastic idea!" exclaimed Rick Puglisi, Secretary of Agriculture.

"They'll never go for it," grumbled the black Vice-President, Grover Brown.

"They'll have no choice. Cut off their life line and they'll come flocking to our farms."

"And...this is a big AND! They'll have an option. We'll set up employment offices at each facility. As we encourage the expansion of business and industry, those working

at the Welfare Farms, will be given the opportunity to take jobs and move back into the main stream.”

The President folded his arms and was silent for a few moments as he studied each face. Some were beaming with appreciation over the unorthodox idea. Others looked dubious.

“Grove, I realize the logistics are complicated, but I don’t expect this to take place overnight. I just think it’s high time we got the ball rolling. you’ll have the generous help of these worthy gentlemen, and if you need me, I’ll go with you wherever you want.”

“We’re with you Grove,” said the others, clapping the Vice-President on the back.

Grover Cleveland Brown smiled at them in gratitude and turned to the chef executive.

“Well, you’re the President!” he said with a smile.

“He sure is! One hell of a President!” said the Secretary of Transportation--almost as if he wanted to lead a cheer for the man at the desk. The new Welfare Committee nodded enthusiastically.

“But, I haven’t told you the best part,” added the President. “Not only will the welfare groups become self-sufficient and take a big load off the treasury, I think we can even make a profit.”

Eyes lit up around the room as this sank in.

“Yes, I’m sure we’ll make a surplus from the farms and factories that we can feed back into the treasury. Enough to at least pay the interest on the national debt and even possibly pay back the debt itself in a decade.”

The whole group stood up this time and cheered. They were solidly behind the President’s new program. They clapped George Potter on the back and shook his hand. The President laughed and smiled.

“I think it’s time for a Fireside Chat concluded the President.

## THIRTY

The President tapped his glass to bring the cabinet meeting to order. Also present were: Secretary of State, David Woods; Secretary of the Treasury, Larry Bernstein; Secretary of Defense, Frank Madison; Postmistress General, Virginia McCaddon; Secretary of the Interior, Brice Woodward; Secretary of Agriculture, Richard Puglisi; Secretary of Commerce, Joseph Stepanick; Secretary of Labor, Paul Rossman; Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, Dr. Ivor Gustafson; Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Martin Treadway, and John Quincy, Secretary of Transportation. The only one missing was Grover Cleveland Brown, Vice-President. He usually attended the cabinet meetings, Today, however, he was out inspecting the Welfare Farms. They took up all his time these days. Besides, the agenda didn’t require his presence.

“The first item of business concerns the steel industry,” announced the President, turning to the Secretary of Commerce. “Bill, you said in your message to me this morning that Union Steel--the nations numero uno, plans to raise their price fifty dollars a ton and the other mills will follow suit.”

“Righto, George,” answered the Secretary with a frown. “And you know what that means....”

“Yes, it does seem our own monetary system is based more on the steel standard than the gold. Unfortunately, as the industry goes, so goes the nation. I’m sure you’ve all noticed when one allied industry raises prices, the rest overcompensate and double the raise. It’s like a poker game.”

The others nodded as the President continued. We’ve just about had it with such shenanigans. So has the public and we can’t permit it to continue. So, Bill, if you will, send the chairman of the board of Union Steel a personal message from me to the effect we are planning to make a complete audit of his corporate books and hold a full investigation of his profit structure. I’ll sign it,”

“That should do it, Mr. President,” chortled the Secretary of commerce.

“I believe the Secretary of Agriculture is next on the agenda. Brice, if you please?”

Brice Woodard rose from his chair, a worried frown on his face.

“The grain cooperatives are after me again, George. They want to sell seven million tons to Russia again this year. Somehow there was a leak and the public is enraged. This year is going to see a bumper crop and the masses don’t want a repeat of the Butts scandal. I mean, back then they used the old chestnut they must use food stuffs to negotiate leverage with the communist bloc. They can’t use that this time, Mr. President. You’ve already made peace with those countries and they know our problems here at home. I trust they understand.”

“They understand, Mr. Secretary. Go on,” urged the President.

“When Butts had my job, he allowed the growers to do what they wanted. During the 1972-’73 they sold to Russia, created a false wheat shortage and raised the prices sky high. Most Americans wanted to hang Butts. I’m no coward, Mr. President. But I’m too young to die!” concluded the Secretary of Agriculture.

“Of course you are, Brice,” agreed the President as the Secretary resumed his seat.

“Tell you what, Mr. Secretary. Since we have been so generous with our aid and support of the farmers in the past, I think they owe the people more than one. Send out the word that the farmers may sell their surplus, and stress surplus, to whomever they like, but they may not create a false shortage and raise their prices. On second thought, their prices are too high anyway. Have them cut the price a nickel a bushel. I’d like to see a corresponding cut in the price of bread, our staff of life. Inform the bakery channels they will have to follow suit, okay?”

“Okay!” beamed the Secretary of Agriculture.

“Next case gentlemen,” smiled the President as he rapped for order. “...deals with the ongoing problem of petroleum hikes. As you know we are about to put an end to the energy crisis with the methane program. John Quincy will give us his report.” The President leaned back in his chair as the Secretary of Transportation rose to speak.

“I’m sure each of you has read my rather lengthy and informative booklet on the subject,” began the Secretary with a wry and knowing smile. “But for those who don’t know what’s going on the Department of Transportation, here’s a refresher.”

“The supply of accessible petroleum across the world is just about used up, or will be within the next fifty years. Accordingly, the petroleum producing countries have had a field day with the price of the stuff, with resulting price hikes on gasoline and in every



other related field. The President and myself made a study of the problem and found an alternate method, which he is enforcing in his usual persuasive manner.”

The cabinet members looked toward the Chief Executive and chuckled.

“Basically what we’ve done is take garbage, grass clippings, and plain old poo-poo...”

“Please Mr. Secretary,” chided the President with a grin. “I’ll have to ask you to watch your language. There’s a lady present and your language may even shock some of the distinguished gentlemen.”

This brought a belly laugh from the distinguished gentlemen.

“Sorry Mr. President, Sorry Ms. McCaddon,” agreed the Secretary of Transportation.

“...Human feces and other animal waste...ah...better, Mr. President?”

“Better, Mr. Secretary,” rejoined the Chief Executive.

Turning back to the fascinated cabinet members; the Secretary went on with his report.

“We blend it all together in a potpourri of glop and let it ferment for a few days. There’s a terrific build up of fumes and the mess gives off a powerful gas.”

“I can well imagine!” retorted one of the members.

The rest laughed in assent.

“And one that is very combustible. We add a few things and filter it a bit to take out some the the stench, the rest burns off completely.

“Thank Heavens!” quipped Virginia McCaddon, the Postmistress General.

“What is the status of the nation’s methane conversion?” asked the President.

“About ten percent of the personal vehicles and nearly seventy percent of the business vehicles and buses have already converted and are using methane from our plants on the Welfare Farms and elsewhere. These percentages escalate daily.”

“Then the tax refund incentive is working?”

“Beautifully, Mr. President!” responded the Secretary and to the rest he continued.

“You see, we waive the sales tax on vehicles that are converted to methane and make special allowances to certain groups. Conversion costs are minimal and soon the price of producing the methane will be about one third the cost of a gallon of gasoline. The beautiful thing about methane is that the supply of raw materials is endless. Or should I say the supply of at least one source, human waste, is bottomless!”

