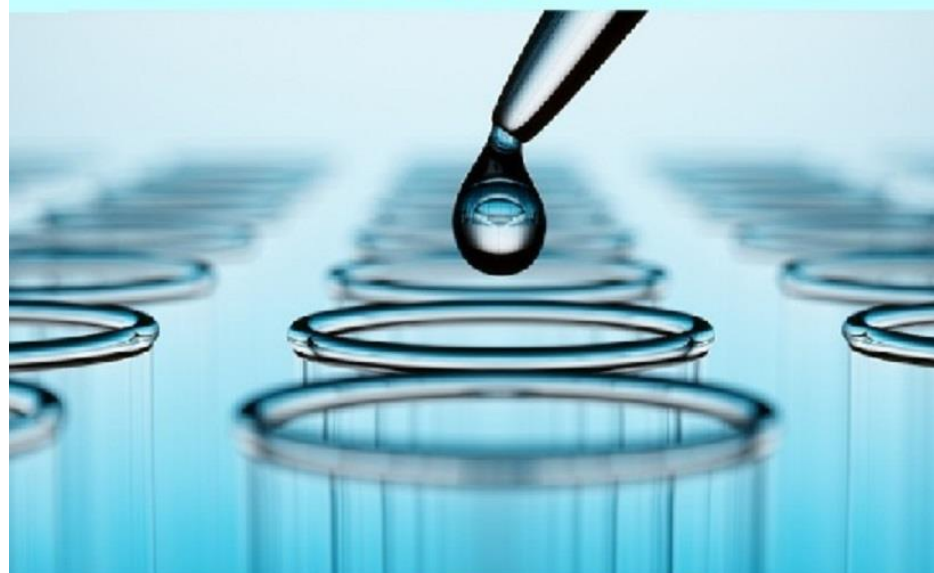


# **AGEH**



## **Advanced Genetically Engineered Humanoid**

**Russell E. Vance, III**

AGEH: Advanced Genetically Engineered Humanoid.  
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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR.** Russell E. (Rusty) Vance, III, PhD. is a retired psychotherapist who, after retiring, has followed his passions and dreams. He and his wife, Pamela, spent the first ten years of retirement as nomadic RVer's spending over 90% of their life off-the-grid far out into the Sonoran Desert or in the dense cedar and hemlock forest of Glacier National Park in northwestern Montana where Rusty and Pamela served as volunteer campground hosts.

An unabashed tree-hugger and environmentalist, Rusty's post-retirement advocacy became wildlife management, living among and helping keep deer, mountain goats, big horn sheep, bears and other creatures safe. Many of his stories carry a strong environmental message.

Rusty enjoys spending his evenings writing stories. His novels include – *AGEH*, *New Prince of Coillearnach*, *Tree of Life*, *The Tillman Place*, and *Mountain of Gold* along with several novella and short stories.



## CHAPTER ONE.

Muriel lay quietly. She hadn't opened her eyes yet. She really wanted to open them and find that last night had been a horrible nightmare. She wanted to raise her head and look around her bright cheery room, pull back the drapes and see the sun rising above the mountain and reflecting off the lake. She wanted to roll over and snuggle down in the great downy comforter and lose herself in that half-dream state where your body slowly becomes alert and welcomes the morning. That's what Muriel wanted. But the hard ground under her and the tiny root that poked her for the few hours she tried to sleep told her that the night before had not been a nightmare and the almost perfect, comfortable, innocent life she had known was gone forever.

Predawn light was just beginning to come through the trees. It was going to be a beautiful day. Light danced on the ground as a gentle breeze moved the canopy of leaves above her. But Muriel's mind was not on the stunning light display but was flooded with memories, thoughts and worries. This was the culmination of weeks of struggle and terrifying discovery ... discovering who, or perhaps better said, what she is ... discovering the terrible secrets her parents had kept from her.

Now there was an ironic thought. Her 'parents'. For eighteen years Ronald and Teresa Smith had raised her as their own child. After all of the other secrets and lies, she wondered if Smith was really their name. Muriel had thought once or twice about the fact that her older sister, Katherine, had looked so much like their father when she didn't look anything like either one of them. Now she knew. Katherine was obviously their natural child.

Muriel and the others had been pursued and mercilessly killed the night before, and the hunters were undoubtedly still out there. She wondered whether her 'parents' had realized that she was one of those fleeing, chased by helicopters and armed men. What did they feel, if they

felt anything at all, when they realized that she was gone? The thought hurt. But that didn't hurt as much as the thought of the seven people who had died at the hands of cold-blooded mercenaries. That made her stomach hurt so badly that she was afraid that she would get sick.

The people whom she had loved and adored had not only lied to her but were monsters posing as scientist. In their warped sense of improving human life, for over thirty years they had been playing with life, throwing away their mistakes. Muriel had been their only success. They called it advanced genetic engineering. As she lay thinking about all that had happened she wondered for a fleeting moment whether she wouldn't just as soon have remained ignorant. Then she glanced at the disfigured features of Danny's face and realized that, as painful as it had been, Harris telling her the truth was the best thing that ever happened to her.



It had all started seven weeks before while Muriel was hiking through the forest near her home in the mountains of central Washington State near Kittitas. It was early spring. Spring was probably Muriel's favorite time of year. The signs of new life were everywhere. The mountain . . . the entire earth smelled, sounded and felt refreshed after a long winter's rest. She would spend days gathering roots, seeds, grasses, needles and fir cones for a variety of uses.

Muriel was at home on the mountain. Practically since the day she could walk she would climb and hike through the mountains with their housekeeper's son, Jaime Vargez. He was three years older than Muriel.

That morning the sun had been warm. Muriel had started early and climbed to the tree-line of their valley where there was a saddle into the next valley west. It was mid-afternoon and she was moving south and west along the narrow ridge that separated the valleys. This was actually one of the first times she had ventured this far south along the ridge. She had been warned

not to go into the next valley. As she scanned the meadow for Bear Grass a helicopter flew low overhead.

“Control, this is Search-1,” the pilot spoke into his headset.

“Search-1, control.”

“I’ve spotted a girl up here,” said the pilot. “She’s young, short, brunette and definitely outfitted for hiking.”

“Does that sound like tall, blonde, and wearing blue jeans and a red shirt?”

“No, but do you want us to see if this girl has seen her?”

“10-4,” came the reply.

The pilot turned the helicopter so it was in front of Muriel and just a few feet off the ground. He switched on the exterior speakers.

“Miss,” said the pilot over the speakers, “we’re looking for a tall, blonde girl wearing blue jeans and a red shirt. Have you seen her?”

Muriel waved her arms to say ‘no’.

“Thank you,” said the pilot.

Muriel watched as the pilot pulled back on the controls, turned, tipped the nose of the helicopter down and flew off. As she watched the helicopter fly south Muriel noticed some Hemlock along the edge of the meadow. She was curious about the lost girl. She had never encountered a search this far into the mountains. Muriel's analytic mind systematically went through a series of possible scenarios as she walked toward the Hemlock.

As she pulled a branch toward her she saw a man under the tree holding a young woman in his lap. He was rocking back and forth attempting to comfort the crying girl. The girl was blonde and wearing blue jeans. Under a dark green jacket she had on a red shirt. Muriel jumped back in surprise.

“Please don’t be afraid,” the young man pleaded. “My name is Harris. My friend is hurt. Her name is Stephanie. Do you have a first-aid kit with you?”

“Yes,” said Muriel quickly overcoming her shock and turning to rescue-mode. “I’ve got a sat-cell phone. I’ll call for help.”

“No, please don’t do that.”

“Why not?”

“Because there are bad people looking for her.”

“Then I’ll call the police.”

“Please. No,” begged Harris. “The police will believe the bad people before they believe her.”

As the two spoke they were aware of the helicopter returning. Muriel looked in the direction of the approaching aircraft.

“Please don’t tell them we’re here. Please don’t tell them you’ve seen us. Help us and I’ll explain everything.”

To Muriel’s surprise and Harris’ dismay this time the helicopter landed. Muriel looked at Harris and Stephanie and then walked to meet the helicopter. The man who climbed from the craft was dressed in a black uniform, starched and pressed with knife edge creases. His trousers were meticulously bloused over high polished boots. His body armor and cap with high crown and long brim that shadowed his face gave him the appearance of a science fiction storm trooper. His reflective sunglasses and the short assault rifle slung casually under his right arm completed the effect.

He didn’t look at all like the type who was going to give another person the chance to explain. Neither did he look like he was there to rescue anyone. In an instant Muriel decided to give Harris the chance for which he had pleaded. She could always call the police later.

“Hello,” said the soldier removing his sunglasses. He had a little boy face with light blue eyes. The eye almost frightened Muriel. They were ice cold and warned her not to be taken in by the pretty face.

“Hello,” replied Muriel.

“I know we already asked you about the girl we’re looking for, but we just realized that you are Muriel Smith.”

“How did you know that?”

“We know your parents,” the soldier's smile was a poor attempt at appearing human. “We figured that you probably hiked here from your home and wanted to ask you where all you’ve been so that we can eliminate those areas from our search.”

“I left home this morning,” said Muriel, “and I’ve been either in the saddle or along this ridge all day. I don’t think anyone could have gone past without me seeing them. The ridge is pretty narrow up here.”

“I think you’re right. But if you see her, would you please try to take her to your house with you and we’ll come get her. She’s left an institution but she’s not dangerous.”

“I have a sat-cell phone,” Muriel offered.

“That’s even better. If you see her just call your parents and they’ll let us know.”

“Okay,” responded Muriel. “What’s wrong with her?”

“I don’t know,” said the soldier. “I’m just looking for her, but I was told she’s not dangerous. Thanks.”

“Okay.” Muriel really wanted to ask him why he was carrying an assault rifle if she wasn't dangerous, but decided against it.

The soldier climbed back into the helicopter and they lifted off as before.

Muriel went back to Harris and Stephanie. She put down her backpack and opened it to get her first aid kit.

“That man said that she’s run away from an institution,” Muriel said as she was preparing to cut Stephanie’s trouser leg.

“That’s true, but it isn’t a mental institution or prison. She was being held against her will in a research facility. I told you it would be our word against theirs if you called the police.”

“But how do I know you’re telling the truth?”

Before Harris could answer the question Stephanie opened her eyes and looked at Muriel.

“Who’s that?” asked Stephanie.

“It’s Muriel,” said Harris. “She lives with Dr. Ronald and Dr. Teresa Smith.”

“I’m their daughter,” said Muriel, “and how do you know me?”

“Oh, I know your parents,” said Harris.

“Everyone seems to know my parents.”

“Muriel?” questioned Stephanie. “She’s the one they got right. She’s the success.”

“Yes,” said Harris quietly trying to act as if Stephanie hadn’t said anything.

“Wow.” Stephanie wasn’t to be put off.

“What does she mean?” demanded Muriel.

“Do you know about your parents work with the AGEH project?” Harris asked.

“The what?” said Muriel.

“You’re an AGEH like us,” said Stephanie.

“What’s an AGEH?” said Muriel.

‘She doesn’t know,’ thought Harris.

“I don’t know what?” Muriel was getting frustrated and angry.

“I didn’t say anything,” said Harris.

“I could have sworn you just said ‘she doesn’t know’.”

“No. I didn’t say anything.”

“So what does she mean I’m an AGEH?” Muriel again demanded.

“It’s just the pain talking,” Harris tried to bluff.

“You’re lying,” said Muriel. “You promised me the truth, and if I don’t get it I’m calling my parents.”

Harris was in a real quandary. He didn’t want to tell Muriel but it didn’t look like he had any options. Muriel obviously had some skills of which she was unaware. There was no way he was going to lie or mislead her.



“What are you babbling about?” Muriel said looking up from finishing Stephanie’s splint. “Of course there’s no way you’re going to lie to me.”

“You have no idea what you’re asking.”

“Yes I do,” Muriel said bluntly. “I’m asking for the truth.”

“I really don’t want to tell you the whole story and you’d be safer not knowing.”

“Sorry. A deal is a deal.” Muriel pulled out her sat-cell phone.

“Okay! Okay!” said Harris pushing Muriel’s hand holding the phone back toward her bag. “But you’re not going to believe it and you going to like it even less.”

Muriel finished giving Stephanie a couple of aspirin and sat down on the ground.

“An AGEH is an ‘advanced genetically engineered humanoid.’” Harris started. “I assume that you’re familiar with Dolly the lamb?”

“Of course.”

“Well, AGEHs are like Dolly, just a lot more sophisticated.”

“I’m no clone!” Muriel objected.

“Please, don’t shoot the messenger,” said Harris holding up his hands in mock surrender. “You insisted.” Muriel sat back and let Harris continue. “Down in that valley is the entrance to a large underground research facility where Dr. Ronald and Dr. Teresa Smith create AGEH.” Muriel again started to object but Harris held up his hand.

“The three of us are their creations. You were a success and taken upstairs right after you were born. I only heard stories about you until I saw you near your home.” Harris paused. “Stephanie and I are failures. The failures are kept in the mountain for research.”

“What have you been smoking?!” Muriel demanded. “Genetic engineers?! Humanoids?! My parents are simple research biologists and I’m as human as the next person! You must be on drugs!”

“All AGEH have three things in common. Did you look at Stephanie’s eyes?”

Muriel looked at Stephanie.

“Oh,” said Muriel. “That’s called Waardenburg Syndrome. I have that.”

“Yes,” said Harris, “and all AGEH have it.”

“That’s no big deal!” Muriel replied angrily. “It isn’t as rare as you’d think.”

“Perhaps,” Harris said gently. “Actually only six one-thousandth percent of the population has Waardenburg. That’s only 21,000 people in the entire United States or one in every seventeen thousand people. Perhaps not super rare but what are the odds that two people who encounter one another on the side of a remote mountain both have Waardenburg Syndrome?”

Muriel knew the odds were astronomically opposed to such an encounter. She just sat quietly.

Harris opened his eyes wide and looked at Muriel. “What are the odds of three people with Waardenburg meeting on a remote mountain?” Now Muriel was really rattled.

“Well” said Muriel, some of her bravado shaken.

“Well,” Harris interrupted. “Your chances are far greater of being struck by lightning or hit by a meteor.”

There was a pause. “Then,” Harris continued, “all AGEH have a birthmark on their left shoulder that looks like a sunburst.”

Muriel’s mouth dropped open. She thought about the birthmark on her left shoulder. Her little sunburst. How could he have ever learned about that?

“I bet if you were to let me look at your left shoulder I’d find a sunburst.” Harris pulled down the neck of his shirt so that Muriel could see his sunburst. It was identical to hers. “Go ahead,” he said. “Look at

Stephanie's left shoulder." Muriel looked at Stephanie but did not touch her. Somehow she knew what she would find.

"What's the last thing?" asked Muriel hoping and praying for something she could discredit.

"I bet you are a genius."

"Yes, but there are a lot of geniuses." Muriel said weakly.

"You're right," Harris conceded, "but every AGEH who has survived into adulthood is a genius."

"So let's say that I am one of these AGEH," Muriel was afraid of the answer, but she had to ask the question, "what is so bad about that?"

"There's nothing bad about being an AGEH," said Harris, "but you have to remember that I'm one too, so I'm rather biased."

Muriel smiled and Harris smiled back. It was the first break in the tension.

"Most AGEHs die shortly after birth." Harris was picking his words carefully. "Those of us who survive are kept in the mountain where we are studied. What they are doing in those labs is a step beyond cloning, and cloning is illegal. They could take you out of the mountain because no one knew that you're an AGEH. None of the rest of us could leave. Since those of us who survive are geniuses, several of us have escaped."

"This is *really* hard to believe," Muriel said.

"I'm sure it is. I know that it's the truth and I realize how it sounds."

"How did you escape?" Muriel asked out of curiosity.

"There's an exercise area that is enclosed by an electric fence with barbed wire on top. Some of my friends pretended to have a fight at one end of the exercise enclosure. I had brought out a blanket. Inside it was a device I had made that would ground the electric wire. When the guards were occupied with the fight I shorted the electric wire, put the blanket on the barbed wire and went over the fence. By the time they realized it I was far enough away that they couldn't shoot me. I was out of range. The guards

who chased me over the mountain, however, had high powered rifles with scopes. Thankfully they never found me.”

“That's quite a story,” Muriel said. “Why did you stay here? Why didn't you leave like the others, if there are so many who have escaped?”

“I can't really tell you that.” Harris said hesitantly. There was no way he was going to tell her that since the first AGEH escaped there had always been at least one living in the mountains as a 'watcher' to help others escape. He couldn't tell her how many times he had passed near her home on his way to the exercise area to watch.

“You can't?” Muriel mocked. “Or you won't?”

“It doesn't matter. I'm not going to tell you.” Harris said. “I've told you more than I should have already.”

“If this is all true, why haven't you all come forward and gone to the authorities with this story?” Muriel asked. “Why aren't my parents in jail?”

“One question at a time,” Harris stated. “There are at least two answers to the first question which will probably answer the second.” Muriel cocked her head.

“The Smiths are the research directors but I don't think they are the power behind the project. It takes a great fortune to secretly build a large research facility inside a remote mountain, and with that type of great fortune comes great power. There have been AGEHs who have attempted to talk to authorities.”

“Well?” questioned Muriel.

“We haven't seen them since then.” Harris said hesitantly. “What do you think would happen if I were to go to the authorities and tell them my story?”

“They wouldn't believe it,” Muriel admitted.

“You and I both know that the technology is out there to clone a human being. This is just far more advanced. But most people would probably not believe that it is possible.”

“Probably.”

“And if I convinced them to ask questions?” Harris continued.

“It would be your word against someone with money and power.”

Muriel finished his sentence.

“So what good is that going to do?”

“I see your point,” admitted Muriel. “But . . .”

“But let's say the authorities believed me, went in and closed down the research. What do you think would happen to us?” Harris looked Muriel straight in the eyes.

“I haven't the slightest idea,” said Muriel.

“Do you think that the government is going to say 'sorry they did this to you. You're free to go and have a normal life'?” Harris asked.

“Probably not.” Muriel lowered her eyes.

“Do you think they might say something like 'the public is going to freak out when they hear about these people. It is political suicide to let them go free. We should intern them for their own safety.' That's what they did with the Japanese.”

“I guess . . .”

“Do you think they might think something like 'are these real human beings? Even their creators call them humanoids. They're mutants. We don't know what they can do. We'd better study them before we let them go.'?”

“Yes.” Muriel admitted. “That sounds like government paranoia.”

“Then we'd go from a private research facility to a government research facility.” Harris said flatly.

“What do you want me to do?” Muriel's words almost exploded from her mouth.

“Right now I'm just thankful for your help taking care of Stephanie. I assume you can send a text with your sat-cell.” Muriel nodded. “I'd like to ask that you text a friend who will come and help me get Stephanie to safety.”

Muriel brought up the application on her sat-cell phone and handed it to Harris to send his text. It took him only a moment and then they sat back to wait.

“If the Smith’s actually raised you like a daughter, I’m not going to sit here and try to convince you that they’re doing something illegal. All I ask of you is that when you get home, don’t tell anyone that you met us.” Harris paused and watched the curious look on Muriel’s face. “Please! Our lives and the life of two friends depend upon that.”

“How? ... What?” Muriel struggled for words. “Now, you’re being melodramatic.”

“No, I’m not,” said Harris. “You saw that soldier.”

“Okay.” Muriel agreed. “I have no reason to get you into trouble.”

In a couple of hours a figure could be seen almost running across the meadow. Harris stepped out of their hiding place and hailed the figure.

He introduced the young man to Muriel as Danny. Danny, like the others, had Waardenburg Syndrome. She assumed that he had a starburst birthmark and was a genius. She also noticed that his face was disfigured.

Harris saw Muriel looking at Danny.

“Each of us has some sort of physical abnormality,” Harris said quietly while Danny was talking to Stephanie. “My appendages on one side are shorter than the other. Stephanie has cancer.”

“Cancer!” Muriel felt shocked.

“Yes, that’s why we’re trying to get her away. They would just watch her die without trying to help her.”

“Oh,” was all Muriel could say. She didn’t know whether that was true, but there was no reason for Harris to lie. She was already doing everything he asked. She felt a horrible knot in her stomach. She couldn’t imagine just having a cold without someone there to help her.

Harris and Danny made a make-shift litter and were ready to leave.

“Will I ever see you again?” Muriel asked Harris.

“I don't know,” Harris said. “Do you want to after what I've told you?”

“That's a good question.” Muriel also wondered why she had said that. Was it just some sort of politeness? For some reason she felt oddly safe around Harris and liked him.

“I can give you my email so you can write me. Maybe we'll both be up here again sometime and we can talk about more pleasant things.” Harris said.

“You have email?” Muriel was surprised.

“Yes,” Harris smiled. “I do live in the twenty-first century.”

“Sorry. I just thought that if you're hiding in the mountains you wouldn't have such things.” Muriel apologized.

“That makes sense, but we have friends all across the country. One friend bought me a Hughes Net satellite internet and another provides me with a Blackberry that also uses satellite.”

“Wow,” Muriel exclaimed as she dug the notebook she always carried out of her backpack. “What's your address?”

“926437@gmail.com” said Harris.

“That's unusual,” Muriel commented as she wrote it in her notebook. She wrote her own email address at the bottom of the page, tore it off and handed it to Harris.

“I don't want it to contain anything that may point to me,” explains Harris. “The numbers were randomly generated. They have no meaning. But please remember that you can't give anyone my address, even if you think you can trust them.”

“I won't.” Muriel promised.

Harris waved as they picked up Stephanie and started east. Muriel slowly descended the mountain toward home.

## CHAPTER TWO.

Her encounter with Harris was all that Muriel could think about that evening. Could he be making up all that stuff about genetically engineered humanoids? She wanted to think so, but he was right about the odds of three, no four people, all having Waardenburg Syndrome and a sunburst mark on their left shoulder, being too great to ignore. Could her parents – or the people she believed to be her parents – actually be genetically engineering human life in a secret lab under the mountain? It even sounded like the plot of a B-rated movie. Unfortunately she couldn't laugh off her encounter with Harris as she would a B-rated movie.

Muriel really wanted to go to her parents and ask their opinion, but she had made a promise. If, by the wildest stretch of the imagination, Harris was right, then he would be in danger. If he was partially right and her parents were a part of some secret research project, they obviously didn't want her to know about it or they would have told her, so keeping her promise to Harris was the best course of action. It made everyone happy. At the same time, if Harris' story was the result of delusional thinking, maybe she should say something. However, the girl, Stephanie, obviously shared his beliefs and, delusional or not, he appeared to be totally harmless, so there was no reason not to keep his secret. The logical battle raged on - tell her parents OR don't tell her parents.

While it would seem that talking to her parents was gaining the upper hand, Muriel couldn't stop thinking about the Waardenburg and birthmark. Even her genius brain couldn't wrap itself around how astronomic the odds were against the chance encounter of four people with Waardenburg and an identical birthmark. She had to take Harris' word for the fact that he was a genius, but either way he was right – viz. that the odds were right up there with being hit by lightening.

In the whole process of trying to decide what to do, or not do, Muriel started having other things come to mind which caused her to



wonder. Her parents would go to their lab every morning. She thought of the many times that she had gone to the lab only to be told by their lab assistant, Jason, that they were out collecting samples or something. She could never remember seeing them leave the lab. Of course, she thought taking the other side of the argument, if she had seen them leave she wouldn't have been up there looking for them.

There was only one thing to do. She had to play detective and see if her parents were hiding a secret lab or involved in some sort of secret project. She would keep her promise to Harris, since keeping promises was very important to Muriel, then she would go about exonerating her parents. After that she'd try to deal with the birthmarks and Waardenburg.

□ □ □

Muriel decided that the first and easiest thing to do was to watch her parents enter their laboratory and, making sure that they hadn't left the building, go and visit them. If they weren't there, that would be a problem. If she actually got inside and saw that they were not there, then she would have to admit that they had a serious secret. It was a quick and easy way to deal with the issue of them not being in the laboratory when she went to visit. Being a smart and budding scientist, Muriel decided that good research would require that she repeat the experiment more than once.

'Day 1:' Muriel wrote in her notebook. 'Time – 0815 – subjects entered laboratory'. Since a variable would be the amount of time between her parents entering the building and her visit, she decided that she should allow adequate time. After all, if they were going into some secret laboratory, there is a good reason to believe that they wouldn't walk directly from the front door to that room. They would talk to Jason and maybe take care of some matters at their desk. In any case, she decided that she would allow an hour. At 9:15 am Muriel walked into the laboratory.

"Hi," she said in a loud cheerful voice to anyone who might hear.

"Oh, hi Muriel," Jason said emerging from the lab room.

"Aren't my parents here?" Muriel asked.

“No,” Jason replied. “They’re looking for a *Phallus Ravenelii*.”

“Really?” said Muriel. “I would have thought it was too early in the year.”

“I guess they’re wanting a young sprout,” Jason replied cheerfully.

“I guess so,” Muriel worked hard not to show her concern. “Which way did they go?”

“I really couldn’t tell you,” Jason shrugged his shoulders.

“Okay,” said Muriel, “I’ll catch them later.”

