



WITHIN

GRASP



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Your thoughts on this novel are appreciated at wrightcommunications@sympatico.ca

One

D'Arcy Rohmer crept low within a deep ravine. He removed several branches and some dry leaves camouflaging a Barrett M98 semi-automatic sniper rifle, a rare beauty, which he had hidden the day before. It was a rifle for the avid collector, but its 10 round detachable box magazine also made it ideal for both the serious and weekend sniper alike.

He had purchased the weapon and ammunition easily two months earlier at a gun show in Arkansas. It had been a magnificent event—a true orgy for gun lovers, with over 600 tables attended by thousands. By the end of the three day extravaganza, some guns had been reduced by 50% for quick sale like sweaters on the clearance rack at Wal-Mart.

The selection at the gun show had been so vast, and the prices so reasonable, that Rohmer had been unable to resist buying a couple of small handguns as well. They could be so practical at times. Seeing as he had sought out and had done business with an unlicensed dealer there had been no intrusive background checks to contend with. No inconvenient wait-time whatsoever.

Rohmer had traveled to Massachusetts the week before in his rusty Chevette, intent on sending a message. The President himself had said that the activist judges were intent on rewriting the laws of the nation instead of interpreting the constitution as it had been written. A prominent evangelist had said that the militant judges were more of a threat to America than terrorists. The conservative talk show hosts had advised him as well. How dare the judges allow Darwin's theories to be taught to America's youth? How could they remotely consider allowing assisted suicide? It was a sin. An abomination of God's word. The liberal judges had to be stopped. They simply had to be shown that the word of God was sacrosanct

The judges had taken God from the classroom and from the Public Square. The institution of marriage was under attack from gays and lesbians who for years had been able to marry in Massachusetts. And now, thanks to this sinful judicial precedent, other states were following suit. The courts had even given homosexuals their blessing to raise children!

The abortionists continued to flourish and the proponents of stem cell research were growing in numbers, advocating their evil harvest. America simply had to return to some basic family values.

He'd begin with the seven Justices from the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. They were the most influential; the most blameworthy. Yes, he would start right here in Massachusetts, this most liberal of states.

Rohmer settled into a hollow shielded by the root of a giant oak. He had chosen Judge Collins at random after attending a hearing at the John Adams courthouse. He had waited for the judge to leave, and had followed him from the court house to his home in Beacon Hill, an upscale neighborhood in Boston's south side. The judge's protection evidently ended the moment he left the courthouse property. His driver seemed completely oblivious to the old Chevy hanging two cars back.

After three days of stake-outs the pattern was clear. Every afternoon, just after five, the judge invariably worked in his garden atop the ravine, busily preparing it for winter.

Rohmer sat patiently in the damp earth and watched Judge Collins cavort with a young black lab. He raised his sniper rifle and squared the weapon's scope. He waited until the dog was safely out of view and then pulled back gently on the trigger. A torrent of bullets burst forth driving the judge from his feet, spraying blood, brain tissue and skull matter throughout the rose garden. Another round for good measure. One activist judge was gone, with more to follow.

Two

Manny Boyce eased his blue Dodge Polaris into the taxi stand at the bus depot in downtown Sutton. He backed into the spot so that the passengers on board the Greyhound could have a clear view of his waiting cab as they stepped off the coach. It was a daily ritual for the cabbie, his first stop for fares. Give or take 10 minutes, the bus arrived at 2:00 p.m. seven days a week, having collected passengers from six small centers along Highway 67.

The cabbie had arrived early to purchase some supplies at the 7-11, a short walk across the street. He hoisted his heavy frame from the cab, and made his way to the convenience store for his large coffee with extra cream and sugar, a family-sized diet Pepsi for later, a bag of Fritos, some smokes, a newspaper and his weekly supply of lottery tickets.

He entered the store and was immediately struck by its nearly depleted shelves and racks. A clerk was emptying gum and candy bars into a carton. "Afternoon, Colleen, looks like this store is just about history."

She sealed the carton and took her position at the till. "We've been moving our stock over to the new store for two days straight. Don't worry; I've still got your cigarettes and lottery tickets."

Manny splashed a generous quantity of cream in his coffee and snapped on a lid. "It'll be handy having a store right beside the bus terminal. Are you going to work at the new location?"

Colleen leaned forward surreptitiously as though she were about to reveal the combination numbers to the store's safe. "I'll let you in on something. My sister lives in Miami. There's a cashiers position open at a Home Depot right down her street. I've got my name in. I find out tomorrow."

A sharp ring from Manny's cell phone interrupted the conversation. He walked down an empty aisle and took the call. It was someone looking for money. He was behind on a payment for his prized possession, a Nikko digital camera, essential for his part-time business, Skyline Investigations. His private investigator's license gave him the right to follow people, snap their pictures, and charge for his services. Much of his time was spent following spouses suspected of cheating, insurance scammers, and teenagers whose parents thought they might be selling, or at least using drugs. He charged \$50 an hour; results were never guaranteed. The cab seldom drew attention when parked for hours in front of motels, driveways, parks and malls.

Manny folded his phone and returned to the counter. "Sorry about that. I'll think of you soaking up the Florida sun while we freeze to death five months of the year. I'd like to chat longer but the Greyhound will be pulling in shortly. Grab me a Lucky 9, a Super 7 and a Play to Win. Oh, and a Magnificent Millions ticket as well."

He filled in his favorite lottery numbers while Colleen rang things through. Manny wished her well and left the store. He crossed the street and walked back to his cab. He set his coffee in the holder and his snacks on the seat. He still had several minutes before the

Greyhound was expected, and with a long shift ahead of him, he took the opportunity to make his way downstairs to the terminal's men's room, newspaper in hand.

Ian Sinclair was off to Ashbury University. He had packed as few bags as possible for the long bus ride—just one large suitcase crammed with as many clothes as the hinges would bear. He also had a bag full of hockey gear, and a burgundy Ashbury backpack which was a freebie sent to him from the athletic department.

He lived with his mother, Arlene, and his Uncle Pat in a social housing complex called Scarlett Heights. It was located in the east end of Sutton, safely away from the better neighborhoods.

Money in the Sinclair household had always been hard to come by. Arlene took the bus to the “Bowl A Rama,” where she worked full-time as a clerk, selling game cards, dispersing sweaty shoes, supervising the lanes, and pouring soft drinks and cheap draft beer.

Pat had moved in temporarily five years earlier following the collapse of his marriage. He defrayed expenses by working part time as a painter. He had spent the morning drinking coffee, smoking, and watching ‘The Price is Right’ and following Ian around the townhouse. “Guess you’re gonna get lucky every night at university,” said Pat. “I know I would.”

“Yeah, right,” said Ian as he tried to remember something that had to be retrieved from the basement. He spent a lot of his life dodging his uncle.

Ian was an only child. His father was unknown, or at least, never mentioned. He must have taken after his father. He certainly didn’t look anything like his mother. While Arlene was fair, Ian had dark features with jet black hair and dark brown eyes. He was tall, at 6 ft 3 inches, and lean at 180 lbs. Ian had been told he was good looking often enough that any insecure teenage doubts in this area had long been put to rest. Girls had been phoning him since he was 14. He had no one serious in his life at this point, but looked forward to the prospect of meeting someone special at Ashbury.

As Ian scurried about the townhouse he reflected on his good fortune. Thanks to a generous hockey scholarship he was actually going to university. He had been carefully scouted by several institutions, but Ashbury offered the best deal: full tuition for three years, residence, and \$200 a month for expenses. Plus it was only two hours from home. There would be try-outs starting Thursday and a trip to Fredericton, New Brunswick in just a week for an exhibition game. He could hardly wait.

The kitchen phone rang. Ian grabbed it before Uncle Pat could annoy the caller with his usual “who may I ask is calling?” routine. It was Morley Cannon, the head coach at Ashbury. Coach Cannon, as he was known, had called a few times recently inquiring as to the status of Ian’s scholarship money, his residence arrangements, and generally making sure that nothing was going to complicate the arrival of Ian Sinclair, his hottest hockey prospect since Mike Armstrong, who was now setting scoring records in the American Hockey League. Cannon relished the thought of coaching Ian. A winning team to the head coach at a university was as prestigious as the development of a Rhodes Scholar to the academic types.

“Everything set?” he asked.

“Yes sir, I’m taking the Greyhound. According to the bus schedule I should be in Ashbury about 5:30.”

“I’ll meet you at the terminal and give you a ride to campus.”

Ian dragged his hockey bag and suitcase out to the front porch and waited for Tyler Milligan, a friend who had promised him a ride to the Sutton bus station. Arlene had planned to borrow a car and see Ian off but she had to work extra hours for a bowling tournament. The overtime was essential. It had already been spent.

Ian watched as several skinny stray cats darted under a rusty car which sat stupidly on blocks season after season. Plastic bags clung tightly to a chain link fence. Pop cans rolled around the filthy parking lot. There was little in the way of maintenance provided for Scarlett Heights. The complex was largely ignored by City Hall.

The neighbor’s dog was whining for his attention. He left the porch to pat it. While several dogs of dubious lineage within the housing complex were best avoided, Ian was fond of this Collie whom he had named “Mutt.” He often checked to make sure that he at least had water and frequently took him for walks. One day he had confronted the owners pointing out that the extension cord was far too short for the dog—that he couldn’t lie down. They didn’t care. Ian later purchased a long rope for Mutt but the extension cord was back—the new rope was being used to hold the front bumper of their old Pontiac in place.

He heard Tyler’s noisy truck well before it came into view. He left the dog, stepped inside the house, and yelled downstairs to Pat over the canned laughter of a mindless sitcom. “I’m going now. My ride’s here.”

“See ya”

Nice send off, thought Ian.

It was a short drive to the Sutton bus station. Ian grabbed his hockey gear, suitcase and knapsack, from the back of Tyler’s pickup. He waved goodbye and walked towards the busy terminal. His bus left in 15 minute, leaving enough time for a quick visit to the men’s room. He detested going anywhere near the bathroom aboard the bus, likening it to an “outhouse on wheels.”

Ian approached a 20-something cute red-head behind the ticket booth, and flashed his best smile. He asked her if she would watch his suitcase for a couple of minutes. She readily agreed, and even came out from behind to get it. He wore his backpack and carried his hockey bag and sticks with him. His equipment never left his sight. He made his way downstairs, and found the men’s room at the far end of the hall.

Four urinals were available but Ian still chose a stall for privacy. While zipping up, he spotted something orange partially behind the toilet. It looked like colorful Canadian money. He leaned down and very gingerly picked it up. Squinting in the dim light he realized that it wasn’t money as he had hoped, but a discarded lottery ticket of some sort. It was a little smaller than a credit card, damp and limp. On closer examination he noticed that the draw date was that that very night. It was worth keeping.

He pinched the ticket between his thumb and forefinger as if it were laced with anthrax and walked to the sink. He punched the hand dryer and waved the ticket around. He hoped that no one would come in and see this strange activity.

As if on cue, the bathroom door suddenly burst open and slammed noisily into the tiled wall behind it. A giant of a man dressed in a heavy black wool overcoat stumbled through the doorway and looked Ian up and down. He walked forward unsteadily and

began to scream in Ian's face. "What are you looking at?" he bellowed. "We're all slaves, just slaves." And then, "God save the Queen, God save the Queen."

The man's pock-marked face was covered in dark red scales. He had a large festering sore on the corner of his mouth. His breath smelled like a sewer. Ian didn't know if the man was drunk, on drugs or mentally ill, he didn't care. He grabbed his hockey bag and sticks and yanked on the bathroom door. The man followed, shrieking "Salvation" and "Repent." Ian had made it half way out of the room when the bathroom door swung shut on his hockey bag abruptly stopping him short. He kicked at the heavy door to free his bag. It swung back, slamming into his tormentor's mid-section. The man reeled backwards and fell.

Ian yanked his bag free and ran to the end of the hallway. He dropped his equipment and leaned against the wall. The screaming had stopped. He was concerned for the man, but decided not to check the bathroom. He would report the incident when he got back upstairs.

While gathering his wits, he realized that he was still holding the lottery ticket. Warily eyeing the men's room he pulled out his wallet, folded the ticket in half, and stuffed it deeply into an empty credit card slot. He hoisted his gear, gathered his sticks and walked upstairs to the main floor, two stairs at a time.

Three

Heather Driscoll stood on the porch of her parents' 18th century New England farmhouse still in her nightgown. She was consumed by a combination of apprehension, expectation, and excitement as she contemplated her imminent departure from home to a new life at Ashbury University.

She gazed at the rolling fields surrounding her. She would miss the farm. It had been a wonderful place to grow up. A tire on a rope swayed in the wind from the arm of a maple tree. She thought of secret forts long since abandoned, but still out there somewhere. From forts and swings to university in just six years. Time had flown so quickly.

She glanced through the kitchen's screen door and swallowed a lump. Most of all, she would miss her family. Her father, Judge Philip Driscoll, was in the kitchen sipping coffee with the Sunday newspaper spread before him. Earlier in the day she had brought her mother, Jean, a blouse to press. She stood over an ironing board applying the final touches.

She laughed silently as brother Adam made his first appearance of the day, his hair askew, bleary eyed and dressed only in blue jeans which sagged halfway down his skinny waist. He was 15, three years younger than herself, a day student at Upper New England Academy. She had finished up at St. Mildred's, both established private schools.

Heather walked into the kitchen and chatted with her mother before gathering her blouse and taking it upstairs. During a campus tour in March, Heather had noted what the students wore and with this in mind had decided that a simple blouse and jeans would do just fine. Besides, she felt comfortable in this outfit, and deep down knew that she filled out her clothes beautifully. She had every reason to be confident in her appearance. Medium-length natural blonde hair framed exquisite features: large blue eyes, a perfect nose, and chiclet white teeth that any ad executive would die for. Like many children of privilege, she radiated good health and self-confidence.

Jean left the kitchen to apply some lipstick in front of the hall closet mirror. "Philip," she called, "don't forget that we have to drop by Mother's. She wants to say goodbye to Heather." Her reflection revealed that she had been putting on weight recently, due mostly to her favorite 80 proof bourbon. She had chosen a brown pant-suit for the trip to Ashbury. It fit her well enough. Her salt and pepper hair was cut short. Philip had recently endeared himself to her having commented that it looked 'too butch.' She had hazel eyes, surrounded by lines and wrinkles which seemed to form daily. "Philip, did you hear me?"

"Yes, I heard you," he called impatiently from the kitchen. "But we're not staying long. I hope you told her that." Oak Leaf was at least an hour out of their way. The judge left the table and busied himself by carrying Heather's things out to the van. It seemed like yesterday that they had brought her home from the hospital only three days old. He would miss her gentle nature, her beautiful face, and his favorite golfing partner. Perhaps his biggest regret in losing Heather's company was that he would have to spend even more time with Jean. The two of them had not been getting along well for years and she

was drinking again. Adding to Philip's unhappiness and discontent with life in general was his copious work-load. It was almost overwhelming; a consequence of the court's back-logged cases. He toiled at least 10 hours a day, usually bringing work home to the farm in the evenings and over weekends. The justice system, it seemed, simply couldn't begin to keep ahead of the criminals, and he was growing weary of their very presence before him.

Philip and Jean had, for the most part, kept marital tensions to a minimum for the children's sake, but both knew there was a very tumultuous road ahead. They rarely spoke. While the judge was buried in work, Jean played solitaire, smoked, talked for hours on the phone, and drank bourbon in the breakfast nook.

Judge Philip Driscoll had just turned 53, and wore it well. He still had a thick crop of light brown hair, graying at the temples. He was tall and slim; considered handsome and charming. The Governor had appointed him as a District Court Judge six years earlier following the unexpected resignation of Judge Wooten. Philip had the position for life, barring truly outrageous conduct. There was no need to campaign for votes to maintain his position. In Massachusetts, judges weren't expected to be politicians.

The judge presided over Hasting County. He was based in the town of Sutton, population 20,000. The surrounding countryside was mostly rural located half-way between I-90 to the east, and the New York State border to the west. His reach extended throughout 100 square miles, encompassing several small farming communities.

The last of Heather's things had been loaded in the van. Philip, Heather and Adam climbed aboard and waited for Jean. Five minutes passed. Philip honked for her.

After a final satisfying swig, Jean hid her bourbon behind a pile of laundry. She took out a breath mint and lit a cigarette. She locked-up and joined her family in the van.

It was a magnificent Sunday morning in the north-east, early fall and warming slowly. A brilliant blue sky promised comfortable temperatures to come.

Heather flipped through a university calendar; her apprehension at leaving home giving way to eager anticipation of university life. Adam was already making a nest among the blankets in the back row.

Philip and Jean perched in their "captain's chairs," and bickered quietly.

"I thought you were going to get some gas."

"Sorry, I got busy," replied Jean.

"Do you have to smoke in the van?"

"Roll down your damned window if it bothers you. I hope you remembered Heather's blue suitcase."

"It's in the back with the others." Philip turned up the radio, a clear indication that he wasn't in the mood for more conversation.

The Driscoll clan rolled into Jean's mother's high rise condo complex located in Oak Leaf, about 70 miles southeast of Sutton.

Five years earlier roughly 1700 people had lived in the small farm town. With the addition of a new plastics factory, a Honda assembly plant, and the completion of an improved highway linking the town to I-90, Oak Leaf's population had more than tripled.

The newcomers continued to snap up new homes in subdivisions and condominiums. The banks were writing up mortgages as quickly as the legal forms could

be printed. Those who couldn't qualify for a conventional mortgage turned to predatory lenders who were only too willing to add a few points to prime rates.

These were exhilarating times in the real-estate business. Throughout America, home owners, it seemed, were getting rich, at least on paper. No one gave much thought, if any, to the repercussions should interest rates rise. Not the lenders and certainly not the giddy purchasers. Rates would remain low. No one would default.

Even the experts in Washington who had at their disposal the best actuaries in the world, watched and rejoiced as the economy boasted strong numbers propelled by unprecedented home sales and by the acquisition of all the things vital to the good life. Hot tubs, expensive flooring, stainless-steel refrigerators and granite counter tops—everything fundamental to one's happiness and self worth—rolled off the shelves at huge building depots as quickly as stock could be replenished.

Buy and sell. Spend that line of credit. No problem. It's secured by the house. And the house is going up in value by 20% a year! There was no limit to the greed and unrealistic expectations.

"I can flip my condo for \$100,000 more than I paid for it for just three years ago," boasted the blissful homeowners to relatives and friends.

"You should buy that cottage now. It's only half a million. Think of its worth in five years."

In many cases homes and condo units were pre-sold two years in advance of the promised completion date. "Don't Miss Out," screamed the ads in the real estate section. "Buy Now," and secure your future.

Jean's mother, Martha Van Whyte, lived at *The Gardens of Oak Leaf*. There wasn't a garden in sight, and any sign of oak leaves had disappeared with the trees, uprooted by huge Caterpillar bulldozers that had cleared the fertile land for parking facilities, tennis courts, and future development.

Residents of Oak Leaf and prospective buyers alike were greeted by a large neon sign which flashed: "Welcome Home to Carefree Adult Living," and in large block letters: "California Style." Philip wondered if the management somehow fabricated occasional mudslides, brush fires, floods, and earthquakes for true Californian authenticity. And was Californian living supposed to be something to aspire to? Another sign attempted to create a sense of urgency to prospective buyers announcing: "Phase Three coming soon. Hurry!"

Following the sale of the Van Whyte home in Boston two year earlier, Martha had moved to Oak Leaf to be closer to Jean and Philip. She enjoyed her new lifestyle in the sky, where she played Bridge three times a week and was active on the Condo-Board. Her apartment was filled with antique furniture, Persian rugs, traditional oil paintings, silverware, and fine crystal. The complex was a gated community, Oak Leaf's first.

Philip pulled up to the enormous wrought iron gate and stopped at the entrance where they were cleared by Security.

They made their way to the lobby of the second tower, boarded the elevator and strolled down the long, quiet hall.

"This place reminds me of a hotel," commented Philip. He noticed that many of the residents had adorned their heavy oak doors with tacky wreaths in an attempt to somehow personalize their suite. Behind each door unfolded a different life, hundreds of lives and stories within feet of each other.

They came to Martha's unit, and rapped using the heavy brass knocker and waited while Jean's mother struggled with two deadbolts.

Martha Van Whyte was an extremely well preserved 78-year old, with snowy white hair, sparkling blue eyes, and diminutive stature. A pampered life had treated her well. She all but ignored Philip, gave Jean a quick peck on the cheek, and never one to mince words, embarrassed her daughter by commenting that her breath, "smelled like scotch."

Martha's warmest greeting was reserved for Heather, who was without a doubt her favorite of the group. Adam had already gone to the window to see the view from the 17th floor, showing little interest in his grandmother.

"I've made Sunday lunch," announced Martha.

Philip knew this was coming. He had earlier noted that the dining room table had been elegantly set for five. She could be so manipulative. He had made it clear to Jean that the visit was to be short. "Actually, Mrs. Van Whyte," (Philip had never felt comfortable addressing his mother-in-law as Martha, nor had she ever invited him to), "we were planning on a short visit. We want to get Heather to Ashbury in good time."

"You have to eat. We'll have a quick sandwich, and there's some business I want to discuss with you, Philip."

Evidently Martha's idea of making lunch was to phone Albertino's Fine Foods and have it delivered. She had moved the food to a silver tray, explaining that she would "never eat from plastic." The large tray held roast beef, ham, egg, and chicken sandwiches, as well as a wide selection of cheese and pickles. Coffee was brewing in the kitchen. The food did look appealing, thought Philip, but what had really caught his attention was her reference to "discussing business," and perhaps the prospect of having a look at Martha's portfolio. The "old doll" as he privately thought of her, had raised the subject at Christmas. He had always been curious about her net worth.

Martha beckoned and said, "In this way, Philip." She had made it clear that Jean was not to be included. Martha was of the generation which precluded women from being privy to too much financial information. The finances had always been strictly controlled by her late husband, and she was following suit with Philip. In her mind, he was the head of the household, a judge, someone who could be trusted. Besides, Jean had always had a problem with alcohol, and wasn't to be trusted.

Philip and Martha went to her small den. She started right in. "I have some concerns about my investments. I don't like that new woman at my bank. Why just the other day she suggested that we sit down together soon and go over my affairs."

The judge was amused but said nothing and let her continue.

"I want you to look at these investments and tell me if you see anything out of the ordinary."

Philip slipped on his reading glasses and studied a financial statement. Martha's idea of "investments" was sinking her funds into a daily interest savings account which paid a 3% return. It didn't matter. The judge looked with interest at a total sum of nearly \$1.4 million dollars. Fifty thousand or so in annual interest was low, but it would easily pay for Martha's needs, while keeping that wonderful capital intact. "Mrs. Van Whyte, your investments are safe and in order. Just leave them as they are."

“I thought so. I just wanted to be sure. I won’t let the bank fiddle with anything. At another time, I’d like you to go over my will. I want to make sure everything is in order. Is this agreeable to you?”

“Of course. Give me a call when it’s convenient.”

Jean walked in, holding the silver sandwich tray, a pretext to see what on earth her husband and mother were doing in the den with the door ajar.

Martha closed the files and slipped them back into a worn leather satchel. “We’re finished in here, Jean. Let’s go to the dining room.”

Lunch was finished quickly, but not before Jean had opened a bottle of some rancid home made wine she had unearthed from the inner reaches of Mrs. Van Whyte’s dining room buffet. Knowing Jean’s proclivity to drink, Martha had earlier hidden all the alcohol she could find, but had missed the wine. It looked cloudy and smelled like vinegar three feet away.

Before they left, Heather’s grandmother pressed some money into Heather’s hand and told her to write often.

The drive to Ashbury was uneventful. Jean dozed on-and-off, Heather listened to music, while Adam slept.

The quiet allowed Philip time to think about the substantial inheritance coming their way. He did the math. Assuming Martha lived for another ten years, he would be 63 before Jean inherited Martha’s money. The old doll looked as if she could go on forever. What if she lived well into her nineties? To make matters worse, he would have to stay with Jean to share in the inheritance—and that was assuming that Jean would share it at all. He’d have to endure decades on the bench before his pension offered anything close to retirement money. It was an utterly depressing and absolutely unacceptable state of affairs.

Four

Ian's bus ride to Ashbury was uneventful. He tried to sleep, but the bus driver insisted on informing the passengers of weather conditions and estimated times of arrival for various destinations along the way. He continually reminded all passengers to stay seated until the coach had come to a full stop, as if he were piloting a 747. The information was conveyed through a scratchy P.A. system, its volume at full blast.

Morley Cannon met Ian at the Ashbury bus depot as planned. They drove to campus and chatted about the up-coming season, the weather, and residence food. Cannon pulled through the ivy-covered gates of Ashbury University and then into a courtyard, full of other frosh. The coach reassured Ian that someone would be on hand within minutes to show him to his room. The coach produced the practice schedule and said, "See you on the ice Thursday, 7:00 a.m. sharp. Be ready for a workout and bring your passport. I'm collecting them ahead of time before we go to Fredericton on Sunday for the exhibition game."

"Yes sir. I had to get a passport for a tournament in Toronto last year."

Ian watched Cannon drive away. As promised, a second-year student approached him with a wide grin and introduced himself as Steve something or other.

They went to the registration desk located in an older building which had obviously at one time been someone's grand home. After showing some identification, Ian was given his room key. They crossed another courtyard, and walked another five minutes towards a large structure made of dull, poured concrete.

"Here's your new home," said Steve triumphantly.

Ian gazed at the monolithic atrocity for a moment, thinking his residence building looked like a parking garage. He looked at his key. "Let's go. It's Room 355."

Together they climbed the stairs to the third floor. They passed one dorm after another. Ian glanced into each room without trying to look nosy. It was a co-ed residence and he had already seen three girls he thought he might like to know better!

It didn't take Ian long to unpack. He didn't have much, just his clothes, hockey equipment, and an old laptop which his mother had brought home from the lost and found at the bowling alley. Following a 60 day waiting period, unclaimed goods were disbursed among the staff. The computer was password protected, but Ian had a friend in Sutton who installed a new hard drive for free, and the computer proved to be fine for word processing and surfing the web, although it was very slow. He busied himself configuring his computer with the high-speed Internet connection supplied to every room.

Ian's desk faced the dorm's window, and he had a wide view of the university's court yard. Other students poured-in with their families, some in mini-vans, and others in expensive looking SUVs. Mothers and fathers, and brothers and sisters milled around with university staff. Ian wondered if he was the only student who had arrived alone, by bus. He noticed a black van roll up, the driver arrogantly pulling in between two signs that clearly stated "No Parking. Fire Zone" The van blocked a path, forcing people to walk around it.

He left the view from his window and looked around his room. It was surprisingly spacious, measuring about twelve feet in length and seven feet in width. In addition to his desk and chair, the room had a built-in chest of drawers, with a mirror, and a small bed. Industrial blue carpet lined the floor. A bathroom was across the hall.

Ian had left his door open, hoping that someone would stop by and say hello. Feeling homesick and a little unsettled, he decided to leave his room and explore the campus. He looked at his watch and noticed that it was nearly six and he was famished. He put his meal card in his wallet, brushed his hair, locked his room, and set out to discover for himself whether residence food was as bad as Coach Cannon had told him it was.

The Driscoll's helped Heather move her suitcases and desktop computer into her modern residence room. She had a roommate, who was from Rhode Island. After organizing Heather's room they went back outside.

Groups of students were walking to the dining hall for dinner, but owing to the late lunch they had enjoyed at Martha's, Heather wasn't hungry, and decided to spend more time with her family instead of eating. Jean needed to use the washroom, and she, Adam and Heather walked back to the residence.

Philip sauntered over to a large bench. Being back on the Ashbury campus again had made him feel nostalgic and he longed to sit quietly for a minute or two by himself. He reminisced.

He and Jean had both attended the fledging university in its infancy. There were constant parties held in residence rooms and in the pubs, fed by seemingly unlimited kegs of cold draft beer. They listened to The Doors, The Stones, Jefferson Airplane, Dylan, and Janis Joplin while passing around fat joints filled with homegrown pot, just harvested.

He vividly recalled the bedlam of the anti-war rallies that he and Jean had marched in at various campuses around Massachusetts. It was 1970. The war in Vietnam was the most important political issue of the day.

Jean and Philip had met their very first night at Ashbury—Philip with hair to his shoulders, a mustache and sideburns; Jean in a long denim skirt, braless, her hair almost waist long and braided.

While he sat on the bench looking at the new students scurry about, it occurred to Philip that they all looked so very clean cut, conservative, and young. He was pleased that Heather had chosen Ashbury. It hadn't seemed to have changed. The campus had always been small and personal. The university had imported many traditions found in ancient English universities; the prevailing attitude among the early founders was that anything British must somehow be good. It was a comfortable, protected environment.

A tall young man seemed who seemed to have come out of nowhere interrupted his reverie.

"Excuse me, sir. I was wondering if you know where the dining hall is?"

"It's in the white building across that walkway," said Philip. He noticed the boy's jacket had *Sutton* emblazoned on both arms. "I see you're from Sutton. So are we. We just helped our daughter, Heather, move in. She's in Westminster House." Philip looked

towards the residence building. "I'd like you to meet her. It's always nice to know someone from your own hometown."

"I guess I'll meet her soon," replied the young man, who seemed anxious to move along.

Philip stood and extended his hand. "I'm Philip Driscoll."

"Ian Sinclair."

The judge saw Heather and Jean in the distance walking towards them. "Here comes Heather now."

Who was that her father was chatting with, Heather wondered. He's gorgeous!

"Heather, this is Ian. He's from Sutton." He didn't introduce Jean.

"Hi," said Heather. He's even better looking up close, she thought to herself.

Ian admired Heather, as well. They held each other's eyes until it became uncomfortable. "Your father says you're in Westminster," said Ian finally. "I'm in Canterbury, the cement building over there."

"I just moved my things in," said Heather. "Room 233. Come over sometime."

"I'm Heather's mother," interrupted Jean. "What part of Sutton are you from, Ian?"

"The north end. Scarlett Heights."

"So you probably went to Lawrence Park?" asked Philip.

"No. Our Lady of Perpetual Suffering. The Roman Catholic high school."

Phillip studied at Ian's jacket more closely. "I see you're a hockey player."

"Yes. I'm here on a hockey scholarship."

He looks like an athlete thought Heather. She smiled and asked, "When did you get here?"

"About an hour ago, on the Greyhound."

"Please don't hesitate to ask us for a ride at any time," offered Jean.

Feeling reassured that Heather had made at least one new friend, Philip decided it was time to begin their journey home. Adam had already returned to the van to play with his new video game.

"Well dear," said Philip to Heather, announcing the inevitable, "we should be on our way."

Ian took this as his cue to leave, saying "see you," to Heather, and nodding to her parents.

Heather, Philip and Jean walked back to the van. Goodbye hugs and kisses were exchanged.

Heather fought back tears at the van's window. "See you at Thanksgiving."

They pulled out. Jean waved to Heather until her daughter was out of sight.

Five

Following another shift driving cab, Manny returned to his four-room apartment located in the west side of Sutton which he shared with his enormous black alley cat, Stray.

He busied himself organizing the proceeds from his night's work. He pulled out money and credit card receipts from a bulging wallet. Manny determined that he had earned about \$140 after expenses, an average night's wages.

His wallet was also stuffed with lottery tickets which he hadn't yet checked for possible winnings, a ritual that he always saved for Tuesdays.

He perched on the edge of his frayed La- Z-Boy recliner, fished his tickets from his wallet, and placed them on a small side table. *The Sutton Examiner* lay on the floor in front of him. He guzzled warm Diet Pepsi straight from the bottle, fired up a Marlboro, and opened the newspaper to the lottery section, third page in.

Peering through his reading glasses, he cross-checked his Lucky 9 ticket, Power Ball numbers, Super 7, Play to Win, and his \$5 Mega Bucks ticket. Nothing. Not even close. In fact, not one of his lucky numbers showed up on any of the five entries combined. Winning the Power Ball lottery would have been nice, he dreamed. It had grown to a gluttonous \$193 million.

He was just about to fold up the newspaper, when he remembered that he still had to check his Magnificent Millions numbers. The draw had been held a couple of nights before, on Sunday.

He thumbed through his wallet in searched of the bright orange ticket. Not there. He sifted once more through the day's receipts. No sign of it. It dawned on him that he really didn't need to have the ticket in front of him. He had filled out his usual favorite numbers for the Magnificent Millions game at the 7-11's counter, numbers he had long ago committed to memory.

He squinted through his reading glasses at the tiny numbers in faint print sitting in the lower corner of the newspaper. His heart pumped violently, instantly shooting adrenaline and blood to his temples. He felt dizzy. Cheeks flushed crimson. His stomach turned. Bowels loosened. He tried to re-focus. He scanned the numbers again, slowly this time. 3, 2, 36, 48, and 23. They were his numbers! He fumbled for another Marlboro, and looked at the numbers again, even more slowly this time. The digits were jumping all over the page. Focus! 3, 2, 36, 48, and 23 No doubt about it, they were all his! He had won \$25 million dollars!

Manny giggled like an eight-year old and squealed out loud, "They're mine, they're mine, I won!" He thumped his feet on the floor and pounded his fists on his thighs, while bouncing on the edge of his big chair.

The cat bolted to the safety of the bedroom.

Settle down, he told himself, settle down. The numbers in the paper were always unofficial. He needed to confirm the numbers. It suddenly hit him. He didn't have the

ticket. Elation mixed with panic. Where was his ticket? He'd find it in the cab. He'd find it between the seats, or maybe above the visor. Yes. That's where it was. Or maybe in his windbreaker. He walked to the cab, mind racing, already spending his fortune. He'd give his cab away. He'd get a Lincoln Town Car. No. A Mercedes! Maybe both! He could go to Florida! He was incredibly rich! He could do anything he wanted!

He snatched his key chain from the kitchen table. Wheezing heavily, he lumbered to the cab, the proper key already aimed towards the lock. Trembling, he twisted the key and flung the door open. He leaned in and cracked his forehead hard on the door frame. He hardly felt it. A quick flip of the visor. Not there. With one knee on the seat and his other leg halfway out the open door, he stabbed his right hand, wrist deep between the heavy black vinyl, and pawed between the crevice, his fingers outstretched.

Tuesday's court docket had left Philip drained and disheartened.

He had presided over an arduous probable cause hearing to determine if an alleged child abuser should be bound over to the Massachusetts Superior Court.

The photos of the young victim had made Philip nauseous. Following his decision, he had fled to his chambers and wept. The poor child. She had been deliberately burned. Every bone in her body had been broken at one time or another. He wanted to take her home, protect her, and love her. Grief gave way to anger. After his legal brethren had pronounced the pervert guilty, he'd be sent away for life. The animal wouldn't live long—the inmates would rip him apart. Sometimes the guards forgot to keep a close eye on child abusers and that was a good thing. It would be but a matter of time.

Was he losing it? Had he lost his ability to remain the least bit objective? He was increasingly unhappy on the bench, and he assumed his responsibilities with about as much enthusiasm as an auto worker might greet the sight of another bumper which needed bolts. The daily dispensation of justice had become something to endure, and he wasn't sure how much longer he could take it. He was fed up with the Law, and his home life with Jean was even worse. He didn't love her any more, of that he was certain. Sex had stopped completely months ago, and she barely acknowledged his presence. At least there was Julia, he thought, consoling himself. She was the new court house clerk, 16 years his junior. Julia had hinted on Friday that they were overdue for a romp. He would set up a rendezvous with her as soon as possible. They always met at *The Owl's Nest*, a cheesy motel on the outskirts of town.

He grabbed his briefcase, secured the door to his chambers with a heavy thud and walked to the van. The judge was in no hurry to return home to the farm. It had long ago ceased to be a welcome refuge from the bench. Jean barely acknowledged his presence. Adam wasn't much better. He was sure that Jean's drinking had been detrimental to his son who was usually sullen and incommunicative.

Most of all, he missed Heather and she had only been gone from the farm for two days. He wondered how many other men or women his age found their marriages to be unbearable once the children left home. Empty nesters. He wanted out from his marriage and out of his profession, but the timing wasn't right. He simply couldn't afford to

reinvent his life despite the fact that he had been squirreling money away from Jean for years.

His careful scrimping had amassed roughly \$80,000. He'd go through that in no time. He needed to find a profitable investment. The banks had nothing to offer. Their "high interest" savings accounts paid a whopping 3.25% monthly, and he certainly had no patience for the stock market which was always all over the map, far too affected by whimsical oil prices, unfavorable earning results, and nervous profit takers.

While driving along Sutton's main street, he noticed a colorful real-estate banner draped over a former bookstore. *Phase Three Coming Soon! Love Life in Oak Leaf. We're closer than you think.*

Curious, he pulled over. He had recently been giving thought to investing in real estate. A realtor who Jean was friendly with had said the farm could be sold for \$130,000 more than they had paid for it. Most of the appreciation had occurred over the past three years.

The door to the sales office was partially opened. He knocked and entered. An attractive woman who Philip guessed was between 35 and 40 years of age left her desk and greeted him, smiling. She was dressed in a crisp red blazer with a white blouse and a navy skirt. Her platinum blonde hair was tied back in a pony tail with a large red bow which matched her jacket. She had long bangs and fascinating cat-like large hazel eyes that Philip noticed right away. She wore little make up.

Her desk was littered with file folders, faxes, legal documents, computer print outs and waxed wrappings from fast food. A busy office. Serious money was being made here, thought Philip.

"I'm Andrea Spurway. I apologize for the mess."

He squeezed Andrea's slender hand. "Philip Driscoll. It looks as though you're working hard. But in your business, I'm sure that's a good thing."

She stubbed out a smouldering cigarette. "Yes, we have been busy. It's almost overwhelming. We closed three deals today alone. Not bad for a branch-office. The suites are almost selling themselves."

Philip appraised her more fully in better light. All legs. He tried not to stare too obviously at her skirt which sat well above her knees. "Oh, I'm sure you had an important hand in those closings."

Andrea was giving the judge the once-over as well. A prosperous looking man, clearly a professional of some sort, expensive suit, shoes and wristwatch. He might be just the individual her development office required.

"I was curious," said Philip. "My mother-in-law lives in your second development in Oak Leaf. It's a one bedroom unit on the 18th floor facing south. She paid \$120,000 for it a couple of years ago. How much would it be worth now?"

"In the range of \$190,000. It's a very desirable building, and the last time I looked, they're not making any more views like she has."

"No, I guess they're not."

"Are you looking for a condominium suite for your family?"

"No, we have a farm just outside of Sutton, but I was considering some possible investment opportunities. Tell me about Phase Three. When do you expect to start construction?"

“We’ve encountered a temporary set-back. The County Council in Oak Leaf wasn't exactly bowled over with our plans,” she said. “It seems as though they’re concerned about the density of the area, and will require us to add more land to the site.”

“Add more land?” repeated Philip, puzzled.

“Yes. We are now required to build on a 110 acre site, instead of the 70 acres we had envisioned. The good news is that we made some enquiries, and the additional land we require is available from a farmer whose property borders the site. It’s a parcel of 135 acres or so, more than we need, but we’d find a use for all of it.”

“So what’s the problem?”

“He absolutely refuses to sell it to a developer. We have already approached him with a very generous offer of \$2.5 million. It wasn't a good meeting. I fully expected him to pull out a shotgun and chase us off his property. He carried on at how we have already ruined several farms, destroyed the land and the views, created traffic problems, and that our neighboring developments have raised his property taxes so high that he is now forced to sell old family land to survive.”

“I think he’s playing hard-ball with you.”

“I’m not so sure. He made it clear that he would only sell his land to someone who, in his words ‘would care for it’”.

Philip turned to leave. “Phase Three doesn’t sound promising. I think you should take down your promotional banners for it.”

“The thing is, if we can get possession of the farmer’s land, Phase Three will go up rapidly.” She paused and said, “I’ll leave this thought with you. There’s an incredible investment opportunity waiting for someone out there.”

“And what would that be?”

“I am suggesting that someone could conceivably earn a small fortune virtually overnight by purchasing the land from Mr. Pringle, and then in turn, selling it to us. It’s done all the time. My hunch is that he will sell to the right person, and for an excellent price. If you happen to know of anyone who might be interested in working with Lauder Holdings—our development office—please let me know.”

“And if the person was successful in purchasing the land from the farmer, you would promise him or her 2.5 million in return?”

“Yes.”

“What kind of time frame are you looking at?”

“As soon as possible. We want to begin construction before the frost sets in. If someone acquired the land tomorrow we would purchase it within 24 hours. In fact, our new site proposals are being drawn up as we speak, as if the land were already ours. This time we’re including an enormous greenbelt, a nature sanctuary and the preservation of as many trees as possible. We’ll get that land one way or another, and we’ll pay top dollar for it.”

Philip remained poker-faced, even though he was wound up. If he understood Andrea correctly, the chances were better than good that he could make an enormous profit on the land deal she described, and make it quickly. Such an opportunity might never come his way again.

“Is this of interest to you by any chance?”

“Perhaps. I’m thinking. How can I reach this farmer? What is his name?”

“Jacob Pringle. Here is his number and the directions to his farm. It’s only a short drive from your mother-in-law’s condo. As I told you, he’ll only sell privately, so you’ll need a good real estate lawyer.”

“I have people. Wait to hear back from me. No one is to know that we have spoken. Here’s my card, and I’ll need--”

Andrea’s business card was quickly proffered.

He stuck it in his pocket. “I’ll be in touch.”

Andrea’s eyes widened as she looked at Philip’s card. She had been speaking with a District Court Justice. “Just so there’s no misunderstanding. I wasn’t proposing anything dishonest in flipping Pringle’s land.”

“Of course you weren’t. You’re on solid ground, so to speak.”

“Goodnight, Your Honor.”

Philip headed to his car. Your Honor—that still had a pleasant ring to it. Even though he had come to detest the day-to-day trials and tribulations inherent in being a judge, he had never tired of the immediate respect that his position commanded—the presumption that his character was beyond reproach.

The judge eased out into the evening traffic while crunching numbers. As the farm drew nearer his excitement mounted. Martha had nearly \$1.5 million sitting around in a savings account. He might well have stumbled into an opportunity whereby he could cash in on his powerful personal capital and attain the financial independence necessary to leave the bench and his wretched marriage behind.

Six

Manny was frantic. It was Wednesday morning, a little after nine and he'd been up all night.

He had searched his cab thoroughly three times, and there was still no sign of his winning Magnificent Millions ticket. Twenty-five million hung in the balance, shooting relentless, cruel contrasts to his mind between the joys that this wealth could bring and the despair of seeing it unrealized.

He scoured his apartment room by room, discovering a gold-plated pen between the cushions of his sofa which he had given up for lost years ago; his birth certificate, grimy and water-stained on the floor of his cab under the passenger's seat; and a couple of toy mice covered in greasy dust batted by Stray behind the fridge. He searched through his clothes five times, and inch by inch, explored every nook and crevice throughout his four-room apartment. He looked under his old-fashioned bath tub, went through the garbage, partially dismantled the La-Z-Boy, and even sifted through the cat litter.

He had checked the Magnificent Millions website. The bold update revealed that there had been a winner, and that the winning ticket had, indeed been sold in Sutton.

He poured a coffee and sat for a few minutes, thinking. The most prudent course was action was to phone Lotto-Central, the originating office for the Magnificent Millions game and where all huge state lottery prizes were awarded. He would explain that he was the winner, but that he couldn't find the ticket. Perhaps the office had contingency plans for such situations. They'd ask him just the right questions about the ticket, and he'd reply with the answers they were looking for.

The frayed La-Z-Boy squeaked, creaked and groaned while Manny shifted fretfully, cradling a portable phone.

"Lotto-Central. Lisa speaking. How may I direct your call?"

He started right in. "I am calling about the winning Magnificent Millions ticket from your last draw. The one three days ago—this past Sunday. I had the winning ticket, but now I can't find it."

"Oh?" said Lisa. "And just exactly what do you think happened to your ticket?" Two other people had already phoned the office saying they were winners, one claiming that she also had lost her ticket, another reporting that his ticket had been stolen.

"I think I dropped it somewhere."

"I see. And did you sign the back of your ticket?"

Manny's heart sank. "No. I didn't know you had to."

"It's your only real proof of ownership; otherwise we have to treat it as a bearer bond, meaning that the finder keeps the winnings."

"I can't believe this."

"If someone comes forward with the ticket, we can review your claim to ownership. In the meantime, I suggest you keep looking for it. Did you look between the seats in your sofa?"

"Yes, everywhere."

“What about the washing machine. Check the lint trap in the dryer too.” Every year the lottery office was presented with faded and limp tickets which had gone through the wash and dry cycles.

“Nope, I haven’t done a wash yet this week.”

“All I can say is good luck,” said Lisa, knowing they would just be going in circles. “I’ll take note of our conversation. Please send us a written claim of loss and keep looking. I’ll let you in on something. So far, no one has redeemed the ticket.”

Following the conversation, Manny wandered around his apartment considering his next plan of attack. It was time for him to start thinking like the trained private investigator that he was. He would retrace his steps as best he could from the time he purchased the ticket on Sunday to the present. He would start at the old 7-11.

A temporary banner was draped over the store announcing that a new “Cash N’ Fast” would soon be open for business on the site. The sign promised “Quick Cash When You Need It,” as if it were free.

While he scoured the parking lot, a young man approached him, flashing brilliant white teeth. He was wearing an open neck shirt and a gaudy gold chain, looking very much like a refugee from the ‘70s. “We aren’t open until tomorrow sir,” he announced. “Were you looking for some cash?”

The irony of his question wasn’t lost on Manny, who replied, “You could say that.”

“Be sure to come by tomorrow, it’s our grand opening and we’re celebrating by offering a point off our regular interest rates, free coffee and donuts, and balloons for the kids.”

“Oh, I wouldn’t want to miss out on that,” said Manny, at the same time wondering why parents would take their kids to a Cash N’ Fast. One of his fellow cab drivers had used their services once and had almost been forced into bankruptcy when he chose to extend his loan instead of paying it back right away.

Manny left his car where it was and walked across the street to the bus terminal. Upon entering, he paused before an overhead closed-circuit television monitor, mounted from the ceiling. Working fine, he thought. No shaking, excellent picture quality and the color is dead-on. As part of his investigations business the bus company had given him a generous contract for the placement of five security cameras within the bus terminal. There had been complaints of stolen luggage upstairs and drug use in the lower level, specifically in the bathrooms. Privacy laws forbade the installation of cameras directly in the bathrooms, but it was permissible to mount lenses at both ends of the hall and directly above the doors leading to the men’s and ladies’ rooms. As part of his contract with the city, Manny made occasional adjustments to the camera angles and cleaned the main recorder. Images were captured by the cameras were recorded in super slow motion on a seven day cycle, and then re-recorded.

The last time he had been in the bus station was three days earlier, right after he had purchased his Magnificent Millions ticket. It might be worthwhile to examine the tape from that day for any possible clues as to the ticket’s whereabouts. With \$25 million on the line, nothing could be left to chance.

He approached an attendant selling tickets and held out his business card. “I would like access to the video room. I maintain the equipment.”

“Yes, I recognize you. Come around. I’ll let you in.”

Manny closed the door to the video room, which doubled as a lost and found area and a kitchenette. He sat in a swivel chair in front of a television monitor prepared to watch “a day in the life” of the Sutton bus terminal. Using the date stamp that flashed at the bottom of the television monitor, he rewound the tape to Sunday Sept 7th 1:40 p.m.—about the time he had entered the terminal to use the bathroom.

The cabbie sat back and watched a cast of characters enter and leave the men’s and women’s bathrooms. Within a couple of minutes he spotted himself walking along the basement hallway holding a newspaper.

He stopped the tape and punched up the images caught on camera three. This provided a superb close-up from over the bathroom’s doorway. He cued it up to the right spot. Frame by frame, he looked at his body for any sign of the ticket, hoping that it might remarkably be dangling from a pocket, or possibly be stuck to a shoe. He followed the same procedure as he watched himself leave the bathroom about 10 minutes later. To his dismay, the overhead camera clearly revealed that the bald spot on his crown had grown much larger than he had imagined and that his careful attempt to cover it was futile. There was no sign of the ticket.

The date stamp read 1:50 p.m., just the time he would have been sitting in his cab outside the terminal.

He saw a tall young man strolling confidently down the hall. He wore a backpack and carried a hockey bag, a couple of sticks slung over his shoulder. He pushed the washroom door open with his hockey bag and disappeared out of view.

About three minutes later, a huge bear of a man wearing a black winter coat shuffled down the hall alone. He suddenly spun around and began walking backwards. The man appeared to be screaming while waving his fists at the cameras. He walked a few more feet and then, like a linebacker, threw his shoulder into the door of the men’s room and disappeared from view.

Within seconds, the hockey player burst out of the room, his sticks in one hand, dragging his equipment bag in the other.

Manny stared intently at the drama unfolding on the monitor. The bathroom door swung back on the kid’s hockey bag stopping him short.

Wait. Something orange his hand!

Manny punched the stop button on the video recorder. He hit rewind. Back slowly, frame by frame. Then forward, and...freeze. The still picture shook a little, but there was no doubt about it. The hockey player was holding a bright orange Magnificent Millions ticket between his fingers. My ticket, breathed Manny. He let the tape run and selected the wide view which gave a broader picture of the hallway. Utterly focused on the boy, he stared intently as he kicked the door open, freeing his bag. He yanked it from the door frame and walked away. The boy’s burgundy backpack bore the familiar stylized large “A” which Manny recognized right away as Ashbury University’s crest. The student had put down his hockey bag, and while it was hard to see, he appeared to be stuffing the lottery ticket into his wallet. Manny watched him re-group and walk back upstairs.

He rewound the tape to the close up images caught on camera three. There. Those unmistakable, marvelous and magnificent black double M’s jumping out clearly against the bright orange background of the ticket. The overhead camera had picked up everything. It was if the kid were intentionally flaunting the ticket.

It all added up. The time line was perfect. The date stamp clearly revealed that the hockey player had come into the bathroom not 10 minutes after he had left. The young man who had his lottery ticket was an Ashbury student, and a hockey player. At a university as small as Ashbury, the prospects were better than good that he could track him down. The boy was extremely tall, and he'd recognize his dark features easily.

But why hadn't this student redeemed the ticket yet? He'd found it Sunday afternoon. It was now Wednesday. Lisa had said no one had cashed it in yet. There could be plenty of explanations, Manny reasoned, the most likely being that he'd probably just forgotten about it. Busy at school. Hadn't checked his numbers. It didn't matter. He'd get his ticket back by offering the boy a reward he couldn't refuse. Something huge. A half million. That's what he'd offer the kid. A half million dollars. No teenager would walk away from that kind of money. Getting his riches back was as good as done, but he'd have to act right away.

Manny left the video room and went to his cab. Feeling hungry, he decided go to the Sutton Hotel for a meal. Wednesdays were half price for early birds. He dined on roast beef and mashed potatoes smothered in gravy and chugged back a tall glass of cold draft beer. He filled the cab with gasoline, and exhausted by his marathon search, decided to go home, pack, and get to bed early. Ashbury was two hours away and he wanted to be on the road early.

Seven

Jean, Philip and Adam sat at a long pine dining room table which Jean had discovered at an auction sale years earlier. She had spent months stripping and refinishing it over the winter months, and had found six chairs, which matched perfectly.

Recently, the dining room had become little more than a museum, a place to display furniture and hang paintings. The family seldom dined together or entertained friends around the big table, thanks to Philip. He had ruined everything.

They had married young. Philip was 22, Jean had just turned 20. Both the Van Whyte and Driscoll families had approved of their children's choice of partners. The couple shared similar Protestant backgrounds; and both had been raised with all the trappings of old Boston money which included enrolment at the right private schools, and memberships at established country clubs.

Philip's quick appointment to assistant district attorney in Boston had confirmed to everyone that Jean had married well, but things weren't everything they seemed to be.

Early in the marriage he had cheated on her. This had come to Jean's attention, but not from someone who had spotted her husband escorting an unfamiliar woman down the hallway of a motel, nor had there had been a dramatic phone call to Jean from a concerned friend with "disturbing news." Rather, Philip's "indiscretion" as he later had referred to it, was announced to Jean in the form of tell-tale crab lice which she had discovered infesting her pubic hairs, clothing, bed sheets and even her eye lashes. Not two years into their marriage, the itchy crabs told a tale of Philip's infidelity. He had brought home a bona fide STD, easily taken care of, but an STD nevertheless.

Jean was humiliated, angry and ashamed. Sex stopped for over two weeks. There had been tears, shouting, and threats to leave the new marriage, but she still loved him. Even at Ashbury, surrounded by hundreds of eligible young men, she had declined the many offers of dates that had come her way. No other man had ever moved her like Philip, nor had she ever been with another man. She remained in the marriage, and one year later was pregnant with Heather. Philip continued to win more cases than he lost. He became a full district attorney in Boston. Jean gave up her career as a sales representative at Atlas Life. Three years later, Adam was born. They lived a contented, if not predictable life.

After Philip had been appointed to the bench in Sutton, they painstakingly restored an old farm house. It was once showcased in a spring edition of *Country Living* magazine, a fine home where Jean and Philip entertained their many friends with grace and style, hosting frequent dinner parties.

Jean passed the gravy boat to Adam. Six months earlier, she had caught Philip cheating again. This time it had been with Monica Irwin, whose husband, Douglas, had been killed in a car accident over Christmas. During the winter, Philip and Jean had spent a great deal of time with Monica while she dealt with her grief. She and Philip had invited her to dinner at the farm many times, and Jean had helped Monica redecorate her small house in Sutton.

Monica and Douglas had one daughter, Megan. She was the same age as Heather. They both attended St. Mildred's and took modern dance lessons together. The two girls were best of friends.

One weekend in early March, Jean had arranged to drive Heather and Monica to Boston for a dance recital. Reservations had been made to stay overnight.

The weather had been clear when they had left Sutton, but within two hours on the interstate leading to Boston, a late winter storm had swept in unexpectedly, bringing with it a combination of snow, sleet, and freezing rain driven fiercely by easterly winds. Jean had decided to return home. She had driven straight to Monica's home to drop off Megan. Philips' van had been parked in the drive.

Upon calling for Monica, Jean had gone upstairs, fearing the worst. She recalled that the bedroom door had been closed. She had yanked it open, and in the dim light had seen Philip's back as he struggled to put on his shirt. Monica had stood, as if frozen, staring at her. She was naked from the waist up. The air had been steamy, and smelled of sex.

Philip had betrayed her again. She had detested him ever since. Her disdain for Philip had festered daily as she recognized that he wasn't in any hurry to leave the farm, despite the fact that his infidelity with Monica had destroyed their marriage. She found his continued presence in her life infuriating. She had stayed in the marriage for Heather and Adam. It was as simple as that. Jean and Philip had retreated to separate bedrooms, explaining to the children that their father snored. They rarely spoke. Philip came home late, and left the farm house early every morning. She had begun to drink heavily.

The carcass of what had been a seven-pound chicken sat before Philip's carving knife. Jean served mashed potatoes, Brussels sprouts, and carrots from her end of the table. Adam had pretty well emptied the contents of the gravy boat on his potatoes, and had pushed the sprouts to the far reaches of his dinner plate lest they somehow contaminate his chicken. He devoured his meal like a starved German Shepherd.

Jean had prepared the formal meal entirely for Adam's benefit. Too many dinners had recently been eaten in the kitchen or in the rec-room in front of the TV.

Over the course of the meal, it became apparent that the pretense of a normal family dinner was, in fact, a ridiculous charade. Jean and Philip completely ignored each other. All questions were directed towards Adam, who restricted his answers to "Yeah," "nope," and, "I don't really know."

After dinner, Adam left the table, and went to his room. Philip headed for his study. Jean, as always, was left to the dishes. She cleared the table and clanged pots and pans noisily. Her anger and frustration was partly a result of the hopelessness of their marriage, and the fact that she wanted a drink in the worst way. She was over two days dry. She hadn't touched a drop since sipping the bitter wine she had found at her mother's condo. No AA and no counseling. So far, so good. The first day had been the most difficult.

After finishing the dishes, she set her attention to a pile of laundry which lay strewn in a hamper in the upstairs bathroom. She spotted one of Philip's dress-shirt on top of the pile. Damn him, she cursed. He comes home late, asks me to hold dinner before he showers, leaves wet towels everywhere, and then sneaks his shirt in with Adams,' as if I wouldn't notice. She had told Philip more than once that he was on his own for laundry. She couldn't bring herself to touch his clothes.

Something was sticking out of the top pocket of the shirt. Curious, she removed it. A business card. *Andrea Spurway – Realty Broker—Oak Leaf* was emblazoned in raised letters. The agent even had a small color photo of herself framed in the upper corner of the card. Andrea Spurway was very easy on the eyes.

She lugged the laundry hamper downstairs and mulled-over the real estate card. He'd have no reason to be dealing with a real estate agent unless they were fooling around. She stormed upstairs to his study.

“So. You thinking of buying some real estate?”

Philip pulled up from his desk, startled. “Why would you say that?”

Usually controlled and in charge, his response to her question was just too quick. Too defensive. “Oh, I don't know, could be the fact that you're leaving real estate cards around the house.”

“What are you talking about?”

“The real estate card I found in the top pocket of your white dress shirt,” she snapped. “The very shirt you wore today.”

Philip scrambled. “Oh, Andrea. I was having a drink after work at the Sutton Hotel. A friend of mine introduced me to her. You know how those agents are. They never miss an opportunity to hand out their cards.”

“No, I don't know how those agents are. And I didn't ask about her. I was merely asking about the card. If she's so insignificant, why do you remember her name? And if you were drinking in Sutton, why does her card say Oak Leaf?”

“I guess she was visiting Sutton. Maybe she lives here and commutes to Oak Leaf. She handed me the card and I took it as a courtesy.”

“I find it hard to believe that you'd be seen at the Sutton Hotel. From what I've heard, all they serve are trays of draft beer. It's full of sad, old men. Always has been. Besides, you seldom drink. Who else was there?”

“A retired attorney. You wouldn't know him.”

“You're a stinking liar and a cheat,” seethed Jean through pinched lips. “I really don't care what you do. And by the way, I phoned Donald Abramsky, the manager at Mother's bank this morning. He informed me that she is financially comfortable. More than comfortable.”

“He did what!”

“He told me mother's net worth. I have every right to know as much as you. I'm her daughter, and an executor.”

“Your responsibilities as executor don't kick-in until after Martha is gone. Abramsky had no right to tell you anything about her finances without your mother's authorization. That's a serious breach of confidentiality.”

“Tell that to him.”

Philip didn't reply. The banker's blunder could be a good thing. He had something to hold over Abramsky, which might be very useful.

There was nothing more to say. Jean retreated to the opposite end of the house. Later that evening, she set-about trying to relax. After soaking in the hot Jacuzzi, she took two sleeping pills, but the confrontation with Philip made rest impossible. It had taken six months, but she had caught him. He was obviously back at it, screwing around. Even though it didn't really surprise her, she found it unbearable. She wanted—needed out, now.

Unable to sleep, she wrapped herself tightly in her white terry cloth housecoat, went downstairs, lit a cigarette, and looked up the number for Bernie Gardiner, a divorce attorney.

She and Bernie Gardiner were friends from her days at Atlas Life in Boston. He was a corporate attorney, and had represented the insurance company on retainer. Gardiner now specialized in family law. Jean and Gardiner had become reacquainted through mutual friends when he had moved his practice to Sutton.

She jotted down several questions that she'd ask him in the morning. She went to bed and tossed and turned for hours while trying to shut out visions of Philip and Andrea rolling around in the bedroom of some model home.

Jean stayed in her bedroom until Philip and Adam had left for the day. She put on some fresh coffee, lit a Winston and phoned Gardiner. She asked the attorney about "a friend's" chances of suing for divorce, based on her husband's adulterous behavior. Gardiner told Jean that it was essential that her friend provide absolute proof of adultery to make a strong case and to file papers for divorce right away. He advised that the best way to obtain the evidence her friend required was to hire the services of a private detective. Indisputable proof of adultery provided by incriminating photos would assist in presenting the leverage needed to obtain the maximum assets her friend would be entitled to.

"There are two private detectives here in Sutton," he stated. "I suggest Skyline Investigations. He's excellent. Here's the number. Tell your friend to give Manny Boyce a call."

Eight

Wednesday morning. Encouraged by Andrea's land proposal the afternoon before, Philip had placed a call to Martha Van Whyte from his chambers. He had arranged for an impromptu lunch on the pretext of examining her will. They would examine the document, but he had far more serious business to discuss.

The unseasonably warm temperatures of the past week had given way to cool rains and wind. A variety of trees were showing signs of color. It would take several more weeks for the real show to begin—resplendent shades of crimson red, orange, and yellows which moved tourists, some from as far away as Japan, to visit the hills and valleys of the New England countryside to take pictures of dying foliage. Canada geese had been spotted early this year on their migration to the south. Old-timers commented that this portended a cold winter ahead.

A more curious species of snowbirds was also migrating south in SUVs, RVs, vans, and campers. Philip made his way to Oak Leaf for his meeting with Martha, slowly in the rain, stuck behind an enormous motorhome with Nova Scotia tags. Still not satisfied that they had used their full amount of eligible asphalt, the adventurous campers had also chained a Toyota Corolla to the RV's bumper which shot a constant spray at Philip's windshield. For good measure, an aluminum boat was perched on the RV's roof, just behind the satellite dish. Philip fumed as he tried in vain to see around the motorized campground.

The judge arrived in Oak Leaf a little after noon. He glanced at his leather briefcase beside him. Everything was in place. He parked across the street from Albertino's, Martha's restaurant of choice. He entered and spotted Martha in a booth.

She offered a less than warm greeting. "I had just about given up on you." Philip looked at his watch and noticed that he was all of 10 minutes late. "I'm sorry; traffic was heavy and very slow because of the rain."

"I can't bear sitting in restaurants alone."

Philip slid in and picked up a menu. "What do you recommend? What's your favorite dish here? My treat."

"My appetite isn't what it used to be, but I would love to try the fish and chips."

Philip suppressed his inclination to ask why she would order fish and chips in an Italian restaurant, and quickly agreed that fish and chips sounded good to him as well. Anything to speed the meal along. The restaurant was damp, cold and empty. An AM radio blared country music and static right over their heads, plus there was a dead fly sitting atop the stainless serviette holder. Martha turned back and waved a waitress over.

A dark, pretty teenager arrived to their table. "Hello, my name's Maria," she said, too rehearsed, "and I'll be your server." The recitation continued as she looked off in space. "Our special today is Veal Cordon Blue, smothered in a mild sun-dried tomato sauce, and topped with caramelized onions. I also have a--"

Martha held up her hand rudely. "Stop. We'll both have the fish and chips."

Philip blew on his hands to warm them. “Two coffees, and please turn down the radio. And what do you use for heat in here?”

Two plates of heavily battered fish surrounded by chips followed the coffee. Maria returned brandishing a gigantic cylindrical pepper mill “Fresh ground pepper on your fish?”

Martha set down her fork and looked at the waitress curiously. “I have a question. Why do you people always think that we’re incapable of adding our own pepper?”

Philip intervened. “It looks very tempting. A bit here, please.”

Maria gave the grinder a couple of angry twists and left the table.

Martha had raised a good point thought Philip. Was ground pepper supposed to be some kind of exotic treat? Something so rare and precious that it could only be entrusted to the guardianship of a server carefully trained in the intricacies of delivering the perfect portion? Perhaps the pepper corns were stored in the restaurant’s vault at night? Must be a value-added thing he thought to himself, dreamed up by the head office of some formula restaurant chain, now copied everywhere, a ploy for a larger tip, designed to offer the illusion of service.

The addition of Maria’s fresh ground pepper had given Philip heartburn. Albertino’s should stick with sandwiches, he decided. They finished the main course, and passed on the requisite assortment of cheesecakes. Martha insisted on picking up the check. She left a .50 tip on the table, which Philip hastily embellished while Martha found her way to the bathroom.

After lunch, Martha and Philip got down to business. They sat at the dining room table in Martha’s condominium with her will spread out between them. It had been updated six years earlier, shortly after Martha’s husband, Edward had died. As Phillip had expected, the document bequeathed all her money, jewelry, and furniture to Jean, save for a few paintings, and other household articles earmarked for friends.

It was time to establish the most important authority over her estate—his full control of her holdings.

“Mrs. Van Whyte,” said Philip earnestly, “Your will is in fine order. There is, however, something that I would like you to give some thought to. It’s a legal document that everyone should have called Durable Power of Attorney.”

“What is that?”

“Power of Attorney entrusts someone called the agent to handle your estate if you were unable to look after your financial affairs should you become mentally or physically incapacitated. Decisions regarding your investments for example. Without a Durable Power of Attorney in place, the family would be forced to go to court and have a guardian or conservator appointed over your assets. It’s not a pleasant thing to think about, but as I said, it’s something everyone should have whether they’re 25 or 105.”

Philip deliberately failed to disclose the fact that a Durable Power of Attorney would also provide him, as the potential agent, legal control of her estate while she was of sound mind and body.

Martha stared at the table. Philip had earned her trust earlier when they had first gone over her will. He had seen her financial statements a couple of days ago, and knew

how much she was worth. Not once had he remotely suggested that her will be changed to include him as a beneficiary with Jean. She had been on guard for that very suggestion, and he hadn't so much as alluded to it. "I have heard of such precautions. I would like you, Philip, to have this Power of Attorney business for my estate. As long as Jean continues to drink she just isn't up to such responsibilities. How do we make the arrangements? Where are the forms?" she asked, pen already in hand.

Philip reached for his briefcase. "I have them right here."

Martha read the document carefully and signed. Philip gathered them up and pushed out his chair. "It's the right decision, Mrs. Van Whyte. I'm pleased that I could assist you."

She smiled and said, "I really wouldn't object if you called me Martha."

"Of course, Martha."

Goodbyes were exchanged, and Philip left the condo. The judge stood in a roomy, mirrored elevator admiring his new suit while dropping silently from the sky at the rate of one floor a second. He had left Martha's suite with everything he had come for. Her signature quickly scribbled on a couple of legal documents granted him unobstructed access to her sizable estate. He would visit with Jacob Pringle in the morning.

Manny was closing in on Ashbury. The cabbie hoped to track down the kid who had his ticket by the end of the day. He was desperate to get his unsigned ticket back before the boy discovered that it was a winner and cashed it himself.

It was chilly and raining heavily for the third day in a row. While the windshield washers flopped monotonously, Manny daydreamed. Once he cashed his lottery ticket, he'd live in Florida from November until April. He might get one of those new condominiums in Oak Leaf for the summer months. Condo living, California style, that was for him! He had seen pictures of The Gardens of Oak Leaf in the newspaper. The big towers sure looked impressive. With \$25 million he could buy the condominium's whole top floor. He imagined welcoming his buddies to his fabulous penthouse. He imagined inviting women to dinner—the meal beautifully catered of course.

Manny had made good time despite the slick roads. Wednesday traffic was light. He sailed along on Rolling Valley Drive, the main artery leading into Ashbury, distinguished by the appearance of one familiar fast food restaurant after another. The wide street was also lined with gas stations, donut shops, and several "big box" stores, selling building supplies, electronics, and office supplies at "warehouse prices guaranteed." A couple of large grocery stores loomed on the horizon, several traffic lights down the road.

The cluttered landscape was typical of any small city in North America. Urban sprawl looked identical everywhere, as if it were franchised, a blight discovering new territories daily.

Ashbury was located in central Massachusetts, 30 miles east of the Chicopee River Watershed and the Quabbin reservoir, supplier of water to Boston, 65 miles to the east. Its main employer was General Motors, attracted to the area decades before by a plentiful workforce, and access to rail lines that fed large cities. Always considered an avid "sports

town” the city embraced its Ashbury Wildcats, the university’s winning hockey team. Hockey fans were especially excited about the pending arrival of Ian Sinclair, a highly touted rookie out of Sutton. He had been described as “sensational,” “spectacular,” and “gritty,”—an exciting addition to the Wildcats who might just lead the team to another national championship.

University hockey in the north-east was big business. In some cities attendance rivaled numbers associated with NHL teams but without the crippling pay rolls. Once the regular season kicked off, the Wildcats filled the local arena to the rafters with 10,000 screaming fans every Thursday night. Plans were underway for a new 17,000 seat facility. Gate receipts and lucrative television contracts embellished the university’s coffers, and the sale of Ashbury hockey jerseys, mugs, programs, and other memorabilia accounted for \$250,000 in annual revenue alone.

The games were carefully observed by NHL and AHL scouts who hugged the railings on the second level of the rink sipping coffee from Styrofoam cups.

Manny consulted a map and easily found the entrance to the university. Two turns up the drive and the modern athletic complex came into view. He planned to ask someone where the hockey team practiced. At this point he didn’t know the name of the student who held his ticket, but it didn’t matter. He’d easily recognize him from the surveillance video tape.

The building was dank and musty. He heard a spirited basketball game through the gym’s big doors. Sneakers squeaked on varnished hardwood. In the distance, whistles tooted from the pool. He sauntered down the corridor, and came across a bulletin board. Clearly posted under “Wildcats Hockey” was a try-out schedule. They would be on the ice at 7:00 a.m. the following morning at the Ashbury Colesium.

Armed with all the information he required, Manny walked back to his cab and contemplated his next move. Perhaps he should walk around the campus hoping to spot the student on the video tape? No, too much of a long shot. And there was no point in returning to Sutton for work. Wednesdays tended to be slow anyway. Instead, he’d find a motel and relax. He would go to the rink early in the morning, track down the kid, and offer him a generous reward for the return of his lottery ticket.

He started the old Dodge and headed out. Things were coming together beautifully. Within 24 hours he’d be depositing his millions in the bank.

Nine

Philip sat in court early, and then juggled his schedule to clear most of the day. He left Sutton for the Pringles' farm late Thursday morning. It was situated in the fringes of Oak Leaf, not far from Martha's condo. Andrea Spurway's directions led him through a maze of gravel country roads, all it seemed, loaded with potholes carved by recent heavy downpours.

He eventually spotted an aluminum mailbox, the name *Pringle* neatly printed in bright red lettering. A zigzagged fence fashioned from old logs clearly defined the front of the property. Several brown cows grazed just feet from the road and stared at the van.

He pulled in, and rolled up the long driveway lined by mature maple trees. A two-story yellow brick farmhouse with peaked dormers, gingerbread trim and a wrap-around porch stood solidly in the distance. The smell of burning hardwood wafted through the damp September chill.

Philip parked, and sat for a moment collecting his thoughts. He might have just one opportunity to convince Jacob Pringle to sell him the land. He'd have to be at his charming best.

He stepped from the van. Suddenly a large mixed-breed farm dog, its long black and tan hair on end, came bounding out from behind a barn barking fiercely. Philip scrambled back to the safety of the van's cabin, and slammed the door shut. The animal stood on its hind legs, large nails clawing on metal, snapping and snarling. Its hot breath fogged the tightly closed window.

"Get away. Go on," yelled Philip.

"Gretel," came a voice from behind the van. "Back off, girl." The dog stopped its noise and lay down, her brown eyes trained on Philip.

An elderly man approached Philip's window. "What can I do for you?"

Philip rolled down his window. "I'm looking for Mr. Pringle. Jacob Pringle."

"That's me. What do you want?" he asked stiffly.

"I'm Judge Philip Driscoll. I was hoping we could have a short chat."

"Are you here about our taxes? I know we're behind. I've already told them we'd try to pay up soon. Spoke to the girl at the office twice last week."

"Oh no, I'm not here about anything like that, sir." Philip climbed out of the van and extended his hand towards Jacob. With that, the dog sat up and bared its teeth.

"Gretel. Back to the house," ordered Jacob, pointing. "She's a good dog. Shepherd-Collie mix. Very protective, but she'd never bite anyone."

Yeah, right, thought Philip appraising Jacob. He guessed his age as anywhere from early to late 80s. The farmer stooped slightly but he was still close to six feet. He had a full head of hair, mostly white. His eyes were blue—kind eyes, thought Philip. Jacob's heavily lined face was tanned; his hands were large and rough. Working hands. He wore light green coveralls, leather work gloves hung from the top pocket; scuffed brown work boots protected his feet.

“I’m researching some family history,” lied Philip. “There’s a good chance that our families may be related.”

“Related. That’s interesting, Judge. On what side?”

“The Pringles. My mother was a Pringle.”

“My wife will want to hear about this. She loves family history things. Made a family tree. She’s always adding to it.”

“It’s a hobby of mine, as well.”

Jacob furrowed his brows. “Judge Driscoll. I’ve heard of you. Seen your name in the paper here and there. I was just on my way inside for a bite. Doris should have dinner ready anytime now. We always have a big noon-day meal on Thursdays. You’d be welcome to join us. We don’t get much company.”

“I don’t want to intrude.”

“Nonsense. Let’s go in. There’s plenty.”

A promising start, thought Philip.

“Doris, we have a visitor,” called out Jacob, as they entered a large country kitchen.

Jacob’s wife of 58 years was at the stove tending to a black cast iron frying pan. Chicken breasts, coated in flour and drenched in oil, hissed, popped and splattered. She was a tall woman with angular features, her grey hair pulled back tightly in a bun. She walked with a slight limp and wore a blue apron over a mid-length floral patterned dress.

“This is my wife, Doris. Doris, Judge Driscoll.”

She shot a concerned glance at Jacob.

“Judge Driscoll is in the area doing some family research,” he added hastily.

“Family research,” repeated Doris turning down the stove. “Whose family?”

“Mine,” said Philip. “On the Pringle side. My mother was a Pringle.”

Doris rubbed flour from her hands. “How interesting. I have plenty of information on the Pringles. I hope Jacob has invited you for dinner. As usual, I’ve cooked too much.”

“Yes. Thank you. It smells delicious.”

“Jacob, set a place for the judge,” directed Doris. “Excuse me; I have to keep an eye on the chicken. But I’m interested in hearing about your kin.”

Jacob beckoned towards a round table made of oak. “Come and sit down.”

“We have a table very similar to this at our farm,” said Philip.

“You have a farm? Where?”

“In Sutton. Had it for years. My wife Jean, and my children, Heather and Adam all love it. It’s small, just 20 acres, but I wouldn’t live anywhere else. I’ve always needed space around me, and plenty of it. On weekends, when I’m not writing judgments, I never miss the chance to cut the grass, plow some snow, and mess around with fences, tractors—anything that needs fixing. Helps me relax.”

Doris placed a plate filled with cheese and crackers between them, and returned with a pitcher of ice water. “Tell me more about your ancestors.”

“My mother was a Pringle, before she married Albert Driscoll. Her family originally settled in Boston. I discovered that her great-great grandfather Pringle was one of the original founders of Oak Leaf County, going back four generations.”

Doris looked on with interest. “Jacob’s Pringles settled in Vermont. But we’ll get the journal out later, and see if we can’t trace something.”

"I'm very curious to learn more. Maybe there's a reason we have farming in our blood," said Philip. "It's in the genes."

"You might have something there," agreed Jacob pouring a glass of water. "Could I offer you something stronger? A beer perhaps?"

"No. I'm not much for drinking."

An avalanche of food began to cover the table. Doris placed a heaping basket of steaming homemade biscuits in front of Philip. A bowl of scalloped potatoes smothered in a cheese sauce followed. Homemade pickled beets sat alongside a fresh salad. Jacob assisted Doris by carrying a platter to the table. It was piled high with crispy fried chicken, still sizzling.

"We enjoy a noon day dinner on weekends," commented Philip. "My wife, Jean is such a good cook. After six hours of farm work, I'm starving. Heather and Adam help out as well. Do you have children?"

"Yes. Douglas. He runs a fitness club. He's married with two teenagers," answered Doris. "He's also a reserve Marine," she added proudly.

Philip buttered a homemade biscuit. "Doris, this is a wonderful meal. Thank you both for your hospitality."

"You're more than welcome, Judge."

"Philip. Please call me, Philip."

Doris passed the salad bowl. "It's not everyday we have a judge at our table. Maybe we'll even find some common ancestors."

Don't count on it, thought Philip.

Dessert was homemade pumpkin pie. Jacob took the liberty of adding a scoop of vanilla ice cream to Philip's plate, a twinkle in his eye.

"Jacob, I'm just stuffed. Would you mind showing me around the farm? I'd like to work off some of this meal."

"I was just going to suggest the same thing. Doris, I'll get to the dishes later. My wife does the cooking and I look after the clean-up," he explained.

"We the same arrangement," said Philip. "Jean cooks, and I always clean up. It's only fair."

"I'll take care of the dishes today," offered Doris. "You two go on. Take Gretel with you. When you get back, we'll have a look at the family book with our coffee."

Jacob and Philip left the house for a tour of the farm. Feeling he had gained their trust, Philip was anxious to set his attention to the severed parcel of land that Andrea had described.

"We have 380 acres," said Jacob proudly. "Mostly dairy cattle, soy, acres of cabbage, potatoes, lettuce, green beans, and plenty of hay."

"You must have help."

"Yes, we have three men who come in. But I still put in an eight hour day. I've been up since five. I do like a nap about two though."

Philip pointed towards Martha's condo complex. "What are those tall buildings over there? In the distance?"

"Don't remind me. Condominiums. Can't stand looking at them. Bird cages, if you ask me. Percy Muldrew sold-out three years ago. A 400 acre farm. Surprised us all. But what can you do?"

Philip shook his head in empathy and then said, "Not much I guess. Such a shame. This has always been some of the most beautiful land in the state. The developers are taking over everywhere. It's very sad."

"They came around here looking for some land just yesterday," commented Jacob dryly. "Tried to bribe us. Offered a fortune. I told them to get lost. This land has been in our family for four generations. I'm not going to be the one to ruin it. At my age, money isn't important anymore. What would we do with millions of dollars? We just need enough to pay our bills, and live in peace."

"Yes, I've heard that land values here in Oak Leaf have gone through the roof," said Philip.

"It's ridiculous. We could sell the whole farm for a fortune, take our money and live in some swanky senior's center. Can you imagine Doris and me in one of those places? What would we do with Gretel? I'd miss all the animals. We're staying right here. They'll have to carry us out."

Philip egged Jacob on. "Land has gone up in Sutton too. I've noticed our property taxes have almost doubled in the last couple of years alone."

"Don't speak to me about property taxes," retorted the farmer angrily. "We can't keep up. Land around here is so expensive that the taxes have gone crazy. Just between you and me, we're behind on our property taxes, and I can't sleep at night. Neither can Doris. Keep getting calls from the township, wanting us to pay up. We're going to have to sell off a parcel of land to pay our tax bill," he continued. "I've already had it legally severed. A beautiful parcel, about 135 acres. But we'll never sell to the developers. It would just break my heart to see condominium apartment buildings or cheap subdivision houses on my land. I'd rather be dead, and Doris agrees with me. The only land I want to sell just happens to be the land that the developers want so badly. It fits right in with their plans. Well that's too bad. We're not selling out to them."

"I'm in the market for some land," confided Philip. "Please keep this to yourself, but I want to leave the bench early and breed horses. American Quarter horses. Maybe Arabians. Horses are my wife's passion, and my daughter has loved them since she was a toddler."

"You have a farm. Not big enough?"

"It's only about 20 acres. A hobby farm really. Not enough for proper stables and riding trails."

The two men walked in silence, Gretel leading the way, sniffing everything in sight.

Philip stopped. "I'm wondering, Jacob, if you don't mind me asking, how much are you and Doris asking for your severed lot. The one for sale?"

"The developers offered us \$2.5 million for it."

"Two and a half million!" exclaimed Philip.

"That's what I said. But that's just developer talk. I hope that everything crashes on them."

"But the land is for sale?"

"To the right person. Someone who would care for it. Be a good custodian. Enjoy it and use it as God intended, to raise animals and grow crops. I'm not a terribly religious man, but the way I see it, the Creator didn't provide this beautiful land for subdivisions.

Look at that view,” directed Jacob. “This is what I want to keep. I’d be selling my soul if I just grabbed their millions and tried to ignore the rest.”

“Could we walk over and have a look at the land for sale?”

“We’re standing on it.”

“I can understand why you don’t want to see it destroyed.”

“I thought you might.”

The two men walked without speaking. Philip decided it was time to make his pitch. “I didn’t come out here to look for land. But would you mind telling me what you’re asking for the severed parcel?”

“Why? You interested?”

“Perhaps But I can’t come anywhere close to \$2.5 million.”

“You’d raise horses, maybe build a nice stable and arrange for your own driveway to the highway?”

“Yes. A beautiful red stable. I’m imagining it now, just at the bottom of that valley. Clean white fences. Quarter horses grazing.”

“Beats the hell out of cranes, swimming pools and parking lots,” said Jacob. “Where would you live?”

“We’d build. A ranch style bungalow. A small one. Something that would blend right in with the land. We could sell our farm in Sutton, and build a new home here. Jean has always hated our old farmhouse. It’s so drafty. Too large. Hard for her to clean.”

Jacob looked at Philip intently. “I think you’re serious.”

“The more I look at this land, the more serious about this I get. What kind of price are you looking at?” asked Philip. “Just roughly. I’d like to know so I don’t get my hopes up too much.”

“That’s something I’d have to discuss with Doris. But we’ve talked about asking in the \$1.5 million range—for the right person. That would keep us more than comfortable. We’re not going to live forever. And the money would give us plenty for our property taxes, no matter how high they get.”

Philip was elated. Andrea had assured him that her company would pay him \$2.5 million should he secure the land. He’d make a million dollars profit within a couple of days. No mortgages. No complications. This was meant to be! Goodbye court rooms and goodbye Jean.

“Let’s go back to the house and talk this over with Doris,” suggested Jacob.

Good idea, thought Philip.

They found Doris sitting at the kitchen table, looking through a leather-bound journal, full of photos and yellowed newspaper clippings. “I can’t find the page with the family tree. I was sure it was tucked in the back.”

“That’s all right, Doris. Let it be for now,” said Jacob. “There’s some business to discuss. Pull up a chair, Philip.”

“Business?” asked Doris

“We may have a buyer for the land. Someone we could live with,” said Jacob.

