



Morris Parker, ex-soldier, family man, and hardworking businessman, has put his nose where it does not belong. His comfortable routine of work, home life, and weekly boys night out is about to end.

This thriller has men who usually listen to their wives, awkward moments, computers, a coffee pot, date rape, bribes, Molotov cocktails, piglets, PowerPoint slides, heroin addiction, utility programming, geeks in Las Vegas, lunch with a prostitute, a car chase, parachute jumps, a drum solo, snipers, swine flu, the Boston Marathon, the American Revolution, and a satisfying post-climax

final scene where a minor but significant character gets her revenge.

"Are you a shooter?"
"Years ago. Lately, I've been more of a target," said Morris.

See inside for story outline
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BACON BOXCUTTERS

a novel by
Jim E.M. Miles

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a novel by **JIM E.M. MILES**

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a First Novel by
Jim E.M. Miles

This novel has men who usually listen to their wives, awkward moments, computers, a coffee pot, date rape, bribes, Blackberry smartphones, Molotov cocktails, piglets, PowerPoint slides, heroin addiction, utility programming, geeks in Las Vegas, lunch with a prostitute, a car chase, parachute jumps, a drum solo, snipers, swine flu, the Boston Marathon, the American Revolution, and a satisfying post-climax final scene where a minor but significant character gets her revenge.

Morris Parker, ex-soldier, family man, and hardworking businessman, has put his nose where it does not belong. His comfortable routine of work, home life, and weekly boys night out is about to end.

Ed Smitt is ex-US Special Forces. Jacques Tremblay used to command a French Canadian Infantry Battalion. The Wednesday night beer buddies intervene in a robbery at the The Cumberland Arms pub. In self-defense, Morris kills the young gang member who is shooting at him. The police charge him with murder. Morris must rely on his business resources – and his good friends – to try and clear his name.

Morris discovers he was set up to take the fall by a dirty cop. Then he learns he is facing more than just a local gang. He is up against a vicious international criminal

operation that is set on killing him and his family to stop him from finding out more.

Unable to trust the police, Morris and friends decide to take up arms and fight for information. Their investigations lead them to a remote camp in Northern Ontario, where a bio-terrorist group has found a simple method to develop a deadly new virus.

The more he learns, the more danger he encounters, and Morris and his team must ultimately choose between self-preservation and self-sacrifice. The world faces a frightening new weapon of mass destruction.

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This .pdf has bookmarks to assist in navigation.

Bacon Boxcutters

by Jim E.M. Miles

www.BaconBoxcutters.com

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Blackberry reader: Ray DeBruyn, Enterprise Information Systems, Inc.

Some of the events described happened as related, others were expanded and changed. Some of the individuals portrayed are composites of more than one person and many names and identifying characteristics have been changed as well.

"This is a work of fiction. No reference to any person, living or dead, is intended or implied. Some of the author's documented personal experience in business dealings with certain individuals has been exaggerated and used as a basis to portray bad behavior on the part of the antagonists in this story."

Acknowledgements

In the summer of 2009 I re-discovered reading on the back deck of our home in Orleans. One of several books I read that summer was *A Time to Kill* by John Grisham, which includes an author's note describing how he wrote the book by doing a few pages a day with the objective of simply completing it.

I undertook this novel with the same objective. Thanks to some vital early encouragement from my daughter Stephanie, I produced the first ten chapters in about a month. I then realized I could probably complete the task. So I set a deadline of four months, aiming to finish before my birthday.

My Dad agreed to proofread chapters as they came out, and his encouragement and feedback served to further motivate me. I also recruited other family, friends and co-workers to provide input.

As the book neared completion, my brother-in-law Ben read almost fifty chapters in two days. He told me the chapters worked well, making him want to keep reading, and the story read like a movie.

I missed my deadline by several days, writing "the end" on 16 December, after starting on 12 August.

I continue to get encouragement and feedback as I prepare my attempt to self-publish. I plan to simultaneously send the manuscript out the conventional path and collect rejections from agents and publishers, so that local encouragement is vital.

Thanks to Garth, Rick, Pat and Jim for being the inspiration for the Wednesday night heroes in this story.

Thanks to Kim, Deb, Ron, Valerie, Pete, Caroline and the other family members who will participate in the coming weeks with continued interest, questions, and contributions.

Thanks to Ray, Suzanne, Wayne, Sam and Cathleen for their opinions and ideas.

And thanks especially to Thérèse for being as patient as possible in giving me time to complete the challenge. While I was chasing this dream, she had to watch the store. She is baking for Christmas as I write this.

I'm done, dear; we can paint the living room now.

Jim E.M. Miles,
Orleans, December 2009

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Jim E.M. Miles

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PROLOGUE

Jaleel looked at the gauge on his air supply. It was finally empty. He had no choice but to remove his helmet and breathe the contaminated air.

He did it decisively, sucking in a lungful.

“Mohamed,” he said. “I have removed my helmet.”

“Your spirit pulls you upward,” said Mohamed through the intercom speaker. “You are immune to the downward pull of the material world.”

Jaleel did not want the others to find him in this humiliating position. He wanted to do what must be done before they returned. “I am ready.”

“The camera is running,” said Mohamed.

There had been no blank tapes available for weeks – all the existing tapes had been filled with testimonials and pledges of *bayt al-ridwan*, named after the garden in Paradise reserved for the prophets and the martyrs.

Now was no time for doubts. Jaleel decided not to ask Mohamed where he had found a blank tape.

Jaleel drew his pistol and disengaged the safety catch. He stood like a soldier, helmet under one arm, back straight, and placed the muzzle of the pistol against his temple.

“May Allah be with you. May Allah give you success so that you may achieve Paradise,” said Jaleel.

“Wait!” Mohamed exclaimed. “Your testament, Jaleel.”

Good. Now Jaleel was certain that Mohamed would not lie about having a tape in the camera at a time like this.

“This is my free decision, and I urge my friends to follow. We will meet in Paradise.”

“Farewell. Your wait is over.”

“*Allahu akbar.*” With a smooth, steady squeeze, Jaleel unflinchingly fired the pistol into the side of his head.

BANG.

Jaleel’s lifeless body collapsed into the straw.

The loud noise startled the six small pigs, and their biosensors recorded a sudden, temporary increase in heart rate.

PART ONE – CEO IN TROUBLE



1 – BOYS BEING BOYS: A GUNFIGHT

Morris Parker arrived at the Cumberland Arms at precisely 2030 hours – also known as 8:30 PM – Wednesday. It was his usual time. He nodded to the bartender. After seven years of weekly visits, Morris still could not remember the bartender's name, because he never sat at the bar.

Morris saw that his regular table in the corner booth was already occupied, which was unusual. Morris and his army buddies occupied that space almost every Wednesday night. He decided to wait for the others to arrive, and seek consensus on selecting another table.

“Buddy, that seat's taken, eh?” stated a voice from behind as Morris was about to take a seat at the bar. Morris turned to see two broad-shouldered guys in leather jackets. They were just returning from the washroom.

Morris nodded and chose another seat farther down. A pair of tough assholes, he thought. The Arms does not normally attract the Beavis and Butthead Biker type. Beavis was arrogant and stupid looking – a real dick.

The bartender did not notice Morris waiting. Angela, a pretty, 20-something blond waitress in a short tartan skirt, had seen him come in. She had poured him a pint of Keith's Red Amber Ale, and had it ready on her tray.

“How are you tonight, good looking?” she asked, as she served him the frosted mug and a smile.

Morris could not remember the name of the bartender, but he could recall the names of several waitresses who had served him and his buddies over the years. Angela had been working Wednesdays for almost two years now, as she paid her way through nursing school.

“Cold beer!” Morris grasped the handle on the mug, feeling the cool glass in his hand. “And a warm smile. Thank-you, Angela. I am well. And you?”

“It’s been a long day.” Angela looked around, checking for the owner. Not seeing him anywhere, she sat down next to Morris, and put her tray on the bar. “I’ve been on my feet all day, doing rounds at the Ottawa Civic.”

“You graduate soon,” said Morris.

“Thank God for that.”

“Here’s to you.” Morris raised his mug, then brought it to his lips and tipped it back, taking three deep pulls. “Ahhh.”

Morris wiped his moustache with the back of his hand, and turned to Angela. “You look different.” Morris looked at her hair.

Angela raised her eyebrows. “Go on....”

“Your hair. Did you cut it?”

She rolled her eyes. “Buzz. Wrong answer.”

Morris winced.

“Are you this observant with your wife? Of course you are.”

Morris took another swig of beer, suddenly feeling some pressure. “Was it a color change?”

“Maybe. Is that your final answer?”

Morris looked at her, trying to read her poker face. “Yes, I’ll go with a color change.”

Angela smiled and shook her bangs out of her eyes. They immediately fell back in place, partially masking a blue-eyed, steady gaze. “You are... *correct*. Now tell me what the color *used* to be.”

“That’s easy.” Morris reached for the beer nuts. “You used to be brunette.”

“Yes.” Angela looked sideways to show Morris her profile, and began teasing her hair. “Now, for one million dollars, tell me when did this major motion picture change occur?”

Wow, thought Morris. She looks like a movie star. “Hmmm. Could we make this multiple choice?”

“Not this game.” Angela turned her head back to face Morris, and looked at her watch. “This game is timed.”

Morris started to squirm.

Angela noticed his discomfort, and batted her eyes to increase it.

Morris realized his underarm antiperspirant was about to fail.

“The pressure... the pressure!” Morris held his hands to his head and slowly said: “Head... must... not... explode....” Then he blurted out: “Last Wednesday you were brunette, now you’re blonde. Final answer.”

“Buzz.” Angela frowned. “I changed it two months ago,”

“Oops.”

“Well, at least you noticed,” she said.

“But I almost had the million dollars...”

The door swung open and Boyd MacDougall, owner of the Cumberland Arms, entered the bar. He spotted Morris and started to make his way over.

Angela stood up. “Boyd has a poker game on tonight.” She picked up her tray. “He’ll probably ask you to join.”

“What’s the buy-in?” The last time Morris played poker at the Arms was because he had to entertain a rich client from California.

“Twenty thousand.”

“Last time I sat at that table in the back room I lost six thousand, to a client of mine. I only play for business reasons. Besides, I just used up all my luck playing *Wheel of Hair Color*. Wait – don’t leave. He’ll come and talk to me.” Morris knew Boyd was interested in Morris for only one reason: money.

Angela began to wipe the bar, trying to give herself a reason to stay. “Who else is coming tonight?”

“Ed will be here. And Jacques is bringing a new guy. There may be others. Who knows for sure?”

“I’ll try to get your regular table back. Those two guys in the corner have been here for a couple of hours. Only one beer each.” Angela saw Boyd stepping up to Morris, and turned to get back to work.

“Morris. Now there’s a good candidate.” Boyd grinned. “Would you care for a seat in tonight’s game?”

“It would be fun, but I don’t have the buy-in.”

“I would be happy to cover you with my own cash.”

Oh yes, the all-cash game, Morris thought. Cash eliminated the problem of covering losses, and prevented wives from seeing large debit transactions. The players found that attractive.

The other attraction Boyd provided was sex. Morris’ California client had loved that fringe benefit. Boyd had some very discrete hookers. After the game, he brought them over from his strip club – to console the losers. The regular pub staff was unaware of that activity. They all knew about the poker game, but this late-night entertainment did not arrive until long after The Arms closed for the night, and the regular staff had left for home.

“You run an honest game and provide classy entertainment,” said Morris, “but tonight is just my regular pub night. The other guys will be here soon.”

Boyd grinned. “OK. But I also wanted to say that your security guy – Zia – he set me up with a really great video security system. He hooked-up these cool hidden cameras, and they give the best face shots of all the systems I tried. He gave me software that zeros-in on each face, recognizes the person, and timestamps their photo and arrival time into my database.”

“Face recognition? What do you need that for?”

“Just because it’s cool. The players are impressed – it reminds them of Vegas security. They think I’ve checked out all the other players thoroughly. Besides, Zia gave me a good package

price. He wants to use my place as a reference, which is OK as long as he doesn't say anything about the poker game.”

Morris figured Boyd's idea of running a secure game consisted of making the players bring cash, to ensure everybody pays up, and not getting caught by the cops for running an illegal game. “I'll tell him you're satisfied.”

There was a pause, as neither man could think of anything more to say.

Morris noticed Ed Smitt arrive at the main door and waved him over.

“I'll let you get on with your evening,” said Boyd. “Enjoy.”

Ed walked up and greeted Morris with a handshake. “Hello, Morris.”

Ed and Morris had known each other for many years. Yet, at The Arms on Wednesdays, there was always a ritual handshake greeting.

“What happened to our regular table?” Ed asked.

“Those two were here when I arrived. Angela says she'll try and reclaim it for us.”

Morris observed a bruise and skin abrasions on Ed's neck and cheek. “What happened to you? Lose a fight with your little sister? Lady hit you with her purse?”

“I fell off my tricycle.”

The thought of Ed on a tricycle made Morris grin. Ed was six foot one and 220 pounds of muscle in a marine haircut. He was big-chested with muscular arms, and he walked like a linebacker.

Ed was formerly with the US Special Forces. He was born in Maine and married a Canadian, so he now held dual citizenship. He presently taught as a civilian instructor on contract to the Canadian Forces unit responsible for counter-terrorist operations, Joint Task Force 2, also called JTF2.

“I was teaching unarmed combat. I let a rookie put me in a chokehold so I could show him how to break it, just as a guy flipped beside us. I couldn't get out of the way in time, and my left cheek arrested his right foot. He was wearing combat boots.”

“Ouch.”

“You can make out the tread pattern.” Ed turned down his collar.

“Yeah. Size 12. Nice.”

Angela delivered Ed a Hoegaarden in a huge mug. Ed nodded and took a drink.

“What’s new with you?” Ed put his mug down. “Any interesting deals? Did you get that land you wanted?”

“Almost. Our building design won the bid, and I signed agreements to purchase two of the three empty lots I need. The third owner is out of town. I think I’ll be able to offer him either a good price for his land, and/or I can interest him in participating in the project. I happen to need another investor for this deal.”

“How much is this deal worth?”

“The land and construction costs will run about seven million. The lease deal we just won is worth about twenty.”

“Wow. How do I get into your line of business? Twenty years ago in Gagetown, you and I were lieutenants. Our idea of property ownership was renting a hotel room in Montreal. Seriously. How do you do it?”

“Seriously?” Morris said. “You have to be in the right place at the right time. I quit the army to build database systems. When that business started to take off, I took some of the revenues to buy the building we were leasing. The owner was letting it go for half of what it cost to build. Then property values in my business park skyrocketed. Demand for office space went up – I was able to rent out extra offices. It kind of grew from there.”

“That sounds too hard. I think I’ll just marry rich.”

“What exactly would Debbie think of that, Ed?” Jacques Tremblay had arrived.

Ed looked at Jacques and offered a handshake. “You think an additional wife would be out of the question?”

“You’re lucky she lets you out on Wednesday nights,” said Jacques, as the two men shook firmly.

“Look who’s talking, it’s Mr. Mom.”

“True, I am whipped. But at least Suzette doesn’t leave any marks.” Jacques pointed to his neck.

“A guy tumbled into me. I made him eat his ass.”

Jacques shook hands with Morris. Like Ed, Jacques was another big guy. Two inches taller at six foot three, he had the build of a basketball player, with the arms and shoulders of a boxer, which he once was. His face was weather-beaten and his nose had been broken a few times. He sported a black handlebar moustache, short haircut, and had a perpetually cheerful expression.

“Guys, this is Bill,” said Jacques. “He’s my sister-in-law’s husband. They’re visiting from Halifax. Bill’s a Navy pilot.”

A round of handshakes followed.

“I’m Ed. I used to be airborne. Morris is ex-infantry, like Jacques. Jacques was a CO, but we still let him sit with us.”

“You guys are all what, six foot four?” Bill asked, looking up at the three men.

“I’m only six-two,” said Ed. “Those guys are older. That’s how high they piled shit back then.”

“And now, they compact it a bit.” Jacques gave Ed a slap on the back. “Ed’s like a brother to us. A more ugly, pain-in-the-ass, little brother.”

“It’s easy to miss Ed’s humor,” said Morris. “On one of his night insertions, the chopper dropped him on his head, we figure.”

Angela appeared. She had a pint of Keith’s Red for Jacques. “Are you guys going to take a table?”

“Why don’t we take this one,” Ed suggested, pointing to an empty table in the middle of the room.

“What can I get you?” Angela asked Bill as the four men took their seats.

“Do you have Moosehead?” asked Bill.

“Sorry. In the bottle we have Canadian, Blue, Sleeman, Bud, Coors Light, and Stella.”

“What do you have on draft?”

“We carry mostly Labatt’s line.” Angela efficiently listed every beer The Arms carried on tap: “Tennent’s, Blue, Boddingtons, Hoegaarden, Stella, Strongbow, Keith’s Pale, Keith’s Red and Keith’s White, Bud Light, Kilkenny and, of course, Guinness.”

“Go for a Keith’s,” suggested Ed. “Pride of Nova Scotia.”

“I’m from *Torrone*,” said Bill. “What do you have in the bottle, again?”

“Canadian, Blue, Sleeman, Bud, Coors Light, and Stella.”

Bill popped a beer nut in his mouth. “Actually, I’ll take a diet coke for now.”

“Would anyone like to see a menu?” Angela asked.

“By anyone, she means you, Bill,” said Ed. “We always order wings. We follow the same pattern every week. We order after the first round is done.”

Bill nodded. “Could I have a plate of nachos?”

Angela smiled. “Sure.” This guy must be a pilot, she thought. Bill was fitting in to the group like a fish in an anthill. She left to put in the order.

“Anyone know if Jim’s going to make it tonight?” asked Ed.

“Not likely,” said Jacques. “He’s in Africa on a three-year posting.”

“Piss poor excuse,” said Ed.

Bill turned to Ed. “What did you do with the Special Forces?”

“If he told you that, he’d have to kill you,” said Jacques. “By boring you to death.”

“We think he killed a couple of minor terrorists,” said Morris. “And Elvis.”

“Elvis lives,” said Ed.

“He also shot the man who killed Kennedy,” added Jacques.

“Yes, I shot Lee Harvey Oswald.” Ed said sarcastically. “I would have been one year old. Just a cute little baby.”

“A very bloodthirsty assassin-baby,” Jacques said, reaching out to pinch Ed’s cheek. “Goochy-goo. Whack the nice man, baby.”

The conversation level in the pub was at the usual level, with about forty people in the room. Suddenly, from the corner near the group’s regular booth, a female voice shouted “HEY!”

The room went silent.

A waitress was fighting off one of two guys sitting in the booth. “Hands off, Grabbypants!”

The guy was running his hand up her thigh, so the waitress slapped him hard. The smack sounded like a shot. Bill let out an involuntary laugh.

The guy went red in the face. He turned toward Bill. “You think this is funny, asshole?” He glared at Bill.

Bill sized up the guy. He looked pretty tough. He was seated in the corner booth with another guy, an Asian. The Asian was young and skinny, with scraggly long hair. He looked like a punk who wished he were tough.

The guy got out of his booth. “*Hey! Got anything to say, fuckface?*”

Bill estimated the guy was over six foot and at least 250 pounds. He was beefy, with a bit of a potbelly. Bill looked at Morris, Ed and Jacques, and felt confident. “I count four of us over here, Mister, uh, *Grabbypants.*”

A couple of people laughed nervously.

Grabbypants took two steps closer. “Smart mouth? You wanna be smart with me?”

Morris leaned over closer to Bill, and spoke quietly in his ear. “Don’t.”

“There are only two of them and four of us,” Bill whispered to Morris.

“Yeah, but those jean jackets don’t make sense. It’s hot and muggy tonight. The guy must have a knife or something. He’s baiting you.”

Grabbypants started walking toward Bill. “I think you should learn some respect.” Walking slowly, maneuvering around tables, he seemed to enjoy the attention he was getting. People moved out of his way and avoided eye contact.

Morris tried to size up the situation. This guy was showing off or something, for someone. Are these gang members?

The Asian wore a New York Yankees baseball cap, dark blue. Grabbypants had left his cap on the table. It was black. These could be gang colors, Morris realized.

There had been a recent break-in at a PHL property. Morris had reviewed video of the suspect with a police officer who told him that Ottawa street gangs often wear sports team jerseys having gang colors. Dark blue was the color of the Ledbury Banff Cripps. They wore black on special missions.

These two might be part of a gang. Picking a fight in public seemed an unusual activity for a gang. Was it an initiation? Maybe this was a diversion. Could these two be working with somebody else – a pickpocket perhaps? Someone else in the bar could easily lift a purse while all eyes were on this little drama.

“These guys are up to something,” Morris said to his group.

Ed leaned over to Morris and Jacques. “Should I take this guy out?”

“Hold off, and let’s see what he does,” said Morris. “Jacques, see if you can stall him.”

Jacques stood up and moved forward to intercept Grabbypants. “Please h’excuse my friend, Monsieur.” Jacques was suddenly using a thick French-Canadian accent. “My friend, ‘e was laughing at some’ting I said, me.”

Grabbypants stopped. The two big men stood face-to-face, looking each other in the eyes.

Grabbypants suddenly moved forward, shoving Jacques hard with both hands. “Fuck off!”

Jacques felt a surge of adrenaline as he took two steps back to recover his balance.

Grabbypants waited for Jacques to react.

Jacques looked across at Morris, and rolled his eyes. “I’m terribly sorry, Monsieur! My squarehead friend was laughing at my accent. ‘E was not laughing at you.”

Grabbypants glared at Jacques. “Well then, why don’t I just kick the crap out of *you*?”

Morris looked around the room. All eyes were on Mr. Grabbypants, except for two guys in biker jackets sitting at the bar. Other spectators were tense, but these two were not. One of the guys was ignoring the action. Instead, he was watching the short hallway leading to the back room. The other guy was leaning back, and he seemed amused, not concerned, at the disturbance being created.

This is a four-man team, thought Morris. It’s warm in this room, and those heavy jackets *should* have been placed on the empty barstool between them. These guys must have weapons. Were the four of them going to rob the place?

Morris leaned over to Ed. “Check out the bikers at the bar – Beavis and Butthead.”

Ed looked at the bikers while the action on the floor continued.

“But why?” Jacques asked Grabbypants. “Why should you want to fight me?”

“Here’s a good reason.” Grabbypants stepped forward and shoved Jacques again, forcing him back two more steps. “You’re a mother-fuckin’ frog!”

Ed stood up, confronting Grabbypants. Jacques took a step to the side.

Grabbypants turned his attention onto Ed. “Which one of you fucking kittens is going to stand up for yourself?”

“Meow,” said Ed.

Morris realized the bikers at the bar, Beavis and Butthead, were behind Ed and Jacques. They were in a good position. From those seats, they could see everybody in the room, and had nobody behind them. They could easily back up Grabbypants. That explained why Grabbypants was so cocky.

Morris stood up suddenly. “OK, one against one. That’s fair enough.” It was time to get in a better position. Morris motioned to Jacques. “Let’s make room. Help me move this table, Jacques. Give us a hand, Bill.”

Jacques, Bill and Morris swiftly moved the table aside, clearing floor space. People who felt too close to the action vacated their seats or moved their chairs back.

Ignoring Bill, Morris motioned Jacques over to the bar. They took two seats to the left of Beavis and Butthead. There was a full Pyrex pot of coffee on the bar. Morris sat so it was within arm’s reach.

Morris suddenly realized what these guys must be up to. Split four ways, there would not be enough cash in the till to make robbing the pub worthwhile. But there would be over one hundred thousand dollars in the poker game. They were creating a disturbance to draw out Boyd. Boyd was the only one with a swipe card able to access the locked, back-room area.

Grabbypants surged toward Ed. Ed stepped back and to the side, gripping Grabbypants by the lapels of his jean jacket, pulling the heavier man off balance and over his hip. Grabbypants tumbled and crashed to the floor, rolling out of control. He collided with a table. Beer, nuts and nachos went flying in all directions.

Morris noticed the Asian had his hand in his jacket. He must be holding a gun. Morris slowly reached over and firmly grasped the handle of the coffee pot.

Angela entered from the hallway. “I informed the owner,” she said loudly, with authority. “He’s calling the police, and he’s coming out.”

Beavis stood up, threatening Ed from behind. Butthead stood up and faced the hallway leading to the back room, waiting for Boyd MacDougall.

Beavis, closest to Morris, reached into his jacket. Morris saw the butt of a pistol.

“GUN!” Morris yelled loudly.

Beavis looked at Morris.

Morris brought the coffee pot across his body in an arc, striking Beavis squarely on the forehead.

Pyrex shattered on skull. Scalding coffee burst in Beavis' face, and exploded in all directions. Blinded and burned, Beavis released his gun and grabbed his face with both hands, screaming. The gun clattered to the floor. Morris scrambled after it.

Butthead, splattered with hot coffee, screamed with rage. He pulled his gun on Morris.

Jacques charged into Butthead, knocking him up against the wall. Butthead fired a shot wildly into the ceiling. People screamed and ducked.

Jacques grabbed Butthead's gun arm with both hands, and the two men began to fight for control of the weapon.

Grabbypants pulled a pistol from his jacket and pointed it at Morris' back. Ed reacted instantly, lunging forward to tackle Grabbypants. Slipping on the beer, Ed skidded across the wet floor, struggling to maintain his balance. Grabbypants aimed at Morris and squeezed the trigger hard. The pistol did not fire.

Dropping two hands to the floor, Ed executed a perfect low spinning sweep-kick that took Grabbypants down from behind. The pistol went flying. Ed jumped on Grabbypants and the two of them began to wrestle on the floor.

The Asian stood with a gun in his hand, taking aim at Morris.

By now, Morris had Beavis' gun in hand and he had disengaged the safety.

With a stabbing motion, the Asian fired a shot at Morris, missing.

Morris, on the floor, spun into a sitting position and faced the Asian. Aiming quickly, he began firing.

Multiple shots blasted out from both pistols in rapid succession. BANG-BANG-BANG-BANG-BANG-BANG!

The Asian was aiming one-handed, and his pistol arm flailed with the recoil from each shot. His shots went increasingly off target.

Morris held his pistol with a firm two-hand grip, placing his left elbow on his right knee for support. Morris calmly counted each shot out loud.

“One! Two! Three! Four!” Morris counted, ignoring the bullets flying at him.

On his fourth shot, Morris struck the Asian mid-torso. The Asian dropped backwards to the floor, dropping his gun and grabbing his chest. Morris stopped firing.

“Morris!” Jacques was doing his best to control Butthead against the bar.

Butthead gripped his pistol in both hands high above his head. Jacques had a tight hold on one of Butthead’s forearms, and was struggling to block Butthead from taking aim. Butthead was slowly gaining control of the pistol, and was about to align it with Jacques’ head.

Morris turned to aim at Butthead. From his position on the floor, Morris could not shoot without fear of hitting Jacques.

“Jacques!” Morris yelled. “Spread your legs!”

Straining, Jacques managed to bow his right leg a bit.

Morris fired a well-aimed shot. BANG!

“Five,” said Morris.

The bullet passed close to Jacques’ groin and hit Butthead in the left thigh. Butthead screamed in pain, and dropped like a sack of potatoes, exposing himself for a second shot. Morris aimed for his head and fired. BANG!

“Six,” said Morris.

The shot struck the side of Butthead’s neck, spraying blood against the wall behind him. Butthead spun and collapsed against the wall, landing in a sitting position.

Keeping his pistol aimed at Butthead, Morris said calmly “Jacques, take his gun.”

Jacques had thrown himself to one side. Jacques checked his crotch. “*Saint-ciboire, ça passé proche!*” He got up and walked over to examine Butthead.

Butthead's eyes were open. He stared vacantly at the floor in front of him, stunned. Blood spurted from the side of his neck. Jacques firmly grasped Butthead's gun arm, and carefully took the pistol.

"Got it, Morris," Jacques said, then rose to his feet. "You were trying to kill me, you piece of shit!" he said to Butthead, no more French accent. "And worse, you almost made my friend shoot my balls off. We should let you bleed out."

Morris looked around the room. Several people were lying on the floor. "Jacques, cover the Asian," he said. "Angela, how's your first aid?"

Jacques checked the safety catch was in the fire position, and then aimed his gun at the Asian lying in the far corner. Jacques could not see him fully, and he suspected the Asian might still be able to use his gun.

Morris, aware that Ed was still struggling with Grabbypants, switched aim to cover them.

Grabbypants was no longer interested in fighting Ed. He was simply trying to get away.

"You can't leave until you pay your bill." Morris said.

"I can hold him," Ed said, grunting. "If he starts to get away, though, do me a favor and just shoot him. I don't like the way you serve coffee."

Angela was looking for something to plug the spurting blood before Butthead bled to death. She found a clean bar rag and clamped it down on his wound. "Here. Hold this tight." She positioned Butthead's hand over the rag. He complied – with difficulty.

"Bill?" Morris gestured toward the Asian. "See if the guy's still alive, willya?"

Bill had been hiding under a table during the battle. He stood shakily to his feet. Then his face went white and he fainted to the floor.

"Let me do it," said Angela.

"OK Angela – just stay out of our line of fire. Walk around behind us."

Angela nodded and began walking, looking determined.

“You are always ready to go that extra mile for your customers,” said Morris, trying to reassure her. “Good food. Cold beer. Checking the enemy wounded.”

Angela looked down, winced, and adjusted her step to avoid a puddle of Butthead’s blood, pooled with some spilled beer and still-steaming coffee.

“I expect a good tip for this,” she said in a shaky voice.

Angela examined the Asian. “He’s just a kid.” Putting two fingers on the side of his throat, she checked his pulse. “No pulse. His shirt is soaked in blood. You must have hit his heart. He’s dead.”

“I could use a little help, here!” Ed said. Ed, holding Grabbypants from behind, had him in a partial strangle hold. Grabbypants was gasping for air but succeeding in slowly rising from the floor, pulling himself steadily up to the bar countertop. He was bringing Ed with him. Both Ed’s feet were now off the floor.

Using his free hand, Morris reached over and gripped Grabbypants by the ear. “Put my friend down!” Morris twisted the ear sharply.

Grabbypants yelped and instantly submitted.

Ed got his feet back on the ground and quickly took control by twisting Grabbypants’ arm behind his back.

“Jacques, Grabbypants’ gun is somewhere around here,” said Morris.

“I see it.” Jacques picked up the pistol from the floor.

“He tried to shoot Morris,” Ed said. “But his gun didn’t go off.”

Jacques looked at the guns he was holding. “These are very nice pistols – 9mm semi-automatic. Very similar to what we trained with.” He put down one of the guns and examined Grabbypants’ pistol with both hands. Then he walked over to where Ed was holding Grabbypants, head forced down on the bar.

Jacques looked Grabbypants in the eye. “How do you like me now, tough stupid guy? Let me show you something. Look here.” Jacques held the pistol up to Grabbypants’ face. “You see this

little metal part, just here, above the grip?” Grabbypants looked at the small lever Jacques was indicating, going slightly cross-eyed to focus.

“Shit.” Grabbypants closed his eyes, disgusted.