Muriel left. She was very upset. Jason shouldn’t have tried to bluff a botany buff. *Phallus Ravenelii* is the scientific name for Ravenel’s Stinkhorn. It is a fungi found in eastern United States. If they went out looking for *Phallus Ravenelii* they weren’t looking in the Rocky Mountains.

There wasn’t anything to do but to watch the laboratory until her parents returned. It was a long day. Finally about 4:30 her parents emerged from the laboratory and walked to the house. Muriel met them.

“I was looking for you this morning,” she said as light hearted as she could. “Jason said you were out looking for some *Phallus Ravenelii*.”

“Oh, for pitty sake,” said her Mother. “Jason may be a good lab technician but he’ll never be anything more. He should know that *Phallus Ravenelii* is an eastern fungi. We were looking for some *Aleuria Aurantia*.”

‘Well, at least she picked a western fungi,’ Muriel thought. “Did you find any?”

“No,” her Mother replied as she headed up the stairs to their room. “It must be too early.”

‘About three months early,’ Muriel thought. Why her parents thought they could bluff her was anyone’s guess. Muriel loved the *Aleuria Aurantia*, which is known as the ‘orange peel fungus.’ It is a bright orange cup fungi that grows in summer and fall. Muriel would get excited to find any because it prefers clay soil, which is not very common in the northern Rocky Mountains.

Disturbed and deeply concerned Muriel tried to think of any reason her Mother would lie to her. She had watched them go into the laboratory. She had spent all day watching for anyone coming or going, and watched them come out that afternoon. Then her Mother told her that they had been out hunting for a fungi that wasn't going to be around for another three months or more. She made notes in her notebook and decided to give them one more chance.

'Day 2: 0821 – subjects enter building' Muriel wrote in her notebook. At exactly 9:20 she walked through the door and called out "hi!"

This time her Mother stuck her head out of her office to tell Muriel that she and her Father were on an important conference call. Muriel apologized and left.

That felt better, but as she walked back to the house she began to have doubts. What if, she wondered, her Mother had realized that she hadn't fallen for her story? Perhaps her Mother realized that the Aleuria Aurantia wouldn't be up yet and was expecting Muriel to get suspicious and visit again.

Muriel turned almost immediately and returned to the laboratory.

"You just missed them," Jason said.

"You're kidding me," Muriel exclaimed. "I was just here and Mom said that they were on an important conference call."

"Sorry," Jason apologized. "They're back out looking for that Phallus Ravenelii."

Muriel turned and started out of the building. At the door she turned to Jason. "by the way, Phallus Ravenelii is an eastern mushroom known as Ravenel's Stinkhorn. It doesn't grow out here." She left.

Again Muriel watched the laboratory. Again no one went in or out all day until her parents left in the late afternoon.

Something was definitely going on. Whether or not it had anything to do with Harris' claim of a secret genetics lab was yet to be determined.

Nevertheless, she now felt she had to solve the mystery and what she needed was time to explore the building alone.

The opportunity came a few weeks later. Her parents announced that they were going to Seattle on business. Muriel asked if she could stay home since it was mid-May and the mountain was bursting with new life. As she waved at the disappearing car Muriel turned her attention to the small laboratory behind the cottage.

The lab was a small, unimposing looking building. It sat at the foot of the mountain ridge with a long porch on the front that looked out across the narrow valley at the mountain ridge to the east. The door was locked – as if anyone even knew that this valley was here nevertheless a building that might contain something of value. Actually that made Muriel a bit uncomfortable since they never locked the house. Why was the lab locked?

After a short detour to the cottage for her mother's spare keys, Muriel let herself into her parent's laboratory. She called out to the lab tech, Jason, but there was no answer. She had the entire place to herself. Just inside the door was a small room with a single table, a couple of chairs and walls lined with bookshelves. She knew that the two doors to the right led to her parents' small offices that were piled with books and papers, and to the left was their lab with its long laboratory tables and cases lining the walls with chemicals, vials, and samples. As she looked around she had no idea where to start looking or even for what she was looking.

It seemed that the logical place to start was in her parents' offices. She looked at the papers on their desk and went through their filing drawers. There was nothing about AGEH or notes about human genetics.

The last remaining door in the small entry room and library was to the storage room. Muriel had rarely gone into the storage room that was lined with shelves filed with supplies, files and other miscellaneous items. She searched and searched but could not find anything strange or out-of-place. She was actually walking toward the cottage when it struck her. There were windows on every side of the building except the back. One might

make the argument that there isn't any reason to put windows on the back since it is just the back wall of the lab and the storage room, but it still could be important. Besides, in all of the detective shows and movies that's how secret rooms are hidden.

Muriel returned to the lab and stepped off the distance from the front to back corner. Then she went inside and stepped off the distance from the front wall to the back wall. The building was actually deeper on the outside. There was at least four to five feet difference. Muriel stood for a moment trying to take it in. Perhaps she had made a mistake. She didn't actually use a measuring device. She repeated the process with the same results. Now she was worried.

With renewed determination Muriel returned to the back of the laboratory room. She was sure there had to be a logical explanation. Moving things around and inspecting the wall carefully she found no place that there was a break in the painted drywall. That left the storage room. Here the shelves were a bit different. They went from floor to ceiling so there were wooden legs that were attached to the wall. A seam could be hidden behind the leg. Muriel began to inspect each one. In each case the legs were secured to the wall. Upon re-inspection Muriel noticed that the shelves did not go all the way to the wall on the north end of the room, and that there was a gap between two of the sections – as though one section was free standing. There would also be enough room to swing out.

Muriel pulled over a chair and climbed up so that she could inspect each shelf carefully. After a short time her hands ran across a lever that was recessed into one of the legs. This discovery was both exciting and unsettling. She was excited that she had found a hidden door but she wasn't happy because it meant her parents were, in fact, keeping secrets.

Carefully she pulled. She could hear a click and the shelf unit swung like an oversized door. Behind the shelf unit was a large metal door. Above the handle was a key pad.

Muriel's heart sank. She hadn't thought about encountering a locked door nevertheless one with a number pad lock. How many combinations might there be? Was it a four, six or eight number code? She sat staring at the lock. How was she to get it open?

Muriel visualized her parents opening the lock and disappearing into a secret enclave. It was only after visualizing the same act many times that it occurred to Muriel that if one was to touch the same keys enough times they would become more worn than the others. She looked but it was impossible to tell the difference. Nevertheless, if one touches certain keys to the exclusion of others, they are going to leave oil from their skin on those they touch. Theoretically she should be able to use a powder like they use when dusting for finger prints and see which keys were routinely touched.

She had neither the materials nor the skills. Her only option was to go and learn how to dust for fingerprints and return when she had the knowledge and materials.

Her parents returned from Seattle in time for dinner. Muriel felt awkward because she was afraid that they could tell that she had been doing something about which she didn't want them to know. It was a childhood leftover. After all, they always seemed to be able to tell when she did something wrong as a child. Her fears were soon abated. She realized that both of her parents were distracted and on edge. They hardly looked at one another and when they did there was an obvious discomfiture like they shared a horrible secret. When Muriel asked about the trip, the answers were short and evasive.

"It was just a business trip, you know," said her mother, trying to smile. "Nothing fun. Nothing exciting." From their expression there wasn't anything fun, but evidently something happened.

Sensing the tension in his wife's voice, Ronald Smith added, "our backers are pressuring us for some samples and data they want and are using

funding as leverage.” That came out sounding like the truth. Muriel wondered.

“Do you have the samples they want?” Muriel asked with as much casualness as she could muster.

“Yes,” replied her father, “but we can’t guarantee when they will be ready. Mr. Simpson wants them right away.”

Teresa Smith shot her husband a horrified look at the mention of the name ‘Mr. Simpson’ as though it was the unspeakable and he had violated a rule punishable by death. She tried to cover up by smiling and changing the subject to what Muriel had spent her time doing, but Muriel could tell that she was terrified.



After excusing herself from dinner, Muriel went to her room. One of the great things about the internet is that you can get information about anything and everything. She was amazed to find that there were a good six or eight websites dedicated to amateur fingerprint dusting. The process seemed simple and straight forward.

- Pour a small amount of dusting powder on a piece of paper.
- Shake the brush so the bristles spread apart.
- Dip the tip of the brush into the powder.
- Remove any excess powder by gently tap the brush's handle.
- Run the brush's bristles lightly over the surface to be dusted in short and quick strokes.

Now all she had to do was get the right powder and the right brush. She decided upon a fine cosmetic brush but she was concerned about having fine enough powder. Another internet search lead her to a method using candle soot. She had everything she needed. Now it was a matter of getting back into the lab alone. She toyed with the idea of sneaking out of her room

at night but decided against that since the window in her parents bathroom looked out on the lab. She wasn't ready to risk the coincidence that they might get up, go to the bathroom and either see her crossing the yard or light in the lab. She would again wait for them to go out of town on business.

Not knowing when the Smiths would leave on business again, Muriel was determined not to waste the time. She would explore the valley west of the cottage where the entrance to the hidden facility was supposed to be located. That night she prepared her backpack. She had been told that going up the west ridge was dangerous. At this point she wasn't sure whether that meant the terrain or what she might encounter. According to Harris she was told that because of what she would discover. She decided that she was going to be prepared for both possibilities.

The west ridge was very steep immediately behind the cottage and the valley became deeper as you went down the mountain. It would be much safer to go north toward the mountain summit and then cross through the saddle where she had met Harris and Stephanie. The ridge was almost 200 feet above the cottage, so it was going to be a difficult trek. Muriel loaded her backpack with emergency supplies, a first aid kit, food, poles and a selection of mountaineering equipment like rope, cams, carabiner, piton, nuts, her harness, and, of course, her topographic maps.

After everything was packed, checked and double-checked, Muriel sent Harris an email telling him about her discovery in the lab, her plan to dust the keypad to find out what numbers were pushed and her plans to explore the valley west of her home. Harris responded almost immediately.

Muriel, be careful!!! I didn't tell you about the AGEH to get you to take horrible chances. It won't benefit anyone if you get caught. Why don't you just drop it. - H



I need to know the truth and this is the only way to do it. I'll be careful. - Muriel

Why don't I go with you. - H

Isn't that dangerous for you? Muriel

Yes, but I don't think you should be going near the compound alone. I know my way around. - H

If you really want. I'm leaving in the morning. The ridge is very steep behind my house so I'm going to head north toward the tree-line by the saddle where we met. I don't know how we'd find each other. Muriel

I'll be watching for you at the north end of the lake. See you in the morning. H.

OK. See you then.

Muriel closed her laptop slowly, thinking about making the trip with Harris. If he was telling the truth he was taking a great risk to keep her safe. Even if it wasn't true, Harris believed it to be true, and that meant he was willing to take the risk. She'd never had a boy, other than their housekeeper's son, Jaime, do anything like that for her. It made her feel special. It made it hard for her to focus as she studied her maps before going to bed.



Muriel awakened early as usual with the sun streaming in through the open window. It was still chilly, but she loved the brisk mountain air. She dressed quickly. A flannel shirt and kaki pants would be fine as the day grew warmer. It would still be chilly higher up the mountain. She picked a green plaid flannel just in case they had to hide. A warm pair of heavy wool socks would provide cushion as well as comfort. Her hiking boots were well worn, which was all the better. You want good sturdy boots that are well seasoned. Boots that are not properly broken in will give you blisters on a long or hard climb. She double-checked her back-pack and looked in the mirror. She was ready.

As she entered the kitchen to get breakfast before leaving Muriel was surprised to find her parents. They were in the midst of a heated discussion when she entered the room and stopped as soon as they realized she was there. They smiled weakly. Muriel pretended that she had not noticed and chattered about her plans for the day. Botany was Muriel's love and she had no trouble going on at great length about the plants of the Alpine biome in which they lived.

"It's far too early for the Pygmy Bitterroot or Alpine Phacelia," Muriel said, "but I'm looking for some Bear Grass, Spruce to make some Spruce Beer, Hemlock needles for tea, and the fir cones should be on."

Muriel could see that her plans were of no interest to her parents. Normally they would join in with great interest, but nothing had been normal recently. They were still as sullen and moody as they had been at dinner the night before. So Muriel wished them a good day and went outside where she adjusted the harness on her backpack, checked her trekking poles and retied her boots. As she started north along the edge of their small lake she could see her parents walking toward their lab. Their hands and arms belying a lively discussion. Probably a continuation of the one she had interrupted.

Muriel headed almost due north toward the mountain summit. Their cottage was well up the valley so it wasn't very far to the summit – a

few miles – but the incline was quite steep at the top of their valley where the two ridges came together. Nevertheless it was much less steep than attempting to go straight up behind their cottage. She had studied her maps carefully and decided that the best route would be toward the summit for about a mile then turn west. At that point the ridge just west of the cottage and the ridge west of that come together. That's where she had met Harris and Stephanie. She could then go up and down the top of the ridge with a bird's eye view of the valley below. She had no idea where Harris would meet her, if he would find her at all.

The sun was shining, warming the mountain side and creating dancing light figures as it shown through the ever-moving tree tops. The forest was still thick and while the pine needles were softer to walk on they could also be slippery. She used her trekking poles with skill, expertly picking where to place the spiked tip for the greatest stability. This was an integral part of Muriel's life. She had learned mountain skills as a girl and had been trekking this mountain alone looking for her beloved plants ever since Jaime had left for college three years before. Jaime also loved the mountains and the two of them would spend hours every day exploring and learning. Jaime was an excellent climber and guide and was paying for his college by taking groups through area wilderness. He had gone off to the University of Washington to study orography – mountains. He was a junior this year. She missed him when he was away at school.

Lost in memories, absorbing the beauty of the mountain around her and watching her step, Muriel didn't notice Harris come up behind her. She was startled when he called to her.

“Boy are you setting a pace!” Harris called.

“Oh, you startled me.” Muriel smiled. “This is my usual pace. Think you can keep up?”

“Is that a challenge?” he asked returning her smile. He was wearing blue jeans, a heavy dark flannel shirt and worn boots. He didn't have a backpack but did carry a small frameless rucksack and a water bottle tied to

his belt swung freely at his side. Instead of trekking poles Harris used a single hiking staff. With a well worn felt Stetson pinnacle Beaver fedora Harris looked the part of the American mountain man. He moved easily along the uneven ground and seemed to place his staff in exactly the right place without thought.

Muriel showed Harris her maps and explained her planned route. Harris agreed that her route would be the easiest and most comfortable. Following her compass a few degrees west of due north, they picked their way carefully through the trees. After almost an hour they sat down on a rock and pulled out water bottles and map. This was the spot where they needed to turn west. Even though the incline appeared steeper to the west, they knew that it was going to become increasingly steep as they approached the top of their valley.

From this point on Harris took the lead. He knew where they were going. Stowing her map, re-adjusting her backpack and sinking the tips of her trekking poles deep into the soil, Muriel fell into Harris' comfortable cadence. Within another hour they were standing at the edge of a large barren area where two ridges came together closing the top of the valley Harris had identified as the location of the compound entrance. Moving out from the tree line their view became expansive. To the north-northwest was the summit of their mountain rising 5,498 feet into the azure blue sky. Muriel thought how she'd never get over the thrill of such a view. To the southwest she could see Mt. Rainer standing majestically in the distance. Below was a vastness of green.

This was still relatively new territory to Muriel even though the meadow in which they met was very near. Harris knew the ridge well and led the way without hesitation. As they started down the ridge Muriel's thought went to what they were going to see. She wanted to be prepared, and she wanted to know about what Harris had been through when he lived in the mountain. Muriel finally worked up enough courage and blurted out, "how was it growing up in a research compound?"

“How do you think?” Harris replied sharply. Then quickly reigning in his anger, “I’m sorry. We didn’t know anything else, but we knew that there was something better.”

“Were you mistreated?” asked Muriel.

“Well,” there was a long pause. “physical abuse wasn’t too common but psychological and emotional abuse was a daily experience.”

“I’m sorry,” said Muriel. She wanted to know but she realized that she didn’t really want to hear.

“It isn’t your fault,” Harris said gently. “I should ...”

“No,” Muriel interrupted, sensing that he was going to stop. “If you don’t mind telling me, I’d like to know. It’s just hard to hear.”

“Probably as hard as it is to tell.” said Harris.

Again there was a long silence as Harris gathered his thoughts.

“There wasn’t much physical abuse. It was usually by one of the guards or caretakers. What made it hurt so bad when it did happen was that they never got into trouble for physically hurting us but that their actions might damage either the ‘sample’ or ‘skew the data.’ After being physically hurt we were reminded that we were nothing more than experiments. The scientists were more concerned about their experiments than the subjects on whom they were experimenting.”

“That had to hurt,” said Muriel softly.

“You better believe it.” Another short silence. Harris started hesitantly. “Sexual abuse was much more common.” He peeked a look at Muriel and he could see the horror in her eyes – not only the horror of what he had said but of what she was going to hear. She quickly looked down as their eyes met.

“It’s ironic. The same people who would remind us continually that we were not human but some kind of freaks were the same ones who had no compunction about having sex with us. They knew that we wouldn’t tell. The guard or caregiver we told might also have a secret, and then we’d have a bigger problem.”

“Were they allowed to do that?” Muriel asked.

“No. It was against the rules, but again it was because it might interfere with their experiment. It never had anything to do with our feelings or physical wellbeing.” Harris looked at Muriel. “I’m sure the same thing happens in concentration camps and prisons. When you have people who have total control over another group ... well, rape is not an act of love.”

“That doesn't make me feel any better.” Muriel said. “Were my ...”

Harris didn't let her finish. “No!” he said emphatically. “No, the Smiths never did anything like that! But I have to be honest, their attitude toward the offenders was the same as the other scientists – ‘you’ll mess up our experiment.’”

“The most common abuse was the constant reminder that we were not ‘natural’. The guards and caregivers were there because they were paid. They didn't care about the experiments or us. It was just a very good paying job. Occasionally a graduate student, who was trying to work their way into the research program, would work as a caregivers but that was rare and they were just less thoughtless.”

“Most of the guards and caregivers were uneducated and over-religious. It really hurts when the person who is supposed to be replacing your parents spend most of your waking hours reminding you that you weren't even the product of sex. We were often called abominations and told that God hates abominations, so forth and so on. You get the idea.”

“Unfortunately I do,” said Muriel. “Why were they allowed to treat you that way? If nothing else the scientist should have wanted to protect you from psychological harm as well. It sounds as if the average lab animal gets more love and affection.”

“That's true. I figure there are at least a couple of reasons.” Harris paused to count and put his thoughts in order. Like Muriel he was very analytical. “Firstly, I don't think the scientists knew a fraction of what went on when we weren't being observed for an experiment. Secondly, most of the experiments were centered upon our physiological development. A few

researchers were interested in our intelligence but emotion never seemed to count. Thirdly, I think that many, if not most, of the researchers didn't really care but they knew that when they were able to take their research public they'd have to show that their samples had not been abused. Rather like those who use chimps. The general public doesn't really care but doesn't want to be offended by cruelty, so the scientists show how well they take care of their chimps. It doesn't matter that the chimps live in small cages and are going to die.”

“That doesn't make sense.” Muriel said.

“What part of it doesn't make sense?” Harris was a bit defensive.

“No, I don't mean your analysis,” Muriel said, “but that scientists would ignore the emotional factor. All higher animals show what could be argued to be emotions. Things like anger and fear.”

“True. However, we have not really made it into any one of the taxons nevertheless be an identified species.”

“I never thought of that.” Muriel replied.

“Yeah, and you have to be able to breed to be a species,”

Muriel shot a look at Harris. “No,” he laughed. “In fact, I never heard of any experiment to see if we can breed. I think some of them are afraid that we can. They just don't know Veronica.”

“What do you mean they're afraid that we can?” Muriel's question sent a tingle down Harris' back. It wasn't because of the question but because it was the first time that he had actually heard her include herself when talking about AGEHs.

“They know that we're all geniuses. That's a problem for them. They could probably remove that from the primordial soup they use to create us, but they don't really want to do that because it would make it look like they've created something inferior. However, if we're geniuses they know that we can out-think most people and might take over the world and treat them like they've treated us.”

“Ah,” Muriel stated sarcastically, “revenge. But doesn't it take emotions to have revenge?”

“You catch on quick, kid.” Harris smiled.

“But what does Veronica have to do with it?” Muriel's mind had gone back to Harris' off-handed interjection 'they just don't know Veronica.'

“What?”

“A moment ago you said 'they just don't know Veronica.’” Muriel even stopped walking for a moment as she watched and realized that the question made Harris extremely uncomfortable.

“Well, er, uh . . .” Harris was searching. All of his intelligence was not going to get him out of this. He stood looking at Muriel with a sheepish smile.

“You and Veronica?” Muriel asked.

“Yes.” Harris' sheepish smile broke into a broad grin.

“Really!!” Muriel was so excited. She was not only happy for Harris and Veronica who had had such a horrible life but she realized that it was a testimony to her authenticity and that of all AGEHs. “When!?”

“Mid-fall. Probably around the end of October.” Harris said with a grin. “She's done fine this first trimester.” A shadow crossed his face. “I'm just worried if the baby needs some special care when she's born.”

Muriel quickly picked up on Harris' worry. “Why?”

“You're the only AGEH born without some sort of physical abnormality.” Harris looked directly at Muriel and the concern showed in his eyes.

“Oh.” That's was all that Muriel could say. Harris was right. “I can understand your concern, but let's face that bridge when we get there,” she said in an attempted rebound.

“Let's', 'we'?” Harris asks. He was surprised at her acceptance of herself as an AGEH, and how her including herself in their lives made him feel. They hadn't been able to tell anyone except their friend, Danny. This, he thought, must be how couples feel when they announce that they're



going to have a baby. It was such an enjoyable release of pent up happiness. He felt almost giddy.

“You don't think I'm going to miss that, do you?” Muriel said with a smile.

“I don't remember inviting you.” Harris teased.

“You won't have to,” Muriel retorted, “Veronica will.”

“And how do you know that?”

“Because we girls have to stick together.” Muriel suddenly felt a kinship with the young woman whom she had never met. It was a feeling that she had never experienced before. She liked it. She realized that this was not just a new friend having a baby. It was a 'girl thing', an affirmation.

They continued their trek down the mountain ridge that divided Muriel's world from the entrance to the secret compound. The gut-wrenching reality of life inside the mountain had given way to happy, excited talk about new babies and new life. As Harris held up his hand to indicate that they were just above the compound and should be quiet, Muriel felt the shooting pain of fear and excitement in her stomach. For a moment she wanted to go back up the mountain and talk about the new baby, but she knew that she had to keep going.

There were no signs of human life or activity in the valley below, but Muriel knew that that could easily be obscured by the forest. They continued south and downhill along the ridge. A short while later they emerged into a clearing. From here they could look down into her valley. This was the bald spot Muriel could see from the cottage, and looking down she could see their lake and the top of her house. She could not see into the valley to her west but a few hundred yards down the ridge they came to a spot where they could.

There was an open area at the valley floor and there was a road! Her heart began to beat faster. Muriel had always believed that their home in the other valley was the only human habitation for many miles, but here was a road that disappeared into the trees at the top of the valley. It had to stop

in those woods because there was no road above the tree line. As they stood watching a large truck emerged from the forest, moved slowing up the road through the clearing, and disappeared.

"It's going into the compound." Harris said casually. Muriel just looked. She didn't answer. There wasn't anything to say. She just looked at where the truck disappeared. Had she really thought that she wasn't going to find anything? She looked at Harris who was still surveying the view.

"The exercise area is right below us." Harris pointed down into the valley. "It's rather steep but there really isn't an easier way. We need to try to keep quiet from here on in."

They started to make their way down into the valley using a zigzag method of descent. It was much slower but a lot safer. Muriel calculated that they should soon be to the clearing through which the truck had passed. She watched Harris. He was in stealth mode. Every step was carefully calculated. She could sense the tension in his body even though he was several yards ahead of her. His head was cocked like an animal listening carefully to things which humans can't hear. Muriel couldn't help but wonder if he was wishing that he hadn't agreed to be her guide. What must it feel like to be this close to the place he had risked everything to escape?

Muriel didn't have much time to think about that. Harris held up his hand and Muriel stopped immediately. Harris pointed straight ahead. She listened carefully. There were voices. The voices were coming from right below them. Muriel watched Harris carefully pick out each step after silently planting his staff to give him optimum support. When he paused she followed the same path. They continued this alternating movement for what seemed like hours, even though it was actually only minutes. Finally they came to a fence with barbed wire along the top. This was the last thing Muriel would have expected to find in the high mountains. Its appearance was menacing. It looked angry. She'd never seen a prison but this was exactly how she would have envisioned the fence. As they moved along the fence they came to a sign – "Simpco Security. Keep Out".