“Oh?”

“Yes,” said Philip. “Jacob showed me the land you have for sale, and it’s perfect for Jean and me. I’m planning on an early retirement, and would love to raise horses—perhaps board them, and offer riding lessons. Jean has been around horses all her life. It’s

always been a dream for both of us. We'd build a small house, a stable—nothing too large of course.”

Doris looked at her husband. “What are your thoughts on this?”

“It sounds good to me. That land can easily support a stable with plenty left for a house. There'd be lots of privacy for everyone. It would be ideal. A farm within a farm. But you wouldn't turn around and sell in a couple of years would you?”

“Certainly not. If Jean agrees with the plan, and if we can afford the land and a house, it would be a long term commitment. And we have two children. One of them could carry the farm through to another generation.”

“We'll have to settle on a price,” said Jacob. “Doris, I've already quoted him \$1.5 million, like we talked about.”

“That's fair,” she agreed.

Philip looked earnestly at Jacob. “Actually, I don't think we could manage quite that much. Any chance you would consider \$1.2?”

“If you can pay cash we'll agree to \$1.3. How's that?”

“It's a deal. Would you accept a check from me right now as a show of good faith? A deposit. Something to hold the land for us?”

“That won't be necessary. We won't sell the land to anyone else. You have our word, doesn't he Doris?”

“Yes, but it would be best if we could sell soon, what with--”

“I've already told Philip about our tax problem. If we have to sell the land, I can't think of anyone we'd rather deal with than a judge. A man of honor,” stated Jacob. “You see, Doris, I told you everything would work out.”

“Things have a way of doing that,” said Philip. “And I can't think of two people, we'd rather have as neighbors. After all, we share Pringle blood from somewhere down the road.”

Doris stood. “I forgot. I was going to put some coffee on.”

“Please don't trouble yourself about that now,” said Philip. “I really should be going. I can hardly wait to speak with Jean, and get some financing in place. It's been a wonderful visit. Thank you for lunch. I won't need to eat again for a week.”

Philip shook hands with Jacob, and promised to phone him within 24 hours to finalize the land deal.

He pulled down the drive, and in the mirror caught sight of Gretel half heartedly chasing him. Doris and Jacob stood together on the front porch then went inside, hand-in hand.

Ten

Ian's first days at Ashbury had flown by. Thursday had finally arrived. His first hockey practice as a Wildcat was just hours away. The familiar nervous stomach was back—a condition that preceded every trip to the rink. He would feel better the moment he took his first long strides on the ice.

He figured that the University wouldn't have gone to all the trouble of offering him a scholarship just to cut him, but he'd be scrimmaging with many hopefuls who would be determined to make their presence felt. This invariably meant fights and probably a few cheap shots. He didn't have anything to prove, but should the situation arise, he knew he was more than capable of asserting himself.

Academics so far, seemed interesting. He had chosen anthropology, English lit, American history, sociology and urban geography as his courses. He was far more interested in playing hockey than learning about an ancient tribe in Mozambique, or the intricacies of the American Electoral College, but recognized that he had to maintain a "B" average to maintain his athletic scholarship, and he would do just that.

He and Heather had become close. It had only been a few days, but they had spent a lot of time together, including two nights. Still, a number of other girls had caught his attention, and he had noticed her checking out other guys. It was too early to say how things might progress. For now, they enjoyed each other's company.

As he lay in bed, he heard Alison Hannaford and Emily Wheaton from down the hall. They had been up all night again, drinking wine with the music too loud. Rap music. He couldn't stand it.

Alison and Emily were both from Boston, and had boarded at Heather's private school in Sutton. They constantly droned on about the best place for ski vacations, the finest make of mountain bikes, and the expansion of their parents' summer cottages. Any talk of "work" included tales of woe about baby-sitting at a resort in the Hamptons, serving drinks at the private golf club, instructing something at a summer camp or tending lawns and walking dogs.

He was struck by the unapologetic show of wealth exhibited by so many of his peers. Many students had their own vehicles which included Jeeps, Volkswagen Beetles, Lexus, and BMW's. He had never seen so many expensive cars in one place at a time.

He sometimes wondered if any of these "Harvard wannabe's" as he thought of them, had actually ever really worked a day in their lives, or had everything simply been handed to them? Maybe he should have gone to a public college.

While his education was paid for, he was constantly short on spending money. He had been forced to opt out when someone suggested they split a pizza. Knowing that couldn't afford his share, he had explained that he didn't like pizza, when in fact it was his favorite. The same held true for the movies.

He even felt out of place in his clothes. It seemed everyone around him was dressed in the latest L.L. Bean, Tommy Hilfiger, or Ralph Lauren fashions. One night while walking by a residence room, he overheard some girls comment that he was "hot," "but that his clothes must come from Bargain City," followed by much laughter. They

were right. Most of his clothes and shoes came from a discount clearance center not far from his home. He had purchased his own clothes since he was 15, with money earned from part time work at McDonald's.

In contrast to the challenges of fitting in to everyday campus life, the prospect of suiting up and hitting the ice was intoxicating. There, he would excel. He always had. Cars, clothes and spending money just didn't matter at the rink. His formidable athletic ability would be quickly recognized and level the playing field with those whose idea of hardship was contending with rainy weather during their March Break in the Bahamas.

Within a couple of weeks he'd be "the talk of the town," within and beyond the university, as he made his mark as Ashbury's new rookie sensation.

It was time to move. He showered, dressed and grabbed a quick breakfast of toast and cereal from the dining room.

The university didn't have its own hockey arena; instead, the athletic department rented ice time at the Colesium. The old building, built of white-washed concrete blocks, was affectionately known as "The Barn." It could hold up to 10,000 fans in its cramped wooden seats. The facility had a reputation for being frigid in the winter and sweltering hot in the summer. It had no new amenities. The closest thing to a private box was at ice level where the players served penalties.

The rink was a long walk from campus, but a short drive. Three vans were provided for team transportation. They would be waiting in the south parking lot at 6:20 a.m. sharp.

Ian strode to the university's south parking lot, hockey bag slung on his shoulder, sticks in one hand, and an apple in the other.

During a series of try-outs Coach Cannon and his assistant, Keith Lawler, would be appraising the skill levels of 23 boys invited to camp. Eventually, Cannon would have to tell six of the players that he wasn't going to select them for the team. Word was, that he always delivered the bad news privately in his office a day or so after the annual exhibition game against the Fredericton Reds.

The coach had always made it clear that no one was assured of a spot on the roster, returning players included, and that they had better arrive for try-outs in shape. Ian had run hard daily in the summer heat and had lifted weights in the basement, filling out his tall frame with 10 lbs of new muscle.

Most of the team hopefuls had gathered in the parking lot by the time Ian arrived. Some were chatting in small groups among themselves. A few were playing an impromptu game of ball hockey with a tennis ball.

Ian dropped his hockey bag and leaned against a van, looking for someone to talk to. Several guys were staring at him. He felt as though he was being sized up. He was the star from Sutton. The youngest rookie at try-out camp. A "hot prospect" who had been in discussions with the Chicago Blackhawks, and who had already been interviewed by the local newspaper. He had even been on television, showcased nation-wide on Sports World. He indifferently tossed away his apple core, sensing that even this move was being observed.

Coach Cannon had a reputation for toughness, pushing everyone hard. Even the second and third year veterans, who confidently swaggered around were secretly fending off the jitters.

A couple of stragglers arrived. It was finally time to get underway. The vans quickly became uncomfortably full. Ian was jammed against a large panel window which didn't open. Fresh air was hard to come by.

The caravan pulled into the long driveway leading to the Colesium. Ian fixed his eyes on at the old arena. Its bricks had recently been given a fresh coat of whitewash paint. It was topped by a crimson red steel roof. It really did look like a barn, he thought. A huge sign with red lettering hung over the front doors. It read: Ashbury Colesium. Home of the Wildcats.

The van's sliding door opened. "OK girls," the driver joked, "out one at a time."

After retrieving their bags and sticks, the players found the two dressing rooms assigned to them and things began to loosen up.

"Hey, Martinez," yelled Ryan Wadsworth, a senior and last year's team captain, "were those your Dad's skates?"

Carlos Martinez, a sophomore, replied by whipping a ball of tape at Wadsworth's head. Wadsworth replied by returning fire from a water bottle. Another boy joined in, drenching anyone within range. Within seconds everyone had grabbed a bottle from the center of the room, and a free-for-all water fight ensued. Ian joined in, and gave as good as he got. The room was filled with raucous good-natured kidding, accusations and boasting. Talk of girls and "getting lucky." Assertions as to who got the most "hammered" at a dorm party. Bathroom humour. More posturing about girls, and shouts of "who's got some tape? Anyone seen my elbow pad?" and "gawd your equipment stinks."

The door opened and Coach Cannon entered brandishing a clipboard. He wore a blue nylon windbreaker, a green ball cap, and a whistle hung from his neck. "All right. Listen up. Fridge, our equipment manager, who some of you know, couldn't make it today. His father died suddenly and he's at the funeral. He wanted us to go ahead with the try-outs. Fridge's assistants are with him and so Keith Lawler, assistant coach and head trainer. So I'm gonna need some help. First off, I want Sinclair and Waite to get the practice sweaters, pucks, and pylons from the storage area. And I want you all on the ice in 20 minutes. Loosen up. We're gonna do a bit a skatin'."

After Cannon left the room Ian and Jamie Waite, another rookie, walked down the dark hall, looking for a maintenance man to unlock the equipment room.

They came across Emile Pepin, a skinny, mousy looking man, mid-thirties, sitting at a desk in a small office. He had a pencil thin moustache, and oily black hair. He wore a denim shirt, sleeves rolled up to his elbows. Ian and Jamie gawked at a tattoo on his neck—they had never seen anything quite like it: a large black rat complete with bright pink eyes and a long tail which disappeared behind his ear.

The rat was an unfortunate souvenir Emile had acquired four years ago following an afternoon of binge drinking with friends. Emile and his buddies had stumbled into Ashbury's only tattoo parlour, daring each other to leave with some new body art. His choice of the rat was in deference to the fact that rink attendants were commonly known as "Rink Rats." Emile, in a drunken stupor, had allowed the tattoo parlour's owner free artistic expression. He had regretted the highly visible tattoo ever since.

Emile Pepin was a fixture at the Colesium, having worked there for over 12 years. He swept out the dressing rooms, mopped down the floors, drove the Zamboni—the huge ice resurfacing machine—booked ice time, threw out the trash, and maintained the

vending machines. He swung open the heavy storage room door for Ian and Jamie, while snapping his chewing gum furiously. “Going to make the team?”

“Sure hope so,” replied Wait.

“Cannon can be pretty tough out there. Pushes the guys too hard if you ask me. Tell the others I don’t want anyone puking on the ice, or anywhere else. Guess who has to come by with a mop?”

“We’ll be OK,” said Ian, suddenly dreading the next hour.

“Close the door when you’re finished. It locks by itself.”

The moment Emile was out of sight, the boys looked at each other and burst out laughing.

“Did you see the guy’s tattoo?”

“I know, gross.”

They brought back the practice sweaters, pucks and water bottles to the bench area. It took two trips. Some of the players were already on the ice. They were running late and hurried back to the locker room to put on their gear.

Manny hadn't slept well at *The Highway's End*, a discount motel in the east end of Ashbury. The bed had been comfortable enough, but his mind had kept racing making sleep almost impossible. How would that hockey player react when asked about the ticket? Did the kid still have the ticket, or even worse, had he discovered its worth and cashed it? Perhaps he had lost it?

The cabbie jumped at the sudden jarring ring from his bedside telephone. It was his 5:30 a.m. wakeup call, completely unnecessary. He had been up for at least an hour feeling edgy—smoking and drinking the weak coffee provided by the motel.

Manny paced about making plans. He had thought it best to speak with the hockey player after the 7:00 a.m. practice. The kid conceivably would have more time to discuss the ticket without feeling rushed to get suited up and on the ice.

In the meantime he had plenty of time to enjoy a long hot shower. It would kill some time and help settle his nerves. He cursed at the feeble stream of water trying to get past the low flow shower head. It was closer to a mist. For \$90 a night, he had expected more. The motel’s vacuum brigade fell in line. Machines howled and trash cans banged successfully awakening the rest of the guests.

He skipped the complimentary *Country Style Breakfast*. The front desk provided excellent directions to the Colesium. The rink was a short drive from the motel.

While tossing in bed the night before, Manny had rehearsed his strategy for his chat with the student. He had decided that a straightforward approach was best. He would simply explain to the boy that he knew that he had his ticket, and then offer him something he couldn't resist—a \$500,000 reward for its return. He’d still have over \$24 million left over, more than enough money for anyone. How could anyone, a teenager, resist that kind of offer? Manny was sure that the boy had simply forgotten about the ticket and would be delighted with the unbelievable news that he was now rich. He imagined the kid jumping for joy and telling his friends. He hoped he'd have the ticket with him, stuck in his wallet, forgotten. They might even go to the lottery headquarters together and then do some banking later in the day. Manny would claim the ticket,

transfer the proceeds to his checking account, and write the student a certified check. It was as good as done.

He pulled into the Coliseum's empty lot and parked near the front door. He was halfway inside, when his surveillance instincts kicked in. He returned to his cab to get his digital camera. He could use its telephoto lens like binoculars. After removing the camera from the lockbox in the cab's trunk, he added some fresh batteries, and made his way inside the clammy building.

There were about a dozen players on the ice early, fooling around. They were enjoying the freedom of some pick-up hockey before the coach arrived. The boys had ignored the rule posted on a large sign stating that helmets must be worn at all times on the ice, leaving their hot armour on the bench instead.

Manny scanned the ice, but there was no clear sign of the kid from the surveillance tape. There were a couple of dark haired players who could be him, but on closer examination, he ruled them out.

A player blasted a heavy slap shot. The puck sailed over the net and smashed the glass with a sharp crack just above Manny's head. The noise sent him reeling backwards. He climbed the cement stairs to the third row for a panoramic view of the rink, away from flying rubber.

Most of the team appeared to be on the ice, but he still couldn't locate anyone who resembled the young man he was in search of. A couple more minutes went by. He was becoming disheartened. Still no sign of the guy from the video tape.

He kept an eye on the hallway which led from the dressing rooms to the ice. Nobody had appeared for at least 10 minutes.

The cabbie's heart jumped. A couple of stragglers were almost running in their skates from the hallway towards the ice. A player of average height was followed by an extremely tall and very dark-haired young man who hopped over the boards, and skated quickly around the perimeter of the ice. He glided by Manny, who leaned forward and gawked. It was him! The boy had stopped skating and stood at the blue line waiting for someone to pass him a puck so he could shoot at the goaltender.

Manny aimed his telephoto lens at his subject, zoomed in, and studied his features. He now had no doubts whatsoever. He was definitely the boy on the surveillance tape. He opened the lens to let in more light and snapped several close-ups of him.

A couple of men holding clipboards were also in the stands. Manny guessed that they were scouts, or perhaps assistant coaches. He decided to ask them some questions. He climbed up three rows, camera in hand. "Hi. Can you tell me the name of that tall guy at the blue line? That guy right there in the red. He's just about to take a shot."

"That's Ian Sinclair. Keep your eye on him. Best player to come around in a long time."

"You said his name is Ian Sinclair?"

"Yup."

"Do you know where he's from?"

"Sutton. Played Jr. 'B' last season. Tore up league."

"Thought so. Thanks."

Manny grinned widely. He now had the boy's name! He went back to his seat to watch Ian Sinclair from Sutton practice. Within an hour, his investigative prowess would pay off for both of them.

Coach Cannon called the boys over to the visitors' bench. Consulting his clipboard, he formed two teams. They were differentiated by the red and blue practice jerseys, which he doled out efficiently.

Cannon let the players skate around the perimeter of the ice for a few minutes to limber up and then gave two sharp toots with his whistle summoning them to center ice. He instructed Ryan Wadsworth to lead the team through a series of stretches. Following the stretches, they gathered around the coach for the next instructions.

"I want you to skate clockwise around the ice, going hard between the blue lines," ordered Cannon. "On the far side, you skate backwards just as hard. Now move it."

A herd of hockey players took off with unbridled enthusiasm. Ian paced himself until he got to the blue lines and then pushed hard. Good hard, fast ice, he thought. His skates cut sharply as he circled the net, and as instructed, he turned easily, accelerating backwards between the blue lines at the far side of the rink. He was still breathing easily, hoping this would be one of those practices when he felt he could skate forever. Some days were like that, but on occasion, his legs could feel heavy and unresponsive. There was no rhyme or reason for it. He looked into the stands at the thousands of empty seats and glowed inside. All those seats, soon to be filled with fans. Cheering, booing and screaming, and all having paid to watch them play!

While skating hard, Ian watched Igor Antanoff, another first year student, who was from Russia. He had been recruited to Ashbury by a contact of Cannon's. Antanoff had already had discussions with the Boston Bruins, and he had jumped at the chance to play hockey in the States. Ian was looking forward to seeing him in action. Igor had been painfully shy in the dressing room but he now appeared completely at home in skates, even on the smaller North American ice surface.

When Ian skated, he sometimes appeared to be loafing, his long fluid strides looking less laborious than the crisp choppy strides typical of shorter players. When he pulled away easily from the competition who gave frantic chase, their two strides to his one, the fans took notice, rose in their seats, and cheered him on, appreciating, in fact, what a speedy skater he was. The game's best skaters had always made it look so easy. Legends from the past—Jean Beliveau, Bobby Orr, Paul Coffey, and Mark Messier— all had possessed powerful acceleration without the appearance of even trying.

Ian was finally sweating and it felt good, but the drill was starting to get a little tedious. Coach Cannon was in skates at center ice, waving a hockey stick. He watched his troops carefully and shouted the usual encouragement. "Come on. Work it! Move your butts! My grandmother can skate faster than that!" Every player had heard these clichés before, different coaches, same noises.

Finally, Cannon blew his whistle, and he directed the two teams to their respective benches. It was time for some three on two's, and two on one's. Two players warmed up the goaltenders first, peppering them with short snap shots, while Cannon barked more instructions to both teams.

After opening the door to the storage room for Ian and Jamie, Emile Pepin went back to the arena's tiny office, located several doors down the hall from the Coliseum's

foyer. It was actually the General Manager's office, but Emile used it just as much. The space gave Emile privacy and a place to smoke. It was furnished with a scratched steel desk painted metallic blue, with a matching steel swivel chair. There was also a portable heater and a small television set, which he watched during his breaks. He sat on the hard chair, the television silent, and considered doing something truly desperate.

Emile needed cash, and he needed it quickly. He had been invited to participate in a poker game by Steve Cochrane, a mechanic who played hockey early Wednesday mornings at the Colesium as part of an old-timers' hockey league. Cochrane and Emile had chatted casually several times over the years. Flattered to have been asked, and never one to turn down a poker game, Emile had agreed enthusiastically to join in for a few hours of cards the week before.

Things had not gone well. By the end of the evening he was down over \$500. Emile had brought a little over \$100 to the table, and had covered the rest with a check. He hadn't counted on the check clearing within a day, and it had bounced.

One of the card sharks, known simply as "Sully" had called Pepin at the rink and had threatened to break his legs if he didn't make good on his debt, and soon. He had also called him at home, repeating the threats, having added that "nobody ever messed with him." Emile had been given explicit instructions to pay the thug by Friday—cash only—through Steve Cochrane who would personally collect and deliver the money.

Emile was terrified.

Steve Cochrane had apologized for the heavy handed tactics of his poker playing connection, explaining that Sully was a "friend of a friend," that he didn't really know the guy all that well. Confirming Emile's fears, he had said that Pepin had sure bounced a check on the wrong guy—that Sully rode with a tough biker gang and had a reputation for being a small time loan shark.

Emile had promised Cochrane that he'd get the \$410 and would give it to him at the rink on Friday following Cochrane's old-timer's hockey game.

Pepin had hoped to get a short term loan somewhere to cover his gambling debt. He hadn't bothered asking the bank, he and his wife's accounts were both overdrawn. He had asked his boss for an advance on his salary, but had been turned down. He had gone to a Cash'N Fast, feeling sure they would offer an advance based on future pay checks, but something hadn't checked out and even they had denied his loan application.

It was Thursday and Emile desperately needed the cash by the morning. He was absolutely convinced that he would come to some kind of physical harm unless he delivered the money as promised.

Emile sat deep in thought, oblivious to Cannon's shouting which reverberated throughout the Colesium. The solution to his financial dilemma might just lie in the two dressing rooms, now vacant. Over 20 wallets with cash, plus watches, rings, and other jewellery lay in wait. Easy pickings.

He had stolen money from the locker rooms many times in the past, \$10 here, \$20 there—never enough to arouse suspicion. He would simply enter the room with his master key, grab a wallet, go to the stall, remove some money, and then return the wallet with a few bills still intact. The victims never reported the thefts; Emile figured they hadn't even noticed their wallets were lighter until they got home, and even then had just assumed they had lost it somewhere. He had never come close to being caught, and over

the years he figured he had stolen a little over \$900. His job at the rink was so mundane, that he actually looked forward to his thievery. It gave him a thrill.

This time he'd go big. He'd clean out a whole room—perhaps both rooms if time permitted.

He left the office and checked on the ice surface. Cannon was still yelling, and had them skating hard. It was 7:10 a.m.

He would act. There was simply no other choice. His personal safety was at stake, his legs smashed, perhaps worse.

Pepin made his way down the hall, looked around, and opened dressing room 4. He moved from hook to hook, fishing through trouser pockets, picking through the wallets for cash.

This approach was taking far too long. Losing his composure, he ripped a heavy duty plastic bag which lined a large trash can, spilled its contents on the floor, and then frantically grabbed every pair of trousers he could find and stuffed them in the bag. He was sweating, his heart thudding. If he was discovered, a theft conviction and jail time was guaranteed. The goods were literally all in the bag. There would be no explaining it. He had visions of Cannon suddenly bursting in and confronting him. The coach would throw him around the room like a tennis ball. He spotted a whole row of clothes he hadn't yet pilfered by the shower room. Should he grab them too? Leave them. Gotta get out of here. Now.

Pepin opened the door slowly and peered down both ends of the hall. There was no one around. He heard Cannon's whistle from the ice. He locked the door, snapping the padlock shut. He scrunched the bag tightly making it as small as possible. He walked down the hall to the office as nonchalantly as he could manage. His legs were trembling. Completely spent, he ditched the bag under his desk. Hitting the other dressing room was out of the question.

There was still some business to attend to. He went to the maintenance room and took a pry bar from the tool shelf. The team was still skating hard. He walked back to the dressing room door. He slipped the pry bar between the padlock and the steel plate and gave it a strong shove. Several screws ripped from the wood. The lock held tight but the door plate flew off with surprisingly little resistance. The wreckage landed quietly on the rubber-lined floor which protected sharp skate blades.

Good. The theft now looked more like an outside job, deflecting attention away from anyone who held room keys, like him.

Holding the pry bar inside his windbreaker, he went back to the maintenance room, wiped it clean of prints with a paper towel and returned it to the shelf.

Eleven

Coach Cannon blasted his whistle and ordered the players to form several units of forwards and defencemen. Ian was on his familiar left wing, centered by Nick Lombardi, a lanky dark haired speedster who had transferred from Yale, hoping for the chance at more ice time at Ashbury.

The right winger's name was Peter Yule, a stocky, short shaggy-haired dynamo who had an amazing shot.

The coach was just beginning his experiments with line combinations. It would time to find just the right chemistry.

Ian, Lombardi and Yule were up first. The centerman slapped the puck deep into Ian's corner. Ian took off quickly, trying to beat a defenceman to the puck. They met at the same time and collided hard. Neither was going to be accused of letting up. The collision was a draw—both players momentarily stunned. Lombardi swept in, gathered the loose puck, and fed a neat back pass to Yule, who had held back away from the crowd. He fired rapidly, and the puck caught the top corner of the net.

"Sniper Man," complimented Ian slapping his winger's shin pads with his stick.

"Nice hit," replied the sharp-shooter.

Scattered applause came from avid Wildcat supporters, curious to preview the talent on the ice. Manny amused himself by taking a few more pictures.

It was a good start. The three had all carried out their assignments, although Ian had always seen himself as more of a goal scorer than a hitter.

Cannon was impressed that Ian had taken the punishment and hadn't held back in the corner. It's where games were won or lost.

While the team worked hard on the ice, Emile retrieved the garbage bag of stolen clothes, which he hoped held plenty of wallets, from under his desk, and took the arena's rear exit which led almost directly to his rusty Toyota Corolla. He shielded the bag with his body as best he could and piled it in his trunk. He wanted to ditch the bag away from the arena before the break-in was discovered, and before Cannon called the cops.

He and his wife, Teresa, lived close to the rink. He checked his watch. It was 7:20 a.m. Teresa wouldn't be home, having already taken the bus to work. They didn't have children. He was taking a big chance—the maintenance staff had strict instructions that they were never to leave the property during their shift. In addition to carrying out their day-to-day duties, arena staff provided security for the building and more than once, Emile had called an ambulance for an injured player, and had even extinguished a small fire that some kids had inadvertently started in a dressing room. Leaving the building was strictly forbidden, considered a fireable offence.

He drove down the Colesium's drive and turned left onto Parkhill Road. It was raining lightly. What's this? Some kind of construction underway and traffic was backed up. He was just about to turn back to the rink when a flagman began to wave his lane through. He ploughed through soggy white silt and reached his house minutes later.

Emile pulled into his drive. There were no neighbors in sight. Once inside, just to be sure, he called for Teresa, while their aging white poodle yapped excitedly. No answer. He went back to the car, retrieved the bag and returned to the small bungalow. He hid the bag of contraband deep inside a basement closet, locked up the house and got back in his car. He would have to check his spoils later.

On the way back to the Colesium, he decided to drive a little out of his way, and approached the arena from the west, by-passing the construction. He parked behind the rink and checked his watch. He had been home and back in less than half an hour.

Inside the Colesium, things were calm. The theft evidently had gone undetected.

Coach Cannon blew his whistle, and ordered all pucks into the nets. Ian knew what was coming and braced for some serious skating drills. He had run over the summer, but had not skated much. Summer hockey was too expensive. Skating muscles he forgot that he had were already seizing up.

Manny was antsy. He couldn't keep still. He searched a corridor for a snack bar. He wanted a coffee and perhaps a donut, but had to settle for some atrocious liquid concoction from a vending machine. Watching the drills was getting monotonous, and he went outside for a smoke, his eyes never leaving the front door.

"Everyone line up here," ordered Cannon, pointing to the red icing line by the net.

"Go hard to the blueline, stop, and then back here. Hard to the centre line, stop again, and then back here again. To the far blueline, stop, and then back, to the end of the ice then back here, hard. Last guy home gets 100 pushups and I want to see full stops."

The goaltenders looked at him as if he were crazy. With their 40 plus pounds of equipment, it was an especially cruel drill.

They took off hard. Ian was familiar with this punishing drill and tried to pace himself, not really caring if he was first, but he sure wouldn't come in last. Cannon was back at centre ice screaming and waving his hockey stick at the "slackers."

"Come on! Hustle," he screamed. "You gotta want it."

Ian was in the middle of the pack, breathing hard, and mechanically putting one skate in front of another. Josh Levin, one of the goaltenders had stopped skating and was wrenching in the corner. While Cannon attended to him, the pace slowed slightly. It was almost over. Ian didn't notice who finished first, he didn't care. Several of the pack crossed the line at the same time, Ian among them, and a few stragglers, including the surviving goaltender stumbled towards the boards gasping for oxygen.

Levin had stopped throwing up, and Cannon had already sent the exhausted goaltender to the dressing room. "OK, boys. Good effort," said the coach. He had evidently forgotten about the pushups for the last man back. "Tomorrow, same time. Sinclair and Waite, take the practice gear back to the storage room. And you can all store your equipment here at the rink. I'll have Emile show you where."

The players shuffled off the ice in single file, breathing hard, too exhausted to talk, while columns of steam rose from their sweat-soaked heads. They yanked off their helmets, while staggering towards the dressing rooms on the rubber mats.

They were met halfway there by Levin still in his skates who howled, "We've been ripped off. Everything's all over the place!"

Manny shuffled aimlessly about the Colesium's lobby. He stopped to peer through locked glass at a collection of trophies and ribbons which sat on shelves in an oak cabinet.

He heard showers running somewhere down the long dark hall leading to the locker rooms. He'd be speaking with Ian Sinclair within minutes. Twenty-five million hung in the balance! The wait was excruciating—by far his most exhilarating stake-out ever. Perhaps it would be wiser to wait outside the rink. He could keep an eye on the rink's side door at the same time. No way Ian Sinclair was going to slip past him.

The outside air was warmer than the clammy chill which permeated the old arena. It had finally stopped raining, and the sun was shining for the first time in days. He shakily lit a Marlboro. An approaching convoy of three large vans splashing large puddles caught his attention just seconds before the Coliseum's front doors burst open and the first group of Wildcats began to wander out of the Coliseum in groups of two's and three's. Manny stood about twenty feet between the vans and the arena's main door staring intently at faces—watching for Ian Sinclair. With a camera slung over his neck, he looked like a reporter. He received some curious glances from the boys as they walked past, some wearing hockey pants in place of their trousers.

Ian was among the last to emerge from the building. He walked slowly towards the van, hair still wet, chatting with Peter Yule

It was time to move. "Excuse me. Ian Sinclair?"

Ian looked in Manny's direction, startled at hearing his name called out so unexpectedly.

"Looks like someone wants to take your picture," said Yule. "Catch you later."

Manny walked towards Ian. "Hi. I'm Manny Boyce, in from Sutton. Was wondering if we could chat for a moment?"

"I have to catch my ride back to the university. But any chance we could talk back on campus?"

"I have to get back to Sutton today," said Manny. "I can give you a lift back to the campus."

Ian studied Manny's expensive looking camera and imagined his mother and Uncle Pat clipping his photo from the Sutton newspaper. "I guess that would work. Hey Thompson," he yelled towards the van, "tell the driver to go ahead without me."

Manny was relieved to see the vehicles pull away, allowing the two of them to chat in peace without further cat-calls of, "Hey, wanna take my picture too?" and, "put in a good word for me, Ian."

"So you're from *the Examiner*?"

"No. Sorry if I gave you that impression."

"It's just that when I saw your camera and you told me you were from Sutton I guessed you were from the Sutton paper." If this guy wasn't a reporter, then who was he? He scanned the lot, now vacant, except for a blue Call A Cab he recognized as local from Sutton.

"Let's get in my car and we can chat," suggested Manny.

"Where's your car?" asked Ian warily.

"That cab. It's mine. Let's talk in there."

"I don't think so," Ian replied testily.

"OK, we can talk here. I came to speak with you about that lottery ticket you found in the bathroom at the Sutton bus terminal this past Sunday."

That grungy ticket, thought Ian. He'd completely forgotten about it. "What ticket?"

"The ticket you found in the bathroom at the bus terminal," repeated Manny.

"I don't remember anything about some lottery ticket."

"The bus terminal has security cameras, and there's a video tape with you holding my lottery ticket right in your hand, clear as day. You came out of the bathroom with it. Right after the weird guy scared you. You put the ticket in your wallet. Remember?"

Ian recalled everything Manny was saying. "Who are you?"

"I'm a private investigator, and it was my ticket that you found. I came to ask you for the ticket back and to give you a big reward for it."

"I thought you were a cab driver."

"I am. And I'm an investigator. Look, I'm sorry if you thought I was a reporter, it's just that--"

"How'd you find me here? How do you know my name?"

"It doesn't matter."

"It does matter. I don't like being followed, especially to another city. What's going on?"

"It's simple. I'm sure you found my lottery ticket, and I'm here to offer you a reward for it. A very large reward. I checked with the lottery office. I know you haven't cashed it. You've probably just forgotten about it."

"What kind of reward?"

"How does \$500,000 sound?" asked Manny smiling.

Half a million dollars! Ian kicked at a crack in the asphalt, a thousand thoughts a second. The ticket was in his wallet and his wallet was among the dozen or so ripped off from the locker room over the past hour. He didn't know what to say.

Manny watched and waited, baffled by the boy's hesitation in accepting the huge reward offer. Something was wrong. "Tell you what. Let's get in the cab, drive around a bit, and talk this over. You must want to sit down after your practice."

"I'm not really comfortable with that idea."

Smart ass, thought Manny. He'd just offered this brat a fortune. What was his problem? Maybe he had lost the ticket? He couldn't get a read on his him. Was he holding out for more money?

Ian's mind was in overdrive. If he told this private detective that he no longer had the ticket, he'd be sure to investigate further, probably find out about the locker room theft, and perhaps track down his wallet. The investigator would get the ticket back, and the reward money he'd just offered would disappear. Half a million dollars was at stake. It was best to keep things to himself for now. He had to buy some time. He wanted first crack at retrieving his wallet, the ticket, and the promised reward money that came with it. "What did you say the name of the ticket was again?"

"Aww come on Ian. A Magnificent Millions ticket. Bright orange."

"You still haven't told me how you know my name."

"I asked some scouts in the rink. They recognized you right away. Said you were a great hockey player."

"How much was the jackpot?"

“That’s not the point. I’m offering you half a million dollars for it. I’m being sincere. Please just give me back my ticket, and I promise. I will give you the reward.”

Ian took a deep quiet breath avoiding eye contact with the cabbie. The combination of early hours, a tough practice, the theft of his wallet, and the realization that he may have just lost out on \$500,000 was making him dizzy. He needed space and a chance to think everything through. He was still apprehensive at standing in a deserted parking lot with this stranger.

“A half million dollars, Ian. I’m serious about this.”

“Tell you what. Let me think about this. I’ll get back to you but right now I’ve got to get back to campus. Could you leave me your card? E-mail?”

“Let’s cash the ticket. If you don’t have it on you, I’ll give you a ride back to campus or wherever it is. We can go to Lotto-Central in Lakefield today. You’ll come home rich,” urged Manny.

“It’s not a good time for me, but as I said, if I remember anything I’ll be sure to let you know.”

“OK I know what you’re doing. I’ll give you a \$1 million reward, Ian. One million dollars. Think of it!”

The offers of immense sums of money were tortuous. Was the guy for real? A million dollars, possibly gone. “Like I said. I’ll stay in touch. I’ll need your phone number.”

Manny pulled out his wallet and handed him his business card. “I’m willing to offer you \$1 million today for my ticket. The offer won’t be good for long. The ticket expires soon. And it’s my final offer.”

“We’ll talk, I promise. I have some things I have to take care of.”

“Please, Ian. Just let me give you a ride into town, we can talk about it,” Manny pleaded.

“No it’s best if I walk. Good for training. I’ll be in touch.”

Ian turned and walked away. He had a long trek back to the university; thankful that his heavy bag was stored at the rink. He knew he looked odd wearing hockey pants, bare legs showing. He didn’t care. The walk would help him collect his thoughts and try to make sense of what had just happened.

He could hardly wait to get back to his room to check out the Magnificent Millions website. He wanted to find out more about the ticket—exactly when it expired, and its worth. A million dollars for a ticket he’d possessed just an hour or so ago. It was mind-boggling. He just had to find his wallet. Call the coach. The cops. Do everything he could to get it back.

Ian looked back to reassure himself that this stranger wasn’t following him, or perhaps even pulling out a weapon. Nope. He was just standing there, staring at him, and looking very sad.

Manny watched Ian walk away, and then made his way dejectedly to his cab feeling wholly defeated, absolutely drained. Hands trembling, he lit a Marlboro, inhaled deeply, and blew smoke out the window.

Might as well go home. Nothing else is going to happen here. I can’t pursue him any further, at least for now. I have to be careful following minors. The kid could cause big trouble if I don’t back down. Maybe have me charged with harassment or stalking. I

can't use my private investigator's license for my own purposes. The last thing I need is a restraining order thrown on me. The next move is up to Ian.

Looking at his watch, he was surprised to see that it was just 8:45 a.m. It felt much later. Manny figured half-heartedly, that he could easily make it back to Sutton to cover his afternoon shift. He didn't have much other choice. His bank account held just over \$200 and the trip had cost him a fortune in motel costs, food, gasoline and oil, not to mention yesterday's lost wages. He had put all his trip's expenses on his Visa, and he knew he was nearly at his credit limit.

Ian was out of sight. He started the cab and slowly drove away.

Twelve

Emile Pepin had to contain his yearning to race home to the bag of stolen merchandise that lay hidden in his basement closet. Had the theft paid off? Would the stolen wallets yield enough cash to pay off his gambling debt? He couldn't leave the premises. There was ice to flood, and he still had to endure a visit by the Ashbury police who Cannon had notified minutes earlier.

The janitor stood anxiously by the Colesium's front doors, waiting for the cops to show up. Still on edge after the theft, he was completely unnerved at hearing the sound of a shrieking siren in the distance, heralding the frantic arrival to the Colesium of a blue and white Ashbury police cruiser. The vehicle roared into the lot, and pulled up crookedly at a right angle, partially covering the rink's walkway. Emergency lights flashed, and the radio crackled at full volume, giving the distinct impression that the officers had responded to a major calamity—that that they had raced to the Colesium as though its roof had collapsed, trapping hundreds.

There were two officers in the car; a younger man at the wheel, and a thoroughly frazzled looking older officer in the passenger's seat, who, it seemed couldn't get out of the car fast enough. The Ashbury police department had just taken possession of three new high-powered cruisers. The young constable hadn't been able to resist any excuse to put the new super charged-engine through its paces. It had been a slow morning.

Pepin greeted the two officers and introduced himself to Sergeant Bob Goulding, a tall red-haired police veteran, mid fifties with a heavy New England accent, and Constable Indir Singh, 27 years old, medium height and build, second generation American, of East Indian descent.

Coach Cannon met them inside the lobby and escorted the cops to the violated dressing room. After scribbling some notes, Goulding said, "I suggest you consider installing some security cameras around the dressing room area. It wouldn't hurt to have a good look around the perimeter of the arena. Check the bushes. The guy most likely just helped himself to the cash and dumped the rest. Maybe you'll find the kids' keys at least."

"I'll have the team do a search after practice tomorrow," said Cannon.

"In the meantime, it looks like you're going to have to call in a locksmith," added the sergeant. "I suggest you retrofit all your doors with deadbolts."

"If we're finished, I have to flood the ice," said Pepin, anxious to distance him from the cops.

"Actually," said Constable Singh, "I was just going to ask. Where you were you when the room was ripped off?"

"I guess I was in the office or in the maintenance room."

"So you were in the building the whole time? You didn't leave for any reason?"

"I'm the only man on duty in the morning. I can't just leave," said Pepin, as if Singh had just asked him a thoroughly stupid question.

"And you didn't see anyone suspicious or hear anything?"

"No, nothing out of the ordinary at all."

“There’s a rear door, isn’t there?” asked Goulding.

“Yes,” said Cannon.

“It’s possible the thief or thieves left by the back of the building maybe scattering some stuff in the lot,” said Goulding. “We should have a look.”

Cannon nodded at Emile. “Show the officers please. I’ll be right with you. I have to use the men’s room.”

Goulding and Singh followed Emile to the office.

Singh approached the door and stepped outside. He scanned the back lot from a small porch. “Who owns that old Toyota?”

“That’s my limo,” said Emile. “Gets me around though. Always starts.”

“Where’d you pick up all that mud?”

“Two year’s worth. I never take it near a car wash. Not worth it.”

“Are you sure that you didn’t leave the building this morning?”

“Yes,” said Emile tightening, “I’ve been here since before six. Why?”

“Because highway 28 is under repair. The rain has washed out a culvert, and they’re spreading some kind of white silt around everywhere to soak up the water. Our cruiser got plastered with mud. Same color that’s caked all over your tires and the sides of your car,” he added.

“I must have driven through it early this morning. I remember seeing the heavy machinery.”

“And you came in before 6:00?” Singh asked.

“Well before 6:00. Closer to 5:30,” said Emile, sticking to his story.

“The road crew must have gotten a really early start,” commented Goulding. “I’m surprised that they’d work in the dark. Hope they finish up soon. That road’s a real mess.”

Cannon joined the trio. “What mess are you talking about, Sergeant?”

“The broken culvert. Just before the turn-off to the rink. You must have been held up when you came to the rink this morning. Traffic’s down to one lane,” stated Goulding. “There’s white silt everywhere.”

“No, it was clear sailing when I came in. No construction.”

“You came in from Parkhill Road East?”

“Yes.”

“What time?”

“About seven I guess. Why? You think maybe some road crew guy broke into the room?”

Emile wanted to hide disappear but could only stare off in the distance, listening to Singh’s relentless questions

“Anything is possible.”

“Do you think there’s any chance you’ll be able to solve the break-in?” asked Cannon. “I’d like to be able to tell the team something.”

Singh flashed Emile a knowing glance. “Tell them we have a few ideas.”

“Ideas?”

“Yes. I’ll be in touch with you about things once we investigate further.”

“So you think the thief can still be caught?”

“We aren’t ruling out anything.” The constable looked in Emile’s direction again. “Or anybody. That’s all I can say for now.”

Cannon and Pepin walked Goulding and Singh back to the front of the building and watched as the muddy cruiser left the drive.” I’d be surprised if the officers ever catch the thief,” said Cannon.

“I agree,” said Emile weakly.

Emile stayed outside and shakily lit a cigarette. He'd been caught in a lie, and Singh had just told Cannon that they'd be investigating further. He mulled over his options. It would be wise to play into Goulding's theory that the thief had grabbed the cash and dumped the rest. He would scatter the stolen clothes and wallets around the Coliseum early the next morning.

Cannon appeared at the doorway. “I’m leaving now. Tell your boss to have deadbolts installed like Goulding suggested. My wife has better locks on her suitcases than what you have on your doors right now. See you tomorrow.”

The Rink Rat tried to take his mind off the morning’s events by assisting a locksmith retrofit all six dressing rooms with solid brass deadbolts and new plates. It was fussy work. Nothing matched up as every door, hinge, and frame was misaligned, having been punched, body-checked, slammed and kicked over the years by exuberant players and coaches alike.

Emile tore home the moment his replacement reported for work. Teresa was still at work. He went to the basement, pulled the bag out of the closet, and carried it to the rec-room. He yanked out the clothes, and spread them out on a ping pong table. He snapped on a pair of rubber gloves he’d taken from the kitchen sink. Proceeding methodically, he picked through the pockets of the stolen jeans and khakis and extracted the wallets and valuables, placing the loot aside. He then stuffed all the clothes back in the bag. He turned his attention to the wallets and removed the money. Total take: over \$500 in bills, \$9 in change—the biggest pay off coming from one wallet which contained over \$100. He had also stolen seven watches, numerous sets of keys, three cell phones, one wooden beaded necklace, a gold chain and one expensive looking gold ring.

Perfect. He had enough money to pay his gambling debt with a little left over. His legs would survive to carry him another day.

He began to toss the boy's wallets back in the bag containing the clothes, but reconsidered. Surely he could do something with all those driver's licenses, birth certificates, and social insurance cards? Perhaps he could sell them sometime down the road? He had watched numerous stories about identity theft on television. All the reports had indicated that there was a ready market for original documents which were sold to theft rings in the States, and to foreigners looking to get into the country. He had even come across a student visa in one wallet, belonging to a boy from Russia. That had to be worth a few bucks alone, he thought. This was something he'd explore later. He'd call one of his tattooed compatriots who had once served time for counterfeiting and get some advice on how to sell original I.D.'s.

He flipped through all the stolen wallets and set aside 6 of the 13, keeping them for the identification they contained. He buried the wallets along with the gold chain and gold ring in the bottom of a box of Christmas decorations. He'd pawn the jewelry out of town sometime later.

He decided that the watches, key chains, cell phones and the wooden necklace were expendable and threw them in the plastic trash bag which contained the clothes. He also added the seven remaining wallets to the bag and hid it in the closet. He would

retrieve the bag in the morning and dump its contents close to the Coliseum. If that's where Sergeant Goulding thought the stolen merchandise might be, that's where it would be found.

Satisfied that everything was under control, he climbed upstairs, his own wallet now flush with cash.

After his encounter with Manny, Ian walked briskly back to campus. He had to ask a university residence supervisor to unlock his room, as his keys had been stolen in the break-in. He closed the door to his room securely, and hit the "on" button of his computer. He waited impatiently for the old laptop to start, went to the Google search engine, and typed in "Magnificent Millions." The screen turned bright orange as the colorful website loaded.

There had been a draw about two weeks earlier, and a winner of \$6 million had already come forward. He scrolled down the page looking for a more recent draw, and quickly found what he was looking for:

Draw Date: Sunday September 7th 2007. Winning Numbers: 3, 2, 36, 48 and 23. Jackpot \$25 million. Winning ticket sold in Sutton, Massachusetts. No claim made. Ticket Expiration Date 18 March, 08.

Manny's incredible reward offer had been for real! He flopped on his bed gripped by the knowledge that he had once possessed a fortune, only to have had it taken from him. He decided not to tell anyone about the ticket, especially Manny. Once more he had visions of the detective tracking down the wallet himself, finding the ticket and the offer of a \$1 million reward vanishing. No, he wouldn't tell anyone. Word might spread possibly tipping off the thief about the riches that lay in wait in that credit card slot. It would be best to search for the ticket back at the rink early the next morning.

Thirteen

Manny grabbed a bite to eat, and was back in Sutton a little after noon. The drive back from Ashbury had been slow and tedious with lengthy delays. It had seemed as though the whole state was undergoing road construction of some kind. He had been so looking forward to retrieving the ticket. Instead, he became more depressed with every mile that brought him closer to home and to the monotonous and predictable day-to-day routine of driving his cab.

He entered his apartment and sorted through his mail. Just bills, reminding him of even more bills to come, and the futility of his expensive trip to Ashbury.

He picked up his cat, and sat down, rehashing the past 24 hours. Ian had lost or at least misplaced the ticket, he decided. Any teenager, he reasoned would have been delirious with his offer of \$1 million by simply returning a found lottery ticket. Ian didn't know where that ticket was, he'd been stalling for time in that parking lot, and at this very moment was most likely tearing apart his room, in search of it.

It would be best to leave Ian alone for a day. Later, he would offer his skills as a private investigator in searching for the prize. In the meantime, to cover all bases, he sat down and phoned Lisa at the lottery office. It was important that she have advance warning that a young man might just try to cash the ticket.

"If someone comes in with this particular ticket, we will ask all the right questions," she said. "I really have to let you go. I have calls on three lines."

Manny checked the wall clock in his kitchen and sighed. Time to report to the cab stand. He shaved again, changed into a fresh white shirt, and went to work. The streets were slow, giving him an opportunity to throw in a load of clothes at the adjoining Wash-O-Mat, a task he always reserved for Thursdays.

He sat in his cab in the laundromat's lot sipping coffee. Like a teenager anticipating a call from a new love interest, he pulled out his cell phone, and for the third time that day, checked for any sign of a message from Ian. He hadn't heard it ring, but nevertheless he checked again, just in case.

After delivering a fare to a hardware store, Manny doubled back to the laundromat. While extracting his damp socks, shirts, and underwear from the big drum, his cell phone suddenly rang.

He excitedly wrenched the phone from his trousers. "Skyline Investigations. Manny Boyce speaking."

"Yes. I was given your name by an attorney. He suggested that I call you. I was just wondering, do you do surveillance on people. Follow them?"

"Yes we do, ma'am." Damn, thought Manny. It wasn't Ian. Just another suspicious spouse. Still, it was some much needed business.

"I need you to follow someone for me but he can't know anything about it."

"Of course, ma'am."

"I need some information about his comings and goings."

"Most of my work involves similar surveillance. No one will ever know."

"I want an idea about who he may be spending time with, and I'll need pictures

for evidence.”

“I can follow him; provide you with photos, and a full written report.”

“You should know that you are highly recommended by Bernie Gardiner.”

“I know him well. I’ve assisted him in several divorce cases.”

“Good, how do we make arrangements?”

“I suggest that we meet briefly, perhaps out of town somewhere.”

“No,” she interrupted. “I can’t meet with you, we’ll do it all by e-mail.”

She has obviously given this some thought. Manny considered his payment options. “E-mail is fine. My rates are \$60 an hour. Photos are extra. I require a \$200 retainer, fully deducted from any work. Send a money order. Here’s the address.”

“I’ll mail it today. I’ll also need your e-mail address, to send you instructions.”

“That’ll be fine, ma’am.”

“If you don’t mind, please don’t call me ma’am. I can’t stand it.”

“What should I call you?”

“Audrey.”

“OK Audrey. I’ll wait for your instructions by e-mail. You also mentioned photos. They can be e-mailed as well. They’re \$75 each.”

“That’s acceptable. I won’t need to phone you again. And I know you won’t just take my money and run.” It was more a statement than a question.

“Of course not. I’d never do that.”

“I guess that’s it for now. Goodbye.”

Manny put the phone back in his pocket, pleased with this new business. The surveillance work would help take his mind off his lost lottery ticket.

After an uneventful shift he returned to his apartment and checked his e-mail.

Mr. Boyce. Please be assured that I have mailed \$200 to your box. As I have already told you, I would like you to follow a man for me. He works as a clerk for the County Courthouse here in Sutton. He leaves the building about five. I am only interested in what he does after work. He drives a large black Chrysler van, tag number 39T H73. He is slim, 6 ft tall, graying at the temples, a young looking 53. He will be well dressed, probably in a dark suit. I want to know where he goes after he leaves his work. If he meets with a woman, pictures are a must. That’s it for now. E-mail me when you have something. Keep track of your hours and I’ll pay you promptly as we go. There’s no rush, just use care and don’t let him know you’re following him. Audrey.

She’s certainly careful thought Manny. But that’s better than careless. Her instructions were clear. He often had fares to the courthouse. He could do some preliminary scouting around without looking suspicious. He liked following white collar types. As a rule, they were not dangerous. They rarely carried guns. This records clerk she described, no doubt her husband, sounded harmless enough. Still, he lamented he shouldn’t even have to be doing this. He should be on a beach in Florida, enjoying the sun, good food, and the pretty women of course. He couldn’t get that lottery ticket out of his mind.

He typed a quick note to Audrey, fed the cat, and went to bed.

Fourteen

“The land is fine, Philip. Just fine.”

Thursday afternoon, and the judge was in his chambers on the phone with Sandy Briscoe, a prominent real estate lawyer with whom he had attended Northeastern University, 25 years earlier. They had kept in touch over the years. Sandy had a reputation for thorough work, and was often called upon as an expert witness in complicated legal cases involving land deals.

“Farm land in the Oak Leaf area is at a premium,” assured Briscoe. “I’m surprised the developers haven’t snapped it all up yet. The parcel of land you’re interested in has no encumbrances. Pringle owns it free and clear. The soil is good. It’s been producing vegetables and hay for generations. Cattle and sheep have grazed on that land safely for decades. I even checked with the Sierra Club for any claims of endangered species in the area which might complicate future development of the land. I checked out everything. You asked me for your opinion, and my conclusion is that the land is pristine. In fact, if you were considering the land as an investment, I was wondering if I could somehow get in on this deal?”

Philip was reassured by Sandy’s report. He would only be in possession of the land for a day or so before selling it to Andrea’s company; nevertheless he couldn’t take any chances that there were buried PCB’s or other contaminants on the site in view of the fact that he was purchasing the land with someone else’s money.

“I’m sorry, Sandy, but friends and business deals never mix well. But I would like you on hand at the Pringles’ farm when I complete the sale. I’m aiming for Saturday morning. The day after tomorrow.”

“Just let me know what time.”

Confident that the land was safe to purchase, the judge dialed Andrea. “It’s Philip. I met with the Pringles this morning. They’ll sell the land to me. I want to confirm that your company is still interested in it. If you are, we can close as soon as I put some financing in place.”

“That’s fantastic news. Yes, we want that land. Let’s see, today is Thursday. I’m booked solid with showings. How about Sunday?”

“Your attorneys will work on a Sunday?”

“They are paid handsomely on retainer. They’ll be there. What did Jacob agree to? How much do you have to pay for the land?”

“That’s between the Pringles and me. But I want to confirm that Lauder Holdings will pay me \$2.5 million for it.”

“Yes, \$2.5 million, as we discussed.”

“How about \$2.8?”

“No. \$2.5 firm.”

There was no time to bicker. Her offer would give him a profit of \$1.2 million. Not bad for less than a week’s work. “I have a meeting at the bank tomorrow, and I will give Pringle his check on Saturday. Before I commit to spending over \$1 million for acres of farm land, I will need a guarantee from Lauder Holdings first,” stated Philip. “A

deposit. Something to demonstrate that you will indeed be buying the land from me. I can't be stuck with it."

"You've read my mind. I have authorization to provide you with a deposit of \$35,000 as a show of good faith. Believe me, we want that land. I'll make a direct deposit to your bank account."

"I would feel more comfortable with a larger sum. Thirty-five thousand is nothing to a multi-million dollar development company."

"That's our offer. What's your account number?"

Philip met with the assistant district attorney in his chambers for half an hour and discussed procedure for an upcoming trial. Following the conversation the judge fired up his laptop and checked his bank balance. Looking good! He had just made \$35,000, a small taste of what was to come. Lauder Holdings clearly wanted the land as much as he wanted to sell it to them.

Later that night Philip lay in the darkness; his eyes wide open. He was about to spend nearly every cent of his mother-in-law's money. He'd be taking the biggest chance of his life. Technically, his Power of Attorney over her estate allowed him to move her cash around. But taking her cash and investing it for his own self-gain was another matter altogether. If something went wrong, he could face charges of self-dealing, elder abuse, or fraud, leading to a long stretch in prison. Conviction on any of such charges would result in disbarment.

But what could go wrong? Martha might find out her money was missing. Highly unlikely. Jacob would most likely cash his \$1.3 million dollar check on Saturday. The land deal closed on Sunday. Martha's cash would be replaced first thing Monday morning. The funds would be removed from her account for less than 48 hours. What if she died while the money was out of her account? Again, not a big issue. If Jean somehow discovered that he had taken possession of her mother's money temporarily, he'd simply tell her that he had acted on Martha's directions. Martha would be dead. Who was to know differently? Besides, Martha was in excellent health, and wasn't about to join the big country club in the sky any time soon.

No, nothing would go wrong. He had considered every possible scenario. Lauder Holdings had already provided him with a deposit—they were desperate for that land. Hell, Briscoe had even checked the soil for contamination and endangered species.

Judge Phillip Driscoll would be a millionaire within three days. Worth 1.2 million to be exact. Not a huge fortune by any means, but properly invested, enough to leave the bench and Jean. He would see about hiding his new-found wealth. That's what Swiss and Cayman bank accounts were for. The money could be wired overseas, safely hidden from Jean's grasp, and the IRS.

Philip stretched out contentedly. He'd begin a new life. A small condo, winter vacations with Heather and Adam in Hawaii, and occasional flings with young women. No more cheap motels. He'd finally be financially independent, a retired judge, the high regard of his former position remaining intact. He would visit the bank in the morning. The deal was as good as done.

Friday morning. Philip picked out a black pinstriped suit, a white dress shirt with his best gold cuff links. A bold red tie worked perfectly in preparation for his meeting with Donald Abramsky, manager of Oak Leaf Savings and Loan. Normally a trip to the

bank didn't warrant any particular attention to his choice of clothes, but today was different. He was going to present his Power of Attorney to a bank manager, a breed known for caution. A District Court Justice, powerfully dressed in his best suit, might assist to allay any uncertainties the banker might have in carrying out his instructions.

Philip left the house while Jean and Adam were still sleeping. Armed with his documents, he set out for Oak Leaf. It was raining heavily for what seemed the 100th day in a row.

The bank was located in a strip mall, jammed between a dry cleaners and a restaurant. This manager, Abramsky, was obviously no big gun in the financial world, thought Philip.

Abramsky himself was watching for Philip through the bank's front window. He unlocked the door the moment he noticed Philip darting from his van in the rain.

"Mr. Abramsky?" asked Philip.

"Yes. Come right this way."

"A pleasure to meet you," said the judge extending his hand. The banker appeared to be in his late 60s. His wavy white hair was yellowing at the sides. He wore dated heavy-framed glasses over a red bulbous nose, and was dressed in a black suit, white shirt and blue tie. A Masonic pin was on his lapel. He's dressed up for me, thought Philip.

Abramsky ushered Philip to his office. The manager enjoyed its location, tucked back of the front counter, affording him a panoramic view of the teller's area. He could wave to his favorite customers, while pretending to look busy behind his large faux-maple desk. It was bare, except for a blotter, a pen set, a brushed aluminum name plate, and a matching holder for business cards. A computer sat on a small side table.

Philip took a seat and opened his briefcase. "As I explained to you on the phone, I am here to confirm my Power of Attorney over Martha Van Whyte's account. I have the necessary papers with me."

The banker placed the document, four pages in all, on his blotter and began to read. Philip sat back, and drew in deep breaths, surprised that his heart was pumping furiously. Abramsky read each page thoroughly, turning over each document carefully and placing it beside the next unread page.

Philip looked around the office. A large poster declared that dreams really can come true with an Oak Leaf Opportunity Loan. A happy family fawned over a sleek ski boat.

He looked at Abramsky. The banker had an unnerving habit of mouthing each word silently as he read.

"The document appears to be in order," stated Abramsky finally.

"I would like to be granted signing authority on Martha's account."

Abramsky looked down at the papers again.

"Is there a problem?" asked Philip. "Perhaps I should explain. Mrs. Van Whyte is in the early stages of Alzheimer's. Fortunately, she had the foresight to arrange for Power of Attorney."

"I'm sorry to hear about her health."

"We're all devastated." Philip stared hard at Abramsky. He guessed that some reference to 'head office' was seconds away. "Mr. Abramsky, I am authorizing you to arrange for my signing authority on Martha's account. She has bills that I must pay."

"I should really speak with our district manager first."

Philip sat forward, trying to contain his anger. "When I came in here, I wasn't expecting to have any delays. I assure you, I am looking after her interests."

"I'm not sure that this doesn't have to go through head office. They may want to have our legal department look over your request."

Nonsense. By the way, are you always in the habit of releasing confidential information about your customers to other people?"

"I'm not sure what you mean."

"You told my wife that Mrs. Van Whyte is a wealthy woman."

"But Jean is her daughter."

"It's Mrs. Driscoll to you."

"Mrs. Driscoll. I didn't think there would be a problem with telling her that," said Abramsky. He left his chair to shut the office door.

"You were, and are in direct contravention of the State Depository Act. Subsection 3. Under Privacy. I'm sure you're familiar with this?"

"Ah. Yes. Of course," said Abramsky reddening.

"You don't sound certain. I'll refresh your memory. The Act states that no bank official shall reveal the contents of a customer's affairs to another party, without the express written consent of that party in the form of a bona fide legal release." It was all a bluff. "Your actions have caused considerable difficulty for our family."

"I am so sorry, Your Honor. I have met both Mrs. Driscoll and her mother before, and I really didn't think--"

"That's the problem. You didn't think at all. I am due in court in less than two hours. I have an hour's drive ahead of me. I want to leave this bank with my business complete."

Abramsky sat for moment, staring at his pen set. "Fine. I'll grant your request."

"Today?"

"Yes, within the hour."

"I would like to see the particulars of Mrs. Van Whyte's account."

Abramsky entered some data on his desktop. More pecking, then he spun his computer screen towards Philip.

The judge leaned forward with interest. Things hadn't changed much. Martha had \$1,368,242.09 in her savings account. Some interest had been added, but Martha evidently lived off the proceeds from her pension. The only transaction showing a debit was in the amount of \$8000, which Philip knew was the first of three payments made to Ashbury University for Heather's fees.

It was uncomfortably close. If he withdrew 1.3 million dollars from Martha's account, she'd be left with less than \$70,000. No other choice. The money would be paid back within two days. He'd use his Power of Attorney to have her next statement and cancelled checks forwarded to the courthouse. If she missed them, he'd explain that he had wanted to keep a personal eye on her affairs. He'd then urge her to change to City Bank, explaining that he had caught wind that Oak Leaf Savings and Loan was overextended with sub-prime mortgages. Fresh statements would be generated, free of any tell-tale debits.

"Thank you," said Philip. "I'll need some checks for her account to pay some bills. And I'll need deposit slips and a transfer form as well. I want to be clear. You are not to

initiate any conversations with Mrs. Van Whyte. She is often confused about her finances and you'll just upset her."

"I appreciate that."

"I take it that you understand the illegality of discussing Martha's affairs with my wife, or anyone else for that matter. The serious breach of confidentiality?"

"Yes. It won't happen again."

Philip was back to the courthouse before noon. He made a call to Jacob Pringle, to confirm that he would be by the following morning to purchase the land.

"Judge, you have no idea how pleased we are that you and your family are going to be our neighbors."

"Please. It's Philip."

"We'll be waiting for you, Philip. Our lawyer has already prepared the papers."

"Wonderful, Jacob. I was wondering, would you keep Gretchen in the house when I arrive. She terrified me the last time."

"Gretel," corrected Jacob. "And we will."

Two hours later, the judge presided over his court room, bored to death. An official from the IRS, who was a witness for the prosecution, had lulled Philip into a drowsy stupor. The suit spouted out facts and figures in an unhurried southern accent while referring to copious notes and memos piled high beside him. The case was complex, involving a numbered company and some offshore rental units.

Philip had lost track of the proceedings, and yearned to pound his gavel and tell the whole lot of them that they were tiresome, and to get to the point.

At the moment, his mind was focused elsewhere, on Julia. As he watched her strut confidently about the courtroom, high in heels, disbursing notes and files, he again looked at the clock. Within ninety minutes, the two of them would be having a much better time between the sheets at the Owl's Nest Motel. A wonderful way to complete the work week and a fitting celebration to a momentous day.

Fifteen

After a fitful sleep, Ian was up and moving in his room. It was early Friday morning, 4:30. He pulled back the drapes and looked out on the courtyard to check the weather conditions. The rain had stopped. He had a long walk to the Colesium. He hoped he could find his way. Everything looked so different in the dark. He recalled that his route would take him right by the G.M. plant, a dicey area, but there was no way to avoid it. He decided to arm himself with a hockey stick just in case. The dorm was silent. He pulled on an extra sweater and a ball cap and stepped outside.

A damp heavy fog had set in overnight. He walked confidently past stores, single family homes, and apartment buildings. White smoke poured from the high stacks surrounding the G.M. plant, its long brick buildings sprawled over three city blocks.

About 45 minutes later, he walked up the long drive to the Colesium. The road was well illuminated by tall, humming florescent lights. Wisps of rolling fog and dewy long grass added a surreal quality to the surroundings. Canada geese squawked in the distance.

It was getting light enough to make things out. As he poked at a few shrubs with his hockey stick, he quickly began to feel the whole exercise was futile. The area was so huge. So many spots to search. His wallet could be anywhere. Trying to keep his spirits up, he walked around behind the arena, and came across a large blue dumpster a few feet away from the back door. Security lights mounted on the outside of the rink cast an orange-yellow glow.

While holding his hockey stick, he hoisted himself up on the side of the container, and peered in the steel box. He was assaulted by the putrid stench of rotting meat. Gagging, he spotted hundreds of flies and maggots sharing in the spoils of discarded wieners and rancid ground beef.

Green and black trash bags were piled high. Holding his breath, he moved a couple of them around with his hockey stick, startling a brown rat which scurried to the top of the bags, looked at him, and then dived back to the depths the dumpster. A cloud of angry wasps emerged, buzzing and swarming around his head. He jumped down and cleared out of the area, running hard, waving at the wasps with his stick

Emile was also up earlier than usual, with a lot on his mind.

Teresa was fast asleep. He slipped out of the house by 4:45. He drove through the quiet streets and reviewed his plan. He'd scatter the bag of clothes, cell phones, keys and wallets in the roadside ditch which ran parallel to the driveway leading to the Colesium. Later in the morning he'd give Steve Cochrane the money to pay his gambling debt. The threats would stop.

Ian wandered back to the front of the Colesium, and searched under the bases of several large cedars, looking carefully for any sign of his wallet, but discovered only candy wrappers and pop tins. What a waste of time, he thought dejectedly. His wallet was lying in a smoldering landfill somewhere. The reward money was history. A million bucks down the drain. He wished he'd never heard of Manny Boyce.

He was cold, hungry, and discouraged at the futility of his search. It occurred to him that he had more than enough time before practice to get some breakfast at the Hungry-Man truck stop that he had noticed on his walk to the rink. He could warm up as well. He had three dollars. Enough for a muffin and a hot chocolate. He wandered back down the long drive, half heartedly sweeping the grass with his stick. Heavy fog continued to sit across the roadway. A set of headlights, cutting a swath of light in the mist caught his attention. A small car was moving slowly up the drive, and for no apparent reason pulled over and stopped.

Emile's attention was focused on the side of the road. The drainage ditch was covered by long grass, but the stuff could still be easily found. It was as good a spot as any. He reached for the bag beside him and opened the door. He was just about to scatter its contents when he caught sight of someone walking towards him carrying a hockey stick. Who could that be at this hour? What was he doing here, so early? Better hold tight. He's looking right at me. Emile squinted and tried to make out who this mystery man was. He moved the bag to the passenger's side and stashed it on the floor.

Ian was now about 10 feet from the car. He still couldn't make out the driver. He hoped it was Pepin or some other staff member reporting to work. He wanted information about the break-in. See if anyone knew anything.

It's that hockey player, thought Emile. One of the boys he had let into the storage room yesterday. Must have his times mixed up. The Wildcats weren't on the ice until 7:00 a.m.

Ian approached Pepin's window and leaned in. "Hey Emile, remember me? Ian Sinclair. We met yesterday. You opened the storage room for Jamie and me."

Emile shot a glance at the plastic bag to his right. It was securely closed. "What are you doing here so early?"

"Thought I'd walk and loosen up"

Emile hurriedly put the Toyota in gear. "My car stalled. But it seems all right now. I better move. Gotta get things ready."

"I wanted to know something. Is there any news about the break-in?"

"No. The cops were here, but they weren't any help."

"That's it? They're not going to do any more investigating?"

"They said something about looking for evidence--"

Suddenly out of nowhere a high pitched electronic tune stopped him short.

"What's that?" asked Ian. "Sounds like a cell phone." He leaned forward closer to the source of the noise. "Sounds weird, like the phone is caught between the seats or something."

The noise continued. Both Ian and Emile recognized the musical ringtone as the first few bars of *The Star Spangled Banner*. While a little muffled, the phone's penetrating pitch still cut through a shroud of clothes and plastic wrapping.

"Is that your phone?" asked Ian. "Go ahead and answer it. Where'd you get the ringtone? Download it?"

"It's my wife's phone. It's on the floor somewhere."

The ringing finally stopped.

"I think it came from that trash bag," said Ian. "Better be careful, you don't want to throw it out by mistake. What's that you were you saying about evidence?"

"The cops said that the thief may have dropped some stuff. That's all," Emile

mumbled distractedly.

“Could you do a favor and let me know if anything shows up? Anything at all? I really want my wallet back.”

“Yeah sure. I’ll let you know.”

“I was going to get some breakfast at the truck stop, but now that you’re here, I’ll just get a cereal bar or something from the vending machines. Gimme a lift?”

Emile didn’t hear the question, trying frantically make sense of what had just happened. He had thrown three cell phones in the bag the afternoon before, and he hadn’t thought to see if they were turned on.

“Hey Emile, can I hop in?”

The last thing he wanted was Ian in the car. What if the phone went off again? Ian would want to see the damned thing. Ask too many questions. He needed to dispose of that phone, and quickly.

A huge Coca Cola truck pulled in the drive, passed them, and rumbled towards the rink, air-brakes squealing.

“Gimme a ride?” asked Ian again.

“Your stick won’t fit in the trunk,” replied Emile. “And it’ll barely fit in the car. Sorry, but I gotta catch a delivery.”

“OK, I’ll meet you inside.”

Two quick honks escaped from the Coke truck’s air horns. Emile sped off to deal with the driver, gratefully distancing himself from Ian. He wheeled into his parking spot at the rear of the Coliseum. He had to get that bag of stolen goods out of his car. It was getting light. The first wave of the day’s hockey players would be arriving at any moment. His mind continued to race. He had to unlock the front doors, turn on the lights, adjust the compressor, collect money for ice time, and disburse dressing room keys.

“Hey Emile.” It was Ian again.

The rink rat froze. “What?”

“I got a lift up the drive from one of the old-timers. They’re at the front doors. They want to get in.”

“Do me a favor. Let them in. Here’s the key. Tell them I’ll be there in a minute.”

Ian took the keys and left.

“Emile. You gonna let us in or what?” Three middle-aged men were walking towards him.

“The kid. Ian, will let you in. I gave him the keys. Relax.”

“There you are.” It was the truck driver. “Didn’t you hear me honk? I need to unload your soda. Gotta do it now. No way I can come back. You wouldn’t believe my schedule.”

“Sorry, Roy. I’ll be right there.”

Ian and the old-timers had left for the front of the building. Roy had gone back to the loading dock. This wasn’t unfolding anything like he had planned. Here he was stuck with a bag of stolen goods in his car, and he now seemed to be the center of everyone’s attention. Why hadn’t he just dumped the whole damn bag on the freeway instead of being cute and trying to plant the stuff at the rink? He couldn’t take the bag into the woods, and he couldn’t drive away from the rink. Too many people around, all making demands of him. But he simply had to lose that cell phone. Smash it. Anything. He broke through the plastic bag and pawed through the clothes, rummaging, and feeling for

phones. Were there two or three of them? he asked himself panicking, his memory frazzled. He found one phone almost immediately and yanked it free of the bag. Was it the phone that had gone off? He punched at several buttons.

“Emile. We need some lights. You got Sully’s money?” It was Steve Cochrane. Emile jammed the cell back in the bag out of Cochrane’s view. “Yes. I’ve got the cash. I’ll give it to you inside. I’ll just be a minute.”

“We need some lights,” repeated Cochrane.

“I heard you!”

More blasts from the Coke truck’s air horns. Urgent long blasts. Cochrane was no longer in sight.

The hell with this, thought Emile. He snatched the plastic bag and ran towards the woods. No. The dumpster. Closer. He tossed the bag as close to the middle of the container as possible. It landed softly, but disturbed a nest of wasps, feasting on sticky pop tins and caramel corn. They flew out of the dumpster, buzzing. One angry yellow-jacket planted its stinger on his forearm. Another stung him behind the ear, while even more swarmed around his neck. “Shit,” he screamed, while running forward and then backward, flailing his arms.

“Hey Emile, you OK?” The voice added to his confusion. It was Ian standing on the back door’s metal porch.

“I let the old-timers in.”

The janitor scrambled up the steps to the safety of the building, frantically running his hands through his hair and clothes to clear the wasps. “Close the door. Close the door,” he shrieked. “They got me here and here,” he wailed, as if he had just been sprayed by bullets.

“I heard you should put rubbing alcohol on wasp stings. I brought your keys back. The guys still need the lights on,” said Ian.

Emile checked his bites in a filthy mirror.

“I nearly got stung around that bin earlier this morning,” said Ian. “It’s full of rats too. I sure wouldn’t toss anything else in there. You’ll just stir up trouble.”

Sixteen

Coach Cannon was relieved that the team seemed to have put the locker-room theft behind them. The boys had worked hard at Friday practice. Fridge, the equipment manager was back from his uncle's funeral, as was Keith Lawler, the assistant coach and head trainer. The room was humming. Cannon was feeling far more organized.

Ian was happy with his play. He had really stood out. His legs were light, his passes, perfect. His shot had found the back of the net four times. Even the skating drills had seemed easy. The practice had taken his mind off the disappointment at not having found the lottery ticket—temporarily at least.

Now, off the ice the plight of the missing ticket continued to gnaw at him. A \$1 million reward, lost.

Cannon assumed center court position in the locker room and tooted his whistle. "Just a couple of things. Tomorrow, Saturday, it's dry-land training at the gym on campus. We'll have a doctor and a nurse practitioner coming in to measure your fitness levels, and to take your stats. Bring some lunch with you. We'll be all day. I want everyone at the gym by 9:00 a.m. Another thing. Some of you still haven't brought me your passports. I want them before we leave for Fredericton on Sunday. I'm not taking any chances that some of you clowns may show up at the border without the required papers. Also. You may have noticed that we finished early today. I want you all to look around the outside of the rink for any sign of your wallets and stuff. The police said there's always the chance that the thief could have just dumped everything he didn't want. It's worth a shot. You probably won't find any money, but you might find your keys and identification. Spread out, but don't go on any private property."

Before beginning the search, Ian and a few others collected around a Coke machine in the rink's hallway, feeding it quarters as quickly as it could roll out the cans.

The sound of someone singing, while fighting squelching feedback from the Colesium's aging sound system penetrated the corridor.

"What's that racket?" asked Troy O'Neil.

"I think it's someone practicing 'The Anthem'," replied Ian. "I saw a notice about a competition to sing at our games on the bulletin board out front."

"I hope she looks better than she sounds."

"Hey Troy, maybe you should just hold your cell phone to the microphone," suggested Peter Yule. "They wouldn't have to bother auditioning people."

"You mean the cell that I had. It got ripped off yesterday in the room."

Ian gulped his drink and pounced on what he had just heard. "O'Neil, does your phone have a ringtone like *The Star Spangled Banner*?"

"About 10 notes," piped in Yule. "It's so lame."

"No. Really. Does it sound like 'The Anthem?' Your cell. Does it have an anthem ringtone?"

"Yeah, it's called the patriot phone. My Dad's company sells them. Why? What's the big deal?"

"Anyone here have a cell on them?" asked Ian.

“I’ve got one,” said Fred Dinsdale.

“You remember your phone number, Troy?” asked Ian excitedly.

“Of course. It was only stolen yesterday.”

“Follow me. Everyone,” commanded Ian. “I think I may know where your cell is, and probably the rest of the stuff!”

Ian could hardly contain his enthusiasm. Pepin was the thief! He had cleaned them out and he had dumped the goods in the bin. No wonder Pepin had been so jumpy. His wallet must be with the rest of the stuff in the bag. He was about to get the ticket back, and a \$1 million reward wasn’t far behind. “Come on, out the back door,” urged Ian. “Bring your phone, Dinsdale. Follow me. Come on!”

Emile was sitting in his office eating a sub and watching *The Simpsons* when a pack of Ashbury Wildcats led by Ian, streamed by and headed for the back door. By the time he caught up with the boys, they had already gathered around the dumpster.

“What are you guys doing back here?” shouted Emile. “Can’t you read? It says Staff Only.”

They ignored him.

“Dial Troy’s number, Fred,” instructed Ian eagerly. “Tell him what it is, Troy.”
“760-682.”

Fred punched in the numbers, and almost immediately a muffled noise came from the bin. The first few bars of the *Star Spangled Banner*, repeating over and over.

“See! I told you! It’s your phone! It’s in there with the rest of the stuff,” shouted Ian triumphantly. He scrambled up the side of the large container. The phone stopped ringing. “Redial it.” The musical ring tone began all over again.

Coach Cannon, Keith Lawler, and Fridge came around the corner with several other players.

“We found the stolen stuff,” yelled Troy. “It’s in the dumpster!”

Ian was knee-deep in the bin, oblivious to its stench—squashing, ripping and popping the tightly sealed plastic bags—while he stumbled around trying to zero in on the ringtone. Wasps flew in every direction.

“Sinclair, get out of there. What are you doing?” bellowed Cannon.

“It’s private property, he’s not allowed in there,” was all Emile could muster.

“Got it,” declared Ian, as he tossed the bag to the ground. It landed softly, cushioned by the clothes, cell phone still ringing. He scrambled out of the dumpster and joined the others a safe distance from the wasps.

The players descended on the bag like wolves, and had the plastic torn apart in seconds.

“Here’s my wallet. Shit. It’s empty,” said one boy.

“So’s mine.”

“I got my keys.”

“Here’s another phone.”

“Let’s see. It’s mine.”

Ian was in the midst of the chaos around the bag as clothes were pulled out and searched. Word of the discovery had spread, and the whole team was on hand. Within two minutes, the three cell phones had been claimed along with a necklace, several sets of keys, and seven wallets. All had been emptied of cash.

“My wallet isn’t even here,” said O’Neil.

“Mine either.”

Ian frantically patted down and shook every article of clothing he could find. There was no sign of his wallet. He looked at Emile, who was standing beside Cannon and Fridge. “Where is it? Where’s my wallet? What did you do with it?”

“Why should I know anything about your wallet?”

“Because you had this bag in your car this morning. And Troy’s phone went off in it. And I saw you throw the bag in the dumpster. You’re the thief! Where’s my wallet. I need it back. Now!”

Cannon stepped forward. “Sinclair! You don’t speak to the arena staff like that.”

“But he ripped us off. It’s so obvious.”

“I said knock it off. I want you to all calm down. Fridge, collect everything that’s been found, including the clothes. It’s all going to the police for their investigation. The rest of you, get to the vans. Tell one of the drivers to wait for Sinclair.”

The boys reluctantly dropped their belongings in a box that Fridge had found by the dumpster.

“Sinclair, Emile,” barked Cannon. “I want to see you both. Over here.”

“I don’t appreciate being called a thief, especially in front of everyone like that,” said Pepin.

“Shut up, Emile,” said Cannon curtly, as if he were one of his players.

“You are the thief,” shot back Ian. “I have proof!”

“Sinclair! One more accusation like that, and I’ll suspend you. I mean it,” said Cannon. “Emile. Ian did raise some questions a minute ago. And I want those questions answered. Did you have that bag with the boy’s stuff in your car this morning?”

Emile crossed his arms defiantly. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“What’s this Ian said about that cell phone going off in your car?” asked Cannon. “It makes a pretty distinct sound.”

“He’s lying. He must have heard my car radio.”

Ian couldn’t contain himself. “That’s bullshit Coach. It wasn’t his radio. I heard Troy’s phone ringing in that green bag. The sound was unmistakable. It was definitely a cell phone ringtone. ‘The Anthem.’ It was on the floor of his car in a bag. He told me that it must have been his wife’s cell phone. He can’t even get his lies right. First it was his wife’s cell. Now a car radio, what a joke. Where’s my wallet? I know you have it! I need it back.”

“You’re a liar,” answered Emile.

“You’re the liar, a rat and a thief.”

Cannon let it go.

“Why don’t you ask Ian what he was doing prowling around the rink in the dark before I even got here?” said Emile.

Cannon listened intently. This was a new twist to the story. “Is this true, Ian?”

“Yes I was out here early. I walked for the exercise, and decided to look around for the missing stuff. I was hoping to find my wallet. It’s got my driver’s license, social security card, birth certificate and meal card.”

“Why would you come out two hours early? In the dark?” asked Emile.

“I just explained that, Rat--”

“Sinclair! His name is Emile. Do you understand me?”

“As I just said, *Emile*,” continued Ian sarcastically, “I wanted to look for my wallet.”

“Sounds sort of fishy to me,” answered Pepin.

Cannon knew things were at a stalemate. “OK. Let’s take a break. The cops can take it from here. They’ll be checking out the evidence, and I’m sure they’ll find that neither of you had anything to do with the theft. In the meantime, you don’t even so much as look at each other until this is cleared up.”

Seventeen

Friday Afternoon. Manny had a fare to pick up in Scarlett Heights. He was familiar with the housing complex. Most of its tenants couldn't afford cars, and he often shuttled the residents to and from grocery stores, especially at the end of the month following the delivery of welfare checks.

Those who couldn't afford the luxury of a cab were forced to purchase a good deal of their food from local variety stores at much higher prices. Grocery chains, ever mindful of the higher profits to be made by offering expensive deli-prepared foods and fresh baked goods, had either never built grocery stores around Scarlett Heights, or had shut them down, and had set up shop closer to new subdivisions, near better-heeled customers.

A haggard-looking bleached blonde woman with a black eye was waiting for him at the entrance of the complex. Manny guessed that she was about 30, but could easily pass for 50. She asked to be taken to the courthouse. The fare would provide an ideal opportunity to have a quick look around for the black van that Audrey had described in her email the day before.

"I'm sorry ma'am, you can't smoke in the cab," Manny cautioned, as he heard the sound of unraveling cellophane.

"I wasn't planning on smoking in your precious car," she shot back. "I was just getting my smokes ready. Just drive. And where do you want me to put this?" she asked, stretching forward with the cellophane wrapper clinging to her fingers.

Manny had an answer in mind, but contained himself. "Put it in the ashtray please, ma'am." Again, he thought of his lost millions. If he could only get that ticket back, he wouldn't have to spend ten hours a day in a cab, dealing with people who ordered him to "just drive," as though he were their personal slave.

The week before, a teenager had bolted from his car without paying, and four days before that, without warning, an intoxicated businessman had thrown up everywhere, even spraying the ceiling. The cab had just been detailed to the tune of \$90 Manny had kicked him out of the cab, and had spent over an hour at the car wash cleaning up the mess.

At least, he had never been robbed, like a fellow driver who had suffered a broken nose in a heist. The thief made off with less than \$40. Driving a cab was an increasingly dangerous way to make a modest living.

"Gonna put it to my boyfriend today," his fare announced proudly out of nowhere.

"Why, what did he do?" asked Manny, not really wanting to hear the answer.

"Well, he comes home drunk one night last week, and starts trashin' my apartment. I tell him to quit it, then he hits me good, right in the face. More than once. Got my eye, and I still got the bruises to show for it. See?" she asked, leaning forward.

Manny checked his rear-view.

"Anyways," she continued, "the cops took my boyfriend outta there. Took three of 'em. Had to drag 'em out. It's the third time he hit me. Today I gotta testify against him. Should be good for a laugh," she declared, cackling, before breaking into a prolonged coughing fit.

Manny sighed quietly. He had nothing to say. Why did she still refer to him as her

boyfriend? Had she really said third time?

After dropping off his unfortunate fare, Manny circled around behind the building. There it was. The black van as Audrey had described.

The cabbie wheeled the Dodge back to the front of the building, glanced around for any potential fares, and made his way back down the driveway. He spotted a small variety store across the street—an excellent spot to conduct surveillance.

After delivering a couple more fares, Manny drove to his stakeout location. It was a little before five. He lay in wait for a black van.