Using a thick French accent as he had done before, Jacques said, “I may be French, Monsieur, but I know how to use zis safety catch, *tabarnac!*”

2 – AFTERMATH

Morris heard sirens in the distance, getting gradually louder. He looked around the room. The Asian was dead. Beavis was scalded and moaning on the floor, in fetal position. Butthead had two gunshot wounds and was bleeding against the wall. Morris stood up from the floor, put the pistol on the bar, and pulled out his cellphone. He dialed 911.

“911 Emergency,” said an emergency operator. “Police, Ambulance or Fire?”

“Police and Paramedics. There has been a gunfight at The Cumberland Arms in Orleans. Corner of Innes and Jeanne d’Arc. One person has been shot and another has been killed. There is also a person with burns and cuts to the face.”

“Your name sir?”

“Morris Parker.”

“Location, again?”

“The Arms. Corner of Innes Road and Jeanne d’Arc Boulevard in Orleans.”

“Is anyone there still armed?”

“No. There were four people with guns, trying to rob the place. My friends and I have disarmed them all. Tell your people the situation is safe. I hear sirens – are they yours?”

“Yes. Several cars are responding. We received other calls.” The dispatcher had called for all available resources. “Did you say one dead, and two injured?”

“Yes, one dead. One casualty has a gunshot in the leg and the neck, and the other was burned in the face with a pot of hot coffee. Oh yeah, one guy fainted. I should look at him now.”

“Stay on the phone with me, please.”

“I’ll do that, but I’m going to put the phone down for a minute.” Morris looked at Jacques. “It would probably be a good idea for us *not* to have a gun in our hand when the cops storm in here

all pumped up. Let's put the pistols here on the bar. Make sure you can remember which gun came from which one of these guys."

With a puzzled look, Jacques began to retrace the events that had just occurred, trying to be sure which gun belonged to Beavis and which one belonged to Butthead.

Morris walked over and examined Bill, who had just opened his eyes. Bill was a bit confused, but unhurt.

"I'll bet you thought a Navy bar was a pretty tough place, eh?"

Bill mumbled incomprehensibly.

Morris left Bill and walked over to the bar. "Boyd? Are you there? It's safe now."

Boyd emerged from the hallway where he had retreated when the shooting started. "I'm here," he said meekly.

"It would be good if you go out and meet the police when they arrive."

Boyd nodded, and quickly headed for the front door. A couple of other patrons followed.

Morris picked up his gun off the bar. He removed the magazine, placed it on the bar, and cocked the pistol, ejecting a bullet from the chamber onto the bar. He put the empty pistol with the other two that Jacques had placed on the bar. He resisted the urge to unload the other pistols.

Ed had Grabbypants in a submission hold. Butthead looked like he was about to pass out from blood loss. Beavis was still moaning and groaning from his cuts and burns.

"Jacques," said Morris, "you keep an eye on Beavis, here, and I'll see if I can stop Butthead from bleeding to death."

Morris adjusted the rag Butthead was using to keep his neck from spurting blood everywhere. "Do you have a first aid kit, Angela?"

Angela left the room and returned a moment later with a first aid kit. She pulled out some gauze bandages and began to work on Butthead.

"It's a good thing you know how to shoot," said Ed.

"I didn't like the idea of letting someone pull a gun," said Morris.

“I figured you were going to do something,” said Jacques. “When you put your hand on that coffee pot, I knew what was coming.”

The three friends were silent for a moment.

“When the cops arrive,” Morris began, “just tell them what happened. I didn’t plan all this. Thanks for backing me up.”

Jacques nodded. “You’d have done the same for us.”

They looked at Ed, waiting. “What’s done is done,” he said, finally.

A moment later, Boyd entered the room. “Over there.” Two cops followed him in, guns drawn. “This guy is Morris Parker, a regular customer. I think he saw everything.”

The first cop looked at Morris. “Who has weapons?”

“Three pistols are on the bar,” said Morris. “There is a fourth one over there somewhere, next to the dead body.”

“Ray,” the first cop said to his partner, “check for a gun over there.”

“There are two injured bad guys over here.” Morris pointed to Grabbypants. “And this guy pulled a gun and tried to kill me.”

The first cop put his gun in his holster and pulled out his handcuffs. “You are under arrest,” he said to Grabbypants. He cuffed Grabbypants, then frisked him for weapons.

“There’s a gun here, and I’m calling the coroner,” Ray said from the corner booth.

“Report the situation is secure.”

“Roger.” Ray pulled out a portable radio and began a conversation with the dispatcher.

The first cop resumed speaking to Grabbypants. “I recognize you. You are under arrest for attempted murder. Do you understand? You have the right to retain and instruct counsel without delay. We will provide you with a toll-free telephone lawyer referral service, if you do not have your own lawyer. Anything you say can be used in court as evidence. Do you understand? Would you like to speak with a lawyer?”

“Fuck you.”

“I’ll take that as a no.” The cop turned to his partner, who was still talking on the radio. “Call for the guns and gangs unit. And where is our ambulance?”

Two more cops came in with guns drawn. One of them had sergeant stripes.

“The paramedics are right behind me, guys,” said the sergeant.

The sergeant quickly took control of the scene. He ensured the remaining suspects were cuffed, searched and read their rights. He moved everyone out of the room where the shooting had taken place, and ordered a policeman to start taking names.

There was a dead body to examine, and bullets had flown, so the sergeant called for the forensic investigation team. He retrieved the fourth gun from the Asian, and established from Morris and Jacques who had been the original owner of each of the three other guns. Morris described the fight sequence to him. Ed and Jacques added details.

“We have a detective on the way,” the sergeant told Morris, Ed and Jacques. “He will be taking your statements. You will be speaking with Detective Clark.” He paused to glance around. “I’m not telling you this, but *good job*. This guy here,” he pointed at Grabbypants, sulking in cuffs against the wall, “is a known quantity. He was involved in a drive-by shooting downtown last summer. We think he was the triggerman. They shot a guy for fun.”

Colored lights were flashing through the windows. The coroner had arrived, and a couple more cop cars were now in the parking lot. Crime scene tape was being deployed. Butthead was in critical condition and was being taken out by the paramedics together with Beavis. Beavis’ head was covered in bandages. He looked like a goon straight out of *The Mummy*.

“Can we call our wives?” Morris asked.

“Go ahead. This news is about to break.” The sergeant observed a CJOH-TV truck arrive. Morris dialed home on his cellphone.

Terri answered. “Hello?”

“It’s me. I’m going to be a bit late.”

“This better be good. You’re out having a great time and I’m here doing homework.”

“There’s been a fight. Guns were involved. Everybody’s OK, except for the guys who started the fight. I shot two of them.”

There was a period of silence. “Terri?” Morris asked.

“Tell me one of them was Bruce Connor,” she said finally.

“No, sorry.”

“Where’d you get a gun?”

“I took it from one of the bad guys. I hit him with a pot of coffee. He dropped his gun. Then I grabbed it. His buddy started shooting at me, so I shot his buddy. Then I shot a guy who was going to kill Jacques.”

“Oh, my God.”

“It’s OK. I killed that guy in self-defense. There were a lot of witnesses. The guy was shooting at me. The other guy I shot will probably live.”

“Why’d you shoot the other guy?”

“He was going to shoot Jacques.”

“Holy Crap. Just what kind of place is this? The Last Chance Saloon?”

“The Arms, our usual hangout. Two blocks from the house.” Morris knew Terri was not aware of the poker game. Morris might have to tell her -- Later.

“Any other casualties?” she asked.

“Well, I scalded that guy in the face with the coffee pot.”

“Crap, oh Crap. He’ll probably sue us.”

“What was I supposed to do? Let him pull a gun?”

“His friend also had a gun. How many guns did these guys have?”

“Four.”

“You decided to fight four guys with guns. You had a coffee pot!”

“Terri, I had Ed and Jacques with me.”

“If Ed and Jacques jumped off a cliff....”

“Look, I have to go. I have to give a statement. Check the CJOH News if you want to see more.”

“Bye.”

Ed came up to Morris. “I told the family what happened. My son thinks you’re a hero.”

“Terri thinks I’m an idiot.”

Morris noticed a tall, dark-haired man in a well-tailored, dark suit had been speaking with the sergeant. He walked up to Morris, Ed and Jacques and introduced himself. “My name is Detective David Clark, Ottawa Guns and Gangs Unit.” He held out his badge for Ed and Morris to examine. “Which one of you is Mr. Parker?”

“I am.”

“Can I see some I.D. please?”

Morris pulled out his driver’s license.

“I’m sending your friends to the station to give statements,” said Detective Clark as he examined the license, “but I will require that you remain here and answer my questions.”

“Sure,” said Morris.

Two cops came in to escort Ed and Jacques away. Detective Clark led Morris to a table and offered him a seat.

The place was now buzzing with activity. A police photographer was shooting the scene. The coroner and a cop in coveralls, obviously a forensics guy, were working on the dead body in the corner. Two other crime scene investigators, one male and one female, were collecting evidence. The female was about to tag the pistols on the bar.

“Hold on, I need to use those for a minute,” said Detective Clark. He went over to the bar and had a short discussion that Morris could not hear. The female crime scene investigator eventually left but was not happy about it. Detective Clark motioned for Morris to join him at the bar.

“Which gun did you use?” the detective asked Morris.

“I used this one.” Morris pointed to the pistol with the action locked open. “It came from one of the two guys at the bar.”

“This is the only gun that has been unloaded. Did you unload it?”

“Yes. Old habit. I’m not comfortable around a weapon until I have proved it to be safe.”

“Was there a bullet in the chamber?” asked the detective.

Morris nodded and searched briefly, finding it. It had rolled off the main surface onto a small shelf, out of sight. He pointed it out. “There.”

Detective Clark took a plastic bag from his pocket and rolled the bullet into it using a coaster, then placed the bag in his jacket pocket.

“Tell me how this all started,” he said.

Morris described the build-up to his coffee pot attack, explaining how he deduced the suspects were armed and about to hit the poker game.

“So you suspected they were armed. Who fired the first shot?”

“The first shot came from the second guy at the bar. That shot hit the ceiling.”

“How many shots did you fire, Mr. Parker?”

“Six. Three misses, three hits.”

“How can you be so sure?”

“In the army, I did a lot of competitive combat shooting. I learned to keep track of my shots.”

“Can you tell me about each shot?”

“Sure. The first three, I was zeroing in on the kid. I was not familiar with this particular pistol, and it took a couple of shots to realize bullets were going left. I adjusted by aiming right until I scored a hit with shot number four. Shot number five was on a new target, the guy trying to kill my friend Jacques. I had to be careful with that one not to hit Jacques. The final shot was not that good – I hit my target in the neck.”

“Why don’t you consider that shot good?”

“I was aiming for the head.”

“That’s a pretty glib answer. Look, Mr. Parker, you could be charged for what you did here.”

Morris raised an eyebrow. “Then perhaps I should not be speaking with you, Mr. Detective.”

“Would you like to be charged with obstruction?”

“I would like to be treated fairly.”

“Look, a private citizen does not have the right, even if there is a crime in progress, to simply....”

“I am not in the habit of standing idly by in a situation where my life, and my friends, are put in danger by some obvious criminals.”

“The best thing you can do for yourself is to co-operate fully with me.”

“Apparently, detective, you want to control this interview. I will not lie to you. Here are the facts you need. Those guys came in armed and expecting to enjoy total dominance of the situation. They pulled out guns, but I used the element of surprise to gain the initiative. I did what I thought was best, and my friends stood by me. We did not start this fight, but we finished it.”

Detective Clark looked uncertain. “What if I told you the two guys at the bar were undercover cops.”

“That, I would consider bullshit.” Morris glared at the detective. “They didn’t act like cops. They didn’t identify themselves as cops. They acted like they were going to ambush the owner as he came out of the back hallway. They behaved as if they were working with the two guys at the corner table.”

The two men glared at each other.

The detective realized that Morris was not going to be intimidated. “Alright, alright.” He grinned awkwardly. “Sorry, I seem to be using the wrong technique.” He offered his hand to Morris. “Let’s get started on the right foot, OK? You are not a suspect. Those guys are not undercover cops. We don’t know who they are yet.”

Morris shook hands warily. “You were testing me.”

“I just need for you to tell me the truth,” said Detective Clark. “I get a lot of liars in my profession.”

Morris thought about that statement.

“The business world is no different. I have been lied to by the best, Detective Clark,” Morris said.

3 – DETECTIVE CLARK’S INVESTIGATION

Detective Clark asked Morris to write a statement, then excused himself. Several people were already doing the same, and the pub began to resemble a classroom at exam time.

The sergeant approached the detective. “The two injured suspects had no identification on them. I sent Constable Bradley and his partner with the ambulance as escorts. Their shift was just ending and they will need to be relieved. The other guy is cuffed in the back of my car. I’m going to take him to the station now for photo and prints.”

“They were here to rob this place, I guess,” said the sergeant, “but didn’t get very far. It’s harder to charge them if they didn’t manage to commit their crime. At least we can charge the three survivors for carrying concealed weapons. The guy who tried to shoot Mr. Parker – we can get him for attempted murder. Did you get his ID?”

“Yes, and I know him. He was the leader in a drive-by shooting downtown last August. He’s Ledbury Banff Cripps. On the street he goes by the name Big Mac.”

“OK. I want to interview him at the station. I’ll need a ride there. But I need a few minutes more with Mr. Parker. Wait for me.”

“Yes, sir.”

The detective approached Morris. “If I can interrupt your writing for a minute, I’d like you to follow me over to the bar.”

Detective Clark asked Morris to describe the sequence of events again. He then made Morris walk through the steps he had taken, repeating his actions. That included getting on the floor to re-enact how he picked up the gun that had been dropped. He made Morris use his thumb and forefinger as if he was holding a gun. The detective took notes and made a floor plan sketch showing the location and direction of each shot Morris had taken.

“Your friends are at the station giving statements.” Detective Clark walked Morris back to his table and motioned Morris to pick up his statement. “I would like you to go to the station, and finish your statement there. I will be there shortly. Do you need a ride?”

“No, I have my car.”

“Do you know how to get to the station?”

“No.”

“OK, the constable at the door will give you directions. I’ll see there you in half an hour.”

Morris nodded, and then went to speak with the constable.

The female crime scene investigator went over to tag the pistols on the bar. Detective Clark joined her swiftly.

Smiling warmly, he introduced himself and asked for her name. She told him it was Sandy. Sandy was plain looking, short and slightly overweight. She had huge breasts.

“I haven’t seen you around before. Sandy, I admire the way you do your work,” said the detective.

Sandy was not used to receiving compliments from tall, dark-haired men well above her rating. She was about a six, and the detective was about a nine-point-five.

She smiled nervously. “I just started with the crime lab about six months ago.”

“No kidding. Only six months? The way you go about your job, it looks like you’ve been at it much longer.”

Sandy blushed. Detective Clark could tell she enjoyed his attention.

“What are your procedures for handling this evidence?” Detective Clark asked, pointing to the three guns on the bar.

“Well, it depends on what needs to be done with the analysis...that is...I mean, um the objective of the analysis. In this situation, we will lift prints to try to determine the suspect who carried each gun. We do that back in the lab. Assuming the detectives need printing, of course. You do need printing, right?”

Detective Clark nodded, and Sandy resumed talking nervously, thoughts scattered.

Meanwhile outside, the sergeant stood in the parking lot, waiting. His partner was in the driver's seat of his cruiser, and Grabbypants, a.k.a. Big Mac, was handcuffed and slouching in the back seat, silent and sullen.

The sergeant watched Detective Clark and Sandy through the window. "What the hell is Clark doing now? Looks like he's trying to get a date," the sergeant said to his partner.

His partner looked amused, watching Clark nodding and smiling. "I guess he likes big boobs."

Back inside, Detective Clark looked at the guns on the bar, pointing at one. "How can you get a print off this? The trigger is very narrow and the grip is not smooth."

"The best prints are found inside – on the magazine. If we take out the clip and find a print on that smooth metal, we will be able to establish who loaded the gun."

Detective Clark smiled and turned on the charm. "Sandy, I need a bit of time to examine these weapons, but I have to interview a few more people first. Is it OK to examine this one here? This is the one that Mr. Parker used, and it fired the fatal shot that killed the Asian kid. I would like to examine it and record the serial number, if there is one. It will help me in court if I can give testimony that establishes continuity of evidence. I want to be able to prove this gun is the one I found on scene. I want a record of the serial number in my notebook."

Sandy was reluctant. "These guns have already been photographed. I was just about to tag them and bag them and lock them in our gun box out in the truck. You can examine them in the evidence room tomorrow. We should be done lifting prints by then. There will be ballistics testing in the afternoon."

"Wow." The detective sounded impressed. "Are you a ballistics expert, too?"

"No, but I hope to get that training soon. I'm not the gun expert."

"I'll just be a moment, with this, Sandy, really." Detective Clark turned up the charm. "Look, I'll handle it by the grip and I won't contaminate any print-carrying surfaces."

The detective quickly picked up the pistol before Sandy could object. He examined it, squinting. “It’s pretty dark here, this being a bar.” He smiled warmly. “I’ll just take it over here to the light for a second. You go ahead and tag these others, I’ll be right back, OK?”

“I suppose that would be all right,” Sandy said meekly.

Detective Clark walked over to the hallway leading to the back room. He glanced at Sandy, and saw she was working with the other guns. He stepped into the well-lit hallway and examined the 9mm automatic pistol carefully. The action was locked in the rearward position because the magazine was empty. He saw the serial number had been ground off.

Detective Clark looked around, making certain there was nobody able to see what he was doing. He put the gun Morris had fired in his jacket pocket and drew his own 9mm automatic pistol from his shoulder holster. The model was similar. He removed his magazine, and loaded Morris’ bullet into it. He then loaded his magazine into the Morris pistol, and placed it in his holster.

The detective turned and walked back to the bar. He placed his personal pistol with the other guns on the bar. It was unloaded, just like Morris had left the other pistol. The swap was complete.

Detective Clark walked over to where Sandy was working. “Thanks, Sandy.” He smiled again. “Oh, one more thing. I have a full day tomorrow, and it would be much better if I could examine these guns first thing, before you get started again.” He paused and looked at her breasts for a moment.

Detective Clark saw she was hesitant. He needed to get Sandy to agree to meet him.

He looked her in the eye. “And I would also like to take you out to dinner some time – I would love to hear more about how your evidence handling procedures work. You’re very interesting to listen to. I love the sound of your voice.”

Sandy was beaming with the warm feeling the detective had given her. “That would be wonderful.”

“See you tomorrow. I start at 6 AM. Can I meet you then, at the forensic lab?”

“Sure,” she nodded, smiling.

The detective winked and headed for the exit.

The sergeant saw Clark depart the pub and opened the front passenger door of his police car.

“Sorry to keep you waiting, fellas.” Detective Clark declined the front seat. “You take the front, I don’t mind. I’ll be interviewing Big Mac back at the station. I’d like to get acquainted.”

The sergeant shrugged. Both men entered the car and attached their seat belts. The driver exited the parking lot.

The front and back seats were separated by a thick, transparent acrylic shield. In the back, the detective sketched in his notebook. “You will be facing a charge of attempted murder, of Morris Parker,” he said quietly to Big Mac, “and carrying a concealed weapon.”

Detective Clark showed Big Mac his sketch. It showed several stick men. One had the label “Parker,” another was labeled “Big Mac,” and there were two stick men with integers “1” and “2” in the positions where Beavis and Butthead had been sitting at the bar.

“You attempted to shoot Mr. Parker from this position, right here.” Clark pointed at the words he had just written. “And there are at least three eyewitnesses who can confirm that fact.”

Big Mac looked at the detective’s notebook. Clark’s pen point was resting near the words SAY PARKER FIRED THE FIRST SHOT.

“That shot,” said Clark, “would have been taken from here,” he pointed at the Parker stick figure, “and aimed here.” Clark moved his pen from the Parker stick figure to the Big Mac stick figure.

Big Mac absorbed this information. He looked at the detective. Looking at the roadway ahead, Detective Clark calmly closed his notebook and placed it carefully, together with his pen, in his breast pocket.

Big Mac relaxed. A look of satisfaction spread slowly across his face. The fix was in.

The car soon arrived at the police station. There were a few reporters and photographers at the main entrance.

“Take the main entrance,” instructed the detective. “And turn on the lights. Let’s give them a bit of a show.”

The sergeant nodded and turned on the lights. Red and blue light beams flashed against the brick and glass of the building in a circular motion, creating a small disco ball effect. The photographers scrambled for a good position.

“Smile,” the detective told Big Mac. “Time for your perp walk.” The sergeant and his partner extracted Big Mac from the back seat. Big Mac stood between them in cuffs. Each policeman held him by one arm.

The detective pulled a comb from his pocket and ran it through his hair, then got out of the police car.

“I’ll take this,” said the detective, and he waved-off the junior policeman, who released Big Mac’s arm. Then the sergeant and the detective escorted Big Mac down the sidewalk. Flash photographs were taken.

After the three men passed through the entranceway, the detective released Big Mac and headed for the interview rooms.

For the next few hours, Detective Clark shuttled between interview rooms containing Morris Parker, Ed Smitt, and Jacques Tremblay, each in a separate room alone. Detective Clark told the men they could not leave until he had reviewed their statements, and received and reviewed statements from other witnesses at the scene. The detective read statements from each man, asked questions and took notes as he compared their stories and documented the sequence of events for his report. He also made several phone calls to keep track of the progress of the crime scene investigation at the pub.

After he was fingerprinted, photographed and processed, Mr. Innes MacDick, alias Big Mac, was placed in an interview room. Detective Clark was told that Mr. MacDick had declined to have a lawyer present during questioning.

The interview rooms were individually wired for discreet video and audio recording of conversations. There was a central control room. Detective Clark entered the control room, greeting the two technicians present. He looked at four active display screens, each of which showed a live view of his subjects: Morris, Ed, Jacques and MacDick.

“Who’s in charge?” asked the detective.

“I am, sir,” said the first operator.

“Do you have my sessions with the three ex-military guys?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I want a CD of their interviews on my desk by noon tomorrow.”

“But we have a full set of Detective Scott’s interviews to process. Our CD burner went down....”

“I don’t give a shit if you have to work all night. Noon tomorrow, got it?”

“Yes, sir.”

Without looking back, Detective Clark left the room briskly. “I’m going to do MacDick now.”

The two operators sat in shocked silence for a moment.

“What did he just say?”

“I dunno. Something about doing his dick. I don’t want to think about it, and I sure hope we don’t get it on video. That guy’s weird.”

“I heard he was a jerk. He gives new meaning to the word.”

Detective Clark entered the interview room where MacDick was waiting. The room contained a hidden camera and microphone. Back in the control room, Detective Clark had observed the camera angle being used. He positioned himself with his back to the camera so his face could not be seen.

The detective leaned back confidently in his chair, looking at MacDick. He reached in his pocket and pulled out a pack of gum. “Gum?” He tossed a stick without waiting for a response.

MacDick accepted cautiously. He removed the wrapper. There was writing on the inside. “YOU ARE ON HIDDEN CAMERA.”

MacDick glanced around, curious, looking for a camera. He put the gum in his mouth. He looked at the detective, wondering what to do with the wrapper.

Detective Clark leaned forward and took the wrapper.

“Mr. MacDick, you are being charged with attempted murder.” The detective put the wrapper in his pocket. “If convicted, under the Criminal Code you will receive a *mandatory minimum* sentence of four years.”

MacDick had been thinking about the detective’s message in the car: SAY PARKER FIRED THE FIRST SHOT.

“This fight was started by Mr. Morris Parker. He hit a bar patron with a pot of coffee. According to my information, you aimed a gun at Mr. Parker, who was not armed at the time, and you attempted to shoot him.”

“He tried to shoot me first.”

“Really? So far there is no evidence to support that position.”

MacDick frowned. “Well, he did.”

“I have a diagram here.” The detective pulled out his notebook and flipped it open, searching for the right page. “If he really did shoot at you, we should be able to find a bullet and match it to the gun he was using. That would support a claim of self-defense.”

Detective Clark slid his diagram across the table. “Where were you when he fired this shot? And where was he? Mark this diagram.” He offered MacDick a pen.

MacDick studied the diagram.

The detective leaned across the table and pointed to the diagram. “That’s the bar, that’s where Parker was seated when the shooting began. Mark the two positions with letter ‘P’ for him and ‘M’ for you.”

MacDick looked at the diagram. There was already one ‘P’ and one ‘M’ on the diagram. He looked at the detective.

“Mark the diagram. Put one ‘P’ for him. Put one ‘M’ for you.”

MacDick looked at the diagram, paused, then retraced the two letters. He looked at the detective again.

Detective Clark smiled and reached for the diagram.

“Wait.” MacDick realized the detective must be planning to plant evidence to frame Parker. When MacDick had cased The Arms job, he had looked at the pub’s security situation. There was something the detective would need to know. “Let me double check this.”

The detective realized MacDick was about to write something on the diagram. He stood up quickly, placing his body between the camera and the suspect, obscuring the suspect from the operator in the control room. MacDick wrote something on the diagram.

“Yeah, that’s about right.” MacDick pushed the notebook and pen back to the detective.

Detective Clark looked at the diagram. MacDick had drawn the back hallway. MacDick had added a label: SECURITY CAMERA.

The detective realized he had swapped pistols in that hallway. The camera would have a clear view of his evidence-tampering.

“Thank you, Mr. MacDick. That’s all for now. I’ll be checking out your story.”

Detective Clark left the interview room quickly and immediately placed a call to the crime scene. He learned investigators had found twelve bullet strikes and had recovered four bullets, and they were about to call it a night. Processing on the scene would resume tomorrow. The owner wanted to lock up and leave. Detective Clark asked to speak to him, arranging to meet

with him for a few moments before closing up. The detective immediately arranged for a ride back to the pub. Within minutes, Detective Clark was on his way back to the crime scene.

“That’s my car over there. Thanks for the ride.” The detective headed in to the pub.

Boyd MacDougall was waiting. There was a police officer standing with him. They were the only two people remaining in the pub.

“Thanks for waiting.” The detective presented a business card. “I wanted to give you this. I know you want to go home. We have to keep this scene secure until the forensics team has finished collecting their evidence. There will be a policeman here on guard all night, until the team returns in the morning. If you show me how to lock up, you can leave.”

Boyd shrugged. “Follow me.” Boyd led the detective through the back hall. “People have to leave by the back door. All they have to do is shut the door behind them. Normally, you put in a four-digit code to activate the security system. There can’t be anyone inside if you do that, they would set off the motion sensors.”

“Do you have any other security systems?”

“Follow me.”

On their way through the back hallway, Detective Clark searched for a camera, but saw nothing at the location MacDick had indicated.

“Any cameras?”

Boyd grinned. “That’s what I’m going to show you. Look at the ceiling.” He pointed at a sprinkler head. “See anything unusual?”

“I see a sprinkler head.”

“Fire code for a building this small does not require sprinklers. It’s a fake. It’s actually a camera. I’ll show you the camera monitor.” Boyd was in a hurry, but the detective was taking his time.

“Very clever.” The detective stood looking at the sprinkler head camera. “You keep an eye on staff with that?”

“Something like that.” Boyd was getting uncomfortable with these questions. He knew his hidden cameras required a sign indicating there was a video surveillance system on his premises. The installer had told Boyd to post one, but Boyd had ignored him.

The detective examined the camera position, realizing it had a clear view of the spot he had done the pistol swap. “Do you have tapes?”

“No – we use a DVR. It’s an all-digital system. Recording occurs only when motion is detected. All the clips are stored on a computer hard disk drive. The clips store both video and audio.”

“Show me the monitor.” Detective Clark took out his notebook. “According to my notes, the shooting started at 2149 approximately. Do you have any clips at that time?”

“I should have.” Boyd led the detective into the back room.

Detective Clark observed that the poker game had been disbanded long ago. He could tell Boyd was nervous about the detective learning about the game. Boyd had no idea that Detective Clark had been aware of its existence. Boyd had no idea the detective had expected it to be robbed that night.

Boyd showed the detective a small desktop computer with a large display screen. An open window on the screen showed a list of clock times in chronological order.

Boyd searched the list and found one for 20:48:12. He played the clip.

The clip showed no motion for a couple of seconds, then Boyd was visible from behind as he headed down the hallway toward the main room. Suddenly a shot was heard and Boyd ducked, moving out-of-frame. A rapid burst of shots occurred, too quickly to count, followed by two additional shots. The clip lasted a total of 20 seconds.

“Do you have any backups of this?” Detective Clark placed his hand on the small computer and looked at Boyd.

“No. It’s a new system, we don’t have that yet.” Boyd was embarrassed – the system had been in place for about three months, plenty of time to establish a backup routine.

“We will need this evidence. Any problem if I take this computer?”

Boyd thought about all the customers who were likely in clips on the DVR. The girls would be visible in some scenes. The machine was full of incriminating and embarrassing evidence: gamblers, hookers, and other sins. Late one night, Boyd had sex in the hallway with two girls who did not suspect he was recording them.

“Can I just make you a CD of the relevant clips?” Boyd asked.

“I need to inspect the accuracy of the computer clock and other internal workings, to establish validity of the recordings.” Detective Clark emitted a smug smile. “I could just seize this unit.”

Boyd dithered, unsure of what to say.

Detective Clark decided to play his trump card. “How would liquor board inspectors react to gambling in your establishment?”

“No problem, take the unit.” Boyd reached over and unplugged the computer, causing the operating system to crash. “Glad to be of assistance.”

“I’m afraid I don’t have an official receipt.”

“Don’t worry about it. Just take the computer. You can use any keyboard and monitor with it. It’s easier for you that way.” Boyd disconnected the keyboard, mouse and monitor and offered the computer to the detective.

“Thanks for your cooperation.” Detective Clark smiled.

Boyd left the pub. Detective Clark watched him get into his car, and waited until Boyd exited the parking lot.

The detective then headed out the back doorway. The door would lock automatically behind him after he went outside, so he propped it open with a nearby broom handle. He took the computer to his car and put it in the trunk. He retrieved a thick blanket from the trunk and brought it back to the pub. He re-entered the pub, removing the broom handle, and let the door lock.

Detective Clark placed the blanket out of sight and approached the policeman on guard duty. “What time does your shift end?”

“In about an hour.”

“My wife is being a bitch tonight. I’m waiting for her to go to bed. Why don’t you take off early? End your shift with a nice long coffee break – I’ll be here until your replacement arrives.”

“Sure, thanks!” The policeman left immediately.

Detective Clark entered the bar area where the shooting had taken place. He consulted his sketch, and maneuvered his body into the position from which Morris had done all his shooting. Like Morris had done, he sat on the floor. The detective looked in the direction MacDick had been standing. The detective pointed his arm and finger in a likely direction that a bullet could have flown from Morris’ gun. There was a ceiling beam on the far side of the room. The heavy, dark wood beam rested on a vertical support beam running up the wall.

Detective Clark placed a chair next to the beam, climbed up, and then placed the muzzle of the loaded pistol against the inside of the 90-degree joint between the wall support beam and the ceiling beam. He glanced back to Morris’ firing position to check alignment of the shot.