They moved in a northerly direction along the fence. The voices became louder. Then, through the trees, she could see people. She looked through the fence and the trees at a small group of people ranging in age from children to young adults. Some were sitting at picnic tables. Others were just ambling around. Most of the children were playing games. She could count fifteen in all. As she watched she had a startling realization. These people were all AGEH. She couldn't see their eyes. She couldn't see the sunburst and she couldn't tell whether they were geniuses but they almost all had some physical deformity that she could see from where she stood. Harris had said that she was the only success. She was the only one without some deformity. Her eyes welled up with tears and she sat down and sobbed. Harris put his hand on her shoulder. Her mind was a jumble of thoughts and fears and prayers, clashing emotions from guilt to compassion for those before her to anger with those who were responsible for their incarceration – the people she called Mom and Dad.

Harris pointed at a teenage girl wearing a cervical collar and whispered in Muriel's ear, "that's Jennifer. She was born a couple of years before I escaped. We thought she was going to be like you but she wasn't. She has to wear the collar because her neck isn't strong enough to support her head." She glanced at Harris. Tears were welling in his eyes.

"And over there," he pointed at a young man sitting at a picnic table. "That's Jackson. He's about four years older than me. Every time I come I'm surprised to see him alive. He has interstitial pulmonary fibrosis." As though aware of their presence Jackson look directly at Muriel. His eyes were dark and sunken. He looked frail. After a moment he smiled and turned back to watch the children playing in front of him. Muriel looked out at the collection of people and realized that this was Harris' family. Even though there was no hard evidence that these were AGEH and that she was one of them, she knew the truth. Harris had been telling the truth and she knew that now they were also her family.

Suddenly Harris held up his hand in front of Muriel. She looked at him. With his other hand he put his index finger to his lips and pointed to the south. Coming along the fence was a large man in a black paramilitary uniform carrying an automatic weapon. He looked like the man from the helicopter. Until the day before Muriel had seen men like this on the news in faraway places but here they were on her mountain. She wasn't sure which emotion was stronger – anger or fear. Her stomach hurt and she was terrified that she was going to become ill as the man moved closer.

Muriel lay in silent terror until he had moved past her. Then they very slowly and quietly moved up the hill and further along the perimeter of the enclosure. They came to a point where they could see a concrete arch and a door leading into the mountain. Beyond was the tree line into which the road disappeared. Moving along the fence but staying high enough that they were protected by the thick growth of trees, Muriel and Harris worked their way to where the road entered the trees.

Before her was the final evidence that there indeed was an installation inside the mountain. A large concrete arch over an opening big enough for large trucks to go in side-by-side looked like a scar on the side of the mountain. There were no signs or identification. As she watched she saw several heavily armed men moving around the entrance.

She looked at Harris. He evidently understood the look on her face. “They are a private military company,” he whispered. “What people use to call mercenaries or guns-for-hire. They're a tough group. I don't think words like compassion or kindness are in their vocabulary and they were definitely born without a moral bone in their bodies.”

While they sat looking at the hole in the mountain and the black-clad mercenaries Muriel became aware of voices shouting in the enclosure. Turning back they saw the guards yelling and herding the people into the doorway. They walked slowly with heads down. They obviously did not want to go back. Two young men were helping Jackson. He was having a hard time walking.

Harris and Muriel silently made their way to the top of the ridge. Harris stood looking down into the valley. Muriel could only stand and watch him. The sorrow on his face was so deep. He knew all those people by name except the children. He had shared their lives, their fears and their hopes.

They spoke very little on the way back to Muriel's valley. There wasn't much that could be said. As they approached the north end of the Smith's pond Muriel thanked Harris for showing her.

"I know that that must have been really hard." said Muriel reaching out and touching Harris' arm.

"It always is." said Harris avoiding eye contact. "I keep telling myself I'm going to help them but every time we get someone out they make security tighter."

"I'm going to find out what my parents are hiding in their laboratory. Maybe that will help." Muriel was grasping at straws but she wanted so much to saying something encouraging.

"Maybe," Harris forced a smile. "But be careful. I'm trying to get people out. I don't want to have to go visit you through the fence."

Harris moved off to the east toward his valley carrying his burden. Muriel returned to the cottage, avoided her parents and sat at the window of her room looking at the mountain and thinking about what she had heard and seen.

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Ronald and Teresa Smith continued to be quiet and moody, often seen arguing and spending a great deal of time in their lab. At dinner one evening a few days after Muriel's visit to the other valley they apologized for having to go away on business again. This time they had to be gone for several days. They clearly didn't look forward to the trip. Of course they invited Muriel and again she declined. Was it the whole idea of secrets, intrigue, and entrances to hidden underground installations guarded by armed men or were they actually relieved that she would not be going. It

didn't matter. It meant that Muriel was going to get a look behind the locked door.

Back in the seclusion of her room she opened her laptop and sent an email to Harris to tell him about her parents leaving again.

The Smith's didn't leave until after noon the next day. They spent the morning at the lab getting ready. Muriel had lunch with them filled with strained conversation and terribly awkward pauses. Ronald Smith hugged Muriel and avoided eye contact. Teresa hugged and kissed her. Ms. Smith eyes filled with tears. Muriel could tell that she was terrified of whatever they were facing.

After they left, Muriel went to her room to gather her things. With a flash light, balloon, candle, the make-up brush and some matches in a paper bag, Muriel set off to the Smith's lab. The lab technician had not come today so Muriel was free to come and go as she pleased.

She wasted no time pulling out the hinged shelf unit and preparing to dust the keypad for finger prints.

Muriel first filled the balloon halfway with water, blew it up the rest of the way and tied it off. She lighted the candle and put it on a small stool near the steel door, and held the balloon just above the candle so that the flame just touched the balloon. The candle began to smoke and in a matter of seconds the bottom of the balloon was covered with soot. She took the make-up brush and rubbed it across the balloon gathering the soot on the bristle ends. Lightly she rubbed the brush over the keys. It was slow because she had to go back and make more soot two more times. Nevertheless, after painstaking care, the dusting worked. Finger prints showed clearly on the numbers 0,1,2,4,8 and 9. Now she just had to figure out the sequence.

The excitement was so great that it was hard for Muriel to think about putting things back so that her visit would not be noticed if the lab technician did come. Carefully she put the candle, balloon, and make-up brush in the paper sack. She wiped off the key pad thoroughly so that no one got sooty fingers, returned the stool and closed the shelf unit making

sure that it closed securely. Looking around to make sure that everything was as she found it, Muriel returned to the cottage feeling like she was going to explode.

That night Muriel ate dinner with their housekeeper, Maria. She didn't figure that Maria was a danger. While friendly and caring, Maria stayed to herself in her apartment when not working. Maria seemed happy working for the Smiths, she didn't share her son's love of the mountains and she hated the cold. Muriel had known Maria for most of her life and found it very easy to talk with her. Muriel suggested that it was silly for Maria to stay at the cottage just to cook for her and wouldn't she like the week off – paid of course – to go see her family in Seattle. Maria jumped at the chance. It was a win-win situation. Maria got time off and Muriel had complete freedom of movement.

After dinner Muriel went to her room and booted up her lap-top computer. The only thing to be done was to put the six numbers in every possible order. She knew that the resulting combination must be at least a six-digit number. There was the chance that one or more of the numbers was used twice, but she doubted that it would be more than six since she had never actually seen any digital keypad that used more than six digits. It shouldn't take too long for the computer to come up with the list. She had already figured out that the permutation was  $6!$  1 times 2 times 3 times 4 times 5 times 6, or 720. What was going to take the time was what she was going to do with those 720 numbers.

Muriel sat looking out her window at the dark mountain as the computer ran silently. Out there was Harris. She imagined that somewhere on that mountain he and two companions were gathered together in some form of hut or cabin. Did they have light? Were they afraid to have light in case it might give them away? Had they had enough to eat? Were they comfortable?

Somehow it all seemed to be her fault, Muriel thought. Sure, Harris said that he had fled twelve years ago. She would have been only five or six

years old, but somehow she felt that she should have known ... she should have figured it out and saved the others. He had said that she was the ‘success’ while he was a ‘failure’. What made her the success? What made him a failure?

Then Muriel thought about Harris’ appearance. They shared having two different eye colors and a mark. The only difference was that Harris had the shortened limbs. Muriel had to admit that physically she was almost perfect. She was the average weight for a woman her height. She was almost never sick and thought that she was probably relatively strong compared to others. She didn’t have any disabilities or physical abnormalities like Harris. That was it! If Harris was right about her parent’s misguided desire to improve humanity through this advanced genetic engineering, then they couldn’t produce a child with physical abnormalities. That would be a failure. Only someone like her could be introduced to society. That was success.

At first Muriel wondered why she had not been introduced to society as their success. Then she realized that her parents were scientist. They knew that their results would have to be replicated. They couldn’t have someone else attempt to replicate their experiment since what they were doing was illegal. So they had to have more than one success before anyone was going to believe them and risk the legal repercussions by trying to replicate. They had obviously not had any more success since Muriel since she didn’t have any younger “brothers” or “sisters”, unless they were sent somewhere else.

If Harris was right, how many lives had been destroyed trying to make another Muriel? She didn’t want to think about that now. Muriel turned her attention to the string of numbers her computer had produced. Her eyes scanned quickly down the 01s through 07. It was when she saw 0814 on the screen that Muriel was struck by the numbing awareness that her birthday – 08/14/92 – was a possible combination. It was the combination of their success. Her heart sank. Unless this was just a



combination to a special hiding place to keep prized specimens or data and, out of love, they used their youngest daughter's birthday, this was just one more piece of evidence to support Harris' claim.

Muriel turned off her computer, turned out the lights and lay down on her bed. She was exhausted, yet she couldn't sleep. Her mind raced with the possibilities. Most of all she wanted to get into that cabinet so that she could prove her parents innocent of the horrible things which flooded her mind.

Finally out of sheer exhaustion, she fell asleep.



Muriel awakened before the sun. Her mind was racing with possibilities of what she would find behind the hidden door. She decided that it would probably be best if she were dressed in dark clothes. That's what they always do in the movies to keep from being discovered.

Maria was already up and in the kitchen when Muriel went to get breakfast. Muriel knew that Maria was an early riser and always had breakfast ready for the family. This day was no exception even if she was leaving to see her family. She was a very faithful housekeeper and had probably spent as much time being a mother to Muriel as Teresa Smith.

Muriel sat and listened to Maria's excited chatter as she ate her breakfast. Maria's excitement was infectious to the point that Muriel momentarily forgot about what might lay behind the hidden steel door. Muriel was enjoying watching the tiny round woman move lightly and effortlessly around the kitchen and listen to the softness of her Mexican accent. But she knew that it was time to return to reality as Maria gathered up a worn canvas bag, gave Muriel a hug and kiss, and headed out the door to her car.

Muriel wasted no time grabbing a flashlight and heading toward the lab. Apart from the dark clothing she couldn't think of anything else she would need.

Quickly she unlatched the shelf unit and pulled it open. With trembling fingers she typed 081492 and waited. Nothing happened. She tried the handle but the door was securely locked. She had been so certain that her birthday was the code. She hadn't even taken the time to look at other possibilities. She chastised herself soundly for being so short-sighted. There were 720 possible combinations. Was she going to have to try them all?

Before returning to her room to get a copy of the complete list of 720 combinations Muriel decided to try some variations on her birthday. In Europe the day always comes first, so she tried 140892. Nothing. How about year, month, day or year, day month? Nothing. Finally she tried just putting it in backwards – 294180. There was an audible click.

Suddenly her fear and anxiety were so bad that she was afraid she couldn't move. It was much worse than when the guard at the enclosure walked so close to them. This was fear of the future – of what was going to happen when she opened this door. She knew that no matter what she found nothing would ever be the same, and she was terrified of the options. To this point everything Harris had said was true. Unless there was something behind the door to exonerate her parents the best she could hope for was to find that they weren't quite the monsters Harris implied.

She stood for several moments and then slowly reached out her hand and pushed down on the handle.

As the door opened and light from the room behind her started to illuminate the interior the lights in the room ahead came on. Cautiously she took a quick peek around the corner. A short distance down the wall was a security camera. Just inside the door was a light switch. Quickly she reached in, turned out the light and closed the door. Certainly, she thought, someone would be coming soon to check. She looked at the back of hinged shelf

unit. Sure enough there was a lever to allow the unit to be opened from the inside. It made sense. If you were trying to keep the door secret, you certainly would not want to leave the shelf unit open after you went through the door.

Muriel closed the unit and went off to find a hiding place. Hiding under her father's desk she sat and waited. While she waited she thought about what had happened. The camera would need light and evidently it had a sensor that turned the lights on when the door was opened. So either it was the act of opening the door or the light from store room behind her. The only way to tell was going to be by trial and error. If she didn't get caught now, the next time she tried she would not have the lights on in the storage room. Then if the lights came on again, she would know that it was the act of opening the door.

Sound from the store room caught Muriel's attention. Someone had opened the shelf unit. They must be standing in the store room listening. Then there were footsteps and the sound of the store room door opening. Footsteps. Door. Probably the lab. Footsteps. Door. Probably her mother's office. Footsteps.

The door opened. The light of a flash light swept the room. Then the door closed and the person returned to the store room. Muriel could hear the shelf unit open and shortly close again. There was silence. She sat for a long time just to be sure that she was alone in the building. Then she quietly slipped out and returned to the cottage.

The next morning Muriel determined to try again. She thought about how the camera and lights might work as she ate her breakfast. If there was a switch in the door jam that turned on the light like a light in a refrigerator, she would have to try to find some way to keep it from activating. The light and camera might be activated by movement. Muriel had no idea how to get around that, but hoped that the internet might help if that was the case. Her greatest hope was that the light and camera were activated by light. If she was lucky they would have decided that a light

sensor would be better because anyone entering the room would need light and that with a light sensor they wouldn't have the security going off because of some creature like a mouse.

After breakfast Muriel gathered the items she felt she would need including a piece of heavy dark cloth and headed toward the lab. After opening the shelves and exposing the hidden door she turned off the lights in the storage room. It was almost completely dark. A bit of light shown under the door which she blocked with a throw rug.

Satisfied that the room was as dark as possible, she entered the combination and turned off her flashlight. Carefully she opened the door. No lights came on. She stepped inside the room, poised to run, but no lights came on. She was in luck. They had obviously decided to make the security system light activated. Keeping her hands on the wall, Muriel walked toward the camera. Once there she covered the camera with the heavy dark cloth she had brought and returned to the doorway.

Holding her breath Muriel turned on the flashlight. No lights.

The room was quite narrow. It was actually no more than a short hallway. By the camera were steps leading down into the dark. Carefully listening for any sound that would indicate that someone was approaching, she tried to think of what she would do but the effort seemed to interfere with listening and looking. At the bottom of the stairs a tunnel went to the right. Muriel drew a map in her mind and decided that the tunnel was leading west. She decided to risk shining the beam of her flashlight down the tunnel. It was a long tunnel that had been left just as it was after being cut through the solid rock. There was a downward slope and the slightest of curve, but both were enough to keep her from seeing the other end. There were lights at intervals and conduit leading from one light to the next, but there were no cameras.

The tension was tremendous. She was hearing sounds where there was no sound and seeing things that weren't there. 'I wonder if this is the way a cat burglar feels?' she asked herself. It was so distracting that it was

hard for her to think through her next move. She spent a few moments looking down the long tunnel before trying to reason her odds of getting caught half way down and finally decided to take the risk.

Slowly she moved forward. All the way down the tunnel she thought about what she was going to do when she got to the other end. She thought about finding herself facing people on the other side. On the other hand, if she wasn't going to go all the way, why was she taking the risk to walk down the tunnel at all. She paused as she wondered whether she should stop and go back, but wanting to know the truth drove her forward. She tried to think about what story she could give if she was caught. She could come up with a story about finding the door into the tunnel but she couldn't think of a story about how she got it open and why she put a cloth over the camera to keep it from coming on.

As she was deep in thought Muriel realized that she could see the end of the tunnel. There was a door. She approached the door and listened carefully. There was no sound from the other side. She pressed her ear against the door and strained for any sounds that would warn her of danger on the other side.

The door opened away from her. Muriel turned off her light, leaving the hallway in total darkness. She crouched down with her face near the handle so that she could carefully look through the smallest opening. She felt that her heart was beating so loud that it would give her away, but it didn't seem as loud as the clicks of the latch and squeak of the handle. She peeked through the smallest opening. It was dark and quiet.

It was dark but not totally without light as was the hallway. She pushed the door a fraction of an inch farther and could make out what appeared to be cavern walls. Inch by inch she pushed the door further open, taking time to wait and listen after each move. Finally there was enough room for Muriel to peer around the edge of the door. She was not prepared for what she saw.

An “oh, my God!” slipped softly from her lips as she stood up and stepped into the enormous cavern. Light was coming from the far side of a large building in the middle of the chamber. She supposed that that was the opening which she had seen from the mountain side. It gave just enough light to make out the enormity of the cavern with a ceiling so high that it was almost indistinguishable.

The building, which filled the cavern, was a single story structure with no windows. Looking closely, Muriel could make out a door straight ahead. As her eyes grew accustomed to the minimal light she could tell that there was a path from where she stood to the door. This had to be the way her parents had gone to work each day when she thought they were in the little laboratory behind the cottage.

Again she was confronted with the danger of discovery if she attempted to open the door ahead of her. And yet again she decided that this is why she came. The door had a key pad like the one in the storage room. She pressed the code. Nothing happened. She tried a couple different combinations of the numbers before deciding that there was a different code. She would have to come back with her fingerprint kit.

Muriel decided to look around before going home. The building was a couple of hundred feet across. She carefully made her way around the north side. Probably another couple hundred feet away she could just make out where the wall of the building met the cave opening. Going to the southeast corner she could not see that side of the building because the building was quite close to the cavern wall and the building itself blocked the light from the entrance.

Muriel decided that she would do more exploring when she returned to dust the lock, and with that decision started back to the tunnel. No words could describe how Muriel felt when the door was locked. What if it had a different code like the door into the building?

It took but moments to confirm that this door also had a different code. With fear and panic growing exponentially with each try, Muriel tried

every combination she could. Finally, after several minutes of trying, she slumped to the ground emotionally exhausted.

Her only way out was through the cave mouth with its armed guards. That was guaranteed capture. She thought about how, in the movies, the good guy just takes someone's employee badge and walks out like they own the place. Even if she had the skills to pick a pocket, she couldn't get into the building.

Muriel walked along the north wall of the building toward the light of the cave opening. As she got closer, she realized that the building wall was actually attached to the cave wall. Even if she was ready to take the chance of being caught, she couldn't get through there either.

As she sat and pondered her situation Muriel thought about how Jaime had taught her that the mountains were pocketed with caves, often going for miles and having more than one way opening to the outside. Exploring the cave for another possible way out was at least another option even if the odds were astronomically against her. Besides she hadn't followed the south wall all the way. Maybe there was a way to the front entrance around that corner.

With determination Muriel turned to explore the other side of the cavern, but she was going to follow along the cave wall in case there was another passage.

A short way along the north cave wall Muriel's spirits were lifted. There was a passage. Could she be so lucky?

The passage almost immediately turned east and then north again. It opened into a large chamber. Feeling that she was far enough away from compound she shined her light around the chamber. At the far end was another passageway. This one again turned east and then ended at a crack in the cave wall. It was a dead end. The walk back to the main chamber felt longer but she continued her way around the cave wall and then along the south wall. As she looked around the southwestern corner of the

compound, she was confronted with a wall just as on the other side. No way to the entrance.

Panic was again setting in. Muriel went back and forth along the cavern walls looking for another way out. With each pass the building looked more menacing and the fear of what would happen when she surrendered. Would her parents take her home or would she be a prisoner as had been Harris and the others? What was it like inside that building? She was going to find out ... find out the hard way.

Muriel looked at the door and raised her arm to pound on it so that someone would let her in. 'No' she thought, 'one last time along the wall.'

Again, like the times before, Muriel made her way along the southern wall. Again, she encountered the man-made wall that blocked her access to the cave entrance. Again, she turned and started back all the time thinking about knocking on the door. Perhaps it was the resignation that calmed her mind so that she noticed what she had done each time she walked along the south wall. Each time she had walked along this wall she had to veer out into the cavern to avoid a pile of rubble. This was the only place where she had encountered such rubble. Logic said that the only reason for a pile of rubble like this was if there had been a cave in because of a lack of support . . . like an opening!

Risking the light from her flashlight being seen she turned it on and studied the pile of rock carefully. She looked for the point where the pile met the wall of the cave and began to pull large rocks away from the wall. After considerable time trying to move rocks quietly she saw an opening into the wall. Was it her way out?

With each rock that Muriel pulled away the opening became larger. After considerable time and effort there was an opening large enough for her to crawl through. Shinning her light into the hole she could see that it did go for at least the extent of her flashlight beam. She crawled in.

To her delight the hole opened into a short passageway which almost immediately opened into a long, large chamber running north and



south. There were a number of antechambers which were clearly dead ends. At the far southern end of the chamber she could see that the cave turned eastward. It wasn't as wide as the chamber but was still a fairly wide passageway.

As she followed this passage she realized that it was growing more and more narrow. At the end was another hole. Most likely created by water running along a fault it could lead nowhere, lead into another chamber or to a way out. She had come this far, thought Muriel, there was no reason not to continue. Although she had no idea how much time her flashlight batteries had left she felt compelled to push forward.

Sliding through the opening she found herself in yet another chamber. This one was much smaller than the previous and appeared to have no other exit. 'The water must have gone somewhere,' Muriel thought.

Trying to remain calm and use common sense and logic Muriel thought about how surface rivers make wide sweeping bends. If they were empty they would look much like this chamber. If this were an empty river the deepest part would be the channel and should lead her to where the water exited. And there it was. A small opening barely large enough for her to crawl, but crawl she did.

After several yards Muriel was beginning to feel claustrophobic and wonder whether she shouldn't turn back. She was about ready to give up when she realized that it was dark but it wasn't the absolute darkness of the inner cave. It was night-time darkness.

Excitedly she crawled as quickly as she could. Pushing against a large bolder she could see outside. She turned around and pushed the bolder with both legs until it rolled forward enough for her to get past.

Muriel looked around and began to cry. This time they were tears of joy. She was standing in a thicket of low shrubs. The forest was relatively dense and the slope steep. If she had kept good track of her direction, this should be her valley, she should be facing east, her cottage should be to her left and if she goes straight she should intersect the road home.

It was night. Muriel had lost track of time. Time had been of no consequence compared to finding an escape. She had been in the cave for almost ten hours. Slowly and carefully she made her way down the steep slope and, as she had expected, came to the road leading up the valley to the cottage. Since she didn't have her compass and map with her she couldn't triangulate her position, so she leaned a broken branch up against a tree near the road hoping that it would appear to anyone passing by like it has just fallen there from the tree. She hoped that would be good enough to help her find the place again.

It took Muriel about twenty minutes to walk home. She was struck by how dark the cottage was and the lack of the warm lights that usually awaited her. She realized how alone she was. She made herself a peanut butter sandwich and went to her room. Trying to wrap her mind around her adventure, she sat in her easy chair eating her sandwich and looking out at the still, dark mountain. Soon she was asleep.



Muriel was awakened early as the sun rose over the mountain. She stretched - spreading her arms and arching her back as if trying to capture or absorb the power of the warm sun that was filling her room. If it weren't for waking up in her easy chair, still wearing her dirty clothes and with a half-eaten peanut butter sandwich on her lap, she would have sworn that her adventure in the cave was a dream. She had been so consumed with escaping, and after that with getting home, she hadn't had a chance to think about the ramifications of what she had seen. What was she going to do? She felt she had to do something but she had no idea what that might be.

Ideas came fast and furious, and with each idea there were the problems and roadblocks. She couldn't think through them before another idea popped up. Her mind was swimming in ideas, dangers and consequences.

She thought about calling 'the authorities' – whatever that meant. She could call the sheriff. What would she say? 'My parents have a secret laboratory in the mountain where they make genetically engineered humanoids'? She could hear their skeptical reply, “okay. How do you know they're making these genetically engineered humanoids?” She would say, “because I'm one of them.” That would be the end of that. No. That approach wouldn't work. She couldn't say that she had seen them do it because she hadn't. Even if they did believe her, what would happen to her? What would happen to all of them? Would they just end up in some government research center? That whole train of thought was frightening.

She could say that they are holding people against their will. That's it! She had seen that. Well, she had seen the AGEHs in the exercise area and she believed Harris, Veronica and Danny when they said that they don't want to be there. But even if the authorities didn't challenge her and sent someone to investigate, could they get in? Couldn't her parents insist upon a search warrant? In the time that it would take to get a search warrant, what would they do to the AGEHs? Would they attempt to hide them somewhere? Or would they . . . no, she didn't want to consider that.

Muriel pulled out her laptop and sent an email to Harris. She told him about her adventure in the mountain and about the 'back door'. While she awaited his reply Muriel decided to Google Simpco Security on the internet.

There was a lot about Simpco on the Internet. It was a large private security company or private military company commonly known as mercenaries. It had been involved in a lot of questionable actions and had been accused of violating the US Military Commissions Act on more than one occasion by using “offensive force.” Muriel figured that meant that they shot first. It didn't sound like a very nice group of people. The President, CEO and majority stockholder of Simpco Security was Clarence Simpson. Muriel felt a shudder go up her back. She thought back to when her parents had returned from Seattle so upset and her father

accidentally mentioned a Mr. Simpson. She remembered how they reacted – like his name was poison. Could they be the same person? Obviously, they are since her parent's installation is being protected by Clarence Simpson's company. Muriel continued to read. According to what she could find he was arguably one of the richest men in the world. He made his early wealth in real estate and it appeared that he somehow slipped under the radar in the sub-prime mortgage scam bust. He was ex-military. That's how he came to invest his fortune in starting a private military company. 'What a charming person,' Muriel thought sarcastically.