A parade of vehicles drove up and down the courthouse hill. White vans from the Department of Corrections transported securely chained human cargo. Clerks driving compact cars, lawyers in their BMW's and police cruisers came and went.

Manny appeared to be taking a break. A newspaper was spread out over the steering wheel, but he was intently looking for any sign of the van that Audrey had described.

He didn't have to wait long. The van came into view and shot down the drive. Manny's nerves fluttered, his senses on full alert, as he started his engine and slipped the cab into drive. His digital camera sat ready on the passenger's seat.

As the van turned right onto Crescent Street, Manny could see that it was driven by a white male. The passenger's seat was empty.

Manny pulled out of the parking lot and stayed a couple of car lengths back. He followed the van south and then east for a couple of miles. Rush hour traffic moved slowly in the late afternoon drizzle.

Traffic came to a sudden halt. The driver of the van was parallel parking. Manny deftly swung into a U turn, and tucked into a metered parking spot on the other side of the street.

Manny readied his camera. The driver got out, and walked towards Allen's Dry Cleaners. At the last moment, he ducked into Playful Pleasures. The store's large window banners enticed passers-by with the promise of naughty lingerie, toys, and steamy XXX videos.

Within 10 minutes, his subject was back on the sidewalk and walking briskly back to his vehicle clutching a small plastic bag.

The van pulled out. Manny completed another U turn and caught up to his quarry. Traffic crawled past rundown white framed wooden houses, dilapidated vacant storefronts, a couple of gun shops, and several seedy looking bars. Next stop was Pappy's Liquors. Manny pulled alongside the curb as if waiting for a fare.

He finally had an excellent view of the man he had been hired to follow. He was well dressed, very coiffed and young looking just as Audrey had said. A few minutes later he emerged from the store holding a bottle from its stem, the rest lost in a plastic bag.

The van pulled out of the lot and took the first right to an exit ramp which led to a freeway. Manny was able to slide comfortably two cars back, in the right hand lane. After several minutes, the van took the Dunlop Street exit, and proceeded three blocks north. The tail lights signaled that he was preparing to turn into *The Owl's Nest Motel*.

Bingo. Manny watched the van disappear behind the motel. He waited a couple of minutes and followed.

“Where have you been?” asked Julia. “This place is scary when you're by

yourself. I feel like we're in the middle of nowhere."

"We are. That's just the way I like it. I had a couple of stops to make. Here's something for you," said Philip, extending a plastic bag. "Try it on, while I pour some champagne. We'll have to use motel glasses. I hope they've been washed."

"I wouldn't count on it." She removed some lacy lingerie. "Very nice."

"I thought you might enjoy it."

"You mean you might enjoy it," replied Julia, as she slowly unbuttoned her blouse.

"Let me help you with that." They fell into a tight embrace. "I've been thinking about this for days," he crooned as they rolled around on the king-size bed. There was no answer from Julia, as she tore at his belt. The lingerie would have to wait for another day.

"That's strange," commented Stan Armitage, a 62 year old U.S. Marshal. He sat behind the wheel of a dark blue Caprice, obscured by an SUV and a pick-up, two rows back and to the right of Philip's van and Manny's cab.

"What's strange?" asked Deputy Gary Bleeker from the passenger's seat.

"There's that cab again. He just pulled in few spaces down from Driscoll's van. I noticed it at the liquor store earlier. Why do you suppose he'd be waiting for someone at the back of the motel? Wouldn't the front entrance make more sense?"

"He's probably off duty, taking a break," replied Bleeker.

"Maybe he's here to whisk away your boss's girlfriend, or maybe blackmail him. A judge would be a good mark. He'd pay up no questions asked. Believe me, it's been done before."

"You marshals see snipers and blackmailers around every corner," replied Bleeker. His tone became serious. "I know this looks kind of bad. The porn shop, and this sleazy motel and everything, but I'd appreciate it if none of this went any further."

"You're just looking out for your meal ticket. I know you've been working with Driscoll for over five years," replied Armitage. "And I don't blame you for being protective. Relax. There's nothing happening that I'm going to report. What the judge does in his spare time is none of our business. We're all on the same team. Got to give a guy a break once in awhile. I say, go get 'em, Judge."

"Thanks for keeping this quiet. He's actually always been good to me, and I feel like a jerk having to follow him around like this. You really think the sniper is close by?"

"All I know is that there was a reported sighting not far from Sutton just an hour ago. Probably a crank call, but no one is taking any chances, especially since the murder of Judge Collins in Boston, and the botched attempt on Judge Kirkby just 60 miles from here. The guy's not finished. Apparently he's some kind of religious zealot. A madman. A bunch of us retired marshals were temporarily sworn back in just yesterday. We normally just look after the Federal Judiciary, but word came down from the Feds that all judges are going to receive protection until the guy is caught. Someone wanted blanket coverage—and fast."

"Fast is right. My boss nearly threw me in your car," said Bleeker. "You can't beat the overtime though."

"That's true. I don't mind making a little extra change here and there. Actually kind of fun to see all the guys again. Wait a minute. Look at our cabbie. He's holding something. Got something in his hand."

"It's a gun!"

“No,” replied Armitage, calmly. “It’s a camera with a telephoto lens. He’s taking a picture of the judge’s van. Now he’s getting out of his cab. He’s aiming it right at the judge’s room. I was right. He has been following Driscoll. This is very interesting.”

Bleeker reached for the door handle “Let’s nail him.”

The veteran marshal restrained the deputy’s arm. “Shhh. Easy, keep it down. Let him hang himself. We want all the evidence we can get. We need to find out exactly what he’s up to.”

The two watched Manny at work. “Messing with a judge, said Armitage. “This guy’s dead meat. Good. He’s gone back to his cab. We can ambush him.” The marshal removed his revolver from a well-worn leather shoulder holster. “Be prepared to give me cover.”

Armitage walked towards the cab from behind. He was as close as the trunk before Manny caught a glimpse of him in his side-view mirror.

“U.S. Marshal!” yelled Armitage. “Don’t move!”

A gun was pointed inches from Manny’s head through his open window. Within seconds, Bleeker was pointing his gun at the side of his face from the other side.

“I’m a private investigator.”

“Shut your face. Drop the camera and put your hands on the dash.”

Manny complied. “I’m a private investigator.”

“I told you to shut up. The marshal’s gun was trained at Manny’s temple. “I’m going to open the door. You’re going to get out of the car with your hands where I can see them. When you get out you’re going to put your hands on the roof. Do you understand me?” said Armitage.

“Yes sir,” whimpered Manny.

With his hands in the air it was difficult to stand from his sitting position. By rocking, Manny managed to get half-way up, couldn’t hold himself, and fell back heavily onto the seat.

“What’s the matter, tubby?” taunted Bleeker from the passenger’s window.

“Maybe we should throw some cuffs on you and drag you out.”

On the third try, Manny was able to gain enough momentum to stand up and stumbled uncontrollably towards Armitage.

The marshal spun Manny hard, throwing him against the car. “I want your hands on the roof. Bleeker, get over here. Pat this guy down and cuff him.”

“**W**hat’s all that shouting?” asked Julia. She was curled up with Philip sipping champagne. They were both drained after a quick but satisfying vigorous romp.

Philip approached the window. “Sounds like a fight. That’s a cop’s radio.”

“Why can’t we go to a decent place some time? This is such a bad end of town. It frightens me.”

Philip didn’t answer. He separated the heavy drapes and froze. It was his deputy, Bleeker, and a plain-clothes officer. There was some kind of commotion around a cab. He yanked the drapes shut. “We have to go. At least you have to go. Bleeker is out there, and that means there’s something going on that involves me. There’s no other choice. We’ll catch up on Monday at the courthouse. I have to distance myself from you, and fast.”

Julia scrambled from the bed. “Whatever.”

“Where are you parked?”

“Out front as always.”

“Go to the office, settle the bill, hand in the key, and then straight to your car. I’ll reimburse you for the motel on Monday. Sorry about this, but--”

“I said, I understand. Just go and do what you have to do. Your trusty deputy has obviously been following you. I’m not crazy about that idea either. Remember, I work at the courthouse too. You’re not the only one with a reputation to protect.”

“Don’t forget your lingerie,” mumbled Philip, this time peeking carefully through the drapes.

“Keep it for your next girl,” spat Julia walking towards the front door. “We won’t be meeting again. Sorry Philip, but getting involved with a married judge is just too high maintenance for me. I’m out of here.”

“We’ll talk on Monday,” answered Philip distractedly. He stood naked by the window. Bleeker and some other guy had a heavy-set man pinned against the side of a Sutton Call A Cab. Guns were drawn!

Philip threw on his clothes and emerged from the back door. “Bleeker! What brings you out here?”

“Please, sir,” shouted Armitage tersely. “Get back inside. We have a situation.”

“Situation? This man doesn’t look too threatening to me, and you certainly have him well covered.”

“It’s a mistake,” said Manny, feeling free to speak now that there appeared to be a rational person on the scene. “I’m a private investigator.”

“We caught him taking a picture of your van and of your room. He was right at the window,” added Bleeker. “He’s been following you all afternoon.”

“Now that’s very interesting,” said Philip. Jean. She’d hired a snoop. And this investigator, armed with a camera, had just caught him red-handed at a sleazy motel. She might sue him for infidelity. Divorce. Alimony payments. He had to take care of this situation now, and on his terms. Bleeker and the plainclothes officer had done him an incredible favor by intercepting the private eye, but what were they doing here?

“Gentlemen,” said the judge, “I would like to speak with you privately. Please come with me,” he directed, motioning to his van.

“Bleeker, keep a close eye on that guy,” said Armitage.

Philip and the marshal walked away from Manny’s cab.

“I’m Stan Armitage, from the U.S. Marshal’s office. There has been a reported sighting of the sniper in the area. The guy who shot and killed Judge Collins, and took a shot at Justice Kirkby. We’ve been assigned to protect you.”

“Marshal Armitage,” said Philip authoritatively. “First of all, I want to say that I appreciate your efforts at offering me protection. I want to explain why I’m here. Sometimes I have to get away to work on judgments—away from all distractions.”

Armitage could barely contain his inclination to laugh in Philip’s face.

“I would appreciate an opportunity to speak with this private investigator alone,” added Philip.

“I can’t allow that, Your Honor.”

“And why not?”

“Because at this point, we feel that he represents a threat to you, and that he may possibly have ties to a larger plot involving the judiciary. We have just caught him following you.”

“He says he’s a private investigator. If that’s true, then he has a right to follow me.”

“I suppose that’s true, but nevertheless.”

“It is true, I happen to have a casual knowledge of the law,” said Philip. “Have you asked for his investigator’s license yet? If not, then why has he been cuffed and being held at gun point?”

“Because we’re trying to protect you,” retorted Armitage. “We discovered some guy tailing you in a cab and snapping pictures of your van and your room. We were within our rights to arrest him immediately.”

“But have you formally arrested him?”

“You mean, read him his rights?” asked Armitage as if this was a new concept in police procedure.

“Yes. That’s exactly what I mean. You have detained him in cuffs under the threat of gunpoint with no explanation. He says he’s a private investigator. I tend to believe him. Let’s go back and find out.”

“Your Honor, the Patriot Act allows us to take certain liberties with prisoners.”

“Don’t give me that! We’re not a police state, at least not yet. Don’t hide behind something that irrelevant in this situation, and that you know nothing about. And put that gun away before you kill someone. I detest guns.”

“Suit yourself. Speak to him. What do I care? We’re only trying to protect you,” said Armitage petulantly. “By the way, Your Honor, are there some good buys available at Playful Pleasures?”

Philip decided it was time to be conciliatory. “You guys have caught me with my pants down so to speak. I’m not going to deny it. I just want to keep this quiet. It’s very embarrassing. I hope you understand. But I am convinced that this guy you have is an investigator, and he was probably hired by my wife. I would appreciate a moment of his time. I’m sorry for having questioned your diligence and procedures. I simply want to intercept a potentially devastating personal situation. Sometimes a guy can’t resist a pretty girl. You know how it is. Turns out you’ve both done me a big favor,” he added, winking.

“Sounds fair to me, Judge.”

They walked back to the cab where Bleeker held Manny at gunpoint.

Armitage took control. “Deputy Bleeker, put down your gun and remove this man’s cuffs. He looked at Manny. “Where’s your I.D.?”

“It’s in my wallet. The officer took it from me.”

“Bleeker, pass me his wallet.”

The marshal flipped it open. “What is your name?”

Philip groaned. These cowboys hadn’t even asked for the man’s name yet, much less checked his I.D.

“My name is Manny Boyce.”

Armitage cross-checked Manny’s answers with his papers. “And you’re a cab driver?”

“Yes. I drive for Call A Cab out of Sutton.”

“And you are also a private investigator?”

“Yes. You’ll find my license at the back of my wallet.”

“And why were you following Judge Driscoll?”

Manny reeled toward Armitage “What! He’s a judge? There’s been a mix up. A mistake. I was hired to follow someone else. I would never have followed a judge.”

“Someone else?” asked Armitage

“Yes. A records clerk.”

“Is that I.D. in order?” interjected Philip.

“Seems to be,” said the marshal.

“I’d like to speak with this man privately.”

“Go ahead. We’ll be right here.”

Philip walked with Manny over towards the van. “Seems you got a few people excited this afternoon.”

“Yes sir,” was all Manny could manage.

Philip looked at Manny earnestly. “I have a few questions that I’m sure you won’t mind answering.”

“I’ll try.”

“For starters, I want you to tell me who hired you to follow me.”

“Judge, do you mind if I don’t answer that question? I am hired in confidence, and I don’t want to betray my client’s trust.”

“I can understand your reluctance to tell me,” said Philip, “but you really have no choice.”

“What do you mean?”

“Marshal Armitage and Deputy Bleeker told me that you trained your camera on my hotel room. You should know better than that. A person has an expectation of privacy behind closed doors and windows.”

“I was just taking a picture of the sign.”

“How do I know that?”

“Well--”

“I could have you charged with invasion of privacy.”

“I was following proper surveillance procedure.”

“Don’t you dare contradict me. I’ll refresh your memory. Any person who photographs or films another person, without that person’s knowledge and consent where one would have a reasonable expectation of privacy is in violation of basic privacy laws. Believe me; I’ll prosecute you to the fullest extent of the law. I could have you formally arrested within seconds. I simply want to know who hired you to follow me.”

“Audrey It was Audrey.”

“Audrey? Who’s that?”

“I don’t know. I’ve never met her. She just told me that you worked at the courthouse, and she hired me to follow you.”

“Tell me more. You must have spoken with her. What did she sound like?”

“We only spoke once. She sounded kind of scared.”

“How did she pay you? You must have some records.”

“Cash, mailed to my P.O. Box.”

“I want you to tell me exactly what you have given her in the way of information. You have one chance to tell me. You had better be truthful, or I swear, I will have you arrested. We judges don’t like being followed—having our privacy violated. And there are two officers standing 30 feet away who would like nothing more than to put you in a jail cell. I mean it. Start talking.”

“I got a call on my cell. It was someone called Audrey. She asked me to follow you. Said you worked with records at the courthouse. She mailed me \$200 in cash.”

“How many times have you followed me?”

“This is the first time, I swear.”

“I’m going to seize your camera. I’ll return it within day or so. I also want your cell phone. You’ll give your equipment to my deputy now, and you will never follow me again,” warned Philip needlessly.

“Yes, Your Honor. I am so sorry. I didn’t know you were a judge.”

Manny walked back to his cab to gather his camera warily eyeing Armitage and Bleeker, who were leaning against the Caprice.

“Everything all right, Judge?” inquired Armitage.

“Just fine. We have everything straightened up. Just so we’re on the same page, we had a situation here and it was cleared up. I know you drew your guns, and it should be reported, but you’ll never hear anything about it from me, and I can assure you, you’ve heard the last from Manny Boyce.”

“We are obliged to follow you out of here, Judge,” said the marshal.

“Bleeker can ride with me. We’re going back to the courthouse. There’s no need for you to file a report.”

“Understood,” said Armitage. “Nothing happened here of any consequence.”

“Exactly,” agreed Philip. “Case closed.”

Eighteen

Philip and his deputy had gathered in the judge's chambers after leaving *The Owl's Nest*. It was late Friday afternoon.

"I'll never understand why you didn't tell me that you'd be following me today," scolded Philip as though his deputy were a wayward teenager.

Bleeker flinched at the reprimand. He hated to disappoint his boss. The deputy coveted his role as Philip's personal assistant and protector. At 32 years of age, his heavily muscled physique and military-style cropped blond hair, made for an imposing figure, especially in uniform. The deputy hung on every word the judge uttered. His main purpose was to secure the courtroom, and to protect Philip, but he also picked up dry-cleaning for him, washed the van, chauffeured Philip about town, ordered and delivered flowers, and even handled some of Philip's Christmas shopping. Deputy Bleeker lived his life vicariously through the judge, and was staunchly devoted to him.

"It all happened so quickly, Judge. I was about to leave the courthouse when Sheriff Wesley intercepted me. He told me that someone had phoned in a possible sighting of the sniper outside of town—that Chevette they're looking for. He told me to join Marshal Armitage and to find you. It was easy. I knew you had just left and would be heading towards the farm. Then you threw a monkey-wrench into things and took us for a bit of an expedition."

"I was put in a very embarrassing position. If you thought I was in so much danger, why didn't you just pull me over? You lost me didn't you?"

"Ah, yes we did," admitted Bleeker. "Downtown. Picked you up again before you hit the freeway. When Armitage saw that you were pulling into the motel, he decided to leave you alone, but then we discovered that Boyce guy checking you out. We sure scared the hell out of him. He won't be causing you any grief. I'm sure you're grateful for that."

"I suppose so."

"By the way, I never asked you. Who was she?"

"Mind your own business. And in the future let me know when I'm under surveillance. And tell the sheriff to call off the Feds. I'm comfortable with the protection that you've always provided to me."

"It's possible that the sniper is in the area. You don't seem to be worried."

"They'll catch him. Just a matter of time. I'm not changing my routine. Have a look at Boyce's camera. That's why we're here."

Bleeker looked through the long lens. "It's a beauty. It's gotta be worth over three grand."

"I want to see the pictures he took of me."

As Bleeker scrolled through the photos, Driscoll stared intently; reading glasses sitting at the end of his nose.

"There I am coming out of the liquor store, and a shot of my hotel room, van in front. I detest being spied on. Slow down. What are all these hockey pictures? Stop."

Philip stared at the small screen. "This boy looks familiar. Do you recognize him?"

"No."

"Keep going. Let's see some more. A picture of Boyce's cat. And another," chortled Philip. "I guess business is slow."

"That's all of them," said Bleeker.

"Now, how do you delete these pictures, and I mean delete them for good."

"Simple. I'll just format the memory." Bleeker scrolled the images. "Are you sure you don't want any of these pics?"

"Get rid of them. Wait. Go back to those hockey shots. I want to have another look." Philip studied a close-up of a dark-haired hockey player standing on the ice. "I know that guy. I knew he was familiar. He's at Ashbury with Heather. I'm sure he's the young man I met when we dropped her off. I remember he told me he was a hockey player. It has to be him. Why is Boyce tailing a hockey player in Ashbury?"

Bleeker shrugged.

"I've changed my mind. Don't delete the hockey pictures. I want to confront Mr. Boyce with them. I'll find out what he's been up to."

Bleeker produced Manny's cell phone. "What are we going to do with this?"

"I had forgotten. I want to know who's been calling him."

The deputy examined the phone. "I'll bet he has an answering feature. Yes. Look. He has an unread message, but it's password-protected."

Philip opened his top drawer and pulled out a form. "That's easily solved. I'll issue a court order for the release of Boyce's password. How long is the battery on the phone good for?"

"Usually a couple of days. You'd be best keep it turned off. I'll get you a power cord. In the meantime, the phone will still receive and save any messages."

"Thanks Gary. Take this court order to Sutton Tel. No telling who's been calling my big detective agency," said Philip mimicking Manny as best he could. They both broke up in laughter.

Manny slouched in his recliner and tried to recover from the day's traumatic events. Try as he might, he couldn't shake the disturbing images of guns at his head. He was emotionally drained at having been interrogated by a U.S. Marshal, a deputy and then by a judge. He was sore all over. His wrists were bruised and chaffed from sharp handcuffs and both knees were swollen from being slammed into the side of his cab. His back ached from standing awkwardly over the car in the cold. His expensive camera and his cell phone had been confiscated, with no guarantee when they would be returned.

He was especially furious at Audrey, or whatever her real name was.

His first impulse was to send her a nasty e-mail. Tell her what she had put him through, but had decided against it. He wanted absolutely nothing else to do with either Audrey or the judge. Audrey had lied to him. He would never have followed Driscoll with a sniper—a judge killer—still at large. He wasn't that foolish. The cops were all over the judges. They were probably following them to the bathroom. She of course knew this, and had described Driscoll as a records clerk. At the moment, he detested Audrey even more than the judge. He wouldn't tell her a thing. He'd ignore her completely. This was

the best way to get even. If the judge wanted to run around on her, what did he care? They deserved each other.

Manny continued to fume. His right wrist was very swollen and hot. It throbbed in time to his pulse. Maybe it was broken. More cruel flashbacks from the parking lot:

“What’s the matter tubby...can’t stand up?”

He watched as Stray struggled to climb up on his favorite chair. The cat was 16 years old and his hind legs were failing. Getting worse with every week it seemed. He knew that he would have to make a decision soon. He’d have to put down his best friend. The very idea was intolerable—so premeditated.

He looked at a white framed picture of his former wife, Tracy. He refused to accept her as his “ex.” That somehow implied that the marriage had been bad, when in fact they had had such fun. He missed her often. Tracy worked at a local hair salon and two years ago had fallen for Helen Greenwood, one of her customers. The two had moved in together within six months. Manny’s ensuing divorce from his wife had been mutually agreed upon—no support payments to hammer out—no hassles. Even the division of personal property had gone smoothly. The marriage breakdown had been devastating, but he realized that he couldn’t compete. In time, he’d made peace with Tracy’s sexuality, and was ready to move on. They had managed to maintain a friendship, and talked from time to time. There were no children from their marriage.

A chat with Tracy would do him good. He began to dial, but then reconsidered. Her new partner might answer. He couldn’t deal right now with the jealousy he felt towards her—envy towards both of them for that matter. They were happy. He was so often lonely.

Following the divorce, his father had held Tracy in such contempt. Lesbians and his father’s strong allegiance to Roman Catholic doctrines were not at all compatible. His father, gone now five years. He’d have been the one to tell about the arrest; the ticket. They had always talked about everything. He’d been such a proud man, a construction worker for over 30 years. Puerto Rican decent, third generation American. Medesto Boychevz. Later shortened to Boyce. That name worked better in a state where Latino’s were few. He had married Lucy, not long after her family had emigrated to Boston from Ireland in the early 1920s. It was an unlikely match, but the partnership had flourished for over 50 years. His mother was 83 years old, still independent and living in Boston.

Enough reminiscing. He left the recliner. There was business to take care of. He should phone Ian. It had been over 24 hours since they had met in the parking lot at the Ashbury Coliseum. The kid had had plenty of time to call. Sinclair had obviously lost the ticket and didn’t have the skills necessary to perform a logical search. He’d phone him and offer his assistance to find it. Doubts surfaced. He wouldn’t phone him. It would be too easy for Ian to tell him to stay away. He couldn’t handle that rejection. Not now. It would be best to surprise him with another visit to the university and confirm that he was serious about the reward he had offered. Together they could track it down. He simply had to take action and do something. The chances of recovering his fortune dimmed with each passing day.

Nineteen

The judge waited until Bleeker had left his chambers and then phoned Andrea Spurway.

“I’m confirming that I’m going to purchase the land from Jacob and Doris Pringle about noon tomorrow—Saturday. I’ll meet you at your office in Oak Leaf on Sunday, where we’ll complete our end of the deal. One o’clock sharp. Do you have a certified check ready for me?”

“Your money has been set aside,” replied Andrea.

“Set aside? Perhaps I wasn’t clear. I need to know that I will be leaving your office on Sunday in possession of a certified check payable to Justice Philip Driscoll in the amount of \$2.5 million. Nothing else will do. No conditions, just a straightforward cash deal. If you can’t provide me with this assurance, I refuse to purchase Pringle’s land, and you’ll never build Phase Three.”

“We’ve already given you a \$35,000 deposit. I think that indicates that we’re serious. Don’t worry. We’ll have a check waiting for you. You’re still not willing to reveal what you paid for Pringles’ land?”

“No, but I’ll be making a reasonable profit.”

“Reasonable. As in over half a million I bet.”

“Enough of a profit to take you for dinner sometime. Somewhere very nice.”

“Count me in.”

Philip picked up some Chinese food and drove back to the farm. Jean greeted him indifferently and disappeared upstairs. He considered confronting her about Manny Boyce but nothing would be gained from that. She’d just deny having hired him. The land deal was his most important concern. Martha’s money had sat in his account for about 24 hours. He was eager to return it to her. Just a day and a half to go and he he’d be in the clear, and Sutton’s newest millionaire.

The judge poked half-heartedly at an egg roll covered in some sort of vile red sauce. He threw most of it out and then joined Adam who was downstairs watching the Bruins play the Leafs.

Jean came to the doorway, cupping a cigarette behind her back as if to shield Adam from the smoke. “Mother called today.”

Philip masked his alarm and asked calmly, “How is she?”

“I’ve invited her to the farm for the weekend. I’ll pick her up tomorrow but I’d like you to stay here with Adam.”

It was difficult to hear Jean over the frantic voice of the play-by-play announcer. Philip joined her just outside the rec-room. Martha’s planned visit to the farm was ideal. The longer she was separated from her bank and any potential calls from Abramsky, the better. But he couldn’t possibly spend the day with Adam. He thought quickly. “It so happens that I will be quite close to Oak Leaf tomorrow.”

“Visiting your real estate friend, Andrea Spurway, no doubt.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. I’ll be in Cardiff. I’ve been asked to review a deposition. I’ll stop by Oak Leaf, pick up Martha and bring her back here with me. You can stay here with Adam.”

“Fine. I’ll phone her now.”

“Tell Martha that I’ll meet her at the condo at 1:30 p.m. sharp.”

On Saturday morning, Philip picked up Route 2, and headed out for Oak Leaf. The relentless rains of the past week had given way to thick drizzle. He arrived in the town in a little over an hour. After a short drive along county roads, he spotted the Pringle’s mailbox and drove up the lane. No sign of the dog. He pulled up beside Sandy Briscoe’s Mercedes SUV.

Jacob came out from the back door waving and smiling. “Right on time. Come on in.”

They entered the kitchen. Gretel barked briefly, but posed no threat. Philip spotted his attorney at the kitchen table. “Hello Sandy, having an early lunch I see.”

Briscoe set down a drumstick. “Jacob has plied me with food since I got here.”

Philip looked around the kitchen. “Where’s Doris?”

“She’s upstairs,” said Jacob. “She’s not feeling well. She went into town last night to play Bingo. When she came back to the farm she was feeling terrible. Got a bad case of the trots.”

Doris appeared at the top of the stairs. “I heard that. Really Jacob, that’s private. Did you give Philip his present yet?”

“No. Thought we’d do our business first. Pull up a chair, Philip.”

Doris walked down the stairs unevenly, using the banister for support. Her gray hair, normally arranged in a tidy bun hung long to her shoulders. “Give it to him now.”

Jacob went to a corner of the living room and brought back a beautifully wrapped box about the size of a small television, and set it on the kitchen table. “Go ahead. Open it.”

A present. Why did these people have to be so nice? He was about to completely betray their trust. There would be cranes, dump trucks and hoards of loud construction workers in their backyard within weeks. Everything they hated. Philip and Doris would go to their graves detesting him. He felt like a modern day Judas. Judge Judas. He tore off the paper, revealing a beautiful pine mailbox.

“It’s all hand-made,” said Jacob.

“He was up nearly all night adding the final touches,” added Doris.

P and J Driscoll was beautifully carved in bold raised letters, with a very detailed horse’s head appearing on both sides of the box. Jacob had also fashioned a sturdy mail flap, held in place with decorative black hinges.

“That’s gorgeous,” exclaimed Briscoe.

“We thought you could use a good mail box. Seeing as you said you’ll be keeping some horses, I thought I’d carve a couple for you,” said Jacob.

“It’s too nice to keep outside,” was all Philip could manage.

Jacob tapped the top of the box with a stubby finger. “Nonsense. It has four coats of Varathane. Hard as nails. Put the last coat on early this morning.”

“If you’ll excuse me, I have to go upstairs. I feel absolutely wretched,” said Doris.

Philip stood. "Thank you so much, Doris. I hope you're feeling better soon."
Briscoe spread some papers across the table. "Everything is all in order, Philip. Just sign here, and here."

With two strokes of a pen, the judge was the owner of 135 acres of land—Martha Van Whyte's estate virtually wiped out.

Jacob couldn't take his eyes off his check. "I'll be depositing this today. My branch is open Saturdays until 3:00 p.m."

"I guess that's it then," said Philip.

"Judge, I can't thank you enough. Our money problems are over, and best of all, our land is safe from developers"

Philip gathered his coat. "You sold for a very fair price. The deal worked out well for both of us."

The judge walked towards the door, turned back and looked at Jacob's lined face and those kind blue eyes—confident that he'd never see the farmer or Doris again.

"You're forgetting something," said Jacob.

"What's that?"

"Your mailbox." He stooped over, picked it up and passed it to Philip's waiting hands.

Philip was a short drive from Martha's condominium. He'd be early, but that was fine. The sooner he got her out of Oak Leaf, the better.

An ambulance approached from the opposite direction. It whizzed past splashing puddles, lights flashing. A few minutes later another ambulance appeared out of nowhere behind him. He slowed and let it speed by. What was going on?

Phillip pulled up to the gates of Martha's building, cleared security, parked, and walked to the lobby. A guard called Martha's suite. There was no answer. "I imagine she's stepped out, sir."

"Have you seen her come down?" asked Philip. "Did she leave any messages?"

"No sir."

"Try her again."

Philip looked around the elegant lobby for any sign of Martha.

"I let it ring eight times."

"I'm concerned. Take me to Mrs. Van Whyte's suite, and bring a key. I'd like you to let me in if she doesn't open the door."

"We don't normally do that. Are you family?"

"The name is Judge Driscoll. I'm Mrs. Van Whyte's son-in-law."

Philip rode the elevator with the guard. The judge rapped at Martha's door.
"Open it."

The two men stepped in. "Martha, it's Philip. Are you here?" He scanned the living room and kitchen. He walked down the hall towards her bedroom. "Martha?" He glanced in the bathroom and gasped. "Oh my god. Call 911!"

Martha lay on the white tile floor in a fetal position, one arm partially wrapped around the base of the toilet, her flannel housecoat open. Philip stepped in a runny puddle of slippery clear vomit. He lurched forward, and slammed his knee into the vanity. He steadied himself on the sink, and bent down tentatively touching Martha's shoulder.

"Martha. It's Philip." There was no response.

The guard came to the bathroom doorway holding a phone. "There'll be a long delay in getting an ambulance to the condo, and he wants to know if we can we get Mrs. Van Whyte to the clinic ourselves."

"What do they mean, delay? Give me that."

"We need an ambulance to—what's the address of this place?"

"I've already told him."

"All ambulances in the area are accounted for," said a dispatcher. "We'll send the police."

"What's the matter with you people? We need medical attention now."

"What are his symptoms?"

"Hers. She's lying on the bathroom floor semi-conscious. A 78 year old woman. Stop asking me questions and send us some help."

"Has she thrown up?"

"Yes. Why? What can we do?"

"We've had dozens of reports of similar symptoms within the last six hours. She's probably suffering from food poisoning like the others."

"Just send someone," snapped Philip.

He dialed Jean. "I just got to the condo, and found your mother in a bad way. She's barely conscious."

"What! Can she talk?"

"The 911 people say it may be food poisoning."

"Call an ambulance!"

"I did. Call Bleeker. He can get you here in a hurry."

She had already hung up.

Philip turned to the guard. "Are there any doctors in this building?"

"Dr. Chen and Dr. Sanderson."

"See if you can get one of them. Leave the door to the condo open. The police are coming."

Philip grabbed a pillow from the living room sofa and returned to the bathroom. He gently lifted Martha's sweat-soaked neck. He slipped the pillow under her head.

Martha gagged, trying in vain to throw up. There was nothing left.

"It's OK Martha. Help is coming."

The guard arrived accompanied by an Asian woman of medium height about 60 years old. "This is Dr. Chen. I'll wait at the door for the cops."

Philip stepped outside of the bathroom to make room.

"Help me sit her up. I don't want her to choke," ordered the doctor.

Philip and Dr. Chen lifted Martha into a sitting position, propping her against the wall. Martha's chin was buried in her chest. The doctor snatched a small towel from a rack. "Soak this in water and pat down her face and wrists."

The cool wet cloth partially revived Martha. Her eyes opened, gazing emptily at Philip's torso.

"We're going to take good care of you," said the doctor reassuringly.

Two police constables appeared carrying a stretcher.

"I want her to taken to the clinic," said Dr. Chen. "I practice there part-time." The stretcher was unfolded and raised in seconds. Martha was lifted to a white sheet.

“Wait for my wife in the driveway,” said Philip to the guard. “She’ll be driving a red Sunfire. Tell her that we’re at the clinic. Give her the directions.”

“Let’s go,” directed Dr. Chen.

Martha was wheeled into an elevator. Philip looked one of the police officers and asked, “What’s going on in this town?”

“All we know sir, is that we’ve been on the run for about four hours. Calls started to come in around nine this morning.”

Once outside, they carefully lifted Martha into the back seat of the cruiser. Dr. Chen sat with her in the back seat. Philip followed in the van.

The Oak Leaf medical clinic was two miles from Martha’s condo. It was a simple gray cinder brick building containing about a dozen rooms all on one floor. It was not equipped to handle a public emergency.

The first patient, a 21 year old auto mechanic had arrived by ambulance around ten that morning suffering from painful stomach cramps, a high fever, and explosive bloody diarrhea. He was followed by three more patients exhibiting variations of the same symptoms. By noon, thirty more people, aged three to 88 years had been admitted to the clinic, some in worse shape than others. By mid-morning, a five year old boy had died with unverified reports of other casualties within Oak Leaf.

The ill lay on cots, or sat in small chairs. Many were hooked to IV units which had been rushed in from neighboring hospitals, nursing homes—wherever they could be found. The victims vomited, urinated and defecated helplessly where they sat or lay leaving behind a stench which permeated every hallway and every room throughout the clinic. IV’s sat high feeding clear tubes which lead to thirsty veins, but bodily fluids were expelled as quickly as they could be replenished.

Martha was relegated to a small hallway. She slouched in a wheelchair tucked away in a back hall between rows of vending machines.

Dr. Chen located blood pressure apparatus and busied herself with Martha’s arm while Philip looked on. “Her blood pressure is extremely high. She’s at risk to have a stroke. She may, in fact, have already had one. Plus, she’s exhibiting symptoms consistent with food poisoning.”

“Can’t you give her some antibiotics?” asked Philip.

“No. Antibiotics wouldn’t be of use.”

“She certainly can’t stay here. It’s just too horrible.”

“I’d like to move her to the hospital in Sutton for some tests,” said Dr. Chen.

“My wife is on her way here. We should wait for her.”

Philip found a chair and stayed by Martha’s wheelchair, while Dr. Chen attended to some other patients. Half an hour later he spotted Jean and Adam working their way through the crowds. Adam looked about the horrid sights, wild eyed.

“Jean. Over here,” beckoned Philip.

She raced towards Martha and spoke in her ear. Martha’s eyes fluttered briefly, and then closed.

Dr. Chen spotted Jean. “I believe your mother is suffering from food poisoning.”

Dr. Chen is from the condo,” said Philip.

Jean nodded then glared at Philip. “How could you have brought my mother to such a place? This...refugee camp.”

“Go to hell.”

Dr. Chen spoke up. “Your husband did his best. Neither of us had any idea things here would be so bad. We are going to move your mother to the Sutton hospital. I checked. There are no ambulances available. However I feel she can be moved safely in your van. I’m waiting for an IV unit first.”

Two paramedics dressed in full blue regalia arrived on the scene hurriedly wheeling a stretcher.” Excuse us. Make room please. Coming through.”

An elderly man followed behind trying gamely to keep up, his fingers outstretched, attempting in vain to touch the gurney, as if to somehow retain a connection with the patient. “It’s all right, Doris. I’m right behind you honey.”

Jacob! Philip spun away. He leaned as unobtrusively as possible between the vending machine and the brick wall beside Martha, praying that he hadn’t been noticed by the farmer.

The old man’s attention had been entirely focused on Doris as she was wheeled past Philip to an adjoining corridor. The danger passed, for now. Still, Jacob was still somewhere in the clinic. Jacob could appear from around the corner at any moment. He’d see Philip and he’d naturally want to meet Jean. In the course of the conversation he’d be sure to mention that Philip had just purchased acres of his farmland.

Philip felt helplessly cornered. “I have to go back to Martha’s condo,” he announced. “I’m missing my wallet. I must have left it there. How soon will it be until we can move Martha to Sutton?”

“I don’t want to disturb her just yet,” replied Dr. Chen. “It’s important that we provide her with some nourishment from an IV first. The nurse said there should be one available within half an hour.”

“Half an hour,” exclaimed Jean. “Where are we living? In some banana republic? I want my mother moved to a real hospital now.”

“I’m going back to the condo,” said Philip again while he scanned the hallways for any sign of Jacob

“I have a better idea,” said Jean. “I’ll go. I need to pack a bag for Mother. Where did you leave your wallet?”

“It’s probably on the bathroom floor.”

“Be sure to pick up any medications she’s taking,” advised Dr. Chen.

Jean and Adam left. Philip wandered down the corridor in search of Jacob and Doris. He turned right and scanned a long hallway, easily spotting Jacob’s white hair. “Jacob. I saw you earlier, but I was busy with my mother-in-law. She was admitted here a couple of hours ago. How’s Doris?”

Jacob looked up at Philip, his lined face stained from tears. “Everything happened so quickly. Just after you left the farm I went into town to deposit the check. I was only gone about half an hour. When I returned, she had a bad spell, throwing up, sweating. Then she fainted. I couldn’t wake her. I thought she was gone.”

“She’ll recover, Jacob. Just give her a few days. She’ll be cooking fried chicken again before you know it. You mentioned the bank. The check went through?”

“No problems at all. This should have been a happy day. Now this.”

“I know exactly what you mean. You see, the land I bought from you and Doris was supposed to be a big surprise for our 25th wedding anniversary, but please don’t mention anything about the land to my wife. She’s just not able to cope with anything else today, good or bad.”

“I won’t say a thing. I’m not feeling sociable. I’d prefer to meet your wife at another time. I’m staying right here with Doris.”

Philip left Jacob to Doris, confident that he had diffused a potential land mine. He needed to use the downstairs men’s room. He passed by the clinic’s staff room, where a group was crowded around a television set. Curious, the judge stepped in for a look. A reporter filled the screen. She was standing on Oak Leaf’s main street, microphone in hand, the town’s large Co-Op in the background.

“All available ambulances in the area have been dispatched here to Oak Leaf. At last count, six people, aged 5 to 77 have died,” she reported breathlessly. “Hundreds more are reported sick. The governor is on his way here from Boston. The chief medical officer of health has dispelled rumors of a bird flu outbreak. We have also heard speculations of everything from SARS to Legionnaires disease as possible reasons for the outbreak. Homeland security is investigating the possibility of intentional mass poisoning, but it’s important that we stress that this is simply a rumor. We’ll resume our coverage after this break.”

Homeland security? repeated Philip. Bird flu? SARS? What was happening? The only explanation for the illnesses that he had heard had been attributed to food poisoning. He had been so preoccupied with Martha’s immediate health concerns that he’d given little, if any thought as to the cause of the outbreak. He’d better phone Andrea just to make sure she and the lawyers would show up for the land closing as scheduled. Nothing could go wrong. Settle down, he told himself. There was just a serious flu bug of some sort going around. His own mother had died in a nursing home from influenza. And it was the start of flu season. Perhaps the local grocery store had sold bad hamburger meat. That’s all it was. The media, as usual was just being hysterical. Still, he couldn’t shake the reporter’s disturbing facts. Six dead, hundreds sick. He had to find out more.

The people in the staff room numbered about 20. They stared vacantly at a cheesy local car commercial, the loudmouthed owner of the lot making a fool of himself. “Turn the channel,” Philip ordered. “See if there’s more coverage.”

A series of football games, the weather channel, cartoons and a sit-com flashed by. Then, CNN’s bold logo appeared on the screen. A perfectly coiffed blonde anchor woman read from a brightly lit set, looking concerned. A map of Massachusetts highlighting Oak Leaf in the top left hand corner of the state provided a backdrop behind her. *Breaking News* appeared in red graphics at the bottom of the screen. The story had gone national!

“Turn it up,” shouted someone.

“CNN is investigating the possible cause of the pandemic which is devastating the tiny town of Oak Leaf. We are joined by our correspondent Nicolas Manziatti from our affiliate WKGZ in Boston reporting live from ground zero.”

Philip groaned. Ground zero. Who writes this stuff? And the reporter has a surgical mask hanging around his neck.

“Barbara, I am standing just outside the Oak Leaf Clinic where over seventy five patients have been admitted over the past several hours. Conditions inside the facility are described as grim, with serious overcrowding. Shortages of IV’s and other medical supplies have been reported. Our crew has confirmed from local officials that many more are at home, perhaps hundreds, exhibiting classic symptoms of food poisoning, stomach cramps, diarrhea and vomiting. One patient here at the clinic succumbed to his illness just

an hour ago. The mysterious virus has now taken six lives, including that of a five year old boy. We are standing by for Dr. Carla Goldstein, Chief of Staff for this normally quiet--”

“Nicolas, I have to cut you off.” The CNN anchor referred somewhat awkwardly from notes just handed to her. “Word has just come to our desk that authorities have determined that the cause of the illness and deaths in Oak Leaf is from E.coli poisoning. The 0157:H7 strain to be specific. This is a particularly virulent strain of E. coli, sometimes found in uncooked meat. The organisms are thought to originate in the intestines of cattle. Tests have concluded that the bacterium has somehow infiltrated the town’s water system.”

Several people in the room gasped. Philip sank back against a wall.

“We have been asked to urge all people residing in the town of Oak Leaf and those in the surrounding area to boil their drinking water immediately and to refrain from taking baths or showers. Again, a boil-water advisory has been issued for the town of Oak Leaf, Massachusetts, and area effective immediately. Calls have been placed to the National Guard and to the Red Cross for shipments of bottled drinking water. And a sad note to pass on. We have just learned that a seventh person has died from what we now know is E. coli poisoning. We understand that the Governor has just arrived and will consider asking the federal government to designate Oak Leaf as a disaster zone. CNN will be staying with this story. We have a team of reporters, our own medical correspondents, and camera crews’ en-route to Oak Leaf as I speak. When we come back, we’ll be joined by the town’s mayor.”

The anchor faded from the screen accompanied by eerie music behind bright graphics which read *Crisis in Oak Leaf*. The producers had wasted no time in creating a new show. The timing of the disaster couldn’t have been better. Hurricane season had so far, been quiet, there were no recent sex scandals from Washington to expose, Iraq was yesterday’s news, and the North Koreans hadn’t yet started World War Three. The producers had plenty of air space to fill.

Philip broke out in a sweat, the words of the reporters and the disastrous implications of what he had just heard cascading through his head. The town’s water supply was contaminated! A disaster zone. Bacterium. A particularly virulent strain of E. coli. Seven dead, hundreds more ill. The drama was unfolding hourly—every possible development relentlessly reported on CNN, and no doubt on the FOX network as well. Oak Leaf’s fate was as good as sealed. The town would be known across the United States, and around the world for that matter, as the community whose water was toxic—an untreated sewer. An intolerable place to live, synonymous with misery and death.

The national media’s relentless reports would quickly decimate the town’s land values. A flu outbreak or mass food poisoning was one thing—a toxic water supply was catastrophic. Nobody would choose to buy property in Oak Leaf. Not for years. And the cable networks were just getting warmed up. They’d hammer the story to death as only they could. Coverage would only intensify as more people died. The media would be sure to cover the funerals with close-ups of weeping family members, and endless speculation for weeks as to how this could have happened. Not to be outdone, in just hours, ABC, CBS and NBC would lead with the unfolding drama on their evening news shows, reaching millions of other viewers, further eroding Oak Leaf’s land values. Then there were the newspapers, radio, and the Internet.

As a hovering helicopter shook the clinic, Philip continued to process the reality of the carnage surrounding him. At this point he had little concern or empathy for the sick or the dead. Instead, he contemplated his own personal demise. Andrea would cancel the land deal. She'd have no other choice. Phase Three was history. Lauder Holdings wouldn't be constructing anything new in Oak Leaf for years.

It was all over. Despite his careful planning, certain that proceeded cautiously and had considered every scenario possible, the unthinkable had still occurred—something completely unforeseeable.

Judge Philip Driscoll was stuck with 135 acres of utterly useless farm land. Worst of all, he had squandered nearly a million and a half dollars of someone else's money to buy it.

Twenty

Dry-land training and fitness testing at the Ashbury athletic complex had taken up most of Saturday. Ian's results had been impressive, registering excellent cardio scores after vigorous cycling sessions, as well as running drills, squats and push-ups. His flexibility, agility and reflex readings were superb; lung capacity and recovery rates better than average.

The team was off to Fredericton the following morning and wouldn't be back until Monday. He had no choice but to spend early Saturday evening trying to study for an up-coming history test but found it difficult to focus. The road-trip had him keyed-up, but it was the lost lottery ticket that nagged at him relentlessly.

For what must have been the fifth time that hour, he replayed the scene in the Colesium's sparking lot—the ringing cell phone, stashed trash bag and his shouting match with Pepin. The janitor was obviously the thief, but where was his wallet and that \$25 million dollar ticket?

He left his desk and wolfed down a candy bar while trying to figure out his next move. Emile Pepin had his wallet, or at least he'd had possession of it at one time or another. He could go to the cops with his suspicions about the janitor but that's all he really had—suspicions. There was no hard proof that Pepin had cleaned out the room. He had decided not to tell the cops that a ticket worth \$25 million dollars hung in the balance. That might open up a Pandora's Box of doubt, ridicule or possibly even a media circus. Tempting as it was, he wouldn't tell anyone about the ticket. The threat remained. Pepin might catch wind of the huge prize, find the ticket, and cash it himself. The ticket's whereabouts was a matter that had to be handled quietly.

He went to his bulletin board and took down Manny's business card. He sat on the edge of his bed, thinking. He had access to a private investigator—one who would work happily for free. A highly motivated private investigator with \$25 million reasons to check out Emile thoroughly. If he delayed taking action, Pepin might well destroy his wallet and with it, the ticket. Pepin had every reason to get rid of the evidence. The ringing cell-phone had betrayed him. The Rat had been found out and he knew it.

In hindsight he recognized that he should have told Manny that his wallet had been stolen when they had met in the parking lot. His initial fear that Manny would do some investigating, find the wallet himself, and forget about the promised reward seemed short-sighted now.

He would phone Manny and get him working right away. He just hoped that the detective would honor the promised reward. But why wouldn't he? After all, he'd still have \$24 million left over.

Ian went to his phone and examined the lone number on Manny's card, a number described as being his "mobile."

"This is Manny Boyce from Skyline Investigations. I'm sorry I've missed your call. Please leave your message and a number where I can reach you after the tone."

“Hi Manny. It’s Ian Sinclair...the guy with the Magnificent Millions ticket. It’s Saturday night. I didn’t tell you at the rink, but I wanted to let you know that I know where it is now. It’s a long story but Emile Pepin...the janitor at the Colesium has it. He stole it from our locker room. But he’s denying everything. I’m going to Fredericton tomorrow. You’re a private detective. Go to the Colesium and get the ticket before he finds it. It’s in my brown vinyl wallet. The ticket is in a credit card slot. I trust you on this... I went to the website and found out that the ticket is worth \$25 million so I know you can afford to give me that million bucks for my reward like you promised. I’ll phone you when we get to Fredericton. You have to go to the rink as soon as possible before Pepin loses the ticket or cashes it in himself... I really wanted to tell you all of this personally. You have to keep this quiet. I’ll try to reach you at the cab depot.”

Saturdays in the farming community of Sutton were hardly what one would call vibrant, however Manny had been on the go for five hours straight. Pick-ups from the hospital to home, fares to and from the bus station, grocery stores and a steady stream of shoppers laden with merchandise from the local Wal-Mart, were all in need of his cab. Later, the bar-flies would require his guarantee of a safe drive home. Saturdays were lucrative which was a good thing. The cabbie was for all intents and purposes, bankrupt.

How could someone who earned \$40,000 a year with no dependants be broke? This was a question posed every time he encroached on his line of credit to pay off his MasterCard, so that he could get a cash advance and make the minimum payment due on his Visa. Musical credit. It was born of sheer foolishness and a cycle that saw no respite. He was in far too deep, constantly trying to keep up with yesterday’s purchases. Nevertheless, he continued to eat virtually all of his meals in restaurants, smoke cigarettes by the carton, and for some inexplicable reason could never resist buying clothes he seldom wore and electronic gadgets that he had never needed.

Manny had however, made one crucial purchase—a new cell phone. Driscoll was evidently in no hurry to return his old phone or camera for that matter. He had called the courthouse repeatedly asking for the judge who never seemed to be in. His messages hadn’t been returned. He had tried Ian at Ashbury to tell him his new number but the university wouldn’t reveal students’ phone listings. He had decided to stay with his plan to drive to Ashbury and confront Ian early Sunday morning.

The cabbie patiently assisted an elderly woman to her apartment’s lobby and returned to his vehicle. His dispatcher was calling for him through the static of the two-way. “112 call home. 112 call home.”

He lifted the handset. “This is 112, Brock and Antrim.”

“Yeah, Manny, I have a message for you. Call an Ian Sinclair. Here’s the number.”

Ian! He had found the ticket! Manny seized his new cell. No tone. Sutton Tel had told him there might be a delay in activating it.

He tore back to his apartment and went straight to the land-line.

“It’s Manny Boyce. I got your message.”

“I guess I should have called you before now but here’s exactly what happened,” said Ian. “My wallet and the ticket were stolen by Emile Pepin. He’s the janitor at the Colesium.”

“How do you know this, exactly?”

“I saw him throw a trash bag in the dumpster. It contained stolen stuff from the locker-room but not my wallet. I know he has it somewhere. Come to Ashbury right away. You have to remember that my wallet is brown vinyl, kind of worn out. The ticket is in a back credit card slot, pushed way down. I doubt that he’s discovered it.”

“When does this Pepin guy work? What shift?”

“He’s always there in the mornings.”

“On Sundays?”

“I can’t be sure but just come. Track him down at home if you have to. He’ll be in the book. I’m trusting you to give me my reward.”

“Of course. I promise. Are the Ashbury cops aware of Pepin?”

“They know about the break-in, but nothing about the ticket.”

Manny checked his wall clock. Nearly seven. There was no point in driving to Ashbury now. The janitor would be at home. Better to intercept him at the rink. Besides, he didn’t have enough money for another motel stay. “I’ll pay Mr. Pepin a visit at the Colesium first thing in the morning. Maybe we should confront him together.”

“No, not with everyone around.”

“Who would be around?”

“We’re all meeting the bus at the Colesium before heading to Fredericton for our game. You can leave a message for me at the Fredericton Holiday Inn when you get the ticket. I really want to know as soon as possible.”

“I will. It’s important that we stay in touch. What’s your cell number?”

“I don’t have one.”

“I’ve got a new phone. It should be activated by tomorrow. Here’s the number. Got a pen?”

“Yeah.”

“I’m really glad you called,” said Manny. “I’ll confront Pepin and if that doesn’t work, I’ll bring in the Ashbury cops for help. I’ll let you know how it goes. I just hope that we’re not too late.”

Twenty-One

Philip left the Oak Leaf clinic's staff room, reeling from the shocking news that the town had been incapacitated by an E. coli bacteria outbreak.

Jacob had told him that he had already cashed the \$1.3 million check for the land. That would leave Martha with a balance of just under \$70,000. It wouldn't be long before Jean somehow stumbled upon her mother's depleted bank account. Certainly, if Martha recovered to the point that she could handle basic banking chores she'd discover her missing funds immediately. Martha would call in the lawyers, the cops.

The judge trudged heavily up the stairs and wandered as if in a trance down the corridor, stopping by Martha, who still lay sleeping in her wheelchair.

Dr. Chen was assisting a patient a few feet away.

A scratchy male voice from an overhead speaker made him jump. "Attention. The water supply to the clinic has been cut off. The water is contaminated with E. coli bacteria. The health department has issued a boil-water advisory for Oak Leaf and area. You are advised to refrain from bathing until further notice. Supplies of safe drinking water will be disbursed here within the clinic by staff members. We are told that there will soon be designated safe water stations throughout Oak Leaf."

Upon hearing the alarming announcement, Dr. Chen returned to Martha and Philip. "I knew it was something like this. It all adds up."

"I didn't know that E. coli could be so deadly."

"It depends on the strain. About 70,000 Americans are infected annually, with around 250 deaths. We'll just have to wait for now," she said looking at Martha. "Most patients recover from E. coli poisoning within 10 days or so, but it's common for some to have complications for years."

"I was in the staff room. The story just broke on CNN," said Philip.

"Did they suggest how this travesty could have happened?"

"I'm sure there'll be a thorough investigation. They'll be yakking about this for weeks."

"Aren't you interested in how there could possibly be a mass poisoning in Massachusetts?"

"Of course I am. It's just that the media grabs on to something like this and doesn't let go."

"Maybe that's a good thing."

Philip wasn't in the mood for further discussion. He watched as a nurse disbursed bottled water. He jumped from his chair. "Adam and Jean! They can't drink any water. I have to warn them. I don't have my cell."

"Use mine."

Philip stepped out a side door. "Don't drink any water. It's contaminated."

"I know. We've heard. How's Mother?"

"The same."

"We're in the car, just about back at the clinic. We should get moving to Sutton as soon as possible. You wouldn't believe the traffic leaving Oak Leaf. It's crawling, like

there's been an evacuation order or something. I've got things for Mother, but I couldn't find your wallet."

"I found it. We'll meet you out front."

"I'll help you to the car," said Dr. Chen. "I'll phone Dr. McNair and tell him to expect you. He's excellent with geriatric patients. My guess is that there'll be many patients from Oak Leaf in the Sutton hospital."

"I appreciate your assistance," said Philip as he wheeled Martha to the sidewalk. "You've been more than kind. There's Jean now."

Martha was helped into the back seat of the van. She settled in beside Jean. Adam sat up front with Philip.

"Look, Dad. Cool. A helicopter's landing!" exclaimed Adam excitedly. "There's the Red Cross. The stack of bottled water must be 100 feet high."

Philip was lost in thought. Lest the news reports on television had left any doubt, the vivid reality of brilliant flashing blue, orange and red emergency lights, seemingly everywhere; the stench of diesel fuel from convoys of army trucks carrying the National Guard; throngs of lost looking crowds on the streets and the wail of sirens surrounding them made it absolutely clear that there was, indeed, a crisis in Oak Leaf.

"Dad, did you see the chopper?"

"Yes I saw it. Keep it down would you? Your grandmother is trying to rest."

"You don't have to snap at him," admonished Jean.

"Where are we going?" came a weak voice, but unmistakably belonging to Martha. She had just completed her first complete sentence in hours.

"We're taking you to the Sutton hospital mom," replied Jean. "You'll be home in a few days. No. You'll be staying with us at the farm. How do you feel?"

"I don't want to go to a hospital," she said weakly. "And they're so expensive."

Philip spun back. "You have health insurance don't you?"

"Of course she has health insurance," said Jean.

"We'll be going right by Martha's condo. Ask your mother if she knows where her policy is. I want everything in order before we admit her to the hospital."

"In my satchel," replied Martha unexpectedly. "Top shelf in my bedroom."

Philip pulled in front of Martha's condo behind a long line of idling vehicles. Key in hand, he strode into the lobby. It looked as though a convention had just rolled in. Suitcases were piled in all directions.

Philip boarded a crammed elevator. The carriage rose, stopping at several floors. People got on and out squeezing past each other hurriedly.

He finally reached Martha's floor. He entered the condo and went straight to her bedroom. He retrieved her satchel and found her policy.

Stepping out to the living room he looked around. The light on her answering machine was flashing.

"Mrs. Van Whyte. It's Donald Abramsky at the bank. I have something I want to discuss with you. Would you please give me a call?" It's 720-9748."

Philip listened in dismay. The banker's call might well have destroyed him. He yanked the cassette from the machine, pulled out reams of celluloid and stuffed it all back in the slot making it appear as though the player had jammed.

He closed the door to the condo and peered down the hallway. There was a throng waiting for the elevator. Someone was gagging. He couldn't deal with the crowds and decided to take the stairs, all 17 floors.

The stairwell was cool and clammy. He gripped the iron tubular handrail and reached the ground floor in minutes. He stepped outside and walked to the van. As he opened the door and climbed in, the vehicle's big dome light came on and clearly illuminated his face. Philip glanced back at Martha. He was surprised to see that she seemed alert.

"You look upset," she said weakly. "Don't trouble yourself. I'll be home soon."

At the best of times, Sutton Regional Memorial Hospital was crowded despite the recent addition of a new wing built to cope with the expanding population in the area. Now, the significant influx of new patients who had fled Oak Leaf like refugees hours ago threatened to completely overwhelm the facility.

Exhausted administrators cross-checked identification papers to insurance documents and allowed the most vulnerable, mostly the young and the elderly the first chance to secure hospital rooms, wards and hallways. Others were told to return to the waiting area, with the assurance that they'd be seen by a doctor—eventually.

Martha was admitted to a room which she shared with three others. She appeared comfortable, sleeping soundly.

Eight hours had passed since Philip found Martha comatose on her bathroom floor. It felt more like days. He was anxious to get to his chambers, yearning for the quiet solitude that the room provided. It was there that he felt most in control. He had so much on his mind, so much to do

"Jean, I am going to take Adam back to the farm. There's no reason for him to stay here."

"Go ahead. Make him some dinner. There's lasagna in the freezer and a head of lettuce in the crisper."

Philip and Adam rode mostly in silence over the twenty minute drive to the farm. Philip's mind continued to reel. Martha paid for all of Adam and Heather's education. How would Adam fit in at the local high school? Because that's exactly where his son was headed should it be discovered that he had absconded with and lost his mother-in-law's money. And what about Heather's university? She'd simply have to go to a public college and take out student loans. If he were sent to prison, Jean would have to find work. She'd be lucky to find anything in Sutton that paid over \$25,000 annually. They'd have to sell the farm; it was an expensive place to maintain. More disruption for the children.

Philip tore apart some lettuce while Adam set the kitchen table. A tub of lasagna spun in the microwave.

"I wanted to ask you, Dad. Would you be able to show some of the guys at school around the courthouse, maybe even the jail?"

"We don't normally have tours."

"Mr. Matthews, our guidance teacher, asked us if our parents could show everyone where they worked. It's for career day in a few weeks. The guys would rather see the jail than some stockbroker's boring office. I already told him you'd say yes," he added, with a mischievous grin and wink which melted Philip's heart.

The judge's eyes welled with tears as he walked over to the microwave. He loved his children more than life itself and there was a distinct possibility that he was about to be separated from them, perhaps for years. "Tell Mr. Matthews that I'd be happy to show the boys around." I'll never let you or your sister see me in prison, Philip vowed. I'll do anything it takes to get out of this jam. Anything.

After their meal, Philip drove to the courthouse, listening to further reports from Oak Leaf.

"Hydrologists have determined that the source of the E. coli poisoning is from cattle feces. The record rainfall this autumn saturated surrounding fields, and allowed for the run-off of animal waste into an open well. A similar situation occurred in the town of Walkerton, just north of Toronto, Canada several years ago. In that case seven people died, many others to this day are still battling intestinal, kidney and liver ailments. An investigation is under way as to why the water inspectors in Oak Leaf failed to identify the E. coli strain in the town's drinking water before so many people were poisoned."

I smell a huge class-action lawsuit, thought Philip. Maybe Martha can get in on it. "Good evening, Your Honor," greeted a guard at the entrance of the courthouse. "Evening. I won't be long. Please make sure I'm not disturbed." He unlocked the heavy oak door to his private sanctuary and breathed in the familiar and comfortable musty smell of the formal judges chambers.

He referred to Abramsky's card and dialed. The banker answered on the second ring.

"Mr. Abramsky. It's Judge Driscoll. I know that you have been attempting to contact my mother-in-law, despite the fact that I told you that she is in the early stages of Alzheimer's and was not to be disturbed. This must stop. You'll only confuse her. Do you understand me?"

"Judge, I called Mrs. Van Whyte, because something came up at the branch."

"What do you mean, something came up?"

"For starters, you have transferred \$1.3 million dollars from Mrs. Van Whyte's bank account."

"I have indeed."

"I'm concerned."

"I made an investment on Martha's behalf. The money will be replaced within a week—not that it's any of your business."

"Actually it is my business. Following 9/11, the banks and other financial institutions nationwide are required to notify the Federal Government of any large monetary transactions. It's a security thing, presumably to alert the government of funds which may be funneled into terrorist groups or the like. I'll need your signature on the form before I send it in."

"Mail it to me."

"Seeing as you authorized the transfer of someone else's money, I'll need Mrs. Van Whyte's signature on it as well."

"Impossible. I have already told you. She has Alzheimer's."

"I know."

"Then why did you phone her? I heard your message on her machine."

“I couldn’t find your home number. I assume it’s unlisted. I was hoping that your mother-in-law might have had the wherewithal to have provided it to me. My thought was that I could have reached your wife and she could have facilitated and witnessed Martha’s signature.”

“There’s something you should know. Mrs. Van Whyte is gravely ill. She’s one of the victims from the contaminated water in your unfortunate town, and the last thing that Jean—any of us—need right now is to be pestered about some foolish paper-work.”

“I would never have phoned her or your wife at a time like this if I had had any idea.”

“Send the form to my attention at the courthouse.”

“I have. And I have also mailed one to Mrs. Van Whyte’s condominium along with a copy for Mrs. Driscoll. The bank will be covered.”

No problem, thought Philip. He had already exercised his Power of Attorney to have all of Martha’s mail forwarded to the court house. He’d intercept both copies.

“We’ll watch for them.”

“Thank you, Judge. I’ll be praying for Mrs. Van Whyte. Bless you all.”

Everyone’s a clergyman these days thought Philip hanging up.

There was more business to attend to. Philip removed Andrea’s number from under the blotter of his mahogany desk. He would approach her as though the land deal would proceed as planned.

“It’s Philip. I’m just confirming that everything is all set for tomorrow’s signings.”

“I’ve been expecting a call from you. Haven’t heard the news from Oak Leaf?”

“Yes, but I am sure so long as no one drinks the water we’ll be fine. We could move the meeting to Sutton if that’s more convenient.”

“Philip, you don’t seem to understand. We can’t go ahead. We have no use for that land now. The deal is off.”

“What!” exclaimed Philip feigning shock. “You can’t possibly back out now. Why would you do this?”

“Seven people have died in Oak Leaf. Hundreds more are sick. It’s all over the news. I’m watching it right now.”

“Yes, I know. But this will all blow over. They’ll fix the water problems. The media will tire of the story and turn their attention to the next crisis that catches their interest.”

“The damage has been done. The poisonings and deaths are being showcased nationally 24/7. It’s all about perception. The real estate market is extremely sensitive to things like this. There’s no way that anyone will be moving to—much less buying real estate in Oak Leaf for years. Phase Three is off the books. The plans have been shelved. At this point we’d have better luck selling condos in Chernobyl,” she added confirming everything that he already knew.

“In that case, would you be interested in purchasing the land I bought from Pringle for what I paid for it?”

“And how much was that?”

“I purchased it for \$1.3 million.”

“And we were prepared to give you \$2.5. You’d have made over \$1 million.”

“Don’t you think I know that,” snapped Philip. He took a breath and tried to calm himself. “But seeing as you think I made such a good deal, why don’t you purchase the land back from me? I’ll let it go for \$1.3 million. Exactly what I paid for it.”

“Why would we purchase land that’s perceived as tainted when there are other areas of the state that we can focus on? Thanks to the media, the whole country by now thinks that Oak Leaf is a stinking open sewer. Phase Three is history. It’ll never happen. The last thing we need is any more land in Oak Leaf. We’ll be lucky to sell the remaining units we still have in our other building. They’ll have to be deeply discounted for any movement.”

“Please, just give me what I paid for it,” pleaded Philip

“Are you holding a mortgage on the land?”

“Frankly, yes. A huge mortgage.”

“I’m sorry. It should have worked out for all of us.”

“I should never have let you con me into this deal.”

“Con you? Oh please. It was an incredible opportunity for you to pocket a huge amount of money within a day or so and you know it. As it stands, we will have to eat your \$35,000 deposit.”

“Just know that you haven’t heard the last from me. I have formidable legal connections. I’ll sue. I’ll--”

“It’s over, Philip. Accept it. Move on. You have some excellent land. It’s not as though you’ve lost everything. It’s just a set-back. Give it a few years. You’ll still be able to make a profit. I have to go now. You’re not the only one with financial concerns. I’m trying to salvage two sales that closed last week.”

Philip slumped low in his chair and stared at the dark paneling which lined his chambers. A few years. Right. Martha’s money had to be replaced immediately, and the only prospect to do that lay in the remote possibility that the Pringles might purchase the land back from him. Now that they had paid their taxes, perhaps they’d reconsider the deal. He looked at his watch. Just after eight. Not too late to call.

“Hello?” It was an unfamiliar voice.

“It’s Judge Driscoll for Jacob Pringle. Who is this?”

“Douglas. Jacob and Doris’s son.”

“I called to have a word with your father. Is he available?”

“Just a moment.”

Philip reached for the remote and turned on a small TV mounted high in a corner of his chambers. He stopped at the FOX network. It was airing a heartbreaking “exclusive” interview with the bereaved parents of a five year old boy who had succumbed to E. coli poisoning early in the day. Parents, who for some reason had agreed to share their anguish with the world. The camera zoomed in slowly in search of tears. He tapped the remote impatiently on his desk as he waited for Jacob to come to the phone.

“My father doesn’t want to speak with you,” replied Douglas eventually.

“That’s understandable. I imagine he’s completely worn out. I was hoping to come out to see him tomorrow. There’s something I’d like to discuss.”

“What do you want to talk to him about?”

Philip exhaled noisily. He wanted to speak with Jacob, but he wasn’t in a position to be selective. “I wanted to explore the possibility of selling the land back to your parents, minus the tax money of course.”

A long pause ensued.

“Hello?”

“I can answer that for you. I’m glad you called. My father and I were talking about the land that they sold to you just today. It was to have been left to me. I’m convinced my parents will agree to buy it back from you. In fact, you can count on it.”

Philip’s lurched forward on his chair. His heart leapt, flooded with joy and immense relief. There was a god. He had given away his life, but now he had it back!

“Yeah. I’m sure that we can work something out. Be here at 10:00 tomorrow morning.”

“I could come earlier if it’s more convenient, even tonight.”

Douglas had hung up.

Twenty-Two

Preparations for the annual exhibition game between the Ashbury Wildcats and the University of New Brunswick Varsity Reds were all in place. The teams would clash on Sunday night.

The Wildcats were scheduled to leave Ashbury early Sunday morning. They would drive north through Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and then Maine en route to the border towns of Calais, Maine and St. Stephen, New Brunswick. They expected to cross into Canada by one in the afternoon.

From St. Stephen, it was about an hour to Fredericton where the team would check into the Holiday Inn, have a meal, and take it easy before heading to the Aitken Center, home of the Reds.

The game was organized by Coach Cannon and his close friend, Scotty MacMillan. They had known each other for years having played semi-pro hockey together in Baltimore in the 60s. MacMillan had told Cannon that the game was a sell-out, with over 3,500 fans expected. After expenses, proceeds from the gate would be directed to scholarship funds, split between the two schools.

The universities alternated visits. The previous fall, the Reds had won the game 3-2 at the Colesium. Cannon had good naturedly promised revenge this year. The boys enjoyed the rivalry and playing in another country always added a sense of adventure to the experience.

Emile Pepin was well aware of the annual contest. After Teresa had left the house for work, he slipped on a pair of rubber gloves and went to the basement closet. He unearthed the remaining wallets he had stolen and hidden among a box of Christmas decorations. He had planned to sell the boys' documents but he had a more immediate use for them.

He rummaged through the wallets and removed driver's licenses, some birth certificates, social security cards and the student visa owned by an Igor Antanoff. He stuffed the documents into Ian Sinclair's wallet and bound it with a thick elastic band.

Teresa was home from work by four. They spent their Saturday shopping at the mall, and picked up a couple of movies to watch that night.

About midnight, Emile told Teresa that he needed to go out to get cigarettes. He left the house and made the short drive to the Colesium. Familiar with all ice-bookings, he knew that the building would be empty.

Earlier in the day he had observed Fridge and his assistants fastidiously organizing a set of clean sweaters, neatly placed on hangers. Over two dozen sticks sat in a portable rack. The boy's equipment had been washed, skates sharpened, and hockey bags packed in preparation for the trip to Fredericton. The gear would be loaded from the equipment room onto the bus first thing in the morning.

Emile drove to his spot behind the arena and entered by the back door. The Colesium was silent. He walked down the hall to the equipment room and unlocked the wooden doors. The room smelled like liniment and sweat.

He spotted Ian's number 16 sewn on the side of his red nylon hockey bag. He slipped on his rubber gloves, unzipped the bag, and tucked Ian's wallet, fat with stolen documents, into a hockey sock.

There you go, you spoiled brat, thought Emile smirking. You wanted your wallet back so badly—enjoy it! He locked up and returned to his car.

Emile left the Colesium and drove to a pay phone several blocks away. He pulled out a telephone number which he had looked up earlier in the day, swiped his phone card, and dialed.

A woman answered. "Canada Border Services," followed by something in French.

"I have a tip. It's about a bus coming to the Canadian border."

"Go ahead."

"At around 1:00 p.m. Sunday, tomorrow, there will be bus arriving at the Calais, Maine-St. Stephen, New Brunswick border. The bus will be from Ashbury Massachusetts, full of university students—hockey players going to Fredericton, New Brunswick. I have knowledge that there are guns and drugs on board as well as stolen documents, including stolen student visas. You will find them in hockey bags in the bus compartments."

"Repeat what you have just said."

Emile complied.

"Just to be sure. You said the Calais-Stephen, border crossing?"

"Yes. But you should put out a general alert for a bus from Ashbury Massachusetts to all crossings leading from Maine to New Brunswick."

"Please identify yourself."

"No. I have to remain anonymous for my safety."

"All right. I have your information."

Emile hung up, jittery, but pleased with his performance. His embellished story, adding drugs and guns to the mix, would ensure a thorough search.

Once it came to everyone's attention that Ian Sinclair was in possession of the remaining documents missing since the locker room break-in, there would be no doubts whatsoever that he had stolen from the team. What other possible explanation could there be? Sinclair would be kicked off the team. Shunned. The bus might be turned back, the game cancelled, and all because of Ian Sinclair.

The big hockey star deserved anything the border agents would throw at him, thought Pepin bitterly. The boy had humiliated him right in front of Cannon. He'd called him a thief before the whole team. Big mistake.

His small house came into view. Revenge was sweet, but the most important outcome from the plant would be the fact that he, Emile Pepin, would no longer be considered a suspect in the theft. Goulding and Singh would leave him in peace. His job would remain secure.

He parked the car and strutted up his walk feeling 50 pounds lighter. He wore a self-satisfied sneer. Nobody messed with Emile Pepin. Nobody.

Twenty-Three

Sunday morning. Philip had been up before the newspaper arrived in anxious anticipation of his crucial meeting with Jacob Pringle.

Jean had decided to stay at Martha's bedside overnight. He had called and learned that Martha's condition was stable. She would have tests later in morning.

After breakfast Philip drove Adam to the Su Hi Karate School. He was going for his black belt within a couple of years. The judge found Don Morrissey, a family friend, whose son took karate lessons with Adam. He asked if Adam could spend the day with them, explaining that Martha was ill, and that he and Jean would be commuting to and from the hospital. Morrissey readily agreed, leaving Philip to focus completely on his trip to Oak Leaf, and the important mission at hand. Philip gave Adam his cell phone and instructed him to phone Jean if he needed anything before he got back.

Philip's stomach churned as he approached the fringes of Oak Leaf. He was a little early, but Jacob had most likely been up for hours. Smoke rose from the tall red chimney. Everything was still—no sign of the dog. He pulled up beside an unfamiliar car which he guessed belonged to Douglas, the Pringle's son.

He sat for a moment rehearsing his spiel. He'd ask Jacob and Doris to buy their land back citing Martha's ill health, and the need for money to care for her. It wasn't a difficult story to fabricate. It happened to be the truth. A truth that terrified him. As such, he'd probably be quite convincing. Besides, he thought, Douglas had seemed amenable to the idea of repurchasing the land. He had said it was to have been left to him.

The judge climbed out of his vehicle and was about half way between the van and the farmhouse door, when it suddenly opened. A dark haired, thick-set man dressed in blue jeans and a white T-shirt stepped out and closed the door decisively behind him. This had to be Douglas thought Philip. The man's body language was abrupt and business-like, indicating that this was perhaps to be a private meeting without Jacob's involvement. As he walked closer, Philip could hear the dog barking and growling from within the kitchen.

"Driscoll?"

"Yes. Philip Driscoll. I know I'm a little early but--"

"Don't come any closer. The dog doesn't take kindly to trash like you. My father might just let her out."

Philip's knees locked. Douglas' insult far less injurious than the terrible realization that he had been lured to the farm on some kind of false pretext—that he wasn't going to recover Martha's money after all. "I beg your pardon?" was all he could manage.

"I said you had better stay where you are."

They know. They somehow know that he had planned to flip the land. But how? The judge stood in his tracks, stymied, not at all sure what to say next. His attention was directed to the back door which opened slowly, preceded by much clawing and excited barks mixed with deep growls. Jacob emerged—the large tan and black farm dog restrained by a thick leather leash. The animal choked as it stood up on its hind legs.

Philip was convinced that a collar and lead held by an elderly man were the only objects separating him from a violent mauling.

“What’s this?” shouted Jacob as he waved some papers around with his free hand. “What’s the meaning of this?” he demanded plaintively.

Philip stepped forward slightly. “Jacob, I don’t know what you’re trying to show me.”

“I’ll tell you what this is. It’s a copy of a deed. The deed for the land that I sold to you.”

Philip was confused, but let him continue.

“And do you know what it’s attached to? A proposal to the Oak Leaf County Council Planning Committee. I can’t be bothered reading it all to you, but it was to have been offered as proof to Council that Lauder Holdings had an agreement with you that my land would be available to them for more development. That you’d sell it to them,” he added pointing to the papers. “These documents were prepared in advance for a presentation, but the meeting has been cancelled because of the poison.”

Philip stared on, listening helplessly, one eye on Jacob, the other on the dog.

“My cousin happens to sit on the Planning Committee. He brought me these papers yesterday. He wanted me to know what was happening—that we might have had bulldozers around here soon.”

“Jacob. I--”

The farmer’s voice shook with anger. “Shut up. For a judge you’re incredibly stupid. Don’t you realize what a small community we are? Did you think I wouldn’t have found out? I don’t suppose you really cared. You were planning to flip the land to a developer. Your story about retiring here and raising horses was all a bunch of lies. But now you’re stuck with the land because of the E. coli thing. The developers don’t want it any more do they? And you thought you could come out here and we’d buy it back. You’re a joke.”

Philip stared at the ground, humiliated at this dressing down, and sickened at the prospect of that he was most certainly going to be stuck with acres of useless land.

Jacob’s rant continued. “Things have a way of working out. You paid me well over \$1 million for land that no one wants right now. We got our money. No one will want that land for years. But you know, I don’t really care so much about that. What I’ll never understand is how you could have come into our home and lied to Doris and to me. How you could have sat down for dinner and pretended that we were friends...perhaps even relatives. You’re a judge for god’s sake. I even made you that nice mail box. It took me hours to carve it. And Doris stained and varnished it.” With that recollection his heated tirade gave way to tears. He drew a handkerchief from the back pocket of his green overalls and blew his nose loudly.

Douglas walked over to console his father. He draped his arm around his Jacob’s shoulder. “Come on, Dad. Go back in the house. You’ve had your say.”

Jacob turned back towards Philip. “You’re a real bastard, you know that? A real bastard.” He passed the dog off to Douglas went back inside.

Douglas glowered fiercely at the judge. “I don’t know how you can live with yourself. My parents have been in constant tears because of you and I hold you directly responsible for my mother’s deteriorating health. I brought you out here to face my father. He needed to confront you. And I wanted a shot at you too. Just get back in your

van and get out of here. Don't you ever set foot on this farm again or I swear, I'll kill you. And by the way, if you still want to sell your land, I'd be willing to offer you say, \$2,000 for it."

Douglas's heated pitch had riled the dog again. It snapped, growled, whined and barked at the judge, raising its hackles, revealing pointed teeth.

Philip turned and walked away. He was within feet of the door when he heard Douglas's soft but shocking command: "Get him, girl. Sic-em."

Stricken with panic, Philip slipped and stumbled on the wet grass as he lunged for the van's door. He flung it open, grabbed the steering wheel, and hoisted his right leg safely inside the cabin. That's as far as he got.

Oddly, the animal's bite wasn't that painful. Not at first. Most of the pain was veiled by the sheer horror of being attacked. "It's biting me," his cries raw with fear. "Do something." He frantically pulled his torso across the seat. The farm dog so far had been satisfied with Philip's leg, and held on about three inches above the ankle.

Douglas slapped at the dog's hind end. "Gretel! Back off. That's enough." The dog relinquished its prey and the crazed snarling subsided.

"Back to the house."

The dog obeyed, slinking low and dragging its leash along the long damp lawn.

Philip hauled his injured leg into the safety of the van and slammed the door.

"That animal should be shot."

"Sometimes she gets away on us," commented Douglas casually.

"Gets away on you? You turned the dog on me. You made her attack," choked Philip through a crack in the window. "I'll have that dog put down. Believe me I'll make sure it's destroyed. It mangled my leg."

"Too bad."

"I'm going to sue you."

"Not likely. Around here farm dogs are allowed to protect private property, especially against shysters like you. Get the hell out of here. I'm telling you again. If I find you on this property once more I'll break you in half. And good luck trying to unload your land—loser."

Twenty-Four

Coach Cannon, Keith Lawler, Fridge and various assistants arrived at the Colesium early on Sunday morning in preparation for the road trip to Fredericton.

Fridge made some last minute repairs to goalie pads, packed extra towels, and sharpened several pairs of skates. Cannon looked over the boy's passports and double checked hotel arrangements, while Lawler repacked his medical bag and reviewed penalty-killing strategy. Nearly two dozen hockey bags were loaded into a modern bus, along with sweaters, sticks and water bottles.

Pepin had made himself scarce, but the coach had come across the janitor in the arena's canteen. Normally effusive, Pepin had seemed distant and jumpy, spilling his coffee as he removed it from the machine.

The locker room theft continued to eat at Cannon. A thief in his team's midst was intolerable. He reflected on the parking lot scene the day before. Ian had known that Troy O'Neil's cell phone was buried in a trash bag in the dumpster. Sinclair claimed to have heard its distinctive ringtone coming from a trash bag in Pepin's car. He had also claimed to have seen Pepin throw that same bag into the dumpster. But Pepin had been adamant. *"I didn't have a phone in the car. He must have heard my car radio."*

On a hunch, Cannon put his briefcase in the bus and then walked to the back of the Colesium. He peered into Pepin's Toyota. No radio. Not even a spot for one.

He'd lied. Car radio. Bullshit. It was too late to take his suspicions about Pepin to the police. The bus would be pulling out shortly. He'd have to deal with Pepin on Monday.

The boys arrived in the vans half an hour later. They piled out excitedly in eager anticipation of the trip. Groups of parents, Wildcats' fans from the Ashbury community and students from the Booster Club milled about talking amongst themselves.

Cannon paraded around with a clipboard looking very much like an army general. "Attention. I would like you to board the bus now. The front seats are reserved for coaching staff. If you've got wrappers, soda tins and the like, use the trash bags provided."

The reference to trash bags resonated with Ian. He spotted Pepin from the bus window. He was standing by the rink's entrance, a coffee in one hand, smoke in the other. Lazy stinking thief. Manny would be arriving in Ashbury shortly. Hopefully he'd ambush the crook and get the ticket back. Wishful thinking. Pepin had done something with his wallet. He'd never get it back.

Fans followed the boys into the bus. Ian had saved a seat for Heather, who came aboard a few minutes later with a group of friends. She joined him about half way down the aisle.

After a roll-call, the bus rolled out. Cannon was pleased. The boys had shown up on time, well groomed, no jeans, as he had directed.

The day was sunny but cool. I-95 was busy but moving efficiently. Boisterous joking gave way to naps and reading by the time the bus crossed into Maine. A couple of

hours later they pulled into Fat Albert's Food Emporium—a cavernous roadside restaurant which Cannon had discovered years ago. It was famous for its long all you can eat buffet. The coach was sure the owners would lose money with his herd of famished teenagers.

“Fill up with lots of carbs,” instructed Keith Lawler. “Spaghetti, lasagna, any kind of pasta is good for your energy reserves.”

They resumed their north-eastwardly trek. Ian looked at Heather. She was sleeping. He had too much on his mind to rest. The missing lottery ticket continued to gnaw at him—a distraction he didn't need. It was important that he devote all his efforts to playing well. The game was an ideal opportunity to showcase his talents in front of NHL scouts. He would, as usual, be the center of attention on the ice—studied carefully by scouts, screamed at by fans, and shadowed by the opposing players. After the game he'd be in demand for interviews. He was getting used to his notoriety, quite enjoying the attention.