Detective Clark stepped down, retrieved his blanket and draped it over the pistol, taking care not to obstruct the muzzle. Multiple neat folds hung on each side of the weapon. He removed the safety catch, climbed back up on the chair and aimed the pistol at the joint between the floor and ceiling beams. He fired a shot into the soft, dark wood.

The blanket muffled the sound of the shot, and the bullet embedded itself deeply in the joint. Detective Clark checked the point of impact to be sure there was no visible gunshot residue. The dark beam should easily mask any residual powder burns, he figured, which had been mostly absorbed by the blanket anyway.

Detective Clark picked up the warm, spent cartridge casing from the floor where it had fallen. He considered leaving it at the scene, but then put it in his pocket.

After putting the chair back in place, Detective Clark checked the scene to ensure he had not forgotten anything. Then he sat down and waited for the next shift to arrive.

About 45 minutes later, a policeman arrived to replace him.

The detective entered his car and lit a cigarette. It had been a long night.

He picked up his cellphone and placed a call.

A voice answered with a thick South African accent. “Tell me what happened.” It was van Praag.

“Our four friends tried to rob a poker game. They ran into trouble with some military guys. The Asian kid is dead. Your two men are in hospital under guard. MacDick will be charged with attempted murder and all three will be charged with carrying a concealed firearm.”

“I need all these men back on the street as soon as possible. We have an operation underway – a very important operation, with only two remaining deliverables. There must be no delay.”

“I know.”

“Did you know about this job?” asked van Praag.

The detective took a long drag on his cigarette. “No,” he lied.

“This was not an authorized job.”

“I know. They were moonlighting. They were lucky I was on duty when it went down.”

“Clean up this mess.”

“I have everything under control. MacDick will get off. I have planted some evidence that will clear him and set up one of the military guys. I’ll also arrange to get your two men out of the hospital. They had no ID with them, and they have not identified themselves.”

“There must be no delays in the operation. We are on a tight time schedule.”

“I know.” Detective Clark took a final drag on his cigarette and then stubbed it out. “By the way, I will need something for this unexpected extra.”

There was a long pause.

“Make this problem go away. I’ll pay you twenty thousand.”

“Fine.”

The call ended.

Detective Clark put down his cellphone and smiled, thinking maybe he should have asked for twenty-five thousand.

4 – PARKER HOLDINGS LIMITED

The next morning, Morris was already awake when his Blackberry alarm sounded next to his head. The device played an audio clip – a laughing child. Morris had made a recording of Victoria when she was three. Usually, it woke Morris with a smile. This morning, he felt as if he was being laughed at.

Morris thought about how Detective Clark had kept him busy at the station until 2 AM. A few reporters had been waiting when Morris was finally released. There were a couple of newspaper photographers and a news cameraman, who asked Morris for an on-camera interview. Morris declined, but offered a couple of comments for the story because he felt sorry for keeping everyone so late.

The Blackberry emitted child's laughter again, and Morris picked it up to cancel the alarm. He rubbed his eyes, fumbled for his reading glasses, and put them on. He squinted and strained to focus on the small screen.

Morris saw an email from the_barbarian@parkerholdings.com. Conan Moore, an old friend and longtime employee, had sent a message a few minutes before. The subject heading was 'Fwd: Gunfight in Orleans Pub – One Killed, Two Injured by Ottawa Business Leader.' Conan had written: "Wow, I can't wait for you to tell me about this, schmuck!"

The rest of his email consisted of an article published in that day's Ottawa Citizen.

"One man is dead and two others injured after a bar fight ended in gunfire at the The Cumberland Arms in Ottawa's east end early Wednesday evening," the story began. "A 19-year old man was pronounced dead at the scene, identified by police as Kendo Kanise, a student from Carleton University. A second victim, an unidentified male, was shot in the leg and neck and remains in stable condition in hospital. A third man, also unidentified, was taken to the burn unit with undisclosed injuries.

“According to an Ottawa Police Service media release, police received numerous calls just before 9 PM Wednesday. Police recovered four guns at the scene and arrested one suspect.”

The article quoted several people who gave fragmentary descriptions of the battle. Morris skipped through the text until he saw his name.

“Several witnesses observed Morris Parker, CEO of Parker Holdings, shoot Mr. Kanise dead. Mr. Parker offered little information about his involvement in the battle, saying only ‘Gang members pulled guns on my friends and me. I did what I thought was the right thing to do.’”

Morris took a deep breath and sat up, rotating his feet onto the floor. “The right thing to do. Not a very good reason.”

He got out of bed stiffly and went to the bathroom to relieve himself. He put on his robe and went to check on his daughters.

One bedroom door was open and the bed was empty. Morris remembered his 18-year old daughter, Victoria, was sleeping over at a friend’s house in the country. Morris hoped it was a female friend.

The second bedroom door was closed and he opened it quietly. His 12-year old girl was sleeping soundly. Morris sat down carefully on the bed.

“What the hell was I thinking?” Morris thought about his willingness to take business risks that put the family in financial jeopardy. This had not been a calculated business risk.

There had been no time for a risk analysis. Morris had decided to confront several armed men with only a coffee pot. He had put his friends and himself at great risk. He had put their families at risk of losing fathers and husbands.

Morris kissed his daughter on the head, careful not to wake her. Then he headed out for his morning run. He decided to cut it short, and would run his six mile route instead of the planned ten.

While he was running, Morris reflected on his actions at The Arms. Morris did not often second-guess his decisions. He did not always make the right decision, he realized. But once the

effort of reaching the best possible decision had been expended, and the decision appeared to have been made with all available information, Morris was ready to live with the consequences. There was no point in worrying.

Two hours later, Morris arrived at the headquarters of Parker Holdings Limited, PHL, and pulled into his parking spot, marked by a sign with the company logo bearing the name “Morris Parker, CEO.”

He entered the building and breezed past the security station. The guard on duty nodded and they exchanged greetings. As the majority owner of the building, Morris had exempted himself from being logged-in and out at the security desk. His security staff recognized him. Any new staff member who he had not met could rely on the photo of him posted there.

Morris entered the first available elevator and placed his thumb on the fingerprint pad, unlocking access to the private floors. He then pushed the elevator button to ascend to the 22nd floor containing his penthouse office suite.

A tall, attractive, middle-aged lady entered the elevator just as the door began to close. “Morris,” she said, “I’ve read a lot of business stories about you, but I never read anything quite like the Sun story this morning. You started the gunfight at the OK Corral.”

“Good morning, Wendy.” Wendy Doolittle, owner of Doolittle Media, published several specialty magazines and rented half the 15th floor from Parker Holdings.

“I heard on the radio you killed a member of a street gang.”

“He was doing his best to kill me. Did they say which gang?”

“No. But they describe you as a real estate tycoon, software genius, and former owner of the Ottawa Colts baseball team.”

“His gang should have no trouble finding me, then. I’m not sure this kind of publicity is going to be too good for business.”

“Any publicity is good publicity. I always thought you were a straight shooter. Now you have literal proof, because they said you are an expert shot.” She exited the elevator and held the door

open. “If you feel inclined, we would like to do a feature on you. A heroic champion gunfighter story would sell magazines.”

Morris nodded. “I’m flattered. Let me get back to you. Gotta run.”

The elevator door began to close. Wendy stuck her hand in the way.

“And if I can’t do an article, at least you can let me buy you a drink so you can tell me all about it.” Wendy smiled at Morris for a moment, then removed her hand, letting the closing door break eye contact.

Wendy was very attractive, Morris realized, and she had never seemed interested in Morris before. He decided to get a copy of the Ottawa Sun ASAP. The elevator door opened on the 22nd floor.

“Morris!” The receptionist, Jill, a pretty brunette with a short ponytail, held up a copy of the Ottawa Sun. “Have you seen this?”

A headshot photo of Morris wearing jacket and tie, taken from the annual report of one of his publicly traded companies, was on the cover. The headline was BUSINESS LEADER GUNS DOWN GANGSTER.”

“Mr. Latham requested to meet with you right away.” Jill was concerned. “He wants to discuss this situation.”

Liam Latham, PHL In-House Counsel, had the second-best corner office on the floor, after Morris’ own office. Morris noticed his door was closed.

“And Conan told me not to tell you he’s in your office.”

“Thank-you, Jill.” Morris accepted the newspaper and looked at his watch. “Tell him I can see him in thirty minutes.”

Reading and walking slowly, Morris entered his office and closed the door. He observed the magnificent view of the Ottawa River, seeing his desk chair was facing the window, opposite to its normal position.

“Conan Moore,” said Morris, addressing the back of the chair.

The chair spun around to reveal a bald, overweight man with a bushy beard. “Nice shooting, schmuck.” Conan usually wore a plaid flannel shirt and looked like he lived in the woods. Today, he was wearing a white tee shirt. The word UTILITY was visible on his upper chest.

“Would you care for a seat, Mr. President?” Conan gestured to one of the visitor chairs in front of Morris’ desk.

“If it’s not too much of a bother, Mr. Utility Programmer, sir.”

“Like the shirt? Check this out.” Conan stood up and displayed huge lettering on his barrel chest: UTILITY PROGRAMMER. He turned around and pointed with his thumb to the Parker Holdings Limited name and logo on the back. “I got this tee shirt made up. You remember the shirt you gave me back when?”

“Yes, I remember offering you a job about twenty years ago.” Morris paused. “We were working in my basement. You were joining a company of three people. Our fourth employee had just quit because he wanted to work on database systems, but I wanted him to do integration work. He complained that all I wanted him to do was utility programming, like it was gofer work.”

“And I was happy with that title,” Conan grinned.

“And now your utility programs permeate this company -- like a bad smell. I made up a shirt for you back then. But it was classier than this one. It had a collar, your name and title were hand-embroidered, and the company name was spelled correctly. That shirt you are wearing says ‘Parking Holdings Limited.’ It’s P-A-R-K-E-R, not P-A-R-K-I-N-G.”

“No shit?” Conan struggled to read the writing on his back. He started to pull it off his big belly.

“Keep your shirt on, please.” Morris said. “The shirt fits fine and will be good when I assign you to manage the *parking lot*. I’ll give you a nametag. *My Name is Conan*, spelled S-C-H-M-U-C-K.”

Conan laughed. “OK, but remember the parking lot is still within wireless networking distance of your supposedly secure systems. Secure against anyone, that is, but me! I built your network, and I know how to take it all apart.”

“OK, you can keep your regular job, since you have me over a barrel.”

Conan pointed excitedly to the Ottawa Sun newspaper Morris was holding. “That story said you shot a guy with his own gun. Killed him with it. Then you shot a guy he was with. You also scalded another guy with hot coffee and shot him too.”

“Actually, I only shot two guys. I scalded the first guy with coffee and took his gun. I shot an Asian guy who was shooting at me, then I shot another guy who was struggling with Jacques Tremblay. Otherwise he would have shot Jacques.”

“How many guys were there?”

“Four guys. Two in a corner booth, and two at the bar.”

“Everyone here is going crazy with this news. Nobody knows what exactly happened. It’s front page in the papers and top story on every radio station. Jill has tons of messages from press people already. All the big TV networks have called, Canadian and American. They seem to like vigilante justice.”

“I guess I should read this story, then.” Morris opened the paper and walked around his desk, stopping a few inches short of colliding with Conan. “See if you can utility-program me a coffee,” he said without looking up from the paper.

Just then, Jill knocked and opened the office door. “I thought you might like this.” She offered Morris a cup of coffee in his favorite mug with milk, no sugar.

“Good job,” Morris said to Conan. “Dismissed.”

Conan stood to attention and saluted.

Morris accepted the coffee from Jill. “Thanks.”

Conan left with Jill. Morris could hear him, with great enthusiasm, start to tell Jill what he had just learned from Morris.

Morris closed his office door and walked over to his desk. Conan had written the word “SCHMUCK” on a notepad on his desk.

Morris read the Ottawa Sun story. It contained disjointed quotes from numerous people, and it was difficult to acquire an accurate understanding of the sequence of events. Everything happened quickly, and everyone had a different point of view. One woman was sitting near the Asian. She was terrified when the shooting started. She hid under her table and was horrified to see a person fall to the floor dead, right in front of her.

Liam Latham knocked twice and entered the office without waiting for an invitation. “I’ll make this quick, Morris.” He closed the door behind him.

“You may approach the bench, counselor,” said Morris.

Walking briskly, Liam held up a copy of the Ottawa Citizen. Under the headline “Gunfight in Orleans Pub” was a photo of a covered dead body being wheeled out of The Cumberland Arms by an attendant with a grim look on his face. “I’m worried about this.”

Morris looked at the picture with mild interest. “You worry about using expired toothpaste, Liam.”

“Who fired the first shot? Tell me it *was not* you.”

“It *was not* me.”

“Who fired the first shot?”

“I don’t know his name. Let’s refer to him as Butthead.”

“What was he shooting at? Why?”

“Aren’t you supposed to ask questions one at a time? He shot the ceiling. Probably because Jacques tackled him as he was drawing his gun and spoiled his aim.”

“What was he aiming at?”

“He was about to aim at me, probably. I had just clobbered his friend, Beavis, in the face with a pot of coffee.”

Liam paused, then began pacing back and forth like he was performing in front of a jury.

“Please explain why you did that, Mr. Parker.”

“I observed Mr. Beavis was about to pull out a gun with the intention of committing a crime.”

“What made you think he had that intention?”

“Mr. Beavis and Mr. Butthead were in a position that they could gain rapid access to the back room. At that time, a high-stakes poker game was in progress. There was a large amount of cash available. I deduced that they were working with another pair of individuals in the room, who were creating a diversion. Their plan was to draw out the owner so they could access the back room and steal the cash.”

“And you thought you had the capability to intervene and prevent that crime?”

“I was with friends. I had moved into a position beside Mr. Beavis. I saw a pot of hot coffee I could use as a weapon.”

“Are you a trained police officer?”

“No.”

“Are you a police detective?”

“No.”

“Are you in any way associated or have you ever been associated in the past with police enforcement?”

“As a victim, yes.”

Liam looked at Morris and frowned. “Do *not* say that if you face this line of questioning.”

“Fine.”

“So you are not a trained law enforcement official, yet you chose to initiate an attack against several armed men in a crowded public place. Are you aware of police advice in situations where an armed robbery is taking place? At a bank for instance?”

“Yes. I have a daughter who works in a bank.”

“What do the police recommend in the event of a holdup, even when no weapon is visible?”

“They recommend giving over some cash.”

“Mr. Parker, you acted extremely foolishly. You put the lives of innocent people, including yourself, at risk. You are a past victim of crime. Did you think you could do a better job of controlling the situation than police professionals?”

“Yes. There were no police present at the time.”

Liam frowned again. “Do *not* say it that way.”

“OK, how about just ‘there were no police present?’”

“Better, but it’s already too late. There is no way I would put you on the stand, if I was defending you.”

“Defending *me*? I didn’t commit the crime here! Four armed thugs are about to execute a heist. If somebody is about to point a gun at *me*, my friend, I do not just sit quietly.”

“If you were on the stand and gave the answers you just gave, the Crown Prosecutor would sum you up like this: you took the law into your own hands. He would present your opportunistic business track record and past military training in such a way he could conclude you are an aggressive, authoritarian figure used to controlling every situation.”

“What’s wrong with that?”

“There is a lot wrong with appearing as a past crime victim with no respect for safety procedures or the rule of law. You would appear to the jury as a trigger-happy, racist, punk-hating right winger who eagerly killed a 19-year old Japanese kid.”

“A kid who fired at me first.”

“Can you prove it? The shooting was over before many people knew what was going on. The eyewitness statements in the newspapers are all over the map. You could be charged criminally with manslaughter. You could be sued civilly. How this story comes out in the press is certain to affect your business dealings. Right now, public sentiment could go either way.”

Morris sagged. “I thought I had already heard the worst of this from Terri. I was kicking myself this morning when I got up and looked at the kids.”

“Why didn’t you call me when this happened?”

“I didn’t need your help telling them what I did, and I didn’t want to bother you. Why waste resources? Doing it myself was more efficient.”

“You put too much faith in honesty and efficiency. Those are great business values, but if you screw up in a criminal matter....”

Morris paused, then continued defiantly. “All I did was tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”

“You act as if *that* is the only thing that matters. This is not Wonderland. You’re in my world now, Alice. What we’re dealing with here is our *justice system*.”

5 – DETECTIVE CLARK HAS HIS WAY

Detective Clark arrived at the forensics lab at 5:50 AM. He did not want to be late. He parked in an empty lot with a Tim Horton's coffee in his hand, sipping it occasionally. There was a second coffee cup on his dash. A wisp of vapor emitted through a pinhole in the cup cover, fogging a small section of windshield.

After he had been waiting about five minutes, Sandy's car arrived, just before 6 AM. She exited and began walking toward the main entrance. She was wearing a pale blue blouse, black mini skirt, and walked a bit awkwardly in black pumps.

Pretty good-looking legs for a short woman, Detective Clark thought as he smiled to himself. The Detective stepped out of his car, with his coffee in his left hand. He reached for the second coffee, taking it with a small Tim Horton's bag containing creamers and sugar. Both hands full, he closed the car door with his hip.

"Good Morning, Sandy," he said as he walked briskly toward her, smiling warmly.

"Hello," Sandy replied with a smile. She carried a large purse over one shoulder.

The detective approached and noticed she was wearing perfume. He offered the coffee and Tim's bag. "I brought you a coffee. Cream and sugar are in the bag. I'm not sure how you like it."

"Thanks." She adjusted her purse strap higher on her arm and accepted the coffee and bag. They started to walk together toward the building.

"So how do you like your Tim's?" he asked.

"Oh," she said. "Double double," meaning two creams, two sugars.

"Double *trouble*? He looked at her breasts for an instant. I think I can remember that." He smiled.

Sandy blushed.

They reached the main door. Sandy had a proximity pass hanging around her neck, and she passed it by the card reader. The reader beeped and Detective Clark opened the door for her. They proceeded through the building with Sandy in the lead.

“Since we got back so late, we left the stuff locked in the truck last night.” She was nervous and started talking quickly. “You want to see the guns, right? They haven’t been dusted for prints yet, so you’ll have to be careful. Right now, they’re still in the truck in the garage. We’ll be heading back to the scene in a couple of hours. I have to log the evidence items into the evidence room computer before you can sign them out. I hope you can wait a few minutes.”

“What are the steps to log them?”

“I have to enter a description of the item in our database, and match each item to the photo taken last night. It won’t take long.”

Detective Clark realized Sandy would have to read and register the serial numbers on the weapons. His personal pistol had his police issue serial number. The Morris pistol had no serial number. He could not allow her to enter the serial numbers before he got his hands on the guns.

“If you have a bit of time, I’d like to see your cool truck. I watch CSI all the time. Can you give me a bit of a tour?”

“Sure!”

Sandy swiped her proximity pass again and they entered the garage area. In the middle of a large floor area, there was a cube van about the size of a box ambulance. It was marked CRIME SCENE UNIT in large lettering and painted in City of Ottawa Police colors. There was nobody else in sight. They walked to the back of the truck.

There was a padlock on the door handle. Sandy placed the coffee bag and cup in the same hand. With her free hand, she reached into her purse and pulled out a set of keys. To open the padlock, Sandy would require two hands, but both her hands were full.

“Let me help you here,” said Detective Clark.

Sandy held her cup hand slightly higher, expecting him to take her cup.

Instead, the detective stepped closer and grasped the padlock, twisting it so she could insert the key. Sandy inserted her key and snapped it open.

Detective Clark stood close behind Sandy. Before she could extract her key, he slid his hand down onto her hand. Then he guided her hand and they removed the padlock together.

Sandy felt a rush with the warmth of his hand on her hand. He was standing very, very close to her, and the scent of his aftershave made her want him to get closer. She had never enjoyed this kind of attention from such a good-looking man.

“I ...” she began, then her voice cracked. She began to cough, and withdrew her hand from his to cover her mouth.

Detective Clark manipulated the door handle and opened the door. He placed the padlock on the floor. “After you.” He motioned for her to climb the steps. He followed her into the van and closed the door behind them.

On one side of the van was a work surface with two small-backed steno chairs on wheels. There was a laptop computer in a docking station in front of each chair. The detective was unable to stand up straight – the roof was a bit too low for him. He stood slightly hunched, slightly uncomfortable.

Sandy smiled up at him. “We can sit on these.” She placed her coffee on the work surface and grabbed the back of the chair closest to the door. She released bungee cords holding the chairs in place to prevent them from crashing around when the truck was in motion. The detective sat on her left and took a sip of coffee.

Sandy opened the laptop in front of her and pressed the power button. “We have a secure wireless network in the building. I’ll update the database from here.” She punched a code into a tall wall safe beside her, opening it. “This is where we lock up the firearms.”

Sandy reached into the safe and extracted a pistol in a plastic zip-lock bag. She gave it to the detective. “You can look this over while I enter the others.”

“Thanks.” Detective Clark put his coffee down and accepted the pistol.

The detective examined the gun through the plastic bag. There was a small yellow tag with the digit “2” on it. It was not the gun Detective Clark needed. The detective watched Sandy extract a second gun from the safe. This pistol had the action locked rearward. This was the detective’s pistol, and he would have to swap it for the one Morris had used, the one the detective now carried in his holster.

Sandy waited for the laptop to finish booting, watching the screen.

The detective pulled his chair closer to her and placed his hand on her thigh.

Sandy didn’t look at him. Blushing, she tried to concentrate on the computer. The login prompt appeared, but she did not react, unable to concentrate on what she was doing.

“Come closer,” he said.

Sandy turned her chair to face him. He pulled her close and kissed her. They began necking.

The detective moved his hand up and down her outer thigh, caressing slowly. She sighed. He got down on both knees, pushing her legs apart. She wrapped her arms around his shoulders, pulling his face between her breasts.

A moment later, his next move was to start removing her panties.

“Wait,” she said. “I’m not sure....”

“I’m clean,” he said, kissing her. “And I want you.” He kissed her again. “Are you using birth control?”

“Of course, but....” She drew back slightly. “We just met....”

The detective stopped, leaned back, and took a deep breath.

“Then let’s get to know each other.” He smiled and took her two hands in his, kissing them.

“We can start with this coffee.”

The detective reached for her cup and removed the lid. He opened the bag and reached in.

“Two cream, two sugar. Double double. See? I’m getting to know you already.”

Sandy laughed, and reached out to touch his face.

The detective peeled back the creamer cups just enough to allow liquid to escape. Then he opened the sugar bags and poured one into her cup. "Sugar will give you quick energy." He poured the other.

Making a show of it, he then picked up her coffee cup and one of the creamers. He gently squeezed the creamer container between his thumb and forefinger with multiple short pulses, causing the white liquid to shoot into the coffee in small spurts. "But certain creams," he said as he picked up the second creamer, "can have long lasting effects."

She laughed.

"You are having an effect on me, by the way. You have me in quite a state." With a boyish grin, the detective adjusted his position a bit and revealed to Sandy he had a hard-on.

Sandy looked at his bulge, then at his eyes, smiling.

"If the lady will permit me," he said. "I will take a moment to adjust this, uh, situation."

Sandy blushed again, still smiling, and turned her head away.

The detective got to his feet, turning his back to her. He reached into his pants pocket, pulling out a small plastic bottle containing a clear liquid. He still had her coffee cup in one hand. He flipped open the lid of the plastic bottle with his thumb and dumped the liquid in her coffee.

The bottle contained one carefully pre-measured dose of GHB, the date-rape drug.

Early that morning, Detective Clark had estimated her body weight when he prepared the bottle. He did not want to cause an overdose. GHB required about 15 minutes to take effect. In a drink, it had a slight salty taste. The sugar in her coffee would disguise that taste nicely.

"That's better." He returned to his seat and poured the second creamer.

He offered her the coffee. "To new friends."

They touched their paper cups together.

For the next fifteen minutes, Detective Clark was the most charming and disarming self-depreciating male on the planet. He asked her questions about her past and listened intently to her stories. He complemented Sandy on her accomplishments, her sense of humor, and her good

taste in clothing. Any time she slowed the pace of drinking her coffee, he jokingly proposed a toast to something new and meaningless. She enjoyed him immensely.

Clark watched Sandy closely. He did not want her to take in more of the drug than necessary, because he needed her to be able to leave the vehicle under her own power.

When it appeared to Clark the drug had loosened Sandy up just enough, the detective tried kissing her again. This time, she reacted without inhibitions. He caressed her inner thigh and she spread herself wide. He quickly removed her panties, hoisted her skirt above her hips, embraced her from behind and fucked her doggie-style. She kept her balance by bracing both hands on the work surface.

He was quick to climax.

She wanted more, but he pulled up his pants, buckled his belt, and zipped shut.

She took a couple of deep breaths to wind down. She put her skirt back into place, and tried to straighten her hair. She could feel his semen starting to run down her crotch.

“Why don’t you freshen up?” he suggested. “I’ll be here when you get back. We can make dinner plans.”

She smiled weakly, feeling a bit dizzy. The drug effect was still increasing. She bent over and picked up her panties from where they lay near his feet. She put them in her purse.

“I’ll wait here for you.” He gave her yet another confident, warm, dazzling smile.

She stepped out of the truck.

Detective Clark closed the door. He opened the zip-lock bag that contained his personal pistol. He removed the numbered yellow tag from the trigger guard, and placed it on the Morris pistol, then swapped pistols.

Detective Clark sat and relaxed for a moment, thinking what to do next. He had a full day planned.

In the washroom, Sandy vomited. When she returned from cleaning herself, Detective Clark was gone, and she was having trouble remembering what had just happened to her.

6 – ALEX JAMES, GOVERNMENT AGENT

After his meeting with Liam, Morris spent time working on deals. He signed an Agreement of Purchase and Sale for a lot of land. He negotiated a Shareholder Agreement with two partners for a new corporation to own and develop the land. He reviewed the financial statements for a company he planned to take public, and he accepted a speaking engagement at a charity dinner.

At 10 AM, the speakerphone on his desk beeped.

“I have Mr. James for you, parked on 3.”

“Thank-you, Jill.”

Morris grabbed a wireless telephone headset from its cradle and put it on his head. He punched a button with the label PARKED CALL followed by the digit 3, and picked up the call.

“I hope you’re not making this call on government time,” said Morris.

“What’s your point?” Alex James demanded.

“I expect you nearly-retired government types to push yourselves, and try to accomplish at least three or four hours of productive work *each and every day*.”

“That much?” Alex James had come to expect a lot of government bashing from his old friend. “I want to assure you, Mr. Taxpayer, we are putting your tax dollars to very good use. For example, today we are planning our next reorganization. That project will likely be followed by a federal election, resulting in a change of government. Then we will experience staff cutbacks, followed by a re-reorganization, followed by a change of mission, followed by another reorganization, followed by aggressive hiring.”

Morris grinned. “And your career plan is therefore: retire, collect pension, get re-hired on contract and earn double salary?”

Alex James changed to a thick and convincing Scottish accent. “Correction *laddie*: I’ll be forced into retirement and *collect severance*, then collect pension, get re-hired on contract and earn double salary. Ach.”

“Of course. That’s why you were on French language training for the last six months, so they can release you and hire you back at greater expense into a bilingual position.”

“Bien sûr. You understand government perfectly. You should run for Prime Minister.”

“OK, that hurts.” Morris paused. “Did you call to remind me I cannot retire like you, at age 55?”

“I see in the papers you have made new enemies. I am calling in my capacity as your security advisor.”

Alex James, another ex-army buddy who ended up working in Ottawa, had self-appointed to the position of security advisor to PHL. Alex worked for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, CSIS, for fifteen years. Morris was not sure exactly what Alex did there at the present, since his work was mostly classified.

Alex actually took his self-appointed job very seriously. “You need to increase your personal security, Morris. You killed a gang member. You have to expect they will retaliate. It’s not difficult to figure out your home address.”

Morris raised an eyebrow. “How?”

“As a director of PHL, your home address is listed on several corporate filings. This information is available to anybody who writes Corporations Canada to request it.”

“You think a member of the Ledbury Banff Cripps is literate enough to do that? Would Corporations Canada give my personal address to a thug?”

“They would give it to a lawyer. And your new opponents have lawyers.”

“I thought the Cripps were mostly young street types.”

“They are. But they have new friends. The Cripps recently developed an association with the Hell’s Angels Motorcycle Club.”

“How do you know that?”

“I can’t tell you.”

“Sorry.” Morris paused to think. “What *can* you tell me about them, then?”

“Hell’s Angels is the biggest supplier of GHB and Ecstasy in Canada. They manage a good chunk of the prostitution in Quebec and Ontario. Over half the illegal weapons seized in the country are likely sourced by Hell’s Angels. They use smart, expensive lawyers and are incorporated federally with a headquarters in Montreal.”

“You think these guys will come after me?”

“Were all four of the bad guys Cripps members?”

“The cops could not identify two guys we called Beavis and Butthead. I hospitalized both of them.”

“Got a pen? Write this down.” Alex paused. “Get a video surveillance system for the house with perimeter intrusion sensors. I’ve been meaning to mention it the last few times we were over at your place. Your lot backs onto a ravine and that’s a major vulnerability. Put security film on your ground floor windows. There are other things you should do, but start with these. Put in an outdoor low-light security camera system.”

“OK. I’ll have my security supplier give me something right away. I’ll put this in TaskMan.”

“What’s TaskMan?”

“It’s our automated task tracking and notification system.”

“What kind of notification?”

“It sends reminders to people if they are responsible for overdue tasks. It notifies whoever assigned the task as well. It’s not for government work. Can you imagine how much pressure it would create for a guy like you? You would get about a hundred reminders a day. A queue full of important national security tasks set by your boss: GET COFFEE FOR DIRECTOR, GET COFFEE FOR DIRECTOR....”

“Funny. Actually, I work directly for him now. He meets who I schedule him to meet, and he goes where I arrange for him to go.”

“You sound like a glorified gofer. Gofer this, gofer that.... Bad dog! Sit! Heel, boy, heel.”

“That reminds me, I have to shine his shoes....”

“Let’s get together this weekend,” Morris said. “It’s your turn to bash the private sector. Why don’t you and Sarah come over for steaks?”

“Did you check with Terri? If so, I’ll check with my commander.”

“Good point. I’ll ask her first. I don’t think she has plans, but if she does, this conversation never happened.”

“What conversation?”

“Bye for now – get back to your government nap.”

“Bye. Don’t forget those security arrangements. And make sure your fire insurance is paid up!”

Morris disconnected the call, turned to his keyboard, and created a new TaskMan task. He inserted the title VIDEO SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM FOR PARKER RESIDENCE and added text describing the requirement. He assigned HIGH for severity and IMMEDIATE for urgency. Then he picked Zia’s name from the ASSIGN TO list.

Morris added a sentence to the task comment history: “Zia, I need a design quote. Call me ASAP to discuss this requirement.”

He was about to send the task then added to the task description: “Supply and install fire extinguishers for kitchen, garage, and back deck.”

Then he clicked SEND.

7 – CLARK AND THE KANISE FAMILY

It was late in the day. Detective Clark was putting the finishing touches on his report.