The cabinet members roared at this sally and the President remarked through his mirth-produced tears.

“Well put, Mr. Secretary. Well Put!”

“In addition to the methane and natural gas programs, we have contacted the auto manufacturers and urged them to create new vehicle which utilize other alternative fuels. Pollution from petroleum has become a world wide issue and it’s time something was done about it.”

I’m surprised this plan of yours wasn’t put into effect long ago, Mr. President, “ offered the Secretary of Commerce.

“Speculators, and Lobbies, Mr. Secretary. Lobbies for the petroleum industry and vote buying...or candidate buying, if you wish. I prefer the system we have now. Lobbies outlawed and government suggestions only by written petition. It’s much more impersonal and less dangerous the the majority.”

## THIRTY-ONE

The President hardly noticed the greetings as he walked slowly down the central hall of the White House. "Good morning, Mr. President!" "Hi George!" etc. Each salutation was acknowledged with an amiable grunt. The President was concentrating. He held a sheaf of papers as he studied them carefully. A White House tour almost ran him over.

He smiled absently at the squeals of delight from the ladies from Des Moines before he returned to his studies. He shook his head from time to time and made faint clucking sounds, until he felt someone take his arm.

"Ya look worried, George." It was Doctor Ivor Gustafson, the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare.

"Oh, Hi Ivy! I was just going over these literacy figures you prepared for me. Or should I say il-literacy. Appalling!" snorted the President.

"Nothing new," offered the Secretary.

"I know, but I'd never seen them in black and white before. Why can't these kids read? Come along to the office. I'd like to discuss this thing." George took the big Swede by the elbow and led him through the door into the Oval Office.

"Why?" questioned George Potter again.

"Lots of reasons. Pressures from peers and environment. Lack of interest, too much TV. Poor teachers, the wrong books--it's a long list," answered the Secretary of Education. The two men settled themselves in the comfortable chairs at the end of the oval room, opposite the President's desk. The President poured them both cups of coffee from the silver service on the table. The President glanced again at the papers in his hand and then set them down beside him as he tuned to the portly, graying blond man who sat opposite him.

"Ivy--this is as serious as it is important. We've got to something about it--and quickly. The children of this nation must be at least taught the basic three Rs."

"Funny you should mention that, George," returned the Secretary. "I had dinner with Selma Atkinson, the director of PBS the other night. It was just after your fireside chat on solar energy. She said, and I quote: 'It's too bad George Potter isn't teaching school. He's so lucid, so interesting and so damned cute, you just can't resist his arguments. He could sell fur coats to orangutans.'"

"She said that?" beamed the President.

"That's what she said," grinned the Secretary. "She went on at length about what a great teacher you'd make. Used to be a grammar school teacher herself."

"Aw--that's a riot, isn't it?" laughed the President.

"Wait a minute!" interrupted the Secretary as the flash of an idea seemed to brighten his face. He looked hard at the President, a funny smirk on his face. Then his expression changes as he apparently dismissed the idea.

"Naw--you'd never go for it," he said.

"Come on Ivy. Spit it out. I'm willing to do anything to get these kids educated. What we decide could affect the whole future of this country."

“But this is the craziest idea of my career,” Ivor Gustafson paused for a moment as the President eyed him expectantly.

Finally the Secretary of Education spoke. “What if...? What if you taught the nation?!”

The President exploded with mirth, “Awwwheee heee awe ha ha hee hee! Awww, you’re kidding.”

“Well, I thought I was at first, but you see--the fact is, the people will do about anything you ask of them, and that includes the kids. I know they might not like to hear or admit it, but it’s the unvarnished truth.” The Secretary got up and stood looking down at the President.

“Now, come on, Ivy. You exaggerate,” blushed the President modestly.

“Don’t you know nearly every man woman and child in this country hang on your every word and follow you like a swarm of lemmings? Whenever you ask them to do something--they jump to it.”

“Oh...come on now...” The President blushed a brighter red.

“It’s true.” The secretary gestured toward the President as if introducing him to some unseen audience.

“There he sits folks, probably the most popular man in the history of the world. George, if I had what you have, I’d have an ego that was insurmountable. But there he sits folks--good ol’ George Potter, or should I say young George Potter...Youngest President of these United States of America, as modest, down-to-earth and comfortable as an old shoe with a bright new shine!”

“Are you finished?!” laughed the President. “One more accolade and I’ll throw up.”

“What I’m getting at,” continued the Secretary as he sat down again, “...is if, once a week you could give a little TV class on--you know, readin’, writin’ and rithmetic, I know those kids would listen to you and it might just inspire them to really apply themselves to their studies. I think that’s what they really need--inspiration.”

“Gosh, you think it would work?” asked the President, hesitantly. “It’s a pretty harebrained idea. Ah, no offense Ivy. I guess it could though. This administration was founded on some pretty harebrained ideas.”

“Some damned smart hare-braining, Mr. President. I’m sure it’ll work.”

“Well, look. why do it only once a week? Couldn’t we cover more ground faster, if we gave a class every day?”

“That’d be pretty tough with your schedule...”

“Oh, I dunno. If you really think we could make a go of it, we could build our own TV studio right here in the White House basement. I don’t bowl. We could turn Eisenhower’s bowling alley into a studio.”

“Yeah!” smile the Secretary as he saw the possibilities of the President’s plan.

“I think you’re idea is a sound one, Ivy. but, I’ll need a lot of expert help. The major problem in some of the minority communities is a real lack in the quality of education. If they are going to move ahead at a steady pace, they are going to have to be educated as well or better than us honkies.”

“We honkies, Mr. President,” corrected the Secretary of Education with a smile.

“That’s right. Look Ivy, I have to keep my speech colorful and colloquial or the folks won’t listen to me. But you’re right, If I’m going to teach school, I’ll have to be correct, too.”

The President got up and began to pace the room as he spoke. "I really think we should bring some other people in to help us with this project."

Puzzled, the Secretary leaned forward to pour himself another cup of coffee and asked,

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you know, part of the problem in education, as I understand it, has been some minorities can't relate to the white teachers and the textbooks designed for white kids. I think we ought to integrate the damned thing. You know, make the program multiracial."

"Hell of an idea!" agreed the Secretary, enthusiastically.

Suddenly, George Potter, President of the United States, stopped his pacing and slumped down in his chair.

"Are we crazy? Can we pull it off--or will...?"

"Let's cogitate a little on it," replied Ivor Gustafson. "Hell, I know it'll work." All at once the Secretary was laughing. "Jesus, George--I was just thinking. If you were to sing the A,B,Cs--wouldn't that be funny? Funny, hell! It would be sensational!"

"Okay, Ivy, if you say so. Looks like we're back in the music business."

"We can test it out right here in the capitol," added the Secretary of Education.

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George had taken to riding around Washington in a plain secret service car instead of the presidential limousine. Sometimes he wore dark glasses, depending on the weather, or even a false mustache and slouch hat. He usually rode in the front seat with only his body guard, Bill Foster driving. As long as George Potter didn't smile, no one recognized him.

Today, however, he rode in the back with Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, Ivor Gustafson, as they compared program notes.

The car arrived at the PBS station WETA-TV without much fanfare. The press hadn't been officially notified, but there were a few who had taken advantage of a news leak, or their kids had told them that the President was appearing on TV. Ol' George made a brief statement, posed for pictures with station manager, John Optypack, and they went inside. The manager gushed.