Seven rows up, Cannon looked at his watch. They had made excellent time. The coach stood. “I want everyone to listen up. We'll be at the Canadian border soon, and we'll have to clear customs. I will meet with the guards and show them your passports. They'll probably ask you a few questions. I want you all on your best behavior. Answer all their questions, but don't say anything more than necessary. There is to be no eating, drinking or listening to music while the officers are on the bus, and no one is to be in the bathroom. We'll be at the border within the hour.”

Annette Coulter, a senior Canada Customs official was on duty in her kiosk. She reached for the microphone of her two-way radio. “They're here. I'll board the bus, look for anything suspicious, and then direct the driver to the parking lot. Arrange for the dogs.”

Vince McBride, a tall, lanky red-head, fresh out of college, had heard her instructions clearly. “Do you think we'll have any trouble?”

Coulter referred again to a faxed bulletin which had been waiting for her that morning in the customs office. “No. But we should be prepared to uncover firearms, drugs, and stolen documents in hockey bags. You stay in the building until I call for you.”

Coulter switched a signal light to green. Air brakes hissed as the bus pulled up to her booth. The door swung open. Cannon greeted Coulter on the lower step.

“What is the purpose of your visit to Canada?”

“My team has a hockey game in Fredericton, tonight.”

“How long will you be staying in Canada?”

“One night. Tonight. We'll be returning to Ashbury, Massachusetts tomorrow morning.”

“How many on board?”

“We have 73 in total.”

Coulter stepped aboard the bus. Cannon looked her over. The agent's hair was cut short. Her probing brown eyes were decidedly unfriendly. Navy blue trousers surrounded her broad hips. A shiny brass badge hung from a matching jacket. “Driver, proceed to the parking lot.”

While the bus moved ahead, Coulter walked down the aisle, directing most of her attention to the younger passengers, repeating, "Do you have any firearms? Do you have anything to declare? Where are you from?"

She returned to the front of the bus and asked to be given the microphone. "I want you to leave the bus in an orderly fashion."

Cannon groaned. This was trouble. He disembarked with the others.

Coulter waved for McBride who came out from a nearby building marshalling two leashed German Shepherds.

"There is no reason to be afraid of the dogs," said Coulter. "Please spread out alongside the bus."

McBride handed off a dog to Coulter. The canines obediently sniffed the passengers, receiving encouragement of "good boy," and "sniff."

"You can get back on the bus," said Coulter. "Driver. Open the compartments."

McBride hauled out the hockey bags and luggage. The parking lot was soon strewn with shin pads, shoulder pads, hockey pants, underwear and skates. There was no sign of the promised firearms, drugs, or documents. No interest in anything from the dogs. A bum tip thought Coulter. Someone with a grudge; possibly the work of their competition, or a player who hadn't made the team.

McBride pulled a wallet from a hockey sock. He examined its contents. "I may have something here."

A dozen boys and fans crowded against the bus's window, watching. "Hey, Ian. That's your bag isn't it?" asked Dinsdale loudly enough for half the bus to hear. "They're taking stuff out of your wallet."

Ian's eyes were transfixed on the proceedings outside the bus. His wallet! Where had it come from? Had it been in his bag the whole time? No. Impossible, he'd have seen it. Didn't matter. He'd get that million dollar reward after all. The ticket just had to be the credit card slot. But what were they examining?

Together the agents looked over each document, one at a time. "The wallet belongs to an Ian Sinclair," said Coulter removing his license from a plastic window.

"Here's a birth certificate. Now here's something interesting, a student visa."

"The documents belong to different people," commented McBride. "It looks like there was something to our tip after all. Are you thinking identity theft?"

"I don't know. Take the dogs back to the kennel, and wait for me in the office."

Coulter entered the bus.

"What's going on ma'am?" asked Cannon.

Coulter squinted as she read Ian's license. "If there's an Ian Sinclair on board, I'd like him to come to the front of the bus." "What does she want?" asked Heather.

"Probably wants to return my wallet. I'll be right back."

Heather got up and let Ian out from the window seat. He walked up the narrow aisle to the front of the bus, receiving curious gazes.

"Come with me," ordered Coulter quietly. "You as well, Mr.--"

"Cannon. Morley Cannon."

"Where are we going?" asked Ian, confused.

Led by Coulter, Ian and Cannon walked across the concrete parking lot to a small building sheathed in rusty blue aluminum siding.

Coulter, pointed at several metal chairs around a table. "Sit down."

Ian obliged and surveyed the room. His eyes locked on a small holding cell. To his right was a small kitchenette. Water dripped from an old fashioned faucet into a stained porcelain sink. The office was chilly. A dog whined mindlessly somewhere out back.

McBride entered the room from an adjoining hallway and joined them. "Put the evidence on the table," directed Coulter.

Ian gawked at his wallet. His \$1 million reward just feet away!

"Mr. Sinclair," started Coulter, "We found that wallet in a hockey bag. Is it yours?"

"Yes. It's my old wallet. It was stolen by the janitor at our rink. He must--"

"Enough. Just answer my questions. In your wallet we found documents which belong to other individuals. Explain."

"The janitor at our rink must have planted it in my bag," said Ian, embarrassed that beads of sweat were trickling maddeningly down his sides, soaking and staining his dress shirt.

Coulter spread the documents before the coach. "Mr. Cannon. Can you identify these documents?"

"They belong to members of my team. We had a break-in."

"So you are confirming that these documents are, indeed, stolen," said Coulter.

"Yes But you can't pin that on Ian. They were planted in his wallet. Just as he said."

"Why should I believe that?"

"Because Ian certainly wouldn't have stolen from his team-mates. He had nothing to do with any of this. I don't know if you follow College hockey?"

"No."

"The point I want to make is that Ian Sinclair is ranked number two nationwide."

"So?"

"He wouldn't jeopardize his scholarship by messing around with stolen meal cards."

"Mr. Sinclair's athletic prowess is of no concern to me," retorted Coulter icily.

"And we have far more here than stolen meal cards."

"I've never seen those licenses and things," interjected Ian.

"Mr. Cannon, we have reason to believe that Mr. Sinclair was attempting to smuggle stolen documents into Canada."

"Oh come on."

Ian half rose from his chair. "No way. I didn't put those things in my wallet or in my bag."

"Be quiet and sit. McBride, stay here with Mr. Sinclair. We won't be longer than fifteen minutes." Coulter spun towards the coach. "Mr. Cannon, follow me. We have to talk."

Several minutes passed.

"I was wondering if you can tell me what's going on?" asked Ian breaking an awkward silence.

"Just sit tight," McBride answered abruptly. "I've got work to do." He opened a laptop computer, and began to peck at the keyboard.

Ian stared intently at his wallet which sat on the table to McBride's left. He had to find a way to get it. With Coulter gone, this might be his only opportunity. His heart thumped violently—faster than he had ever remembered, even before his biggest games.

"I hate filling out these reports," muttered McBride. "You're from Massachusetts, right?"

"What are you writing about me? I didn't do anything."

The agent stopped typing for a moment and looked over his work. He blew on the computer's keyboard. "Dog hair. It's everywhere. Gets right inside the motherboard. I hate those dogs."

That was it, thought Ian excitedly. He'd create a diversion. A big one, and in the process he'd grab his wallet.

"I have to use the bathroom."

"Be my guest," said McBride pointing at the stainless toilet in the holding cell. "There's a throne in there with your name on it."

"I need some privacy. Your boss could come back at any moment and see me. Besides," he added, "the toilet may be gross. Have you cleaned it recently?"

"Cleaned it? Me? You've got to be kidding. There's a bathroom around the corner. Don't even think of stepping out of the building. The side-door has an alarm."

Ian entered a small men's room. He flushed the toilet, ran the sink on full and left the door to the room open. He walked over to a vending machine that he had almost run into when he entered the building. He pulled out a fistful of change and purchased two Big Q Colas. He turned off the sink's faucets. Holding a tin in each hand, he shook them fiercely and rejoined McBride.

"I bought a soda. Got one for you too," said Ian cheerfully sideling up close to McBride.

The young agent looked up from his computer screen. "No. I don't want it. Just go and sit down."

Ian placed the tin on the table "OK. Have it later." He stepped back behind the agent's shoulder. One final but subtle shake. He aimed his soda directly at McBride's laptop and popped the tab, simultaneously releasing a fizzy stream of sticky cola which sprayed forth over the screen and the keyboard of his computer.

"What are you doing!" screamed McBride as he attempted to shield the lap top with his arms and hands from any further assault.

"Sorry. Sorry." He aimed the remaining spray at the table. He dropped the tin on the table where it spewed out cola like hot lava.

McBride tilted the computer to its side urgently trying to drain the screen and the keyboard of the caramelized sugar. "You idiot. It's everywhere. Get me some paper towels by the sink. Now. Wet ones. I can't believe this. Who said you could open that?"

Ian ran to the sink and spun off a long stream of towels and soaked them under the tap. He bunched them up, and raced back to the table.

"Give me some!" ordered McBride frantically.

Ian set his attention to the table top making wide swaths with the towels soaking up rivers of bubbly cola which ran everywhere. He glanced at McBride who was dabbing frantically at the keyboard. Ian deftly placed the towels over his wallet and gathered it within the soggy clump.

The agent blew feverishly on the lap-top. "This computer is ruined. How could you be so stupid? Get me more towels. Dry ones this time."

Ian ran back to the sink; separated his wallet from the mushy towels; and with two fingers fished out the ticket from a credit card slot. He jammed it down the front of his underwear.

"Come on. Hurry."

He pulled off several more sheets and hid the wallet within them. He yanked a few more towels for McBride, and ran back to the table. The guard snatched the towels and patted at the screen. Ian wiped at the table and calmly slid the wallet back in its place.

"Do you know how expensive these things are? Coulter will have your head. You'd better tell her what you did. None of this was my fault. Just go and sit down. I should have never let you out of your seat."

Whatever, thought Ian as he returned to the other side of the table.

McBride continued to fuss excitedly over his lap-top.

Ian watched, biting his lip, scarcely able to hold back laughter. Pepin had handed his wallet back, practically gift-wrapped, and a \$1 million awaited!

Agent Coulter and the coach stood in a small storage room cluttered with two broken chairs, boxes of files, an old computer and assorted uniforms. "I'm not going over this again, Mr. Cannon. I am going to send your bus back based on the discovery of stolen documents hidden in Ian Sinclair's wallet."

Cannon stood silent, his mind spinning.

"And we have no choice but to detain Mr. Sinclair. He's been found to be in possession of stolen property."

"Ruining our game is bad enough, but don't you understand how serious this is for Ian?" protested Cannon. "He'll lose his scholarship, be kicked right out of Ashbury—his reputation ruined. I'll be forced to remove him from the team. Other colleges and NHL teams will shun him. We looked into this boy carefully before offering him a scholarship. He's always worked. Good grades. He's never been in trouble in his life. His future will be destroyed."

"That's only if he's found guilty," pointed out Coulter.

"I'm convinced that the stuff was planted. It was a sleazy attempt to implicate Ian in something he didn't do. I'll post a bond for him, whatever it takes. Please, he can't be kept here. He's not a criminal."

"We've been over this. I have no other choice. Please come with me."

Coulter led the way back to the office. She entered the room and approached Ian. "Mr. Sinclair, you will be detained here for the night."

Ian leapt from his chair. "No way!"

"On exactly what grounds are you detaining Ian?" demanded Cannon. "Spell them out for him."

"On suspicion of identity theft, and attempting to smuggle stolen documents into Canada. We will notify the U.S. consulate. Mr. Sinclair will have access to a lawyer within 24 hours, if not sooner. She nodded to McBride. "Take Mr. Sinclair to the holding cell and search him."

"But Ian hasn't done anything," protested Cannon. "You can't lock him up like some criminal."

“Mr. Cannon. Please don’t presume to tell me what I can and cannot do. Mr. Sinclair will be detained until he has a hearing in Youth Justice Court here in St. Stephen.”

“Then what?”

“If the court decides that there are grounds for charges, he’ll be remanded to a secure facility—the New Brunswick Youth Center at Miramichi and held until trial.”

“Where the hell is Miramichi? Secure facility. That’s just a nice name for prison isn’t it?”

“Miramichi is in eastern New Brunswick, about a four hour drive from here. And yes, in the truest sense the remand center is a secure custody facility.”

“So you’re going to lock him up in a foreign country with a bunch of delinquents, drug pushers, and thieves. Ruin his future over a planted wallet. That makes a lot of sense.”

Ian was horrified at what he had just heard. “I don’t want to be sent to prison.”

“You will receive a fair hearing. A lawyer will be appointed for you.” Coulter turned impatiently towards the younger agent. “Mr. McBride. I have just instructed you to take Mr. Sinclair to the holding cell.”

McBride reached for Ian’s arm.

Ian raised his fist provocatively. “Touch me and I’ll knock your teeth out.”

“Ian!” roared Cannon.

“That’s enough,” ordered Coulter stepping in. “Mr. Sinclair you’re not in some hockey rink. Cooperate or I’ll call the R.C.M.P. and have you taken to the city jail. Believe me, you wouldn’t like it there.”

McBride escorted Ian to the cell. “Empty your pockets.”

Ian gingerly dug out a set of keys, a package of gum and his new wallet. He tossed them on the cell’s cot.

“Mr. Sinclair,” barked Coulter, “you’ll need your clothes and toiletries. Do you have a bag on the bus?”

“With my friend, Heather Driscoll. May I see her? She can bring my things.”

Coulter nodded at McBride. “Go.”

McBride came back with Heather at his heels. She spotted Ian at the end of the room. “What’s going on? Why have they put you in there?”

“Put his bag on the table,” said Coulter. “McBride, search it. She can visit with Ian for a few minutes. Mr. Cannon and I are going to the bus.”

“I have to make a phone call first,” said Cannon. “The least I can do is give our competition an early head’s up that we won’t be able to play. It’s a real shame that you’re going to ruin an important fund-raiser.”

“You can’t send the bus back,” cried Ian. “Everyone will think it’s my fault.”

“Mr. Sinclair, stop your outbursts,” ordered Coulter. “Mr. Cannon, make your call. I’ll meet you outside the bus.”

The coach stepped out of the room, cell phone in hand.

Heather went straight towards Ian. “What’s going on?”

“It’s all a big mix-up,” said Ian, choking up slightly. “They think I stole things from the team when it was really Pepin and now I might be sent away to Mira—Miramichi or whatever.”

“This is ridiculous.” Heather turned back and shot an angry glance at McBride. “Would you let me in there?”

McBride opened the cell and returned to his desk.

“I don’t know what’s going to happen to me,” said Ian quietly “The bus is going to be sent back. I’ve wrecked everything. They’ll kick me out of school. I’m so screwed.”

“Nothing is going to happen to you. “My father’s a judge. You met him. Remember? He knows lots of people. I’ll phone him.”

“I hadn’t thought of that. Can you call him right away? And could I borrow your cell? Could you use someone’s phone on the bus to make the call?”

“I guess so.”

Heather removed her phone from her purse and passed it discreetly to Ian. “It’s got a good charge. It’s turned off.”

Ian removed a scrap of paper from his trousers. And there’s something else. I need you to phone this number. Tell Manny Boyce that I have the ticket. It’s possible that his phone hasn’t been activated yet. If you can’t get through, phone Call A Cab in Sutton, and the Ashbury Police and leave the same message for Manny Boyce—that Ian Sinclair has the ticket.”

“The police?”

“Yes. I’ll explain later.”

Heather dug into her purse. “Just a sec. I need a pen and some paper. What should I say again?”

“If you reach Manny Boyce personally, tell him that I have the ticket. If you can’t get through leave a message for him at Call A Cab, and the Ashbury police department. And be sure to leave your cell number so Boyce can call me back. Got it?”

“Yes.”

“And I better have a copy of that number I just gave you. I may get a chance to call Boyce myself.”

Heather handed back a scrap with Manny’s number. “What ticket? Who’s this Manny Boyce?”

“It’s about a lottery ticket I found,” whispered Ian. “Magnificent Millions. Manny Boyce is going to give me a reward.”

“All right. You’ve had enough time,” said McBride from the front of the office. “I’d like the girl to go back to the bus.”

“A reward?” asked Heather.

“Shhh. I can’t get into it all right now.

Coach Cannon finished his call to Scotty MacMillan, coach of the Reds. He had informed him that the Wildcat’s bus was being turned back and that all options to proceed had been explored and denied. His old friend hadn’t been able to disguise his deep disappointment and irritation at the unexpected development. Over 3500 tickets had been sold for the game; scouts and media notified. Cannon had offered to defray some of the costs associated with ice rental and payments to referees. The conversation had been short and extremely awkward.

He caught up with Agent Coulter by the team bus. Another equally disagreeable task was at hand. He saw Heather approaching the bus. They waited until she was seated before boarding.

Despite the driver's best attempts to ensure a flow of fresh air, the ventilation system had failed to deliver. The compartment had become unbearably warm and stagnant as the bus sat motionless in bright September sunshine. The boys, their parents and fans from the booster club were at once impatient, annoyed and perplexed at the long delay.

"What's the story," yelled a parent from about half way down the bus. "Why have we been stuck here for so long?" from someone else. "The bathroom stinks, we need fresh air. Nobody's told us anything. This is ridiculous."

Cannon reluctantly reached for the bus's microphone, and faced the assemblage of boys, parents and fans. The passengers settled down waiting for him to speak. He took a deep breath. This was going to be the most distasteful news he'd ever had to deliver.

"I have an announcement. There's a paperwork problem. There won't be a game tonight. We are being sent back to Ashbury."

A chorus of "What's?" "Why's?" groans and assorted expletives greeted this information.

"What do you mean, paperwork?" hollered a fan from the rear of the bus.

"We have a hotel reservation," stated a woman three rows back of Cannon. "We'd better be able to cancel without penalty or I'll come back on you for our \$120 bucks."

"Where's Ian?" asked a teammate. "Is it his paperwork that's the problem?"

"I want to know why we've traveled all the way here and are being sent back," demanded a hefty man who Cannon recognized as a regular at the Colesium. He'd had season's tickets right behind the team bench for years. "I'm diabetic. I'm going to need a meal soon."

"We'll stop somewhere," replied Cannon.

"What do you mean, stop?" from an elderly woman sitting up front. "We haven't moved in ages."

The coach looked to Coulter for assistance. He handed over the microphone.

"Canada Border Services has determined that this group has not fulfilled its obligation to provide adequate documents for entry into Canada. There are issues of non-compliance," she added. "You are hereby refused entry into Canada." With that, she promptly left the bus.

Cannon ignored the clamors for his attention as he conferred with Keith Lawler, and Fridge. "I am staying here with Sinclair. Probably overnight. I'll fill you in tomorrow."

There was nothing to be gained by staying on the bus any longer. Cannon turned to the bus driver. "Head out, Leo. Stop at the nearest restaurant."

The coach disembarked and walked alongside the bus on his way back towards the customs office. His nerves on edge, the sudden noisy release of pressurized air from the bus's brakes made him jump. The big diesel revved. As the bus edged on by he heard someone pounding angrily on a window pane from inside the compartment. He didn't look up.

Cannon entered the customs building.

"What happened? Has the bus left?" asked Ian from the cell."

"Yes."

"What did they say? Did they blame me for everything? Do they know I'm under arrest?"

“No, Ian. Nobody blames you for anything.”

Cannon directed his attention towards Coulter. “Tell me again. What’s the deal? You have someone coming to see Ian?”

“I was just on the phone with Immigration. A lawyer is being arranged for Mr. Sinclair.”

“Then what?”

“He’ll appear in Youth Justice Court tomorrow morning. A judge will decide if there are strong enough grounds to take Ian to trial. Mr. Sinclair may be released, turned over to American authorities, or sent to Miramichi until legal proceedings commence.”

“In the worst case scenario, how long might he be held?”

“Possibly weeks.”

Twenty-Five

Philip threw the van into gear and wheeled out, leaving deep trenches in the Pringle's lawn. His leg throbbed but the bite wasn't deep. Of much greater concern was his desperate need to come up with over \$1 million, and in a hurry.

He drove directly to Sutton Memorial and decided to have someone look at his leg before joining Jean and Martha.

"It's not a bad wound. No need for stitches," assessed a young medical student. "I'll give you a tetanus shot."

Philip found his way to Martha's room. She was asleep, connected to an IV. Jean sat beside her in a chair, reading.

"How are things?" asked Philip.

"Not good," said Jean batting back tears. She set aside her magazine. "Tests show that she's had a stroke. It's not directly related to the E.coli, but brought on by the trauma of her poisoning. She's very confused and can barely use her leg. Her kidneys are failing. She's been given a shunt for dialysis. Dr. McNair wants to meet with both of us to discuss Mother's prognosis and to consider her options for long-term care."

"Not very encouraging."

"No. By the way, I was speaking with Heather. She phoned for you, and Adam picked up."

"I wanted him to be able to reach us if necessary. He's with the Morrisseys."

"Heather's upset that we didn't tell her that Mother was ill—that she had to hear it from Adam."

"Don't put that on me. We both agreed that we'd let her continue with her trip, and that we'd call her when she returned to Ashbury, or sooner if necessary."

Jean adjusted Martha's blanket. "I know. Anyway, as it turns out she'll be back in Ashbury tonight. She's on the bus as we speak."

"Why? She was going to stay over in Fredericton."

"There was some kind of problem at the border."

"Problem? What did she say?"

"It concerns that boy from Sutton who we met when we helped Heather move in. Ian something. I forget his last name."

"What about him?"

"Heather said that he's in trouble. The Canadian border guards found stolen items in his hockey bag."

"That doesn't surprise me. He's not exactly from the best end of town. Scarlett Heights, as I recall."

"The bus was turned back but apparently Ian has been detained. Heather's concerned about him. She was hoping that you might intervene on his behalf."

"There's nothing that I can do. As a judge I can't possibly interfere. He'll get a lawyer if he needs one."

"I told her that you'd phone her. Why are you favoring your leg?"

"I banged into something. So when's this meeting with Martha's doctor?"

“I was waiting for you. Now that you’ve finally arrived, why don’t you ask to have him paged? The name is Dr. McNair.”

Philip found a nursing station down the hall. The doctor returned the nurse’s call right away. After a brief conversation, Philip returned to Martha’s bedside. “He’d like to meet with us in his office right now.”

Dr. McNair’s office was located in the basement of the old hospital. Jean and Philip navigated through a maze of doors and hallways, ending up in the lab and then the hospital’s kitchen before finding it.

McNair stood from behind a desk swamped with papers. “Please have a seat.”

Philip guessed that the doctor was around 40. He wore a white coat over a button-down blue shirt. His full head of coal-black hair was flecked with gray at the sides.

McNair addressed Philip. “Your wife has probably informed you that Martha has had a stroke.”

“Yes.”

“There has been cognitive damage. She also appears to have lost the functioning of her left leg. This may come back with physiotherapy. The E. coli bacteria have caused kidney damage. I suspect that Mrs. Van Whyte will need dialysis for the rest of her life.”

“Any chance she could receive a kidney transplant?” asked Philip.

“No. She’s not a suitable recipient. She’s too old,” replied the doctor frankly. “Her vital signs however, have shown some significant improvement. Mrs. Van Whyte may well live for years. But she will need to stay in an assisted-care facility.”

“We’ll have to sell her condo,” said Jean. “She’s never going home.”

More like give it away, thought Philip.

“It’s unfortunate, but you are being realistic,” said McNair. “Do you happen to know if your mother carries any long-term health insurance?”

“I know she doesn’t. I broached the subject with her not six months ago. She wasn’t specific, but she told me that she had enough money to meet future medical needs. She’s always disliked insurance companies for some reason.”

Philip winced, fearful at the direction of this conversation.

Jean spoke. “Doctor, can you recommend any good long-term care centers that are nearby?”

“I happen to be on the board of directors for the Sunshine Center. It’s located on the outskirts of town. It can offer your mother the care she needs. Otherwise, she’ll have to go to a home as far away as Boston for competent attention. I should add that Sutton Memorial does not serve long-term care patients. She’ll have to be moved somewhere, and soon.”

“I’ve driven by the Sunshine Center. It looks quite nice,” commented Jean.

“The Center was built to meet the needs of patients like your mother. Its clients are mostly seniors, most of whom have more than one serious health issue. Each patient has a private room with around-the-clock nursing. Dialysis is available on site.”

“That sounds wonderful,” said Jean.

“She would also have access to physiotherapists and speech therapists. They really can work wonders.” Dr. McNair pulled out a brochure from his blotter and handed it to Jean.

She flipped through the pamphlet and began to read. “A chaplain visits daily. The choice of meals is generous. Alzheimer’s and stroke patients are carefully supervised and loved. The Sunshine Centre believes in dignity for all.”

“It sounds like an upscale private hospital,” interjected Philip. “Do you get some sort of kick-back for your referrals?” Sunshine Center, he thought, spare me.

“Philip! Please excuse my husband.”

“It is a private facility, Mr. Driscoll, and I certainly don’t receive kickbacks.”

“It’s Judge, actually.”

“Yes. Of course. Judge.”

An awkward silence ensued. Philip waited for Jean to ask the question he knew was coming.

“How much do you think Mother’s care would cost in such a facility?”

The doctor paused for a moment and then said, “Given your mother’s needs as they stand now—roughly \$90,000 to \$120,000 a year. Of course that’s just a rough estimate. It could be much higher.”

Philip contained a gasp.

“Mother can afford the Center,” announced Jean confidently, “at least for ten years or so, and I really don’t think any additional years will be an issue, Doctor, do you?”

“Given your mother’s health and age, I’m afraid not.”

“Would you please work with us on this? Check for availability? The sooner she’s admitted the better she’ll be.”

“I would be happy to assist. You should bear in mind that the Sunshine Center will require a significant deposit.”

Jean looked at Philip. “We can arrange for a deposit .My husband has Power of Attorney over my mother’s financial affairs.”

The judge met Jean’s eyes and looked away. He wanted to evaporate. The bungled land deal was quietly enveloping others. There would be no Sunshine Center for Martha.

“Philip. A deposit? That wouldn’t take long to arrange would it?”

“There’s something else,” broke in McNair. “Judge Driscoll, please inform Mrs. Van Whyte’s bank that the Center will require a financial statement which provides a thorough documentation of her assets.”

Perspiration beaded on Philip’s brow. His heart pumped furiously. His mouth was dry. “I understand,” he mumbled.

Jean stood and gathered her purse. “Thank you, Doctor. The Sunshine Center will receive everything it requires.”

“The sooner the better,” added Dr. McNair offering his hand towards Jean. “It can be difficult to get a spot.” He looked over in Philip’s direction. The judge’s face was pale, his eyes dilated, and he seemed detached from his surrounding. “Judge Driscoll, are you all right?”

“I’m fine,” muttered Philip.

McNair left his desk for Philip’s side. “Give me your wrist.”

“I’m fine, really.”

“Your heart rate is elevated and you’re sweating. Are you having chest pains?”

“No.”

“Do you suffer from any anxiety disorders?”

“No. Never had anything like that. I just need some rest. Are we finished here?”

“It has been a stressful day,” said Jean.

“I think you should be examined.”

Philip left his chair. “No. That’s not necessary.”

“If you have any more spells, contact me,” replied McNair.

“We appreciate your concern and advice about Mother,” said Jean. “Do you have an application form for the Sunshine Centre?”

“Yes. It’s quite involved. I’ll fill in the medical portion and drop off the rest of it for you in Martha’s room.”

Jean and Philip left Dr. McNair’s together. “I’ll be at the courthouse,” said Philip walking ahead.

“Wait

“What is it?”

“I want you to phone Abramsky right away.”

“It’s Sunday.”

“I don’t care. Phone him at home and tell him that we need that financial statement. He can get on it first thing tomorrow morning.”

“I’ll see what I can do.”

Jean stopped by the elevators en route to Martha’s bedside.

Philip continued ahead and took the first exit out. He climbed into the van, and drove off in a stupor.

Twenty-Six

After leaving his apartment and pulling into a drive-thru for coffee, Manny picked up the interstate, and set out for Ashbury. It was a gray morning with an expected high of just 50.

As the miles rolled by, the cabbie reviewed his plan. He would go directly to the rink and offer Pepin a generous reward for the return of the ticket, no questions asked. While he hated to compensate the crook, this plan made the most sense. He could certainly afford to reward both Ian and the janitor generously. He would warn Pepin that it would be a serious blunder for him to try and cash the ticket himself. The ticket had already been reported as lost and that the lottery people had information about the ticket. They would pose questions that Pepin couldn't possibly answer. Take the reward, or lose everything.

He tuned in a local radio station for the news. Oak Leaf was still the top story. There had been no further deaths. There was a report about a sniper who had been targeting judges. Arrests had been made early that morning. Details were still unfolding, but a couple of teenagers had been nabbed as they pulled out of a Wal-Mart outside of Boston. An assault rifle linked to the shootings had been discovered in the trunk.

Manny approached the Ashbury city-limits. Recalling his previous visit to the Colesium, he took a by-pass which led directly towards the rink.

Several minutes later, he pulled up to the Colesium. He sat for a moment and stared at the massive building. This time he'd get the ticket. It was show time.

Emile Pepin had purchased a radio for the office at the arena. He wasn't interested in listening to music; his attention was riveted on the news, broadcast on WJBD A.M. which billed itself as "*The Home of Wildcat's hockey.*"

The broadcast team traveled with the Wildcats and relayed the games to thousands of fans throughout the greater Ashbury area. Emile was convinced that any word of the chaos he had hoped to create at the Canadian border would be reported via cell phone. With a radio crew on board the bus it wouldn't take long for the news to break.

Pepin nudged up the radio's volume. A news update came on, but there was nothing mentioned about the Wildcats. Instead there was that E. coli story again and something about a sniper. What had happened? Surely the team hadn't been waved on through, the bags unsearched? Give it time he thought. It's early. Maybe they had been delayed.

The janitor heard a door slam from the lobby. Someone was walking down the hallway. Pepin stepped out of the office to have a look. "May I help you?"

"Are you Emile Pepin?"

"Yes."

"I'm Manny Boyce. Do you have a few minutes?"

Emile gave Boyce a once-over. Fairly well dressed. Bad comb-over though. Maybe a salesman or here to register his kid for skating lessons. "I guess so. Come into my office."

“I’ll get straight to the point. I have reason to believe that you may have come across something that belongs to me. A lottery ticket to be specific.”

Emile stopped short. “You a cop?”

“No.”

“What are you talking about? What’s this about a lottery ticket?”

“Here’s the bottom line. My nephew is a member of the Wildcats hockey team. He had his wallet stolen from a dressing room a few days ago. In that wallet was a lottery ticket which belongs to me. My thought was that as the custodian here, you may have come across the ticket, perhaps while cleaning up.”

Manny watched Emile’s reaction with interest. He appeared nervous but interested. What an ugly tattoo!

“Why? And what’s your nephew’s name?”

“Ian Sinclair.”

Pepin lost color, and then blushed. He pulled nervously at his shirt collar and studied something on his desk.

“I’ve come to get my ticket back. In fact, I’d be pleased to give you a reward for it. An extremely large reward.”

Emile reached for his cigarettes. “How much you talking?” He was curious but not entirely sure he wanted to hear Manny’s reward offer. That ticket was at the border and he had sent it there.

“I am prepared to offer you \$250,000 for it—the ticket handed to me now, no further questions. Let’s do some business.”

The rink-rat’s hands trembled as he lit his smoke. A quarter of a million dollars in reward money—gone. “I don’t know what you’re talking about. I’ve never seen a wallet or ticket. Nothing like that.”

“I think my reward is more that generous, Mr. Pepin. I will give you one more offer. My last. I am prepared to offer you \$350,000 for the return of my lottery ticket. I have all afternoon. Get it for me. I’ll wait right here.”

Emile sat dumbstruck. Maybe the bus hadn’t been detained. Maybe he’d have another chance to get Sinclair’s wallet. No. Not gonna happen. If, in fact, they had sailed through customs, Sinclair would laugh his butt off when he unzipped his bag and found his wallet and ticket thoughtfully returned. It was all too much to process coherently. He needed to buy some time. “Tell you what. Come back tomorrow. I’ll have a good look for it. Maybe it will show up. I have some ideas.”

Manny tried to contain his impatience but remained outwardly calm as he assessed Pepin. He definitely knows something. There was no way that he’d dismiss a \$350,000 reward. He’ll come up with the ticket somewhere. He’s probably stashed all the stuff he stole and needs me out of his hair. “You should know that I don’t intend to spend the night in Ashbury. I’ll give you the rest of the afternoon to find the ticket. After that, my reward offer is off the table.”

“Yeah, do that. Come back later.”

The radio crackled: “We have a special report from WJBD sports director Bill Bennett.”

“Tonight’s scheduled game against the Reds has been cancelled. After being delayed at the Calais-St. Stephen border, our bus has been ordered back to Ashbury. Canadian Customs officials searched all luggage and hockey bags. Dogs were brought

in. Ian Sinclair and Coach Morley Cannon were escorted to a customs building. They did not rejoin the bus."

"Turn that up," ordered Manny.

"And so we wait for further developments. We stress that everyone on board the bus is fine. We will provide regular updates as warranted."

Manny stared at the radio processing the information he had just heard. Ian Sinclair was being held at the border. Bags had been searched. The border guards were clearly concerned about something. What on earth was going on? He looked at Emile. Why the smirk on his pasty withered face? "What are you thinking?"

"Thinking? Nothing."

There was nothing to be gained in further dealings with Pepin. A trip to the Ashbury Police Department was in order. Perhaps they knew something about the theft that could be useful. Something was wrong, and instinct told the detective that the custodian knew a whole lot more than he was letting on. "I'll be back at 5:00 p.m. My reward offer is a once in a lifetime opportunity. Just find my ticket or you'll be flooding ice for the next 20 years."

Manny drove straight from the Colesium towards Ashbury's downtown core. He searched the local radio stations for any more radio reports from the border. The police station came into view standing prominently on the main street. It had been built in the late 1960s. The facility was made of poured concrete and finished in white stucco. It had all the lines of a shoebox. It contrasted sharply with the surrounding red brick storefronts adorned with charming gingerbread trim painstakingly assembled a century earlier. The Stars and Stripes, State flag, and City ensign flew high above the station and snapped to the east in the brisk autumn breeze.

He parked at a meter and walked rapidly towards the police station, head low against the cutting wind lest his comb over be disturbed.

Once inside, Manny approached a long counter and caught the attention of a young cop who was on the phone. A couple of other officers sat at desks over laptops sipping on take-out coffee. Others milled about clutching paperwork. Manny watched them enviously. He'd liked to have been a cop. The officers all appeared young and ready for action, sharply outfitted with guns, night sticks, and handcuffs hanging from crisp pale-green uniforms.

An officer approached the counter. "May I help you?"

"I'm Manny Boyce. I'm a private investigator. I have been retained by an Ian Sinclair. He's a student at the university."

"The hockey player?"

"Yes."

"What is this concerning?"

"It's about the theft of his wallet from the Colesium."

"Just a moment." The officer conferred with a colleague who glanced dubiously in Manny's direction before coming to the counter.

"I'm Constable Singh. This is about the theft at the Colesium?"

"Yes. I understand that you have looked into it."

"It's an ongoing investigation. May I see your investigators permit?"

Manny opened his wallet. "Ian Sinclair informed me that there was evidence collected at the scene of the theft. I was curious to know if you might let me have a look at it."

“When did Sinclair hire you? More to the point, why would he hire you?”

“Ian looked me up shortly after the theft. He suggested that I should investigate an Emile Pepin. Apparently Pepin is trying to twist things around and implicate Sinclair as the thief.”

Singh reflected on the dirty car scenario.

Manny presented an offer. “I’m hoping that we might kind of work together. You know, share information. Would you allow me to examine the evidence you collected?”

“No. That wouldn’t be permissible. Completely against regulations, but by all means ask Pepin some questions. Let me know what you find out. I have to get back to my desk.”

Manny began to protest but stopped. He left the counter and availed himself of a bathroom before leaving the station.

“Mr. Boyce. Wait.” It was Singh calling from the stairs. The constable was holding something. “There was a message left for you. My boss took the call about half an hour ago.”

Manny lumbered up the stairs.

Singh referred to a note. “*Please tell Manny Boyce that Ian Sinclair has the ticket, signed Heather.* No last name. And there’s a phone number. What does this mean? How did this girl know where to find you?”

“I told Ian that I would be contacting you as part of my investigation,” replied Manny. He could barely form words. The ticket was safe and Ian wanted him to know it!

“What does he mean, the ticket?” asked Singh again.

“A hockey ticket. I asked him to get me a hockey ticket. I guess since Ian is away, someone phoned the message in for him.”

“Are you aware that there’s some sort of problem at the border concerning Sinclair?”

“Just what I heard on the radio. Have you learned of any further details?”

“No. But if you know something about Ian Sinclair that may be important, I’d appreciate you telling me.”

“I don’t know anything more than you.” He gestured towards the slip in Singh’s hand. “May I keep it?”

The moment Manny was back in his cab he reached for his new cell. Still not activated. He spotted a pay-phone across the street. He walked to the booth, referred to the number at the bottom of the slip, and let it ring eight times. No answer. No message center.

He returned to the cab and considered his options. Should he drive straight to the border? No. There was no guarantee that Ian was still there. He’d sit tight and listen to the radio for more developments and get the evening paper. And he’d keep dialing.

It looked like another overnight stay in Ashbury. He couldn’t take his eyes off the note. It was nearly over. He’d have his ticket back within a day.

Twenty-Seven

A security guard held the courthouse door open. The judge gave him a cursory nod, and walked straight to his chambers. He pulled out his chair and sank down hard, his mind in turmoil.

Jean would be unrelenting. If he so much as even hesitated in asking Abramsky to forward Martha's financial statements to the Sunshine Center, she would phone the banker herself. After she explained the significance of her request, Abramsky would be sure to reveal that Martha's account had been cleaned out. The \$70,000 or so left in her account wouldn't begin to satisfy the Center's stringent financial requirements.

The judge pondered his fate. Middle America was in a vindictive mood, demanding stiff penalties for white collared criminals—and the justices were delivering. Gluttonous corporate CEO's, investment bankers and their minions had recently received sentences comparable to those dolled out to serial killers. And the corporate crooks were serving their time in state penitentiaries, not some facility akin to a country club. When the residents of Hastings County discovered that a District Court Judge had lost a senior citizen's savings in a botched real estate deal, there'd be impassioned demands that he be punished harshly.

The story would be alluring fodder for the press. There'd be coverage in newspapers and magazines and his image would be televised on the evening news. There was no doubt about it. By the time the media was through crucifying him, what might normally have been a three year sentence could well be inflated to six, maybe more. He'd be sent to a conventional prison under protective custody, but ever fearful of his life just the same.

It was possible that the courts would show some leniency. Perhaps his handling of Martha's money would be seen as extraordinarily obtuse, but not criminal. After all, the E. coli break-out couldn't have been anticipated. He hadn't absconded with Martha's cash and run off to the Bahamas. He was simply the victim of an Act of God. Martha's money could be replaced in time. It was just bad luck.

The judge exhaled noisily as he reflected further. Few judges would consider such an argument. He'd heard similar rationalizations many times before in his own courtroom. Pleas for understanding and clemency so often coming from individuals who had greeted the morning with no criminal intent in mind, but had exercised exceedingly foolish judgment, changing both theirs and others' lives forever. Negligence knew no bounds: The College bound teenager who had wiped out an entire family while street racing in his ridiculously souped-up Celica. The woman who had left her infant unattended in a car—shocked that temperatures could reach 110 F within minutes and cause irreparable brain damage. The fools who carelessly kept a loaded gun in the bedside table—the weapon discovered by their eight year old daughter who in turn had shot her younger brother.

To Philip, crimes committed out of negligence were no less egregious than those perpetrated by the procession of seasoned muggers, thieves, rapists and drug dealers who

contaminated his courtroom. He had referred to and read enough judgments from his colleagues on the bench to know that they were of the same mind-set.

A family portrait sat on a corner of his desk. They appeared to have been such a happy functional family. Perhaps at one time they were. Jean's drinking hadn't yet become problematic, their marriage was solid albeit predictable, but he had been content—proud of his station in life as a district attorney and blissfully free of the malaise and nagging restlessness that had plagued him in recent years. Philip gazed meditatively at the colorful glossy. The gathering depicted a Driscoll family Christmas worthy of a Norman Rockwell painting. Heather stood at his side proudly wearing a red velvet dress, white leotards and her new black party shoes. Adam sat grinning impishly on Jean's lap dressed in gray flannels with a white shirt and a red bow tie. Overwhelmed with guilt, fear, and regret the judge fell forward, buried his face on the top of his hands and wept.

Several minutes went by. He wiped his eyes, focused and tried to regroup. A few notes had been placed by his secretary by his telephone. He half heartedly gathered the small papers.

Phone Manny Boyce. 875 3987

That idiot. Probably wants his camera back. He turned to the next note.

Phone Judge Whitely re: convention plans..

Yeah, right. As if I'll be in Texas anytime soon.

The third note was similar to the first.

A rap at the door to his chambers startled him. He wiped his face again, straightened his hair and cleared his throat. "Come in."

Deputy Bleeker entered. "Afternoon, Judge I was driving by and noticed your van."

"And?"

"I wanted to let you know that we exercised your court-order to get the password for Boyce's cell phone. You still want to listen to his messages?"

"I suppose so." Philip pulled open his middle drawer and removed Manny's phone.

Bleeker plugged it in and accessed the message centre. "Here you go. The code is 8998. See you in the morning. I have to run to pick up my daughter."

Philip nodded goodbye, distracted by the robotic automated voice on the cell.

"You have three new messages: Listen press one."

"It's Audrey. I haven't heard from you yet. I was wondering if you've managed to discover anything. Email me. You have the address."

So it was Jean, thought Philip. Her voice was unmistakable. What a conniving, malicious snake. Go ahead. File your divorce papers, Jean. Call in the attorneys. It's all moot now. I'm off to jail. There'll be no support payments—you'll have nothing to go after.

"Second message."

"I'm calling from Beamish Insurance here in Sutton. We would like you to conduct an investigation.. I'll try you after the weekend."

"Third message."

"Hi Manny. It's Ian Sinclair.....the guy with the Magnificent Millions lottery ticket. I didn't tell you at the rink but I wanted to let you know that I know where it is now. It's a long story but I know where the ticket is..."

"To save the message press nine. To replay the message press three."

Philip saved it and listened to Ian's message repeatedly, furiously transcribing information on a legal pad. He sat back and considered exactly what he had just heard.

Manny Boyce, that hapless detective had once owned a lottery ticket worth \$25 million. He had lost the ticket. Ian Sinclair had found it. The ticket lay hidden in Sinclair's wallet which had been stolen by some janitor in Ashbury. Boyce had offered Ian \$1 million as a reward. This was incredible!

He focused on the timeline. "*I'm going to Fredericton.*" But they had never reached Fredericton. Jean had told him that the team had been sent back from the border and that Ian had been detained. This could be remarkably fortuitous. He had a window of opportunity to grab the ticket from that janitor before Ian or Boyce got to it.

The judge leaned back in his tall chair and schemed further. He could go to the Ashbury arena with Bleeker. A uniformed cop would scare the daylights out of the thief. Bleeker could demand that the janitor return the stolen wallet or be thrown in jail for theft. Once the ticket was recovered, he would demand at least \$2 million from Boyce for its return.

He needed to find out more about Sinclair's problems. Perhaps he could arrange to have the boy placed under the control of the Sutton authorities, separated from both Manny Boyce and the janitor.

He called Wayne Lubinowski, Hastings's County District Attorney. "Wayne, it's Judge Driscoll."

"Yes, Judge."

"I apologize for intruding on your Sunday, but I need some information. It's almost a family matter actually, and as a judge I can't get involved. It seems that my daughter's boyfriend, an Ian Sinclair, has encountered some difficulties at the Calais-St. Stephen border. His team was traveling to Fredericton for a hockey game. The bus has been turned back, but the boy is being detained by Canadian authorities. I'd like you to make some calls and look into it for me as soon as possible. I want to know where he's staying. Everything about his situation."

"That shouldn't be a problem. I'll call the U.S. border officials in Calais. I'm sure they'll be able to put me through to the right people."

"Call me back as soon as possible."

Philip needed some fresh air but didn't want to miss Lubinowski's call. Instead, he set about organizing correspondence which littered his desk. Half an hour later, he absentmindedly examined various memorabilia collected over the years; an oak gavel presented to him by the Hastings County Law Society upon his investiture as a judge. He gazed at an oil canvas commissioned by the County. Mr. Justice Philip Driscoll at the bench dressed in his black robes overseeing his court of justice. He wondered what was to become of the painting should he end up in prison. Perhaps it would be safely stored somewhere and preserved so that his children might have an opportunity to find some pride in their father's past in later years.

Despair, pooled with fear for his future overtook him again. A lottery ticket of all things—his only opportunity for salvation resting on a game of chance.

His phone rang shrilly.

"Your Honor. I have some information for you. U.S. Customs put me through to Canada Border Services. An Agent Coulter is the supervising officer relating to Sinclair's detention."

“Just a minute. I’m writing this down.”

“Evidently the Canadian agents found stolen documents in Ian Sinclair’s hockey equipment. He has a hearing in the morning. In the meantime he’ll remain in custody.”

The judge considered Lubinowski’s information. Assuming he was sent on his way after court, Ian wouldn’t be back to Ashbury until the following afternoon. But just to be safe, why not assume control of Sinclair for longer. Have him brought to Sutton, safely away from Ashbury, the rink, and that ticket.

“Judge?”

“Yes. I was just thinking. I want to explore opportunities to bring Ian back to the U.S. He can face charges here. I told my daughter that I would try to assist him.”

“There may be a simple solution. The alleged theft of the documents occurred in the U.S. and not in Canada. As such it’s incumbent on U.S. authorities to lay charges. I suppose the Canadian authorities could make a case for attempted smuggling but that’s a stretch. It could be argued that the documents were planted.”

“I agree. Please reach this Agent Coulter’s superior. Tell them that you are grateful for their work and that our local police are anxious to speak with Sinclair. I’m sure that if their courts are as clogged as ours that they’ll be happy to discharge him under the care and control of a U. S. District Attorney.”

“Me?”

“Yes. Tell them you will assume responsibility for Sinclair. We can send an officer to collect him. We’ll see where that leads. Keep my name out of this. Find out where he is, and let him know that an officer is coming to escort him back to Sutton, where he will remain until he has met with you. Please keep in touch with me. I’m in for the evening. Here’s my number at the farm. I’ll be waiting for your call.”

Philip hung up. It was time to call Heather. He needed to find out more about Ian and his relationship to Manny Boyce. He flipped through his phone book and found Heather at her dorm. After exchanging pleasantries and after his daughter had been assured that Martha was going to live, Philip got straight to the point. “I’m working on getting Ian out of jail and back to the U.S.”

“Thank you. I was hoping that you might be able to help him.”

“Why was he arrested? Mr. Lubinowski wasn’t entirely clear. What exactly did Ian tell you?”

“Someone planted stolen documents in his hockey bag.”

“Who?”

“He thinks it’s one of the janitors at the Colesium.”

“That’s very strange. But I’m sure the truth will come out,” said Philip. “I’m curious about something else. It has come to my attention that a local private investigator may have been hired to follow Ian.”

“Follow Ian? Why would anyone think that?”

“It’s probably nothing, but after an investigation, the police confiscated the detective’s camera. They found some pictures of Ian on the ice. Deputy Bleeker showed them to me. I recognized him right away.”

“That’s kind of weird. Who took the pictures of Ian?”

“A Manny Boyce.”

“Manny Boyce! Ian just told me about him.”

Philip pulled his legal pad closer. “What exactly did Ian say?”

“We couldn’t really get into much detail, but Ian found a lottery ticket. Boyce promised him a reward for it. That’s probably why he was following Ian.”

“Anything else?”

“Ian asked me to leave a message for Boyce at the cab stand and at the Ashbury Police station.”

Philip sat bolt upright “The message you left for Boyce. What exactly did Ian ask you to say?”

“That Ian has the ticket. Magnificent Millions.”

“The judge’s heart sank to his toes as he processed Heather’s shocking revelation. The ticket wasn’t with Pepin at the rink after all. It lay in Ian’s possession, some 500 miles away. “I’m sure everything will work out with Ian,” he said finally.

“I’m coming home tomorrow to see Grandma.”

“That’s nice. I’ll see you then.”

Philip hung up feeling as though he’d been kicked across two state lines. He pounded his desk in frustration. The prospect of retrieving the ticket from the janitor had been so enticing. Within minutes everything had changed. His last hope to replace Martha’s cash had vanished. It was over. Life as he knew it was about to change forever.

Twenty-Eight

Ian and Coach Cannon helped while away the afternoon by playing Crazy-Eights in the holding cell. Agent McBride provided donuts, coffee and soda. Cannon readily accepted the refreshments, but Ian wasn't the least bit hungry or thirsty. His stomach was wracked by spasms of unrelenting anxiety. Just what would the judge do with him at court in the morning? Coulter had said that he might be banished to the Youth Detention Centre in Miramichi.

With the possibility of searches and incarceration in mind, Ian waited until McBride and Coulter appeared busy and caught Cannon's attention. He shot the coach a look that clearly said *don't say anything*, and slipped him the ticket. Cannon looked at Ian inquisitively but didn't say a word. The coach inconspicuously stuck the ticket in his trousers.

The office phone jangled. There seemed to have been a flurry of calls to the office over the past hour or so. Coulter again instructed McBride to transfer her party to a secondary office, presumably for privacy. Coulter returned to the main room after a particularly long absence and opened the door to the cell. "I would like to speak with both of you. Join me at the table."

They settled in and waited with interest for Coulter to speak. She directed her attention to Cannon. "Ian is surprisingly well connected."

"Well connected? What do you mean?"

Coulter referred to some notes. "I have been speaking with a Mr. Wayne Lubinowski. He happens to be the District Attorney for Hastings County in Massachusetts. We have been discussing some options for Mr. Sinclair. The D.A.'s office has offered to assume responsibility for Ian's case."

"So what happens now?" asked the coach.

"Mr. Sinclair is on a docket at Youth Justice Court for 10:00 in the morning. He will appear as scheduled. However, given his age, I did grant the D.A. one dispensation. Mr. Sinclair will be allowed to stay under your care-and-control for the balance of the evening. We will retain your passports until after his appearance as security; however I certainly don't anticipate any complications."

"There won't be any," said Cannon.

"I want you to understand the grave implications should Ian miss court or flee. Any attempt to leave the country will be tantamount to a clear admission of guilt. Is this understood?"

Ian nodded solemnly.

"He'll be there," replied Cannon.

"Mr. Sinclair's attorney will meet with you both at 8:00 a.m. at the motel. I have already briefed her."

Ian and Cannon piled into a cruiser with McBride at the wheel. "There's where you'll report tomorrow," said the agent pointing to an austere turn-of-the-century Provincial Court House built of red sandstone. Another block and they pulled up to a

modest two-storied motel framed in white clapboard. “And here’s where you’ll be staying tonight.”

Cannon checked them into a standard motel room furnished with two queen-sized beds and an array of cheap furniture. He was curious to see how news of the cancelled game and Ian’s arrest was playing back in Sutton. He’d do damage control later. The events of the day had left him worn out. “I’m going to lie down for a bit. Maybe you should get some rest as well.”

“No. I’m OK. But wanted to ask—you still have that lottery ticket I gave you, right?”

“Yes,” said Cannon pulling it from his flannels. “Do you want it?”

“No, hold onto it for now. But please keep it safe. I don’t want to take a chance that they could take it from me tomorrow.”

Cannon put the ticket in his wallet. “Tell you what. If it’s a winner you owe me a car.”

“I’ll get you a Vette.”

“Nope, it’s gotta be a Porsche 911 Carrera. I’d look good in that.”

Cannon went to his bed and stretched out on the bedspread. “Don’t let me nap too long.”

“I’m going out to the balcony for some air.” Ian pulled out Heather’s cell and Manny’s number. He peeked into the room while he punched the small buttons.

“The number you have reached is not in service.”

He snapped the phone shut. What now? Hopefully Heather had gotten his message to Manny. He checked his watch. They might be home by now. He phoned her dorm. The line was busy.

Nothing was working. He pulled out a cheap plastic chair and tried to relax. The setting September sun felt good. He dozed for twenty minutes, and then awoke feeling chilled. He stood and watched as traffic crawled slowly in his direction. Directly below his second story perch, the motel’s parking lot was mostly empty. It bordered the back lot of a Ford dealership and an Italian Hut restaurant. A large shopping center lay directly to the east, encompassing a Shoppers Drug Mart, a Business Depot, a Canadian Tire, and another unfamiliar store called Sobeys, promising, *Great Food Ideas*.

To his left, The Provincial Court House stood menacingly amidst a stand of trees.

He gripped the balcony’s metal railing and turned away nauseous—unable to view the building replete with all of its judges, attorneys and bailiffs a moment longer.

Cannon joined Ian on the balcony. “You’re going to freeze out here. What do you want to eat?”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“You all right? You seem upset.”

“Just nervous about tomorrow I guess.”

“I’m sure that everything will go just fine.”

“But what if it doesn’t? What if I’m sent to some detention center?”

“Then we’ll bring in the big guns. Get you out on bail.”

“Attorneys are expensive. You know I don’t have any money. And anyway I didn’t do anything. This whole thing sucks. I shouldn’t even be in this position. I should be getting ready for the game right now. Instead everyone was sent home. Who knows what they’re saying about me?”

They were interrupted by the ring of Heather's cell phone.

"Where did you get a phone?"

"Heather loaned it to me."

"I'll give you some privacy."

Ian waited until the glass door was slid closed. "Hello."

"Is this Ian?"

"Yes. Manny?"

"Finally! I got your note at the police station. I've been trying to reach you all afternoon."

"I had to have the phone turned off until now."

"Why? Where are you?"

"St. Stephen."

"Where's that?"

"St. Stephen, New Brunswick. On the other side of the border from Maine. Calais Maine."

"When are you coming back? I haven't forgotten about your reward."

"My \$1 million like you promised?"

"Yes. So how soon can you get here? I'm in Ashbury. We can go straight to Lotto-Central in Lakefield."

"I have to go to court tomorrow."

"I heard something about trouble at the border. What's going on? You still have the ticket don't you?"

"It's a long story. I can't talk too long. Yes, I have the ticket."

"I need to know. Where exactly are you now?"

"The St. Stephen Motor Inn."

"I'm going to drive there. I'm in Ashbury on a payphone. I'm going to leave right away and come to St. Stephen. You can give me the ticket. I'll set aside the reward for you. I promise."

Ian stared at the horizon considering Manny's proposal. "Come and take me with you."

"You just said that you have court."

"I don't care. I need to get away from here. I can't take a chance that they'll throw me in prison. Just come and get me. My \$1 million will buy me the best attorneys in the state. In fact, don't bother even coming for the ticket unless I can return with you. You'll be wasting your time. I swear, it's me and the ticket or no ticket at all."

Manny considered Ian's proposal—his ultimatum—but just for a split-second. Of course he'd go and get him. There was no way that he'd take any chance of losing out on his ticket again. "I'll do it."

Ian glanced through the door. The coach was reading a newspaper. "Leave right away. St. Stephen is about six hours from Ashbury. It's just after five. There's a shopping center right across from my motel room. The St. Stephen Mall. It has a Canadian Tire and a Shopper's Drug Mart. The grocery store is called Sobeys. There's a big green sign. Wait for me out front of the grocery store. I could be anytime from eleven to after midnight."

"I'll wait for as long as it takes. This is fantastic. You have proper I.D. to get across the border?"

“Shit. The border guards kept my passport.”

“What do you have?”

“A student card, with a picture.”

“That’s it?”

“The rest was stolen.”

Manny heaved a sigh and sank his cheek into his palm. “Then that’ll have to do.”

Ian heard Cannon calling for him. He left the balcony and entered the room.

The coach was perched on the edge of his bed with a phone book splayed on his knees. “They have Italian Hut restaurants in Canada too. I’ll order a large assorted pizza with garlic bread, salads, and Cokes. OK with you?”

“Sounds good,” replied Ian agreeably although he wasn’t the least bit hungry. His stomach was twisted in knots, and he had a splitting headache.

“The food will take about 40 minutes. I’m going to have a shower before we eat.”

Ian flopped on his bed and watched as Cannon walked to the bathroom clad in tattered boxers and holding an old leather shaving kit. He listened for the sound of running water before removing Cannon’s wallet from his grey flannels. The ticket was sandwiched between several bills. After returning the coach’s wallet, Ian switched on his bedside light. The back of the ticket was stained with cola. Some fine-print was a little smudged. Other than that, it was still in good condition.

Ian stuck the ticket in his wallet and used the motel’s stationery to jot a note for the coach that he would leave before taking off.

A few minutes later, the bathroom door opened releasing billows of steam. Cannon stood at the mirror, a towel around his waist. “Once I’m dressed, we’ll go for a walk and pick up the food”

“You mean I can leave the room?”

“Of course.”

“Coulter and the rest of them seem to trust me—letting me stay at a motel. That’s a good sign for my odds in court isn’t it?”

“It might well be.”

“But aren’t they taking a bit of a chance?”

“Chance?”

Ian left his bed and stood at the bathroom’s doorway. “Yeah, let’s just say for example that when we’re walking to get the food, I decided to run for the border. To just go for it. Escape. What would happen?”

“I’d let you go,” Cannon answered. “The guards would bring you back so fast you wouldn’t know what hit you. That is, providing the attack dogs hadn’t eaten you for dinner first.”

“But seriously, if I somehow made it safely across—what would happen to you?”

“To me? I guess I’d collect my passport, and go home on the first available bus.”

“Wouldn’t Coulter put you in the holding cell?”

Cannon chuckled as he combed his hair. “And hold me as collateral until they rounded you up? I don’t think so.”

“Wouldn’t they fine you or something?”

“No luck there either. I don’t have any money. They’d chase after you, not me. You’ve been released on your own recognizance.”

“What does that mean?”

“It’s an agreement between the District Attorney and the Crown that you’ll appear in court.”

“So it’s just an agreement.”

Cannon put down his comb and frowned at Ian through the dripping bathroom mirror. “No. It’s not just an agreement. Your release is a privilege that you were fortunate to be offered.”

“So you’re saying that the D.A. is responsible for me and not you?”

Cannon brushed past Ian and walked towards his suitcase. “No, I’m not saying that at all. You’re old enough to fight in Afghanistan or some other hell-hole. You’re responsible for yourself. Not me. Not Mr. Lubinowski. Not anyone else. And in life you have to accept the consequences of your actions. This is something I want all of you guys to learn.”

“I know.”

Cannon finished getting dressed. “Let’s go and get the food. You’ll need lots of energy to hammer those big Boston College defencemen this Thursday.”

They took the stairs leading to the motel’s lobby. “I know exactly where the pizza place is,” said Ian. “You can see it from the balcony.”

After cutting through a driveway behind the motel, the vast parking lot of the St. Stephen Mall came into view. Ian looked intently at the Sobeys grocery store—the pre-arranged rendezvous spot with Manny. He checked his watch. It had taken less than eight minutes to walk to the plaza.

Back in the motel room, Cannon eagerly dug into the meal. Ian chewed indifferently on his pizza, deep in contemplation. I’ll go. I’ll definitely go with Manny. The coach will be infuriated with me, but he won’t get into trouble. He’ll understand once he knows about the ticket. I’ll be taking responsibility for myself, just like he wants me to. He’ll realize that I made a good decision.

Manny topped up with gas, picked up 1-95 and headed north. He crossed the Massachusetts-New Hampshire state line, and then entered Maine.

The old Dodge chugged along obediently. He’d miss the cab. The car felt like a second home. The springs on his seat had long ago surrendered to his heavy frame and molded to his torso like a comfortable pair of sneakers.

It was a damp and chilly night with sporadic heavy rain and occasional foggy patches in low-lying areas. Despite the onerous drive, Manny remained energized—confident that this time, he’d finally be successful in retrieving his millions.

The miles quickly passed, aided by an all request retro ’60s campus radio show out of Colby College in nearby Waterville. He was surprised that the students had even heard of, much less requested, so many of his favorite oldies. Signage for downtown Bangor came into view. He crossed the Penobscot River and picked up State Route 9, a meandering highway, which would take him on a northeast trek marked by communities such as Wesley, Crawford, Alexander and others to the Calais-St. Stephen border. He’d ask for directions to the mall once he cleared customs. A stop for coffee and more miles followed. A sign to his right declared that the International Border was 40 miles away.

Cannon was stretched out on his bed, the TV's remote in hand. He paused briefly to watch a home-improvement show before moving on to cable news, bowling, a dance competition and the Weather Channel.

The coach's channel-surfing did nothing to settle Ian's nerves. He walked over to the balcony and gazed at the distant neon signs from the plaza—brilliant yellows, reds and greens were distorted by raindrops that trickled down the glass door. Manny would be in the mall's lot within a couple of hours.

The coach eventually gave up on the TV. "It's been a tough day. We should both get some sleep. Your attorney will be here at 8:00."

"I'm tired too. I've finished washing up. It's all yours."

While Cannon brushed his teeth, Ian did a final check. His knapsack sat ready to go by the side of his bed. He took off his shirt, but left his trousers and socks on and slipped under the covers.

Within minutes the room was pitch black—the only noise from the drone of the decrepit ventilation system and the splash of distant traffic. Ian looked at the illuminated numbers on his watch. It was 10:30 p.m. Manny had thought he'd arrive between 11:30 and midnight.

Another hour went by. Cannon's rhythmic breathing had progressed into a heavy snore.

Manny checked his watch. It was just before eleven. He saw the lights of Calais in the distance. As he entered the town, he followed the directions on a massive green sign pointing him to the International Bridge. He felt his pulse quicken. Border crossings always made him anxious. He crossed the bridge which spanned the St. Croix River. There were no vehicles in front of him and he pulled into the first border gate to his left. An agent with a full beard dressed in a heavy blue coat stepped out of a kiosk. After a few cursory questions Manny was cleared into Canada.

Manny drove past a sign welcoming him to St. Stephen—"Canada's Chocolate Town"—but wasn't sure where to go. He pulled into a service station for directions. A mechanic slid out from under a truck. "It's off of River Street. Go three blocks, and then hang a left."

The directions were accurate. The Sobeys store, with its fluorescent green neon lights, beckoned. The parking lot was almost deserted. He lit a Marlboro and waited.

Twenty-Nine

Ian silently left his bed. He pulled on his sweater and laced up his running shoes. After placing the note for his coach on the dresser, he gathered his jacket and walked warily past Cannon. He turned the heavy brass knob and opened the door just wide enough to squeeze through. After closing the door softly, he walked to the stairwell at the end of the hall and took the stairs two at a time.

Upon entering the mall's parking lot Ian stopped and peered at the Sobeys grocery store in the distance. His heart jumped. A blue cab shimmered under a tall florescent light stand.

Ian drew nearer. He heard the car start and rev as if to offer a greeting. He climbed in and met Manny's wide grin.

"You made it."

"Of course."

"You're sure you have the ticket?"

"It's in my wallet. Come on. Let's get out of here. My coach may already know that I'm missing."

They left the mall and drove for half a block. Manny unexpectedly pulled in behind a variety store and threw the cab into park.

Ian grabbed the latch to his door. "What are you doing?"

"We're close to the border. I want to go over some things. First off, you're going to need proof of your U.S. citizenship. You told me that you had something with your picture on it."

"My student card."

"Are you absolutely sure that's all you have? No Social Security card? Something else with your picture on it?"

"Nope. All stolen."

"I hope that'll do. The guard will ask how long you've been in Canada. What's your answer? Quickly."

"Um--"

"Not good enough."

"I've been here since this morning."

"What was the purpose of your visit?"

"A hockey game."

"How did you enter Canada?"

"By bus."

"Why aren't you returning on the bus?"

"I had to--"

"Pardon? Explain. Why aren't you on the bus?"

"Because—I hate this."

"Listen to me. You have to be prepared. The customs agent will throw some curves at you. I guarantee it. First of all, don't mention the bus. You'll just talk yourself into a corner. But stay with something you know. Here's what I suggest. You were on

your way to Fredericton with a friend to see your team play hockey. Here, in St. Stephen, you received a call from me that your mother was ill. I offered to come and get you.”

“OK.”

“Now remember. I’m a family friend. What is your mother’s name?”

“Arlene.”

Manny started the cab. “You feel confident? Ready for any questions?”

“I guess so.”

“You gentlemen can go ahead and collect your fortune,” said Manny in an exaggerated New England accent. They both had a much needed laugh.

Coach Cannon was torn from a deep sleep by the penetrating ring of his bedside phone.

“This is Wayne Lubinowski. I’m the District Attorney for Hastings County. I apologize for the late call but it took some digging to find out where you and Ian Sinclair were staying. I’m phoning to tell you that we’ll be sending an officer to St. Stephen for Ian after his court appearance in the morning. I’d like to speak with him.”

Cannon turned on a bedside light and blearily focused his eyes towards the bed beside him. Empty! He kicked off his covers and walked to the balcony. He returned to the phone, bewildered. “Ian doesn’t appear to be here.”

“Where is he?”

“I’m not sure. We turned in early. He’s probably getting something from a vending machine.” Cannon spotted something on the dresser. “Just a second.”

He picked up the note. *Coach...I want you to know that I am safe. Don't worry about me. I'll tell you everything tomorrow in Ashbury...Ian.*

Cannon read the message three times. Sinclair was going to cross the border—or at least try. He must have called one of his buddies or a family member to meet him. Foolish boy. What was he thinking? There was no point covering for him. He’d be found-out soon enough.

The swallowed hard and picked up the phone. “Ian is gone. My guess is that he’s crossed the border. He left me a note to that effect. He waited until I was asleep and he slipped out.”

“Oh for god’s sake. It took me all afternoon to arrange for his release. What does he hope to accomplish?”

“I have no idea.”

“I’m glad I called. I’ve saved an officer an unnecessary trip.”

“What will happen to him?”

“That remains to be seen. But since I arranged for his temporary release, my office could charge him with breach of recognizance.”

“Is that serious?”

“It’s a felony, and punishable by jail. I won’t tie you up. Goodnight, Mr. Cannon.”

Manny and Ian pulled up to a kiosk at the U.S. border crossing. A young African American woman looked at Manny as he rolled down his window.

“Your citizenship?”

“American.”

She looked at Ian. “And you?”

“U.S. as well.”

“Some identification from both of you.”

Manny handed her the documents. Ian looked on, mouth dry, his heart throbbing.

“How long have you been in Canada?”

“For an hour or so,” said Manny.

“What was the purpose of your trip?”

“I came to pick up the young man.”

“All the way from Massachusetts?”

“His mother is ill.”

“Are there any firearms in this vehicle?”

“No ma’am.”

“Do either of you have anything to declare?”

“Nothing,” answered Manny.

The agent aimed the beam of a flashlight at Ian. “And you?”

“Nothing to declare.”

She studied Ian’s I.D. again. “I’ll need something else. Do you have a passport?”

“No. My passport, social security card and driver’s license were stolen.”

“And the Canadian agents accepted this student card?”

“Yes.”

“What’s your name, and where do you live?”

“Ian Sinclair. I live in Sutton, Massachusetts.”

“What’s your relationship to this man?”

“He’s a family friend.”

“What do you do in Sutton?”

“I’m a student.”

“This says that you’re a student in Ashbury.”

“I live with my mother in Sutton, but I go to school in Ashbury.”

“Where did you stay in Canada?”

“I didn’t. My mom got sick.”

“Where had you planned to stay?”

“The Holiday Inn, Fredericton.”

“What was the purpose if your trip?”

“To see a college hockey game.”

“Who was playing?”

“The Ashbury Wildcats and the Fredericton Reds,” answered Ian confidently.

“Have you ever been before a judge?”

“No ma’am.”

She turned her attention to Manny. “Leave the vehicle and open the trunk.”

Manny stepped out. The agent joined him at the rear of the cab. She looked under a blanket, and waved her flashlight about.

The agent returned the ID’s to Manny. “You may proceed.”

Manny pulled out. Within seconds he was dragging heavily on a Marlboro.

“We did it,” cried Ian as he looked back at the border crossing.” It was so easy.”

“Easy? Are you kidding? I thought I was going to have a stroke.”

“What now?”

“We’ll drive for a couple of hours and stop in Bangor to grab a burger or something. Then we’ll push right on through to Lakefield. We should get there about 5:30.”

“Then what?”

“We’ll hang tight until the lottery office opens.”

“Do you think that there’s any chance we’ll get pulled over?”

“Highly unlikely.”

“I left my coach a note telling him not worry about me, and that I’d explain everything to him once he got back to Ashbury.”

“So he knows you’ve crossed the border. I wish you hadn’t told him that. You didn’t mention me or the ticket did you?”

“Of course not.”

“We’ll be fine. Why don’t you try to get a little shut-eye? It’s going to be a long day. But a day that neither of us is ever going to forget.”

Philip ate by himself at a local Thai restaurant. He took his time, in no hurry to return to the farm. Heather’s unexpected revelation that Ian was in possession of the ticket, not the rink attendant continued to smart. His hopes of coming into millions, dashed in an instant.

Jean was on him the moment he walked into the farmhouse. “Did you call Abramsky?”

“Yes. No answer. He’s probably away for the weekend. I’ll give him a call at his branch first thing in the morning.”

At Adam’s insistence, he went to the rec-room to catch the ending to a *Bourne* DVD.

The judge pretended to watch the show, but the drama playing out in his mind made the movie’s plot seem feeble. He rubbed his temples in an attempt to massage away a throbbing headache. He was tight—absolutely drained. How the hell was he to deal with Abramsky? This was his most pressing concern. He’d simply have to stall. He’d lie and tell Jean that he had, in fact, ordered copies of Martha’s financial statements. He wouldn’t tell her that he’d made the request by fax. When she asked why the statement hadn’t yet arrived to the Sunshine Center he’d explain that the fax to the banker must not have gone through. At most, he’d buy another day before Jean lost patience and phoned the banker herself. It was shortly past eleven, the movie showed no signs of ending. The kitchen phone rang.

“It’s Wayne Lubinowski,” called Jean from the landing. “Why would he phone at this hour? I nearly had a heart attack. I thought it was the hospital calling about Mother.”

Philip wearily trudged up the stairs and brushed past Jean. “I’ll take it in my study.”

“Yes, Wayne.” He heard Jean hang up the extension.

“I thought you’d like to know. Sinclair is missing. His coach thinks he’s bolted from Canada and is heading for home.”

Philip released a heavy sigh. “I don’t need this right now. Tell the cops to check out some joint in Scarlett Heights. It’ll be in the book.”

“He slipped out on Cannon as soon as the coach was asleep. Probably afraid to attend his hearing.”

Ungrateful brat, thought Philip. What was he worried about? The kid was on track to earn \$1 million simply for returning some lottery ticket. The judge took pause. That was it. Sinclair skipped out to collect his reward. Why wouldn’t he? Was it possible that Boyce had aided in Sinclair’s flight? Interesting. He’d see where his hunch led.

“Give me Cannon’s number. And you should probably phone Juvenile Court in St. Stephen first thing in the morning and tell them that Sinclair will be a no-show. And one more thing. Please check and see if there are any reports of Ian in custody. It’s possible that he didn’t get across.”

Philip phoned the motel. “Mr. Cannon, this is Judge Philip Driscoll. I have just spoken with Mr. Lubinowski. What’s going on up there?”

“Ian has left. I have to assume from his note that he’s crossed the border.”

“How could this have happened? Was he not under your care and control?”

“He left the room while I was asleep. But his note says that he’s safe.”

“Safe, but an escaped felon. Did Ian give you any hint whatsoever as to why he might have fled?”

“I know he was worried about his hearing.”

“Were there any phone calls to Ian during his time with you at the motel?”

“He did receive a call or two but I’m not sure who from.”

“Mr. Cannon, did Ian by chance ever happen to mention a lottery ticket to you? I ask because it’s possible that he’s involved with an extremely undesirable man—a con-artist who is under investigation. Does the name Manny Boyce mean anything to you?”

“No, but to answer your first question, Ian did give me a lottery ticket for safe-keeping.” Cannon reached for his trousers. “He wanted me to keep it in case things didn’t go well in court.”

“Do you still have it?”

Cannon fanned through his wallet. “It’s gone. Now I’m worried. What did you say about a con-artist? Is Ian in some kind of danger?”

“That remains to be seen,” replied Philip. “Thank you for your time.”

The judge heard Adam calling for him—something about “missing the best part.” He returned to the rec-room and distractedly watched the rest of the movie. As the closing credits ran, Lubinowski’s call came in.

Philip hustled back to his study.

“It’s Wayne. No sign of Sinclair but here’s something. There is a record of a vehicle with a Massachusetts tag crossing about half an hour ago. The vehicle is described as commercial in nature. A cab.”

“What about the occupants?”

“Two males, aged 17 and 48 years, but I hardly think that Sinclair would hire a cab.”

“Who knows. Thank you, Wayne.”

Philip walked about his study. Ian had taken off with Manny Boyce to cash the ticket. Manny Boyce could be apprehended for a crime clearly identified by Massachusetts General Law—*aiding escape from an officer or a person having custody.*

It was an offence that carried up to two years in prison. But it was also an offence that he could arrange to overlook—for the right price.

Fraught with indecision, Philip unraveled a couple of TUMS and chewed them furiously. While it had been reckless to mess with Martha's money, he had never intended to steal it. Not a cent. His plan to recover the ticket from some two-bit thief at the rink had been more than palatable. But at this moment, he was flirting with the idea of actually extorting an individual for cash.

Philip revisited the scene at *The Owl's Nest Motel*. He had been stalked and photographed like some common criminal. Boyce had aimed his powerful camera at a draped window—a deliberate and illegal incursion on his and Julia's expectation to privacy. The private detective, or cabbie or whatever he was, had been intent on gathering evidence which would have resulted in divorce and crippling alimony payments. Because of Manny Boyce, he had been thoroughly humiliated in front of his colleagues. The low-life snoop owed him. What would a couple of million mean to Boyce when weighed against jail? He would express his demand—request for money—to Boyce in terms of a loan. Surely Boyce would cooperate.

The judge turned on his computer. There it was, just as he recalled. Lotto-Central Headquarters. Lakefield, Massachusetts. *The only lottery office in the state that can redeem prizes of \$200,000 and over.*

Sinclair had skipped out on a court date—Manny had aided and abetted his escape. They both had to know that they were in trouble. They would be heading south towards Lakefield through the night.

Philip reached for his phone.

Deputy Bleeker answered.

“Something important has come up. I don't want to get into it right now. Book a cruiser and meet me at the courthouse by six in the morning. I want you in full uniform. We have some business to attend to.”

Thirty

Philip awoke early Monday morning. He showered and dressed as quietly as possible and slipped out the front door. A spectacular harvest moon illuminated freshly cut fields of wheat. As rural roads turned to pavement, the moon cast subdued shafts of light on carefully tended lawns and over the courthouse's slate roof.

In his chambers, the judge sifted through some correspondence anxiously awaiting his deputy's arrival. It was critical that Bleeker participate in his plans. He didn't anticipate any resistance. Bleeker had always been agreeable to anything asked of him. Nevertheless, Philip had prepared a compelling argument as to why Bleeker should accompany him to Lakefield. A uniformed officer, replete with a high-powered cruiser were just the props he required to round up Boyce without incident.

While they had never spoken of it, the judge was aware that his deputy had encountered a set-back early in his career. Bleeker had shot and severely injured a young man, who had later been found guilty of nothing more than a petty theft. Bleeker had been suspended with pay while a full-fledged inquiry into the incident was launched. The investigation had dragged out over two years. Philip decided to exploit this unfortunate period of Bleeker's career, but a little grooming was in order first.

Philip heard the throaty rumble of Bleeker's cruiser as it rolled into the parking lot. The deputy's heavy boots knocked along the bare floors to the judge's chambers.

"Morning boss. What's up?"

Philip motioned to a chair before his desk. "After you left here yesterday afternoon, I listened to the messages left on Boyce's cell phone."

"Oh yeah? Anything good?"

"There was a message from my wife wondering why Boyce hadn't returned her calls. She obviously hired him. I know that this won't go any further."

"Of course not."

"Last night, I received a phone call from Boyce himself. Jean must have given him our number. Anyway, he was really peeved about being arrested in the motel's parking lot. All of a sudden he's feeling very brave. It seems that he has had a change of heart. He's threatening to tell Jean that I was with the young lady. He could ruin my marriage and destroy me financially."

"I hate to say it, but you should have let Armitage and me have our way with him."

"Actually, you're wrong. You did quite enough. Boyce told me that he's going to take you and Marshal Armitage to the Police Services Board."

"What for!"

"Police brutality. He will claim that that you used excessive force against him. He's already hired an attorney."

"That's ridiculous. We caught him red-handed following you."

"Yes, that's true. But nevertheless he may have a case. You held him at gunpoint. You threw him in cuffs. All this before even checking his I.D."

"But we had good cause!"

“I wanted to give you advanced warning. Be prepared. You might get a call from the brass.” For good measure Philip added, “From what I understand, the investigations launched by these complaints can be extremely grueling.”

“I can’t believe this. I don’t need any more grief from Internal Affairs.”

“You’re referring to that incident years ago?”

Bleeker nodded.

“What happened exactly?”

“It was dark. The guy matched the description of a rapist. We phoned in his tag. He was driving a stolen vehicle. He refused my order to show me his hands. He went for something that looked like a gun. I shot him in the chest. I didn’t have any other choice.”

“I have no doubts about that.”

“Even though I was cleared, I was still taken off active patrol duty and got assigned to the courts—guarding doorways, running metal detectors over ugly bodies, telling people to rise. But I do enjoy working with you, Judge. Don’t get me wrong.” Bleeker looked solemnly at Philip. “Things were going so well. My little girl, the new house. But now this. I can’t handle another inquiry. Who knows what the outcome will be. You’ll back me won’t you?”

“Of course, but Boyce may never get an opportunity to rat on you.”

“What do you mean?”

“We have an opportunity to put him in his place. It turns out that he’s in big trouble. I’ll need your assistance to bring him in.”

“Name it. What do you have on him?”

The judge reached for his reading glasses and referred to a legal pad. “In addition to Jean’s message on Boyce’s message center, there was one from Ian Sinclair.”

Bleeker squinted looking perplexed. “Ian Sinclair. Why do I know that name?”

“He’s a hockey player and a friend of Heather’s. Remember?”

“That’s right. And we found pictures of him in Boyce’s camera.”

“Yes. Here’s what’s going on. Turns out Boyce won the Magnificent Millions lottery.”

Bleeker nearly jumped from his chair. “You’ve got to be kidding. Come on. Not the big one. The ticket that hasn’t been claimed yet? There was a thing in *the Examiner* about that just yesterday.”

“That’s the one. The \$25 million payoff. But here’s where things get really interesting. Boyce lost the ticket, and somehow discovered that Ian found it. He offered Ian a million bucks as a reward to get it back.”

Bleeker whistled softly “Not bad.”

“Not bad at all. But get this. Ian lost the ticket.”

“You’re kidding me.”

“Nope. And there’s more. Sinclair was on his way to a hockey game in New Brunswick, and ran into some kind of trouble at the border. Something about stolen documents. Anyway, he was set to appear in Juvenile Court today.” Philip paused for effect. “And, it seems, he somehow found his ticket.”

“Where? How do you know this?”

“I don’t know how it suddenly showed up, but Sinclair told Heather that he had it, and his coach told me that Ian shown it to him. But here’s the thing. Ian went missing. I

had Lubinowski do some investigating. Boyce took it upon himself to personally collect Ian and he's sneaked him over the border."

"Then Boyce is in deep. Assisting escape. Isn't that aiding and abetting?"

"You are right. Good for a couple of years. We have leverage that we can use against Boyce. We can get him to drop the plans he had to have you charged with improper conduct and I can convince him to lay-off going to my wife."

"I see where you're going with this."

"We'll scare the hell out of him. We'll bring Boyce and Ian back to Sutton. I'll confront Boyce in my chambers and flash an arrest warrant in his face. He'll cooperate."

Bleeker sprang to his feet. "Let's move out."

Manny and Ian pulled into a truck stop about half an hour east of Bangor. The restaurant was full of activity, filled with a curious mix of truckers and shift workers who chatted over hearty meals at various tables and booths. Others parked themselves on padded stools along the counter before the splashing honeydew machines and stared vacantly at their coffee cups or thumbed through day-old newspapers.

After a lengthy wait they were finally seated. Their order was eventually taken by a weary looking woman who Manny guessed was approaching 70 but could pass as 80, too aged to be waiting tables at an all-night diner. Both he and Ian ordered the daily special of fried chicken, mashed potatoes and peas with pie and ice cream offered as dessert.

Ian ate hungrily while Manny took his time observing their waitress hustle about with pad and pencil in hand. Her boss, a smarmy looking young man dressed in a cheap dark suit with an open white shirt showing lots of gold, intercepted her and yapped excitedly while waving towards a couple who were waiting at the front for attention. She busily cleared a table for them.

Manny considered just how fortunate he was. Without the lottery windfall coming his way, he'd be in the same situation. Still broke in his senior years, plodding about at some marginal job, retirement out of the question. His future had looked dubious at best. Instead, he was about to become an extremely wealthy man. Even after taxes, he'd still have about \$16 million remaining, maybe more. The monthly interest earned on that alone would be more than their beleaguered waitress earned in three years.

The waitress came by with the bill. Manny left a generous tip and he and Ian left the restaurant armed with sodas and coffee for the long journey ahead. After filling up at the all-night gas-bar, Manny swung the cab down a winding service road and merged onto Route 9. Rain had given way to a fine mist and occasional wisps of fog which hugged the low lying valleys along the highway.

As the miles passed by, Ian became sleepy closing his eyes for long intervals.

Manny plodded on, fueled by adrenaline, caffeine and nicotine. He searched the radio dial looking for some tunes that might help the trip go faster. "Three more hours and we're in Lakefield," he reported.

Ian shifted and stretched out his cramped legs. "You're not going to fall asleep at the wheel, are you?"

"Nope. I'm on my second wind. Maybe third."

"And 10th cigarette."

Hey I've been blowing the smoke out the window. Oh, oh."