He had before him a convincing statement from Mr. Innes MacDick describing how Morris Parker had fired a shot at MacDick – the first shot of the gun battle. Mr. MacDick also denied any connection to the two still unidentified men now in hospital.

The detective also had other – much more compelling – evidence against Parker. An email he had just received from the ballistics lab indicated the crime scene investigators, acting at the detective's direction, had found a bullet embedded in the ceiling beam. Using their standard procedures, the bullet had been carefully extracted and compared to a test bullet fired from the pistol Morris had used. Both bullets were proven to come from the same gun.

The statements of Mr. Ed Smitt and Mr. Jacques Tremblay supported Parker's version of events, but they could be discounted by the fact that they were his loyal friends. There were other statements from various witnesses, all of which Detective Clark ensured contained just enough contradictory information to create a good smoke screen. The most reliable evidence was the physical evidence. Detective Clark was feeling very satisfied with his day's work. He had enough to get his man MacDick out of jail.

As for the two men requiring identification, Detective Clark had managed to neglect ordering photos and prints to be taken. He could not postpone those formalities indefinitely. The sooner he could get them out of there, the better.

His report recommended the charge of attempted murder against Mr. MacDick be dropped. He knew that recommendation would be followed, now that he had an alternate person to charge. Mr. MacDick would instead face lesser charges: pointing a firearm and unauthorized possession of a firearm. If convicted, it would be Mr. MacDick's first offence. He would plead self-defense and his lawyer would tell the judge what a tough life his client led, in constant danger since

childhood, because his mother did not love him and abandoned him to the street at age 16. He would likely get no jail time. Most importantly, he would immediately be eligible for bail.

The report recommended that Morris Parker be charged with three offences. First, for the coffee pot attack against unidentified suspect #1: aggravated assault. Second, for the two shots he fired into unidentified suspect #2: attempted murder while using a firearm. Detective Clark smiled. For that one, Parker had admitted to Clark he aimed at the head and missed. Clark included that information in his report. And third, for killing Kendo Kanise: manslaughter.

Detective Clark did not care if Parker eventually was convicted or not. He only cared that the heat was off MacDick until van Praag's operation was finished.

Detective Clark's phone rang. It was the front desk officer calling up to say a Mr. Masahiro Kanise and family had arrived at the station and wanted to meet with him. The detective was tired and hungry, having worked through lunch. Still, he was curious. There were four people in total. Clark told the desk officer to place the family in the large meeting room.

Clark pulled out a report on Kendo Kanise.

Kendo was 19-year old student at Carleton University. His family had been informed of the death this morning. Coincidentally, the father, mother, and grandfather were visiting their son in Canada.

The police priest had been used to inform the family at their hotel. A Japanese language interpreter was required. Normally, a 9-1-1 Communications Clerk would have informed the next of kin by telephone. This was a VIP family. The Japanese embassy had been contacted to locate next of kin, and had requested special handling due to the high profile of the family.

Detective Clark turned to his Internet browser and googled the name "Masahiro Kanise." Mr. Kanise was the subject of several business news articles. He owned a couple of textile factories and seemed to be involved in steel production and consumer electronics. One of his companies had apparently been penalized for bribery. A public official had been given a gift of golf

equipment and a country club membership valued at four million yen. Detective Clark did an online conversion to learn the value: over \$45,000.

Clark drummed his fingers then asked himself: “What is your expectation in dealing with the police, Mr. Kanise?” The detective googled the search words “police corruption Japan.”

Detective Clark skimmed a few item headings and then found an authoritative, scholarly article on police integrity in Japan. The article summary indicated that the Japanese police system suffered from a spate of recent scandals, and those scandals might be the tip of the iceberg. In Japan, internal investigation procedures and techniques related to police misconduct were not well developed. Detective Clark learned there were three acute problems: embezzlement of money from police slush funds, endemic corruption through police control over the pachinko slot machine industry, and police tolerance of organized crime.

“Welcome to Canada, sir.” He closed his browser and headed for the interview room.

The interview room had no cameras. Four people were waiting.

A well-dressed, middle-aged Japanese couple sat stoically, in two adjacent chairs, at a large conference table.

There was a thin old man with long grey hair and a long, wispy moustache and beard seated at the table resting his hands on a cane between his legs. An empty chair separated him from the couple.

There was also a young man in a business suit standing at the door. Speaking with a strong accent, he said, “You must be Detective Clark?”

“Yes. David Clark.” The Detective offered a handshake.

“I am Chikara Sato, interpreter.” The young man bowed, eyes down, to about a 15 degree angle, slightly to the left so as to avoid colliding with the detective. Then he quickly straightened and accepted the handshake.

“You look tired, Mr. Sato.”

“I just arrived from Japan.”

He was called all the way from Japan for this meeting, thought the detective. The embassy's interpreter was not good enough, apparently. Clark had met her, and she spoke English much better than this young man. Perhaps she was not trusted enough.

"Detective, may I present Mr. Masahiro Kanise and his wife," said Mr. Sato.

Mr. Masahiro bowed slightly to the detective, and Detective Clark responded with an equivalent bow. Masahiro did not seem overly impressed.

Then the detective considered the situation. Mr. Masahiro was a senior executive, and Detective Clark was a lowly public servant. Japanese etiquette required proper recognition of rank.

The detective bowed deeply and slowly, looking down to the floor. "Express my condolences to your employer and his family, and my sincere apologies for our police service being inadequate to protect your son."

Detective Clark remained bent down, forehead at tabletop level. Mr. Sato spoke to the couple in Japanese. When he finished, the detective slowly straightened himself and re-established eye contact with Mr. Kanise.

Masahiro Kanise was impressed with this apology, and he bowed about 15 degrees, eyes down, then spoke a few words, then straightened.

Mr Sato said "Mr. Kanise accepts your gracious sentiments."

The detective bowed again, slightly.

Mr. Kanise nodded.

The detective took a seat at the table. The interpreter remained standing.

"How can I help Mr. Kanise?" said the detective.

"Mr. Kanise asks what was being done to prosecute his son's killer," said Sato. "He is concerned that Mr. Parker is not in jail."

"There would need to be evidence to allow us to apprehend Mr. Parker," the detective stated.

Mr. Sato translated, and Mr. Kanise responded.

“Mr. Kanise expresses the strongest and most urgent desire possible that such evidence be found as quickly as possible.”

Detective Clark liked the way this was going. “I have limited resources available to me. I am but a humble public servant.”

Mr. Sato translated.

Mr. Kanise responded with a nod, eyes down. It was a mini-bow, the detective realized. Then Mr. Kanise said a few words to the old man. The interpreter did not translate.

The old man began to speak in Japanese. His voice was slow and surprisingly deep for someone of his age. He looked down at the tabletop while he spoke. The interpreter waited patiently for him to finish, trying to remember everything being said.

“*Ojiisan* is grandfather of Kendo and father of Mr. Masahiro Kanise,” said Mr. Sato.

The detective nodded toward the old man. “How do you do, Mr. *Ojiisan*.”

“I speak wrongly.” The interpreter bowed apologetically to the detective. “*Ojiisan* is Japanese language for grandfather. The mister’s name is Kendo Kanise, Senior. He is *samurai*. He is grandfather of Kendo Kanise Junior, victim of Morris Parker.”

“How do you do, Mr. Kanise.” The detective understood the significance of the *samurai* to be the honorable warrior class, highest stature in Japanese society in ancient times.

The old man nodded in reply.

“In Japan, his grandson was *bosozoku*, member of motorcycle gang. He was sent to study in Canada to break that connection. He was a good grandson.”

“I understand.” The detective turned his attention to Mr. Sato.

“Mr. Parker has murdered the only son and heir to the family of Kanise. The honor of the family must be recovered. Mr. Kanise seeks your approval for *katakiuchi*.”

“I’m sorry, what?”

The interpreter struggled for better words. “The *Ojiisan* does not know the rules in your country. He believes in the ancient customs of Japan. In ancient times, if a family member was murdered, the family could seek *katakiuchi* – revenge.”

“Go on.”

“Private retribution was allowed if the criminal had not been apprehended by the state. The avenger must apply for permission from the authorities. The town magistrate must register the samurai’s name on the list of official avengers and provide a copy to the potential avenger, giving him permission to attack his enemy wherever the culprit might be found.”

“The *Ojiisan* wants me to give him and his family permission to go after Morris Parker.”

“The *Ojiisan* is wise, and he knows these rules may not be legal in Canada.” Sato turned to the grandfather and they appeared to discuss what to do next. Sato made a suggestion, and the grandfather nodded slightly.

The interpreter looked at the detective. “Can you help us?”

The detective looked at the old man. “Cut the bullshit.” He raised his hand toward Mr. Sato. “Don’t translate that.”

“I can help in some ways,” Clark said cautiously.

Mr. Sato turned to the grandfather and told him in Japanese *it appears he will accept a bribe*. The old man smiled.

The old man spoke two words, and Mr. and Mrs. Kanise stood immediately.

“We look forward to seeing you again, Detective Clark,” said the interpreter.

Clark stood and watched them leave. The interpreter closed the door, leaving the detective and the old man alone.

The old man reached into his jacket and pulled out fat a business envelope, and placed it on the table.

The old man slid the envelope across the table. “A wedding gift,” he said, in perfect English.

Detective Clark picked up the envelope. The flap was not sealed, so he opened it. Inside was a stack of US \$100 dollar bills. The detective estimated the envelope contained \$10,000. He closed the flap and placed it on the table, looking at the old man.

“I have a friend who also wishes to marry,” the detective said.

With a small smile, the old man pulled a second identical envelope from his pocket and slid it across the table.

The detective stood up, gathered the envelopes, smiled, and bowed.

The old man nodded.

Detective Clark left the room with his unexpected bonus creating a visible bulge in his jacket.

8 – MORRIS, ZIA, CONAN AND TASKMAN

Morris had been working on a business proposal for five hours without a break. Terri had expected him home by 6 PM. At 6:15, he had called to say he would be another 30 minutes. At 7:00 PM, the family started dinner without him. It was now 7:30 PM. Morris was still working.

An email from Zia arrived. The subject was FWD: URGENT TASK TMID12524 VIDEO SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM FOR PARKER RESIDENCE.

Morris opened the message. Zia had forwarded a TaskMan reminder email, adding text to ask about the fire extinguishers.

The text of the reminder consisted of the statement DO NOT REPLY TO THIS EMAIL. DO NOT FORWARD THIS EMAIL. CLICK ON THE LINK BELOW TO READ YOUR REMINDER.

Zia had mishandled the message. Zia had clicked the link, Morris could see, because otherwise he would not have seen anything about fire extinguishers. All Zia was supposed to do was type his question into the TaskMan screen, not send email. The system would do that for him by notifying Morris as soon as Zia had added his question to the TaskMan database. Morris sighed.

Because Morris had marked the task urgent, TaskMan would continue sending hastener emails until Zia recorded a response in the system.

Morris clicked the reply button. “Follow instructions,” he typed. “You must click the link in the reminder message. Put your response into the web page that comes up. That way TaskMan knows you have responded. Otherwise, it will keep reminding you by email. Eventually, it will escalate by sending an audio message to your cellphone. Call me at the office.”

Morris clicked send and resumed working on his proposal. A few moments later, his desk phone rang.

Morris put on his headset and checked the name on his call display. “Zia, this is Morris.”

“In my country, they do not harass you with reminder emails or audio messages to your cellphone. In Iran, the hardliners just send someone to kill you.” Zia said E-RON, not like most North Americans would say: I-RAN.

“Which is why you left your country, right, Persian?”

“No.” Zia spoke with no discernable accent. “I love to do outdoor camera installations at 30-below zero, like I did last winter.” He had been living in Canada since age five.

Zia’s family departed Iran after the fall of the Shaw. His father worked as a house painter to put his two sons through university. Now they all worked in a family business selling security solutions that integrated cameras, sensors, computer controllers and sophisticated software. Their systems outperformed more expensive systems from very large companies. They called their enterprise Iron Integrity Security.

“I have been advised to implement a home security system ASAP,” said Morris.

“I have read the newspapers. I can see why.”

“Do you understand the requirements I sent you?”

“Yes. You need all-around exterior coverage of your residence with cameras and/or sensors, perimeter intruder detection, and offsite video monitoring. I’ll have to devise an illumination plan. I will also need to meter your exterior night lighting. I hope you have a site survey for your lot. Do you have streetlights nearby? Can you meet me there tonight, after dark?”

“Sure. Let’s meet at 9 PM. I’ll have a site plan for you.”

“Good. I’ll have a look at your landscaping then, and start coming up with camera positions. For your perimeter intruder detection...what kind of alerts do you want?”

“A loudhailer challenge system. You know, ‘Intruder Alert!’ and maybe a klaxon to scare them off.”

“OK. I can also set up an automatic notification to your cellphone. You have a Blackberry with a color display, right? The system will send you a photograph from whatever camera detects the intruder. Camera location and timestamp will show on the screen. There is just one drawback

– there will be false alarms, especially at first, until we tune the cameras and sensors. Birds, cats, raindrops on the lens, for example.”

“It would not be good to have a lot of loud false alarms – the neighbors will complain.”

“We will disable the loudhailer during the tuning phase.”

“OK. For arming and disarming – what do you suggest?”

“We could give everyone a swipe card or they could enter an alarm code on a keypad, but we have a new face recognition solution that you might prefer.”

“Boyd MacDougall at The Cumberland Arms says you talked him into something that did that. He was very satisfied, by the way.”

“Good. The software is still a bit crude, but it’s getting better. Basically, each image is analyzed to identify the shape and size of a human. A running cat would be too small. A tree moving in the wind would be too big. If the system thinks it’s looking at a human, the software parses out the head area, looking for facial features. If it finds what registers as a face, it frames the face and sends a cropped face shot to the hard drive. If it has seen the face before, it stores the image in the same folder each time. The more face shots, the better it can recognize a repeating face. We can put that snapshot in the image we send to your Blackberry.”

“Interesting. Can you make it send only the new faces to my Blackberry? I don’t want it to send an alert for each family member or friend.”

“We have the source code, but I don’t have a programmer available at the moment,” said Zia.

“I have one.” Morris checked his watch. It was now almost 8:00 PM. Conan could very well still be at his desk. “Let me get my favorite Utility Programmer on the line.”

Morris dialed Conan’s four-digit office extension.

“I’m sorry,” Conan answered, “I’m not at my desk right now.”

“Where are you?” Morris asked.

“I’m whitewater paddling.”

“I have Zia on the line. We are discussing a new security system for my house. I need to keep out whitewater paddlers. Hold on, I’m going to conference us together.”

Morris linked the two calls together.

“Zia, I have Conan,” said Morris.

“Yo, dude,” said Zia.

“What’sup,” said Conan.

“Zia has a camera system that will analyze an image of a potential intruder in my back yard,” Morris began. “It zeroes in on the face and crops it out, writing just the face image on the hard drive. It recognizes repeat faces. What I need is to trigger an alarm and send a snapshot of each new face it sees to my Blackberry. Right now it will send every face it sees.”

“How does it organize the snapshots on the hard drive?” Conan asked.

“It writes each similar face in the same folder,” Zia said. “One folder for each person, basically.”

“So each new face will go in a new folder?”

“Yes.”

“Sounds easy,” said Conan. “I just have to monitor for creation of a new folder, then trigger the alarm and send whatever snapshot appears to Morris’ Blackberry.”

“Cool,” said Zia.

“What happens,” Conan asked, “if I drop my drawers and moon your camera?”

“It will snapshot your ass and file it with your face, because they are similar in appearance,” said Zia.

“Zing!” said Morris.

“Cool,” said Conan. “Ass recognition. But, you know, there is a more reliable system than this.”

“What’s that?” Zia asked.

“Morris could buy a big dog,” said Conan.

“Yes, but in my country, owning a dog is seen by the hardliners as a corrupting influence of decadent Western culture.”

“Why do you keep calling it your country?” asked Conan.

“I want to remind you how good you have it here. I decadently own a big Newfoundland Dog. Here in Canada, he can drink from the cleanest toilet water in the world.”

“Guys,” Morris interjected, “I’m still trying to get past the image of Conan dropping his drawers. Zia, I need you to send source code to Conan. *Do not* send a regular email. Attach it to the TaskMan task, and then submit the task to Conan.

“You don’t want me to send it to you?” asked Zia.

“No. You are responsible to return the task to me when, and only when, it is complete. You have to get Conan to contribute. He gets your software, modifies it, and then sends it back to you. Then you install and test it. Then the task is complete. Then you can send it back to me, the task originator.”

“You have to be nice to me now, Zia,” said Conan.

“I’ll send you a nice goat for Christmas,” said Zia.

“Any questions?” Morris asked.

“I still think a dog would be better,” said Conan.

“OK, lets keep things simple for Conan. Make sure the loudhailer alert has a barking dog option, Zia.” Morris reached for the call disconnect button on his headset. “Oh, yes. Make sure you both respond through the TaskMan system. Do not simply forward as email, because it is not secure. TaskMan will encrypt all text comments and attachments.”

“Conan! Pay attention. I see you nodding off,” said Zia. “You remember from Utility Programming School? *Encrypt* means jumble up the words so they have to be decoded by a person with the right password, get it?”

“Enough,” said Morris. “See you at 9 PM, Zia. Thanks for your time, gentlemen.”

“9 PM, yes. Iron Integrity Security thanks you for your business. See you in cyberspace, Conan.” said Zia.

“Woof,” said Conan.

9 – CLARK FAMILY FINANCES

At 9:00 PM, Detective Clark returned from the washroom to find a large envelope on his desk, next to the remaining slice of now-cold pizza he had ordered for his late supper. He opened the envelope. It was from the Crown Attorney's office. It contained a warrant for the arrest of Morris Parker.

He smiled and felt a rush. His pistol swap had worked perfectly.

The envelope also contained a handwritten note. "Attempted murder charge dropped, MacDick released from custody. The Arms wants their computer back. Complaining you did not provide receipt."

Detective Clark had figured out how the software worked and had deleted the video clip of his pistol exchange, so he no longer needed the computer.

The detective's desk was located in an open cubicle next to several others on the floor. Room lighting had gone to a low level because the floor was not normally occupied at this time of day. Detective Clark unlocked and opened his second desk drawer and observed it contained a DVD case. It was there because *someone wanted to be paid*.

The DVD was a well-worn copy of *The Bourne Identity*, his favorite film, still in its cardboard sleeve. He removed the sleeve and snapped the plastic case open. On the side opposite the DVD there was a concealed flap.

Detective Clark looked around to make sure he was not being watched, and counted out \$2,000 in \$100 bills. He placed them carefully under the flap. Anyone opening the DVD case not knowing about the flap would not see the money. He replaced the case and locked the drawer. In the morning the case would be gone, until the next payday.

His cellphone rang.

Detective Clark flipped the phone open. "Yes, dear."

“What am I supposed to eat for supper? And when are you coming home?” she demanded.

“I’m working late on a case. I won’t be much longer.”

“When are you getting paid again?” She was not speaking about his police salary. That came on a regular schedule. She wanted to know when to expect the next irregular amount.

“I told you about the deal I made last night. I’ll be getting ten grand in a couple of weeks.”

“A couple of weeks? Tell them you want it sooner.”

“They don’t like to be rushed, sweetie.”

“Fucking arrest them, then.”

“Look, I got an unexpected little bonus from somebody new. I have four thousand. On me.”

“Well, that’s more like it. Now I’m really looking forward to seeing you.”

“Let’s have a party. Just you and me, and Mary J. I’ll pick some up on the way home.”

“Don’t spend it all. We also have bills to pay. The neighbor wants his money. He says you owe him for your share of the fence repair.”

“He wants \$500. Fuck him. I don’t like the color of the stain.”

“He says it’s the color you agreed. Anyway, you deal with him. What about the other bills? We have the house payment and my surgeon,” she paused, thinking. “And other smaller ones.”

“We’ll pay the mortgage – and for your new tits – but screw the other bills. Your sister – does she still want that loan repaid?”

“She seems to have given up. She stopped calling.”

“OK. Anything else?”

“Pick up cigarettes – I’m all out. See you later.”

“Bye.” He closed his cellphone.

Detective Clark picked up the arrest warrant and headed for the Communications Center on the first floor. He approached the shift supervisor.

“Dispatch a patrol to arrest this suspect.” He pointed to Morris’ name on the warrant. “His home and office addresses are on the warrant.”

10 – DEATH THREAT

Thursday night at 9:00 PM, Morris sat having a late supper while his wife Terri watched him eat and discussed the events of the previous 24 hours. Because Morris was well known in the Ottawa area, the bar shootings had generated intense local media interest. Terri had received numerous phone calls from reporters that day, and their 18-year old daughter Victoria had received comments and questions from classmates. Victoria had programmed the family PVR to record the national news later that night.

Morris had hoped to finish eating before his 9:00 PM meeting with Zia. He had paused to help his 12-year old daughter Catherine with questions on her math homework. He was halfway through his plate of re-heated spaghetti when the doorbell rang.

Catherine answered the door. It was Zia. She invited him in.

“We can reheat this one more time,” Terri said to Morris as she quickly put the rest of his meal in the fridge.

Morris regretted seeing his meal disappear. “Come on in,” Morris said to Zia. “This is Catherine.”

“Hello, Catherine,” said Zia.

“Hello,” she replied shyly.

“Catherine, it’s your turn to dry the dishes,” said Terri.

Morris spread the site survey plan for his residence on the kitchen table and the two men got to work immediately, discussing camera and sensor locations. Using a flashlight, Morris led Zia around the outside of the house to confirm the camera locations and viewing angles. Zia took light meter readings and identified additional illumination requirements. They went into the basement to identify a location for the computer controller and digital video recorder – DVR.

The Parker girls had migrated to the basement to watch *America's Next Top Model*. All three Parker daughters were sitting on the sofa and Terri was on a chair. Catherine pushed PAUSE on the remote control as Morris and Zia entered the family room.

A large German Shepherd stood up and began alertly watching Zia.

“Rimshot, sit.” Morris pointed to the ground.

The dog obeyed immediately.

“Good dog,” said Susan.

“How do you get him to be so calm?” asked Zia.

“He gets constant attention from these three,” said Morris. “They take him everywhere – in crowds downtown, swimming at the beach, for a sidewalk run on busy streets – he’s used to stimulation.”

“As a pup, we dressed him up like a Barbie doll,” said Catherine.

“He’s seven years old, and completely socialized,” said Susan.

“Susan is his favorite. He follows her everywhere,” said Morris.

“He listens to all of us,” said Victoria. “Even Dad.”

“He’s the only one who listens to me. I’m at the low end of the pecking order,” said Morris.

“Rimshot gets way more attention than me.”

“That’s because he’s here all the time, Dad,” said Susan. “Not like you.”

“Ouch.” Morris looked at the television screen. “I thought this show was on Wednesday nights.”

“We’re watching it on the PVR. Victoria missed it last night,” said Terri.

Morris introduced the girls. “Zia, you already met Catherine. This is Susan. She’s 22. This one is Victoria, she’s 18, and today she’s a blond. Yesterday, she was a redhead.”

Zia looked at the three beautiful young girls, impressed. “Very nice to meet you, ladies.”

“Dad calls this show *America's Next Top Bey-otch*,” said Victoria.

“That’s because the models are always stabbing each other in the back,” said Susan.

“And that makes the show interesting, not like your hair, Victoria,” said Catherine.

“Your face is interesting,” Victoria said to Catherine. “It’s a more ugly version of your butt.”

Catherine swatted Victoria on the arm with the remote. “Shut up, Vicky.”

“Don’t hit me, you little slug,” said Victoria. “Do something, Dad!” She glared at Morris.

“They look best in a still photograph,” Morris said to Zia. “They were born over a span of ten years. For a while, we had the full spectrum, from diapers to tampons.”

“Dad!” exclaimed the three girls, annoyed.

“Come on girls,” said Terri. “Let Dad and Zia work. We can watch this later.”

“No, please stay. Go on with your show. We won’t be long,” said Zia.

Morris opened a small closet door beneath the basement stairway. “How about putting the DVR here?”

“Looks good.” Zia put his head in the closet to look around. “We should be able to run all the wiring to here – there seems to be quite a few wires here already. I see there are three electrical outlets.” Zia pulled out a poster-size white cardboard with a child’s drawing on it. “What’s this?”

“I did that when I was six,” said Victoria. “It’s Dad’s office when he used to run the business from the basement.”

The drawing showed a child’s representation of the basement stairway with several stick figures scattered around it. There was a clock on the wall, and three office desks with computer monitors. Each stick figure had a label with a gigantic arrow leading to it. The labels read MOM, CONAN, MARTIN, and DADE.

“I know who Conan is,” Zia smiled at the picture. “Which one is you?” he asked Morris.

“I’m D-A-D-E. Daddy.” Morris looked at Victoria. “She even signed it *love Victoria*. Good job.”

“That was twelve years ago,” Susan said. “Back in those days, Mom used to serve soup to the employees for lunch.”

“That closet used to be the computer server room,” Terri said. “The wires were for telephones and computers. This whole floor looked like a small cubicle farm. We grew to four employees then we had to move. The business drove me crazy. I’m glad to have the basement back.”

The phone rang, and Susan got up to answer it.

“Do any of your daughters work in the family business?” Zia asked Morris.

“From time to time. Susan got her first job as a cleaner with PHL.” Morris sighed. “That was back when we had our first office building.”

“She had to clean toilets,” said Victoria. “I had to help her, and we had to clean the urinals too. One time, we didn’t realize that Conan was in one of the stalls, and we were talking really loud about how gross this one urinal was because no one ever flushed it. Then Conan farted, and we were totally embarrassed and ran out of there. It was so funny!”

“I’m so proud of my little princesses,” said Terri dryly.

Susan came back in the room. “Dad....” Her voice was breaking. Trembling, she held out the phone to Morris. She had tears in her eyes. “This man just said he is going to kill you!”

Morris took the phone. “Whoever you are, you son of a bitch....” The line went dead.

Morris took a deep breath and stared up at the ceiling for a moment. All eyes in the room were on him. Catherine sobbed, and Victoria put her arms around her little sister.

“Everything,” Morris felt a sudden surge of anger and he choked up. “Everything will be *all right*. Zia will be installing a new video security system and he will be installing security film on our windows to make them shatterproof.”

“I have some equipment in my truck.” Zia said gently. “I’ll start right now.” Zia headed up the stairs to get his tools from the truck.

Terri’s expression was pure shock. “Who would want to kill you?”

“It’s a cheap threat. The Asian kid belonged to a gang of punks. They are obviously pissed and want to scare us.”

“What if they go after the kids?” Terri asked.

Morris looked at the girls and didn't know what to say.

“Dad, I know you can protect us.” Susan put her arms around her father.

“I will. I promise.” Morris embraced Susan. “I will not let any harm come to this family.”

The doorbell rang just as Zia was about to step out the front entrance. He opened the door. Two uniformed police officers were standing on the step. Three patrol cars were in front of the house, and a CJOH-TV truck was unloading a reporter and cameraman across the street.

“We have a warrant for the arrest of Morris Parker,” said one of the police officers. He nodded to his partner, and the two policemen entered the home.

11 – BEAVIS AND BUTTHEAD IN HOSPITAL

It was Friday morning at the Ottawa Civic Hospital.

“If only you could see this,” Daniel Dejeu said to John Paxson, who was lying in the bed next to him.

“If only I could see *anything*...” John replied. His face and head were wrapped in gauze except for his ears, nose and mouth.

“Shh! Listen,” Daniel said.

Daniel had been listening with headphones. He removed the plug and the sound became audible.

“...last night. Morris Parker was arrested and taken from his home at approximately 10 PM. The local business icon has been charged with manslaughter in the death of Kendo Kanise, a 19-year old student of Carleton University. Numerous witnesses to the shootout in the East end at The Cumberland Arms on Wednesday described an intense gun battle between Parker and Kanise, with Kanise eventually taking a single bullet to the heart which killed him instantly. Two other unidentified bar patrons were also hurt. More news after this.”

A commercial started to play. Daniel replaced the headphone jack and killed the audio.

“I wish I could see the damn screen.” said John.

“It was Parker in cuffs. He went from his house into a police car.”

“Could you tell where he lives?”

“No, but we’ll find out.”

“It’s payback time. Any family members in the picture?”

“No.” Daniel took a sip of coffee and swallowed with a grimace. His neck wound made it painful to swallow. His left leg ached like hell. He had not slept well.

John's cuts and burns had not bothered him much – John had snored like a sawmill. It was lucky for John that Daniel could barely move, otherwise Daniel would have gone over to John's bed at some point during the long night and strangled him.

“Care for some coffee, John?” said Daniel.

“I never want to see another pot of coffee!”

Daniel laughed, and then grimaced again.

“I would love a nice donut, though. I think that fuckin' cop at the door probably has some of your favorite – Boston creams, right? Too bad you can't eat solid food.”

The door opened and Detective Clark entered the hospital room. He placed a large briefcase on the floor.

“Which one is stupider – Beavis or Butthead? I told you fucking idiots not to bring ID when you went in,” said the detective. “MacDick had his driver's license on him.”

“I told him that,” said Daniel.

“Did you tell him to pick a fight with somebody easy?” Clark folded his arms, waiting. “Or did you tell him...”

“How the fuck were we supposed to know three fucking ninjas were going to jump us?” Daniel interrupted.

“Is he alone?” asked John, adjusting his bandages, wishing he could see.

“No,” Daniel said sarcastically. “The Tonight Show with David Letterman is here too. Of course he's alone.”

“Letterman does *Late Night*, not the *Tonight Show*, idiot,” said Detective Clark as he pulled a chair between the two beds and sat down. “This was supposed to be a simple side job. Now van Praag is pissed. The whole operation is in trouble if I can't get you two back on the street.”

“You were OK with this idea. It was some extra cash.” Daniel said bitterly. “We're the ones in hospital. You were getting a cut for doing nothing.”

“Nothing!” The detective stood up. “I was in the Communication Center listening for the The Arms 9-1-1 to come in, you ass. I was your goddam guardian angel. If it hadn’t been for me, Martin would have been caught too. He was waiting out back. He’d still be waiting if I hadn’t sent him a text message to take off. You guys fucked up beyond....”

“What’s done is done,” John yelled. “Fuckit, who the hell expected three middle-aged washed-up army guys to put up such a fight? The plan would have worked if not for them.”

Detective Clark gritted his teeth. “Couldn’t one of you at least have shown MacDick how to use a *safety catch*?”

“Don’t you think we’ve thought about that a few times by now? Forget about it,” said John. “We fucked up. We can fix it. And some day we’ll have payback.”

The three men stayed silent for a moment.

“How many more people do we need to ship?” asked Detective Clark.

“Two. Two fucking bums to go,” said John. “We’re lucky there are two subjects in Winnipeg. That took the pressure off us for two weeks. Mohamed found a couple of natives who won’t be missed.”

“Have you identified our two subjects?” asked the detective.

“Yes,” said John. “But we’ll need to choose a new escort. And I need to get these fucking bandages off.”

“When does van Praag want the next subject?” asked the detective.

“He booked a flight for two weeks from now.” John paused to think. “We have two Air Canada tickets, Ottawa to Winnipeg. We’ll have to change Kendo’s ticket.”