"Oh, Mr. President. This is such an honor!"

"No, Mr. Optypack, it is we who appreciate the use of your facilities for our little experiment."

"Great Experiment, Mr. President!" corrected the delighted station manager. "I'm sure we're all ready for you. Please come this way. He bowed the President toward the studio.

The program opened with a tight shot of a guitar. Expert hands and fingers began to play a melodic intro. Then the famous, smiling face appeared in a soft oval in the center of the instrument and George Potter began to sing. The children who sat in classrooms and auditoriums across the city, heard the same warm, friendly voice that still sold millions of records each year.

"A--go AHEAD and try!

B--you'll BEGIN to C

D--we DEPEND on it..

E--for EVERYTHING, you and I”

On he went through the alphabet--swinging along to a catchy new Potter tune.

Within days following the President’s appearance on WETA-TV, the reports were available on it’s effectiveness. George and Dr. Gustafson saw not only unequaled ratings for the local PBS station, but all the reports gave glowing evidence of the President’s teaching ability. The President and the Secretary of Education held several conferences with Selma Atkinson and other brass from the Public Broadcast system, who were overjoyed at the prospect of adding the President of the United States and former pop star to their programming.

Modifications were made to the basement bowling alley and a microwave system was established between the White House and the Public Broadcasting System. The new program, entitled Mr. Potter, was aired at various times during the day to various age groups in each coverage area across the nation and in Canada.

Popular demand dictated that a couple of nights a week they must air Mr. Potter in prime time. The adult public wanted to see what ol’ George was up to. For the first time in history, PBS pulled a larger audience than the major networks. Another hit for George Potter; and the successful program boosted the nation’s literacy rate by leaps and bounds.

## THIRTY-TWO

The White House tour guide motioned for the visitors to pause while she showed them the portrait of George Washington. One of the visitors raised her hand.

“Yes?” asked the smiling guide

“Will we be seeing the President today?” the tourist asked , and the others nodded hopefully.

“Oh, I am sorry,” the guide replied, “but the President is in the Middle East working on peace negotiations.” The tour looked disappointed. “But there is a good chance you may see the First Lady and George Two. The Potters try to make all visitors welcome to their home.”

Just then a handsome, majestic, black woman passed near the group.

“Liza Cooper,” someone whispered. “It’s Liza Cooper.”

The woman smiled a dazzling smile and waved at the group as she made her way to the stairs.

“As I’m sure you know,” continued the guide, motioning them to follow. “Ms. Cooper was once George Two’s nanny. He’s almost teenage and now Liza is official keeper of the White House, among other things. She’s a big help around here!”

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Meanwhile, in Baghdad, President George Bertram Potter had been meeting for days with the heads of state and religious leaders of the troubled muslim nations. The first days of the U.S. sponsored meeting had gone badly, and though discouraged, the President plugged away. He cajoled, pleaded, argued and even tactfully browbeat the

stubborn heads of state and religion in what at times seemed a vain attempt to have them agree to the accords.

What happened on the last days or what President Potter said to them was kept very hush-hush. However, as if by a miracle, on the fifth and final day of the negotiations., the great doors to the council chamber opened, and the participants were seen laughing and hugging one another.

The president looked pleased and relieved. What he had said to them was still secret, but many assumed he had only pointed out what they already knew: That they all believed in Mohammed and Allah, and as the Koran had stated or implied:. Peaceful coexistence was the only pathway to heaven.

Perhaps the force of his personality had helped build agreements on the many issues. At least, for the moment, he had brought peace to that part of the world.

The U.S. leader had also made many promises. Ones he intended to keep. He felt one of the principle underlying problems with the Palestinians and some of the others was their jealousy of the Israeli success in turning their land into a fertile paradise. George Potter had convinced the Israeli government to send consultants to show their enemies how to bring fertility to their arid deserts.

At first there was predictable friction between the Jews and Muslims. But as they talked and listened, they began to see the light. The President also had the promise of the U.N. and his own government to subsidize the program. As the various parties became more enthusiastic about the potential for food production, a question was raised: What to do with all the surplus? The President was ready for that one: Feed the world's hungry. The U.S. had been doing just that for over a half century with airlifts and cargo ships. He advised the governments to combine their peacetime armed forces along with American Army, Navy, Marine and Air force units to create a transportation network of distribution. that would feed the third world and beyond.

In addition, Potter's advisors would help the countries to create new industries to employ the unemployed, and bring the Middle East into the 20th century.

The idea of getting their hands on Yankee dollars appealed to some of the Afghan Taliban war mongers. Seeing the greed in their eyes, George was prompted to add a proviso: Afghanistan would receive all the help they needed, but only if they burned the opium poppy fields and convinced their farmers to grow wheat and other essential foods. He hoped this would cut into the heroin, and related drug industry...drugs high on the list of drug dealers in the U.S. and elsewhere. He also implied there would be spy planes overhead to make sure they complied.

### THIRTY-THREE

Spring filled the air as the small, three car caravan moved at a leisurely pace through the Maryland countryside. Far in front was a pale green sedan; at a comfortable distance to the rear came a plain sport coupe; and between them cruised a dusty, beige Ford Fairlane two door.

The driver of the Ford was the President of The United States, George Potter. He wore a golf cap and sun glasses (As long as he didn't smile, no one would recognize the Chief Executive.) Beside him sat his handsome, eleven year old son, George Two. The cars in front and in back held secret service men dressed in casual clothes. There

was really no need for them. Who on earth would want to harm good ol' George Potter? George kept them on because they all had families and needed the work.

Camp David lay a few miles behind, and minutes later, the caravan turned off the highway, down a dirt road and into the woods. They finally bumped and joggled to a stop in a small clearing.

The President hopped out first. "This is it boys," he called out with a big grin. "Indian Creek is just below that clump of aspens. You boys do whatever you want. George Two and I are gonna try to catch dinner."

The Chief Executive opened the trunk of the dusty Ford and he and the boy gathered up creels, reels, rods and tackle boxes and started down the trail that led to the creek. It was a beautiful day. The sun shown through the branches above them, and there were birds singing cheerfully along their path. They had to climb down the rocks that bordered the creek. Some were huge boulders and the two helped one another up and over as needed.

At last they came to a small grassy knoll that lay next the the creek. "Here we are son, just like I said. Beautiful, eh?"

"Sure is, Dad!" replied the bright-eyed boy.

The knoll was shaded by a huge oak that reached out over the slow moving stream. At this point, the waterway broadened out to form a large, quiet pool, before it narrowed to spill down a small waterfall farther on. It was an idyllic setting and the two, father and son, drank in the beauty that surrounded them, before they settled down to the business at hand. Both opened their tackle boxes and expertly prepared dry flies they'd made themselves. They often went fishing together. Sometimes they fished the deep sea; sometimes they went after salmon during the annual run up the Potomac: often they angled small streams such as this one. On the President's peace missions, they had even fished in Europe and the Orient.

They decided against waders. The President hunkered down to avoid the branches overhead, and as the automatic reels sang in unison, they expertly cast their lines out from the grassy plot on which they stood. The President selected a spot down stream. George Two whipped his into an area near a big log where the stream entered the pool.

