

**SCREAMING
BATFISH BLUES**

SCOTT L. ANDERSON

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For Bones and Twinkie, the two women in my life

He who fights with monsters might take care lest he thereby become a monster. And if you gaze into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you.

Nietzche

*Sitting on the sofa
Suckin' on a bowl of crack
Thinkin' to myself about my
Angel dressed in black*

Warren Zevon

PROLOGUE

I was sacked out with some bimbo that I had picked up at bar the night before when I got the phone call from my older brother telling me that my father was dead. It was about five in the morning and my mouth tasted like a dirty ashtray rinsed out with stale beer. The bimbo laying next to me was bleach blond and fat. She was stretched out on her back and snoring so loud I was surprised that my always nosey neighbors hadn't been pounding on the walls and threatening to call the cops as they so often did when I had a small get together. The bimbo looked familiar. Not because we had just recently fornicated but like I had seen her somewhere before familiar. Probably in one of my classes or around campus. I was studying film at UCLA. I wanted to be a filmmaker like Kubrick.

"Dad is dead" was the first thing that came out of the mouth of my pathetic brother, a GED graduate that had spent his whole life in Minneapolis working at a roller rink. "Suicide. He shot himself with his shotgun." he sobbed. "Mommy just found him. She came back from walking at the mall and found him sitting there dead in his office."

I rolled out of bed and walked into the kitchen and reached into the fridge for a cold Lucky Lager, popped the top and killed the bottle in three long gulps. Damn, that tasted good. "I'll call you from the airport to give you my flight numbers." I replied to my sobbing sibling as I stifled a huge belch and hung up the phone. I heard the bimbo groan, roll over and fart loudly.

It was late spring in Minnesota but a sloppy wet snow was falling the day of my father's funeral. Open casket. Dad had shot himself in the chest not in the noggin. My brother had taken my mother to his house to spend the night at his house along with the whining brats that his wife seemed to pop out on an annual basis.

I walked into Dad's office and sat down in the very chair where he had decided to take his own life. It smelled like lemon Pledge and Mr. Clean. My mother had done the clean up herself. There wasn't a spot of blood anywhere.

It wasn't a big surprise that the old man had done himself in. We always seemed to know that it was coming sooner or later. It was just surprising that it had taken this long. He had been a young naval officer on Guam during WWII and had helped screw up the arrival and departure times of the USS Indianapolis. The ship that had delivered the atom bomb.

Everybody knows the story. Damn thing got torpedoed, sank like a rock, and a shitload of sailors got killed by sharks. No one knew where it was. Only the captain of the ship got screwed, he got court martialed while everybody else walked. Dad blamed himself his whole life even though he stayed in and retired. When we moved back to Minneapolis he took a job with the government. Never talked about it to us, we never asked. He'd go on weekly trips, come home, get drunk for two days, and life went on.

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I opened up his liquor cabinet and poured a shot of vodka into a glass. Fired up one of Dads unfiltered Camels with his battered old Zippo that had the name of some long gone base in Japan on it. This was my first time in his office, the door had been locked my entire life until now. The room was spartan. A desk and chair and a small single bed. The bed spread looked like you could bounce a quarter on it. Typical.

A long neck beer case was sitting next to his desk with the word OPEN in magic marker on the top. I slammed the shot, poured another, and pulled the box over. It was filled to the top with records. Dads service revolver was sitting on top of them. Military, medical, prison, surveillance, police reports, paid informant reports, mug shots, even some porno shots. I picked the box up and took it over to the bed and began to separate the files.

Must of been hundreds upon hundreds of documents on just two men. Both of them originally from Minnesota. Down south of here. For years someone had been documenting or trying to, every step of their life. Obviously that someone was my father . But why? Why in the hell would he have all this shit?

By the time I had some semblance of an answer the light of morning was starting to shine in through the window. I had killed the old mans bottle of vodka and smoked up almost half a carton of his smokes. My lungs felt like crap but I wasn't close to being drunk.

Two young men, boys really. From the same part of the country, close enough that they might have even met at one time. How their lives could become so entangled so closely in such a mixture of drugs, narcs, and eventually murder and they didn't even know each other? And what was my father doing in the middle of all this? That I guess I'll never know. He took care of that with his shotgun.

The files were all separated on the bed. Coded. Batfish and Juice. Two different men, two different piles. But their story is just like their lives. Intertwined in the words of the snitches, narcs, prison guards, mental ward attendants, cops, and thugs who walked through their lives.

The author

JUICE

SAN DIEGO

Chief Petty Officer (Retired) Jerome Wyatt rolled his vintage Plymouth Valiant to a stop in the driveway of his run down four room house. The dump was located in a rather shitty suburb of San Diego known as National City. He had bought the place after buckling under the constant bitching and nagging of his second wife, Mi Mi, who had insisted that it had always been her childhood dream growing up in the P. I. to own a house of her own. Mi Mi had not only been the chief's second wife, she had been his second Filipino wife. Lois was the name of his first bride and it had taken her only six months to divorce his scrawny carcass after her feet hit American soil. She had taken to dancing and giving blow jobs in the titty bars in downtown San Diego until a drunken Marine ran over and killed her on his moped as he was barreling down the sidewalk after celebrating his promotion to PFC.

It had taken Mi Mi two years to leave the chief after he had married her on his sixth WesPac cruise to the Philippines. Actually he had kicked her out after coming home early one evening from the enlisted mans club and found her being piledriven on the living room sofa by a burly yeoman third class. A fucking yeoman of all things! But a yeoman who had kicked the chief so hard in the nuts that he hadn't been able to report to work for three days after. Mi Mi had moved out and in with the yeoman, leaving Wyatt with his Valiant and the house, in a neighborhood that was quickly turning into what could best be described as white trash shit.

Wyatt had just recently retired from active duty after twenty five years in the navy. He left with a pension, a huge problem with alcohol, two lungs plugged up by tar and nicotine, and a hankering for sex with people under the normal age of consent.

He had been successful beyond his wildest dreams in the navy. Supervisor of hundreds of men, drank the finest liquors, been all over the world, and had had all sorts of deviant sex with an enormous amount of young males and females in all corners of the globe. Mi Mi and Lois had been so attractive to him because of their androgynous looks and youthful appearance.

The only downfall with his retirement is that it cut off his easy access to young sexual partners. People were not as understanding in this country, so he had been relying recently on his enormous collection of 8 mm film, magazines, polaroid snapshots, video tapes and most recently the Internet to satisfy his needs. Once the chief had gotten over his initial reluctance to buy a computer and jump into the joys of cyber porn, he couldn't get enough. At this very moment he was in negotiations with a sex broker in the Netherlands to set him up for a two week fun filled vacation full of boy and girl toys.

Wyatt shuffled slowly up the busted up sidewalk to his front door, all the while ignoring the taunts of "needle dick" and "bugfucker" from the teenage boys of the marijuana dealer who

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lived across the street from him. He had made the mistake of complaining about the volume of their car stereo to their no good goddamned long haired father and had been paying for it ever since.

It took him almost a full minute to get his front door open. He had been boozing all afternoon long at the chief's club and between the liquor, trying to get his keys in the door, and balancing his bag of groceries all at the same time, he felt practically winded when he finally got the door open. A health nut the chief was not.

The interior of the house was as shitty as the outside. It was decorated with cheap furniture bought at the base second hand store and smelled of generic liquor, smoke, and beer farts. On his way to the tiny kitchen he passed the most expensive item in the house, his new computer, an iMac, and noticed that he had left it on all day. Funny, he thought he had remembered shutting it off prior to the leaving for the club. His memory must be going south with the rest of his body.

He put his weekly staples away in the kitchen. Three cartons of Camels, loaves of white bread, bologna, chips, and of course, a half gallon of black and white label whiskey. He had survived on this diet for almost his entire naval career, even while at sea.

"You live like a fucking pig, chief."

Wyatt whirled around and almost fell over from the combination of vertigo and flat ass fear. Standing in front of him in the doorway of his kitchen and aiming a military issue .45 caliber Colt Commander at the chief's head was an enormous muscular man who was wearing silver wrap around shades, shorts, and a Gold's Gym "San Diego" T-shirt. His hair was bleached snow white and worn in a semi mohawk fashion. Wyatt had to clamp down tightly on his sphincter for fear of shitting his pants.

"Who are you?" he barely stammered out.

"Trouble with a capital fucking T. That's for sure, dipshit. Now put your dick skimmers in the air where I can see them and move into the living room. Real slow now. That's the boy."

Wyatt moved into his living room and sat down on the couch without being told to. He had to or his legs would have given out they were shaking so badly. The intruder pulled up a chair and sat across from him.

"You don't have any idea what this is about, do you?"

Wyatt didn't say a word, just shook his head. It was all he could do to keep from throwing up much less speaking

"The short version of the story is that you have short eyes and need to be permanently wiped off the face of the fucking earth." The man grinned at him.

The chief thought he was going to pass out but he had to do something. And fucking quick.

"I have no idea what you are talking about." That was the best he could manage considering the circumstances.

"Then what do you call that box full of porno I found in the hidey hole inside the closet of your bedroom and those files of naked kids in your computer? Which you may also be interested in knowing that I erased from your hard drive using this handy little software kit that I brought along in my gym bag with me. Man, you are one sick fuck."

Wyatt looked at him quizzically. "If your a fucking cop why did you erase my files?" His voice squeaked.

The big man leaned his head back and roared with laughter. "A cop? You think I'm a cop? Do I like like a cop to you?"

"If your not a cop, then who the hell are you?"

He removed his sunglasses and looked the chief in the eyes. "Have you ever seen *Apocalypse Now*? Old navy fart like you must have seen it a dozen times."

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Wyatt nodded weakly.

“Well, chief, just like they said in the movie. I’m been sent to terminate your command.”

“What the fuck for?” Wyatt shrieked.

“Actually just you boning all those kids would do it alone for me but you’ve got different problems.” Mohawk leaned down into his gym bag and pulled out a manila folder and paged through it.

“In twenty five years of service you only had one shore duty stint, the rest was at sea. Your either one ignorant motherfucker or just plain stupid. But anyway, your one stint on shore duty was as a admirals personal driver and gopher. An Admiral Russell. Correct?”

Wyatt nodded his head weakly.

“Well, dipshit, as you may or may not know, it doesn’t matter, Russell has now retired and is quite active and successful in politics. He is in fact being groomed for the big time. He’s got it all going for him. He’s charismatic, intelligent, and best of all, he’s black. Plus the President himself just loves his ass.”

“What’s this got to do with me?” Wyatt croaked out.

“What’s it got to do with you? What are you, boy? A fucking retard? You think the higher ups want to place Russell in Washington, working side by side with the President on a daily basis and all of a sudden the media stumbles onto the fact that his old driver and confidant from his navy days is a fucking child molester? They’d have a field day.”

“But how would they know?”

Mohawk pointed to Wyatt’s computer. “By that, you dumb shit. Your dirty little secrets have been traced by that. Did you actually think that when you were corresponding with those freaks over in Europe that you were on some sort of secured line? The Internet is a fucking party line. Plus your ex is a loud mouthed bitch when you drop a little green her way. Soon as she was paid off the Feds pulled her green card and she was put on the first flight back to Manila. She’s probably turned a couple dozen tricks by now.”

Mohawk chuckled softly as the chief bent over with his face in his hands and sobbed. “By the load of shit I found in your bedroom and on your computer I would guess that you would almost make the FBI’s top ten list.” He paused. “But I’ve got a way out of this for you chief.”

Wyatt looked up, teary eyed. “How? I’ll do anything.”

“You’re gonna have to do yourself.”

“What the hell do you mean?”

Mohawk rolled his eyes. “Damn, boy, you are a retard. Kill yourself! I’ll give you a choice of two ways. You can hang either hang yourself or OD on pills and booze. I’ve got the pills. The bottle even has your name written on the prescription. Straight from Balboa Naval Hospital. That will probably be the easier way. Don’t you think?”

Wyatt stared in horror. The couch cushion turned wet.

The big man went on. “They really want your ass. They even had someone put a consultation in your medical record at the hospital saying you were being treated for depression and the pills are actually prescribed. Isn’t that great?”

Wyatt finally spoke. “I’m not gonna do it. You’ll have to kill me.”

“Well, I can sure do that. In fact before you interrupted me so rudely I was going to give you that option. This .45 I have was taken from your last ship and reported stolen. I’ll just take it and jam down your throat and blow your brains out. No one will notice for weeks. Your mail doesn’t even get delivered here. You have a post office box for all your dirty little packages. Your neighbors hate you. By the time someone does notice the stink the evidence will be minimal. The cops won’t care anyway. Your just another retired military puke who couldn’t handle the civilian world.”

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Mohawk reached into his gym bag and set the prescription bottle along with a bottle of Johnny Walker Red Label on the coffee table.

“Look at that. I’m even treating you to a good bottle of hooch for your final hours.”

Dying by booze and pills in real life is a lot different than in the movies. Wyatt had quite a tolerance to depressants from years of hard core drinking so it took almost the entire bottle of Johnny Walker along with two bottles of Budweiser to wash down the bottle of barbiturates. Then the dumb shit began to cry and tell his life’s regrets to his hit man who was busy trying to watch *NORTH DALLAS FORTY* on HBO, while relaxing in the chief’s easy chair.

By about midnight it was over. Wyatt had gone into a series of convulsions and had barfed all over himself, but was now laying quietly on his couch. Mohawk packed up the chiefs massive collection of porno in two large cardboard boxes, wiped the place down for prints, and then checked and double checked Wyatt's pulse.

He pulled out a cell phone and dialed in a number.

“It’s over. Come get me.” He flopped back down into the easy chair.

Exactly one half an hour later his phone vibrated on his hip.

“Go ahead.” he answered.

“All clear?”

“Clear. Come on in.”

“One block away. Out.” The phone clicked off.

He peeked out the curtain and saw the black van roll into the driveway with its lights off. The driver got out and walked briskly up the sidewalk and into the front door. Without saying a word the two men shut off all the lights and turned up the AC, picked up the boxes of smut, walked out the front door, put the boxes in the van, gave the area a quick look around, got in the vehicle and drove off.

Mohawk reached into his gym bag and pulled out a mirror, a switchblade, and a little brown bottle. He tapped a small amount of white powder out of the bottle onto the mirror and cut two thin lines with his switchblade. The driver glanced over anxiously while his passenger took a gold tube hanging from a chain around his neck and snorted both lines up.

Mohawk smacked his lips and leaned his head back. “Tasty. Pure Bolivian flake.”

The driver snorted in disgust. “I don’t want you doing that shit in front of me.”

“No one asked for your opinion, asshole.” Mohawk grunted.

He rummaged around in his bag once more and pulled out a silver cigarette case. Popping it open he fired up a joint.

“Enough, goddamn it.” The driver yelled.

His passenger looked over at him calmly. “Just what is your problem, fuckhead? What do you think is gonna happen? We’re gonna get pulled over and the local P.D. is going to roust us? You ignorant bastard. Where do you think I get this shit? You think every time our righteous government makes a major league drug bust that it all gets flushed down the shitter? He settled back into his seat. “We’re untouchable on this one.”

The drove in silence until they turned onto Harbor Boulevard.

“Pull over at the the next deserted parking lot.” The van swung in.

Mohawk got out and quickly broke down the .45 and threw all the individual parts as far as he could out into the bay and then hopped back up into the van. The driver pulled out and headed towards the San Diego Naval Station.

Mohawk started in on the driver again. “So what are you, a booze hound?”

“I don’t drink.”

“Cigarettes?”

“I’m drug free.”

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The big man looked out the front of the van, shook his head, and kept talking. "It never fails to amaze me whenever I do one of these gigs the uptight assholes they send to work with me. What the hell are you involved in this shit for? God and country?"

"It's my duty. I'm just following orders."

"Jesus fucking Christ. You walk into a scene like that back in that house and say it's your fucking duty? Following orders? And then have the balls to look down your fucking nose at me because I fire up a joint? Where the hell do they get you guys?"

The van was pulling up to the sentry at the naval station. The Marine sentry popped to attention and saluted the blue officer's sticker on the van. They rolled on in silence until they pulled up to a plain cinder block building. The driver honked the horn once and the garage door began to go up. The van pulled in and the door closed behind it.

They were inside the burn room facility where all the base classified material was disposed of. The furnace was cranked up and burning red hot. There was no one inside on the floor. The two men got out of the van and walked the two boxes of porn over to the open door of the furnace and threw them in along with their cell phones. The driver put on a plexiglas face shield and raked the boxes apart with a long metal rake. The heat was incredible and the boxes and their contents were reduced to cinders and ashes within minutes. When they jumped back into the van the garage door began to open and they pulled out into the night.

Once more they drove in silence until they reached the passenger's motel.

"Two hours and I'll be ready."

Mohawk walked into his room, stripped down, and went into the bathroom. Taking an electric clipper he shaved his mohawk down close to his scalp and began to cover the remaining burr with a men's hair dye. After showering, he changed into a Marine Corps bulldog T-shirt and a pair of Levis. Glancing into the mirror he now looked like a jarhead out on the town. He then put all of the clothes he wore on the job into a plastic garbage sack along with the room drinking glasses and anything else disposable that he might have touched and put the garbage sack in his gym bag. He then busied himself wiping down as many areas of the room as he could with a towel. Satisfied, he sat down and cracked open a ice cold pint bottle of Guinness to await his ride to the airport.

The driver was there two hours on the dot and this time didn't say a word when he noticed his passenger's open beer. He just headed down the highway towards the San Diego airport. Without saying a word the big man got out of the van and began to stroll towards the terminal when he heard the honking of the vans horn. He turned around to see the driver rolling down the window and beckoning to him.

"What do you need?"

"I just wanted to ask you. Why do you do it?" the driver asked.

Mohawk stared at the driver for a few seconds and then smiled. He knew what he was asking about. They always did.

"Two reasons I guess. First one is they have me by the nuts. So I have to do it. The juice is the second reason."

The driver gave a puzzled look. "The juice?"

"Yea man. The juice. You know. Adrenaline, buzz, rush, the juice. Whatever the fuck you want to call it. I love it. My uncle always said it comes from the reptile side of the brain."

He smiled the at the driver. "You take it easy now, sport." Turned and walked inside the terminal and headed directly to the men's room where he stuffed the garbage bag from the hotel down deep into the trash and covered it with used paper towels.

He had just enough time to buy a *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED* and a *USA TODAY* before catching his flight out of San Diego.

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After settling in his seat he was approached by a flight attendant who's better days were behind her but who would still do in a pinch. His hormones were always racing after a mission.

“Going home on leave, marine?”

He gave her his All American, God, country, and apple pie smile. “Yes mam. Going home. I'm sure anxious to see my folks.”

BATFISH

ISLA MUJURES

Steve Earle's "Copperhead Road" was blasting out of the tinny sounding speakers as I watched the lumbering beast walk into the bar.

"How could a normal woman fuck a dwarf?" was the first thing that came out of the piehole of my best friend/partner Artimus, as he settled his fat ass down on the bar stool. I tried not to wince, while acting at the same time like I hadn't heard the remark.

Not for my benefit. But for the benefit of the elderly couple from Missouri, who were sitting just four bar stools down, sipping on their banana daiquiris.

Very sneaky like, I tried to turn the music up.

I had absolutely no idea what he was talking about until I observed a rather striking topless woman walking down the beach with what could have been either a midget or a jockey. "That's not a dwarf, that's probably a midget," I half-whispered.

"Dwarf, midget, big deal. I saw a broad fuck a donkey in Baja once and I can almost understand that more than I could see fucking a midget. At least the chick in Tijuana was getting paid." Artimus belched out between chugs of his beer.

That did it for the couple, who hurriedly packed up their beach gear while I idiotically called out "Come again".

"What in the fuck is wrong with you?" I raged at Artimus who innocently looked at me and said "Did I ever tell you about that place? It was called the Blue Fox. Man, what a fucking joint that was. They sure don't make 'em like that anymore."

What can you say to man with logic like that? I had first met Artimus about a year ago, when I had just gotten to the island and he was the exact same person then as he is now.

He's about six foot four and about two hundred and fifty pounds soaking wet. Which he normally is.

Wet that is. The guys sweats like a whore in church. He claims it's because he's from somewhere in South Dakota and his body has never gotten used to the humidity of the island. I think it's just because he's a fat bastard.

With Artimus, what you see is what you get. Literally.

Artimus told me the very first night that I met him that he was on the run from the law. Claims that he was on the wrong end of a marijuana deal gone real wrong and that he was a wanted man in the Badlands. He very well could be. But I've been through the Dakotas many times and it just doesn't strike me as a hot spot for pot cultivation or sales. Every time that Jimmy Buffett song, "A Pirate Looks At Forty" was playing on the CD player, Artimus would get

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all choked up and blurt out "That's me man, that's me." Especially if he had been drinking, which was damn near always.

I had asked him one time if he should walk around with his shirt off so much, since he had two very unique tattoos he had gotten while in the marines. One was of a mouse perched on his shoulder nibbling on a slice of cheese with tracks running up from Artimus's asshole. While the other one was inscribed "HERE'S THE BEEF" across his stomach with an arrow pointing down to his crotch.

When I had pointed out that those very distinct markings could very well single him out to law enforcement officials or vengeful drug dealers(since I couldn't imagine there is anyone else in these parts or anywhere else for that matter who has those exact tats). He had replied "Fuck 'em if they can't take a joke".

In spite of all his faults he was a helluva lot of fun to hang out with and we had a nice little illegal business on the side going on. We both had fake Canadian passports that we used monthly to fly over the gulf to Cuba to buy cigars. We then sold them one at a time to the tourists on the beach or in the cantinas. Some of the dumb shits paid up to fifty dollars a cigar and when we couldn't get over to Cuba, we'd substitute Mexican cigars, but sell them out of a Cuban box.

Very sweet deal.

"Hey dude, what's up with you? I can't believe that you'd get all bent out of shape over those two fucking yahoos hearing a little dirty talk. Shit, he's probably so worked up now he's gonna rush the old lady back up to the room and lay the pink steel to her." I was standing behind the bar and looking out over the ocean and worrying. I had been doing a lot of that lately. Worrying.

"I don't know man," I replied while watching Artimus work his fat gut over the bar counter to grab another beer out of the cooler. "I just can't shake that bad feeling I've had since I saw that guy down by the fishing charters the other day. I know him from somewhere".

"Well if he's gotten you this squirrely, maybe we should just look him up and kick his ass" Artimus boozily replied.

"Goddamn it Artimus, kicking somebody's ass is not the answer to everything and stay the fuck out of the beer cooler. It's 12:30 in the afternoon and you're already three sheets to the wind. Plus Orlando is starting to notice that books aren't exactly balancing out to the amount of beer that I'm supposedly selling."

For some reason those words triggered like a mini flashback in my mind. All of a sudden I think I had a good idea who the guy by the fishing boats was.

I mean it looked like the guy but only with more hair. But maybe he had gotten out of the navy or maybe he was wearing a rug. He looked a lot heavier too. Maybe it wasn't even him. Damn it!! My mind was racing and I couldn't get it under control. To much coffee or not enough beer.

Either the color had washed out of my face or I was shaking like a dog shitting peach pits because for once Artimus didn't say a thing. I must have stood there for a couple of minutes until finally I heard my buddy say "Dude, you know we've been partners for almost a year. Isn't it about time you told me just what the hell you're doing down here?"

"You'll never believe a word of it" I replied.

"Well give me a chance motherfucker. I don't think there's anything that you could say that would surprise me."

I resumed my looking out over the gulf. Now pondering if I should tell this man something that not only could put me behind bars for a long time if the story ever got to the wrong ears, but could also put his own existence in jeopardy. He could do some serious gum rattling after he had tied one on. Well fuck it. He asked for it. I took a deep breath.

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“OK. Here go’s nothing. I’m AWOL from the navy, wanted by the Feds on numerous drug and espionage charges and I was also wanted in California for questioning about several murders, also drug related. There! That surprise you?”

I stopped and grinned at him. “I almost forgot to include that I’m an escapee from a maximum security mental hospital?”

That surprised him all right! By the look on Artimus’s face, I’m surprised that he didn’t fall right off his bar stool or take off running.

If you didn’t know what it was already. You would think that the Security Hospital in St. Peter, Minnesota was either some sort of a college or office building. It’s a one story, flat roofed, brick structure that’s quite pleasing to the eye. Surrounded by beautiful lawns and groves of trees. If you just didn’t happen to notice the barbed wire enclosure topped with razor wire around the back of the building. Which if the weather was decent was often full of shuffling and drooling idiots.

I can remember when I was a young lad growing up in southern Minnesota hearing all the horror stories about what went on behind those walls. Of course, then the old security hospital looked more like a prison and was run more like a prison than it is now.

There was a shithead for my home town who was only a year or so older than me who had gotten caught raping a gal and had wound up there for observation. Two days later the gutless turd hung himself behind those same hallowed halls. And this guy had terrorized my hometown for years! So shit, I thought this must be one rough joint . But I digress.

I better get it out of the way right off the bat and tell you right now that I am not crazy. Or dangerous. Well, I was dangerous once, but I mean only once. Uno. So how did I wind up in the booby hatch then?

The reasons I would end up in St. Pete is that I was faking crazy to avoid being sent to Stillwater State Prison. If you’ve seen the movie The Shawshank Redemption, you have a basic understanding of what Stillwater State Prison is like. And I have no desire in this or any of my previous lives to get cornholed and turned into some guy’s bitch .

And I thought a mental institution would be easier to escape from than a prison.

I was working my way back from the west coast and had finally made it back to Minnesota. Duluth to be exact. But I was short on cash so I was staying at this shelter up off of Superior Street for the night.

The place was crawling with scumbags, so I was just trying to catnap my way through the night, when I suddenly woke up and this huge black dude was standing over me with his wang in his hand. Well I knew what he wanted to do with it. I already told you that the place was a fucking zoo so I was sleeping with my shank (it was German made, high quality steel, sharp as a cats ass), so in a panic I sat up real quick and just slashed at him. Just to try to back him off. But I misjudged how close the prick was to me and sliced the head of his dick right in half.

Of course he went absolutely apeshit and started running around the dorm, screaming at the top of his lungs. The night security staff flicked the lights on and must have called the police instantly because in no time the cops were there and I was wearing silver bracelets.

I couldn’t get out because they lock the doors at night so no one can come in or out. And it didn’t take James fucking Bond to figure out who did it since the guy had fallen half on to my bunk and pumped blood all over the sheets.

I never knew that the penis had some many veins in it.

Right after it all went down I had just sat there at the side of my bed while watching this idiot run around the dorm holding his bloody pecker. That was when I realized that I was still holding my knife. So I stood up and walked over to this old rummy who was sitting up in his

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bunk with this amazed look on his face, while he watched the rapo, who was now down on his knees making this eerie squealing noise. I just handed the loony old dude my beautiful handcrafted knife and he slipped it into his pocket while he gave me this toothless grin.

Anyway. The cops rushed in, saw the blood, and had the cuffs on me quick as a bunny. But they couldn't find the knife. Not that they really gave it that much effort. I imagine that going to that mission to roust a bum or break up a fight was probably damn near a nightly thing for those guys.

It was snowing like a bitch out when the cops hauled me on down to the county jail. Duluth can get just enormous amounts of snow. Feet at a time, not inches, feet. The cop who was driving was slipping and sliding all over the road. It was snowing so hard that the wipers couldn't keep up and he had the window down to see. Since they hadn't allowed me to get my jacket before they rushed me out of the mission I was kind of chilly. So I asked the kind officer if he wouldn't mind rolling up the window a tad and was told not very nicely to "shut the fuck up."

The jail was the exact opposite though. It was hotter than the gates of hell. Even in the booking room where I was stripped bareass naked. I then had the area under my nuts and asshole looked at for anything I might be hiding in or up there. Was deloused and then dressed out in these wild orange scrubs like nurses and doctors wear. Only on the back mine said "COUNTY".

I was then led to my cell where I met my new roommate. A short, one eyed, child molesting Indian who was on his way, I would learn, to the Security Hospital in St. Peter for the third and most likely last time of his life. He would probably be taking up permanent residency there since his last offense had been the attempt to molest a little girl in the rest room of the local county courthouse and the people of this fine state were getting good and tired of his shenanigans. Immediately upon my entry into the cell, Dan (his name), asked me for a smoke. I apologized and said I didn't smoke, but Dan just shrugged and flipped up his eye patch and pulled a butt out of his eye socket. It was the beginning of a short but beautiful relationship.

Dan had been a ward of the state in one capacity or another for almost his entire life. His whole adult life had consisted of consuming huge amounts of alcohol, listerine, lysol, Ny-Quil, and any street drug he could get his hands on. However, Dans body did not process ethanol in a normal fashion and he became quite combative at times, making him a star of all the local drunk tanks. In one of these drugged states he attempted to boink his sister which earned him trip number one to St. Pete.

Upon his release he celebrated by consuming an entire fifth of generic vodka along with a tab of acid and began to hear voices. These voices told him to rip his eyeball out and pour gasoline into the socket and then light it afire, which he promptly did. Visit number two.

He had been released only a week or so when he attempted to pull the little girl into the rest room of the court house and was now awaiting his commitment hearing. Visit number three and probably a permanent room at the state run asylum.

You couldn't tell by his appearance if he was twenty five or fifty.

It was with Dan that I began to put my plan together. He had been in county for several weeks now and had pretty much de-toxed, so at times could hold a somewhat normal conversation. It was at these times that I grilled him like a hard boiled detective. What was security like there? Where there bars and razor wire? How many guards? Are you always locked down? Etc.

Dan jacked off like a monkey and didn't seem to care if I was in the cell or not and he often slipped into psychotic ramblings. But in between, I pumped him for info as hard as I could. The incident at the shelter had occurred on a Friday night so I had until Monday to formulate a

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plan. I had to act fast before the jaws of justice caught up to me. I would be meeting my state appointed attorney at 10:00 AM.

A rookie straight out of law school and this was to be his proving ground. He was about twenty seven years old, white hair, pink eyes, fat, and with skin as luminous as the snow outside. He looked like a overweight Edgar Winter. All dressed up in a suit I'm sure his mommy bought him when he graduated from law school. I really never got to know him well, the poor guy. I had taken the opportunity to not shower or brush my teeth the entire weekend and had pissed my pants on purpose. Just that very morning.

The first thing my attorney informed me of was that most likely I was facing a sentence of a year and a day in Stillwater State Prison for a variety of charges. Mainly for assault with a deadly weapon, even though they never found a weapon. But that was all he got out before I began to whimper, pull at my hair, and rock back and forth like a total fucking moron while clutching my arms.

Snow boy sat there looking at me with a look of pure horror on his face and then hurriedly began to stuff documents back into his briefcase.

My pretrial hearing would be in two days.

It went pretty much like clockwork. I still hadn't showered or brushed my teeth and I put on a performance that would make at least a Golden Globe winner proud. All it took the judge was two minutes of me pulling at my crotch through my pants, whimpering and calling out "Daddy," and looking around the room like bats were flying around my head, before he ordered a temporary commitment to St. Peter for pretrial observation.

I would be shipped out within the week.

Three days later when I shipped out, poor Dan misted up in his eye and said he'd do his damndest to look me up once he got settled in down there.

However, the sheriff's deputy that was going to transport me did not look at me quite as fondly. He remained adamant that I shower before I set one foot inside his squad car.

There was a bit of a miscommunication between the jail staff and when I was escorted into the shower, there stood my nemesis from the shelter. Naked as the day he was born.

I had no idea he was even in the jail, as I had been so busy honing my mental act and hadn't really been a social butterfly during my stay. His crank was completely covered in a clear plastic bag under which you could see his tool was wrapped in gauze. Giving it the appearance of a tennis ball wrapped in athletic tape.

He went totally schitzo at the sight of me and charged. For a few glorious seconds we went at it. Trading punch for punch while the jail staff stood there screaming and caught totally off guard. He was just on the brink of getting the better of me when I slipped a big left hook of his and grabbed his injured crank by its gauze covered package and gave it a big yank. He screamed so loud that I think I still may be able to sue the county for loss of hearing while I was in their custody. The giant dropped faced down into the standing water.

After order was restored. I was allowed to take my douche, as the French say, and prepare for my ride to the bughouse.

Enroute to the hospital, which was almost a four hour ride, we would be stopping at Lino Lakes prison to pick up another unfortunate soul to share the ride.

This turned out to be a another three time loser in the sex offender field, who went by the name of Ray. As I said earlier, Minnesota does not like sex maniacs and if you had the misfortune of being arrested three times for a sex offense, you could be committed to St. Peter after your prison sentence ran out. You would then remain there until a judge deemed you were well enough to reenter society. In other words, you would be there for life. No judge in his right judicial mind would release a three time convicted sex offender if he didn't have to. Especially during an election year.

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I always thought it would be cheaper to just to hire three or four three hundred pound ex-football players, outfit them in tropical shirts and pork pie hats, give them each a set of brass knuckles and a baseball bat, and have them go visit the sickos as soon as they're released from jail. I can goddamn guarantee you that that's the last time they'd be sticking their dicks where they don't belong.

No one that I had ever met, deserved this fate more than that asshole Ray. He babbled nonstop about how many women he had fucked, beers he had drank, and that he had once had a bit role in the movie ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST. They had made that movie in a mental institution that he claimed he was a resident of at that time. I believe it was in Washington. He also claimed that he had been railroaded on his last charge. He had conked his sister in law on the head, screwed her, and had been caught trying to hang her in the family barn. All just a silly "prank/misunderstanding" he told me.

Dan had told me that upon admittance to the security hospital that I would be placed in the classification unit and would remain there for about a week. Which was all the time they really needed to figure out if you were crazy or if you were just scared of going to prison. Which was not enough time for me to accomplish what I was scheming.

***BUT**, if you acted up or were a naughty boy, you could be placed in Unit 800, where the committed mentally ill and dangerous inmates were kept along with the other hospital problem children. Then all bets were off. You could remain in there for months while they got you straightened out. Just the place I needed to get into.*

By the time we rolled into the town of St. Peter, everyone was tired and cranky, except for Ray. St. Peter is a liberal college town and as we proceeded down the main drag, Ray kept up a running commentary on what he would like to do to every college coed he saw walking down the street. Much to the chagrin of the two deputies. My plan began to fall in place. I felt everyone would benefit from it.

As we rolled up the hill that the Security Hospital sits on, I began to complain that my wrists were really starting to hurt from the cuffs. Immediately Ray picked up on this and began to call me among other things "a fucking pussy" and a "whiney shit." I could see the deputies were squirming in their seats. They had had just about their fill of Ray by about then.

We were taken out of the car and walked a short distance up a sidewalk into a locked reception room, which was monitored through thick glass by a very fat woman sitting in what appeared to be some sort of control center. She had an open bucket of the Colonel and a diet Coke in front of her. The officers informed her who we were and she picked up the phone. Summoning guards from inside the facility I gathered.

I turned to one of the officers and pleaded for him to please remove my cuffs. Right on cue, Ray piped in with "what a cunt". The officer who obviously by now was sick of the sight of both us, but mostly Ray, told him to pipe down and went behind me to remove my leg irons while his partner took off the hand cuffs.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you, officer," I whimpered as I rubbed my wrists and stared down at the floor while Ray looked on with undisguised disgust.

As the officers began to removed Ray's restraints, I took a slight step to Ray's blind side and hauled off with a Kenny Norton over hand right that poleaxed Ray with such force that his false teeth flew out of his mouth, hitting the officer removing his cuffs right on the forehead. Ray dropped like he been shot. I don't think he probably was able to get on his feet for a couple of minutes. But they weren't going to let me hang around and see.

The two officers gang tackled me along with three guards from the hospital that had finally arrived on the scene. I was handcuffed behind my back and marched down to classification where we were met by a professional looking man, closely resembling Woody

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Allen, who said "Don't even fucking bother. Just keep on walking and take him down to Unit 800." Beautiful!

JUICE

NEW RICHLAND

His parents were as dead as Lincoln's dick. Dad, literally. Mom, figuratively. As dead as Chief Petty Officer (Retired) Jerome Wyatt. Who by the way had been born and raised but an hours drive south of his killer's hometown in Mason City, Iowa. Talk about coincidences or a quirky fate.

New Richland, Minnesota had been a great town to grow up in. Less than two thousand for a population. A farming community set amongst the cornfields of southern Minnesota. Football games on Friday nights. Church socials. Summer carnivals. Mom and apple pie. All that happy horseshit.

Mohawk had a given name at that time. Long before he was given a new one by his government. His Christian name in those days was Jacob "Jake" Morrow. His parents were Rick and Sandy Morrow and they had lived their entire lives within ten miles of New Richland, with the exception of the four years that Rick had served in the army. Rick had been an employee of the local grain elevator while Sandy had been a stay at home mom.

When Rick returned from his stint with the army in Korea, he returned a different man. Something he had seen or done over there had gone horribly wrong, but he never would talk about it. To anyone. Not even about all the medals he kept in a cigar box on top of his stroke books in his sock drawer. Gone was the church going honor roll student that everyone had been so proud of. In his place was a bitter, violent, hard drinking, and at times, whore chasing individual. He was quick to anger and start to throwing fists, especially after a night with the bottle. He and Sandy had married prior to Rick shipping out for Korea. She had gotten pregnant almost immediately after his return and they settled into a small house just off the small downtown area of New Richland.

It was not a marriage made in heaven. After work, Rick enjoyed drinking with his buddies at the local tavern which had once been the towns bank, and on the weekends he got totally blasted while either watching the Twins, North Stars, or the Vikings in action on television, depending on what sport was in season. He also liked to hunt and fish, also while intoxicated. He was a rugged man's man and even though he was incredibly obnoxious when drinking, he had no problem scoring with the town's single and sometimes married women.

Sandy enjoyed staying at home and watching her soap operas while stuffing huge amounts of candy, cake, pudding, or any other sweet into her mouth. Along with her normal pregnancy weight gain she became enormous.

Things changed a little for the better after little Jake was born. Rick absolutely loved the little guy and had big dreams for his son. Being a complete Minnesota Viking maniac who drove

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a classic 65 Ford Mustang painted Viking purple with the Viking horns decal in the rear window, Rick naturally wanted his son to grow up to become a member of the Minnesota Viking football club. He became obsessed with it. The first toy put in Jake's crib was an official NFL "Duke" football.

Rick threw himself hog wild into the upbringing and molding of his son. He taught Jake to catch a full size football by the time he was four and had him running wind sprints in the back yard by the time he was seven. He was playing in the Pee Wee leagues by the next year and on his tenth birthday Rick bought him a sand filled weight set so he could start bulking him up.

Rich himself gave up drinking after work and only got wasted on the weekends while watching his games on TV. Not all of this was voluntary. He had been banished from attending the entire season of Jake's second year of Pee Wee football after showing up blotto and calling a referee (who was also a local minister) a "blind as a bat cocksucker." He also had given up chasing women after narrowly avoiding been shot while dallying with a local married woman. Her husband had come home unexpectedly after leaving to go bowling in Waseca, he had forgotten his bowling glove, only to see his wife taking it from behind while leaning against the kitchen table that his parents had given them for a wedding present. He had rushed into the living room to grab his 12 gauge, which gave Rick the moment he needed to jump buck naked through a plate glass window. The enraged husband still took a wild shot at the fleeing Rick but succeeded in only killing seven of his neighbors homing pigeons nesting in their coop.

Rick now had a steady single piece, a truck stop waitress who lived over in Geneva. That was safer.

Sandy was by now a virtual shut in and weighed close to what a starting lineman would hit the scales at. It wouldn't be too long before she could be the subject of an article in the *NATIONAL ENQUIRER*.

By the eighth grade, Jake had settled into his position as a defensive back on the junior high team. Along with the weight routine his father had him on (the family's basement now had almost as much iron as the high school gym), three protein shakes a day, and his mother's gigantic home cooked meals, Jake was now as big and buff as some junior college ball players.

And the boy could hit like a fucking mule kicks. He starched two wide receivers from Glenville in the first quarter of their game. One with a severe concussion. He had a natural instinct to go towards where the ball was being thrown. Interceptions didn't matter to him. Only pure contact.

A hit was only good to him if snot flew out of both of their noses. He didn't care if the receiver held onto the ball, if he fumbled, or even if his own bell got rang. He just wanted to hit. By his freshman year he was playing on the high school "A" squad and banging a cheerleader who was in her senior year. He didn't bother to study, he had people doing his homework assignments for him.

Rick thought he was shitting in tall cotton he was so proud. After Jake was ejected in the game against Conger for close lining a running back who was stupid enough to run into Jake's zone on a draw play, Rick went out and bought Jake a copy of Jack Tatum's *THEY CALL ME ASSASSIN*.

His pre-game meal was two chicken breasts, a baked potato, a small side of spaghetti with tomato sauce, and after an hour or two of digestion, five white cross and three cups of coffee. Just like the pros.

Although Rick loved his liquor and beer, he had no time or patience for people who used recreational drugs. By recreational he meant marijuana, acid, heroin, or coke. Speed did not fit in this category. Speed wasn't a drug to Rick. It was just something that kept you awake so you could drink more beer or helped you get through the work day after drinking. Or something that you gave to your teenage son before a big football game. That other shit was for hippies and

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other degenerates. Rick had no problems getting his hands on any zip anytime he wanted it. His little brother Billy, was the biggest methamphetamine, pot, and Quaalude dealer in the county.

Billy was a veteran too. Vietnam. Three tours. All in a row. He would have stayed for another tour if it hadn't been for the cobra that had bit him on his left hand causing him the loss of three of his fingers. He had been pillaging a Buddhist temple at the time for souvenirs and the little bastard had been coiled up and sleeping behind a shrine when Billy had disturbed him by dropping a religious statue on his tail. He could have easily died but a chopper was already on its way to his platoon's camp to medivac out a soldier who just had his testicles blown off by a bouncing betty. He still spent over a month in a hospital in Saigon before being returned stateside. It was there that began his lifelong affair with pharmaceuticals.

Billy had loved Vietnam. You could do whatever you wanted over there. You could drink, do great drugs, screw all the women you wanted, and on top of it all, kill people. And no one could do a thing about it. Not that anyone cared anyway. It all had given him an incredible rush of power and a feeling of invincibility. He called it the "juice."

On the freedom flight home he had wept while everyone else had cheered when the pilot had announced that they were out of Vietnam's air space. The stewardess had patted his shoulder affectionately. She thought he was weeping for joy.

After returning to New Richland, he had worked for a while at the corn cannery in Waseca to supplement his VA disability check, but soon found the monotony of a day to day job to be unbearable. Dealing drugs was much more fun and profitable.

Soon he had bankrolled enough cash to buy a beautiful brand spanking new Harley-Davidson and was running with a biker gang out of Albert Lea called The Grim Reapers. He was forced to take year and a day vacation in Stillwater State Prison for possession with intent to distribute, but his gorgeous wheel chair bound wife, Dawn, had ran the business for him while he was away. She was a natural with numbers and investing, and soon they owned a small farm, a four wheel drive pickup, the previously purchased Harley, and a Winnebago motor home which was specially equipped with an electric lift to get Dawn in and out of. She had had no problems dealing with the scrotum heads that they supplied their crank and downers to while he was away. Underneath the Mexican blanket she sat on was a chrome plate .357 magnum and after she had shot the dumb shit in the ass who had tried to walk out the door without paying for his gram of speed, word had gotten around fast. It hadn't taken Billy's fellow Reapers long to find out where the guy that was walking around with a .357 slug in his rectum lived and they had paid him a friendly visit by shining their boots on his rib cage.

Dawn was a tough nut. Billy had met her when she was dancing with a carnival strip show called *Chez Paree* at the Freeborn County fair in Albert Lea. Billy had gone to see the sprint car races that were held on the final night of the fair on its half mile horse track. The track was not maintained at all during the course of the year and for the the drivers it was almost suicidal to compete on it. But it drew enormous crowds who came to see if they might luck out and see someone get killed, so their racing association booked them for the fair on an annual basis. After the races Billy had gone to the beer garden and had gotten incredibly wasted snorting crystal meth washed down with Grain Belt beer. It was his desire for a corndog smothered in mustard that drew Billy to the midway and to Dawn.

They had brought the girls out on stage to pump up the audience for the final show of the night. When Billy saw her up on the stage shaking her money maker and grinding away, he had forgotten the corndog and had paid his six bucks to see the show. It had long been a custom for the girls of *Chez Paree* to get totally naked for the last show of the night, even though in Freeborn County the rule was g-strings and pasties at all times. Not to worry though since the local sheriff's department had already been paid off. Getting naked for the last set really got the local farm boys and packing plant workers all fired up and it was easy to talk them into the

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twenty five dollar blow jobs, even though they had to wear a rubber, that the girls gave after the show out in the trailers behind the tent.

Billy gladly paid the cash for a hummer from Dawn and after she got a taste of the dope he was carrying and saw the wad of cash in his pocket, it hadn't taken him much to convince her to shitcan the glamour of the stage and to take off with him. Plus, he was a good friend of the owner of the local strip club, *The Aragon*, so she would never be lacking for employment. The carnay boss of *Chez Paree* was a little pissed when Dawn gave notice but was calmed down by a fifty, a gram of crystal, and the sight of Billy's .38 caliber Colt Detective Special stuck in his belt.

They were married a week later and while Billy dealt drugs, Dawn flashed her jugs (covered in pasties) for the local idiots of Albert Lea. It was easy work for her. Her own father had turned her into a prostitute at the age of thirteen by charging his drunk buddies for her and at eighteen she had taken off with the show when it passed through Cairo, Illinois. Billy treated her like a goddess and she only danced because she wanted to help contribute to their dream of living somewhere on the beach. After Vietnam Billy couldn't handle the cold of Minnesota.

On a snowy Saturday night at the club she had unknowingly gotten the wife of a customer convinced that her husband was interested in more than just watching her dance. As Dawn had gathered up her clothes after her set and stepped down off the stage, the woman had come up from behind and stabbed her in the back with the sharpened end of a rat tail comb. Dawn had been confined to a wheel chair ever since then. The woman assailant had been sentenced to fifteen years in Shakopee State Prison. Her husband meanwhile, was shot eight times and killed when he was walking out the back door of a bar in Albert Lea called *The Name Of The Game*, almost a year to the day later. Billy was questioned for over ten hours but had an ironclad alibi. The murder case was kept open for years.

BATFISH

ALBERT LEA

Artimus sat at the bar looking like he had tried to swallow a cockroach and it was stuck in his throat.

“What’s the matter?” I asked.

“What’s the matter?” he exploded. “You sit here telling me a fucking story like that and then have the nuts to ask me what the matter is?” Jesus Christ! I cannot fucking believe that you’re an escaped mental patient on top of all the other shit you’re on the run from.”

“Well, in a way I am and in a way I’m not.” I replied.

“What the hell is that suppose to mean?”

“I’m not crazy. I think. But I did escape.”

He shook his head in disgust and just stared at me. A couple of college babes on spring break had wandered in off of the beach and had sat down at the bar, so I made myself scarce for a second to take their order. They both wanted a drink called a “Smelly Beaver” that was all the rage this year.

When I came back to Artimus’s side of the bar he appeared to have gotten his second wind. “Both of those bimbos have decent racks.” He paused. “Hey! You never told me you were from Minnesota. All this time you’re from Minnesota and you never tell me? Shit man, I’m from right next door in the Dakotas. Do you realize how fucking homesick I get? And you don’t have the common decency to at least tell me you’re from the same neck of the woods so we could bullshit about it.”

The mental patient issue seemingly having dropped from his mind.

That was another thing about Artimus. Very short attention span.

“Hey man, what town in Minnesota? I use to run a lot of dope through this shithole called Albert Lea.”

That “shithole” was my hometown. Albert Lea was named after some civil war colonel who got smoked at a big battle. Its biggest accomplishment is that it’s the hometown of Eddie Cochran, the 1950’s rock and roll star, who was killed at a very young age over in England. Car wreck or something. Summertime Blues. Marion Ross from the show Happy Days supposedly is from there, too. She was Richie Cunningham’s Mom. But who gives a crap about that?

There had also been an incredibly cool murder in Albert Lea when I was growing up. But no one talks about it now. A local minister had been carrying on a torrid homosexual affair with a younger member of his parish. For reasons unknown, the young man had stabbed the minister about a million times and had dragged the body all over the county for a couple of days.

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He was the subject of a massive manhunt that the area has never seen the likes of since. During that time my mother's favorite way to keep me in her sight was to remind me that this maniac was on the loose. And to just think of horrors he would inflict on my young body once he caught me. Further evidence of her terrific parenting skills. No wonder I had horrible nightmares all through my childhood.

I still think that that murder would make a great John Waters film. Would really put the town on the map.

Albert Lea has always had its own distinct smell. There was a packing plant in Albert Lea and the air always smelled like someone was taking a shit and smoking a White Owl cigar at the same time. You'll never forget that smell once it hits the old shnoz.

When I was a kid, the biggest thing going on was "dragging Broadway." Just driving up and down the main drag of the town. Well, not the biggest thing. The biggest thing was drinking and just like you said, Arty. Drugs If drinking was numero uno, then drugs were numero dos.

Albert Lea sits right at the intersection of Interstate highways 35 and 90 so it's a natural location for drug trafficking. A lot of biker gangs hung around and meth was popular in old A. L. long before it became trendy But pot was king.

Albert Lea was were I acquired my taste for marijuana.

I think you remember your first joint just like you remember your first piece of ass. I sure do. It was a massive red, white, and blue number and we smoked it right next to Billy Hawks garage. It was like smoking rubber.