“Can you send Daniel as escort?” Detective Clark asked John.

“I was playing the social worker,” said Daniel. “I told the first subject there would be another street person with him, as usual.”

“It wouldn’t work to use Daniel. We’d have to change our story too much. Fuck, this bandage is annoying.” John scratched his head through the bandage. “The subject would think something was fishy. He probably wouldn’t get on the plane.”

“Send me,” said the detective. “I’ll play the street person. I can win the guy’s confidence. Put me on the flight.”

“Yeah, we can send David,” said Daniel.

“Yeah, OK.” John’s mood improved. “You’ll have to do this one in two weeks, and the final one will be the week after. The last subject will be used to confirm the final results. After that, they close the camp.”

“How much did you pay the kid for each trip?” asked the detective.

“Two grand,” John said.

“I’ll need triple,” the detective said.

“That comes out of our cut!” said Daniel.

“I don’t think we have much choice,” said John.

“Right. You don’t.” Detective Clark put his briefcase on Daniel’s bed, bumping Daniel’s leg, causing another grimace of pain. “You guys are scheduled for one more day of hospital time, then you’re being transferred to the jail. I’m coming back here tonight to deliver a transfer order. You’re going to be moved at 8 AM tomorrow. The night shift here starts at midnight, and there is only one cop on guard duty between midnight and 6 AM. I’m going to buy him a coffee. It will be spiked with a sedative. He should be asleep within about an hour – that will be about 1 AM.”

The detective opened the briefcase and pulled out two sets of street clothing. “Keep these hidden until then. And don’t get caught in my town again.”

12 – MORRIS IN JAIL

It was early Friday morning. Liam entered the visiting room of the City of Ottawa Police Station's Temporary Custody and Detention area with his briefcase in one hand and two morning papers in the other. Both papers were running front-page photos of Morris in handcuffs being arrested in front of his home.

"Terri will not be happy." Morris sat on his bunk, looking over the pages. "Her geraniums don't look too good."

"Are you serious?" Liam was incredulous.

Morris looked at the worried look on Liam's face. "Would you prefer I get all worked up in a knot about this situation?"

"I would prefer you understand the seriousness of your position."

"I see the seriousness. I also have you working on it. Until I get new information to process, there are no decisions I can make and nothing else I have to figure out. Worrying won't help a thing. Humor is better."

"So you think the geraniums are important."

"They're the most important new information I have available. She works hard on that garden. We both want our house to look good. It's not exactly a palace, but it's our part of the neighborhood. I think one of the bloody cameramen must have stepped on the flowers. Let's sue."

"OK, OK. What say we go for \$20? Maybe we could get \$30 for pain and suffering."

"Now you're getting the idea. Humor." Morris looked up from the paper at his lawyer friend. "It's important to keep cool, and especially important to appear cool. Nobody likes a boss who panics. It spreads. It's bloody bad for group morale. Humor is better than panic."

Liam pulled a notepad from his briefcase. He consulted his scribbled text. “The Crown Attorney has informally shared the key evidence against you. He has a bullet extracted from a ceiling beam. From your documented shooting position, the angle of the bullet hole proves you took a shot at Mr. Innes MacDick. Mr. MacDick claims that was the first shot fired.”

“Impossible. I counted my shots.” Morris closed his eyes. “I had my back to that guy. He tried to shoot me first, according to Ed.”

“That would be Ed’s word against his.”

“I remember the sight picture for each of my targets.”

“How can you do that?”

“I trained so many years in the army. I was a small arms champion shot with the pistol, assault rifle and sniper rifle. During one particular match I accidentally loaded two rounds too few in my magazine. I lost out on a championship. Ever since then, I counted my shots. Even though I have not fired a small arm for years, it comes to me as a reflex. It’s the same with sight picture. I know where I placed the foresight for each shot. During a rapid fire shoot with a short range weapon like the pistol, I’m always looking for the effect of each shot, meaning where did the bullet strike versus where the sight has to be pointed to get a hit. When I was shooting at the kid, I was watching the splinters fly from behind him. The sights were off to the left. I had to compensate by aiming to the right to get a hit. I remember that sight picture.”

“Very impressive, but a jury would think you are lying to protect yourself.”

“What about the other witnesses?”

“Jacques and Ed made statements that corroborate your version of events, but they are your friends and they participated in the fight. The Crown Attorney will discredit them. Not only that, he has three witnesses that say you fired the first shot.”

“MacDick and two guys who have not been identified, right?” Morris thought for a moment. “Somebody must have planted that bullet.”

“Physical evidence like that is hard to discredit. We only need to establish reasonable doubt, but you realize we have an uphill battle to do that in this case?”

“Why?”

“A ballistic test is as reliable as a fingerprint. The bullet came from the gun you used. I would have to discredit the police evidence-handling procedures. I would have to show how the scene could have been compromised and someone deliberately planted that bullet. They will put a lineup of professional crime scene investigators who will swear to the integrity of the evidence from collection in the field through each step of analysis in their lab. They would establish a paper trail that would be very hard to discredit.”

“How about some good news?” Morris stood up. “Got any?”

“No.” Liam flipped to another page in his notepad. “As a result of the publicity, your potential partners in the property purchase have bowed out. Without them, or somebody like them, that deal is dead. The press is having a field day and your reputation is suffering. PHL stock fell 20% this morning. And that charity event you were supposed to speak at, well the coordinator called Jill and cancelled.”

“It’s time to worry for a bit.” Morris began to pace.

After a few moments, Morris stopped. “I’ll make a public statement.”

“I would recommend against it. We should simply state you are not guilty. The less said the better.”

“Every fucking crook on the planet goes *no comment*. I’ll be judged guilty by the market.”

“Better the market than the courts. The market won’t put you in jail for 20 years.”

“No, it could put me out of business *forever*. Tell me about your legal strategy.”

“We get their detailed evidence. We judge the jury situation. If we go for a jury trial and there is a reasonable amount of public sympathy for you, or if the public forgets about you, we may be in a good position to plea-bargain.”

“Plea-bargain? We go through months of bureaucratic legalistic crap, suffering business damage each and every goddam day, and then I accept a guilty plea? That’s not much of a bargain.”

“Something might go our way during the process.”

“If we bargain, we do it from a position of strength. I do not intend to sit quietly while some bureaucratic weasel takes potshots at me from the safety of his hole.”

“You talk as if this is just an administrative process....”

“It’s a human process. The Crown Attorney is doing a public servant job and gets his paycheck whether he performs competently or not. You know that’s not the way things work for us. If we have to fight, I’m going to fight my way. Our best defense is a good offence. I’m going to put those assholes to shame in public.”

“I would have to advise against that approach.”

“I appreciate that you are trying to protect me. You could be right – I might end up in jail. But I would rather go down fighting than take myself down.”

“Alright. Give your version of events in public. Let’s put something together now....”

“Not just that. I intend to go after the Crown Attorney. He has accepted fabricated evidence. That’s the truth. He made a mistake. He’s made others. Get me a list of his missed prosecutions and I’ll start with that. He’s wasting tax dollars because he’s going after the wrong man.”

“I know him. We went to the same school. He gave me this early stuff as a favor.”

Morris stopped his pacing and turned to face Liam. “I need you to burn that bridge. If he never does you another favor, what would be the impact?”

“No significant impact.”

“This guy took a swing at me. I don’t want this fight but I intend to take a few swings and put him back on his heels. We can’t just take this lying down.”

“All right. We do it your way. Just let me suggest some of the timing. I’ll try to get you in front of a justice of the peace today; otherwise you’ll be in here for the weekend. I expect he will

set your cash bail pretty high, and you will have to surrender your passport. The court will also give you some restrictions.”

“What kind of restrictions?”

“Where you can live, how often and where you have to report. You will also be prohibited from touching any firearms.”

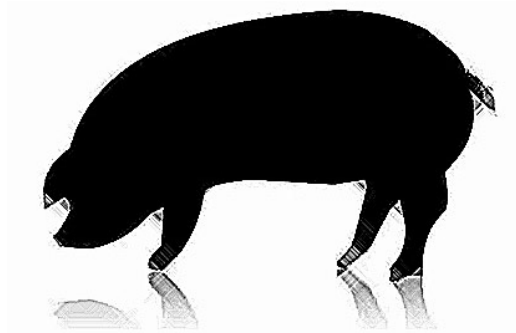
“Any restriction against shooting off my mouth?”

“Nobody has ever restricted your ability to do that, Morris. If we get bail, I think you should make a public statement on the front steps, right here. I’ll call a couple of reporters, and you do all the talking.”

“OK, let’s do it.”

“There’s just one more thing,” Liam reached into his briefcase and pulled out Statement of Claim. “The Kanise Family hired an Ottawa litigator. You are being sued for wrongful death in the amount of ten million dollars.”

PART TWO – ON THE DEFENSIVE



13 – PORK ROAST

The Northern Ontario black flies could not get at him, thanks to his equipment, but Mohamed Ziad wished he could wipe the sweat from his forehead that made his eyes sting. He could not reach inside the protective hood of his bio-suit.

Mohamed had a lot of work to do, and limited time in which to do it. The air supply on his back would last only 20 minutes.

Mohamed was wearing a Level “A” vapor-tight HAZMAT suit, which provided him the highest level of protection against direct and airborne chemical and biological contact. The air tank on his back maintained an overpressure in the suit to keep out intruding liquids or gasses. The suit had a multilayer design that was great for protection, but not good for flexibility or mobility. It also made the wearer very hot and uncomfortable, especially on a warm summer afternoon such as this.

Mohamed trusted none of his underlings with this task. The consequence of error was too high. He had trained one of his men, Jaleel, on proper suit use and safe carcass disposal procedures, but the man had mishandled the air lock procedure and had contaminated the clean zone between the doors. The mistake had cost him his life.

Before putting on the suit, Mohamed made sure the camp’s 45-kilowatt heavy-duty propane generator was running smoothly. It provided electric power to the camp’s operational facilities, including the isolation cabins, the laboratory, the barn, the ‘ice cream truck,’ and the furnace hut.

The isolation cabins consisted of two specially modified sea containers. Mohamed double-checked his air supply gauge, and then he opened the outer door to Isolation Cabin Number One and entered the air lock. He closed the outer door behind him. Then he activated the compressor, and heard a short hiss and felt his ears pop. Now he was able to open the inner door.

Improper inner door operation was the misstep that had cost Jaleel his life. Jaleel had opened the door without first ensuring the airlock pressure was higher than the inner chamber pressure.

He had forced the door open against the higher inner chamber pressure, and contaminated air moved from the chamber into the airlock rather than clean air moving in the opposite direction. Then Jaleel had been unable to disinfect the airlock and his HAZMAT suit because the decontamination sprayer had malfunctioned – he had forgotten to check it first. Mohamed had no choice but to leave Jaleel locked in the chamber while the sprayer was repaired as quickly as possible, but Jaleel ran out of air.

Rather than breathe the infected air, and then die slowly from the disease, Jaleel shot himself. Trained as a suicide bomber, Jaleel had proven he was a true believer. He told Mohamed they would meet again in Paradise.

Mohamed carefully checked that refrigeration mode had been set, and that the chamber had been sufficiently chilled to be safe. The animal chamber had been chilled to just above freezing in order to immobilize the germ. Mohamed took a cautious breath and entered the chamber space.

In the dimly lit chamber, there were six individual animal stalls. Mohamed could see one live pig lying huddled in its straw, shivering. It was very sick – barely alive. Now was the time to seal it up, before it died. Dead, it would release infected bodily fluids into the chamber, making Mohamed's cleanup job even more difficult.

The pig was a young adolescent, weighing about 50 pounds. The pigs were brought to the camp as piglets of about 30 pounds, and grew fast. The average weight gain was a pound per day, but that growth occurred before each pig was infected. After infection, there was no appetite, for either pig or human subjects. The average post-infection life expectancy, for both species, was four days.

Mohamed pulled a bag that had been soaked in germicide from a pouch in his HAZMAT suit. It was a body bag designed for a human child. The bag would keep the fluids inside. He disconnected the pig's biosensor rig, and maneuvered the helpless animal into the body bag and zipped it shut. The animal would now die of suffocation, rather than from the germ. Death from

the germ was extremely messy, because the final stages of the disease caused the skin to fall off in chunks, and blood flowed freely.

Mohamed carried the pig in the body bag into the air lock, carefully following the proper procedure. Once sealed inside, he activated the decontamination sprayers, and his HAZMAT suit, the pig in the body bag, and the inner chamber were sprayed with a coating of germicide disinfectant.

He exited the airlock and brought the pig to the ice cream truck, and placed it on the floor inside, across from about a dozen stacked frozen pig carcasses, varying in weight from 40-50 pounds. The ice cream truck, as they called it, needed a lot of electric power to maintain temperatures well below freezing, and to run the one piece of equipment it held: a six-foot high electric butcher's band saw. Keeping power running reliably to this truck worried Mohamed above all else. If the carcasses thawed, the germ could escape easily.

The frozen pigs were ready for the next step. The latest pig would take a couple of hours to freeze up, so it would have to wait until the next batch. It was not safe to place a warm pig in the furnace. The furnace was not pressurized or isolated. Only when a carcass was fully frozen was it safe to expose the infected flesh to the outside air. The germ must go from frozen state to high temperature vaporization or combustion in a single step, otherwise accidental release of the live germ into the atmosphere could occur.

Mohamed loaded four frozen pigs in body bags onto a cart. "Time for a pork roast," he said to himself. It took him three trips to transport the pigs to the furnace hut.

The hut measured about the size of a single-car garage, at double the ceiling height. Inside, the industrial propane box furnace was mounted waist-high off a concrete floor. It had a venting chimney leading to the roof. The furnace interior was box-shaped, with dimensions of forty inches on each side. On one side, it had an electric door that opened vertically like a guillotine blade. The door was currently closed, because the furnace was hot, holding steady at a temperature of 1500 degrees Fahrenheit.

Mohamed checked his air supply. Only four minutes of air remained. He quickly opened the furnace door, feeling a blast of heat. Blinking sweat from his eyes and breathing hard, Mohamed stacked the eleven carcasses in the furnace chamber, hearing pig flesh searing as it came in contact with the hot metal of the furnace floor. He closed the door and checked that the chamber was venting properly. Fluids were boiling off quickly and vapors needed to escape. Intense heat killed the germ, so the small steam cloud pouring into the night sky was now harmless.

Mohamed closed the furnace hut door and then removed his HAZMAT helmet and gloves. He could now smell the scent of barbequed pork. He was finally able to wipe the sweat from his brow.

Satisfied, Mohamed thought about the purging effect of the fire. The scent of the cooking meat was appealing, but only to a non-believer, he had been taught. Pigs are carrier of diseases to man, making them unfit for human consumption. Pigs will eat everything, even human excreta.

Then Mohamed thought about his mission. For all this effort, for all his time spent living in the western world, putting up with the arrogance and greed of its people, Mohamed knew he would be rewarded. When he returned home, he would be a conquering hero. He would live a long, rich life, treated like a king.

He thought of Jaleel. The man had been an outraged young Muslim. His mother and brother had been killed as the collateral damage of an Israeli targeted assassination, and he had been easily recruited into a martyrdom cell. He had showed dedication and determination – and intelligence – so he was picked for this operation and given, at great expense, the identity papers and training to travel into Canada without detection.

Jaleel's early martyrdom as a result of the contamination accident had been costly to Mohamed. A replacement had finally been imported only recently, and it had been forbidden to use any of the other young men awaiting martyrdom for any similar risky tasks. That meant Mohamed had to clean the isolation chambers himself.

Mohamed had no pressing desire to become a martyr himself. He could wait until he had lived a full life before achieving paradise. His 72 virgins could wait; twenty earthly wives would be satisfactory.

Looking upward at the starry night, he thought of Mohamed Atta, pilot of the first plane to hit the World Trade Center on September 11th. Atta had not been part of a plan to kill infidels while keeping himself alive. Mohamed Ziad had such a plan.

Still, Atta had been presented the opportunity to become an historic figure, and had taken it. Mohamed Atta, with one deed, made history far surpassing the level of significance attainable by most men. That would not be such a bad fate, should the Ziad plan require it, Mohamed thought.

Some day they would meet in Paradise, and Atta would say his own efforts in killing a few thousand infidels was a humble contribution in comparison to the billions of people that Mohamed Ziad killed with his germ.

Mohamed looked at the complex isolation chamber and thought about the equipment and procedures they were using to develop the germ. Using pigs and human subjects, there was no difficulty in developing a deadly new germ at all. Each time the infection passed from human to pig back to human, it mutated into a more deadly strain. The hard part was in making sure the germ was not too deadly, as van Praag wanted.

Van Praag wanted to kill no more than a few hundred million people worldwide. He was motivated by profit.

Without the need to continually test and manage the strain, the only equipment needed was HAZMAT protection to ensure the developers did not kill themselves. The specially configured isolation chambers, biosensor arrays, and complex computers were not needed. A large barn in a desert area would suffice. The air in the barn could be kept humid with simple equipment. The germ could not live in an arid climate, so it could not escape by accident.

The germ could have been developed back home, Mohamed thought, much more easily than here in Northern Ontario.

Mohamed's favorite part of the attack on the World Trade Center was the fact that lowly knives and box cutters had been the only weapons needed.

Mohamed opened the top of his HAZMAT suit, then went down on one knee, and pulled out a large, sharp, shiny knife from a sheath under his shirt. He looked up, thinking about words Atta had written in his will. He held his knife up to the heavens, and spoke slowly. "You must make your knife sharp and you must not discomfort your animal during the slaughter."

14 – BBQ AND FIREBOMBING

It was warm and sunny Saturday afternoon. Morris had been released from detention late Friday, and Liam had organized a press scrum on the steps of the police station as planned. After that, Morris went directly home without bothering to check his messages. He and Terri drank a bottle of wine and made love.

Morris had caught up with his messages that morning, and now Morris flipped steaks on the back deck BBQ and chatted with his friend Alex.

“So why are we in Afghanistan, again, Mr. James?” Morris was in the mood for a bit of a debate.

“Because it’s the right thing for Canada to do. We are helping build schools and roads. We are fighting the Taliban and helping women’s rights. The Taliban don’t even want to let young girls have any education.”

“And these objectives can be achieved at the pointy end of a gun, of course.”

“Damn right. Anybody over there with a gun should be shot. Except for our guys, of course.”

“The true blue conservative view.” Morris pulled out his Blackberry. “I came across this article a few weeks ago and I’ve been meaning to show it to you. Here it is...”

Morris read from his Blackberry display. “There is a new draft law on the personal status of Shiite women, which was recently approved by both chambers of the Afghan Parliament. It places severe restrictions on women's freedom of movement, denying them the right to leave their homes except for a ‘legitimate purpose.’ It requires women to submit to the sexual desires of their husbands, thus legitimizing *marital rape*.”

“The Afghan Parliament wants that law?”

“Yes. The Western World is officially appalled. I guess we should send soldiers into those Afghan parliamentary chambers, eh? Democracy Enforcement Squads – vote for things that don’t offend us or we will shoot you.”

“I assume you have a better solution?”

“No, but Terri does.”

Alex noticed a steak was starting to flare. “Don’t burn that steak.”

“Terri thinks we should fly the women out of there.” Morris moved the meat away from the flare-up. “Leave the abusive men without the ability to reproduce. It might work.”

“Ha! That’s thinking outside the box. Time for another beer.” Alex reached into the cooler and pulled out two bottles of Budweiser. He removed the twist tops and gave a bottle to Morris.

“Support our troops,” said Alex as he raised his bottle.

“Here’s to the Canadian Soldier,” said Morris. “I support the Canadian Soldier. I’m no longer in favor of having our army in Afghanistan.”

“Why not?” asked Alex.

“They taught me one of the first principles of war is to select and maintain the aim. The aim over there has been changed more often than a poopy diaper. Enough of this Afghan misadventure. The Canadian soldier doesn’t have to prove a fuckin’ thing to anyone. We did that at Vimy.”

“What about the war on terror?” asked Alex.

“Take our soldiers out of there and you take away the ‘repel the invading infidels’ motivator.”

“Hold on – back the tank up! Where would you rather fight these people – over there, or over here?”

Morris smiled. “I’ll be happy to answer that. First, tell me what weapons we need to fight them over here.”

“The last time they used nineteen suicidal maniacs to pilot commercial airliners full of explosive jet fuel into occupied buildings! What would you like to fight that with?”

“Those suicidal maniacs didn’t have an arsenal of commercial airliners. They had much simpler weapons. They had knives and box cutters.”

“Box cutters, plus nineteen men with a fucked belief system, plus flight training, plus financing....”

“All of which could have been defeated with a lock on the control cabin.”

“OK, the control cabins are locked now. But there are other men with the same fucked belief system still out there.”

“So we better figure out where to put the next lock. And we are not in the process of doing that by putting soldiers over *there*. We have to do that by spending our money on more police and intelligence folks over *here*.”

“Hmm. That might mean extra hiring and promotion opportunities,” said Alex. “But there is one serious flaw with that position.”

“What’s that?” Morris asked.

“You are almost out of beer.”

At that moment, Terri came out on the deck. “Morris, the radio is reporting those two guys you put in hospital have escaped!”

Morris and Alex looked at each other.

“That’s good, and that’s bad,” Morris said.

“How is that good?” Terri demanded.

“Good because the Crown Attorney loses two witnesses that were up against us.” Morris took a swig of beer. “And bad because there are two more guys out there with the motivation to kill me.”

“We need police protection!”

“I don’t think I’ll get it, dear, I’m charged with manslaughter.”

“Well, at least you should get whatever information the cops have on these guys,” Terri said.

“I can try asking, but I don’t expect much cooperation. I launched a bit of a counter-attack against the Crown Attorney’s office yesterday in a media scrum on my way out of jail. I basically called him incompetent.”

“Morris!” Terri scolded. “Why do you always have to do things that way?”

“This guy is a bureaucrat, Terri,” Morris said. “I’m meeting him head on. I have no time for bureaucrats.”

“Funny you should choose to live in Ottawa...” Sarah James stuck her head out of the house. “How much longer for the steaks? Things are ready in here.”

Conversation and debate continued during dinner and beyond, until well after dark. After the meal, the group gathered in the basement to watch the news events that had been recorded on the PVR.

There was a report from Friday morning showing the Kanise parents and grandfather making a statement through Mr. Sato, their interpreter. They were standing in front of their son’s apartment. A photo of their son, dressed in a high-school graduation outfit, was displayed. Detective Clark was visible in the background. The Kanise message was their son had died and they expected justice to be served. The report replayed the scene of Morris being arrested Thursday night at home.

Then came the scene of Morris leaving the jail. Morris was taking questions from a crowd of reporters.

“I have been advised by my lawyer I should be making no comment,” Morris was saying. “So I want you all to know that Liam Latham is a very good lawyer and if I go to jail for anything I tell you folks here, it’s not his fault.”

That line got a laugh.

“I am innocent of this charge. This charge should not have been laid against me. This charge is based on bad evidence, and it is the result of a bad decision by the Crown Attorney, Mr. Clive Adam. I would like to remind you Mr. Adam was responsible for charging the Mayor of Ottawa

with influence peddling last year. That decision was also based on faulty evidence and led to a costly and pointless trial, which resulted in a complete exoneration of the mayor.”

“Are you saying that you are being wrongly prosecuted?” a reporter interrupted.

“That’s exactly what I am saying,” said Morris.

“Do you believe Mr. Adam has something against you personally?” asked the reporter.

“Mr. Adam and I have never crossed paths before.”

“Why do you believe you are being prosecuted?” asked another reporter.

“I believe Mr. Adam, for reasons known to him, has made a mistake. It is interesting to note that it is in the public record that Mr. Adam, two years ago, got into a protracted small claims battle against his neighbor over a property issue. That issue was finally settled for a sum of less than two hundred dollars.”

“Where did you get that information?” the reporter asked.

“From the court records. The file is about this thick.” Morris held his thumb and forefinger about six inches apart.

At that moment, Liam stepped in. “I’m sorry, but we have an engagement. We have to go now.”

The report ended and the station went to commercial. Morris stopped the PVR playback.

“Wow.” Alex was impressed. “You went right for that guy’s throat.”

“Yeah, Liam dug up some pretty good stuff for me. I was a bit unfair, but tough shit. The property file was thick because the neighbor had flooded it with statements from every family member, mortgage documents, bank statements, cancelled checks and everything but the phone book in an attempt to cloud the issue.”

“But Mr. Adam is unlikely to get a chance to straighten out that perception now that it’s in public,” said Alex, sounding impressed. “The way the story comes across is the Crown Attorney is willing to waste public resources and court time, and he is lousy at his job. You outmaneuvered him with a frontal assault.”

“For now.” Morris felt his Blackberry vibrate, so he drew it quickly from his holster to check for a message. One of Zia’s new security cameras had caught an image of an intruder in the back yard.

“Alex, there is somebody in the back yard!” Morris started quickly up the stairs.

Alex followed Morris up the stairs, followed closely by Rimshot.

A second image arrived as Morris headed for the back door. “He’s got a bottle in his hand. Shit! Everybody out of the basement! NOW! Somebody bring a fire extinguisher!”

The second image showed the intruder igniting a Molotov cocktail. Morris flung the patio door open, shouting as he dashed through the doorway “HEY! YOU!”

At that instant came the sound of the breaking bottle, followed by a whoosh as fire from the gasoline it had held ignited the outside of the kitchen picture window. Thankfully, the window had not shattered, so no flames were in the kitchen, but they were spreading onto the wooden deck below.

Rimshot burst through the open door, snarling and barking.

Morris had startled the intruder mid-throw, spoiling his aim. The intruder turned and ran toward the back fence, which was overgrown with a hedge, Rimshot right behind him. In the dark, the intruder had forgotten where the gate was located, and headed in the wrong direction. He was scrambling for an escape route.

Morris grabbed the BBQ fire extinguisher and pulled the pin. Then he tossed the extinguisher to Alex just as he came through the doorway. “You do this!”

Morris jumped off the deck and dashed after the intruder, who was now heading toward the locked gate. Rimshot slammed into him from behind, almost bringing him down. The intruder jumped on the six-foot high chain-link fence and threw himself over just as Morris grabbed him by the collar.

It felt to Morris like his arm would be jerked out of its socket. The weight of the intruder dragged Morris against the top bar, slamming his armpit painfully. The intruder struggled to escape, but Morris had a tight grip on the collar.

The intruder was wearing a balaclava to hide his face. Morris reached over with his other arm and yanked it off. Morris still could not get a good look at the intruder. The intruder was looking away from Morris, desperate to hide his face. It was dark, but Morris saw he had long shaggy hair.

Rimshot's ferocious and frenzied barking was inches from the man's face. Dog spittle was hitting his face through the fence.

"Scared, punk?!" As Morris felt his grip loosen, he reached over the fence and grabbed a handful of hair. Morris released the collar and yanked the hair. The punk's head smashed against the fence bar and a large, bloody clump of hair came free. The punk screamed in pain, fell, got up, and ran down the pedestrian path that led into the ravine.

Morris looked back at the house. Flames lit the yard. Alex was blasting them with the CO2 extinguisher. Terri joined with another extinguisher, and they put the fire out in seconds.

Morris looked at the bloody scalp in his hand. A feeling of intense rage overcame him.

Meanwhile, down the path, the punk caught up with his driver, who had been waiting in the woods. As they ran, they heard a chilling, animal sound that made them run even faster.

Back at the house, Morris let out a long, loud, lion-like roar. He held the punk's bloody scalp above his head, like a victorious apache warrior. Eyes bulging with fury, Morris screamed into the night: "NEXT TIME, I – WILL – *KILL* – *YOU!*"

Moments later, the punks reached their car on the other side of the ravine. They scrambled in quickly.

"What happened – your head is all bloody!" asked the driver as he fumbled for his keys.

The intruder was gasping for air. "That guy is a maniac!"

The car started and sped away from the curb, tires squealing.

“Man,” said the driver. “You stink like shit.”

The intruder sniffed and looked down. He had crapped his pants.

15 – MOHAMED AND QAMAR

It took Mohamed two hours to clean the animal side of Isolation Cabin One. He had to replenish his backpack air supply four times during that period, taking a five-minute rest at each tank change. With his first tank, he had bagged the straw and leftover food, then spread silica gel litter into the pig shit to dry it up. He also disassembled the feed trough so it would fit in the furnace. With his second tank, he shoveled the dried shit into burn bags and then blasted the interior chamber surfaces with a high-power electric pressure washer. With his third tank, he sprayed germicide through an applicator wand onto the feed trough, interior surfaces, and all the burn bags. He used his final tank to carry the bagged straw, food, and shit to the furnace where he burned it.

The rest of his work could be done without the HAZMAT suit. Before removing it, Mohamed sprayed it with germicide, and then rinsed under the outdoor shower.

Back in the freshly-cleaned isolation cabin, he placed fresh straw on the floor and fresh grain in a new feed trough. Isolation Cabin One was now ready for new animals. Two days later, according to the schedule, six live young pigs would be placed inside.

Mohamed brought his HAZMAT suit to the storage room in the laboratory trailer, a specially fitted 24-foot construction trailer, then he headed toward the pig barn.

The second 24-foot trailer on the campsite was a living space. It provided sleeping Accommodation for a total of six men, including Mohamed. During the daytime, its primary purpose was to hold prayer meetings and discussions. Mohamed did not often attend those sessions. His purpose was to run the camp, not train the young men. That was the job of Qamar, the cell leader.

“Mohamed,” Qamar called out as he crossed the dark compound to catch up with Mohamed.

“Yes Qamar.” Mohamed stopped to speak.

“I have a favor to ask. We need more video tapes.”

“Why?”

“The ones we have are wearing out.”

“I am not inclined to give you more tapes.”

“We need additional copies of the video testaments of the martyrs from past operations. There are scenes of family celebrations after their missions, sermons in mosques, and graffiti on the walls in the martyr’s neighborhoods in praise of their heroism.”

“These tapes will be viewed here at the camp only?”

“Yes. We have only a single tape that will eventually be copied for distribution – after the operation has been successfully completed. I know you are tense about security, should a testament of one of our living martyrs get out. But Hesam was not serious when he expressed the desire to mail an advance tape to his mother....”

“If I relax my vigilance and we are detected, years of work will be lost and we will be killed or jailed for the rest of our lives.”

“I am vigilant also. I agree with your rule to prohibit beards, and I have argued your case for security. But the men need to maintain their motivation.”

“The poster is not enough?” Mohamed said dryly, referring to a drawing hung on the wall of the sleeping accommodation: green birds flying in a purple sky, a symbol of the Palestinian suicide bombers.

“Please.”

“My mission is to run this camp. There must be no compromise of security. Hesam was asleep at his post the other night.”

“I have spoken with him. He has apologized for his sin. I have made him perform additional recitations and pray all night.”

Mohamed turned and resumed walking. “Give me your old tapes and I will replace them with new blanks.”

“Thank-you.” Qamar kept beside him. “There is one other thing. May I ask you about Jaleel?”

“What do you need to ask?”

“The men want to know more about your final conversation with him.”

“I told you enough. He died with a smile. His final words were Allah is great, all praise to Him.”