If Clarence Simpson is the investor her parents went to see, why would he want to invest in AGEHs? Could he be wanting her parents to make soldiers for him? There had to be some reward. From what she read, the number of times that he had barely avoided prosecution and the fear she saw in her parents, Muriel knew that he expected a lot for his investment.

Muriel was still considering all of the possibilities when Harris' email arrived.

I should be angry w/ you for taking such a horrible risk but I am very excited about the back door you found. Since there aren't any windows we never knew that it was a building inside a cave. We assumed that it had been cut into the rock. Could you show me where it is? H.

I left a marker near the road. I can take you there.  
Muriel

Oh, no! You've risked too much already. H.

I don't have anything more to lose than you. In fact, with a baby coming, you are the one who shouldn't be going in. Besides, I want to find a way into the compound so that I can see for myself and find out about my birth mother. Muriel.

Let's compromise. Show me the cave and we can talk about what we should do next. Even if we can get into the building I don't think you would be able to get to the records without getting caught. I'll explain then. H.

OK. When? Muriel

How about tomorrow morning? Don't start out too early. Give me time to get over the mountain. I'll watch for you like I did the other day. H.

I'll be going south along the road from the cottage. I'll leave about 10. OK?

That's fine. See you then. Stay out of trouble. H.

Do you know anything about a Clarence Simpson?

Never heard of him. Why? H.

Tell you later.

Muriel closed her laptop. She didn't know why she told Harris that she wanted to learn about her birth mother. She hadn't really given it any conscious thought until the moment it came out. Teresa Smith had always been her mother. Even now, as they were becoming more and more estranged, she still thought of the Smiths as her parents. Yet suddenly her only connection with humanity seemed to be through an unknown woman. She unconsciously touched her belly button as she thought about how her life had changed. Perhaps she wanted to know the truth about her birth mother so that that couldn't be abruptly taken away.

How did they do it, Muriel wondered, thinking about the AGEHs. They had to use a woman to carry the baby. As far as Muriel knew that was still the only way. If her parents create AGEHs in any way similar to cloning, like Dolly the sheep, they use a donor cell, called a somatic cell – any cell from a person other than a reproductive cell – and put its nucleus into an immature, unfertilized female reproductive cell from which the nucleus and thus most of the DNA has been removed. This unfertilized cell is called an enucleated egg after the nucleus is removed. The process is called somatic cell nuclear transfer. The resulting embryo is then put into the womb of a surrogate. But what her parents were doing must be going far beyond this basic cloning method. They must have found some way to manipulate the DNA in the somatic cell. That's why they call it advanced genetic engineering. It must be far beyond anything going on in public.

Muriel knew the arguments about cloning. But this is obviously worse than cloning. She realized that most likely she shares nothing genetically with her birth mother. She glanced down at her hand resting on her abdomen. Does that make her less than human? Is she no more than the result of scientists playing with the chemistry of life? DNA has been called a recipe. Does that make her merely the result of a gene cocktail? What makes her human or non-human? Since the cloning of Dolly the argument has been made that embryos resulting from somatic cell nuclear

transfer do not have the same moral status normally accorded to other embryos. One scientist called the combination of a somatic nucleus and an enucleated egg a “transnuclear egg”, which, he argued, is a mere “artifact” with no “natural purpose” or potential “to evolve into an embryo and eventually a human being,” and therefore falls outside the criteria to be considered a human being. In other words, according to many scientists she does not meet the criteria for being human since she must be the result of an enucleated egg, an artifact with no natural purpose. If this is true, she thought, then what is she? She is alive. She looks, thinks, moves and acts like a human. Why isn't she human?

She almost smiled as she thought of the preacher who lived at the foot of the valley near Kittitas. She was sure that he would have a lot to say about AGEHs. They, of course, wouldn't be human because you can only be human through divine intervention and since she wasn't created “God's way” then she couldn't be human. She was sure that he would then push on to the “fact” that the only one interested in doing anything other than “God's way” was the Devil. Since the Devil is 100% evil and the creation of AGEHs could only be the work of the Devil, then she must be evil as well as inhuman. Would that be upper or lower case evil?

Their problem, Muriel realized, was that no one on either side of the argument thought that they were human or that they were viable life. The thought was so intense that it caused Muriel physical discomfort. She had to move. She sat up and looked out at the mountain. It was so majestic. No one doubted what it was, and it didn't care what anyone thought. The scientist only protected the AGEHs because they were valuable experiment samples. Otherwise they didn't care what happened to them. The religious bigots and others who are afraid of anything or anyone who isn't like them, would want to destroy them. She thought about how many times in history religions have identified and labeled other groups of people as sub-human or not human and endorsed their eradication. Right in the Bible, a holy book for Christians and Jews, the prophet Samuel told the king to kill all

the Amalekites. Of course, she thought, she didn't have to go back to the ancient middle east. A 16<sup>th</sup> Century religious leader said that the Jews were not people of God – therefore not human – and full of the 'Devil's feces.' He also said that society was at fault for not killing them. Then again, she thought, you don't have to go back that far. There are those in this country who advocate destroying all Muslims because they are evil. How was she and the rest of the AGEHs to find peace in such a society?

The pain of her thoughts quickly became more than she could bear. She pulled on a pair of comfortable hiking boots and headed off to the only place she knew of where how you came into existence didn't matter – the mountain.



Muriel tried to think of all the equipment she might need going back into the cave. She was a trekker, not a spelunker, so she again turned to the internet. Having a backup light source was very important. That was logical. Spelunkers use lamps that can be attached to their hardhat so that their hands will be free. She had the hardhat but no way to attach a light to it. Protective clothing was also listed as a high priority. That wasn't all that different from trekking and climbing. She pulled out a pair of good sturdy boots and some heavy weight clothes that wouldn't tear as easily as her usual kaki. Rope was another essential. She hadn't really thought about that, since she knows the cave, but she'd probably have taken some just out of habit. Then, of course, there were the safety items like a first aid kit.

After double-checking her equipment, she put on her backpack, pulled the cinches and started down the road. She noted that it was just 10am.

The morning was overcast and threatening. Of course the threat of a storm somehow always seemed more ominous in the mountains. Perhaps it was the play of light and clouds against the rugged terrain. Perhaps it was



like a clash of Titans. Whatever the reason, Muriel had a great respect for a storm in the mountains. Yes, she thought, she had packed a poncho.

Muriel was watching the approaching weather and admiring the new plant life when Harris called to her from the woods. She looked around to be sure that no one else was on the road and then went to the tree-line to meet him. Danny was there as well.

“Hi,” Muriel said smiling at the two young men. They both returned her greeting.

“My marker shouldn't be too much farther down the road.” Muriel told Harris and Danny.

“How did you mark it?” asked Danny.

“I put a branch up against a tree.” Muriel said. “It should just look like it has fallen out of the tree, but I'll recognize it. The cave entrance is just up the ridge from there.”

“Why don't you go along the road and we'll stay up here.” Harris suggested. Even though the only traffic on this road was the Smiths, the lab technician or Maria going to and from Kittitas, Harris didn't want to take any chances.

“Works for me,” Muriel replied walking back to the gravel road.

She continued for only a few more minutes before she stopped. Again she looked around and then headed toward the tree line where a branch lay up against a tree. Harris and Danny came close without leaving cover of the trees.

“This is it.” Muriel said. “The cave entrance should be right up there.” She pointed up the steep incline that lead to the ridge.

The three of them began to climb. It was not easy with the needles of the pines making the ground almost slippery and the incline steep enough to make climbing difficult even for the experienced climbers. They had climbed for several minutes when they were seeing signs of the tree-line ahead of them.

“It should be about at the tree-line.” Muriel said. “There is a lot of low brush around the entrance.”

“Over there,” called Danny, pointing to a thicket just ahead and to their right. “What do you think?”

“Could be,” Muriel replied as Danny moved off to investigate. Actually, as Muriel looked around, it was the best possibility she could see. She had zigzagged down the mountain that night but it shouldn't be too far either side of where she came out at the road.

“Nah,” came the call from Danny. “Nothing here.”

Harris had moved off to the left, farther south down the ridge. He was standing on a shelf and called to the others.

“Here it is.” Harris disappeared momentarily.

When the others got to the shelf there was a lot of low brush which Harris had pulled back to reveal the cave opening. The reason they couldn't see it from farther down was that the shelf projected out two to three feet creating an overhang that obscured anyone's view of the plants from below.

Muriel led the way into the cave. Crawling along the first several yards she hadn't realized how long this section was. It probably didn't seem as long when she was heading toward an exit after hours of searching for a way out. Harris and Danny followed on hands and knees with the occasional expostulation about the hardness of the rock. She couldn't help but smile.

They were all happy to arrive at the first chamber. Muriel could see it a lot better with three lanterns. It did, as she had thought, resemble a dry riverbed at a bend. The far wall was gently curved and, had the chamber been filled with water, would have been the shallow end. They were walking through what would have been the main channel. Most likely that's how the chamber was created. Muriel led the two men west where she showed them the narrow passage that headed into the larger cavern from which the compound could be accessed.

She showed Harris and Danny the spot where she had pulled the rock into the hole to help hide the entrance. Muriel was relieved to see that

the rock was still there. They decided that they should turn out their lights when they pushed the rock away from the opening so that they didn't give themselves away if anyone happened to be in the cavern.

With the lights out Harris carefully moved the rock and peered into the cavern. He was absolutely still as he took in what he saw. Danny finally had to push him to one side with the same result - transfixed silence. Muriel wondered what they were feeling. She remembered what it was like when she first saw the cavern, but she hadn't been incarcerated here for most of her life. Danny and Harris crawled out of the tunnel and stood again motionless staring at the complex before them. Muriel decided to give them all the time they needed.

Finally Harris turned around and whispered, "It's incredible. We never knew about this living inside."

For some time they quietly and carefully move around the perimeter of the building. Muriel was going to try a code on the door pad but Harris stopped her. "You don't want to go in that part of the building," he whispered.

Muriel watched as the two men poked at the siding, pulling pieces as far out as they would go. They checked out the points at the front of the building where the building wall met the cavern wall. After spending a great deal of time studying the building Harris motioned to the other two to go back into the safe cave. They followed him.

"We may be in luck," Harris spoke when they had returned the stone and moved away from the entrance.

"What do you mean 'in luck'?" Muriel asked.

"With this cave we could get everyone out." Danny answered.

"That's great," said Muriel, "but I want to get into their files and find out about myself and my parents!"

"You don't want to try that," Harris said emphatically.

"And why not," said Muriel feeling a bit defensive.

"Because there's no way you'd make it," said Danny.

“I got through from the laboratory upstairs.” Muriel said.

“But that place is a front,” Harris said, “and this place is the real thing with real security cameras and real guards.”

“Okay so it won't be as easy,” Muriel insisted.

“No,” said Harris. “Let me tell you about what's inside that building.” Muriel sat back showing a bit of a pout. “That place is divided into four basic areas – the dormitory and AGEH living area; the laboratory, birthing and research area; the staff office and sleeping area; and the operations and security area. The only place in the building where there aren't cameras at every corner is in the AGEH living area. Once that's locked they figure we weren't going anywhere. There was a guard right outside the door. I got the crap beat out of me for trying to raid the refrigerator one night. We didn't get to see much of the staff office and sleeping area except when we were taken there to clean. Like other areas the cameras were everywhere and all of the doors had key pad locks. Don't forget companies like this are also paranoid about industrial espionage. The only time you saw the security area was when they left the door open when you were working in the laundry or if you were in serious trouble. It looked like pictures of the space control center!”

Muriel had calmed down and accepted what Harris was saying and was listening intently. “Go back to the part about the AGEH living quarters.”

“What about it?” asked Harris.

“Did you say that it doesn't have cameras in it?” Muriel asked.

“She's right,” said Danny. “There still weren't cameras when I escaped last year. No one has ever escaped from inside so I guess they think it's safe.”

“That could...” Muriel started, but Harris at the same time said, “That's their weak point.” They all looked at each other and smiled.

“You guys know where that is?” Muriel asked.

“Of course,” they both replied.

“But how do we get in?” Muriel's smile faded.

“I don't think that's going to be much of a problem,” Danny stated.  
“The building is prefabricated”

“They probably built it in modules and then assembled it in the cave,” Harris chimed in.

“Right,” agreed Danny. “It has metal siding – probably for longevity – but there's no insulation underneath.”

“Do you know how they build an exterior wall, Muriel?” Harris asked.

“No.”

“Well, most modern exterior walls have studs with some sort of insulated board or plywood on the outside, insulation stuffed between the studs and then covered on the inside with drywall. Whatever exterior surface you want goes over the insulated board or plywood.”

“Where did you learn all of this?” Muriel asked even though it was off the track.

“We had a lot time to do nothing but read and study anything we could get our hands on,” said Harris. He looked at Danny who nodded in agreement.

“We're walking encyclopedias of a tremendous amount of useless trivia.” Danny said.

“From time to time we remember something useful,” Harris objected. “This being a case in point.”

“But why are we in luck?” Muriel questions. “It sounds like there's a lot to get through.”

“Since the cave is a constant temperature and there isn't any inclement weather to worry about they didn't bother with any plywood or insulation.” Danny explained.

“So all we have to do is pull away a section of exterior paneling and cut through the drywall.” Harris finished.

“Great!” exclaimed Muriel. “Let's go.”

“Not so fast,” said Harris holding his hands up as if to hold Muriel back. “Getting them out of the building is going to be the easiest part. What we do with them when we get them out is the hard part.”

“These guards will go postal when they realize that the AGEHs are gone.” added Danny.

Harris continued. “We need to make sure that we have everything ready so that we can be as far away as possible when the escape is discovered.”

All they talked about going through the cave and down the mountain side was the what and how of getting all of the AGEHs out of the compound. Muriel had a hard time sleeping. When she did get to sleep her sleep was filled with dreams of what she was going to see inside the compound.

□□□□□

The next morning Muriel headed to the eastern ridge near the top of her valley. She was going to spend the day with Harris, Danny and Veronica planning the Great Escape and this is where they had agreed to meet.

She had just arrived at the saddle which drops sharply into the other valley ... Harris' valley ... when she heard Danny call from the tree-line.

Danny skillfully led Muriel down the steep slope along the tree-line into the deep valley below. Suddenly they were standing in front of a small cabin. It blended in so well with the dense forest that she hadn't seen it until she was right next to it.

“Home, sweet home” exclaimed Danny, proudly showing Muriel the cabin.

It had a front porch that went the length of the cabin with three mismatched chairs. There were basically two rooms on the ground floor. Immediately upon entering you were in a living room and dining area with a large fireplace to the right. Against the back wall of the cabin was a

kitchen. About half way down the left wall were stairs that disappeared into the loft. Muriel was told that there were two bedrooms up there. There was a wall on the other side of the stairs blocking off a small area around the back door. Pegs on the wall were covered with coats and hats. It was like a mini-mud room. Near the stairway was Harris' computer. What furniture there was appeared to be handmade and designed for utility, not comfort. There was a table that dominated the room. It was covered with tablets and maps. Muriel noted the candles and lanterns. The only thing she saw that required electricity was the computer.

Muriel was introduced to Veronica. Her first impression was that she was well named. She reminded Muriel of the comic book teenager Veronica. Veronica was the black-haired girl in the Archie comics - tall, slender and pretty. If you looked at Veronica from her left side you would think that she was a pretty young teenager dressed up for a camping trip. It wasn't until you saw her full faced that you noticed deformity of the right side of her face. She could probably find some way to deal with that but not with having only three fingers on her right hand. Veronica had a captivating smile. 'Probably how she caught Harris', Muriel thought. The two women immediately became fast friends. By lunch you would have sworn that they had been best friends all their lives.

"You've got a lovely home," Muriel complimented Veronica.

"Thank you," Veronica smiled, "We're happy here."

"It must be tough without all the electric conveniences."

"Actually I've never had them so I don't miss them," said Veronica.

Muriel felt herself blush. She had forgotten that Veronica had also grown up in the mountain.

"We actually have two sources of electricity," Harris said proudly.

"Oh?" Muriel looked around.

"Yes, we have a bank of solar panels hidden up on the side of the mountain that charge up a bank of batteries in a small cave just above us. And we have a small generator as a backup." Harris was obviously and

rightly proud of this electrical system. “It was one of the first things I did when I became the watcher. One of my friends on the outside helped me get the parts up here and installed.”

“What's a watcher?” Muriel made a sudden shift in subject.

“Oh,” Harris smiled. “There has always been an AGEH living in the mountains to keep watch on the installation for chances to communicate with the AGEHs inside and help them if they get over the wire. That's how Veronica and I met.” Harris blushed. “Well, I knew her inside, but she was only 11 years old when I escaped.”

“Yes,” Veronica teased him, acting like a big shot, “he was a big, tough 14 year old.” They all laughed. “I fell for the oaf the minute I made it over the wire and he pulled me into the bushes.” Harris blushed again.

“And I'm going to be the new watcher,” Danny added. “Harris is teaching me the ropes.”

“When we realized that Veronica was pregnant I decided that it was time for us to try our luck in the outside world.” Harris said seriously.

“We're both a bit nervous,” Veronica added. “This is the only place either of us has ever lived other than in the mountain.”

“I think we're both a bit frightened.” Harris said. “We're planning to leave in August.”

“We both love the mountains,” Veronica said. “I don't know how we're going to do in a city.”

“Maybe you could get job as a Park Ranger or something,” said Muriel.

“That would be great but you have to have birth certificates and such for that.” Harris said. “It's a government job and they're picky about such things. I'd have to have a background check. It would be almost impossible to fake all that.”

“Oh,” Muriel could feel their disappointment. She knew that they had obviously thought about that option. A silence fell over the room. “Hey,



Jaime, our housekeeper's son, has paid his way through college by guiding tourist through the mountains. Maybe you could do something like that."

"Not a bad idea," Harris smiled.

"Come on," Danny interjected, "let's grab a cup of coffee and start planning this Great Escape. I'm anxious to pull this off!"

"You do realize," said Muriel, "that when we get all of the AGEHs out of the mountain you'll be out of a job."

"Oh, my gosh," Danny said in mock shock. "Call it off! Call it off!" Everyone laughed heartily.

They sat down at the table covered with lists and maps. The three of them had already started the task.

"You've obviously got a good start here," Muriel commented.

"Yes," said Harris, "At first we thought about just holding up in the exit cave until things calmed down. I mean all hell is going to break loose when they discover everyone gone. But there were a lot of problems with that idea. First and foremost the guards are probably going to find out that we went out through the wall and that won't make the cave safe anymore. And even if they don't catch us in there, they have to know that we've gone out through a cave and just have helicopters and soldiers waiting for us to finally come out."

"My feeling was that we should get enough vehicles on the road just below the cave entrance to take everyone away," said Danny. "If we wait until it starts getting dark then we'll have more time and less chance of the vehicles being seen."

The computer beeped and Veronica went to check. "Email" she said matter-of-factly.

Danny continued. "When I was still inside, the guards would lock the dormitory at about 8 o'clock. Like I told you, there weren't any cameras in there when I escaped."

“If we leave after the lock-down, then there's no reason for the guards to discover everyone missing until the next morning. . . . best case scenario.” Harris says.

“It took the three of us the better part of any hour,” Danny picked up the explanation, “to walk through the cave, crawl through the tunnel and climb down the mountain. And we are experienced and healthy.” Muriel shook her head in agreement.

“Where are you going to get the vehicles?” Muriel asked.

“Well,” said Veronica from across the room, “that was Rhonda Bell. They can get an 11 passenger wagon.”

“Great!” Harris and Danny exclaim in unison. Muriel just looked at them in astonishment.

“Like I told you before,” said Harris, “we have friends on the outside.”

Veronica picked up a list. “If the Bells have room for 9, Tim Robbins has room for 7, Rick Evans has room for 7 and Andy Small has room for 6, that means we can take 29 people.”

“You know that we're all going to have to go,” said Harris seriously. “And that means you too,” looking at Muriel.

She hadn't thought about that before but she realized that Harris was right.

“If there are about 30 people in the compound, we're four seats short.” Danny calculated.

“Four?” asked Muriel.

“30 from the compound and three of us.” Danny said.

Muriel could see Veronica's face darken and a pout come to her lips. “We have friends who are going to sneak Veronica into Canada before we even go in,” said Harris looking at Veronica, “and she doesn't like the idea.”

Muriel gave Veronica a weak smile. “Sorry, but you know they're right. We can't risk you. You're the AGEH hope for the future. You're living proof that we are humans *with* a future.”

Veronica shook her head. She understood but that didn't mean that she had to like the idea. It would be the first time since she escaped 7 years ago that she had been separated from Harris.

“Why Canada?” Muriel asked.

“We know that someone with a great deal of money and power is behind this,” Harris explained. “We know that they've got some US authorities on their payroll. We're hoping that their influence doesn't extend to Canadian authorities.”

“Makes sense,” Muriel agreed and then thought, “that reminds me. I never told you what I found out about Simpco Security Corp. I might have found your rich and powerful person.”

“Do tell,” said Harris.

Muriel went on to relate what she had learned about Clarence Simpson and how her father had shown so much fear when he accidentally mentioned the name 'Mr. Simpson' and called him their investor. So it was a private army guarding the compound. They all agreed that this would also account for never having any problems with the government. Clarence probably knows a lot of dirty little secrets about the government and government officials, and they undoubtedly need him. None of them knew whether it was really true, but even in the confessions of ex-spies they talk about letting people get away with illegal activities because the government needs them for some 'national security'.

“It's going to be hard to stay out of his sights,” Harris said looking very concerned.

“Let's face that later,” Muriel tried to get them back to the positive work of getting everyone out of the mountain.

“But . . .” Harris started.

“I agree with you,” Muriel said calmly. “But we can't spend our time trying to second guess Clarence Simpson. We'll have to just take one situation at a time and keep a step ahead of him.”

“Well,” he said turning his mind back to the escape plan. “We were thinking that Danny and I would go in during the late afternoon, cut through the wall, and get everyone out after lock-down. We would have the vans standing by for loading at about eight o'clock. That's going to be our weakest spot. They're going to have to sit along the side of the road waiting for us, and there's no place to hide them. Hopefully we can get everyone out of the mountain by nine or nine-thirty. Each of the vans will be going in a different direction when they get to the interstate.”

“I bet Jason and Rhonda's son Wayne would bring a car.” added Veronica. “The three of you could ride with him.”

“Good idea,” said Harris.

“Wait a minute,” Muriel held up her hand like a cross guard. “I'm going in too.”

“I thought we had agreed that it was an unnecessary risk that would threaten the entire project to try to get to the offices.” Harris pushed back from the table and looked hard at Muriel.

“I'm not talking about trying to go for the records.” Muriel returned his hard look. “I'm talking about helping everyone out. You said that you're expecting thirty people to be in there. That's ten a piece. You need me in there.”

“But ...” Harris started.

“But nothing! I found the cave and I've been in there twice. How many times have you been through it?”

“She's got you there,” Danny interjected.

“Okay! I know when I'm out numbered.”

“Actually having three of us would be better,” Danny went on. “When we get them to the tunnel where they have to crawl, we could have one person on the inside, one person at the entrance of the cave and one of us helping them down. If Wayne comes with their family car, we're going to be the last to leave anyway, so he could be in charge of loading.”

“Great idea,” said Harris, but, pointing at Danny, “one of the two of us is going to be the inside person.”

“What?” Muriel started to object.

“I’m with Harris on this one,” Danny interposed.

“Why?” Muriel demanded.

“Just in case any guards catch up with us.” Harris said.

“And what do you and Danny think you can do about guards with guns?!” Vernoica obviously hadn’t thought about that scenario and there was no way she was going to have the father of her baby taking on armed mercenaries.

“None of us are a match for those guys even if we had guns,” Muriel said. This unfortunately didn’t fall into the category of ‘face it when the time comes.’

“You know,” Veronica face showed an idea. “Larry Pardue has a construction company.”

“Yeah,” the two men said, giving Veronica a questioning look.

“Wouldn’t he have access to explosives?” Veronica questioned. “It wouldn’t take much and I bet he could get us everything we need to make a booby trap.”

“Brilliant idea,” Harris said with a broad smile.

“It helps to be a genius,” Veronica teased.

“Yeah, but how are we going to devise a booby trap?” Danny questioned.

“Come one, we’ve got four geniuses sitting right here.” Veronica said. “With some tips from Larry I’m sure we can come up with something.” She paused. “Besides, there’s always the internet. You can get the schematics for an atomic bomb on the internet.”

“True,” they all agreed.

The four spent the afternoon fine tuning the escape details. It was almost four o’clock before Muriel headed back. Fortunately the days were getting longer, even in the mountains, so she had sufficient light. It was hard

to go to sleep. Her head was filled with the ideas and plans that they had made and the excitement of getting all of the AGEHs out of their mountain prison.