“What?”

“We’ve got a road-block up ahead.”

Blue and white lights flashed everywhere. An officer stepped forward pointing to the side of the road.

Ian dug out his wallet “Should I give you the ticket? I can’t believe this. How could they have known that I was missing so soon?”

“Yes. Give it to me. Quickly. No. Too late. Put it away. Let me do the talking.”

A heavy-set Maine State Trooper, flashlight in hand, leaned in through Manny’s rolled-down window. “Evening, gentlemen. Some I.D from both of you. He looked things over. “Would you open your trunk please sir?”

Manny left the cab and complied. “What’s this all about, officer? Escaped prisoner?”

“A judge was shot earlier tonight. Just north of here.”

“I thought they had caught that guy.”

“Apparently not, or it maybe a copycat thing. Radio-in anything you may see that strikes you as suspicious. He may be on foot.”

“That was scary,” commented Ian as they drove off.

“Got my heart pumping a bit. I guess that sniper is still on the loose. Another judge shot. What a maniac. But at least we know that they haven’t posted an alert for you. If we stay away from Ashbury we’ll be fine, and nobody is about to search us out in Lakefield.”

Another couple of hours went by. It was getting light. Ian awoke and watched the outskirts of Boston unfold. “The traffic is so busy, even this early. I can’t believe all the trucks.”

“It’s the only time of day they can make decent time. In another half-hour this highway will be gridlocked. Mondays are always crazy.”

“Where exactly is Lakefield, anyway?”

“It’s about 40 miles north-west of Springfield. Just off of I-90.”

“What are we going to do until the lottery office opens?”

“I guess we’ll just hang out somewhere. Get some breakfast, stretch our legs.”

Manny rubbed his hand over a day’s worth of stubble. “I was hoping to look a little better for the cameras. You know, for the presentation of the giant check.”

Manny and Ian pulled into Lakefield around 6:30. “It’s on Russell Street,” said Manny.

Ian consulted a map. “Keep an eye out for a fork in the road, and then Chemong Road.”

Lotto-Central came into view, a two-storied building constructed of red brick surrounded by manicured shrubs. Manny pulled over and gazed at the building as though it were a national landmark. “We made it, Ian. In just over two hours, we’ll be inside that building cashing in.”

“Let’s get some food.”

Manny took his time driving through historic old neighborhoods, eventually coming out at the north end of the town’s main street.

“There’s a place,” pointed Ian. “Dunkelman’s Donuts.”

Manny parked out front. He and Ian walked to the service counter. Ian looked at Manny under the brilliant florescent lights. “You look really rough.”

“What do you expect? I’ve just driven to Canada and back. I haven’t had sleep since I can remember. You don’t look so hot yourself. Your eyes are like little slits.”

Manny ordered two glazed donuts and a super-sized coffee. Ian chose a tuna fish sandwich and carton of milk. They selected a seat by an enormous plate-glass window at the front.

Philip and Bleeker headed east on 1-90. The popular interstate was clogged with early Monday morning commuters embarking on a fresh week of drudgery—robotically driving to Springfield, Chicopee and even Boston, only to return home some eight hours later.

“Is there a normal radio in this car,” asked Philip scowling. “Turn down that scanner. It’s getting on my nerves.”

“What’s the matter, boss? Feeling a little edgy?”

“As a matter of fact, I am. I’m running on about three hours sleep.”

“So when we get there we’re going to cruise around a bit looking for Boyce’s cab?”

“Yes. The sooner we intercept them, the sooner we can head back to Sutton.”

“I’ve never been to Lakefield,” commented Bleeker. “How big is it?”

“A couple of thousand, I think. It’s pretty much turned into a bedroom community. They have a cheese factory as I recall, and of course Lotto-Central.”

“It’s a large enough place that we’re not just going to just run smack dab into Boyce.”

“I’m not so sure. He’ll probably be killing time in a restaurant. What else would you do in Lakefield at 7:00 in the morning? Plus they’ll be at the lottery office later, waiting for the doors to open. We’ll find him eventually.” Philip pulled a piece of paper from his jacket. “We’re just about there. You’ll want to keep an eye open for highway 17.”

The judge and his deputy snaked through unfamiliar streets and eventually cruised by Lotto-Central. There was no sign of Boyce’s cab.

“This town is dead. Where’s the nearest donut shop?” asked Philip.

“How would I know?”

“Don’t you guys have ingrained radar for coffee and donuts?”

“Get real,” laughed Bleeker. “But seeing as you mentioned it, I noticed some fast-food places when we came into town. I’ll double back.”

“Keep your eyes peeled for Boyce.”

“There’s a Dunkleman’s. They’re not bad.”

“You should know. Wait a minute. Slow down. You see? I was right. There’s Boyce’s cab.”

“Where?”

“Beside that white cube van. Pull right.”

“Why?”

“Just listen to me. We’ll go in together, and you zero in on Boyce. Tell him that he’s wanted for aiding escape.”

“Cuffs?”

“Not unless he resists, but I want Boyce and Sinclair in this cruiser within the next five minutes. And they’re not to speak with each other. Let’s pick them up.”

Thirty-One

Ian chewed unenthusiastically on his tuna fish sandwich then gave up on it. His stomach throbbed with nervous expectation as he counted down the hours before that wonderful moment when he and Manny finally walked into the lottery office. Killing time in a sterile donut shop was unbearable. A squalling infant two tables down added to his impatience. He pushed his tray aside. “Let’s go somewhere else, I can’t handle sitting around this place any longer.”

Manny gathered up his empty coffee cup and various wrappings. “I was just going to suggest the same thing. You finished with your sandwich?”

“Yeah. Take it. Thanks. My stomach hurts. I feel like puking.”

“That’s nice talk.”

“I just want to get this over with.”

“Me too. Not long now.”

A deep rumble from the parking lot caught Ian’s attention. “Hey, not bad. The cops in Lakefield drive those new Chargers. Actually, it’s a Sutton cruiser. It’s pulling up front. You don’t think--?”

Manny shifted awkwardly on his bench seat to turn around. “Where?”

“They’re getting out, and quickly too.”

“I don’t see them.”

“Behind you. No to your left. Your left. You missed them. They’re coming in.”

Manny spun towards the front entrance. Driscoll! And he was with that cop who had held a gun to his head. What was going on? It must be a coincidence. Nobody could have known where they were.

Bleeker approached their table—his uniform attracting points and whispers from staff and customers alike. “Mr. Boyce.”

“Yes?”

“You are wanted for aiding in the escape of this young man.”

Manny stared at Bleeker, stunned—unable to respond.

Philip stepped in. “Ian, you may remember me.”

Heather’s father! “Yes.”

“You have breached your recognizance. You’ve let me and everyone else down.”

Manny’s jaw dropped, flabbergasted. “How the hell do you know Driscoll?”

Bleeker extended his arm towards the cabbie. “No questions. Leave the table and come with me.”

“Why?”

“Because we are charging you with a crime against public justice,” broke in Philip. “Under Massachusetts State Law Chapter 268 Section 17—aiding escape from an officer or a person having custody. Just go with Deputy Bleeker. Ian, you come with me. We are taking you and Mr. Boyce back to Sutton. The district attorney has questions for both of you.”

Manny squeezed out from the table and followed Bleeker and Driscoll. His legs quivered, he felt woozy—he had been less than two hours from claiming the ticket. Now this.

“Get your things from the taxi,” ordered Philip.

“I just can’t just abandon my cab.”

“You’re going to have to. You can get it tomorrow, or whenever.”

Manny retrieved his briefcase and got in the back of the squad car. Ian threw his backpack in the cruiser’s trunk, and joined him.

“How did you know that we’d be in Lakefield?” asked Ian.

“We’ll talk later,” said Philip. “Why don’t you try and get some sleep? You must have driven through the night.”

Bleeker headed out towards the interstate. Ian looked out the window, self-conscious at the curious stares of passing motorists. Manny slumped low, his back deep against the seat. Overcome by fatigue, he lowered his head and closed his eyes.

Philip and Bleeker listened to a baseball game. Philip looked to the back seat and noticed that Ian and Boyce were fast asleep.

A rough patch of road awoke Manny. He felt woolly, and yearned to brush his teeth. He focused on Ian who was awake, staring vacantly ahead.

“Did you get some sleep?” asked Manny

“Yeah I guess so.”

“I told you. No talking,” said Philip.

Manny watched the scenery race by. He observed the dark red buildings of a dairy farm which he recognized as being about half an hour from Sutton. Bleeker and Driscoll spoke quietly up-front—their words weaving in and out of his subconscious as he drifted off once more.

“We’re here,” said Philip.

Manny sat upright, confused.

“Where are we?” asked Ian sleepily.

“Behind the courthouse. Bleeker will show you where the bathroom is, and then I want to speak with you individually in my chambers.”

Philip took Bleeker aside. “Remember what I told you. Don’t let them speak with each other. After they use the bathroom, keep them separated. Assign a marshal to stay with Boyce, and you stay with Ian. Bring him to my chambers in about 15 minutes.”

Philip made his way through the courthouse. His secretary greeted him outside of his chambers.

“Judge Driscoll, are you feeling better?”

“Not really, but there’s a matter I have to attend to. Deputy Bleeker will be bringing a young man to my chambers. Please show him in, and hold all calls.”

Philip freshened up in his private bathroom and waited behind his desk.

Bleeker arrived with Ian. “Thank you, Deputy. Wait outside.”

Ian shifted from one foot to the other standing apprehensively before Philip.

“It’s not my intention to alarm you Ian,” began the judge, “but missing your hearing was extremely irresponsible. You understand that don’t you?”

“Yes sir.”

Philip motioned towards a couple of easy chairs. “Have a seat.”

“I didn’t steal anything,” stated Ian.

“That may be true, but you are in breach of recognizance. There are penalties that can be laid. Time in a correctional center if you’re found guilty. Do you understand?”

“Yes sir.”

“I personally intervened in your situation at the border. The district attorney arranged for your release to Coach Cannon.”

“Yes sir. Thank you. But I have a question. How did you know where I’d be? Where to find us?”

“Heather told me that you had a lottery ticket. When you went missing I followed up with Mr. Cannon. Your coach told me that he was safekeeping the ticket for you and that it was missing. We investigated at the border and learned that you had cleared customs in a cab.”

“Oh.”

“I am intervening again, but only because you are a friend of Heather’s. It’s possible that arrangements can be made whereby you’ll be allowed to continue your studies while your legal status is reviewed. But you need to be honest with me. Understood?”

Ian nodded.

“I need to know your connection to Mr. Boyce.”

“I found his lottery ticket. He offered me a reward for it. We went to Lakefield to cash it.”

“I’m not at liberty to provide details, but Boyce has a criminal record. You mustn’t associate with him. Just who is in possession of this ticket?”

“I am.”

“Show it to be.”

Ian gingerly removed the ticket from his wallet and handed it across to Philip.

The judge slipped on his reading glasses. Unsigned! He left his chair and took it to the light of a window.

Have you finished looking at the ticket? I’d kind of like it back.”

I’d of like it back, repeated Philip silently. Such arrogance. Why should a \$1 million reward come your way so easily?

“Judge?”

Philip returned to his desk clutching the ticket. “What is the value of this ticket?”

Ian hesitated for a moment. “It’s worth \$25 million dollars.”

The judge widened his eyes, feigning surprise. “That’s incredible. Where did you find it?”

“In a bathroom stall at the Sutton bus station.”

“Where did Boyce purchase it?”

“At the 7-11. It’s all on the website.”

“What website?”

“Magnificent Millions.”

Philip scratched at the ticket with a thumbnail. “What’s this substance on the back?”

“Cola.”

“Cola? You’re spilling soda on a ticket worth \$25 million? You must be more careful of it. An unsigned lottery ticket is a bearer instrument.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means that anyone who finds it can cash it.” The judge continued to study the ticket. A plan began to take shape. There was no need to extort Boyce. If he worked things craftily, he’d be able to gain full control of the ticket, while staying within the parameter of the Law. Once the signature of Justice Philip Driscoll appeared on the back of that ticket, Boyce wouldn’t have claim to a cent.

“So all this time, the ticket was really mine? Did Manny know that?”

“I’m sure that he never considered it yours; however, the lottery ticket was lost. As the finder, you now own it unless Boyce can provide indisputable proof it is his. Seeing as it was found in the stall of a public bathroom, I think that’s highly unlikely, if not impossible.”

“Have you finished with it?”

“I’m willing to assist you. Despite the fact that you are in breach of recognizance, I will allow you to return to Lakefield to cash the ticket. But you will be under my care and control. Once the ticket has been cashed, you will have to meet with the district attorney.”

“That’s what I had planned all along. I just wanted to get my reward money before dealing with the Law.”

“I don’t think you heard me. I said that I’ll allow you to cash the ticket,” stated Philip.

“Me?”

“Yes. It’s yours. You found it.”

“But that wouldn’t be right.”

Philip leaned forward and peered over his reading glasses. “Ian, there’s really no choice. You should both be before the police. I’m willing to go out on a limb and allow you to cash the ticket. I’m not willing to extend Boyce the same opportunity. His crime is far more serious than yours. There’ll be all kinds of publicity after the ticket is cashed. It could come to light that I enabled Boyce. That wouldn’t look good.”

“But I’m the one who skipped out.”

“You’ve been very foolish. But I think you’ll catch a break. As I recall, Heather told me you’re 17?”

“Yes.”

“Then I’m sure you’ll be allowed to stay in school and play hockey—assuming that you had nothing to do with the break-in”

“I didn’t. I swear. It was the rink guy. Emile Pepin. It will all come out.”

“Now. Back to this ticket. I insist that you cash it.”

“Manny will go crazy.”

“Don’t misunderstand me. I’m not suggesting that you take the money and run so to speak. You’ll keep your reward and pass on the rest to Boyce.”

“As long as Manny doesn’t think that I’m ripping him off.”

“I’ll tell him just what I’ve told you. He won’t cause you any problems.”

“How can you be sure of that?”

“Simple. I’ll remind him that he could be arrested for assisting your flight from court. He’ll cooperate. Frankly, he should be in custody as we speak.”

“Then why isn’t he?”

“Think about it. If he were arrested for aiding in your escape, the police would come after you as well. I want you to have an opportunity to cash the ticket, and then I’ll

suggest a good lawyer for your defense. Now, I think it would be prudent if you allowed me to store the ticket in the courthouse safe.”

“If you don’t mind, I’d rather keep it myself.”

“I really think it would be safer locked-up. But it’s your ticket. Don’t let it leave your sight. I highly suggest that you make a copy of it. And don’t, whatever you do, sign it. You have to do that in front of the lottery officials. They have to witness your signature; otherwise they’ll void it,” lied Philip.

“OK. May I call home, and Heather?”

“You can phone your home shortly. You can call Heather after you have cashed the ticket. I want you to stay low. If people find out where you are, the Ashbury police will come and get you.”

“When are we going to Lakefield?” asked Ian eagerly

“I know that you have been up all night. We’ll go back first thing in the morning after we have all had some rest. You can cash your ticket when the office opens.”

“When can I go home?”

“I haven’t decided that yet. I have to speak with Boyce, first,” said Philip as he rose from his chair. He stepped out of his chambers. “Bleeker. Take Ian to the lounge. And ask the marshal to bring me Boyce in 10 minutes.”

The moment Ian had left his chambers; Philip closed the door and went straight to his computer. He punched in Magnificent Millions. The website popped up. He scanned it hurriedly. Magnificent Millions...Draw date Sept 7...ticket worth \$25 million still unclaimed... purchased at a 7-11, Sutton. Ian’s information had been accurate.

He shut down the computer and stretched back in his chair rehearsing how to deal with Boyce. He heard a rap at his door and straightened up.

“Come in.”

“I’ve brought this gentleman for you, Your Honor.”

“Thank you, Marshal. Please wait outside the door. We won’t be long.”

“Have a seat, Boyce. You must be exhausted.”

Manny clenched his jaw defiantly “Actually I’ll stand. What do you want?”

“For starters I want to know just what you were thinking in aiding and abetting Ian’s departure from Canada. Actually let me rephrase that. I don’t care what you were thinking. You are facing a serious charge. Under Massachusetts State Law. Chapter--”

“Yeah yeah. You already rhymed all of that off at the donut place.”

“I think you should pay attention. You could be facing up to two years imprisonment. You knew he was dodging a court appearance.”

“Did I?”

“Don’t be smart with me. You’re in big trouble. I’ll get right to the point. I happen to know that the lottery ticket you own is worth \$25 million. I am willing to allow you to cash it. I hope you realize that you could just as easily be sitting in a jail cell.”

“Yes.”

“Here’s my proposition. We’ll go back to the lottery office tomorrow morning.”

“We’ll?”

“Yes. You, me, Ian and Bleeker. I should add that deputy Bleeker will accompany you personally. After you have cashed your ticket, I’ll speak with the district attorney and see if we might overlook your extremely bad judgment in taking Ian across the border.”

“Sounds reasonable. What’s the catch?”

Philip reached for a stainless water jug on his desk. He filled a tall glass. After a lengthy swig he spoke. "It's simple. Ian told me that you have promised him a reward for the ticket. He didn't tell me how much, but I want to see that you actually make-good on it. You are of no use to Ian in jail. I am allowing you to cash the ticket for Ian's sake, certainly not yours."

"I have always intended to make-good on his reward."

"Talk is cheap. Frankly, I don't trust you. I am determined to protect Ian's interests. He may have told you that he's a good friend to my daughter."

"So that explains how Ian knows you. I'll think about your offer."

"I can't believe that you are even hesitating. There's nothing to think about. I am being more than fair." Philip pulled out a paper from his breast pocket. "This happens to be a warrant for your arrest. I prepared it this morning. Don't push your luck."

"So all I have to do is give Ian his reward? You don't have some other agenda? I'm half expecting you to try and cash it yourself."

"Don't be ridiculous. I don't even know where it was purchased."

"Everyone knows that it came from the 7-11 at the bus station."

"My only concern is to see that Ian gets paid. Cooperate, and you'll be free to enjoy your money."

Philip's intercom buzzed. He ignored it. "I presume that we have an understanding."

"Yes."

"We're finished for now. Bleeker is waiting for you outside the door."

Another buzz from his phone. "Yes, Joyce what is it?"

"I know you asked me to hold all calls, Your Honor, but it's Mrs. Driscoll on line two. She insists that you speak with her and I think you should. There's something wrong. She's extremely upset—almost hysterical."

Thirty-Two

Philip sent Manny to the cafeteria with Bleeker and returned to his desk. He stared at the menacing phone button which flashed urgently. The news behind it foretold one of two things: Either Martha had died, or Jean had somehow discovered that he'd lost Martha's money.

He took a deep breath. "Yes, Jean."

"Where's my mother's money? It's nearly all missing."

The worst scenario had happened.

"Answer me. I've just opened a form sent to me from Donald Abramsky. Over \$1 million has been transferred from her account. Where is it?"

"Jean, there's an explanation."

"Stop it. I can't stand it. Where's the money? You've stolen it."

"No, her money is safe. I made an investment for her. It can be cashed in anytime."

"An investment? What are you talking about? I need to speak with you face-to-face. You'd better be here within 20 minutes or I'm calling the police."

"Don't do that."

"I will. You're a thief."

"Stop saying that and keep your voice down. Is Heather nearby?"

"No. She came in this morning to see Mother and she's returned to Ashbury. She wanted to see you. Why did you leave the house so early this morning?"

"I had things to do."

"Just get here. Mother is nearly bankrupt. And she needs expensive long-term care. So help me Philip, if you've lost or spent my mother's money, I'll kill you."

"Don't say stupid things." The line went dead. Philip sank to his chair, stunned that he'd been found out. He fumbled through his top drawer for the Abramsky's business card.

"It's Judge Driscoll. I was just speaking with my wife. I understand that you have sent her some correspondence regarding the transfer of money from Martha's account."

"I did indeed. You'll remember that I told you that we required Mrs. Van Whyte's signature on form 2356. Notification to the Federal Government of any large monetary transfers."

"Yes."

"You had told me that Martha has Alzheimer's," continued Abramsky. "I explained to you that I had sent a form to Jean so that she might oversee her mother's signature."

"No! That's not what you said. I remember clearly. You said that you had sent the form to Martha for her records *along* with a form for Jean to sign. I took that to mean that you had sent *both* forms to Martha's condominium."

"I don't recall. Perhaps that's how I expressed it."

"You're damned right that's how you expressed it."

“I would hardly have sent both forms to Mrs. Van Whyte. She might well have lost or discarded them. But really, what difference does it make where Jean’s copy was sent? She’s received it. That’s the important thing. I have to tell you that I am very concerned. I hope there isn’t a problem with Mrs. Van Whyte’s money.”

“There’s no problem, I assure you.”

Philip kicked back from his desk and left his chambers. It would take every degree of persuasion, deceit and imagination that he could muster to somehow pacify Jean until he had obtained funds from Lotto-Central. And he still had to deal with Boyce and Ian.

He walked into the cafeteria doing his utmost to appear calm. Bleeker was staring out a casement window. Manny was sitting at a small table sipping coffee. Philip pulled out a chair across from him and spoke quietly. “You are free to return home for the night. Once we take care of business in Lakefield, I’ll tear up your arrest warrant.”

“Gee, that’s big of you.”

Philip caught Bleeker’s eye and directed him to a hallway outside of the cafeteria.

“So did you put it to Boyce?” asked Bleeker anxiously. “Did you make him change his mind about taking me to the Police Board?”

“You bet I did. It’s a close file. Don’t even bring it up with him. And we’re all heading back to Lakefield in the morning. Boyce will ride in your cruiser but you will never arrive to Lotto-Central. Your vehicle will develop engine trouble.”

“I don’t get it. If Boyce isn’t at the lottery office, how will Ian get his reward?”

“Ian is going to cash the ticket himself. He found it. It’s his.”

“And you don’t want Boyce around when Ian is cashing it in.”

“Precisely. He’d have a fit. I don’t want Ian associating with Boyce in public whatsoever, and I certainly don’t want people seeing me in Boyce’s company.”

“Then why not lock Boyce up right now?”

“Too much trouble. And his arrest would indicate that Ian is around here somewhere. The cops would track him down and he’d be detained. Don’t get me wrong. Sinclair will have to account for missing court, but I want to see to it that Ian gets his million bucks first. He’s never had much. Is everything clear?”

“Understood.”

“I want you to give Boyce a ride home. You will pick him up tomorrow morning at 6:30 and bring him to the courthouse where we’ll all set out for the Lotto-Central.”

“Engine trouble,” said Bleeker smiling. “I love it. Come to think of it the cruiser has been running a little rough.”

The judge walked up a flight of stairs to the lounge where an elderly marshal was watching television with Ian. “Ian, come out here for moment.”

They ducked into a photocopy room. “I have to leave for my farm right away. You will have to stay here at the court house for the time being. I won’t be long.”

“I want to go home. I’ve been up all night.”

“I know. I’ll be back for you shortly.”

Philip somehow managed to navigate the van towards the farm. As he drove up the laneway, he half expected to be met with cops, bullhorns in hand, yelling at him to get out of the van and onto the ground. Nothing so dramatic.

Philip entered the kitchen. The house was silent. He walked into the hallway. “Jean?”

His wife appeared from the living room, glaring. "Tell me. And don't you dare lie. What did you do with over \$1 million of my mother's money?"

"I purchased some land in Oak Leaf."

"You purchased land! Then you'll just have to sell it. Immediately."

"There's a problem. The land values have plummeted because of the--"

"You're right! I can't believe this. How could you have been so brainless? How dare you make investments with my mother's money."

"It should have worked out."

"Shut up. I need some air."

Philip waited briefly then followed Jean through the kitchen and outside. "The land deal was solid," he stammered. "I had planned to replace Martha's money within 48 hours. Less than that. It should have worked out."

"Worked out for you, I am sure. Did my mother authorize you to use her money?"

"No."

"I knew it. I've called Bernie Gardiner. I told him that you may have taken my mother's money without her knowledge. He told me that the state prosecutes these cases vigorously, especially when seniors are defrauded."

"Who do you think you're talking to? Don't you think I know the Law? Tell Gardiner that there's been a mistake. Please Jean. I was the victim of unforeseen circumstances. I didn't clean out her account and race off to Bermuda, or blow it gambling."

"It doesn't matter. And perhaps you might want to consider that my mother is the real victim here, not you. She's virtually broke. She'll die before she has to because of you. I loathe you. I'm embarrassed that you're the father of my children, and I want a divorce." Jean walked away, stopped, and turned back. "You're scum and you're going to jail."

"Hold on. Get back here. Is that what you really want? To see me ruined?"

"Of course that's what I want. You deserve everything the courts can throw at you."

"I see. It's better for Heather and Adam to live in poverty while you gloat that I'm in jail. It's better that you have to go back to work at some menial sales job just so you can say that you got me. Put me away and it's all gone. Your life will change forever."

"I don't care. We'll get by," replied Jean quietly.

"Consider what you're doing, Jean. Gardiner is right. I will go to jail, possibly for a long time. And you will go from sharing in a salary of \$135,000 a year to virtually nothing. At least think of Adam. He's at a stage where he especially needs a father."

"Are you seriously suggesting that I should just pretend that nothing's happened? That you have wiped out my mother's savings and all is forgiven? You've got to be kidding."

"No. I'm not saying that at all. But there is an alternative to having me put away. Allow me to continue to earn an income and I'll agree to a divorce with conditions that are favorable to you."

"What exactly are you saying?"

"That's about it. You set the terms."

"Get away from me. I want to be alone."

Jean walked off, thinking. She wandered towards the barn while staring at the gorgeous vista across the valley to the north. To her immediate right, several of the neighbor's beautiful white horses grazed contentedly.

The bastard is right, she conceded. With Philip in jail, everything would change. She would never be able to afford the costs of maintaining the farm. She imagined their property dotted with for-sale signs and another family moving in, changing things. She thought of Adam trying to adjust to a subsidized apartment unit downtown, miles from his friends, and possibly surrounded by bad influences while she was at work, toiling at something she hated, constantly trying to stretch a meager salary. She realized that she had left herself far too vulnerable—far too dependent on another person's income. Maybe there was some sense in his offer. Why should he drag down the rest of the family? He wasn't going to. She would take full control. She unquestionably had the leverage to see that the children's needs would continue to be met—that even when they divorced, there'd be no dramatic disruption in their lives.

Philip was on the cusp of ruin, and he knew it. His very future depended on her decision. She walked by a dilapidated chicken coop and followed a well worn path which led towards the barn. She kicked listlessly at chunks of earth which had been churned up by the deep treads of the farm's tractor and spent several minutes considering just what she'd demand. Within 10 minutes her plan was finalized.

Jean marched back towards Philip, who was sitting on an old bench, his hands in his face.

He stood as she approached.

"Here are my terms. First, I want a divorce, and as quickly as possible."

"Agreed."

"I want full custody of Adam. There'll be no haggling over support payments. Your monthly paycheck will be deposited into my bank account. From that, I'll give you \$30,000 a year—that's \$2,500 a month. The balance of nearly \$70,000 after taxes is for me and the children. I want the land you purchased put in my mother's name. We'll see an attorney and have the ownership of the farm transferred wholly into my name. And I insist on 80% of your pension. Should you refuse, or later renege on any of these demands, I won't hesitate in going to the police. Naturally, you'll sign off on Power of Attorney. And I want this fast-tracked. I'll allow you one more night at the farm so that you can pack a bag, then you are to leave this property forever."

Philip sat back down on the bench, shaken at Jean's demands. He'd expected that she'd insist on a divorce, but almost all of his salary, the farm and his pension? This was outrageous. "Jean, I think you're being a little unreasonable,"

"Unreasonable! This from a shyster? A swindler? An embezzler?"

"It's important to me that you understand that there was never any intent to steal. I simply had incredibly bad luck."

"No. Bad luck is turning on the tap for a glass of water and ending up with irreparable kidney damage. Tell Mother about your bad luck. I can't believe that you're offering any resistance to my demands. Forget it. I'm calling the police," stated Jean walking off.

Philip caught up to her. "How am I to live on \$30,000 a year?"

Jean reeled back. "It's more than you've left for my mother. Accept my terms or go to prison."

“I’m amenable to your demands. I have no other choice. I do however have two stipulations. I want full access to Adam on weekends.”

“I suppose that would be acceptable, but I don’t want you on my property. We’ll work something out.”

“And should I receive monies over and above my salary, you’ll have no claim to them.”

“What are you talking about? What monies? It’s money damn it. Stop talking to me as though you’re on the bench.”

“Eventually, I will receive an inheritance from my father. I will of course share that with the children, but you are not to have access to it. After all, I’ve just agreed to give you the farm, almost all of my salary, most of my pension.”

“Agreed. And I’ll be protected by the same clause—not that Mother has any assets left, thanks to you.”

“The land will come back in value. Your mother will get her money back, and then some.”

“She won’t live long enough to see that happen. You’ve left her virtually destitute. Where’s the money going to come from to meet her medical needs? Tell me. Where’s the money going to come from?” shouted Jean. “God I detest you. Let’s just get the divorce in place. Now.”

“You have to realize that a divorce can take months.”

“Of course I realize that. I’m going to have Bernie Gardiner draw up a separation agreement. It’ll be signed and filed as soon as possible with my terms clearly spelled out.”

“Yeah Bernie’s Gardiner’s good at these kinds of things, weasel that he is. But when you are speaking with him, be sure to tell him that there was just some confusion pertaining to Martha’s money. That I didn’t do anything wrong. Tell him right away.”

Jean stormed into the kitchen and dialed Gardiner’s office. “I jumped to some conclusions that weren’t warranted. The missing funds are fully accounted for.” She paused, surprised that she had to fight through a lump before saying, “I am divorcing Philip. I would like you to draw up a separation agreement as soon as possible.”

“I’m sorry to hear that but based on your asking me to put ‘your friend’ in touch with Manny Boyce, I’m really not surprised. Were you able to reach him by any chance?”

“You’re right,” conceded Jean, “I was asking for myself, not some phantom acquaintance. As it turns out, Manny Boyce is a flake. He seemed very professional at first, but he won’t return my calls or emails.”

“That doesn’t sound like him.”

“He’s irrelevant now anyway. The divorce is mutually agreed upon.”

“What are your terms?”

“Simple. The farm, his pension, and 80% of his salary are mine. He has visiting rights with Adam on the weekends, and no claim on any of my money.”

“Those are some very strong demands,” said Gardiner. “Are you sure he’ll agree to them?”

“There will be no resistance from Phillip whatsoever.”

“That certainly makes my job easier.”

“When can you have the paper-work ready?”

Gardiner flipped through his day book. "I'm in court for the rest of the day. The best I can do is afternoon tomorrow, say, 3:00 p.m.?"

"That'll be fine. Thank you."

Jean hurriedly left the farmhouse to intercept Philip. He was in the van, ready to pull out. "I've made the arrangements. You will sign the separation agreement tomorrow afternoon."

Philip looked anxiously through the van's window. "And you told Gardiner that there was nothing to the missing funds?"

"I hated doing it, but yes I told him. But so help me, I can change my mind in a second should you offer one iota of resistance to my demands. You can have one more night here at the farm, but only because I want you to stay with Adam. I'm heading to Oak Leaf as soon as I pack a bag. I hope to meet with Donald Abramsky first thing in the morning. Maybe he can offer a solution to the financial mess you've created."

"Don't tell him that I made a bad investment."

"Lying doesn't come as naturally to me as it does to you, but I'll cover for you. When I return tomorrow, I want you gone. We'll sign the separation agreement at the courthouse or at the law office. Now, get out of my sight. Make dinner for Adam. If nothing else, you make a decent babysitter."

Philip stared at Jean as she walked off towards the house. He had dodged jail, but relief was tempered by the nauseating reality that he had surrendered virtually all his net-worth and future security in return. If that wasn't bad enough, he might just be working for Jean the rest of his life. A woman he had just agreed to divorce. Absurd. Gardiner was good. The divorce attorney would draw up a separation agreement that no shrewd lawyer could penetrate and contest. But all of this would be moot. The lottery pay-out would provide him with the means to easily meet Jean's excessive demands, even buy her out. It all came down to sharing in the ticket.

Thirty-Three

Emile Pepin pulled his chair up tightly to a long table deep within the Ashbury police station, terrified at having been summoned to appear before Sergeant Goulding and Constable Singh. It was Monday afternoon, his day off. This wasn't how he had anticipated spending it.

Cannon had caught a morning bus out of St. Stephen, arriving back in Ashbury early afternoon. His wife had taken a message from the Ashbury police. The coach was to attend the police station for a 3:00 p.m. meeting. Thinking the cops had rounded up Ian, he had wasted no time in complying. He arrived at the police station slightly out of breath, balancing a coffee. A constable took him to the conference room. No sign of Ian. Pepin! He contained his instinct to confront the rink attendant, sensing that something quite intriguing was about to go down.

Goulding took a place at the head of the table. "Thank you for coming, gentlemen. Mr. Pepin, we have asked that you report to the station to answer some questions regarding that break-in at the Colesium."

"Whatever. I don't have anything to hide."

"But first, Mr. Cannon, would you provide some background as to the events just prior to and immediately after the theft from the Wildcats' locker room. My preference was to have heard a full accounting from Ian Sinclair; however, he seems to be missing."

Cannon put down his coffee and began. "Just let me get my days straight. So much has been happening. Let's see. It's Monday. The break-in was five days ago, on Thursday, first week of school. Ian told me that he arrived at the rink early on the Friday to look for his missing wallet. He and Pepin apparently spoke briefly about halfway up the driveway. Ian heard a cell phone. Its ringtone was the *Star Spangled Banner*. Ian said it seemed to be coming from a trash bag in Pepin's vehicle. Ian said he saw Pepin throw a similar bag in the dumpster shortly afterwards."

Goulding continued to scribble on a long pad while Cannon paused and took a swig of coffee.

"Continue," directed the sergeant.

"I forget exactly why, but after practice Ian suggested that someone should call a cell phone belonging to one of the boys. O'Neil's, I think. Sure enough they heard it ringing in the dumpster. 'The Anthem.' Clear as day. I heard it myself."

"Go on, please."

"Turns out that there was a lot of stolen stuff in the bin. All of it in a green trash bag," added Cannon. "There was still a lot missing though. Including Sinclair's wallet." The coach gave Pepin a pointed look.

"What are you looking at?" retorted Emile. "I never saw his wallet. If anyone's a thief it's Sinclair."

Goulding set down his pen and looked at Pepin impatiently. "Please. No accusations."

Constable Singh spoke up from the end of the table. "Emile, are you saying that you never saw O'Neil's stolen cell phone that morning?"

Pepin threw up his arms in exasperation. "That's right. We've been over all of this before."

"You maintain that there was never a trash bag full of stolen things in your possession?" Singh asked.

"Yes. I keep telling everyone that. And nobody can prove a thing. It's my word against Sinclair's. Besides, don't you think it's suspicious that Sinclair was hunting for his wallet so early in the morning?"

"What are you getting at?" asked Goulding.

"It just seems very strange that he'd be out at the rink on a cold morning pretending to look for his wallet. I think he stole from the room and dumped the loot in the dumpster, trying to cover his tracks. And I heard a few of his teammates talking. They said that he's taken off."

"I wonder why?" yelled Cannon unexpectedly. He leapt to his feet and bent toward Pepin from across the table, fist clenched. "You set him up."

Goulding jumped from his chair to intervene. "Mr. Cannon. Sit down."

"I don't have to put up with this crap," said Pepin.

"Both of you. Just keep quiet unless I ask you to speak." Goulding laid a 5x7 in front of Pepin. "Do you recognize this picture?"

Pepin looked it over. "It's kind of dark but it's me in my car. You can see my tattoo. Who's been taking pictures of me?"

"That's very interesting," said Goulding. "The photo of you in the car is an enlargement."

"So?"

"It's an enlargement of a photo taken by this cell phone," said Singh dramatically. He held out the phone and activated its patriotic ringtone. "You snapped your own picture with this stolen phone but never knew it. The flash is set to *off*. This photo proves that not only were you in possession of the stolen merchandise, you actually handled it. Explain."

Oh god, no thought Pepin. I took my own picture when I was searching through the bag in the car trying to find the phone with the ringtone. I remember pulling a phone out, handling it, punching a bunch of buttons in a panic.

"You bastard," from Cannon.

Pepin shifted fretfully in his chair, and looked about the room helplessly.

Singh approached him. "Do you want to see the original picture? Look. It's right here in the camera. It's even dated. September 11th 5:50 a.m.

"Someone else must have taken that picture."

Goulding cut in. "Impossible. They would have to have been sitting on your lap to get the shot. Don't be ridiculous."

"Another thing," added Singh. "For some reason you lied to us about your activities the very day of the break-in. You said that you arrived early at the Colesium and never left the premises. The thing is, your car was covered in white silt. The coach had arrived early as well. His car was clean as a whistle. We checked. The road crew hadn't started work until after 7:00. You told us that you had never left the rink. My guess is that you went home to stash the stolen goods. Why did you lie to us? Explain."

Pepin looked at Goulding, then at Singh. The room was hushed; all eyes on the janitor. Emile's eyes almost bore a hole in the table top.

“And you told Ian and me that the noise from the cell was your car radio. I checked. Your car doesn’t have a radio in it,” said Cannon.

“You ripped off the locker-room,” said Goulding. “Even worse you planted the stolen items in Ian’s bag to frame him for your crime and you gave Canada Customs a heads up. You stole, and framed someone for your crime. You are looking at three years in jail, at least.”

Emile shook his head in denial, his small dark eyes darting about. “You’re wrong. It’s all a mistake.”

“A mistake? You think that the cell phone picture lies?”

“I’m not saying or admitting to anything. This is entrapment.”

“Hardly entrapment,” said Goulding. “We didn’t induce you to steal from the locker room. We merely asked you here to identify some pictures.”

“I want an attorney. You made me incriminate myself.”

“So you admit it. That you stole that cell phone and everything else from the room,” replied Goulding.

“I’m not admitting nothing.”

“You just did, you idiot,” shouted Cannon.

“That’s fine. Go and get your attorney and take this to court. But before you do, I want you to consider what I have to say,” said Goulding. “And I’d advise you to think about this carefully. Come clean right now and admit that you stole the wallets, phones and other things and then planted them in Sinclair’s bag. I’ll tell the prosecutor’s office that you came forward and turned yourself in. Maybe he’ll go for a reduced sentence. You will save everyone the time and trouble of a trial. Accept my offer. Confess now and you’ll save yourself some prison time.”

Goulding stopped talking and appraised Emile. The janitor sat with his head bowed. “I ran a check on you. You have no previous criminal record. With good behavior you could be released early. Confess right now and do yourself a big favor.”

Pepin buried his face with his palms. A sweat had broken on his brow. His cheeks and neck flushed crimson red. They had him. There was no way out.

“I need an answer,” coaxed Goulding

“I’m going to get fired,” mumbled Pepin. “We’ll lose the house. My wife will never understand.”

“Understand what?” asked the sergeant.

“That I needed money in a hurry for a gambling debt.”

“We all do stupid things,” said Goulding gently. “You’ve put Sinclair through hell. Make things right, Emile. Confess formally and get it all over with.”

“I’ll do it. I’ll make a statement. But not in front of everyone.”

Goulding stood. “Gentlemen, we’re finished here.”

Thirty-Four

Philip left Jean to her packing, and drove back to the courthouse. The judge found Ian and the marshal watching television in the lounge.

Ian looked at Philip expectantly. "Are we going now?"

"Yes. Thank you, Marshall."

As they left the courthouse and walked to the van, Ian said, "I can hardly wait to get home. I need a shower and a good sleep so badly."

"Actually, I'm not taking you home. We're going to the farm."

"Why?"

"Because there'll be people looking for you—reporters—even the Ashbury cops. It's best if you stay low until you get decent legal counsel. The last thing you need is a bunch of reporters sticking microphones in your face. You might say the wrong things. You need good legal representation."

"That was my plan all along. When I get my money I'll hire the best attorneys. I'm going to drag Pepin through court. I'll sue his butt off and make sure he does time."

They snaked out of town to the gravel roads leading to the farm. "I was hoping to speak with my mom. She must be worried. May I call her when we get top your place?"

"Of course you can. Later, I'll cook my famous spaghetti dinner. It'll be just the guys tonight. Mrs. Driscoll is away. You and Adam can hang out."

The farm came into view. Philip slowed and looked towards the driveway to see that Jean's car was gone before he ventured up the lane. "Grab your backpack and come with me. I'll show you to the rec-room."

Ian tagged along with Philip while peeking into the dining room noticing its oil paintings, the china and books lining deep shelves. The living room was filled with expensive looking rugs, antiques and dark furniture. He had never been in a home quite so lavish.

Ian followed Philip downstairs. "The sofa folds out. There's a bathroom down the hall. Now, let's go to the kitchen. You can call home."

Philip pointed to the wall-phone. "Remember, you are in a very tenuous situation right now. Simply tell your mother that you're straightening out some legal problems and that you'll be home tomorrow."

Arlene answered on the second ring. "Ian. Where are you? What on earth is going on? What kind of trouble are you in? People are saying all kinds of horrible things."

"Like what?"

"That you were arrested then escaped custody and that you fled from court. The phone's been ringing off the hook. The police, scouts, and Mr. Cannon phoned this afternoon. Where are you? I've been so worried."

"I'm at Judge Driscoll's house."

"Who?"

"There's this girl I met, Heather. We're friends. Her father's a judge. But don't tell anyone where I am. Judge Driscoll is helping me with some legal things. It's a long

story but they found some stolen items in my hockey bag at the border. Please don't worry. It'll all be cleared up. I'm going to stay here tonight."

"What do I tell everyone? I mean it. It's one call after another."

"Just say no comment. Take the phone off the hook. I'll be home tomorrow."

Philip looked back at Ian and nodded approvingly at he pretended to search for something in the refrigerator.

"And I'll have some exciting news," added Ian, fully expecting and receiving a glance of disapproval from Philip.

"Did the Hawks offer you a big contact?" asked Pat eavesdropping on the upstairs extension.

"Almost as good. That's all I'm going to say. I'll tell you tomorrow."

The front door slammed. "In here, Adam," called Philip. "We have company."

Adam entered the kitchen dressed in grey flannels, white shirt and tie with a blue blazer, a laptop case in hand. Ian thought he looked like a little businessman. "This is Ian, Heather's friend," said Philip "We're going over some legal things. He'll be staying overnight."

"Where's Mom?"

"She's gone to Oak Leaf to get some things for your grandmother. She'll be back tomorrow."

Adam set his computer on the kitchen table and turned to Ian. "Wanna play some video games?"

"Sure."

Adam led the way down to the rec-room; he opened the doors to a colossal entertainment center.

Ian fixed his eyes on a sleek computer monitor. "That's pretty impressive."

"Yeah. It's a great unit," said Adam as he grabbed the controls for a video game. "Tons of memory and a really fast processor. My dad bought it last Christmas. It's got awesome speakers, plus we have a laser printer and a scanner."

"Would you mind if I checked my e-mail?"

Adam turned on the computer. "It's ready. I'll dig out a few games—I have one somewhere with hockey players. You can get them to slam each other over the boards; then there's a huge brawl."

Ian had just one message—from Coach Cannon.

Ian. I don't know where you are, but I presume from the note that you left for me that you're safe.

The President's office has suspended you from the university effective immediately. The suspension will be revoked pending a satisfactory conclusion to your legal problems. I advise that you report to the police right away. In the meantime please stay away from the rink.

Coach M. Cannon.

Ian closed the e-mail window and sank to the computer chair. Suspended. They hadn't even heard his side of the story. He imagined all the guys talking about him, convinced that he had ripped off the locker room.

Adam walked towards Ian holding a DVD. "I found it. Are you ready to play?"

"Yeah. In a minute."

He took the stairs two at a time and found Philip in the kitchen frying ground beef. "I just checked my e-mail. The coach told me that I've been suspended."

Philip turned down the stove and said, "I'm sorry to hear that, but I'm really not surprised. You should never have missed your court date."

"I know. But they can't just suspend me. Can you do something? You used to go to Ashbury."

"There's nothing that I can do, but remember; there's a big difference between being suspended and expelled. Hand me that bread knife."

"Yeah, but I took off on the coach."

"That wasn't wise, especially with someone like Manny Boyce. Did you really think that he'd make good on a \$1 million reward?"

Ian froze, jolted by Philip's question. "How did you know that Manny offered me \$1 million?"

The judge stopped slicing and went to the stove. He couldn't say that he had learned of the specific amount of the reward from Ian's phone message to Boyce. Careless blunder. "Heather told me."

"When?"

"It must have been when we talked last night."

"I see," murmured Ian, his eyes locked on the floor. The patterned tiles jumped about as his senses were overcome by waves of uncertainty and disbelief—an awful realization that the judge was lying to him. He certainly hadn't revealed the specific amount of the reward to Heather. He hadn't wanted McBride to overhear. He had simply told her that there was a reward involved. Only Manny could have told Driscoll the actual amount of the promised money. Why the lie? What was going on?

"Do you like green onions?" asked Philip nonchalantly.

"I have another question. How could Manny have gotten a cab license with a criminal record?"

"That would be up to his company."

"How would he get or be able to keep a private detective's license with a criminal record? They must do background checks."

Philip drained a kettle of pasta into a caldron and pulled back from the steam. He required Ian's unquestioning trust and feared he was losing it. "They'll give P.I. licenses to anyone," answered the judge dismissively. "Trust me. Boyce isn't someone you want anything to do with. Give me a hand and take these plates to the dining room."

The table was laid with heaping plates of spaghetti with meat sauce, French bread, salad and Pepsi. It was all Ian could do to eat a thing. He'd lost trust in the judge—the man had just lied to him.

As he twirled a forkful of pasta Philip realized that this was quite possibly the last time he'd sit at the familiar pine table. He'd agreed to leave the farm forever, perhaps the most painful concession he'd made to meet Jean's demands. He'd have to stay at the Holiday Inn while he looked for an apartment somewhere. Jean would have to permit him to come back at least once more for his possessions. In the meantime he had spare clothes in his chambers and some toiletries. Hell, if the day went as planned he'd be purchasing a beautiful home somewhere and placing orders for custom-made shirts.

Still, as he looked at Adam, he was filled with regret that the marriage had ended. Wealthy or not, his relationship with Adam would never be the same. But Adam would

soon be off to college, and without the children at the farm, life with Jean would have been empty anyway. They'd have been little more than roommates who didn't get along.

After dinner, Ian and Adam played video games on a big screen TV.

Adam proved to be far more adept at manipulating the Xbox controls than Ian.

Philip called from the foot of the stairs. "Adam. That's enough for now. It's a school night. Shut things down."

Adam said goodnight and passed his father on the stairs. Philip entered the rec-room. "I thought I'd see if you needed anything. I don't know about you, but I'm bushed."

"Yeah. I'm kind of tired even though I slept in the car and a little at the courthouse."

Philip handed Ian a blanket. "See you in the morning."

Ian unfolded the sofa bed still troubled that Philip knew far too much about the reward and had lied to him. The judge and Manny had obviously been talking. What had they been up to? Maybe he and Manny were working together to rip him off for the reward? He couldn't phone Manny, Driscoll might overhear. He looked at the computer cabinet. An e-mail to Boyce would be better than nothing.

Ian patiently waited until all noises ceased above him. He opened the computer cabinet and turned it on. The Windows page opened, accompanied by a musical flourish. Good. No password required. With a few clicks Ian logged into his hotmail account. He pulled Manny's business card from his wallet and began to type.

Manny... I have to know...when and why did you tell Driscoll about the reward? What's going on?

No! He was going about this all wrong. If Manny and Driscoll were in cahoots, the cabbie would just deny it. Why not pose as Driscoll himself? He could create an e-mail account in the judge's name and dupe Manny. It took a few tries to create an identity containing Driscoll. Philip Driscoll had already been taken. Surprisingly, so had Judge Driscoll. Ian settled on "J" for judge, and created a new account for Philip—j_driscoll@hotmail.com to be specific. The password was Heather.

Manny... It's late Monday night. I'm at the farm. Great news. I've got the ticket! Let's go to Lakefield in the morning and split it. Reply to this right away.

That'll prompt some kind of reaction, thought Ian with satisfaction. Manny's reply might just reveal if he was in on some scheme with Philip. He'd sit tight and see what Boyce had to say.

In the meantime there was some other business to take care of. He would be as prepared as possible for whatever scenario might unfold at the lottery office in the morning. Nothing could be left to chance.

Thirty-Five

While Ian spent time at the Driscolls, Manny attempted to catch-up on much-needed sleep. It proved elusive. The cat jumped on and off the bed looking for attention, the *Sutton Examiner* carrier pounded on the door in search of money, and the upstairs neighbors shouted over a loud stereo.

After eventually drifting off, he was wrenched awake once more by the piercing squeals of his fax machine which sat on a bedroom table. He sat up, disoriented and checked the bedside clock. It was a little after four.

As Manny's head cleared, recollections of Driscoll and Bleeker's unforeseen arrival in Lakefield earlier that morning twisted his stomach in knots of despair. He had come so close to cashing in his lottery ticket. Instead of counting his millions, he had been detained and even threatened with jail by a judge. Bleeker's curt parting words reverberated: "I'll be in your driveway at 6:30 tomorrow morning. Be ready."

With a heavy sigh, he kicked off a blanket and groggily left his bed for the fax machine. The bold letterhead belonging to Canada Border Services caught his attention. He pulled it from the tray and zeroed-in on a blurred, handwritten message across the top.

*Manny---We nailed Pepin today (Monday)—even got a confession. Sinclair is in the clear. Cannon put me in touch with Customs. See below. If you have any luck in finding Sinclair, do him a favor and tell him to contact his coach, the Ashbury Police, and the D.A. in Sutton so we can put this matter to rest.
Regards, Indir Singh.*

Mr. Singh:

Further to our conversation, please be advised that the documents belonging to members of the Ashbury hockey team will be returned by registered mail to your police station for disbursement. They will be sent, pending formal notification to us from the District Attorney's Office in Sutton, that Ian Sinclair has, in fact, been vindicated. Please expedite this ASAP.

Sincerely,

Annette Coulter. Senior Border Agent. Canada Border Services.

C.C. Morley Cannon.

Manny took the fax to his easy chair where he re-read it twice. What a turn of events! Pepin had confessed. If Ian was in the clear, then so too was he. Driscoll had nothing on either of them.

He drew heavily on a Marlboro and blew smoke-rings deep in contemplation. Given that his cab was in Lakefield, and that Ian was undoubtedly at Driscoll's place, he would still go with Bleeker to the courthouse in the morning. He would ambush Driscoll with the news of Pepin's arrest and tell the judge to get lost. He would need a car for the drive to Lakefield with Ian. It would be best to have one on-hand right at the courthouse. He flipped through the Yellow Pages, and found a local car rental agency—the one that

promised to come right to the door with a vehicle. Much to his relief, the \$62 rental fee went through successfully on his credit card. Half an hour later the representative arrived with a shiny new red Impala. After the rental-papers had been signed, Manny placed a call to his cab depot and arranged for a buddy to pick up him from the courthouse.

After dropping off the rental-agent, Manny drove straight to the courthouse. There was no sign of Driscoll's van. He parked in a side-lot out of view from the judge's spot. After a cursory inspection, a security guard was satisfied that the car wasn't laden with explosive devices and accepted Manny's story that he was leaving the vehicle for a client. As promised, a fellow cab driver arrived on the scene and drove Manny home.

Famished, the cabbie microwaved a frozen entrée and ate ice cream from the carton, content that he would finally have an opportunity to cash in the ticket. He climbed into bed and drifted off as he imagined taunting Driscoll. "See you, Judge. Ian and I will get to Lakefield on our own. You're not needed here."

The next morning Manny set about preparing for the momentous hours ahead. He had a long shower and shaved, paying special attention to the whiskers that invariably stuck out around his Adam's apple. He meticulously arranged his comb-over. When all the wisps were satisfactorily in place he secured them with a sticky hair spray which promised "wind tunnel hold."

The next step was to choose his clothes for the day. He had to look good. After all, he would be studied by the press—his picture taken—maybe even TV. He selected a fresh white shirt and a blue striped tie from his closet. His best slacks, a tweed sports coat and a pair of brown tasseled dress shoes completed an outfit appropriate for a multi-millionaire in waiting.

There was time for a coffee and a cigarette. He went to his La-Z-Boy, mug in hand and stared out the living room window in anticipation of the arrival of Bleeker's cruiser.

The sound of running water stirred Ian from a heavy sleep. He heard Philip and Adam walking around above him. He immediately checked for any e-mail which may have come in while he slept. No reply from Boyce. No matter, he was still in control of the ticket, and there wasn't a thing that either Manny or the judge could do to change that.

After washing up, Ian found Philip and Adam at the kitchen eating breakfast. He nodded towards Adam who was pecking away on his school-issued laptop.

Philip smiled warmly. "There's juice on the counter and cereal on the table."

As he ate, Ian observed Philip calmly sipping coffee, engaged in a newspaper. If Driscoll were planning on pulling some charade to get the ticket, his body language didn't reveal any outward signs of preoccupation or apprehension. The judge appeared composed and continued to be a warm and welcoming host.

Following breakfast, Ian returned to the rec-room. He made up the sofa bed and grabbed his backpack. He said goodbye to Adam and accompanied Philip to the van. They chatted idly about sports along the way to the courthouse. The judge eased into his parking space where they waited for Bleeker and Boyce.

Bleeker pulled in front of Manny's apartment and unnecessarily blasted the horn. Manny stubbed out his smoke, locked up and walked hurriedly to the cruiser. He spotted a neighbor peering at him from a porch. "Let's get out of here," he said while climbing into the back seat.

Bleeker and Manny drove off in silence. The fax which would absolve Ian of any alleged crimes burned a hole in Manny's breast pocket. His heart thudded in anticipation as the courthouse drew nearer. The deputy wheeled up the drive and parked alongside Driscoll's van.

The judge hopped out and approached Bleeker's open window. Manny tried to open his door. It was locked. He took the opportunity to shout, "Hey Driscoll. You better let me out of here or I'll have you charged with unlawful detainment."

"What are you talking about?"

Manny thrust the fax towards the window. "I've got something to show you."

"What's that?"

"It's a fax from the Ashbury police department. The janitor at the Colesium has been arrested. Ian was never guilty of anything. He was free to leave Canada and I was within my rights to pick him up. You have nothing on either of us."

"Nice try," said Philip weakly.

"It's true. Here. Read it for yourself, dumbass, and tell your stooge to unlock my door."

Philip took the fax. "It's a fake."

"Don't believe it? Go ahead, phone Constable Singh."

Ian scampered out of the van alerted to Manny's shouts. "What's happening?"

Manny leaned forward towards Bleeker's window. "Ian, you're innocent. Pepin confessed."

"Really? Is it true? What's that in your hand, Judge?"

"It's a fax from the police," said Manny. "Show it to him, Driscoll."

Ian reached towards Philip's hand. "Let's see."

The judge reluctantly handed it over and looked on powerlessly. This couldn't be happening. He'd never get that ticket. Think. There had to be something he could do.

Ian studied the paper. "It says here that Pepin confessed! I knew he did it. I don't have anything to worry about. And Customs is going to return all the stolen wallets."

That was it, thought Philip. Ian's wallet. He frantically tried to recall the particulars gleaned from the intercepted phone message that Ian had left for Boyce.

"Let me out of here, Bleeker," demanded Manny. "Did you hear me?"

Philip nodded to his deputy. Manny climbed out. "We're on our way to Lakefield, Ian."

"Just how do you propose to get to there?" asked Philip, stalling—scheming.

"I'll borrow a car or rent one," said Manny "But thanks for your concern and the offer of a lift. Really very kind of you."

Philip beckoned towards the courthouse door. "Ian, come with me. I want to verify the fax. If it's accurate, you are free to go on your way."

Ian looked questioningly at Philip and then at Manny.

"Go with him. The fax is authentic. You have nothing to be concerned about."

Ian followed Philip inside. They didn't get any further than the vestibule. Philip stopped short, crossed his arms and looked at Ian sternly. "I want you to come to Lakefield with me."

"Why?"

"There's something that you should know. Boyce and I encountered each other a few days ago. He was conducting some snooping operation. Deputy Bleeker caught Boyce following me. Following a judge is a very serious offence."

"What happened?"

"Boyce suggested that in return for letting him go, he'd give me some cash. Some very serious money."

Ian's eyes bugged out. "He tried to bribe you?"

"Yes. He started babbling about the lottery ticket. He said he was going to be rich, and your name surfaced. This of course immediately caught my attention. I let him continue. He gave me a lot of details about the ticket. He told me that he had offered you a \$1 million reward. In fact, Boyce offered me your reward if I could come up with the ticket."

"You! My reward! No. How would you find it?"

"Boyce suggested that I should go to the Coliseum and try to shake down some guy named Pepin, using Bleeker."

"What else did he tell you?"

"That the ticket was in a credit card slot in your wallet. A brown vinyl wallet, as I recall," added Philip.

"He told you all that?"

"Yes. Every word. You see the kind of man you're dealing with here?"

Ian stared through the glass door. Manny was pacing around puffing on a cigarette. "I guess so," he answered. "I was so wrong about Boyce. I can't believe that he was willing to give you my reward. What a slimy opportunist."

"I'm not one to say I told you so."

"Then don't. I'm sick of this whole thing. I just want to cash the ticket and get it over with."

"And I'd still like to accompany you to the lottery office. I'll make sure that nothing goes wrong."

"You know what? I really don't think I need your advice or your assistance. You seem just too anxious to be part of things. And why didn't you tell me all of this before now?"

"Because Boyce caught me somewhere that I shouldn't have been. That's all I'm going to say about that."

"I couldn't care less where you were. I wish that you and Bleeker would just leave me alone."

"Ian I only want to see that you get your money."

"Why wouldn't I? You said that it's my ticket. You also told me that if Boyce tried to interfere with me cashing it you'd throw him in jail. And I kind of hope you do. He--"

"Calm down and think. Everything has changed. The authorities know that you're innocent, and I'm pleased for you. But it also means that I have lost all leverage over Boyce. He can do as he chooses. Once he realizes that he's not going to get the ticket

back, he'll make a huge scene. The officials at Lotto-Central might even confiscate the ticket. You'd probably get drawn into a long and expensive appeal-process. You'd win eventually, of course, but I have a plan whereby you can cash the ticket today unencumbered by Manny Boyce."

Ian stared blankly at a housefly struggling to free itself from a spider web strung along a radiator. The judge had a plan for everything. "How?"

"It's simple. You'll get to the lottery office well before him. Listen to my idea."

Ian mulled over the judge's proposal.

"What do you think?"

"I guess that could work."

"It will. Let's go."

Ian and Philip walked back to the van and met up with Manny and Bleeker.

"Here's what we're going to do," announced Philip. "Ian's coming with me. You can find your own way to Lakefield, Boyce." He left Ian with Manny, and joined Bleeker by the squad car.

Manny gawked at Ian. "Why on earth would you do that? What lies did he tell you in there?"

"You're the one who's been telling lies," exploded Ian. "How did Judge Driscoll know the color of my old wallet? That it was made of vinyl—that the ticket was stashed in a credit card slot unless you had told him? How would he have known that you had offered me a \$1 million reward for the ticket? Answer that. And how would he have known that I had instructed you to hunt down the ticket at the Colesium unless you had told him?"

"He couldn't have known that information."

"Well he does know it and I'm not traveling anywhere with someone whose been double-dealing me all along." Ian climbed into the van and slammed the door shut.

After speaking with Philip, Deputy Bleeker climbed into his cruiser and rumbled away.

The judge walked back to the van, hopped in, and began to back out.

Manny ran alongside and pounded on the windows and door. "Ian you're making a big mistake. Come with me."

"Get out of the way, Boyce, or you'll get run over," yelled Philip.

Manny watched Driscoll and Ian disappear down the drive. He headed to the rental car as quickly as his large thighs would push him. He opened the door and settled in behind the unfamiliar dash. He was wheezing heavily, his brand new dress shirt soaked in sweat.

The Impala roared to life. He raced down the courthouse drive to Sutton's main street. No sign of Driscoll.

Philip pulled in behind a restaurant and parked in the back lot. He and Ian piled out of the van and into Bleeker's waiting cruiser. Philip looked at Bleeker impatiently. "Come on. What are you waiting for? Let's move out."

Bleeker, Driscoll and Ian sailed along unimpeded by traffic. The cruiser's blazing red and blue roof lights cleared their path effortlessly. When lights weren't enough, Bleeker activated a piercing whoop from the cruiser's side console. He found it amusing

to observe the startled and sometimes guilty expressions of the motorists as the squad car swept by.

Philip shifted uncomfortably searching for room to stretch his cramped legs. He glanced behind him. "No sign of Boyce."

"Are you kidding? The way I see it he'll be an hour behind us if he ever gets to the lottery office at all. We ditched him without a vehicle, and we're tearing past anything that moves."

Ian listened from the back seat as they whizzed by small family farms, occasional service stations, a gigantic trailer park and numerous gaudy roadside billboards which extolled the virtues of everything from New England's maple syrup to country inns. He was caught up in the urgency of the drive, imagining he was an important politician as traffic cleared so easily around them.

Philip craned his neck towards the speedometer. "Pick it up."

"We're doing 85."

"Then do 100. I don't want Boyce anywhere near us when we arrive in Lakefield."

Manny roared down the southbound lanes of Route 7. The late-model sedan was tight and responsive. The cabbie hovered on the edge the seat and focused intently on the traffic patterns unfolding before him. He gripped the wheel tightly and weaved in and out of traffic, tailgating and flashing his lights while cursing at any motorists who dared block his path. Blasts of bracing cool air blew noisily through the open windows drying his brow. His hair, so carefully arranged in the bathroom mirror, wafted about and spilled across his scalp every which way.

He desperately wanted to arrive at the lottery office before Driscoll. Lisa, the woman Manny had phoned upon learning he had lost the ticket, had seemed sympathetic about his plight; however she had firmly pointed out that once signed, it would be considered the property of the individual who possessed it, that this was State Gaming Law, and clearly spelled out on Lotto-Central's official website.

The speedometer needle rose incrementally with the cabbie's mounting apprehension, anger and uncertainty about his lottery ticket.

After guiding the Impala around a long curve, the traffic slowed abruptly, eventually coming to a complete halt. A sea of brake lights extended least a mile in the distance. I don't need this right now, thought Manny angrily reaching for his cigarettes.

Stop and go. Go and stop. He leaned out the window looking for the source of the hold up. Ten minutes later he discovered that some fool, despite a wide smooth lane and perfect driving conditions, had found it too much of a challenge to keep his car on the road. A young man leaned against a small import in the grassy center median. His car was bright orange with tinted windows, oversized wheels, a custom exhaust and an absurd looking spoiler. The driver appeared to be uninjured, but looked extremely embarrassed. Traffic inched along as drivers for some reason slowed to view the innocent mishap.

Traffic sped up. A sign indicated that Lakefield was 60 miles away.

“Ten more miles, Ian,” reported Philip. “You are about to become a very wealthy young man.”

Ian’s forehead was pressed against the steel security partition looking at the car’s gauges. “We’re flying.”

“This car’s got a 5.7 liter Hemi V-8,” commented Bleeker. “Puts out 340 horses.”

“Just a little quicker than my old van,” chuckled Philip. “Get ready to make a left.”

Bleeker slowed down as they entered the outskirts of Lakefield.

“We’re looking for Chemong Road. I think we turn right at the second light,” directed Philip. “Then Russell Street.”

Lotto-Central came into sight. The deputy guided the cruiser along a wide asphalt driveway lined by tidy evergreen hedges. Philip felt his pulse quicken. “Drop us off and watch for Boyce at the entrance. He probably won’t be a factor, but I want you to stall him if necessary. I’ll phone you when we’re finished. We won’t be long.”

“I just thought of something. What about the press conference?” asked Ian.

“You’ll have to tell them that you’ll come back later for that. Tell them you’re ill. We want to get in and out of here as quickly as possible Are you all set? Got your ticket and your ID?”

“Are you kidding? I’ve been ready for over a week. Let’s just go.”

Thirty-Six

Ian leapt from Bleeker's cruiser and took the concrete stairs leading to the lottery office's wide entrance two at a time. He looked behind for Philip. "Come on."

"Hold on a second. Catch your breath. You can't go running in there helter-skelter. You're about to present a ticket worth an enormous amount of money. A ticket that you found. There may be some questions. You want to be calm and assured. In absolute control."

"All right. So what do we do? Where do I go?"

"Here's what I suggest. I'll find out where you redeem your ticket and get the necessary information. You stay here by the door and watch for Boyce. I'm sure he's miles away, but we don't want to take a chance. He might just get by Bleeker. If you see him, make yourself scarce."

"Why."

"Because I don't want him bothering you and making a big scene. You have to realize that he'll be frantic."

"Then let's just get in there. I want to cash this thing so badly."

They entered the breezeway and pushed through another door into the main office. The judge looked around as his eyes adjusted from brilliant natural sunshine to a yellow pall cast by fluorescent tubes within the ceiling's suspended white tiles. The walls of the lottery office were painted in a soft shade of peach. The floor was covered with beige industrial broadloom. A wide staircase ran up the left side of the room. The air was chilly, unnecessarily air-conditioned considering the day was cool.

"I don't see where I'm supposed to go," commented Ian, following on Philip's heels.

"Go back to the door and watch for Boyce," said Philip. "I'll find out for you."

There were far more people in the building than Philip had anticipated. Women and men of all ages sat amidst connected fiberglass chairs which lined the perimeter of the room and faced a long counter such as one might find at any financial institution or government office.

A couple of disorderly children raced about playing tag. Other than their excited squeals, and some obscure piped-in music, the room was quiet, exuding the stiff formality of a bank. Not exactly a joyous spot, thought Philip glancing about. He'd seen more animation in hospital waiting rooms. The judge had half-expected to see family members back-slapping, whooping it up, waving their checks about, perhaps accepting balloons and hearty congratulatory salutations from the office staff. He'd bought into a marketing fantasy, he decided. No one appeared especially joyful. Instead, if anything, the mood was subdued. Two security officers dressed in white shirts adorned with very official badges strutted about as if primed to suppress the first signs of merriment.

Philip approached a guard. "Excuse me. I'm in a bit of a hurry. I need to know where I redeem my lottery ticket."

"You'll have to wait your turn like everyone else."

“I’m sorry. I didn’t know it was such a difficult question,” retorted Philip in no mood for the young man’s imperious tone and veiled suggestion that he was attempting to jump the cue. “Or perhaps I wasn’t clear. I want to know where I go to redeem my lottery ticket.”

“Depends on its value. One of the agents will know,” replied the guard pointing to the counter. “But you’ll have to get in line to find out.”

The judge walked back to the door. “I’ll just be a minute, Ian. I have to go to the counter.”

“I’ll come with you.”

“No. We’ll stay with our plan. You keep an eye out for Boyce. If you see him, disappear. If he can’t find you he can’t cash the ticket.”

Philip and five or six others shuffled along dutifully between a set of velour covered ropes. The procession was corralled right and then left as though they were steers heading to a pen.

The judge eventually arrived at the customary *Please Wait Here* sign. He surveyed the long faux marble counter. Signs hanging from chains identified a spot to purchase tickets; another area offered tax and legal information. At the far end of the counter he spotted the redemptions area where four employees sat at their wickets. A 30-something woman looked up from her computer terminal and waved Philip forward.

Philip approached the wicket confidently and smiled at the agent. She wore a lottery-issued red blazer with an embroidered crest on the front pocket. The judge’s eyes were immediately drawn to her ample breasts which filled out a ruby red blouse. She had a somewhat pale complexion with high cheekbones. Her curly hair was jet black. A bronze plaque sat by the wicket, identifying her as Christina.

“I’d like some information about redeeming a lottery ticket,” said Philip.

“Certainly. I may be able to assist you right here. What is its value? May I see it please?”

Philip leaned in towards the wicket. “I happen to own a winning Magnificent Millions ticket. The September 7th drawing. But please. I don’t want a lot of attention.”

She referred to a plastic coated printed sheet. “You’ve won millions.”

“I know.”

“I’m authorized to redeem scratch-and-win and other prizes under \$100,000.

Seeing as your prize is so valuable, you’ll have to meet with our director, Mr. Saltzman. He’s processing another claim. We had a small computer glitch earlier today. I’m afraid that there’s a bit of a back-log, but he shouldn’t be more than half an hour.”

“That’s unacceptable,” said Philip. He shot a nervous glance back towards the front door. “I’d like to speak with the director right away.”

“He’s with another customer at the moment,” replied Christina patiently.

“I should tell you that I am a District Court Judge. Judge Philip Driscoll.”

“And?”

Impertinent clerk. “And I happen to be extremely busy. I’m expected to be in court within the hour.”

“Sir, the director won’t be long. There’s a coffee machine downstairs if you like.”

“I didn’t come here for breakfast. Look. Can’t you move things along for me? My prize is far more significant than some scratch and sniff ticket.”

“It’s scratch-and-win,” chortled Christina. “And as I’ve explained, given the value of your ticket, will have to meet with the director. In the meantime, I’ll need the ticket. I need to scan it.”

“It’s in the custody of my deputy,” replied Philip importantly. “You have no idea how nerve-wracking it is to walk around with something worth \$25 million.”

“I can imagine. Why don’t you get your ticket and bring it to me? I’ll try to move things along for you.”

“I suppose that will have to do.”

Philip wandered from the counter-area gathering his wits. It was time to deliver his bomb-shell to Ian—the shocking revelation that would leave the boy with no choice but to surrender the ticket to him. Philip took a deep breath and rehearsed. He would be matter-of-fact, almost casual. It was crucial that his disclosure be perceived by Ian as completely uncontrived. He walked confidently back to the front of the lottery center and found Ian leaning against a square pillar inside the front door.

“What a process,” declared the judge. “You’d think the people here got their training from the passport office. Stand in line. Have a seat. Wait. Anyway, I pulled some strings and--”

“What now? Where do I cash the ticket?”

“You have to see the director. He’ll want to verify the ticket, check your ID, witness your signature, and then he’ll present you with your check. You’re about to become a millionaire at the ripe old age of 18. Not bad.”

“Actually, I’m 17. Even more amazing.”

“Excuse me? Don’t even kid.”

“Kid about what?”

“About being 17.”

“I am 17. Why?”

“You’re 17?” asked Philip incredulously. “Are you sure?”

“Yes. Of course I’m sure. Why?”

“Ian, you can’t cash the ticket. You have to be 18 years of age or older to redeem lottery tickets. It’s State Law.”

Ian felt the blood drain from his head, stunned at Philip’s startling revelation. “You knew that I was 17!” His distressed outburst reverberated throughout the office.

“Actually, I didn’t. Of course I didn’t. And keep it down. Let’s step outside. People are looking at you. We may still be able to salvage this debacle.”

Ian followed Driscoll through two sets of doors to a small landing at the top of the stairs. “You told me all along that I could cash it,” he stammered over a choking lump in his throat. The ticket was slipping away, again.

“Yes, but I didn’t realize that you were 17. Heather’s 18. I just assumed that you were her age if not older. Why didn’t you look into your eligibility to cash it? You’re not a child.”

Ian turned away and kicked at a cylindrical concrete planter, overcome by a sickening sense of hopelessness. “Can’t you do something? Why do you have to be 18 anyway?”

“It’s the Law.”

“I can’t believe this. Things are so bad at home. I wanted to buy a house. I’m sick of being broke. My scholarship’s never enough. I needed that reward money.”

“There’s nothing that I can do. You’re considered a minor.”

“Then I’ll have to give it to Manny. There’s no other choice.”

“No. You don’t want to do that. There’s no guarantee that he’ll give you your reward. You’ll be no further ahead. He’s under no obligation whatsoever to give you a cent. A verbal promise. That’s all you have from him. An empty non-binding verbal promise.”

“What can I do?”

“I’ll cash the ticket for you.”

“You?”

“Yes. It makes sense. I’ll sign ownership of it and cash it. You’ll still get your money. I’ll put \$1 million into your account later in the day.”

“But I wanted to cash it.”

“Ian, look at me. Stop whining. It doesn’t matter who redeems it. The important thing is that it gets cashed before Boyce arrives in time to contest ownership. It’s certainly a good thing I came to the office with you.”

“No. I’m going to wait for Manny, and give it to him. He’ll give me my money. I’m sure he will,” said Ian unconvincingly as he stared at his tattered running shoes.

“That would be foolish. Don’t forget, you called Boyce a liar an hour ago. You bailed out on him and decided to come to the office with me instead. And remember the reason you decided to come with me. Manny Boyce has always been quite willing to betray you. He shared confidential information about the ticket with me promising that he’d give me your reward. All this when you were hundreds of miles away in Canada. And you still trust this man to actually give you one million dollars? It’s a gamble that I certainly wouldn’t want to take. A million dollar gamble.”

“I don’t know what to do.”

“It’s simple. I’ll meet with the director and redeem the ticket. You’ll still get your reward.”

“I don’t know.”

“It’s the only solution.”

“I’m really confused. It’s just that this age-thing has come out of nowhere.”

Philip and Ian stepped back to allow an elderly couple through. “Trust me. Let me cash it. Once the lottery people make the decision to redeem the ticket it’s a done deal. Boyce won’t have a case to get it back. He’s still going to get his money, but the crucial thing here is that we’re going to make certain that you get your promised reward.”

“Maybe I’ll just wait until May, when I turn 18.”

“No. Won’t work. I remember Manny telling me that the ticket expires in March.”

Ian flushed in anger. The very thought that Manny and Driscoll had discussed the ticket and had possibly schemed together to retrieve it, reignited the troubling misgivings he’d had about them both. “Boyce told you a lot didn’t he? You’ve got this all figured out don’t you?”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Nothing. I just don’t like the feel of this.”

“No. Wait a minute. Go back. What did you just mean that I’ve got it all figured out? Do you really think that I’ve been somehow orchestrating things to my benefit? How insulting. I’m presenting a sure-fire opportunity for you to collect \$1 million but you don’t seem to appreciate it.”

“I’m totally confused. I feel like punching something.”

“The ticket. Give me the ticket,” urged Philip extending his hand. “You’ll get the reward. But we have to hurry. Boyce will be busting in here shortly. We want to be gone by then.”

Ian averted Philip’s eyes and stared down the drive. He studied a groundskeeper clipping a long bush dotted with small yellow flowers.

“Ian, did you hear me? Boyce could arrive at any moment.”

“I’m thinking. I want to talk with a lottery person. Maybe they could put the money in a trust account for me until I’m 18.”

“No. You’d have to prove that a family member purchased the ticket for you to do that. Far too complicated. Leave well enough alone and let me cash it for you. Let’s go back inside.”

Manny had continued to shatter the speed limit unconstrained by traffic and cops. He slowed as he approached Lakefield. He spotted the donut shop. He stared hard at his cab, thoughts spiraling. Seems to be in one piece. Doesn’t matter anyway. I’ll be driving a new vehicle soon. Something snazzy, just like this one. I’ll be in that office in less than 10 minutes. I haven’t seen any sign of Driscoll. I’ll bet I flew by him at a service center. That van must be a pig on gas.

The cabbie sped through a residential neighborhood, rolling through stop signs, speeding to the next one, oblivious to the posted speed limits. A right, then a left. Another left at Chemong Road, a jog onto Russell, a long straight stretch and Lotto Central finally appeared in the distance.

Deputy Gary Bleeker detested stakeouts. Before he had been assigned to the courts he had logged countless hours in front of seedy apartment buildings and rundown homes on the lookout for suspected drug dealers. He had always found such vigils tedious and rarely amounting to anything. Nevertheless he had agreed with Philip’s request to watch for Boyce and to stall any attempt he might make to enter to the lottery center.

A cluster of evergreens shielded Bleeker’s cruiser from view by anyone traveling up the lottery center’s drive. The deputy had a clear view of the highway leading to Lotto-Central’s driveway, clearly marked by a sign which sat atop a giant pink boulder.

A bright red sedan speeding from the east caught the deputy’s attention. The car screamed up to a set of stop lights at the lottery center’s gates. The lead-footed motorist braked heavily and waited to turn left. Bleeker craned his neck in an attempt to make out the driver. The person behind the wheel was a male. That’s all he could determine. He’d better be prepared. The Impala unexpectedly peeled rubber and squealed through the red light. Bleeker threw his cruiser in gear to intercept the offending driver.

Manny raced up the drive. He hadn’t traveled 200 feet when a police cruiser unexpectedly shot out of nowhere and blocked his path. Manny hit the brakes and gasped. A Sutton cruiser. And that was Bleeker behind the wheel.

Manny jumped out of his car.

The deputy met him head-on. “I thought that might be you, Boyce. Do you make a habit of ignoring stop lights?”

“So call a real cop,” retorted Manny. “You’re out of your jurisdiction. Did you bring Driscoll and Ian here with you?”

“Maybe. Maybe not.”

“Move your car, Bleeker. I’m warning you. Just get out of my way.”

The deputy stood his ground; arms crossed smirking. “You really shouldn’t threaten a police officer. You’re not going anywhere. At least not anytime soon.”

“Don’t count on it,” yelled Manny hustling back to his car. “You’re an insignificant clerk. A glamorized chauffeur and Driscoll’s personal yes-man. You’re even more stupid than you look. Get a life.”

Incensed at Boyce’s verbal abuse, Bleeker gave chase. Manny slammed his door shut. He started the car but couldn’t proceed. The deputy was directly in front of the vehicle moving along the shoulder of the road to the passenger’s door. “Get out of my way,” yelled Manny leaning towards the lock. As Bleeker reached for the door handle his heavy boots sank unexpectedly in fine gravel. He tripped and stumbled backwards while instinctively flinging out his left arm to break his fall. He landed in a dry drainage ditch. The limb shattered under his weight with a nauseating snap.

Manny left his car to see what had happened. Bleeker was lying in an overgrown furrow, writhing and moaning. Perhaps he should offer to assist him? Visualizations of Bleeker sadistically holding a gun to his head at the Owl’s Nest made his decision easy. No. He had to get to the lottery office. Someone would be along within minutes anyway. “I’ll get you someone,” yelled Manny before scrambling back to the car. He steered around Bleeker’s cruiser and with a quick tromp on the gas raced up the drive. He pulled up in front of the lottery office and lurched to a stop. The cabbie hauled his heavy frame out of the vehicle, ran to the entrance door, flung it open and burst inside.

Thirty-Seven

Ian fished out his wallet from the back of his jeans. “You’re sure there won’t be any trouble with you cashing it?”

Philip bit his lip and ran his hand over his face barely able to suppress his jubilation and immense relief that Ian was about to surrender the ticket. “Not at all. You’re doing the sensible thing. There’s no other choice.” His attention was diverted by the noisy clang of someone slamming through the breezeway. It couldn’t be. It was. “Boyce is here. Not now.”

Manny hurried into the lottery center marching straight past Philip and Ian who were standing to the left of the front door. He stopped and scanned the counter.

A white-haired security guard ambled by. Manny intercepted him. “Excuse me. An officer is in some difficulty outside. You may want to get him some help.”

“An officer? One of our guys? What happened?”

“No, a Sutton cop. He’s near the front of the drive.”

The guard hurried off.

“He was asking about us,” said Ian softly.

Philip leaned in close to Ian and spoke urgently from the side of his mouth. “I want you to leave the office. Just walk out. Make yourself scarce until I deal with Boyce.”

Manny stood about halfway into the building not quite sure what to do next. He looked around and surveyed the room. Ian! And he was nearly out the door.

“Ian. It’s Manny. Over here.”

Ian stopped in his tracks.

Manny caught up to him. “Did you and Driscoll come in Bleeker’s squad car?”

“Ah, yeah.”

“Why? Were you trying shake me—maybe hoping to cash the ticket before I got here?”

“Not really,” replied Ian looking towards Philip.

Manny caught his glance and spotted the judge. “So you or Driscoll haven’t tried to cash it?”

“No.”

“Let’s go to the counter. Give me my ticket. Here comes Driscoll. Ignore him.”

“Boyce. Leave Ian alone,” snapped Philip.

“Get lost. I’m sick of your interference. We’re going to cash the ticket. Come on, Ian.”

Ian looked at the judge, not sure what to do.

“What’s the problem? You don’t need his permission. Give me my ticket!” yelled Manny in exasperation. “Just give me my damned ticket!”

Manny’s outburst caught the attention of a guard. A stocky young man with short, heavily-gelled black hair wandered over. “Is there a problem here?”

“Yes, in fact there is,” broke in Philip. “I’m Judge Philip Driscoll, and you are?”

“Duane Fife.”

“Well Duane, this man is bothering us. I insist that he be removed from the building.”

Manny threw up his arms. “Get real, Driscoll. You’re too much.”

“Sir, keep your voice down. If there’s some sort of ownership dispute you’ll have to take it up with our legal department.”

The elder guard half-ran back into the building, stopped, looked around, and scurried up to Fife. “We have to locate a Judge Driscoll.”

“I’m Judge Driscoll. What do you want?”

“Your deputy’s hurt. I think his arm is broken.”

“What? How?”

“He told me that he was knocked down by a car, intentionally. Last I saw, he was being taken to the Lakefield Medical Center by one of our maintenance guys. Broken arm like I said. He was in a lot of pain.”

“What do you mean, knocked down? By whom?” asked Driscoll

Manny listened in disbelief, knowing where this was heading. He should never have told the security officer about Bleeker. What a fool he had been.

“He was run down by a vehicle driven by a Manny Joyce. Your deputy asked me to warn you that Joyce might cause you problems.”

“The name’s Boyce. And he’s right in front of you,” answered Philip pointing.

Manny spoke up. “And you might like to know that I told this guard here that Bleeker was injured. He fell. I didn’t run him down.”

“Right. He fell. All by himself.” Philip addressed the guards. “I’ve already asked that this man be removed from the building. He’s been threatening me for over a week. Stalking me. And now he’s assaulted a police officer. What more do you have to hear? Just arrest him!”

Both guards moved toward Manny. “Come with us, sir.”

Manny backed off. “Why? I didn’t do anything.”

“You assaulted a police officer.”