After they placed their flies, they sat down shoulder to shoulder and hitched at the lines from time to time to give the flies a lifelike action, designed, with any luck, to lure the cagiest trout. They barely spoke. Silence is essential to trout fishing. George Two looked at his father. The President was concentrating on his fishing, trying to keep his line from drifting too near a couple of snags near the end of the pool.

George Two admired his old man. I only wish I'd known him when he was a big pop star, he said to himself. Being President is Okay, but being a pop star is better. He'd been too young to remember the adulation and fame his father had enjoyed eight years earlier. Actually, the President's music was still very much a part of the pop scene. His songs were classics and though there were many imitators, most everyone agreed there was no substitute for the real thing. George Potter's recordings were still played on nearly every station in the world. Every once in a while, there would be a big George Potter revival and some of his million sellers would move back into the top ten. Yet, the fact remained that George Two had seen and heard only the recorded sounds and images of his father as an entertainer. They still inspired, still influenced the new generation--his generation. In the tapes and films of those concerts he could still feel

some of the wonder of the George Potter legend. But, to actually be there--at a real live concert, that must have really been something!

"How's the guitar coming, Son?" his father's soft spoken question interrupted the boys reverie.

"Okay Dad," whispered the boy. "In fact, my teacher is very proud of my progress."

"Good! How about the singing?" "Bout the same. I still sing like a bird--a crow!"

"Sounds familiar. I used to have a similar problem. Maybe when your voice changes?"

"I sure hope so, Mr. President," his son replied with a grin. The Chief Executive winked back at him as the boy continued. "Music is my whole life now."

"I trust you're keeping up with your studies. Your last grades were excellent. I'd be happy if you could maintain that."

"No sweat, Pop. I like what I'm learning and my tutors in economics and political science are very inspiring. But of course, they do follow your example."

Suddenly there was a big splash near the log where George Two's line lay.

"Hey, Dad, did you see that one?!" A real whopper!"

"Yeah!" replied the President with admiration.

"Dad?" asked the young man as he twitched the line to lure the big trout they'd just seen.

"Uh huh."

"What's it like being President?"

"Oh, I donno. I've gotten used to it. Come to think of it, it's kinda fun. Ya get to talk to a lot of interesting people. The kind who make history. And you get to make decisions that effect the lives of millions of people. I'll admit that can get kinda sticky. I've been pretty lucky in that department, however, don't ya think?" asked the President as he looked down at the boy who sat next to him, on the grassy knoll, under the spreading oak tree.

"Yes, Mr. President. Yer doin' a great job, nobody denies that, but then, ya do have congress by the short hairs."

"What's that, Son?" The President stood up, reeled in his line and cast it into another corner of the giant pool.

"Ya got 'em by the balls, Dad," replied the boy quietly.

"George Two! exclaimed the President in a shocked whisper.

"Yeah, Dad?"

"Your language is deplorable."

"That's what Uncle Ivor told me."

"I prefer to think of it as friendly persuasion."

"Well, whatever it is, it works."

The President sat down, glanced at the boy, pulled his hat back and scratched his head. Then he straightened the cap and added,

"Speaking of...uh...balls, I think it's about time you and I had a little discussion about the ol' birds and bees."

"Sure, Mr. President," the boy replied, reeling in his line and zinging it out again the direction of the giant trout's lair. "What do ya want to know?"

"But, I..."



“Dad,” whispered the boy with a slightly condescending tone. “We had sex education a year ago in the fifth grade.”

“Oh,” said the President.

“There’s one thing I figured out by myself, though.”

“What’s that son?”

“When a man and a woman get together to do it they’d don’t just do it to have babies. They do it because it’s Fun. At least that’s my theory.’

“What! Where did you...?! Ha...ha...ha...hooooo hooo...yee hee! The President broke into gales of merry laughter. “Right on, son!” he choked out between guffaws. “Right on!”

The President rolled on the grassy knoll, holding his sides as he laughed

“Look out, Dad!” cried George Two.

The boy grabbed for the Chief Executive, but it was too late. The President rolled right into the pool and took his son along with him. Fortunately the water was shallow where they fell and they stood only knee deep when they regained their balance. They stood laughing and splashing on another. Finally they fell into each others arms and roared with glee.

The secret service men, hearing the hysterical caterwauling, came running to see the cause and found the father and son laughing and hugging each other. The two were soaked from head to toe. There was some kind of water plant sticking from behind the President’s ear as they heard him say.

“I just love you, George Two!”

“I love you, too, Mr. President!”

## THIRTY-FOUR

The President’s passion for languages was well known. He already spoke fluent French and Russian, the languages of his college days. French because it was the traditional diplomatic language and Russian because when dealing with the Russians, it was best to be prepared for anything.

The Chief Executive was a firm believer in the notion that if you are going to deal with people, it was only polite and sensible to do so in their own language. After all, why should they be expected to struggle with English just because he spoke it? It was a difficult language at best and had been known to contribute to credibility and communication gaps between nations.

Therefore, the President continued his language studies. He had an unusual way of doing this. His schedule was full except for the noon hour. So, each day he’d invite a visitor to join him for lunch in the Oval office. On Mondays came a Buddhist monk in saffron robes. Tuesdays, a former officer and member of the German embassy staff. Wednesdays brought an Arab prince who was studying at the University. Thursdays he was taught by a sultry seniorita, and each Friday a handsome black man lunched with the President as they studied Swahili.

When he reached a certain stage of fluency in any one language, he would rotate another into his schedule. At the moment a turbaned Indian Sikh was alternating Wednesdays with the Arab prince.

The Chief's fertile mind was like a sponge. He had a perfect ear and absorbed language the way most people breathe. Each morning he'd awaken with a phrase for the day.

"Gutten morgen meine lieber liebechen." He might say with a stretch and a yawn.

"Must be Tuesday," said Lydia. "At least it sounds like German. What does it mean?"

"Good morning, my lovely Love," he'd translate as he gave her a good morning smooch.

"Wonderful darling," replied the First Lady as she returned the First Man's kiss.

While he shaved, the President conjugated or declined the verb forms for the day. He made great progress and was soon fairly fluent in seven languages, with more on the way. There was one tongue, however, that had him completely stumped. It was totally incomprehensible to him and although he tried diligently to break it down into some semblance of order, he was unable to do so. George Potter refused to give up-- nothing had defeated him before. His inability to grasp the subtleties of the language didn't frustrate him, but it did start thought processes which eventually led to a momentous decision. At last, in a secret evening meeting with his closest advisors, he revealed his dilemma.

"Gentlemen, I have a problem."

"What's that Mr. President?" asked the Secretary of State, David Woods.

"I just can't grasp it--can't speak it. that damnable balderdash language called-- Bureaucratese!"

The whole table broke into gales of laughter. "No one understands it, Mr. PResident," roared Grover C. Brown, the Vice President. "That's the beauty of it. The only thing that's clear about it is the definition: Bureaucratese is that incomprehensible language that reached it's height at the Federal level where communications is reduced to numbers!"

The President hadn't jointed the laughter, although he did offer a wry smile.

"Then If I'm not the only one who finds difficulty with it. I have the uncomfortable feeling that such twaddle probably causes a terrible credibility gap between Washington and the public. As you know, I believe in clear lines of communication. Therefore, I propose to do something to eliminate bureaucratese from our midst. Let's lay it away with Sanskrit, ancient Phoenician and other dead languages. The President stood up and paced around and around the table where his advisors sat. They had a time following him, and a couple got kinks in their necks.