The Smiths returned about noon the next day. Muriel tried to act excited to see them and ask them about their trip. They were moodier than ever. Teresa Smith looked old and drawn. Ronald's eyes appeared sunken and dark like he hadn't slept since he left the cottage. They tried for a short while to hold polite conversation with Muriel but finally just admitted that they were upset and exhausted and needed to go to bed.

What kinds of demands was Clarence Simpson making of them? From the looks of her parents Muriel figured that either he was demanding something they didn't want to do or insisting upon something that they couldn't do. She was hoping for the former. What she couldn't figure out was what did Clarence Simpson want? You can't make a woman have babies faster. Perhaps he was wanting soldiers. What else could he want, Muriel thought.

## CHAPTER THREE.

Plans were coming together when the unexpected happened. In all of the excitement about the great escape Muriel had forgotten that it was time for Jaime to get out of school. He arrived home about a week before the planned escape.

Any other time Muriel would have been bugging him to go hiking before he got out of the car and he would have been more than happy to go. Muriel was excited to see Jaime, but she realized that she couldn't take off right now.

“Boy, you've changed,” Jaime said.

“How's that?” Muriel asked.

“Normally I haven't even had a chance to say 'hi' to my Mom and you want to go hiking. You haven't even mentioned it.” Actually he looked a bit hurt. He knew that he had been replaced by something and Muriel had to think fast.

“Sorry! It's really great to have you home. Really!” Muriel was being honest to this point. “But home school doesn't have holidays, and I have an assignment that's really pressing me.”

“Oh,” said Jaime sympathetically. “Maybe I can help.”

“Thanks but it isn't that it's hard. It's just taking a lot of time.”

“Oh, one of those,” Jaime said looking a bit relieved.

The last thing Muriel wanted to do was hurt Jaime. He had been her best friend as long as she could remember. They had explored a more girlfriend-boyfriend relationship a few years ago, but realized that they were too much like brother and sister, but she loved him very much and wanted so much to tell him about all that had happened over the past six weeks. She knew that he would like Harris, Veronica and Danny but she knew that she couldn't introduce them.

Her parents were spending from early morning to late evening in their laboratory – i.e. in the mountain. Each day they looked worse even

though Muriel thought that they couldn't look any worse. Jaime noticed the change in their behavior and asked Muriel. She gave him their explanation – a backer was putting them under a great deal of pressure to produce samples.

Muriel was excusing herself from breakfast with the excuse that she had to work on her project and slipping off to meet with Harris and Danny. As days passed she noticed Maria looking at her with a sad smile and then at Jaime. She was hurting Jaime and she didn't want to do that, but the day was coming soon. After it was over Jaime would understand.

She wondered what he would think. Jaime was a very accepting person. He had experienced a lot of prejudice because of being Hispanic, so she was sure he wouldn't change his feelings about her because she was an AGEH. What he would think of her breaking them out of the mountain was a different thing. He was obviously going to get the Smith's and Simpco's version of what happened. That made her feel horrible. What Jaime thought of her meant everything to her. Perhaps she would be able email him afterward and explain. She comforted herself with the belief that he would understand.

A day or so later she made her usual excuses at breakfast. Maria gave her the usual sad smile and looked at Jaime. She didn't think about how Jaime had given her a broad smile and wished her well. She went about her usual routine. Grabbing a soft rucksack she quickly slipped into her boots and headed up the mountain to their usual rendezvous. Unbeknown to Muriel Jaime had been watching her leave each day and finally decided that today he was going to follow along and find out about this 'project.' He believed she was seeing a boy. He wasn't jealous of her having a romantic relationship, but he did miss the attention that he had always enjoyed.

Today they were working on the final plans of moving the AGEHs from the homes of those who actually take them from the mountain to the homes where they would live until they were able to assimilate into outside society. Since they weren't sure exactly how many would be coming out of



the mountain and how old they would be, they had to find homes that could be extremely flexible and enough for thirty or more people. It was quite a logistical project.

They were deep in thought when Jaime spoke.

“So this is your project!” Jaime said in a friendly voice.

Harris and Danny jumped up in alarm. It took Muriel a moment to realize what was happening. “It's okay!” she shouted to Harris and Danny, who were not looking pleasant or even a little bit friendly.

“It's Jaime Vargaz, our housekeeper's son,” Muriel explains. “I've known him all my life and I trust him with my life.”

“How about ours?” Danny asks still showing no signs of acceptance.

“Yes,” Muriel said putting her hand on his arm, “and with yours.”

“I'm sorry!” Jaime exclaimed. “I'm really sorry.”

“I need to tell him,” Muriel said almost pleading with Harris and Danny.

“We don't have much choice, do we?” said Harris. He didn't look happy.

“Don't do that to me, Harris,” Muriel scolded. “Don't forget that I learned about the AGEH because you had no other choice.”

Harris looked embarrassed and relaxed his threatening pose. Danny followed suit. Jaime just said “I'm sorry!” again with more emphasis.

He explained that he thought Muriel had found a boyfriend. He was just being a nosy brother and going to do a bit of teasing.

Muriel told Jaime the story from the point of meeting Harris to planning the great escape with Harris and Danny filling in gaps and providing addendum. Jaime sat quietly listening. A look of total disbelief showed on his face. Not that he didn't believe what Muriel was saying but he found it hard to believe that it could be going on right where he had lived for most of his life.

Jaime reacted when Muriel mentioned Simpco Securities. His face turned red and he stood up.

“You mean those monsters are on our mountain?” he said with such venom that the other three cringed. Muriel had never seen Jaime so angry.

“You know these guys?” Danny asked.

“Not personally but they killed my aunt, uncle and three cousins.” Jaime spit out.

“Oh!” they all exclaimed.

“My mother's sister and her family stayed in the family home in Tres Marias, Morelos, just south of Mexico City. Carina and her husband, Juan, had a small produce shop. They had three children – my cousins Tina, Andre and Carlos. They were very happy in Tres Marias and my mother could not convince them to move north. Their shop was very near the city square. They drove an old beat up American Chevy. It was all they could afford but they liked it because it was big.”

“Those monsters were guarding some American big wig and taking him to Mexico City. The main road to Mexico City doesn't even go through the town square, but somehow those idiots got off on the local streets and came rolling into the square with their armored vehicles. My uncle came around the corner and there they were. He hit the break, killed the engine and it backfired. They didn't look to see what happened. They just opened fire with their automatic weapons. They riddled the car with bullets and killed everyone inside. My family didn't know what hit them. When the truth came out Simpco Security was not even reprimanded, the big wig never said he was sorry and the US government tried to buy off the family with a few thousand dollars. That just added insult to injury. If you guys are going to do something to hurt Simpco, I want in!!” Jaime stood there with such intensity that no one could say anything. They just looked at Jaime and at each other.

Finally Harris said, “we're definitely going to do our best to cause them some serious harm.” Jaime smiled. Harris continued. “If Muriel trusts you, I say you're in.” He looked at Danny.

“The more the merrier,” Danny said standing up and shaking Jaime's hand. “And I know it's too little, too late, but on behalf of *real* people living in this country, I'm sorry for what they did to your family.” Danny's reference to “real people” caused Muriel and Harris to laugh.

Jaime gave him a big smile and a two-handed handshake. “Thank you. It may be many years too late, but I do appreciate it. Especially after hearing what you've gone through.”

Harris stepped up and likewise greeted Jaime, welcoming him to the band of conspirators.

Harris briefed Jaime on the plan.

“You do realize,” Danny said, “Jaime would be a perfect watcher when we have to go.”

“What?” Jaime asked.

Danny explained the original role of the watcher and added, “you can wander these mountains without anyone thinking a thing about it. You're not suspected of anything. You're a student majoring in the study of mountains, and you've lived here much of your life.”

“He's got a point,” Harris joined in. “You could be our inside man and feed us information about what goes on after we get the AGEHs out.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Jaime agreed. “But what do I get to do to help the escape.”

“He would be a tremendous asset getting everyone out.” Muriel said.

“I don't know this particular cave, but I know this mountain well enough that I could help coordinate the vehicles when they arrive and help on the slope as you start sending people out.”

“That would be great,” Harris said.

“But have you thought about getting those SUVs out of here after dark.” Jaime asked. “It's going to be pretty dark. If your jail break happens to be discovered before they're off the mountain, their headlights would make them sitting ducks.”

“Hadn't thought of that,” Harris said thoughtfully.

“Could you get some night vision goggles?” Jaime asks. Harris and Danny looked at each other. Neither of them could think of anyone. “If not, I know a guy in Seattle who might be able to get us some.”

Even though Jaime had won everyone's trust, without talking it over, Muriel and the others didn't tell Jaime about Veronica, the cabin or anything which didn't pertain to the escape. She figured that the other had the same reason – if something were to happen and Simpco tried to extract information from Jaime, it would protect everyone, including Jaime, the less he actually knew.

The days passed quickly as they made final preparations including pulling some of the debris out of the portion of the tunnel through which the people would have to crawl and leaving lanterns and other supplies they would need in the cave so they didn't have to take it all up at the same time. Maria was happier. Now when Muriel excused herself from breakfast, and she went off with Jaime, Maria would smile and give them each a lunch she had prepared.



Once the plans were set, the supplies on their way and the volunteers contacted, Harris made contact with the AGEHs in the compound. His predecessor, Mac McKenzie, had given the AGEHs a sat-cell phone. The guards never searched them for contraband. Where would they get it? Obviously they couldn't use it openly or indiscriminately so they had a system. The phone was always kept on vibrate. When it was safe to talk the AGEHs would dial the Watcher's number, let it ring once, and hang

up. The Watcher would know that it was safe and call back. Those inside the compound would call the Watcher on Wednesdays and Sundays even if there wasn't an escape planned since it wasn't safe for him to try to randomly call in.

It was Wednesday and Harris waited anxiously for the AGEHs to call. The call came at almost 3pm that afternoon.

“Good afternoon,” said a cheery voice belonging to a young woman named Rose when Harris called, “and what bits of news and wisdom do you have for us this fine sunny afternoon?”

“You're in a good mood, Rose.” Harris replied.

“No use being otherwise, especially on a lovely day like today.” she said.

“Wow! Then you'll probably feel even better if you knew that this time next week you'll be enjoying the summer afternoon outside the fence.” said Harris.

“I'm not slated to escape!” Rose said excitedly. “I mean ...”

“Sorry,” Harris interrupted, “did I say 'you'? I meant to say 'all of you'.” Harris waited for a response but got only silence. “Rose? Are you still there.”

“Yeah,” said Rose. “I'm still here.” There was another pause. “What are you saying?”

“I'm saying that we've figured a way to get all of you out of there at one time.”

“You're kidding!” Rose sounded skeptical but hopeful. “You and what army?”

“Just a few of us actually, but unbeknownst to Simpcos there's a back door to that place.”

“A what?”

Harris went on to explain the cave and gave detailed instructions.

“So you do everything as usual,” he concluded. “Don't do anything out of the ordinary, just like if you were going over the fence. I wouldn't

tell the children. They might accidentally say something or their excitement might attract attention. Make sure you've got warm clothes and your best shoes on. We don't know where we'll come in. Just make sure that everyone is in the residential area after dinner.”

Harris could only imagine how Rose and the other AGEHs were dealing with this news. They had to be excited but they couldn't show it.



D-Day was upon them quickly. Muriel had pointed out that the day they selected for the great escape was actually the same day as the WWII invasion of Normandy which signaled the beginning of the final defeat of Hitler and his genocide in Europe. It seemed fitting.

On June 5<sup>th</sup> the troops began to arrive with their SUVs and vans. They all camped at a campground just outside Kittitas. They blended in with the other campers and hikers that flocked to this area. Larry brought the explosives and some triggers that could be rigged to create a booby trap. Jaime's friend had met Andy Small in Seattle and sent ten night vision goggles. That meant that not only could each of the drivers have a pair but the three of them helping people down the steep slope would have a pair.

The couple from Vancouver had arrived on the 4<sup>th</sup> and left on the 5<sup>th</sup> with Veronica. As one might expect it was a very tearful parting. It was hours before anyone, especially Harris, was fully functional after that. There had been so much hustle and bustle in preparation but it was Veronica's departure that made everyone aware that this was really happening. It was her leaving that reminded everyone that tomorrow wasn't just going to be another day in the valley.

Everything was in ready. All that remained was to wait. Muriel and Jaime sat beside the small lake in front of the cottage.

“A lot has changed but the mountain looks the same,” said Muriel.

“Perhaps that's why I love mountains so much,” said Jaime. “They're so strong ... so resilient. Our lives might get turned upside down but the mountain is the same and will always protect us.”

Muriel nodded in agreement. There was a long silence.

“Every time there has been some big event in our lives we've ended up sitting here together,” Muriel said. “Graduations, going off to college.”

“Making out,” Jaime added. Muriel gave him one of those gentle 'get serious' pushes. They put their arms around each other.

“I'm really afraid,” Muriel said at last.

“I know,” said Jaime. “I'm scared too.”

“I keep wanting to wake up and find out that this is just a horrible nightmare, but it doesn't happen.”

“It's going to be okay,” Jaime said. “We've got a good plan and lots of good people helping us.”

“Yes, but always before when I've faced a problem there were at least some constants,” Muriel continued. “Tomorrow there won't be anything that is constant – nothing that I know and can count on.”

“Except the people,” Jaime said gently.

“Yes,” she said. “You're right. I'm just afraid of the unknown. How are people going to react to AGEHs when they learn about us? What kind of prejudice awaits us?”

“I'm an expert on prejudice,” Jaime said. “If something goes wrong and there's a Mexican in town, it was his fault.”

“That's not very comforting.”

“No, but that's how prejudice works.”

“I know. But there's a big difference between fighting against prejudice and being the object of prejudice.”

“That should have been my line,” Jaime tried to lighten the conversation.

“Yeah,” Muriel smiled. There was another long silence.

“You know you're parents are probably going to go to jail.” Jaime broke the silence. “If we bring down Simpco they will be implicated. We can't stop Simpco without hurting them.”

“They knew what they were doing.” Muriel's eyes welled up with tears. “They've been my loving parents and it is hard to accept the truth, but I can't make excuses for them. Perhaps they convinced themselves that they weren't really doing anything wrong, that they were working for the good of society, but they knew it was illegal and they know that Clarence Simpson is a ruthless monster. If they feel that he's gone too far or is asking them to do something unethical or immoral, they could do something about.”

Jaime had no argument for that.

“I've been working on a plan to give them a chance to redeem themselves,” Muriel said. “After the smoke clears I'm going to give them a chance to help us bring down Clarence Simpson. I owe them that much.”

“How are you going to do that?” Jaime asked.

“I don't know yet, but I have time to work on it,” Muriel said as they fell into another silence.

“You know,” Muriel said. “You and your Mom are to stay at the cottage no matter what happens.”

“Unless the government takes it, that is still my home even if my parents are in prison. They could throw me out but unless they do, I say you guys stay.” Another silence. Muriel looked up at Jaime and said softly, “If you want to stay.”

Jaime smiled. “This has been our home since before you could walk. We'll keep the home fires burning for you.”

Muriel smiled back and put her head on his shoulder. They sat for a long time before going back to the cottage.

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The next morning at breakfast the Smiths, as usual, paid little attention to those around them. They looked even older and more tired, Muriel thought. She tried to smile and say “have a nice day” as they left the



cottage not really looking at anyone on their way out. She wondered when, or if, she would ever see them again. Her eyes filled with tears. No matter how much she hated what they were doing, she could not hate them. They had been loving parents. Now she knew what was meant by the saying 'hate the sin. Love the sinner.' She had to get up and leave the dining room to regain her composure.

When she returned Jaime was giving his mother a hug. As he looked at Muriel she could tell what was going through his mind. He couldn't tell her what was going on because, besides worrying, it would put her in harm's way. At the same time there was always that chance that he wouldn't see her again. Muriel too gave Maria a hug. She knew that, at best, it could be a long time before she would see her, if ever again. She didn't want to let go. Maria gave her a quizzical look and asked if everything was alright.

The rest of the day was spent going over plans so that everyone knew what they were to do, checking equipment and restless, nervous waiting. Waiting was the hardest part for Muriel. She looked at the faces of her friends and the people who had come to help them. The tension was evident. Worry was etched into every face with every glance at a watch. Harris contacted the AGEHs in the mountain and told them what was happening.

Finally it was late afternoon. It was time to get the show on the road. One last talk through and Muriel, Harris, Danny, Jaime and Wayne started off to the cave. Wayne would stay out of sight near the road so that he could direct the vans when it was time for them to arrive. The other four continued up the ridge to the cave entrance. If anyone was going to turn back, it was now or never. They paused a moment and went into the cave.

In the large chamber adjacent to the compound they checked the supplies that had been left. Harris double checked the explosive device and sat it carefully in place ready to be connected. They were ready.

The tension and excitement was electrical as Harris pushed back the stone that helped to hide the opening between the two chambers. For some

reason the compound built inside the cavern seemed bigger and more ominous.

Danny and Harris determined where they were most likely to open into the dormitory. With a crowbar they carefully pulled the siding away from the wall. As Danny held the aluminum siding away from the structure Harris use a pair of large sheet metal cutters to make a cut perpendicular to the ground. The break-in was started. It was a slow task to avoid noise but little by little a large square began to emerge exposing the wall studs and the drywall beyond. As they had surmised there was no insulation in the wall. It would have been an unnecessary expense. It was now almost six o'clock. The AGEHs would be eating dinner.

Danny listened carefully for sounds beyond the drywall. Hearing none he cut a small hole in the drywall. They had cut into a bedroom. That was good. There was no one in the room so they waited.

Almost an hour later someone could be heard to be moving around the room. Danny peeked through the hole. "It's Timothy!"

"Timothy," Danny said with his mouth close to the hole.

The teenage boy inside looked around.

"Timothy," Danny said again, "down here. It's Danny."

Danny stuck his finger through the hole and wiggled it. In a moment the face of the young man was by the hole. "Danny?"

"Yes."

"You can't imagine how excited we were to hear that you were coming" Timothy said. "I couldn't . . ."

"Is it safe for us to come in?" Danny interrupted. "Are there any guards in the dormitory?"

"Oh, sorry. No." said Timothy. "We're just getting back from dinner. What do you want me to do?"

"Watch the door for us and we'll cut our way in." Danny instructed.

The young man went and stood at the bedroom door while Danny cut a large opening in the wall. As they cut through the drywall they had a

horrible realization. People weren't going to be able to go between the studs. A properly built wall only has studs sixteen inches apart from the middle of the stud. That means there's only about fourteen and a half inches clearance if the studs are placed perfectly. This was obviously a load bearing wall, but they didn't have any way to build the support necessary to distribute the weight around a larger opening. They decided that the wall would probably hold for long enough to get everyone out, so they really didn't care if it collapsed as long as no one was still inside.

As quietly as possible, which meant it was very slow going, Danny and Harris took turns sawing at the stud. When it was removed Danny made the hole through the drywall big enough for people to crawl through and the three of them crawled in. Jaime stayed just outside to keep watch. The compound had been breached.

Danny and Timothy hugged. Then Danny introduced Harris and Muriel. Timothy had been little more than a toddler when Harris escaped.

The room was not very big and quite plain. Muriel realized that it was totally devoid of decoration. It told of the starkness of these people's lives. It wasn't uncomfortable. The bed looked nice and there was an easy chair with a table and lamp next to it. A book lay on the table.

There was also a chest of drawers which Danny, Timothy, and Harris were moving near the hole so that it was at a right angle to the wall. Harris explained that they would empty the contents into the closet to make it lighter. After everyone had passed through the hole they would put a loop of rope around the far leg so they could pull it up against the wall. It wouldn't fool the guards, but it would take a bit longer for them to discover how the AGEHs escaped. Every few seconds would get them farther away when the escape was discovered.

Harris explained the plan. The room was too small to get more than a few people together. Against Muriel and Harris' objections Danny decided that he should go to the day room and meet with small groups. Giving them instructions. Even Timothy didn't like that idea.

“If a guard would come along for any reason,” Timothy explained, “it would be all over. Besides, Rose has us all organized.”

“Rose?” Danny said in surprise.

“Yes, she was elected leader and she's very good.”

Danny looked up at Harris who smiled.

“Okay,” said Danny, “what's Rose's plan?”

“Whoever sees you first is to let her know,” Timothy started explaining. “She has the children assigned to adults and older teens so you don't have to worry about them. And she has us divided into small groups. She'll send one group at a time wherever you say.”

“Let her know that the exit is in your room and that she can start sending people right away.”

Timothy left to tell Rose that Harris had arrived but returned only moments later with Rose right behind him.

After hugs and kisses Rose said, “we’ve got a big problem.”

“What?!” exclaimed Harris.

“Carmen was taken from the dining room,” explained Rose. “She hasn’t returned yet.”

“Oh, no,” said Harris looking at his watch. It was almost eight o’clock and the cars would start moving into position in about forty-five minutes.

“I’m sorry,” said Rose. “There was no way to let you know.”

“Okay,” replied Harris. “It’s okay. We’ll just have to wait.”

It was almost eight-fifteen when a guard escorted Carmen to the dormitory. Rose whispered that he was one of the guards known for raping the young girls. He didn’t usually work the night shift. Rose and Timothy went to meet Carmen in the hopes that it would dissuade him from any ideas he might be having.

The guard looked at Rose and grinned. Suddenly he grabbed her by the hair and Carmen by the arm and started dragging them to the room from which Rose had come. He didn’t know that it was Timothy’s room.

Muriel and Harris hid in the closet. Danny slipped out the opening and pulled the dresser into place. The guard threw the girls into the room, turned and kicked Timothy. As Timothy fell into the hallway the guard said, “and you don’t say anything to anyone or you’re dead meat. Understand!”

The girls struggled. The guard hit Carmen hard enough that she fell unconscious and then turned his attention to Rose.

As the guard was ripping at Rose’s clothes Timothy burst into the room at the same time Harris appeared from the closet. Harris and Timothy were attempting to subdue the guard when Muriel picked up a weighty book and swung it at the guard’s head with all of her might. He went limp.

“So much for them not noticing until the morning,” said Harris as Danny came back into the room. “Muriel and Timothy, tie and gag that guy. And if he wakes us, . . . hit him again! Harder!”

Harris was taking stock of their situation as the other awaited orders. “Rose, get your people moving. We’re going to have to move a lot faster than planned. He wouldn’t have come in here to rape you guys if he’d thought someone was going to come looking for him soon. Let’s hope he’s right.”

Within moments people were entering Timothy’s room. Their reactions were all different but the common one was excitement about getting out of the compound. One by one they were quietly slipped through the wall. Each child had an adult. Muriel and Jaime stayed in the adjacent cavern to help them through and to keep them quiet. Harris escorted them from the building to the hole in the cavern wall, and Danny gave the instructions and sent them through the hole in the building. It wasn’t long before Danny and Timothy were pulling the dresser in front of the hole and replacing the drywall. So far, so good!

Muriel did a head count. There were 27 people – 14 adults, 7 teenagers and 6 children. That meant they had plenty of room. Jackson was having trouble breathing. Muriel decided that he needed to be the first to leave. Muriel soon learned that while the entire community looked after each

other and everyone helped with the children, each of the children had a specific adult who was the 'parent'. This made it a lot easier.

It was almost 8:45 by the time the first group started through the last tunnel. Harris, Danny, Timothy and Jaime had dragged the guard into the adjacent cavern so that he couldn't sound an alarm. The guard was lying there wide-eyed.

Danny leaned over and whispered into his ear. "You can be thankful we're not as cruel and heartless as you. Despite what I'd like to do to you, I'm going to let you live. Don't you ever forget that your life was spared by an AGEH."

With that Harris and Danny pulled the rock back in place, put some more rocks behind it just to impede anyone coming through and armed the explosive device. If a guard was to start moving rocks the device would go off and should block the entrance.

Danny, Muriel and Jaime took their places along the slope and started helping the excited escapees down the steep incline. Wayne did a good job taking charge of loading the vans as they arrived. The Smalls from Seattle were the first to arrive. Jackson, who was having more and more trouble breathing, was the first to be loaded into the van. The young man who carried Jackson's oxygen tank looked worried. Jackson tried to reassure him. Each van had waited to see the previous van leave before pulling up to be loaded. This was to avoid having all of the vans together if guards came.

The last van, belonging to Rick Evans from Portland, was just pulling up when they heard the explosion. Smoke and dust spewed from the cave opening. The guards had obviously discovered the escape and set off the explosion. Harris, Danny, Jaime and Muriel made their way down the ridge as quickly as possible and helped Wayne get people into Rick's van. Rick hadn't even turned off the engine and pulled away almost before the door was closed.

Jaime didn't have time to clean up the area. It was just a ploy to stall the guards anyway. He gave Danny and Harris a hug and kissed Muriel, then

turn and started running up the road. If he was going to be a convincing inside man he needed to be at home so he could look totally incredulous and innocent when the guards arrived at the cottage.