Albert Lea was not exactly what you would call a racial friendly town either. Hispanics were tolerated because it was felt that they were good for the local economy. In other words they would take the jobs that no one else would take. But if you were black, beware. You better be out of town by sundown! There had been at one time in the city's history, a local chapter of the KKK, its offices located above the Woolworth's store.

I feel truly fortunate to have had the chance to grow up in my formative years in a area filled with such culture, along with such kind and caring people.

Neither of my parents were from Albert Lea originally. My Dad was born just up the road in Faribault, Minnesota. His parents had both been employed at the state hospital there as ward attendants. My grandfather was a mean son of a bitch. Strong as a rhino on steroids and he could back it up. For fun, he liked to go in the local taverns and beat the shit out of the first person who looked at him wrong. For money, he could knock out a horse with one punch. My grandmother weighed over three hundred pounds. All I remember about her is that she had tits the size of basketballs.

My mother was born in Plainfield, Wisconsin. The home of Ed Gein, the first famous serial killer. She actually had known him personally. It was really her claim to fame, due to the fact that my grandmother was one of the bodies that Ed had dug up. My grandfather was a rambling, gambling man. Location unknown at that time.

My Dad was a Hoover vacuum cleaner/bible salesman. Which was the first job(s) that he grabbed after he got out of the service after the big one. WWII. My Mom was a beautician who ran her own shop out of the basement of our house. Dear father was offered Albert Lea as his territory shortly after they were married and they had lived in A. L. ever since.

The family house smelled like permanents, gin, and dog shit.

They had three kids. In order of birth it was my sister, Lucy (named after Lucille Ball), my brother, Luther (named after Martin Luther, the religious guy, not the great guy), and me. Plus, our family dog, Skippy, a rat terrier. Now that's a whole different story

Skippy is my entire reason for believing in reincarnation. He had the unbelievable habit of roaming the neighborhood and either taking a crap or pissing on whatever he set his little brain to. If someone had just washed their car, Skippy would come over and take a leak on his

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clean tires. If someone had just rubbed mink oil on their prized leather golf bag and had left it in the sun to dry. Skippy would piss on it. He even walked into a neighbor's house one time and took a leak on the family's floor length curtains, which had just been bought that day.

But his crowning achievement in life was for some reason he liked to back his little hairless asshole up to the windows of the neighbors basements and shit on the glass so that it stuck. That little dude was doing some serious payback for being fucked over in a earlier life. Maybe he just liked the feel of cool glass on his bunghole. I don't know. But I do know one thing. More than once I heard someone's scream of anguish or rage and would see Skippy running for life and some neighbor chasing him down.

He would eventually be bestowed the nickname of "Squirty" by the neighborhood. Skippy/Squirty died of a heart attack and I know that the only people in town who grieved for him was our immediate family, minus my Dad.

Dear old Dad wasn't the kind of guy who would get all emotional over a dead dog. Dad had four passions in life: Selling suckers and bibles, God, the Minnesota Twins, and Buckhorn beer. Not necessarily in that order.

During the baseball season, he and my mother would sit on the back porch and easily kill damn near a case of beer every night while listening to the Twins lose another game on a tiny transistor radio.

Both my parents are what you would today call functioning alcoholics. They could kill the better side of a case of brew along with a couple of shots of cheap gin and still pretty much carry on a normal conversation. Not that there hadn't been a few slip ups.

Dad once was burning trash while pie eyed and accidentally threw a box full of hairspray cans in the fire causing a fucking nuclear blast. He was lucky that he wasn't killed. The lid off the burn can must have gone 500 feet in the air and landed on a neighbor's kid riding his bike down the street.

My mother and her sister once got so trashed on an August evening that they put sheets over their heads and went trick or treating in the neighborhood. My aunt was so bombed that she fell off a set of steps and cracked her head open. It was all a thrill a minute for them, although my mother had lost a few customers when she took to having a few morning bracers before she gave some old broads their Lady Clairol dye jobs.

In those days drunks were funny. Remember Otis on Mayberry staggering around?

My poor sister reacted to these shenanigans by hiding in her room, reading movie magazines, practicing her cheers for cheerleading squad, and dreaming of the days to come when she would move to Minneapolis and lead a life of glamour. Her goal in life was to marry someone with money and drive a Buick.

My brother reacted with underage drinking, fast cars, felony theft, and assault of school teachers and anyone else who told him different. His goal in life was to be a bad ass or a prison snitch.

I just looked toward getting a meaningless high school diploma and leaving town. Hopefully, I would get laid at some point in that time frame. At that point in my life, that was all that mattered

In then end we all got what we wanted. In a way that is. Dad's mind got so pickled on cheap Minnesota draft beer that he and God often sat talking to each other on the back porch. Remember that in the years to come the Twins would win two World Series titles. Maybe my Dad had something to do with that.

My mother had to close down her beauty shop after she really got tanked one morning on beer and tomato juice and wound up passing out in the middle of the floor while she was giving some old biddy a makeover. She then had plenty of time in her day to sit around and agree with whatever nonsense came out of my fathers cakehole.

SCREAMING BATFISH BLUES

My sister married a high school athletic star. They moved to Minneapolis where he had a full ride at the University of Minnesota. There he majored in football, pot smoking, and having lots of sex with both women and men, while she stayed at home and had his kids. She drove a Corvair.

But it was my brother who really brought pride to the family name. He was sent to the state reform school at Red Wing, where he ran into a stainless steel shank in the shower room on his first day, when he refused to be the new shower toy boy. The night before they took him away he had confessed to me that he had been laying the pork to two of the women who came to my mother's beauty parlor. They were both in their sixties! He should have been imprisoned for that alone.

He did leave me his girlie magazine collection. There must have been two hundred dirty books hidden in my parent's attic. They were under my mother's wedding dress in a trunk.

*And me? Early in my senior year I had smoked two huge joints of Colombian Gold and had gone to see the flick *The Last Detail*. That was all the convincing I had needed to go join the navy.*

By the way, I got finally got laid before I left. It just wasn't as good as I thought it would be.

JUICE

NEW RICHLAND

Just before Jake's junior year started, Rick Morrow was killed in a spectacular and lurid car accident that would start the tongues of the local yokels of New Richland wagging for years.

Jake's sophomore year in football had been incredible, although the team had finished with a record of four and four. His hard charging, balls to the walls, take no prisoners style had even attracted a sportswriter from the *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, who had written up a glowing article on the young phenom. In final game of the year against Ellendale, Jake had snorted a line of his Uncle Billy's finest crystal in his pre-game ritual, and it had shown against the receiving corps of the opposing team. One of the receivers had gotten so gun shy that he had cut off on one of his routes and the quarterback had thrown the ball directly to Jake who had returned it 95 yards for a touchdown.

Big things were in the making for the next season. The team was starting to gel as a unit and there was talk of not only making the playoffs but advancing deep into them. The town itself was ecstatic, especially after the newspaper article was published. New Richland had never been much of a football town.

In the off season, Jake had thrown himself into a strenuous diet and conditioning regime. Grades were no worry as no teacher was even giving their new "star" anything close to a failing grade. His older girlfriend had dumped him when she was accepted to a college on the east coast but he didn't give a shit. His new piece of tail, Janine, was the daughter of the minister that several years past had barred Rick from attending the Pee Wee games. Life was getting sweet at the Morrow ranch.

The first game of the new season was two weeks away and Jake was taking it easy. The final two a day practice session had concluded that afternoon and school itself would be in session in a few days. He had wanted to slip over to Janine's to get in a little lovemaking. Man, that broad could fuck for a preachers' daughter, but she had begged off with plans to go to the movies with friends over in Owatonna. So he had burned a joint and was laying on his bed with the windows open, around ten o'clock in the evening. Late summer in Minnesota can be incredible and that night had been no exception. Beautiful starry night with a nice warm breeze blowing in lightly through the window. Led Zeppelin was playing softly on the stereo and he slowly dozed off when he heard the phone ring and then his mother screaming.

"Oh shit, oh no, oh fuck, oh god, no, no, no, no...." She wailed.

Jake jumped out of bed and raced down the steps to find his mother collapsed on the kitchen floor, clutching the phone. By now Jake could bench press weigh over three hundred

SCREAMING BATFISH BLUES

pounds but his mother had gotten so fat that he could barely lift her and drag her over to the couch.

“Mom, what the hell is wrong?”

The woman was in hysterics and refused to answer. She rocked her massive frame back and forth while tearing at her hair. Jake finally heard a voice calling his name from the phone still hanging by its cord.

“Who is this?” he demanded.

“Jake, this is Chief Gates.” There was a long pause and Jake had to plug one ear to hear over his mother’s shrieks. “Son, I’ve got some some bad news. Your Dad and Janine were in a car accident just outside of Otisco. They hit a manure spreader crossing the road. I’m sorry, but they’re both dead.”

No one ever found out what was really going on between Rick and Janine but there was enough evidence at the scene of the crash to pump up the rumor mills for years. They had hit the shit spreader broadside in Rick’s Viking purple Mustang and Rick had been killed by the force of being thrown into the steering wheel. Janine had been decapitated, just like Jane Mansfield, as many of the locals would comment. Rick’s pants had been undone and pulled down to his thighs. Janine had been topless. There was an open bottle of Crown Royal in the vehicle. It didn’t take Dick fucking Tracy to figure out what had been going on.

Two days after the crash, while staying at her parent’s house, Sandy Morrow tried to bump herself off by washing down three Quaalude with two sixers of Pabst. It was only her extreme size that saved her, even then she had still slipped into a sort of catonic state, which the doctors felt was brought on by a combination of the drugs and the news of the accident. Along with the fact that her husband had been boinking her son’s fifteen year old girlfriend.

She was rushed by ambulance to the hospital in Waseca and after she recovered from the physical aspects of the overdose, she was transported back to New Richland and admitted to the local care facility. She was unable to attend the funeral of her husband or even leave the facility for that matter. Sandy would spend the remainder of her days watching *Wheel of Fortune* and reruns of *Mannix*, her late husband had had some resemblance to the main character in that series and Sandy believed that he had left her to become a star in Hollywood. Nurses at her care facility would also often witness Sandy carrying on deep conversations with Oprah Winfrey in the last few years of her life.

Jake had been taken in by his Uncle Billy and Aunt Dawn immediately after the accident. Rick’s mother had been dead for years and his father was a permanent resident of the alcohol treatment center in Hazleton. The former owner of a hugely successful golf course, Grandpa Morrow had loved fast cars and women, and even more, good quality scotch. At the age of seventy, the old fart had been pulled over on I-35 after a high speed chase of way over a 120 miles an hour with the highway patrol. He had a blood alcohol level of .025 and had tried to pull a handgun on the arresting officers. It was his seventh driving while intoxicated charge. His license had been pulled years before.

Sandy's parents were God fearing country folk in their late sixties and frankly their grandson scared the shit out them, with all the weightlifting and football and such. They had no problem at all with their only grandson moving in with his fathers brother and wife.

After the funeral and when school started was the hardest time for Jake. Everyone was whispering about the illicit affair that been going on with Rick and Janine. The news of the crash had even been picked up by the *Pioneer Press*, the same rag that had written the high praising article about Jake’s football exploits. By the time the first game of the season rolled around Jake was a loaded gun that was ready to go off. The coach of the team had even told Jake that he would understand if he wanted to sit this first one out. Jake would have none of that. The first receiver that came into his zone was going to pay for all the bullshit of the last two weeks.

SCOTT L. ANDERSON

Jake moved into a spare bedroom in Billy and Dawn's farmhouse and Billy had cleared a spot in his barn for Jake's weight equipment. Dawn was a woman who had known great misery almost her entire life and she did her best to try to help young Jake through this terrible time. She felt that Jake should think about not be playing ball this year about transferring to another high school in the area until all this tragedy passed.

Billy would have none of that babying crap. He had spent his formative years in the bars, brothels, and jungles of Vietnam, and the way to get through grief was to make some other motherfucker feel some pain.

The night of the first game of the season, Billy had driven Jake into town in his truck and pulled into the small cemetery outside of New Richland where both Janine and Rick were buried.

"What the fuck are we doing here Billy? I don't have time for this shit, I've got a game to get ready for. I don't want this in my head tonight."

"Boy, you need this head in your head tonight. These local assholes have been laughing behind our backs for the last two weeks. Do you think your Dad would have put up with that shit? Hell no, he wouldn't have. No one gave him any shit when he was alive and they're sure not going to do it now that he's dead. Not if I have anything to do about it."

Jake looked over at his uncle. It would be the first and last time he would ever see anything close to resembling tears in his uncle's eyes.

"Your dad always told me that you had the juice, that you were gonna be big time. Well, tonight's the night, big time. You're gonna show these cocksucker what we're all about. Can you do it?"

Jake hung his head and cried for the first time since the accident. The two men sat quietly in the dark for several minutes.

Finally Jake spoke. "I can do it, Uncle Billy, I can make 'em pay."

"Fuck ya, you're gonna make 'em pay!" His uncle roared as he pounded his nephew on the back. "That's my boy."

"I've got something special for you tonight, Jakey boy. Something to really give you an extra edge." His uncle reached into the pocket of his leather jacket and pulled out a small round mirror and a glass vial. With his Buck knife he cut four long lines across the mirror. Two lines apiece

"This is a little combination that I whipped up myself. Some dynamite crank cut with just a hint of absolutely pure coke. You'll be wired for sound."

BATFISH

ST. PETER SECURITY HOSPITAL

Fucking A. I use to move pounds of weed for a biker gang from Albert Lea called the Grim Reapers. Man, were they a lame bunch of faggots. The biggest guy weighed about a buck fifty and none of 'em rode Harleys. Shit! Suzukis, Kawasakis, Hondas, not even a fucking BMW or an Indian. They never wanted any quality. Just fucking ditch weed.”

Artimus seemed like he was over the initial shock of my story and was on a roll. His eyes wide open but the pupils looked like pinheads. I always suspected that he did a lot more speed than I saw him do, but never brought the subject up. He must have dropped something while I was waiting on a customer because he was chain-smoking his Camels.

“I think I even know where St. Peter is. Is it over by a place called Mankato? Where the Vikings have their training camp? Me and a buddy went over there one time cause he claimed he knew some guys, who knew some guys, who dealt weed to the Vikings while they were there and if we brought some primo shit we might get turned on to some season tickets but it turned out to be bullshit.” Once he got on a rant you couldn't stop him. His brain just seemed to bounce around in his huge skull like a pinball.

“You know with that anchor tattoo on your forearm I should have guessed you had been in the navy. But since you never said anything I just thought you might have been in the merchant marines or something. Lots of dopers were.”

“So what happened after you popped that pervert at the looney bin?”

I had to sit in a cell for around three hours while a variety of guards, nurses, and I guess some shrink or something, either would peer at me through a little glass window or ask me questions through the food tray slot in the door. Shit like “Are you going to hurt yourself?” or “Are you going to try to hurt anyone else?” I didn't answer them, just shook my head and that seemed to be good enough for them, because pretty soon this big dude opened the door and said I could come out.

He introduced himself as Scott and said he was the lead security counselor (that's what they called guards there) for the unit. He laid out the ground rules: no smoking on the unit, smokes, if you had them, were given out on the hour and were to be smoked out in a secured courtyard adjacent to the day room. You never left the unit unless escorted (the doors were always locked anyway), and basically everything revolved around sort of a merit system. But, as Scott pointed out. There was to be no more of that kind of foolishness that went on in receiving. Anymore of that, and the consequences could be much more severe.

SCOTT L. ANDERSON

In other words, if you were a nice boy everything would be just swell. I would remain in an isolation cell which would be locked at night for three days and then would be assigned to my own room/cell. I would be free to roam the unit at my leisure and could partake in the groups activities.

The observation period began. They observed me and more importantly, I observed them.

There were twenty inmates on Unit 800 and unlike me, of course, everyone of them belonged there. But as I was soon to learn, there was really no hierarchy there, like I imagine there is in prison. These weirdos were the cream of the crop for anti-social behavior and couldn't even come close to forming any sort of bond with each other.

There was a threat of physical violence in the air at all times.

The biggest client was Norm. A bear of a man who so dangerous that he wore what the counselors called walking restraints. It was like a weight lifting belt around his waist with one hand strapped securely to it. While the other hand, while also strapped to it, had about a ten inch strap which gave Norm a range of motion so that he could eat and somewhat protect himself in event of an attack. Norm had killed his father by beating him over the head with a cast iron skillet.

He had a follower in Jeff. Sort of a biker wanna be who closely resembled Charles Manson in facial appearance (probably in beliefs, too). They had the only (if you could call it that) semi-friendship on the unit. Jeff had killed his mother by slashing her throat.

Bob was probably one of the more interesting, certainly the most pungent, of the "clients." Bob had grown up in the local area and was in the habit of having his morning coffee at the Greyhound bus depot in Mankato. One day the dumb shit had sauntered in and held up the place. He was immediately arrested and sent to Stillwater prison where he immediately called a large inmate a "nigger" and was promptly thrown off the third tier. Only the finest in prison medicine could save him. Bob now had no feeling below his waist but could actually walk. Who knows how? He had to be sent to a state hospital to serve out the remainder of his sentence as he was defenseless in the general prison population.

But while at the state hospital he unwisely attacked a nurse. His prison sentence had now long ago expired but he was now just another client caught up in the system. He was despised by clients and staff equally. He was required to have a permanent catheter attached to a bag with a nifty ankle holster and the nursing staff had to give him two huge soapy enemas every week. He didn't like to shower which resulted in him smelling like a walking shitpile.

Earl was the only black client. Minneapolis Vice Lords would give him a McDonalds happy meal and would send him out with a aluminum baseball bat on payback missions against opposing gang members. He had been picked up and had assaulted several St. Paul police officers. He also had a reputation on the unit of trying to fuck anything that walked, so he had a special cell that set a light off in the guards control bubble anytime he left his cell.

Alvin was a Indian off the Red Lake reservation who had stabbed his brother in the stomach over a bowl of his moms chili. I would once witness him during medication time turn around and jam his narrow little ass through the medication window and fart. That earned him a one day stay in seclusion.

Pete had married a woman in a wheel chair and had pushed her chair, with her in it, down a long flight of stairs. Pete had been around a long time. Long enough that he had been in the hospital when they actually took clients out on field trips. At Como Zoo in St. Paul, Pete had picked up a young boy and held him over the alligator moat. He didn't drop him but the staff almost had a nervous breakdown. The boy had loved it.

Tony, a wild religious fanatic, had tried to kill the president of Planned Parenthood. He also had the ability to get drunk by drinking huge amounts of water and could get very aggressive.

SCREAMING BATFISH BLUES

Fred was in for a variety of assault charges. He had been a suspect in the Green River killings in Washington state at one time. The police had arrested him and in his possession he had the scarf and bible of one of the dead whores. For some reason nothing ever came of it. The guy had pure predator eyes. I was very careful around him.

And that left me and a number of other clients who had acted up at the state hospital below the hill or in one of the lower security units. A number of them are what the politically correct public calls the developmentally disabled. They are referred to as "retards" by the other clients and staff

The old days of straightjackets, billy clubs, and ice bath therapy were over. Medication, handcuffs, and a high starch diet kept the inmates from wanting to take over the asylum. If they really wanted to fuck you up they still old sparky going though.

The staff of the unit would only on occasion venture on to the unit. Mostly to pass out the food trays that were brought on to the unit or to direct clients to the med line to receive their daily medications. I had been put on a multi vitamin and something to keep me "calm." I would cheek this and then try to spit it out as soon as I could.

Under the watchful eyes of the staff, sometimes this could take fifteen minutes or so and some of the medication would seep into my system much like chewing tobacco or snuff, and I would have some very wild and vivid dreams. For some reason they usually involved me laying the wood to Marcia of The Brady Bunch. I mentioned that to the unit shrink the first time we met and he seemed genuinely puzzled as he scribbled it down in my chart.

Three days later after arrival I was moved into my own cell. All brick with a metal toilet and sink combination attached to the wall. A cement bed with a thick mattress and a large window equipped with shatterproof glass that looked out on to the grounds of the hospital. I had to act fast. I had no idea how long it would be before my colorful background would catch up to me and how long it was going to take these geniuses to figure out I wasn't crazy.

Principal Diagnosis:

Acute Paranoia

Bipolar Disorder

Narcotic Intoxication

This patient has been admitted to SPSH for a two week evaluation on the recommendation of Judge Darwin C. Hardwood, Circuit Court Seven, Duluth, Minnesota. Patient was arrested at a Duluth shelter after he allegedly attacked another shelter resident with a knife, severing the resident's penis. Although patient was not aggressive to the arresting officers, he was involved in another physical altercation at the jail with the same shelter resident, which resulted in further injury to the resident's penis. Patient was observed by jail staff to have extremely poor hygiene and appeared at times to be suffering from hallucinations. Upon arrival at SPSH the patient assaulted another patient who had been on the same transport. Due to patient's size (6'2 and estimated 225 pounds) it was considered in the best interests of the facility to admit patient to a more secure environment while here for evaluation. Patient did well on initial consultation. Has good memory and appears to have a knowledge of current events. Performs well on counting back from 100 by the #7. Refuses to give any information about any relatives or his past. Anchor tattoo on right forearm may indicate military or merchant marine service. Staff are to be reminded to practice extreme caution while on the unit with this patient.

JUICE

NEW RICHLAND

Pumped up wasn't the description for it. Jake played on special teams and on the opening kickoff was flagged for being five yards offside. When Madison Lake did get the ball, they ran up the gut for the first two plays with little or no gain. On third down, their receiver caught the pass after a short button hook, laid his head down and knocked Jake flat on his ass, and then ran untouched for a seventy yard touchdown.

On the ensuing kickoff, New Richland fumbled on their own thirty yard line and Madison Lake recovered. On the very next play the Madison Lake coach called for a reverse and the wide out once more put his head down and bulled over for Jake for a score. Within three minutes the score was 14-0.. The New Richland coach asked Jake if he was all right and if he maybe wanted to sit the next series out to regain his composure, but the young defensive back refused.

New Richland's next series was three and out and the defense returned to the field. Jake's instincts told him that the opposing team felt he was vulnerable and decided to take matters in his own hands. The speedball that he had snorted made his heart feel like it was ready to beat out of his chest. At the snap of the ball he rushed the QB on a blitz but was picked up by the Madison Lake tight end who gave Jake a shot to the chest, knocking him to one knee. But the tight end didn't follow up and Jake sprang to his feet, rolled around the end, and charged the quarterback who had faked a handoff and rolled out to the right side of the field.

The QB threw a long pass down field to a wide open receiver and didn't notice the oncoming rusher until he caught a flash of the opposing team colors out of the corner of his eye and turned directly into the hit.

Jake had been a good five yards away when the QB had thrown the pass and had plenty of time to hold up. but whether it was the speed, or the accident, or just all the shit that had followed it, he didn't. He would never really ever know why he did it.

He had left his feet and the crown of his helmet hit the quarterback straight on the chin, knocking him down and out. You could hear the collision from the top row of the bleachers.

Both benches cleared and in the ensuing melee fans from both towns spilled out of the stands and brawled in the middle of the field like it was an English soccer final. Over a dozen players and fans were injured. One player from Madison Lake was stabbed in the rib cage. Jake always suspected his Uncle Jake in that incident. When order was finally restored with the help from more level headed fans and a few police officers in attendance, the opposing team's quarterback was still laying stone cold unconscious in the spot where he had been hit, his condition forgotten about during the fight.

SCREAMING BATFISH BLUES

He would be diagnosed with a severe concussion and would require over twenty stitches in his chin. The game was called and forfeited to Madison Lake.

The following Monday, Jake attended a hearing in the office of the school principal and was informed of his suspension for the entire football season by the school board and the Minnesota High School Athletic Commission. Next season he would have to reapply for a hearing with the board to determine his eligibility. Jake walked out of the principal's office and the front door of the school and would never return.

BATFISH

ISLA MUJURES

Business was winding down at the beach bar. It usually does after the boats head back with the tourists to Cancun. The majority of the tourist trade does not stay overnight on Isla Mujeres. Which is one of the reasons I live here. More low key, more out of sight, more out of mind I took the days receipts up to the hotel and locked the doors to the bars coolers. Artimus and I then strolled down to the sea wall with two six packs of Bohemia beer, apiece. We often sat and drank the nights away there. Whatever he had taken was really starting to wind him up.

“You want a couple of these?” Two black capsules sat in the palm of his outstretched hand. “Black beauties, dude. The real thing. Not those fake, caffeine, diet pieces of shit they sell in those women's magazines.”

I washed the capsules down with a swig of icy cold brew. Knowing that I wouldn't probably be getting much sleep for the twenty hours or so now.

“So do your folks know all about this shit? Did they come see you in the nuthouse?”

“No, they sure didn't. In fact, I haven't seen or heard from my parents since the day I left for the navy. I'm sure they have no idea where the hell I am. I don't even know if any authorities have ever tried to contact them,” I replied.

“I hated the fucking marines, man. Those guys were some of the most uptight assholes I've ever met. Should've joined the air force. They had it dicked. Navy didn't seem much better. How did you decide on joining up with those gonads?”

“Just like I said before. That Nicholson movie. I thought it would really be like that.”

“I'd like to find my recruiter and beat the ever living shit out of him. Fucker fed me a pack of lies and I ate it like a hash brownie.” Artimus belched out. An annoying habit he has when he's been seriously drinking.

“Coming from where I was though, I sure bought the hell out of it. Here I am seventeen years old, 120 pounds soaking wet, buck toothed, and no one is mistaking me for Paul Newman. And here sits this navy recruiter telling me about going to the Philippines and screwing all the broads you want. Even two or three at a time. The navy should have made that part of their advertising campaign. All I could think of was laying around at night while my oriental house girl serviced me in ways the sluts of Albert Lea hadn't even thought of.” I was starting to feel the intense black beauty buzz coming on.

Not much fanfare when I left home. I had graduated a few weeks earlier. Not much to say about that either. The old man dropped me off at the bus depot and told me to “give'em hell

SCREAMING BATFISH BLUES

boy” and drove off in his calf shit colored Ford Torino. He was probably glad that I had made it that far considering the families recent experiences with the military.

Before my big brother bought the big one at the state reform school he had been given an option to either enlist in the marines or go to youth prison. He had been caught on a breaking and entering charge. He and some buddies had broken into the local high school and tore the place up. The coup de grace had been the taking of a crap in the principals top desk drawer. Offender of said heinous crime never identified.

He enlisted and it took him four visits to the induction center before the marines had had enough of him. First time up he was running a fever, probably had some cigarettes tucked under his armpit. Time number two he went to “wash up” after his physical and someone stole his glasses. Third time was not the charm, he slipped on ice the night before he was to leave and broke his arm. Probably had someone drive a car over it. Fourth time he simply walked out the door of the induction center before they swore him in. Some jarhead called my Dad on the phone a few hours and told him to keep his “pussy” of a son.

Both of his buddies that had been involved in his crime of the century had also been force enlisted into the marines. One was killed in Viet Nam within six months. The other one had been busted shitting in his commanding officer’s desk top drawer and was serving three to five in the brig. Mystery solved.

The judge wasn’t as forgiving to my brother as the U. S. Marine Corps had been. Sent him straight up the highway to Red Wing reform school and the rest is history. Shank in the gut and a bar of Ivory up your ass.

There was uncle on my mothers side of the family who had also joined the navy, but he wasn’t a real popular subject of family conversation. Something to do with young boys and syphilis, but the facts aren’t very clear

I had just turned drinking age and made the most of my last night in Minnesota. They put us up at the Raddison Hotel in Minneapolis and a couple of us filled a bathtub full of ice and Crazy Horse malt liquor. Got insanely fucked up and went and saw my first porno movie down on historic Hennepin Avenue. Historic because it’s such a shithole. Not much of a going away party. I had a old army vet in my room who was going back on active duty and I was slightly afraid of losing my anal cherry but had nothing to worry about.

He came in and said he had drank about “a fucking hundred beers” and passed out.

I was sworn into the navy with a hangover that would have killed a fucking horse and I couldn’t have cared less. The induction center reeked of the smell of dirty feet and bungholes and it was all I could do to hold down my free continental breakfast. It was a relief to leave the place even if the next stop was the San Diego Naval Induction Center.

I started to bang down screwdrivers and soon as the drink cart rolled down the aisle of the plane. Looking out the window at the cornfields down below I never realized that I how long it would be before I ever saw Minnesota again.

I didn’t remember until I was two days into boot camp, that the night before I left Albert Lea , high on mescaline and beer, me and a buddy of mine had shot all the streetlights out in Allman, Minnesota and then burned down an abandoned farmhouse.

Must run in the family.

JUICE

FARIBAULT, MINNESOTA

“**T**hrow a hard fucking jab, then a right to the body and a left to the head. That’s all you’re gonna have to fucking remember in these kinda fights. When they get in close to you, push ‘em back and bang hard to the fucking body. I can guarantee you that none of the assholes you’re gonna be fighting are in half the shape you are.”

Jake had stopped ripping shots to the heavy bag to stop and listen to the instructions of his uncle. His Uncle Billy sure didn’t look like he’d know shit about boxing. He looked more like Tommy Chong, only with dragon and snake tattoos all over his thin but muscular arms, but he had learned how to box in the army and was now trying to pass his limited wisdom onto his nephew.

Billy had come up with a real bright idea, and Jake, although he was going along with it, was secretly hoping that he just didn’t get killed.

Once a year, a guy who owned a farm over by Faribault, promoted his own illegal tough man contest. Twenty four men could enter with a thousand dollar entry fee. The fights would be four two minute rounds. Winner of the last fight would win fifteen thousand dollars. Runner up would get two thousand. Everyone else would get jack shit. It was an all night affair filled with cockfights, gambling, drinking, drugs, strippers, and hookers, along with the fights.

Billy had attended several of these gala events and thought that his young nephew had the moxy to win the tournament for them.

Jake had been a high school dropout for six months and had been working at the corn packing plant over in Waseca, lifting weights, and making his Uncle’s drug deliveries for him.

When Billy came home with the idea of the tough man contest he had jumped at it at first. If he could get his ass whipped into shape and pull off a win he could use his share of the winnings to get his ass on the road and out of New Richland.

Dawn was less than thrilled about it. She was furious at her husband to even think about getting their nephew signed up in a human cockfighting contest but knew better than to question him about it. Vietnam and Stillwater prison had hardened Billy against any authority figures to the point to where he listened to no one, even her, once he had his mind set on something.

“How do I know that one of the guys that I have to fight isn’t some ex-fighter and I wind up getting the holy shit kicked out of me?” Jake asked.

“It’s against the rules of the tournament.” Billy answered with a grin.

“Rules? What kinda rules are they gonna have in something like this?”

“Listen to me, Jakey boy. The dude that runs this show doesn’t allow any bullshit at all. He knows that if anyone tries to slip in a ringer that he’s gonna get a bad rep and no one will ever

SCREAMING BATFISH BLUES

sign up to fight again. And this guy is one bad motherfucker. If anyone is stupid enough to try any shit they'll probably wind up in a swamp with cinder blocks attached to their nuts."

For four solid weeks, Jake got up in the early morning hours to do his roadwork, go to work, make his deliveries, and then come home to pump iron and work out on the bag. He knew he was in good football shape but wasn't sure about fighting shape. The only fights he had been involved in were short scraps during a game or practice that were quickly broken up. His size alone had intimidated most people.

They drove to Faribault in Billy's four wheel drive. Jake was silent but his Uncle chattered on like a fucking monkey, wired to the gills on crank, and drinking out of a tall can of Grain Belt.

"Just let 'em come to you. Let them do the work. They come to you, you just unload on them. Push 'em off, and do it again." Billy was ranting like a amped out Angelo Dundee.

"That stick and move shit won't work here. Just hard fucking shots to the body to soften them up and then go to the the head."

"Goddamn it Billy. Will you just shut the hell up for a minute so that I can think?"

Billy glanced over at his nephew and took a swig of his brew. "Sorry kid. I'm just nervous is all. Should've take half a 'lude along with that zip."

"Yea, I know. I'm sorry too. I'm just ready to get this thing going." Jake replied.

They cruised through Faribault and passed by the state mental hospital and continued out of town for about three miles and then turned down a long private drive ending up in a wood covered natural hollow. Cars and pickup trucks were parked all around a brand new bright red barn. You could hear the sounds of men drinking, and men already drunk, emitting from the open doorway. They got out of their truck as a large biker with a clipboard approached them. It was hard not to notice the .357 magnum strapped to the biker's chest.

"Name?" The biker asked.

"Billy Morrow and my fighter, Jake Morrow."

"I.D.?" The biker looked at his clipboard.

Jake and his Uncle both showed their state driver's licenses which the biker glanced at.

"Through the door." The biker pointed to the barn, obviously a man of few words.

When they walked through the door, Jake was surprised to see what looked like an official boxing ring set up in the middle of the barn. In each far corner of the barn, small stages were set up, and there were nude dancers on three of them. A bar was set up on two sides of the barn and men were in a circle watching what appeared to be a rooster fight in action.

The place was packed. It smelled like sawdust, pot, booze, blood, and fear.

The fattest man that Jake had ever seen was waving them over to a card table with a schedule taped up behind it on an easel. He grinned and shook hands with Billy.

"Hey you old douche bag, how the hell they hangin? the fat man yelled.

"Always lower than your needle dick." Billy laughed.

Fat man grinned. "Same old asshole Billy. Man you never change. Still giving head to the brothers for cigarettes?"

"You know, me and you could in the ring tonight." Billy joked as he raised his fists.

"I'm too busy tonight, maybe some other time. This your boy? He pointed to Jake.

"Sure as shit is. This is my nephew, Jake. He's a tough motherfucker. Jake, meet Don Lang, one of the meanest pricks to ever walk the cell blocks of Stillwater."

Jake reached out and shook the fat man's hand. "Nice to meet you."

"Good to meet you, kid. I just don't think you're gonna be as happy though when you see who your first fight is against." He pointed over a corner of the barn.

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Standing and grinning like an idiot in front of one of the strippers was a huge black man wearing nothing but a pair of jeans. He looked close to weighing three hundred pounds and stood way over six feet tall. He was flanked by two smaller white men.

“That retard’s name is Charlie Johnson. He’s a patient from the nut house in Faribault.”

“What the fuck are you talking about, Don?” Billy demanded. “From the state hospital? What the hell is he doing here?”

The fat man shrugged. “Those two guys with him are attendants who work his unit. They run kind of a loose ship over there with all the budget cuts and shit so they’re always low staffed. Gonna turn the place into a prison. Their supervisor is on this, so they just walked him out a side door and drove his ass over here.”

“Why’s he in the hospital?” asked Jake.

“He raped a little girl, shot her in the head with a .22, and shoved her down the hole of an outhouse. He’s a retard so he couldn’t go to the joint. He was over in the maximum lock down in St. Peter for years, but I guess he was a good boy for a while, so he got transferred to Faribault.”

“Can he fight?” Billy piped in.

“Fuck if I know. But those two boys and their supervisor chipped in the grand so I don’t give a shit. I heard one of them tell him that if he wins they’ll buy him one of the hookers. I don’t know which one would fuck a coon. Especially that one.”

The three men stood and watched the giant retard swaying in his tracks and groping his crotch through his hospital issued pants. Everyone couple of seconds he would laugh and scream out “pretty lady.”

Don laughed and slapped Billy on the back. “Ain’t that a kick in the nuts?”

Billy grinned sickly. “It’s a kick in the nuts on all right.” He turned to Jake. “Come on man, let’s get you warmed up.”

Don was still laughing. “Don’t get too warmed up, you’re not on until the fourth fight. Maybe you’ll be lucky and the big dummy will have shot his wad by then, the way he’s grabbing at his johnson.” The fat man bent over and rested his hands on his knees, he was laughing so hard.

“I should have run a shank through that fat fucker in Stillwater when I had the chance.” Billy mumbled as he led Jake to a vacant spot to start his warm up.

“Jesus Christ, Billy! Did you see the size of that son of a bitch?”

“Big fucking deal. Here’s the plan. Soon as the bell rings, charge him and stick him hard with your best shot. If he doesn’t go right way, get on your bicycle and let him punch himself out. He lives in a fucking nut hatch. What kind of wind could he have?”

The bell rang for the first bout of the night. Two burly biker types hammered away at each other and in less than a minute one of them was punched right through the ring ropes and onto the barn floor where he was counted out. The crowd roared like they were watching Ali - Frazier. The winner leaned over the ropes and barfed onto one of the judges score sheets.

Jake grabbed his jump rope and began to try to break a sweat. The crowd roared again as a topless dancer climbed into the ring and began to dance a jig to Lynyrd Skynyrd’s *Gimme Three Steps*.

The second fight was between a obese Mexican who was covered in jailhouse tattoos and a middle aged truck driver. After pounding each other for thirty seconds, they spent the rest of the fight wrestling and clinching. At the final bell the ring was showered with beer as the crowd booed and screeched their disapproval.

Billy snorted another two lines of crystal and reached in to their gym bag and retrieved the warm up mitts. Jake fired out the only combination he really knew in succession. Left jab, straight right, and a left hook. The crowd roared at the lesbian act that was going on in the ring,

SCREAMING BATFISH BLUES

the promoter felt bad at the poor showing of the last fight and felt he owed the audience a little treat.

Fight number three was between a tall lanky redhead with a farmers tan and a bodybuilder. The redhead knew how to box. He spent the first two rounds backing away from his opponent and snapping out a solid left jab which bloodied his opponent's nose and mouth. In the third round the redhead got a little cocky and tried the old bolo punch like Leonard tried against Duran in their second fight. Only in this fight he didn't pull back quick enough and the bodybuilder threw a smoking right hand that drilled the redhead right square in the kisser and sent him down and out. When they pulled his mouth piece out, his two front teeth were wedged inside.

Don the promoter walked by and announced they were up in ten minutes. The between fights act was a woman firing ping pong balls out of her vagina. Drunks at ringside were scrambling to pick up the balls and a couple of them were popping the balls in their mouths.

"Classy bunch of assholes, ain't they?" laughed Don as he walked away.

A greasy looking man who looked like he might have spent his life working as a carny approached them. He handed over a set of boxing gloves. As Billy started to lace them up on Jake's hands they noticed one of the redheaded fighter's teeth lodged in the glove.

"You've got me into a nice fucking situation here, Billy."

The crank was hitting Billy hard. He was talking a mile a minute. "Click in the reptile side of your brain, kid. This guy's a fucking retard for shit's sake. You're a trained fucking athlete. He lays around all day jerking off and smearing his shit on the walls. Get out there and kick his motherfucking ass."

Jake stared hard at his stoned uncle. "Let's just get this over with."

Billy leaned his head back and screamed out like a possessed wolf as they headed toward the ring.

The giant retard was already in the ring with his "handlers." A fantastic looking blonde stripper wearing a Tilt A Whirl t shirt that was cut so that the top two thirds of her jugs and her tollhouse cookie nipples were exposed to the hooting crowd, was strutting around the ring.

Jake's opponent openly leered and screamed out "pretty lady" at her as she passed by him.

"Here, take a swig of this." Billy had tipped back a water bottle.

Jake took a long swig and felt the inside of his mouth go numb.

"What's that shit?"

"Spring water with a dash of coke."

They began to walk to the center of the ring to get the referee's instructions. He looked like he had been let out of the nursing home on a day pass to officiate this fight. He was also wearing a Tilt A Whirl t shirt.

"What's with the Tilt A Whirl shirts? Are they sponsoring this thing?" asked Jake.

"What? Huh? What the fuck are you talking about?" Billy was beyond manic. Too much crank.

"Why is everyone wearing those carnival ride shirts?"

"Oh, the shirts. They make Tilt A Whirls in Faribault." Now Billy was leering at the ring girl.

As they reached the center of the ring, Jake's foe raised his glove and said "Hi."

The referee began his instructions. He had obviously been drinking and he smelled like a urinal that had been cleaned out with rum.

"OK men, keep 'em up at all times, follow my instructions, and break when I yell break. Touch 'em up and return to your corner."

The two fighters touched gloves and Jake's opponent said "Bye."

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Billy was so worked up that Jake thought he might have a seizure. “Did you hear that shit? Hi, bye? He’s a fucking idiot. This will be a cakewalk.”

The bell rang.

Jake fired out of his corner on a coke induced rush and as soon as he was in punching distance he wound up and threw the hardest overhand right that he could muster.

His grinning opponent walked right into it and it caught him directly in the nose. The giant shrieked, held his nose with both hands and charged backwards, knocking the geriatric referee down on his ass.

Jake took advantage of this and stepped forward and fired a screaming left hook to the retard’s balls. He screamed in agony and dropped to both knees. Jake ran to a neutral corner. But the referee had yet to get to his feet. One of the giant’s seconds jumped on the ring apron to protest the nut shot but was grabbed by the back of his pants by one of the judges, an enormous biker, and was pulled back on to the floor.

Finally, the ref staggered to his feet and began to start his count. The crowd was going absolutely batshit.

All Jake could hear was Billy screaming out “It’s a long fucking count. It’s goddamn Dempsey and Tunney all over again.”

The coke was making Jake hyperventilate.

The retard was up at the count of eight. He must have been down for close to twenty five.

Jake charged and attacked his foe. Left jab followed by a right followed by a left hook. They landed in succession as often and as hard as Jake could throw them. Blood was pouring from the giant’s nose, mouth, and a gaping cut under his eye. He just stood there and took it. After about thirty or forty seconds of this shit, Jake was totally exhausted and dropped his gloves.

Then the giant went on the offensive. His arsenal was even more limited than Jake’s. All the retard threw was a round house right to the side of Jake’s body. But wherever it landed it felt like a sledgehammer hitting. The first one landed on his kidney and the force of the punch picked his left foot right up off the floor. The second punch landed on his elbow and it felt like his arm was broken. Jake was too exhausted to retreat and tried to tie his opponent up but his foe had learned to fight on the floors of the state’s finest mental institutions. He grabbed one of Jake’s arms with his left hand and pounded away to Jake’s body with his right until the bell rang.

Jake slumped onto his ring stool. Across the ring he could hear the retard screaming out “pretty lady.”

“Fuck. Jake, drink some of this shit.” The coke spiked water numbed his throat going down. “Fight this fucker, Jake. Long range. Don’t get in close. Stick and move. Stick and move, goddamn it.”

The bell rang.

Jake was revived for a few seconds by the cocaine concoction and began to stick out his jab. It landed almost constantly, snapping his opponent’s head back. But for every five jabs he landed, the giant was land one crippling shot to his body.

The retard’s face was a mask of blood.

Jake’s left side of his body was already turning purple.

After less than a minute into the round, Jake was spent again.

He stopped moving away from his foe and once more, this time in pure desperation, tried a round house shot to the nuts of his opponent. But he was too tired and the punch landed on the giant’s hip. His opponent reached out, fast as a cobra, and hooked Jake’s head with his massive arm and tucked Jake’s head securely in his vile smelling armpit while he whaled away at Jake’s unprotected body with his right.

Jake went down to one knee.

SCREAMING BATFISH BLUES

One.. Two... Get up Jake..Three...Pretty lady....Four...Five...I get to fuck pretty lady...Six...Seven....Eight....Get the hell up Jake...Nine.

He got up.

He couldn't raise his arms.

His foe advanced on him.

Jake tried to raise his hands

The retard threw another of his right hands only this time it was at Jake's head.

The ring floor was soft but it was bouncing up and down. Jake began to sit up but almost blacked out so he lay back down. It took him several moments to realize that he wasn't in the ring but in the back of his uncle's truck. He recognized the car freshener that Billy always bought. Smelled like coconuts. The truck was still bouncing up and down.

With a groan Jake grabbed the back of this seat and pulled himself up. He looked out the back window. Billy had the stripper with the Tilt A Whirl shirt spread eagle in the box and was laying the wood to her. Hard.

Jake laid back down and went back into his fog.

Jake was bedridden for four days after the fight. He had no recollection of the drive back to New Richland, being carried into the house like a baby by Billy, or hearing the huge screaming match between Billy and Dawn after she had seen the condition that her nephew was in.

The first two days Jake drifted in and out of consciousness. He woke up only to drink some water and to take a leak. When he urinated for the first time he passed out in the bathroom after seeing the blood colored urine. His kidneys had taken a pounding.

The last two days he was able to eat peanut butter and jelly sandwiches washed down with some orange juice. Dawn had him smoke some hash to help smooth over his pain and to stimulate his appetite.

The knockout punch that had been administered by the boxing mental patient had landed right between Jake's eyes. It hadn't broken his nose, but it was swollen as hell, and both of his eyes were blackened.

On the morning of the fifth day, Jake finally got out of bed and joined Dawn at the kitchen table as she was weighing out and packaging up a recent shipment of grass.

"Where's Billy?"

"He had to make a run over to Owatonna."

"I guess I let him down."

"Jake, you didn't let him down. He's just disappointed in himself. Sometimes the drugs and the booze and what went on in Nam just clouds his judgment and he doesn't think things out too clear. He spent almost the whole time after you guys got back from the fight out on the porch, drinking Jack Daniel's and talking about how shitty his life has become."

Jake sat silently.

"He was proud as hell of you, Jake."

"I've gotta get out of here, Dawn."

"I know you do, sweetie. This is a no where place to live to begin with. And after all you've been through all ready in your life, I think it's time you got out into the world and explored your options. These dumbass rednecks around here will never let you forget what's happened. They have no future so they live in the past."

"I just don't know where to start."

"You thought about joining the service."

"Yea, but I think I fucked up by not getting a high school diploma."

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“Well, that’s not gonna be a problem. I supply speed to a gal who works over in Albert Lea in the high school office. A gram of zip will get you a beautiful framed high school diploma with your name on it. And a transcript to boot. No problem.”

“Sounds like you and Billy must have thought this all out already.”

She smiled. “Well it wouldn’t hurt to get you stationed in some place like Hawaii or Thailand and every once in a while you could drop a pound or so of their local weed in the mail. Stuff like that around here would draw top dollar. But that’s all up to you. Billy and I would provide all the cash and you’d just have to score and mail it to us. We’d put one third of the profits in a account for you when you get out.”

Jake leaned back in his chair and put his hands behind his head. “Let’s do it.”

BATFISH

SAN DIEGO

I staggered off the plane in San Diego smelling remarkably like my step-grandfather did in the terminal stages of alcoholism, only without the dying. We were not greeted warmly by the swabby in the airport. “Put out those fucking cigarettes and give me your goddamn orders you dumb shits,” he shrieked at our little group. He didn’t seem to care that there were a lot of civilians walking around. The gray Navy bus awaited us at the curb and we were whisked away to what would be our new home for the next nine weeks.

Looking back now, the first day was the worst one, after that it wasn’t so bad. But the first day truly sucked. Long before the sun came up, some asshole came running into the barracks and screamed “Get your pussies out of those racks and hit the deck running.” It was not the kind of awakening that I normally preferred.

The only thing we were allowed to do before marching over to the chow hall was either take a leak or a shit, couldn’t even brush your teeth. Upon the arrival at the dining facility I sat down across from a fellow recruit who promptly barfed all over his tray. The day had just begun.

After our delicious meal, we were then taken over to have our heads shaven, outfitted for uniforms, and then to this huge hall where the biggest prick that I would ever meet in the military was waiting to greet us. He was in charge of making sure our clothes were stenciled.

All of your clothes that are issued to you in the navy have to be stenciled so they can be returned back to you if you are on a ship that does your laundry for you. I also think it’s because the navy is nothing but a den of thieves. As I would find out in the coming years that some son of a bitch would steal your used rubber if you left it laying around.

This guy though was an absolute maniac. He ran around screaming “pussies, limp dicks, motherfuckers” and anything else at us that happened to pop up in his mind. At the same time we were trying to stencil all this crap with this big round brush and permanent India ink. Of course, we were fucking up horribly and at one point he even jammed a guy’s brush into his mouth. I never did figure how that poor dude got that ink out of his teeth.

As this was all going on I noticed a rather heavy, older, black man observing us from the back of the room. I would shortly find out that this was our new company commander, Chief Petty Officer Johnson. We would be his last company prior to his retirement.

He wanted to go out with a bang so he physically tortured us and mentally mind fucked us until we were the number one company in the battalion at graduation. He also wound up with a tidy little nest egg upon retirement after he ran two scams on us.

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The first being the cigarette scam. Johnson announced that you could not have your own cigarettes, so all smokes were rounded up and a collection was taken. If you smoked, every week you were required to put in two dollars towards the smoke kitty. BUT, only two cartons of cigarettes were to be in the possession of the company commander, base regulations of course. You were given one cigarette a day. If you deserved it. Johnson ran things on the merit program. Normally no one deserved it. Yet, every week the yeoman (the recruit unit clerk) came around and took another two dollars from you. This went on week after week. Do the math. About sixty guys smoked. 120 bucks a week times 9 weeks gives you \$1080. The old bastard maybe bought three cartons of smokes the whole time we were there. Cigarettes at that time cost about five dollars a carton on base.

Close to eighty guys bought into the next gift. Johnson announced that he would smuggle pizzas in for recruits who would chip in ten dollars a piece. When the big night came it looked like he had gone out and bought about fifty of those frozen pizzas that you get for a buck a shot at the grocery store and cooked 'em himself. The boxes that they came in didn't even match.

But we all had it better than Murphy, the recruit unit clerk. The day we left San Diego, the recruit company commander told me that one of Murphy's many duties beside running the cigarette scam was also smoking Johnson's big black cigar.

He knew this for a fact. Late one night he had got up to take a leak and heard a weird noise coming from the company commander's office. Risking great bodily harm to himself, he still couldn't contain his curiosity and had gently opened the door, only to see Murphy on his hands and knees getting his ass blasted by Johnson.