"While we're on the subject of bureaucratese, I'd like o bring up another sore spot. The organizations that bred this esoteric jargon--the bureaus themselves. Let's face it, many of them are obsolete, or inefficient or worse. I think it's time to clean house."

"That's a heavy idea, Mr. President," offered the Vice President.

"Time for another fireside chat, George?" broke in Dr. Ivor Gustafson, Secretary of Education.

"Good idea, Ivy!" replied the Chief Executive.

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The picture changed from a close-up of the President's seal to a medium shot of George Potter, seated near a fireplace. He was dressed casually in shirt, slacks and pullover.

"Hi folks! I'm glad you could join us this evening," he began. "Tonight I'd like to take up two subjects that are near and dear to my heart. Language and communications. This time, I'm not speaking about any foreign language, but one that is spoken here in Washington and in scattered pockets across the nation. I refer to Bureaucratese. I realize you have been bombarded by it most of your lives and have found it as puzzling as I have. To illustrate my point, I'm going to give an example. I had to learn this phonetically since there appears to be no rhyme or reason for its construction,"

Then the President launched into a long tirade of rhetoric and political mumbo jumbo, liberally laced with numbers which supposedly referred to bills, government forms, etc., ad nauseum. Finally he finished and took a deep breath.

"You see what I mean. Bureaucratese is completely unintelligible. Well, I think that's wrong. It's not only the language spoken in many circles in Washington, and even laid on you the listening public, but it is the jargon of billions of pieces of paper work which flow from one often inefficient and obsolete bureau to another." Around and around it goes and what does it mean? Nobody knows," rhymed the President.

"I think it's time to clear the air and get back to straight talk. Let's eliminate bureaucratese, and while we're at it, let's get rid of the excess baggage of dozens of bureaus which no longer serve any useful purpose.

"I realize this could put a lot of worthy folks out of jobs. Fear not. We are in the process of expanding new businesses, industries, world trade and such to take up the slack. In the meantime, let's see what we can do about reducing the size and number of bureaus.

"Please think about what I've said and then write to your Senator and Congressman about it. Thank you very much for being here tonight. So long for now."

Once again the viewing public, and they were the great majority, reached for pen and paper or went to their computers and wrote their legislators in Washington. The mail flowed into the capitol in a river, a torrent and then a flood. The legislators trembled, but held their ground.

The battle lines were drawn, the enemy met, and the strategy planned, as the President of the United States set about conquering the canker of--Bureaucracy

## THIRTY-FIVE

One dark and stormy night in an ancient, distinguished house on the outskirts of the city, a group of powerful politicians met in a dim library. Surrounded as they were by dusty books, the dusty-crusty old men leaned toward one another in close conversation. Then we all agree," whispered one. "Regicide it is!"

"He's not exactly a king!" snorted another.

“He’s not exactly a god either, but the people live under the delusion he’s a bit of both. That is why he must be eliminated!”

“Gentlemen, enough of this quibbling. We are launched on a very serious course. One that could be our undoing. I have taken the liberty of inviting a hit-man to be with us tonight.”

“Don’t you think that’s a bit premature and dangerous?”

“I think delay is more dangerous. The President will speak to a joint session of Congress only three weeks from tonight. Two weeks after the National Convention. We must be ready. When he speaks to us and them, the great unwashed, he will outline his plan to cut back our bureaucracy, thereby derailing our big fat gravy train. We must think of our future and those who come after us. Potter is doing radical thing to the government and he must be stopped.”

“Then I say we must do radical things to him,” said another. “But we must plan carefully. One false move could sink us all.”

There was a heavy knock at the door and one of the old men motioned for the others to be quiet as he said gruffly:

“Come in.”

The door squeaked open and a swarthy man with a scar on his cheek entered the dark, dusty room. The host stepped toward the stranger and led him into the light.

“Gentlemen, I’d like for you to meet Mr. Gino Giancano.”

“Hi ya, gents,” said the hit man. He glanced around the table at the octet of conspirators and recognized famous faces of both Congressmen and Senators. Some nodded to him; other seemed to shrink back into the shadows as if they’d rather not be seen by this stranger.

“Mr. Giancano, we’ve asked you here tonight to advise us on a project and to render us a service,” said the chairman of the conspirators.

“Yeah, I know dat. Ya wants me to rub out some poor jerk, but ya didn’t say who de lucky party wuz ta be. I’d like ta know dat.”

“Da...ah...The President of the United States,” announced the chairman.

The hit man froze where he stood. His face turned white. The scar on his cheek stood out red against the pallor. The assassin's head jerked from one to another of the men seated around the table as he looked in disbelief at each leader for confirmation.

“Oh, No! Not ol’ George,” moaned the hit man. “Youse wouldn’t want me to bump good ol’ George, the greatest guy in da whole woild?!”

“Yes, Mr. Giancano, I’m afraid Ol’ George is just the man we have in mind.

“But why? Why’d youse want to kill ’im? He’s one of da only decent Presidents we ever had!”

The chairman leaned forward. “Mr. Giancano, let’s just say it’s in the national interest to eliminate George Potter.”

“Lem’me sid’down,” moaned the hit man, sinking into a chair. “Jeeze, I can’t do dat for no fifty G’s. Not for a million. I just couldn’t do dat ta good ol’ George.”

The shocked assassin held his head in his hands as the chairman looked around at the group at the table. Some of them stared at the hit man, shaking their heads.

“Then perhaps you could suggest someone else for the...uh...job, Mr. Giancano?” asked the chairman.

"Ain't nobody I know'd do it. Most might want to kiss ol' George, but none of 'em would want ta give him da kiss of death!"

"Look--we'll pay you a hundred thousand!"

"Sorry gents. I'll bump off anybody ya say, 'cept ol' George."

"One hundred-fifty thousand," volunteered the chairman.

Some of the others groaned, yet this time there was no reaction from the assassin. He sat crumpled in his chair, his eyes staring straight ahead.

"Two hundred thousand...and that's our last offer."

The hit man turned and looked sharply at the chairman.

"Dat's an awful lott'a money. Me missus is sick and dat money'd come in handy. It'd take care of da brats too, if sumpin' goes wrong wiff did deal. But...ol' George!" The hit man groaned again. He threw up his hands and looked toward the cob-webbed ceiling. "Why Me, Lord?! Why me?" he cried.

"But Mr. Giancano. Just think. This is your opportunity to change the course of history," soothed the chairman.

"Wit-out ol' George dere might not be no hist'ry," suffered the hit man. "But...but..."

The chairman could see the assassin was wavering and hit him with a barrage of double talk about what a service he'd be doing for mankind to rid this country of a dictator who ran their lives, etc. The simple mind of the hit man was befuddled by the smokescreen and the offer of so much money for one hit.

"You'd haf'ta pay me a hundred thou' before da job and..."

"Den...ah...harumph...Then do you want us to sign a contract, Mr. Giancano?" asked one of the conspirators.

The hit man smiled sadly at the man's ignorance. "Naw man. Puttin' out a contract on somebody's only a figure a' speech. Jist gimme yer marker on it--dat you'll pay da balance in one easy one hundred smakola installment to me--or m' missus, should da Fed's ketch me."

"Then it's a deal, Mr. Giancano?" asked the chairman, extending his hand.