“But there was a debate before that. You had to convince him to shoot himself.”

“There was no debate. There was only a discussion. I did not have to convince him. He made the choice himself.”

“The men have it in their heads that Jaleel was fearful. They think you were asking him to commit suicide, which is forbidden in Islam!”

Mohamed stopped and faced Qamar. “I had to interpret his situation for him. I did not describe it as suicide.”

“Tell me the whole story. None of us were present. You are the only witness, and you have not told us everything.”

“Fine. I told him he would have to remove his helmet so as not to damage it. I said upon his first breath of the infected air, it was like the first drop of blood shed by a martyr during jihad. His sins are washed away instantaneously – so Allah would forgive Jaleel shooting himself in the head. He had two choices: die now by his own hand, or die later of the infection. He could not exit and spread the infection, and if he stayed in the pig chamber, he would contaminate the experiment. This was true.”

“Jaleel had not made his will or his testament. He would have asked to do that. You have not told us of that discussion.”

“No, I have not.” Mohamed paused. “You are correct, he did ask for the opportunity to make his testament, but there was little time because he wanted to complete his martyrdom before you or your men returned. I found the video camera and told him to speak his testament. I could not see him inside the sea container, but I could record his voice through the intercom.”

“Then why have we not heard his testament?”

“Because there was no tape in the camera.”

“You made Jaleel believe he was being taped.”

“Yes. I did it for his comfort. I deceived him. I am not proud of that. I hope to be forgiven for that sin one day.”

“I understand. You should know something, then. Jaleel’s fear was not about death. He did not lack the confidence to press the trigger. You saw him do that without hesitation. He did it with awe and joy. His anxiety came from his heart’s wish to accomplish his task in the correct way and be propelled into the presence of Allah.”

Mohamed listened intently. “He had not been prepared to die.”

“Not at that moment, not in that exact way. It was an accident of the risk we are taking in our work.”

“It was my fault. I am responsible for the camp and its security.”

“This event has been bothering you. It was in Allah’s hands. Jaleel needed reassurance that his death would have significance. Our germ is more complex than a sacred explosion. He needed to see that his death was meaningful and correctly placed on the path of helping to release our germ as an effective weapon.”

Mohamed looked at the ground, picturing Jaleel’s face as he struggled with the consequences of his error. He did not want his death to be meaningless, but he had not said that to Mohamed.

“Because the accident happened quickly, Jaleel was denied the opportunity to prepare himself. You did the right thing. You helped him prepare. Once he understood the purpose of his death, as my men do, he would have been properly in awe of the situation.”

Mohamed choked up. “Thank you for telling me this.”

Qatar embraced him. “I would have done the same thing, my brother. Remember, the outcome is always in the hands of Allah. All we can do is make the sacrifice.”

16 – SUNDAY MORNING COFFEE

At 6:00 AM Sunday morning, Morris woke with a start, breaking out of a disturbing dream. The poster Victoria had drawn when she was six was burning. The stick men were moving, trying to escape the flames.

Morris walked into the bathroom and relieved himself. He washed his hands, and looked in the mirror at the huge bruise under his right arm.

Morris and Terri had gone to bed about midnight, but lay sleepless until around 2 AM. As soon as the fire was out, Morris had called 9-1-1. He described the attack, and said the suspect had left his property on foot, heading south through the ravine. Morris described the punk as about 5 foot 10, 160 pounds, with dark, long curly hair, and a big chunk of missing scalp.

Then Morris called Zia, asking him to come to the house to examine the video. The system was new, and Morris did not know how the playback worked. Zia came over immediately and they examined the images together. The clip showed the suspect had climbed over the gate, and an accomplice handed him the Molotov cocktail. He walked to the middle of the lawn area and lit the rag, and as he was preparing to toss the burning bottle, he was startled by a yell from Morris. The suspect's aim was spoiled and the throw fell short. Had it hit the roof, the breaking bottle would have spread a much more destructive fire.

Alex and Terri had extinguished the fire completely, so the fire department had not been called. The police response had been disappointing. It took thirty minutes for a single constable to show up.

Terri had packaged the punk's scalp into a Ziploc sandwich bag and presented it to the constable as soon as he arrived. This item initially confused him. Terri explained it contained ample DNA to identify the suspect, if they caught up with him at some point.

The constable was young and relatively inexperienced, but seemed capable of collecting information for a report, at least. Zia burnt a CD of the video images for him. The constable had been quite surprised to find such a sophisticated surveillance system in a suburban residence.

As Morris navigated the stairway down to the kitchen, he considered whether the police response had been dismal thanks to his remarks attacking the reputation of the Crown Attorney. It was not likely, Morris concluded, that the Crown Attorney would leave instructions for the 9-1-1 operator to give a low priority to any calls from the Parker residence.

Morris checked the video surveillance monitor. There were a couple of short clips showing action in the back yard. At about 1:22 AM a cat had crossed the deck, triggering an immediate transmission of a camera image to Morris' Blackberry. Morris had grabbed the device from his bedside and was heading for the bedroom door by the time he figured out what the image showed. There had been a second alarm ten minutes later – this time it was a moth flying in front of the camera lens.

False alarms like these were the reason the loudhailer had been turned off the previous evening. It was still off, until the cameras and sensor intruder detection thresholds could be set.

Morris made coffee and then went out on the deck to inspect the damage. It was just after dawn, and there was a clear blue sky above. The sun had not yet risen high enough to clear the neighboring houses, and the air in the long shadows was cool.

He noticed several planks of decking needed replacing – the burns were too deep to remove by sanding. The picture window was smashed, but still in place. The security film Zia had installed the day before had performed as designed. Although the glass shattered like a spider web, the broken pieces remained in place and prevented flames from entering the kitchen.

Morris sipped his coffee and started to make a list. The siding was scorched and would need to be cleaned. Some of it would have to be replaced due to heat warp. He needed white paint for the window frames. He would have to order a replacement window. Morris measured the window dimensions and wrote them on his list. He measured the planks that would need to be replaced.

By then it was about 7:30, and Terri came down from the bedroom. She poured herself a coffee. “We need to talk.”

With those words, Morris realized he was in shit. “Just a minute, dear.” He sat cross-legged on the deck, counting the various lengths of deck planking he would require. He folded his list and placed it in his shirt pocket. “OK, lets talk.”

Terri gave him a second coffee and sat down with him. The sun was warming the deck now.

“We have been through a lot of financial risks, but there has never been a situation like now,” she began. “What do you intend to do about it?”

Right to the point, Morris thought. “Well, things are not going exactly the way I expected. To be honest, I’m winging it right now. I don’t like this feeling.”

“Who thought of the home security improvements?”

“Alex James.”

“Good thing.” Terri looked at the charred walls and deck. “We could have lost the whole house.”

Morris looked down at the deck in front of him.

“Nothing you have ever done before resulted in an attack against the family.” Terri said in a somber tone.

“Are you trying to say I should not have intervened in the pub?”

Terri looked at him. “I am looking at a middle-aged, responsible, family man. A lot of people depend on this man. I’m not looking at a 25-year old soldier who can throw his life away on some questionable battlefield adventures.”

Morris cringed. She was right. He had been looking for an explanation of his behavior at the pub ever since the fight happened.

“Well, when I was 25, I jumped out of airplanes and got that out of my system.” Morris put his head in his hands. “But there was something else that happened back then. Something I never told you.”

Terri sipped her coffee, listening intently.

He looked up at her. “I was in Gagetown on a training exercise. I was a lieutenant leading a 10-man night patrol through enemy positions of over 100 men. The scenario was a rescue mission. We were supposed to escort a pilot and his VIP passenger out from behind enemy lines, where their helicopter had gone down. An enemy observation post spotted us with night vision equipment and we started taking a lot of fire. They eventually chased us into an abandoned building. We were shooting it out – with blanks, of course – and the umpire was gradually declaring more of my men dead.”

Terri had never seen Morris talk this way. He always spoke with confidence, as if invincible – this time he seemed a bit lost.

Morris cleared his throat. “It was obvious that we were going to lose the battle. The situation was hopeless and my mission was a failure. I reported the situation on the radio and called for assistance. I had been going without sleep for three days. The firing subsided and the enemy offered surrender terms – put down our weapons and give up our VIP. I asked HQ what to do, and they said to give up.” Morris looked blankly at his coffee.

It seemed to Terri as if Morris was re-living the experience. “Then what happened?”

“My men complied with my order to stop fighting. The enemy took our weapons, then lined us up against the wall and shot us all, including our pilot and VIP.”

“But it was just an exercise....”

“I forgot to ask for authentication when I received the surrender order. I had a code sheet. I was supposed to use it to confirm the identity of the person I was talking to. It was not a genuine order. Help arrived ten minutes later. We would have had a fighting chance. The exercise scenario was that we were up against a bunch of fanatics capable of anything. I should not have trusted them to honor our surrender.”

“That was a long time ago, Morris.” Terri had a tear in her eye. “You should forget it.”

“Seven years later, a group of ten Belgian paratroopers were killed in Rwanda. Their mission had been to protect the Rwandan president. Their lieutenant had received orders to comply with enemy demands to turn over their weapons. They received a legitimate order and complied. Then they were murdered – hacked to death by machetes.”

Morris took a sip of coffee. “The enemy had deliberately targeted the Belgian forces in order to get them to leave the country. After the ten paratroopers were murdered, Belgium withdrew their forces. Other United Nations forces soon followed. The country was left to the extremists, who murdered hundreds of thousands of civilians in tribal genocide.”

“None of this is your responsibility!”

“I know. But things happen to you when you go for days without sleep. I learned a lesson that night in Gagetown that I can never forget. I lived the feeling of being executed, of being humiliated. When I heard about the Belgian paratroopers years later, I re-lived the experience.”

Morris looked at Terri briefly, then looked down. “Then, after September 11th, I heard the story of the passengers of flight 93.”

They were both silent for a moment.

“They fought the hijackers, right?” Terri asked.

“They did. They went up against them, against their knives with bare hands. And they went down fighting. And they inspired millions because of their damned determination.”

Morris looked up and into Terri’s eyes.

“I learned never to give in. I learned it’s better to go down fighting. Win or lose. I want to protect you and the kids. I care what you guys will think about me after I’m gone. It’s not that I’m reckless, I don’t plan to leave any time soon!” Morris took a deep breath. “It’s hard to explain, but... I will never willingly put us in a position where somebody else gets to decide our fate. Never.”

There was a long pause. Terri looked away into the woods.

“So tell me your plan.”

“I think you and the kids should go to the cottage until summer is over. I’m going to need all my time to fight these charges and get back at whoever is after me. I need to focus on a plan of attack, not on how to defend you guys. I need you in a safe place, OK?”

Terri nodded silently.

Morris smiled. “I’m going to offer jobs to Ed and Jacques. I’ll use them to improve company security and track down the bad guys. I have a couple of ideas about where to look. The police obviously don’t have the resources – or the motivation – to solve this problem for us. We’re better off relying on ourselves.”

Terri looked at Morris and thought about what he had just said. “You listen to Ed and Jacques. And you rely on what Alex says, too.”

“I will.”

She turned to look at him, and pointed with her finger. “You get control of this situation. You make us safe again.”

“I will.”

“I will not stand for our girls being afraid like this.”

“I feel the same way.”

“And one more thing…” Terri struck her empty coffee mug on the deck, making a sharp whack that echoed into the woods of the ravine.

“What?”

She looked at the smashed kitchen window, burnt decking, and soot-covered siding. “You find these people, and kick their ass.”

17 – WORKOUT WITH ED AND JACQUES

Jacques looked at his Blackberry screen. “I just got a text message from Morris.” Sweating, he looked at Ed beside him. The two men were running on side-by-side treadmills.

Ed felt his holster vibrate on his hip. Without missing a step, he un-holstered his Blackberry and checked the screen. “Me too.”

“Job offer?” asked Jacques.

“Yeah.” Ed clipped his device back into his holster. “Sixty seconds to go. I’ll race you to the finish.”

The two men increased their pace and the two machines started to emit a higher pitch as the belt speed increased.

“30 seconds,” said Ed, breathing hard.

“15...” he said. “10...9...9...9....” He was grinning.

Just then a beautiful woman, a sculpted blonde in spandex, crossed Ed’s field of vision. He lost his footing and crashed. The treadmill immediately ejected him to the rear.

“Abort!” said Jacques, slowing his pace. “Man down!”

Jacques dismounted from the treadmill and looked back at Ed seated cross-legged on the floor. One knee was skinned and bleeding. The spandex blonde was now standing beside him.

“Are you OK?” she asked.

Ed looked up from his knee, taking his time to enjoy the view on the way up. She had perfect legs, outstanding breasts, and was looking at him with concern.

“I got a boo-boo,” Ed said, pointing to his knee.

The woman smiled and knelt beside him, exposing her knockout cleavage. “Let Mommy see.” She put her hand on Ed’s knee and turned his leg gently, checking the damage.

“I think we can save this leg,” she said.

Ed was struck silent. This woman's scent was incredible, and her eyes were turning him to jell-o. He held up his elbow in order to get more attention. He pointed out a minor scrape.

"Two boo-boo's," she said. "I'll be right back with a bit of gauze." She stood up and headed for the door to look for some first aid.

Ed and Jacques watched her walk away, slack-jawed.

"Great wheels," Ed said.

"That's my girlfriend," said an unfriendly voice from behind. Ed and Jacques turned to see a huge bodybuilder in a muscle shirt. Two of his bulky bodybuilding buddies stood behind him. "I don't like the way you look at her."

"She came over to me, buddy," said Ed.

"I don't give a crap." The bodybuilder positioned himself directly in front of Ed.

Still sitting on the floor, Ed turned his head and looked up at the sweaty, hulking gorilla. "How Mongo take his steroids? Mixed with banana, or straight up?"

"I think you should leave, before she gets back."

Ed looked over at Jacques. "We're being picked on, *again*. That's twice this week. If these guys *also* have guns..."

Jacques approached Ed to offer a hand up. The bodybuilder shifted his body to block.

"Are you gonna leave?" the bodybuilder asked Ed.

"Not just because you want me to," Ed said in a steady tone.

"Let me help him up," said Jacques, reaching for his friend. The bodybuilder shifted again and their arms collided. Jacques swatted the bodybuilder's arm aside. The bodybuilder turned to face him, grabbing Jacques' shirt with one hand.

As the bodybuilder looked away, Ed quickly rolled backwards onto his feet.

At the same instant, Jacques broke the bodybuilder's grip on his shirt with a sharp upward stroke, then swiftly pulled the bodybuilder off balance by hauling his upper arm across Jacques'

chest. Jacques then tripped him from behind and they both fell to the floor, Jacques in control. It was a perfectly executed arm bar takedown, just as he had practiced with Ed many times.

Ed now faced the two other bodybuilders, and guarded Jacques' back. "Which one of you girls wants a new hairstyle?"

Surprised by the speed of Ed and Jacques' teamwork, the two big men backed off a step.

"I recognize you!" one of the men exclaimed. "You guys were part of the shootings at The Arms!"

"That's right. Don't mess with us." Ed turned his attention to the bodybuilder.

The bodybuilder looked up at Ed, face distorted because Jacques was pressing him against the floor.

"If you behave yourself, your girl will not see you with your head shoved up your ass," Ed said.

The bodybuilder nodded. Jacques released him.

Ed walked over and offered him a hand up. The bodybuilder took it reluctantly, and Ed pulled the larger man to his feet.

At that moment, the bodybuilder's girlfriend returned.

Ed saw her coming and changed his grip into a handshake. "Pleased to meetcha," he said to the bodybuilder, who looked at his girlfriend as Ed pumped his arm heartily.

"I see you two have met," she said. She seemed a bit disappointed that she wasn't going to have Ed all to herself.

"We were just talking about you," Ed said. Ed noticed the name 'Hank' written on the bodybuilders' weightlifting belt. "Henry here came over to ask if I was OK, and we got to chatting."

"Oh really?" The woman did not sound convinced.

Everyone looked at Ed with anticipation.

“Henry said he was a bit insecure about the fact that you were helping me. I kinda was watching you from behind when you went to get the first aid stuff – sorry about that – I’m actually married. Anyways, we also talked about how taking more than fifteen steroids in the program can mess up your aggression a bit.”

“My God, I was trying to tell him the same thing. I was watching Oprah the other day...”

“Yeah, he told me you had that discussion. He’s sorry he didn’t listen better, and he thinks maybe he can cut back a bit.”

The woman’s lower lip quivered, and she started to tear up. “Is that right, Hank?”

Hank stood completely dumbfounded, looking at her blankly.

“I’m so worried about you, Hankie-poo. You don’t have to impress me with your muscles. And the other night when little hank couldn’t play....”

Hank’s bodybuilding buddies turned away in embarrassment.

There was sudden panic on Hank’s face. “OK, yes, I’ll cut back!”

The woman dropped the first aid items she was holding, and stepped quickly to embrace Hank.

“I’m sorry I was flirting, honey, I love you. I’ll stop showing off to other men. I’ll make this all up to you. I’m so hot for you now...” she whispered in his ear.

Cautiously, Hank gave her a hug.

Jacques and Ed turned away from the sappy scene and left the cardio room.

The little tussle had happened so quickly that nobody else had noticed.

Ed and Jacques showered and dressed, then headed for the parking lot. Their two cars were parked beside each other.

“If that had happened to me last week, I would have just left.” Ed reached for his keys. “I would have simply backed down. What the hell has got into us?”

“I suppose it was from watching Morris in action at The Arms.”

“I suppose that’s the Die Hard effect. You come out of the movie wanting to beat up terrorists.” Ed suddenly remembered the text message they had both received from Morris. “Hey, what about that job offer?”

The two men pulled out their Blackberry cellphones.

Jacques read the message aloud. “Subject: Job Offer. Minimum two-month contract, security and investigations work. I need your help, both of you. Meet me at PHL office downtown Monday 10:00 AM if interested.”

“I have the same message,” said Ed.

“I’m supposed to teach two one-day seminars in government security procedures next week, but I can reschedule them or let someone else do it.” Jacques pocketed his cellphone. “This sounds interesting.”

“I just finished a contract with JTF2. I was going to take a couple of weeks off before looking for something else,” said Ed.

“Let’s do it then. Saddle up. Time for some adventure.”

“I’m up for it,” said Ed. “All for one, and one for all.”

18 – THE HELPING HAND OF ALEX JAMES

“We’ve come to help you clean up,” Sarah James said to Terri Parker as she and her husband Alex stepped out of their car.

“Wow, thanks guys. Morris went to get some supplies. Here he comes now.”

Morris backed his pickup truck into the driveway then stepped out. “Did you guys come over to borrow coffee or something?”

“We don’t need any coffee,” said Alex. “We have enough adrenaline left over from last night’s bonfire to stimulate a horse.”

“Is that what happened last night?” asked Sarah, looking at her husband with mock admiration. “You were stimulated?”

“Did you two do *it* last night?” Morris grinned as he approached the group. “If a horse was involved in any way, I will have to report you both to the SPCA.”

“No horse,” said Sarah, “just a horny cowboy.”

Morris looked at Sarah. “I hope you rode him hard, Ma’am,” then he looked at Alex, “and put him in the barn wet.”

“Ewww!” said Terri.

“Very funny, hamster dick,” Alex said dryly.

“So,” Terri said to Morris, “Heading for a new subject, did you get everything you need to fix the house?”

“Everything on my list, except a new window.” Morris pulled out his list and showed it to the group. “That will have to be ordered. I’ll do it Monday.”

“Did you get deck stain?” Terri asked.

“Ooops. Forgot to put that on my list.”

“White paint for the window frames? How about fabric cleaner? Did you notice the smoke damage on the awning?” she asked.

“Nope, no paint or fabric cleaner. Didn’t think of those things,” Morris admitted.

“How about new curtains on the inside,” Sarah suggested.

“Great idea,” Terri said. “Let’s shop. I’ll grab my purse and we’ll leave these two cowboys to tend to their chores.” She looked at Morris. “Don’t forget to feed breakfast to the young’uns, Tex.”

Terri went to get her purse and the ladies left as Morris and Alex unloaded the truck. Morris set up his bench and cutoff saw and they began to work. While Alex used a cordless impact driver to remove decking screws from the burnt planks, Morris measured and cut replacement planks to the correct length. The sounds of power tools echoed in the air.

“Considering we’re just a couple of white collar guys,” said Morris, “we sound pretty manly with these tools.”

“I was wondering,” said Alex, “your home insurance policy must cover this kind of damage.”

“I suppose so. I just don’t want the hassle of going for quotes. It’s not that big a job anyway. Mostly, I just want to fix this scar without delay.”

“Right,” Alex nodded, “No need to give the pricks who did this any satisfaction from seeing the damage done.”

“Deny the enemy their battle damage assessment.” Morris pointed at the charred siding. “They did this, to try and scare us. Therefore, screw them.”

Alex surveyed the back yard. “You have a nice little family place here, but you and Terri could afford a palace. Why do you guys still live in a regular, middle-class house?”

“Hah,” Morris said. “Because we’re not as rich as we look. The last three years have been pretty good, but before that we had ups and downs. This house is only 25% ours. The rest is still leveraged to invest in our first office building. Then we leveraged that building to invest in others. I work with ‘high net worth’ individuals – otherwise known as rich people – as partners in

each of these properties. I'm in control of the projects because that's the way I set up the deals. I find or develop the properties, and I do all the work, but I'm not the guy making the largest profits on any one deal."

Morris walked over to the small pile of new cedar planks, and brought one back to his saw. "Business is risky. I started with about two years of salary saved up when I quit the army. I didn't have millions of dollars to play with. There have been times when I could not pay Terri or myself a salary. We had to live off our savings for two years during a market downturn. Our employees got regular salaries – and sometimes we had to use credit card cash advances to meet payroll. Our rents and other expenses had to be paid. The owner gets paid last."

"The Kanise family is suing you for ten million," said Alex.

"That would wipe us out. But they won't get that much, because we don't have it."

Alex removed a plank and tossed it on a pile of charred planks. "How do you feel about the manslaughter charge?"

"Liam, my lawyer, feels it's a weak charge. It's even weaker now with two fewer witnesses since the two guys escaped from hospital."

"I was thinking about the evidence they have against you," said Alex.

"Me too. I think somebody related to the Cripps gang got into the pub that night and planted the bullet in the beam. They set me up to take the fall so they could get the heat off their own guy." Morris unclipped a tape measure from his belt. "The cops arrested this guy MacDick for picking the fight and attempting to shoot me. The Cripps or Hell's Angels must want him free."

Alex watched Morris measure a new cedar plank, thinking how confident Morris always sounded. Morris wasn't always right, but he was always confident.

"I agree," Alex said, "that somebody, somehow, planted a bullet in the beam late Wednesday night – sometime between the time the forensics team left for the night Wednesday and the time they resumed Thursday morning."

"How did you get that information?"

“I phoned Ed Smitt and asked him to go back to The Arms on Friday, while you were taking the day off in jail. He spoke with your waitress, Angela. She showed him where they extracted the incriminating bullet. He said there’s no way one of the shots fired during the fighting hit that particular spot. Ed sent me an email yesterday about it.”

“Thanks for looking into it.”

“I think something fishy is going on.” Alex paused, looking at Morris. “In the Ottawa Police Department.”

“Why?”

“The pub was guarded by the cops all night, until the forensics team had finished on Thursday. There was continuous police presence from their first man on the scene until all the bullets were retrieved.”

Morris, with a skeptical expression, looked at Alex. “Come on. I can understand the cops making wrong deductions based on conflicting witness statements. But you’re talking about a conspiracy. Why would they be part of a setup against me?”

“You are just collateral damage. The heat is on you because someone wants the heat off someone else. The heat’s off MacDick. It’s also off the two guys who got away from the hospital.”

“If you say so.” Morris positioned a plank to cut it.

“I’m the trained spy. I find it too suspicious that those two guys were under guard by the Ottawa Police, the same force responsible for the crime scene.”

“So you think one of the Ottawa cops let somebody in to plant the bullet?” asked Morris.

“Yes. And the bullet in the beam had to come from the same gun you used.” Alex aimed his impact driver like a pistol. “Not a similar gun: your gun. During the entire period when the bullet in the beam could have been fired, that gun was under the control of the Ottawa Police.”

Alex went on, “The forensics team must have done a ballistics analysis on Thursday and found a match. Every gun barrel manufactured leaves a distinct set of scratches on bullets fired through

it, like fingerprints. The forensics investigators would have fired a test bullet from your gun. The grooves in the lead of the test bullet must have matched the bullets they found on the scene. Your statement did not explain the presence of the bullet in the beam, so they charged you.”

Morris pressed the trigger and the saw motor started with a loud kick, then the plank screamed as he cut it. “Liam says it will be hard to discredit the forensics team,” Morris said loudly over the sound of the saw winding down.

“Sounds like Liam’s worked firearms cases before. That kind of physical evidence has to be cross-examined by attacking the expertise of the ballistics team members, and that is a tough job. Whoever planted the bullet needed two things: access to the scene, and access to the gun you used. The evidence team will make it difficult for you to raise either possibility as a reasonable doubt.

“I do remember a female investigator tagging the pistols,” said Morris.

Alex nodded his head. “They are trained to be very thorough. They are trained to appear credible and confident in court. I’m sure the guns were the first things they secured.”

“Still, they have to prove the bullet in the beam was fired first. I could claim it might have been a ricochet. I could also claim it was the second shot fired, or the third. It will be my word against MacDick.”

Morris gave Alex the plank he had just cut.

“You each have a reason to lie. When do you get to see exactly what evidence they have on you?” asked Alex.

“It could be several weeks, according to Liam.” Morris suddenly realized there was a way to get a better idea of what he would be up against – he could ask Alex. Alex must have access to police databases, he thought. “It would be nice if I could find out what is in the police reports against me.”

Morris looked at his friend and waited.

Alex sighed. “I’m supposed to be on the side of law and order. I’m not supposed to help manslaughter suspects.” Alex squatted, fiddled with the plank, trying to fit it in. It was a bit too short. “You need to lengthen this one about an inch.”

Morris accepted the plank back, glaring at it. “How did I fuck this up?”

“Look, any time I access a confidential, need-to-know information system, I leave tracks. These systems make an audit record of each and every user who reads any police report. I would need a reason to access your file, and I would be in big trouble if I got caught. I could be charged myself.”

“I understand that.” Morris turned to get another plank. “How could I find out the name of the cops guarding the pub Wednesday night or Thursday morning? One of them must be in on the frame-up.”

Alex pondered. “I don’t know. Maybe other cops are named in the online report. Or if the cops on guard filed reports of their own, which I doubt.”

“We could subpoena the roster. We can investigate and question these cops. We could call them as witnesses.”

“Only during the trial. Whenever that is. That could be a year or two from now.”

The two men were silent while Morris measured twice and cut another plank. “So you suspect somebody on the good guy side is protecting a bad guy.” Morris pointed to himself. “I’m one of the good guys. I’m innocent, and you know it. Who am I supposed to turn to?” Morris handed the plank back to Alex. “There. I added an inch.”

“Hold on.” Alex stood up, accepting the plank. Alex considered the risk if he helped his friend. If caught, he would certainly face internal discipline. He had never heard of anyone facing a criminal charge for improperly accessing information. He decided it was worth the risk to help his friend.

“I know a guy who would have a reason to access gang-related files.” Alex positioned the plank and pulled a screw out of his pocket and drove it in smoothly. “This guy owes me a favor.

I'll ask him to print me a copy of the reports. He's the type of guy who knows things sometimes need to get done by *looking the other way*. He won't ask questions. He works in Toronto now. He may not have heard of your case. He certainly doesn't know that you and I are friends."

19 – ED AND JACQUES’ FIRST DAY

It was Monday morning at 10:00 AM.

“Thanks for coming in, guys,” Morris said to Ed and Jacques, as he greeted them at his office. “Have a seat and I’ll give you the briefing.”

Morris activated a six-foot wide computer display mounted on the wall beside his desk. It showed an Organization Chart for Parker Holdings Limited. The top of the chart contained a box with the label ‘Morris Parker, CEO’ in it. Below the CEO box was a pyramid of department names and position titles with names of position holders. Immediately to the right was a box labeled ‘Security and Investigations.’

Ed and Jacques looked wide-eyed at the massive chart.

“Holy shit, Jim, I’m a doctor, not a bricklayer,” said Ed.

“You’ll get to know this organization and the people in it as we go along. This is where you guys fit in.” Morris pointed to the Security and Investigations box. “You are the Security and Investigations Department. You have a direct line to me, CEO of PHL, and the freedom to work with any other person, anywhere in the organization. I will inform my VP’s that I expect them and their people to give you full cooperation. The VP’s will have no right to know what you may be discussing with their people. But as a courtesy, you must inform them the name of anyone in their department you need to deal with. They will facilitate your meetings, and they will give you any resources you require.”

“I’m a simple soldier,” said Ed. “I think Jacques should be in charge of our team.”

“That’s pretty much what I had in mind,” said Morris. “Jacques, you were in command of an infantry battalion and can handle the administration and logistics demands of an organization this size. Your title is Director of Security and Investigations.”

Jacques nodded.

“Ed, you will be his operations officer. You will plan and execute investigations and missions.”

“Missions?” Ed and Jacques said simultaneously, with some surprise.

“I have a couple of intelligence-gathering activities in mind. We know that the Cripps are linked to the Hell’s Angels. I expect our investigations may get a little rough.”

Ed and Jacques looked at each other. Ed grinned. Jacques winked.

“As you indicated to us on the phone, boss,” said Jacques.

“I need you both to know what you are signing up for. I’m not some rock star, and you’re not here to be my bodyguards. We seem to have an enemy, and I do not intend to underestimate him. I do *not* want to go into battle light. You both will have all the resources of PHL to face whatever challenge may present itself. I intend to be able to finish whatever we start.”

“What is the overall aim of our department?” asked Jacques.

“A good question. In my book, the primary principle of war is to *select and maintain the aim*. I therefore want to be clear that the mandate of your department is *to identify and eliminate all criminal threats against PHL, myself and my family*.” Morris looked at Ed and Jacques in turn, then re-stated the mandate for emphasis. “To identify and eliminate all criminal threats against Parker Holdings, myself and my family.”

“Do you expect all our activities to be within the boundaries of the law?” asked Ed.

“Another good question. Especially if you look at what I’ve managed to involve you in so far.” Morris paused.

“Our first approach will be to provide information and evidence to the legal authorities. I hope to find those legal authorities capable of using that information and evidence to satisfy your aim. If they do not, your aim still applies.”

Morris let that answer sink in for a moment. “You both saw me smash a bad guy in the face. That, depending upon the outcome of a trial, may turn out to be an illegal act. I do not anticipate

asking you to commit any illegal acts, but as you can see, the definition of an illegal act can come long after the decision to commit the act has been made.”

“Made by armchair quarterbacks,” said Jacques.

Ed spoke up. “I read in the paper a couple of days ago these two guys chased down a speeding drunk who had just sexually assaulted a woman. They found the woman on the side of the road, hysterical. She pointed out her attacker and they jumped in their Porsche and chased the guy down. They kept in contact with a 9-1-1 operator the whole time. They reached speeds of over 100 miles an hour. The 9-1-1 operator did not ask them to call off the chase at any point. They never got charged for speeding.”