The other four started running toward Wayne's car which was parked around the corner where the vans had been waiting. By the time they got to the car there were helicopters in the air. How did Simpco mobilize so quickly? The helicopters were moving around the ridge. Hopefully they wouldn't be looking down the road.

Wayne started the engine and was about to pull out when a lone helicopter flew down the road. He stopped short of pulling out from the cover of the trees. It didn't matter. The helicopter already had a target. The four of them saw Evans van traveling along a ledge. There was no place for him to hide.

The helicopter pulled alongside. Rick slammed the brakes. They saw a muzzle flash from the helicopter and dirt fly in front of the van. Rick hit the gas and tires spun. The helicopter raised, pulled out over the ravine where it hovered for a short while and then dropped to where it was level with the van. Again muzzle flash. Even from where they were hiding Muriel and the others could see the glass in the van explode. The van weaved out of control and went over the cliff into the deep ravine. The four of them sat in shock as the helicopter lifted, revolved slowly 180 degrees and returned to the others behind them.

"Oh, my God," Muriel put her head in her hands and began to cry. "What have I done?"

"It isn't your fault," Harris comforted her. "It may sound trite but they did die free and they wouldn't have stayed behind if you had told them this could happen."

"No, but," Muriel started.

"Don't go there," Harris said sternly. "There's still a lot for us to do. There are three other vans out there and we're not out of here yet. Now we

definitely have to bring Simpco down. We have to live so that they can't do this to anyone else. Do you understand me?"

Muriel lifted her head, "Yes, but . . ."

"No buts!" Harris held her hands. "We can grieve later."

Suddenly Wayne tromped on the accelerator. He had noticed that the sky was momentarily free of helicopters and he was making a run for it.

"We've got to get down past where the road to the compound intersects this road before they get the idea of putting up a roadblock." Wayne appeared calm as he careened down the mountain. They all held their breath until they were past the exposed ledge where Rick's van had been shot. They looked down as they past. They could not see the bottom or the wreckage.

"Don't even think about it," said Danny looking at Muriel. He knew she wanted to go look for survivors. "They couldn't have survived the gunfire, and even if by some miracle they did survive it they'd never survive that fall." Muriel nodded but her eyes stayed on the spot where the van disappeared until their car was well past.

Wayne continued to expertly guide the careening car down the mountain. He let off the gas a bit when they passed the Y in the road where the road to the compound intersects, but he didn't slow down much. A short while later they came to the stop sign at the state highway. Wayne turned on his headlights and turned right toward Kittitas. They were almost to the interstate. The roads were empty. Simpco would obviously not hesitate in the least to take their chase to the interstate, but Wayne couldn't travel without headlights. Being stopped by the police would be tantamount to being turned over to Simpco. From that point on he drove strictly by the rules. A few miles later they were on I-90. They would travel west for about 40 miles and then turn south on I-82 and US 97. US 97 went all the way through to Redding. As they pulled onto the interstate they looked back at the mountain. Helicopters were moving around it like fire flies.



Harris called the other vans. Andy and Sarah Small had been the first to leave. They were well on their way to Seattle but Jackson wasn't doing well. They were concerned. Harris told them about Rick. There was silence on the other end.

Bells were a good hour or more ahead of Wayne's car and things were going well. "Do you want us to wait for you?" Jason Bell had asked. "No." Harris said. "We still don't want to be traveling together." Tim Robbins was also making good time toward Spokane. Harris got the same reaction when he told them about Rick's van. All three vans were going in different directions. With the number of helicopters that wouldn't make much difference to Simpco, but all the refugee could do was live in hope. If they could get everyone to their next rendezvous their chances for success were much greater.

Tim Robbins had three families waiting in Spokane to further scatter the refugees. Neither Tim nor any of the other who helped in the actual escape would keep AGEHs at their homes just in case Simpco started tracking down everyone who was staying in the campgrounds. The Bells had four families waiting and Smalls had three families waiting. Their thoughts went to those who were waiting for Rick Evans. None of them knew who they were. That was on purpose but now it was a problem.

Harris decided to try Rick's home phone. After a few rings a woman answered.

"Hello," Harris said. "I am a friend of Rick's. He has been helping some friends in the mountains. He was to deliver some packages. Are you waiting for one of those packages?"

There was a pause at the other end. Finally, "yes. Why?"

"Rick and the others aren't going to be home." Harris felt his face flush as he struggled for words.

"I'm sorry. I don't know your relationship to Rick and there's no easy way to tell anyone this but Rick and six others were killed by a gunman

in a Simpco Security helicopter.” There was a brief silence and then a scream. Shortly a man's voice came on the line.

“Who is this?” the voice demanded.

“I'm a good friend of Rick's. I was there when it happened. Who was the lady?” Harris asked.

“It was Rick's sister.”

“I'm horribly sorry. We can't tell you how badly the rest of us feel. It was cold blooded murder and we couldn't do a thing to stop it.”

“I understand,” the man said.

“I know that there are others there waiting for Rick and the others. You may be in danger. I suggest that you remove any signs of your being there this evening and go home. You cannot mention that you know Simpco was involved. We're going to do our best not to let them get away with this ever again.” Harris heard the words coming from his mouth and realized what they had to do.

“What should we do?” the voice asked.

“Wait until they notify you of his death. Someone will undoubtedly ask a lot of questions without telling you that he had passengers. Tell them nothing. Don't accuse anyone of anything. This is for your safety. After this we don't want anyone else to be put in harm's way. Do you use Face Book?”

“No,” the man said.

“Open a Face Book account. Any teenager can tell you how to use it. It has a place that says 'what's on your mind.' People will put everything they do on their Face Book, so no one will think a thing of it if you post a running account of what happens. But you have to say it in a way that the entire world can read it. If you want me to call write 'feeling very anxious today'. I'll call as soon as I can. Are you following me?”

“Yes.”

“I know this must be horrible. I know how we feel and he wasn't a blood relative of ours. We don't want anyone else to get hurt so please follow my instructions carefully.”

“We will.” said the man. “I know what this meant to Rick. He died for a very good cause. We're just shocked. The anger will come later. We would be proud to be a part of whatever you are planning.”

“We'll be in touch,” Harris said. “Just keep things safe and calm at your end.”

“Thank you.” the man said.

Harris sat quietly and looked out the window. The others didn't invade his thoughts. This had been the hardest job for any of them and there was nothing they could say to make it any easier.

They had crossed I-84 and were on a long stretch of highway with very few towns. Harris' phone rings. It was the Smalls. Harris' face belied the bad news that he was receiving.

Jackson had become really bad. They pulled over at a rest stop at Snoqualmie Pass. He had asked one of them “am I really free?” They had assured him that he was indeed free. A short while later he had a convulsion and died. They knew that, for the safety of the others, they had to leave him. The men in the group found a nice place out of sight of the main rest stop area and left Jackson sitting against a tree with his hands in his lap looking very peaceful . . . and free.

Muriel didn't even want to think about what else could go wrong. She knew that Jackson didn't have long to live and it was a miracle that they got him out of the mountain before he died, but that didn't help a lot.

According to the map they were between Crater Lake and Winema National Parks. No one could help Wayne with the driving because they didn't know how to drive. They decided that it would be best not to try to drive straight through but to stop and get some sleep at a rest stop. Just north of the town of Chiloquin, Oregon they found a rest stop. Wayne pulled the car as far away and out of sight of the road as he could. Exhausted and overcome with grief and worry, the four lay down on the ground and fell asleep.

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Muriel was shaken from her thoughts as the others awakened. They drove to a truck stop in Chiloquin where they cleaned up and got something to eat. In all of their great genius planning they hadn't thought about being out on the road without money. Thankfully Wayne had a credit card.

It was still quite early so there were very few people in the diner. The waitress didn't seem to pay any unusual attention to the four of them. She was either just at the end of her shift, sleepy and wanting to go home, or at the beginning of her shift and wasn't totally awake yet. In either case it was enough to put them at ease while they ate.

They were still 169 miles from Redding. It was turning into a beautiful day. Harris made calls to the others to make sure that everyone had arrived home safely. The Robbins had made it home without any incident and had already sent all but one AGEH on to other safe havens. The Smalls had arrived safely home and all but three AGEHs were on their way to other safe havens. The Bells had the longest drive. They drove through the night because Jason and Rhonda could take turns driving. They were home and all of their passengers were still with them, but their contacts were arriving as they were talking with Harris.

Having read a number of spy novels Muriel worried that they might suspect Jaime because they had been so close and 'bug him or something.' Actually Jaime had taken her seriously. Simpco would definitely have the technology to track known cell phones, so during the week before the escape he had purchased a number of the throw away phones. Because they were not sat-cells he would have to go to town to use it, but that was probably good since it would get him away from the cottage.

Muriel and the others had just entered California when Jaime called. Muriel couldn't believe how relieved she was to hear his voice.

"How are you!" she almost exploded.

"I'm fine, but this place was unbelievable last night. We certainly shook the gates of hell."

"What happened?" Muriel asked.

“By the time I got back to the cottage there were helicopters in the air buzzing around the top of the ridge. They evidently saw something because one of them took off down the mountain.”

“Rick Evans – the last van – didn't make it.” It was hard for Muriel to get the words out.

“What do you mean?” asked Jaime.

“That helicopter pulled alongside of them and shot all of them. Their van went off the ravine.”

“Oh, I'm so sorry!” Jaime said.

“Jackson died at Snoqualmie Pass,” said Muriel, “but we weren't sure he was going to survive to make the trip so he at least died free.” She paused. “All the others are fine. Did the guards talk to you?”

“Oh, yeah. They were here within two hours. They roused us all out. I don't think they were expecting to see your parents. They apologized when they saw them. Then they talked to someone on the phone and immediately asked to see you. I heard them tell your Dad that their lab had been breached by a young woman. Your parents looked terrified. They gave Mom and me some story about fugitives having escaped and believed to be hiding in the mountains. They asked me a lot of questions about you – when did I see you last, what were you doing, where were you heading. My mother looked more worried when they started questioning me about you. She obviously knew yesterday morning that something was up. She has no idea what it is but she's worried about you. It was a good idea to get the throw-away phones. I'm sure they're following me. Are you okay?”

Muriel gave Jaime a quick run-down of what had happened concluding that they were in California and everyone was fine.

“I think I've got a tail,” Jaime said. “I'd better get going. I'll call you later.”

Jaime did, indeed, have one of the Simpco guards following him. Jaime went to the gas station, made a few purchases and started back up the mountain. He was planning to dump the telephone in a trash container at

the gas station but he was afraid that the guard might see him and take it. On the way home he stopped at the camp ground office where he would often get jobs guiding tourist and trekkers through the mountains. He stopped with the pretense of checking on work. The guard didn't follow him in, so Jaime dropped the phone in an old pot-bellied stove in the office. There was one couple who expressed interest in a guide. Jaime watched as he went to talk to the couple. The guard immediately went into the office. Jaime made arrangements to take the couple on an excursion. He passed back through the office on his way to the car.

“You in trouble?” the owner asked.

“No,” Jaime tried to look surprised at the question. “why do you ask?”

“As soon as you went to talk to the Hermans there was some sort of security agent in here asking what you were doing.”

“That's strange,” said Jaime. “There was some excitement up on the mountain last night. They came to the house asking a lot of questions and told us that there were some fugitives they thought were hiding in the mountains.”

“Yeah,” said the owner, “I heard that. They're looking for the Smith girl too.”

“I know. She didn't come home last night.”

“You think the fugitives got her?”

“No, but that's probably why they're following me around.”

“Why?”

“I was probably the last one to see her,” Jaime said in a very matter-of-fact manner. “She does that a lot. She's probably at home right now wondering what all the fuss is about.” Jaime smiled.

The owner smiled back and Jaime left.

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Muriel was worried about Jaime being followed around by Simpco guards. She hadn't thought about how dangerous the Simpco people would

be until she saw them kill Rick and the others. Before that she could never have imagined anyone doing such a thing. She'd read about it happening, but that always seemed so remote. Now she worried about what they might do to Jaime to get to her.

"I wonder how they ever suspected you?" said Harris.

"I don't know," Muriel said, "but Jaime said that the guards were already there when they got a call and then asked for me. Evidently they might have gone away without finding out that I wasn't there if it hadn't been for that call."

"I'm just glad you didn't try to go home and play innocent." said Harris.

"But I'm worried about Jaime and Maria," said Muriel. "I'm going to tell them to leave. We need to get them to a safe house. Who knows what those monsters might do to them to get to me and what Jaime might do if they touch his mother."

"She's right," Danny said. "If we need a watcher it would be better for me to go back to the cabin."

"No," said Harris. "We can do without a watcher. They're in too much danger. These guys are worse than I could ever have dreamed. Let's just try to get them out. How do we do that? You can bet that Simpco is watching them."

They all rode silently thinking about their new problem. They arrived in Redding a couple of hours later. All but two of Bell's passengers had already left for safe havens by the time Muriel and the others arrived. The AGEHs were excited and could not stop thanking Harris, Danny, Muriel and Wayne for rescuing them.

"They did that with us for the first two hours of the trip," Rhonda Bell laughed.

After the thank yous they had to tell the newcomers about every new thing they saw.

“Only a couple of them finally fell asleep, but most of them just starred out the windows at everything that went by.” Rhonda added.

Once the last two had met their new families and were on their way, the Bells took Harris, Danny and Muriel to their new apartment. It was in a quiet part of the town within easy walking distance of shops, since none of them could drive.

As Muriel looked around she thought of how hard it was going to be to become accustomed to city living. The apartment was very nice and very comfortable. The Bells had stocked the cupboard and refrigerator and there were linen and clothes in the bedrooms.

Harris offered their benefactors a cup of coffee. Danny, Harris and Muriel brought Jason and Rhonda up-to-date on the others. They also talked about the danger facing Jaime and his Mother.

“If we send anyone in to get them out we're just exposing more people to danger. We're no match for Simpco Security.” Harris said.

“You know,” Jason spoke up, “we didn't sign on because we thought this was going to be safe or easy. None of us figured that Simpco would go so far as to kill people, but that doesn't change our resolve.”

“He's right,” Rhonda joined in. “Now that they've shown just how abominable they are we must be more determined to bring them down so they can't do this to anyone else.”

“I agree with you,” said Harris, “but how do we fight a giant like Simpco?”

“David and Goliath,” Muriel smiled.

“Who?” asked Harris.

“There's a story about the Jewish King David. He was the first king of the unified Kingdom of Israel. When he was a boy the Israelites were in a battle with the Philistines. When he was taking food to his brothers he heard the giant, Goliath, taunting the Israelites and challenging them to send their own champion to face him in single combat. Everyone fled except David. He was a shepherd boy with a sling shot against a giant in full armor.



David nailed Goliath in the head with a rock and the Israelites chased the Philistines all the way home.”

“Exactly,” Rhonda exclaimed. “Everyone runs in fear from these guys. Even the cops won't stand up to them, but we have to.”

“Don't get me wrong,” Harris explained. “I really do agree with you, and I'm not suggesting that we run, but we still have to come up with a plan that will out smart them at a game they've been playing for a long time.”

“Who said we can't change the game,” Muriel said. “Besides I was once told that all AGEHs are geniuses.”

“Yeah,” Harris smiled. “I heard that too.”

## CHAPTER FOUR.

It had been two days since the AGEHs had escaped from the mountain. Up to this point the Simpco people were keeping a close watch on Jaime but hadn't made a move. Ron and Teresa Smith had been taken away in a large black limo without any explanation. Jaime had called Muriel the night before. She had told him the plan to get his Mother and him off the mountain.

"Mom, I have to tell you what is going on." Jaime told his Mother at breakfast. "Muriel and the Smiths aren't who we always thought they were."

Maria looked worried and began to cry as Jaime told her the story.

"We're in danger," Jaime said bluntly. "The Simpco people could decide at any time to use us to try to either force me to tell them where Muriel is hiding or to make Muriel come out of hiding. If they do that it won't be pleasant and we could be killed. They are the ones who killed Carina, Carl and the kids."

There was terror in Maria's eyes. "What are we to do?"

"I talked to Muriel last night." Jaime held both his Mother's hands. "They have a plan for us. You have to do exactly what you're told."

"I'm afraid," she said.

"I know. So am I, but we must follow the plan exactly. Can you do that?"

Maria shook her head. Jaime explained what she was to do. Maria left the house first. It was normal for her to go shopping. The house phone rang. Jaime answered it, smiled and said, "I'll be right there."

Jaime pulled in to the camp ground office. There were two men there who wanted a guide to take them trekking. They were standing on the porch with packs ready.

After introductions the man called Frank said, "You come highly recommended. Our friend George from Chicago said we should ask for you." Jaime smiled, not because of the compliment but that was the code that these were his contacts.

Jaime was standing talking to them with his back to the road. After the owner of the park left them, the one man said "Simpco pulled up only moments after you arrived. They're over at the edge of the parking lot. Go get your pack and don't look at them."

He followed their directions and they were soon heading up the mountain. When they were a safe distance away from the campground the two men, whose real names were Carl and Ted, told Jaime that they were related to Rick Evans, the man whom Simpco had murdered. They were happy to be able to help get Jaime away.

They hadn't gone far when Carl's two-way radio squawked. "Yeah," said Carl.

"They're on their way," came a voice on the other end.

"Great. See you soon." Carl responded. He turned to Jaime. "Now's the fun part." Ted laughed.

The three men sat down behind a large bolder obscured from the trail. A short while later they could hear the two Simpco guards coming. Carl and Ted pulled out enormous handguns. Jaime's mouth dropped open. The two men smiled reassuringly at Jaime.

As the guards passed the bolder Ted and Carl stepped out directly behind them. "Hey, bozo," Carl called. The two guards swung around startled but well trained enough that their hands were going for their guns. There were two pops and the guards stood momentarily as if frozen in time with their hands on the guns under their arms then dropped to the ground.

"Tranquillizers," Ted held up his gun. "These are strong enough to drop a cow or a horse almost instantly. These two will be out for quite some time."

The two men leaned over and pulled their darts from the guards. They put on surgical gloves and took the guard's guns. With a few quick movements they field stripped the guns and removed the firing pin. Putting the guns back in their holsters Carl said, "That should be a surprise that might save a life."

Jaime watched the men with great amusement and grinned thinking about these two killers pulling the trigger and having nothing happen.

They went back down the mountain, avoided the campground and went to where there was a third man in a parked car. "We'll meet your mother in Yakima," they reassured Jaime as they drove through Kittitas.

While Jaime was meeting Ted and Carl, Maria was going into the local superstore. As she walked from her car to the store she didn't notice the car with two Simpco guards pull into the lot. She was intent upon following the instructions she had been given.

She walked to the produce just inside. She stood pondering an apple and counting to 100 as she had been instructed. She then put the apple down and pushed her cart at as fast a pace as she could straight back toward the back wall. She didn't notice the large man dressed in black following. As she had been instructed, she turned left at the last aisle and moved quickly toward the auto department. She had been told that no matter what happened she was to walk quickly to the auto repair department where a man would approach her and say "Maria, your car is ready." She was to go with him.

Shortly after she had started down the back aisle she heard a man behind her call, "Help. This man has collapsed!" She turned and saw the man in black lying on the floor. The man who had called for help looked at Maria. She turned and followed her instructions.

As planned she was approached by a man saying that her car was ready. He led her to a car parked near the auto repair entrance and had her get into the back seat. A few moments later the man she had seen with the

Simpco guard got into the front seat. They pulled along the back side of the building. He turned to her and smiled.

“We're friends. We need you to lay down on the seat and cover up with the blanket. We'll tell you when you can sit up. We're going to meet your son in Yakima.” He noticed Maria looking back at the building. “Oh, I just tranquillized the guard. He's not hurt but we do have to drive near his partner, so you need to lay down.”

Maria laid down and pulled the dark blanket over her. She could hear the sound of an ambulance approaching but she couldn't see the Simpco guard's partner get out and run toward the store. Neither could she see the two men smile and give each other the thumbs up.

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At Fulbright Park on the south side of Yakima two cars were parked in the shade off to one side of the parking lot. Maria sat anxiously in the back seat of one of the cars. She was still frightened of these men no matter how they attempted to calm her fear. A woman now sat next to her. She watched the road. A car pulled in and drove directly toward them. Her face broke into a smile and her fears seemed to disappear when she saw Jaime get out of the car.

She began to cry. She turned to the two men who had brought her from Kittitas and hugged them. Through the tears she said, “Gracias! Mucho gracias!” Then she turned to Jaime and hugged him, speaking rapidly in Spanish.

Carl explained that they would take Maria to a safe house. He said that he understood that Jaime insisted on continuing with Harris, Danny and Muriel. Maria looked at her son. The fear returned to her eyes.

“I have to Momma.” he said in Spanish. “Simpco killed our family. They killed a van load of innocent people from the mountain including a relative of these men, and they would have killed us. They indiscriminately kill people all over the world. I've got to help stop them.”

The two talked for some time while Rick's family sat nearby keeping watch. Maria accepted what had to be. She would go to the safe house. She promised that she would not call any family or friends until this was over.

After hugs and kisses Maria climbed into the back seat of one of the cars. A man and the woman got into the front. The woman leaned out the window and called out to Jaime “we'll take good care of her. Don't you worry.”

Carl handed Jaime the keys to one of the remaining cars. Shaking his hand hard, Jaime said, “I don't know how I can ever repay you.”

“You don't have to. Just stop Simpco. And if you need us again, let us know. That was rather fun.” Carl grinned.

“Oh. There's a cell phone in the car,” Carl continued. “You'll get a call. If you don't exceed the speed limit or don't stop for too long you should get it just before you get to Redding. They'll give you an address to put into the GPS on the dash.” The men shook hands again and got into their cars.

Two cars pulled out heading north. Carl had explained that the car with his mother would take State route 12 so that none of them were on the same road. Carl was heading home – wherever that was. According to the GPS device on the dash Jaime had a 494 miles, 9 hours and 38 minute drive ahead of him. He smiled, fastened his seat belt, turned on the radio and headed south toward Redding.



A cool breeze was coming off Puget Sound. Clarence Simpson stood on the veranda of his private estate sipping a gin and tonic and looking across the sound at downtown Seattle. In the distance was the Simpco Building. He was surrounded by grim faced men in expensive suits. It had been nine days since the AGEHs escaped from the mountain.

“So tell me, Raymond,” he said. “What do we have on the AGEHs who escaped? Are we any closer to finding the people who helped them? What about that girl, Muriel? What do we have on her? And that fellow – the housekeeper's son. What happened to the two of them?”

“We don't have a lot,” a nervous man replied.

“I have the biggest damned private army in the world with more connections, spooks, informers and intelligence gathering equipment than the Pentagon, and you're telling me that you don't have anything after over a week?!” Simpson was angry but he kept staring out at the water as though he expected to see a sign.

“Well,” the nervous man continued, “we do have a little bit.”

“Are you going to make me guess?” Simpson said testily.

“We have recovered the van and bodies from the ravine. There were six AGEHs and a man named Rick Evans from Portland. His family say that he was up there for a trekking excursion. They're demanding that the police tell them what happened.”

“The installation staff found a black cloth over the camera in the hallway that goes from behind Smith's cover laboratory to the installation. That caused them to go back and look at video. On May 15<sup>th</sup> the camera was triggered. For some reason a guard went to check and found nothing, but never reviewed the video.”

“Idiots!” Simpson interjects.

“Yes. They did look at the video after they discovered the cloth and found a partial picture of a young woman. It was determined to be Smith's daughter, Muriel, from family photos.”

“Are we talking about their daughter or the AGEH that they took?” Simpson questioned

“We're talking about the AGEH that they've raised as a daughter. The other one's name is Katherine and she's away at college.”

“Go on.” Still not looking at the speaker.

“The girl is eighteen years old. We don't figure she had either the skills or the resources to pull this off.”

“Okay, then who helped her?”

“The housekeepers son, Jaime, is a student at University of Washington. He may have helped but there's no evidence that he did more. He was still on campus when Muriel breached the door in the lab. We did find that his mother's sister and her family were victims of an incident in Mexico where we killed a car load of civilians.”

“So we're still no closer to figuring out how they got away.”

“Yes, sir.”

“They've obviously got a network and we've got to find it.”

“Yes, sir!” All the suits agreed.

Simpson finally turned and looked at the collection of men who sat in fear of this powerful man. “Put out a contract,” without the slightest sign of emotion or hesitancy.

The men all looked at each other and there was a hubbub of whispers.

“Didn't anyone hear me?” Simpson shouted.

Finally one man had the courage to ask, “You mean put out a contract to kill someone?”

“Yes, you idiots!” Simpson's face was red with rage. “These AGEHs have kept under the radar. We can't find them. They've got to be organized to have pulled this off. They're going to ruin us . . . or worse, we're all going to end up in jail! I want them eliminated. I want them dead!”

“Do you want one of our people . . .” one of the men started.

“No!” Simpson was still screaming in their faces. “I want you to put the word out on the street to every crazy with a bb-gun. Put a bounty of \$25,000 for every dead AGEH. Tell them that the AGEHs are evil mutants. Tell them not to listen to the AGEHs talk or they'll be hypnotized and not to look them directly in the eyes or they can freeze you. Tell them that they've got the Devil's mark on them. Tell them any damn thing you want,



but I want every paranoid sicko in this country climbing over each other for a chance to kill an AGEH. If that doesn't flush them out they'll just die."