The weirdest day in boot camp was the anti-drug lecture that they gave you. We had a chaplain give us our seminar. He actually showed an old episode of Dragnet. The one where at the beginning of the show some straight business man type comes into the station and informs Joe and Bill that his daughter and her husband are smoking reefer and he fears for the safety of his granddaughter. The acting is way over the top. All the heads are wearing love beads and granny glasses and call the cops "pig". In the end of course, the granddaughter drowns in the bathtub while the hippies are having a "pot" party. Bill Gannon has to run out to the driveway and get sick.

At the end of the viewing we were all roaring with laughter and the chaplain was enraged. Shaking his fist and screaming about how his own daughter had become "addicted to reefer." The man of God then had us marched to our barracks where we were outfitted in our raincoats and forced to do pushups and jumping jacks until four or five recruits passed out.

"He had to do the dude's pole? Man, talk about nasty!" screamed out Artimus. He was laughing so hard I thought he was going to pass out. "No shit like that ever went down in the marines, man, that's for goddamn sure. Fucking guy blowing the company commander." He shook his head in amazement.

"I'm starting to put on a serious buzz here. What do you say we go over to the Posada del Mar and try to force some chow down before I get wasted?" I asked.

"Good idea. I could use a big plate of beans and rice. Let's roll." Artimus lumbered to his feet and began to walk down the beach then suddenly stopped and started laughing again. "Hey you never had to put out to the old company buck did you? Or did you wait to lose your ass at the nuthouse?" Such a sensitive guy.

JUICE

HAWAII

Billy drove Jake up to Minneapolis to the armed forces examination and entrance station about a month and a half later. It had taken that long for the swelling in Jake's face to go down, as well as for him to quit pissing blood. He had gone first to the marine recruiter but his options were limited with them. Grunt or engine mechanic. The navy offered him damn near anything he wanted so he had picked Gunners Mate as his military specialty. The Morrow family had always had a thing for guns. His recruiter had run off a copy of his fake high school diploma and didn't give it a second look. A week ago he had gone to Minneapolis to take his physical and get sworn in. Today he was leaving for boot camp. Dawn had cried like a baby when they left and it had dampened Jake's spirit.

It hadn't bothered Billy though. He had been smoking pot, drinking beer, and eating cheese flavored popcorn since they left the New Richland city limits, talking non stop about every guy's ass he had kicked and girls he had screwed, starting from his time in the seventh grade. He had the orange powder from the popcorn all over his face.

They had stopped off in Faribault to take a leak at a shitty truck stop and when they came out of the can, Jake had noticed a large article on the front page of the local Faribault newspaper. He bought a copy and was reading it in the truck.

"Shit, Billy! Those guys who brought that retard to the fights got arrested. Some guy at the hospital saw him the next morning when he reported to work and thought that those attendants had beaten him up. They may have to go to prison if the charges stick."

Billy roared with laughter. "Serves 'em right, bringin' a Frankenstein fucker like that to the fights. They better not think about turning in Don Lang to save their sorry asses. He'll have 'em chopped up and fed to the carp in the river that runs behind the nuthouse. You laid it on his ass, Jake. The big dummy came over after he knocked you for a loop and wanted to make sure you were all right. His head was swollen up like a pumpkin. Both of his eyes swelled shut and he couldn't fight in the next match. I imagine that they had a helluva time trying to explain how that happened."

This was the first time since that night that Billy had talked about what had happened.

"I don't blame you for any of it, Billy. I made the choice."

"I know, kid. But it's my fault, too. I've always been a sucker to try and make the quick buck." He paused. "You know you don't have to send any dope back if you don't wanna. We just thought it would be a good way to make some good fast cash and to build up a quick nest egg. These local morons would shit their pants over the pot they have over overseas."

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“I want to do it. After I kicked out of football I felt just lost. I’m starting to feel alive again. When I started making some dope runs for you and especially when I got in the ring that night, that’s when I knew what was missing. That rush, man. God, I love that rush.”

Billy grinned, his teeth were orange colored and full of popcorn hulls. “That’s the juice, my man. When your heart is racing so fast that you think it’s going to burst out of your chest but everything is moving in slow motion. Your vision is so clear it’s like you’re standing outside on one of those winter nights when it’s crystal clear and about forty below zero. When ever we got into a fire fight, that’s what it was like. I never found anything to replace it when I got back. Drugs, biking, fighting, fucking, nothing was like that.”

The pulled up in front of the AFEES station. Billy must have averaged about eighty miles an hour driving up. It was only seven thirty in the morning. He had already drank almost a twelve pack of Old Style and had smoked about five joints. Jake could have spent the previous night at a local hotel but Billy had insisted on driving him up that morning.

“You gonna be able to drive back, Billy?”

“Shit, man. You oughta know me by now. A twelve of this bunny piss won’t come close to putting the zap to my head. I’ll stop at White Castle anyway and chow me down a bag of those sliders. They’ll soak up damn near anything.”

He reached over suddenly and hugged Jake.

“Take care of yourself, dude. Make sure you write Dawn. If you don’t, I’m the one who will have to listen to all of her bullshit about her poor little baby.”

Jake jumped out of the truck and reached back through the window and took Billy’s hand. The lump in his throat felt like a baseball. “I’m really gonna miss you guys.”

Billy threw the truck in gear and gave another orange colored grin.

“Just stay away from the clap.”

Jake was assigned to the USS Bryce Canyon. Home-ported in Pearl Harbor which is located in the beautiful state of Hawaii, on the island of Oahu.

Boot camp had been nothing for him. He was a physical guy, so he liked all the running, pushups, sit-ups, and obstacle course crap. He even enjoyed the endless classes on everything navy. He was a squad leader and was voted the outstanding recruit of his company upon graduation.

Billy and Dawn had flown out for the ceremony, and they had rented a van and had spent Jake’s two weeks of leave, before he had to report to “A” school, on the beach in Baja. Billy’s body hadn’t seen sun like that in years and he got a world class case of sunburn. It was probably the most fun Jake had ever had with anyone in his family. Two weeks of drinking Mexican beer, playing in the surf, and laying in the sun. They fished every afternoon and grilled their catch that evening. At night they would get a big fire going and some American expatriates who lived down there year round would come over to swap lies and jam on Jimmy Buffett. Jake had never seen either Billy or Dawn look happier.

Jake had kept his nose clean while attending navy “A” school. He once again graduated at the top of his class and was awarded by getting the assignment of his choice after graduation. Pearl Harbor.

He loved Hawaii and being assigned to the Bryce Canyon. The Canyon was described as being a gray building that was tied to the dock. It was a destroyer tender, a class of navy ship that rarely went to sea. It was like being assigned shore duty but you still got sea pay. Jake had a rack on the ship, but only slept in it on duty nights or on the rare two day cruises the ship went out on.

He threw himself into sports. The Canyon had a flag football team that Jake quickly became one of the stars on. The team made it all the way to the finals but lost a close game to the naval station team, 21-20.

SCREAMING BATFISH BLUES

Jake continued to pump iron. He had a workout he designed so that he would lift weights one day and do a boxing style workout the next. Rope jumping, heavy and speed bag, running, shadow boxing, and if could find anyone to do it, sparring sessions. He entered the Pearl Harbor boxing tournament and easily swept through the heavyweight division, winning a beautiful handcrafted trophy.

His success in sports also won him the attention of his immediate supervisor. Tony Hendrichs, a total sports junkie and the biggest marijuana dealer on the ship. Tony was married and lived off base with his wife. Jake began to spend many nights at their small house in Waipahu which was where he would package up the pot that he began sending to his aunt and uncle, several months after his arrival.

It had started off slowly then had progressed to where Jake was sending home a package almost weekly. Tony would find a pound of whatever quality dope was on the market and Jake would call home with the price. A couple of days later a greeting card would arrive with the cash in either fifties or hundreds.

Jake and Tony would wrap the pot up in a thick plastic bag wrapped in heavy tape with a car deodorizer inside. Place the bag in a shoe box, wrap it up, and simply take it down to the local post office and ship it off to Minnesota.

Tony would take his cut off the top, and every month Dawn would send Jake a copy of his bank statement.

Jake lived by a strict personal rule. No consuming of pot while on the ship or the base. For two reasons. Number one reason - He had the cover in place of being a jock, no one suspected him of being involved in anything close to being illegal. Billy had stressed the importance of a solid cover. But reason number two was the big one. Jake had fallen ass over heels in love.

A stranger combination there could not be.

He had met her one Saturday morning in the submarine base dining hall at brunch, the most popular meal of the week. Jake liked to get up early on Saturday to work out and then hit the chow hall for a huge brunch. He was balancing his tray covered with plates of eggs, fries, and burgers, while looking for an empty seat. The only empty chair he spied was across from a pale, black haired, kind of straight (and strange) looking chick, who was reading a book while she was eating.

“Mind if I sit here.”

She had looked up and smiled. “Please do.” To Jake’s horror he saw the book in her hand was a Bible. His family had never been big on religion, and in the navy, people who were religious were considered either narcs or Jesus freaks. Both to be avoided.

But the brunch had gone well. Her name was Sophie and she was the daughter of a Wyoming minister. She was a yeoman and worked in the chaplain’s office on base. The combination of that, along with the fact that she almost always wore a large silver cross with her civilian clothes, scared away the majority of horny sailors who would normally fuck a woodpile if they thought a snake might be in it, but were scared off by religion. She had been in Hawaii for just over three months and had yet to get more than a mile off the base. Jake had walked her back to her barracks room and wound up asking her if she would like him to take her down to Waikiki to see the beach. They were inseparable after that.

She had a double room in the barracks and Jake spent every night he wasn’t on duty with her. Her roommate lived off base with her boyfriend and rarely dropped in. Jake and Sophie didn’t share the same bed though. Every night when they got ready to hit the sack, Jake would roll out his sleeping bag next to Sophie’s bed. She was a virgin and would never think of sex until after marriage. A handjob was even out of the question.

Two daughters of ministers in his young life. One a total whore, the other a total virgin.

SCOTT L. ANDERSON

The news of this had stunned him at first but he quickly got used to it. Her calm, quiet manner seemed to keep him grounded and he had lost some of his inner rage. He didn't however, let her in on the fact that he was mailing on a now weekly basis, pounds of Thai stick, Kona bud, Maui wowie, and Puna bud, to his relatives back in snow covered Minnesota.

A little more than a year later, Jake drove up to Tony's house to send off another care package to his uncle Billy. They had scored a pound of weed nicknamed hash bud and it was probably the most potent pot Jake had ever seen. It resembled a thick moss that had grown around the branch of a tree and was positively gooey with resin. One hit and you were loaded for an hour. Tony swore he caught a buzz just wrapping it up.

Jake drove to the post office in Honolulu, dropped off the package, and drove straight to a phone booth.

Billy answered on the second ring. 38 Special was blasting out *Turn it On* in the background.

"Talk to me, bitch." Quite the way to answer the phone.

"Uncle Billy, how's it hanging. It's on the way. I think you're gonna really enjoy this."

"I haven't been disappointed yet."

"Well, you might be now. I've got some more news."

Billy immediately went into panic mode. "Are you all right? Has anything happened? Narcs? Have you been followed? Jesus Christ! What in shits sake is going on?"

Jake was giggling. Billy had obviously been sampling his own product again. He sounded a tad paranoid. "Nothing's wrong. Calm down," he soothed his uncle's jangled nerves. "I'm gonna ask Sophie to marry me and I just don't want this hanging over us. I hope you understand, but it's time to get out. I don't want to hide anything from her and I'm tired of looking over my shoulder." Billy didn't answer. "Are you pissed?"

"Man, you just scared the crap out of me, that's all. Of course I understand. You've got a nice little bank account all ready and waiting for you. Congratulations! Shit, me and Dawn will even fly over for the wedding. Have you got a date?"

"Not yet. I haven't even asked her, but if she say's yes, I was hoping for this summer."

Jake was probably more nervous driving back to the base than he was before he fought the retard a couple of years ago.

He walked into the chaplain's office with a dozen roses and a diamond ring that he had bought at the base exchange.

She said yes.

BATFISH

ST. PETER SECURITY HOSPITAL

IWhat never did happen there, getting cornholed that is, but that doesn't mean I didn't worry about it. There seemed to be a lot of the guys doing each other, and Earl, the gang enforcer, was forcing himself on a few of the weaker ones on the unit. But I was pretty much left alone. I guess it hadn't taken long for news of my sucker punch to the back of Ray's head to travel through the hospital grapevine and that I wouldn't be a real easy one to take.

When I first walked through the door of that unit I knew right away that this was going to be a world that I had never known in my wildest dreams existed.

I figured that out after this client walked up to me and said "I knew you were coming."

I was surprised. "How's that?"

"How do you think? I could smell your asshole."

Jumping Jesus!!

I had been on the unit for about a week when lo and behold who walks through the door but old Dan, my one eyed buddy from the county jail in Duluth. He acted like he didn't even remember me, which I don't think he did at first. Took him about two days to do it. I think he was still trying to get over the initial shock of his life time commitment to the place.

Dan had a companion along with him who was absolutely guaranteed that he would be serving a life sentence. His name was Cedar and although I didn't know him personally, I had read about him.

One of the staff had left an alternative newspaper called the City Pages, out on the unit, which I had snatched up. In it was an article about this body that was found in the Mississippi River that had been missing its head, feet, and hands. The really strange part about it was that the body had already been embalmed. Turns out that these two idiots had broken in to the crypt of a young boy and had removed the parts and thrown the torso in the river. They had a helluva time at parties throwing the head on people's laps and scaring the shit out of them. Cedar had been mentioned in the article, but only that he was an old former buddy of the two morons.

No, Cedar's reputation more than proceeded him. Cedar had been born to a hippie couple who had some problems with parenting skills. He was a tad too boisterous for them so they decided to medicate him with LSD, even though he was only three at the time.

It would effect him in his adult life since he started to believe that his grandmother was a witch and needed to be killed. So one night after an evening of partying, he beat the old gal half to death, tore out her eyes, and in the final insult, gave her a swirly in her toilet.

For the uninformed, a swirly is when you stick someone's head in the bowl and flush. She died several days later.

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Cedar had been on the classification unit for a month prior to coming to Unit 800 and the medications he was on seemed to work wonderfully. He could carry on amusing conversations, knew rock and roll like it was nobodies business, and was obviously pleased when I mentioned to him that I had read his name in the City Pages. He had smiled and said "Shit, those clowns are just riding on my coat tails." The staff had found a joint on him, hence his trip to Unit 800.

Medication wasn't the only that was keeping him under control. He had been given a series of ECT treatments, electro convulsive therapy shock treatment, before being brought to our unit. Every week he still made the trip for his dose of the electric juice. Thinking about that worried me.

I don't know how it happened, but he would become the only person in the whole fucking joint that I would ever be able to trust.

We became chums and began to spend the days together discussing The Allman Brothers Band-both the new and old version, good pot, and most importantly, how to break out of the St. Peter Security Hospital.

But after three weeks on the unit it was becoming painfully obvious that jig was about up. Let me tell you, it's goddamn hard to play crazy and I just wasn't up to the task. From the little things like the staff noticing that I'd always ask for the television channel to be changed from cartoons, which the other clients watched like it was the word of God, to football, hockey, or boxing. Or when we went out to the yard how I'd run the inner perimeter doing my road work. The average nut just doesn't do that. I just wasn't fitting in. The other nuts noticed it too. They gave me a lot of space. Everybody but Cedar, and for some unknown reason, Bob. And although Bob himself always had a load of shit in his pants and a odor of urine about him, he smelled a rat.

I had been on the unit a month to the day when the unit shrink sat me down on his rounds and told me that he felt "I was full of crap and that it was time to face my responsibilities." His recommendation to the court was going to be that I was fit to stand trial. Jesus Christ, the dumb shit only talked to me once a week. And then for only ten minutes. How in the hell could a guy fake he was ready for a permanent straightjacket in that amount of time? I didn't have the strength to argue with or try to bullshit him. He was just a typical government employee looking for an easy pension. The thought of pulling him over the desk and whipping the shit out of him passed through my mind. That would let the dumb bastards know I was crazy. But I couldn't do it. I knew that he had a wife and kids at home.

I had needed more time. Sitting in the jail in Duluth it had sounded so easy. It was a hospital, a fucking hospital! How hard could it be to escape from a hospital? I had underestimated everything. Security was much tighter than I thought it would be.

And it wasn't just a hospital. It was a prison with thick glass instead of bars. To top it off, the place was full of goddamn lunatics. How could you possibly form any sort of escape plan while living in that sort of environment?

I had looked and looked and still could not find a detect a chink in the hospital armor. A way where I could get the fuck out of here.

The past eight years hit me hard and I walked out of his office without a word. I went and sat down in the day room with rest of lunatics. It was all rushing back in a steady stream through my head, like a bad acid trip.

Albert Lea, my drunk parents, my dead brother, all the drugs, all the booze, Rose dead, the drunk admiral sitting there in his Fruit of the Looms, AWOL, Zak hanging in his locker, L.A., the dead bodies on Wonderland Avenue, half dicked blacks and one eyed Indians, it all ran together. Shit, maybe I am nuts.

Norm and his diminutive biker lackey stood up and walked off like I smelled like Bob. Muttering some shit under their breath. Fuck 'em, at least I'd be out of here. Prison would

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probably be better anyway. Get this shit all over with. They call Stillwater a gladiator school. Well it'll be better to get carried out of there than rot in here. They were going to catch up to me sooner or later anyhow. How much longer could this nightmare go on?

Cedar came over to join me. "You know I've been pondering this escape shit all this time and all of a sudden, right out of nowhere, it hits me right between the motherfucking eyes, dude. All you need to break out of here man is a crack torch. It's as simple as that."

Oh shit! Without a word I stood up and walked to my cell.

I was snorkeling on Oahu's north shore. Warm, crystal blue water, me and a good navy buddy named Tom. We had smoked a big fat number of Maui Wowie and were just floating on the surface like a couple of jelly fish. I had a spear with like a rubber band on the end that you stretched out to propel the spear forward, but hadn't found anything to take yet. Then I saw this fish, this strange fish, swimming along the bottom. It was almost translucent and it looked like a bat. A clear underwater bat swimming along like it was looking for its cave or attic to go hang upside down in. I dove down so I was over it as I pulled the band on the spear back. It was a perfect shot, right through its back. But I could hear this weird sound in the distance and I looked around but there was nothing there. It had a weird high pitch, kind of like it sounds when you're inside a house and an outside water faucet is on. And then I saw what it was. The batfish had his mouth open and he was the one that was making the noise. His little mouth open and he was screaming. Screaming because I had shot him in the back and now he was dying a horrible death.

I awoke with a start. It had gotten dark outside. Someone was standing in my cell, in the dark. Cells aren't locked in the hospital at night. Only on the sex offender's unit or if the doctor writes up an order in your chart, something about patient rights. It was Cedar standing there, quietly, just watching me. I was hoping he didn't think that I was a witch and try to kill me. Or worse, give me a swirly.

"A torch is what I really thought we would need. That glass will fucking melt, man. But we don't need my crack torch. The dumb shits have the torches on the units, man. Just waiting for us. Those fucking cans of Right Guard!"

Cedar turned to walk out of my cell. "By the way you missed supper. Chicken Kiev. Tasted like shit."

JUICE

PEARL HARBOR

Two days before the wedding, the soon to be married couple had left the base after work to sign their lease on their future home. It was a small, one bedroom apartment just outside of navy family housing, in a suburb called Salt Lake.

Sophie had duty that evening so she had to return to the base as soon as the lease was signed. Jake had worn his running clothes and was planning on getting his run in before he went back to their room.

The sun was going down and the air was losing some of its tropical stickiness but was still warm enough so that within minutes Jake was sweating heavily. He had quit smoking pot and was starting to get his old wind back again. He began to pick up the pace as he wound through the streets of naval housing.

Then he heard a scream. Probably kids fucking around, he thought.

“Stop it you son of a bitch!”

Jake looked down a short dead end street and saw a couple struggling beside a car in one of the driveways.

The woman screamed again. “I said stop it! You’re hurting me!”

The man, who was dressed in all white, slapped her. Hard. The woman slumped down and he shoved her into the vehicle. Jake saw him reach in and pull her legs towards him.

“Prick teasing little bitch!”

Jake jogged over to the end of the driveway.

“Is there some trouble here?”

The man straightened up and Jake saw that he had been attempting to pull the woman’s panties down or off. He also saw that the white uniform the man was wearing was that of a commissioned naval officer.

“Mind your own business, asshole.” The man spat out at Jake.

Confusion reigned in Jake’s mind. He had been in the navy for just over two years and had never been in a bit of trouble, plus he had no idea on how to deal with an officer in this sort of situation. Officers in the navy were treated like gods.

He turned to go.

The woman shot up out of the car. “Don’t leave! Please!”

Jake turned back and saw that it wasn’t a woman at all, but a girl who was probably just barely in high school. She had the imprints of the man’s hand on her face where he had slapped her. Her nose and mouth were both bleeding.

Jake started up the driveway.

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The officer let go of the girl's arm and she darted past Jake and up the street.

"I thought I told you to mind your own business." The officer assumed a boxer's stance but wobbled a little as he did so. He had been drinking. Jake could smell the booze on his breath from five feet away.

"I don't want any trouble, sir. I just heard the girl scream and thought she might need help."

The officer charged at him and throw a roundhouse right that Jake easily ducked. He pivoted behind the officer and shoved him away.

"You motherfucker. Keep your stinking hands off me."

The officer threw another right, only this time Jake parried it off with his left and drilled a straight right into the officer's mouth which staggered him back.

The officer was bent over holding his mouth while Jake stood back, stunned at what had just occurred. When the officer straightened up, blood was pouring out of his mouth and down the front of his dress white uniform.

"Do you know what is going to happen to you, asshole? You just struck a commissioned officer. I'm an ensign in the goddamn United States Navy!"

"Sir, I was just trying to defend myself! You tried to strike me!" Jake was getting so scared that he thought he might shit his running shorts.

"You're going to the brig, dickweed! But first I'm gonna teach you a lesson you'll never forget." The officer charged.

It wouldn't have been a fair fight if the officer was sober. He was maybe five or six years older than Jake but he was outweighed by a good thirty pounds. The officer kept coming at Jake swinging wildly, while Jake kept moving backwards, just like when he fought the retard, and he kept snapping a hard left jab into the officer's face.

A cut opened over the officer's right eye and a hard right put him down onto the grass of his front yard. He staggered up, the entire front of his uniform was now covered in blood and grass stains.

"Please sir, stop this." Jake was practically begging.

The ensign spit a wad of blood and snot at Jake. "Your life is over, punk. By morning you'll have sucked every dick in the brig."

The battered ensign came forward once more with his hands raised. Jake feinted a left and fired a vicious right uppercut that caught the ensign under the chin and dropped him down again on the lawn, his head snapping back with a whiplash action and striking the ground with a sickening plop. The officer rolled over on all fours and vomited onto the grass. He attempted to get to his feet but collapsed face down on his lawn. Right next to the birdbath.

The neighborhood was suddenly awash in the blue lights of the base police and the shore patrol.

Two shore patrol advanced on Jake with their nightsticks drawn, the base police with his gun aimed squarely at Jake's chest. He was spread-eagled on the patrol car, frisked, handcuffed, and taken to the Pearl Harbor base police headquarters.

The battered ensign regained consciousness on the ambulance ride to Tripler Army Hospital. He was treated for a deep cut over his right eye, a broken nose, a severe laceration on his lower lip, and two broken off front teeth. He was able to give a statement to the Naval Investigative Service's officer who was on call. While being wheeled down to x-ray the ensign, now known as Raymond Dunn, lost consciousness again, and lapsed into a coma.

Jake was interrogated by the base police officer, the senior shore patrol petty officer, and another NIS agent called to the scene. He gave his version of the story, beginning with the signing of the lease with Sophie, his run to the base, the girl being assaulted by Ensign Dunn, and the officer then attacking him despite Jake's pleas to stop.

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An hour later the NIS agent received a call from his partner at Tripler hospital. Jake was handcuffed again without a word and driven to the base brig also known as the Pearl Harbor Detention and Confinement facility.

He was stripped, searched, given a shower and covered in a delousing liquid, issued a set of prison issue dungarees, and placed in solitary confinement. He was informed by the officer in charge, a cueball bald marine, that a lawyer from the JAG office would be there to see him in the morning and to inform him of the charges pending against him.

No phone call. No way to get hold of Sophie. No nothing.

Ensign Dunn remained in emergency surgery for over five hours in an attempt to relieve the pressure of the blood clot that had lodged in his brain. Approximately two hours after being placed in the intensive care unit, Ensign Dunn died.

The next morning Jake was charged with the murder of a commissioned officer and attempted burglary.

Dunn in his statement had said that he had arrived home from the officer's club to find Jake trying to break into his house. The ensign's wife was back home in Utah visiting her parents. When the ensign had attempted to apprehend Jake, he had been severely assaulted by him.

A neighbor woman had called the police after looking out her kitchen window and seeing Dunn getting the asskicking of a lifetime. Which is the exact wording she used. She also told the NIS agent that Dunn had been drinking and carousing for the last week, the time period his wife had been gone to the mainland. He had also come out of his house to get the morning paper yesterday, in only his cotton briefs and was in a state of arousal. When he saw her out on her front lawn he had only smiled at her and walked back into his house.

The NIS agent forgot to write this information down.

Jake was assigned a young lieutenant from the JAG office on his first big case. Previously he defended nine drug possession cases and another case of a seaman apprentice caught masturbating under the table while at the enlisted men's club. He hadn't won any of these cases although he was able to get the naughty seaman off with a captain's mast appearance instead of a court martial.

It only took three weeks for the prosecution to build their case. Jake appeared at his court martial in front of a board of naval officers. It was the first time he had seen Sophie since the incident had happened, she hadn't been allowed to visit him while he was in the brig. She would be the only witness for the defense.

Jake's time in the brig had been tough. Ensign Dunn had been the navy's ranking officer in the Pearl Harbor Detention facility, the brigs at that time were staffed by marines but required that a navy representative be on their administrative staff. Since Dunn was considered one of their own, all staff followed a strict code of no verbal contact with Jake. He had remained in total isolation for "protective custody" reasons.

At the court martial, Ensign Dunn was portrayed as a fine naval officer who was quickly climbing the military ladder. He was the son of a retired naval captain and had graduated near the top of his list while at Annapolis. A fine family man, whose pregnant widow was placed in the front row for the two day court martial.

The fact that Dunn had been suspected of raping a classmate while in high school (charges dropped after monetary compensation was paid to the girl's family), had been accused of cheating while in the Academy, had a known drinking problem, had been in several fist fights since reporting to Pearl Harbor, and had been rumored to have flashed his dick at more than one wife in the neighborhood, beside the one who reported it, was never brought up at the court martial.

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The autopsy report pointed out the broken nose, cuts, broken teeth, and the blood clot in the brain that had killed the ensign. It did not report that Ensign Dunn had a alcohol blood count that was high enough that if he was cremated the furnace would have exploded. He also had traces of cocaine in his system that were “below” standard testing limits.

Defense attorney Lt. James Jacqui never voiced an objection or produced the girl that had been assaulted by Ensign Dunn. It was like she had been a ghost.

Sophie testified in Jake’s defense that they had just gone to sign their lease, were getting married, and he would never do anything like burglary much less assaulting an officer. Seeing her on the stand about broke Jake’s heart.

The evening of the second day of the court martial, Jake was found guilty of the murder of Ensign Raymond Leonard Dunn III. The charges of attempted burglary were dropped, a triumph in the record book of his defense attorney. Jake was given a dishonorable discharge, busted down to E-1, forfeited all pay and benefits, and was sentenced to life in prison at the federal military prison in Leavenworth .

During the reading of the verdict Jake had sat stunned and was unable to address the court. All he could do was turn and look at a crying Sophie who was dressed all in black with her silver cross. Clutching her Bible to her chest.

No one had seemed to notice the slender man with the great Hawaiian tan, who was dressed plainly in khaki trousers and a golf shirt, and who had sat in the back of the court room during the entire proceedings. He had sat quietly taking notes and referencing a file that he would occasionally draw from his briefcase. When the verdict was read he stood up and quietly walked out the door.

BATFISH

PENSACOLA

I *f I could have gotten stationed in Hawaii I would have been a fucking millionaire by the end of my enlistment. Dope that good, people are practically knocking your ass down on the street to get it.” Artimus had a dreamy, faraway look in his eyes.*

“Excellent is the only word to really describe it.” I said. “Other than the fact that I love the ocean, that was main reason I wanted Hawaii. Those asskicking, THC enriched buds. So dewey sweet and what a buzz.” I was drooling like that cartoon character, Homer Simpson, just thinking about it. Watching that television show in Spanish on the local TV was a hoot when you’ve been getting loaded.

We had finished our meal at this little beach front restaurant right off the wharf that has the best lobster you could ever eat. Isla Mujeres is a fishing village and almost all the seafood you ate there had been caught that morning. I preferred the Posada del Mar, but Artimus had decided at the last second he had to have lobster. After taking the speed I was surprised that I had any appetite at all but that’s the thing about real black beauties. It’s such a high quality go fast that you can actually eat while you’re buzzing along. Now we were spread out on a couple benches of the little town square watching the locals and their kids have their family time. Right in the middle of the square, two dogs were screwing like it was nobody’s business.

While in boot camp I had taken a series of classification tests and it was discovered that my aptitudes were mainly in the communications and administrative fields. So I volunteered for communication technician school in Petaluma, Florida. It was a lot of top secret and spy shit supposedly, but didn’t seem that way when I reported there after boot camp.

Located on a old airfield, the base which was called Corry Station, catered to all four of the services and was quite modern. It had nice barracks and an outstanding dining facility. Pensacola itself was a huge navy town and is also home of the Blue Angels, the navy acrobatic flight team.

Absolutely everyone attending school on the base was being screened for a top secret security clearance, but you would never have known it by the behavior of most of the students. Drugs, especially marijuana, were everywhere. Right outside the main gate there was large woods in which bike and motorcycle trails ran through. It was a huge dopers meeting area. Once your eyes got used to the dark you could see groups of people sitting around getting high. The air thick with the sweet pungent smell of ganja.

Paranoia seized me big time. I had several strikes already against me. My brother had been killed in prison and my parents were raving drunks. Two big items that I would imagine

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would for certain stand out on a background check. I decided that there was no finer time than then, to throw myself into a physical workout routine during the week nights and skip town on the weekends to do my partying. It was at the base gym while I was pumping iron that I met Zak.

The man was a total iron freak. But then again he seemed to be a total freak over everything and anything that he got into. Whether it was running, lifting weights, getting high, drinking beer, banging beaver, speeding in cars, fist fights, or whatever. It was like he had found out somehow exactly how much time he had left to live and he was going to pack as much fun into it as humanly possible. He actually wore his hair in a mohawk.

I think Zak had the old Napoleon complex. He was real short in stature and it really seemed to piss him off. No one was going to get in his way or tell him what to do.

Zak came from an intense military background. All the males on his fathers side of the family had served in the navy. Intense is actually not the right word to describe his Dad. "Fucking maniac" would be more appropriate. Retired and living the good life just down the road in Panama City, Captain Clint (as he liked to be called) had spent twenty years in some deep undercover, covert, top secret, military intelligence agency. Retiring as a Captain. He could pull a lot of strings and was planning on doing just that for his son. He had big plans for Zak.

I began to spend all my free weekends with Zak, Captain Clint and his fifth wife, Yolanda, down at their home on the beach. Zak's real mother was long gone, reason never given, and I suspected that the Captain had met Yolanda in a Filipino whorehouse. She often wore T-shirts advertising "Mommas" a legendary whorehouse in the P. I. where you could buy baby ducks and feed them to an alligator that lived in the middle of the bar.

The mornings would be spent sitting around the back deck with the Captain, as he spun his tales of the sea and "slant eyed pussy," while drinking a glass of whiskey at eight o'clock in the morning. Zak and I would then take off for the beach after the old man passed out in his lawn chair, spending our afternoons either scuba diving or working on our tans. Evenings were for putting a buzz on and chasing all the hot college tail that a tropical coastal town attracts.

It was the life I had always dreamed about and they always treated me like a member of their family. Yolanda even wrote to me on a regular basis after we were transferred out, just like I was her own son. Although I would find out later that she had an unusual way of treating her sons.

Zak would confess to me months later, that after a night of partying on microdot acid and tequila, he had fucked Yolanda in the family hot tub when the old man was out of town on one of his spy/right wing gun nut conventions in Las Vegas. He said it was all the fun of "sticking your dick in a dead fish" and never mentioned it again.

I needed the relaxation on the weekends. Not that the training was hard. Shit, anyone with half a brain could have passed that course. What's the old saying? Military intelligence is a contradiction in terms, or something like that. Hell yea! No, what I needed was a break from the hard core workouts that Zak had us doing five nights a week. Every night was two hours of intense iron pumping followed by either an additional half an hour of either wind sprints or distance running. We gobbled down vitamins, drank three protein shakes a day, and we were the first ones at the chow hall when the doors opened. We were starting to pack on some size!

The intelligence training was broken into two halves. The first was the basics, almost all of it unclassified. Good share of it was teletype operation. The reason behind that was everyone was waiting for their clearance to come through and they had to be teaching you something and teletypes were still a major component of naval intelligence. And I don't know how it did, but my clearance came through slicker than shit. I would have loved to have heard some of the things those investigators heard from our neighbors. The navy must have really needed bodies.

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Both Zak and I were half way through the second part of the course which entailed learning how to use the antiquated cryptological equipment the navy still used, when we were summoned to the office of a commander over at the headquarters building. Deep shit was what I thought we were about to fall into. Although we had given up doing drugs while on the base, our weekends were fucking barn burners and who knew what chick could have popped up pregnant. Naval Intelligence could very well have eyes in the Panama City, Florida area.

Our worries were soon put to rest. With the commander was a chief petty officer who wore the insignia of the navy SEALs. There was a new program being started where select communication technicians would be assigned training with the Underwater Demolition Team (UDT) and the SEALs in Coronado, California. Generally, SEAL/UDT members are not highly trained in the transmitting or routing of intelligence as they are subject to capture and torture when out on missions. This is where the special program would come in. These members after completion of training, would then be stationed in select areas and be responsible for the handling of all intelligence gathered from their area SEAL/UDT teams, leaving everything in house, so to speak.

A good share of information that SEAL teams gathered was not shared with even normal intelligence agencies. We would be the go between with the intelligence that our area units gathered and would decide who would have the necessary "eyes" to view this information.

Both of us had volunteered for the program months ago when it had been announced. The qualifications hadn't been much. A shitload of volunteers showed up on a Saturday morning and went through a round of pushups, pull ups, sit-ups, and a three mile run. That was it. Never even gave it a thought after we were done.

The commander told us that both of us had scored very well in the physical qualification portion of the test and we also had a very strong recommendation from a source that he was not at liberty to disclose.

It would entail an additional nine months of training that there was a 75% chance that we would not be able to physically complete because of the extreme nature of the training. What the fuck, we thought. Let's give it a shot.

Captain Clint was well into his personal happy hour when we arrived on our next visit. The old fucker had just sat there with a shit eating grin as we excitedly told me him all about the offer. When we were done, he stood up and poured a us each a glass of Jim Beam on the rocks, his only drink, and yours when you drank with him.

"You boys are going to learn that there are things going on this world that most of the population has no idea about. You two are going to become members of a very select society and you should be goddamn proud of it. I know I was and still am. You know there still a lot of things that I still can't talk about that I was a part of when I was on active duty. Just keep your mouth shut and do your job and everything will be fine." He then walked over over and proceeded to puke off the side of the deck.

"Yes sir" we reported solemnly to this sage old navy salt. And then celebrated on the way downtown by burning a big fat joint.

Sneaking back into the Captain's house at three o'clock in the morning we found the old man sitting at the kitchen with a glass of whiskey in front of him and a splattering of vomit on his shoes. He looked real bad and smelled worse.

"You son of a bitches got out of here before I could show you this. Took me five fucking times to get the safe open." He slurred. Reaching under the kitchen table he pulled up what looked liked a pickle jar with a bluish colored liquid in it. The light was bad in the kitchen and I had to sit down and pull the jar over towards me to see what was inside. It took all I could do to not power puke across the room right then. It was a head! A motherfucking head! The head of

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some oriental man. The only way I could tell that it was a man was because floating next to his head was his dick. I guess it was **his** dick anyway.

The Captain had his own head resting on the table and was muttering "He was my first. My first one."

I realized then, that the drunk old bastard that was laying in his own vomit in front of me, was our anonymous recommendation for our UDT training

I wouldn't smoke a doobie for six months after arriving in Coronado, California. Steroids would become the drug of choice while under going Basic Underwater Demolition training. Recreational drugs were of no use there. With the amount of physical punishment that you had to put your body through day after day, you needed something to aid your recovery process. We gobbled down Dianabol like candy.

Training started with forty sailors and we lost six the first day. That first night laying in my bunk in the open bay barracks I listened to grown men cry themselves to sleep. I was too fucking tired and sore to cry.

Every morning began with a ten mile run through the surf while wearing your combat boots. Then two hours of push ups, sit ups, squat thrusts, and jumping jacks. Afternoons we would be taken out several miles into the harbor in small boats, dropped off, and would swim in while the boats would shadow us. No free time. People dropped out it seemed on a hourly basis. The final humiliation of this was having to stand in front of the platoon and ring a little brass bell signifying that you had given it up.

Hell week was the grand finale of the initial training. It was a week straight of this bullshit only with only minimal sleep and that was only in rations of minutes at a time, wherever you could just drop your beaten body and try to catch a few precious moments of rest. 168 hours later, seventeen sailors stood at something that might be called attention and received the news that it was over and after a few days of rest, we would be advancing on to Basic Underwater Demolition. Zak and I were two of the seventeen.

When we got back to the barracks I had to take my shower with my underwear on because I couldn't peel it off with out it being wet.

Although now the training was just as ass busting as before, now we were treated as equals with the instructors, so it was much more enjoyable as well as interesting. Pumped into your brain on a twelve hour daily basis was all the information you could ever know about diving, demolition, covert operations, martial arts, knife fighting, nutrition, physical work out routines, weapons both domestic and foreign, airborne training, hostage taking, and interrogation. Everyday was something different and we ate it up. The platoon only lost three men in this phase and all three were due to injury.

There was a first class hull technician named Barry that had become our steroid contact during our training. He smuggled bottles of the little birth control sized pills on to the base and sold them at a tidy profit to his shipmates.

The majority of the platoon spent a good share of their off hours in the gym and along with added benefit of the recovery that Dianabol gives you, it also makes you have massive gains in size, strength, and aggression. The navy didn't give a shit. We were in the animal factory.

After six months the platoon began to get more free time and we began to roam the San Diego and Tijuana areas on our free weekends. You can do and see shit in Tijuana that isn't acceptable two miles north of the border, and that was just what we were looking for. At first it was just for the whores, the booze, and the freedom. But one Sunday morning we had staggered into a Mexican drug store to find something to cure our massive margarita generated hangovers when Zak noticed a bottle behind the counter that looked remarkably like the same bottle that our steroids came in.

It really all started at that moment.

SCOTT L. ANDERSON

Do you ever look back on life and say if I could get in a time machine, without the morlocks, and go back to just one spot in your life so I could change it, where would it be? Well, that's the time for me. If I had walked out of that pharmacy and not made that deal with that pharmacist, who knows how differently things might have turned out?

We quietly began to sell our juice at half the price that Barry was, and began to make some nice additions to our bank accounts. It wasn't long before our pharmacist had turned us on to his younger brother who also was a pharmacist, but he carried the kind of drugs that you put in a pipe or rolled in a Zig Zag paper and smoked.

Sailors are always selling cars on navy bases at rock bottom prices, due to the fact that they are always shipping out or going home and need to get rid of their wrecks. An old Volkswagen bug was purchased from a seaman who was leaving on a West Pac cruise for a hundred dollars and an ounce of Mexican ditch weed.

We had an old genius at a Tijuana chop shop remove the gas tank and replace it with another one that he designed. It only held half the gas but the other half was used to pack several pounds of pot in. All you had to do was open the front end of the bug, grab the gas tank by the spout (remember those old bugs had the gas tank in the front) and pull. The top part of the tank was a false top. We drove it across the border almost on a weekly basis and were never given a single glance, much less a search from the Border Patrol.

Lots of young sailors running around San Diego and most of them are dying for a taste of some killer weed. We had more customers than we did product.

Wasn't long before Barry noticed a lack of business on his end and an appearance of more cash on our end. He became suspicious and began to check around. He got stupid and started to shoot his mouth off around the base.

A week before we were due to graduate, we were at a hardcore strip joint and biker bar called "The Hitching Post". Our orders had come in assigning us to CINCPACFLT (Chief in Charge of the Pacific Fleet) in Pearl Harbor. Captain Clint had come through again and we were celebrating. If you're going to be involved in the drug trade, especially pot, there is no finer place to be than Hawaii.

Zak was dating this incredible looking blonde who was a cocktail waitress/exotic dancer at the club and she was up on the stage swinging around her massive jugs. "I think we may have to deal with Barry before we leave". he told me. His gaze not once leaving the stage where his bimbo was now gyrating to the always popular sounds of Starland Vocal Band. Afternoon Delight. I've always hated that song. Where did these broads get their ideas about music? She had tassels on her nipples and was trying to do the old circle trick, to no avail.

"He's been bumping his gums around the base and I think he may snitch us off after we leave."

"Shit! Any suggestions?" I asked.

"Yea, let's give him the bug and have our contact in Tijuana take care of him."

I wonder what kind of karma Barry had coming that his future was decided in a slimy strip bar in San Diego. He jumped at the chance to take ownership of our smuggling vehicle once we showed him the gas tank. On his first run to Tijuana he was pulled over by the Federales three blocks after he left our contacts house. They pulled open the hood and jerked off the false top of the fuel tank and found two and a half pounds of Mexican Gold, three vials of crystal meth, and a 8 mm reel of kiddie porn hidden inside one of the packets of pot. Last I heard, he was doing hard time at some Mexican prison.

That wouldn't be the only time I would witness just how vicious Zak could get when crossed. Zak had also conveniently forgot to tell me that he had been laying the wood to Barry's wife ever since we had started to get liberty. He told me all about it one night after we had

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smoked a joint of some exotic Vietnamese dope while driving to a bar. We both had gotten so high that we couldn't get out of the car for over an hour. We had sat in the car and chatted.

Barry's wife weighed over two hundred pounds and Zak said screwing her was like fucking a pile of warm bread dough. He couldn't get enough of it. Said she was better than the stripper. He had met her at the base exchange. He was buying rubbers. She was buying a case of Budweiser and box of Snickers bars.

The graduating class threw an awesome party. Booked a hall at the local VFW, had a kick ass meal catered in, and four kegs of beer. The absolute topper was the two strippers that were hired. Both of them were drop dead gorgeous, looked like college girls. They put on a wild live sex show that brought the house down. Zak had to leave after the show for one last fling with his white trash momma (although at the time he said he has the shits from the catered shrimp). Poor Zak didn't know that both strippers would take on all hands at the party in a massive gang bang, including two world war II veterans that had somehow wandered in from the bar to see what all the hubbub was about.

When I told Zak about it the next morning, between dry heaves over the bowl, I think it was the closest I ever came to seeing him cry. It somehow made it all worthwhile.

We flew out to Honolulu four days later. I'd tell you more about our training but some much of it is classified that I'd have to kill you.

"That's about as funny as a turd in a punch bowl. If I had a dollar for every time I heard that fucking line I'd own a whorehouse over in Juarez." Artimus snorted.

"Actually, I think that a turd in a punch bowl would be pretty funny." I laughed. The speed was starting to make my thoughts fire off in my head at random.

"Did you guys really set that dude up to take a fall that hard?"

"I never meant for it to go that bad." I replied. "But Zak hated the mans guts and he wanted him taken out. The original plan was just to have him get stopped with just an ounce or so and have the local cops just rough him up and hold him for a few days. Zak went overboard like he always did."

"But I'm not bullshitting you about the top secret crap. Day before we shipped out for Hawaii, Captain Clint and Yolanda flew in from Pensacola for a little going away celebration and we went to meet them at their hotel room. The Captain took Zak over to the Officers Club to introduce him to some old navy buddies and I took Yolanda over to this mall. On the way over, driving down the freeway she takes my prong out and gives me this world class blow job. Said it was her going away present."

"Well, that night we're having dinner with them and the Captain looks at my real dead serious and tells me that he wants to talk to me after we're done eating. I about shit. I figure he's found about the blow job. What he does is lead me into the bar, buys me a beer and hands me this card. He tells me that he already gave one to Zak and wanted me to have one too. It's just a plain white business card with just a telephone number with an extension. That's it, no name or address or anything. And he tells me that if anything bad is going down and we can't handle it and can't get hold of him, to call this number. Tell the person who answers at the extension the Captain's name, tell them who I am and what's going on, and hopefully everything can be taken care of."

"Clint is all fucked up as usual. But he looks me in the eye and tells me he knows that people think he's just an old drunk and that most of his talk is all bullshit. Says that he can guarantee he's killed more men than women that I've screwed and most of them never saw it coming. It just scared the holy crap out me."

SCOTT L. ANDERSON

“Then he just slaps me on the back and buys me another beer. Starts telling me about all the pussy I’ll get in Honolulu. Said when he was stationed there he tag teamed two high school teachers on vacation.”

“That night when we got back to the base I went down to the phone booths and called the operator. I asked where the area code was that was on the card. Do you know where she said, man? Fucking Langley, Virginia. That’s where the CIA is.”

JUICE

LEAVENWORTH

The morning after the sentencing, Jake was shackled in handcuffs and leg irons and put in a van that took him over to Hickam Force base for his flight back to the mainland. Two Marine Corps chasers escorted him on the military flight to Norton Air Force base in California. From there they caught a commercial flight to Kansas City, and were met there by several military corrections officers from the United States Disciplinary Barracks in Leavenworth, Kansas.

Jake's requests to either see or call Sophie or to call home to Minnesota were denied for "reasons of security."

Upon arrival at the stockade after the long silent flight, Jake was once again strip searched, showered, and debugged, and given his meager prison issue. All of this was done with minor communication from the guards. They were still honoring their fallen comrade in Hawaii.

Jake was ushered into the office of the warden of the barracks, Commander Max Morgan. Jake had never seen a uniform as white or with so much starch. The commander was also very diminutive. He was sure to have the short man complex.

"Stand at attention, prisoner."

Jake stared at Morgan and slowly crossed his arms across his chest.

"I said stand at attention, shitbird."

Commander Morgan gave a tar and nicotine colored grin. "Tough guy, huh? We'll see how tough you are in a couple of days. You'll be crying like a pussy for his momma."

Jake continued to silently stare at the commander.

Morgan looked down at the open file on his desk. "Life sentence. Murder one. The murder of a commissioned naval officer who was assigned to the correctional facility in Pearl Harbor." He read this off like it was fresh news, he stopped and looked up at Jake. "You fucked up big time, tough guy. The CO's here aren't going to take kindly to the murderer of a fellow officer."

Jake finally responded. "Does it say in your file how I stopped your buddy from raping a girl and then when he came at me I had to hand his ass to him?"

Morgan's face turned beet red. It really stood out against his dress white uniform.

"Let me tell you something, asshole. You were convicted by a military court of your peers for the murder of a fine officer. And you are going to do hard time. Hard fucking time!" Morgan slammed his little fist on his desk.

"I stop a man from raping a girl and I'm the one who has to do the time. Typical fucking navy justice. Well, let me tell you something, SIR! Fuck you and the fuck the navy. I've lost

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everything in my life that means anything to me in the last month for trying to help somebody. And you sit here in your ice cream attendant uniform and tell me about hard time. Fuck hard time and fuck you.”

Morgan’s face was so red it was like the port running light of a ship. “Oh you’re going to do hard time, shitbird. You are going to isolation for as long as it takes to get your mind and attitude right. You brutally killed a member of the corrections brotherhood and a naval officer. Your life is in my hands now and you will learn how to do time my way. Not your way, my way.”

Jake laughed. “My life is over, you little midget bastard. Bring on your hard time.”

Morgan stood up. “Get this son of a bitch out of my office and over to the hole.”

The CO’s spun Jake around and began to move him out of the office.

“Your buddy died like a punk.” Jake yelled over his shoulder.

Thirteen months later.

47, 48, 49, 50! Jake jumped to his feet. His was doing push ups in set of 50’s. 1000 push ups a day along with 500 sit ups. Every day, seven days a week.

He was in his cell 23 hours a day, 6 days a week. On Sunday he was locked down the whole 24. Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday he was taken out to shower and to stretch his legs in the adjoining courtyard. Tuesdays and Thursdays he was allowed to use the weights in the courtyard for one hour. Alone. He was always alone.

Morgan had been true to his word. Officers only spoke to him if absolutely necessary and then sometimes they still didn’t. Some officers would write their directives on a scrap of paper and throw it into his cell. Some spit in his food.

Jake only had the two days with the weights because an order had come down from a ombudsman in the prison who had discovered that Morgan had been going against the stockades policy by keeping Jake locked up on scheduled recreation days without proper documentation or suitable reasons. That had fried Morgan's nuts and he had taken revenge by personally coming down to segregation and informing Jake three separate times of bad news.

Bad news the first time came only a week into Jake’s sentence. Dawn and Billy would not be allowed to visit. Both had felony convictions on their records and thus could not be allowed in for visits. Jake had never known that Dawn had been convicted at one time of prostitution and possession of LSD with intent to sell.

Jake had tried to write Sophie at Pearl Harbor and his letters had been returned as undeliverable. When he tried to write her at her parent’s address, Morgan had come down and personally shown him the letter from her father demanding that Jake cease from trying to contact his daughter. Jake was given a direct order to do so.