"Yeah, goddamit...poor ol' George," sighed the dejected assassin. "It's a deal."

The committee released a sigh of relief as the chairman shook hands with the hit man.

## THIRTY-SIX

The cheering, stomping pandemonium in the mammoth convention hall continued for what seem an eternity. George Potter's name had just been unanimously tossed into the party's ring as their candidate for reelection. No one was surprised; no one expected anything different. Fact is, the whole convention had been merely a token gesture; part of a tradition that no one wanted to break. Though the President planned to eventually make some changes in the laws governing conventions and delegates, he just hadn't gotten around to them. Even now he was basking in the glorious worship that came from the convention. floor.

George Potter stood with his First Lady, Lydia, on the high platform, waving and smiling at the exultant crowd of delegates below. Balloons were still descending from

the huge nets in the rafters and the sound of their popping was lost in the uproar. Signs and banners proclaiming POTTER FOR PRESIDENT were waving and moving in small serpentine parades through the crowd.

George and Lydia, their faces moist from the heat, were having just a bit of difficulty. Their arms were about to fall off from waving and their mouths were tired of smiling, but this was all part of the show, and the show must go on!

Suddenly George looked around at the TV cameras and seeing they were pointed elsewhere for the moment; reached down behind Lydia and gave her a firm pinch on her shapely rump. She jumped slightly, but was used to her husband's little quirks and quickly regained her composure. There was no one behind them, and though many were looking at them, they saw only the smiling faces, the waving arms. Lydia knew something they didn't know. Their beloved President, the tried-and-true, perfect-and-pure, charming-and-brilliant was just a little bit wicked.

Not mean-wicked, Lydia thought, but as far as she was concerned, ol' George was just Nice and wicked. For that she was thankful. He could have been the kind of President who neglects his wife in favor of his fame. George wasn't that sort of man. He loved her more than ever and showed her night and day. Especially at night. Most folks just can't imagine Kings and Queens, Princes and Princesses, Presidents and First Ladies in the wonderfully, inelegant process of lovemaking. Lydia knew better. Her President was a lover, par excellence.

Lydia turned slightly and looked up at her husband. She took her hand from his, put her arm around his waist and rested her head on his shoulder. He glanced down at her and bent to kiss her lightly on the forehead. The applause and cheering doubled as the great crowd saw--there on the platform--bathed in bright spotlights their symbols of love and hope.

Those in the great hall and those who watched on television in the United States and by satellite around the world, were touched by the simple affection of the handsome couple. Lydia and George were an integral part of the gleaming force and personality of leadership in the United States. A force which had brought peace to the world, and in that moment in time, happiness and prosperity to most of the people of the small planet called...Earth!

## THIRTY-SEVEN

The first three years of George Potter's reign were years of change...radical change that brought with it peace and prosperity--Years that were even better than the Good Old Days! The country marched to a different drummer as George Potter proposed and the government acted and reacted. George had an unusual yet immanently successful tactic to get the work done. Taking a ploy used by Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the thirties, he gave regular Fireside Chats, in which he suggested changes and new proposals. He always ended these informal talks with a mild enjoiner to his avid listening public to write their Congressman about this or ask your Senator about that. The mail flooded the legislative offices just as they had in the days of MDS. The Congressmen, woman and Senators were virtually blackmailed into voting as the

executive office dictated. Ol' George's proposals were rushed through Congress unimpeded.

The effect of his good works brought a new way of life to Americans, and in fact, to most of the world. The period would be fondly remembered as a Pax Americana. It was a period that was even more soothing to the American life style than the times marked by the presidency of Dwight Eisenhower.

As it invariably does, the presidential election year rolled around...or as most referred to it. the Presidential Re-election Year! Few doubted George would be unanimously held over for a second term. There were even whispered debates about changing the law governing the length and number of Presidential terms to be infinite. In George's case many wanted it to be for life.

George's opposition, and there were quite a few, moaned under the yoke of this paternal ruler. They would like to unseat him, but lacked the means. Halfheartedly, George's opponents went on the campaign trail. They had several favorite sons in mind. Polls favored, if you could call it that, Senator Wilbur Henry Rottenberger, the Senate Majority leader from Pennsylvania. Their candidate was the most photogenic and charismatic man in their party, but somehow paled in comparison to the talented, brilliant and charming former pop-star-turned-President.

They had one thing going for them. The President absolutely refused to campaign; saying he objected to the habit of his predecessors who took off most of their last year in office to campaign for reelection. He had too much to do to leave the confines of the Oval Office for prolonged periods. IF the people wanted him back. he would be glad to continue as their President. Right now, however, he was occupied with the task of making America a better place in which to live. He just had no time to go running down the campaign trail.

The disloyal opposition sat in long tactics sessions that usually ended in screaming, hollering debates, because they had nothing on which to hang their hats. George Potter was a model of a modern President. Most of the country loved him. In fact, more than half the world adored him to distraction. He was the most benevolent, yet aggressive leader the country had ever known. They tried to drag up the old chestnuts about his false paternity suit, his rock stardom image...but no one listened. George had already proven himself!

Then someone remember Paul Connor, George's famous friend and agent. Connor had recently come out for gay rights, and some wondered: Just what was George Potter to Paul Connor? Or more to the point, what was Paul Connor to ol' George? IF they could dig up something more than a business and friendship relationship, it could be the biggest scandal of all time, and just what they needed to turn the tide in their direction.

Yes, If they could prove the former pop-KING...was a QUEEN! What could be more perfect?!

## THIRTY-EIGHT

A week following the National Convention, and the clandestine meeting of the opposition, the enemy laid their first bomb in a TV news interview.

Lydia and the President, along with much of the nation watched as Senator Parker Patterson went into a long explanation of just who Paul Connor was. The former child star and now prominent talent agent, had recently come out publicly and was making a big to do as a gay liberation leader and activist, along with his new partner, country singer, Arnie Ardor. After carefully laying the ground work, the Senator fired his first missile. The fact that Paul Connor was a notorious gay libber who had been an intimate friend of President George Potter. He carefully insinuated there might have been more than friendship between the two men.

George covered his eyes with one hand and sank deeper into the cushions of the couch as the interview went on. Lydia watched his reaction and knew what it must be doing to him. She tried for a light touch.

“George--if you’re gay, you certainly don’t look very happy about this”

“Not funny, McGee,” choked the President. “Those bastards! Those slimy bastards!” growled the President through his teeth.

“But, George, the allegation is ridiculous!”

“Of course it is, and damned unfair to our friend, Paul. We knew he was different, but it didn’t matter to us. He and Arnie should be lauded for taking this stand”

“You’re going to deny the charge then?” asked Lydia.

“What good would it do? It’d be just my word against theirs.”

Lydia patted George’s hand “Well, we’ll see. “We’ll see”, she said softly.”

The weeks that followed brought a storm of controversy across the land. The gay--libbers cheered--“Good for ol” George!” they cried. The middle-of-the-roadsers shrugged...while the conservatives frowned a puzzled frown.

The White House remained mute. The President growled as he prowled the halls. He issued an ultimatum that nothing should be said. Still, by innuendo and blatant statement, the opposition grabbed onto this one crutch and slung a lot of mud as they tried to spatter George’s spotless reputation. The popularity polls wavered. George was still way out front, but the polls also indicated the undecided were wavering.