“Did they catch the guy?” asked Morris.

“Yes they did,” said Ed. “The cops headed him off. The chase ended safely.”

“Good example,” said Jacques. “Count me in. I accept our aim.”

“Me too,” said Ed.

“Right. Welcome aboard.” Morris offered a handshake and the three friends shook hands.

“Your department’s first priority is to identify who we are up against.”

Morris walked over to the computer display. “This is a touch-screen display.” He began to manipulate the objects on display, closing the window containing the organization chart to reveal a list of names in his personal telephone directory. He double-tapped a name, and the computer speakers on the wall next to the display activated and telephone dialing tones were audible. “I’m calling our security systems specialist.”

“I want a phone like that,” said Ed.

“This phone is a computer program. You should both have one in your office by the time we finish this meeting. You each get a new Mac computer as well, like mine, integrated with the phone software.”

“With a six foot display?” asked Ed, as the sound of a telephone ring emitted from the speakers.

“If you guys need a six foot display, then that’s what you’ll get.” Morris said. “You just have to convince your Director, Jacques. Here’s his budget.” Morris opened a spreadsheet window showing a budget breakdown by category with a six-figure grand total. “I spoke with my various partners, and funds have been allocated to your department as a high priority. This is just the operations and maintenance part. Salaries, special projects and capital equipment acquisitions are separate.”

Ed’s eyes bulged and Jacques started to laugh.

At that moment, Zia’s voice sounded through the speakers as he answered his phone.

“Iron Integrity Security, this is Zia Kubra.”

“Zia, you are on speakerphone and I’m here with the new Director of Security and Investigations, Jacques Tremblay and his Operations Officer, Ed Smitt.”

“How do you do, sirs.”

“We are well,” said Jacques.

“Zia, I sent you login credentials to take over my desktop. I would like you to log in and show us the clips from my residence on Saturday. Our objective is to try to identify who we are up against. The people in this clip are most probably associated with Innes MacDick and the Ledbury Banff Cripps, and possibly the Hell’s Angels.”

“Morris, before you go any further, is this a public telephone line you are using?” asked Jacques.

“No. Zia and I are using Voice Over IP technology. This conversation is going over our high-speed fiber-optic link to the Internet, and it is encrypted. Zia insisted on installing the software here for me on the weekend.”

“Each of you will have the same setup,” Zia said.

Morris walked over and sat on the sofa next to the visitor chairs where Ed and Jacques were seated. “Zia and his firm provide surveillance and security systems on most of our properties, including my residence where the firebomb attack took place on Saturday.”

The computer seemed as if it had been taken over by a ghost. The display showed mouse movement and then a new window popped up, showing Zia's face, live.

"I can't see you folks, but here I am." Zia waved at his camera. "And here is the Parker residence."

Another window popped open. This one showed four scenes, various views of the Parker backyard. There were two men in coveralls working to replace the shattered kitchen window.

"I see my new window has arrived," said Morris.

"This is the live view," said Zia. "I'll cue up the clips from Saturday...."

"Wait just a second." Morris watched as one of the workers took a cigarette out of his pocket.

"No smoking at the Parker residence," said Ed.

"I'll remind him," said Zia.

Zia manipulated the mouse and clicked a button on screen. The button had a microphone icon on it.

"You in the baseball cap! No smoking!" Zia said with authority.

The window installer jumped and dropped his cigarette.

"Pick it up!" Zia commanded.

The installer bent over quickly and struck his head on the windowsill.

"As you can see, the loudhailer is active now," said Zia. "Watch as I zoom in with this camera."

The scene changed from four-scene to a single-scene view, and the camera began to zoom in on the window installer. He was rubbing his forehead, but then suddenly started to swat at his left breast pocket like a madman.

"I think he must have put the lit cigarette in his pocket," said Jacques.

The unfortunate man doubled over, trying desperately to move the burning tobacco away from his skin. Suddenly his chest burst into flame.

"Jump in the pool!" Zia ordered.

The installer took three steps and plunged into the water. He came up sputtering.

“How the hell did that happen?” asked Ed.

“I think I know,” said Zia. “Watch this.”

Zia started playing the scene back from the moment the installer struck his head on the deck. Zia zoomed in and it was now possible to see the cigarette as the installer placed it hurriedly in his pocket. The end was lit.

Then Zia froze the image. “See that rag in his breast pocket? Now look at this.”

Zia panned the camera view across the scene toward a small cylindrical can on the deck. He zoomed in. The label was visible. It said PAINT SOLVENT.

“They were removing old paint!” said Jacques. “He put the solvent-soaked rag in his breast pocket.”

“And then he lit a cigarette,” said Ed. “What an idiot.”

“As you can see,” Morris said, “Zia’s cameras can do quite a bit.”

For the next several minutes, the group examined video clips of the firebomb intruder. Even though the cameras were working in the dark, the images were clear and sharp. The scenes were lit with infrared light visible to the camera, but invisible to the human eye.

Morris had seen the first view before: it showed Morris chase the intruder until they disappeared behind the hedge. Then Zia showed a second scene that Morris had not seen on Sunday. This view showed Morris from behind as he chased the intruder over the gate. The scene was almost as bright as daylight.

“I worked on this clip a bit,” said Zia. “Using this angle, I was able to compare the height of the intruder with the height of your fence. I estimate him to be five foot ten and about one hundred and sixty pounds.”

“Where did that view come from?” asked Morris. “We didn’t have anything from that camera, I thought.”

“There was nothing on the disk at your house,” said Zia. “Because that particular camera had not been set to trigger a recording on your DVR when it sensed motion. But I happened to be recording all cameras at all times from our monitoring facility. I searched for the appropriate time on the gate camera and found this scene.”

The overall results were disappointing, however. Since the intruder had worn a balaclava until Morris had removed it out of camera view, there were no facial features visible.

“Is that all you have?” asked Morris.

“This time, yes.” Zia activated another multi-camera window on the computer display. “Next time, however, we have a close-up camera at the gate. Not only will this camera show a better view of a person at the gate, it has the face-recognition software configured.”

“What does that mean?” Ed asked.

“Let me show you. It’s been running for a while today.”

Zia manipulated the application software and a window appeared containing a series of faces. One of the faces was the unfortunate window installer. Zia clicked on his face.

“Each time the software sees a new face, it creates a folder, and puts the image there. Every time it sees the same face after that, it places the image in the same folder. Each image has a timestamp. We can therefore see what times Smokey the Installer entered via the back gate today.”

There were three shots of the installer. The shots had occurred over about a 90-minute interval. In two of the shots, the installer had a short cigarette in his mouth.

“This guy takes a smoke break every 30 minutes,” said Ed.

“You’ll have to remember that when you see the labor bill for this installation,” Jacques said to Morris.

“Oy!” Morris said from the sofa.

“Oy?” said Ed.

“Zia,” Morris said, “Boyd MacDougall said you set up a face recognition system like this for him.”

“That’s right,” said Zia.

“Does that system capture customers, or just staff?”

“It catches both. I showed him how he could count the number of customers with it. He said he was going to use the data for marketing purposes.”

“He was also using it to impress the poker players. He runs an illegal game in the back room.”

“No shit,” said Zia.

“Can you log in to his system and review the customer faces?” asked Morris.

“Yes. I logged in yesterday.”

“How many different faces are there?”

“He’s been running that system for about three months. There must be about 5,000 unique faces by now.”

“Task,” Morris said to Jacques.

“Looks like we have some images to look at.” Jacques stood up to leave. “Ed and I will see if we can spot Beavis and Butthead.”

“We’ll meet here again tomorrow, same time.” Morris thought about Alex James and the police reports. “I should have more information for you before then. Remember, we’re looking for evidence to connect MacDick to Beavis and Butthead. If you find their pictures, it will help us to identify who they really are.”

20 – MOHAMED AND DR. TRAGAR-MIERDA, Ph.D

It was almost sunset on Monday. Mohamed had been working steadily since 5:00 AM. His chores that day included changing oil in the camp electric generator, pumping lake water into the camp's 500-gallon water tower, preparing a list of food, fuel and other essential supplies, cleaning the barn floor, and repairing a leak in the roof of the living quarters. He had taken one 15-minute meal break at lunchtime.

Mohamed was awaiting the arrival, by seaplane, of Dr. Graciano Tragar-Mierda, Ph.D. He was late, as usual.

The "emperor's suite" had been cleaned for his arrival. This particular living space had been established upon the first visit of Dr. Tragar to the camp. The planned sleeping arrangements had not been suitable, in the opinion of the doctor, because he had to share space with everyone else equally.

After a painful discussion between Dr. Tragar and Mohamed, during which none of Mohamed's objections seemed to be heard, the doctor made a firm and final pronouncement in the interests of his personal privacy and comfort. Dr. Tragar insisted on having the 24-foot accommodation trailer all to himself.

To please Tragar, Mohamed had to convert the entire trailer into a private bedroom for the sole use of Dr. Graciano Tragar-Mierda, Ph.D., Chief Scientist, CEO, and Chairman of the Board. Mohamed and the men would sleep outside in tents.

Thankfully, Dr. Tragar visited seldom. After numerous discussions between Mohamed and Dr. Tragar over various matters, Mohamed could no longer stand to be in the same space as the doctor, and the doctor could no longer stand to be with Mohamed.

Dr. Tragar was CEO and Chairman of his own organization, which he had grandly named the Institute for the Discovery, Innovation and Optimization of Bio-Technologies. This name had the acronym IDIOB, just one letter away from IDIOT, Mohamed noted.

Not only was Dr. Tragar the organization's chief idiot, Mohamed had discovered, he was the organization's sole employee. One night while cleaning the lab floor, Mohamed had spotted ten years of corporate tax returns on the desk of Dr. Tragar. He had not filed any of them yet, and was being threatened with penalties and interest on unpaid taxes. Looking through the documents, Mohamed estimated the average gross income of the IDIOB organization had been less than twenty thousand dollars per year. The financial statements showed income from one-time speaking engagements and short consulting contracts for companies mostly in Italy.

The documents also included the doctor's personal tax returns for the past ten years, as well as those of his ex-wife. Tragar's primary source of income had been his ex-wife. She was a highly paid scientist for the World Health Organization. She had divorced him about two years ago.

After finding the tax returns, Mohamed did some Internet research on Dr. Tragar and IDIOB. He found that the doctor had begun his career in biotechnology in brilliant fashion, with a discovery that led to a patent for a blood test that detected anal cancer at a very early stage. Investors poured money at the doctor's feet and he seemed to be on his way to fame and glory. But the company ceased operations mysteriously after five years without getting the blood test to the market.

Several years later, newspaper stories regarding Dr. Tragar and the same patent emerged. The doctor claimed his first company had failed because the investors had given him too little control. In fact, he had managed his first company very badly.

Several years after the company went under, Dr. Tragar formed a new partnership with the objective of exploiting his patent. This time, his partner had very little money to invest, but was able to disentangle the legal mess left behind by the first company and make a viable business plan for the new venture.

New investors had become interested in the patent, but the doctor had imposed so many unreasonable terms and conditions that the second company was unable to acquire financing. The partner sued Dr. Tragar, and proved the doctor had taken the partner's money in bad faith. The patent was released into the public domain for nonpayment of annual maintenance fees. The partner won a \$100,000 settlement but was unable to collect because the doctor went bankrupt.

Then the doctor lost his home and his second wife.

Shortly after that, a large pharmaceutical company announced a blood test based on the Tragar discovery, and began to make hundreds of millions of dollars from it. Not a penny went to Tragar.

Mohamed realized that the doctor had been both a personal and professional failure, until recently. His latest tax return showed an income of over \$400,000. With this latest return, there was a photocopy of a check made out to IDIOB for that amount, from Concourse Pharmaceuticals. The signature was that of Joris van Praag.

That signature was no surprise to Mohamed, because both he and Dr. Tragar were currently receiving funding from Joris van Praag.

Joris van Praag had also authorized payments to the various contractors and suppliers that had built the camp. He also funded the ongoing bills for supplies. But these payments did not come from Concourse Pharmaceuticals directly. It was vital that Concourse Pharmaceuticals not be connected to Mohamed, the camp, or the germ in any way. And here was a document from the brilliant doctor that would incriminate all of them.

As Mohamed reflected on the events to come, the muscular sound of a double engine propeller aircraft became audible in the distance. The sun had set, and it would soon be dusk. Had the doctor delayed the takeoff any longer, the pilot would have refused to make the flight. There was just enough time remaining to make a landing on the lake before it was too dark.

Mohamed decided to ask the doctor about the delay. He predicted there would be no good reason, and the doctor would not admit a mistake or offer any apology. The doctor would probably try to deflect the question with some other criticism of Mohamed.

The plane landed and taxied to the dock. The pilot stopped the engine and Mohamed tied up. “Good evening, Dr. Tragar.” Mohamed noticed the pilot looked quite irritated. “I was expecting you two hours ago.”

“I hope you do not expect me to maintain a schedule at a pace that is inconsistent with my duties and responsibilities as Chief Scientist!” Dr. Tragar struggled to pull a small suitcase from the plane. “I require a comprehensive and integrated platform of harnessing technologies to ensure mutually beneficial outcomes for our converging efforts!”

What? Mohamed recognized the *word salad* defense. “Dr. Tragar, the pilot....”

“I have a serious problem with your schedule, as I have told you before. You are ignoring my demands!”

Mohamed recognized the *interrupting* defense. He raised his voice, and both men began to speak at the same time. “The pilot has a contract that states at what time you must be ready to depart!” Mohamed had learned the doctor was able to hear and understand him even though Tragar was simultaneously forming words and speaking.

As Tragar continued to babble about his dissatisfaction with the schedule, Mohamed continued even louder. “You have a contract also, and it states exactly what times you are supposed to be here! If you had missed this flight, you would have been late for tomorrow’s work!”

The doctor changed tactic. “You have delayed our activities here by refusing to negotiate with Concourse Pharmaceuticals!”

At last, Mohamed identified the *criticism* defense.

While the arguing went on, the pilot untied his airplane and was restarting the engine.

“As Chief Scientist, I have to attain consolidation and integration norms that....”

Finally the airplane engine drowned out the doctor's verbal diarrhea. Mohamed turned his back on Tragar and stomped back to the camp.

There would be a long, fruitless discussion ahead. For over a month now, Tragar had been trying to force Mohamed to compress the schedule for his biweekly visits. Instead of every 14 days, the doctor wanted to visit every ten days, in an attempt to end the work sooner. This pattern would wreck havoc with every other activity at the camp. Not only that, Mohamed needed some point during the busy week when he could rest.

Tragar, in attempting to get his way, was being stubbornly uncooperative in every way possible. He was making ridiculous demands at every opportunity. He wanted the all-terrain vehicles to be parked on the other side of the camp. He wanted programmable thermostats for the pig barn, rather than the standard model. And he wanted the 20,000-gallon propane tank moved from the center of the camp to the perimeter, despite the fact that extensive excavation and rerouting of underground piping would be required.

There was only a few weeks of operation left, thought Mohamed. Thankfully, he would not have to put up with these antics any longer than that.

The doctor did not say why he wanted to rush the schedule. Mohamed guessed that it was so he could finish the assignment and get paid quicker. If only the doctor knew what would happen when his assignment was finished.

Van Praag had been very clear that when the doctor was no longer needed, Mohamed was to ensure that Tragar could never provide information about the operation to anyone, ever.

Mohamed looked forward to the moment when he could forever silence the great Dr. Graciano Tragar-Mierda, Ph.D., Chief Scientist, CEO, and Chairman of the Board.

21 – JACQUES' BRIEFING

It was Tuesday Morning, 10:00 AM. Jacques waited at the podium in the boardroom while Zia fiddled with the computer display. Seated at the boardroom table, Ed Smitt sipped a coffee and Liam Latham sat writing notes.

“Can you get cartoons on that thing?” Ed asked Zia.

“We can get YouTube,” said Zia.

“That’s not much.”

“Not much?” Zia looked at Ed with mock surprise. “It is a privilege to get YouTube. In my country, the authorities block YouTube, Twitter, and web sites associated with the leader of the opposition.”

“Have you seen our official opposition leader? I would love to see him blocked,” said Liam.

“Can they block teenage texting?” asked Ed. “My teenage daughter....” Just then, Ed saw Morris enter the room. “ROOM!” he exclaimed.

Morris saw Ed had snapped to attention with a big grin on his face.

“Carry on,” said Morris.

“What was that about?” asked Zia.

“In the military,” Jacques explained, “when the Commanding Officer enters the room, the first person to spot him arrive calls the room to attention.”

“These guys are just poking fun at that tradition,” said Morris. “At one point, each of us got fed up with being a career military man.”

“So you are actually mocking this tradition,” said Zia.

“Yes,” said Jacques.

“It’s either that or Ed just had another flashback,” said Morris.

“I love the smell of napalm in the morning,” said Ed, developing a glazed look.

Zia observed Ed's change of expression and started to shake his head. "So none of you take military authority seriously,"

"Not any more," said Jacques.

Morris noticed that Liam was writing on a copy of Detective Clark's investigation report, quietly acquired on Monday by Alex James via his Toronto contact. Alex had provided it with the strict instructions to minimize its distribution and not to reveal its source.

"But we do use some military techniques and experiences," said Morris, "when it suits the situation. Are you ready to start, Jacques?"

"Oui, Mon Capitaine," said Jacques, giving Morris a nod.

Morris took a seat at the end of the boardroom table. "Please begin your briefing."

Jacques nodded to Zia, who illuminated the computer display showing a Power Point slide with the title PHL INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY BRIEFING, followed by Jacques name and title 'Director, Security and Investigations.'

"Gentlemen," said Jacques, "this will be an informal briefing and I expect you to interrupt me if you have questions."

Jacques cleared his throat. "Since yesterday, we have accumulated quite a bit of new information. First I would like to summarize the situation. Morris was arrested and charged on Thursday night after what seems to have been a very sloppy police investigation."

Jacques nodded his head at Zia, and a slide appeared showing the title THREAT ASSESSMENT with two sub-headings: PUBLIC RELATIONS and CRIMINAL CHARGES.

Jacques went on. "I got this information from the VP of Sales and Marketing. When the news hit the media the next day, public opinion quickly turned against us. Online comments on the newspaper websites, radio talk show callers, columnists and commentators universally condemned what they perceived as vigilante-type action. Whatever reputation and popularity Morris had before the incident seemed to be working against him, in the opinion of the vocal minority. People seem to enjoy when a celebrity falls from grace."

“I’m just a minor celebrity, I assure you,” said Morris.

“What was the effect of the comments Morris made against the Crown Attorney?” asked Liam.

“Morris claimed that he was being wrongly prosecuted, and I think that message got out. He also painted the Crown Attorney as incompetent, and that message also got out.”

“On what information do you base these conclusions?” Liam asked.

“I asked VP Marketing to hire a public relations firm and yesterday evening they did a telephone survey. Two hundred Ottawa-area homes were called.”

Liam’s raised his eyebrows, surprised and impressed.

Jacques looked directly at Liam. “I considered the public relations area as part of my threat assessment. Morris is dealing with a criminal charge, and it affects him personally and also impacts PHL’s reputation and ability to do business.”

“I agree,” said Liam. “I think the feedback I got in the past 24 hours bears out your assessment of the PR situation. I have spoken with several customers, partners and business associates who tell me that confidence in doing business with us has held up. It seems to have been a better angle than the typical ‘no comment’ approach.” Liam nodded at Morris.

“As for the criminal charges,” Jacques resumed, “I expect the PR battle will have no bearing on any future court case, right?” Jacques looked at Liam.

“Theoretically, a competent judge would not be affected by public opinion,” said Liam.

“Yeah, right.” Liam shrugged. “Impossible to predict.”

Jacques went on. “The PR situation seems to have motivated the wheels of justice at this point. They are in a rush, and the evidence against us is scattered and incomplete. Ed and I have read Detective Clark’s investigation report and we have identified several flaws. It refers to written statements from witnesses. Hardly anybody saw who produced the gun Morris used, it happened so fast. Three witnesses who saw Morris pick up the gun from the floor believe he brought it to the scene with him. Ed has looked into that situation. Ed...”

Ed remained seated. “Yesterday afternoon, I took the names of those witnesses to The Arms. Working with Angela, using the receipts from Wednesday night, we were able to identify who *else* was there that night with the witnesses. There were other people who should have seen the action. I contacted most of them by phone, and learned a very interesting fact. There was a group of four people who had not been asked to give written statements. All of them said the gun came from the guy Morris served coffee to.”

“In my country, such poor police work is a sure sign of corruption. Next, you will be beaten until you confess.” Zia looked at Morris.

“Not only that,” Ed continued, “two of these people would have said MacDick tried to shoot Morris first, and that Morris *did not* fire the first shot. The first guy I spoke with said the Asian kid fired first, the second guy said it was the guy Jacques was wrestling with. That second guy sounded like he would be very reliable as a witness. He had the presence of mind to call 9-1-1 even before the shooting started. He was actually on the phone describing the shooting as it was happening!”

“Why didn’t they each give a statement?” asked Morris.

“They were sent to the station. When they got there, they were told enough statements had already been collected. They were to be contacted if additional statements were needed.”

“Tell us what you got from the owner of The Arms,” said Jacques.

“Right. While I was there, I spoke with Boyd MacDougall about the Asian kid. Turns out his father played in the poker game at the pub about a year ago. Boyd recognized the father from the TV news.”

“So that’s how these guys knew about the poker game,” said Morris. “Dad told son about it. When in Canada, go here for a good time.”

“Seems likely,” said Ed.

“The Crown’s case is looking pretty weak,” Jacques said, “especially with the disappearance of the two unidentified guys from the hospital.”

“Still no ID on Beavis and Butthead?” asked Morris.

“The cops have no photos, not even a sketch. But wait for it,” said Jacques. “Zia...”

Zia had been waiting for this moment. “Jacques, Ed and I went through 4,800 different face shots. We were up most of the night. And we came up with this.”

Three faces appeared on the screen. The first and third faces were clearly Beavis and Butthead. The timestamps showed a date about two weeks before the Wednesday night shootings.

“These images came from a hidden camera I put in to count customers for Boyd MacDougall. The face in the centre is not visible because the subject was looking down and wearing a baseball cap. But we matched the clothing in that shot to another one taken six minutes later, when the guy went for a leak.”

On the screen appeared a profile view of a person with the same clothing. This time he was looking up, and his face was fully visible. It was Innes MacDick.

“Good work,” said Morris. “They must have been checking out the pub in preparation for their heist.”

“Ah, but there’s more,” said Zia. “There are two unidentified individuals who were with Beavis, Butthead and MacDick at the stakeout. They did not come in to the pub on the night of the heist, but I’ll bet they are part of the same gang.” Zia showed two more timestamped photos. “And on the night of the heist, there was an outside camera on the back driveway.”

Two shots of a black minivan appeared on the screen. The license plate was not possible to read in either shot.

“From the timestamps on these images,” said Jacques, “this van was parked at the back entrance from the time MacDick started his antics in the bar until about five minutes after the shooting ended. Then it took off quickly. It was waiting there, with the driver at the wheel, for 14 minutes.”

“A getaway car?” asked Morris.

“Probably,” said Jacques. “And if it is, most likely a stolen car.”

“Why can’t we see the plates?” asked Liam.

“The camera resolution is not good enough,” said Zia.

“Still, if the cops look for a report of a stolen black minivan for that time period...” said Morris.

“As we can see, Ed’s investigation and Zia’s videos give a whole new interpretation to the situation,” said Jacques. “We now have evidence linking MacDick and the two guys at the bar. We have a motive with the poker game, and we have a getaway driver. Do we have enough to have the charges dropped?” Jacques looked at Liam.

“The Crown has to prove Morris committed manslaughter, beyond a reasonable doubt. In light of all this evidence, they would be reckless to put him on trial, except for one thing. If Morris were charged only with possession of a firearm, I would make a motion to have the charges dismissed on the basis that the Crown had no reasonable chance of conviction. However, even if there was a crime in progress, a citizen cannot use deadly force to stop it.”

Liam looked at his marked-up copy of the police report. “They have a bullet fired from the gun Morris used. It’s their so-called first shot. The statement Morris gave does not account for that bullet.”

“We both saw who fired the first shot. It was not Morris,” said Ed.

“And we both gave statements at the time to back that up,” said Jacques.

“And you are not only both life-long friends of his,” Liam said, “you are both now working for him. The Crown will use your relationship with Morris to undermine your credibility.”

“Physical evidence trumps all,” said Morris. “Ed, did you say you met with a guy who was on the phone to the 9-1-1 dispatcher when the shooting started?”

“Yes.”

“Zia, is there a video clip around that time?”

“Yes, we can see Boyd on his way to the bar area. He ducks when the shooting starts. But we cannot see who’s doing the shooting.”

“I know, the camera location is wrong. But can you hear the shots on the audio track?”

“Yes.”

“Did you count them?”

“No.”

“OK, here’s what we need to do. First, count the shots. We might find the count on the clip does not match the count of bullet strikes in the room,” said Morris.

“They could say two shots happened at the same instant, so only one sound would be on the recording,” said Liam.

Morris nodded. “Right, that’s why we also need to get the audio recording of the 9-1-1 call. The shots should be audible. Two microphones: stereo sound. If we combine the recordings, it should be possible to analyze the waveforms and get the approximate location of each shot.”

Liam thought for a moment. “OK, that sounds good. To make this evidence as reliable as possible, we will need to be able to show that we have not tampered with it.”

“That’s easy,” said Zia. “We’ll work on my copy. I won’t touch the copy on the system at The Arms.”

“How is it that you have a copy?” asked Morris.

Zia smiled. “Our monitoring station received each video clip from The Arm’s computer as soon as the clip was recorded. We have a copy of everything.”

“But you have the ability to log in and use the computer at The Arms. That’s where you got the face data, right?” asked Liam.

“Yes, but I have read-only access to that computer. I cannot add or erase clips.”

The room was silent for a moment.

“Smells like victory,” said Ed.

“Jacques,” said Morris, “I’d like you and Liam to package this up, and pay Detective Clark a visit. Give him everything we have.”

Jacques and Liam nodded.

Morris thought about the suspicions of Alex James. “One final thing – keep your eyes and ears open. We have reason to suspect someone with the Ottawa Police may be involved in trying to cover up something.”

22 – DETECTIVE CLARK UNDER PRESSURE

Detective Clark was at a loss for words. “How embarrassing,” he finally said.

Seated in front of him, Liam and Jacques were pleased with their presentation. They had just finished describing a number of items.

The Detective looked at those items on his desk.

The first item was a list of names and contact information for four additional witnesses. Jacques claimed they would state that Morris had not fired the first shot; in fact he was shooting back in self-defense.

The second item was a set of time-stamped photographs of MacDick, Beavis, and Butthead, and two other unidentified men, showing them together at the pub two weeks before the incident. They were obviously there to case the joint.

The third item was the only one that troubled him. Detective Clark saw time-stamped photos of the getaway van. The source of the images was a video clip he had not seen before. “Where did you get these photos of this van? I saw the security videos, and there was no camera angle like this.”

“I have an affidavit here from Mr. Zia Kubra.” Liam reached in his briefcase. “He is the installer of the video system at The Cumberland Arms. These images came from an outside camera that was being recorded at his central monitoring facility.”

“Monitoring Facility?” Detective Clark was poker faced. “What else does he monitor?”

“Video signals from his various security systems customers. He has a duplicate record of all the video action at The Arms on the night of the shooting.” Liam flipped to the back page of the document. “Since the defense has collected this evidence, I need to ensure it can withstand scrutiny by the prosecution. So I asked him to prepare an inventory of the various video feeds

that he was tracking that night. I will be able to demonstrate the validity of these videos by comparing them to the original source – the security system at The Cumberland Arms.”

“May I see that?” Detective Clark reached for the document.

“Mr. Kubra has not signed this document yet, so I would prefer not,” said Liam.

“I have already seen the videos, Mr. Latham.” Clark was still reaching out. “If you at least show me the list, I should be able to tell you if you are on the right track or not.”

At that moment, the phone on Detective Clark’s desk rang.

“Excuse me.” The detective withdrew his hand and picked up the telephone receiver.

“Detective Clark.”

“You need to know something,” said a familiar voice.

“Yes, go ahead,” said the detective.

“The Parker lawyer just dropped off a demand for a copy of the 9-1-1 recording. Not the transcript. He wants the audio – he says the shots can be heard on the audio track.”

“OK, thanks.”

“One more thing. Mr. Bourne only had \$2,000 for me on payday. I need more for this.”

“OK, sure.”

“You’re doing some risky stuff and you need somebody to watch out for you.”

“Right.”

“Show Jason how much you appreciate him. I’ll check with him tonight.”

“OK.” Clark hung up the phone. “Gentlemen, unless you have anything else?” Clark stood up.

“That’s all we have for now,” said Liam.

Detective Clark motioned the two guests toward his office door. “I’ll walk you to the front door.”

The three men made their way through the hallways in silence, Clark in the lead. They reached the main door.

“If what you have given me looks good to the Crown Attorney, I will recommend the manslaughter charge be dropped. Would I be able to reach Mr. Parker tomorrow to give him good news?”

“He won’t be in the office,” said Jacques. “He’s taking the day off. He’ll be at the cottage with his family. You can reach him on his cellphone.”

“I hope I will have something that will put his mind at peace.” Detective Clark offered Jacques a handshake.

Jacques and Liam shook hands in turn, said their goodbyes, and stepped out of the building into the busy downtown Ottawa street.

They headed down the sidewalk together. After a few steps, they stopped to wait for a walk signal before entering a crosswalk.

“Did he seem very eager to get that document, then change his mind after that phone call?” asked Jacques.

“Yes, I noticed that.”

“That call came from inside the cop shop. I saw his call display. It was a four-digit internal extension.”

“Write it down. I have a bad feeling about that guy.”

After Detective Clark said goodbye to his guests, he returned to his desk. He unlocked his second desk drawer and found the Jason Bourne DVD exactly where he expected it to be. He looked around to make sure he was not being observed, and then opened the DVD case. The \$2,000 was gone. He reached into his jacket pocket and quickly counted out another \$2,000 and placed it in the case, then locked the case back in the second desk drawer.

Detective Clark signed out for the day and got in his car. He picked up his cellphone and placed a call.

“What?” said the South African voice of van Praag.

“Trouble. Parker is going to discover I tampered with the evidence.”

“We can’t have that.”

“Can I use your men?”

“They’re pretty banged up.”

“This will be an easy job. Parker is going to be at his cottage tomorrow with his family. It will be like shooting fish in a barrel.”

Pause. “You will be delivering the final two subjects to the camp?” asked the South African.

“Yes.”

“You have the address of this cottage?”

“Yes.”

“Send it to me by confidential text message. I will send them tomorrow. Parker caused my men a lot of pain. I’m sure they would enjoy a small fishing trip. They will leave no witnesses.”

23 – KILLERS AT THE COTTAGE

“Do we have any cold beer down there?” asked Morris, looking down into the small galley of *Tacotime*, the Parker family’s 28-foot Bayliner Cruiser.