Six months into his stay in the hole, Jake was informed by the commander that his uncle Billy had been arrested, tried, and convicted of a murder in Albert Lea. It was the unsolved killing of the husband of the woman who had crippled Dawn. A drug connection of Billy's had turned state’s evidence to avoid a drug conviction. Billy had been sentenced to thirty years in Stillwater state prison.

To Jake, his life was over. He refused to speak to anyone. He had a routine revolving around his workouts and reading. He was allowed books from the prison library. He pored over the writings of Hemingway, Nietzsche, Marx, Malcolm X, and any of the classics that the prison carried. He had no television or radio in his cell, but he had been able to get an old book on yoga, so he learned how to meditate.

The military barbers refused to cut his hair, so his hair was down almost to his shoulders and his wispy, blond beard was hanging down to his chest.

SCREAMING BATFISH BLUES

The military CO's would never admit it, but they were leery of him. He had killed once and murderers were always suspected of being able to do it again. Jake would stand in his cell and shadow box for hours at a time, until he would drop down onto his bunk, exhausted and covered in sweat. His silence put them on edge, and with good reason.

He was waiting for an opening. He knew that he couldn't spend the rest of his life like this. In the back of his mind sat a plan. If he could get the chance he would kill again. This time on purpose. Not for revenge, but in the hope of drawing a sentence of a trip to the gas chamber or electric chair.

He had completed 900 of his push ups when he noticed a short, plump rookie officer standing at the door of his cell. Jake stared at him.

The rookie fidgeted nervously. "You've got a visit." Jake couldn't believe that the officer had spoken or that he had a visit. Who the hell would that be?

"Who?" The word rasped out of Jake's throat. He couldn't remember the last time he had spoken. His throat felt parched.

"Commander Morgan didn't say. He just told me to tell you that you've got a visit and we'll be back down to get you in fifteen minutes. OK?" The young rookie smiled.

Jake was confused, he had no idea who would be here to visit. "Yea, OK, thanks."

The officer walked down the cellblock.

Jake stripped down and wiped the sweat off with a towel and washed up as best as he could in his cells sink.

Fifteen minutes on the dot, the rookie and two other familiar COs came down and shackled Jake's hands and legs. He was led down towards the end of the cell block and into a small conference room that also was used for visits for the inmates of isolation.

Sitting at the table was a very slender, very tall, very tan man dressed in khakis and a sun bleached work shirt. He had on dock shoes with no socks. By his appearance you would think that he had a sailboat moored outside the prison.

He looked vaguely familiar.

The man turned and spoke to the guards. "You can leave now. Thank you."

Beiderman, the senior guard, a redneck from Alabama spoke up. "I'm sorry, sir. But his inmate is not allowed to be anywhere without direct supervision by an officer."

The tan man's eyes froze over and stood up and walked over to the phone and punched in several numbers. "Commander, this is Banks. You might need to talk to one of your men down here." He looked over at Beiderman's name tag. "His name is Beiderman."

Banks put the phone down. "The commander would like to speak to you, son."

Beiderman picked up the phone. Listened and then quickly hung up. He turned to Banks. "I'm sorry, sir. Take all the time you need. We'll be outside the door if you need anything."

Banks smiled. "Excellent. Thank you, Beiderman. Before we get started here, why don't you run down to the canteen and get me and Mr. Morrow a couple of Cokes?"

Beiderman bit down on his lower lip. "Yes, sir. Right away." He slammed the door the door on the way out so hard the outer wall vibrated.

BATFISH

ST. PETER

All that fucking paramilitary training and it took a committed lunatic to point out to me that a hot flame would melt the security glass that the hospital used instead of bars. Have you ever lit the spray off a can of deodorant? Shit, the flame shoots out almost five feet!

The staff kept our personal hygiene items in their security bubble and we had to request them on shower days. They just handed you this plastic basket and when you were done with your shower you simply handed the basket back in. I was positive that we could keep out our deodorant and hide the cans somewhere on the unit. Wait for a day or two. Then tell the staff that we had run out and would need our caseworker to give us some cash to buy another can at the canteen.

I kept my can out first after I had found a place to stash it. I had been wearing an old pair of jump boots when I was brought to the hospital but I hadn't been wearing them. I had been wearing my running shoes and the boots had been sitting in my cell. In the exact same spot since I had taken them off. I stuck Cedar's can along with mine in the boots. One per boot and stuck a disgusting smelling sweat sock in each to hid the cans. Not one staff picked those boots up on their semi-daily cell checks.

Several days later I stole Bob's nearly full can from his shaving kit as he was taking his yearly shower next to me. He never noticed it missing. Probably still hasn't. Cedar bought another can and we hid both those cans in his mattress. We had slit the ends of his mattress with a razor blade taken from a safety razor on the female unit, then lightly ran a cigarette lighter over the seam. It looked good as new when it was done.

Both the razor and lighter had been smuggled to Cedar from a female client who had fallen hard for him after she read about his celebrity status in the City Pages. She left the items in the canteen taped under a table using the sticky ends of a kotex.

We were ready to go. Cedar had called his graveyard robbing buddies from the newspaper article. They had only received probation for their stunt and they would meet us in St. Peter at the local Taco Johns as soon as they got the word. I wasn't real pleased have to rely on those two fucking gonads, but I was running out of choices. They were thrilled out of their socks to be helping a celebrity during his prison break. Great thing to be able to tell the kids. If they even know where they come from.

I still find it hard to believe that we could use the telephone whenever we pleased. One of the differences between a mental hospital and prison I guess. You always had to call collect, but you could call direct if it was a 800 number call.

SCREAMING BATFISH BLUES

One nut on the unit called in a bomb threat to a pen factory in Pennsylvania on their toll free line. When the police traced the call they told the staff that the factory had to shut down for a half a day. Cost them thousands.

But the whole master plan almost was severely sidetracked two days later. The unit had been taken up to the gym for our daily "workout". Out of twenty clients maybe three or four did any physical exercise. The rest played cards or jacked off while watching soap operas on the gym television.

Walking out of the gym and heading towards our unit, we met Unit 900, the sex offender unit. I hadn't seen Ray face to face since we had been brought to the hospital and as we passed I gave him a shit eating grin. Well, that cock sucker had been palming a ink pen and he turned around and jammed it right into my shoulder. Fuck did that hurt. But Ray was getting old and his reflexes weren't quite up to snuff. I reached back with my left hand and caught his wrist before he had could pull the pen out of my shoulder to stab me again.

I snapped him towards me with my left hand and drove my right fist straight into his nose. It exploded like a rotten tomato and Ray went down like he had been hit with an ax, screaming at the top of his lungs. One of his baby raping buddies tried to jump in but I saw him out of the corner of my eye and drove my elbow right into his open mouth. I think he was shouting "motherfucker" when my elbow knocked out all of his front teeth.

I turned towards my next advancing opponent but when I realized that it was Scott, my unit's lead security counselor, I was finished. I put my hands up in a sign of surrender, turned around, and assumed the cuffing position.

I was led back to the unit where I was placed in solitary confinement for the next three days. Cedar had taken the opportunity to jump the smallest deviant, a pedophile, who was just standing there minding his own business, and had landed several good shots before being pulled off. It was good strategy. We both had been worried that Cedar would be assigned to a different unit before we could attempt our break. After assaulting the sex fiend he'd remain on Unit 800 indefinitely. The rest of the unit goofballs had sat down at the canteen tables and had watched the whole thing go down like it was just a continuation of their soap operas.

The next time I saw Ray he had the 8 ball hemorrhage look. Both eyes were solid black.

Upon my release from the hole, the first thing I did was go check my cell to see if the cans had been disturbed. Luckily, the staff had merely locked the cell door and hadn't bothered to do a shakedown. Thank God for lazy state employees.

The staff were extremely wary of me now. They had never seen a mental patient dispatch two grown men that quickly or in that manner. Their observation of me became much more rigid as well as cautious.

Less than a week later I received notice from my caseworker that the court in Duluth was going to be dropping the charges. The black who's dick I had severed wasn't much on showing up for court dates and the judge had finally said the hell with it. He had also received the hospital shrink's report on me and was going to be recommending that I be released.

My heart began to race. Maybe I would be able to walk right out the fucking front door. This was going to work out after all!!

However, she continued, I could possibly be facing charges for my recent assault on the two fudge packers from Unit 900, so there was a very good chance that upon my release from the hospital, that I would be met by representatives of the local sheriff's department, who could very well detain me. "But" she said "That's probably going to be the least of your worries."

Within seconds my hopes were being dashed. My guts were starting to churn like I had ate a pack of Ex-Lax and washed it down with a six pack of bad beer. I didn't think I was going to like what she had to say next.

SCOTT L. ANDERSON

My caseworker was a nice lady named Darlene and she always seemed to know that when she was dealing with me that she was not dealing with your normal run of the mill mental case. She had always been very professional with me but I always had the feeling that she was pissed I was running a scam and was just wasting her time.

So now she was sitting back in her chair with this tight little smile on her face and when she asked "Have you ever been involved with the government? Like the army or something like that?" I about bolted up in my chair like someone had shoved a broom handle up my ass.

"Why would you ask that?" I stammered.

"Well," she paused "It seems that a different name than yours has popped up on a governmental data base after the local authorities ran your prints through the National Crime Information Center and the Automated Fingerprint Identification System. It's pretty standard stuff. It just takes a while for all that information to get routed through. But it sure looks like that the government is interested in you and they're sending some people down for a little chit chat. Their scheduled to be here in several days. Tell me something. Are you using a different name than your own?"

JUICE

LEAVENWORTH

It's amazing how good a Coke tastes when you haven't had one in a real long time. Jake pounded down the first one and Banks sent a guard down to get him two more.

"Thanks for the Cokes. But who in hell are you? I know I've see you before."

"My name is Jerry Banks. I'm an agent with the United States government. What agency I am not at liberty to say. And I was at your court martial in Pearl Harbor."

Jake remembered now. He had been in the back row of the court house when he had turned around to look at Sophie. Had never given a second thought to who he was or why he was there.

Banks leaned back in his chair. "You really got fucked."

Jake snorted. "Tell me something I don't know."

"I know you didn't try to break into that idiot's house and I know that his death was an accident."

A shiver ran down Jake's back. "How do you know?" he whispered.

"A young girl came forward to my office and told me what happened. Said that she had been out smoking a little pot with some friends and had been hitchhiking home when Ensign Dunn picked her up. He tried to rape her and you stopped it."

Jake's head was reeling. They knew. They finally knew. "Am I free? Can I go home?"

"It's not that easy. Shortly after she came to my office, her father was discharged and they went back to the mainland before we could get a sworn statement from her. We weren't able to find them."

"Why didn't you get a statement right away?" Jake's voice was so high it practically squeaked.

"Legally we couldn't. She was a minor and a adult member of her family had to be present. They left before we could get them back into the office."

"Jesus fucking Christ. Am I gonna have to stay here until you guys find her? That could years or maybe forever."

Banks leaned forward in his chair. "It's going to be forever on getting a statement I'm afraid. The family was involved in a car wreck in New Mexico, the girl and her father were both killed. Hit a train. It's like she never existed."

Jake stared at the agent. It had taken approximately thirty seconds to dash his newfound dream of walking out the door. What the hell was there to say?

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“So you came all the way out here to tell me I’m fucked with a capital T?” Jake knocked his can of Coke to the floor. “You assholes are all alike.” He stood up and began to walk around the table towards Banks.

“Did Morgan send you in here to fuck with me? Help him out on his mindfucking?”

Banks leaned back in his chair and aimed a 9 millimeter at Jake’s chest. He must have pulled it out of a ankle holster.

“Don’t try to be a badass with me, Morrow. Not when I’m here to help you.”

He waved the pistol at Jake’s chair. “Now sit the fuck down.”

Jake shuffled over and sat back down.

“How are you gonna help me?” Jake sneered.

Banks reached down and holstered his weapon.

“I can get you out of here, Jake. I have the power to have you released into my custody. Right this second. Staying out of here, though. That’s a different story. That’s not gonna be easy. It’s going to entail you doing some really big favors for my office. A shitload of effort on your part. You’re gonna get involved with some heavy duty action. Are you willing?”

“Shit, Mr. Banks. If you told me I could walk out that door right now. I’d do anything to get out of here.”

The agent stared coldly at Jake. “You will have to do anything. Anything I say. Anytime of day. Anytime of night. You balk one time at one of my orders your ass will be back in that cell. You try to bolt on me, I’ll blow the back of your head off. We understand each other.”

“Yes, sir.” Jake whispered.

Banks laughed. “Call me Jerry.” He stood up and walked over to the phone. “Morgan, this is Banks. Radio to your officers and have them escort myself and Mr. Morrow to your office.” He turned to Jake. “Ready to go, Jake?”

Jake fired out of the chair like his ass was spring loaded. The three guards entered and walked both Jake and Banks to Commander Morgan’s office. Banks opened the door and walked in without knocking.

Morgan sat behind his desk with a sullen look on his face. Banks walked over and flipped the file onto the desk. “This has all the necessary signatures. I think that you’ll find that everything is in order.”

Morgan opened the file, his eyes seemed to bulge. “Holy shit. He signed this?”

“None other. Only the big guns get involved in these kind of operations.” laughed Banks.

The commander looked over at Jake. “Morrow, you have to understand my position here. You were sentenced to do your time at this institution and it’s my job to make sure that the sentence of the court is carried out whether you unjustly sentenced or not. Remember a commissioned officer is still dead.”

“You better make make damn sure the day never comes that you ever cross my path, motherfucker.” Jake screamed out.

Banks stepped in front of Jake. “Easy there, big guy.” He laughed and turned to Morgan. “I think you probably had that coming, commander. Well, I think our business is finished here. If you gentleman would be kind enough to remove these restraints, we will be on our way.”

Beiderman looked over at Morgan. The commander shrugged his shoulders. “Go ahead, First Sergeant, release the prisoner.”

The cuffs and shackles were taken off of Jake. Banks reached into a bag and pulled out a shirt and a pair of jeans. “Get out of that prison shit and put these on.” Jake dressed while the guards stared at him.

Jake glared at Beiderman. “Same goes for you, fat boy.”

“Jake, let’s go.” Banks gave a gentle tug on his arm. “Do you want anything from your cell?”

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“No, let’s just get the hell out of here.”

They were escorted to the front entrance by Commander Morgan and First Sergeant Beiderman. Morgan entered the control center with the paperwork. Several minutes later the gate buzzed and slid open. Jake gave Morgan the finger as the commander watched him through the glass, then he and Banks walked through the gates and out the front door into a waiting van.

“You better hope to God you never come back here.” Banks chuckled.

The van drove straight to KC International and pulled right onto the tarmac next to a small jet. As soon as they boarded the plane and were strapped into their seats, the jet fired its engines up and began its departure out of Kansas City.

“Where are we headed?” asked Jake.

“Let me do the worrying. Tonight you just enjoy yourself.” Banks reached into a cooler and popped open a Guinness beer. “Try one of these.”

A couple of hours and more than a couple of beers later the plane touched down on a remote airfield in Nevada.

The jet taxied up to a large hangar and shut its engines down. Jake and Banks got out and Banks directed him through a door into the hangar. They walked down a hallway and went through another door coming out into what looked like a furnished apartment.

“Shit, I never expected to see this.” exclaimed Jake.

“Go ahead and take a shower and I’ll get some food brought in.” Banks walked over and picked up a phone.

Jake took about a half hour shower. Washed his hair three times with three different shampoos, scrubbed down his body with some great smelling soap and a weird kind of sponge, and afterwards put on some cologne that he couldn’t even pronounce the name of. When he came out of the shower, Banks was sitting at the kitchen table. On the table was a tray with what looked like several joints already rolled, along with five or six Thai sticks on it.

“Is that what I think it is?”

“Damn straight, you earned it. There’s a big steak with all the fixings being brought over right now. Smoke up, drink up, chow down, and I’ll see you in the morning.”

Someone knocked at the door. Banks got up to answer it and suddenly stopped.

“Jake, you didn’t turn queer in the joint, did you?”

“What? Why the hell would you ask that?”

Banks laughed and opened the door. Standing in the doorway was a knock out blonde with huge jugs and a tiny little waist, wearing only an orange see through negligee with nothing on underneath and high heels, she was carrying a tray loaded with plates of steaks, fries, and cheesecake.

“The fridge is full of beer and champagne and I think there’s even a vial or two of nose candy in the freezer. You kids have fun. I’ll see you in the morning.” Banks shut the door on the way out and then suddenly popped his head back in. “Oh Jake, for security reasons I’ll have to lock the door. I hope you don’t mind.”

Jake didn’t respond. His head on must have cut off the flow of blood to his eardrums.

BATFISH

PEARL HARBOR

When the military transport landed in Hawaii and the doors opened up, the first thing that struck your mind was the smell. It smelled of salt air and flowers. Tropical. The trip over not been uneventful. We flew out of Norton Air Force base. Up by Frisco. We had to meet the military bus that would take us there at the downtown bus depot, in the heart of what had to be the shittiest part of San Francisco. I swear that every vagrant, pimp, drunk, dope addict, and pervert in the city was hanging out in that joint.

Our flight from San Diego had gotten in late and it was after midnight. Prime time for bottom feeders. While we waited for our ride an old homo had followed Zak into the latrine in hopes of either getting or giving a blow job. Didn't really matter because Zak hit him so fucking hard the guy's feet literally came right off the floor. Thinking quickly, we went through his pockets and found forty bucks and a vial which held what looked like around twenty hits of windowpane acid. We then sat him on a empty stool and closed the stall door.

Then to make matters worse, this old woman who was wearing nothing but a yellowed Condor Club T-shirt, an adult diaper (which looked like it could use a changing), and flip flops for shoes, started screaming at us about how her son was dying of a brain tumor and it was all the governments fault. She eerily reminded me of an aunt on my father's side of the family. I approached the old hag and calmly told her that I had something that would make her feel better and handed her about half of the bottle of windowpane, which she promptly washed down with a swig of a beer wrapped in a racing form that she had been holding in her gnarly hands. Couple minutes later our bus showed up and no one was the wiser.

The Condor Club is a famous San Francisco titty bar. I certainly hope that she hadn't been one of the dancers there.

By the time we got to Norton AFB it was so late we had to sleep across some folding chairs and the flight over the next morning was a nightmare. The military had chartered a huge jumbo civilian airliner and there was no food, refreshments, or even stewardesses on the damn thing. Officers and higher ranking enlisteds had let their little bastard kids run up and down the aisles like it was a track meet.

Zak, who I was starting to think should been named Beelzebub instead, promptly met a young army gal who was straight out of boot camp, and screwed her standing up in the bathroom. Then of course, refused to talk to her the remainder of the flight. The sound of her sobbing left me with zilch for sleep.

When we arrived in Pearl Harbor we were both running on empty and had to spend the night in the transient barracks. Everyone in the place was being discharged for other than

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honorable reasons and it showed. The air was blue with the haze of marijuana smoke and one guy in our dorm sat on his bunk and openly mainlined some coke. The needle that he was using didn't look like it could pierce a rotten apple. The dude looked like skid row material. The grim reaper was close by to him.

The next morning we were awoken by a tall, skinny, white guy with an afro. He was wearing this loud Hawaiian shirt with parrots and beer bottles on it. "Hey wake up motherfuckers, it's time to roll. Sorry I didn't meet you at the airport but I got sidetracked. Was at this Korean bar and met this little bitch that could suck a golf ball through a garden hose and shit I couldn't leave that. I just couldn't. Could you? Fucking A, this place smells like dope. Bunch a fucking derelicts in here. Lucky you didn't get butt fucked while you slept. You didn't, did ya? You guys been getting high? Well if you want a pick me up, let me know. Come on let's go."

We had just met Tom, our assistant section leader. Tom had been munching on government issued bennies washed down with coffee and talked non stop while we checked into our permanent barracks and at headquarters.

I vaguely remembered Tom from Corry Station in Florida. He had graduated almost right after I arrived there. I went to New Orleans with a roommate of his and we had gotten severely wasted on Bourbon Street. Wound up getting a couple of black whores and spent the weekend with them snorting amyl nitrate. Tom's roommate had been pissed that I got the better looking one of the two. His had resembled a horse. I got the good looker on the grounds that I had set up the deal while he was off buying a hot dog.

Tom was also going to be our roommate. He was a graduate of the first class that merged the SEAL teams with communication technicians. It was a nice spacious barracks room that held only three men and had its own shower. Tom had even had a personal phone installed. Communication technicians work varied shifts so that's one reason they are roomed together. The other reason is because of their high security clearances it's better to keep them away from regular navy where they may be exposed to harmful and illegal behavior.

What bullshit!

It was Friday and there was a section party being thrown that night in honor of arrival. When we pulled up to the curb I could smell the dope smoke out to the street. Rock and roll was blaring so fucking loud I thought the windows would break. Beer and liquor were flowing, and more importantly, reefer was being openly smoked.

One good looking gal was dancing topless on top of a coffee table while guys were standing around and cheering. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw this fortyish looking dude standing off to the side with a bottle of Jack Daniels in one hand and his crank in the other. Obviously, he was beyond fucked up. He was watching the chick dancing and stroking his wang to the beat of The Trashmen's "Surfing Bird". No one else seemed to notice him or care. When I pointed his rather rude behavior out to Tom, he just shrugged and said "Oh that's just Red, he's our section leader."

Red I would find out, along with being a career navy man, was also a boozier of epic proportions, and huge fan of deep sea fishing. He even owned his own boat. Jacking off at parties once he got tanked was nothing new for Red. Especially if Rose was around. She was the girl dancing topless. Red had a big thing for Rose and it was driving him crazy. Quite often after Red had been rebuffed by Rose, he would take his crank out and begin to dry hump anyone who was bending over at the time. Male or female. This also would explain the black eyes and swollen noses that Red seemed to have after parties.

There was nothing more in this life that Red wanted to do than to get Rose out on his fishing boat and pour the coals to her. But she would have nothing to do with him and this about put him over the edge. He was about ready for a psych evaluation up at Tripler Army hospital.

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You see even though Rose was in the navy herself, she also earned extra income as a high dollar hooker down in Waikiki. She wouldn't fuck Red even if he paid her triple her normal going rate.

The following Monday when we reported for work and we saw these same people, it was like night and day. You would never had even dreamt that these were the folks who ended up their bash with a pissing for distance contest (The bulls eye was a passed out seaman apprentice). Except for Red, who had a terminal corn liquor smell about him at all times.

CINCPACFLT is located about a mile off of Pearl Harbor. It's a huge, white, wooden structure, and houses the offices of a shit load of high ranking naval officers. It is also the communication outpost of the Pacific Fleet. Tom, Zak, and I were in a small center of our own on the third floor. It was accessible only by coming through a door equipped with a combination lock and since we were the only members of the SEAL/CT program we were the only people allowed in besides Red. There wasn't much worry about there. On most evening watches Red showed up for work boiled as an owl on Mr. Daniels.

We also had a nice little outside deck which no one other than us had access to. This would come in handy for getting high while on watch.

There wasn't close to enough SEAL/UDT generated intelligence coming through the channels to keep nine men busy on three rotating shifts, so we also handled intelligence concerning the private lives of Naval personnel and their dependents, along with the misbehaving adventures of sailors that the navy was always doing their damndest to keep out of eyes of the civilian reporters. It was great fun to go out on the deck and get high and then read about all the good times that other people were having in their lives.

Like:

The two navy corpsman who went to pick up an officer's wife in their ambulance who had fallen down the stairs at home and was knocked unconscious. They stopped enroute to the hospital and screwed her.

Another officer's wife who was screwing a young seaman at a party and when caught in the act cried "rape". The misguided seaman was sentenced to three years at hard labor.

The master chief petty officer who discovered that members of his division had been pissing in his coffee pot, but not until after they had dosed it with LSD. He had been found doing a lurid dance in his boxer shorts on the fantail of his ship.

The USS DIXIE out of San Diego received an unusual amount of reports. Must have been a rowdy crew. The Captain, who was a former Green Bay Packer, assaulted a sailor when he didn't come to attention quick enough to suit his taste. Someone had mailed a photograph of a huge pile of cocaine sitting on a mirror with the words "High from the USS DIXIE" under it, to High Times magazine.

And one evening while in port in Los Angeles the ship had taken a busload of sailors to the taping of a TV show called "The Liar's Club." Everyone on the bus had gotten incredibly fucked up on mescaline and cheap wine during the drive and were so obnoxious at the taping that the MC had began to actually weep and had stormed into the audience and told the crew that they were "fucking up" the taping.

A local sailor had been caught screwing the mascot of his department, a dog named "Brownie," and had defended his actions by telling investigators that they were in love.

People lost their security clearances on occasion and this information also circulated across our desk. One young lady had some tasteful nude photos taken of herself to present to her husband when he returned from his rather lengthy cruise. Her supervisor, a typically drunken old sot of a chief petty officer had stumbled on to the photos and told her that he would tell her husband that she had the photos taken for the chief unless she fucked him. She had screwed the old bastard, had understandably felt degraded, and had turned him in. She promptly lost her

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clearance and was facing discharge from the service, while the chief had been reassigned to the motor pool, which had lots of young navy WAVES working there, to await his retirement.

But drugs were the main topic of a good share of these reports. In those reports we had a very professional interest.

Pearl Harbor was a absolute supermarket for the connoisseur of fine marijuana and other fun recreational drugs. With ships coming in daily from all parts of the world it was a buyer's market. MDA, LSD, THC, hash, cocaine, heroin, uppers, downers, all a rounders. And the pot. Oh my stars, the pot. If you weren't smoking some of the asskicking shit that was grown locally on the island, you were smoking Thai stick that just came in off a fast frigate returning from a cruise to the Orient. Or some Cambodian Gold smuggled in by a sailor just off a West Pac.

Right out of the box we met two communications technicians who had an active interest in the marijuana trade and wanted to expand their business on Pearl Harbor itself. Matt and Rick were both married and lived on the north shore of the island and had a ton of good contacts out there, since the majority of the population in that area were locals. And it was the locals that could turn you on to the really good smoke.

Our business took off like gangbusters. Matt and Rick supplied the pot to us and named their price per pound. If we agreed on the price, the dope was fronted to us and we smuggled it on to the base. Which entailed throwing it into a grocery bag and putting it in the front seat of our car and driving past the marine gate guard.

We would accept only the finest quality spleef. No shit with all the leaf, stems, and seeds. Hell no! Only pot with the beautiful buds that were glistening with resin on their tips. Then we would break the pound down by sorting the buds out on a newspaper and would then weigh the buds out on a scale and seal them individually in plastic with a food sealer, like you buy at Sears. To really make our product stand out, we would quite often seal up a pack of Zig Zag rolling papers along with the bud. Made a nice extra little touch.

I bought an old used Plymouth Valiant from a sailor who was rotating back to the mainland. I had noticed that the plates had a good ten months left on them before it had to be registered again and that sealed the deal. I left the vehicle in his name and we parked it in the barracks parking lot amongst the hundred or so other cars. The dope was stored in the trunk inside of several zip lock containers bought at a base tupperware party, which were stashed under the spare tire. Every five days or so, one of us moved the car to avoid suspicion by the Shore Patrol.

There were only two time periods that our product was available. Pay day and the following two days following it because that's when everyone was flush with cash. And then three days before payday, we would front our product to our good and trusted customers at a 25% mark up, because everyone was broke and out of dope and were desperate to get high.

It was a lovely system. After we sold each pound, we paid off Matt and Rick, and split the remaining cash. I brought in almost a thousand bucks a month on average. Every month I would send my sister in Minneapolis a manila envelope, which held one hundred dollars and another envelope which she was not to open. That held an additional five hundred dollars for her to hold for me. The extra hundred was for her troubles. The extra four hundred that I kept was stashed in a old shoe box in my locker for a rainy day.

It was a great life for almost a year. Time just seems to fly past you while living in the tropics. Every day we'd get up and start the day by washing down our steroids with a big joint of Hawaii's finest and a glass of orange juice. Hit the gym and blast our bodies. Spend a couple of hours training with our team. Hit the beach and try to bang some beauties. Go to work. Party hard that night. Go to bed. Get up the next morning and do it all over again.

Then it all fell apart in what was really a shitty series of events for all concerned.

JUICE

SOMEWHERE IN NEVADA

Jake was suffering from a hangover that was so severe that he thought his brains were leaking out of his ears. Couldn't even open his eyes for fear the dim light would burn a hole in his retinas. He and Jasmine, the call girl, had snorted up over two grams of Peruvian flake, smoked a number of Thailand's finest, all washed down with two bottles of champagne and uncounted bottles of Guinness. They had bone danced until four that morning. It was now around nine a. m. and Jake had been roused when Jasmine had gotten up to go to the bathroom. He must have dozed off again when he felt her sit down.

"Tell you what babe, a blow job would probably help me feel a lot better than I do now."

"I thought you might have started to like boys in the slammer."

Jake's eyes popped open. Banks was sitting on the side of his bed.

"Shit, I thought you were Jasmine," he laid his head back down and giggled.

"She had to split," the agent replied. "Get your ass up, we've got work to do."

Jake struggled through a shit, shave, and shower, and joined Banks in the living room. They talked over coffee and eggs. Mostly coffee for Jake, the eggs made him feel like gagging.

"So did you like Jasmine?"

"You wouldn't have to spend over a year in the joint to like her, that's for damn sure."

Banks grinned and nodded his head. "She's great all right. And she's at your beck and call whenever you're here at the home base. But remember, she's a pro, just like you and me. So don't fall in love or any shit like that."

Jake stared at Banks. "By calling me a pro, what do you mean by that?"

"I had to pull a lot of strings to get you out. Once I realized that you were innocent and the girl was killed, I ran a background investigation and profile on you. You've had a rough row to hoe, so to speak, when you were growing up. And you've been involved in activities since you've been in the navy that would be considered felonies in some circles."

Banks opened up a file and began reading.

"Father dead. Killed in an auto accident with your then girl friend. Mother is currently institutionalized. You lived with your uncle, a Nam veteran who is one of the biggest drug dealers in southwestern Minnesota. He is currently serving time in a state penitentiary for murder. His wife is a former hooker and exotic dancer who is wheelchair ridden. Stabbed in the back by a jealous woman who had a husband that was subsequently murdered by your uncle, for which he is serving time. Your aunt currently continues to run his drug business. You severely assaulted a player during a high school football game which started a small riot. Suspended from school, did not graduate, but have a GED which appears forged. You enlisted in the navy using

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false statements and documents. While stationed in Pearl you mailed marijuana on a consistent basis to your aunt and uncle, but for some reason ceased this operation when NIS got close to you.? Banks looked up. “Did you know you were close to getting busted?”

Jake shook his head. “No. I was going to get married and I wanted to get out of the business.”

Banks looked by down at his file. “Ah yes, Sophia Linn Carter. Yeoman Third Class. Assistant to the Pearl Harbor chaplain. Requested and was given a honorable discharge after your conviction. She currently resides with her parents in Wyoming and is studying to become a minister. That sure as shit doesn’t fit in your profile.” He closed the file.

“Of course, the beating and unfortunate death of Ensign Dunn is also well documented so there is no reason to go over that nasty business again.”

“So you know my history. Big fucking deal. Why did you get spring me?” Jake felt like shit already and this dredging up of the past was starting to piss him off.

“Because you have nothing to lose and everything to gain.”

“What do I have to do?” repeated Jake.

“To earn your freedom you are going to have carry out six missions for the government.”

“Missions?”

“There are six pukes walking around that under currently on or were on Uncle Sam’s payroll that are involved in activities that are so illegal and/or so controversial to the point that if they are ever arrested, which they all will be eventually, will bring extreme embarrassment to the government of the United States.”

“And what am I expected to do these so called pukes?”

“Terminate them.”

Banks said it so casually that it caught Jake off guard. He was silent for a moment.

“You mean kill them. Don’t you?”

“Yes, Jake. Kill. In a nutshell, to stay out of prison you are going to have to kill six total douche bags. It’s as simple as that.”

“And if I refuse?”

“If you refuse you will be eating supper tonight in Leavenworth prison. And you will be doing harder time than you were doing when I got you released.”

“This is total fucking bullshit,” yelled Jake. “I’m fucking innocent and you know it.”

Banks rolled his eyes. “Oh can the crap, Morrow. This morning when I checked my messages, I had a little message from Commander Morgan. They tossed your cell after we left the prison and they found a shank made out of a toothbrush with a razor sharp tip. You were in total isolation there, you didn’t protection from any other inmates. You were going to use that shank on a guard. So don’t try that choirboy horseshit with me. You’re a drug dealer, and innocent or not, you killed a man with your bare hands. And you were giving thought to doing it again.”

The two men sat glaring at each other across the table.

Banks softened his tone. “Jake, I am promising you freedom to do this. Not total freedom, you won’t be able to go back to your hometown and buy a house with a white picket fence, but you will be one helluva a lot better off than you were 24 hours ago. But, if you want to refuse, feel free to do so, I’ll have you on a plane to Kansas in thirty minutes.”

“Maybe I should start off by killing you,” whispered Jake.

Banks smiled. “You could try. But this apartment is hardwired. There are microphones and cameras hidden all over here. You jump me, your brains will be splattered all over these walls in seconds and your ass will be six feet under in the desert.” Banks chuckled. “You and Jasmine really put a show on last night for the graveyard shift.”

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Through the fog of Jake's hangover he vaguely remembered Jasmine whispering, while they laid in bed after their numerous sexual acrobatics, "Do you remember an inmate named.....?" When he had tried to answer in his normal voice she had put her hand over his mouth. He didn't remember her asking him anything again. Too much booze and dope from the night before was plugging up his thought process. Did she know the place was bugged? Maybe she never said anything like that at all. Maybe he had imagine it. They had gotten really loaded.

"So what do you mean I don't get total freedom?" asked Jake.

"You were convicted of murder. Given a life sentence and no way to prove your innocence. You just can't walk down mainstreet of hometown U.S.A., if you decide to carry out these missions. I don't have to the power to do that. But if you decide to do this,after the last assignment is finished, you will be given a civilian position with the government on the island of Diego Garcia. You can work until retirement, receive a nice pension, and live out your life there. It's one helluva a lot better than spending your final days in the geriatric ward of Leavenworth."

Jake had his head down on the table. "I thought I was free when you got me out of there."

"Morrow, I can give you a total new identity and the military court that convicted you will still be thinking that you are sitting in a cell in Leavenworth. Morgan and his band of idiots have already been briefed. As far as they are concerned, you are still an inmate in their prison and the administration will continue to inform that to anyone who questions it. Ensign Dunn's father thinks that's where you are, he's an old turd and will probably be dead in a couple of years, and his widow is already involved with another man so she doesn't even give a shit."

"Jake, you kill these six total assholes and you will be free, but it just won't be in this country."

"I want to find Sophie."

"The letter from her father to Morgan is in your file. She doesn't want you in her life anymore, Jake." Banks paused for a second. "What is gonna be, Jake?"

"I can't go back." He took his hand off the table and looked at Banks. "Do these people really deserve this?"

"We don't go around killing innocent people, Jake. They are the scum of the earth."

Jake stood up to head to the bathroom. The little bit of breakfast that he had eaten was about to come up. He stopped in the doorway

"OK, I'm in."

BATFISH

PEARL HARBOR

The President of the fucking United States is the one that started the enormous shit avalanche that was about to hit us. That's not totally true. His daughter was coming to visit. But since our head honcho, the Admiral of the Pacific Fleet, was going to be taking the little shit for a boat ride on his personal barge around Pearl Harbor, all the boats and the boathouse had to be checked for explosives about a week out before they arrived.

We were pulled out of our cozy little communications dope nest and sent to the CINCPACFLT boathouse on temporary orders. The first two days were spent diving under the boats and docks and the surrounding areas to check for explosives. The remaining days were spent at the boathouse with two advance party Secret Service agents who got high. You heard that right! Those two crazy fuckers smoked dope and they were the ones who brought the subject up.

Late one evening, the four of us were sitting on the back dock enjoying a cold brew when one of the agents asked if we happened to have anything a little more stronger. Shit, I thought the dude meant like a bottle of rum. But dumbass Zak pipes in with "Right fucking here" and fires up a pin joint of some excellent dope called Mango. I almost passed out right then and there. Those two agents grinned like they had just received word that they were being transferred to a unit that guards the teenage daughters of politicians and started to toke away. To this day I've never seen two guys get as stoned as they did on one joint.

Mango, by the way, was the invention of this crazy asshole who lived up in the mountains somewhere on Maui. He had a degree in horticulture and cross bred this pot with a mango tree by growing the pot so that it somehow intertwined with the mango tree branches, giving it a delicious fruity flavor and a THC kick that would knock your dick in the dirt. Couple years ago I heard some locals shot him in the head.

Anyhow, the Prez's daughter, along with her cat, came to visit and to go on her harbor tour. Took all of an hour and then we were free to go back to our normal duties. Our two new buddies had gotten a taste for the bud though, and wanted to take some back to the states.

But the problem was that it was between pay periods and we were waiting on our next shipment to come in and all we had in inventory was a couple of Thai sticks that a fleet sailor had given Zak for services rendered. The guy liked to watch while other guys screwed his wife so Zak had volunteered for the chore. That was all great but the fact that the Thai stick had been treated with PCP was not. We hadn't sampled the product and didn't know it, but Zak in his usual "what the fuck" manner gave the agents the sticks.

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“What the fuck,” I’m sure was running through one of the agent’s mind, when safe at home back in Seattle, he had rolled up a big fat number and gotten so blasted that he took out his service weapon and fired off the entire clip into his garage, thinking that he was firing at a sasquatch sitting in the back on a lawn chair.

I had only done angel dust one time my self. A sailor had stopped by our barracks room one evening and we had snorted a line of it and then on top of that he had produced a baseball size junk of hash. He filled up the bowl of a tobacco pipe and we had smoked the whole damn bowl. I got so high I tried to come down by taking a cold shower but jumped out of the shower stall when sparks had come flying out of the nozzle. Zak crawled under his bunk, whimpering, and didn’t come out for the entire rest of the night. Never again!

The sasquatch that the secret service agent saw turned out to be his daughter’s plastic swimming pool with a picture of Ronald McDonald on the bottom, that was sitting upright against the back wall. Both the daughter and his wife had gone running screaming into the night. The authorities were notified and the agent did what most people in his situation would do (once they came down and got out of the hospital), he snitched us off to his bosses. Who in turn snitched us off to the office of the Naval Investigative Service located in Pearl Harbor.

If the NIS agent who answered the phone in Pearl Harbor had been a regular Hawaii Five O kind of cop, things would have turned out one helluva lot different. But he wasn’t. The asshole who answered the phone was on the take and had been almost since the day he arrived on the island.

Leon had started off his career in undercover work as an enlisted man in the navy. Just a lowly storekeeper who gathered brownie points with his superiors by informing on his crew members. He was given no actual authority to do this. It was just his sense of duty that brought forth his patriotic actions. Didn’t matter if they were selling or smoking pot, committing murder, throwing paint brushes overboard, or jacking off in their bunks reading Playboy. Leon would snitch them off.

This went on for almost two years until two black enginemen caught Leon out on the fantail one balmy afternoon as the ship cruised the waters off of Norfolk, Virginia. Leon had recently narced these two gentlemen off for bringing vodka on board to help them through the lonely, boring nights at sea.

They didn’t even ask for an explanation. One of them simply kicked Leon right in the nuts, they hoisted him up, and proceeded to throw him overboard while the ship was over a mile off the coast. Luckily for Leon, his only friend on the ship, an effeminate Filipino steward named Romy, had been hiding on the next deck up, watching the whole fiasco. Thinking quickly, he pulled the quick release lever on one of the ship’s life rafts which catapulted it overboard and Leon was able to swim to it.

Then not thinking quickly, he hurdled the railing to land on his feet on the deck below, Bruce Lee style, in front of his friend’s assailants. Who then kicked him in the nuts and threw him over the side. Poor Romy, who had grown up in the poor section of Manila, had never done well in boot camp during swimming classes, and he sank to the bottom like a bag of concrete. Never to be seen again.

By human eyes that is. The air had no quite left Romy’s lungs for the last time when a fifteen foot great white shark, who was cruising along outside of her normal hunting grounds, spied Romy quivering in his death throes, and gobbled him up like he was a large tuna and later giving her a bad case of gas.

Leon and Romy were both discovered missing at formation the next morning. They were so universally hated by the crew that no one even noticed them gone for almost sixteen hours.

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The life raft that Leon had crawled into had been caught in an out going rip tide and had been swept farther out to sea.

Leon would be discovered a week later, hideously sunburned and hallucinating from dehydration, by a coke dealer out on a shakedown cruise with his new high powered cigarette boat. All he had on board to drink was Heineken, which Leon drank four bottles of in about fifteen minutes.

The combination of dehydration and alcohol sent Leon into a psychotic rage when he arrived at the naval hospital in Norfolk and he had to be restrained after he tried to assault one of the nursing staff by biting her on the tit. He kept screaming to “open up the fucking tap.” So he wound up spending three weeks in the hospital psych ward.

It would not be what most people would consider a pleasant three weeks. Leon was roomed with a psychotic, two hundred pound marine, who thought he was Dean Martin. He also thought Leon was his “bitch” and treated him so in the evenings. The night staff being more interested in playing cards and catching a buzz than checking on the welfare of their patients.

After his “recovery” Leon decided it was time to go about his career in a more intelligent way. In other words he felt he needed a gun to back up his actions. He applied for the NIS training program in Glenco, Georgia and the navy being so highly impressed by this young man, accepted his application. There is absolutely nothing more that the navy loves than a snitch.

NIS school was a slice of heaven for him. Everyone in his class was cut from the same bolt of cloth. All had been terribly tormented by their peers while growing up and they all had the same goal. To pay back everyone of those motherfuckers if it took the rest of their lives.

Leon was assigned to Pearl Harbor after graduation from training and began to spend his evenings on Hotel Street, the red light district of Honolulu. It was there he met a transsexual Korean named Pok who looked remarkably like Romy. Romy as it turns out had been more than just a good friend.

Pok was high dollar all the way and the things he/she did to Leon with an ice cube, a little dab of cocaine, a twelve inch dildo, and a bottle of Boone’s Farm put Leon in places he had never been before. But Pok liked his/her money and drugs.

A young NIS agent was not bringing in the jack that his fancy whore would require for maintenance, so Leon began to skim drugs and money from the sailors he was busting. He almost fell apart when he answered the phone call from the secret service office in Seattle. He knew exactly who we where. Someone facing a drug related court martial had already tipped him off about us to avoid being sent to the brig. His last big bust had gone tits up when the suspect had beaten the officer to death before he could bust him. Damn the luck. Leon had already been using his cat like observation skills. We like typical drug dealing idiots, had let our guards down by sampling our own product and had gotten sloppy. Leon knew we could make him enough cash so that Pok could get his/her final operation done to make him/her complete.

JUICE

By lunch time, Jake had a new military I. D. card, Nevada driver's license, and a wallet full of other cards, all in the name of Derek Powell. He was sporting a fresh military haircut and was clean shaven. To anyone concerned, Jake Morrow was sitting in a cell in Leavenworth federal prison. While Derek Powell was sitting down to a lunch of chicken breast sandwiches and french fries with Special Agent Jerry Banks.

"Little hair of the dog that bit you?" Banks was standing in front of the fridge and waving a Guinness.

"Bring it on. Maybe I'll feel better."

Banks set the beer in front of him. "You've made the right decision, Jake. Shit, I mean Derek. It'll take me a while to get used to your new name. It's probably only going to take a couple of months or so to finish your missions and compare that to what you were facing a day or so ago. Won't be long you'll be sunning your ass on an island out in the middle of the ocean without a care in the world."

Jake/Derek bit into his sandwich without responding so Banks continued on.

"Let's start going over these cases. Number one is a air force recruiter currently stationed in Omaha, Nebraska. Career type that's been stationed all over the world. We've uncovered that he is responsible for the deaths of over fifteen streetwalkers and runaway girls who lived around the bases that he has been stationed at. Intelligence has reported that law enforcement agencies have begun to put together a pattern but have yet to narrow it down to our target. Yet. If he kills a hooker or some kid in Omaha in his usual fashion, it won't take long for them to center in on him."

"Why don't you just turn over your evidence and have him arrested?" asked Jake.

"If he was some normal enlisted man that would be no problem. But this asshole was voted recruiter of the year and even had lunch with the President. Publicity would be the shits. Hit recommended is to make it look like a street crime."

Banks flipped a page.

"Number two is a marine stationed at Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri. Gunnery Sergeant who is involved with some local hillbillies and rednecks in a very profitable methamphetamine operation. Operation brings in an estimated one to one and a half million dollars a year. Been going on almost three years now. What gets his ass in a twist and brings him to our attention is that his assignment at Leonard Wood is with the drug eradication team there. Dipshit has a chest full of medals and accommodations from his work with the team. Not a thing that the higher ups want plastered all over the evening news. Lives alone in trailer outside of Licking, Missouri.

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Clean out all evidence of narcotics and blow the place to hell and back. Trailer's got a big propane tank behind it, should be easy."

Derek finished two sandwiches and started on another beer. He was starting to feel a little better and listening to Bank's briefing was starting to give him a familiar adrenaline buzz. These guys are assholes, he rationalized.

Dumb shit number three is a wannabe pimp down in Orlando, Florida. That one should be kind of fun for you. Lot of sun and poontang to check out while you're there. This asshole is a former sailor with a bad conduct discharge. He's got one girl working for him and they have a room with a two way mirror set up at a sleaze bag motel. They take sailors and other military types in there and videotape or take pictures of them in action with the whore and then blackmail them. Couple of younger sailors objected to the strong arming and he killed them both. Shot one and slit the other one's throat. That one had graduated from boot camp that day, guess he didn't want his mother to see him in action with a black chick. Anyway, our mark recently hit the jackpot with a higher ranking naval officer and has been blackmailing him on the installment program. This one we have to find the evidence before he gets taken out. This shitbag can then be taken out anyway you so desire. No one will care. You may have to take the hooker out, but probably not. She's not real bright."

"Banks, how am I gonna get around in these towns? I've never been to any of them."

"Not to worry. A contact will meet you at the airport for every assignment and will handle all transportation. These guys are handpicked and gung ho to the max. They'll do anything you tell them to. OK?"

Derek/Jake nodded.

"Four is a retired navy chief in San Diego. Hard core pedophile and porno freak. Former driver and confidante of a soon to be major political star. This one is going to have to look like a suicide or accident. Definitely have to find and destroy all the sick shit that this guy has been stockpiling. I'd like to kill him myself."

Banks stopped to catch his breath and to chug down a beer.

"All right. Five and six are where you are really going to earn your wings. These two are one of the main reasons you were hand picked for these missions. Fifth name is Gary Bryant. You might of heard of him. Been a couple of books and even a movie made about him. Currently serving a long sentence in Oak Park Heights prison just outside of the Twin Cities. Your neck of the woods. He sold a shitload of secrets to the Russians some years back when he was working for a civilian intelligence company with a military contract. Soon to be released on parole. We can't let that happen. He's gonna get snuffed."

"Ja..Derek, we're going to put you inside to do this one."

"Inside where?" demanded Jake.

"In Oak Park. Don't worry, you will be totally protected in there. We have an inside contact. It would be too suspicious if Bryant got wacked as soon as he was released. His parents have money and a lot of influence. He's gotta be done inside. It'll be quick. You'll do him in a couple of days after you get there. No one will question a prison killing."

"How did I get handpicked for this shit?"

"You still have the Minnesota accent and you've done hard time. You'll be easy to slide right in there. No one will suspect a thing."

"I'm bound to been seen in there doing it. Then what happens?"

"That's the genius of it, Derek. After Bryant is killed you will be shipped to the Minnesota Security Hospital for evaluation. The unit you will be on is the same unit where our number six man is locked up. He killed a navy WAVE in Hawaii and was running a large marijuana and narcotics ring while he was stationed there. He also stole some extremely sensitive classified material which was never recovered. It's a two for one hit. You do him.

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You'll be arrested and we will have our officers pick you up. But instead of being bound over for trial you will be whisked away to your flight to Diego Garcia.

"Obligation fulfilled."

"That plan sounds like bullshit to me. Anything can happen once you get locked inside. I could get shanked by some punk trying to earn some respect," Jake paused. "Or you guys just leave me inside after the hit and no one would be the wiser."

Banks smiled at Jake/Derek. "Derek, why the hell would I go to all the trouble to spring you out of Leavenworth just to leave you inside a prison in Minnesota? Remember who you're working for and why. The government needs these skels taken out of circulation. They sure as hell don't want you left inside Oak Park and to start opening your piehole to the media. These are pure covert operations that you're going to be sent out on. Top secret shit. The Feds know they fucked up on your court martial and they are willing to set the record straight. Trust me."

Jake/Derek snorted. "Trust me. In a pig's ass I can trust the Feds. Those fuckers had me locked up in the bowels of the worst shithole prison in their system, not talking to me, letting me go slowly nuts, and now I'm suppose to trust them."

"Derek, what can I say? You either accept the offer or you go back to Leavenworth. I think Diego Garcia would be a whole helluva a lot better than a prison cell."

"What I can't believe it, Banks, is that you can sit here eating a chicken sandwich and tell me how easy it's going to be to kill six people. Like it's going to be a walk in the fucking park. Have you ever killed anyone or do you just like to talk big?"

Banks glared at Jake. "Don't get all huffy with me, boy. I was taking out assholes like this when you were still jacking off to the bra section in the Sears catalogues. So don't try your badass prison routine with me. I'll have your ass shipped back so fucking fast your head will spin." Banks stood and threw his beer glass against the wall, glass and Guinness sprayed both of them. He stared daggers at Jake, his fists clenched, he was breathing so hard it looked like he had just finished a hard run. "I'm tired of fucking around with you. Are you in or not?"