In spite of the President’s ultimatum, influential supporters of the administration came forward to bolster the President’s cause. Howard Casey, prominent, retired news analyst, former Congressman and much admired friend of the Chief Executive, wrote a book entitled THE FIRST 1250 DAYS, and toured the country; appearing on one talk show and news program after another.

The gist of his argument and the central theme of the book was: Just what has George Potter done for this country--for this world?

“It’s a long list and I hope I haven’t missed anything,” Casey stated in a TV interview. “George Potter has brought us prosperity, He’s balanced the National Budget; shown the way to pay not only the interest on the National Debt, but to eventually pay off the debt itself, achieved a balance of trade with most foreign countries. He’s encouraged the youth of America to shun television and return to their text books. He’s almost eliminated prejudice and bigotry from the land. He’s helped reduce the crime rate dramatically and has found ways to eliminate pollution from our highways and waterways. George Potter has brought harmony to labor and management, and given the working man renewed pride in his work.

“The President has eliminated the welfare problem and even brought at least a temporary peace to the near and far east, South America and Africa, virtually the entire



world. Unfortunately, man being what he is; inconsistent, greedy and belligerent, this peace may not last. For now at least, let's not concern ourselves with the possibility of a gloomy future. Let's bask in George Potter's Pax Americana, and hope it's permanent."

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One night on a coast to coast talk-a-thon, Casey said. "I confess I know little about George Potter's personal life, but he has a delightful wife and apparently adores the First Lady!" Then Casey suggested that perhaps Lydia should come forward and make a statement.

George balked at this. But Lydia pondered the question and without consulting the President, she went on Nationwide TV to speak to the voters.

"I hate to destroy George's reputation altogether," she began, "But I'm going to reveal his darkest secret. Ladies and gentlemen, if your children are still up at this hour, cover their ears or send them out of the room." She paused for a moment and then went on. "The fact of the matter is folks, your President, that sweet and adorable George Potter is just a little bit naughty. Not to say he's a dirty old man. No, he's too young for that yet, but he is naughty, and I should know, because, I'm the one he's naughty with!"

The first lady appeared calm, but the hands she clasped together behind the lectern were trembling and her mouth felt dry.

"There's been a lot of talk about George and Paul Connor, George's agent and our good friend. Paul lived with us for a time, and if anything was going on between those two characters. I mean anything...I would have known about it. Ol' George has always slept with me. And, when he wasn't asleep, well, as I said, he could be pretty naughty. Not Naughty naughty, but Nice naughty, and he hasn't changed a bit. He's a devil in the sack and that's the truth--so take it from ol' Lydia, ol' George Potter is as normal as blueberry pie. Probably more normal!

"Confidentially though," she went on with a little grin. "He does wear his sox to bed on cold nights. Sometimes that's all he wears, and I've told him I think it's darned rude!"

"Thanks for listening, folks. I hope this little speech of mine will allay any fears you may have about your president. He's the greatest!" she said with a wink. "If you know what I mean."

"Night, now--time to get home to ol' George!"

Lydia stood there for a moment as the tally light on the camera switched off. She hurried off the stage and into the wings where she broke into tears and was comforted by friend and confidante Liz Cooper. It had been one of the most difficult moments of her life. She had been forced to reveal her most personal life to the world--something she held sacred, yet she had to present it almost facetiously. It had seemed the only way. She had to do it to save George's reputation. George? Would he ever forgive her?

The surprising speech was followed by an analysis from news commentators of all major news networks. Although they didn't come right out and say it, most agreed Lydia's speech would surely clear the air. And it did. The opposition slunk back into their lairs and no more was said about it.

The conservatives cheered. "Good for ol' George!" they cried. The middle-of-the-roaders shrugged and the gay libbers, frowned a puzzled frown.

Mail poured into the White House. Most of it commended Lydia on her courage. George was very proud of her and was even naughtier than before.

## THIRTY-NINE

The President's entrance and walk to the speaker's rostrum was received with luke warm applause from the Congressmen and Senators. Many didn't applaud or even stand in respect for the Executive Office. They knew why he was there. It was a long time coming, but today was the day...the day President George Bertram Potter was going to derail their gravy train. There was enthusiastic cheering, however, from the gallery of the House. As the President reached his destination, he turned and directed his waves and dazzling smile to the fans in the gallery; and especially to the pretty lady with the handsome, thirteen year old boy who was her escort.

The great room quieted and they all waited expectantly for what they knew was coming.

"Mr. Speaker, Senators, Congresspersons, honored guests. Thank you for this record turn out. I believe you know why I called this joint meeting, so I will get right to the nitty and the gritty of my address." The President's voice rang loud and clear across the hall.

"For some time I've studied the complexities of this government. It's come a long way since George Washington's administration. I'm sure you can all see, and are only too well aware that many of our departments have worn out their usefulness."

There was a smattering of: "Hear, hear!" from a few corners of the room. Some turned to see who these assenters were, as the President continued.

"It's clear to nearly everyone in this nation that the government has become too unwieldy, too expensive and too inefficient. It's time to turn back the tide of bureaucracy that was set in motion by Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1935,"

A rash of groans swept the room. Now he was getting to it!

"Wait now, don't panic," soothed the President. "This is not a time to mourn, but a time to rejoice!"

He had raised his arms to quiet the throng below him, and grinned his famous grin. He was about to launch into one of the most momentous programs of his administration when, suddenly, over the hubbub, a shot rang out. The smile froze on the President's face; his arms dropped, and he began to crumple slowly as he disappeared behind the lectern.

At first only a single scream came from the gallery, and cut through the silence that followed the shot. Then people were running, crying and yelling. Some moved toward the source of the shot...some toward the wounded President.

Lydia, goaded by near hysteria, hurried down the stairs followed by her son and secret service agent. People made way for them, but it seemed an eternity before she was kneeling

at the Chief Executive's side. The Capitol doctor was with him, and a gurney appeared almost as if rehearsed. The President's face was contorted in pain, but he was conscious.

"Darling...oh my darling," Lydia kept repeating as she held his hand.

"It's okay, hon. It's gonna be all right," George croaked. But as he did so, he coughed and a trickle of blood oozed from between his lips.

"Please, Mr. President, don't talk, cautioned the doctor, as the attendants wheeled the gurney up the middle aisle.

Most of the legislators wore expressions of great concern. Here and there, however, a trace of a smile could be seen.

As he was carried from the chamber, Lydia walked by her husband's side, still holding one of his hands. Their son George Two, trailed along behind her, dazed by the tragedy. It was difficult to get through the press of legislators and news media who had flooded the area. At length they reached the great doors and the crowd spilled out into the sunlight. TV cameras, and flash cameras followed them. Sirens screamed. The First Lady shielded the Presidents' eyes with her purse as they carried him down the steps and into the waiting ambulance.

A police escort roared with wailing sirens up Wisconsin Avenue to Bethesda Naval Hospital. Lydia and George Two rode in the ambulance with George Potter. the President was rushed into emergency and the expert staff of surgeons worked over the wounded executive for seven hours.

The nation was stunned by the news of the assassination attempt. In fact many of the peoples of the world stayed close to their radios and TV sets as they kept vigil and prayed. Reporters and commentators informed them with minute-by-minute reports of the drama at Bethesda. The news media tried to keep the reports optimistic until finally the doctors sent out word the President was dying and the masses went into an orgy of mourning.