“Horse-shit. I tried to help him. And you don’t have the authority to arrest me.”

“We sure as hell do. Just stand still and give me your arms,” replied the senior guard fumbling with his cuffs.

“I didn’t assault anyone. He fell.”

“You can tell that to the Lakefield authorities. We are going to detain you until they get here,” replied Fife, reaching for Manny’s shoulder.

“Don’t you touch me,” snarled Manny pulling back.

Both officers clasped Manny’s arms.

Philip watched in glee as Manny struggled. Bleeker, you’re a genius. You have no idea how perfect your timing is. Faking a broken arm. I wonder how you carried that off. Maybe Boyce did hit you. Even better.

“Give us your wrists. Now.”

Manny pushed the guards’ arms away. “I said don’t touch me.”

“You a trouble maker?” jeered Fife. “You like hurting cops?”

“I told you. He fell. I didn’t touch him.”

“That’ll be up to someone else to decide. Just cooperate.”

“Let go of me. I’m warning you,” hissed Manny.

He was silenced by a stinging cuff to his face.

Ian watched as the struggle escalated. Manny grappled with the guards, his torso spinning, elbows flying and short legs kicking, wild eyed, and sweating. Several people had left their chairs to watch the scuffle.

“Ian. Get me some help. Look for a woman named Lisa. She knows about my ticket,” urged Manny. “Do something.”

Philip stepped in and took Ian aside. “No. You stay out of it. It’s not your fight. Come with me. We have to find the director, Saltzman, and cash the ticket.”

Ian glanced behind him. Manny continued to struggle vigorously with Security.

“This way,” motioned the judge.

Ian hesitated, torn. Perhaps he should wait and allow Manny to cash the ticket after all. He was the rightful owner. But real cops would be swarming the building within minutes. Assaulting a police officer! True or not they’d arrest Manny and none too gently. They’d drag him away, lock him up, and ask questions later. Boyce wouldn’t be able to cash the ticket, at least not anytime soon. Perhaps never. He had lost all credibility. The reward and all the wonderful things it could offer, gone. On the other hand, the lottery people would trust a judge. He would be able to cash it easily. Nagging doubts remained. Driscoll had to have known he was 17. He had told him that right in his chambers. There was no way he’s have forgotten that information. What to do?

“Come. Now,” ordered Philip sharply.

Manny twisted and spun thwarting the guard’s attempts to reign in his arms. “Ian, get me some help. I need to speak with someone in authority.”

Manny was dragged backwards and thrown against a wall but not before he had managed a fleeting glance at Ian over the cloth of a white shirt. The boy appeared to be pulling something from his front pocket!

“All right, Judge. Here. Take it. Just take it. But you better give me my money.”

“What are you doing?” shouted Manny as he shoved at the guards with renewed vigor. “I saw. I saw you give it to him.”

“This guy’s nutso. Keep your mouth shut and stop resisting. Cops are coming and they’ll have guns.”

Ian walked away with Philip towards the end of the building. “You’ll have to wait down here,” instructed Philip. “In fact, get away from all of this. Leave. Here comes the lottery girl. I’m going to have her take me to the director’s office. I’ll meet you outside.”

Manny saw Philip walking rapidly towards the end of the building accompanied by a lottery official. He drove his knee into a groin, and kicked viciously at a kneecap. He pounded down hard on the first foot that he found. Fife shrieked, the other guard gasped and hit the floor. Manny twisted free of his captors and raced towards Philip.

Fife hobbled after Manny and yelled, “Somebody stop that guy. Stop him.”

Philip spun back, startled to see that Boyce was charging towards him wearing a crazed, an almost maniacal expression. The judge broke into a run towards the staircase.

Manny caught up. His momentum knocked Philip head-first into the railing. He punched frantically the back of the judge’s head. “I want my ticket. I know you have it. Give it to me.”

“Stop it. Get off of him,” screamed Christina before running up the stairs.

“I need help,” howled Philip. “He’s crazy. He’s going to kill me.”

Fife loomed over Manny brandishing a long fiberglass nightstick. He swung his weapon and landed a heavy thwack to Manny's ribcage. The cabbie's scream was cut short by a vicious blow to the side of his head, splitting it open like a melon.

Ian stepped in to shield Manny from further injury "Stop it. Stop hitting him!"

Manny fell silent and slowly rolled off Philip's backside. Blood spurted from a long deep gash which ran from his temple to the back of his neck. More blood trickled from his mouth. "It's my ticket," he wheezed. He lifted his head as if to say more, but could only manage an incomprehensible gurgle. His head fell back to the floor.

Philip scrambled to his feet and stared at Manny, sickened at the spectacle of blood hemorrhaging from his skull. "He was going to kill me. He was."

A crowd gathered. "Call an ambulance."

Ian staggered to his feet and wailed, "He's dead. I can't believe this."

Christina and Aaron Saltzman raced down the stairs towards the fracas. The director stopped short about six feet from the carnage below and peered below. "What the hell's happening here?"

"That's Judge Driscoll," pointed out Christina. "The man I told you about. The one with the winning ticket."

Philip looked up at the two lottery officials "I was attacked."

The director ventured down a couple more stairs. "Come with me, Judge. Christina, call 911."

Philip followed Saltzman, leaving Ian with Manny. "The man's a lunatic," declared Phillip breathlessly climbing the stairs. "He attacked my deputy, me and your guards. I should press charges against this facility. You need properly armed security. Not an old man and a kid."

"You're safe now. Such a thing has never happened here."

Philip straightened his hair and tie as they walked into a large office. "Your security guards are incompetent. I insist that you cash my ticket without delay. I want to get out of this asylum soon as possible. That woman told you about my winnings didn't she?"

"Yes she did." Saltzman hesitated. "I should really be downstairs."

"No. I want you to cash this ticket now." Philip watched as the director slipped behind his desk. Saltzman was a painfully thin man of retirement age. He had an intelligent and prosperous looking countenance. The thin wire rims of his glasses encased thick round lenses. Thinning gray hair had been left to grow at the back and hung over his collar in a manner characteristic of a musician or artist. His dress shirt was monogrammed.

Saltzman said, "Very well. I'll cash your ticket. I need your social insurance card, your driver's license, and of course, the ticket."

Philip removed his wallet. "And I'm not interested in a formal check presentation. Here. Everything you need."

The director examined the ticket carefully. "This has seen better days. What's all this dark matter on the back?"

"I spilled soda on it."

"Judge, you have to sign this." He passed the ticket back to Philip. "I can't believe you've been walking around with an unsigned ticket worth millions. Anyone could have cashed this."

“Believe me, it has never left my possession,” replied Philip, scribbling. Saltzman cross-checked Philip’s signature with his driver’s license. “Everything appears to be in order. I’ll take this to our accounting department. You’ll have your check shortly. Please wait here.”

Ian knelt by Manny. He watched in horror as warm blood seeped from a gruesome wound.

“Give me some room please, son. I’m a doctor,” said an elderly man gently. He kneeled down and reached for Manny’s wrist. “See if you can apply some pressure to his skull. Try and keep the wound closed.”

Duane Fife looked on. “Is he going to be all right?”

“All right? What do you think?” asked the doctor. He pulled off his tie for use as a tourniquet. “Just look. Why did you have to take a club to him? I saw the whole thing. You’ve almost split his head in two.” Manny’s skull was bound in seconds. “He’s lost a huge amount of blood. He barely has a pulse. The man would be in better shape had you shot him. Couldn’t you have used pepper spray, a stun-gun or something?”

The guard slapped his nightstick on an open palm. “We’re unarmed, except for these babies.”

“You reacted with excessive force.”

“Hey. He attacked a cop. Tried to get a judge. What do you want? He should have cooperated with us.”

“You and your partner are clearly unqualified for such incidences. Things don’t look good for him right now,” appraised the doctor standing up unsteadily. “You’re a very dim-witted young man. Get out of my sight.”

Fife hobbled off.

Two paramedics ran forth pushing a stretcher. Ian assisted in lifting Manny onto the gurney. A crisp white pillow case turned dark crimson.

“I’m a physician. He has a seven inch wound forming at the temporal bone leading to the parietal region where most of the blood loss is occurring.”

“Vitals?”

“He’s just about gone. Barely a pulse. You’ve got to get him some blood.”

The stretcher was raised while one paramedic stuck an IV in Manny’s arm. On-lookers gasped at the sight of Manny’s blood soaked stretcher as he was speedily wheeled through the building.

Ian ran alongside Manny. “I’m going with him.” As he brushed through the vestibule he felt a sharp tap on his shoulder. He looked up. It was Fife, propping the door open with his shoulder.

“Tell your friend that I think he might have cracked a bone in my foot.”

Ian came to a halt, beset by intense hatred of the young security guard. “So you turn around and crack his head?”

“He deserved everything I gave him.”

Ian threw up his fists. “You know what? I’m unarmed too, except for these babies. Want to go? Come on, right now. Let’s see what you can do without your stick.”

Fife answered with a kick towards Ian’s stomach. Ian deftly sidestepped the boot and unleashed two quick, flawlessly placed punches. The right jab plastered the guard’s

nose across his face; the left hook split his lip. He crumpled to the ground, a tooth dangling by a sinewy ligament.

Ian caught up to the paramedics. He stared powerlessly at Manny as they slid the gurney through the ambulance door. Three squad cars screamed up the drive. The wail of sirens and radios was deafening. “You heard me back there? That I’m going with him?”

“You family?”

“Yeah.”

“Get in.”

Thirty-Eight

Philip fidgeted uneasily as he sat alone in Saltzman's office awaiting his payout. What should have been a glorious moment was tempered by disturbing visions of blood spewing from Manny Boyce's head-wound, the cabbie having been possibly battered to death.

Saltzman entered his office and went straight to his desk. "Shouldn't be long, Judge. I really wish that you'd reconsider, and permit a formal presentation of the check. It's customary to--"

"No. Out of the question."

"You seem rather firm on that."

"I think it's highly irresponsible of you to allow, in fact, demand big winners' names to be published. Their identities are even posted on your website, vulnerable to tens of millions of scammers, or worse. People should be allowed their privacy. I have two children. Some lunatic could kidnap them for ransom. No presentation. It's out of the question. If you insist on such a tacky exercise, I'll direct you to put the money in a trust and I'll have an attorney collect it on my behalf."

The director's phone buzzed.

"It's Peter, from Legal. Accounting just brought me a Magnificent Millions ticket, drawn September 7th. I've cross-checked for any prior claims and have discovered that a concern has been filed concerning the ticket."

Saltzman swiveled away from Philip and faced his office window. "Give me the specifics."

"A Manny Boyce phoned Lisa Carter in reception on the morning of the 10th alleging that he had purchased and then lost the ticket in question."

"Excuse me. May I have that name again?"

"Manny Boyce. She advised that he send in a written claim of loss. He did. It was directed to my office and filed."

The director rolled out from his desk. "I'll be right up."

"You have to leave?" asked Philip. "I thought someone was expected here momentarily with my check."

"There's a matter that needs my attention. I won't be long."

The judge leaned back in a sumptuous leather arm-chair and tried to relax. Saltzman probably has to speak with the cops about Boyce. He examined the colorful Inuit art which hung on the walls of Saltzman's office. They looked like originals. The polished hardwood floor was accented with a lavish Oriental rug. The director's chrome and steel desk was predictably uncluttered. He evidently wasn't a particularly busy man—a fat-cat, no doubt raking in an inflated salary. Awarding lottery earnings. What a cushy position. Philip reached for a newspaper from a glass coffee table.

Saltzman took the stairs up one floor to the legal department. Peter Mulroney's office door was ajar. He entered to find the attorney at his desk poring over some papers.

"It's a detailed file," said Mulroney looking up.

“What have you got?”

“This Manny Boyce I mentioned reported the ticket missing on 10 September, by phone. He was advised to send us a letter with the details. Let’s see, he claims he lost it in the end-stall in the bathroom of the Greyhound bus terminal sometime between 1:35 and 1:50 p.m. on the afternoon of the 7th.”

“What else?”

“He writes that he purchased the winning ticket at what he refers to as the old 7-11 located on Division Street, Sutton. He made note of the clerk. A Colleen. No last name. Writes that she’s no longer employed with the store. In fact he says that the store has since been closed but that Colleen’s former supervisor works at a new 7-11 located across the street beside the bus station on Reid Street. He didn’t sign his ticket. Lisa has made some additional notes. She writes that Boyce made three follow-up phone calls to her, and she’s written a notation that he thought the ticket might be in the hands of a young man. No name provided. Something about video evidence from the bus station’s bathroom.”

“It all sounds a little far-fetched. However he’s right about the location which sold the winning ticket,” said Saltzman. “We honored the usual prize of 1% of the \$25 million to the store for selling a winning ticket. I approved the check personally. We weren’t sure where to send it. What else do you have?”

“That’s about it.”

“There’s something you should know. There was a melee downstairs about 20 minutes ago. A man was badly injured by one of our guards.”

“Yes. I heard. What was that all about?”

“Are you ready for this? The victim’s name happens to be Manny Boyce.”

“Oh, my god.”

“Yes, my reaction exactly.”

“So one of our security guards injured Manny Boyce, who might well be the winner of \$25 million.”

“I’m afraid so. In fact, our guard beat the man senseless with a baton.”

Mulroney left his chair abruptly and said, “I don’t have to spell out the implications of this.”

“You mean a potential lawsuit?”

“Yes. We can’t go around attacking our customers. What was that guard thinking? I would advise that you fire, or at least suspend him. We’re on very fragile legal ground. The media will eat this story up. Big bad lottery office clubs winner of huge jackpot. I can see the headlines now.”

“We may be all right,” advised Saltzman. “You should know that Boyce was beating up a judge before security stepped in. A Judge Driscoll. He’s in my office as we speak expecting a pay-out.”

“A judge! This is getting more bizarre by the minute.”

“Boyce initiated the fight. He jumped Judge Driscoll from behind. Christina saw the whole thing.”

“As did many other people I’m sure. We’ll have plenty of witnesses that we can call on if necessary,” said Mulroney pacing, thinking. “Are you entirely satisfied that Driscoll has an indisputable case for ownership?”

The director hesitated. “You’d think a judge would be solid, but given this situation with Boyce it’s imperative that we scrutinize His Honor’s claim thoroughly.”

“I agree. We have to get this right, the first time. Once we are satisfied that Driscoll is the owner, we’ll redeem the ticket. Then we’ll explain to the press that he was attacked by some kind of nut. That’s the best scenario.” Mulroney looked gravely at Saltzman. “Let’s just hope that this judge is on the straight-and-narrow. Let me question him with you. If we get this wrong, we’ll both be looking for another line of work.”

Saltzman was already half-way to the door. “Let’s go.”

Ian watched as a paramedic tended to Manny in the back of the ambulance. “Where are you taking him?”

“The Lakefield Medical Center. We have to stop this blood loss. He’ll need a transfusion. Then I imagine the doctor will ask us to transfer him to a hospital for tests.”

“Do you think he’ll live?”

“It’s hard to know. He could have a concussion, perhaps brain damage.”

“Why is he twitching like that?”

“Involuntarily muscle spasms. But he isn’t in pain. He’s unconscious.”

“One of the guys on my hockey team in Bantam did that after he went into the boards. He was doing the same thing on the ice. Twitching, rolling his eyes.”

The ambulance raced into a circular drive and pulled up to the front doors of the medical center, an unassuming one-storied clapboard structure. The paramedics slid Manny from the ambulance and wheeled him into the building.

“Right through those swinging door,” directed a nurse.

Ian followed behind. A few people sat on benches in the corridor. “This way. In here,” beckoned a physician.

Ian backed away as the medics swung the stretcher in a wide arc, startled to see Deputy Bleeker sitting alone, his arm in a sling. The officer stared in horror at Manny.

“You’ll have to wait out here,” someone in a white coat said to Ian. He watched as Manny was pushed into a room, and then turned his attention to Bleeker. “Satisfied? It’s all your fault.”

“I didn’t touch him. What happened?”

“You lied. You said Manny hit you so the guard in the lottery office clubbed him. You’re responsible.”

“Where’s Judge Driscoll?”

“Who cares? Don’t even talk to me. Why don’t you get lost? The last thing Manny needs to see is you.”

Saltzman and Mulroney entered the director’s office smartly. “Judge Driscoll, I’d like you to meet Peter Mulroney. He’s from our legal department.”

Philip set aside his newspaper and stood. “Legal? Is there some kind of problem?”

“Nothing to be alarmed about, Your Honor,” replied Mulroney. “But a concern has been filed about your Magnificent Millions ticket.”

“A concern. What exactly does that mean?”

“In this case, the individual in question filed notification claiming that he lost the ticket.”

“That’s absurd. It’s been in my possession since I purchased it.”

“Claims such as this happen quite frequently,” continued the attorney. “People trying to cash in on something that never belonged to them. I don’t know why they bother. Their claims never amount to anything. Nevertheless, given the ticket’s worth we have no choice but to verify a few things with you. It’ll just take a moment.”

Philip tightened, crossing his arms. Mulroneu could be trouble. He was good looking in a swarthy kind of way. A pinstriped suit that screamed “made-to-measure” hung on his trim frame perfectly. The attorney exuded confidence and calm. He wouldn’t be out of place in a major Boston law firm. Just the right age, about 40, young but experienced. “Verify what?” asked Philip.

“First of all, we need to confirm where you purchased the ticket.”

“At the 7-11 in Sutton,” answered Philip confidently drawing on the information he had gleaned from the lottery’s website.

Mulroneu casually leaned against the wall jotting down Philip’s answers on a legal pad. “Which 7-11 would that be? And please, sit down.”

Philip remained on his feet, stunned by the attorney’s question. There was more than one 7-11 in Sutton?

“From which 7-11 did you purchase the ticket?” asked Mulroneu again.

“Sorry, in all the excitement I’m a little confused.”

“Take your time.”

Philip recalled something that Boyce had told him in his chambers. “*Everyone knows that the ticket was purchased at the Greyhound’s 7-11.*” Should he go with that? Perhaps Boyce had been setting a trap. But then again, Ian had told him that he’d found the ticket in the bathroom at the bus terminal. Boyce must have purchased it from there. “The 7-11 in the bus stop,” replied Philip hastily.

“Bus stop?”

“I mean the bus station.”

“Just so we’re clear. You purchased your Magnificent Millions lottery ticket at the 7-11 which is located beside the Greyhound bus station in Sutton.”

Philip took a seat. “Correct.”

“Is it beside the station or within the station?”

“Beside it,” answered Philip praying that he was right.

“Where did you park?”

“Park?”

“Yes, when you went to the 7-11 at the bus station to buy the ticket.”

“That’s a strange question. I didn’t park. I just threw on my flashers on Reid Street. I stopped. I didn’t park.”

“When did you purchase the Magnificent Millions ticket from the Greyhound’s 7-11 on Reid Street?” continued Mulroneu coolly “What day?”

“It’s difficult to remember such a small detail, but a day or so before the draw. But as I say, it’s all very fuzzy.”

“Do you remember the clerk’s name?” broke in Saltzman.

“You’re being absurd. Why on earth would I recall some clerk’s name?”

“Was the clerk a male or female?” asked Saltzman.

“Female.”

“Do you recall the time of day that you purchased the ticket?”

“Late afternoon. After court.”

“When and how did you learn that you had the winning ticket?”

“I checked the numbers in the paper. I don’t recall the day.”

“Is there any significance to the numbers?” from Mulroney

“No. I chose them at random.”

The attorney headed towards the door and nodded at Saltzman to join him. “All right. Thank you, Judge. Sorry to have troubled you with these questions. I think you can understand that with \$25 million--”

“Yes. I’m sure that you have your procedures. But how much longer is this going to take?”

“Mr. Saltzman and I will see to things immediately. Excuse us.”

The judge left his chair and stared out the window, dazed and shaken by the line of questioning he’d been forced to endure. They don’t believe me. That attorney is no fool. I’ve slipped up. I’m sure of it. I have one opportunity to set things right. I need information. Solid reliable information.

Philip jotted a note and left it on the director’s desk. *Be right back. Nature calls.* He left the office and walked casually to a stairwell at the end of the hall. He pushed open the fire-door, walked halfway down a set of concrete stairs and took out his cell.

“Information.”

“Yes. The number for the 7-11 in Sutton.”

“That number is no longer in service.”

“Impossible. Would you check again?”

“Just a moment. It may be a new listing. Yes, here it is. I could put you directly through for just a .50 cent charge.”

“Do it.”

“7-11. Derek speaking.”

“Yes. I need some information. Where are you located?”

“On Reid St. Beside the Greyhound depot.”

Philip drew a sigh of relief. “And you’re the only 7-11 location in Sutton?”

“Yes”

“And do you sell lottery tickets?”

“We sell some instant-scratch cards but none of the big ones like Powerball.

“What about Magnificent Millions?”

“Nope. Not yet, anyway.”

“But I received a Magnificent Millions ticket as a gift. I wanted to check the numbers at your store. I was sure he told me that the ticket was purchased from the 7-11 on Reid Street at the bus station,” countered Philip.

“He couldn’t have bought it here. Can you hold? I have a customer.”

Philip listened to the sound of electronic beeps from a cash register, and tried to remain calm.

“Hello?”

“Yes. I was telling you that--”

“Oh yeah. That ticket must have come from the 7-11 on Division Street. But it’s closed now.”

“When did it close?”

“I’m not sure. Close to a week ago anyway.”

“Do you know if that store by any chance sold a winning Magnificent Millions ticket?”

“You’ll have to hold again.”

Philip clutched his small phone tightly overcome by anxiety. He’d lied and Mulroney and Saltzman knew it. They’d never award him the ticket. Two minutes went by. “Come on, come on,” mumbled Philip impatiently.

“7-11. Isabel speaking. May I help you?”

“I was just speaking to someone else. Sounded like a young man. Please, it’s important that we finish our conversation.”

“Was it Tammy? She’s on break.”

“No. I said it was a male,” his voice echoing through the dank stairwell. “I forget his name.”

“I’m sorry. I didn’t hear you right. We’re real busy. Might have been Derek. He’s in the back. I’ll page him”

This was excruciating. “No, wait a minute. I just need some simple information. I was wondering if the former 7-11 on Division Street sold a winning Magnificent Millions ticket recently. The one worth \$25 million.”

“You want to believe it. I used to work there. In fact three of us girls come over to the new store. And the big winner still hasn’t come forward if you can believe it. Twenty five million still unclaimed. What I couldn’t do with that. It’s been in *the Examiner*. Anyway I have to go. My cigarette order is pulling in.”

Saltzman and Mulroney returned to the attorney’s cluttered office. Mulroney picked up a slip lying on his desk. “It’s happening already. Someone who witnessed the commotion downstairs must have called the paper. A reporter wants me to call her back. I’m not sure what to say right now.”

“If we award Driscoll the ticket we won’t have much explaining to do,” said Saltzman. “The struggle was simply the result of a confused man claiming a so-called lost ticket and one of our guards coming to the aid of the rightful owner who was being beaten up. A judge, at that.”

Mulroney shook his head with certainty before speaking. “Nope. Too easy. I’m not buying it. I’m having a real problem with His Honor.”

“You thinking we’re into a real mess here?”

“Looks that way. Driscoll gave us the wrong store. If I had won \$25 million, I’d sure remember where I had purchased the ticket.”

“Yes, but perhaps he’s confused. Don’t forget that he was just in a fight. And he is in possession of a signed ticket.”

“He’s not confused,” declared Mulroney. “When pressed, he clearly remembered that he stopped his car on Reid St. while he ran into the 7-11 to buy the ticket.”

“I’ve just thought of something. Let’s see Boyce’s letter. Yes. You see? Right here. Boyce refers to the 7-11 on Division as the old 7-11, and he makes reference to a replacement store at the bus station.”

“So?”

“It’s quite possible that the new store isn’t yet set up to sell tickets. It can take weeks to get on-line. Can you access our data base on your computer?” asked Saltzman eagerly.

Mulrone y settled in behind his desk-top. "I see where you're going with this." He clicked away. "There's a Mike's Mart on Dublin Street, a Grab-and-Go on Herman Street. Here we are: a 7-11 on Division Street. Non-active."

"That's the store that sold the winner."

"Now look at this. Just as you suggested. A 7-11 on Division, Sutton, Terminals pending."

"The judge outright lied to us," said Saltzman. "There's no way in hell that we can cash that ticket for him."

Mulrone y stroked his chin thoughtfully. "I agree, but we have to protect ourselves."

Saltzman shot Mulrone y a puzzled glance. "What do you mean?"

"I want Driscoll to sign an affidavit whereby he'll swear to having purchased the ticket at the 7-11 at the bus station."

"But we know that he couldn't have. Wait a minute. You're out to ambush him."

Mulrone y selected a file folder from the bottom drawer of his desk. "Call it what you like. I simply want this office protected against any legal protest that the judge may come up with. If we're going to refuse payment to a justice who has a signed ticket worth \$25 million we have to demonstrate good reason to do so. Hence the affidavit."

"You're the attorney. I accept your advice."

"An affidavit is a simple but powerful legal instrument," continued Mulrone y. "I'll prepare one right now. We can explain to Judge Driscoll that he must sign it to get his check. I'm not proposing anything out of the ordinary."

"Even though we know that he's going to self-incriminate?"

"We're not going to force him to sign it."

"We know that he will."

"If he's foolish enough to lie under oath, that's not our problem. I'm just being prudent. I'm protecting our backsides against a false claim. My suggestion is that you go back to your office and explain to the judge that I'll be up shortly with some papers for him to sign."

Thirty-Nine

Philip came out from the stairwell and walked casually back to Saltzman's office, relieved to find that he and Mulronev hadn't yet returned. He removed the note he had left on the director's desk and went back to his chair. He picked up a newspaper and did his best to appear calm.

Saltzman arrived alone a couple of minutes later. "Mr. Mulronev is preparing some legal documents that will serve to expedite the ticket's redemption," he announced formally.

That sounds promising, thought Philip. He wanted more information. "Once I sign-off on the documents that your attorney is preparing are you willing to redeem the ticket?"

Saltzman avoided Philip's hopeful gaze. "That decision will be made by our legal department," he said quietly.

"I see."

"While we're waiting for Mr. Mulronev, may I offer you a coffee, soda perhaps?"

"No. But if he's going to be a while, I'm going to stretch my legs."

Philip left the director's office and stopped at the top of the stairs. He leaned against a railing and surveyed the busy headquarters below him and scanned the room for Ian. There was a long line to the counter. Nearly all the chairs were full, but no sign of the boy.

He spotted a couple of Lakefield police in black uniforms standing by the front door. The cops appeared to be jotting down notes while speaking with the senior guard.

A maintenance man was working the broadloom with a noisy wet-dry vacuum where Manny had lain. The custodian had set up a yellow *Caution: Wet Floor* sign by the work site. Wet with blood thought Philip shuddering. There had been so much. The janitor put the hose down and sprayed liberal quantities of foam which released a phony pine-scent that Philip could detect on the landing.

The judge waited at his perch for a few more minutes. The delay was interminable. If they'd just release the funds. He turned back and headed to Saltzman's office.

Philip sank into a chair and tried to focus on a magazine while the director typed behind a computer monitor. Saltzman took a couple of phone calls and poured himself a coffee.

Mulronev showed up minutes later grasping a black leather case. The attorney started right in. "Judge, given that a concern has been registered against your ticket, we must have you sign a declaration to formally claim the proceeds." He removed a typewritten sheet from his case and handed it to Philip.

"This is an affidavit!"

"Standard policy, Judge. I am a notary and can take your sworn testimony. I have already written the body, if you wouldn't mind filling in the blanks, so to speak. Please take all the time you need."

Philip looked over the document. Basic, but complete. Mulroney had covered all points of contention. The lottery office wanted him to swear that he was the rightful owner of the ticket. To state where he had purchased it. To swear that he hadn't found the ticket and that it had remained in his possession since he had purchased it. Philip suppressed his desire to smile. An affidavit was perfect! The document would legitimately trump his prior inaccurate verbal testimony. He set the document on the table. "Your work appears to be sound. I'm ready to proceed."

"Please use my desk," offered Saltzman.

"No, the coffee table is fine," said Philip, his expensive fountain pen already in hand. "This won't take long."

The judge busied himself with the affidavit while Saltzman fussed with some paperwork. Mulroney stood at the cooler quaffing back water. He peered at Philip from time to time as the judge confidently filled in the affidavit using bold strokes.

The judge pushed the paper forward on the glass table. "I've completed my statement."

"I'll swear you in before you sign it," said Mulroney soberly as he reached for his attaché case. "Place your hand on the Bible."

Philip took an oath that the contents of the affidavit were true. He scrawled his signature with a dramatic flourish and offered the form to Mulroney from his chair.

The attorney read the affidavit three times. "Thank you, Judge. Mr. Saltzman and I will be back shortly. I have to make a copy of your statement for our files."

"Then what?"

"We won't be long," assured Mulroney heading towards the door. "Make yourself comfortable."

"Help yourself to some water," added Saltzman as though it were a rare scotch.

Mulroney led the way up the stairs, and into his office. "He's changed his testimony. He got it right this time. Read it for yourself."

Saltzman looked it over and said, "It seems peculiar that when faced with an affidavit he suddenly remembered the correct location."

"He had some time to think. I was a little direct with him earlier, and let's face it. 7-11's are all pretty similar. He must have mixed up the stores. That's the only logical explanation."

"What are the legal implications of the judge's sworn testimony?"

Mulroney looked over the affidavit once more and set it down. "My legal opinion is that Judge Driscoll must be considered the rightful owner of the ticket."

Saltzman was silent for a moment considering the implications of what Mulroney had just told him. "That certainly solves our problem with Boyce."

"You're absolutely right. The agency may have to answer for using excessive force, but we are fortunate. Manny Boyce can be explained away as a frenzied madman who assaulted a big lottery winner. Our guards acted to protect a customer."

"What if Boyce launches an appeal for the winnings?"

"He doesn't have the grounds to launch an appeal. He's got nothing to take to court. Boyce can launch all the challenges he desires. The critical thing here is that the agency is safe. We've done our jobs," replied Mulroney.

"I really hope you're right"

A trace of annoyance crossed Mulroney's face. "You don't sound sure. Look at the facts. We have a District Court Justice who has just signed an affidavit that we know to be correct. Judge Driscoll has also presented a bona-fide ticket which he signed in front of you. In the eyes of the Law he is the rightful owner. Incidentally, if I remember correctly, I was the one who brought Boyce's concern to your attention. Less than an hour ago you were quite prepared to issue His Honor a check no questions asked."

"That's true."

"You're the director. Ultimately it's your call, but my advice is that you authorize accounting to issue Driscoll a check. I'll back you. I am of the opinion that Judge Driscoll is unquestionably the legal owner of the ticket."

Saltzman headed towards the door. "Your legal advice has always been beyond reproach. I'll tell Judge Driscoll that he's about to become a multi-millionaire."

"You get to have all the fun," quipped Mulroney. He stamped Manny's file, *closed*.

Saltzman made his way back to his office. "We're ready to proceed with your payout, Judge. I have to know whether you'll be taking the money as one lump-sum or as an annuity over a number of years."

Words had never sounded sweeter. Philip rose from his chair flashing a broad grin. "Wonderful. And I'll be taking the cash in full," he added. "No staggered pay-outs. Who knows if I'll even be alive in five or ten years? Maybe you guys will go broke. Anything could happen."

"That's what most people decide. All the proceeds up-front."

"Just how much am I going to be nicked for?"

"You can pretty much count on Uncle Sam and the state to reduce your winnings by 30%."

"Let's just get it done."

Saltzman's phone rang.

"It's Janet from accounting. Mr. Mulroney has informed me that the check for the Magnificent Millions ticket has been cleared for processing."

"Yes. You can go ahead. He'll be taking the lump-sum."

"You've answered my question. I've already taken the liberty of arriving at the final payout. It comes to seventeen million, five hundred thousand dollars."

"You can go ahead and process the check. A check for \$17.5 million payable to Judge Philip Driscoll," said the director for Philip's benefit. "Yes. Two l's in Driscoll. And please have Mr. Mulroney bring the check to my office along with any necessary tax forms."

Ian paced fretfully about the hall outside of Manny's room. Bleeker had received his prescription and had left the clinic. The doctors had been attending to the cabbie for over half an hour.

A woman in a white coat splattered in blood stepped out hurriedly and scanned the hallway. "Is there any family here with Manny Boyce?"

Ian stepped forward. "Right here."

"I'm Doctor Worthington. This way, his condition has changed."

Ian raced into Manny's room. A private room, barely large enough to contain a small bed. Manny appeared comfortable, thought Ian. His face had been scrubbed of blood; a tube in one arm led to an IV, another leading to a bag of blood. His hair had been shorn, clearly revealing a line of staples which extended from just behind his temple to the back of his neck.

"I wanted you here because he has come around. He's speaking coherently which is very encouraging. We want to keep him conscious. Talk with him. Get him to respond to you. I'll be in the next room."

Ian approached Manny's bedside. "Manny. It's Ian."

His eyes opened.

"Good. Keep speaking," encouraged the doctor.

"It's Ian," he repeated, not at all sure what to say. "You're going to be fine."

"Ian," mumbled Manny.

"Keep going," from the doctor.

"Umm. The doctor says that you're going to get better."

No response.

"Can I call anyone for you?"

Manny's eyes opened blearily. "My ticket. Why did you do it?"

Ian choked up and sputtered, "I'm sorry, I panicked. None of this should have happened. Let me explain."

"I suppose I shouldn't complain, but the government certainly takes its share," commented Philip.

"The IRS is actually withholding the money. With the right accountant you can recover a good deal of it, and with careful investments you can grow your payout to the original \$25 million or more," replied Saltzman as though he were a financial guru.

"Any investments I make will be extremely conservative. The stock market makes me nauseous. Someone belches in China and we lose 400 points in a day. And following a disastrous trading-day the brokers attribute triple-digit losses to some overdue market correction. I'll let the market correct someone else's money."

Peter Mulroney strode into Saltzman's office and smiled at Philip. "We're all set." The attorney took a check over to the director's desk for his signature. Saltzman looked it over; signed it and passed it back to Mulroney.

The attorney approached Philip check in hand. "Your Honor, on behalf of Lotto-Central, and our executive director, Aaron Saltzman, I'm delighted to present you with this check for \$17.5 million."

Philip accepted the check shakily. "And I thank you for it."

Mulroney held out the decrepit Magnificent Millions lottery ticket. "Would you like to keep this as a souvenir?"

"Yes. I think that would be nice," replied Philip from his chair. "Something to show the grandchildren."

Mulroney pulled back the ticket and flipped it over. "Just one thing. I had a question about it."

“What’s that, Peter?” asked Philip amicably.

“What is this substance on the back?”

“Oh that. It’s just some cola that I spilled on it.”

“When did you spill soda on it?”

“A few days ago. I had the ticket on the kitchen table and I knocked over a tin of soda with my elbow. Why?”

“I just find it curious that you’d be so careless as to spill something on a ticket worth tens of millions.”

“It so happens that I didn’t know its worth at the time. If I known that it was a winner I’d obviously have been more careful of it,” replied Philip edgily.

“I see.”

“What?”

“And just to be sure. You bought this ticket at the 7-11 on Division Street in Sutton. You didn’t by any chance find it? No one gave it to you?” persisted Mulroney sounding very much like a trial attorney.

Something’s amiss here, thought Philip. No, couldn’t be. Mulroney is just a Doubting Thomas. Grandstanding. Playing the role of a big-shot prosecutor for Saltzman’s benefit. But why? It didn’t matter. The check had been issued. The judge shot back defiantly. “You never give up, do you? Yes, I purchased it. No, I didn’t find it. And nobody gave it to me. I’ve sworn to that.”

“The reason I’m asking, Judge, is because I have the utmost respect for a man in your position. And as fellow member of the Law fraternity, I’m willing to give you one opportunity to save yourself.”

Saltzman looked on intently from his desk.

“Save myself?”

“Yes. I’ll ask you once more. Is this the original ticket that you purchased at the 7-11 on Division Street? Has it been in your possession since you purchased it and did you spill a soda on it?”

“Yes. For god’s sake, yes! Why all these question? Especially now. You’ve awarded me my check,” retorted Philip angrily.

“All right. Suit yourself. Look at the check again. Two signatures are required, and mine isn’t on it. The check as it stands, Judge Driscoll, is about as legally binding as this ticket.”

“What are you getting at?”

“What I’m saying, Your Honor, is that you have lied under oath with intent to deceive. You have committed perjury, and that’s just the beginning of your legal problems.”

Philip gave a fleeting look at Mulroney, then to Saltzman, overcome by dread. “I don’t understand,” he said weakly.

Mulroney dramatically assumed the center of the room, the ticket outstretched towards Philip. “We’ve discovered that this ticket, this ticket that you’ve sworn to have purchased and have presented to Lotto-Central for redemption, is a forgery.”

“Forgery!” echoed Saltzman in astonishment.

“No. It couldn’t be. It’s not,” choked Philip clutching the arms of his chair for support. “You’re wrong!”

Mulroney approached the judge ticket in hand. “Actually I’m right. Do you think that we’re fools? There’s absolutely no doubt about it. This ticket’s a fake—counterfeit!”

Forty

“Counterfeit!” erupted Manny.

Ian recoiled, startled at the Manny’s outburst. It was fleeting. The cabbie sank back in bed.

Dr. Worthington entered the room alerted to Manny’s cry. “Mr. Boyce, are you all right?”

“Yeah,” he said feebly.

She checked Manny’s heart monitor and took his pulse. “He’s stable. Keep him engaged. I’m going to make arrangements for Mr. Boyce’s transfer to Sutton Memorial. Will you be accompanying him?”

“Yes.”

Ian pulled the ticket from his wallet. “Manny, I have something to show you.” His eyes flickered, and then opened widely, devouring the orange and black object before him. “I thought--”

“When I showed Judge Driscoll the ticket in his chambers he got all excited. He said he couldn’t believe that I had spilled something on it and that I had to be more careful with it. He told me that I should make a copy and that gave me an idea. When I stayed overnight at the farm I used their computer, laser printer and a scanner that does both sides. You still with me?”

“Yeah,”

“I even messed up the back of it a bit with some Pepsi. You both knew it had been sprayed with soda so I made the copy as realistic as possible. Then I creased it and stepped on it. Are you listening?”

An almost imperceptible nod.

“I didn’t trust either of you. I needed to protect the ticket and buy some time,” continued Ian. “I gave the fake ticket to the judge. In all the excitement he took it no questions asked. Then you got hit. I didn’t have a chance to tell you that I’d given him a phony ticket. Of course Driscoll has probably discovered it’s a fake. I’d love to see the look on his face right now.”

Manny lay still, expressionless. Ian’s voice drifted about, an imprecise noise without meaning.

“Anyway, I’ll let you rest. I’m going to find a place for lunch. I’ll be back later. You want anything?”

Philip remained planted in his chair. He knew his trembling legs wouldn’t have supported him had he had tried to stand. “A forgery, I don’t understand.”

Mulroney motioned to the director. “Mr. Saltzman, I need to speak with you. Judge, don’t try and leave or I’ll have you arrested.”

Mulroney and Saltzman ducked into a supply room. “This is astounding,” declared Saltzman. “Counterfeit. Let me see it.”

Mulroney handed Saltzman the ticket.

The director held it towards a fluorescent ceiling light. “You have to admit, it’s not bad.”

“It is very convincing, but the last time I checked, Lotto-Central normally scans tickets for authenticity,” answered Mulroney.

“I assumed that Christina had scanned it at the counter. That’s her responsibility. When we came across that scene at the bottom of the stairs she yelled, ‘That’s Judge Driscoll, the man with the winning ticket.’ All hell was breaking loose. Driscoll had been attacked. Boyce was spurting blood. It was awful. I hustled Driscoll upstairs to my office and he gave me the ticket. He signed it in front of me. I was upset. Maybe I didn’t ask the right questions. How did you discover that it’s a fake?”

“Janet, in accounting handled the ticket after applying some hand-cream. She noticed a trace of orange on her fingers. Our ink is indelible. She brought the ticket to my attention. It wouldn’t scan. If you look really carefully, the numbers bleed. And it’s not quite the same shade of orange as it should be.”

“This is extremely embarrassing.”

“The important thing is that we caught it before a payout was issued. We have a decision to make.”

“About laying charges?” asked Saltzman

“Yes.”

“I say nail him,” declared the director bitterly. “Perjury, attempted counterfeiting, fraud. Whatever the Law allows. We were minutes away from giving Driscoll a check for millions. We could have looked like fools and lost our jobs. The agency would have been the laughing stock of the state—the country.”

“True, but I can’t help but think that His Honor has been duped. Driscoll isn’t a stupid man. He’d have to have known that the barcodes are magnetically treated. I am convinced that he believed it was real.”

“Let’s see what we get out of him,” suggested Saltzman. “I’ll accept your decision pertaining to any charges.”

Mulroney and Saltzman entered the office.

Philip stared right in.” Gentlemen,” he began in his best courtroom voice, “let’s be reasonable. You surely don’t think that I’d intentionally attempt to pass off a phony lottery ticket do you?”

“It did occur to us that you’re bright enough to have known that we have validation procedures,” commented Mulroney. “And sit down.”

“I didn’t know it was a fake. I found it. I assumed it was real. I wasn’t trying to pull anything.”

Mulroney glanced alternately at the ticket and the affidavit before glowering at Philip. “You lied on an affidavit. You stated that you purchased the ticket.”

“There’s a logical explanation. I did state that I purchased what has turned out to be a fake ticket. But you see, I buy many lottery tickets. Here’s what happened. Last week, not only did I purchase several Magnificent Millions tickets, but I happened to find one as well. I added the ticket that I found with the ones I had purchased. They were all together in my wallet. Later I spread them out on the kitchen table while I checked the numbers. Clearly, as it turns out, the ticket that I had assumed to be the winner was the ticket I had found—the fake—and not one that came from a store, hence the confusion on the affidavit. There’s been no counterfeiting, No wrong-doing.”

Mulroney scowled at Philip and thrust out the phony ticket. “This thing is a mess. Surely you would have realized that this was the ticket that you had found in a ditch or wherever.”

“Actually, when I found it, the ticket was in good condition. As I told Mr. Saltzman earlier, I spilled a soda on it.”

Mulroney stroked his chin considering what he had just heard. Judge Driscoll’s story would be difficult to disprove. Charging a judge with attempted counterfeiting and perjury wouldn’t be prudent—too many gray areas. Such allegations would ultimately be dismissed; but not before months of wasted time and money. The attorney looked over the affidavit once more then glared at Philip. “I don’t believe a word that you’ve just spoken. I hope I never have the misfortune to appear in your court room. Get out of the building.”

The judge left Saltzman’s office without a word. He descended the stairs two-at-a-time, crossed the lobby and pushed through two doors. He slumped against a wall and exhaled. After he had regained composure, Philip pulled out his phone and called Bleeker.

The deputy answered on the first ring. “I just got back to the cruiser. Are you still in the lottery office?”

“Yes. What’s this I hear about Boyce running you down? A security guard told me that you were sent to the hospital.”

“I tripped and broke my arm. I told a security guard and the Lakefield cops that Boyce intentionally hit me with his car. Guess I got him in a little trouble. I saw Boyce and Ian at the local clinic. Boyce is in rough shape. Who beat him up him?”

“You saw Ian! The little jerk crossed me.”

“How

“I’ll tell you later. I’m standing outside of the building. Come and get me.”

“I said that I was in my cruiser. I didn’t say that I could drive. Someone from the clinic dropped me off. I thought you could drive us back to Sutton. I’m at the end of the drive.”

“I’m on my way.”

Saltzman slammed his office door on Philip’s heels and muttered, “Driscoll’s a snake.”

“We didn’t have enough on him to make any charges stick,” said Mulroney.

“I know, but the man is a fraud artist.” A smile crossed Saltzman’s face. “I must say though, it was amusing to see him sweat. You put on quite a show.”

“I’m glad you enjoyed it. I took great pleasure in dangling that multi-million dollar check in his face.” Mulroney picked up the ticket from the coffee table. “We have unfinished business. If an individual took the trouble to make a copy of this ticket, I think we have to assume that someone out there knows that they’re a winner.”

“You thinking, Boyce?”

“Maybe, but why would he have attacked the judge had he known that Driscoll was in possession of a copied ticket? He’d have just sat back and laughed at the moron.”

“It’s possible that Boyce didn’t know the ticket was a fake. Don’t forget, he told

Lisa that he lost the ticket. Perhaps he saw Philip with it, thought it was real, and tried to get it back,” suggested Saltzman.

“I don’t know. This is getting very complicated. Don’t forget what we’re dealing with here. A ticket worth \$25 million. We have no room for error.”

“Boyce may be able to clear things up. Maybe he’s got the original,” suggested Saltzman.

“Let’s go and find out. I imagine that he’s at the clinic.”

Saltzman and Mulrone y piled into Mulrone y’s car and made the short drive to the medical center. They reported to reception. “We’d like to speak with a Manny Boyce,” said Mulrone y.

“I’ll see if that’s possible.”

A nurse approached the vestibule. “The doctor says you can have a short visit,” The director and the attorney entered Manny’s small room.

“Mr. Boyce, can you hear me?” asked Saltzman.

Manny’s eye’s opened slightly.

“I’m Aaron Saltzman, the director at Lotto-Central. I’m here with Peter Mulrone y, our chief attorney.”

“What do you want?” asked Manny quietly.

“We’ve examined your claim to a Magnificent Millions lottery ticket. I was curious to learn more. Can you give us a little history?”

Manny shifted ever so slightly in an effort to sit up, a miniscule movement stopped short by a searing pain radiating from a bruised rib. He persevered. “I bought the ticket, but I lost it.”

“Where is the ticket now? And could you speak up a bit please?” asked Saltzman.

Even thinking shot stabbing throbs through Manny’s head. “It’s with Ian Sinclair.”

“And where is he?”

“I don’t know. He was here,” whispered Manny, beset by confusion, doing his utmost to decipher reality from his jumbled dreams. “I know he was.”

Mulrone y spoke up. “I’m curious. How did this individual come into possession of your ticket?”

“He found it in the bathroom.”

“What bathroom?”

“The bathroom at the bus station. I saw him on tape before he was caught at the border,” answered Manny, struggling to form coherent sentences and maintain some train of thought.

Saltzman leaned closer to Manny. “Caught at the border? Which border?”

“Canadian. He had stolen documents with him. But--”

“Stolen documents?”

Manny’s eyes closed snugly trying to shut out pain.

“Manny? You still with us?” asked Saltzman.

“Yeah. The janitor stole the ticket and planted it in the wallet,” continued Manny in a slurred voice.

“Whose wallet?”

“Ian’s.”

Mulroney assumed the next line of questioning. "I'm confused, and I realize that speaking is difficult for you. Just nod if you like. Are you saying that you bought the ticket and Ian found it?"

Manny nodded weakly.

"And it was stolen from him by a janitor?"

"Yeah. But Ian got it back. The janitor planted it."

"And Ian was discovered with stolen documents at the Canadian border?"

"Yeah"

"Then how did Ian get the ticket back?"

"He stole the ticket from the border guard. I helped him escape before his trial," mumbled the cabbie.

"Did you say stole, trial, and escape?" asked Mulroney

"Yeah. Ian had court. He could have gone to jail," replied Manny trying mightily to keep his eyes open lest he pass out. The two men before him melded together, and then faded in and out of view.

"I see. That's enough for now, Mr. Boyce," interjected Saltzman. "We wish you the best for a full recovery."

Mulroney and Saltzman left Manny's room and lingered in the hallway.

"He's in rough shape, but I'm satisfied that we've learned all we have to know," stated Saltzman. "I'm not prepared to take this any further. The ticket has been stolen, at least twice. We don't honor stolen tickets. From what I could gather, Boyce is involved with some criminal who was arrested in Canada, charged with the theft of stolen documents, the ticket among them. Boyce illegally sneaked him out of Canada before trial presumably with the ticket."

"And the Canadian authorities would have considered the ticket as evidence," added Mulroney.

"It seems that everyone on the planet has at one time come into possession of the ticket. If half of what Boyce said is accurate, then I'm not confident that we'll ever get at the truth. I don't even want to try. It's not in Lotto-Central's interest to pursue this investigation a moment longer."

"And we have yet to see the original," pointed out Mulroney.

"There you are. Let's get out of here. There are far too many variables in the ticket's chain of custody. We were nearly taken in by Driscoll. I'm not going to take a chance on Boyce. And I'm certainly not interested in chasing down evidence, an exercise which has the potential to lead to a foreign county."

"What are you going to do now?" asked Mulroney.

"I'm going to void the ticket," replied Saltzman.

Mulroney stared hard at Saltzman as they edged past a child in a wheelchair.

"You're serious, aren't you?"

"I certainly am. Magnificent Millions is our contest. It was created by our agency and is administered through my office. As executive director, I have the authority to suspend, recall, withdraw or cancel all or part of a lottery scheme at any time before the period for claiming a prize expires. I've done it before. Remember that *Pick-9 You Win* ticket that was defaced a couple of years back?"

"Yes I do. You cancelled it and applied the proceeds to create a huge jackpot for the subsequent draw."

“Yes. And ticket sales quadrupled,” commented Saltzman. “I’d love to add \$25 million to the next contest.”

“I think you’ve just answered my question, but what option are you going to apply?” asked Mulrone as he opened the door to his Jaguar. “Suspend, recall, withdraw or cancel the ticket?”

“Cancel. As of this moment the ticket is null and void. Let’s get back to the office.”

Forty-One

Jean spent the night in Martha's condo and awoke Tuesday morning invigorated for her meeting with Donald Abramsky. She planned to investigate financial options with the banker in arranging for her mother's admittance to the Sunshine Center, or any decent long term care facility for that matter.

Following breakfast, she drove to Oak Leaf Savings and Loan. She was on the early side and killed time by haphazardly thumbing through shiny pamphlets which extolled the virtues of various loans and mortgages.

Donald Abramsky ushered Jean to his corner office. She took a seat across from the banker's desk and started right in. "I appreciate you seeing me on such short notice. My mother has fallen ill, poisoned by E. coli. We want to move her to a facility that is able to care for her needs—the Sunshine Center. It's an expensive private facility. They require a signed financial statement of assets before they'll admit her."

Abramsky looked at Jean sympathetically. "I hope Mrs. Van Whyte recovers. I'd be more than happy to provide the facility with a statement."

"Mother has always been less than forthcoming with me about her financial affairs. I was curious to know if she had any stocks or bonds, maybe an insurance annuity?"

"I'm really not at liberty to discuss your mother's finances. Your husband has made that very clear."

"But seeing as I will presumably have access to the financial statement that you've just agreed to prepare I'm sure you can at least let me know if she has funds over and above her day-to-day savings accounts."

"I am not aware of any stocks, bonds, or annuities. But your mother is, or at least was a millionaire. By the way, did you sign that form I sent to you?"

Jean pulled it from her purse.

"I'm curious. Your husband was somewhat testy with me yesterday. It was as if he hadn't wanted you to receive this notification."

"Is that a question?"

"I'll be unambiguous. I was given the distinct impression from Judge Driscoll that he hadn't wanted you know about the transfer of over a million dollars from your mother's account."

"The money is tied up in a real estate deal," said Jean flatly.

"What kind of deal?"

"We have a non-disclosure clause, but the money has been invested prudently. We expect to make a healthy profit for Mother, but we'd lose if we backed out now. We simply need to arrange for some bridge-financing to get her admitted to a decent facility. And we need the money at once."

"I see." Abramsky ran a hand over a cheek, thinking. Finally, he said, "Mrs. Van Whyte once mentioned to me that she owns a condominium. Is it free and clear?"

"Yes it is. What would it be worth now, given the state of affairs in this town?"

“A realtor would have a better idea, but I’m sure it could still be sold for \$90,000 or so.”

“That’s over \$50,000 less than she paid for it. I may have no choice. I’ve been told that she can’t stay in the hospital much longer. It would have to close within a couple of days.”

“Sell it in two days? Highly unlikely. The local and national media have decimated the reputation of this town. They continually refer to the source of the poisoning as ‘ground zero.’ Oak Leaf has been described as a ‘watershed wasteland.’ My guess is that nobody will want your mother’s condominium for at least a year or two.”

“In that case, please consider this. My husband earns \$130,000 a year. I have \$18,000 in mutual funds. We have a small mortgage. Other than that we’re debt free. Would you please present a case to the administrator at the Sunshine Center on our behalf?”

Abramsky removed his glasses and polished them thoughtfully with a handkerchief. “You’ve certainly found yourself in an awkward situation, but I’ll try and assist you. I’ll work with what you’ve told me and prepare as favorable a report as possible. It seems that Martha’s cash has been spoken for. Where specifically is this land you’ve purchased?”

“I’ve already told you. I’m not permitted to reveal that information. Let me assure you that it offers great promise.”

“How did you discover this investment opportunity? Can you at least tell me the name of the developers?”

“My husband handled the particulars.”

“You’re very trusting.”

“He’s my husband. I let him make all of the important financial decisions.”

All right. I’ll work with the Center, but frankly there’s not much left in assets to show them.”

“I have the necessary forms with me,” said Jean.

Abramsky scanned the paperwork. “Why don’t you go shopping or have lunch while I work on this? The form looks straightforward. I’ll follow up personally with them on your behalf. I’ve always liked your mother.”

“I’ll be at her condo,” said Jean standing. “Please get back to me as soon as possible. Here’s my number.”

As Jean made the short drive back to Martha’s home, she could barely contain the rage she felt towards Philip and Abramsky. She loathed covering for Philip. She felt as though she had somehow betrayed her mother and had been forced to protect, if not collaborate, however tacitly, with the man she was embarrassed to call her husband.

She was humiliated by her fawning responses to Abramsky’s questions. “*My husband makes all the important financial decisions,*” as though she were brain-dead. She didn’t care for Donald Abramsky. He was a condescending and chauvinistic relic. “*Why don’t you go shopping and have a nice little lunch while I intervene and rescue your mother?*” Surprised he didn’t call me “dear,” thought Jean bitterly as she pulled into the condo’s gates.

She put on some coffee and leafed through a magazine awaiting Abramsky’s call. An hour went by. Bored, she wandered from room to room in Martha’s condo, a dust rag in hand. She turned her attention to a collection of family photos standing on a dark

mahogany table in the living room. She ignored a 5x7 of Philip dressed in his judicial regalia. Even the thought of handling the wooden frame up was repugnant—cleaning it would have been far too personal—somehow misconstruing that she cared. She dragged out the canister vacuum from the hall closet and gave the oriental rugs a good once-over. Later she polished the silver tea set which sat on the dining room buffet.

Abramsky called back just before noon. “I have encouraging news.”

“What did they say?”

“I actually managed to speak with the Sunshine Center’s administrator. Turns out that we were members of the Rotary Club years ago in Bancroft. She ran a medical home-care business. I pulled a few strings--”

“So what did she say?” asked Jean impatiently.

“First of all, there is a room available for Martha in acute care. Apparently it had been spoken for but the prospective resident died. You would have to secure it right away.”

“I hope you told her that we want it.”

“Yes, I did. And based on Philip’s salary and his secure position as a District Court Justice, they are willing to admit Martha with an initial deposit of \$30,000. They normally require far more.”

“We could manage that.”

“I’m not finished. In addition to the deposit, they will require monthly payments of at least \$5,000.”

“That’s too much.”

“I suggested that might be a stretch but she wouldn’t go any lower. I did however, take the liberty of presenting an alternative proposal.”

“Being?”

“A significant lump sum payment which would cover her deposit and expenses for the year.”

“And just where do you suggest that we find this lump sum?”

“Seeing as you need funds in such a hurry to secure the room, and that it’s highly unlikely that Martha’s condo will sell easily, I am suggesting that the bank is willing to give you a mortgage on it at a very attractive interest rate—say, 8%? Your husband’s income would qualify you for such an arrangement. If you took the proceeds and provided the Sunshine Center with a \$90,000 deposit, they would be willing to admit Martha for a full year.”

“I don’t know. It sounds quite complicated,” said Jean.

“It’s the best I can do for you. A mortgage is the only option that makes sense. Even if you somehow managed to sell the condo within two days and that’s a big if, you’d lose tens of thousands. If you mortgage it, there’ll be some interest, but you can buy time to wait for the condo’s value to return. Plus if Mrs. Van Whyte should recover, she’d still have a home to return to.”

“She’s never going home. And it really wouldn’t be her condo anyway. The bank would own it.”

“Yes, we would assume full title. The condo would be held as security against the mortgage.”

“What would the monthly payments be on a \$90,000 mortgage?”

“That would depend on the period of amortization, but we could keep your payments to under \$1100 monthly.”

Jean walked out to the balcony to light her cigarette. She inhaled deeply and released a blue cloud over the railing before replying. “All right. Your plan offers the only sensible solution.”

“We would require your husband’s signature on the mortgage note as the guarantor.”

“I’m sure mine would suffice.”

“That wouldn’t be acceptable unless you are earning an income of some sort?”

“No.”

“That’s what I thought. Because Judge Driscoll is the principal bread winner, and has Power of Attorney over Martha’s affairs, there’s really no alternative. The mortgage papers must be signed by him.”

Jean hesitated for a moment. Further involvement by Philip with her mother’s assets revolted her. She had to make a decision, and quickly.

“Yes. Fine. Let’s proceed. How long will it take to prepare the paperwork?”

“Half a day.”

“Send the papers express delivery to my attention by courier.”

After leaving the bank, Jean drove back to Sutton. She and stopped by the hospital to see Martha. Her mother was awake, but she hardly spoke. Jean combed her hair, fluffed her pillows and fed Martha some pudding. After promising that she would come by in the morning, Jean left for the farm.

A message light was flashing on the kitchen phone. Abramsky wanted her to call him as soon as possible.

“It’s Jean. I just got back. I hope that there isn’t a problem with the mortgage.”

“There’s a problem all right. A big problem.”

“I don’t understand.”

“There’s a letter to the editor concerning your husband in today’s *Oak Leaf County Echo*. You lied to me. You told me not four hours ago that you were expecting a big payout from the land investment that you and Philip made for Mrs. Van Whyte. That you had a non-disclosure clause and couldn’t tell me more.”

Jean pulled out a chair and sat down filled with dread. What had he discovered? “I’m not sure what you’re alluding to.”

“I’ll summarize the important parts of the letter I just referred to.” The banker cleared his throat and began: “An individual by the name of Douglas Pringle sent a letter to the editor on behalf of his parents, Jacob and Doris. He describes in detail how a man he aptly refers to as Con purchased a parcel of land from them. The couple agreed to sell him the land for \$1.3 million, on the condition that Con use the land for farming. Apparently they had turned down a much larger offer from a developer. It goes on to say that Jacob and Doris learned of Con’s scheme to flip the land to ABC Holdings—another pseudo name—through a cousin who sits on the Planning Committee in Oak Leaf. I phoned Jacob Pringle,” added Abramsky. “My suspicions were confirmed—that Con is in fact, your husband. And you might like to know that Jacob informed me that his wife is critically ill with E. coli poisoning. She went to Bingo in town and came back to the farm, sick. He made a point to inform me that he’s convinced that Philip’s antics are

responsible for making her condition even worse and have added immeasurably to their misery.”

“But--”

“But nothing. I’ve been lied to. It’s clear that Judge Driscoll, with or without your support, used Mrs. Van Whyte’s capital to invest in a parcel of land right here in Oak Leaf. I assumed that you had invested closer to Sutton. The developers walked away from the deal and Martha is out over \$1 million. Am I right?”

Jean remained silent.

“This is a travesty. What is she going to do?”

“There’s the mortgage.”

“There will be no mortgage,” replied Abramsky flatly.

“But the Sunshine Center. She just has to be admitted. Mother is so ill. She needs the care and treatments.”

“I’m sorry, Jean. I am not prepared to advance a mortgage to your family. You’re a bad risk.”

“You said that the mortgage would be secured by the condo and by Philip’s income.”

“What income?”

“I don’t understand.”

“I’ll give you advanced warning. Your husband could be in serious difficulty. I’ve already informed the bank’s security and legal departments about Judge Driscoll’s possible misuse of Power of Attorney. We will be asking for a medical determination from Martha’s attending physician as to exactly when her Alzheimer’s might have rendered her incapable of attending to her finances.”

“Alzheimer’s?”

“Don’t tell me.”

“She has severe health problems but not Alzheimer’s.”

“Judge Driscoll told me that she does.”

“Why didn’t you ask for a doctor’s certificate before you permitted Philip to mess around with her money? You could have stopped him in his tracks.”

“Such a certificate is not required. Your husband had all the necessary papers.”

“Why then, didn’t you just phone Mother and confirm that the transfer met with her approval?”

“Because I was led to believe—from a District Court Judge no less—that your mother had Alzheimer’s. Phoning her would have been pointless.”

“Then why didn’t you check with me?”

“That would have been a violation of confidentiality guaranteed by the bank.”

Jean was silent, inwardly cursing her mother for being so retrograde and sexist pertaining to her financial and legal affairs.

“Power of Attorney was exercised on the 10th of September. Was your mother’s mental or physical health at that time compromised to the extent that she was unable to make sound financial decisions on her own?”

“No.”

“Were there ever extenuating circumstances that would have provided Judge Driscoll any reason whatsoever to have exercised control over Mrs. Van Whyte’s finances?”

“No.”

“Did your husband ever have Mrs. Van Whyte’s authorization to purchase the land? You might as well tell me now, as the bank and the district attorney’s office will be asking Mrs. Van Whyte, personally.”

“Don’t you dare let anyone pester my mother. I won’t allow it. And I can’t deal with all these questions at the moment. You’re not an attorney. Stop making me feel as though I’ve done something wrong. My mother is going to die in some horrible institution because of you and Philip.”

“No. Don’t drag me into this sham. The bank simply carried out your husband’s requests. Your permission wasn’t sought because it wasn’t required. Nevertheless it’s clear to me your husband has clearly abused his Power of Attorney for his own self-interests. This is a very serious crime.”

Jean’s locked her eyes on the kitchen wallpaper, barely hearing Abramsky’s words.

“I can keep you out of this. But I’m sorry. I’m afraid that Philip is--.” The line went dead. Abramsky decided not to call back. His point had been made.

Overwhelmed by fear for the future and a nauseating sense of defeat, Jean ran to the bathroom but only managed to gag. Her wobbly legs could barely carry her back to the kitchen. She craved alcohol, but knew that she had emptied the farmhouse of every drop. She opened the fridge and reached for bottled water instead.

After sitting quietly for a few minutes Jean attempted to calm her whirling head by making a list. She would see Dr. McNair first thing in the morning. He might offer some acceptable suggestions for her mother’s care. Later, she would work on her resume in preparation for the foreboding task of looking for work. She would have to find a real-estate agent for an appraisal on the farm, and check out the availability of low-rental apartments. And serious thought had to be given on just how to tell Heather and Adam that not only were their parents about to divorce but that their father was in serious legal trouble and would most likely be heading to prison.

She studied the tasks before her and snapped her pencil in half. She scrunched-up the list and burst into tears.

Forty-Two

Manny was admitted to Sutton Memorial late afternoon, Tuesday. He shared a room with two other patients.

“You go on home, Ian,” he said in a rasping whisper.

“Is there anything that I can do for you? Do you want me to phone anyone?”

Manny shook his head and then said, “My cat.”

“What’s that?” asked Ian edging along Manny’s bed. “What are you trying to tell me?”

“My cat. Ask the superintendent to look after him.”

“You want some clothes? Socks, underwear and stuff?”

Manny nodded.

“I’ll take care of it. Where are your keys?”

“In my clothes somewhere. It’s 1400 Westbrook. Unit Two.”

“I’m on my way. I’ll see you in the morning. Get better. Maybe we can go back to the lottery office in a couple of days.”

Manny nodded again. “Keep the ticket safe for me.”

Several hours later, a uniformed police officer entered Manny’s room. He was accompanied by a nurse.

“Which bed?” asked the cop.

“By the window. He’s sleeping. Are you sure this can’t this wait?”

“I’ve got my orders. Emanuel Boyce?”

Manny stirred slightly.

“You are under arrest for aggravated assault on a police officer.”

“Arrest?” repeated Manny faintly.

The officer stepped closer to Manny holding a notepad. “A Deputy Bleeker reports that you assaulted him at the Lakefield lottery office at approximately 11:15 this morning. You are under arrest for aggravated assault. You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a ...”

Manny’s eyes fluttered slightly before he turned and settled on his side.

“I’m not even sure that he heard you,” commented the nurse.

“He heard me. I read him his rights and you’re a witness.”

Ian took a cab from Sutton Memorial to Manny’s four-plex. He entered the drab lobby and found the right door. After a couple of twists of the lock he managed to gain entrance to the apartment while taking care not to let Manny’s shaggy black cat escape. It led Ian to a food dish in the kitchen. Ian filled the bowl with dry food and topped up a stainless water bowl.

The apartment really wasn’t too bad, thought Ian as he looked about, curious to glean more about Manny’s life. The kitchen was clean and tidy. He poked around a little

in the living room and imagined Manny spending hours in the colossal easy chair which was strategically placed before an aging television set.

He looked-over a couple of photos sitting on a round table. One was of Manny standing proudly in front of a huge car. A real boat, thought Ian laughing. And the clothes! He was wearing a yellow and black checkered jacket that made him look like a honey bee. The huge collar on his shirt was contained by a wide striped tie. At one time Manny had had a full head of dark hair replete with 1970s long sideburns. In another photo he posed with an eye-catching blonde who clutched a colorful bridal bouquet. Manny had never mentioned his wife. Ian wondered what had happened to the marriage.

He went to the bedroom and found a couple shirts, some socks and underwear and stuffed them in his backpack.

The superintendent's door was clearly marked. Ian explained that Manny was in the hospital. He asked that the cat be cared for. Manny would phone when he was feeling up to it. Ian also asked that she phone Call A Cab and tell someone that Manny wouldn't be able to work. She readily agreed to assist.

Ian set out for the nearest bus route. He'd have to transfer twice to reach Scarlett Heights. He didn't have to walk far before coming across a small bus shelter. It was surrounded by several newspaper boxes. Ian selected an *Examiner* thinking that there may be something in it about his reinstatement to Ashbury. A flip to the sports section and there was.

LOCAL HOCKEY STAR VINDICATED

The Examiner has learned that Ian Sinclair, considered one of the hottest hockey prospects in the nation, has been cleared of theft charges stemming from a search conducted at the Calais—St. Stephen border over the weekend. Following an investigation by Ashbury Police, it was determined that the janitor at the Colesium had planted stolen documents within Sinclair's hockey bag. "Not for a moment did we think that Sinclair was guilty," commented Morley Cannon, head coach of the Wildcats. "Nevertheless this is just a great relief. We look forward to putting this unfortunate incident behind us and having Ian in the lineup for our season opener against Boston College on Thursday." Mr. Sinclair couldn't be reached for comment.

He climbed aboard a crowded eastbound bus, smiling. What a relief. Everyone by now would know that he wasn't to blame for the cancelled game.

The air in the bus was suffocating, what little there was of it. Rush hour commuters were jammed into all available seats; others hung tightly to poles and straps. Somebody really needed to discover deodorant. He couldn't handle jostling for space a moment longer and bolted from the bus one stop early.

Several minutes later and he walked down the littered drive leading into the Scarlett Heights housing complex. What had once been farmland was now occupied by several low-rise buildings, each housing four apartments. The shabby buildings had been given majestic names more befitting castles or chic hotels than social housing units—The Regency, The Berkshire, The Washington.

The Sinclair family home came into view, the middle apartment within The Balmoral. The unit was identical to all the others but for Arlene's tiny flower garden. Ian bounded up a set of crumbling concrete stairs, house key in hand.

"It's Ian. Anyone home?"

He heard the television from the basement. Uncle Pat came out from the top of the stairs, unshaven as usual, dressed in blue sweats. "Keep it down. Your mother is sleeping."

"Nice to see you as well. Sleeping? It's not even seven."

"Come out here. I want to tell you something."

Ian followed Pat to the backyard, a small patch of earth where grass never seemed to take. "What's going on?" he asked apprehensively, knowing that Pat was seldom, if ever, the bearer of good news.

"Two nights ago your mother was closing at the bowling alley. A couple of white-trash punks came in and robbed her till."

"Robbed!"

"She gave them money, but one of them grabbed her by the hair and slammed her face to the counter just the same. She's got a wicked bruise and a broken front tooth."

Ian was engulfed by the kind of rage which led people to murder and ask questions later. "Did the cops catch them? Because if they did I'm going to beat their heads in. I mean it. I'll wait outside the courthouse and I'll kill them."

"A couple of uniforms came to the house. She gave them a full description. But your mother is fine, physically anyway."

"You're not telling me everything."

"She's frightened. Acting strangely. Appears in control one minute, and then she's a basket case the next. Bursts into tears over nothing. She sleeps 15 hours a day and won't leave the apartment. Work is out of the question."

"Ian." It was Arlene beckoning through the screen door.

Ian hurried towards her. The right side of his mother's face was covered in powder but makeup couldn't hide a hideous bruise—a blotch of purple fading to yellow. Her hair, always perfect was matted and shaggy. She was pale; her smile revealed a badly chipped front tooth. "Pat just told me. How are you? Why didn't you tell me what happened to you when we talked last night?"

Arlene clutched her dressing gown against the chill of evening. "I'm fine, dear. Just a little shaky."

"No, you're not fine. Somebody beat you up!"

"Shhh. Come inside. It's cold. Coach Cannon phoned for you. He told me that you're not in any trouble."

"Did the coach tell you that the janitor at the rink framed me?"

"Yes, Mr. Cannon told me everything; the holding cell, court, the cancelled game. No wonder you left Canada. How did you get back?"

"A friend. We came in his cab. Why are you still in your dressing gown? You're not all right."

"A friend?" chimed in Pat, his nose in the refrigerator. "Nice friend to drive 500 miles and back."

"He's a friend's father."

Pat swigged some juice out of the pitcher before saying, "A friend's father would sneak you out of a foreign country?"

"He didn't sneak me out. Why can't you use a glass? Anyway I'm talking to Mom and not you."

“That was certainly kind of him,” said Arlene. “You’re staying the night, aren’t you?”

“Yeah. Thanks. But I need to know. How are you feeling? What about your tooth?”

“There’s St. Teresa’s. They do dental work at a reasonable rate. Maybe I can get a cap one day.”

Ian pointed at several orange crates piled up in the corner of the kitchen. “What’s with all those boxes?”

“I was about to tell you. We’re changing apartments. We’re moving to The Berkshire, next week. I was hoping you could come back and help. Pat thinks that we can carry everything over.”

“Moving? No. Not to The Berkshire. It’s the worst. A friend of mine lives there. He’s always talking about the cockroaches. Have you seen the apartments? They’re so small. And the whole building stinks.”

“They’re almost \$300 less a month,” stated Arlene firmly. “We don’t need three bedrooms. Pat can set up in the basement and you can use the pull-out.”

“But it’s so gross. The Berkshire. I hate that building. The cops are always there.”

Pat joined his mother and Ian at the kitchen table. “I’m pretty handy. It won’t take much to spruce things up.”

“Yeah you can repair the bullet holes in the drywall that the low-life’s made in some drunken brawl. You can spray poison to kill the roaches and the rats. The Berkshire actually makes this dump look pretty good.”

“Oh listen to you, Mr. College. Turning into quite the little snob, aren’t you?” chided Pat before belching.

“The landlord says that we can paint our unit and he’ll even supply the rollers and brushes,” said Arlene twisting at a ring on her index finger. “We can make it nice. You’ll see.”

“No you can’t. Nothing would improve that place. This whole complex should be bulldozed.”

Arlene looked down at the table top. She spoke quietly. “I know this area isn’t the best but you never complained about it when you lived here. You always had nice friends. I always made sure you had everything—new skates, good food, hockey registration. What’s the matter with you anyway?” she asked, her voice rising. “This isn’t like you. I’m doing my best. You’re suddenly so...so critical.” She left the table and fled to the living room.

“Nice work,” from Pat. “You have no idea how tough it’s been around here. Your mother has just been attacked and robbed. There’s no money and every other telephone call is from some scummy collection agency. The landlord hasn’t thrown us out only because your mother has been a long-standing tenant. Can’t you be just a little more supportive?”

Ian sat motionless. He hated his home life. He wanted to disappear and return to Ashbury that minute.

Arlene came back into the kitchen. “We’re having macaroni for dinner,” she announced frostily. “Ian, get me the big pot. I can’t reach it.”

Ian obliged. His mother was clearly annoyed at him, and for good reason. He had been too critical and too insensitive to the money problems plaguing his family. The

beautiful buildings and lavish grounds at Ashbury had made him intolerant of the stark reality of Scarlett Heights. But it was more than that. In his mind, he'd been living the life of a millionaire for over a week, so close to having shared in the ticket, his dreams thwarted at every turn. It had left him raw, edgy and frustrated. He desperately wanted to show off the ticket. To announce triumphantly that Scarlett Heights would be but a distant memory and that they'd indeed be moving, but to a nice apartment, perhaps even to a house. But that wouldn't be fair. Not until his money was in the bank. Anything could still happen. He'd learned that well. "What else can do?" he said finally.

"You can set the table."

Ian opened the top drawer. He noticed a credit card of some sort stuck sticking out from under the cutlery tray.

"What's this?"

Arlene looked back from the stove "It's nothing. Leave it."

"No, what is it? What does EBT stand for?"

"Electronic benefit transfer," piped in Pat as he organized some boxes. "High-tech food stamps."

Ian reeled towards Arlene. "Really? You're, we're on food stamps?"

"Yes. Yes we are. For over six months now."

Ian studied the card disbelievingly. "You never told me that."

Arlene glared at Pat. "There was no need for you to know."

"Actually, I'm glad he knows," shot back Pat. "You've always overprotected Ian to the realities of this household."

"Bull. I've always known that we're poor. I just didn't know that it had come to food stamps." Ian looked over to Arlene who had wandered quietly back into the living room. He could tell from her heaving shoulders that she was crying.

Ian approached her tentatively. "It's OK, There's nothing wrong with needing assistance."

"Everything's getting so expensive. Pat can't find work and I've been coming up short at the end of the month. But not by even that much, just \$200 or so. And then I got some cash advances to make up the difference on my credit card. I'm being charged over 19% interest. Predators. So stupid of me. I can't even make the minimum payments. We really need the food stamps. I'm so sorry."

"You don't have to apologize. It just surprised me, that's all. Maybe I haven't been paying enough attention to everything."

"It's not your job to be concerned about money. And I don't want you to worry. It'll all work out. I just need to get a higher paying job somewhere. But who would hire me? I look like a monster. And I can't go back to the bowling alley right now. I can't even leave the house. Someone might hurt me again. I'm so...so frightened."

With that Arlene collapsed on the sofa; buried her face in her hands, and wept inconsolably.

Ian stared at his mother and hesitantly placed his hand on her shoulder. He wasn't a physically demonstrative person, and ill at ease at this kind of thing—comforting. He had never seen her, or anyone in such a broken state.

Arlene's tears carved through the mask of heavy powder surrounding her bruised cheekbone. Ian couldn't help but gape at her chipped tooth. Her tormented wails were getting louder. She trembled.

Ian couldn't stand it a moment longer and dug out his wallet. "I want to show you something. Remember when I said on the phone last night that I had exciting news?"

"Yeah. What was that all about anyway?" asked Pat leaning on the kitchen doorframe. "I was meaning to ask you."

"This doesn't concern you. Mom. Please. I have something that I need to show you. Take a tissue. Take the whole box."

Arlene dabbed at her eyes and patted her bruised face. "I'm sorry. I'm so easily upset. What's that?"

"It's a winning lottery ticket. Our money problems are over."

"You've got to be kidding!" cried out Pat.

"You won some money?" asked Arlene

"Yes. Actually it's not my ticket but I'm getting a reward for it."

"I thought it was too good to be true," said Pat.

Ian ignored his uncle and sat down on the sofa. "This ticket is worth a lot of money. It belongs to a man named Manny Boyce. He came to get me at the border, not a friend's father."

"He must have had a good reason to travel all that way," commented Pat, his interest renewed. "And he's offering you big bucks to get it back. Am I right? What's the ticket worth? A hundred grand?"

"Mom, listen. He is going to give me \$1 million for it."

Arlene gasped. "A million dollars. That's so much. It's--"

"It's \$1 million. I promise you. It's true. You will never have to flip burgers or hand out bowling shoes again."

Arlene abruptly snatched up several discarded tissues, got to her feet and walked to the kitchen. "Please. This isn't the time."

"Time for what?"

"It's not the time to get carried away with false hope. Nothing like this ever happens to people like us."

Ian scrambled from the sofa. "What do you mean, people like us?"

"What I'm saying is that you mustn't get your hopes up about that ticket. Why would anyone give you such a huge reward?"

"It's true. You don't know the whole story. We're friends. Manny is in the hospital I've been looking after him. Don't bother packing. We're moving to a good place."

"Dear, that would be wonderful, but please."

Pat approaching Ian, his hand outstretched. "May I see the ticket?"

"No."

"Probably a fake anyway."

"It's real." Ian directed his attention to Arlene who was at the sink. "I was kind of hoping for a different reaction. Anyway, you'll see. It'll be that much sweeter when the money comes through."

Arlene put down a tea towel. "You're saying that this man who's offering you such a large reward is the same man who drove all that way to get you at the border?"

"Yes."

"At least tell me what kind of ticket you've got," said Pat.

"Magnificent Millions."

“You’ve got that ticket that no one has claimed yet? The one that’s worth \$25 million? No way.”

Ian held out the ticket. “Satisfied?”

“You’ve confirmed the numbers?”

“Yes. It’s the winner.”

Arlene stared at the ticket. “When is your friend going to cash it?”

“The moment he gets better. He had an accident and hurt his head. He’s in the hospital”

“I was sure I had some frozen rolls,” said Arlene moving things around in the freezer.

“Don’t worry about cooking. Let’s order a pizza or something,” suggested Ian. “Come on. Let’s celebrate. You’re being so weird about this. Everything’s going to change.”

“I would love to go back to school,” said Arlene wistfully.

“And you can. With the right investments, \$1 million will earn thousands and thousands a year in interest. You can go to school. Do whatever you like.”

Arlene left the fridge for a stack of magazines and papers on the kitchen counter. “I suppose I could pay you back. Look at this,” she said, pulling out a leaflet and opening it to a well-thumbed spot. “It’s a one-year course for a teacher’s assistant at Hillfield Community College.”

“Any chance that you could give me enough cash for a van?” interrupted Pat.

Ian felt a flush of anger. He hadn’t given thought as to how he might deal with his free-loading uncle. “A van. Why would you want a van?”

“It wouldn’t have to be a new one or anything. I’d really like to start my own painting company. I’d need some basic supplies: ladders, scaffolding, and some start-up money for business cards and flyers.”

“Maybe. We’ll talk.”

“I think we’re all getting too far ahead of ourselves,” cautioned Arlene, her eyes lingering on some photos of laughing children. She folded up the pamphlet and tucked it into her dressing gown. “We’ll have dinner here. There’s no money for take-out.”

“Not yet, anyway,” said Ian.

Arlene produced a tasty meal of macaroni and toast. Pat droned on-and-on about a recent drug bust within The Washington. Arlene asked Ian about Ashbury, the hockey team and his experiences at the border, but foremost on everyone’s mind was the unclaimed lottery ticket. Arlene complained that the hot pasta hurt what was left of her front tooth and left the table. Ian wolfed down his food and did the dishes—anything to escape Pat who had an aversion to domestic chores.

The phone rang. As usual, Pat pounced on it as though he were expecting a call from the President.

“It’s for you, Ian.”

“I’ve got it. You can hang up now.”

“It’s Heather. I was just speaking with my father. I can’t believe that you’ve been hiding so much from me.”

“Hiding? I’ve tried to phone you. You haven’t been in your dorm room. What do you mean, hiding?”

“When? When did you try to reach me? Before or after you stayed overnight at our farm without even telling me. Or did you try to call me after you deliberately made a fool of my father at the lottery place? He told me everything. He said that you’d go blabbing to me and try to make him look bad.”

“Figures. For your interest your father wouldn’t let me phone you from the farm, and you shouldn’t believe anything that he may have told you about the lottery ticket.”

“Are you calling him a liar?”

“Yes. And I could call him a lot worse. What exactly did he say about me?”

“After he got you released from jail in Canada he said that you took off with that Boyce guy before court. Then my father even tracked you down in Lakefield to help you before the cops got you. He was willing to do you a favor and cash that dumb lottery ticket. For some reason you gave him a fake. It was really embarrassing for him.”

“He probably didn’t tell you that he tried to trick me to get the ticket for himself and that because of him Boyce was nearly killed.”

“My father wouldn’t lie to me.”

“That’s a good one.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“There’s a lot more to the story. I’ll explain what really happened when I get back to Ashbury tomorrow.”

“Actually, I think we should take a break from each other. And I want my cell back.”

“Why? Have you met someone else?”

“What kind of question is that? No, have you?”

“No. But maybe I will, seeing as you want to ‘take a break’ from me. What’s that supposed to mean anyway?”

“It’s just that maybe we’ve rushed things. We haven’t had a chance to meet other people.”

“I get it. You are interested in somebody. Just so you know, I’ve always been able to have my pick of anyone.”

“Well so have I.”

“Fine.”

That went well thought Ian sardonically. Trust the judge to tell her a pack of lies. She hadn’t even given him a chance to defend himself. Maybe she was right. He’d only known Heather for a little over a week. They’d met first day and had pretended that no one else existed. He was surrounded by 8000 people his own age—half of whom were women. He’d always had his eye on Shelly Abramson since they had chatted in the coffee shop, and then there was Margie Baxter from Maine, a tall brunette with killer blue eyes and she even played hockey. So many possibilities. Still, he hated the way the conversation had ended. He’d try and talk to Heather tomorrow in person.

He passed his mother’s bedroom. Arlene was sleeping, the Hillfield College pamphlet spread out on her chest.

Forty-Three

Wednesday morning. “What did you want to see me about?” asked Peter Mulronev.