A vision of last night in bed with Jasmine and then the thought of his prison cell back in Kansas flashed through Jake's mind.

"I'm in, Banks. I'm in. But let me tell you one thing. You fuck me on this deal and I swear to God, I'll haunt you the rest of your worthless pissy life. I'll do whatever it takes to bring you down. Are you in on that?"

Banks reached his hand across the table. "We've got a deal."

Jerry Banks hadn't killed anyone recently, but he had killed a couple of dozen Viet Cong or their sympathizers while he was in the Army Intelligence Corps. He liked to shoot them in the back of the head or throw them out of a helicopter while one of their buddies watched. It really got the little brown buggers to start jabbering. Jerry came from a well to do family in Venice, Florida. His dad had been in insurance and his mother had been big in real estate. Jerry had a full ride golf scholarship to Florida State after high school, but had majored in pussy, beer, and marijuana instead, and had flunked out after two semesters. His draft board immediately beckoned. His old man pulled some strings with some buddies on the draft board and Jerry had wound up going to officers candidate school after boot camp. After OCS he had attended military intelligence training and it was there that he found he had a hidden skill in interrogation. Jerry lucked out once more and was cut orders to a Psych Ops unit in Saigon. There he spent his mornings grilling Viet Cong and North Vietnamese soldiers for the minimal military intelligence that they possessed, his afternoons on the golf course with the generals, and his evenings smoking opium and screwing whores. Life had never been better. Like Jake's Uncle Billy, Jerry was bummed out when the war ended but he quickly found employment with the CIA, and then a little more than ten years ago, with the agency that he was currently working with. It was great

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work, with minimal supervision, an almost unlimited budget, the golfing was fantastic in Nevada, he could gamble in Las Vegas, and there were whores galore. Almost like Vietnam but safer. Jerry liked to think of himself as a kid living out his wildest fantasies. He never wanted to grow up.

The only bad part was having to deal with white trash like Jake (Derek) Morrow and gutless weasels like Morgan. This wasn't the first time he had worked with that little shit. Sooner or later, Morgan would have to become the victim of a cap in the brain pan. He was too shaky and nervous. Couldn't be trusted for much longer. Might spill his guts.

"Ok, Derek. We'll start briefing on assignment number one in the morning. I'll send Jasmine over to help calm you down a bit. You'll have a seven o'clock wake up call, so don't stay up all night banging. Go easy on the toot and the booze. I'll need you fresh for your briefing."

BATFISH

CINCPACFLT

“O H FUCK,” Zak screamed, making me almost jump through the windshield. I turned and saw the blue flashing gum ball on the dashboard of the unmarked car behind us.

This was our first meeting with Leon.

We had just pulled on to the base after making a dope run and the fucker had been waiting for us to drive back on to his turf. In the back seat was two pounds of Kona Gold in a shoe box. Way too much dope to try to eat to avoid a bust. You could try I suppose, but man, would you get high.

“Easy now, Zak, it’s probably nothing.” I was eyeballing Zak’s right hand reaching for his .38 Colt Detective Special that he kept under the front seat.

The little bastard was out of his car and screaming like a banshee. “Put up your hands where I can see them you cock suckers.” He had a really shrill, irritating voice. Obviously, he had watched a lot of cop movies.

He then walked up to the car and told us to put our hands on the dashboard and don’t move. Opening the back door of our car he reached in and picked up the shoe box .

“Holy shit” he gasped looking in the box. Sneering at us as he looked up, he said “I know you pussies won’t mind if I take this. Do you? Cat got your tongue? Big bad SEALS. Bunch a pussies you ask me. Now you two punks drive back to your barracks and wait for me. I’ll be by in an hour or so. We need to talk.”

He showed up in three hours with a buddy in tow. A balding, anorexic looking turd, who it turns out was the handler of the base drug sniffing dog, who was named Spider. The handlers name was Garret and we would find out later that he dated Pok’s sister/brother Lee. That’s how he and Leon got in cahoots together.

Between the two, they either skimmed half of the drugs they turned up or outright took them all. Who was going to complain? The sailors that they were busting?

The only problem they had was getting the product back on to the street for resale. They were both well known narcs. Who in their right mind would buy dope from them? And neither of these two fucking idiots were what you would consider street smart. That’s where we came in.

Leon would keep the PCP smoking secret service agent incident hush hush, for as long as he could, if we sold their confiscated dope for them. All proceeds of the sales would go to them. Our own business was officially shut down and if we talked we could expect a court martial and a lengthy stay in Fort Leavenworth. There was seemingly no way out.

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“Let’s kill them. Both of the cock suckers.” Zak hissed, after the “cock suckers” had left the barracks.

“Are you fucking nuts?” I said (panicking). “If we kill two NIS agents, every fucking government agency will be here on the next flight. Plus the secret service in Seattle will put two and two together and figure out that we rubbed out the agent that they called. No way, man. No fucking way. We’re just gonna have to roll with it and think of another way out of this elephant shitpile of a mess.”

We rolled with it for two almost three months but it was the absolute shits. Jerry and Garret were indiscriminate on the kind of dope they picked up, and a good share of the time the quality was beyond garbage. Our normal customers business dropped off to zero when the quality went down.

I had told Rick and Matt that Pearl Harbor was hot and that we wouldn’t need any product for a spell. Since they both lived way off base they didn’t seem to suspect anything.

The weekly payments that we made to Leon and Garret involved a complicated scenario of putting the cash inside of an envelope, which was then placed inside of a plastic bag, which was then placed in a jar, and then buried according to the weekly map we received in the mail from the two fucking boneheads. I’m sure that one of them had read about it in some espionage novel.

If things couldn’t possibly get any worse, we then we got word that Captain Clint had passed on to that big shipyard in the sky. His birthday had rolled around and Yolanda had surprised him with a threesome, the third party being the young wife of a naval officer who was at sea. She liked it both ways and the Captain had gotten so worked up that he had shorted out all his wiring and stroked out. Zak had left for the mainland on emergency leave.

I felt worse when the Captain passed on than I did when my own brother had expired in the shower at the reformatory. Although I think that Clint went out having a lot more fun than my brother did. But, who knows? Some of those magazines I inherited from my brother were borderline, if you know what I mean.

I was working on the midnight shift while Zak was back in San Diego and my mood could be best described as “surly”. Leon and Garret had visited me before work and had woken me up from a deep coma like sleep. I had consumed the better half of a twelve pack of beer and several joints to put me in that state. They had used their master key to enter the room and had woken me up by letting Spider jump up on my bunk and hump my head. Both of them thought it was hilarious.

What had brought them on this unexpected (and uninvited) visit was that Leon was buddy buddy with some ancient admiral stationed at CINCPACFLT and the old bastard was having problems securing companionship. His female driver had recently rotated back to the states and she was his former source. In other words, they wanted me to find the old geezer a whore.

“What do I look like? I asked. “A pimp.”

“I know for a fact, asshole, that there’s a WAVE stationed here that’s been selling selling her bush. And I hear she’s hot. I need you to set it up.” He replied. “There’s good coin involved. Just not for you.”

Fucking comedian. “I forgot. Since you seem to be only interested in women who have both tits and a dick, you wouldn’t know where to start looking. Would you?”

That struck a nerve. “Listen fucker. You two haven’t been getting shit done lately on the dope sales, so I have to find other ways to generate income. So shut your fucking mouth and just get me the whore. It’s for this Saturday night. His old lady is going over to the big island for some church benefit.”

So you can understand that I wasn’t in the greatest of moods at work that night. About two in the morning I had to go on the security walk through the headquarters building. This

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involves walking through the building offices and checking for fire hazards, unlocked file cabinets and safes, and general security violations.

Great opportunity to rifle through people's desks and look for dirt on them.

I had stopped out on the top floor prior to burn a joint and was feeling really groggy. Like I said earlier, the dope that came through Leon was not the top of the line shit that we usually smoked. Which the result of, was a high that was usually a low grade buzz, that made you more tired than anything. So I decided to skip most of the walk through and catch a quick cat nap in the big admiral's office. As I leaned back in his hand tooled leather recliner for a quick snooze, I noticed that his wall safe was open and the door ajar. Huh! Obviously the rules don't apply to the old bastard.

Before I locked it up I decided to walk into the safe and take a look around. Not much of interest in there until I saw a old cardboard file box on the bottom of a stack, at the back of the safe. On the side of the box were the letters N-P and then the name "Morrison, J."

Having always been a fan of The Doors and knowing of Jim Morrison's family connections to the navy, I was interested if there could actually be information on him in the box, so I pulled it out of the pile and took it out to the desk and began to go through it.

Inside was a huge manila folder on both Jim Morrison and Elvis Presley. From what these documents said, both of them were under extensive government surveillance right up until the times of their deaths.

In fact, according to these reports, Morrison had been tailed in France the very day of this death. There was also a report on NIS being involved on setting up a tail on Elvis when he was scheduled to come to Oahu on one of his many visits, but it was canceled when he couldn't make it due to a family illness. A copy of Elvis's five page letter to Nixon was in there. The prick wanted to be a government narcotics agent while he was doing more drugs than The Rolling Stones. He volunteered his services. What a fucking gold mine! The King and the Lizard King being checked out by the Feds and Elvis wanted to be junior g-man narc.

There was also two smaller files on the bottom of the box. The first one describe a locally based commander had been having a fling with one of the enlisted dental technicians and NIS had stumbled on to the affair. The couple would go out at lunch and drive up into this little woods and fuck like monkeys in the back of the commander's pick up. It's pretty warm around lunch time in Hawaii, so they'd leave the back of the camper shell open for air. This gave the agent who was following them a perfect party view for his long range lens.

Their folder was full of shots of the couple going at it (I've never seen hotter photos in a skin rag)and included the police report detailing the reaction of the technicians husband when he got copies of the photos in the mail anonymously. He had taken a shotgun and shot the inside of their house up. A SWAT team had to be called.

They were now divorced (and discharged)and she had moved to Los Angeles to explore opportunities in the entertainment field. The husband had moved to Hawaii state prison where he explored opportunities in getting sodomized by Samoans. I remembered both her and her husband, they had bought a lot of weed from me before their life had gone to total hell.

The second file was about the sailor who had beaten an ensign to death. Looked like he had been doing a little dealing himself prior to his arrest.

It took me almost an hour to photo copy the Morrison and Presley file. Get it in back into the safe and lock it up. I didn't bother to copy the skin flick file, I just stole it out right. The pot dealer's remained in the box. He was out of circulation for good. It took me so long that Tom had gotten nervous and was about to send a marine sentry to look for me. I put the files in my lunch cooler next to my tuna sandwich and walked out through the front gate with it after the change of shift.

JUICE

OMAHA AND MISSOURI

Brad Wake loved the air force. Everything about it. He couldn't imagine doing anything else. He had been in the air force almost fifteen years with the last three spent in recruiting. His positive message and gung ho manner captivated both parents and their dumb shit kids into signing on the dotted line within an hour or so after visiting his recruiting office in downtown Omaha. Only last month he had visited the White House and met the man himself after Wake had been voted AF recruiter of the year. The Presidents autographed photo now hung in a place of prominence over Brads desk. It had really help pick up his recruiting quota even more. Yes indeed, the air force had certainly been good to him.

It had gotten him away from his bitch mother in Ohio. He hated her more than he loved his precious air force.

Not without good reason. Mom had bitched poor old Dad right out of the house and then the old shrew had turned her attention to Brad. He wasn't allowed to leave the house after school or on weekends. No friends were allowed in the house, not that Brad would have ever wanted anyone to see how they lived. He was forced to watch his mother drink a bottle of vodka almost everyday while she smoked three packs of Virginia Slims. Thursday night was enema night. Brads mom would tie Brad to his bed and forcibly give him a coffee enema. On weekends she brought men home and forced Brad to watch them screw on the living room fold out couch. Sometimes the men wanted Brad, too. His mother really liked that. Near the end of Brad's senior year in high school his Mom had gotten really tanked and had fallen down the basement stairs and wound up shattering her leg. She was in the hospital and in rehab for over five months. In that time Brad would move in with his grandparents, graduate from school, and enlist and ship out with the air force. He never saw his mother again, only the demons she planted in him.

While in military technical school in Texas, Brad had met a hooker in San Antonio, took her to a cheap room, but he didn't screw her, that would be sick. He had strangled her with his belt instead.

She had looked just like his mother.

Once he started, he couldn't stop. It was too good of a release. It continued in towns surrounding every base and in every country that he was stationed in.

He only used a belt the first time. Now he used the tubing off of enema bags.

He had killed over thirty prostitutes and runaways. He never had sex with them. But when they died, he would sometimes come in his pants. A couple looked just like Mom.

It hadn't happened in Omaha yet, but it would. It was starting to build in him. At first he would only go to the porn shops a couple times a week. By the time he was ready to do another

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he would be going almost daily. He liked to watch the short loop films which showed older women screwing. How could those filthy whores do that? At their age! It made him hate her more. Tonight would be his fourth time this week.

SSG Brad Wake locked up his file cabinets, checked to make sure his outgoing mail included the enlistment packets of his newest recruits, went into the back room to change out of his uniform, shut off the office lights, and locked the front door, giving it several good shakes.

He didn't notice the Chevy Vega parked half way down the street.

"Is that him?" The guy who had been assigned to pick Derek up had been driving him fucking crazy. They were in their third day together. He couldn't believe the dude was driving a fucking Vega, he thought they had been outlawed or something while he was in the joint.

"That's him," Derek replied as he watched Wake get in his government issued sedan. "Let him take off first. Don't turn your lights on until he turns the corner. The fuck book store that he's probably going to is only about two miles away so don't get to close."

His driver put his car in gear and farted wetly. He glanced over at Derek. "I'm sorry but I'm real nervous. Stomach is real queasy."

"Do that again and I'll give you something to be nervous about," Derek barked as he rolled down the window. A block down the road he could see the recruiters sedan. He looked over at his driver. Obviously, he was military, you could tell that by the haircut and poor choice of civilian wear. Probably an officer. I wonder how they recruited these guys, Derek thought. Wanna be an accessory to a murder? Help you out on your promotion.

The sedan took a right hand turn. "OK. He's going to the book store again. Find a parking spot as soon as you make the turn and shut off the lights."

As they turned the corner, Derek could see the recruiters car pull into the driveway of the porno store and drive around the back into the hidden back parking lot. Without a doubt he wouldn't want anyone to see that car.

Derek reached into his gym bag and pulled out a .357 magnum revolver and checked the cylinder. Six rounds rested in there. He snapped it shut and put it in the shoulder holster under his leather biker jacket and reached to feel the knife case at the back of his belt which contained a razor sharp Buck knife. Strapped to his right ankle was a .38 Colt snub nose. He pulled on a Omaha Royals ball cap.

"Keep your eyes peeled and when you see me come out of that front door you start this piece of shit up and tear ass down the street to pick me up. Keep the motor running and leave my door open. Got it."

His driver nodded sickly, farted again, and tried to open his door but puked all down the inside of the driver's side.

"Jesus Christ. Get it together, man." The combination of the funk inside the car and his own nerves made Derek quickly step out for fear that he might have to vomit himself. He took a couple of deep breaths and began to stroll towards the skin shop. He could only hope that the driver would be there when he came back out.

The adult book store was a plain cinder block building painted a baby blue color. Derek stepped inside.

At the elevated counter reading a *Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers* comic book was a punk rocker with a Sid Vicious T-shirt and a haircut that looked like he might have done himself with a pair of dog clippers, and without the use of a mirror. He barely glanced up at Derek and went back to his doper oriented periodical.

Wake was standing over in front of the magazine section and was looking at a fine publication called *Bunghole Babes*. Jake wandered over to the lesbian and S & M section and fingered through a few magazines. The recruiter put his magazine down and walked down the

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hallway where the skin flicks were. He entered a single's booth with the movie title *Grandma's Gash* over the door. Jake could hear the lock on the door click.

It was as quiet as a graveyard in there. He could actually hear the punker turn the pages of his comic books. There was no one else inside. Jake put on a pair of sunglasses and walked to the counter, pulling out his pistol at the same time. He jammed into the punker's forehead before he could even look up.

"Down on our stomach on the floor, shithead, or your brains will be all over the counter."

The clerk dropped to the floor without a word. Derek heard him crap his pants. Everyone he was working with tonight had bowel problems. He held his breath as he fastened a electrical tie down around the punker's wrists. He stuck his pistol at the back of the clerk's head. "My advice to you is to forget anything you've seen tonight." The clerk whimpered. "I'll take that as a yes." Derek stood and walked over and threw the dead bolt on the front door. He turned over the open sign to where it now read closed and turned off the front lights of the store. He glanced down the dirty movie hallway, nothing was stirring.

Derek walked down the hallway and stepped into the booth across from the recruiters to give him some arm room. He reached across to the booth's door knob and gave it a shake.

"It's occupied," came out of the booth.

Derek raised the pistol to head level and began firing while adjusting his aim down the door. Huge splinters of wood were flying from the door. The screams inside were almost drowned out by the roar of the pistol. He kept firing until the hammer clicked on a empty chamber.

Derek quickly walked to the back room of the shop and exited out the back door. He walked down the driveway of the book store, looking both ways, no one was around, must be a slow night for the porno trade. He walked onto the street. The Vega was still in its parking place, the engine idling. It didn't move.

Derek began to run towards the car. There was no one inside. "Fuck," he screamed. He jumped inside, did a quick u-turn, and tore the hell out of there as fast as the four cylinder engine would go. He was lost. He hadn't been paying attention to any of the streets since he hadn't driven while he had been in Omaha.

Realizing how stupid he was acting, he slowed back down and began to gather his bearings and composure. He saw a Burger King, pulled in, and went into the rest room.

After locking the door, he wiped down the magnum and shoved it along with the ball cap deep into the trash can. Giving himself a few more minutes to let the adrenaline subside, he then walked out and order himself a burger, fries, and a coke. He tried to casually ask the girl behind the counter, who was very pretty with dirty, dishwater blonde hair, and with very perky tits, if she could give him directions to the airport.

She smiled sweetly at Derek. "I live right out by the airport. If you could wait about forty five minutes, my shift will be over, and you can follow me out there if you want."

The driver who had picked Derek up at the Springfield, Missouri airport for the second hit was the absolute opposite of the asshole in Omaha who had run off on him. Southern redneck to the core, he was of course, driving a huge four wheel drive pickup covered in rebel flags and NASCAR stickers. It had a camper shell on it and the redneck had told Derek to climb in there if he wanted to crash, they'd be in Ft. Leonard Wood in less than two hours. He'd wake him when they got close.

Jerry Banks had come completely fucking unglued after the hit in Omaha. Derek and the bimbo, Natalie, from Burger King, had stopped off at a local watering hole and one beer had led to two. Two to three. And three back to her place and a night of all star fucking. She was a student at the University of Nebraska-Omaha, and was going with a football player who had

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gone out of town on spring break and left her to work her shifts at the home of the Whopper. She had thought Derek was a ball player and would be an adequate substitute for her beau while he was gone drinking Corona at wet T-shirt contests. The sun coming through the cheap blinds in her apartment had finally woken Derek at about nine the next morning. He had slipped out her bed to go into the kitchen and make the call to Banks.

The agent had answered on the first ring, and man, was he pissed.

“Where the fuck are you?”

“Why, I’m still in Omaha, Jerry. Thanks to that retard that you set me up with.”

“What happened?”

“I came out of the store and he was gone. He left the car, a fucking Vega by the way, and I took off in it.”

“A Vega? That son of a bitch had four grand advanced for expenses and that included a rental car. Is Omaha that much of a shithole that they still rent Vegas? Any idea what happened to the driver?”

Derek blew out his breath. “The last I saw of that guy he was puking down the side of the car. He just freaked out and bolted. I hope you make a better choice for my escort next time.”

“Did everything else go down as planned? Any problems?”

“Everything else was perfect.”

“Where did you spend the night?”

Derek looked over at Natalie’s bedroom door. She was leaning against the door frame, buck naked. She smiled at him as she rubbed her beaver. “You fuck like you just got out of prison. Shit, I’m sore.”

Derek clamped his hand over the phone.

“Who the hell was the that?” demanded Banks.

“A waitress, I’m at a Country Kitchen.”

“So where did you stay last night?” Banks repeated.

“In the car.”

“All right. Get your ass to the airport and go to the lounge. When you hear the name Sam Jacobs paged, go to the front of the terminal and wait in front of the Avis counter and I’ll have a contact meet you there. I think I can arrange for the Air Guard to give you a hop back here to the base. Give the keys to the car to the contact. He’ll dispose of it.”

Derek hung the phone up. “I’ve got an hour or so to kill. What do you want to do?”

She wanted to do everything all over again.

Willie Nelson blasted Derek awake. The redneck must have a helluva of a sound system in this truck. Shit, the guy had speakers built right into the bed of the truck. The air mattress that Derek was laying on was vibrating like a hotel bed that you pumped quarters into.

The truck was pulled over on I-44 and the redneck was waving through the back window for Derek to join him up in the cab.

“My names Jim Pitre. I’m a first lieutenant in the infantry.” He had his hand stretched across the cab as Derek hopped in. The floorboard was littered with Budweiser cans. He obviously had been drinking all the way from Springfield.

“You really shouldn’t tell me anything personal,” answered Derek.

“Fuck, man, I don’t give a shit. This ain’t the first time I’ve done this crap. I joined the army to kill folks and I ain’t had a chance to do it yet, no wars, so I do this for a little extra pin money and the hope that maybe one of you boys will let me join in on the fun.”

Derek couldn’t help but laugh.

There had been no need to case the area or to place the subject under surveillance. Gunnery Sergeant Brian Oneal had such an obvious routine going on that Derek couldn’t believe

SCREAMING BATFISH BLUES

that the cops hadn't busted him yet. Monday through Friday he performed his military duties at the base and went home to his trailer immediately after work. There he changed clothes and went on a daily five mile run and then returned to pump iron in the building adjacent to his trailer house. On Saturday mornings he drove out to a farmhouse located in a deep hollow just north of a town called Licking and cooked meth all day long with a couple of good old boys know locally as The Turd Brothers. Intelligence could not pick up the reason for the nickname although it did pick up that the trio was cooking some of the finest methamphetamine in the surrounding five counties and were making a fortune doing it. Saturday nights were spent at a roadhouse just off the interstate where the Gunny was known to get totally bombed on Beefeaters gin while he enjoyed the company of several of the wives of lower ranking enlisted men who Oneal had scheduled conveniently for weekend duty. On Sundays, Oneal attended services at the local Licking Baptist church all dressed up in his fancy Marine dress blues, and then spent the afternoons lecturing at various youth groups about the dangers of narcotics and marijuana.

Monday mornings when he drove on base for work, he had the weekly meth deliveries, which would be distributed to his base contacts, hidden inside the spare tire of his Pontiac GTO, which had a D.A.R.E sticker on the bumper.

There was absolutely nothing in Oneal's documented past that would lead one to believe that he would become a major player in a narcotics rings. Born to a loving couple who were still married. Dad a retired colonel in the Corps, Mom a stay at home gal. He had graduated in the top ten percent of his class, had placed third in the Virginia state high school wrestling championship in his senior year, and had turned down a scholarship to the University of Iowa, a huge wrestling school, to join the marine corps instead. Marine corps evaluations had shown him to be an outstanding marine with only one blemish on his record. A fist fight with a sailor at the enlisted men's club in Quantico. The swabby had made a crack about the Corps and had to pay for it. Other than that, nothing.

"You know where this guy's trailer is?" Derek asked.

"It's just outside this little dirt bag town called Licking. South of Leonard Wood. We'll cruise by the club and see if his goat is parked outside. I'm sure it is. He gets fucked up there every Saturday night. Shouldn't be back to the trailer until way after closing. Sometimes he screws those enlisted guys wives out in the parking lot after closing, but not always. We'll still have plenty of time even if he doesn't score tonight."

They pulled up into the parking lot of the club. Typical military and southern Missouri beer joint. Country music blaring out the doors and a fight already going on around the back. The bright red GTO sat two cars over from the front door. USMC sticker displayed prominently in the back window. Pitre threw his truck in park and jumped out. "Be right back." A minute later he climbed back and threw a six pack of tall Buds between them. "Damn, I'm thirsty tonight. Grab a couple if you like. We got plenty of time. Our boy was sitting at the bar with a broad that must weigh two bills. He must like 'em big. I can't see her turning him down. Unless she's ragging." They headed off for Licking while listening to a Charlie Daniels tape, drinking beer, and Pitre telling tales of Tennessee football and black pussy.

The truck cruised by the grove of woods where Oneal's trailer sat in the darkness.

"There's a big patch of scrub land coming up on our right about a quarter mile down. We can hide the truck in there and work our way back up in the ditch. No one will be able to see us if they pass by," Pitre said.

"What the hell do you mean, we?"

"Oh, shit, man, come on," whined Pitre. "Let me have some of this action. Please?"

Derek sat and stared at Pitre as he pulled the cab down into the scrub bush. He was thinking about the driver in Omaha. This guy here was undoubtedly a loose cannon but he sure as shit wasn't going to bolt on him. But he could get them both killed, or worse, caught.

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Pitre shut off the truck and hit the lights. He turned and looked at Derek again.

“Please?”

“All right, what the fuck, let’s go. You carry this.” He handed Pitre his gym bag.

They climbed out of the truck and headed back towards the trailer using the deep ditch. No cars passed by. It was a warm, clear night, and the stars were so bright you didn’t need a flashlight. Derek was worried about snakes and kept his eyes close to the ground.

They came around the back of the trailer. The intelligence report had stated no dogs were on the premises. Derek had been leery about that. Meth dealers and makers were famous for having pit bulls around. Pitre took a long screwdriver out of the bag and stuck it into the door jam, the door groaned and popped open with a loud crack. Derek pulled out his 9 mm out of his shoulder holster and walked inside. He clicked on his flashlight.

The place was tidy beyond belief. It was decorated with cheap furniture bought at the base store and the walls were covered with marine corps posters and Oneal’s citations and awards. But the place was so clean it actually smelled like lemon Pledge and Lysol.

“This asshole must have a bitch living with him,” whispered Pitre.

“No. He lives alone. Let’s check the place out.”

They went through all the cupboards and shelves in the kitchen and living room and found no evidence of drugs. The bedroom was clean too. Just a couple of Penthouse magazines and a box of rubbers. Ditto for the bathroom.

“Shit, I’m not sure they have the right guy. This place is spotless. If a guy is running as much as they say he is, he would have to have something to show for it. There’s not even a fucking baggy in here, for Christ’s sake.” Derek looked over at Pitre. The redneck army officer was looking down at a huge throw rug with the USMC trademark bulldog on it.

“Give me a hand here. Let’s get this couch and chair off this rug and see what’s underneath.”

The rug was pulled free from the furniture to reveal a small trap door cut into the floor of the trailer. Pitre stuck his screwdriver in the side and pried up the little door. Sitting inside was a combat boot box. Inside, stacked neatly, right up to the lid, was nothing but twenties and fifties, tied off in neat bundles with rubber bands.

“Jack fucking pot,” grinned Pitre.

Derek emptied the box into the gym bag and stood up. Lights swept through the living room.

“Shit, someone pulled up, get out the back,” ordered Derek.

The two ran out the back door, quickly closing it behind them, and then scampered over and hid behind an old model T Ford that looked like Oneal might be attempting to restore.

The lights came on in the trailer. Oneal’s GTO was still idling in the driveway.

They could see Oneal walk into his living room, stop, look down, and run immediately over to pick up his phone.

“Fuck, he’s calling for his partners, get your head down. I gotta do this quick.” Derek stood and quickly fired three shots from his 9 mm into the propane tank behind the trailer.

The propane tank and the house trailer exploded into an enormous fireball with such force that it threw Derek back ten feet in the air, his fourth shot going high into the sky, where he landed hard against a young sapling.

Pieces of the burning trailer were falling out of the sky all around Derek as he rolled over onto his hands and knees and tried to get the breath back into his lungs. He felt like he had been hit square in the chest by a runaway Volkswagen. He tried to stand but collapsed over onto first his side, then he rolled over onto his back. There was a roaring in his ears that sounded like the time his Dad had taken him to stand right next to Gooseberry Falls up in northern Minnesota.

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Jesus, he missed his Dad. Why did Billy make him fight that retard? Was that why he hurt so bad?

“Get up, man. Get the fuck up. We gotta get the hell out of here. The sheriff will be here any minute. That was like a fucking nuclear blast. I swear to shit there was a mushroom cloud.”

Derek opened his eyes. The retard was standing over him. He blinked his eyes a couple of times. They felt like sand had been ground into them. No, it wasn't the giant. It was that guy who had picked him up at the airport in Springfield. He never thought about it before but he looked just like that kid on that television show his Mom use to like. What was that show? Oh yea. The Andy Griffith Show. His driver looked like Opy only with a military buzz cut.

Jim had him by the front of his jacket and was shaking him like. “Derek, get the hell up. Now!”

Pitre bent down, grabbed an arm and then one of Derek's legs and hoisted him up in a fireman's carry. He took off down the driveway in a fast trot.

They were half way back to Springfield when Derek finally came to. He looked over at Pitre who was cruising down the freeway and drinking a beer just like they were on their way to the county fair. Only Pitre's face was almost totally black from the flames and smoke from the explosion.

Jim looked over at grinned. “Hey there, sleepy head. Thought I lost you for a minute. Man, was that a fucking rush or what? Hunks of that trailer shot straight up the air and came crashing down. I've never seen anything like it.”

“How did I get here?” asked Derek.

“Shit, I carried you to the truck. You flew through the air like Superman and landed right against a tree. That fat bitch that was at the bar with the marine must have been in the driveway in his car when the tank blew. When I carried you around the front of the trailer, she was running around in circles and screaming like a banshee. I don't think she even noticed us.”

“Where's my pistol?”

“Check your holster. I put it back there after we got to the truck. You held the damn thing through the explosion and when I carried you back. I had to damn near break your fingers to get it loose.”

The truck rolled into a motel parking lot. Jim wiped his face off with a rag and got out of the truck. “I'll get us a room to lay low in for the night. You're looking a little ragged, son.”

Derek was able to get into the room under his own power and he soaked in the tub while Pitre left to buy even more beer. The guy must have a terminal thirst or a hollow leg. When he popped back into the room with a twelve pack and a bag of pork rinds, Derek was spread eagled on his bed.

“Beer?”

Derek shook his head no and closed his eyes

Pitre shrugged his shoulders and began to channel surf the television. “Hey, fucking Showtime! Look at the jugs on that bitch.”

When Derek opened his eyes to check out the tits it was already morning and the morning news was on.

Pitre was sitting up in a chair and by his appearance had already showered and was ready to go. He was shoving a huge sweet roll into his mouth and was pointing at the screen. “Jane Pauley. Now that's a broad I could wake up to.”

They headed back to Springfield. Derek was to meet his plane at the National Guard flight activity out by the airport in three hours. Since they were only a half hour away, they had time to kill. Derek was starting to recover a bit and Pitre had a hankering for chinese food.

“Cmon, dude. My treat. I owe you. I've never had more fun that last night.”

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“Jesus Christ, Jim. If anyone owes anyone anything, it’s me. You saved my ass last night. If you hadn’t picked me up off the ground and carried me back to the truck, the cops would have me in the slammer right now on a murder one charge. Or his hillbilly friends would be burying me in a shallow grave.”

“Don’t sweat it my man. I had the time of my life. Tell you what, you ever come back this way again, you just make sure they ask for old Jim to drive you around. That’ll be more than enough payment.”

Derek laughed. “You are definitely one of the craziest fuckers I have ever met.”

They pulled up in front of the chinese buffett. “It’s a little early but what the fuck. I can eat good chinese food anytime of the day or night. I eat here every time I come to Springfield.”

They were the only ones in the restaurant due to the early hour, but the buffett was open and loaded with chinese delicacies. Both men had filled their plates twice and were thinking about hitting it a third time when the two scumbags walked in the front door. It was a salt and pepper team. One white guy and one black guy. Both of them looked like they were in the terminal stages of drug addiction and poor hygiene. When the slight chinese waitress approached them, she was greeted with the sight of a Saturday night special aimed at her forehead.

“Just give me the money you slope bitch,” barked the black one.

Derek reached under his jacket and slid his 9 mm down into his lap. The white skel walked over to them and smiled. It looked like he might have been eating shit sandwiches before they decided to rob the place. He opened his filthy denim jacket to show another Saturday night special tucked into his belt.

“You boys just sit there and enjoy your meal and we’ll be out of your hair in a jiffy. But first I’ll have to ask you for your wallets.”

Pitre picked up a egg roll and dipped it into his hot mustard.

“I don’t think so.”

The white scumbag scowled. “What the fuck did you say?”

Jim started to bite into his egg roll, then stopped, “I said I don’t think so, you white trash piece of shit.”

Derek fired the 9 mm he was holding in his lap directly into the stick up mans gonads. The scumbag grabbed his crotch and felt straight onto his back while screaming like a injured rabbit. It was so high pitched Derek thought the plate glass windows would shatter. The only word that Derek could make out was “Mommy.”

He quickly stood up and assumed a shooting position at the black robber who was standing at the cash register with one hand in the cash drawer while he had the waitress by the back of her hair. He whirled around at the sound of the shot.

Derek fired four times, placing each shot within a five inch radius in or around the skel’s heart. If he wasn’t dead when he hit the floor, he was dead soon after. The waitress ran screaming into the kitchen.

“Fuck, Derek. This is sure gonna screw me from ever eating here again,” yelled Pitre. “We better roll.” Jim jumped out of the booth and leaned over to pull the white trash robber’s piece out of his belt. He pulled back the slide, glanced inside the chamber, aimed and shot the skel in the forehead. “That screaming was getting old.”

Checking both directions as they exited the restaurant, the two men walked swiftly to the truck and raced out of the parking lot.

“I guess you’ll get to enjoy my company a little longer,” said Derek. “My cover could be blown here so we’ll have to go to the alternate pick up point. That’s in Tulsa.”

“Tulsa? Shit, I better stop for some beer.”

BATFISH

ISLA MUJURES

“Are you telling me that the government had Jim Morrison and Elvis fucking killed, man?” Artimus yelled out. He was a huge conspiracy freak.

“Hell no. Elvis died taking a shit and no one will ever know what happened to Morrison. But it was weird just knowing that our government was so freaked about rock and roll that they would tail musicians and keep files on them. There’s even a file about them putting a tail on Morrison’s old lady before she died of a horse overdose in Los Angeles. I think that the navy was uncomfortable about Morrison because his old man was an admiral. Me and Zak were in such deep shit at that point and I was just looking for anything that could give me a little leverage on these bastards. That’s why I copied the files.”

“Shit, they’ve gotta be worth big bucks. Where are the files now?”

“My sister did have them. I mailed them to her just before the real heavy shit went down. They came in real handy down the road.”

“So you killed them, didn’t you?” Artimus asked with one of his shit eating grins. “The two narcs. Fuckers deserved it if you ask me. You stole the Elvis and Jimbo files and killed the narcs. That’s why the Feds are chasing you.”

“I didn’t kill anyone. I stole the files. But no. They took care of all that killing shit themselves.”

St. Peter

The flame that shot out of that can of Right Guard when we sparked it was like a flame thrower, and it lit the cell up like it was high noon instead of after three in the morning. We had lucked out on who was on duty that night.

It was this biker and a fat chick who always came in on duty and gave a quick sweep of the unit and would then spend the rest of the night watching videos or sleeping. I had gotten up late one night with a severe case of cotton mouth and had gone out to the day room to get a drink from the water fountain. I had seen these two sleeping in the control bubble. The biker had taken his watch off and had hung it from the frame on his glasses so the alarm would wake him. By monitoring the night staff, I had also come to the conclusion that they had to make hourly phone checks to the control center.

I had stood at my door at three o’clock and watched them until they made their call and snuggled in back together. I was hoping that they didn’t decide to fuck. They had done that one night when I was watching them. Erotic it was not. I then waited for what seemed about ten minutes and snuck down to Cedar’s cell. He was up and raring to go.

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The minute the flame hit the glass you could see that it was going to work. It seemed to start melting almost immediately. But the can of deodorant got so fucking hot that we'd have to stop and change cans and let the other one cool down. Once we had to stop because a car drove up the main driveway, but it was just a night staff doing a outer security round and he moved on.

Halfway through the last can, the hole had gotten big enough that I'd be able to fit my shoulders through it. Cedar was so goddamn skinny he could slip down the shower drain. Winter air was rushing in through the window. All we had to do now was cool the sides of the hole down with a wet towel and we'd be out of there. I was just hoping to God or Buddha or whoever may be watching that Cedar's mongoloid friends would be waiting for us.

Rendezvous time was set for 4:30 a.m. The staff kept our coats under lock and key, so we began to put on as many of our other clothes as we could. If anyone tried to stop us now, things were going to have to get ugly. I had never killed anyone in my life. But I wasn't going to prison.

JUICE

NEVADA

“I can’t have you running around the country like you’re Genghis fucking Khan,” yelled Banks as he ran into Derek’s bedroom. Derek was curled up against Jasmine’s naked backside.

“What the hell are you talking about, Jerry?” Derek groaned.

You know know very goddamn well what I’m talking about. Jasmine, get your ass dressed and hit the bricks. I’ve got business to discuss here.”

The gorgeous hooker rolled over and kissed Derek. “See you tonight, babe.” She got out of the bed, gathered up her clothes, and walked stark naked out of the room while smiling sweetly at Banks.

Banks closed the door. “First of all, you smoked that recruiter in a adult book store of all places. Jesus Christ, Derek, why not a gay bath house? It took some slick maneuvering from our media department to get that covered up. You were suppose to make it look like a street crime.”

“Jerry, I had that guy under surveillance the whole time I was in Omaha. He went straight to work in the morning and straight home at night. The only place he diverted from in his routine was when he went to the bookstore. I had no choice. I sure as shit wasn’t going to do him at home. He had a wife and kid there.”

“I can buy that one. But I can’t buy what happened in Missouri. That was total unprofessional bullshit.”

“What the hell are you talking about, man? That jarhead got blown to hell and back. They’ll probably find pieces of him in St. Louis two years from now.”

“You shot the propane tank to set off the explosion. What the hell happened to the C-4 you were suppose to use?”

“He showed up unexpectedly with some dependent bimbo. I had to bust ass out the backdoor. As soon as he saw someone had been inside, he grabbed the phone and was going to call someone. I didn’t want him to have a chance to bring in reinforcements.”

“What happened to the C-4?”

“I left it inside the trailer when I bailed out, it went up in the blast.” Bullshit number one. He had given it to Pitre.

“You didn’t find any dope in the trailer?”

“None.”

“Guns?”

“Zilch.”

Banks paused. “Cash?”

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“I didn’t have enough time to shake the place down real good before he rolled up, Jerry. But the place seemed clean.” Bullshit number two. The box had held 36,000 dollars in twenties and fifties, with some hundreds thrown in. He and Pitre had split the booty right down the middle.

Banks blew out a breath and sat down on the side of the bed. “I guess there’s been no real harm done. The marines bimbo is currently in the women’s unit of the mental ward at Leonard Wood hospital, babbling and drooling like an idiot. No one is going to believe shit from her even if she did see anything. The marines at the base are in mourning for the dirt bag so it looks like we’ll get away clean.” He stood up and stared down at Derek.

“But that cowboy shit you pulled in Springfield. What the fuck was that all about. You kill two street punks in a chinese restaurant over a stick up? The waitress gave a better description to the local law of you two dumb shits than your mothers could have given them. I just thank the good lord above that you were smart enough to head for Tulsa instead the Springfield flight facility. The cops would have nailed your asses there as sure as there is shit in a goat.”

“Jerry, our hands were tied. Christ, one of the guys actually tried to stick us up. If we had let it go on I think they would have killed everyone in the place, including us. The simple fact is that those two fucksticks wrote a check that their ass couldn’t cash. I’m sure as shit not going to sit there and let some punk take me out just because some government bullshit might be found out.”

Banks had his hands in his back pockets and was staring down at the floor. He stood there for a good minute before he spoke.

“Just don’t make a habit of it. Remember your sorry ass gets busted pulling some stupid shit and my ass is in the frying pan along with yours. OK? Now, I’m going to give you a week or so for some R and R before you take off for the job in Orlando. You’ve done good so far, Derek. I’m planning on flying you in and out on a commercial flight to Orlando. You’ve earned the trust and using our military flights to often for this shit can sometimes stir up some suspicion, usually with officer types. I have to rework the schedule anyway. We’ve had a change in plans. And I have some personal issues to take care of.”

“What’s that?”

“The personal shit is my business. But the subject in the security prison in Minnesota broke out two nights ago. Used a can of hair spray or deodorant to melt a hole through the security glass. We’ve lost total contact on him. Soon as we locate his whereabouts we’ll probably sic you on his butt, but for now plan on Orlando, the pervert in San Diego, and then wrap it up with the hit in Oak Park prison. Then it’ll be Diego Garcia for you if we can’t trace the escapee.”

“Can I leave the base? Maybe go into Vegas?”

Banks shook his head. “Not yet. Sorry. It’s just too hot right now. You and your army buddy are out on the wire right now. Locals cops could have a description, I don’t know. You’ll just have to party down here. It doesn’t seem like that bothers you too much. You and Jasmine seem to hit it off pretty well. I’ll make sure we get some party favors brought over. Coast Guard has had some major Colombian busts recently. Should be some quality smoke and blow over in the party closet.”

Derek sighed. “All right, Jerry. But I could use some time out of here. I think I’ve earned it.”

Banks headed out the door. “I’ll work on it. Oh, by the way,” Banks turned around. “Watch any pillow talk you have with Jasmine. Remember she’s a pro, not your lover. Do not discuss anything remotely related to the missions. She is not involved in our operation in any way, shape, or form. She’s just a hooker. Got that?”

SCREAMING BATFISH BLUES

Banks shut the door. Derek laid back down and stared up the ceiling. Three to go and he'd be out of this. Not totally free, but relatively close. He could be rotting in the joint. He was getting more freedom on the job though. They were starting to trust him. The opportunity would be there for him to spit the bit and run if he so desired. But then what? These government assholes obviously had the resources to track him down and without a doubt they would kill him if that happened. He still had to worry about Dawn and Billy. What the Feds might do to them if he took off. Might be better just to do the three hits and take the Diego Garcia offer and be done with it. Cut his losses.

And there was something else he had to admit.

When he was on the job.

Stalking.

Tracking.

Then the hit.

He loved the feeling it gave him.

The adrenaline rush.

The juice.

Ed "Cool Breeze" Byrd had come to believe that he was a major player in the street scene of downtown Orlando. Although he didn't have a string of whores like some pimps, he did have one, that was a start. Even if she wasn't the smartest bitch to ever walk down the street. He had a good side business going on selling quarters, halves, and ounces of weed to the tourists who were in town to see Walt and the Mouse, and the college kids who were here to get laid and to get fucked up. Ed had even pimped himself out a few times to some white college bitches from some backwater town up north who had wanted to see what a black stud like himself was like in the sack. He hadn't disappointed. He thought anyway.

He had struck gold though with the blackmail scheme. Orlando was not only a tourist town but it was also a navy town. There was a boot camp here and Florida was full of bases. It brought in sailors and officers alike. And white boys are no different than white bitches. Them white boys want to see what that black trim is all about. That's where Cool Breeze came in.

Breeze had his whore, Belinda, dumb as a stump but still a damn fine looking girl, pick up unsuspecting sailors and take them to the Pink Fox motel, which is where Cool Breeze had greased the hand of the manager with a three hundred dollar monthly payment and a weekly blow job from Belinda, to allow Breeze to install a two way mirror in one of the rooms.

Once the john was brought into the room and started getting in on with Belinda, Breeze would either photograph or videotape the session, which he would sell to the underground porno trade. Depending on the john, Breeze would then quite often bust into the room with his .45 drawn and blackmail the john right out of his wallet and any expensive jewelry he might have.

Twice it had gone wrong. One white boy, a weight lifter type, had actually jumped up and charged the Breeze Man. Breeze, while backpedaling in fright, had fired off an accidental round which caught the lifter square in the chest.

The second time the boy had like a religious fit or something when Breeze had busted in and started screaming about what his momma would do if she ever found out he had been tapping a black woman. Breeze had to stick him with his blade to shut him up. He couldn't shoot him. Otto, the motel manager, had almost kicked Breeze out after the time he had shot the cracker with his piece. Breeze also had to rent one of those cleaning vacuums you get at the grocery store to clean the carpet in the room after that one.

He had dumped both bodies in a dumpster. Once behind a Shoneys, because they were racist bastards. And the other one behind a McDonalds, because once he had gone into one to use their can and the manager had forced him to buy something first. Plus, he hated their fucking

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fries. He never knew if the bodies were ever found. Breeze wasn't big on the news or reading papers. But with two other marks he had hit the jackpot.

Breeze was behind the mirror one slow Thursday night when Belinda brought in a john and Breeze almost passed out in excitement when he saw who it was. It was the goddamn XO of the naval training facility, the same prick that had signed off on Cool Breeze's very own bad conduct discharge.

Breeze had enlisted in Detroit and hadn't done well enough on the entrance exam to get a school guaranteed to him. So after boot camp, which took him thirteen weeks, instead of the normal nine, Breeze had to stay in Orlando for on the job training before he was to be assigned a ship. Where most likely his assignments would be the chipping and sanding of paint and the cleaning of shitters. While in this rigorous training phase of his career, Breeze had taken it upon himself to expose his crank to a female recruit and had invited her to feast upon it. He had been arrested, court martialed, and discharged within a week. He remained in Orlando because he enjoyed the climate much more than Detroit. And in Detroit there was about two hundred people who wanted Breeze either dead or very hurt.

The man who was now humping Belinda wildly was the same asshole who had had Breeze drummed out of the service, calling Breeze a "disgusting piece of crap" and a "disgrace to the uniform." Breeze now had in his possession the around the world event of the officer and Belinda, and he received a six hundred dollar a month retainer to make sure that no one ever would see the tape.

His second monthly payment came from another officer. This one was a ensign but a female. She had paid Belinda a hundred dollars to eat her pussy and had gotten so worked up that she had returned the favor. She paid Breeze five hundred a month to keep the video out of sight, but he had also sold the video to his underground buddies. No one was the wiser.

So all in all, the Breeze should have been a happy camper but wasn't. He was in fact, a nervous wreck. He was standing on the street, about a half a block from his digs, a fifth floor walkup, in front of his favorite bar and grill, The Bearded Clam, with Belinda, and Breeze felt like he could shit cream corn at any minute. What had happened last night had fucking freaked him. Scared the absolute shit out of him.

He had been behind the mirror when the door to the adjoining room had opened and Brenda came in with this big, football playing, weightlifting type. He had a military haircut but it almost looked like he was trying to grown one of those mohawk looking things that those Sid Vicious guys use to wear around Detroit. More like that wrestler, the one in The Road Warriors, he used to watch them on Ted Turner's superstation, it looked more like that. But the guy was big, he was almost scary looking, and he had freaky fucking eyes. Breeze decided to let this one pass. He was trouble.

Brenda had given the dude a half and half and after the Warrior had gotten done with the second half, the guy had gotten up, ripped off his rubber and thrown it at Breeze's mirror. It had stuck right in front of Breeze's face, and then the freak had grinned right at the mirror and did one of those finger/gun cocking things. He paid Belinda, had gotten dressed, and then walked out.

Breeze was freaked beyond belief.

Belinda had to have told the guy. How the hell else would he have known? He was standing in front of the Clam, holding onto Belinda by both arms, and screaming so loud at her that her face was speckled with Breeze's spit. He didn't give a shit if anyone heard. HOW THE HELL DID THAT GUY KNOW?

Derek was grinning as he watched the couple through his binoculars. He was sitting on a chair in front of a window in Ed "Cool Breeze" Byrd's apartment. The apartment had a cheap dead bolt purchased at Wal Mart. It had been a cinch to pick. The door was such a piece of shit

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he could have kicked it off the hinges it had wanted to but he was afraid of waking up the neighbors. The apartment was one of those ancient old dumps that had been built in the 1950s, had a grace period of a decade or so, then went straight down the crapper, until a few years ago when it became trendy to fix up old crack and whorehouses and then rent them out at upscale prices. Byrd was the only black that Derek had seen in the building. Probably made the yuppies feel good living among the common folk.

The neighborhood hadn't quite caught up. It was still littered with hookers, tattoo parlors, adult book stores, and pawn shops, but it too was becoming a trendy place to go slumming in for an evening. Looking up and down the street you could see a Mercedes Benz parked in front of a strip club, or a BMW in the parking lot of a skinflick theater.

Derek gazed around the apartment. It was decorated in a 70s kind of decor, like a cross between Shaft and All In the Family. He looked back down onto the street, Breeze was still reaming out his hooker. It didn't take much to shake the place down, it was really just a big studio apartment with a separate bathroom. It even had one of those old Murphy style beds. Breeze had one of those huge, ancient stereo systems set up on a big book case. When Derek opened the cabinet he immediately found what he was looking for. A stack of videotapes and they were even labeled. The still photos that he had taken were wrapped with rubber bands and had the date and time when they were taken. Holy shit, was this guy anal or just plain stupid? Derek slipped them into the gym bag he always carried on his gigs.

This job had really been a vacation, it would have been fun to have brought along Jasmine. The driver assigned to him had picked him up at the airport and had stayed out of Derek's way. He did what Derek told him and didn't seem to want to get involved in any needless conversations, more importantly, he didn't seem too anxious to know what Derek was doing or was involved in.