Activity across much of the globe came to a stand still as its people reeled from the shock. Their symbol of hope was passing from them, and the realization was tragic to many.

The assassin was captured shortly after the violent moment in the capitol building. His captors asked him why he'd committed the horrendous crime. Although the President wasn't dead yet, the desperate, almost incoherent hit man choked out:

"I didn't kill 'im. Greed...dat's whut killed 'im."

Finally, after everything humanly possible had been done to save him, the president was wheeled to a large hospital suite. Moved to a bed adjusted to a comfortable position, his upper body was swathed in bandages, leaving only his arms and shoulders exposed. . The room was still except for the labored breathing of George Potter and the soft sounds of weeping. Electronic instruments pinged and pulsed to his faltering heartbeat; as tubes fed the weakened body of the President.

The Bethesda Hospital room was filled to capacity with cabinet members; the African American vice president, Grover Cleveland Brown; the First Lady, Lydia Potter; her son, George Two, and Liza Cooper. The surgeon's tragic news had sent them into various stages of mourning. Lydia sat at one side of the bed, her face ashen. Occasionally a tear would course down her cheeks. Liza stood with a comforting hand on the First Lady's shoulder, while she wiped her own eyes. The cabinet members

were either weeping or glancing worriedly from the man on the bed to the VP, and now president presumptive, Grover Brown. They all liked and admired the vice president, but wondered how anyone could replace their beloved leader. The VP himself was torn between his own grief at losing a good friend and a daunting future of trying to fill the size twelves of their brilliant and popular President. Kneeling at this father's bedside, George Two gripped the dying man's hand as he wept bitter tears onto the sheets.

Suddenly there was a moan from the stricken man. George Two sat up and looked at this father, who was staring at something or someone at the foot of the bed. George Two turned slowly and gasped. Standing at the foot of the bed, surrounded by an aura of green light stood the most amazing creature he'd ever seen. Could it be...?

Incredible! The boy suddenly realized the bedtime stories his dad had told him when he was little were true. The diminutive man in the dapper green suit with blazing red hair & beard could only be Oberon, The Good Fairy!

"Ah, good!" chuckled the little man. "Both Georges at the same time."

George Two looked around, and wondered why no one else seemed aware of the amazing visitor.

Though only George Bertram Potter and George Two could see or hear him, the leprechaun smiled a knowing smile as he continued. "Sorry Mr. president, but you really got yourself into a pickle with this bureaus business. True, many bureaus are merely pork barrel scams or just money pits. But some greedy senators value them highly. Unfortunately, in the guise of doing public good, these officials create bureaus that have no business being in business, then issue contracts to their cronies for lavish kickbacks. They planned your assassination, but they didn't plan on the committee back in Neverneverland. George, we simply can't let you go! For years you kept us entertained, and as U. S. President, you have proved to be our greatest achievement. After all the good work you've done for this country and for bringing peace to the world we've decided to keep you around." Oberon smiled modestly. "Many of your accomplishments were your own doing, but we do like to think we helped out a wee bit."

GeorgeTwo smiled as the leprechaun waved his wand over the stricken man.

A great shower of golden stars poured down on the victim. With that the President suddenly grunted, sat up slowly, looked around and gave everyone a big George Potter grin. Lydia clapped her hands together and laughed as Grover Cleveland Brown heaved a sigh of relief and the cabinet members applauded...President George Bertram Potter was back! Hearing the commotion, the surgeon and several nurses rushed in and stood gaping at what they assumed was a miracle.

While the rest of crowd in the room celebrated, the Good Fairy continued.

"Now that you're back, here's the plan. After your brilliant bureau scheme works out, and the majority sees it's value, they'll change the law to allow you to be reelected as many times as you have years to give. A small minority may still brand you a socialist, but your administration will continue to be so efficient, the government will eventually make a profit, and to the delight of nearly everyone, ultimately pay off the national debt."

The President smiled and responded, "Wonderful! We'll manage to do The Impossible? Good show!!"

The surgeon and nurses crowded around the President's bed and began to examine his bandages. As they removed them, they gasped in disbelief. The wound and even evidence of their surgery had totally disappeared. George finally thanked them and asked for his clothes. The nurses pulled the drapes around his area and Liza had them bring in the suitcase she'd packed for just such a need.

While the President dressed, Oberon continued "Oh, there will still be some nay sayers, but when you cut taxes, and provide jobs for the unemployed bureaucrats, they will certainly become a miniscule minority." Oberon added. "That's the good news! However, the bad news is; there will still be attempts on your life. Due to your continued popularity and extraordinary success in shaping this economy, you'll be reelected virtually unopposed every term. You'll be in office so long, a few bad apples will accuse you of being a dictator, and want to get rid of you. It means the boys back in Neverneverland will have to keep an eye on you and them. We want no repeats of this fiasco. But that's not all...George, the First, Some time in the distant future, when you pass on to your just reward, we hope George Two here will be ready to take up the reins. The committee has instructed me to pave the way." The Good Fairy waved his wand over the teenager and a sprinkle of stars rained down on the bedazzled boy.

The leprechaun, shook hands with the two Georges and wished them luck, and with a flourish of his wand he prepared to leave.

"Oberon, wait!" demanded the President. The crowd quieted and looked toward the bed.

Seeing the hospital drape they assumed concealed only the President and his family, they went back to their amazed babbling. Lydia stared hard at her husband. Thinking he was still delirious from his wound, she laughed and leaned over to kiss him. He returned the kiss and continued what she saw as a one sided conversation with the foot of the bed.

"Oberon, I think you might be pleased to know I finally believe in you and your friends back in Neverneverland. However, Lydia here is a nonbeliever. Is it possible you could make yourself visible to her and maybe to our good friend Liza?"

"Well, it's highly irregular, but for you I'll make an exception, yet I hope your realize, it really is one wish too many." The leprechaun laughed as he aimed his wand at the two women and tiny stars squirted out of its tip and over the puzzled ladies. Suddenly their eyes widened in amazement as Oberon miraculously appeared to them. Lydia in particular was astonished as the truth sank in.

Glancing at her husband, she exclaimed. "George...can it be?...but it's impossible!"

The President responded. "Lydia, I'd like you to meet Oberon...Oberon--my wife, Lydia and our good friend Liza Cooper."

The Good Fairy made an elaborate bow toward the astonished women. "How do you do, Ladies." he smiled. "My brethren and I would like to thank you for your steadfast support of our prime mover, here . It was often your encouragement that made him such an extraordinary leader."

Lydia finally regained her composure and answered, "Uh...you're welcome, And...uh...we'd like to thank you for a...wonderful life well spent, and for bringing him back to us." she added as she gave her husband a gentle hug. Liza nodded in assent.

“My pleasure, ladies,” replied the leprechaun. “And now, I must be getting back to make my report. Good-bye Mr. President...ladies.” Turning to the President’s son, he added, “And George Two, it’s time for you to start really practicing on that new guitar.”

Oberon, glanced around the room at the smiling faces and the First Family’s happy reunion. He felt reassured when word of the President’s miraculous resurrection hit the news, similar scenes of jubilation would be repeated throughout the world. With that, the Good Fairy waved his wand toward the window and sailed out into the night, where he set a course for Neverneverland.

THE END

Dear reader, Thank you for reading OBERON’S GIFT. I hope you enjoyed it and will leave a favorable review for those who come after.