Aaron Saltzman gestured to a chair. “Make yourself comfortable. I’ve ordered some refreshments.”

A young woman carried in a tray laden with croissant, assorted rolls, muffins, and steaming coffee.

“Don’t spill. Set it down gently,” cautioned Saltzman. “Thank you, dear. That’ll be all for now.”

Mulronev’s eyes lingered on the woman’s legs as she left the office. “I’ve always maintained that you bureaucrats live the good life.” He reached for a Danish.

“Are you referring to my impeccable taste in secretaries, or the food?”

“Both”

Saltzman laughed contentedly as he stirred his coffee. “We do our best, but everyone knows that you attorneys make the big bucks.”

“I’ll trade salaries with you anytime, especially when ticket sales are hot.”

“I assume that you’re talking about our sales benefits.”

“Call it as it is. Giant bonuses.”

“Highly overrated.”

“I see. That’s why you drive a new Lexus.”

“It seems to me that your Jag has a pretty comfortable ride.”

“Touché.”

Saltzman passed a sheet of paper to Mulronev. “I’d appreciate your thoughts on this press-release. I want to inform the public that the September 7th ticket has been cancelled. And I want to get the word out as soon as possible.”

“On what grounds specifically?”

“Breach of security. We have reason to believe that the winning ticket has been stolen at least twice. Our policy is clear. Lotto-Central does not honor stolen tickets. Not to mention the fact that an individual attempted to utter a counterfeit, and that the ticket might well be considered the property of Canada Customs.”

Mulronev set the paper down and chewed on the stem of his reading glasses. “Breach of security will work. Leave it at that. You don’t need to offer a rambling explanation.”

“Good point. However, I do want to make clear that the proceeds from the cancelled draw, all \$25 million, will be applied to our next game scheduled for the middle of November. This will create a jackpot worth \$50 million.”

“Yes, of course. Include that.”

An anticipatory smile crossed Saltzman’s face. “I’m planning an across the board launch effort—TV, radio, Internet, the works. We’re going to revamp the Magnificent Millions tickets from top to bottom. The new tickets will be larger, with a new logo and a glossy surface.”

“About time. The tickets as they stand now look like subway transfers.”

“A \$50 million jackpot,” mused Saltzman dreamily. “Ticket sales will soar.” Mulroney lathered a croissant with butter. “Are you aiming to hit the Thanksgiving or the Christmas market?”

“Both. They’re so close together that it’s all one big frenzied blur. I’ve settled on calling it *The Holiday Draw*. Something along that line.” Saltzman cleared his throat preparing to perform: “Magnificent Millions will make a thoughtful holiday present during this very special time of year for a loved-one on your list.”

“That’s not bad” said Mulroney. “You should have gone into radio. But then again, perhaps not. You’re counting on one fine holiday present aren’t you?”

“What do you mean?”

“You said it yourself. You’re anticipating huge sales—your bonus.”

“You know? You’re right. That had never even occurred to me.”

“No, not much it hadn’t,” said Mulroney laughing. He grabbed a muffin and headed towards the door. He stopped. “By the way, after dragging me through that Boyce-Driscoll debacle you owe me a lavish six-course dinner. And don’t think I won’t collect.”

Manny was awake early. He hadn’t much choice. Nurses had been in rousing him all night long. Standard procedure for patients with head injuries he’d been told.

Mindful of his sore ribs, he stretched for his watch which lay on a bedside table. It was nearly seven in the morning. He tried to put time in perspective. He had been brought to Sutton from Lakefield the afternoon before. Ian had promised to look in on his cat, and had said that he’d be by in the morning. The hours that had followed were nebulous—time so contorted. Nevertheless, his long, albeit interrupted sleep, had served to clear his head. He was cognizant of his surroundings and alert for the first time in what seemed like days. He had even joked with an orderly.

A doctor stopped by on morning rounds. He was business like, short in stature with a receding hairline. “Our radiologist has provided me with the results of your CT scan,” he said in a distinct German accent. “You have suffered a severe concussion. Grade three, and there’s been some bleeding. The good news is that there is no need to operate. Of course I don’t have to tell you that your skull has been fractured but it appears to be healing quite satisfactorily.”

“How many staples have I got in there?”

The doctor referred to a clipboard. “You have 47 staples in your skull to be precise. The doctors in Lakefield did superb work. A note on your chart indicates something about an unclear memory. Explain.”

“There are gaps. I remember everything that happened at the lottery center and getting hit, but I hardly remember anything after that. You mentioned treatment in Lakefield. Anything that happened there is just one big blur.”

“This is not at all unusual. Patients who suffer a concussion often have difficulty recalling events that occurred just before their accident or, as in your case, shortly afterwards. It’s nothing to be worried about. Is there anything else of concern to you?”

“Yes, I feel sick to my stomach and I have a splitting headache.”

“These symptoms will dissipate. I’ll prescribe something that will help you.”

“When can I go home?”

“You will stay in hospital for further observation. I insist that you leave your bed twice a day to walk the halls with a nurse. Incidentally, I understand that the officer outside the door is here on account of you.”

“An officer?” asked Manny.

“Yes. I’ll tell him that you must be permitted to leave your room from time-to-time.”

Manny closed his eyes to think. He had been placed under guard! He recalled having fought with Security. But why had they apprehended him? It came back. Bleeker had told them that he had run the deputy down. Unbelievable! Either Bleeker or Driscoll had actually gone ahead and had him charged with assault.

“Mr. Boyce, did you hear me?”

“There’s been a mistake. I didn’t do anything.”

“I am a respected neurologist with influence. After your treatment here, I can intercede and see to it that you are transferred to a correctional center which is efficiently staffed and has a first-class infirmary where you can rest and continue to be monitored.”

“No!” exclaimed Manny struggling up on one elbow. “I’m not going to be taken to jail. Is that what someone told you?”

“I’m sure everything will work out. Get your rest. I must continue with my rounds.” The doctor walked efficiently from the room.

Manny flopped back on a pile of pillows, staggered at the doctor’s reference to a correctional facility. The significance of the false accusations leveled at him were grave. It wouldn’t matter that he had reported Bleeker’s accident to Security. He had ended up brawling with them. An aggressive prosecutor would paint him as a lunatic who had run around Lotto-Central assaulting not only security guards, but a police officer, and a judge for that matter. And he was broke with no money for a decent defense. Not yet. It was time to take control and make arrangements to get his ticket cashed right away. Perhaps someone from Lotto-Central might travel to Sutton? Surely arrangements had been made in the past for disabled or sick people who weren’t able to travel to the lottery center.

He swung his feet to the cool tile floor and stood. His head throbbed excruciatingly with every step towards the room’s doorway. Sure enough, there was someone in uniform sitting in a chair.

There were two other patients in the room; a man with his leg suspended in a cast and a younger patient hooked up to an IV. Both were asleep. Manny found his trousers lying in a bedside chair. He removed his cell phone, walked into the bathroom, closed the door and dialed directory assistance for the lottery office.

“Lotto-Central.”

“I’d like to speak with a woman named Lisa, or a supervisor,” said Manny in a hushed voice.

“Lisa is at her wicket and we don’t have supervisors. What is this concerning?”

“I have the winning Magnificent Millions lottery ticket from the September 7th draw.”

“September 7th, let’s see. That ticket has been cancelled.”

The blood left Manny’s head. He grabbed hold of a chrome safety pole and lowered himself to the toilet. “No. There must be some mistake.”

“I’ll try to put you through to our director.”

Aaron Saltzman's phone buzzed, throwing off his stroke. He watched as a golf ball missed a plastic scoop on the carpet; rolled to the hardwood floor and rattled off a baseboard. He sauntered casually over to his desk, putter in hand. "Aaron Saltzman speaking."

"My name is Manny Boyce. I'm calling about the Magnificent Millions lottery ticket of September 7th. I've been told that the ticket has been cancelled."

"It has indeed."

"Why would you do that?"

"There's a critical question of ownership. That ticket's been all over the map. It's been in the possession of not one, but three different individuals. We have absolutely no idea who actually owns or owned the ticket you're referring to. It's been stolen at least twice."

"Who told you all of this?"

"You did."

"Me? When? When did I speak with you?"

"Yesterday afternoon. Mr. Mulrone, our senior attorney, and I came to the Lakefield Medical Center."

"No. I don't remember that at all. I don't remember anything in Lakefield."

"Trust me, we were there. You told us that you had lost the ticket. That it was found by someone else, who in turn had it stolen from them. And then it was found with other stolen documents and seized at the border."

"Maybe I didn't explain things as clearly as I should have, or could have. I was medicated and I'm having some memory problems."

"Nevertheless, the ticket was stolen from someone who found it. Am I correct?"

"Yes, but--"

This is unacceptable. We require a clear chain of possession, and according to written claim of loss, you didn't even sign the ticket. There are just far too many variables. The ticket is considered null and void."

"But you don't understand. I got it back again. Please reconsider," begged Manny.

"It would be best if you'd just let this go."

"Best for who? Don't do this. I need the money. I'm broke. I have hospital bills and I can't even work."

"The validation committee has met. Our decision is final. The ticket has been cancelled and the proceeds are being carried forward to a future draw. I really must go."

"No, wait."

"Goodbye, Mr. Boyce."

"Wait!"

"I'll give you 10 seconds."

"I'll sue you and your office. I'll collect for damages for the ticket and for assault. Your guard nearly killed me. That much I remember. I'll go to the newspapers. You haven't heard the last of this."

"It seems to me that you are hardly in a position to be threatening legal action. You attacked a District Court Justice and I have subsequently been informed that you are under arrest for deliberately running down a police officer. What kind of person are you anyway? Now, if you don't mind, I must get back to work. Goodbye."

Jean arrived to Sutton Memorial before nine. The remnants of breakfast hung in the air—toast, steamed eggs, coffee.

She stopped by the nursing station before entering Martha's room, and asked that Dr. McNair be paged.

"Concerning?" asked a nurse somewhat arrogantly.

"Concerning Mrs. Van Whyte. My mother."

The nurse referred to a tracking list. "She's been moved."

"Moved? To where?"

"To the palliative care wing, room 201."

"Why palliative care? That's where people go to die!"

"I have no idea."

"Please. It's important that I speak with Dr. McNair. Page him and ask him to meet me there."

Jean took the stairs down two floors and then walked along a corridor which led to a fire door. *Quiet. Palliative Care*, instructed a sign. She pushed through and seemed to enter another world. The halls were still, the lights dimmed. There, 201. She tentatively walked in and looked about. Martha was in the far corner. There were three other patients in the room, one of whom had family members keeping vigil. Quiet sobbing could be heard from behind a partially drawn curtain. To her right, a minister offered prayers over a withered, jaundiced man whose eyes rolled towards the ceiling. Jean turned away appalled.

Martha was propped up, glassy-eyed, but awake.

"Mom, it's Jean."

"I was moved. I don't like it here," announced Martha weakly.

"Yes, I know. I'm not sure why you were moved. Dr. McNair is coming by."

"I want to go home. I'm so tired. They can't make me better."

"No. Don't say that." Jean reached for a vase on the window sill brimming with yellow chrysanthemums. "Have you seen these yet? Let's see who the flowers are from. There's a little card. *To the best grandma ever. All my love, Heather.*" Jean caught a lump in her throat. "You see, Heather needs you. We all need you and love you so much."

"The flowers are pretty. Please tell Heather," said Martha weakly. Her blue eyes which had always sparkled, appeared dull, uninterested.

A gut wrenching cough from across the room caused Jean to cringe. A woman with long straggly gray hair was laboring for breath, her mouth open, gurgling as if drowning in her own mucous.

Jean turned her attention back to Martha. "May I get you anything?"

"Some peppermints. My mouth gets so dry."

"I'll get some right now." Jean strode out of the room intent on having Dr. McNair paged again. She stepped from the room and looked down the hall. There, standing by the nurse's station, laughing and joking, stood Dr. McNair himself.

Jean approached him, fuming. "I want to speak with you. Didn't you get your page?"

"I was on my way."

"Why has mother been moved? And to palliative care? And why wasn't I told?"

“There’s no reason to be alarmed. This is the only area that had a bed for your mother. A patient with more comprehensive insurance has assumed your mother’s former room.”

“So you’re just going to leave her here to die with the others?”

“Of course not. She’ll still receive dialysis. But I don’t know why you’re so distressed. I was at a board meeting last night at the Sunshine Center and I made some enquiries. I’ve heard the good news—that there’s an opening for Martha.

“She won’t be taking it. We don’t have the money. She doesn’t either.”

“I was hopeful that she could be admitted. Are you sure?”

“Yes, and I want to know what her alternatives are.”

“She will have to go to another facility.”

They were interrupted by the distraught cries of someone propped up by loved ones leaving Martha’s room. The group shuffled by Jean and McNair. “She’s gone,” sobbed an old man. “She’s gone.”

Jean waited until they had passed before speaking. “This is just dreadful. How could you put my mother in such a place?”

“Palliative is actually the most peaceful area of the hospital,” replied Dr. McNair. “It’s a good place for Martha to rest.”

“Peaceful! There’s a woman across from Mother who can barely breathe. She’s making the most atrocious noises. Why isn’t someone helping her?”

“I am quite aware of her situation. Don’t let her sounds upset you. It’s sometimes called death rattle. Sounds awful, I know. But she’s not in any pain.”

“Death rattle! I want Mother out of that room. She’s convinced she’s the next to die. This isn’t the right environment for her. Do something. I can’t take any more,” sobbed Jean.

“I’ll make a call to Riverview Manor on your behalf. I know they’re a little less expensive than the Sunshine Center.”

“What are their rates?”

“About \$70,000 a year. But again, they’ll require a significant deposit. All the better facilities do.”

“That’s still too much.”

“Perhaps you could arrange for a loan?”

“No. I’ve tried that.”

“There’s another facility which has dialysis on site and excellent therapists for stroke victims. No private rooms though, and the home is located in Boston.”

“Boston! That’s hours from here. No. And it also probably costs a fortune.”

“It does,” conceded McNair. “I could see about getting her admitted to St. Augustine’s.”

“That place is so ancient.”

“Yes, it is a little grim.”

Dr. McNair’s beeper went off. “I must go.”

“Wait. We haven’t finished. What now?”

“Martha can stay here in palliative for another day. She’ll be transferred to the nearest facility that has a bed. We are not a long term care facility. Our administrator is very firm about that.” The doctor turned on his heel, stopped and looked back at Jean. “I can’t guarantee that she’ll be placed anywhere near Sutton. I’m sorry.”

“She’s not a piece of furniture.” Jean leaned on the counter at the nurse’s station for support.

A nurse came out from behind her desk. “Are you all right?” she asked sympathetically. “There’s a nice family room down the hall if you want to sit down.”

“I’m fine.”

“We have a small chapel.”

“No, thank you,” said Jean walking off in a daze. There was something she had to do. Peppermints. Mother wants peppermints. She set off in search of the hospital’s gift shop.

Ian had taken the bus from Scarlett Heights to Sutton Memorial.

As he walked down the corridor, he noticed a huge cop spilling out of a chair outside of Manny’s room. What was this all about? Surely Manny hadn’t actually been charged with running down Bleeker. He gave the guard a look of utter disdain before walking past him.

“Hold on. Who are you here to see?” asked the officer from his chair.

“Manny Boyce.”

“Sign here.”

“Why?”

“Just sign.”

A curtain encircled Manny’s bed. Ian separated the material. Manny was sitting on the edge of his bed, his blue hospital gown askew, hands buried in his face. He looked up towards Ian, his cheeks soaked by tears.

“Manny, what is it? Is that cop at the door on account of Bleeker’s lie to Security at the lottery office?”

“Yeah, I’m under arrest. Bleeker told the cops that I hit him with my car on purpose.”

“But the truth will come out. They’ll reenact everything and look for damage on your car. Don’t get yourself so upset. You’ll have millions to deal with him.”

“No, I won’t. They cancelled the ticket.”

“What do you mean cancelled? I’ve got the ticket right here,” said Ian yanking it from his wallet.

“Doesn’t matter. The decision’s been made. I spoke with Saltzman earlier this morning.”

“Saltzman, I know that name. He’s the director, right?”

“Yeah. The big cheese. The ticket’s dead.”

“No! Stop saying that.”

“I told him too much. It’s my fault. I’m so sorry.”

“What did you tell him?”

“It seems that he and some other guy, an attorney, came to see me in Lakefield.”

“When? I was there the whole time, except I got some lunch.”

“I guess that’s when they were there. Anyway, I told him about losing the ticket and you finding it, and then Pepin stealing it.”

“I hope you didn’t tell them about the border.”

“I must have. Saltzman seemed to know all about it.”

“Don’t you see? They don’t have any idea who owns it. And Driscoll presented a fake. No wonder Saltzman doesn’t want anything to do with it.”

Manny’s mouth quivered as he said, “He told me that there was no clear chain of ownership.”

“Of course he did. Why couldn’t you have just kept quiet?”

“I don’t remember anything about their visit.”

Ian ran his hands through his hair turning in circles “I can’t believe this. After everything that we’ve gone through.”

“He told me that the validation committee had a big meeting and that everyone had voted to void the ticket. They’re carrying the \$25 million over to the next draw. We might as well face it. There’ll be no money for either of us.”

Ian raced to the bathroom and soaked his face in cold water. His mother’s adages echoed about, ‘*Things like this just don’t happen to people like us,*’ and, ‘*There are no guarantees in life.*’ He resisted the temptation to plow his fist through the drywall and kicked viciously at the toilet instead. He left the bathroom. Manny lay in a fetal position. His face was buried deep in his pillows which did little to muffle his tormented whimpers.

“Manny, don’t cry. Maybe we can still figure something out.”

“It’s just that--”

“I know.”

“And they’re going to put me in jail. I don’t have any money.”

“Shhh. You’re injured and still very weak. Take a deep breath.”

Distraught by her exchange with Dr. McNair, Jean walked in a daze to the gift shop where she purchased a bag of English Mints for Martha and a bottle of Aspirin for herself.

She took the elevator back to the second floor and squeezed past food trays and housekeeping carts in the narrow hallway. She had to navigate around patients who lay in small cots; others slumped in wheelchairs. To add to the confusion, a custodian came her way her pushing a wide broom. She made room for him nearly bumping into a chair occupied by a police officer.

“Mind your step, ma’am.”

Curious, Jean looked in the room she presumed he was guarding. A young man was speaking earnestly with a patient whose head partially bandaged. The teen unexpectedly looked towards the door. She turned away feeling foolish having looked in. Who exactly had she expected to see? Charles Manson shackled to a bed post? Jean took a few steps and stopped. That young man in the room. He looked like Ian, Heather’s friend. Curious, she walked back to the open doorway, and looked in again. It was him, wearing that Sutton hockey jacket.

“Anything I can do for you, ma’am?” asked the guard, his mouth full of food.

“No thank you. I’m going to visit briefly with someone in the room.”

The cop didn’t pursue her.

“Excuse me, Ian?”

“Yes?”

Jean walked in closer. “I’m Heather’s mother. We met in Ashbury.”

“Oh yeah. I remember.”

Manny ignored the unexpected visitor. He turned away, wiped his eyes and loudly blew his nose.

“I noticed you from the hallway. I wanted to say hello, but I won’t keep you.”

This was incredibly weird, and extremely awkward, thought Ian. Should he introduce Manny? Why not? “I’m visiting a friend. Manny, this is Mrs. Driscoll. Judge Driscoll’s wife,” he said pointedly.

Manny slowly lowered a tissue from his nose and stared at Jean in disbelief.

“And this is Manny Boyce.”

Jean returned Manny’s astonished gawk.

“Something wrong? What?” asked Ian bewildered.

Manny was the first to speak. “Hello Audrey. This is a surprise. I didn’t think that we’d ever meet.”

Forty-Four

Jean stared at Manny, completely baffled that their paths had crossed, and through Ian of all people. “Actually, my name is Jean, not Audrey,” she replied finally.

Ian looked on with interest. “You know each other?”

“Give us a minute,” said Manny.

Ian headed towards the hospital’s corridor.

Jean tried not to stare, abhorred, yet mesmerized, by a long row of raised staples which seemingly held Manny’s shaved head together like a zipper. “What happened to you? Were you in a car accident? How do you know Ian?”

Manny shifted and adjusted his hospital gown. “I’m too exhausted to get into it with you right now.”

“Maybe we can chat when you’re feeling up to it. I am curious though. You’ve never returned my e-mails or phone calls. I paid you \$200. I feel as though you’ve gyped me.”

“I’ve ignored you, Jean Driscoll, because you conveniently forgot to tell me that your husband is a judge. You told me that Philip was a clerk, and because of my association with your scummy husband, I was nearly killed.”

“Oh my, god. Is that why you’re here? With that horrible injury?”

Manny sighed impatiently. “Here’s a really short account of my regrettable exposure to Philip. I lost a lottery ticket. Ian found it. I learned that Ian had it but so did Philip. Your husband tried to get it from him. I intervened and I was clubbed by a security guard.”

Jean grasped the hand-rail on Manny’s bed, shocked that Ian had become mixed up with Philip, and that something horrendous had occurred ending in violence. “I am sorry for your misfortune.”

“Misfortune? It’s more than misfortune. I would like you to consider this. If you had simply been honest and told me that Philip was a judge, I’d have refused the assignment. I’d be a multi-millionaire. Instead, I’ve suffered a concussion. I’m in constant pain, and I’m broke, unable to work. I don’t have any disability coverage and I’m sure that my health plan won’t begin to cover half of my medical bills. Your husband has bankrupted me and ruined any chance that I had in redeeming my lottery ticket. If all of that weren’t bad enough, Philip’s deputy has leveled a bogus charge against me that could well send me to prison.”

“Again, I’m sorry.”

“You should know that I followed Philip to a flophouse called *The Owl’s Nest Motel* where he met up with a young woman. I was caught snapping Philip’s picture, and held at gunpoint by a marshal and Philip’s trained ape. They were on duty as part of a state-wide surveillance effort to protect justices from that judge-killing sniper.”

“In hindsight, I should have told you that Philip was a judge. I hadn’t thought of any serious complications. Having said that, perhaps I should be annoyed at you. Bernie Gardiner told me that you were good—an expert at surveillance who got results. Instead

you were caught red-handed. You just used that very word, caught. I find it extremely embarrassing that Philip must realize that I had him tailed.”

“Let’s just forget it.” Manny reached for his overhead light. “If you don’t mind, I have an unbelievable headache.”

Ian returned to the room. “Kind of a coincidence that you know each other.”

Jean gathered her purse. “Manny wants to rest. Call me this afternoon. I want to find out more about your association with Judge Driscoll.”

“How do you know Manny?” asked Ian

“Through a mutual acquaintance,” said Jean.

“Did Manny tell you that your husband is to blame for his injuries—that he wrecked Manny’s chance to cash his lottery ticket?”

“Yes, he did.”

“Manny was going to give me a \$1 million reward for returning the ticket. Now, I can’t help my mother. She was beaten up at work. I was hoping to move her from Scarlett Heights.”

Jean clenched her fists in despair. Manny and Ian’s distressing revelations that Philip had evidently tromped over more innocent people were unbearable. Their disclosures were made even more insufferable by what she sensed was an implied expectation that she should answer to Philip’s behavior. “You both have my sympathies. I’m horrified at what I’ve just learned. I’m especially sorry that you’ve suffered such serious injuries, Manny.”

“You want to know what else Judge Driscoll did?” broke in Ian.

“No! I don’t want to hear anything more. To listen to you both, you’d think that I’m responsible for your problems. Believe me, I wish that I could somehow set things right. There’s nothing that I can do. I have nothing to offer you. I have my own concerns right now.” Jean turned to leave.

Ian intercepted her. “Please stay if you can. I know that none of this is your fault.”

“We’ll talk another time. I must go.”

“No. Wait, please,” said Ian. “There’s something that I want you to consider. I thought of a few things when I was out in the hall. I’m still working through some ideas. There may be something that you can do to help.”

“What would that be?”

“I was thinking, maybe you could cash the ticket for Manny.”

“Me?”

“I heard that, Ian. Don’t be ridiculous. Let it go,” said Manny irritably as he rearranged his pillows.

“Come back closer to Manny’s bed so you can both hear my ideas,” urged Ian.

“All right, but just for a minute.”

“You obviously know each other,” began Ian. “What I was thinking is that people split tickets all the time. Sometimes they divide the prize five or six ways, even more.”

“Why would they accept the ticket from Jean if they won’t accept it from me?” asked Manny impatiently.

“Give me a chance to explain. We’ll change the story you told those lottery guys.”

“It wasn’t a story. It was the truth. And it’s too late anyway. You just can’t suddenly change stories.”

“Just listen. Here’s what happened.”

A Hispanic nurse approached Manny's bed. "Hello, Mr. Boyce," she said cheerfully, "it's time for your walk. The doctor wants you out of this bed at least twice a day."

"Right, he mentioned that."

"I'll accompany you. Don't sit up too quickly."

"We'll catch up some other time, Jean," said Manny.

"No, wait. I want you both to hear me out," urged Ian. "It's important."

"Let's at least hear what he has to say," suggested Jean. Ian had piqued her interest. If she had understood Manny correctly, his lottery ticket had been worth an almost incomprehensible \$25 million. If there was still an opportunity that it could be cashed, and with her assistance, perhaps she could negotiate a loan with Manny for Martha's care.

"Walk along with me then," said Manny. "It's all right nurse. I have help."

"I'll accompany you, at least at first. Now, get out of bed slowly. Don't rush. You'll be dizzy."

Manny stood somewhat unsteadily and led by the nurse, shuffled out of the hospital room. Ian and Jean were close behind.

The guard got to his feet. "Where's Boyce going?"

"We're walking to the end of the hall," answered the nurse. "Doctor's authorization. You'll be able to see Mr. Boyce the whole time."

"He can't leave the floor. I'll be watching."

"Go slowly," instructed the nurse. "I'm right behind you."

Manny took baby-steps to start, sliding his hand along a rail. He didn't feel too badly at all. He picked up his pace.

They passed several rooms. Manny's left leg cramped up. "OK. That's enough. Break time," he said pointing to an arrangement of vinyl covered chairs at the end of the corridor—an open lounge for visitors and patients.

"Well done. Tomorrow, we'll go further. The nurse looked at Jean. "Please stay close to your husband when you return to the room."

Ian started in as soon as the nurse had walked off. "You can cash it, Mrs. Driscoll. Listen to my idea. All you have to do is tell the lottery people that you bought the ticket with Manny."

Manny massaged his sore leg. "How? And why would she want to cash it?"

Ian looked at Jean. "Because I'd be willing to give you part of my reward money if you did."

"I couldn't accept money from you."

Manny shot Ian a withering glance. "You're letting your imagination get out of control. There's no money for anyone."

"Let me deal with one thing at a time," insisted Ian. "Mrs. Driscoll can cash it. You'll see."

"You can call me Jean. Let's listen, Manny. There's no harm in hearing him out."

"First of all, we know that the ticket isn't in bad shape. All the numbers are visible. I'm sure it will scan," said Ian.

"But they won't accept it. It's been cancelled," stated Manny.

"Maybe they'll have to un-cancel it. Here's the thing. You don't even remember talking to Saltzman at the medical clinic in Lakefield, right?"

“No, I don’t.”

“Then how do you know what you told them was the truth? It’s obvious that your explanation can’t be taken seriously. You were talking nonsense because of your injury.”

“Maybe. Continue.”

“We’ll completely reinvent the story of the ticket. I can prove that you, Jean, had possession of the ticket the whole time.”

“Me? What have you got in mind?” asked Jean

“Sit back and listen.”

Ian’s ideas captivated Manny and Jean. Questions were asked and answered, gaps filled in. His plan made sense. There were a few areas which needed work, movements that had to be accounted for, time-lines firmed up, but nothing that a little polishing wouldn’t fix.

Manny looked earnestly at Jean. “Are you willing to do this?”

“Cash your ticket?”

“No, cash our ticket and share in it. Saltzman told me that they’re carrying over the winnings to another draw. We have to act right away, as in today.”

Jean stared at the floor, biting her lip. She looked up at Manny. “This is very awkward, but I have to ask.”

“What is it?”

“If we did manage to cash it, would you give me a loan? Say for \$100,000? I could pay you back in time.”

“I don’t think you heard me,” replied Manny, smiling. “I just said that we’d share in the ticket.”

“Share? I’m not expecting--”

“Yes, of course share. Here’s the deal. I’ll give you \$1 million after taxes, so it’s more like \$1.3. No. Forget it. I’m going to give you \$2 million, and that’s final. And Ian, I’m going to up your reward to \$2 million as well. After all you’ve been through, it’s the least I can do. I’ll still have nearly \$10 million to myself after taxes.”

Jean could barely contain her elation at Manny’s offer. Martha would get the care she needed. The farm could stay in the family. But what if something went wrong? Philip was off to jail, of that she was certain. What if she were charged with something serious and sent to jail as well? How would Heather and Adam cope? But there wasn’t much risk. The story they had worked out made perfect sense. Maybe this was somehow all meant to be.

Manny looked at Jean hopefully. “Is it a deal?”

“Yes. I’ll take our ticket to the lottery office today and have it redeemed.”

“All right,” exclaimed Ian pumping his fist.

Manny grasped Jean’s arm. “It’ll work. Thank you. Now, since you’ll actually be awarded the full value of the ticket, I’d ask that you acknowledge in writing that we agreed to split it. And you owe me \$5.”

“Why?”

“For half the ticket, remember?”

“That’s right,” said Jean fumbling in her purse and pulling out some money.

“Here,” she said laughing as she tossed a bill at Manny. “Let’s go over everything again. The story has to be flawless.”

Forty-Five

Jean returned to Martha's bedside to find that her mother had gone back to sleep. She placed the bag of peppermints within easy reach on the bedside table. The woman adjacent to Martha broke out in an atrocious hack that made Jean's skin crawl. Death rattle. She ventured towards the drawn curtain and peeked through, relieved to see that the poor soul wasn't dying alone, that a minister and an elderly man were attending to her.

Jean hurriedly left the room, anxious to escape the harsh truth of palliative care—a ward where doctors stepped back and deferred to religious officials as persons who might offer the dying the only hope remaining for a continuance of life—in any form.

She joined Ian around Manny's bed. For the next half hour, they spoke in whispers rehearsing answers to every conceivable question they anticipated might be asked of Jean at Lotto-Central.

"I think we're ready," said Jean.

"It's only about ninety minutes. The drive will give time to relax," said Manny.

Ian gave Manny a good-natured nudge on his shoulder and said, "I'll help you pick out a new Cadillac when you're feeling better."

Jean clutched Manny's hand and held it tightly "I'll phone you the moment it's all said and done. I'm going to do my best. You know that don't you?"

"Of course. I'm going to give you two million bucks."

Jean followed Ian towards the corridor. She looked back at Manny. He offered her a big thumbs up with a wide grin and a wink.

He's a good man, thought Jean. A kind, hard working, good man.

Following a quick visit to the farm where more preparations were made for Jean's presentation to Aaron Saltzman, Ian and Jean set off for Lakefield.

"I'm getting so sick of driving to Lakefield," commented Ian. "It's the third time in like two days. Once after we had driven all night to get there, yesterday when Manny was attacked, and now today."

Jean accelerated and merged onto the highway. "This is the trip that you'll remember the best."

"It seems kind of weird driving with you, and Heather not knowing anything about it."

"I was thinking the same thing, but everything has happened so quickly. And what would I tell her? This is such a strange turn of events."

"I should tell you that Heather phoned me last night. Judge Driscoll has been telling her things about me that aren't true."

"What, specifically?" asked Jean as she pulled out to pass an enormous lumber truck lest its cargo of piled logs break free of their chains.

“I guess he told her that I gave him a fake ticket, which is true, but she doesn’t know the half of everything.” Ian shifted in the small seat and looked at Jean. “She doesn’t want to see me anymore. Or at least for awhile.”

Jean winced, stung by the news of Philip’s interference into Heather’s personal life.

“Heather’s so crazy about him. She thinks Judge Driscoll would never do anything wrong. And Adam, he thinks Judge Driscoll is the best. The whole thing is really awkward. What should I tell Heather?”

Jean gripped the wheel tensely. “I don’t know what you should say to Heather. I just don’t have an answer for you.”

As the miles rolled by, Ian allowed himself to think of all the things his wealth would bring. He thought of the moment when he’d announce to his mother that the family’s money problems were a thing of the past. He thought of Heather, wondering if they had a chance of reconciling, or at least at maintaining a friendship, and he thought about his hockey team. He was looking forward to seeing all the guys again. The home opener was the next night against hated Boston College. There’d be a full house. The fans would be expecting so much of him.

Jean was in her own world doing her utmost to imagine what lay ahead at the lottery office. She felt queasy—afflicted by a bad case of butterflies and heartburn. In an effort to allay her fears she assumed the character of an outraged ticket holder denied her rightful winnings by an overpaid bureaucratic pencil pusher. I’ll be straightforward, uncomplicated, and as intimidating as I feel necessary. I’m not leaving that lottery office without success. They will try and deny me what is rightfully mine. This Saltzman I’m about to meet will be more objectionable than Philip and Abramsky combined. How dare the director offer any resistance to honoring a perfectly good ticket?

Gusts of wind buffeted the Sunfire: two hands on the wheel were required. She continued to stew. I’m fed up with men jerking me around. Cancelled?! What are you talking about? Don’t be ridiculous. Manny and I own the ticket. Proof? Of course I have proof. No. I don’t want a coffee. Let’s settle this matter without delay. Do I have to call my attorney?

Aaron Saltzman busied himself in the lottery center’s creative department looking over cardboard mock-ups for his new baby—the *Magnificent Millions Home for the Holidays Bonus Opportunity*. Too wordy. It would have to be shortened. The graphic artists presented him with a multi-colored illustration of a Horn of Plenty, which spewed forth hard currency in place of the customary fruits and vegetables. “Beautiful. This draw is going to be a real hit.”

The director looked through more mock-ups of the Holiday Edition ticket which would later be enlarged to poster size to be sent out to retailers as soon as possible. The inclusion of the proceeds of the cancelled Magnificent Millions ticket, combined with the cash already set aside for the next draw meant that that his office would be presenting a grand prize opportunity of over \$50 million! Not exactly Powerball numbers, but very enticing for serious and casual lottery players just the same.

The public loved big jackpots—the larger the prize, the longer the lineups to snap up a chance to win. Assuming that the Holiday Edition sold well, even just half a

million tickets, it would earn the state a tidy profit of roughly \$12 million, to be disbursed among causes as diverse as arts groups to homeless shelters. More importantly, thought Saltzman blissfully, his bonus of 1% on ticket sales would amount to about \$50,000—his biggest windfall to date. With the right marketing behind it, the draw would take off. He was certain of that. But it was crucial that the game was out the door and in the hands of ticket vendors as soon as possible. There were fewer than eight weeks to the giant draw.

Saltzman leaned over a sketch artist. “Make the horn bigger,” he instructed excitedly. “Add more cash to it. No. Lose the grapes. I want to see lots of bills. Make the money dance,” he urged. “Bring me something exciting and fresh. Give this project your highest priority.”

Ian easily provided Jean with clear directions to Lotto-Central. “You can see the building in the distance. That big brown one with all the flags. Get ready to turn right.”

Jean swung up the driveway, and wheeled into the lot. There weren’t many cars. She threw the car into park. Her stomach was twisted in tight knots which refused to untangle. She craved a cigarette but didn’t want to smell of smoke. A long glass of bourbon on ice would have been even better. A quick check of her hair and makeup in the rear view mirror. “All right. Wish me luck.”

“Do you want to go over anything?”

“No.”

“The ticket. You have the ticket?”

“In my purse.” She climbed out of her car and studied the brick edifice before her. Be positive. Something wonderful was going to happen in that building. She set off with determination, tightly clutching her bag.

Forty-Six

Jean approached the lottery building with long confident strides, head down against the wind. To a casual observer, she might have resembled an employee heading back to work from lunch, perhaps a little late.

She marched up the stairs and pushed vigorously through one set of doors then the other. Ten paces to the roped entry leading to the counter and straight to the first wicket. "I'm here to redeem my lottery ticket."

"This is sales," replied a young man ill naturedly. "You want redemptions. Two girls down."

"You mean women."

"Two down."

"You should have better signage."

Jean presented herself before a teller who was dressed in a snappy blue blazer. Her name tag identified her as Ashley.

"I have a winning Magnificent Millions lottery ticket that I'd like you to redeem."

"That's very exciting. May I see it please?"

The clerk took the ticket and examined it carefully. She cross-checked it with a memorandum taped to her window. She handed back the ticket and said, "The ticket has been cancelled."

"What do you mean, cancelled?"

"It's been cancelled as of this morning."

"That's impossible. It doesn't expire for months. I need to speak with someone else. Someone with authority."

"You will have to make an appointment with Mr. Saltzman, our director," said Ashley.

"I'm not interested in an appointment. I have a winning ticket that you've just told me has been cancelled. I want to speak with him now. Show me to his office."

"I could phone him. But I have to tell you that he doesn't see anyone without an appointment."

"Tell him that Jean Driscoll is here. And I don't want to be told that he's in a meeting."

Ashley closed her wicket. "Wait right here."

"I have no intention of going anywhere."

Ashley walked behind several wickets to a staff phone. She dialed through to Saltzman's office. "It's Ashley. A woman by the name of Jean Driscoll is at my wicket. She insists on seeing you. She has just presented that Magnificent Millions Ticket. The one that's been cancelled. I have to tell you, it looked authentic."

"No. Absolutely not. It's null and void. I hope you told her that."

"Yes."

"She's quite adamant on meeting with you."

“Tell her that I’m in a meeting. I hope you seized that ticket.”

“I gave it back to her.”

“That wasn’t very bright of you. What were you thinking?”

“You said yourself that the ticket’s no good. Why would I have seized it from her?”

“Just never mind.”

Ashley hung up far more noisily than necessary.

Saltzman ran his hands through thinning hair, grimacing. Jean Driscoll. Could it be Judge Driscoll’s wife? What was going on? He buzzed Mulronev. “Please come down here. We might have a problem.”

Saltzman’s phone rang again. It was Ashley. “Mrs. Driscoll insists on seeing you. She’s talking about phoning her attorney. I finally got her to take a seat in reception.”

“Let her sit. I’m busy. And stop disturbing me.”

Mulronev entered Saltzman’s office. “What’s up?”

“It seems that we have another Driscoll to contend with.”

“Another one? What did we do to deserve this? Who this time?”

“I have a feeling that the judge’s wife is trying to take a stab at cashing that ticket. What do we do?” asked Saltzman.

“We see her. What are you so concerned about?”

“Ashley says that the ticket she presented appeared to be genuine. But I’ve cancelled it.”

“Have you sent out press releases?”

“Not yet.”

“So we hear her out. Aren’t you the least bit curious? I’m quite intrigued.” The attorney helped himself to coffee. “My opinion is that you’re, in fact, obligated to meet with her. Any pastries left over?”

“I suppose you’re right, but this is so annoying. I thought that I had finally put that ticket to rest.”

“Have her come up.”

Saltzman called down to Ashley. “Bring Mrs. Driscoll to my office.”

Jean got to her feet expectantly as she spotted the teller coming in her direction.

“Mr. Saltzman will see you now,” said Ashley. “I’ll take you upstairs.”

The decisive moment had arrived. Outwardly, Jean did her utmost to appear confident but was gripped by fear and doubt. Could she pull this off? Was the evidence that she was about to present persuasive enough to demonstrate that she was a bona-fide co-owner of the ticket? She followed Ashley up the stairs and down a broadloomed corridor.

“In this way,” directed Ashley cheerfully.

Jean followed her into the sun-drenched office done in chrome and glass with its gleaming hardwood floor.

“This is our director, Mr. Saltzman.”

“Thank you, Ashley. Close the door behind you.” Saltzman smiled at Jean. “I’d like you to meet Mr. Mulronev, our senior attorney.”

Attorney! These two men in dark suits were ready for her. She could never pass this off. Get it together said an inner voice. Remember, these peons are trying to defraud

Manny of his rightful winnings. They're no better than Philip. These men are fools, maybe criminals. Be self-assured, edgy.

Jean struggled into character. "I'm Jean Driscoll. I have a winning lottery ticket with me. I'm not sure why I was brought to this office, but I'd like you to redeem it right away. I don't have a lot of time. I have several appointments today that I simply can't miss."

"Yes, Mrs. Driscoll," spoke Saltzman carefully. "Please let me take your coat."

"I'll keep my coat with me. I won't be long."

"Have a seat," said the director. "Would you care for coffee perhaps?"

"No, I don't want coffee."

Saltzman took his position of power behind a gigantic desk. It appeared to be made of fiberglass or something similar, buffed to a high shine.

Jean perched on the edge of an armchair in front of him. Mulroney chose a deep lounge to Jean's left and balanced a cup and saucer on his lap.

"Ashley has already informed us that you are in possession of a Magnificent Millions lottery ticket," began Saltzman. "May I see it please?"

"I'll show it to you," replied Jean testily holding it forth. "You can't have it. Ashley told me that the ticket has been cancelled. I'm not taking a chance that you'll simply destroy it and pretend that it never existed."

"But Mrs. Driscoll, if it's genuine, you will have to release it to us eventually."

Jean studied Saltzman. She didn't like him. He reminded her of Abramsky. He's a skinny, fussy man she decided. "All right, you can examine it." She passed it to Saltzman's extended hand.

The director looked it over and set it on his desk. "Thank you. Let's clear the air. I assume that you are Judge Driscoll's wife."

"I am."

"And you are no doubt aware that Judge Driscoll came into this office yesterday morning and tried to present a phony lottery ticket."

"So I've been told. You should know that Judge Driscoll and I have separated. I don't know much about his comings and goings. We don't speak."

"Nevertheless, I am sure you that you can appreciate that we might have some doubts as to the validity of the ticket you're attempting to redeem."

"It's genuine. I'm not in the habit of lying. I'm nothing like my husband."

"And where did you come by this lottery ticket?" asked Saltzman.

"I purchased it with a man by the name of Manny Boyce."

Saltzman's jaw dropped. Mulroney's cup jangled on its saucer.

"The ticket is void," said Saltzman flatly.

"How could you possibly have cancelled a ticket that you haven't seen until now? It's been in my possession for over a week. Manny Boyce and I split on the ticket. Fifty percent of it belongs to me. Therefore I have a right to redeem it."

Saltzman tipped back in his chair, confident of his facts. "Mr. Mulroney and I conducted a thorough interview with this Manny Boyce. He informed us that the ticket had been lost and then stolen. If a lottery ticket has been stolen, it's considered void. In fact he told us that the ticket had been discovered at the Canadian border amidst other stolen documents. The ticket was then taken illegally from the possession of Canada

Customs. Given the dubious history of the ticket, I made the decision to cancel it, and to carry its proceeds to our next draw.”

“I am astounded that you would consider the testimony of a man who has suffered a grave head injury as grounds to void the ticket. This ticket was never stolen and it certainly never ended up at the Canadian border. I repeat. It’s been in my possession for over a week.”

Saltzman shifted and rolled his chair close to his desk. “Mrs. Driscoll. It’s just a little too convenient that you should swoop into Lotto-Central, dismiss Boyce’s testimony as to what has really transpired with the ticket, and demand that we cash it. I find it really quite extraordinary.”

“Do you? Then stop talking and let me explain. You’ll see that I have always been in possession of the ticket.”

“I am listening. Go ahead and enlighten us. This should be interesting,” added Saltzman catching Mulrone’s eye.

“Manny Boyce and I have a history. As you may or may not know, he is a licensed private detective. I hired him to follow my husband. That is how I came to know Manny.”

“Isn’t that opportune,” piped in Saltzman sarcastically. “Can you offer proof of this by chance?”

“Yes. But let me continue.”

“We became friendly. Manny has a weakness for lottery tickets. I offered to go in on a Magnificent Millions ticket with him just for fun. We agreed to split it 50-50. He purchased a ticket at the old 7-11 in Sutton and he brought it with him when he came over to my place to review some photos that he had taken of Judge Driscoll. My husband of course was out of town.”

“Hold on. Stop right there,” ordered Saltzman. “Manny told us that he lost the winning ticket in the men’s room at a bus station. We have documents attesting to that fact. He called the lottery office three times with the same testimony. Not once did he mention your name or address.”

“There’s a simple explanation for that,” answered Jean directly. “Manny checked the paper for the lottery numbers. He phoned me in a panic saying that we had won but that he couldn’t find the ticket. I searched for it and came up empty as well. After assuring Manny that he hadn’t lost the ticket at my home, he looked elsewhere for it. He retraced his steps and thought that he might have lost it in the men’s room at the Greyhound bus station. He viewed a security tape and saw a kid holding something orange. He jumped to the conclusion that the boy had found our ticket.”

Mulrone listened intently, his legs crossed, calmly sipping coffee.

Jean found Saltzman’s eyes through his thick glasses and stared him down. “The fact of the matter is that the winning ticket was in my rec-room the whole time. I discovered the ticket after I had tipped over a soda can on the couch. When I was cleaning up I unearthed the ticket behind the back cushion. That’s why it’s stained. I phoned Manny right away but couldn’t get through. Nobody at the cab depot knew where he was. He was missing for over two days. I phoned him constantly. There was no reaching him.”

“I don’t believe a word you’re saying,” interrupted Saltzman abruptly. “How do you explain the fact that Manny insisted, in writing, that some kid had the ticket. And I remind you that at that time he was of sound mind and body.”

“I just told you,” replied Jean impatiently. “Haven’t you been listening or are you perhaps a little deaf? The fact is, Manny did think some kid had the ticket. He went off on a crusade to track him down. That’s why Manny couldn’t be reached. I’m not sure exactly where his search took him, but none of that really matters. It’s irrelevant. He was chasing a red herring.”

“When then, did you catch up to him?” asked Mulronev.

“I was visiting my mother at Sutton Memorial Hospital. I happened to discover Manny in the same facility—head stapled together. Speaking of which, I point out again that whatever Manny may have told you subsequent to his head injury were the confused utterances of a dreadfully injured man. His neurologist will attest to the fact that he suffered a grade three concussion at the hands of your untrained security guard.”

“He had good reason to restrain Boyce,” broke in Mulronev.

“Restrain? Is that what you call it? He should sue you. But back to the ticket. The truth of the matter is that Manny lost the ticket at my home.”

“Prove it,” challenged Saltzman.

Jean pulled out some papers from her purse. “First of all I’ll offer proof that Manny and I have a history. This is a copy of an e-mail I sent to Skyline Investigations. That’s the name of his investigations company. I sent the mail almost a week ago. In the e-mail you’ll see that I instructed Manny Boyce to follow my husband. You’ll also note his reply to me acknowledging that I paid him.”

Saltzman pored over the papers. “There’s no mention of a Judge Driscoll. Just a mention of someone described him as being a clerk. What are you trying to pull?”

“Of course I didn’t tell Manny that Philip was a judge. He’d never have taken the job—not with a judge-killing sniper at large. But you can see that I described our van and gave him the tag numbers. Here’s a copy of our ownership. They match.”

Saltzman shoved the document aside. “All right. So you know Boyce. Big deal. We need proof that you have always had possession of the ticket.”

“For starters, I’ve provided you with the original ticket. It has my signature on it.”

“How convenient.”

“What do you mean, how convenient. I don’t appreciate your tone of voice. Do you really think that Manny would give up 50% of the ticket to a complete stranger? Of course we have a history that involves the ticket.”

“I’ll accept the fact that you may know Boyce. But here’s what really happened. You’ve told us that you are friends. Manny phoned you in desperation this morning. He told you that I voided the ticket. Somewhere along the line Boyce came back in possession of the ticket—probably from that criminal he ferreted out of Canada. Boyce handed the ticket to you and urged that you come here in an attempt to claim it. You were never aware of the ticket until today. You never agreed to split it with him. He’s using you to claim something that was never yours. You simply went to the hospital and concocted this story with him. He’s probably promised you a huge reward. I stand by my assertion that the ticket is ineligible for redemption. Its history is far too spotty.”

“I’ve already told you what happened and it’s the truth. Manny lost the ticket in my couch. I found it when I was cleaning up a soda. I tried to contact him. He couldn’t be found. Oh, and I happened to have made a copy of the winning ticket.”

Saltzman broke out in laughter. “I’m sure you did. Everyone in your family it seems has a copy of that ticket. You no doubt just ran into the nearest Quick Copy and ran it off.”

Mulroneu sat forward with interest. “No. Let her explain.”

“Thank you, Mr. Mulroneu.” Of the two, he was far more palatable, she decided. “The fact of the matter is that I made a copy of the ticket after I found it in the couch two days ago,” replied Jean recalling Ian’s instructions. “Your own website suggests that people do that. Sign the original and make a copy of it.”

Mulroneu jumped in. “You made a copy, your husband found it, and brought it to us.”

“Indeed.”

“No. You didn’t make that copy,” stated Saltzman. “You’re simply playing on the fact that you knew that Philip had found a copy of the ticket somewhere. His finding it fits your story like a glove. Clever of you. Nice try. I’ll give you that much.

“Is your computer Internet ready?” asked Jean

“Yes.”

“Turn it on. I want to access some documents.”

“This is highly unusual, but I’ll humor you, I suppose.” Saltzman brought the screen to life and partially turned it so that all could see.

Jean went to his desk and took the mouse. With a couple of clicks she located the j_driscoll account that Ian had created two nights earlier. She entered the username and password that Ian had provided to her. First she would reveal the photo of the ticket that Ian had saved to her computer. A couple more clicks and it opened beautifully on the wide monitor.

“That’s the ticket!” exclaimed Mulroneu stepping closer to the screen.

“Yes. I scanned it to my computer; saved it and ran off a copy to prepare for just such a scenario, to prove ownership.”

“Aaron. Let me see the ticket that Mrs. Driscoll just presented for redemption.”

Saltzman handed it to the attorney. Mulroneu cross-checked the ticket with the picture on the computer screen. “It’s unquestionably an exact match, right down to the soda blotches.”

“Yes. And that means that I must have always been in possession of the original,” said Jean looking at Saltzman. “Click *properties* and you’ll discover that the photo of the ticket on your computer screen was created two days ago. Bring in your IT experts. I’d welcome their opinion.” Jean went to another image and clicked it. “And here’s the front.”

“But the ticket that your husband presented to us—the phony—is in far worse shape than the original,” said Mulroneu perplexed. “It’s far more blotched.”

“The copy I ran off didn’t look terribly realistic,” explained Jean. “The blotches looked flat and dull. So I added a little texture by smearing it with Pepsi. Then I rubbed it on the floor.”

“It seems a little much that you’d go to the trouble of adding your own special touches to a copy for the sake of realism,” said Saltzman. “It’s the numbers that count,

not some blotch. That's why people photocopy tickets. To keep a record of the numbers. They don't go to such extremes to produce something that could pass as real."

"I had my reasons," said Jean

Mulroney sat back, forming a slight smile. "I think I see what's happening here. You just told me that you and your husband are in the throws of separation. I assume you don't have much use for him."

"I despise the man but he still comes by the farm to visit with our son."

"You weren't by any chance trying to set up your husband were you? Maybe you had let it slip that you had a winning ticket?" asked Mulroney.

"Perhaps."

"My guess is that you wanted him to find a very real looking copy accidentally on purpose. You wanted him to take it to this office. You knew that he'd make a fool of himself."

Jean put on her best smug look.

"Your silence is very telling," said the attorney.

Saltzman had remained silent, sickened that Jean appeared to have offered irrefutable proof that she had been in possession of the winning ticket for a least a couple of days. "Let's pretend for a moment that you're telling the truth. Why didn't you come here to the office with the ticket yourself? Why would you have waited until now?"

"Because as I've told you, my husband and I are separating. We're in the process of hammering out a formal separation agreement. I didn't want Philip to know that I had money. He'd have demanded half. My preference all along was that Manny cash the ticket. My name would have been kept out of the paper. I was exploring opportunities whereby I could have hidden the money somewhere—possibly in my mother's bank account, safe from Philip's grasp. That's why I waited."

Mulroney nodded approvingly, impressed by Jean's acumen. "That would have looked good on him. Having had the misfortune to have met your husband, I can't say that I blame you."

"Don't agree with her," scolded Saltzman. *The Holiday Draw* was slipping away, and with it his considerable bonus. He wasn't yet prepared to relinquish the ticket to Jean. "Show me proof that you and Manny were co-owners."

Jean clicked and moved the computer's mouse around. I want to draw your attention to an e-mail that I sent to Manny Boyce two nights ago after I had found the ticket. I couldn't reach him by phone, so e-mail seemed like a good idea. Just like the photos, the e-mail is date stamped and even saved in the same folder. Here. Have a good look at this." She opened the e-mail that Ian had sent to Manny.

Manny... It's late Monday night. I'm at the farm. Great news. I've got the ticket! Let's go to Lakefield in the morning and split it...Get back to me at this address right away.

"You wrote that?" asked Mulroney and Saltzman in unison.

"It was written on Monday night. Look at the date. It's impossible to back-date e-mails. And look at the address—jdriscoll@hotmail.com. Incidentally, in case you'd forgotten, my first name happens to be Jean...as in J Driscoll. The password to the e-mail account is Heather. That happens to be the name of my daughter.

Saltzman wracked his brain searching for more questions that might trip Jean up. Something important occurred to him. "If you always had the ticket, then why did Boyce end up here at the lottery office?"

As the e-mails I showed you earlier prove, I hired Manny to follow Philip. I gave Manny instructions to follow Philip as far as California if necessary. I wanted evidence that my husband was unfaithful," replied Jean quietly. She hated divulging such personal information to these strangers. "I needed such proof to initiate divorce proceedings; to maintain custody of our children; and to ensure that he'd be on the hook for full child support."

Jean got up and went to the water dispenser. "As we know, my husband came here to Lotto-Central to try and redeem the fake lottery ticket. What he didn't know was that Manny was on his tail. When Philip pulled into Lotto-Central, Manny naturally followed him into the office thinking that my husband might have pinched the ticket from the farm house. Philip had no idea who he was. Manny managed to get quite close to him. Manny saw that Philip had the ticket right in his hand. It dawned on him that the kid he'd been chasing down didn't have the ticket at all. Then the fight." She tossed the paper cup in the trash and turned to Saltzman. "Redeem our ticket. I've provided all the proof you need."

"The numbers. The numbers on the ticket," repeated Saltzman helplessly. "What is the significance of the numbers?"

"Given what I've just told you, I'm not sure that they're at all relevant, but I'm glad you asked," said Jean confidently. "Hand me the ticket. I let Manny pick them. He always plays the same numbers and as you're about to discover, they're highly personalized." Jean returned to her chair and studied the back of the ticket. "Manny informed me that 3 is for Bobby Orr, his favorite Bruin of all time. His apt number is 2, check for yourself. 36 is for Psalm 36 his late father's favorite, 48 is his age. The last number, 23--"

"Is the age of his eldest daughter," broke in Saltzman derisively.

"No In fact the number 23 is the figure required so that when it is included with the other numbers, and they're all added together the total sum comes to 112. That happens to be the number that's slapped all over his cab. His registration number."

Saltzman madly began to add the numbers together. He stopped. It would be an exercise in futility. Jean had won.

"Nobody but nobody other than Manny could have picked those numbers," asserted Jean. "Think about it. What are the chances that anyone else could have--?"

"All right," shouted Saltzman before willing himself to regain composure. "You have presented a very compelling argument," he finished evenly through a clenched jaw.

"Then redeem our ticket," answered Jean sharply. "Write me a check right now, or we'll sue you for lost interest."

"Before we discuss this any further I want to attempt to have the ticket scanned," stated Saltzman.

Jean scrambled from her chair. "I'm coming with you. I want to witness this."

"Come with me," directed Saltzman. He led the way from his office and down the stairs. They walked across the lobby and stopped by a formidable steel door. The director beckoned to a security guard who punched in some numbers granting them

access to the teller's area. Saltzman led the way followed by Jean and Mulroney. They proceeded behind the chairs of several employees sitting at their stations.

"I need your terminal," said Saltzman to Ashley.

The teller looked apologetically at the customer in front of her, and stepped aside.

Saltzman turned his attention to a shoebox sized scanner attached to a computer.

Jean's knees trembled as she observed the director place the ticket front side down and slide it slowly along a metallic track. The computer screen flickered momentarily causing her heart to leap. She stared at the screen in breathless anticipation that the magnificent millions constrained within that battered ticket were at last about to be released. She clenched her fists and curled her toes, eyes riveted to the dark monitor in expectation that the screen would momentarily explode in bold and brilliant letters screaming JACKPOT!—accompanied by the glorious sound of whopping sirens proclaiming that a winner had been crowned. The screen remained blank. The speakers hushed. Nothing. Nothing happened at all.

Forty-Seven

“It won’t scan. The ticket is worthless,” stated Saltzman.

“Try it again. Please,” Jean begged. “There’s no reason it shouldn’t work.”

“There’s a very good reason. It’s been defaced. It’s a shame that you spilled things on it. But I’ll indulge you.” He slid the ticket through again. The monitor stayed dark.

“I want someone else to scan it and on a different machine.”

“It won’t make any difference who scans it. The ticket has been spoiled and it can’t be read.” Saltzman stuffed the ticket into the breast pocket of his suit jacket. “I must get back to my desk. Mr. Mulrone, please see Mrs. Driscoll out.”

Jean clutched and pulled on to Mulrone’s arm. “Stop him. Can’t you do something? You’re an attorney. This isn’t right. I want my ticket back.”

“We have demonstrated due diligence. The ticket simply won’t scan. We don’t honor defaced tickets. Follow me.”

“Try scanning it on a different machine. He’s got my ticket. Get him back here.”

“Actually, a spoiled ticket becomes the property of Lotto-Central. It’s over. The ticket is ineligible for redemption.”

“No. This is unacceptable.”

“We must leave so that Ashley can get back to her work. There’s a lineup,” said Mulrone pointing through the glass. “I insist that you come with me. This is a restricted area.”

Jean turned helplessly back towards the terminal before reluctantly following Mulrone.

Ashley had stood off to the side observing the goings on with the ticket. Jean had shown her the ticket when she had first arrived at the lottery office. She recalled that it hadn’t been in bad condition. The back of it been covered in something but she had processed other tickets in far worse shape without a problem. Tickets which had gone through washing machines and dryers had scanned in the past. Others had been splattered by paint, or had been torn and frayed. They had all been read successfully by the sensitive equipment.

The teller opened her wicket and beckoned to the next customer in line. A man came to the glass extending a scratch-and-win. Ashley placed it in the scanner. The screen confirmed that he was a winner. No problem with the equipment. She paid out \$600 in fifties and twenties to the happy customer.

Unable to shake her misgivings about Jean’s ticket, Ashley closed her wicket and wandered over to Miss Buck, the head-teller—a severe looking woman with white hair tightly pulled back with bobby pins into a bun. She had supervised the tellers for years—the undisputed matriarch of Lotto-Central.

“I’m wondering,” began Ashley. “May I see a summary print-out of the day’s activities so far for my terminal? It’s possible that I may have made an error.”

“Error?” repeated Ashley’s boss irritably. “An error? Don’t tell that me you’re not going to balance. You girls would never cut it in a bank. I want to leave this building promptly at 4:30.” It was an unwritten rule that no teller left the building until everyone had balanced their day’s receipts. Sometimes it took a team effort to account for missing funds.

“I want to cross-check something,” answered Ashley.

“You might as well catch your mistake now. I’ll authorize an early summary for you.” She entered a code into her computer. A printer kicked on and began to spew out an event summary. Ashley tore off a couple of perforated pages and zeroed in on her most recent transactions.

Tuesday 16 Sept. 07

| | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|
| Scratch @ Win. Paid \$300.00 | Terminal 8 | Ticket 638937 |
| Instant Cash. Paid \$80.00 | Terminal 8 | Ticket 70973 |
| Scan Blocked. | Terminal 8 | 86522b Override Required. |
| Scan Blocked. | Terminal 8 | 86522b Override Required. |
| Scratch @ Win. Paid \$600.00 | Terminal 8 | Ticket 99529 |

Two notations highlighted in bold revealed that the scanner had been programmed to ignore the numbers associated with Mrs. Driscoll’s ticket

Ashley raced to the lobby, print-out in hand. She found Jean speaking intently with Mulrone y in the waiting area. “Mr. Mulrone y, I’ve discovered why the ticket didn’t scan. It was blocked. Have a look at my hourly summary.”

“I knew it,” cried out Jean. “You people have done something. I’m calling my attorney—the paper.”

“Mulrone y folded the summary from Jean’s sight. “There’s no need to do that. I’ll look into this.” The attorney took the stairs two at a time and burst into Saltzman’s office. “I demand an explanation.”

“You were there. It wouldn’t scan.”

“There’s nothing wrong with the ticket. You put a block on it and Jean Driscoll knows it.” Mulrone y slapped the summary down on Saltzman’s desk.

“Where did you get this?” How had the block been revealed so quickly? The daily summary was always brought it to his attention for sign off at closing time. If asked, he had planned to explain the block as a precaution against another counterfeit attempt.

“It doesn’t matter. What’s with the block? Tell me. Maybe we can nip this in the bud before we’re sued for breach of fiduciary duty.”

“I put the ticket on special status yesterday. I’d completely forgotten.”

“No. Here’s what really happened. You didn’t want to see the ticket redeemed because that would have ruined your plans for the big jackpot draw and your sales bonus along with it. You didn’t want Mrs. Driscoll to collect despite the fact she is a rightful owner.”

Saltzman stared at his blotter and fiddled with an ivory handled letter opener.

“Aaron. Look at me. We have to make this right. You will go down to the lobby. You will explain to Mrs. Driscoll that someone from head office is responsible for

blocking that ticket. This time we'll have Ashley run it through. I hope to hell you haven't destroyed the ticket."

"No. It's right here. I'll have to override the block at the main terminal."

"Then do it now, before we both end up in court."

Saltzman and Mulroney made their way down the staircase to the foyer. The director observed Jean glaring at him with a look that could freeze acid.

"You bastard," she cried, "stop playing games with me."

"Please. Keep your voice down, Mrs. Driscoll. This is a place of business. The block has just come to my attention. Apparently head office ordered it."

"This is head office. Don't lie to me. I want my ticket back."

"Take it. Go with Mr. Mulroney."

Jean and Mulroney walked back through the teller's area and waited for Saltzman. He arrived a minute later.

"Ready?" asked Ashley dramatically. She ran the ticket through the scanner. The screen came to life. There were no bells and whistles—no flashing bright letters. Anti-climatic if anything. The screen displayed just a single word: *Confirmed*.

Ashley grabbed Jean's arm. "You're a winner. I'm so pleased for you."

"Yes, congratulations," said Saltzman unenthusiastically. "The check will be issued in your name. Given the confusion surrounding this ticket, and that the co-owner is under arrest, we'll dispense with the presentation."

"Fine." Actually perfect, thought Jean. All the better to hide her winnings from Philip.

"I'll bring you your winnings," said Mulroney. "Please wait down here."

Jean chose a seat in the foyer that offered an unobstructed view of the staircase and waited for Peter Mulroney.

He wasn't long. The attorney came down the stairs holding several documents. "These are some tax forms."

Jean looked over the papers studying the fine print. True to form, the IRS had provided pages of incomprehensible information and instructions that only an accountant could begin to decipher.

"Sign here and here," instructed Mulroney. "And this is what you really want to see."

Jean accepted the check. *Payable to the order of Jean Driscoll in the amount of seventeen million, five hundred thousand dollars.*

"You are on your own as far as Boyce is concerned," said Mulroney. "You'll have to honor any arrangements that you've made with him. We will not mediate any disputes that arise between the two of you. Our work here is finished. Is that clear?"

"I guess I should thank you," said Jean. "You have been somewhat cooperative. Your boss is a fool, if not a criminal."

"He's not really my superior."

"I can't guarantee that you won't be hearing from Manny. He may well launch a lawsuit against this office for damages. As senior officials, you and Saltzman are both culpable. Good day, Mr. Mulroney."

Jean flew out the front doors grateful to leave the stuffy confines of the lottery center. The cool air felt good. She waved triumphantly towards her car. Ian burst out from the passenger's side.

“Do you have it? Did they pay you?” he yelled.

Jean’s smile provided the answer. She half-ran closer to the car. “Yes. They redeemed he ticket. Get back in.”

“Tell me everything. Did you show them the photos and the e-mails?”

“Yes. It all went according to plan—except that the ticket wouldn’t scan at first. They had put a block on it,” said Jean as she started the car.

“I was getting worried. You must have been in there for over an hour. How much is the check for?”

“Seventeen and a half million. The rest has been withheld for taxes.”

“Have you phoned Manny yet?”

“No,” replied Jean backing the car around. “You call him. My phone is in the side of my purse. There’s a scrap of paper with Manny’s number.”

Ian found what he needed and punched in some numbers. He waited expectantly for Manny to answer. He allowed four more rings. “There’s no answer.”

Jean power-dragged on a Winston. “Maybe he’s in the bathroom.” She guided the Sunfire down the lottery center’s drive. “What’s the time? I didn’t wear my watch.”

“Just after one.”

“It will be 2:30 p.m. by the time we get back. The highway is just at the end of this intersection isn’t it?”

“Yes.”

Ian tried Manny again. “No answer. Should I let it go to voice mail?”

“No. It will be more fun to tell him personally.”

I’m getting worried.”

“Worried?”

“Yeah. You’d think that he’d be waiting for our call. I’m surprised that he’s not lying in bed with his phone in his hands answering it on the first ring. What if he’s had a heart attack or a stroke or something?”

“I think you’re imagining things. He’s probably just sleeping.”

“Sleeping? Do you really think that he’d be able to sleep knowing that we promised to call him?”

“Maybe his phone isn’t working. Try him again in a few minutes. He’s going to be so happy.”

Forty-Eight

Jean wheeled onto the freeway and floored it, anxious to get back to Sutton as soon as possible.

“I can hardly wait to get all new hockey equipment,” said Ian. “And then I’m going to get a new laptop and a Civic five-speed with a sunroof and an awesome sound system.”

Jean stubbed out her smoke. “I’ve been giving this some thought. I’m a little concerned about you.”

“Why?”

“Because you are about to come into a huge amount of money.”

“Do you think that I’ll blow it?”

Jean paused to choose her words carefully. “Let’s say lose track of it. It’s been done before. I’ve read where people have come into far more than \$2 million and have somehow spent it all within a matter of a year or two. Just one miscalculation and money can all but disappear.”

“You think I’m going to buy swampland in Florida?”

“Land deals can go bad a lot closer to home than Florida. Actually I’m more worried that someone might take advantage of you. There are always people around who are inclined to exploit people who have money.”

“Like judges,” stated Ian, immediately regretting his barb.

Jean let it pass. “I’m thinking more about your peers. I wouldn’t let anyone know how much money you have. It’s none of their business.”

“From what I’ve seen, no one at Ashbury is suffering. No one will be after my money. Half of them have their own car. And good ones. Better than this one, in fact. They have family summer homes in Canada and in the Hamptons plus condos in Arizona and Florida.”

“Ashbury must have been somewhat of an adjustment for you. Maybe it still is.”

“It’s been tough at times. It’s helped that I’m kind of a celebrity, well not really a celebrity but you know, I am pretty well known.”

Jean nodded.

“I know what you’re trying to tell me. As far as the money goes, I’m not going to tell anyone. I’m going to be really careful with it. I’ll buy a small house mostly for my mother, but it will be in my name.”

“That’s very wise.”

“Then I was thinking that I could put \$50,000 in an account that I can get at easily. But don’t worry I’m not going to buy stupid stuff. We’ve always been poor. I’ll do anything to protect my money.”

“Even if you just invested most of your \$2 million in something really safe it should double within 10 years,” pointed out Jean. “You’d have nearly 4 million by the time you’re the ripe old age of 30.”

“Thirty. That seems so old.”

“Then you must think that I’m a real dinosaur.”

“You’re a mother. You’re supposed to be old. But you still look okay,” he added quickly.

Jean laughed. At times Ian seemed so much older than his 17 year—probably the result of assuming far too many family responsibilities—she thought, but in a flash he could display a compelling naivety characteristic of most adolescents. She hoped that he and Heather would work things out. He was a good kid. Excellent boyfriend material. “Just okay?” she challenged in fun.

“No. I mean good. You look good. But maybe you should quit smoking.”

“Thank you. And I’m working on quitting—not that it’s really any of your business. Back to the money for a moment. You may not appreciate this now, but after the novelty of cars and houses and other material things wears off, you’ll discover that the real value of money is the freedom it can offer you.”

“You sound like one of those TV commercials,” laughed Ian.

Jean smiled in agreement. “I guess I do but the people who flog lottery tickets hammer away at the concept of freedom for a very good reason. Lottery tickets represent the only hope available for most people to escape the day-to-day drudgery of jobs they don’t enjoy. A daily commute and when they arrive, having to deal with some idiot boss who makes their lives miserable. Believe me, I remember. I sold life insurance years ago, before Heather was born. My sales manager was insufferable. He never offered any encouragement or recognition. To make matters worse he was a two-faced, self-righteous, hypocritical, and holier-than-thou former alcoholic turned born again.”

“You really didn’t like that guy.”

“Believe it or not, I still have the odd nightmare about him. The point I wanted to make is that if you protect your money, you’ll never have to work at something or for someone you find distasteful. You’ll always have the freedom to travel when you like, and assist others who aren’t as fortunate. But most importantly, if your work gets to be too much to bear for any reason, you’ll have the freedom to say see you later...I’m out of here.”

“I guess that would be more important than owning a lot of things,” commented Ian.

“Yes. The ability to call your own shots is very important. I’m looking forward to it.”

“Looking forward to it. What do you mean? It’s not as if you work.”

“I work at maintaining a home, but you’re right. I’m dependent on someone else’s salary. Don’t ever get into that trap.”

“Are you suggesting that you are planning on leaving Judge Driscoll?”

“I’m just saying that it’s always important to have your own purse.”

“You are going to leave him aren’t you?” asked Ian looking earnestly at Jean.

“And I think you should. You’re too good for Judge Driscoll.”

“Ian. My marital affairs are far too personal to discuss,” said Jean.

“Oh. OK. I guess I misunderstood you,” said Ian unconvincingly.

They drove in silence for a mile or two lost in their own worlds. Jean looked over at Ian. His eyes were closed.

Jean herself was fatigued. She activated the cruise control and shifted her hips to a more comfortable position.

Despite her new-found wealth, the days ahead posed some major challenges. Martha's health was still fragile. Moving her mother to the Sunshine Center would help in her recovery, but Jean was realistic enough to know that Martha would never be the same. The stroke had left her weak—her damaged kidneys unable to cope without the assistance of dialysis.

Then there was the matter of the separation—specifically how best to tell the children that their father and mother were no longer going to live together. But the divorce would be almost moot. According to Abramsky, Philip was soon to face grave legal problems. Philip was a prominent man in a small town. His trial would receive merciless scrutiny and be dutifully reported in *the Examiner*, radio, and TV. “*There’s Adam. His father’s in jail,*” from the boys at school. “*Hey Heather, did your father really rip off your grandmother?*”

And the children would insist on visiting Philip. Who knew what sights and sounds they’d be exposed to inside some prison? She imagined loud buzzers and sliding electronic doors fashioned from heavy steel. Before actually meeting with Philip the children would be searched. It would be dreadful for them. And Adam was only 15. As a minor, she would have to accompany him to the prison. Jean cringed at the very thought.

As she and Ian got closer to Sutton, an idea slowly took root, fed by the observation that she earlier just passed on to Ian—that perhaps the most important thing that money could buy was freedom. Now that she had \$2 million at her disposal, perhaps the money might be used to save Philip and spare Heather and Adam the spectacle of seeing him reduced to the status of a convicted criminal. Maybe she could cajole the bank to call off its investigation upon the return of Martha’s money. Philip had already agreed to provide her with eighty thousand dollars a year. She could put that money to good use. An expression by George Herbert, an English poet and clergyman she had studied years ago at Ashbury, came to mind: *Living well is the best revenge*. She could keep the terms of the separation agreement in place and use him, just as he’d used her as a glorified maid while he sought sexual encounters with younger women.

Living well. Revenge. What would ultimately be sweeter? Seeing Philip incarcerated and wasting his legal talents behind bars, or sent out to work everyday assuming the role of her personal provider; a robed cash machine. She’d give it more thought.

Ian stretched and yawned. “We’re nearly home. I can’t believe that I dozed off. I’m going to try Manny again.” He grabbed Jean’s phone and hit redial.

“Dozed? You were out like a light.”

“Still no answer. If anything has happened to him I won’t even care about the money.”

“Don’t distress yourself. I’m sure he’s fine.”

“I just thought of something. If Manny has died, you’ll get all the money. The check’s made out to you.”

“Ian, stop it. What a thing to say.”

“I know, but it’s true. Why won’t he answer his phone? Why hasn’t he tried to reach us?”

“We’ll find out soon. Just hold your horses.”

Farmland dotted with golden bales of hay and pumpkins just beginning to show orange eventually gave way to the southern fringes of Sutton. Jean exited at the second

exchange which fed traffic to the downtown area. Ten minutes later they pulled into the hospital's parking lot.

"I can hardly wait to see the expression on Manny's face when you show him the check," said Ian. "Do you think I'll be able to get my reward money today?"

Jean fed a parking meter quarters. "We'll get Manny's directions on that first."

They walked swiftly across the parking lot and into the hospital's main entrance. They avoided a lineup at the elevator by taking the stairs to Manny's floor. The corridor was mostly empty and quiet.

Ian suddenly shouted, "The guard is gone, his chair and everything. I told you. I was right. Something's happened." His long legs drove full tilt towards Manny's room.

"What's going on?" asked Jean catching up.

"There's tape across the door."

A nurse appeared from a nearby room, alerted by the commotion. "There's no one in there. The room has been shut down. We're trying to contain a virus."

"We are anxious to see a friend," explained Jean. "A Manny Boyce."

She ran her finger down a clipboard. "Mr. Boyce has been moved to the fourth floor."

Jean and Ian climbed the stairs and followed signs which led them about midway down the hall. A different guard extended a clipboard.

Jean was first in. "Hi there, you rich hunk."

"I just got back to my room, not two minutes ago. You did it, didn't you? You cashed the ticket! I can tell."

"We all did it," said Jean. "Convincing Saltzman and Mulronev wasn't exactly easy but everything worked out. Nearly \$14 million. Right here in my purse."

"Why didn't you answer your phone?" asked Ian. "Where were you?"

"I was downstairs all afternoon. Waiting around for tests. I had an MRI and an EEG and god knows what else. Then they moved me. Some kind of virus scare."

"Here you are," said Jean holding forth the check.

Manny reached for it and stared transfixed.

"How do you want to handle it?" asked Jean

"Deposit it into your account and have the bank cut a \$2 million dollar check for you and one for Ian, then have them make up a check for me for the balance."

"Consider it done."

"I'm dying to know. What exactly happened at the lottery office today? How did it all go down? Tell me everything."

Once Manny had been brought up to date on the events at Lotto-Central, Jean gratefully availed herself of a nearby washroom, and entered the palliative care wing.

Her mother, as usual, was sleeping. She decided not to disturb her.

Ian had decided to stay with Manny while Jean took care of her business. She would return later with his check and give him a ride home. Her first task was to explore any opportunities with Abramsky whereby the banker might be content to call off the investigation into Philip. He might just bite if Martha's funds were replaced. She took the stairs to the hospital's vestibule, crossed the lot and settled into her car. She retrieved Abramsky's business card, reached for her phone and punched in the banker's number.

"It's Jean Driscoll."

“Yes, Mrs. Driscoll. You have been on my mind. Did you resolve things with your mother?”

“Since you’ve summarily rejected the mortgage application I’m sure that my mother’s well-being hasn’t been keeping you awake at night.”

“Now that’s not really fair. You know very well why we wouldn’t consider a mortgage. I asked because my contact at the Sunshine Center phoned to enquire if Martha still required a room. They’re holding it for now but she needs to know within a day. I don’t want to keep them hanging.”

“Please tell her yes. We’ve managed to come up with the necessary financing.”

“I’ll call her right away.”

“There’s something else.”

“What would that be?”

“First of all, I need to know. Have the police been informed?”

“About Judge Driscoll?”

“Yes, about Philip. Who else?”

“No, the bank will conduct a thorough internal investigation first.”

“I have a proposition.”

“Go ahead.”

“If Mother’s money was returned would you be willing to call off the investigation and keep things from the police and your attorneys?”

Abramsky hesitated. “I don’t know. Philip clearly absconded with Mrs. Van Whyte’s funds for his own gain. It’s called self dealing. And he’s evidently lost everything in a bungled land deal.”

“I’m in a position to return the money.”

“I have to put you on hold for a moment.” The banker eased back in his swivel chair. Jean’s offer might be quite fortuitous. He had been fearful that Martha or an attorney representing her estate might launch a grievance or even a lawsuit against the bank for the recovery of her money. Despite the fact that Philip had lied to him, such a dispute had the potential to be a messy. His bank’s directors detested unseemly publicity. Jean was offering a solution. He punched a button on the phone. “I’m certain that we could review the file.”

“Don’t be vague. Yes or no?”

“Yes. If you replaced the funds I’d be willing to call off the investigation. It hasn’t gone to the police yet. But I’m curious. Where have you suddenly come up with over \$1 million? Just yesterday you were essentially broke.”

“I can get the money. That’s all you have to know. I’ll be back to you.”

“I’ll give you 24 hours. I can stall the inquiry for that long. If you can replace the funds by this time tomorrow afternoon, you can consider the matter closed. If not, I’ll have no choice but to allow the bank’s investigation to go ahead, unencumbered.”

“That’s fair, I’ll let you know.”

Jean folded her phone. Next order of business: Off to Bernie Gardiner’s office to pick up the separation agreement. It was crucial that Philip sign the document before she deposited her windfall. On his very suggestion, the agreement contained a clause which stipulated that any money either of them might come into was to be considered over-and-above the realm of shared assets. How thoughtful of Philip to have suggested that passage, thought Jean chuckling. With the exception of Manny’s legal problems

everything was falling into place. She had successfully redeemed the ticket, Martha was off to the Sunshine Center, her millions would be legally protected from Philip and he would forever labor for her. It was only right. After all, living well was always the best revenge.

Philip presided over his court room clad in a flowing black judicial robe, white shirt and blue tie. He felt a sense of peace at his bench. This is where he was in absolute control. People stood when he entered, and stood again when he left. Attorneys and defendants hung on his every word. Perhaps only the President and the Pope commanded as much respect as he and his legal brethren.

Dissatisfaction with his profession now seemed so unimportant. The land debacle in Oak Leaf had threatened to destroy him. And he had come perilously close to facing charges of counterfeiting and perjury thanks to that phony ticket. He was still shaken over both potential calamities.

A clerk brought him some briefing papers and photographs. He tried to concentrate on the case before him. From what he had gathered, the police had discovered six very-sad looking pot plants in the defendant's basement. The question before the court was whether the marijuana was for personal use, or whether he was in fact intent on trafficking. Philip had already decided to impose the minimum sentence of probation. Far too much of the court's time was wasted on dealing with marijuana. Besides, he and Jean had quite enjoyed the odd joint at Ashbury years before. He wondered how many justices his age, or cops or attorneys for that matter had seen fit to aggressively round up and prosecute individuals for simple possession—something the legal representatives may have partaken in at one time themselves. It just didn't sit well with him.

"If it please the court. Your Honor?"

Philip tipped forward in his tall chair. "Repeat the question, counsellor. And please speak up."

Philip dealt with a procedural matter and ordered a 15 minute recess.

Back in his chambers, he looked over his desk to check correspondence. Jean had called. What now? He reached for his phone. "I'm in the middle of a trial. What do you want?"

"I want you to come to the farm and sign the separation agreement."

"No, bring it here to the courthouse, but give me 40 minutes. I'll try to fit you in."

"Just be ready for me," said Jean. "I want to get to the bank before it closes."

"And after that you have to top up the bird feeders which will leave you so exhausted that you'll have to have a nap. I just don't know how you do it. Such a busy life."

"I'll be there in half hour," shouted Jean slamming down the phone.

Of course you'll be here, thought Philip. I say jump, and you say how far? You desperately need my income. Without my salary, you and the children would be destitute. He contemplated their very bizarre pact. Who actually held the upper hand? Things like that were important to him.

Jean clearly realized that she was completely dependent on his salary. She wouldn't dare turn him in. In fact, she had gone so far as to lie to Abramsky to protect her income stream—his salary.

Philip left his desk to stretch his legs. Thankfully, Abramsky hadn't a clue that the land investment had gone so wrong. Jean may have struck a sweetheart separation agreement—he'd give her that much—but at least his hard earned dollars would go mostly to caring for Heather and Adam. He remained in control. She would never turn him in.

For now he'd abide by Jean's demands and lull her into a false sense of security. When Martha finally died, it would be difficult for Jean to prove that he had acted surreptitiously with the old doll's money. Once she was gone, he would contest the separation agreement and establish terms that were far more equitable. He'd prevail, and Jean would be blindsided. She really wasn't very bright.

Forty-Nine

Bernie Gardiner had left a copy of the separation agreement with his secretary. Jean was in and out of the busy law office in seconds.

There was time to drop by the farm before her hastily arranged “appointment” with Philip. *I’ll try to fit you in*, he had told her. What an ass fumed Jean as she unlocked the door to the farm house. The day seemed to have no end. Philip had to sign the separation agreement. After that, she would head to the bank to deposit her check. Once she had taken care of her banking she would return to Sutton Memorial to give Ian and Manny their checks, and give Ian a lift home.

She noticed the school slip for Adam’s career day stuck on the fridge, still unsigned. It represented a small but important reason to intervene and allow Philip to remain free of prison. Her children adored Philip, seriously flawed though he was. The years would bring graduation ceremonies, girlfriends, boyfriends, Thanksgivings and Christmases. Important events that Adam and Heather would want to share with their father. She stuck the form in her purse for Philip’s signature.

Jean drove to the courthouse and parked in-behind. A guard let her through the rear door. She greeted Philip’s secretary and walked into the chambers.