After Derek located Breeze, who had extreme nocturnal habits due to his occupation as a pimp, Derek spent his days on the beach and nights tailing Breeze.

The man disgusted Derek. He was a bottom feeder of the worst sort. The third night he had done something really stupid. He had snorted up a few lines of Peruvian flake and had picked up Breeze's whore, took her back to the room and laid the coals to her, all the while hoping Breeze would jump him so that he could beat him to death with his bare hands. The chick was hot but that had been really fucking dumb. Gotta be more professional.

Derek fanned through some still photos in the gym bag. There he was getting reamed, steamed, and dry cleaned in bright Kodak color. He stuck the packet in his pocket and continued searching the apartment. In a wooden cigar box on top of the television was an ounce of some pot that smelled like it came right out of the personal stash of the King of Thailand. That also went into his pocket, but he took the single joint that was in the box and fired it up as he continued his search.

He wandered into the bathroom as he puffed away. Boy, was this some sweet tasting bud. The buzz was coming on fast and strong. Derek grabbed the top of the toilet tank and lifted it up. Bingo, floating inside the tank was a shitpot of cash inside a couple of zip lock bags. He pulled the cash out of the bags, in typical Byrd style it was broken up in twenties, fifties, and hundreds. The hundreds he popped into his pocket and the rest went into the gym bag. Derek finished the joint and dropped it sizzling into the bowl. A quick check of the window showed Mr. Breeze still in front of the bar. Derek gave a thought about burning another doobie while he waited for the pimp to come home but decided against it, remembering his boneheaded move from the night before. He opened up a kitchen closet door and saw a long object wrapped in a cloth stuck behind some brooms and mops.

Son of a bitch. It was the most awesome rifle Derek had ever seen. The fucking thing *looked* deadly. Derek pulled back the bolt. It was loaded. Holy shit! This was an AK-47, a

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Russian made assault rifle. Where had a total shitbag like Cool Breeze Byrd gotten his hands on a piece like this?

The “shitbag” had stolen it out of the Jeep of a retired Green Beret, drunk on his ass, while he had been screwing Belinda. Breeze had shelled out a couple of hundred bucks to a gunsmith to strip the weapon down completely and give it a total overhaul and cleaning. The weapon looked like it had just rolled off the factory floor in Stalingrad.

Derek started to giggle. Wouldn't it be a kick in the ass to pop Cool Breeze at long range with his own weapon? Right in downtown Orlando? He slid the chair back over in front of the window and sighted the rifle in on Cool Breeze's head. He was still bitching and raising hell with Belinda. The neon lights of the bar lit up the couple like it was daylight.

Here I am in the book depository, thought Derek. Dallas. Here comes Kennedy. I'm Oswald. Lee mother Harvey fucking Oswald.

Just playing around here, he said to himself. It would be totally crazy to waste him from here. Just goofing around. Stick to the plan. I'll take him out when gets back to the apartment.

“Bitch, you had to have known. That cracker motherfucker threw his scumbag right against my mirror after he be done fucking you. Then he smiled right at me. How the fuck else would have known less you told him, bitch? Huh?”

“Breeze, why would I tell him, huh? He just be another trick. That's all. He was just crazy. Just acting crazy. All coked up and acting up. He didn't know you was there. Dude was probably on them steroids or something. He scared me.” Belinda was close to tears.

“Maybe he a fucking cop, bitch. You ever think of that? Maybe you want to get out the business and ready to punk out the Breeze.” He slapped Belinda across mouth. Hard.

A man walking past the two stopped. “Hey! Knock that shit off.” He took a step towards Cool Breeze.

Byrd reached into his jacket and snapped out his switchblade. “You want to be a man, asshole? Get in my affairs?” The man put his hands up in the air and backed down the street.

“That's what I fucking thought,” Breeze screamed down the street. He turned back to Belinda who was wiping the blood from her mouth with a handkerchief.

“I'm going to the crib and to get me a beer and something to smoke. Clean your ass up and get to work.” Breeze began his practiced pimp roll down the sidewalk. He stopped suddenly as he glanced up at his apartment window which was easily visible from the street.

“What the in the fu...” The top of Cool Breeze's head vaporized in a bloody mary mist. He fell straight back against a parking meter and sat there like he had just had one too many to drink.

Belinda put both hands to her mouth and screamed and screamed and screamed until she collapsed to her hands and knees and vomited her Popeye's Fried Chicken onto the sidewalk.

Derek jumped back from the window. “Yes,” he yelled, “what a shot, what a fucking shot!” Derek threw the rifle onto the couch, grabbed his bag, and busted ass out the door. He went down the stairs five at a time and came out in the back alley, where his trusted driver sat waiting.

BATFISH

THE ADMIRAL'S HOUSE

T*his colorful dragon, like the kind you see in those parades in Chinatown, was slowly moving in circles over my bunk. It circled and circled, until it was going so fast that it was just a blur. All of a sudden it straightened out and shot right through the wall, disappearing with a "plop." Orange barrel acid will make you see some really weird shit.*

A phone was ringing off in the distant and I was wishing that someone would answer the goddamn thing. It must have rang fifty times before I heard Zak answer it. I wonder when he got back? Poor old Captain Clint. At least he died in the saddle. Man, does Zak ever sound pissed! Wonder what the hell is going on?

"You know motherfucker, the sun doesn't rise and set in your asshole. I don't know how we wound being a fucking pimp for you and that old son of a bitch anyway." There was a pause. Quiet. I must have been dreaming. "Dead! How could she be dead? He couldn't stomp a mouse to death. Jesus Christ! You fucked up big this time! All right goddamn it! We'll be there in twenty minutes."

I was wide awake now. I had been out partying with Tom and his girlfriend. She was this hot looking nurse that he had recently met and it had been love at first sight. They had moved into this little cottage half way up in the mountains and had started up their own little dope plantation.

She was also a stone cold acid freak and I had spent the day up there with them. Eating acid, drinking beer, and catching rays. Just like the fun old days before that NIS prick had ruined everything. The highlight of the day was when she stripped off her bikini and and remained in that fine state for the next five hours.

The first time I had visited them was also the first time I snorted MDA, a very powerful hallucinogenic. They had a outlandish looking orange shag rug in their living room and the MDA gave you the effect of wading through it like it was two feet tall. I had gone to use the bathroom and had wandered into the spare bedroom by mistake and was immediately lost. The room couldn't have been more than twelve by twelve. I had a slight panic attack and crawled out the window and wound up taking my leak out in the rain forest, while I was hallucinating that a large tiger was crouched down watching me

The night of the acid trip I had stumbled back into the barracks and had been laying on my bunk, seeing all this weird shit, and giggling up a storm. I must have finally fallen asleep.

Zak was standing over my bed, staring down at me. "Who's dead?" I asked. Hoping that I was still dreaming.

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“Rose. Rose is dead. Something hinky happened with the admiral. Get dressed. We gotta get up there.”

I don't know if I was still tripping or if Zak was driving that fast, but I don't think I've ever been in a car that was going that fast. He was fucking flying. I didn't even remember getting into the car.

Rose had been very receptive when I approached her about the admiral's offer and had been up to his house several times. Mrs. Admiral was very involved in the community and other military wife functions and the admiral had needed a way to spend the lonely nights when she was gone. Expensive wines, fine cigars, and high dollar hookers. He paid Rose five hundred dollars a visit. She had laughed when she was telling me about it. Said he could hardly get it up and wanted her to call him “Daddy” and had her wear this old crackerjack uniform. What he really wanted was to do the old backdoor romp with her, but that was the one act she wouldn't perform. Saving that for the man she would marry. She always was a romantic!

Zak had returned from his emergency leave a couple of weeks ago and just didn't seem to be himself anymore. The funeral had not gone well. Yolanda had been dolled up for the wake like she was still working tricks at the whorehouses of the Philippines.

They were the only two sober people at the event. Besides the attending priest (maybe) and Captain Clint, who had been dead for several days, but was still probably hammered. About six of his old shipmates had shown up and they were all stoned to the gills.

To top it all off, the Captain had left his entire inheritance to Yolanda and then Zak went and picked up a case of the clap. Both on the same day.

Yolanda and Zak had gone to the attorney for the reading of the will and when Zak found out that he wasn't going to get diddly shit, he went ballistic. He had stormed out of the attorney's office and drove straight to a bar in National City and hammered down six shots of tequila with beer chasers. He alternated shots of the the booze with one hit toots of cocaine out of one of those little silver bullet like contraptions that measures out one nostril hits.

After he was good and fucked up, he went next door to a peep show and immediately fell in love with his dancer. After an exchange of cash, she flicked a switch so that the door in her booth would stay up, backed her trim up to the glory hole, and Zak “made love” to her in this fashion.

The next morning he had a number nine hangover that could be cured with aspirin and a bit of the hair of the dog. He also had a radioactive dose of gonorrhea that couldn't be cured with all the penicillin in the dispensary and a red hot wire shoved up his tool.

“What the hell did Leon say? How could she be dead? I didn't know she was going up there again. How did he find out? Did the admiral call him?” I was babbling like a fool.

Zak stared ahead at the road. “Leon said the old fucker called him. He was bawling and sounded like he was bombed out of his socks. Kept saying she was dead, over and over, and that he needed help. Leon was calling from the admiral's house.”

We had to make one stop before we got there so I could puke.

Leon answered the door. He looked liked he had been shot at and missed, shit on and hit. He pointed to the admirals study.

I was sober the instant I walked through the study door.

The place looked like Mardi Gras had been held there. Booze bottles were everywhere and there was a picture of the admiral and the current Pope laying on a coffee table, with what looked like about an ounce of coke on it. They had been cutting lines with a bayonet. Next to the picture lay a chrome Colt .45 semi automatic.

Pasty faced and shaking like a leaf, the admiral was leaning against his desk wearing only his boxer shorts. His stubby, pathetic, pink dick was sticking out of the fly. And he was staring down to the floor at Rose, who looked like the victim of a hit and run auto accident.

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Beside her head was a bloody crystal ashtray. It looked like it weighed five pounds. I could see some of her teeth in the shag rug.

If I hadn't seen her dance topless at several parties I would never have even known it was her. She had a tiny rosebud tattooed on her left tit. Her face looked like it had been beaten with a crowbar.

I looked at the Admiral. "What the fuck happened?"

He look at me through bleary red eyes and stifled an acidic belch. "Fucking bitch gets all coked up and starts giving me a ration of shit about not letting me fuck her in the ass. I'm paying her, she has no say in it. I'm an admiral, she's enlisted. Tells me if I want it that way to go on down to one of the ships and get a boy. She wouldn't shut up. She obviously didn't know who she was fucking with."

He stopped talking and just stood there staring at her. Specks of vomit and blood were splattered in the gray hair on his scrawny chest.

"And by the way, sailor. Address me as sir or admiral when you speak to me."

"I think you've kind of lost that right, numb nuts." I replied.

Zak was down on his knees cradling Rose's head in his arms. He had meant to check her vitals but there was no way she could be alive. Looking up at Leon with tears in his eyes he said "Get this old drunk bastard cleaned up and get him to bed."

"Who you calling a bastard?" the admiral screamed.

Before Leon and I could move, Zak jumped up and grabbed the admiral by the throat, pinning him to the desk.

"After tonight it's over. We clean up your shit tonight and I better never even see your ugly fucking face again. You understand me shitbird?" Zak began to straighten up then suddenly threw the admiral's head back on to the desk. Hard. Sounded like a cantaloupe thrown out of a window.

Zak turned and faced Leon. "That means you too, geisha boy. After tonight we're even. You even think about snitching us off to the Feds, I'm going to blow your fucking brains out."

Leon just nodded and led the admiral, who was now bleeding rather profusely from a scalp wound, to the bathroom.

I went to the kitchen and found a roll of black 50 gallon trash bags and a roll of duct tape in the utility closet. When I came back into the study, Zak was just beginning to scoop the coke back in its baggy when I noticed something. On a tripod was a 35 millimeter camera. The old sex maniac must have been taking pictures of him and Rose in action or non action as the case maybe. Over twenty shots had been taken. I quickly told Zak to stop cleaning and placed the admiral's desk nameplate next to the coke and shot up the remainder of the roll.

I went through the desk drawers and found another roll of 24 shots. We placed the nameplate next to Rose's body and shot the roll up, making sure that a variety of the photos would include the overall view of the study. I pocketed the rolls and returned the camera to its original place.

We then slid Roses body into two of the garbage bags along with her clothes and purse. I had removed her identification from the purse. We then secured the bags tightly with the duct tape and moved the body into the trunk of her car.

On a sudden impulse, just before I had started to wrap up the plastic covered body with tape, I had taken a silver framed snapshot of the Admiral and his wife that was sitting on his desk and put it in the garage bags with Rose. Zak found several shovels in the backyard tool shed and put those next to the body in the trunk.

"We'll take her out to the north shore and bury her. Then we'll leave her car down in a parking lot at one of the beaches. They'll think she drowned. Hopefully." Zak said as I followed him back into the house.

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Leon was standing over the admiral who was already snoring loudly. "I gave him a 'lude, he passed right out."

Zak walked over to Leon and jammed his finger into his chest. "It's over fucker. Remember that. You and your little dog fucking friend even think about coming around. You're fucking dead meat. You don't believe it, just try me."

Leon didn't say a word. He looked like a battle fatigue victim.

Her final resting patch was in a banana patch at the end of an old service road down by the pineapple farms. The black Triumph Spitfire that she loved so much we had left in the parking lot of one of the north shore beaches. Bad rip tides there. Drowning there would not be out of the question.

Atlanta Rhythm Section's Imaginary Lover was playing on the car radio. Every time I hear that song I remember that night and what I said to Zak. We hadn't spoken a thing to each other since we left Rose's car at the beach. Just driving in silence. Alone with horrible thoughts.

"I'm taking off. Soon as we get back to the barracks. I'm gonna pack some shit, grab my money stash and take off. Catch the first flight out of here. There is no way that Leon is going to stay quiet about this, man. We're gonna fall for it. You gotta come with me. There's no other way."

Zak had the Colt out and was looking at it. "No. I'm not going to run. They want me, they can come get me. I'll fill those motherfuckers full of holes."

"Zak, I think you have truly lost your mind." I laughed maniacally.

He giggled along with me. "Maybe. But there comes a time in life when you have to make a final stand. This might be it for me."

"There is absolutely no fucking way this is going to come out good. You and me are gonna do that old bastards time. While he's schmoozing with the Chief of Naval Operations at a cocktail party, we're gonna be busting rocks and getting fucked in the ass."

I didn't waste any time. I got my backpack and threw in some clothes, cash, files, and the rolls of film along with Rose's identification. Zak dropped me off at the airport.

"Please Zak. Come with me. Just to see if it blows over. If it does we can come back. Big fucking deal we're AWOL for a couple weeks. Better than prison. Do you think you could handle Portsmouth?"

He grinned at me. "Take care, Bro. I'll see you in hell." And with those poetic words he dropped the clutch and left about twenty feet of rubber on the asphalt.

JUICE

VEGAS

The tires of the jet hitting the tarmac at Las Vegas airport woke Derek from his slumber. After Orlando had come the retired chief in San Diego with the unhealthy interest in children. It had been the easiest one yet and also the most pathetic. The man hadn't given an ounce of effort to save his own life. Tough shit, thought Derek. One more to go and he'd be a semi free man. Banks had been unable to locate the escapee from the security hospital so it looked like the prison hit would be the last one for him. If Banks was a man of his word, that is. He followed the tourists and gamblers departing from the plane down the ramp. He was surprised to see Jasmine, and not Banks, waiting for him as he came out into the lobby.

She looked fantastic in a black leather mini skirt and a matching tube top. She was wearing her black spike heels. Her blond hair was loose and tumbling down across her tanned shoulders and breasts. All the men seemed to be leering at her.

"There's my cowboy." She wrapped her arms around Derek and jammed her tongue into his mouth. Derek was wearing tight shorts and was worried for a nano second that the other passengers may see his instant woody.

"What are you doing here? Where's Banks?" Derek had never seen Jasmine outside of the base compound.

"Well, that's one hell of a way to say hi. Are you telling me you'd rather see Banks standing here dressed up like this than me?" She gave her knockout smile. Her teeth had to be capped. They were so white and perfect. This broad could be on a toothpaste or a beer commercial, take your pick. She was red hot.

"Shit, no. It's just I wasn't expecting to see you. Usually it's Banks and he's all freaked out about something," he slipped his hand around her waist, "it's just a nice surprise, that's all."

They started through the terminal. "Banks got a call two nights ago. His father had been real sick recently and the call was from his sister who had been taking care of him. He had lapsed into a coma and died. Had some kind of bone cancer. Banks left right away. He told me to pick you up and give you a couple of nights on the town. He said you deserved time off and that he had been riding you pretty hard."

"So that's why he's been so moody lately," said Derek.

"You got it. I've know him for almost four years and I've never seen him as low as he's been recently. He didn't want to talk about it. That guy's a heart attack waiting to happen. Keeps everything bottled up."

Derek reached down and picked up his bag up off of the carousel. "So where to?"

Jasmine hooked her arm through his. "I've got us reservations at Caesar's Palace."

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For three days and three nights, Derek and Jasmine were as close to being a married couple as anyone could be. They spent their days by pool. Nights at the casinos and shows. And the late nights screwing like two teenagers. Derek had never seen such passion in her. It was almost like he wasn't a john and she wasn't a wh... Well, he didn't even want to think about it. He knew what the situation was. It was hard though not to get his feelings involved.

The afternoon of their last day at the hotel, Derek was laying on the bed watching a ball game and Jasmine had gone out to do some shopping. When she came back to the room she dropped a envelope on his chest.

"What's this?"

"A little surprise."

Derek opened the little envelope. Inside were two tickets to the Roberto Duran fight that was being held that night in the sports pavilion of the hotel. It had been sold out for weeks.

"Jesus Christ, Jasmine. Where did you get these? I was so pissed when I went to the box office and saw they were sold out? Man, I love Duran." He grabbed her and pulled her down onto the bed.

"I know you do. So I went to a scalper that I do business with every once in a while. He still had a couple."

Derek felt something stir in him. Jealousy? "You didn't have to? I mean. Well, you know."

"Derek," she laughed, "I think you're jealous. I like that. But no, I didn't screw him. He was more than happy to take cash instead of trade. I think he might like guys."

Derek jumped off the bed. "Well, goddamn woman, let me get dressed and take you to dinner so we can get our asses down to the fights." Jasmine couldn't believe it. This big hulking man was as excited as a little kid.

They burned two joints of the weed that Derek had lifted from the pimp in Orlando as they got ready. That primed them for the steak and lobster dinners they both ordered and then washed down with three bottles of Dom Perignon. On the way to the fight, Jasmine broke out the Peruvian flake and they snorted the long lines of the devil's dandruff on her compact mirror.

At the fight they pounded down tall cups of draft beer, wolfed down hot dogs, and screamed and yelled as a still not over the hill Duran had pounded his midwestern journeyman opponent around the ring. He couldn't score a knockout but won a lopsided decision. When they walked out of the arena and stopped at a booth to buy a Duran T-shirt, it gave Derek great pleasure to see all the other men standing around and ogling Jasmine.

They went back to the room and Derek ordered up another bottle of champagne and rolled up a joint as Jasmine changed for bed. She came out of the bathroom in a see through black teddy, garter belt with black nylons, and matching crotch less panties. Derek felt his jaw drop open

"Holy Christ, Jasmine, you're incredible."

She sat down next to him and took the joint out of his hand. She took a long toke.

"I wanted tonight to be special."

They didn't fuck. They made love. It was the first time Derek had ever noticed the difference. It went on for seemingly hours. To Derek it almost seemed like a beautiful hallucination. Exhausted they dropped off to sleep in each others arms.

It was Jasmine on the phone that woke him. His eyes slowly opened to take a glance at the clock. The red digits red 3:08. Jasmine's voice had slipped into an Arkansas drawl.

"Mother.... Mother Kirkland, please. I know it's late but I need to talk to him. Please. I know it's not the right time but I really need to talk to him."

Jasmine was crying. Her heard her put the phone down and snort another line. She picked up the phone and started in again.

SCREAMING BATFISH BLUES

“Mother Kirkland, I need talk to my baby, please, just for a second, I need to hear his voice, just for a minute, please, just a minute.”

Kirkland. The name struck hard in Derek’s alcohol and coke soaked brain. Where had he heard that name before? Kirkland.

“You wicked old bitch. It’s just like you to throw that in my face. Like it was all my fault. What about your precious little baby? He’s the one that got us into this shit. What? Please don’t. Mother Kirkland! Mother Kirkland! Shit!” Jasmine slammed the phone down.

Derek heard another line being snorted up and then the sound of champagne being poured. Jasmine got up and staggered into the bathroom. Through the closed door her could hear her throwing up and crying.

Kirkland. Mark Kirkland? He was an inmate at Leavenworth just down the cell block from Derek. That was the only Kirkland that Derek could remember. He was what other inmates and staff called a “bug.” An inmate who had lost or was starting to lose his mind. Kirkland would smear his shit on the walls, get naked and jack off, and on more than one occasion had mixed up a “cocktail”, a mixture of urine and feces, which he would then throw at a guard. This would bring a response from the cell extraction team and a visit to the hole for Kirkland, along with an asskicking.

The first night he had spent with Jasmine came back to mind. His first night out of the joint and at the compound. Guinness and cocaine. A beautiful hooker at his beck and call. He was only human. He had partied down hard and had torn Jasmine up. They had been laying, there had been a little pillow talk. But what was it she had said? Do you remember an inmate named...? That’s what she had said! But Kirkland? Did she say Kirkland? Mark Kirkland? He had had a blackout that night, that was for damn sure, but some of it was coming back.

Damn, he had cottonmouth! Derek climbed out of the bed and padded over to the mini fridge and pulled out a bottle of mineral water, slamming it down in four big swallows. He let out an enormous belch as he crawled back into bed.

Jasmine came out of the bathroom. She had gotten out of her porn star pajamas and had put on one of the hotel bathrobes. She had a wet wash rag and was wiping it over her face. It was the worst shape Derek had ever seen her in.

She gave him a grim smile. “God, you can be such a pig sometimes. I think that’s one thing I won’t miss about you.”

Derek was laid out on his back with two pillows under his head. He didn’t answer her.

Jasmine turned her face away and stared at the muted television. The pay per view porn flicks had been running during their lovemaking sessions, but now an old W. C. Fields movie was on. The drunk old bastard was reeling around on the screen.

She sighed. “How much did you hear?”

“I don’t know, probably most of it.”

She turned to look at him. “Did you know who I was talking about?”

“Kirkland? The only Kirkland I’ve ever known was locked up in the joint with me. Mark Kirkland. Is that who you were asking me about that first night?”

Jasmine nodded and turned away again. “He’s my husband,” she whispered.

“Your husband? What the hell are you talking about?”

She sat at the foot of the bed and rambled on in a monotone voice. “Mark was a naval officer and we were stationed up in Washington state. He had a six month tour of duty over in Bangkok. We were both into the party life and Mark used to send me home pot every once in a while. Just for partying, I never sold anything. Then he met this connection who could get this incredible heroin at a dirt cheap price. Before you knew it, he was sending me home pounds and even kilos in the mail. I turned it over to a dealer friend of ours in Seattle and we were making a fucking killing. Went on for almost four months, then just before Marks rotation was about over

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it all fell apart. NIS busted us and Banks stepped in to save the day. He offered Mark the same kind of deal you got, only Mark didn't have the guts for it. He did one mission and something went wrong. Banks had him shipped first to Portsmouth and then when that shut down, he went to Leavenworth."

She turned around and glared at Derek. "Then Banks turned me out. First it was just for you guys to use me as a sex toy. Then he got greedy and started me working the hotels and casinos."

Derek sat up. "Why? What's he holding over you?"

"He told me that if I didn't, he'd have Mark killed in prison. But that first he'd make sure that he was good and gang raped. Banks is a sick, twisted son of a bitch."

"Shit, Jasmine. I thought that you chose to become a pro," said Derek lamely.

"Jesus Christ, Derek. Don't be stupid. No woman chooses to be a fucking hooker. It's not a career choice or something you go to college for. Something horrible happens in your life and it just happens. You wouldn't believe some of the shit I've been forced to do." Jasmine suddenly doubled over like she was stricken with stomach cramps as she grabbed at her hair and began to rock back and forth.

Derek got out of bed and slipped on his pants. He went over and sat down by Jasmine and wrapped his arms around her.

"God, I'm sorry, babe. I didn't know. I just didn't know."

"They'll take my baby away from me, Derek. I have to keep doing this or they'll take away Eric."

"You have a son?"

Jasmine sat up and wiped her nose with the back of her hand. "He's with Marks mother in Little Rock. Banks told me that he'll take him away and put him in a group home if I ever think about leaving or telling any of you what's really going on. Mother Kirkland blames me for all of this. It's up to her if I can even talk to Eric on the phone."

Derek felt a chill like a frozen snake had crawled up his ass and was burrowing up his spine. "What do you mean, any of us?"

She sat up and stared at Derek. "Sweetie, I don't know how many of you Banks has had me keep happy."

She stood and walked over to the window as she wrapped her arms around herself as if she was cold. "Sooner or later, it happens."

"What happens," Derek squeaked out.

"They never come back."

Derek shot to his feet. "I knew that motherfucker would sell me out," he screamed. He ran over and began to stuff his clothes into his bag. He was panicking big time. "I'll tell you one goddamn thing. That bastard will have to hunt me down and put a bullet in my head. I'm sure as shit not going to stick around and just let it happen."

Jasmine ran over and grabbed Derek by the arm. "Derek, you can't leave. Banks will know that I told you. He'll kill Mark and take Eric away. Please don't do this to me."

"Mark is gone, Jasmine. Not physically, but in his mind. The last time I saw the guy he was smearing shit all over the walls. If he ever gets out, you won't know who he is."

"That may be true, Derek, but they're all I have. Him and Eric are all I have. Please, please don't take this away from me. Banks is an animal, he'll do it."

Derek threw down his bag. "And what should I do, Jasmine? Stay here and let myself get whacked? Is that what you want? Is this all been a charade for you? You and me. I'm not gonna bullshit you. The longer I'm with you, the more I can't get you out of my mind. The last three days with you have been about the best of my life. And I thought you might feel the same," he kicked the bag across the room, "what a dumb ass I've been."

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He felt her hands on his shoulders. “With the others it never meant anything. It’s all always been different with you. You know that.”

He turned around and grabbed her by the shoulders. “Then let’s take off. You and me. If Banks come after us, fuck it, I’ll take him out. I’ve got cash. We can leave the country.”

Tears were streaming down Jasmine’s face. “I can’t Derek. I just can’t. I can’t lose my baby.” She hugged him. “But if I could leave, I would want it to be with you,” she whispered in his ear.

Derek felt so tired he thought he could collapse. “OK, Jasmine, OK. I’ll stay until I get briefed for the next mission and then make my break.” He lifted her chin up so she was looking at him. “Can I trust you? Or is everything I tell you going straight back to Banks?”

She nodded “You know you can trust me. Always.”

“So what’s your real name then? Not too many girls from Arkansas are named Jasmine.”

“Rachel. My real name is Rachel. Rachel Perignon Kirkland.”

Derek walked over and scooped up a handful of slot machine change. “OK, then, Rachel Brown Kirkland. I have to go down to the lobby to use a pay phone.”

“I’ll see you when you get back,” she paused, “Jake Morrow.”

BATFISH

LOS ANGELES

I paid cash for my ticket and caught the first flight out to San Diego. Shitting nickels and dimes when I got off the plane because I was sure that the cops would be waiting for me at the gate. But not a soul.

Since car rental companies don't like their autos driven into Mexico, I didn't tell them that I was headed there. I jumped into my little Toyota and headed for Ensenada, where I would spend the next two weeks just laying low and on the beach

Every morning I would go to a restaurant that catered to expatriates and would pore over the west coast newspapers searching for anything out of the ordinary. But there was nothing.

Finally, on the fifteenth day I was there I got the balls up to call Zak. The phone rang a couple of times but it sounded funny and then it made a noise like it was being transferred. Mexican phones are notoriously famous for being fucked up so I didn't give it a second thought until the phone picked up. Whoever picked it up didn't say anything. Then I heard a dog barking. Slamming down the phone I took off for my room, packed my bag, and headed back up the coast to San Diego.

How long does it take to trace a phone call? I had no idea.

Stopping in Tijuana I went into a cantina and bought a beer and got a shitpot of change and went to the back to place another call. This time to Tom's little love shack up in the mountains.

When Tom answered the phone and heard it was me he started to immediately freak out. "Zak's dead, man. They found him hanging naked in his locker. He had speaker wire around his neck. There was a bunch of gay fuck books laying at his feet. They're saying he was doing some sort of weird sex thing and it went wrong. And they found a whole bunch of drugs in the room. Ounces of heroin and cocaine in both of your lockers. Both the fucking cops and NIS. are after you, man. Rose has disappeared and they're saying that you had something to do with it. Where the fuck are you? What the hell is going on?" By now Tom was hysterical and was practically screaming.

Kill the guy. Hang him up so that it looks like it was sex related. Plant drugs on the scene. All designed to cause embarrassment to the victim's family so they don't cause a stink. The mark of the military assassin.

Also way out of Leon's league. He couldn't pour piss out of a boot if the instructions were on the heel. Someone else was involved in this one.

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I laid my head against the glass of the phone booth. "Don't believe a word they say, Tom. Maybe I'll see you some day and I'll be able to tell you the whole story. Take care of that woman of yours. And Tom? Stay away from all of this."

I laid the receiver down in its cradle gently and walked back to the bar. Ten Carta Blancas later I was ready to move on.

As I walked back to my car I was stopped by a young boy who asked if I wanted my picture taken and super imposed on to a painting of The Last Supper. It was really quite a work of art. Maybe I should send it to my parents for Christmas. I was sitting next to Christ himself, with my arm around him, while I was drinking a can of Budweiser.

While I was waiting on my portrait the kids sister kept hitting on me while she supplied me with more cervaze She was very pretty in the face but enormous in the body. There was a cathouse on the floor above the studio and she was on her break. Realizing that I was too bombed to attempt the drive to San Diego, I took her up on the offer and spent the night there. Zak had been right. It was just like a warm pile of bread dough.

The next morning I threw my portrait of me and old J. C. in the back seat and headed up the coast.

For close to two years I lived in Los Angeles on the top floor of this old warehouse. Just a mattress on the floor. The guy who I worked for owned it. It sat behind this huge night club called "The Slippery Tit" which he also owned.

Gus was the name of my boss and he was quite the entrepreneur. Beside the bar, he ran a pro wrestling and roller derby school, and shot low budget porno movies in the warehouse. He also was a part owner of several porno and peep show shops in the county. I was a bouncer/bar tender at the bar, assistant wrestling coach (I let guys pick me and body slam me or hit me in the head with a folding chair), and light and camera man for the porno movies. On occasion, several other bouncers and myself earned extra dough by strong arming people who owed Gus money.

The Black Dahlia case seemed to have had a lasting impression on my employer. Do you remember that murder? Way back in the late 40s the cops found this chick cut in half on a vacant lot. No blood or anything. Real fucking creepy. Lots of movies and books were done about it.

That shit happens practically on a weekly basis in Los Angeles, so I have no idea why so many people are obsessed over a murder that happened in the 1940's. But that's L. A.

Anyway, Gus had his office just decorated from floor to ceiling with photos of this broad, bookcases full of books about her, and he even owned a couple of vintage porno movies that she had starred in. Mostly lesbian crap. I guess her plumbing wouldn't accept the male unit because of some birth defect. Half of Gus's films that he made always had an "actress" dressed up just like Elizabeth Short. That was the dead broad's name.

Thing about it is, I have a hunch that Gus was involved in it. When I was in L.A., Gus must have been in his mid 70s, the murder was in the late 40's. He would have been about the right age. He had a real weird buddy, Wally, that was into this chick, too. Those two were always talking about her and trading shit about the case. Some local news reporter thought that Wally had been the one who did it and Wally loved that. I heard the old loon died in a flophouse fire not too long ago. Drunk and smoking in bed.

I had got the job after a week or so of bumming around L. A. After I had talked to Tom, I drove to the airport in San Diego and caught a flight there. I looked up Regina, the dental tech whose husband went bugshit and shot up their house. She was in the phone book and I told her that I had something that might be of interest to her. She picked me up at the motel I was staying at in Venice Beach and was shocked to say the least when I gave her the file which more than highlighted her affair with the sleazy commander. Her father who was an labor attorney, had

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some rather interesting connections on the east coast, some guys with names like Guido and Sal, and she was planning on forwarding the information to them.

She was making ends meet by working for a dentist during the day and exotic dancing at night. She had also given up men and was living with a female biker who looked like Sonny Liston, who made me feel very unwelcome. Strippers tend to make the sex industry circuit in L. A. and she turned me on to working with Gus. Said that for being a complete slime ball he wasn't bad to work for. That was a good enough reference for me.

I bought a book on how to change your identity out of this catalog from this weird company up in Washington state. It had all sorts of crazy books in it like "How To Make Meth Amphetamine For Fun And Profit" and "How To Kill People And Then Fake Your Own Death." Sounds goofy but it sure helped out in my situation. I wound up with a California drivers license, birth certificate, Social Security card, and video rental card. I mailed my real identification to my sister along with the Morrison/Elvis files and film rolls from the admiral's house.

Appearance wise, I just shaved my head, got my ear pierced and wore a big hoop ear ring, and grew a goatee. I had access to a gym since I worked and lived in a wrestling school, so I continued to pump iron and do steroids. Within the year I had put on roughly forty pounds of muscle. I didn't bear the slightest resemblance to the boney little fucker who had left Albert Lea, Minnesota to join the navy so (what seemed like) many years ago.

I still went to a local newsstand every couple of days to buy a Honolulu newspaper to check out if anything had ever been reported but never saw diddly shit. I even bought a couple issues of the navy propaganda rag Navy Times, but likewise, not a thing.

Gus's porno business didn't attract what you would call real quality adult film stars. He dealt mainly with heroin addicts who needed some fix money, midwest runaways, a midget husband and wife team (yes, I have seen midgets in action, Artimus, and they do it just like anyone else), couple of the roller derby clique, and every great once in a while an old burned out formerly famous "star" would stop in to make a quick buck. That's where my path would cross with Jon.

Jon had once been a hugely successful porn star. He had zero looks, a scrawny drugged out looking frame, and couldn't act even by adult movies standards. But he had an enormous dick. The guy had made thousands of short adult "loops" but had pissed it all away on booze and crack cocaine. Rumor had it (Jon liked to keep this one spreading) that a very famous singer and actress had once paid Jon big bucks to snort a line of coke off his giant root.

He was no longer welcome on any of the mainstream adult sets due to his erratic behavior, inability to get hard on demand, and known ties to the flourishing crack industry. But on occasion for pin money he would make a gay flick or play the heavy in a hard core S & M movie.

Gus signed him on to mainly make appearances at his club, autograph video boxes at dirty book stores, and attempt to make a movie with him once in a while if he could get it halfway up. I don't know how many nights we all stood around setting up the lights and cameras while Jon would be laying on a bed on the set with two young ladies straight off the farm in Wisconsin, who would be giving it the old college try and attempt to get Jon's massive stinger to get up and go. Nine out ten times, Gus would freak out and start ranting and raving about all the money that was being wasted on this quality feature and it inevitably would turn into basically a lesbian shot with Jon just kind of rolling around in the middle and getting in the way.

Once Gus tried to make a porno related Black Dahlia murder film with Jon in the role of the murderer. Jon had been out partying the night before and was horribly hungover. He couldn't get it up as usual, but what really pissed Gus off was the grand finale. Since we didn't have any real bodies to cut up like the real murderer had, we had to settle for a store mannequin.

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It took every bit of strength that Jon had to saw half way through the plastic and then he ruined the whole shot by barfing all over the dummy.

But people recognized him like he was an academy award winner. He came along with us one night to the fights at the Olympic Auditorium, which is a sleazier joint than some of the places Jon made his films in, and we practically had to fend people off of the guy. Both men and women were all over him. Wanting his autograph and maybe a shot at his massive johnson.

My own sister wasn't even immune to his legendary status. On one of my rare phone calls to Minnesota I had mentioned Jon. I had to send an autographed photo of the bastard in the mail to her within two days after telling her I knew him.

He wasn't all bad though. When one of the bouncers got married, Jon managed to recruit some of the old female stars from his heyday to the bachelor party. It was held at an incredibly filthy adult motel on Sunset Strip. Jumping Jesus, what a night! A punch was made in a fifty gallon garbage can (clean) with cold duck champagne, beer, and a hundred hits of quality speed. The night clerk came down to complain about the noise at four in the morning and wound up screwing the porn star he had once jerked off to as a teenager. It was great fun.

I was working the door one night at the club when Jon came out to catch some fresh air. Gus had booked a private ladies stag party and Jon was the main attraction. He had lost a lot of weight from all the crack and he looked bizarre as well as idiotic up on the stage. Shaking his money maker in this g-string that didn't come close to covering up his once great python of love.

Gus had been concerned that he wouldn't show up. Jon had been acting real nervous lately and a week or so ago had shown up with a black eye and a nasty looking gash on his chin.

"Got a proposition for you, my man." Jon always tried to talk like a high rolling pimp. Kind of hissing out the words.

"And what would that be Jon?" Looking out of the corner of my eye at the Los Angeles Laker shorts that he was wearing. No shirt or shoes. Just these shorts that must have been two sizes too big for him. He looked like Bill Walton with an eating disorder.

"I got these assholes up in the hills that owe me some serious jack for some rock that I fronted them. Not a thing really. A couple of little dipshits. Shouldn't be problem for a man of your stature." As he grinned at me I cringed. His teeth looked like little baked beans and the breath coming out of his maw wasn't much better than the sight of those teeth.

"If it's not a thing why do I need to be there?" Sarcasm all over that one.

He didn't come close to noticing. "Pure precautionary measures, bro. Tell you what. I'll double your fee that Gus gives you."

I sure wasn't making anything that night on tips with this private stag going on. How hard could it be roughing up a couple of crack heads?

"Oh what the fuck. When do you want to do it?"

"Tonight. Soon as I get done making these babes cream in their panties." The dumb shit walked back into the club wiggling his tongue at me like a snake.

It was about enough to make you want to give up sex.

JUICE

NEVADA AND MINNEAPOLIS

Banks through the file onto the floor next to the weight bench where Derek was cranking out his reps. “You might want to read up on it. It’s going to be your home for a couple of weeks.”

Derek sat up and wiped the sweat off his face with a towel and flipped open the file. Oak Park Heights state correctional facility. Located just outside of Stillwater, Minnesota. Built for the Feds, originally to be one of their “Super Max” facilities. After the dumb shits got it done they realized that it was going to be too expensive to operate, so they sold it to the state of Minnesota. Housed the worst of Minnesota’s inmates along with trouble making convicts from other state and federal prisons. Built below ground level. Inmates worked, ate, and sometimes exercised, in the same unit they lived in. Yard activities were minimal and supervised intensely. Never an escape.

“Nice place.” Derek snorted.

“You’re not to suppose to love the place. You’ve been on fucking vacation too long. Getting soft. All that booze and pussy. Just do the job the way we plan it, not the way you plan it, and we’ll get you the hell out of there and ship your ass to sunny Diego Garcia.” Banks had been surly since his return. Derek had to resist an urge to strangle the son of a bitch right then and there.

“What about this Gary Bryant? What’s his story? A place like this is gonna make it hard to get close to a high profile prisoner,” said Derek.

“You’ll be assigned to the same cell block as Bryant. He’s been there since his escape from a federal joint out in California. That escape combined with his notoriety, he’s had two books and a movie made about him, convinced the Feds to move him to Oak Park for both his safety and their public relations. It didn’t look too good for them when he busted out of their joint and was on the loose for over a year. No one has ever quite figured out how the hell he managed to bust out of there. It was a maximum joint and somehow he got his hands on a ladder and scaled right over two razor wired fences. It’s been rumored that he had help from the Russians, but that could be bullshit.”

Bryant seemed by his history to be much different from the other bottom feeders that Derek had been assigned to liquidate. “This dude may be harder to handle.”

“He’s a smart one, I’ll give him that. Tested out to be a borderline genius. Worked for a military contractor and sold their secrets to the Russians for years at their embassy in Mexico. Had another flunky working for him, a drug dealer, he’s the one that got them popped. The dealer got life, Bryant got twenty five and another year or so for the escape. He’s been a royal

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pain in the ass since he's been inside. He's been a regular contributor for articles in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* and this entertainment paper called *The City Pages*. Always bitching about inmate rights and prison reform. Physically, he's not much. Seems to be into aerobic activities and not much into the iron pumping like muscle heads such as yourself. It won't matter anyway."

"What do you mean?"

"Our inside contact is going to handle getting the weapon into the facility. Security there is too tight for you to get or make anything inside. He'll smuggle in a shank that will appear to have been made inside the prison in one of the shops. This is going to appear to be a good old fashioned prison murder. Bryant is still jumpy after what happened though."

Derek grabbed a set of dumbbells and started in on his flyes. "He's got a lot to be jumpy about by the sound of the shithole he's locked up in."

"A year or so ago they had an inmate locked up there who had been running around the midwest setting off pipe bombs, just scaring the holy crap out of everyone. Edward Karl was his name. Crazy as a shithouse rat. He was on Bryant's unit and was convinced that Bryant had stolen his "Id" so he tried to dust Bryant. Made some homemade mace out of pepper, vaseline, and water and squirted it in Bryant's face. Then he tried to electrocute him with this homemade stun gun that he had plugged into a wall socket. Damn near worked. If it had, we wouldn't have to send you in."

"Yea, lucky me."

Banks slapped him on the shoulder. "Don't worry about this. Oak Park is a country club compared to where you were locked up at. This is it. Your last assignment. We haven't been able to locate the escapee from the security hospital. Mexico is the last report we had."

Banks sat down on the bench across from him. "Three days and you'll fly into Minneapolis. The contact that will meet you is the same one that you will have inside. He'll take you to an area where you will be outfitted in a federal prison uniform and you will then be transported to Oak Park in a federal prison van. Your story is, if anyone is checking, is that you are being brought in from Leavenworth because of a hit on a rival gang that you were involved in. They want to get you out of the federal system."

Derek threw down the weights and sat. "That's getting pretty close to my actual situation isn't it? Using Leavenworth and all."

"Can't be helped. In a situation like like this we have to establish some sort of feasible explanation to why you are being transferred to their prison if anybody checks it out. We just can't roll up to their front gates and tell them we have a new convict for them."

Derek stood up. "Wait a minute! Wait a fucking minute! You mean Morgan is in on this?"

"He has to be. He's our contact in Leavenworth on this. We need him to cover our bases. It's his name on the paperwork."

"And what's my name going to be on the paperwork?" Derek already knew the answer.

Banks answered immediately and without batting an eye. "It's going to be your name. Your real name. You're back to being Jake Morrow. Officially, you are still locked up in Leavenworth, if anyone checks it out. But after we pull you out of Oak Park it's going to be just like you're in the witness protection program. No more Jake Morrow, no more Derek Powell. When you arrive in Diego Garcia you will have a brand new spanking identity."

"Let me get this straight. I whack a state inmate and you guys are going to just waltz in and pull me out and no one is going to say a fucking thing? Bullshit!"

"Remember this. Bryant is also a federal inmate. The Feds pay his room and board to the state of Minnesota. What we'll have is one fed inmate dusting off another. It will be fed business. Minnesota won't give a shit. They'll be anxious to wash their hands of the whole mess. A month

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or so after it happens, we'll do a press release that'll say that you did yourself in while locked up in solitary. By then nobody will give a shit and you'll be out of the country."

"I just want to make sure that all my bases are covered here. I don't want to go back inside and have you guys leaving me with ass hanging out in the wind."

Banks stood up and started heading out of the gym. "Don't worry. I haven't screwed you over yet and I'm not going to start now. We have everything covered. Trust me, everything will be fine." The agent walked out and closed the door behind him.

"Oh yea, I'll trust you all right." muttered Jake as he picked up his weights.

Jake, Derek no more, looked out the window of the plane and down at the cornfields of Minnesota. It always amazed him how evenly squared off all the farm land looked from the air. It had been a long time since he had been home. It would be even longer after this visit.

Jasmine had spent the last two nights with him. They didn't drink or do any drugs. They had made dinner, popped popcorn and drank Cokes while they watched movies on the VCR, and sat around like an old married couple. After they had made love last night she had laid in his arms and sobbed quietly.

Just before she left this morning, Jake had held her tight and whispered in her ear, "I'll come back for you. When this is over, I'll come back for you." She hadn't answered. He wondered if she had heard that line before. From some other guy that Banks had set up.

Banks had acted suspicious on the drive to the Las Vegas airport. Or Jake was just paranoid.

"You and Jasmine act like you've gotten pretty friendly. She seemed like she was actually sad to see you leave."

"Well, we've fucked about a hundred times. Maybe she started to like it."

Banks laughed. "Shit, boy. You'll never learn. She's a hooker. It's her job to act like she liked it. Maybe you should ask her to marry you and you can whisk her off to Diego Garcia with you."

Jake's contact was already at the airport and waiting in the lobby. His name was Barry Ely, Correctional Officer II. Prior to his employment with the state of Minnesota he had been a correctional officer for eight years in the army, first hitch in the military side of Leavenworth, the second hitch at the military prison in Mannheim, Germany. Barry didn't drink, do drugs, and wasn't even really interested in women though he was definitely not gay. His passion in life was being a soldier and a prison guard. That was it. Barry Ely had been the perfect recruit for Jerry Banks. Totally dedicated and as dumb as a fucking mule, he had been mentored by Commander Morgan. But give him an order and point him in the right direction and he'd get the job done. He was standing in the lobby eating a Mars bar when Jake walked down the tunnel. Ely recognized Jake from the photo that Banks had faxed him.

"Mr. Morrow, I'm Barry Ely. Welcome to Minnesota. Did you check any bags?"

Jake looked at him like he was a moron. "No, I didn't check any bags. I wonder what they would think if I showed up at your prison with a set of luggage."

They walked in silence through the airport and exited out the doors into the parking ramp. It was mid afternoon and no one seemed to be around, you could hear the sound of their footsteps echoing through the cavernous building.

"My car is right over here, sir." Ely pointed to a rusted out Mercury Marquis.

"Jake, hey Jake. Is that you?" Jake and Ely stopped and turned around. A man with a huge cowboy hat pulled down low over his eyes wearing a floor length duster was walking towards them.

Jake could feel Ely stiffen up next to him. "What the hell is this all about? Do's anyone know about you coming here?" Ely was staring stupidly at Jake.

Jake grinned at the correctional officer. "Did you know that they have telephones on

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airlines now? Of all the crazy fucking things!”

The cowboy walked up to the pair and pulled a gigantic .44 Magnum pistol out and stuck the end of the barrel dead center on Ely’s forehead. “Move a muscle and your brains will be decorating the floor of this parking garage, dickweed.” Jim Pitre looked over at Jake. “How ya been you old cocksucker?”

“Never better. I was hoping you could see us coming out of the terminal or else I was going to have to take this little dipshit out myself.”

Jake turned back to Ely. “Give me your car keys.” Ely handed them over without a word. He looked on the verge of fainting. “I don’t understand,” he whimpered.

Jake looked around the parking lot as he opened the trunk of the car. “Get in and put your hands behind your back.” Pitre produced a roll of duct tape and they quickly taped the guard’s hands and legs up. The cowboy laughed with glee as Jake wound the roll around his eyes and mouth.

“Hold up, Jake. Someone’s coming,” whispered Jim.

A pair of good looking flight attendants was walking past with their luggage rolling along behind them. Pitre lifted his hat towards them.

“Good afternoon, ladies.”

They both smiled back at the cowboy. “Good afternoon.” They continued on through the parking garage.

Pitre leaned back over the truck as Jake continued his taping.

“That’s gonna hurt like a bitch when they pull that off. Don’t put it over his nose or he’ll smother, sure as shit.” Pitre spit a long stream of Red Man juice on top of the guard’s head. “Bulls eye.”

Jake slammed the trunk shut and threw the keys down a storm drain. Pitre slapped him on the back. “Goddamn, it’s great to see ya again. Come on, I got a cooler of beer in the truck. You know this fucking Twin Cities area has got some great titty bars. I’d sure like to see those two stewardesses up there on a stage shaking their money makers.”

BATFISH

LOS ANGELES

Jon's battered Mustang was chugging up Wonderland Avenue. Fucking thing must not have had a tune up since it had rolled out of the factory and it was belching out oily, blue smoke.

"We're sure as shit not gonna sneak up on them in this piece of crap, Jon."

He didn't say a word. Just sat there licking his lips nervously. The night hadn't ended well for him. Couple of the broads at the party had wanted to screw him. I imagine so that down the road they could tell their grand kids about how they had once had porked a famous "movie" star. But his pecker once more had let him down. Lost out on a couple of hundred bucks. But I suspect he had gotten used to that. I also suspected that he had been smoking or snorting something.

That pissed me off. I didn't like to do a job while anyone was high or had been drinking.

He parked his wreck at the curb in front of a small apartment building. We just sat there.

"Well what's up Jon?" Are we gonna do this thing or what?"

He turned to look at me. "I think it's already done." In his eyes I could see pure fear and he was putting off this nervous smell that reminded me of the locker room in gym class.

"What in the fuck are you talking about? If it's done what am I doing here?"

"I just had to make sure that I was in the clear. He said that if I didn't tell them who did it that he was going to kill me. And after that he was going to have find my family and have their eyes ripped out."