“You had us on shore power, right? Your beer should be cold,” said Terri from below deck.

“I know the fridge is cold, I just want to know if Susan and her friends drank all my beer again.”

“Catherine, would you take a look and see if Daddy has any beer left. I’m making the bed.”

Morris was busy on deck arranging the fishing equipment for their early morning cruise. It was 5:35 AM – first light.

“Dad, there are four beer bottles here,” said Catherine. “Rimshot!”

“What happened, munchkin?”

“Rimshot tried to stick his nose in the fridge. There’s some ham here, Dad.”

“He’s been on board with us all night, Morris,” said Terri. “You better take your dog for a walk before we push off.”

“OK, Rimshot – c’mon boy.” Morris took the ten-foot leash from where it was regularly stowed.

Wishing he had time for a good hot shower, Morris picked up Rimshot and placed him on the dock. Rimshot was still cautious when moving between the dock and the boat, ever since he had fallen in the lake as a pup.

Morris had arrived at the cottage from Ottawa the night before, just in time for supper. Catherine had wanted the whole family to sleep on the boat that night to make it easier to head out for an early morning fishing trip. Susan and Victoria had opted-out of the early morning plan, and had stayed up late watching horror movies in the cottage. Mom and Dad had slept on the boat with youngest daughter 12-year old Catherine.

Morris followed Rimshot as he headed along the shore. The water was calm, and the sky was slowly brightening.

Mid-yawn, Morris noticed Rimshot react to something in the woods. The dog tensed and emitted a low growl, looking into the dimly lit clearing around the house.

Probably a raccoon, Morris thought. He walked over to the dog and grabbed hold of the collar. “Easy, Rimbo.”

Rimshot was extremely tense, and Morris could feel the hair on the back of the dog’s neck was up. Rimshot began to pull hard, straining to investigate something.

Morris kept a grip on the collar. “Don’t wake the neighborhood, fella. Sshhh... sshhh.” Morris tried to keep the dog calm as they approached the house. A dense forest surrounded the cottage. Rimshot seemed to have detected something in the treeline at the perimeter of the clearing.

Morris clipped on the leash and then let the dog move ahead through the trees. As they reached the clearing, Morris saw a crouching figure emerge from the forest. The man moved cautiously toward the house carrying a shotgun.

Rimshot snarled and erupted with loud, angry barks. Morris strained to keep the dog from breaking free. The man stopped and looked. Morris and the dog were still concealed by the trees.

Susan and Victoria were still in the house, Morris thought. This guy thinks we’re all in there. He’s probably not alone. This guy is covering the back door, cutting off our escape route. There must be a front door man. Maybe more than one. Was the cottage locked? Morris always locked up when the family went to bed. But not last night – Morris had not left the boat after the girls did. How to warn the girls?

Then Morris thought about the girls’ cellphones. They kept them bedside. Morris had left his phone in the boat. He would have to get back to the boat and warn the girls.

Morris quickly tied the leash to a thick birch tree trunk. Rimshot, barking up a storm, strained to break free.

The armed man decided the dog must be tied up, and resumed his approach to the house.

Morris turned and ran in a crouch position back to the boat. He did not want the man or men to know Terri and Catherine were on the boat.

Terri and Catherine saw Morris on the run. He raised his finger to his lips and signaled them to stay silent as he climbed aboard.

“Turn off the lights,” Morris whispered. “I need my cellphone. There’s somebody on the property with a shotgun.”

Terri covered her mouth with her hands, drawing a sharp breath. “Oh my God!”

Morris looked at Terri. “I’m going to call the girls in the house. Call 9-1-1. Tell them we have an armed intruder.”

Terri immediately ushered Catherine to go below deck. “Find my cellphone, honey, and turn off the lights, quick!”

Morris dialed Susan’s phone number. It started ringing.

Rimshot was still barking up a storm. Maybe that would wake the girls. But what if one of them came outside to calm him....

Susan answered her phone. “Dad, what’s all the barking?” She sounded wide-awake.

“Susan, there is a man with a gun sneaking up to the house. Lock the doors! Wake up Victoria, and find a place for you both to hide! Mom is calling the cops!”

“I locked up last night! Victoria’s in her room, I don’t know if she’s awake!”

“Where are you?”

“I’m in your room!”

“Hide under the bed!”

A heavy thud came from the house. Then another thud, followed by the sound of splintering wood.

“Dad! Somebody’s trying to break down the front door!”

Morris did not like the situation. There were at least two men at the house. The family was split in two locations, and had nothing to fight with. These men were not burglars. From their tactics, they were either kidnappers, or killers.

Maybe he could draw them away from the house. He could lure them down to the boat, then move the boat out of shotgun range. Morris cast off the line.

“What are you doing?” Terri was back on deck.

“I’m going to try to get them to come down here. Get ready to start the engine! We’ll take off when they get close. We have to give the girls a chance to escape!”

Morris cupped his hands to his mouth, and shouted toward the cottage: “HEY! What’s going on up there?”

Morris raised his phone to his ear just as a shotgun blast came from the cottage.

“Susan!”

“Dad, I’m scared!” Susan was about to panic.

“Sshh! Don’t let them hear you. Stay under the bed, keep listening to the phone, and don’t say anything!”

A girl screamed hysterically from the house. It was Victoria’s voice.

“Victoria!” Morris shouted at the cottage. He felt a huge surge of adrenaline. “Victoria!” He leaped onto the dock.

“Come back here!” Terri shouted. “Don’t leave us!”

He looked back at her. “Start the engine!”

Their eyes met.

Terri had tears in her eyes. “Don’t leave us!”

Morris looked at the house. “They’re going to kill the girls!”

Terri’s expression changed. She glared at her husband, teeth clenched, eyes wide. “Look at me! If they kill the girls,” she paused, “they will kill you too. Don’t leave your wife and youngest child.”

Morris did not know what to say.

A second shotgun blast came from inside the house. They both flinched.

Terri looked at the house, agonizing. She looked back at Morris. “Get in the boat,” she said. “Now.”

Morris could not make his legs move. He wanted to fight, not surrender.

“Take us out of range,” Terri said firmly, “and stick to the plan. Try to lure them down here, and give the girls a chance to escape! The cops are on their way. Ten minutes, they said.”

The dog barking continued. Morris felt his heart beating in his chest like a bass drum. He felt sick to his stomach.

“Daddy,” Catherine said. “Stay with us.”

Morris put his cellphone in his breast pocket and jumped back into the boat. He started the engine. It roared to life and he gunned it, churning away from the dock. At about 150 yards from the shore, he turned sharply and throttled back to idle speed. Then he killed the engine.

He looked at Terri and Catherine. They were holding each other, looking back at the shore. Morris switched his gaze back to the cottage. What were they doing to the girls?

Morris suddenly remembered his marine loudhailer, mounted on the front of the boat. He switched the amplifier on and picked up the microphone.

“Attention: people in my house!” His amplified voice was loud, clear and authoritative. “The police are on the way. Get the hell away from there!”

Terri’s cell rang. She looked at the call display. “It’s Victoria’s phone!”

“Answer it.”

“Hello,” she said tentatively.

“Put Parker on the phone,” said a menacing male voice.

Terri held out her cellphone.

Morris took the phone. “Fuck you.”

“We have your daughter. Look here.”

Back at the house, Victoria stepped out of the back door followed by a man wearing a ski mask. The morning light was now bright enough to see she was wearing her teddy bear pajamas. The man pointed a shotgun at her back and walked slowly, with a limp.

Morris grabbed his high-power binoculars. He took a close look at Victoria, looking terrified, followed by the limping man.

Rimshot's barking grew more intense. A second gunman emerged, also wearing a ski mask. Morris took a careful look at his face. One eye was visible, the other was obscured by fabric. He was wearing an eye patch, Morris thought. One's a limper, and the other is partially blind. These guys could be Beavis and Butthead, worse for the wear because of the fighting at The Arms.

The second gunman began talking on Victoria's cellphone.

"It's you we want, Parker," the gunman said over the phone. "Come back here, and we'll let your daughter live. Otherwise, my friend here will shoot her dead."

Morris saw Victoria was barefoot. She held her arms tight to her chest, shivering, walking on eggshells.

Morris put down his binoculars and picked up his phone. "How do I know you won't kill us all?"

"We intend to take you hostage. All we want is money," the man replied.

Morris watched the limping man move jerkily. "Tell the gimp to stop pointing that gun at my daughter! I don't want her to be shot by accident."

The gunman with the phone said a few words to his partner, and he pointed his shotgun away.

"It's you we want, Parker. Get over here or we shoot."

"I'm already aware of that part of the deal. Now here's a non-negotiable: you let my daughter move away, I move in closer, a little at a time. Got it?"

"All right, the closer you get, the farther we will let your daughter go."

Stall, stall, stall, thought Morris. "Here I come." He started the engine, and throttled up cautiously. "Let her start to move out of gunshot range, and I'll keep coming."

The gunman with the phone said something to Victoria, and she started walking slowly back toward the house.

Morris throttled back. “Let her go in the other direction, so I can see her at all times. How do I know you don’t have somebody else in the house? Let her go toward the shoreline. She can take the path to the neighbor’s place.”

The gunman with the phone spoke to Victoria again and she changed direction, heading toward the shore.

Morris throttled up a bit. As Rimshot barked frantically, Morris tried to analyze the situation. The police were on their way, but the boat would be at the shore before they arrived. How could Morris get himself close enough to draw them away from Victoria, and still escape? If he landed the boat, would they take Terri and Catherine too? What if they kill everyone to leave no witnesses?

Morris looked below deck. Terri and Catherine were huddled on the galley floor. He looked at the small carpet next to them. His mind cleared and he came up with an idea.

“Find the duct tape!” he said to Terri. “Catherine, steer the boat. Go slow. Head for the shore. Keep your head down low.”

Catherine headed up to the main deck and Morris went below.

Morris placed Terri’s cellphone on the deck and removed his shirt quickly. He scrambled over to the small carpet and pushed it aside.

Terri had a roll of duct tape in her hand. “What are you doing?”

On the floor in front of Morris was a steel hatch about the size of a cookie sheet. It concealed the bilge pump. Morris reached into the two hand holes, one at each end of the rectangular shape, and removed the hatch cover. It was made of solid steel plate.

“Tape this to my chest!” he said, holding it against himself.

Terri looked at him, incredulous.

“I’m going to draw their fire away from our daughter.” He turned his back to her. “Reach around and tape it solid. Hurry.”

Terri peeled some tape free and started to wrap her husband with it. Morris turned his body, and she let the tape pay out like she was wrapping a mummy.

“This is crazy,” she said.

“If he shoots me, I’ll survive. My vital organs are protected.”

“You don’t consider your head a vital organ?” she asked.

“He will aim for the center of mass. He will aim for the steel plate.”

She helped him replace the shirt.

“Dad,” said Catherine in a shaky voice. “We’re getting close.”

“Stop the engine.” Morris picked up the cellphone and spoke into it. “I’m coming up.”

As he emerged from below deck, Morris saw that Victoria was at the shore to the right, about a bus-length away from the nearest gunman. Morris himself was about two bus-lengths away from the same gunman. Victoria was now down on her knees. She must have been ordered to stop.

Morris climbed onto the side of the boat, heading for the bow. “Let her get up and go. I’m coming.”

Terri took over the controls, and slipped into neutral. Now the boat was drifting slowly toward the shore.

Morris put his hand over the mouthpiece of his cellphone. “Put it in reverse,” Morris said to Terri. “When Victoria runs, gun it, and get us away from them.”

Morris spoke into his cellphone. “I don’t see my daughter moving yet. Either she moves away from your partner, or we back away.”

The gunman closest to Victoria was aiming at her back. The other gunman was not aiming at anything because he had the cellphone in his hand.

Morris reached the bow of the boat. He remained crouched. At this distance, from the gunman's point of view, he was a smaller target than his daughter. Morris saw that Victoria was now walking away again.

Now for the tricky part, Morris thought. Surviving the next step.

Morris stood up, making himself a bigger target. The gunman turned his head, noticing, but kept his shotgun pointed at Victoria as she walked.

Rimshot's barking increased as Victoria approached him.

Morris raised his hands to his mouth. "Hey gimpy!" he shouted at the gunman. "Now's your chance to pay me back!"

Back at the house, Susan started the engine of the Parker's pickup truck. Because of the loud barking, nobody heard it. She put the truck in gear and started approaching the gunmen from behind.

Morris saw Susan in the truck.

Victoria, still walking away in the sights of the gunman, was now beside Rimshot. His barking reached a fierce crescendo of fury.

"I'M OVER HERE!" yelled Morris. He was now a single bus length away from the nearest gunman.

Both gunmen were totally focused on Morris. Finally, the closest gunman changed his aim from Victoria onto Morris.

"RUN VICTORIA!" Morris spread his arms and legs into the shape of an X. "TAKE YOUR BEST SHOT, ASSHOLE!"

"Shoot him!"

BLAM!

The impact of the shotgun pellets striking the steel plate knocked Morris flat backwards. He lost consciousness immediately. Blood started to flow from his side.

Terri gunned the engine and the boat churned away from the shore. The gunman pumped his shotgun for a second shot.

Too late, the gunman with the phone turned and saw Susan as she clobbered him with the center of the front bumper. The gunman flew into the air, shotgun and phone flying in separate directions.

Susan spun the steering wheel hard to the right, changing direction toward the gunman who had just shot her father. He saw her coming. He changed his aim from the boat to the speeding truck.

Susan saw the muzzle of the shotgun pointed at her. She bent down quickly toward the passenger side.

BLAM. The windshield shattered and glass flew all over the front seat. Susan sat up quickly, untouched except by glass fragments.

The gunman had no time to reload. He dropped his shotgun and dove to the left, trying to avoid being run over.

Susan steered left and felt the front shocks react as the wheels passed over the gunman. She slammed on the brakes, jerking the truck to a halt, and stalling the engine. She looked back, searching for the first gunman. Susan saw him crawling to get to his shotgun. It looked like he had a broken arm.

Susan cranked the ignition, with no effect. The truck did not start.

The gunman picked up his shotgun. He stood up, left arm hanging uselessly by his side. He started to walk toward Susan.

Susan cranked the ignition. The gunman was approaching quickly. Susan cranked the ignition again and again. Not a sound. The truck refused to start.

Using his one good arm, the gunman stopped and aimed his shotgun at Susan's head. Susan cringed, waiting for the shot.

Running at full speed, Rimshot clobbered the gunman with a vicious snarl. The man tumbled and hit the ground beneath 120 pounds of furious German Shepherd. Victoria had let him off his leash.

Rimshot ripped into the man, going for the throat. Blood started to flow as the gunman desperately tried to fend off the angry dog with his unbroken arm.

Susan realized why the truck would not start. It was in drive. She quickly shifted to park and cranked the ignition.

The engine started instantly. A moment later, she heard a shotgun blast coming from under the truck. Rimshot let out a sharp yelp.

The other gunman had been caught beneath the frame of the truck. His partner's shotgun had fallen within his reach. He had managed to retrieve it, aim it, and shoot Rimshot.

Susan threw the shifter into reverse gear. She pushed the gas pedal hard, the rear wheels spun in the soil, and Susan dragged the gunman along as the truck accelerated. Susan saw the shotgun tumble into her field of view from underneath the front end, and she realized the gunman was stuck. She shifted into forward gear and steered toward the shoreline. She slammed on the brakes just as the truck reached the water's edge.

Terri, still driving the boat, had seen everything. As she shifted into forward gear, she watched the first gunman struggled to his feet. Rimshot lay motionless, unable to continue his attack.

The gunman was no longer carrying his shotgun. He was trying to leave the property as quickly as possible.

Terri stopped the engine. "Catherine, tie us off." Terri climbed toward the bow to check her husband, who lay motionless and bleeding.

A faint police siren wailed.

Terri checked the growing stain of blood on Morris' side. A pellet or two must have missed the steel plate and passed through his torso. She checked his pulse. She saw he was not breathing.

"Is he alive?" Victoria was at the dock.

Ignoring the question, Terri immediately started artificial respiration on Morris. Terri had found a weak pulse. She assumed Morris had the wind knocked out of him.

After Terri administered several breaths, Morris took a deep breath on his own, and started to cough and sputter.

“Keep an eye on him,” Terri said to Victoria. “Call me if he stops breathing again.” Terri jumped to the dock.

Back at the pickup truck, Susan was examining the vehicle. The gunman was trapped under the truck frame, conscious, laying on his back, looking skyward. His left arm, shoulder and head stuck out from underneath.

Susan looked up from the man as her mother approached.

Terri crouched down and yanked off the man’s ski mask. She grabbed the man by his hair, lifting his head. He grimaced in pain.

“You shot my husband! YOU SHOT MY DOG!” she screamed.

Susan looked up. “Oh, no.”

Rimshot lay motionless where he had been shot. She ran over to him.

Rimshot’s eyes were open. He saw Susan approach, and reacted with a small whine. Susan saw fur covered in blood. He had been hit from close range, and his chest had been blasted open. Susan could see internal organs. She realized she could see the heart beating.

“He’s hurt real bad, Mom,” she said.

The police siren was growing louder. “Susan,” Terri looked at her daughter. “Call 9-1-1. We need an ambulance for your father.”

Terri looked down at the gunman. “If you want to live, tell me why you did this.”

“I can’t.” The man struggled to speak. “He’ll kill me.”

“Who will kill you? Who sent you?”

The man remained silent.

“Take your choice. He kills you, or else I do,” said Terri.

The man smirked.

“You’re one of the losers from The Cumberland Arms. My husband showed me a picture of you. You and two of your stupid buddies. You were caught on camera when you cased the joint two weeks before my husband beat the hell out of you.”

The man’s smirk disappeared.

“My husband is alive. You missed.”

“I hit him dead center...” the man was having trouble getting enough air to speak due to the pressure of the truck on his chest.

“He’s the man of steel.” Terri looked at the front left tire. It had run up a large, sloped rock. Catherine had approached the truck and was watching her mother and the injured gunman.

“I need you to turn your back, Catherine,” Terri released the gunman’s hair. “Look away, and plug your ears.”

Catherine did as her mother instructed.

“My husband does not need your information,” she said to the gunman. “You will never hurt my family again, Butthead!”

Terri reached into the truck cab and released the brake. The front wheel rolled backward down the rock, lowering the chassis and crushing the gunman’s chest, ending his ability to breathe. He began to convulse violently.

“My husband was wearing a steel plate under his shirt.” Terri spoke calmly and clearly. “You made a good shot. Thanks for hitting it directly.”

Terri stood over the man, looking into his eyes. Her face was expressionless. The man was terrified. He slammed his head into the mud a few times, and then stopped moving. His face finally relaxed. The pressure on his chest had caused his heart to stop beating. His eyes stared blankly upwards, and the color of his skin changed swiftly from pink to blue.

Terri looked up to see an Ontario Provincial Police cruiser arrive, lights flashing.

24 – MORRIS IN HOSPITAL

“I vaguely remember taping a steel plate to my chest,” said Morris.

“Do you remember why?” Jacques asked Morris from beside his hospital bed.

“I hope I had a good reason,” said Morris. “I somehow ended up here because of it.”

For over two days, Morris had been drifting in and out of consciousness with a head injury. Terri had stayed with him for most of that time, until she finally went home exhausted a few hours ago, letting Jacques take over. Then Morris regained consciousness. He was able to communicate for the first time, and he recognized people.

“You drew shotgun fire. The gunman would otherwise have shot Victoria. She got away while he was shooting at you. Susan ran over one of them with your pickup truck, the other escaped.

“What happened to the guy she ran over?”

“He died very painfully. Terri was questioning him when he expired.”

Morris blinked. “For that guy, hell started early. She probably interrogated him to death. Did she get anything out of him?”

“She didn’t tell me everything about that discussion. She wanted to speak with you first. But she said this incident was more than just a revenge attack.”

“It was Beavis and Butthead, right?”

“Yes.”

“How is everyone?”

“Terri and your three daughters were not harmed, but one of the gunmen killed Rimshot. I’m sorry. Your dog saved Susan’s life. He prevented her from being shot.”

Morris was silent for a moment. “We’ve had that dog a long time. He was a very good dog. How are the kids taking it?”

“They’ve said nothing to Terri about Rimshot because they’re very worried about you. They were not allowed to visit you until just this morning, and you were out of it the whole time.”

“They saw me lying here, helpless, in the middle of all this?” Morris looked at the medical apparatus that surrounded him.

“They insisted on seeing you,” Jacques had a sympathetic expression. “I called Terri five minutes ago, when you regained consciousness and started to make sense. The family is on the way. They should be here in about ten minutes.”

Morris looked around the room. “I need a chair. I don’t want them to see me in this bed again.”

“I’ll get one for you.” Jacques turned to leave.

“Wait. How did I get a head injury?”

“The shotgun blast knocked you flat on your back, and you hit your head on a hatch cover.” Jacques walked over to the bed and pressed the call button. “You have a severe concussion. They gave you a CT scan while you were unconscious.”

A female nurse entered the room.

“Holy cow, that was quick,” said Morris.

“I was coming to check up on you,” she said.

“Mr. Parker would like a chair, please,” said Jacques. “His family is coming to visit.”

The nurse looked at Morris. “You’re supposed to remain in bed, Mr. Parker.”

“I feel strong enough. Perhaps I should stand.” Morris tried to sit up. The pain in his abdomen felt like he had just been stabbed. He swore, and his head started to throb.

“I’ll elevate the bed.” She manipulated the electric control and then adjusted his pillows.

Morris looked at her with gratitude. “Thanks. Sorry about that. I’m humble now.”

The nurse smiled politely, and left the room.

“Terri recognized the guy Susan ran over from The Arms security photos,” said Jacques. “It was Butthead. The other gunman was probably Beavis, but no way to know for sure. He wore a balaclava.”

“I remember that part. Did the cops ID Butthead?”

“His name is Daniel Dejeu. You put two bullet holes in him at the pub – that helped identification. The other guy now has a broken arm, thanks to Susan.”

“What do we know about Dejeu?”

“Dejeu was a Hell’s Angel from Montreal. The Mounties are involved now. Their mandate is major organized crime, putting your case into RCMP jurisdiction.”

“That should complicate things nicely. Now we have three layers of police. When did the Ontario Provincial Police get to the cottage?”

“After all the fun was over. The OPP responded with a single cop. He screwed around at the scene a bit trying to sort out what had happened before he finally took off to try and chase the gunman who got away.”

“Is Susan charged with anything?”

“No. The guy blasted out her windshield with his shotgun, just missing her. It was kill or be killed.”

Morris stared blankly, remembering something new. “I heard two shots fired in the cottage. I was afraid they might have already shot Susan.”

“The first shot was fired at the front door mechanism. The second shot hit Victoria’s bedroom ceiling. They forced Victoria out onto the lawn as hostage. They didn’t find Susan because she was hiding under your bed. You were talking with her on your cellphone, and the line stayed open for quite a while. She could hear what you and Terri were doing on the boat. Susan timed her attack perfectly and surprised them from behind.”

“Wow.”

Jacques paused for a moment. “Before your family gets here, I want to apologize for something.”

Morris looked at Jacques with a puzzled expression. “What could you possibly have to apologize for?”

“The gunmen located you because I told Detective Clark where you would be that day. After Liam and I gave him the evidence we had gathered, Clark asked me where he could contact you. I told him you would be at the cottage.”

“Did you give him the address?”

“No.”

“Then how did he get it?”

“Four years ago you reported a break-in at your cottage to the OPP. There was a police report on file. Clark accessed it.”

“Now we know he’s a bad cop.” Morris looked puzzled. “How do you know he accessed it?”

“Alex James gave me a call when he heard what had happened to you. I told him I suspected Clark. He did a bit of investigating and called me back. Alex told me he gave you Clark’s report on the pub shootings.”

“Now you know who is helping us.”

“Yes, helping at great risk to his own job. He thinks there is more than one dirty cop on the Ottawa force.” Jacques walked over to the window and looked out to see the Parker family in the parking lot, heading toward the hospital main entrance. “Here comes your family. We need to finish up.”

Jacques went on. “Alex was able to get an audit trail report on computer users who had accessed police reports concerning Morris Parker. The report on your cottage break-in was accessed and printed by Clark last week. Alex thinks this is more than just a Cripps or Hell’s Angels’ revenge. So do I. Somebody is out to get you, for some reason.”

“Why me?”

“Dejeu told Terri he would be killed if he revealed who sent him. Somebody big is trying to hide.”

Morris paused to consider the implications of that information.

“Help me with some deductive reasoning here. If Beavis and Butthead had succeeded in their mission, I would be dead now.”

“So what?”

“If I was dead, I would stop doing what I’m doing.”

“What are you doing?”

“I’m looking for information to clear my name.”

“And if you clear your name?”

“Somebody else’s name gets dirty.”

“Clark?”

“Yes, and whoever Clark is on the take with. That somebody is into something so dirty he’s willing to kill a whole family for it.”

“So what?”

“So I keep doing whatever is pissing him off – faster and harder! I get to him before he has another go at me. These bad guys are bigger than what we have seen so far,” said Morris. “What about the good guys? The Ottawa Police force cannot be trusted. Can we report them to the OPP? The RCMP?”

“Not without getting Alex in a lot of trouble. I already told the RCMP Clark was the only one who knew you would be at the cottage. We can’t reveal the audit report.”

Morris folded his arms on his chest. “What are the Mounties doing about it?”

“They say they will investigate. They aren’t telling us much.”

Morris paused, thinking. “It takes years for them to investigate this kind of stuff. Can you imagine the coordination issues? There are three different police forces involved now. Do you have any recommendations?”

“I recommend we don’t give any more information to Clark or anyone in the Ottawa Police. I don’t think we can count on the RCMP to do very much for us. I suggest we increase our information gathering activities.”

“Where do we start?”

“I sent Ed to the Asian kid’s apartment. He was able to find it from a newscast on your PVR because the Kanise family made a public statement in front of the building. Ed found the name ‘K. Kanise’ on the building directory. The apartment is empty at the moment. Ed has been watching it for about 36 hours.”

Morris looked at Jacques. “You want to go into that apartment?”

“I think we have to. We have to look for clues to connect Kanise somewhere.”

“So, to summarize, somebody is out to get me for something we have, or will have. We don’t realize what it is, yet.” Morris closed his eyes and put his hands to his temples. His head was starting to throb a bit. “You gave evidence to Clark, and then he puts the hit on me. Something you told him put him on edge.”

“At our meeting, Clark was very interested in our video evidence.”

Morris dropped his hands to his sides and looked at Jacques. “How does a minor Ottawa detective have the connections to put a hit out on me?”

“Clark must be connected to something bigger,” said Jacques. “Something else is going on. He told Mr. Big, whoever that is, that we’re on to them.”

“It’s in the video evidence,” said Morris. “Or it’s in something the video will lead us to.”

“We need to find it quick. Obviously, the hit stays out on you until we find out who ordered it.” Jacques pulled out a notepad. “What do you want to do, boss?”

Morris thought for a moment. “Look at the videos again. Look at everything in the recording. Let’s figure out what Clark already knows is there.”

Jacques started to write.

Morris went on. “You know breaking in to a private apartment is illegal and you could go to jail, right?”

“You gave us a mission.” Jacques shrugged. “We are dealing with murderers and crooked cops. If we have to stick to the rules, we are going to lose this game.”

Morris nodded. “OK, just don’t get caught. Wait. Bring Conan Moore – he’s a computer hacking expert. He’ll help you out. Look for computer evidence. The Asian kid probably had a laptop or desktop computer.”

Morris waited while Jacques made a few final notes.

Terri entered the room. “So, Iron Man is finally awake.” She smiled at Jacques. “Two days I wait for him, and he decides to wake up for his beer buddy, not me.” Terri turned to look at her husband.

Morris thought she looked exhausted.

“I didn’t take time to do my hair or makeup,” she said. “This is all you get.”

“You look great to me,” said Morris.

“Let me give you two some time alone,” said Jacques.

“The kids are just down the hall,” said Terri. “I said I wanted a word with their father first.”

“I’ll wait with them. I’ll let them know Dad is back in charge of the situation.”

“If I decide to let him be in charge,” she said, smiling. “Thanks, Jacques.”

Jacques left the room.

Terri approached her husband. “I’m having a hard time holding it together for the kids,” she said calmly. “Those men came to kill us.”

“Detective Clark is a dirty cop. Alex discovered he pulled the address for our cottage out of an old police report.”

Terri’s eyes got wide.

“We are going to track down the people responsible. We’ll get Clark too. He went after me because we obviously are on to something that he doesn’t want us to know about.”

Terri stayed silent.

“We’re going to dig for more information. We’re also going to take another look at the stuff we already have. The bad guys obviously think we can get to them.”

Terry walked over to the window.

“Say something,” said Morris.

“I killed the man who shot you,” she said, finally. She turned to look at Morris. “He refused to talk, saying he’d be killed if he did. So I released the emergency brake and crushed the life out of the bastard.”

Wow, thought Morris. “You did the right thing,” he said. Morris looked at her steadily. “You did what I would have done.”

Terri looked down.

“You don’t have to tell anyone else, ever. Not the kids – nobody.”

Terri reached out and took Morris by the hand. “OK.” She looked at the IV needle stuck there. “You were ready to give your life to try to save Victoria.”

“I would do the same for any of you.”

They looked at each other for a long moment.

“None of us have cried yet.” Terri put down his hand. “All we have been doing is worrying about you.” She stood up from the bed. “I’m going to get the kids now.”

Morris watched Terri leave the room. His head was pounding now, and he was tired. He was starting to feel overwhelmed and confused.

He looked around the room. There were flowers and cards everywhere. They must have been sent from the office people, from his associates, and from his friends. He spotted a familiar picture on a table. Morris decided to get on his feet.

This time, instead of trying to sit up, Morris rolled onto his stomach at the edge of the bed. Slowly and painfully, he pivoted his body until his feet touched the ground, and carefully pushed

himself into a standing position. He grabbed his IV stand and walked it with him. He picked up the picture frame to get a closer look at the photograph.

The photo showed the four Parker girls, seated on the basement carpet, smiling, surrounding a German Shepherd puppy. The photo was six years old. Catherine, age six – beaming with pride – was holding the dog. Rimshot was licking her face. Victoria, age twelve, was stroking him. Susan, age 16, posed with a goofy grin, giving a thumbs up. Terri was showing a smile and a shrug. It had taken time to convince her to accept a dog in the family.

Rimshot had been the only other male in the family. Morris suddenly filled with emotion, and his vision clouded as his eyes filled with tears. He stood shakily, one hand holding the photo, the other hand on his IV stand. He looked up. The family had arrived.

Morris struggled to find his voice. “His barking saved us all,” he said slowly, voice breaking.

Catherine walked over and hugged her father, and started to cry. Victoria and Susan quickly joined her, sobbing. Terri’s eyes filled with tears, and she covered her face, weeping softly.

Jacques looked at the group, and felt a tear run down his face. He made eye contact with Morris. Neither man felt shame in the moment.

Jacques stepped out of the hospital room, and stood guard at the door.

PART THREE – THE RECONNAISSANCE





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