“Close the door,” instructed Philip rudely from his desk.

Jean kicked at it with the back of her foot. She walked to his desk and unceremoniously dumped the separation agreement on his blotter. She remained standing while he read it over carefully. She noticed stacks of files on his desk and reveled in the knowledge that Philip would spend countless hours in the gloomy room working mostly for her.

“It appears to be in order,” Philip said. He uncapped his fountain pen. “So typical of Gardiner’s work. The woman gets everything.” He scrawled his broad signature on the document. “I can’t believe that I’ve actually signed this agreement—especially giving up 80% of my salary to you. And your demand for my pension. That’s so sleazy. It’s mine. I’m the one who’s earning it, not you. You’re being exploitive.”

Jean gathered the agreement and stuck it in her purse. “Don’t you dare speak to me about exploitation. You wrote the book on that. And here’s something else that needs your signature.”

“What now?”

“It’s a form that Adam needs signed for career day. He’s on an overnight field trip with his school. He needs to give the slip to a teacher when he gets back tomorrow.”

“Oh yes,” said Philip. “He’d mentioned this to me. I’m going to be taking his class on a tour of the courthouse. Adam is proud of my station in life. What have you ever done to make Adam or Heather proud? If anything they’re ashamed of you. You know, this family had a good thing going until you hit the bottle.”

The blood drained from Jean’s face. She felt woozy, stunned at his accusations. She sat down in a chair before his desk. “Actually, don’t sign Adam’s form,” she said through a lump.

“And why not?”

“You just never know. You might not be able to keep the commitment. It wouldn’t be fair to him.”

“What you carrying on about? You’re no one to speak about keeping commitments. Over the last five years it was all you could do to commit to putting a decent meal on the table.”

Don’t push me she seethed. Don’t push me. “I’m astounded that you actually have the gall to speak to me like this.”

“What’s that? Some kind of threat? Let’s not kid ourselves. You need my income. We both know that you love the farm too much to ever give it up.”

“You’re right. I do love the farm. And so do Heather and Adam. The separation agreement was designed and written with them in mind as much as me.”

Philip pushed his chair back and left his desk for a window. “You’re going to blackmail me forever aren’t you? It’s the only sense of power you’ve ever had.” He spun back and cast a venomous glare at Jean. “I’m not naive. I recognize that you have the upper hand. But we both know that you’d never compromise your charmed lifestyle. You need me too much. You always have. You’re feeble. Unable to provide for anyone. I can’t for the life of me think of a single good reason that I married you. The whole land debacle is your fault.”

“What!”

“You heard me. If you had been a better mother and a better wife, I wouldn’t have been tempted to try to flip that land. I simply wanted to make enough to gain financial independence and to escape your obsessive drinking.”

“I’ve quit drinking. And why do you think I got carried away?”

“Because you’re an addict.”

“No. To dull the pain of knowing that you were sleeping around and quite recently with someone who I had considered to be my best friend. Don’t you have any idea how hurtful—devastating that was for me?”

Philip settled in behind his desk. “Yes, I did sleep with Monica, and more than once for your information. At least a dozen times in fact. She took care of herself. She never smelled like a distillery and stale cigarette smoke like you. And just so you know, she was great in bed. Much better than you, even on your most passionate nights.”

He leaned back haughtily to gauge his wife’s reaction.

Jean fought back tears at his vindictive words. Don’t cry, she told herself. Don’t cry. No use. She’d been so wounded at Monica’s and Philip’s betrayal. Her discovery of them in bed was still agonizingly raw over six months later. Philip’s brutal appraisal of her desirability hit hard. She was confused that she actually cared—that he still had the ability to affect her so.

“Here come the tears. That’s it, when all else fails, cry. You see? Just as I said. You’re weak. Now, if you don’t mind, I’ve got work to do.”

Jean dabbed at her eyes and sat quietly for what seemed an eternity. The tears stopped—her impulse to leap from the chair and strike at her tormentor, repressed. She was filled by something greater than the desire for physical release—a tranquil, but inner strength which seemed to instruct her to stand, as if in slow-motion, and reach for Philip’s desk phone.

“Who are you calling?” asked Philip absentmindedly as he initialed a parole form.

“I’m calling from the Sutton Court House. I’d like to report a theft. It concerns Judge Driscoll. We need the police right away.”

Philip grabbed at the taut telephone cord. “What the hell are you doing?”

“Yes. The County Courthouse in Sutton,” said Jean pulling away from Philip. “There’s trouble. Come straight to the judges chambers.”

Jean returned the receiver to its cradle smiling.

“I get it. Nice bluff.”

“It wasn’t a bluff. I called 911,” answered Jean. “I did. I really did,” she said playfully, deciding that this defining moment in both their lives was too precious to rush.

“Sure you did. You know, you’re such a child sometimes. If we’re finished here, I have a judgment to write. Someone has to earn an income for the family.”

“I had planned to spare you, Philip,” said Jean calmly, “but I’ve changed my mind. You see, I really don’t need your money.”

“That’s a good one,” he said distractedly.

Jean stood before him, arms crossed wearing an impish shrewd smile. “I just cashed a lottery ticket in Lakefield. I’m set for life.”

Philip threw down his pen impatiently. “Jean, I’m busy and I don’t feel like taking this work with me tonight. Have you been drinking? You’re carrying on like an imbecile. Just get out and stop wasting my time.”

“Does the name Aaron Saltzman mean anything to you?”

Philip stopped writing and looked at Jean quizzically.

“What did you think of that long staircase at Lotto-Central? And that parking lot is so far from the main door.”

“You’re testing my patience. Ian Sinclair must have mentioned Saltzman and given you a description of--” She’d tricked him. That’s what this was all about. Heather had told Jean about the fake ticket. Jean had come to his chambers to gloat. It didn’t matter. The book had been closed on his ill fated attempt to cash the ticket. He waited for Jean’s rebuttal.

“Why on earth would Ian Sinclair have been able to describe the lottery office to me? Is there something you’re not telling me? Perhaps some previous involvement with Ian that you don’t want me to know? Did he by any chance trick you?”

“Did you come here just to torment me? That fake ticket is yesterday’s news. I’ve told Heather all about it. Stop being such a nosy little gossip. You have way too much time on your hands. Perhaps you might consider getting a job. Just get a life and leave me in peace. You know, sometimes you’ve got the mentality of a five year old. Go and pester someone else.”

“How did you like the beautiful Inuit art on the walls of Saltzman’s office? That gorgeous Oriental rug?” asked Jean. “I’m sure that those blue leather chairs and glass-topped tables were extremely expensive. And that attorney, Mulroney. Pretty sharp dresser isn’t he?”

Philip dropped his pen, jolted to full attention. Jean knew far too much. He reached for his water and took a long gulp. Ian had never been in Saltzman’s office. He couldn’t have offered Jean these details. “Why would you have had reason to meet with those men?”

“I just told you. I redeemed a lottery ticket today. A Magnificent Millions ticket worth \$25 million.”

“Sure you did.”

Jean gathered her purse. “There’s something I want to show you. It’s a check for 17.5 million after taxes. Have a good look. You’ll notice that it’s payable to me.”

Philip got to his feet, stretched across his desk, and stared at the check unbelievably.

“I’m set for life, Philip,” said Jean pulling back, “and you’ll never share in any of it. Even when you’re released from jail you’ll never see a cent. You’ve just signed off on any claim to my money.”

The judge continued to gawk at the check. No doubt about it. It was authentic. Certified, and in her name. She must have somehow cashed it for Boyce. What was that she had just said? Jail! Had she just said jail? The horrifying realization set in. Jean was about to become a multi-millionaire. She no longer needed him.

Sirens in the distance confirmed it. She really had just called the cops!

Jean put the check back in her purse and leaned forward to retrieve Adam’s permission slip from Philip’s desk. Their eyes locked. “First you’ll be brought to trial, and then you’ll be convicted. You’ll be disbarred before being sent to prison for at least five or--”

He struck out. His fist met Jean’s face knocking her backwards. She tripped over a chair and crumbled to the floor. Maddened by rage he came around from his desk and seized the top of her blouse. The fabric tore as he tried to haul her up. He went for her hair instead. She grabbed at the top of Philip’s desk and struggled to get to her feet. Blood spewed from her nose and splattered on the hardwood floor.

Whooping sirens served to infuriate and panic Philip further. “You bitch.” He landed a stinging slap to the side of her head.

Jean pulled away and stumbled towards the door.

He caught up and grabbed her arm wrenching it painfully.

“Don’t you dare turn on me.”

“He’s going to kill me,” shrieked Jean. “Someone. I need help. He’s going to kill me.”

“Shut up,” roared Philip dragging her backwards. “Nobody messes with me. You won’t tell the cops a thing. Got it? You won’t say a thing.”

Philip’s secretary burst in thunderstruck at the sight of Jean’s bloodied face and tattered blouse. Philip was holding her like some kind of hostage. “Stop it, Judge. Let her go.”

Jean spun around and violently kned Philip’s testicles. The judge doubled up. She broke free and blurrily raced towards the door. She ran directly into Deputy Bleeker who took hold of her before she smashed headlong into the thick door frame.

“Get back here. I’m not finished with you,” bellowed Philip.

Jean latched onto Bleeker’s chest sobbing. “He’s going to kill me.”

Philip’s secretary half dragged her out of the chambers.

Bleeker blocked the doorway. Philip pushed roughly at him, wrenching the deputy’s broken arm.

A courthouse marshal arrived, grabbed Philip, and spun him back to the center of the room. He contained the judge by locking him in an incapacitating hold.

Bleeker looked on in shock. “Why did you hit Mrs. Driscoll? What’s with you?”

“She deserved it. Mind your own business.”

Jean's emergency summons had initiated a full response. The regional S.W.A.T. team prowled about outside the building. Four uniforms ran into the chambers, guns drawn.

Feeling safe, Jean ventured a few feet from the outer-office to the chamber's doorway. "That bastard just attacked me." She caught strings of blood in a cupped hand. "I want him arrested."

Two paramedics hustled in and gently ushered Jean aside.

A police officer trained his gun on Philip and looked at Bleeker. "Who's this guy?"

"This happens to be Judge Driscoll. I'm his deputy. There's no need for the firearm. In fact you can leave. Everything is under control."

"Like hell we're leaving. He's just assaulted that woman."

Philip's wrists were snapped in iron. He was trundled past Jean, a cop hanging off each arm. "I'm so sorry," he sniveled. "I'm so sorry that I hit you. Please don't tell the children."

"Don't you speak to me."

"Get him out of here," ordered an officer.

Honorable Philip Taylor Driscoll, First Justice of the Hastings District Court left his chambers escorted by two police officers and by members of the court's security detail. The procession shuffled slowly down the hall, through the oak doors, down a set of granite steps to a waiting squad car.

Fifty

Following the uproar at the courthouse Deputy Bleeker grabbed a cab and left for home early, seized by apprehension for his future.

In hindsight, it had been foolish of him to have accused Boyce of aggravated assault—an accusation uttered carelessly in a blind rage fueled by the excruciating pain from a broken arm. More imprudent, however, was actually having submitted a signed formal complaint to the Lakefield cops.

Boyce's subsequent arrest would ultimately lead to a trial. Philip had promised to testify against Boyce by painting him as an unsavory individual who had a history of stalking. He had further agreed to testify that Boyce, without provocation, had seen fit to attack him within Lotto-central, subsequent to having knocked his deputy down with a vehicle. A shattered arm was proof of that. It would have been the word of a District Court Justice and his deputy, against Boyce's. No contest.

But Philip had just been taken away in a cruiser having attacked Jean, his integrity and authority severely compromised. Philip had his own problems; his deputy would be the last of his concerns. And why on earth had he attacked Jean anyway? "*Get back here. I'm not finished with you,*" he had yelled. Judge Driscoll was a batterer, a side of Philip that he had never seen. Bleeker wanted out.

The deputy hung up his coat and snapped open a Coors. Both he and Manny knew that his fractured arm was the result of falling into a ditch. There hadn't been an assault of any kind. At trial, he would have to lie under oath. Without Philip's influence his story could unravel. He risked being convicted of perjury, spending years in jail. That wasn't going to happen. He had to make a deal with Manny Boyce, and the sooner, the better.

While Philip was whisked away to the Ashbury Police Station, Jean remained at the courthouse and attempted to provide the investigating officer with a statement. Blood sporadically dribbled from her nose. A paramedic stood nearby extending tissues.

"At what point in the argument did he actually hit you?" asked the officer.

"After we had spoken for a few minutes."

"Spoken?"

"Argued."

"Why did the judge resort to physical force?"

"You'll have to ask him."

"What did he strike you with?"

"His fist."

"Is there a history here? Has he hit you before? Have there been problems in the marriage?"

"What's that got to do with anything? Judge Driscoll hit me. That's all you have to know." More blood.

"Tilt your head back," instructed a paramedic. "And pinch your nostrils gently."

The officer closed his notebook. "I think it might be best if you got cleaned up and came to the station later. You can sign a statement about the alleged assault."

"What do you mean, alleged? Look at me."

"I think that we should take you to the hospital," said a paramedic.

"No. I want to go home." She addressed the police officer. "I'll come by tomorrow with my attorney and press charges. I have a great deal to tell you about Philip Driscoll."

"Very well, here's my card. Ask for me."

A paramedic plugged Jean's nose full of cotton, and gave her a lift back to the farm. Another of the attendants followed in Jean's Sunfire.

Jean went straight upstairs and stripped out of her torn and bloodied blouse. She scrunched it up and jammed it in her bedroom's wastebasket. A shower. That's what she craved. It wasn't until she stepped under the faucet and cranked the water to full that she finally allowed her pent-up tears to flow. She stayed under the tap until the hot water ran cold. She went to her bedroom and lit a cigarette. She examined her face in her bureau's mirror. Her nose was sore to touch but it didn't appear to be broken. Her left eye was getting a little puffy but she actually felt fine, physically anyway. Emotionally she was fragile. She could do one of two things: simply crawl into bed and escape her trauma through sleep, or keep moving and take command. She opened her make-up case. A little foundation would help mask the scrape on her cheek. Be strong. She wouldn't allow Philip to ruin what should have been a day to celebrate. She had a lottery ticket to cash! The blow dryer screamed on full. The hot air was invigorating.

She selected a sharp navy pant-suit and her best shoes for the important financial transactions at hand. She went to the kitchen, dug out a pair of dark glasses from the catch-all drawer and walked to her car.

I can drive just fine, she told herself soothingly. My emotions are under control and there's no trouble with my vision.

Fifteen minutes later she parallel parked in front of her bank. It was just before five, nearly closing time. Jean provided the manager with her instructions. Her requests were efficiently handled. She left the bank with a certified check made out to Ian Sinclair in the amount of \$2 million. Another check was made out to Manny Boyce in the amount of \$13.5 million. The remainder, \$2 million, stayed in Jean's account. She would transfer \$1.3 million of that to her mother's account in the morning.

Jean pulled into Sutton Memorial and stared at the windows dotting the face of the building. Behind each pane of glass lay someone whose body or whose mind perhaps, had let them down. Everyone in that hospital would cheerfully trade places with her. Cancer patients, heart patients and stroke victims. Some who were valiantly attempting to fend off the depredation wrought by degenerative diseases like ALS or Huntington's. And others who were simply being kept as comfortable as possible while waiting to die, some of whom wouldn't even be given the chance to reach 40. So she had a sore nose. Big deal. At least she had the money to leave an abusive relationship. So many others didn't. Time to go.

Jean took the stairs to the fourth floor. She spotted Ian amusing himself by spinning around in a wheelchair. He jumped out of it expectantly and met her half way down the corridor. "Did you get my check? Manny's? What's with the sunglasses?"

"Yes I have your check. I want to give Manny his first."

“You’ll never guess who just came by. Bleeker.”

“What does he want?”

“No idea. He’s in there now. He said that he wanted to meet with Manny in private.”

“I certainly don’t want to see Bleeker. Let’s go to lounge at the end of the hall and wait until he leaves.”

Manny sat up in bed staring at the deputy.

“I’m willing to cut a deal,” said Bleeker. “Judge Driscoll told me that you decided to forget about having me charged with police brutality regarding the Owl’s Nest affair. Give me something in writing to that effect, and I’ll drop the charge of aggravated assault against you at Lotto-Central.”

Brutality, thought Manny. What lies had Driscoll fed Bleeker? He summoned up a pained expression and turned away as though Bleeker’s glorious offer was somehow too agonizing to even consider. “All right. Deal. Drop your preposterous charges against me and I’ll forget that you pushed me around, threw me in cuffs and held me at gunpoint without just cause. And I want something in writing from you too. That you were mistaken about me intentionally running you down.”

The deputy pulled out his notepad.

Manny wrote on the back of a get well card.

“Here,” said Bleeker

Manny looked at Bleeker’s note. “I suppose this will do. Get yourself another judge to chauffeur around. Driscoll’s nothing short of a criminal. But you’ve finally figured that out. That’s why you’re here, groveling. When you see Driscoll tell him that I want my camera and cell phone back.”

Bleeker stuck Manny’s note in his pocket and turned to leave. He stopped. “Just one thing. That lottery ticket. I know Ian Sinclair shafted the judge with a phony, but did anyone ever cash it?”

Manny smiled smugly. “Let’s just say that I won’t be driving cab anymore. I have a question for you. How did Driscoll know so much about the ticket? Specifically how did he know there was a reward involved?”

“I’m not prepared to answer that question.”

“Answer my question or I’ll tear up your note and have you charged with laying a false charge against me. Because of your bogus claim I was nearly killed. I’ll hire a pack of the slickest, most blood-thirsty and money-grubbing attorneys I can find. I’ll bring them in from Boston or New York if I have to, and believe me; I have the money to do it. You’ll be dragged through court. Your department will be sued. They’ll make mince-meat out of all of you. I’ll spare no expense to see that you get nailed.”

Manny’s threats had the intended affect. “I don’t know the specifics, but Ian left a message for you on the cell phone we confiscated. The judge got a court order for your password and listened to it. That’s the truth. Honestly.”

Manny absorbed this information for a moment. “All right. Get out of here.”

Bleeker left the room and looked at the guard. “You’re not needed here anymore.”

The Rent-A-Cop looked at him quizzically but remained on duty.

Jean and Ian watched Bleeker take the stairs at the far end of the hall. They scrambled into Manny's room.

"What did Bleeker want?" asked Ian breathlessly.

"I'm a free man. He's dropped all charges against me. Phony as they were. Ian, why didn't you tell me that you had left a message on my cell?"

Ian looked at Manny blankly. "What do you mean?"

"You left a message on my old phone. Driscoll had taken it from me and he heard it. That's how he knew that I had offered you a \$1 million reward, among other things."

"That adds up. I phoned your cell and told you what had happened to the ticket, the description of my wallet...everything. And right after that I phoned the cab depot and asked someone to tell you to call me."

Manny rolled his eyes and added, "And when I phoned you back I said, 'I got your message.' You thought I was referring to the message that you had left on my cell."

"I never really thought that you had told Driscoll about the reward, Pepin, and everything."

"Sure. That's why you abandoned me at the courthouse."

"That's true, but you thought that I had actually turned over the ticket to him," answered Ian.

Jean dug into her purse. If you guys are finished, "I've been busy at the bank. Here's your check for \$13.5 million."

Manny grasped the check and examined it carefully. He waved it around and sang, "I'm rich and I'm free. I'll deposit this tomorrow. The doctor said I could leave for a couple of hours to see how I feel."

"I'm so pleased for you," said Jean.

"Why are you wearing sunglasses?" asked Manny.

"Philip hit me."

"Hit you!" exclaimed Ian and Manny together.

"Yes. At the courthouse. I don't want to talk about it." She looked at Ian and said, "Please don't mention this to Heather. I'll tell her myself."

"OK. But you should leave him. I can't believe that he'd actually hurt you. All I can say is that he better not get in my way again."

"Have you seen a doctor?" asked Manny.

"Yes. I just have a bruised nose."

A nurse arrived with some medication and it on Manny's tray. "Sweet dreams."

"Sweet dreams?" from Jean.

"Yeah, pain medication for my headaches. Puts me out like a light."

Jean used this as her cue to say goodnight. "I hate to leave so soon but Ian and I will be off now. It's been a long day. I'm completely worn out."

"And I have to deposit my check," chimed in Ian. He held out his hand towards Manny. "I guess I'll be seeing you. Thanks for your reward. I mean it. I'm going back to Ashbury first thing in the morning. Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"No, nothing that comes to mind. Stay in touch, OK?"

"For sure. Maybe you'll come and see one of my games. Hey, are those tears? Come on. You should be happy."

“I am. Just a little emotional. You guys cashing the check. Jean being hit. Bleeker dropping the charge. You leaving. Everything’s kind of caught up with me. You take care of that money. Both of you. Now get moving. I need my beauty rest.”

Jean gave Manny a peck on the cheek. She and Ian left the room.

“I’m going to look in on my mother. I won’t be long.”

“I’ll wait for you out front.”

Martha was sprawled on her side, sleeping soundly. Hopefully she’s gaining some strength, thought Jean. She planned to have her mother moved to the Sunshine Center within 24 hours.

Ian was waiting by the car. As they left he asked, “Do you think we could stop off at my bank?”

“Is it open?”

“No, but I can use the machine.”

“I don’t think it would be wise to stick a \$2 million check in a machine. In fact, you can’t. There are deposit limits.”

“I guess I’ll have to wait until tomorrow.”

A couple of miles later and Jean pulled into the brightly lit drive leading into Scarlett Heights. This housing complex is truly appalling, she thought as they crawled along. Litter everywhere. Kid’s toys strewn about, an old couch on a lawn, a stained mattress, broken glass, and such dilapidated looking buildings. She was pleased for Ian’s windfall, but more so for the financial relief he’d promised his mother. A single mother who had beaten all the odds and had somehow nurtured a child who had grown to be a confident, determined and polite young man. This woman who had been beaten up while working at a bowling alley, deserved any break Ian’s money might provide.

“Here?” asked Jean slowing, “The Washington?”

“No. Keep going. The Balmoral.”

She stopped out front. “Quite a day we’ve had,” said Jean opening her purse while taking a quick look around.

“That’s an understatement. I’ll never forget it that’s for sure.” Ian looked hungrily for his check.

“Here you are. Please keep it safe.”

Pay to the order of Ian Sinclair, the sum of two million dollars. Two million! It was almost unfathomable. Ian was anxious to leave but hesitated at saying goodbye. “I hope we can stay in touch. It’s kind of awkward with Heather. I don’t think she’s too keen on me right now.”

“Things have a way or working out. Give it some time. But perhaps I’ll run into you at Ashbury or here in Sutton. I imagine you’ll be visiting Manny.”

“Yeah. I’ll come back to Sutton on the weekend to see him. Maybe in my new car.”

“Don’t go out and buy some rocket. Now move along. I have to get back to the farm.”

“Judge Driscoll won’t be there will he?”

“No.”

“Thanks for everything, Jean I really--”

Ian’s attention was sidetracked by a scruffy man dressed in jeans and an undershirt roughly dragging a dog to a short rope.

“Don’t bark or you’ll get hit.”

The dog lay flat, ears back, cowering.

“That’s so sad,” commented Jean.

“How much money do you have?” asked Ian impulsively. “Cash. Can you loan me some?”

“Yes, but why?”

“I want to buy that dog. Mutt. He’s always loved me. I’ve kind of grown up with him. Always took him for walks.”

“Don’t you think you should run it by your mother?”

“We’re moving. I’ll find a place with a yard. And next year I want to leave residence anyway. I’ll look after him in Ashbury.”

Jean reached for her purse. “I suppose it’s none of my business. Look at that rope. The poor dog can hardly move. How much do you need?”

“Give me \$100. Please. He won’t say no to that.”

Jean separated some bills.

Ian clasped Jean’s arm affectionately and left the car. He turned back and waved. She answered with a soft honk before driving off.

Ian walked up the front steps to the neighbor’s home. He banged hard on the door.

“Yeah?”

“I want to buy your dog.”

“Tough. It’s not for sale.”

“I’ll give you \$40.”

“You gotta be kidding. It’s half pure-bred Collie.”

“I’ll make it \$60.”

“Give me \$80 and it’s yours.”

Ian counted out the money. “Here you go.”

“You’re a sucker. You can get brand new dogs for free out of the newspaper. Take the thing. It’s more trouble than it’s worth. Don’t let it run loose. And I don’t want to see one piece of crap around here.”

“Then you better not look in a mirror.”

Ian released Mutt from two short extension cords tied together. The dog leapt about staying close to Ian’s side. He led the dog up the steps and reached for his house keys. He drew a deep breath as he stepped into the hall. Good things sometimes do happen to people like us. “Hi, I’m back. Anyone home?”

Pat met him in the hall. “What’s with the dog?”

“He’s mine now.”

Arlene came down the stairs. “Ian. Why are you back from Ashbury? And what are you doing with the neighbor’s dog?”

“I just bought him.”

“What! The last thing we need is a dog. We’re in the middle of moving. Take him back.”

“It’s OK,” broke in Ian with a wide smile. “We’re moving all right, but we’ll have to find a place with a fenced-in yard.”

Arlene steadied herself on the banister. “You didn’t. That ticket. You got a reward?”

Ian released Mutt's collar. The dog took off sniffing, exploring and whining excitedly as though sharing in the good news. "I sure did. Have a look at this."

Fifty-One

EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO COUNTY COURTHOUSE JUSTICE PHILIP DRISCOLL QUESTIONED

The headline jumped from the newspaper box outside the Sutton Bus Station stopping D'Arcy Rohmer short. Anything to do with judges caught the sniper's eye straight away.

He inserted a couple of quarters, snatched a paper, and stepped into the bus station's coffee shop to escape the chilly wind. There was an empty table by the window. He spread out the paper and hungrily absorbed the lead story.

The article told of a 911 call to the courthouse and the discovery of a bloodied woman who according to an unidentified witness was assaulted within the area of the judge's chambers. Reporters had been briefed on the incident at a press conference an hour later. The judge had been released on his own recognizance. A reporter had followed the judge to a downtown hotel. He had refused comment.

He read on, fascinated.

Judge Philip Driscoll has served as a District Court Justice for Hastings County for over six years. He has a reputation for being tough on crime, but embraces liberal views. In an interview with The Examiner last summer, the judge lamented, in his words—"the country's turn to the right." He is generally regarded to hold moderate views on social issues such as abortion, the legalization of marijuana for medicinal use, gay marriage and assisted suicide. Judge Driscoll was quoted as saying that "religion has absolutely no place in the nation's classrooms, political institutions and certainly not within the judicial system."

Rohmer pounded his fist on the table top. "You're wrong. I hate you. You're immoral!"

In a recent editorial, The Boston Globe short-listed Judge Driscoll as a possible contender to fill a vacancy on the Massachusetts Supreme Court following the slaying of Mr. Justice Collins. The judge's murder as well as an attempt on Judge Kirkby of Massachusetts, and the recent slaying of Judge Snell, of Maine, set off unprecedented security measures for all justices throughout New England. Police have arrested a 19 year old man and an 18 year old woman in connection to the shootings."

"Wrong guys. Ha, ha. They'll never catch me."

Customers in the vicinity of Rohmer's table rolled their eyes and took their coats and coffee to a safer spot.

This was unacceptable. Another left wing activist judge possibly heading to the highest court in the state. A liberal, Godless pagan.

The voices came back. They reverberated about his skull sending confusing messages. “Judge Collins is dead,” he replied aloud drumming his fingers on the table top. “Judge Snell is dead, and there’s another with a bullet in his gut.”

Rohmer seized the newspaper and held it tautly. This judge, this Driscoll. He had no respect whatsoever for basic family values. Driscoll approved of killing babies, allowing fags and dykes to marry, assisted suicide, and he wanted religion out of the schools, and out of the courts, out of everything.

Rohmer continued to fume, talking quietly to himself. God had protected him. He had escaped arrest—two fools having stolen his car and the sniper rifle within it from a parking lot.

He lowered his head to the table-top, hands covering his ears, listening and deliberating. It was more than fate that he had chosen to escape Maine by bus. And his bus had a scheduled stop in Sutton. Sutton—home to Driscoll, this most liberal of judges. And of course it had been far more than coincidence that he, D’Arcy Rohmer, should have been provided with a clear photo of that same judge on the front page of the local paper. None of this was mere happenstance.

He pressed harder on his ears trying to shut out the unceasing clatter and noises. He awaited further instructions—familiar commands from the evangelists and the radio talk show hosts.

The directives fell into place. It might take a day or so but he would bide his time and wait for the perfect moment to waste Driscoll. It might be a challenge. The extended range of his sniper rifle had provided a measure of anonymity. The gun would be impossible to replace quickly. To make matters worse, Massachusetts, predictably, had banned the sale of common assault weapons further tromping on the constitutional right of people to defend themselves. There wasn’t a decent AK-47 or M16 to be found anywhere nearby. Now, he would have to be more cautious. But he’d get Driscoll, and sooner than later. The comforting weight of a handgun rested alongside his ribs.

Philip tossed *the Examiner* on the bed in his motel room. Of course he had been released on his own recognizance. He was a judge, not some street punk. And he had hung around the police station in a sweat for well over an hour waiting for Jean to show up to register a formal assault complaint. He had expected her to race downtown and insist that he also be charged with stealing her mother’s money. She hadn’t yet, but she would. He had been forced to take a cab from the police station back to the courthouse to retrieve his van. A nosy reporter had evidently followed his every move. She had had the nerve to fire prying questions at him from within the lobby of the Holiday Inn.

Philip stared at a Monet print hanging over the bureau. Jean, Abramsky, the cops and Gardiner could well be teaming up against him at this very moment. Jean would be relentless in her quest to have him convicted. She certainly didn’t need his income. And to seal his fate, he had hit her. She would have him prosecuted mercilessly. Within moments there’d be a rap at his door. “*Good evening, Judge. Please come with us.*”

Get a grip, he told himself. Think clearly. Think like a lawyer. Consider the principal potential charge. Self-dealing—taking advantage of his position in a transaction and acting for his own interests rather than for the interests of a beneficiary. The D.A.

would argue that he, Judge Philip Driscoll, had been intent on exploiting Martha's cash for his own benefit.

The judge was struck by an absorbing notion. Martha had already granted him legal control over her affairs. It wouldn't be a stretch for a jury to believe that she had trusted him to make an investment on her behalf. He had simply purchased some farmland. He hadn't received a cent from the development company. The deal had been stopped in its tracks. What had been so nefarious about that?

Of course such a scenario would require that he obtain her signature on a backdated release of liability. If he worded it correctly the waiver would serve to absolve him from any alleged crimes.

He went to a round table and began scrawling.

"This is to acknowledge that I, Martha Van Whyte being of sound mind and body authorize Judge Philip Driscoll, acting as my agent under Power of Attorney, to transfer funds from my bank account to be used for investment purpose. Monies earned from the investment made on my behalf will remain solely my property. Likewise, I assume responsibility for any monies lost. Signed....."

Should he forge her signature? No. Handwriting experts would discover the falsification. He needed her to sign. Just one simple signature would do. The last he had seen, Martha had been confused. In her weakened state she'd have signed anything. But that had been three days earlier. It was possible that Martha's health, her mental alertness specifically, had improved since he'd last observed her. He flipped over the front cover of the local phone book and found the number for the hospital. "Yes. This is Judge Philip Driscoll. I am enquiring about a patient. A Martha Van Whyte. I am her son-in-law. Can you tell me how is she doing? And I'm wondering if you might put me through to her? I don't recall her room number."

"Just a moment please, sir. You said Van Whyte? Martha?"

"Yes."

"Mrs. Van Whyte is in the palliative care wing. Second floor. She doesn't have a phone."

"Palliative care. Are you sure of that?"

"Yes. Room 201."

She must have had another stroke or something equally calamitous thought Philip encouraged. Maybe her body was closing down. He hung up smiling. So the old doll was on her way out. What splendid news. Hopefully she'd at least have the strength to hold a pen.

Doubts surfaced. Jean would be sure to question Martha about the waiver. Martha would deny having signed it. Too bad. It would be there in black and white. Martha was a confused, sick old woman. A stroke victim. Her memory had to be sketchy at best. Jean would also ask why he had agreed to sign the separation agreement if in fact he'd had Martha's blessing to spend her money. Not an issue. The court wouldn't expect him to account for the terms of some unseemly family squabble.

The phone rang. It was either that meddling reporter again...or the cops. He left the table and went to his bedside. He hesitated before picking up.

"It's the front desk. May I please speak with Judge Driscoll?"

"Yes?"

“There’s a vehicle in the parking lot with its lights on. We think it may belong to you.”

“A black Dodge van?” asked Philip

“No. I’m sorry. I apologize for having disturbed you.”

Philip slammed down the phone and got back to business. It was possible that someone, maybe even Jean, might interrupt him as he virtually guided Martha’s pen at her bedside. He would stop by the courthouse and pick up the Power of Attorney documents she had signed days earlier in her condo. He would present the papers to her under the pretext of requiring her signature beside a clause that had been previously overlooked. He would add additional papers for her attention and bury Martha in paper. By the time she got to the phony agreement concerning the land she’d be tired out.

He had to move. At this point there was absolutely nothing to lose. The judge reached for his briefcase. No. Slow down. Too early. Jean might be at the hospital. That’s probably why she hadn’t come to the police station. He’d wait. Have a leisurely meal, a couple of drinks, and head out closer to midnight.

Rohmer hung up from a pay phone inside the busy Sutton bus terminal. That had been easy. The article in *the Examiner* had provided a blueprint to Driscoll’s whereabouts. “A downtown hotel,” the paper had said. How coy. As if Sutton had hotels on every street corner. It had taken but three calls to confirm that Judge Driscoll was holed up at the Holiday Inn. A call to his room had established that the judge drove a black Dodge van. This was going to be a cinch. He studied Philip’s features once more, and tossed the newspaper in the trash.

He’d steal a vehicle and track down the judge at the hotel. He preferred to follow him for a bit. He would be patient and wait for the perfect setting, away from witnesses—somewhere in an open area. There was no rush. The chase was always more of a thrill than the actual kill. Judge hunting. What a magnificent sport.

Philip picked listlessly at the Wednesday special, and then pushed his dinner plate aside. He ordered a Grand Marnier to settle his frazzled nerves and checked out the young woman over at the piano bar. Twenty minutes later he ordered another drink, then another. An hour after that he paid the bill. He walked through the lobby, crossed the motel’s parking lot to the van and headed east towards the court house.

The judge was waved on through by a guard. The judge parked in his usual spot behind the building. He left the van and walked to his chambers. His phone buzzed.

“Your Honor, it’s security. Are you expecting anyone?”

“No.”

“I just stepped out of my booth to stop a vehicle but he ignored me. He spun around in a big hurry and screamed out a bunch of gibberish. I think he was drunk or high on something. I’m calling in additional security for you.”

“No. Don’t. I’m leaving right now anyway. In fact I’m meeting with Deputy Bleeker for a drink. I’ll be fine. You just do as I say. No security. Understood?”

“Yes, Judge.”

Probably some unbalanced ex-con thought Philip or someone high on meth. The least of my concerns. He removed the Power of Attorney papers from a filing cabinet,

added some irrelevant legal documents to the mix and stuck them in his breast pocket. Next stop, Sutton Memorial.

The judge pulled into a handicapped parking spot by the front door. He walked through the hospital's vestibule, climbed two floors. Room 201 was the second in from the stairwell.

An emaciated African American woman lay closest to the door, eyes closed tightly. An oxygen tube fed her nostrils. Another bed was partially cloaked by a blue curtain—presumably concealing another ghastly corpse-like shell. He didn't have the stomach to investigate. He spotted Martha sleeping at the far end of the room. He nudged her skeletal shoulder. "Martha, it's Philip. Wake up."

She opened her eyes, and turned her head towards him appearing confused.

"It's Philip," he repeated. "I'm sorry I haven't been in to see you for a few days. I've come here to have you sign some things."

She sighed and closed her eyes. "I don't know."

"It will just take a moment." He placed a form on a tray and took a fleeting look behind him. "This is your Power of Attorney. We missed a spot that needs your signature. Take this pen and sign right by this clause, nice and clearly."

"What is it? I'm foggy," she mumbled.

"Just sign Very nice job, Martha. Very nice." He flipped to another page. "And another here. That's it." He handed her the waiver. "And just one more--"

"And how is our patient doing tonight?"

Philip reeled about, startled at the intrusion. It was a minister, clearly identified by his white collar, bible in hand. "I'm Father Heffernan," he said extending his hand. "You're Judge Driscoll. You spoke at our Knight's of Columbus gathering last spring. I've come by to give Martha her nightly blessing."

Philip offered a cursory nod while turning swiftly back towards Martha.

"I don't understand," she said. "Transfer my money?"

Philip seized the waiver from Martha's hands. "I've given you the wrong page. Never mind."

"Martha has spoken of you and I met your wife briefly a couple of nights ago."

He didn't hear the priest. The distraction had given Martha enough time to scan and evidently comprehended the most critical passage in the waiver! What to do?

"I'll leave you to your visit." Heffernan walked over to a sleeping patient and made signs of the cross.

"What investment?" asked Martha.

"I told you," hissed Philip. "I gave you the wrong form." This was intolerable. He needed to distract her. Philip motioned the priest over. "Martha wants you."

Heffernan sauntered back. He leaned in close to Martha and looked up at Philip. "You are welcome to join us in prayers."

"No, thank you."

Philip stood back a respectful distance, observing. The priest spoke quietly to Martha. She responded to his presence and softly recited portions of The Lord's Prayer without error.

There was nothing wrong with her mind. He had completely underestimated Martha's mental capacity. What was going on? She was in palliative. She should be near death. This was so unjust.

Martha and the priest spoke quietly. He reached for a bag of peppermints from a table by her bed. He took one for himself and handed a candy to Martha. He placed his hand on Martha's forehead, left her bedside, and approached Philip. They left the room for the corridor.

"You're working a little late, aren't you?" asked Philip edgily. "It's nearly midnight."

"In palliative there isn't really a clock. I find that the patients appreciate my presence late at night. It's quiet. More conducive for prayer and reflection." The priest smiled reassuringly. "Martha has made excellent progress. She'll recover. Have faith. I must continue with my visits. God bless you."

Philip stood rigidly against the cool cinder brick like a sentry guarding a door. Martha clearly wasn't near death. If anything, she would only improve. Jean had the means to augment her mother's care by bringing in the best specialists from anywhere of her choosing. Martha would recover sufficiently to recognize that he'd stolen her money. He could be brought to trial in a heartbeat.

Someone in hospital whites was coming his way. He wandered nonchalantly towards a bulletin board and pretended to be interested in the hospital's expansion plans. A look back revealed that a nurse was entering Martha's room carrying a tray with medicines. He ducked into a lunchroom to wait her out. What to do? Martha had actually understood the waiver and had questions about it. There was only one option left. He would speak with Martha and try to explain the mess he was in. Maybe she would understand. Not likely. If she would just die. He furiously removed the waiver from his breast pocket and tore it to shreds. He buried the scraps under the paper towels in the bottom of a trash can.

A few minutes later he reentered the room fully expecting that Martha would be sleeping. Instead, she appeared agitated, making peculiar noises. He approached her bedside and stopped. The side of Martha's neck was beet-red, veins engorged. She wheezed and thrashed about hands clutching her throat. He watched her flounder. It would take under a minute. Martha wouldn't suffer and he'd never be caught. No witnesses, no marks. She had simply choked to death. Who would know differently?

Three steps forward and a tug of the curtain offered privacy from interfering eyes. With trembling hands he took hold of a pillow which lay by Martha's side.

She struggled against the suffocating weight on her face trying in vain to turn her head. More pressure, full weight. She flailed her withered arms and kicked her legs. He moved around to a better position and banged into the beside tray. A water glass crashed to the floor. Loose peppermints fell and rolled along the tiled floor. Give it up Martha. Just give it up. A final muffled whimper and resistance ceased. He leaned over Martha and pushed the pillow to her face a little longer, just to be sure. He looked back towards the curtain. Eyes through a slit!

The material was snatched apart. "You bastard!"

A knee slammed into Philip's back. A thick hand clamped his mouth cutting short his cry. A muscular leg entwined the judge's calves. A violent wrench against his assailant's chest. A meaty forearm choked off carotid arteries. Intense force crushed the trachea. A vicious thrust upwards. Repeated twists to left and then to the right until the expected snap signaled that a neck had broken.

Fifty-Two

Insistent sharp rapping on the glass of the farmhouse's front door jolted Jean from a deep sleep. She lifted her head and squinted trying to make out the red numerals on the bedside clock. Thursday morning, nearly 2:00 a.m.

She put on a housecoat and made her way unsteadily down the staircase to the door. She peeked through the lacy curtain and froze. Police officers. Two of them. This had to be about Mother. No. The hospital would have called. God, please, not Heather or Adam. She slid the heavy dead bolt and opened the door.

"Mrs. Driscoll?"

"Yes."

"I'm Lieutenant Jim Fuller," stated an officer with a heavy mustache. "This is Constable Lauren Tanenbaum. We have bad news."

Jean's legs nearly gave way. She grasped the door frame preparing for the worst news a parent could ever hear.

"There's no easy way to say this. Judge Driscoll was found strangled to death this evening at Sutton Memorial."

"Philip, strangled?" repeated Jean blankly. "He's dead?"

"I'm sorry. His neck was broken, according to the medical staff. May we come in?"

Jean stepped back. "Strangled to death. What do you mean, strangled?"

"Ma'am, it's true. I'm sorry," said the constable. "Judge Driscoll was found in a room on the second floor—your mother's room."

"Oh my god!"

"But your mother is fine," said the constable quickly.

"Philip is dead? Strangled in my mother's room?"

"I'm afraid so," said Fuller. His partner looked on sympathetically. It was the first time that she'd had to participate in breaking such news.

"And Mother is fine?"

"Yes," replied Tanenbaum.

Jean stared unbelievably at the officers. "I have to call my daughter at Ashbury. My son is on an overnight field trip."

Tanenbaum offered Jean her arm. "I think you should sit down." They all went to the living room.

Jean sat at the edge of the sofa. "I can't believe this. Philip, dead. Who?"

"We're on it," replied Fuller. The lieutenant paused. We'll need you to identify Judge Driscoll's body as soon as possible. He had plenty of identification but it's something that--"

"Yes. Where is he?"

"In the hospital's morgue."

"I can't believe this. How am I going to tell my children? Neither of them is here."

“I’m sure you will want to tell them personally. Given your husband’s position, I’ll dispatch some officers to go and get them for you. We’ll try to keep this from the press for as long as possible so they hear the news from you first. You said your daughter, Heather, is at Ashbury?”

“Yes. Westminster House. And Adam is on an overnight field trip. His number is on the fridge. I’ll get it.”

Tanenbaum got to her feet to follow Jean. “I’d be happy to stay until your children are brought home.”

“No, thank you. I’ll manage,” said Jean plucking a form off the fridge. She provided the officers with the information needed to find Heather and Adam, and saw them out.

She returned to the kitchen and slumped into a chair trying to come to terms with the news. Philip was dead. Murdered. His neck broken in Martha’s room. It was mind-boggling. Who had done it? That man who had come to be known as the sniper? The judge killing maniac?

Philip had always been so cavalier about his personal security. He had always refused to get a dog and at first, he had resisted the idea of getting an unlisted phone number. Someone must have followed him. But what had Philip been doing at the hospital so late in the evening? Visiting Martha would have been the last of his concerns. He knew that he was about to face charges of assault and theft. Of course. He had been trying to wrangle a deal from her. That had to have been it. Philip had gone to her bedside to plead forgiveness for losing her money. Oh god. Heather and Adam had loved him so. Their father, murdered. How would they deal with it?

She sat, stunned. There was no pounding of walls. No screams of denial. There was no grief, hardly even a sense of loss. Just utter shock. She craved a drink and longed to share this stunning news. She needed information. Had Martha witnessed this assassination? The cops really hadn’t told her anything. If they had, she had already forgotten it.

She phoned through to the palliative care unit. “It’s Jean Driscoll. Judge Driscoll’s wife. I’m also Mrs. Van Whyte’s daughter.”

A long silence ensued. “Mrs. Driscoll, I’m not sure if you’ve --”

“I’ve heard. The police were just here. How is Mother?”

“I was down to see her not 10 minutes ago. She’s in intensive care.”

“Intensive care!”

“Yes. But please. I didn’t mean to alarm you. She was taken there as a precaution. She’s resting. Martha’s vital signs are stable.”

“But why did you even take her there? I have to know what happened tonight. Tell me everything that you know.”

“I was called into work after the incident. But from what I’ve learned, one of our nurses came across Judge Driscoll on the floor, beside Mrs. Van Whyte’s bed. You’ll be relieved to know that Martha doesn’t appear to be aware of the murder. But that’s to be expected. I should tell you that according to the notes on her chart, Martha was found passed out. Her blood pressure was dangerously low but it’s back to normal. And she is conscious.”

“Passed out!”

“Yes. We think she may have choked. Apparently a partially disintegrated peppermint was found in her bedding. Here’s something else that you should know. Your husband may well have saved your mother’s life. We discovered an oxygen mask on Martha. It wasn’t on properly, but it might well have saved her just the same.”

That sonofabitch cursed Jean. Philip had gone to Martha’s bedside and upset her with information about the land deal. The news had sent her into a choking fit.

“That’s about all I can offer you. The attending nurses will have more but they’ve been sent home, too upset to continue their shift. That’s why I was called in.”

“So Mother isn’t aware of my husband’s murder? She hasn’t learned anything about Philip?”

“No.”

After a much needed sleep, Ian arose early and found Arlene in the kitchen sipping coffee. “I phoned on a house for rent,” she said. “We can move in at the end of the month. In two weeks. Do you want to see it with me?”

“No. Thanks. I have to get to the bank and then I’m back to Ashbury. I still have to buy some gear. My hockey bag is still at the border.”

“I’d love to see one of your games sometime,” said Arlene.

“Come tonight. We’re each given two tickets for home games right at center ice. One for you and Uncle Pat. They’ll be at the box office. You can rent a car and stay overnight at a hotel.”

“A car and hotel. That’s so expensive, plus meals.”

“Mom, it’s different now. You can do these kinds of things. Plus I’m going to give you enough so that we can pay off all the household bills and your credit card. Enough to stop all the scavengers from bothering you anymore. How much do you need?”

“I just hate to take money from you, but I’m behind nearly \$20,000, said Arlene discomfited.

“I’ll take care of it. There’ll be money in your account today.”

Pat joined them. He had decided to take over Arlene’s unit in Scarlett Heights, and planned to sublet two rooms to friends. Over breakfast, Ian agreed to assist his uncle in setting up a part-time painting business with a gift of \$30,000. Anything to keep Pat occupied.

Ian picked up a ringing phone. It was Heather. “I’m home. I don’t know whether you’ve heard.” She stopped. “My father was murdered last night,” she blurted through tears.

“What? Murdered. How? I mean when? Who?”

“The police think it’s that sniper, the guy who’s been targeting judges.”

Ian stretched the extension over to the kitchen table and sat down. Judge Driscoll had been murdered. “Where?”

“At the hospital. He was visiting my grandma and he was strangled to death. I still can’t believe it.”

“Those things I said about him. I’m sorry.”

“It doesn’t matter. None of that matters.”

“I’m coming over.”

“No. You go back to Ashbury. I know it’s the home opener.”

“When is the funeral?”

“We’re trying for tomorrow.”

“I want to come and see you.”

“No. I’ll be busy helping my mom.”

“But I--”

“Ian, I need to be with my family. Please. I have to go.”

Ian hung up, staggered at Heather’s news. Judge Driscoll. Dead. Murdered. It was unbelievable. He thought about going to the farm anyway and he wanted to tell Manny. No. Not now. Heather had made it very clear that she didn’t want his company. He longed to get his own life back in order—to see his teammates, settle into his dorm and he had to make a huge bank deposit and shop for hockey gear. He would call Manny from Ashbury and he’d see Heather and Jean at the funeral.

Manny’s strength continued to improve. He had left the hospital to deposit his check. Upon his return and after more tests and observation it was decided that he could be fully discharged provided that he had the supervision and care of a live-in nurse for at least two weeks. Calls were made on his behalf, and a caregiver was located.

He rested at home and explored investment opportunities and real estate listings on-line. He decided to stay right in Sutton. He’d purchase a modest condominium, newly built in the north end. Winters would be spent somewhere in Florida.

He called work to acknowledge the flowers and card signed by everyone at the depot that had arrived the day before. He would show his appreciation later in the month by hosting his own retirement party with a lavish spread of food and an open bar.

Arrangements had been made to have his cab returned from the donut shop in Lakefield. Manny had decided that he would sell it and give the money to Call A Cab’s reserve fund used for the annual Christmas party. The Impala rental car had been retrieved from Lotto-Central by a couple of employees at a cost of \$370. He could afford it. Manny figured his windfall, conservatively invested, would earn him more than \$600,000 in interest a year.

He phoned his sister and mother with the thrilling news that neither of them would have to concern themselves with money again. A family trip to Puerto Rico was planned over Christmas where Manny was intent on searching out relatives on his father’s side and a spring trip to Ireland would follow, where his mother’s Irish roots could be explored.

Manny had decided to write generous checks to the Cancer Society and to the Sutton Humane Society. He would give to the homeless, a shelter for abused woman and the Children’s Aid.

He would maintain his private investigator’s license and choose his work carefully. He’d offer to assist police in gathering evidence against those who were suspected of mistreating children, spouses or animals. His surveillance work would be carried out with the latest gadgets available and within the confines of a brand-new Lincoln Continental.

Ian surprised and delighted his bank manager with a \$2 million check. The manager opened a high interest savings account. Later they would discuss possible investments. A transfer of \$250,000 was made to his mother's account. Ian took out \$500 in cash for himself.

One stop later and he purchased the latest hockey equipment available, including new skates. Not just any skates. The best the store had to offer. After much fitting and fussing he was satisfied with their feel. He paid by debit card, and hurried to catch the 1:00 p.m. bus to Ashbury.

It felt so good to return to the university. Word had spread that he had nothing to do with the locker room theft. He was enthusiastically welcomed back by his friends in residence. All the talk was of Heather's father, Pepin and the big game.

Ian and the team arrived to the Coliseum in the vans. The arena's parking lot was already filling up.

Cannon was in his office with the door ajar. Ian knocked and entered. "I saw the newspaper article. Thanks for all your support."

The coach put down a game sheet. "You might have at least returned my call. I phoned your home and left a message."

"I know. You wouldn't believe what's been going on since I got back to Ashbury."

"I have several questions for you. We'll talk later. Right now, you've got a game to think about. Get in there and fire up the team."

Ian went to the locker room and pulled out his skates. It didn't take long before they were noticed. "Holy shit. Logan Ultras. The Blackhawks buy those for you?"

"Sinclair, you win the lottery or something?" Several boys came over to examine the new blades more closely.

Fridge had hung up the brand new Ashbury sweaters along the walls of the locker room. Ian found his number 16 and was shocked and delighted to see that an "A" for assistant captain had been sewn on the upper left side. Ryan Woodsworth had retained his role as team captain. Carlos Martinez had been selected as the other alternate captain.

Ian extended his legs from the bench and struggled to pry on his new skates. He walked around the locker room. It would take time to break them in. He pulled them off and asked Fridge to give them a good sharpen.

After a pre-game warm up the team filed back to the locker room. It was 20 minutes before puck-drop. Coach Cannon was in and out of the room barking last minute reminders of everyone's assignments.

Keith Lawler reported that the building had filled to its capacity of over 10,000 fans. The team finally filed out, met by a deafening ovation, the band in full form, plenty of horns and cow bells as well as loud rock music. Arlene and Pat had promised to come. Ian looked into the stands. There. About ten rows up around the center ice line. Pat was eating popcorn; Arlene looked over the program. After skating around the net a few times, the whistle blew signaling game time. Ian and the others lined the ice and stood impatiently while "The Anthem" was sung by a young woman.

Ian's line was first to start. The Coliseum reverberated with a deafening chant of "Go Cats Go." The puck finally dropped. Ian bolted down his wing looking for a quick pass from Lombardi. There it was, right on the tape. He corralled the puck and deftly

banked it off the boards. He smoothly stepped around a defenseman. He picked up the puck and unleashed a wicked slap shot from the blue line. The puck sailed past the goalie's glove, rattled noisily off the cross bar and into the protective mesh. A chant of "Sinclair, Sinclair" cascaded from the bleachers and reverberated around the old barn's rafters. Fans turned knowingly to each other grinning. No doubt about it. Sinclair was the real deal. A star.

Cannon ordered a quick line change. Ian returned to the bench and casually glanced up at Arlene and Pat who waved. He burst with a pride and warmth that all his money could never buy. Everything was finally right in his world.

The teams traded goals in a wide open game. Ian felt awkward in his new skates and gloves and was unnerved at the screams of encouragement that greeted him every time he went near the puck. He hadn't been spectacular, but had still managed two assists in a 5-4 loss. Although disappointed in defeat, the team took some solace that they had been competitive with last season's NCAA champs. The season held promise.

Following the game, Ian met with reporters who circled him with microphones, cameras and pads of paper. They wanted to know how he felt, how far he thought the team would go, were the Hawks going to invite him to training camp, had the legal problem in Canada affected his game, and on and on.

After they finally left, Ian dawdled in the locker room awaiting some private time with Coach Cannon. He heard raised voices from the hall. "I'm sorry. This is a restricted area." It was Fridge.

"I just want to see Ian Sinclair."

"Yeah, you and ten thousand others."

Ian stuck his head out the door. Manny! "It's all right, Fridge."

Manny walked into the locker room dressed in his blue wind breaker and a ball cap. He was a little pale and had clearly lost weight. He clasped a cane but appeared steady. "They let me go home. I've got a personal nurse. Not really necessary, but the doctor insisted. She's in the lobby," he said a mile a minute. "Good looking, too."

"So she drove you here?"

"Nope. We came in style. I hired Call A Cab's stretch-limo so I can sleep on the way home. I'm not big on hotels. The game was sold out but I paid a scalper for a couple of tickets. Good ones. Amazing what money can do," chuckled Manny. "You looked pretty good out there."

"We should have won, but we'll get better. This is so amazing. Thanks for coming. It means a lot to me. You sure you're feeling all right?"

"I still get headaches, and I'm a little weak but nothing I can't handle. By the way, I've quit smoking. A concussion will do that for you." He hesitated and said, "I guess you've heard about Driscoll."

"Yeah. I still can't believe it."

"I saw Jean. She had to identify his body, and then she dropped up to see me. I feel sorry for Heather and Adam. How is she doing, Heather?"

"Hard to say. I'll be seeing her at the funeral. It's tomorrow afternoon. I'm going to buy a suit first thing in the morning. Will you be there?"

"I had thought of going for Jean, but no. I won't be attending. I wouldn't be able to handle listening to anything good that might be said about Driscoll."

“That’s understandable.” Ian tugged at some tape on his stick. “I just want to thank you again. For everything. With your reward, I bought these new skates and we’re moving from Scarlett Heights. My mother wanted to thank you as well.”

“Just don’t let the money change you. Get your degree and see where the hockey leads. I’ll let you finish up here before your personal body guard throws me out.”

Ian broke up in laughter. “He’s our equipment manager. Let’s stay in touch. I’ll see you back in Sutton. I’ll call you. I promise.”

“I’ll be around.”

Ian showered and dressed. Coach Cannon walked in. “Good start,” he said.

“My timing was off and I missed a couple of really good chances.”

“Don’t panic. It’ll come.”

Ian wiped the blades of his skates dry before speaking. “I’ve been waiting to tell you something. Remember that ticket, the one I gave you for safe-keeping?”

“Yes. Whatever happened to it? You get a windfall?”

“Actually, yes. The man who came and got me from the border was a guy I met last week. He, or I should say, the ticket, was the main reason I took off.”

“I’m listening.”

“The guy’s name is Manny Boyce. He was just in here. It’s a complicated story, but the ticket I found was worth \$25 million and he gave me a \$2 million reward for it.”

“Two million!”

“Yes. But please, don’t tell anyone.”

Cannon sat down on the bench beside Ian. “That’s incredible. I’m very happy for you. Is someone looking after all that money for you?”

“I trust the bank. It’s in a savings account. I’ll make some safe investments later. But there’s something I’m going to do with it that involves you.”

“I know! You’re going to get me that Porsche. Remember?”

“Yeah. I hadn’t forgotten,” answered Ian, “but I know you were kidding.”

“Was I?”

“I’m not getting you a car, but I’ve decided to contribute enough money to create another hockey scholarship. Enough to pay for a full year’s tuition and expenses. It will be in your name.”

Cannon let this news sink in. He teared up and stood, his face flushed. “That’s very generous, Ian. I’ve always wanted to do more in that area. Could you name it in memory of my father, Hugh Cannon? He died last year. He always supported the Wildcats. Never missed a game.”

“Of course. And you can decide who gets the scholarship. It’s just a way of paying back. If I hadn’t received a scholarship I’d never have been able to come to Ashbury. I’m going to talk to the University later in the week. I’ll donate enough so that the interest will pay for a year’s tuition and expenses. Plus people can add to it.”

Cannon left the locker room abruptly. A few seconds went by before he reappeared. “By the way, next game I want you to do some back-checking. My grandmother shows more hustle. And try and get your shots on the net.”

Ian grinned and shook his head. Always the tough guy.

Fifty-Three

The bells of St. Alban's Episcopal Church tolled at 4:00 p.m. heralding the commencement of Judge Philip Driscoll's funeral.

The church was a commanding structure built of red sandstone, accented with elaborate plaster cornices and a dramatic black slate roof. The bell tower was topped by a soaring copper clad steeple, which had dominated Sutton's skyline more than a hundred years after it was built.

Pews fashioned from oak creaked and groaned. The church's magnificent pipe organ was played reverently.

Philip's funeral had brought out hundreds. Justices from the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, the Chief Justice of the District Court, and representatives from the Superior, Trial and Municipal Courts were some of the notables in attendance.

Well over a hundred attorneys, the mayor, council members, representatives from four police detachments dressed in their most official regalia, as well as family and friends filled the church to capacity. The custodial staff scrambled to bring in extra chairs for the late-comers and unfolded them hurriedly in the wings.

Lavish floral arrangements adorned the front of the church and its altar. Philip's body lay within a gleaming cherry-wood casket at the front of the chancel. Its lid was closed. Jean hoped the congregation noticed and appreciated the casket's "unassuming elegance" as expressed by the funeral director, especially seeing as she had decided to have Philip cremated and that the coffin was destined to end up in a blast furnace. Such a waste, she thought. But then again, no more so than burying the \$5,000 container within the damp ground.

Perhaps she should have simply put Philip in a cardboard box. That might have made an interesting statement. But Heather and Adam would have been mortified. The funeral expenses weren't an issue. They would be easily covered by Philip's life insurance.

The rector at St. Albans had welcomed the opportunity to showcase his church to the well-heeled congregation that he knew would attend. He had hastily arranged for the church's full choir to partake including a fine baritone soloist. It wouldn't hurt that the Bishop would witness an inspiring service; there was a position for Deacon that the rector hoped to secure.

Jean, Adam and Heather sat in the front pew to the right of the altar. Behind them, a sea of dark suits and dresses.

Jean wore a simple black outfit, which matched her shoes and sunglasses. Given the occasion, the dark glasses seemed appropriate—a fitting prop for the grieving widow. Ironic, she thought looking through the gloom. People assumed she was masking her eyes, no doubt bloodshot and puffy from hours of weeping at the loss of her beloved husband, when in reality she was trying to conceal a black eye inflicted in anger by Philip's fist.

Heather had come across the published account of her father's disgraced exit in a police cruiser from the courthouse. Because Jean had never been named as a complainant,

and thinking it unseemly to vilify Philip, Jean had explained the article away as a false accusation made by a disgruntled clerk. As far as Heather and Adam knew, their mother's black eye was the result of her having banged into a corner of an upper kitchen cupboard. Those who knew the truth, or at least had suspicions about what had happened in his chambers, including the police, were far more absorbed by Philip's brutal slaughter. Jean's assertion that Philip had punched her in the nose was a closed file.

And so Judge Driscoll was eulogized as a dedicated and talented public servant, praised as a loving father and husband who had tragically been cut down in the prime of life by madman.

There were the customary platitudes—that Philip had crammed in more living over his 53 years than many who lived to 90—that there was a reason for his untimely death that would be one day revealed by a higher power. The minister had also acknowledged that Philip must be in heaven because, "God took only the best." Jean had nearly choked on that one.

The proceedings droned on and on. Jean listened distractedly to the interminable prayers, incomprehensible Lessons and perfunctory Responses, her mind elsewhere.

The police had been wonderful, having driven Adam and Heather back to the farm. Adam had arrived first. When presented with the news he had stared disbelievingly at first, and then had kicked out angrily at the kitchen table. Tears had flowed, followed by much time spent in his room. Jean had felt absolutely helpless. It was one thing to tell a child that a parent had died of disease or even a car accident, but to explain that his father had been murdered added so many complex dimensions. It was all so very sordid. She had booked an appointment with a psychologist to help both Adam and Heather cope. The first meeting was in three days.

Heather had been brought to the farm a couple of hours later knowing of course that something calamitous had happened. Her first reaction too had been that of incredulity, followed by anger and inconsolable grief.

Eventually they had emerged from their bedrooms and had joined their mother in the kitchen. Jean had asked for their feedback in planning the funeral—anything to keep them busy. Together they wrote an obituary and collected some photos to be set up at the church. It had been well past 3:00 a.m. by the time anyone had gone to bed.

After a short sleep Jean, Heather and Adam had gone to the funeral home. While Jean met with the funeral director, Heather and Adam had occupied themselves by choosing their father's casket. Jean had decided against a visitation, and had startled the funeral director by insisting that Philip's funeral be held the following day. He had obliged and had taken full responsibility in planning everything—from getting the obituary to the paper, to conferring with the rector at St. Alban's.

Word of Philip's murder had quickly spread by word of mouth, radio and newspapers. Well-wishers had inundated the farmhouse bringing with them food and flowers and cards. The phone had rung incessantly. A family friend had taken Heather shopping for a funeral dress. Several of Adam's friends had come by and had gathered with him in the rec-room.

Jean studied the large hand-crafted stained glass window which dominated the front of the church. Striking images of Jesus, Mary and other biblical figures were illumined by the brilliant morning sun. Deep reds, blues and greens danced about the white linens spread across the altar.

The staff from palliative had been exceedingly kind. They had supervised Martha's transfer to the Sunshine Center and had settled her in. Her mother had appeared stronger; her color much improved in the spacious private room. Physiotherapists had managed to coax her out of bed. With a nurse's assistance she could utilize her private washroom. A small step but progress nonetheless.

Martha enjoyed the food and appeared to be gaining mental clarity, even managing to follow the news for a few minutes on a big screen TV supplied in every room. Her dialysis was undertaken just one floor above. Sleep still dominated her life, but she was comfortable—at peace, and free of pain. It was all that Jean had hoped for.

When told about Philip, her mother had cried. More than once she had declared “Philip was such a good man. He was always so concerned about my affairs, and “we’ll all meet again in heaven.” She vaguely recalled that Philip had visited her recently but was blissfully unaware of his slaying at the foot of her bed.

Jean's mind continued to wander. The FBI had reached her at the farm just before lunch. Philip's murderer, a D'Arcy Rohmer, had been captured at 6:00 a.m. that morning. Elaborate security measures planned at the church, which had included metal detectors, had been called off. The sergeant had described the assassin as a 26 year old sharpshooter gone AWOL from the air force. He had served three tours of duty in Iraq.

From his cell, Rohmer had apparently screamed incessantly about the liberal judiciary, their complete disregard for family values—his obsession at killing judges provoked and directed by subliminal messages from conservative talk show hosts and televangelists.

Clearly insane, thought Jean as she shifted in the uncomfortable pew. Another mentally damaged member of the armed forces lacking adequate medical care and direction. If the draft were ever reinstated she would see to it that Adam would never get dragged into some futile war. They'd move to Canada first.

Another hymn. Jean dutifully stood and mouthed the words but barely sang, her attention focused on Heather and Adam. It was hard to tell, but her children appeared to be bearing up surprisingly well—the touching recollections and flattering words about their father plus the support of many friends were providing a source of comfort to them.

Trying not to look too obvious, Jean casually turned and looked behind her dark glasses to scan the nearby pews, curious at who had come. She spotted Ian just three rows back standing and singing with some other young people. He was wearing what was obviously a brand new and very fashionable navy suit. So handsome, she thought, and spending his new found wealth already. She was happy for him. He'd probably never had a nice suit. Both she and Ian were both deeply indebted to Manny. His recompense had been so extremely generous.

Jean glanced over to Philip's elderly father who was being comforted by her sister-in-law. She had always quite liked him. She would make a point of seeing him after the service.

The hymn ended, the congregation sat. Jean reached for the order of service having mentally checked off each lesson, prayer and hymn as they concluded. Good. The end was finally in sight.

Following some final prayers over Philip's coffin, the service at last concluded, marked by the dramatic chords of the recessional hymn, the powerful organ filling its 400 pipes.

The clergy and the choir filed out, hymn books held high, singing strongly. Philip's casket followed, pushed by two funeral attendants with Jean, Heather and Adam close behind walking with their heads low avoiding sympathetic stares. Jean acknowledged those closest to the aisle with some quick nods.

The pallbearers, who included Deputy Bleeker, a first cousin, the chief of police, and District Attorney Lubinowski, loaded Philip's casket into a long limousine to be taken to the crematorium. Jean planned to have his ashes buried at a later date in a private ceremony.

Heather, Adam and Jean climbed into the rear of another waiting limousine. Police formed an honor guard along the streets of Sutton and saluted as the procession passed by.

From start to finish, Philip's funeral had been a send-off befitting a hero.

Jean had invited a few dozen selected guests back to the farm following the service. While the funeral service was underway, the local farm community had loaded the dining room table with enough salads, lasagna, casseroles, cold cuts, bread, pies and cakes to feed a small city—as though in the course of mourning the guests were sure to have worked up insatiable appetites.

Jean greeted the company as gracefully as she could manage. She tried to eat a sandwich but didn't have an appetite. What she really craved was some time to herself—to escape from the mind numbing condolences from well meaning friends.

She left the throng downstairs for the peace of her bedroom. Jean surveyed the room while lighting a cigarette. The police had returned Philip's wallet. It sat on her dresser. She had already begun emptying his closet of several suits, dozens of shirts, ties and shoes but she had given up. It had proved to have been a highly personal and an unexpectedly emotional endeavor.

Her rancor towards Philip had been tempered to some extent upon his murder. No one deserved such a violent demise. Perhaps it had been the dozens of cards, letters and anecdotes attesting to Philip's sense of humor, his warmth, bright legal mind, and his love for their children that had lessened the acrimony. Maybe it had been Adam's and Heather's heartbreaking tears at the loss of their father that had helped her somehow soften the utter loathing she had held for the man, and maybe the fact that he hadn't actually driven them all to the poorhouse had made her reminiscences of him bearable.

Her mind-set towards him—the events of recent days was agonizingly conflicted. Perhaps her drinking had made the marriage unbearable. Had she been unnecessarily malicious towards him? *“First the trial. Then a conviction. Disbarment will follow, then a long prison sentence.”* Had it really been necessary to taunt him so? Philip had to have been so terrified at the prospect of utter ruin. Had Philip tried to scream in vain as his neck was slowly crushed? Had he suffered terribly before death had set in? She would never know.

Absorbed by a melancholic sense of loss, Jean wandered over to the closet and pulled out Philip's favorite linen shirt. It had been custom made and monogrammed, a Christmas present from Heather two or three years earlier. Heather had been so excited at her selection having chosen the pale blue fabric and monogram pattern herself. Philip had

always said it was his favorite and had only worn it on special occasions. The funeral home had asked for some clothes. She should have taken his special shirt. Instead she had simply pulled out the first dark suit and white shirt that she had found. They had no significance whatsoever. Maybe he would have liked to have been dressed in his judicial robes.

Overwhelmed by the knowledge that Heather and Adam would never see their father again, that Philip had been the only man she had ever loved and that he had betrayed her so—that trusting in anyone again was an improbable hope—and that she might well be destined to living out her life alone, Jean clutched the shirt, collapsed on the bed and finally wept.

Twenty minutes passed. She heard someone asking for her whereabouts. Much as she wanted to simply crawl into bed, she had to get back to the guests. It was important that she at least appear somewhat composed for Heather and Adam. She freshened up and took the back stairs to the kitchen.

The farmhouse was filled with much laughter. Loud attorneys fueled by wine regaled each other with yarns about Philip's days at law school, his career as a D.A. and his memorable judgments. She acknowledged more condolences and sought out and spoke briefly with Philip's father who sat on the sofa looking dazed, a cane between his legs. Heather and Adam were downstairs with their friends. Farm women passed around trays of sandwiches, pickles and cookies. Others poured coffee from an urn.

Among the invited was Philip's secretary who spotted and intercepted Jean from the kitchen. "I dropped by the courthouse early this morning to take care of some correspondence." She removed an envelope from her purse. "Some kid gave this to Security about 8:30 a.m. He said a stranger had paid him \$20 to drop it off. I have a feeling who it's from," she added.

Jean accepted the envelope, addressed to *The Judge's Widow* in bold typed letters. She returned to the privacy of her bedroom; lit a cigarette and set it in an ashtray on her dresser. She tore open the mysterious letter.

I seen the obit in the Wednesday newspaper. I want you to know that the judge wasn't so great. In fact I caught him standing over an old lady jamming a pillow into her face. That's right. That judge was trying to kill her but I put a stop to that.

Jean gasped, took the letter to the edge of her bed and dared to read on.

You want some proof that I saw him with that pillow? Well I'll tell you something that only I could know. You see after I took care of the judge I grabbed the overhead air mask and threw it on the old woman's face before I took off. I tried to help her. Go ahead ask someone. They'll tell you that she had a mask on. If you still don't believe I was there, she had on a yellow gown and there were peppermints on her table and on the floor. I watched Phillip at his farm. I followed him to Oak Leaf, and I followed him to the hospital. It was his first late-night visit there. His black Dodge van was real easy to spot. Nobody's going to kill God's Creations early. The judge probably called it death with dignity but it's against God's word. All them liberal judges who want to change the laws and make the killings legal have to be stopped. So that's what I done. I strangled him.

There's an old woman still alive because of me. I stopped the killing. I done her a big favor. I thought you had to know. Remember what Jesus taught us. "The truth shall set your free."

Jean clutched the letter and read it again. *Philip had tried to murder her mother.* She believed every word. There was absolutely no reason not to. Martha hadn't simply suffered from some kind of choking spell or panic attack. The bastard had tried to suffocate her. With her mother dead Philip could have claimed that Martha had given him permission to buy the land. He'd have beaten any charges laid against him. But murder? Yes murder. The man behind those expensive dark suits, good looks, charm and prestigious position was far worse than a manipulative lying cheat. He had been capable of far greater wickedness than she could ever have imagined.

She sucked back more smoke, laid the note beside her and considered the bizarre turn of events.

Philip's terror at facing prison had driven him to the bedside of a helpless elderly woman intent on cruelly silencing her. Instead, he himself had been killed by a deranged right-wing religious zealot. One man intent on killing entirely motivated by his own self-preservation. The other, having been driven to kill by an insane fanaticism to preserve the life of the unborn and the dying. Ironically he had succeeded. Of the two men, who was more evil—more twisted? It didn't really matter.

Jean stood from her bed and crumpled up the note. A sense of calm encompassed her with the knowledge that justice had been served. Philip had received exactly as he had deserved. There was no need to mourn his death. More importantly she had lost all desire to do so. She embraced the reality that the truth had, in fact, set her free. Gone were any nagging regrets that Philip would forever be absent from Heather's and Adam's lives. They were far better off without him. Nevertheless, this secret, this terrible truth about their father, would never be revealed to her children. In their eyes Philip had been a compassionate man, who despite his demanding schedule had still found time to keep vigil over their ill grandmother. Their illusionary recollections of Philip's benevolent nature—so dreadfully blemished—would nonetheless remain untarnished.

Jean took the note to her en-suite bathroom. She held out her lighter and ignited an edge of the sniper's note. She extended the smoldering paper over the toilet and dropped it in the bowl. Water extinguished fire with a steaming hiss. The note partially sank. A quick flush and what remained of the charred ashes spun about before vanishing forever.

Fifty-Four

Jean fell into a deep sleep following Philip's wake. The funeral and reception had left her physically and emotionally exhausted.

She was up by six. Heather had insisted on returning to Ashbury. Jean drove her downtown in time for the Saturday morning bus while Adam slept in.

Back at the farm, she sat at the kitchen table making a list. There was much to do. As executor, she would have to cancel Philip's credit cards and insurance policies, and close bank accounts. The funeral home had to be paid, the van's ownership and registration changed to her name before it could be sold. Philip's will would have to be reviewed. She would have to look into Philip's pension, and she still had to move \$1.3 million dollars into Martha's account. She would have to visit the courthouse and retrieve Philip's personal effects from his chambers. Closing down Philip's life would take time. Then there was that damned land he had purchased. Title would have to be transferred into her name. Great. One hundred and thirty-five acres of pasture land, all hers.

Feeling somewhat beleaguered at the tasks before her, she busied herself with less onerous chores and was at the sink washing glass casserole bowls and containers when the phone rang.

It was Sutton's police chief. "I'm wondering how you are?"

"We're managing, thank you."

"The funeral was truly a magnificent send-off."

"Please extend our appreciation to your department for participating. I'll be sending a note."

"If there is anything that you need, please don't hesitate to ask."

"Thank you. I appreciate the call. Before you go, there's something that's been bothering me. This is a little awkward, but as you know, Rohmer strangled Philip and broke his neck. Do you think it was instant? Would Philip have suffered?"

Odd question. The chief had no idea. "I'm sure it was very quick. But--"

"Yes?"

"This is just me speaking. The investigation has concluded, but I find it odd that Rohmer would have strangled Philip. He always used a gun."

"A gun would have attracted attention," said Jean. "But that's obvious. I'm not sure what you're getting at. The murderer has been caught. I was informed of that before the funeral. From the FBI no less."

"He clearly killed Judge Collins and Judge Snell. He has admitted to the murders. He has also confessed to having wounded Judge Kirkby. He really didn't have a choice. Rohmer's prints were matched to a sniper rifle found in his Chevette which was stolen by some young people from a Wal-Mart parking lot last week. Ballistics show it was the gun used to kill the judges. He knows he's going to jail for life. But why would he vehemently deny having killed Philip?"

"I have no idea. More to the point, why is the FBI convinced it was Rohmer?"

"Because less than an hour before your husband was killed, a security guard at the courthouse phoned in a description and tag number of a suspicious vehicle that had

wheeled around the premises. A pumpkin-orange pick-up. Pretty hard to miss. Rohmer was pulled over in a matching vehicle outside of Albany, New York. There's more. A parking lot attendant at Sutton Memorial reports having seen the same vehicle leave the hospital in a real hurry right after the cops were called upon the discovery of Philip's body. The parking guy remembers because Rohmer wheeled right past the booth without paying."

"That sounds conclusive. Rohmer was not only at the courthouse but obviously at the hospital."

"I'm having a problem with the time line. Records show that a nurse placed a 911 call at 12:15 a.m. after she discovered your husband on the floor. I'm assuming that the murder took place at least five minutes before that at 12:10 a.m. Let's assume it took the cops five minutes to arrive. Why would Rohmer have murdered someone at 12:10 a.m. then have stuck around the hospital lot until 12:20 a.m. It was almost as if he were waiting for the cops to arrive. It doesn't make sense."

It was Rohmer, Jean wanted to say. He sent me a note in which he described Philip's attempt on Mother's life—a secret that will never be revealed to you, and more importantly, to Adam or Heather. Rohmer had been in Martha's room. He had even described Martha's nightgown and various things around her bed. "Fascinating, I'm sure, but I want to put the murder behind me as best I can. Is there anything else?"

"Can you think of anyone who might have wanted your husband dead?"

Have you got half an hour, thought Jean. Plenty of pens and notepads. Perhaps a computer with a zillion gigabytes of memory to hold all the names? "Your question is absurd. You, of all people should realize that my husband sentenced many people to prison. It could have been anyone."

"That's precisely my point. Are you aware of any threats that were made against him?"

"No," said Jean sharply.

"I apologize if I've touched a nerve. Just my own curiosity. Consider it a closed case."

"Don't patronize me. I have the distinct impression that you're skeptical of the FBI's findings."

"No, not really. Their Violent Fugitives Task Force is superb. I'm just naturally curious. It comes with the job. That being said, there were no prints lifted of any value, no witnesses, security camera video—nothing to implicate anyone else other than Rohmer."

Jean poured a coffee and lit a smoke, annoyed and somewhat rattled by the chief's call. Who else but Rohmer could it have possibly been? Philip had been stalked by him as had the other justices. Rohmer had been described as a highly skilled military man. He would certainly have had the training necessary to inflict deadly force with his hands.

She took her coffee out to the patio and selected a chair facing the sun. Niggling doubts surfaced. Perhaps a doctor or nurse, or maybe a patient or a visitor had stumbled across Philip as he had stuffed a pillow in Martha's face, and, in turn, had strangled him? A possibility, she allowed, but highly unlikely. Besides there was that note.

More questions. Maybe someone had impersonated Rohmer in that note replete with references to "liberal judges rewriting God's sacred words," and other such rhetoric. Rohmer's views on such matters were common knowledge, having been plastered across

the newspaper. Maybe that same individual fully expected that she would have shown the cops the note to the police, in turn prompting a quick conclusion to the investigation. Despite the fact that the individual had saved Martha, no one would want to have been implicated in killing a judge.

Jean went back to the kitchen to add more cream to her coffee. It had to have been Rohmer. The note revealed that he was aware that Philip drove a van. A black Dodge van, at that. No doctor, nurse, patient or visitor who had just happened on the scene could possibly have known that information. Rohmer had intimate knowledge of Philip's comings and goings and had even spotted him in Oak Leaf. And his note had clearly stated that it had been Philip's first late-night visit to the room. To the best of her knowledge, that was true. There was no doubt about it. Phillip had been hunted and slain by D'Arcy Rohmer, and the FBI concurred. She wouldn't give it further thought.

After Forensics had swept, dusted, and photographed the murder scene in room 201 of palliative care, the criss-crossed yellow police line ribbons were removed from its doorway. Patients were returned and tucked back into familiar beds where they carried on the business of dying. The bed that Martha had occupied was stripped of its sheets, lying in wait for the next short-lived occupant.

Across the room, the old woman with the long gray hair continued to hack, rattle, gag and gurgle, but with less vigor as hours passed. She was attended to by her son, who, as always, had arrived by midnight and would devotedly hold vigil through early morning hours.

A nurse came by, clipboard tucked at her side. "How is she?"

"The same. How much longer?"

She grasped a skinny wrist and searched for a pulse. "Her heart rate is weak, breathing, irregular. It could be a matter of hours, to a day or so."

"She's such a fighter."

The nurse set the patient's arm down gently. She turned to the old woman's son and said quietly, "You can tell your mother that it's all right for her to let go. Sometimes the dying need that permission."

"I think my father should be the one to tell her that."

"Of course."

"It's so unfair. She's going to die from water right out of a tap." He looked across the room. "Where's the woman who was in that bed?"

"Martha? She's been moved to a senior's center."

The nurse referred to her clipboard. "Your father is listed as next of kin. Should I call him first if something were to happen if neither of you are here?"

"No. He's 88 years old and sleeps deeply. Phone me. Here's the number."

She began to write on the clipboard and stopped. "I apologize. I've forgotten your first name."

"It's Douglas. Douglas Pringle."

Fifty-Four

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More questions. Maybe someone had impersonated Rohmer in that note replete with references to "liberal judges rewriting God's sacred words," and other such rhetoric. Rohmer's views on such matters were common knowledge, having been plastered across

the newspaper. Maybe that same individual fully expected that she would have shown the cops the note to the police, in turn prompting a quick conclusion to the investigation. Despite the fact that the individual had saved Martha, no one would want to have been implicated in killing a judge.

Jean went back to the kitchen to add more cream to her coffee. It had to have been Rohmer. The note revealed that he was aware that Philip drove a van. A black Dodge van, at that. No doctor, nurse, patient or visitor who had just happened on the scene could possibly have known that information. Rohmer had intimate knowledge of Philip's comings and goings and had even spotted him in Oak Leaf. And his note had clearly stated that it had been Philip's first late-night visit to the room. To the best of her knowledge, that was true. There was no doubt about it. Phillip had been hunted and slain by D'Arcy Rohmer, and the FBI concurred. She wouldn't give it further thought.

After Forensics had swept, dusted, and photographed the murder scene in room 201 of palliative care, the criss-crossed yellow police line ribbons were removed from its doorway. Patients were returned and tucked back into familiar beds where they carried on the business of dying. The bed that Martha had occupied was stripped of its sheets, lying in wait for the next short-lived occupant.

Across the room, the old woman with the long gray hair continued to hack, rattle, gag and gurgle, but with less vigor as hours passed. She was attended to by her son, who, as always, had arrived by midnight and would devotedly hold vigil through early morning hours.

A nurse came by, clipboard tucked at her side. "How is she?"

"The same. How much longer?"

She grasped a skinny wrist and searched for a pulse. "Her heart rate is weak, breathing, irregular. It could be a matter of hours, to a day or so."

"She's such a fighter."

The nurse set the patient's arm down gently. She turned to the old woman's son and said quietly, "You can tell your mother that it's all right for her to let go. Sometimes the dying need that permission."

"I think my father should be the one to tell her that."

"Of course."

"It's so unfair. She's going to die from water right out of a tap." He looked across the room. "Where's the woman who was in that bed?"

"Martha? She's been moved to a senior's center."

The nurse referred to her clipboard. "Your father is listed as next of kin. Should I call him first if something were to happen if neither of you are here?"

"No. He's 88 years old and sleeps deeply. Phone me. Here's the number."

She began to write on the clipboard and stopped. "I apologize. I've forgotten your first name."

"It's Douglas. Douglas Pringle."