My skin was crawling. "Shit! What you have you gotten me into?"

He was out the door and walking up to the sidewalk to one of the apartments. I got out and followed him like a stupid shit. The door was closed but when Jon grabbed the knob, the door swung open.

There were four bodies in the living room and they were beat to a pulp. Worse than what Rose had looked like. Way beyond that. There was blood everywhere and pieces of what I guess were bones or skull were spattered across the tile floor. I could actually see the brains of one of the bodies. The stereo was on. Warren Zevon was singing about Werewolves in London. I now knew for a fact that there was a fucking soundtrack to my life.

"Oh my God, Jon." I gasped. "Who did this?"

His voice was monotone. "Dewald."

"Dewald?" Oh, Jesus Christ! Not that Dewald! "How in the hell did you get involved with him?"

SCREAMING BATFISH BLUES

Dewald was one of the biggest cocaine dealers in the whole fucking country. He had reached untouchable status. Los Angeles cops wouldn't even think of pulling him over for traffic violations. He came to "The Slippery Tit" every once in a while when he felt like slumming. Big tipper. You felt like you needed a shower after just talking to him.

"About a month ago I set him up. I had been up there to do a private show for his old lady so I knew the lay of the place. You wouldn't believe the amount of drugs he keeps up there. These guys went up to his mansion in Beverly Hills and robbed his ass. I really needed the fucking cash. Somehow he suspected me and I had to roll over on them."

"Somehow? How goddamn stupid do you think the guy is? You go up there and do your routine and a couple of days later he gets robbed? And know you've dragged me into this shit. Why?"

He had tears in his eyes but was laughing at the same time. "I was scared to come alone."

I took my shirt off and rubbed the door knob clean. "Come on, we've gotta get the hell out of here." I think I screamed that.

Jon dropped me off in front in the club. I didn't hear a thing from him for about a month. But I heard about it on the news and in the papers. Jon was famous again. Just in the wrong way. I kept waiting for the news channels to run some old clips of his movies. The dead dudes were known associates of his and it didn't take the cops long to figure out who the missing link was in this mess.

The police kicked in the door at a cheap motel outside of Jacksonville, Florida and found Jon sleeping off a high with a fourteen year old girl. Turns out that the girl was actually a porn star who went by the stage name of Anal Annesha, who had been working in the industry for over a year. Porn industry is slipshod on background and reference checks. Annesha thought Jon could steer her towards the big show.

The two had been wanted on an unrelated felony charge of dognapping. Annesha had a wealthy, elderly aunt who lived in Palm Beach and who loved her pekinese with all of her heart. The two desperadoes had stolen the pooch while he was out taking his morning crap and his mommy was in the house making him his dog food omelet.

Jon was being brought back to Los Angeles for questioning on the Wonderland Murders, as the newspapers had dubbed the crime. I knew as sure as there is shit in a goose that Jon was going to spill his guts out and my name was going to be brought up.

I didn't know which would be worse. Having the police after me and then the shit in Hawaii would be discovered. Or have one of the biggest cocaine kingpins in the country wanting to rub me out as a material witness to a crime.

Either way I was busting ass out of there.

JUICE

ALL OVER HELL AND BACK

In the wind. The son of a bitch lands in Minneapolis. He gets met at the airport by the contact. The contact and Morrow walk through the parking garage and some fucking renegade cowboy comes up with his six shooter like he's John fucking Wayne and rescues Morrow. Then they duct tape up the contact up to the point so that he'll never have to worry about hair or eye brows again, and lock the asshole up in his trunk. That sounds just like Morrow. Smart ass son of a bitch. Airport security gets the dumbass contact out of the trunk four hours later when an elderly couple from Des Moines hear him kicking the inside of the trunk. And then Morrow is gone. Just disappears.

Almost five months. Gone. In the wind. The motherfucking wind.

And now this shit. He looked in disbelief at the newspaper in front of him.

Headlines of the most recent *Navy Times*:

DEPENDENT CLAIMS NAVY RAILROADED ENLISTED MAN IN DEATH OF NAVAL OFFICER

NEW ORLEANS, La. - Mary Teresa Givens, 19, the daughter of Navy Captain Monte L. Givens, has approached agents from the Naval Investigative Service in New Orleans to file a report claiming that almost three years ago she was the victim of an attempted sexual assault by Naval Ensign Raymond Leonard Dunn III, now deceased. According to Givens, the assault was forcibly stopped by a naval enlisted man, SN Jacob Morrow, who was jogging through the naval housing area just outside of Pearl Harbor, in the driveway of the deceased ensign. Givens claimed that she had been smoking marijuana with a friend who also lived in the dependent housing area, and had been walking home when Ensign Dunn stopped and asked her if she wanted a ride. The Ensign reportedly then took the young woman back to his home and attempted to sexually assault her. The struggle with Morrow resulted in the death of the ensign. SN Morrow was subsequently court martialed and sentenced to a life sentence in the military correctional barracks in Leavenworth, Kansas. Miss Givens stated in her report that she had been advised by her father, Pearl Harbor NIS agents, and base police that it would be in everyone's best interests at the time not file a report on the incident and she was sent back to the continental United States. Court martial records of Morrow show that there is no record of any statements or testimony from Miss Givens. *Navy Times* attempts to interview Morrow have been denied at the present time by Commander Max Morgan, the ranking naval official at Leavenworth, who states that Morrow is currently in solitary confinement for unrelated behavioral problems. There have been no comments on this incident by neither Pearl Harbor NIS officials or Captain Givens.

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Captain Givens is currently the executive officer of the Naval Reserve Training Center in New Orleans.

Banks crumpled the paper up and threw it into the trash can. Shit! The little bitch had come out of the woodwork at the very worst possible time. It would be just his luck if Morrow stumbled onto a copy of the paper and discovered the truth. That his witness had not been an enlisted mans daughter killed in a car crash but was in fact, the daughter of a high ranking Naval official. And to top it off, she wasn't dead at all, her sweet little pot smoking ass was currently in New Orleans stirring up a shit storm.

What could Morrow do with the information even if he did find out? He had killed six people since Banks had sprung him. Granted it was under government orders and under a different identity, but that could be taken care of. He sure as hell couldn't sashay himself into the local police office and turn himself in. Especially, if the events Banks had been investigating in the last five months were true.

After Morrow took off in Minneapolis, Banks had caught the first flight burning to Minneapolis, an air force fighter, and had puked almost the entire flight to Minnesota. The pilot had been a true fighter jockey and had tortured Banks with a series of rolls and the buzzing of cattle across Iowa.

Morrow had been his usual smart ass self. He had taken the Ely's drivers license and prison I. D. and had anonymously mailed it to Bryant at Oak Park prison with a description of what had been planned for him. Of course, it had been intercepted by the prison mail officials, but they weren't involved in the mission. Oak Park officials had gone bug shit and Ely was suspended while an investigation commenced. Ely would have to be dealt with before he panicked and started bumping his gums.

Banks had jumped into his rental car and driven straight to New Richland, Minnesota, Morrow's hometown, to pay a visit to Morrow's crippled aunt, Dawn Morrow. Good God, what a rural piece of shit. The golf course looked liked a cow pasture with putting greens on it. But Morrows aunt was gone. The house had been sold and the new tenants were a welfare widow and her three screaming yard apes. She had no idea where Morrows aunt was or who she even was. The house had been sold at about half the price of its current market value and the government had picked up the tab for the current owners.

After questioning a few of the local yokels, Banks discovered that Dawn Morrow had taken off in her Winnebago for somewhere in Baja, Mexico. Since she was wheelchair bound, she had paid a local woman to drive her there and had paid for her return flight. The woman was easily found. She spent her afternoons and early evenings at the local municipal watering hole. Banks found her hunched over her draft Buckhorn beer, smoking a generic cigarette, and cursing the Twins as they stumbled around the diamond up on the big screen. She looked unusually tan for a woman from these parts and was wearing a Tecate beer T-shirt. After Banks had approached the woman and she realized what he was there for, she had squinted through the smoke of her coffin nail and had told Banks to "go piss up a rope," had lifted her leg up and farted loudly, and had then returned to watching Kirby Puckett take his turn at bat.

There was absolutely no sign that Morrow had been here. Then town only had a thousand or so people, if he had been, or was here now, someone would know or no one was talking.

Banks had a good idea who Morrows partner was. The maverick first lieutenant from the hit in Missouri. A quick phone call to Fort Leonard Wood gave him the information that James Pitre had unexpectedly resigned his commission in the army and had disappeared.

Then nothing. Banks returned to Nevada and waited

Then two months later, the USS Dixie, a destroyer tender home ported out of San Diego, had been robbed one day before payday. Two white males had walked up the brow of the ship at

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approximately 0020 hours on a Monday morning, flashed their military I.D.s and had been allowed onto the ship. Neither the officer of the day, the petty officer of the watch, or the messenger of the watch had immediately recognized the two. That was no big deal. The Dixie was a huge ship with a crew of over six hundred sailors and had constant turnover. Except these two men had the keys to the finance office. Keys that should have been held by only the financial officer and the captain of the ship. The financial officer had been on duty that evening and had been awaked by a knock on his stateroom door at 0120. When he answered the knock he was greeted by the sight of a large man with a rubber Richard Nixon mask on. Tricky Dick was holding a .45 Colt in his hand. He was ushered up to the finance office, which was already opened and the financial officer, Lt. Perry Palmer, was forced at gunpoint to open the ship's safe which contained the payroll for the entire crew. A tidy sum of over two hundred thousand dollars. The two thieves had packed the cash up in plastic garbage bags, wrapped them up with duct tape, and had placed the bags inside of two large scuba diving bags. Duct tape was wrapped completely around the whimpering body of Lt. Palmer, and he was locked up in the office and wasn't discovered missing until the following morning when he didn't report for morning muster. Two lines were found leading from the main deck of the ship down to the water line.

There were no suspects at the time. Without a doubt they were either current or ex-military men. They knew that late at night onboard a destroyer tender in port there was little or no activity. The ship rarely left the port so many of the crew lived off the ship.

Banks had three suspects in mind, which he was not presently sharing with authorities involved in the active investigation. The case had Morrow and his redneck buddy written all over it. The duct tape and heavy duty firepower seemed to be their style. And Tony Hendrichs, Jake's old marijuana dealing buddy from Hawaii, had recently been stationed onboard the Dixie prior to his medical retirement for diabetes. Hendrichs had been a Gunners Mate and one of his duties on the Dixie had been the cutting and issuing of keys on the ship. It all fit.

A trip to Mobile, Alabama, found Hendrichs tending bar at a bay side dump called Liz's Haven. A rough joint right down on the waterfront. Hendrichs didn't seem to be taking very good care of himself for being stricken with diabetes. It was eleven in the morning and he was smoking a huge Cuban cigar and sipping from a glass of cognac. He had patiently listened to Banks run through his line of questioning, all the while with a grin on his face, but never answering with more than an occasional chuckle or an amused grunt. The "interrogation" ended when Banks noticed that a large presence behind him was blocking out what little sun could make it through the filthy windows. He swiveled around on his bar stool to see a monstrous black man with a shaved head wearing a Tampa Bay Buccaneers jersey with Doug Williams' number on it. He informed Banks that it might be best for him to leave or possibly face having his "honky fucking ass fed to the gators." The agent had taken the advice.

Once again for another two months, there had been nothing.

Then came a report out of Minnesota that Jake's Uncle Billy had been broken out of prison in a spectacular military like operation.

Billy Morrow's lifestyle had finally caught up to him. While serving his sentence in Stillwater prison for the murder of the man whose wife had crippled Dawn, Billy had begun to while away the boring hours by shooting up speedballs with his fellow biker inmates. Drugs were easy to obtain for his crew in the joint but syringes were not, so like good biker brothers, they shared. Billy came down with AIDS. In typical prison medical fashion, the institution first assumed that he was faking an illness to shirk his prison duties. He remained in general population for several more months before the official diagnosis came through. By then a combination of poor living habits and a case of pneumonia had weakened him to the point where he had to be admitted to the St. Paul Medical Center. He began to deteriorate to where nothing

SCREAMING BATFISH BLUES

could be done except to keep him comfortable in his final days. Plans were made to transfer him to the old timers convict unit at the state hospital in Walker, Minnesota.

The state hospital was located in a beautiful section of northern Minnesota, an area covered in gorgeous trees and deep blue lakes. The two transport officers couldn't have pulled easier duty. Taking an old dirt bag to finish out his string so that they could stop on their way back to enjoy a delicious northern pike dinner and do some gambling at one of the Indian casinos.

Fifteen miles out of Walker, without warning, an old Cadillac had shot out of a side road and had t-boned the corrections van with such force that the van had flipped over onto its side as it slide in a shower of sparks down the road. A person dressed in solid black coveralls, gloves, military style boots, and a rubber Alice Cooper mask, had come around the front of the van and kept the two stunned transport officers under his control by firing two warning shots from what appeared to be a M16 into the grill of the van. Another person outfitted the same as the first, only the second person was wearing a Herman Munster Halloween mask, had climbed onto the side of the tipped van and had blown the side doors open with an explosive charge that was later determined to be C4, a plastics explosive.

Billy Morrow had been pulled out of the van and the trio had taken off in an old VW bus covered in flower power stickers. The van would be found several day later, wiped clean of fingerprints and submerged in a lake.

Both officers recovered from their injuries. The driver had only a minor concussion and some facial cuts while his partner had suffered some burns from the coffee that he had been drinking at the point of impact. Routine medical tests had both officers pissing positive for marijuana use.

The Cadillac used in the escape was discovered to have been stolen in Brainerd off the Indian reservation and had been fortified with a cast iron bumper and added weight in the trunk. The front seat had been replaced with a stock car style seat and web harness. The windshield had been removed.

The trio disappeared into thin air. There had been no witnesses other than the two reporting officers. The beautiful trees and iron ore hills of northern Minnesota had prevented the two officers from broadcasting a decent emergency call. The only person who had picked the call up clearly was a eighty five year old communist, who had received the mayday on his ham radio. The old fart had cackled with glee and had headed down to the end of his dock to fish.

Banks was quickly becoming sick of the sight of Minnesota. And when he returned to Nevada, the *Navy Times* was waiting for him. His bosses were infuriated to say the least. They had insinuated in very clear terms that this could be a career ending fuckup on his part. This matter had to be taken care of IMMEDIATELY!

If matters could be any worse, a number of national newspapers had picked the story up off of the wire and had reran segments of the article.

It had tweaked the attention of one Reverend Joshua Carter. Reverend Carter was the minister of a small non denominational church located in Story, Wyoming, in the lower foothills of the Big Horn mountains. Carter was particularly incensed over this story due to the fact that his daughter had at one time been engaged to Jake Morrow and the good reverend had been very instrumental in making sure that Morrow could not communicate with his daughter after he been sentenced.

Reverend Carter now felt that he had been made a fool of. He and his daughter had still not recovered from the emotional rift that had separated them since he had intercepted letters addressed to his daughter from Morrow, and the letters that he had written to the authorities at Leavenworth demanding that Morrow be stopped from corresponding his daughter again .

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She had recently given up her studies in divinity and was living in a small cabin farther up in the mountains while supporting herself by working at a small combination gas station and grocery store. She hadn't spoken to her father for close to a year. He prayed that for now she wouldn't notice any articles about Jake in the local newspapers.

But for now, the reverend was driving Banks absolutely fucking nuts. Carter had written letters to Commander Morgan, the warden of Leavenworth, the Chief of Naval Operations, and Billy Graham.

Banks had only a matter of days before this all exploded in his face. He poured another generous amount of Chivas Regal over the ice in his glass and fired up another Marlboro while he dialed the number. Commander Morgan answered on the second ring.

"I've got an idea where Morrow is. What I want to know is if you can handle your end of the bargain if he's where I think he is?"

Morgan sat up in the chair behind his desk. He felt like he could either puke on or shit in his dress whites. "What do you have in mind?"

"From what I can gather, he may be holed up in San Pedro, California. I'm planning on flying out there in about six hours, and if I find him, I'm going to try to bring him down with either a tranquilizer or stun gun. I'm going to have a flight crew ready to fly us straight back to Leavenworth."

"I can lock him back up, that's not a problem. But with the press rolling on this, sooner or later I'm going to have to produce him. That fuckers going to sing like a bird. What does he care? He's already doing a life bit. Even if they don't let him out, when he spills his guts and they start to check his story, I'm fucked big time. And so are you, my friend."

Banks took a hard hit on his Chivas. "Now you listen to me you gutless little shitbird. We can make this all go away if you don't run around like a schoolboy pissing in his pants. As soon as my crew gets Morrow back to your prison, you get him back to the hole and make it look like a suicide. Slash his wrists or string him up so it looks like he hung himself. But for shits sake don't beat the son of a bitch to death and then say that it happened during a cell extraction like they did to that convict in Oklahoma. That'll bring to much heat. You got me!"

Morgan was silent for several moments. "Jerry, what happens if you can't drug him. What if he doesn't come easy?"

"Then we're double fucked. I'll put him down and as soon as I contact you, report him missing on the next count. Report him as escaped. That's all we can do. The investigation will be worse than Watergate, but it's our only option."

"Make goddamn sure you get him, Banks," Morgan hissed in the phone.

"You just do your job, I'll do mine." Banks slammed the phone down and grabbed his intelligence report.

Intelligence reports on Tony Hendrichs showed that he had purchased two homes in the San Pedro area while he was stationed at the Long Beach Naval station, and was now a long distance landlord since he lived in Mobile. A records check also had shown that he owned a deep sea fishing rig that was kept in a slip in Long Beach harbor and was regularly hired out for charters. Pretty impressive for a retired E-6 in the military, obviously he had had extra income coming in, drugs most likely.

Banks, on a whim, had placed a call to a NIS agent in Long Beach who had done a quick stake out at both addresses. Banks had given him a bullshit song and dance story about how he had information that drugs were possibly being dealt to sailors on the ships in the local shipyards by shipyard employees living in one of these houses.

One of the houses was being leased out by a three hundred pound (a piece) black couple who spent their evenings barbecuing and drinking gigantic amounts of Pabst Blue Ribbon. So that one was a no go.

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The other was a possible hit. Although there was not a lot of activity around the house, the one occupant the NIS agent had seen was definitely yardbird material. Big pickup truck covered in NASCAR stickers and the perp himself was all redneck. Right down to the cowboy hat and boots. Fucking bingo!

Could the cowboy who snatched up Morrow in Minneapolis be the same army officer who resigned his commission after doing the hit with Morrow in Missouri? Very well could be. Most of the contacts that Banks recruited for his missions were military drones who would follow any order, no matter how stupid, just to help out Uncle Sam or God and country. But every once in a while a wild man who enjoyed the job a little too much would pop up. Jim Pitre may have fit that mold. Banks had found no trace of him after discovering he had left the army.

Well, thought Banks, if he is with Morrow, it's going to be the end of the line for him. Like they say, dead men tell no tales. Banks poured another shot.

Jasmine was going to have to be taken care of too. She must have talked. Banks was convinced that he had had Morrow brainwashed that he had to do only one more job and he was home free. But he jumps and runs instead. Had to have been Jasmine. Send her ass out to work at the Chicken Ranch for a month or so and have her blow a bunch of fat greasy businessmen, that would probably get her back in line. That along with threatening to have family services snatch up her kid. Worse comes to worst, just might have to find her a hole to sleep in out in the desert.

Banks glanced at his watch. Might as well call flight ops now and get that flight going to Long Beach. No need to put off the inevitable. He slammed down another shot. The stress must be getting to him, his bottle of liquor was getting dangerously low and he felt kind of loaded. He had never been a huge drinker but a couple of toots of nose candy would help take the edge off that. He pulled out a replacement bottle of Chivas and threw it in his briefcase with the file, his service revolver, stun gun, and tranquilizer pistol.

BATFISH

ST. PETER

“All right, dude. Let’s lock and load.” Cedar had such a smile on his face that I could see the white of his teeth. Which is strange since most mental patients have zero dental hygiene concerns.

“What in the double fuck is going on?”

In a panic I turned to see that smelly ass Bob had stepped into the cell. He had practically screamed that out and I was positive that a counselor must have heard him. He had plugged his catheter into his night bag and was holding it like he was on his way to the gym. “I smelled smoke and thought you guys had some cigarettes in here.”

“Bob” I said. “We’ve decided to take a little vacation. I see you already have your bag packed. Would you like to join....”

While Bob’s attention had been drawn to me, Cedar had stepped up and thrown a roundhouse right which caught Bob right in the middle of the forehead. Bastard really packed a wallop for such a skinny little guy. Bob stood there for a split second and then went down to the floor in sort of slow motion while making this noise like “uhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.”

I quickly stepped up to my cell window and looked out. The unit seemed quiet and the two security counselors were still dozing in the bubble. I could see that the movie *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* was playing on the VCR.

“Let’s go.” I said to Cedar as I stepped over Bob’s prone and pungent body. Cedar slipped out the window like his body was lubricated. I had to get one shoulder and my head through then the other, and even then Cedar had to pull me by both my arms to get me all the way through.

I was down in the snow and then up and running for the side of the building. We had just reached the corner and I heard Bob.

“You motherfuckers. Wait for me, goddamn it.”

Crazy scumbag must have really been able to take a punch because he had gotten up and crawled out the hole in the window. He had ran into a small problem though. His night bag had gotten caught on a rough edge of the hole and had not only ripped but pulled his catheter out. Piss was running down the side of the building.

The light was on in the last cell on the corner of the building. That was Wes’s cell. Wes had been brought to the hospital after his family had gone bankrupt and lost the family farm. Literally. Wes had drilled holes in the road leading to the farmhouse and filled them with dynamite. The idea was to try to blow the bankers and auctioneers to hell when they drove over

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the TNT. Something had gone wrong with the blasting caps and he had missed his intended victims.

The charge didn't go off until an old lady and her schnauzer drove over it in her vintage Rambler. The only body part they found was the old girl's stainless steel hip replacement, laying a hundred feet out in a plowed field.

Now Wes was standing straight up with both of his feet in his toilet. He was completely naked and was reading a Playboy. He looked over at me, smiled, and waved. I waved back.

That was the last sight I saw at the Minnesota Security Hospital.

We dropped down the side of the hill into the woods that surrounds the lower campus and came out through the cemetery where they bury all the unclaimed bodies of the assorted wing nuts who have died there. Made me think about a conversation I had overheard between two staff members.

Years ago, a young man had be brought to the hospital by his father. The old man, a religious fanatic, had caught him masturbating in the barn and wanted him to stop this evil behavior. The kid was terrified, of course, and became very aggressive to the other patients. He wound up having huge doses of shock therapy, thorazine, and then a lobotomy. In the end he would be spending his entire life in the hospital. Somewhere in this graveyard he was buried.

Thinking about it made me pick up the pace, until Cedar complained. He wasn't big on aerobic conditioning.

We picked our way around the back of the campus and crossed the main road leading to the facility, winding up in a residential neighborhood. Coming out on to a sidewalk, we began to walk in a seemingly normal fashion, only diving behind snow banks when a car would approach. It was a gorgeous moonlit night with the temperatures probably only in the 30's.

I knew where the meeting place was. I had seen it when Ray and I were first brought here. Within minutes we were there. The sign was lit up in orange and yellow and had a jaunty Mexican fellow with a sombrero on it. He was holding a taco in his hand. Like he was beckoning to me to come enjoy a taco after my stay in a mental hospital. It was the second most beautiful sight I had ever seen. The most beautiful was the old rag top Cadillac sitting idling in the parking lot.

Cedar's buddies word was good as gold. The only downfall was that the top wouldn't go up and we drove all the way to Minneapolis that way. Those two were wearing snowmobile suits and face masks and drank schnapps the whole way to Minneapolis. Cedar and I had to lay on the floorboards and cover ourselves up with a couple of old army blankets that smelled like old dogs and beer farts.

Two hours later I was dropped off in front of a music store in Minneapolis called "The Electric Fetus" with five bucks, a can of Pig's Eye beer, and a quarter to call my sister. Cedar got out of the car and gave me a big hug.

"Take care, dude. Has this been an fucking adventure or what? Hey man, keep the lipstick off the dipstick."

He jumped back in the Caddy, gave me a wave, and raced off into the night.

I was back in Minneapolis. I could have danced around and thrown my fucking hat in the air like Mary Tyler Moore, but it was to damn cold and I did want to avoid being noticed.

The next day in the Minneapolis Star Tribune I read an article about a daring escape at the Minnesota Security Hospital. Three patients had escaped and two of them, who were still at large, were considered dangerous. The third patient had been captured several hours later just outside of Mankato. He had attempted to flee when authorities approached and was shot right in the ass by a Minnesota highway patrol officer.

JUICE

SAN PEDRO

A Lear jet that had been confiscated by the government from a high rolling smack dealer was Banks mode of transportation to Long Beach. No more of those Top Gun, sky cowboys in their fighter jets for him, that was for damn sure. Banks had taken a seat facing the rear of the aircraft so that he could not be observed cutting his lines on the side of his briefcase, and while taking shots of Chivas straight out of the bottle.

As the jet taxied toward the hanger in Long Beach, the agent checked the clip in his .45 caliber service weapon and placed it in the holster on the back of his belt next to his handcuffs. Just last night he had used those on Jasmine to keep her in place while he showed her who was boss. Her ass was raw when he got done with her, that was for fucking sure. He put a spare clip in his jacket pocket along with a blackjack and the new stun gun that he had just purchased called the “Laxativer.” Cute play on words but really didn’t really want to get that close to Morrow. Better to bring the big moose down with the tranq gun.

The jet stopped with a sudden lunge as it entered the hanger and Banks toppled over into the aisle. “What the fuck?” he shrieked.

The pilot looked out through the cockpit door. “Sorry, sir, I’m not use to the brakes in this rig. They seem to real touchy,” said the young pilot.

“I’ll show you touchy, asshole,” muttered the agent.

Banks gathered up his jacket and briefcase and headed towards the open hatch. The pilot stood there like he was a stewardess at the end of a commercial flight wishing everybody a nice day. “Uh, excuse me, sir.”

Banks glared at the officer. “What now?”

“Your nose, sir. You have something right here.” The pilot made a wiping motion under his own nose.

Banks wiped his nose with the back of his hand and saw a dusting of the coke he had been snorting on the flight. “Oh. Yeah. Thanks.”

The generic government four door sedan sat outside the hangar with the keys in the ignition. Banks fired it up and turned the dome light on to check his map for the directions to the suspected house. Had to cross the Vincent Thomas toll bridge over to San Pedro, follow the road into town, stay on the main drag for about seven blocks, take a right and head up the hill. Not too bad. If things went smooth, he could pop Morrow, cuff him and load him in the trunk, and be back here to load him up on the jet within a half an hour. If Pitre was the one with him, it was going to be tough shit for the cowboy, he wasn’t part of the plan. He should of thought about that before he got involved with a street thug like Morrow.

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Banks reached over and took a pull off of his bottle. *Shit!* He quickly pulled the jug down as he met an oncoming San Pedro police car. Better cool it here. Wouldn't be a good time to get a driving while shitfaced charge.

Banks took a right and started up the hill as he squinted at the houses and mailboxes for street numbers. There it is! He maintained his speed and went down another block before he turned around and parked about a quarter block away. There was a pickup in the driveway but it didn't have Tennessee plates, they were Californian. Pitre was from Tennessee, but could have changed them. No lights on in the house, but he could see the blue flickering light of a television set through the closed curtains. He got out of the car, put the tranq gun down the front of his pants, and crossed the street and began to walk down the dark sidewalk.

The house was just your basic rental shack. Square little dump with a living room in the front, kitchen in the back, and two small side bedrooms off to the side. Banks walked down a little further and crossed back over. Walking up to the side of the pickup, he took a quick glance in, nothing besides empty Budweiser cans. He reached in and opened the glove box. Nothing but maps. He ducked down and crept into the back yard. With his flashlight he looked into the two garbage cans. Same thing in there. Lots of beer cans, pizza boxes and buckets from the Colonel. Nothing to show who might be inside.

The drapes were pulled tight on both bedrooms and the bathroom. The back door appeared to have had the window knocked out of it and had been replaced with a piece of plywood. He tried the door, it was locked tight. Banks crept back up the driveway to the side of the living room. The curtain to the room had about an inch to spare at the bottom of the window, just enough for the agent to attempt a look inside.

Sitting on a ratty sofa, while she drank a Mountain Dew and munched on some pretzels out of a bag, was a woman wearing nothing it appeared other than a T-shirt and a pair of panties. She seemed to be alone and it didn't look by the decor of the place that the house was occupied by too many people. The living room had a couch and old recliner and the TV, that was it. *Fuck!* The agent's instincts told him that this might have very well been a wild goose chase. Better check it out though. Banks pulled out his badge and walked up the front steps.

He gave the door an official rap. Through the door's window he saw the woman stand up and walk to the door. She looked out out quizzically and Banks flashed his badge. She opened the inner door but kept the screen door latched. The TV was blaring. Some made for television movie that was made for idiots just like her.

"Can I help you?" She was bleach blond, white trash, wearing a Raiders shirt that was cut down to show some ample cleavage and which barely covered the worn white panties she had on. Banks glanced down, he swore he saw a glimpse of her bush.

"Uh, good evening, mam. Sorry about the late hour. I'm Special Agent Jerry Banks. We had an attempted burglary at the Bank of San Pedro and one of the suspects has been reported in this area. I'm conducting a door to door check to see if anyone in the neighborhood has seen anything out of the ordinary."

She glanced back into the living room and turned back and smiled at Banks. "Hang on a sec, I need to turn that damn thing down." As she walked back into the living room, Banks noticed what a fine ass she had. She could make a fine replacement for Jasmine.

The television shut off, bathing the room in darkness. Sudden movement. The coke and booze had delayed and clouded the agents response time. *Holy shit!* Something was charging the door. Banks fumbled for the tranq gun as a fist exploded through the mesh of the screen door and drilled the agent directly in the nose. Banks felt the cartilage snap as he staggered back and fell down the short set of steps. Jake Morrow charged out the door, down the steps, and kicked Banks savagely in the stomach as the agent tried to regain his feet. Banks blindly tried to grope through the grass to find the tranquilizer pistol, but Morrow punched him twice in the kidney, and then

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reached down and grabbed Banks by the throat and front of his belt and proceeded to actually military press the agent over his head with a maniacal scream and then slam him down across the metal handrail of the steps.

Banks came down across the handrail on his sternum and felt something crack. A cloud of red was crossing his vision and he felt himself beginning to black out. Morrow now had him by the front of his shirt and was raining one handed punches to the agents head. Banks' survival instincts were trying to kick in but all he could do was feebly try to cover his arms around his head in an attempt to ward off the blows.

“Get some, get some, get some, get some, motherfucker!” Morrow was screaming. He let go of Banks who slumped to the ground and beginning kicking him savagely in the ribs. “Get up and fight me you fucking pussy,” screamed the frustrated Morrow.

“The police are on their way so you better just stop that right now.” A woman was shrieking.

Pitre ran up behind Jake, wrapped his arms around him and twisted him away from Banks.

“Goddamn it, Jake. We gotta get the fuck out of here”

Jake broke free of Pitre's grasp and took a wild roundhouse swing at his friend. Jim quickly ducked and moved out of Jake's range punching range.

“Jake, stop! It's me, goddamn it.”

Jake stopped in his tracks and stared at his buddy. He had lost total control of himself, it was like he had gone into some kind of trance. Just like the night of the football game in New Richland. He stared down at the battered and bloodied agent, who was now face down in the grass and not moving, and then back at Pitre. If Jim hadn't stopped him, Banks would surely have been beaten to death.

“I've already called them, they're on their way.”

The two men turned to see a large Hispanic woman, her rotund body illuminated by her porch light, standing in the front yard of the house next door. “I've already called,” she repeated.

Pitre jammed some car keys in Jake's hand. “You go. Take the truck. Me and Angel will get our gear and take his car.” Jim pointed down at Banks. He turned Jake towards the truck and gave him a light shove. “Go! We'll meet you at the boat.”

Jake gave Banks one more solid kick to the ribcage of Banks for good measure, “You were lucky this time, fucker,” and ran to the truck.

“Angel, grab the bags and let's haul ass.” Pitre rolled the agent over to search for his car keys. Banks had his Colt .45 in his hand and reached up and jammed it into the cowboy's chest.

Time seemed to slip into slow motion for Jim Pitre for the last few seconds of his life. Everything was so clear. Nothing had ever been clearer in his life. The word “shit” popped into his head, he saw hammer on the pistol drop, but when the bullet tore through his heart and out his back, he felt nothing no pain, only a warm calm that washed over his body like a soothing ocean wave.

The force of the slug blew Pitre up and off of Banks and deposited him on his back . A large red blossom stained the front of his embroidered cowboy shirt. He never heard the screams of Angel and the woman next door.

“Jiiiiimmmmyyyyyy!” Angel ran down the front of the steps and threw herself onto his prone body. She never noticed Banks as he rolled back onto his stomach, pushed himself up onto one knee, and began firing wildly in rapid succession at Morrow as he was backing down the driveway. The sound of the firearm and the slugs hitting sheet metal and glass was deafening. The Mexican woman put her hands to the side of her head and ran in circles around her yard, screaming religious babble at the top of her lungs.

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Jake dropped down sideways on bench seat of the truck and stomped on the gas, as the truck shot out of the driveway, across the road, and into a neighbor's brand new Camaro, setting off its car alarm. Jake sat up and threw the gear shift into forward and tore out of the driveway and down the street, taking out the side of a El Camino as he raced by it.

Banks staggered to his feet, popped out his empty clip, and slammed its replacement home. Looking down at his feet, he saw the lost tranquilizer pistol, but as he reached down to retrieve it, he was suddenly driven back down to the ground by a rapid series of punches from Angel.

"You killed him you son of a bitch. I'll fucking kill you!" Bank was down on his back as the punches rained down on his face from the ring covered fists of the enraged woman. Reaching up, he jammed the tranq pistol under Angel's jaw line and fired the dart. She screamed as she grabbed at her throat and rolled over onto the grass. Banks had put enough dope into that dart to bring down Morrow. Shot into a woman Angel's size would probably fry her brain and put her into a nuthouse and eating Cream of Wheat as she watched her cartoons.

Banks once more staggered to his feet. Neighbors were pouring out the front doors of their houses and the agent had to fire two rounds over the heads of two men who were thinking about being heroes, to back them away from his car. They turned and hightailed it down the street.

Banks jumped in his car and glanced up at the rearview mirror. There was so much blood across his head and face that he couldn't even see where it was coming from. He looked like he had been in fire fight, as did the neighborhood. Bodies were sprawled across lawns, cars were destroyed, their alarms screaming as loud as the neighbors. The agent looked backed down and saw a large black man coming down the street carrying what looked like a deer rifle. Banks threw the car in gear and floored it. The black man tried to get out of the way but was knocked airborne by the force of the hit and crashed into the windshield, shattering it, before he rolled off the side onto the street.

Jerry kept his foot right down to the metal. He had heard Pitre tell Morrow to meet him at the boat. He had to have meant Hendrichs boat that was moored over in Long Beach. The fastest way to get there was the route that Bank's had just used. Over the Vincent Thomas Bridge.

The truck was dying fast. By the time Jake blew through the tollbooth for the bridge, which he did not bother to stop and pay at, steam was pouring up from the shot out radiator and the engine was screaming like it was running out of oil. A slug must have pierced the engine somewhere and all the idiot lights on the dashboard were lit up. He was a quarter of the way up the incline of the suspension bridge when the engine gave up the ghost. Jake wrestled it over to the side and jumped out. He started running up the bridge.

Car were flying by him as he ran. A guy stuck his head out the passenger side, screaming "asshole." You could hear the sounds of the police sirens all the way onto the bridge. Sounded like they had called out for reinforcements. Jake was almost to the top of the bridge when he looked back over his shoulder and saw Banks in his sedan breeze through the same tollbooth that he had just ran.

Jake stopped running. He had no gun, his weapon was back at the house with Jim and Angel. He was defenseless out here all alone. Banks was going to win.

The sedan screeched to a halt. A bloodied and battered Special Agent Banks jumped out of the car and aimed his pistol at Jake. He was holding his side and gasping like a big fish who had just been pulled up onto a dock after a hard fight.

"Put your hands where I can see 'em, motherfucker."

"You look like shit, Jerry. Better get to a hospital."

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Jake put his hands on the top rail of the bridge and hoisted himself up, balancing himself by holding onto the one of the huge cable supports.

“I said freeze, asshole,” screamed Banks.

“What are you going to do now, Jerry? If you shoot me and I fall in the bay, how are you and Morgan going to explain how I wound up dead in Long Beach harbor when I’m suppose to be sitting in Leavenworth?”

Jake could see from his vantage point the blue lights of the police cars as they came racing down the turnpike towards the bridge tollbooths. Cops. Prison.

“Morrow, if you turn yourself in, I promise, I can make this all go away. But we don’t have much time. It has to been now.” Government agents. Prison. Death.

“Go fuck yourself, special agent.” Jake stepped off the bridge and disappeared into the night.

“Goddamn you, Morrow.” Banks ran as well as he could in his condition to the side of the bridge and looked over. It was total darkness. He could barely see the water. It must be damn near a two hundred foot jump to the waterline from there.

Banks could hear the screaming of the brakes and tires coming from the police cars, but he didn’t turn around. He kept staring down at the water, looking for any sign of Morrow.

“Let me see some hands. Right now.”

Banks didn’t turn around or raise his hands. “I’m a government agent,” he said wearily

“I said show me your hands, goddamn it.”

All these years. All these years and it comes to this, thought Jerry Banks. Jumping like Morrow just did flashed through the agent’s mind. Fuck that! He was afraid of water.

Special Agent Jerry Banks spun and raised his pistol.

The buckshot from the rookie’s Remington 12 gauge shotgun hit Jerry directly in the center of his upper body mass. Just like they teach the recruits at the police academy. The instructors had always stressed that point during range practice. It’s hard to explain to a criminals mommy and her attorney why her poor baby was shot in the head when he was committing his crime. You have to kill them neatly.

BATFISH

MONTANA

Canada was where I was planning on heading for after the disaster on Wonderland and I almost made it. I had jumped in my old Chevy Citation (I didn't even give Gus two weeks notice) and had driven non stop, fueled by white cross and shitty truck stop coffee. I didn't know exactly how long it would take Jon to try to implicate someone to save his ass, so I didn't want to take any major routes. I tried to stick to secondary roads if at all possible.

By the time I rolled into Montana the transmission in my old beater was starting to act up. Slipping like hell and I could smell the fluid burning. I had poured in four quarts of the shit in three hours and things were only getting worse. By the time I rolled into a little town called Hungry Horse the transmission was shaking so bad I could hardly hold on to the wheel. I rolled into a combination beer joint, grocery store, video rental outlet, gourmet coffee house, and garage.

An old timer came shuffling out of the garage, looking like a cast member out of the movie *Deliverance*. "What seems to be the problem there, young feller?"

Jesus! "Transmission I suppose. It's slipping and shaking like hell. And burning transmission fluid as fast as I can pump the crap in."

"Well, how many miles is on this piece of shit anyway?"

Cackling like a old crow.

"Way over a quarter of a million by now."

He paused to light up a Camel straight. "Quarter of a fucking million?" One eye squinting through the smoke. "My advice to you is junk the piece of shit."

"Easier said than done. I don't have the cash to buy another right now."

"Where the hell you headed for?"

"Canada."

He peered at the front of the car. "California plates and headed to Canada. Huh!"

He walked over and lifted the hood. "Boy you're right about burning the fluid. That shit stink or what?"

Slammed the hood down. "Well, you won't make the border today, that's for sure. I can't even look at it today. I'm booked solid. Tell you what. We got three cabins right around the corner. I'll rent you one for the night for half price. Slow time of the year. Then I'll get on it first thing in the morning."

When I went to crash I didn't get up for two solid days. Didn't matter though. The transmission was totally shot and would cost more to fix than the wreck was worth. The

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mechanic, Chet, who owned the establishment along with his wife, finally woke me up to give me the bad news by pounding on the door.

“Jesus son. I thought you might be dead.”

“Just been on the road a long time. Needed to catch up on my beauty sleep.”

“It didn’t work. Ha ha.”

I stared at him.

“Sorry, you walked right into that one. Anyway. Your not going any farther in that piece of scrap iron. It’s toast. Unless you consider it a classic and want to waste the money.”

I lay back on the bed and stared up at the ceiling. I knew where I had plenty of cash waiting for me. I just couldn’t take the chance of going or even calling there now.

“You got the law after you?” Chet was sitting across from me on the other bed lighting up another smoke off the butt of the previous one.

“Now why would you ask that?”

“You just got the look.” He sat and stared at me. His face wrinkled up in concentration. “Me and the missus run this place. Her name is Betty. We do OK. But on the weekends I rent these cabins out to some local whores and at times things can get a little hairy. Usually I handle things myself, but I am getting up in years and it seems we’re starting to get a lot of white trash coming around. Drugs and all these days. I could use a little help. What say?”

When I didn’t answer immediately, he came back with “This is a good place to lay low. Ain’t but one cop in a hundred square miles.”

I wound up staying there for almost a year.

Chet had an old Airstream trailer that he had taken on a trade in for a pick up truck he had rebuilt and that’s where I lived. It was cramped but cozy

Life was simple and easy. Get up in the morning. Do my roadwork and then work a heavy bag I hung from the rafters in the garage. Other than that, I worked seven days a week. Tended bar. Threw out rowdy drunks and aggressive johns. Learned how to run the espresso machine. Made a mean latte. Did whatever Chet needed. On Saturday night after we shut the place down, Chet would let me have my pick of one of the girls for the night.

Wasn’t too long before it was the same girl every Saturday night. Her name was Sunshine, but that wasn’t her real name. She was a former member of the Rainbow tribe and had stayed in this area after they had passed through here several years back. I guess she got tired of shitting outside and getting hassled by the local cops for going through peoples garbage. Sunshine was her Rainbow name. She never had told me her given name. Didn’t matter to me. What I liked about her was that she could really get down and dirty, was fun to be around, and plus she was covered with tattoos. Dragons, cartoon characters, skulls, sea horses, dolphins, you name it. It was like being able to read a comic book after bone dancing.

She was beautiful. Strawberry red hair with this china white body. Emerald green eyes. Covered in freckles.

Sunshine’s parents had been original Deadheads. Following the Grateful Dead around the country. Listening to those long drawn out jams. I hate that shit. But they were also smart enough to have gotten in on the ground floor of the just starting to flourish concert T-shirt industry. They made a fortune selling them out of their Volkswagen van. They now were retired comfortably in the Northern California area. A town by the name of Weed. Old deadheads who now had a daughter rebelling against them. Talk about ironic.

We were laying in bed one lazy Sunday morning, watching the only channel that the TV antenna would pick up. The news was on and one of the featured stories was about a once famous porno actor who had just died of cancer or AIDS or a combination of both. He had been a suspect in some murders in Los Angeles but the police could never get him to talk. There were

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a lot of rumors surrounding the deaths, mainly that it was a retaliation for a drug deal gone wrong, but now that's all it was. Just rumors.

The police finally thought that they had the evidence to pin the murders on him but he had foiled them by dying. The once great lover had taken the secret to the grave and now his videos were flying off the shelves. He was gonna wind up being a legend. More popular in death than in life. His wife Annesha had even written a book about him. Well, I'll be damned. Good for him.

He hadn't talked. The L. A. cops and a cocaine king weren't looking for me. Just the government was. It was time to make a break and head for Minnesota for one last visit.

I had a shitload of money waiting for me. If my sister hadn't gotten into those envelopes that is. But more importantly, I wanted to get my hands on those rolls of film, get them developed and figure out how I could use them for leverage. I couldn't stand the thought of hiding out here in the north woods for another winter. Freezing my ass off.

I had Sunshine drive me down to Kalispell to the Greyhound station.

"Why can't you tell me what's so fucking important that you have to drop everything and run off to Minnesota? If it's money you're worried about, forget it. My parents will give me cash anytime I ask for it."

Leaning down to kiss her I said "It's just better that you don't know. When I get everything straightened out I'll come back and I'll tell you the whole story."

"Fuck you." She spat out. "You're never coming back. You're just like every other swinging dick that's walked through my life. You're all full of bullshit."

She started up the car and roared out of the parking lot. So much for the mellow Rainbow spirit.

She was right about one thing. I guess I am full of bullshit.

JUICE

LONG BEACH

Long Beach Naval Hospital became a semi-famous hospital back in the late seventies when President Carter had a drunk brother who needed drying out. Not good public relations to be the Prez and have a brother who would get drunk and piss along side the road. But he was just a good old boy having fun. Good old Billy C.

Jake Morrow wasn't quite as famous, but he was getting his share of the press these day. There were several government agencies who were doing their best to try to explain to the media why the man who had just been recently portrayed in the *Navy Times* as unjustly accused and railroaded for a murder he did not commit, was found with a compound fractured leg, hanging on for dear life to a bridge piling in Long Beach (California) harbor. Wasn't he suppose to be in a cell in Leavenworth (Kansas)?

Jake was in the security unit at the hospital with an armed guard at his door. Security precautions were tight for his both his protection and for reasons brought forth by the government. Some one had to figure out just what the hell was going on!

His leg was encased in a large cast and was elevated up off the bed. Jake had no recollection of hitting the water or swimming over to the pilings and hanging on for almost a half an hour. Nor of the Coast Guard rescue crew pulling him into their boat. He remembered cursing Jerry Banks and stepping off the bridge and that was it.

For the first four days, he had passed in and out of consciousness, there was no recollection of even going into surgery to have his badly damaged leg screwed and grafted together. Now he laid in his soft bed, mellowly stoned on legal drugs. Nurses came in to fluff his pillows and giggle at his stupid jokes, all the while treating him like some sort of celebrity. The guard had come into his room on Friday night to watch the fights with him. Later that same evening he had talked the cute little corpsman who came into check his blood pressure and temp to give him a excellent hand job with cocoa butter.

Jake was waiting for the world to fall out from underneath him. For some reason he was not allowed access to newspapers, a radio, and was allowed to watch television only if some one was in the room with him. No one talked about what had brought him there.

So he figured the worst was about to happen, but there was no need to not enjoy himself until that happened.

First thing Monday morning, in walked a trio of trouble.

The guard and Jake had been drinking coffee while goofing on that Kathy Lee bimbo on TV, when the door slammed behind them. The guard's face had gone lily white, he had shut off the TV, and rushed out the door and back to his station.

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Jake's visitors included a stern looking navy captain from the JAG office who was wearing the worst toupee that Jake had ever seen. He also had one of those little mustaches that was trimmed down to just the top of the captain's lip. Jake wondered why you would even make the effort to have it.

He was followed by one of his flunkies. A perverted looking, first class navy yeoman, with bottle thick glasses and beady little eyes, who resembled the actor Wally Cox. Obviously, he was the stenographer, as he went over into a corner and set up his little steno machine. To Jake, he seemed like a guy you might walk in and catch screwing a blow up doll.

It was the woman though who was definitely in charge. She was dressed in a pants suit, with her hair done up in a bun, and she had the start of a better mustache than the captain. Although she had a giant pair of jugs that were straining to bust out her jacket, her appearance screamed out bull dyke.

She flipped out her badge and flashed it to Jake as the captain, without saying a word, took a seat next to the stenographer.

"Mr. Morrow, I'm Nancy Foley, Federal Bureau of Investigations. This is Captain Putnam, Judge Advocate General's office. And our stenographer, Petty Officer Cox."

Jake burst out laughing.

She ignored him. "There is no need to waste time by discussing why we are here. I'm sure you are well aware that these incredible circumstances that you have been involved in recently have perked the interests of many parties. We are here to ask some questions of you and to try to get to the bottom of this. Before we start, do you need the presence of an attorney?"

Jake grabbed the monkey bar that was hanging over his bed, pulled himself up, and adjusted a pillow behind his back.

"Not if he's a military lawyer."

She smirked. "Mr. Morrow, you received a dishonorable discharge from the military. You can receive no veterans benefits, that includes legal representation."

"I don't have any money to pay for one."

"The state of California could appoint you one."

Jake was silent for a moment. "What am I being charged with?"

"Nothing yet."

"Yet! I'm not being charged, yet! You better read me my rights first before you start to ask your questions."

Another smirk. "Mr. Morrow, are you something of a jailhouse lawyer?"

"Not in the least. But I know when I'm about to get fucked again. Ya see, its happened to me more than once."

Foley turned to the stenographer with a weary sigh. "Read him his rights."

The second that Cox finished his reading of Jake's rights, Agent Foley jumped in again.

"Is your name Jacob Thaddeus Morrow?"

"Yes."

"Were you at one time a member of the United States Navy?"

"Yes."

"Were you stationed at one time in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii?"

"Yes." This was getting fucking ridiculous.

"Did you stop the rape of the attempted rape of one Mary Givens in Pearl Harbor Naval housing?"

Jake sat up. "Who?" His voice squeaked.

Foley glanced over at the JAG captain.

"Mary Givens," she repeated.

"You know who she is?" whispered Jake.

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“Did you murder Ensign Raymond Dunn?”

“No.”

“But you admit that he died because of the beating that he received from you?”

“He was trying to rape the girl. It was an accident. I was just trying to help her.”

Agent Foley reached into her briefcase and pulled out a *Navy Times* and handed it to Jake. “Please read this highlighted article.”

After Jake was done with the article he threw it onto his night stand. He turned his head away from the agent. “That fucker knew. He knew the whole goddamn time.”

Foley quietly walked around the bed and stood in front of Jake.

“Who knew the whole time, Jake?”

“Banks. That son of a bitch. I should have broken his neck when I had the chance.”