"But, sir . . ."

"And for God's sake," Simpson adds, "do not get our name associated with it. As clean as a preacher's sheets . . . abhor the killing and all that shit."

"Yes, sir." one of the men finally said. Clarence Simpson picked up his drink and turned back to face the sound. All but one of the men in suits got up and left talking in whispers to one another and looking back at Simpson. That one remaining man walked up and stood slight behind Simpson. He waited.

"Lovely evening," Simpson said calmly, taking a sip of his drink.

"Yes, sir," replied the man.

"Make sure they follow my instructions." Simpson said.

"Yes, sir."

"And make sure that everyone understands that their lives depend upon doing this right."

"Yes, sir." The man turned and walked away leaving Simpson standing there, looking out at Puget Sound, sipping his gin and tonic.

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A few days later Jaime came into the apartment. He had a newspaper and he was clearly upset.

"Simpco has declared war," he said as the others turned to look at him.

"What do you mean?" asked Danny.

"Look at this article," Jaime threw the paper on the table. The other three gather around to look as Harris read aloud.

## Man Claims to be Paid to Kill Evil Mutants

**Eugene, OR.** The man accused of killing what appears to be an indigent man said that he was being paid to kill evil mutants.

Gerald Manly, 52, of Eugene was arrested early today for the murder of an unknown man whom the police believe to be a transient. Manly apparently told authorities that he was going to be paid \$25,000 to kill the man whom he claims was an evil mutant. He could not tell authorities who was paying the bounty or how he expected to be paid. Manly stated that he was told to look for people with two different colored eyes and the sign of the Devil on their left shoulder. Manly said that the mutants are very dangerous and capable of hypnotizing or destroying people's brains. Manly was admitted to Lane County Psychiatric Hospital for evaluation.

“Oh, my God,” said Muriel. “I know they're ruthless but I never believed that they would go this far.”

“By now they've got every wacko in the country looking for people with two different colored eyes and a tatto,” said Jaime.

“It's going to be a witch hunt,” said Danny. “How many innocent people are going to die before these guys are stopped?”

“We've got to step up our game plan and bring these guys down,” said Muriel.

They all agreed but ‘how’ was still the big question. They were a handful of untrained civilians against a highly skilled and well-funded mercenary army. At this point all they really had was their word against a powerful and wealthy man. They needed real proof. They agreed that they needed to get organized. They needed to find safe ways of communicating within the network so that they could recruit help or send out warnings. They had no way to warn any of the others who hadn't read the article that there was a bounty on their heads. The task seemed insurmountable.

“Have we bit off more than we can chew?” Muriel asked the others as they looked at their list. The entire conversation had turned into a giant ‘pity-party’.

“Divide and conqueror,” said Jaime.

“Huh?”

“Divide and conqueror,” Jaime repeated. “Divide the list into categories and then break each category down into tasks, prioritize and take them one at a time.” He leaned back and smiled at the others.

“I thought we were supposed to be the geniuses,” said Harris with a grin. “We can do that!”

“We have to,” the others echoed.

With the pity-party over, the four began the task of divide and conqueror. They agreed that all of the problems and issues were important but that if they were to succeed at any of them they had to get organized. That was a start. They had their number one project. They also agreed that they weren't going to bring Simpco down without proof. That had to be number two. Then they could go after Simpco.

Organization was not going to be easy. They couldn't just start making telephone calls or sending out email. They started by making a list of AGEHs and supporters. Harris, as the watcher, had a list on a SanDisk Cruzer - a smart chip with a security feature. They decided that there should

be more than one chip but that the list should never be put on a computer. Harris said that he would add the names of those who just escaped and then make two backup Cruzers. They must make sure to backup each day. Once they had a system of communications up and running they would work on getting phone and/or internet access for everyone.

"We've got over three hundred names in our database," Harris announced.

"That isn't very many compared to Simpco," Danny said.

"Yeah," added Jaime. "They've probably got more people than that working at their Seattle office."

"The one good thing about our group is that their spread out," Harris went on.

"How is that a help?" asked Jaime.

"Most of them are here in the northwest, where we'll need them most," Harris explained, "but we also have people in or near most of the major cities around the US and even in a few other countries."

"Really!?" exclaimed Murie. "That's great!"

"But we all know that Simpco has some of the most sophisticated communications and tracking equipment in the world. Their resources probably rival the US government," Harris warned.

"That's for certain," agreed Jaime. "If we're not very careful they could track us down through our own communications."

"We've got to be sure to encrypt everything," Muriel said.

"I'm not sure that that's the best idea," replies Harris.

"Why?" Muriel asks, "if we don't want them reading our mail ...."

"The way I understand it," Harris explained, "your typical email encryption isn't hard to break. Also, if we use encryption it might make them stop and look. I really don't know. I just don't want to red flag them."

"I agree," Jaime added. "If we can't trust encryption to keep our communications safe, then we'd be better off hiding them in a crowd."

“The big thing is that we're going to have to make sure that we have very stringent communication rules and change our addresses, passwords and phones frequently.” Harris concluded. Everyone nodded in agreement.

The team spent some time working out the details. They set up communications protocol and even a website that would be open to the public to distribute codes, pass messages and keep everyone updated. The website appeared as that of a horticulture club. That gave them an almost unlimited vocabulary that could be used as code words.



Getting proof was going to be a tremendously difficult task. Simpco wasn't going to have it lying around on a table. The team knew that they would not be able to invade Simpco's computer. The AGEHs had some really good hackers, but that would not only be a daunting task but would also warn Simpco that the AGEHs were on the offensive because there would be failed attempts before success.

They considered the idea of trying to infiltrate the Simpco building. Danny came up with the idea of stealing identification badges from a couple of employees on their way home on a Friday evening. That way they might not notice the badges missing until Monday. It sounded good but none of them were pick-pockets.

“Even if we could get through the front door,” Harris said, “we have no idea where to go from there.”

“We'd go for a computer,” Danny suggested.

“But we wouldn't have the password,” replied Harris, “and you know they'll have a password.”

“If we're going to take the time to hack into their computer, we'd be better off doing it from outside,” added Muriel. “At least then we wouldn't get physically caught.”

“Well, it sounds like you've just eliminated both of our options,” said Jaime.

“Not necessarily,” said Muriel with a smile crossing her face. “What do they do in the movies?”

“They break in,” said Harris. Muriel just looks.

“They hack the computer,” Jaime added looking very puzzled at Muriel's smile.

“And they . . .?” Muriel gestured for an answer.

“They get an inside person!” Danny exclaimed laughing.

“An inside person?” Jaime questioned.

“Yes,” said Muriel, “an inside person. We need to find someone who works for Simpco who doesn't know what they're doing or doesn't agree with what they're doing and get them to go for the data.”

“You have been watching too many movies,” Jaime laughed.

“Is it really any less feasible than our other ideas?” Muriel retorts.

“Well, . . .” Jaime stopped.

It obviously wouldn't be an easy task, but nothing they had to do was going to be easy. They decided that the most likely way they would have to identify a possible inside person was to get names of employees and then start doing a profile on each one. There were several ways of getting the names of Simpco's employees: internet, employee badges, favorite lunch spots, follow them home, just for starters.

“Do you really think they're going to put their employees on the internet?” asks Danny incredulously.

“You would be surprised,” said Muriel.

“She's right,” said Harris, playing with his laptop. “These guys want to look like Uncle Sam and make you feel glad and safe that your government is giving them so much money, so they're going to have a web site . . .” He stopped and turned the laptop to the group.

There was the Simpco web-site with flags and soldiers and everything Harris had suggested.

“And you see right there?” Muriel points to a list of words on a toolbar. Danny nodded.

“Watch this,” Harris said clicking on the word 'contact'.

Immediate a screen full of names and addresses appeared including the names of every department head in the Seattle office.

“A friend of mine at school,” said Jaime, “was from Huntsville, Alabama. That town has so many top-secret government contractors that they figure it’s spook central. She said that one of the people in security was saying how easy it is to find who works where.”

“Really?”

“Evidently they really shouldn't wear their employee identification badges home but many of them actually hang them from their car mirror so they don't forget them. Also the cars almost always have some sort of employee parking pass. You're not supposed to tell people that you work for a Department of Defense contractor but you have a sticker on your window 'Simpco Security Parking Permit.' Then you can follow them to the favorite lunch hangout and just listen – who's having trouble with the wife, who's in the middle of a nasty divorce, who's having trouble paying the bills, who's really angry with the boss, who likes to go drinking and carousing.”

The group laughed but they realized that that is what they needed to be doing. If they were going to gather proof, they needed an inside person.

“What about your folks?” Danny asks cautiously. “Could we turn them against Simpson?”

Muriel actually hadn't thought about her parents since the morning after the escape. She stopped and considered Danny's question.

“I'm sorry! I didn't mean . . .” Danny started to apologize.

“No. That's okay,” Muriel reassured him. “I just hadn't thought about it. They were pretty upset and looked terrified the last time I saw them. But I have no idea where they are.”

“The last time I saw them,” Jaime interjected, “was when they were taken off in a black limo. They looked scared.”

“If we can find them, I'd be willing to try,” said Muriel.

And so it went. Each little problem dissected and each idea given full consideration. Little by little a plan began to develop.



Once they had the organization and the data gathering started they turned their attention to what it was going to take to apply those things to stopping Simpco. Yet again they were confronted by Simpco's massiveness, power and wealth. Nevertheless, there had to be an Achilles Heel.

“I can't help but believe,” said Harris, “that they're not unlike one of those three-dimensional puzzles – one piece keeps it all locked together. And if we pull that piece . . .”

“Yeah,” Danny interrupts, “it's called Clarence Simpson. If we take him out . . .”

“No, you know we can't do that, and I think that there's something else that will bring Clarence down with the rest of the company.”

“What are its weaknesses?” asked Muriel. “It must have some.”

“Why?” Danny said sarcastically. “It has the government to cover for it.”

“That's it!” exclaimed Harris. They all looked at him with expectation. “The government is their weak link!”

“How's that a weak link?”

“What makes up government?”

“legislative branch, judicial branch and administrative ...”

“Seriously,” Harris interrupted. “You have elected officials and bureaucrats. Each has their own agenda and each doing everything in their power to keep their jobs. That's what Simpco is using. Simpco gives them



money and makes them look good to their constituents or bosses. And most of it can be done legally.”

“So all we have to do is . . . what?” asks Muriel.

“There are two things I can think of right off . . . first, you can destroy the relationship. Make it so Simpco becomes a liability. Second, you can expose someone on the take. Everyone will back off. Don't forget these are some of the most selfish people of the face of the planet. A well placed hint, with some compelling facts, before the information becomes public will start everyone who doesn't want burned to back away from Simpco. When whatever fact we get is released, they're standing there by themselves. No one is going to try to hide them.”

Muriel went to the apartment window and looked out at the peaceful neighborhood. She wondered whether their lives would ever be as peaceful as the world around them. Jaime walked up and put his arm around her shoulders and held her tight. As if he knew what she was thinking he said, “It's a start. It's a start.”



Knocking on the Bell's front door Jaime turned to Harris, Danny and Muriel who were standing behind him. He was about to say something when he heard the door open. When he turned back he was confronted by a beautiful smiling face with two large eyes – one brown and one blue-grey.

“May I help you?” the tall, slender young woman asked.

“I'm sorry. We were looking for Jason and Rhonda Bell. I must have the wrong house,” Jaime said.

“You've got the right house,” the young woman said stepping back and ushering the group into the entry hall.

“Danny . . . Harris!” the young woman suddenly squealed.

“Stacy?!” they exclaimed in unison.

The young woman threw her arms around each of two men in turn, squeezing and kissing them. Muriel and Jaime looked on in amazement as the three talked rapidly. Rhonda Bell entered the room.

Putting her hands on Muriel and Jaime's shoulders she said, "the boys helped Stacy escape the mountain over two years ago. They haven't seen her since then."

As the reunion continued Rhonda led the way to a large family room on the back of the house. Jaime notice the slightly unusual way Stacy's right leg moved. He was so engrossed in admiring Stacy that he missed Rhonda addressing him. He gave Rhonda an embarrassed look, Stacy blushed, hoots came from his friends and Rhonda smiled broadly.

"She is lovely, isn't she?" Rhonda said to heighten his embarrassment. All he could do was say "Yes, ma'am" which sent a blushing Stacy fleeing the room.

Hearing the commotion Jason joined Rhonda and the others. After a brief time of Jaime stumbling over words and trying to overcome his embarrassment amidst the teasing of his friends, the group settled down to talk about the business at hand. One of the first things the Bells had on their agenda was getting all four of them new identities.

"We have a good friend, Tony Figioli. He's a retired Redding police officer who just happened to have arrested one of the best counterfeiters on the west coast."

"Oh?" came the mutual response.

"Yes," Jason laughed. "In fact, after Tony encouraged Johnny to come out of retirement to help Stacy, we gave him a job." He got a lot of strange looks so he continued. "The man paid for his crimes! He's been a good employee and uses his special talents to help AGEHs."

"Danny's the only one who doesn't have any identification." said Harris.

"That may be true, but we must assume that Simpco has all of your names." Rhonda pointed out.

“Oh,” again in unison.

The discussion and subsequent planning moved to a large game table where it went on well into the afternoon. Stacy had returned and joined the group sharing her experience in the world of false credentials and establishing a new life. Jason had called Johnny and made arrangements for him to get the pictures and information he needed to make the fake Social Security cards and driver's license.

Toward evening the marathon planning session began to slow. Rhonda, Muriel and Stacy headed toward the kitchen in search of food. Jaime cut Stacy off at the pass.

“I'm sorry if my friends teasing me caused you embarrassment,” he said softly.

“That's okay,” replied Stacy blushing slightly from the reminder.

“Do you live with the Bells?” Jaime asked.

“No. I live in Shingleton over near Lassen Volcanic Park.”

“Oh, sure,” exclaimed Jaime. “I know the park well. I study orology ... mountains ... at Washington State.”

“You do! If I could go to school I would love to study orology. I love the mountains.”

“Rhonda said that Danny and Harris helped you escape.”

“Yes. Danny gave up his own turn to get me out, and Harris was on the other side of the fence waiting for me.”

“Wow!” Jaime's admiration was real. He had seen firsthand the dangers of escaping.

“Danny is four years older than me. He should have been the one to go, but he was afraid that I wouldn't make it without someone on the inside to literally push me over.”

Stacy could see the question in Jaime's face. “I have a prosthetic leg. I was born without a right leg. I couldn't climb the fence by myself. Danny stayed with me. When the distraction started he shorted the fence, threw a blanket over the barbed wire then catapulted me up and over.”

“Amazing!” was all Jaime could say.

“Yes,” Stacy continued. “I damaged my leg when I landed and Harris practically had to carry me. I can't tell you how frightened I was with the shooting and all.”

“I know what you mean.” Jaime thought of the escape and his feelings as he saw the helicopter attack the van.

Again Stacy was reading Jaime, “I'm sorry. It must have been horrible.”

“I didn't even know any of them, but it was still like a part of me was ...” Jaime found the words caught in his throat. They just wouldn't come out. He gasped for air as he worked to control the tears. Stacy reached out her hand and put it on Jaime's. He looked up and saw the tears in her eyes. “Then the driver's family helped my Mother and me escape,” he said through his tears.

There was a silent understanding. For some reason Jaime didn't feel at all uncomfortable just sitting quietly with Stacy.

“How did you end up in Shingleton?” Jaime finally asked.

“Harris helped me get a job doing house-keeping in a small private motel near Portland. They didn't ask a lot of questions when they hired me. It was going great until they had to ask me for a W-4; the IRS form for tax withholding. It requires a Social Security number. That night I took a bus south and stopped in Eugene. The same thing happened there. I ended up leaving and taking a bus south.”

“When I got to Redding, I heard that Bell's were hiring. I thought I'd give it a try. I was really looking for someone who was hiring illegals. I go by the name Stacy Smitty. A lot of AGEHs use some version of “Smith” when they take a last name. Supposedly our mothers were allowed to give us our first names. Rhonda knew immediately that I didn't have any identification. At first she thought I was an illegal immigrant. She confronted me. By that time I was such a basket case that I crumbled and told her everything.”

“Instead of turning me in, she called Jason and they listened to my story. They decided to help me. It took quite a while but they finally made contact with Harris. In the mean time they got Tony and Johnny to get me identification and they gave me a job. They put me on their company insurance so I was able to get my prosthetic leg fixed.”

“I worked here in Redding for about a year and then moved to Shingleton to run their store near the park. I've been there ever since and love it.”

“That's quite a story,” said Jaime.

“Yes,” Stacy replied, “and the Bells have helped three other AGEHs since I arrived. Another woman, Twyla, works in their warehouse, and they helped two fellows start new lives farther south.”

Jaime and Stacy talked for hours. They shared their experiences of prejudice and abuse but mostly they talked about their love of mountains. They became so engrossed in their conversation and each other that they were totally oblivious to the world around them.



Over the following weeks the team began putting their plan into action. An inside man in Simpco was a top priority task. They all agreed that such a person would have to be a basic misfit in the organization. He or she would have to be the one leaving the building that didn't look like an ex-Navy Seal and who didn't think that the mountains are just where you go to kill something. There had to be someone working for Simpco who matched that description. The one factor they couldn't escape was that someone would personally have to go to Seattle to do the leg work. They decided as a group that there was safety in numbers and that they should all go. They could carry on the organizational matters from anywhere by computer. There was some concern about living in the same town with Clarence

Simpson, but then again it might be the safest place. What is that old saying 'keep your friends close and your enemies closer'?

Jason helped rent a house just east of downtown near the Swedish Medical Center's Cherry Hill campus. Tony Figioli decided that the team needed a bona fide detective and probably some protection, so he insisted upon accompanying them. Besides, he argued, he was the only one with a legitimate driver's license, concealed gun permit and credit card.

They had already tried the 'contact us' list on the Simpco website. All of the names on the site were management level individuals. That meant they would be quite loyal. As soon as they arrived they began their observation of the Simpco office tower. Tony turned out to be quite valuable. He went in and asked for a job. He was able to speak with a person in Human Resources and get a good look at their badges. He learned that the employee's department is right under their name. It also landed him an interview which would mean that he would get to see more of the building and its people.

For several days they followed groups of employees to their favorite restaurants, dipped on conversations, made a list of names and departments and looked for anyone who might be mister or miss right. It was very frustrating. The team was beginning to believe that perhaps there weren't any misfits. That's when Muriel noticed an employee come out of the building and not follow the normal routine. Perhaps they'd been so intent upon places where Simpco employees gathered that they didn't think about the fact that anyone who might be disenchanted with Simpco might not want to spend his or her lunch hour with other employees.

The fact that it could be a horrible waste of time crossed Muriel's mind as she followed the man in the opposite direction from the normal flow of employees. He went to a small vegetarian bistro where he ordered and pulled out a well-worn copy of Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche's "Joyful Wisdom." Muriel started to have hope. She ventured close enough to see

that the man's name was Thomas and he worked in IT. He was almost too good to be true.



Muriel made her way back to the spot outside of the Simpco office where they had been watching the employees leave the building. Harris was waiting for her.

“Where in the world did you go?” he asked, trying not to show how annoyed he was. “The other three are out looking for you.”

“I’m sorry,” said Muriel. “I followed a long-shot and I think it was worth it.”

“I sure hope so.” Harris said. “We didn’t accomplish anything else but look for you.”

They sat in silence and waited for Danny, Jaime and Tony to return. As each returned Muriel had to repeat her apology. Finally they started the long trek home.

On the way home Muriel told them about the man she had followed. They all agreed that he was the best candidate they had. Hopefully the vegetarian restaurant and Buddhist book, along with the fact that he went in the opposite direction of the other employees, was an indicator that he might not be a faithful Simpco mercenary.

It was decided that the only way they were going to get enough information to research Thomas was to at least get his last name. The only way that they could figure doing that was by meeting him. Muriel was elected to use her feminine charm.

Of course that didn’t come without a lot of teasing from Jaime. Muriel denied any knowledge of the use of “feminine charm.” Being more of a big brother, it fell to Jaime to explain to Muriel what it meant.

“How do you know that?” Muriel asked.

“I’m embarrassed to admit at how many times they’ve been used on me. Just trust me, they work.”



Muriel was nervous as she waited for Thomas to appear around the corner from the Simpco office. The plan was that she would arrive at the restaurant at the same time and stage a fall. If Thomas was a gentleman, it would give her a chance to at least get his name if not engage him in conversation.

She looked in the coffee shop behind her. Danny and Jaime were sitting at a table by the window. Tony was already in the restaurant. Down the street, positioned so that he could see Thomas before he rounded the corner, was Harris. He would adjust his cap when Thomas was about to come around the corner. That should give Muriel the opportunity to time her arrival to coincide with Thomas.

Harris adjusted his hat. Muriel started moving toward the restaurant. Thomas came around the corner and Muriel picked up her pace so that she would be reaching for the door at the same time.

As the two approached the door, Thomas did the unexpected. He looked at Muriel and hurried so that he got to the door first. Muriel was thrown off balance. She hadn't expected him to change his pace. His next action also caught her off guard. Thomas grabbed the door handle, stepped to the hinge side of the door and pulled it open. He looked directly at Muriel and smiled.

“Thank you!” Muriel said.

“Your ...” Before he could finish Muriel was falling backwards into the restaurant. This isn't how she had planned to meet him. As she fell she did have the forethought to drop her books. She was supposed to have dropped them inside, but now was as good a time as any and Thomas wasn't going to get by them without seeing.



“Oh!” Thomas, being the gallant, quickly rushed forward. “Are you okay?”

“Just embarrassed,” Muriel said with true embarrassment.

Thomas helped her to her feet and turned to pick up her books. He paused as he looked at her copy of Yongey Mingur Rinpoche's “Joyful Wisdom.”

“I'm reading this too,” he said.

“Really?” Muriel replied. “It's a great book isn't it?”

“Yes.”

“Have you read his 'Joy of Living'?” Muriel asked.

“Oh, yes!” Thomas replied excitedly.

“He's quite a man, isn't he?”

“He relates so well to people.”

“I especially enjoyed reading about his life. It gives you hope when you know what he went through.” In preparation Muriel had read both books and was truly an admirer of the young Buddhist teacher.

“He's a great teacher,” Thomas said as he offered Muriel a seat at a nearby table.

“Are you a student of Buddhism?” she asked.

“Not a very good one,” Thomas replied.

Almost an hour later Thomas and Muriel were still talking. It had not been a problem at all keeping the conversation going. Muriel liked Thomas the moment they met. Suddenly he jumped up.

“Oh! I forgot about the time. I've got to get back to the office! I'm going to be late.”

“I'm sorry I kept you.” Muriel apologized.

“Nonsense,” Thomas replied with a smile. “It's the best time I've had for ages. Would it be too forward to ask for your telephone number?”

Muriel hadn't expected this. She was just trying to get enough information to find out whether he would make a good inside person. She had to make a quick decision.

“No,” Muriel smiled, writing her cell number on a napkin. “And if you call and one of my brothers answers, just hang up or they’ll tease me mercilessly.”

“Okay,” he called on his way toward the door. “Talk to you later.” He waved and disappeared into the street and off toward the Simpco office tower.

Muriel’s cell phone rang. She answered.

“Muriel’s got a boyfriend” came the sing-song voice of Jaime. She could hear the others laughing in the background. They were standing outside the restaurant window. Muriel blushed. Could they really tell that she was smitten by Thomas Mason?

Muriel shared what she had learned about Thomas. “He’s 22 years old and grew up near Bellingham, just north of here. He’s a Lummi Indian. His parents are two of the very few people who can still speak the Saanich language. His given name is Ts’huahnt. He took the name Thomas Mason when he went to college because most people can’t pronounce his Lummi name – even his Lummi family and friends usually called him “Tee” - and he didn’t really want to announce that he was straight off the reservation. There’s still a lot of prejudice. He said that he never thought of himself as a Buddhist student, but he does follow the Buddhist philosophy of life because it reminds him a lot of what he was taught at home. He just graduated from Seattle Pacific University with a degree in computer science. With jobs being so few and far between he took the first decent offer ... Simpco Security. He’s trying to save money to send to his parents. He didn’t say anything about liking or not liking the job. He just said that many of his classmates are still looking for work and ‘at least I’ve got a job.’ I took that as a euphemism for ‘I don’t really like my job.’”

“Wow,” Jaime said. “Did you get his shoe size?” The others laughed as Muriel blushed and gave Jaime a good smack on the shoulder.

“Okay,” Harris brought everyone back to reality. “You did a great job, Muriel. Now what do we do?”

“He asked to call me,” Muriel said hesitantly.

“He what?” Harris looked shocked.

“He asked for my phone number.”

“And?”

“And,” Muriel said calmly, “I gave it to him.”

“You gave him your cell number?!” Danny exclaimed. “Are you crazy?”

“It was a calculated risk.” The others couldn't argue with that. The relationship would have ended right there if she had refused to give him a telephone number.