Foley looked over at the captain again. “Mr. Morrow, Special Agent Banks is dead. He was killed shortly after you jumped off the Vincent Thomas bridge in a shootout with members of the San Pedro police department.” She paused, “Was it Jerry Banks who got you out of Leavenworth?”

Jake stared at the wall.

“Did Commander Max Morgan aid in your release from Leavenworth? Was he working with Special Agent Banks?”

Silence.

“What was their reasoning on gaining your release?”

Jake looked up at Agent Foley and smiled.

“I think I need to call an attorney.”

BATFISH

ISLA MUJURES AND MINNEAPOLIS

The sun was coming up on Isla Mujeres. Incredible sight. I never got tired of seeing it. Artimus and I were sitting on the dock watching the fisherman getting ready to go out. The power of the black beauties was still keeping me wide awake. I opened up what must have been our fiftieth beer and passed one to my burly partner.

"The bus got to Grand Forks and I found out that there was a huge blizzard down in southern Minnesota and all buses going there had been canceled. The northern part of the state was clear though. So I thought I'd take a bus to Duluth. The thought of having to spend the night in Grand Forks didn't fill me with a warm, fuzzy feeling. That turned about to about a bad idea."

"I hadn't made a lot of dough working for Chet, so I was traveling on a bare bones budget. When I got to Duluth I tried to check into this landmark dump called the Seaway but they were full. So like a dumbass, I decided to spend the night in that shelter. One half dicked brother later, the rest is history."

Artimus had been standing there taking a piss off the dock. All the fisherman and their families running around and he doesn't even make an attempt to be coy.

"So what happened after you escaped from the bughouse?"

"I called my sister and woke her up. She about shit. She came on down and picked me up. I spent the next few nights hiding in the spare bedroom in her basement. Checked into a hotel after that. I was afraid that the heat was going to look for me at her place. She said that years ago some Feds came around asking questions but she hadn't heard anything since. All they told her was that I was AWOL. All the money I had sent was there."

*"I asked if the Feds had been to our parents. Couple of years ago I guess they inherited a bunch of cash. My mothers father had ran off years ago. He was a gambler living out in Reno. He had died and left his estate to this old hooker who was in her eighties and **still** working. Kind of a novelty act. The will stipulated that she had to quit the life if she wanted the dough. She said fuck that, so my mother got the inheritance. Now they live in North Dakota at some religious, far right wing, militant compound. Haven't been heard from in years."*

"Anyway, I sent my sister out and had her get the film developed at one of those places where the machine does the developing. Had them ready in a hour. If the person who worked there saw them they would have called the cops for sure! You wouldn't have believed those pictures. They start off with the admiral and Rose doing all this kinky shit and winds up with her laying on the floor with her brains bashed in. I had her get three sets of prints."

"So what did you do with them?"

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"I sent one set to the Honolulu police department along with an anonymous note, Roses I.D., and a map detailing where they could find her body. The other set I had put in a safety deposit box."

"What about the third set?"

"One night I had my sister drive me to Lakeville. It's this suburb south of the Twin Cities. I wanted to call that number that Captain Clint had given me the night before we graduated from UDT training. I was worried that they'd be able to trace the call so I didn't want it any where close to where my sister lived. So I called and this lady answered. I asked for the extension and she put me through just like it was a normal business. The phone rang about a hundred times and I was just going to hang up when this guy answered."

"Holy fuck man! Who was it?" Artimus was all ready oozing sweat.

"I don't know. But when I told him that the Captain gave me the number and who I was, he said that some people had been looking for me for a long time. Wondered why it took me so long to call? I told him everything. About the drug dealing, Leon, Rose and the admiral, me being AWOL, even about Wonderland Avenue. But more importantly, I told him all about Zak being killed. When I told him about the pictures, he wanted them. He gave me a PO box in Langley, Virginia. That's where the third set went to."

"So what did he say after all that?"

"He said that I sure had been a busy boy. And that this was it. This was my one favor, but he could only do so much, and he was only doing that for Captain Clint. Then he told me to tear up that card and eat the scraps and forget I had ever called that number."

Artimus was doubled over in laughter. "So did you eat the card?"

"Fucking A, I ate it."

"So then how did you wind up here?"

"I just booked a charter flight to Cancun. Showed up with my fake birth certificate and walked right on the plane with all the other tourists. I bummed around Cancun for a day or two before I took the ferry over here. Found the job tending bar for Orlando. I met you and here we are. I got us those fake Canadian passports using the same book I bought from that company in Washington state."

"Shit, man, do you still have those files on Morrison and Elvis?"

"That was last thing I did before I went out to the airport. I stopped off at the post office and dropped that file in the mail to Rolling Stone magazine. About a month later my sister got a check from the editor. It was enough for a nice down payment on a house out west for her. It was the least I could do."

"So you don't even know if you're in the clear on any of this shit?"

"I know I'm AWOL. I know I'm an escapee from a mental institution. But everything else is in the wind." I said holding my hands up.

"So who's the asshole that you saw down by the snorkel charters?"

"I'm gonna take care of that today."

JUICE

LONG BEACH

Seventy two hours later, the trio reentered Jake's room, only this time a visitor was already sitting in the room with Jake and his guard. A handsome hispanic gentleman, who was wearing a cream colored suit and matching snakeskin cowboy boots. He had a long ponytail hanging down his back and it was obvious by his build that he had spent a considerable amount of time in the weight room.

The three were laughing about a joke which involved something about a dwarf and three hookers with a big dildo.

Jake turned to the hispanic man. "Here they are."

He walked to the government officials, his hand outstretched. "Welcome. My name is Enrique Martinez, the attorney for Mr. Morrow. Please sit," he gestured towards their chairs.

Agent Foley cleared her throat. "Mr. Martinez, during our previous meeting with Mr. Morrow he suddenly decided that he would need some legal representation. Before we start again with our questioning we wish to reiterate that Mr. Morrow has not yet been charged with any crime. And that the gov...."

"No more questions." Martinez smiled with perfect teeth at Agent Foley.

She appeared suddenly flustered. "Excuse me?"

"My client has been unjustly accused by and convicted by the United States government for a crime he did not commit. Information was covered up and known witnesses, who were alive, were not called in his defense. This had been detailed in the media. An agent of the government then illegally released him from his incarceration in an attempt to involve my client in most likely some sort of illegal covert operations. Unfortunately, my clients memory has been damaged by his long fall off the Vincent Thomas bridge and he has no recollection of events leading up to his fall."

Martinez leaned back in his chair and put his hand behind his head. "So there will be no more questions."

Foley's face was fire hydrant red. "Mr. Martinez," she spat, "your client was involved in a shootout which resulted in the deaths of two people, one a federal agent, and a serious injury to a female bystander. Furthermore, at this time we have no accurate time table on just how long your client as been out of Leavenworth. But in the last several months, his uncle, a convicted murderer, was broken out of a Minnesota state prison, and the financial office of a United States navy ship was held up at gunpoint. Your client may very well have been involved in these crimes."

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Martinez's booming laugh filled the room. "Do you have any evidence linking him to these crimes, Agent Foley?"

"Not directly," she admitted, "at this time."

The lawyer stood up. "Exactly as I thought." He unzipped his valise and pulled out three folders and handed one to Captain Putnam and the other to Agent Foley.

"This is a list of the requirements that my client is demanding of the U. S. government. Note I say demands, not requests. First, my client will need his discharge upgraded to an honorable discharge with full benefits restored. Second, all pay and allowances forfeited from the date of his conviction will be restored up until this date. Third, he will be paid a medical severance package for the injuries that have been sustained while under the custody of the United States government. And the final demand is that my client will receive a pardon from the government for any illegal activities that he may have been a part of up until this date."

Martinez up looked at the JAG captain and the agent. Only this time he wasn't smiling. "If you choose to not honor any or part of this agreement within twenty four hours, I will give the media full access to my client. This is a non negotiable issue. We will let them put the matter on trial."

Foley looked like she was going to explode as she shoved the folder in her briefcase. "You'll hear from us by tomorrow morning." The trio started to make their way to the door.

"Oh, Captain. Excuse me," Martinez called.

Captain Putnam turned towards the attorney.

Martinez pointed at Agent Foley. "My client told me that you did not speak during your first meeting. And you didn't speak during ours. So I was wondering. Can you talk or is she your ventriloquist?"

His booming laugh could be heard mocking them as they stormed down the hall.

BATFISH

MEXICO

Garret had put on a lot of weight. Probably over a hundred pounds. And he was wearing a toupee. We found him sitting on the side of the beach that allows topless sun bathing. Garret was sitting on his beach towel and smearing sun block all over his body while gawking at the topless chicks on spring break.

"I thought you only liked boys, Garret."

He swung around and looked up at me while trying to shield his eyes from the sun.

"Do I know you?" His eyes said that he suspected he did.

"You know me, shithead. So knock off the dumbass routine."

All he had to say then was "Oh God!"

I sat down next to him in the sand while Artimus sat on his other side.

"Ya. Oh God. Where's your fucking running buddy, Leon?"

He was starting to shake. It must have been ninety degrees out.

"I've been out of the navy for almost three years."

"Not that I give a shit but I thought you were a career man."

"I was, but they found out about Lee and they discharged me. Bastards wouldn't even let me say goodbye to Spider."

"Fuck that mangy mutt. What about Leon?"

"We used to call back and forth all the time. He was living in an apartment with Pok down off Hotel Street. About a year ago I called and some other guy answered. He was real rude to me but when I asked him about Leon he started to laugh. Leon didn't live there anymore. He said that Leon had been found dead down in Waipahu. In an alley behind Little Egypt's bar. Someone had slit his throat." Garret began to sob.

He was looking at me with tears running down his face. "I swear to God I had nothing to do with Zak being killed. That was all Leon. He was tied in with that admiral. That old fucker had a lot of pull. He wasn't going to let you guys get away with knowing what went on at his house that night. You were smart. You ran."

"Listen to me you little cock sucker" I said between clenched teeth. "You are going to go back to your room. Pack your shit and catch the first flight out of Cancun. I don't care if it's even going to where you live. You just fly out and forget this day ever happened."

Artimus stood up and brushed himself off and leered down at Garret. "You've got one hour to get off this island, fuzznuts. Or I'm gonna feed you to the fucking sharks."

Exactly forty five minutes later we stood at the ferry pier and watched Garret waddle onboard. "Buy you a beer?" I asked Artimus, full well knowing the answer.

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"Fucking A."

We headed up to the bar. "So Artimus. Now you know all about my horrible history. What about yours? Why don't you tell me about this drug deal that went sour and brought you down here?"

"Oh hell man, I can't tell you that." He paused and started to laugh. "I'd have to kill you if I did."

And he never did tell me.

There was still too much hanging over my head. I couldn't trust the idea that Garret would go back to the states and never say a word to anyone. Most likely after he got back home and the fear subsided he would call either NIS or the local cops. Artimus told me that we should have just canceled his ticket, but I just couldn't do it.

I still didn't know what sending those pictures to the Honolulu police and to that mysterious post office box in Langley had accomplished. The only scenario that would have worked would have been Artimus's idea. Killing Garret and feeding him to the sharks. Zak would have had no problem with that. Zak lived by the old "live by the sword, die by the sword" creed. I imagine that Captain Clint had at one time lived by that also. Long before the booze wasted him away.

A week later I left Isla Mujeres.

I backpacked through the interior of Mexico for several months before heading back to the states. It was fantastic. I was tired of tourist Mexico. Spring break, wet T-shirt contests, college kids trying to jump into swimming pools from their balconies and getting impaled on fence stakes.

Sleeping out under stars while hiking through Copper Canyon was a high better than any drug could give you. Take it from the master. Even then I did manage to take my first peyote trip with some locals that I met there. Not very pleasant for a while. Lots of stomach cramps and farting. Artimus would have been sickened by my wimpy display.

The buzz had gotten so heavy that I finally excused myself from the group. Not that they noticed. I found my way back to my lean to and laid down on my sleeping bag.

"Weird buzz isn't it?"

I rolled on to my side and looked at a figure sitting in the sand next to me. I would swear that it was Ronnie Van Zant. Lead singer for Lynyrd Skynyrd. Great singer. But very dead. He was wearing that same hat that he always wore on stage and he looked damn good for someone who had died in a plane crash.

This peyote was some dynamite shit!

"Fuck man! I am high!"

"That you are, brother."

"I also know you're dead."

"That's true too. Got anything to drink?"

"This is all I've got left." I handed over my last bottle of Corona.

"It'll have to do. Was always a bit of a Bud man myself."

"Beggars can't be choosers."

I closed my eyes for several minutes. When I opened them, he was still sitting there. "Since you're still here, can I ask you a question?"

"Fire away brother."

"What was it like when the plane was going down?"

He looked at me. His eyes were like red coals.

"Why would you be concerned about that? That's all anyone ever asks me. That or how many chicks did I fuck. That's water under the bridge. You know what you should be worried

SCREAMING BATFISH BLUES

about? I bumped into this Yankee fucking punk named Leon. He said that you fucking ran out on a buddy or yours and that you're nothing but a coward. You gonna take shit from that pussy?"

"I asked Zak to come with me. I knew that there was going to be trouble. He just wanted to stay and prove some point."

"Maybe it's time you stopped running and made a stand. Like your buddy did. Shit, man! You don't have to shoot it out with anyone. Just stop running and start living your life. Ya know you only got one. Just remember that old saying."

"Which one is that?"

"Living well is the best revenge."

When I came to the next morning there was an empty Corona bottle sitting next to an imprint in the sand of a pair of cowboy boots.

JUICE

WYOMING

It had snowed over eleven inches the evening before up in the mountains and here it was eight in the morning and still coming down. The dry, puffy kind of snow that seemed to pile up as quick as you could shovel it off the sidewalks and driveways. The plows hadn't even ventured out yet. Should have been a slow business day, not that it's ever a real busy day up past Story, Wyoming. It was a land of hermits, people who like to take life slow and easy, and folks who would rather have their past forgotten. If you craved the fast paced life of the city, Story was definitely not the place for you.

That's why Sophie was surprised when she heard the cowbell on the front door clatter, telling her that a customer was coming in. She looked up from her inventory of Green Giant frozen vegetables, and was even more surprised to see that it wasn't a customer, but her father. They hadn't seen or spoken to each other in who knows how long?

She stood and and watched him as he brushed the powdery snow off.

"Sophie, before you say anything, the first thing I want to say is that I was wrong. I was wrong the whole time and I'm sorry. I should have supported you," the reverend was having a hard time choking down his tears, so he handed her an envelope, "Here, this came for you yesterday afternoon."

She took the letter and looked at the handwriting. It was from Jake. For a big man he wrote with a surprisingly nice touch. The stamp was from Mexico.

Her hands were shaking so badly that she handed it back to her father for him to open.

Dear Sophie,

All I can hope is that your Dad gets this letter to you. I don't know if you have heard the news or not. I'm out. It's too long of a story to tell you in a letter, but I'm out of prison. I know it's been a long time and the last thing I want to do is interfere in your life but if you want to write me, here is my address. There is no phone where I live but I've enclosed a map if you ever want to visit me. I still feel the same.

Love,

Jake

"Do you need money?"

Sophie looked up from the letter at her father. "What?"

"Money. Do you need money?"

SCREAMING BATFISH BLUES

“For what?”

“For Mexico.”

Her old Mazda pickup ran like it had just rolled off the factory floor. Her only complaint was its lack of air conditioning once she crossed the border at Yuma and crossed over to Mexicali. The heat was oppressive.

She had driven non stop after her shift had ended at the grocery store, getting by on Cokes and fast food burgers. Sophie had apologized profusely to the owner that she had to leave on such short notice, but he had merely shrugged his shoulders.

San Felipe had seemed so close when she had first looked at its location on the map, but now that the initial surge of adrenaline had worn off, it seemed like it might as well have been in Peru.

The directions on Jake's map showed that he lived just north of San Felipe in a unmarked location on road atlases. She had been driving for miles on a winding dirt road that seemed like it was never going to end. Sophie had just decided that she was lost and was about to turn around to try to find someone who could give her directions, when she saw the Sea of Cortez and the old Winnebago trailer. Just like on Jake's map.

She turned left onto the short driveway that came up behind the trailer and parked her truck there. Jutted up against the Winnebago was one of those old Volkswagen camper vans, the kind where the top popped up with some sort of tent. A ratty old hound came bounding around the side of the van and licked her hand, then turned and went back the way he came. Sophie followed after him.

Sitting there in wheelchair covered in Harley Davidson and rock and roll decals, was a beautiful woman with the most incredible tan that Sophie had ever seen. Her hair was silver and was done up in a braided ponytail that wound down into her lap. If you took the braids out, her hair would have easily spilled out onto the ground. On a picnic table next to her was a brass hookah pipe that the woman was puffing away contentedly on from one of the hoses coming off its octopus like body. The hound had collapsed at her feet and was unashamedly washing his balls.

She smiled at Sophie. “I just got my husband back. So I'm celebrating.”

“Excuse me.”

“My husband, Billy. He passed away last month and you know, things move slow in Mexico, so I just got him back.”

“Excuse me,” Sophie repeated, “I don't understand.”

“From the funeral home, dear. We just got him back from the funeral home. He wanted to be cremated and they were booked up or short on gas for the oven, or some bullshit, so I just got him back. He's right there.” She pointed at a quart bottle of Corona. “He wanted his ashes poured into a beer bottle. Typical fucking Billy. They had to crunch up the bone junks to fit 'em in the bottle.”

Billy. Billy was Jake's uncle, Sophie thought.

“Are you Dawn Morrow?”

The woman had an infectious laugh. “In the flesh. And I know that you must be Sophie. Jake went out partying with the boys last night but he'll be around shortly.”

BATFISH

GULF COAST

The person who was born in Albert Lea doesn't exist anymore. Physically he does, but on paper he doesn't. In a touching little ceremony that I held by myself when I returned from Mexico, I burned my real birth certificate, Minnesota drivers license, Social Security card, and my military ID card. My California identity also went into the flames. Sooner or later the government would get their shit together and put my fingerprints with that name. A tattoo artist had covered up my navy tattoo with a jet black shark. If I look real close I can still see the old one through it.

My identity now is that of a Alabama baby who was born about the same time I was, but died young. Got his name out of the obituaries. His mother had forgotten that she had put him on the top of her car while unlocking the doors. She was coming out of a bar. A true class act.

I never realized how handy that book would become.

I had been working in the gulf shores area at a local marina. Scraping the barnacles off the bottoms of boats. My Dad was finally right. That good navy training finally became useful. In the evenings I would spend my time trying to keep my old houseboat afloat.

The owner of the marina gave it to me when I expressed an interest in it after he said it was destined for the wood pile. It leaked badly, so the bilge pump was always running, and was infested with mice, but it was home.

I'd been drug and steroid free for the first time in over a decade. Anti-steroid zealots are full of shit when they tell the public that being on the juice doesn't work. But when you get off them the size just melts away. I don't even lift anymore. Every morning I get up and run five miles on the beach. I weigh almost fifty pounds less than I did two years ago. I don't know if anyone would even recognize me now. My hair is down to my shoulders and my beard almost reaches my chest. It's starting to turn gray. I feel pretty good.

But being drug free doesn't mean beer free. That part of Minnesota will never leave me. I had been trying to limit myself to only two frosties a night. I'd only broken that self imposed rule once.

I'd also been following another personal rule No contact with anyone from my previous lives. That's meant no letters or phone calls. Ever. It's better for me and it's sure better for everybody else. I never wanted to put anyone in the spot of having to lie to some government official or someone much worse. Some drug dealer still pissed about some long ago scam and wanting to settle the score.

SCREAMING BATFISH BLUES

One lonely night I had decided to call Artimus. He had left Isla Mujeres some time after I had, but he had given me the number of his mother in South Dakota. Said she would always know where he was.

Television hadn't been a big part of my life, but this night at the marina I had caught this weekly show that was about navy and marine lawyers. Shit, the things that they did in one hour were incredible, as well as unbelievable. Flying fighter planes, kicking the shit out of people, and shooting terrorists. All in one hour. And here I am thinking that all JAG officers did was bust people for smoking pot. The marine lawyer was a babe on top of everything else. I just had to call Arty and tell him about it. And I missed him.

Artimus had been killed on his motorcycle while he was headed for the annual biker rally in Sturgis. It was a hit and run accident. The driver and vehicle were never seen.

I woke up the next morning where I had passed out the night before after consuming a huge amount of malt liquor and smoking a gram of hash. I had been laying face down on the beach. A bunch of surly sea gulls were doing bombing runs on my prone body and had shit all over me. They were screaming with glee when I came to.

My life had officially hit rock bottom. It was time to make a stand.

After getting back to the houseboat and taking an ice cold shower, having a breakfast of cold Krystal burgers, and then throwing it up over the side, I had broken my non contact rule for the second time in less than twenty four hours.

JUICE

BAJA

The buds had these beautiful red hairs on them and were so moist with resin that it really took an effort to get one lit up after it was rolled.

“Man, I am fucking toasted. Nice and evenly toasted. This is some dynamite shit.” Jake lay back on the sand as he exhaled the hit. “Is any of that beer in the cooler cold yet?”

It wasn't even eight in the morning and they were at it again. Jake, two gay windsurfers from Michigan named Lance and Robert, and Ozzie, a grizzled old marijuana smuggler with hair down to his ass and the filthiest mouth Jake had ever heard, who had given up the trade when carrying a gun became part of the job description. The party had started off with some late afternoon windsurfing the previous day and had continued on into the early morning hours. After a short cat nap, Ozzie had made a run to town in his battered jeep for some breakfast staples and more beer. The old fart had made a damn good biscuit, something you didn't see a lot of in Mexico.

Ozzie passed the joint over to Lance as he dug a beer out of the cooler for Jake.

“You guys weren't doing any butt fucking last night while we were sleeping, were ya?”

“Jesus Christ, Ozzie,” Jake roared with laughter.

The couple laughed along with Jake.

“No, Ozzie,” Lance said, “we didn't. But I was thinking about sneaking over and sliding my dick in your mouth while you were snoring. Your mouth was inviting.”

“You better fucking not have,” screamed the old hippie as he jumped up and ran down into the surf and dove in. Ozzie had joined the party late the previous evening and had not realized that the windsurfers were an item until after he had started breakfast.

“You'll have to forgive him,” laughed Jake, “he's a little behind the times for an old smuggler and he is very burned out.”

“No problem. We've gotten use to that bullshit.” Robert handed the doobie to him. What brings you to Baja, Jake?”

“Warm weather helps keep my leg limber and it was always the dream of my aunt to live down here, so after her husband died, I helped move her down here and never went back.” His rehearsed bullshit line.

“For a guy who walks with a cane, you can handle a board pretty well,” said Lance. “Do you mind if I ask what happened?”

“Not at all. I was in the navy and doing some high overhead work and took a tumble overboard. Had a compound fracture and after surgery wound up with a medical disability and a

SCREAMING BATFISH BLUES

pension. I'm getting closer to shedding the cane, but it will be a while yet. Do you like it? I picked it up at a survivalist shop in Tijuana a while back."

Jake took the cane and gave the gargoyle head on the handle a twist. A long stainless steel blade slid out of the body of the cane.

"Nasty looking weapon," whistled Lance.

"I've never had any problems down here. But with my aunt being wheelchair bound and all, I like to have a little protection."

"Robert was in the navy, too," volunteered Lance.

"Really? What was your rate, Robert?"

"Actually, I was a officer. In the administrative branch. Only for about two years though, so I only made lieutenant." Robert opened up a can of Tecate and took a long pull. "I was forced to resign my commission."

Jake was finishing up the final touches on another blunt. "Problems with marijuana?"

Robert snorted and took another long drink. "I wish. No, I was involved with another officer and we had a place off base. He was assigned to the intelligence department. We kept our relationship real low. Real hush hush. Never even associated with each other during working hours. One night I had the duty and I got a phone call from a NIS agent. He told me that Darrell, that was who I lived with, had committed suicide by shooting himself in the head in the living room of our apartment, and I better get over there right away." Robert stood up and looked out at Ozzie swimming in the bay.

He continued talking like he had narrated this story a dozen times in his life.

"Something was real wrong there. We didn't have a gun in the house, but there was one in Darrell's hand. We didn't have or even believe in pornography, but the apartment was absolutely crawling with it. Books, magazines, videos, there was so much of the shit in here we wouldn't have had time to even to go to work if we were that into it. If Darrell did kill himself, I'd like to know how NIS found out about it so quick. But I know that Darrell didn't kill himself. He was too happy of a person. We were happy. When it was all said and done, I resigned my commission. That's what the bastards wanted anyway."

Lance went over and put his arms around Robert.

"I've always known that if I hadn't been pulling the duty that night, that I would have been killed too. They wanted to make it look like it was a lovers quarrel. But when whoever got there that night saw that I wasn't there, they just killed Darrell and made it look like we were a couple of sick perverts. I guess they figured murdering one fag would make his lover get the message."

Robert turned and looked at Jake with distant, haunted eyes.

Jake felt a chill go up his body like someone had just stepped on his grave. He remembered the night in Vegas when Jasmine had called him stupid for thinking that he had been the first one that Banks had used for his missions.

Ozzie came shuffling back up the beach with his head hung low. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that. But I got my reasons. When I was a boy back in Michigan, I had a gym teacher who wanted me to jack him off. Fucking pervert, I was only in the seventh grade."

Robert and Lance both laughed. "That's OK, Ozzie. No harm done. But we didn't know you where from Michigan. So are we. We're both from Grand Rapids. What about you?" said Lance.

Ozzie was beaming. "Fucking Detroit, of course. Home of the Red Wings, Lions, Tigers, and the greatest fighter of all time, the hit man, Tommy Hearns. Shit, what a small world." He looked over at Jake. "What do you think of that, you big douche bag? They're from Michigan."

SCOTT L. ANDERSON

Jake felt like barfing up his huevos rancheros and biscuits. “Ya, what do you think of that?” He grinned weakly. “Hey Ozzie, I’m not feeling the greatest. How ‘bout giving me a lift home?” He struggled to get up off of the sand with his cane.

Robert walked over and put a hand under Jake’s arm to help give him a lift and walked over with him to Ozzie’s jeep.

“Such a fucking lightweight,” taunted Ozzie. “I was just getting ready to get and down and do some serious fucking partying with my new amigos.”

Jake climbed up into the passenger seat of the jeep. Ozzie was still back at the camp site with Lance. He was babbling something about Hearn knocking that “homo Sugar Ray Leonard’s dick in the dirt” in their rematch.

Jake shook his head. “Ozzie will never learn.”

“I read about you, Jake.”

“What do you mean?” Jake wished Ozzie would hurry the hell up.

“You were the guy who suppose to be in Leavenworth prison for murder but the cops found you after you jumped off that bridge in Long Beach. Aren’t you?”

Jake didn’t answer.

“The agent that let you out is dead and the naval officer from the prison that he was working with committed suicide a couple of days later.” Robert continued. “I read all about it in *Newsweek*. Why did they let you out, Jake? What did they want you to do to in return for getting you out of there?”

Over Robert’s shoulder, Jake could see Ozzie was shuffling up the beach with his arm around Lance like they were old college buddies.

“I can’t talk about it. They forced me to sign a agreement,” Jake whispered.

“I saw the look on your face when I was talking about Darrell. It was like you knew.”

Ozzie jumped up into the jeep, cocked his ass cheek towards Jake and farted loudly. “Blew ya kiss there, my sweetheart.” The stupid old stoner cackled like a witch.

The jeep roared to life.

Robert reached into the vehicle and shook hands with Jake. “By not talking, Jake, you’re letting them get away with it.”

“C’mon, ya Mary. Let’s get your sick pussy ass home,” said Ozzie.

“We’ll be here for another week, Jake. If you want to talk, you know where our camp is.” Robert turned and headed back down the beach.

Ozzie put the jeep in gear and raced off down the gravel road. “What were you two talking about? Is he trying to get in your cornhole?”

“Ozzie, will you shut the hell up? Please?”

“Fuck you, dickhead.” They rode in silence up to the Winnebago.

“Looks like you got company, Jake.” The argument already forgotten. “Or does Dawn got herself a new guy.” Ozzie sounded jealous. He had had a enormous crush on Dawn since the first day he had come over to sell them a bag of weed.

“Wyoming plates on that piece of shit. Who the hell do you know from Wyoming.”

Jake slid out of the jeep without a word and began to limp around the side of the trailer while ignoring Ozzie’s taunt of “Hey, you dumb fuckstick, you forgot your cane.”

Rossington Collins Band was jamming on *Don’t Misunderstand Me* at a level that almost made your ears bleed. Uncle Billy’s favorite band. He had always claimed that it was Gary Rossington and Allen Collins who had made Skynyrd. So after their plane crashed in that swamp in Mississippi, Billy said that had just helped fine tune the band a little and that the crash hadn’t been the tragedy or the end of southern rock and roll like all those faggot rock reporters wrote about.

SCREAMING BATFISH BLUES

Dawns old nameless hound came loping around the corner, barked a hello, turned and walked with Jake, all the while trying to sniff at Jake's crotch. Jake absently shooed the flea bitten mongrel away. He turned the corner.

It felt like an acid flashback. Maybe Ozzie's red hair buds packed more of a wallop that he thought.

It was her. The woman that Jake was going to marry a lifetime ago. She looked exactly the same way she had the day he had left her to go off for his run. The day the ensign died in the fight and his life went to shit. He always had kidded her that she reminded him of Morticia Adams, with her snow white skin and jet black hair. Jake thought that she had ignored his letter. Had gotten on with her life. Married some evangelist and had forgotten about old Jake sitting in his prison cell. But now here she was. Sitting there with his Aunt Dawn and his uncle in a bottle between them. She was sipping on a glass of sun tea while Dawn was belting down her first margarita of the day. Listening to the survivors of a dead rock and roll band. Like time had never passed. They both turned and looked at Jake at the same time.

Jake Morrow, adrenaline junkie, drug dealer, armed robber, government hit man, dropped to his knees in the sand and cried like he was nine years old.

BATFISH

SOMEWHERE IN THE GOOD OLD USA

The Corvette handled like a dream. He had really missed it when he was stationed in Hawaii, but there hadn't been an option. He just couldn't stand the thought of shipping her over there. So many things could happen to such a beautiful ride in the week it would have taken the freighter to get to Hawaii. Scratches, dents, even theft. He shuddered just thinking about it.

Well, that's all over now. Back in the states and behind the wheel of his 1957 classic. Life was good. Shit, life was great. His career could have gone to hell in a hand basket if NIS hadn't handled that situation the way they did. Just have to be more careful now.

She had been such an incredible piece of ass that he just couldn't resist it. Even if she was married and worse, enlisted. Just too bad the way things had worked out for her. But if her husband was so crazy that he could shoot up their house after finding out about something as minor as a little infidelity, she was probably lucky that she got out of that marriage when she did. Maybe he could look her up sometime down the road.

The 'vette slid in to his assigned space at the officer's club. Early morning game of squash with the captain and some breakfast and he'd be good to go. Probably be best to let the old fool win a game this time. With promotions coming up and all.

Luckily that incident in Pearl wasn't on his official record. Still had a good chance to make captain himself. He gathered up his gym bag and racket and slid out of the bucket seat and began to put the top down. It was suppose to be sunny today, as usual in Biloxi, and he liked to come out of the club after breakfast and get into a sun warmed car. It being a convertible was another reason he loved that car so much

All he heard before the aluminum baseball connected with the side of his right knee was a slight whistling noise. The first blow blew out all the cartilage and severely ruptured his ACL. Before he could scream out, a large meaty paw covered his mouth and a huge hairy arm encircled his throat, at the same time turning him towards his bat wielding assailant.

The second blow shattered his knee cap into six pieces. The third shot went low and cracked his shin bone in half. He began to pass out from the incredible pain and barely could register in his mind the two huge men picking him up and sitting him on the trunk of his classic vehicle.

The second assailant, who was wearing mace filled leather gloves, wound up and punched the commander directly in the middle of his face. Fracturing his nose, knocking out all of his front teeth, and breaking the orbital bone in his left eye.

SCREAMING BATFISH BLUES

He wouldn't be found for over a half an hour laying in the parking lot of the officer's club. The captain he was scheduled to play squash with had stood him up.

The commander would never fully recover from his beating and was medically discharged from the service six months later due to his severely damaged knee and mental impairment. He eventually found work running a popcorn concession stand on Bourbon Street and would be killed in a armed holdup which netted the robber a grand total of \$18.58 and a case of Dr. Pepper.

His beloved Corvette, which had been stolen the morning of his assault in Biloxi, had been painted a bright purple and the the numbers professionally changed.

An exotic dancer in Los Angeles drives it now.

The Green Beret was no fool. You couldn't do the shit he had done in his life and be an idiot. But he could not believe that a woman this gorgeous would ever be sitting across a table from him. She was blonde, beautiful, and built like a brick shithouse. Really built. Almost like she pumped iron.

When he saw her staring across the bar at him, he actually had turned around and looked behind him. He couldn't understand why she was looking at him. He was in good shape. Had to be in his line of work. But he had to admit that he was not what most woman would consider good looking. He was balding, had horrible acne scars from childhood, and a slight hairlip.

She had walked over and asked if that seat had been taken. They had been talking for almost three hours and drinking like it was their last night on earth. Iced vodka. It wasn't his normal drink of choice, he was normally a beer man, but it was her choice and that was AOK with him. But fuck! She could drink it like a stevedore. He was getting awfully fucked up. But not so fucked up that when she asked him if he had ever killed a man that he let the cat out of the bag. He had just acted coy and gave her a sly wink.

He had killed a man. Actually, he had killed fourteen men. Three ragheads during the Gulf war, and eleven government contract hits. Even a special forces brother over in Pearl Harbor.

That had rubbed him the wrong way, but there wasn't much he could do about it. The money was good and he didn't have much choice in the matter anymore. Have to follow orders.

"Let's go up to my room."

That got his attention back.

"Yes, mam." He tried not to stagger as he stood up.

As soon as they walked into her room she pulled her dress up over head, revealing a black bra, black panties, and a matching garter belt. Shit, she was even wearing high heels. Just like a Penthouse magazine model.

"I've got some great coke." She smiled at him.

"I don't do drugs." Piss tests and all.

"I only fuck men who do coke with me. It makes it better."

"OK." He didn't care if she wanted him to smoke her used tampon, he couldn't let this opportunity pass. Piss test or not.

She pulled out a silver vial and cut four long lines on a mirror for them with a razor blade. She handed the mirror and a rolled up fifty dollar bill to him.

"You first. Just plug one nostril and inhale the line. One for each side."

He snorted up both lines like a good soldier. The effect was immediate. The room began to spin and his whole body felt like rubber. He felt like he had to throw up but when he stood up his legs gave out and he crashed head first into the wall. He barely could make out the woman getting dressed and walking by him.

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“Where? Where are you going?” It sounded like he was talking in a tunnel. All he could see was her stiletto heels until she squatted down and her face came into his field of vision.

“You are a tough guy, aren’t you? You just snorted up a third of a gram of absolute pure China White heroin.”

Her face disappeared and down the long tunnel he thought he heard a door open and close. He slowly rolled over on to his back and fell into a long deep, deep sleep.

The maid who had to clean the room after the body was removed had pissed and moaned for a week that she couldn’t get the stains out of the carpet.

JUICE

MEXICO AND WYOMING ABOUT ONE YEAR LATER.

They were bumping along the road in her beat to shit Mazda pickup. Heading for San Felipe to pick up mail, get supplies, and so Sophie could visit one of the local doctors. She hadn't been feeling quite up to snuff lately, feeling very fatigued and nauseous in the mornings. Jake attributed it to the local food, she had built up an incredible appetite for the fare of the area restaurants, and too much sun, she had become obsessed with losing her northern skin tone. Sophie was attributing it to something else, but had kept her tongue so far.

Jake pulled into a parking spot, walked Sophie to the clinic, and then headed down to the post office. Dawn received a monthly disability check, Jake had been awarded a thirty percent disability from the government, and her father had been sending her a monthly check as well. Between the three checks and the cash that Jake had stockpiled while he had been under the control of Jerry Banks, the three lived quite comfortably in the Baja economy.

The mail box was jammed. He only checked it when payday rolled around and then maybe again halfway through the month, if he was in the area. All three checks were there, some junk mail, and a letter from her mother and Jake's *Sports Illustrated*. Jake leaned against a counter and fanned through the magazine, the NFL season was getting ready to start up, one of Jake's favorite times of the year. A good share of the local cantinas would be carrying the games on their satellite dishes. It was fun as hell to gather with the Baja locals and American expatriates on Sundays to eat good seafood, drink beer, and cheer on their teams.

There was a postcard stuck inside the magazine. The picture was of a beautiful topless woman with incredible tits. She was standing under a waterfall with her arms stretched up towards the heavens. Jake flipped the card over. The stamp was US. The message was hand printed with a feminine touch.

Jake,

Call me as soon as you get this. Collect if you have to.

J.

The number was printed on the bottom of the card. It was a Las Vegas area code.

Glancing at his watch to see how long it had been since he had dropped off Sophie, he headed off to the downtown square and stopped in front of a bank of phones. He hadn't picked up a telephone since he had been in Mexico. His hands were shaking so badly he slammed the receiver down and walked over to a cantina and bought a beer. It went down in three long gulps.

SCOTT L. ANDERSON

Jake bought another for the road and walked back to the phone. He picked it up and punched in the numbers. Collect.

Someone picked up on the second ring.

A woman. Very familiar. It had to be her.

The operator was Mexican. "Collect call from Jake. Will you accept the charges, please?"

"Certainly." There was a pause. "Hello, Jake."

"Jasmine?"

She laughed. "Who else would it be?"

"It's been a long time."

"Too long, Jake. Too long."

It sounded like she might be sitting by a swimming pool.

"You never came back for me, Jake. You said you would."

Jake took a swig of Corona and leaned his head against the phone.

"I know I did, but I couldn't, Jasmine. You know that. They would have killed me. Or worse."

"Jerry knew that I warned you, Jake. For me, it was worse."

"I'm sorry." He didn't know what else to say.

"Do you know what he made me do, Jake? He put me out on the Chicken Ranch to punish me. I must have had to suck off or fuck twenty scumbags a day."

"I'm sorry," he repeated.

He heard ice clinking in a glass.

"Oh well, it doesn't matter anymore. The bastard is dead. I hope he rots in hell."

"Are you free, Jasmine? Or is it Rachel?"

"I'm very free. And I stayed Jasmine. She's more fun. The agent who replaced Banks really enjoys me in the sack. He's got a little church going wife back in Wisconsin that doesn't do the things that I can do. So I'm a one man woman now. He's got me put up in a suite in town and everything. Even got a promotion."

"What about your son? Do you have him?"

"Oh, Jake. I wanted to, but in the long run I decided that he'd be best off with his granny. I send him money every once in a while."

"What about getting your husband out of Leavenworth. Banks is dead. Morgan is dead. The story was all over the fucking place. Now is the time to try to spring him."

"And what good would that do, Jake? He lost his mind in there. The last I heard they had him locked up in some federal prison hospital out east."

Jake finished his beer and grabbed a boy walking past him. He handed him ten pesos and pointed to the cantina. He mouthed "Corona." The boy scampered off with the money in hand.

"You sound a lot different than the last time I saw you, Jasmine."

Jake felt a poke in his side. The boy was standing there with his cervaze. Jake took the beer and handed the boy five pesos and waved him away. He took a hard pull on the cold bottle of brew.

"Jasmine, why did you want me to call?"

"I could just say that I missed you and wanted to hear your voice. That I wanted to know if you missed those nights when you would come back after a hit all pumped up with adrenaline and would fuck me until dawn. Or if you realized that I almost told you I loved you that night in Las Vegas. That after Banks was killed, I did wait for you. That I thought you might keep your promise."

"Why did you call, Jasmine?" The beer wasn't working. It was just making him feel irritable. He just wanted to get this shit over and hang up. Go pick up Sophie. Get back to his life.

SCREAMING BATFISH BLUES

“Because your time is running out, Jake.”

“What the hell are you talking about? My time? I’m out. The dumb shits even send me a paycheck every month. I’ve got them by the balls. They’re not gonna try shit with me.”

She laughed.

Jake shivered. It must have been close to ninety degrees out.

“Some little homo who had a lover that got whacked has been making waves, Jake. Writing congressmen, newspapers, magazines, anyone he can. He’s a regular little shitpot stirrer. And he’s been naming you, Jake. Personally. Said he saw you down in Mexico. And that you talked.”

“I didn’t fucking talk,” Jake yelled. “I met him while he was down here windsurfing. He recognized me from the article in *Newsweek*, he told me his sob story but I didn’t talk.”

“You broke your uncle out of prison.” Oh fuck. He had never mentioned Billy to Jasmine.

“What?”

“Don’t play dumb with me, Jake. You broke your uncle out of prison in Minnesota. You paid a guard who was a member of the same biker gang as your uncle to give you the time and date that he was going to be transported to another facility.”

“How the hell do you know that?”

“Because another prisoner in Stillwater talked when he got busted for smuggling drugs inside the joint. He used to be your uncles cell mate.”

“Not that, Jasmine, goddamn it! How do *you* know all of this?”

He heard people splashing in the pool and the ice in her glass as she took another drink. Gin and tonics. She had always talked about drinking gin and tonics while laying by the pool.

“Because I’m the one they want to go down there to take you out, Jake. Because of our history together, they figured that it would be easy for me to get to you. That was my promotion that I was talking about. They figure that a good looking broad can get closer quicker and easier to her mark than a man can. I’ve even done a woman. Lot of kinky things go on in this business, Jake. I fit right in. I can see how you got so turned on doing it.”

“Holy shit,” Jake croaked.

“Don’t worry, Jake. So far they’ve been able to bury any negative information before it becomes too public. But if the shit keeps hitting the fan, they may want me to come pay you a little visit. You’ve become a major boil on their ass, a real hindrance.”

“What we had was real, Jake. I really did love you then. But now this is my life so I need you to tear up that postcard and forget you ever made this call.”

Sweat was pouring off Jake’s face and running down the phone. His legs felt like giving out.

“So this is it, Jake Morrow. I hope that fifty years from now, when your wife asks you what’s on your mind when she sees you sitting there smiling, that it’s been me that you’re thinking about. About that night in Vegas when we went to see Duran fight.”

The line went dead.

Jake hated getting up in the morning when it was that cold. He padded into the kitchen and looked at the thermometer. Holy fuck! It was thirty degrees below zero. No wonder when the alarm went off, Sophie had rolled over and buried in her head under the blankets. Coffee was already half brewed. Thank God for automatic timers. He poured a cup as he finished getting dressed in the kitchen so he didn’t disturb Sophie getting those last precious moments of sleep. Jacob Jr. was in the midst of the terrible twos and was wearing her ragged. She could use the extra sleep.

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He walked into Jacob's rooms to check his blankets. He was going to be a big kid, that was for sure. He damn near filled the crib. Snoring like a little horse. Jake looked up over the crib at the big blown up picture of Jacob being held by Dawn. That idiot Ozzie sitting next to them with a big shit eating grin on his face. Ozzie, his soon to be step uncle.

Five minutes after Jake had hung the phone up after talking to Jasmine, Sophie had told Jake that she was pregnant. They were married one week later and had stayed in Baja until Jacob was almost a year old. Sophie had wanted him to be raised in the states though, so they had returned, and they had been in Story for just over a year. Her father through the many connections that a minister has, had gotten Jake a county job on the road crew. It snowed like hell there, so Jake was up early in the mornings so he could get out and get the plow rolling early. He actually enjoyed racing through the mountains in the early morning darkness behind the wheel of that gigantic plow, the pine trees covered in snow flying past the truck as it screamed down the mountain road, sparks flying off the blade as it made contact with the pavement.

Jake walked back into the kitchen to pour another cup of coffee. He glanced over the letter from Dawn. She really seemed happy with life. Ozzie really loved her, in fact he worshipped the ground she rolled on. And she seemed to genuinely love him. Good for them, thought Jake.

Better go out and start that truck up. Jake hated getting into a cold vehicle and at thirty below that son of a bitch was going to be cold. He threw on his parka and walked out through the snow to the garage,

The inside of the garage was like a refrigerator. The door on the truck groaned in agony when he pulled it open.

The lights came on. Jake whirled around. There was a man standing there dressed in a snowmobile suit and one of those hats you always see people in those sled dog races in Alaska wearing.

"What do you want? What the hell are you doing in my garage?"

The man slowly raised a pistol at Jake so that it was aimed at his chest.

"I know it wasn't you, but it was someone just like you," the man said. "Someone has to pay."

He sounded familiar. The man reached up with his free hand and pulled his hat off. It was Robert, the wind surfer from Michigan.

"Robert! What the fuck? Hey man, I'm sorry about what happened to your friend in the navy, but I had nothing to do with that."

"The bastards wouldn't listen to me. Typical government bullshit."

He pulled the trigger.

BATFISH LEAVENWORTH

The voice was booming out of the speakers with extreme authority.

“Lock down. Lock down. All inmates are to report to their cells for a standing count.

Lock down in five minutes.”

Inmate #3734166 was shuffling down the cell hall corridor, his face wrinkled in both thought and frustration. He had been down trying to make a phone call to his attorney but the son of a bitch wasn't answering his calls and then a inmate had tried to throw a cup of urine at him as he passed by his cell. Heathens!!

Five minutes! How do they expect me to get to my cell in five minutes at my age? Especially in the winter. This cold is playing hell on my arthritis. How could they think that sending me to a prison in Kansas wouldn't effect my health. I imagine that Portsmouth wouldn't have been much better. And these other convicts! All these young punks pushing and shoving me, giving me no respect at all. Don't they know who I am? I know it won't be much longer though. My sweet wife will do anything to get me out of here. I couldn't survive this if I didn't know she was out there waiting for me. She is truly my rock.

The old inmate finally made it to his cell. He couldn't believe his eyes. There was another inmate sitting on his bunk. Going through his property. He was even eating one of his Bit o' Honeys. A Hershey bar wrapper was laying on the floor. That was the last straw.

“What in the hell do you think you are doing, son.”

Glaring at the old man was a pimply faced young man, about twenty years old. He was tall but very lean, his forearms covered with poor quality naked lady tattoos. His body odor was overpowering.

“What's it look like, fuckstick? I'm having a snack. They didn't feed me on the bus.”

The old man was stunned.

“So you think you can just walk into my cell and steal my property.”

The younger man laughed uproariously with his mouth wide open. A disgusting display of of chocolate covered, cigarette yellowed teeth.

“Fuck, Pops. We're cellies now.”

“Cellies?”

“Roommates you dumb shit.” The young inmate shook his head in disgust.

“That's impossible. I'll have to speak to the officers about this.”

“Oh, and you're a snitch on top of everything else.” Yellow teeth waved one of the old mans letter's that he had been reading.

“That's from my wife! Why you no good bastard!”

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"I know. Not a bad looking old broad for her age. And she still calls you admiral. How sweet."

Yellow teeth stood up and walked over to the old man. Backed him up into a corner of the cell.

"I'm a enlisted man myself. Army. Infantry. Least I was until they busted me and sent me here. They said I raped and killed this little girl on Ft. Campbell. But you better never tell anyone in this shit box that I said that. Got that? I wasn't even suppose to be in this cell anyway. Suppose to be with the enlisted guys, but some honcho in a suit said I was suppose to be in this cell all special like."

Yellow teeth backed up and stood by his bunk as he heard the guard doing the count approach. He grinned at the admiral.

"But I been in the stockade and I been in county before, so I know my way around. And I tell you one thing there, Mr. Admiral. Tonight your scrawny old ass is gonna be in the barrel."

EPILOGUE

SOMEWHERE WARM AND SAFE

Chubby Checker was imploring everyone to get down and do The Twist. They had the poorest choice of music in the islands. I was just starting to doze off when the news announcer began babbling about the President of the United States getting caught in a sexual dalliance with an intern.

I sat up on my beach mat and dug a Red Stripe out of the cooler and looked down the deserted beach for my wife. There she was! Buck naked, playing in the surf with our dog, Mongol. He was going crazy. Running around in circles and dashing back into the surf.

I pulled another beer out for her and half of a crab meat sandwich for Mongol and headed on down to see what all the excitement was about. I walked slowly down the beach through the surf. Taking my time. I loved the warm water and its therapeutic value. The years had not been kind to my joints and there was nothing I liked to do more than to soak my knees and nuts in warm salt water.

I'm the harbor master on a small island in the Caribbean, and every so often we take a small skiff over to one of the smaller semi-deserted islands a few miles across the bay, so that my wife can work on her all over tan. It's a job I truly enjoy.

"What's his problem?" Mongol ran up and jammed his bowling ball like head straight into my crotch. He was a pit bull, but had the temperament of a kitten.

"What do you think? A ray about as big around as a dinner plate. God, he's a pussy."

Mongol despised stingrays for some reason and every time he saw one swimming by in the clear tropical water he went nuts.

"Speaking of pussy, I just heard on the radio that the President got caught getting a blow job from a government clerk." I said laughing.

"That doesn't surprise me." She paused and looked out at bay. "I'm sure glad that we don't live in a place like that anymore."

"I first I thought I had dozed off and was dreaming it."

She looked at me with some concern in her eyes. "You were kind of restless last night. You haven't been dreaming about that screaming fish again. Have you?"

"No. Not for a long, long time now."

"Good." She smiled and ran off down the beach with Mongol hot on her heels. From a distance she almost looked like she was wearing a swimming suit with all those tattoos all over her body. Just like a comic book.

The morning I called, she had answered on the second ring.

SCOTT L. ANDERSON

She never has told me her real name. Of all people, why should I care? I guess we all have to have our little secrets.