“We'll just have to make that phone a dedicated Tee phone,” Harris suggested. All agreed.

“So you think you can recruit this guy?” Danny asked.

“He doesn't seem to fit the Simpco type,” Muriel replied. “He's not macho. He's very sensitive and if he really does try to follow the Buddhist philosophy of life he's already finding his new job and his philosophy of life in conflict. That's probably what he meant when he said 'not a very good one' when I asked about him being a Buddhist student.” Muriel paused to collect her thoughts. “I think he's a young man who finds himself where he doesn't really want to be but has no options. He only mentioned prejudice once but I figure there's more to it.”

“We can all relate to that,” said Jaime.

“Okay,” said Harris, “how about we let this play out naturally? We give Tee a chance to call Muriel. Then it will be up to her to decide when to test his loyalties.”

Everyone agreed. The stage was set. They walked the rest of the way home in silence, each lost in their own thoughts of the risks and potentials and the hopes that hinged on Muriel's new friend.



If anyone had any doubts about 'Thomas' interest in Muriel they were quickly dispelled. He called that evening and asked her on a date the next evening. She accepted. When he asks for an address, she told him that since they had just met at a cafe would he mind if she met him instead of giving him her address. "I'm sure I can trust you, but my brothers really want me to play it safe." They agreed to meet at the Cafe Darclee near the Space Needle.

Muriel was nervous as she walked toward the entrance to the restaurant. In reality she had never been on a date. It was rather sad, she thought, that the first time she had been asked on a date she wasn't really going for the romance but to recruit. It made her realize what she was missing in life. Tears began to gather but Muriel had to shake them off and keep to the plan.

Thomas saw her coming and met her at the door, holding it like a gentleman and making a joke about watching her step.

Thomas' ways and manners put Muriel at ease immediately. He had selected the Darclee because of the food and the location. There were plenty of vegetarian choices and on a lovely summer evening there were a lot of people in and around the restaurant. Her body guards, Jaime and Harris, were munching on sandwiches in the park across the street.

Thomas, who asked Muriel to call him "Tee", wanted to know all about Muriel. She remembered how in the books and movies the people who were undercover tried to tell the truth as much as possible so that they didn't get tripped up with lies. She told Tee about growing up in the mountains and her parents being researchers.

She turned the conversation to prejudice and injustice by telling Tee about Jaime's family. They talked for a long time about prejudice and the mistreatment of other people. They talked about beliefs. Tee had grown up in a home that believed in the equality of all living beings. That was one reason he liked the Buddhist philosophy of life so much. He had

experienced a great deal of prejudice in the white man's world but he had nowhere else to go to get work.

Tee avoided talking about his work so Muriel finally had to breech the subject. "How is it that a person with your beliefs is working for a security company?" At first Tee bristled at the question but then, looking closely at Muriel, relaxed.

"Like everyone else, I spent my college career trying to set up a job for after graduation. I had done a summer internship with Simpco. All I knew was that they were basically private police. It wasn't a bad internship so when we were all having so much trouble finding good jobs the spring of my senior year, I accepted a job at Simpco. My parents put everything they own on the line for my education. I'm trying to pay them back as quickly as possible so that my younger brother and sister have a chance to go to college. I knew that I'd have to work in the city. There aren't many good paying jobs on the reservation. It wasn't until after I'd worked for them for a few months that I read about their being investigated. That's when I learned that Simpco is an army for hire and has been investigated many times for use of deadly force. I'm in the IT department. I fix computers and stay out of their business. I don't like them, but they're not illegal so I'll do my job until I find something better. I've got to work."

"I understand," Muriel could sense the tension in his body grow as he spoke. "I wasn't implying anything. I'm sorry if it seemed so. You just don't fit what I'd expect of a Simpco man."

"No?" Tee relaxed a bit and smiled. "Am I not macho enough?"

"No, you're not," Muriel said with a perfectly straight face. Tee seemed almost crest-fallen. "You are a handsome, strong, gentleman who doesn't need to be macho." Tee blushed.

There was an awkward moment after which Muriel allowed the conversation to go back to comparing similar likes, life experiences and beliefs. She really wanted to confide in Tee right then and there, but she knew that she couldn't.

After dinner they walked around the Space Needle and enjoyed the warm summer evening. She really did like this handsome, gentle Lummi man. Like the gentleman he was, Tee offered Muriel his arm. It was a better first date than she could ever have imagined. As they walked along, often with long periods in silence, she allowed herself to forget why she was here. They walked by an older couple sitting on a bench. The couple smiled at Muriel and Tee. She returned their smile and hugged Tee's arm all the tighter. Tee looked down with a soft smile.

Before she knew it, it was time for Muriel to catch the bus. Before she boarded the bus she gave Tee a kiss. "Thank you for a wonderful evening."

"Maybe we can do it again soon." Tee replied.

"I'd love to."

Muriel boarded the bus. As she looked back at the passengers there were Jaime and Harris. They just smiled. She knew that meant she was going to get teased. It was worth it, she thought as she smiled and waved to Tee who was still standing at the bus stop watching her.



There indeed was to be a lot of teasing. Jaime and Harris moved up to the seat immediately behind Muriel and as soon as they were out of sight the teasing began.

"Did you give her permission to kiss him?" Harris asked Jaime.

"Definitely not," Jaime replied in a mock strict father voice. "And on the first date."

They all got off three stops later and transferred to a bus heading toward home. Muriel told the two about the evening with Harris and Jaime giving each other a knowing smile. The night had definitely not been all business for Muriel.

Muriel was still feeling an emotional high when they entered the house. It was to come quickly to an end. Tony and Danny were waiting for them and the look on their faces belied some very bad news.

"Muriel," Tony began, "I was using some of my connections to try to track down your parents. One of my contacts called a little while ago. Your father has had a heart attack."

"Is he okay?" Muriel asked. She was trying to be calm and disconnected. She was a bit surprised to realize that she still had strong feelings for this man.

"Yes, he's okay," Tony reported. "He's in Harborview Medical Center down on 9<sup>th</sup>. Street."

"I want to see him." Muriel said. Trying to cover her concern she added, "maybe I can get him to turn on Simpco."

"It's okay," said Harris. "Families love their own no matter how bad they are. I'd think less of you if you didn't love Ron Smith no matter what he's done."

"I was so angry with them I thought I hated them," Muriel started to cry.

"Of course you were angry," Jaime consoled her. "You were angry, hurt, disappointed, and more. But you're a compassionate young woman and these people were your parents for many more years than they've been your enemy."

"I really want to see him," Muriel repeated.

"That's probably not going to be possible," Tony tried to be as gentle as possible. "You know that Simpco is going to use this to catch you. They probably purposely leaked the information and put him in a general hospital to flush you out."

"I know, but there's got to be some way," Muriel said. "I'll put on a disguise and sneak in."

"Muriel, Simpco people are experts at disguises and sneaking," Tony said.

There was a long silence. It was Jaime who finally broke the silence. "You know, Tony, there might actually be a way."

"How's that?" Tony asked with more than a bit of skepticism in his voice.

"I know several people from school who are working at Harborview. What if I could get one or more of them to get Dr. Smith away from his guards?" Jaime offered.

"We'd still have to get her in and out of the building," Tony replied.

"Let's say that I could get someone to meet Muriel at the ambulance door and then, say, see Dr. Smith somewhere like one of the rooms in the radiology department. In most hospitals they're not too far from the ER. Could that work?"

"We're going to try this, aren't we?" It was more of a rhetorical question. Tony knew the answer before he asked.

Jaime started making telephone calls. By the next day Jaime had a plan and the people to help pull it off.

"Okay," he told the team, "here's how it goes. I have friends at Harborview whom I trust. I told them enough truth that they want to help but not enough that can expose us."

"Jerry Collins is a nurse. He checked and found that Dr. Smith has a CT scan scheduled for 7am the day after tomorrow. He also walked by Dr. Smith's room and said that there is a man in a black suit in the room. Dr. Mary Spencer is a resident in radiology. At 6 am in the morning she'll meet Muriel at the ambulance entrance. Shift change will be going on which will give us some cover. Since only ambulance and hospital personnel are allowed through the ambulance entrance, I doubt that Simpco will watch it as carefully as regular entrances."

"Mary will take Muriel to the control room in the CT lab that they'll use for Dr. Smith. She'll be waiting there when they bring Dr. Smith down from his room. His guard will have to stay in the hallway outside. After she's had a chance to visit she'll leave as she arrived."



“Well?” Jaime asked proudly.

“Simple and well organized,” Tony said with some admiration. “I still think it is suicidal. We need an emergency exit strategy and that is me.”

“Okay,” Jaime agreed. “What do you want?”

“I’m going to be there waiting for Muriel. If I even think I smell trouble I’m calling the shots and I expect you to do exactly as I say.” Tony looked Muriel squarely in the eyes. Muriel nodded agreement.

The next day was quite tense. Tony left the house for several hours saying that he was going to check out the hospital so that he would know the area if things started falling apart. Harris and Danny worked on AGEH organizational issues. There had been another attack in the San Juan area but the victim wasn’t an AGEH. However the person had Waardenburg Syndrome. Jaime and Muriel researched Tee. He made it easy for them. He was on Facebook and access to his profile was not restricted. His favorite activities were hiking and bicycling. He listed eastern philosophy as his principal interest and a cross between native American pantheism and Buddhism as his religious view. Muriel smiled when she saw Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche’s “Joyful Wisdom” listed as his favorite book. His favorite music was an eclectic collection of native music from around the world and his favorite movie was “Medicine Man.” Muriel caught herself hoping upon hope that Tee really was the man he appeared to be. Other than her brief romantic encounter with Jaime, which ended because it was like kissing her brother, and her infatuation with a variety of singers and movie stars, Muriel had no idea whether what she was feeling for Tee was falling in love. Furthermore she was afraid of what it would mean if it was. But she had little time to consider that. Tee was obviously on his way home from work when he called and asked Muriel for a second date the next evening.

She accepted and asked if he could pick her up at the Starbucks at the Swedish Medical Center Cherry Hill Campus Main Hospital. She told him the truth that her father was recovering from a heart attack. She just

didn't give the right hospital. When he asked if she'd rather not go out she again replied with the truth, "no. I'd like to see you. It will be good for me."



As those who don't really like early morning would say 'morning came far too early.' 6 a.m. was Seattle wet, crisp and cold. Tony dropped Muriel off at the ambulance entrance. A short African-American woman in scrubs stood just outside the automatic doors. She smiled as Muriel approached.

"Muriel?" the woman asked.

"Dr. Spencer?" Muriel replied.

"Yes," said the woman, "but you can call me Mary." The woman smiled and led the way into the hospital. Muriel looked over her shoulder at Tony as he pulled away from the hospital.

"I appreciate your help," Muriel said.

"Don't mention it," said Mary. "I mean that literally. Don't ever tell anyone I helped you. It would cost me my job, but I owe Jaime more than this little favor."

"Oh?"

"Yes," said Mary. "I wouldn't be Dr. Spencer if it weren't for Jaime. It was the old prejudice thing. That little, fat, poor nigger wasn't going to get into medical school. Jaime taught me how to deal with the prejudice. I also know that he did something – pulled strings, called in favors, or something - because all of a sudden I had some very influential supporters. He's a great guy!"

"He sure is," Muriel agreed. She was seeing a whole new side of Jaime. He had obviously been doing more than study orology.

The plan went like the proverbial clockwork. Mary took Muriel to a control room that looked into several smaller rooms with large pieces of

equipment she assumed were CT scanners. The technician greeted Mary with both respect and sincere cordiality.

“Hi, Jenny.” Mary’s excellent rapport with the staff was evident. “This is Martha. She’s a student I’m trying to recruit. I want to show her the working end of radiology. Would you mind if I do the next patient?”

“Sure,” said the technician smiling. She held out her hand and greeted Muriel.

“If I might ask you a really big favor,” Mary continued. “Ms. Henderson, in room 509, said that she had a CT a year or so ago. Would you please run down to the file room and see if you can find anything?”

“No problem.” The technician, still smiling amiably, left on her errand.

The timing was close. The technician had hardly exited the control room when an aide opened the door and pushed a gurney into the CT room. It was Ronald Smith. Muriel realized that she was filled with mixed emotions. She could hear the aide tell a man in a black suit that he could sit in the waiting room across the hall.

“He’s all yours,” said Mary putting her hand gently on Muriel’s shoulder. “You don’t have a long time but I’ll give you as much time as I can.”

Muriel thanked Mary and opened the door to the CT room. The aide left as Muriel entered. Muriel didn’t know what to say? She saw Dr. Smith looking around. Suddenly he saw Muriel.

“Muriel?” he asked. “Is that you?”

“Yes.” Muriel replied still unable to speak.

“Oh, my God,” said Dr. Smith.

“You never believed in a god,” Muriel reacted. “What do you believe in, Dad?”

“I’m so sorry!”

“What are you sorry for, Dad?”

“I’m sorry I hurt you.”

“What about all of the others? Are you sorry you hurt them?” Muriel was beginning to find her voice and her anger was coming to the surface.

“I know it is hard to believe but I really meant well. I wanted to help humanity. It just got out of hand.”

“How did we help humanity?”

“We?” Dr. Smith looked confused.

“We!” Muriel emphasized, “AGEHs. People that society will never accept, that religious fanatics call abominations, and that every psycho with a gun will try to kill because your partner, Clarence Simpson, has put a bounty on our heads. The 'we' whom you have kept locked under that mountain from birth to death.” Muriel burst into tears – tears of anger and of pain.

“I didn't mean for anyone to get hurt. You must believe me,” Dr. Smith pleaded.

“How could you do this and think that no one was going to get hurt? You were breaking the law and you were creating a life form that has no rights, no protection under the law. We're helpless freaks.”

“I didn't think . . .”

“You're damn right you didn't think.” Muriel was venting her anger. “At least you didn't think of anyone except yourself.”

“You're right,” Dr. Smith said sadly. “I wanted to be a hero of science – right up there with Curie, Einstein, Salk.”

“Well, you're no hero. Do you have any idea how it feels to find out that the man you loved as your father is a monster? I've talked to them. I've seen them. I've watched them die!”

“I really didn't want any of them to die,” Dr. Smith whimpered. “I wanted them all to live. I wanted them all to have lives like you. Clarence Simpson threatened your mother, your sister and you if I didn't cooperate. I'm sorry.”

“Tell that to the seven people Simpco killed in cold blood.”

“What?”

“You don't know, do you?”

Dr. Smith had a blank look. “Know what?”

“When my friends and I helped the AGEHs escape from the mountain Simpco soldiers gunned down a van full of innocent people. Seven people died that night.”

“I didn't know!” Dr. Smith was crying. “I didn't know. Yes. It was my fault, but I didn't start out the monster you see. I really wanted to help humanity. Whether it was selfish or not, I wanted to be a hero. Oh, God, what have I done? Please, Muriel! Please forgive me!”

“Whether or not I forgive you doesn't matter. What matters is what you do from this point on,” Muriel said.

“But I'm being held prisoner.”

“I know. But my friends and I are going to bring Clarence Simpson down, and you're going to help us. Just keep quiet. Don't tell anyone that you've talked to me. When we get you free, then tell the truth.”

“Anything!” said Dr. Smith.

“Seeing you has taught me something. I realize what it means 'hate the sin. Love the sinner.' I find what you've done so repulsive that it makes me physically ill, but you've been my father all of my life and I do love you.”

“I know it may be hard to believe, but I've always loved you ... not as a successful experiment, but as my daughter. I don't care what the world thinks of me, but I don't want to die with my daughters thinking of me as a monster. Tell your sister that your Mother and I love you both dearly. We have made some horrible choices and as a result become accomplices to some horrible things, but we will do everything in our power to make amends.”

“I'm sorry,” came the voice of Dr. Spencer. “We're running out of time.”

“Dad,” Muriel said, “you must not mention seeing or talking to me. Just wait.”

“I love you,” said Ronald Smith.

“I love you too, Dad.”

Muriel took one last look at the weak and frightened man lying on the gurney as she left through the control room exit. He was so weak.

As Muriel exited the building she had the nagging feeling that someone was following her. She purposely dropped some papers from her purse and took a quick glance back toward the hospital as she reached down to retrieve them. There he was. Simpco should stop dressing their agents in black suits. He might as well have been dressed in desert camouflage with a sign saying 'Simpco mercenary'. He was awaiting his opportunity and that meant that Muriel had to act before he had that opportunity.

Muriel called Tony and told him the situation.

“I'm boxed in traffic. It's going to take a while for me to get free.” Tony said as calmly as he could. “Look across the street from you. You should see a restaurant called Pho Cyclo Café. Go inside and get a table. The Simpco man will wait for a few minutes before entering. Watch for him. As soon as he starts toward the restaurant go to the bathroom and call me.”

Muriel didn't waste any time. She crossed 9<sup>th</sup> Street and entered the Pho Cyclo Cafe. She asked for a table by the window. She was the only patron at that hour of the morning so she had her choice of tables. A short while later she saw the Simpco goon talking on his cell phone and heading toward the café. She immediately did as Tony had instructed and went to the bathroom. As she entered she noticed that it was right next to a door into the kitchen.

“Tony,” Muriel said trying not to panic. “He's coming.”

“Okay,” said Tony. “Did you notice the door into the kitchen?”

“Yes.”

“Okay,” Tony spoke calmly. “As soon as you hang up, go through the door into the kitchen. Just smile, be polite and head toward any outside door. There should be a door that opens into a passage between the buildings. If you look to the left you should see an opening between two

building that face 10<sup>th</sup> Street. Go between those buildings. By that time I should be able to get there. If I'm not there when you get to 10<sup>th</sup> Street go into Wrapp World, get a cup of coffee and I'll be there right away.”

“Alright,” said Muriel.

She looked out of the restroom. The hallway to the restrooms was obscured from the view of the dining room patrons. This must have been what Tony was doing the day before – scouting out escape routes. Taking a deep breath Muriel opened the door into the kitchen and walked in as if she was supposed to be there.

There was a man putting supplies away. A quick glance around the room located an outside door across the room. Muriel smiled and pointed to the door. The man stood still and watched as Muriel walked across the room and exited the building.

As Tony had described, she was in a narrow passage between the buildings on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Streets. Looking to her left she saw the tree-lined opening between two building that faced 10<sup>th</sup> Street. As she made her way between the buildings Muriel dialed 911 and reported a strange man whom she believed was stalking her. She described the Simpco agent. There was no way he could explain why he was following her. As she entered the Wrapp World she saw the police car go past. She smiled to herself. She was sure that it wouldn't be the first time that man had been questioned by the police, but this time it was going to be more embarrassing when he faced his superiors.

Muriel had just received her coffee when Tony pulled up outside the shop.



The Swedish Medical Center Cherry Hill Campus isn't the largest of the Swedish Medical Center campuses but it does cover four city blocks. Best of all the front door was just about a half block from the house the

team was renting and it had a Starbucks. The Starbucks was easy to watch. If they were threatened there were lots of buildings and corridors in which to get lost.

As she waited for Tee to arrive Muriel worried about what she was going to say to him. This meeting could destroy their relationship and she realized that it was a relationship she really wanted. She knew that even if Tee agreed to help them it would be hard, if not impossible, to convince him that she really was very fond of him. By the time she saw him coming up the walk she was wishing that she could just have one more date with him before confessing, but that wasn't going to happen. Lives depended upon her doing her best to convince Tee to help them.

Tee beamed when he saw Muriel. The obvious reaction to seeing her wasn't lost on Muriel and made her feel even worse and as they met Muriel couldn't help but give him a hug. Tee stood and held Muriel tight. She didn't want to have him let go.

"Are you sure it's okay to meet?" Tee asked. "I don't want to drag you away." He paused and looked at Muriel. "How's he doing?"

"He's very weak but he's okay," Muriel replied. "And it's good that we meet because I need to talk to you."

"That sounds ominous," Tee smiled but Muriel didn't. Tee's smile faded.

"I don't know how to say this so I'm just going to blurt it out and hope you understand." Muriel felt sick at her stomach.

"Is it that bad?" Tee asked with a decisively worried look on his face.

"I purposely met you." Muriel blurted out.

"You what?"

"I purposely met you." Muriel repeated. "I knew that you were going to that restaurant and I made sure that we met. I didn't mean to fall in the door, but that worked. I did read 'Joy of Living' and 'Joyful Wisdom', and I do greatly admire Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, but I read them because I knew that you were reading them."



“This sounds very flattering,” Tee said seriously, “but I'm afraid that it wasn't just because you wanted a date.”

“Did you know that our date at Darclee's was my first date,” the tears started rolling down Muriel's cheek. “It was my first date EVER! And I wanted very much to be with you but there were ulterior motives as well.”

Tee pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped Muriel's cheek. “Okay, 'fess up.”

“I followed you from work one day at lunch time.” Muriel started. “We need a person who has access to Simpco computers to get evidence that they're killing people, and, well, you looked too nice to be a Simpco person so I arranged our meeting and I need to ask for your help.”

“Wow,” Tee gasped. “I'm not sure I quite followed all of that. If I'm right you're a part of some organization that wants to recruit me because you believe that Simpco is killing people.”

“That's a thumbnail version,” said Muriel trying to compose herself. “Would you mind if a colleague joins us? He can probably explain things better.”

“Okay.”

Muriel turned to the window and nodded. Harris joined them.

“Hello, Mr. Mason,” Harris held out his hand which Tee accepted and shook. “Thank you for permitting me to join you.”

“Sure,” said Tee. “What's this all about?”

“I'm sure you're familiar with cloning,” Tee nodded as Harris continued without acknowledging. “Have you ever heard of advanced genetic engineering?”

“No.”

“I am an AGEH – advanced genetically engineered humanoid.”

“A what?”

“Do you remember Dolly the lamb that was cloned?”

“Yes.”

“I'm rather like Dolly but much more sophisticated. In fact, the process used to create me is so sophisticated and so complicated that there has only been one real success, and that wasn't me. All AGEHs have three things in common – we have two different colored eyes known as Waardenburg Syndrome, we all have a starburst mark on our left shoulder, and we're all geniuses. We were created by two doctors by the name of Ronald and Teresa Smith and kept in a compound inside of a mountain east of here. The project is funded by Simpco. The mountain compound was built by Simpco and is guarded by Simpco. On June 6<sup>th</sup> Muriel and several others helped almost thirty of us escape. Simpco attacked and killed a van load of innocent people. Clarence Simpson, the CEO of Simpco, has put out a bounty on AGEHs. At least one AGEH has been killed and a couple of people who just happened to have Waardenburg Syndrome. We must stop Clarence Simpson and Simpco before they kill any more people.”

Tee listened intently. He didn't have the look of disbelief Muriel expected.

“Tee,” Muriel added, “all of the stories of prejudice and abuse I told you were about AGEHs.”

Muriel looked at Tee and started crying. He leaned forward and offered his handkerchief. Muriel held up her hand, lowered her head and removed her single brown contact. Looking up at Tee with her one brown and one blue eye filled with tears she said, “Harris was trying to protect me because he know I want you to like me. But the truth is that I'm an AGEH too. I'm just the lucky one that they call the success. Doctors Ronald and Teresa Smith took me into their home and raise me as their child. I didn't know about the other until this past May.”

Muriel went on to give a detail account of her entire experience. Tee would occasionally gasp or make an appropriate sound or statement, otherwise he quietly listened.

Harris continued. “I'm not going to take out my contact but you might have noticed that I have a special shoe. My right extremities are small

than my left.” He pulled down his shirt so that Tee could see the sunburst on his shoulder. “My mother was forced to give me up immediately after birth. Supposedly she was allowed to give me a first name. I’ve never seen her. I spent my childhood being told how useless I am and being physically and mentally abused. You know what prejudice is like. You know how that feels.”

“When I was growing up in the Smith’s home,” Muriel joined in, “my best friend was our housekeeper’s son, Jaime. We found out that his aunt, uncle and cousins were gunned down by Simpco because their car backfired in Mexico. I don’t think you’re like them. That’s why I got my friends to take a chance by telling you our story. You are our greatest hope of stopping the killing and being able to live in peace without fear. I’m begging you to help us.”

“I don’t know what to say,” Tee said. He was very obviously overwhelmed by what he had just heard. “I knew that Simpco wasn’t a very nice organization but I had no idea.” He sat quietly thinking about what he had just heard.

“We have dates and witnesses,” Harris said, “but it would be our word against theirs. Simpco is a very powerful government contractor. We need collaboration from their own files. We need you to look in their documentation and see if you can find anything that would help us stop them from hurting anyone else.”

“Muriel knows that I hate prejudice and that I don’t really like working for them. But you’re asking me ...” Tee paused to find the words.

“We’re asking you to risk your life for people whom you don’t know because you think it’s the right thing to do.” Harris said bluntly.

“Yes,” replied Tee. “If I die, the dreams, hopes and future of my younger siblings die with me.”

“I never thought of that!” Muriel exploded, almost lurching forward toward Tee. Harris put his arm out as to restrain her.

“I know that, and I think that Tee knows that.” Harris said. “I think he's come to know you better than you think.”

Tee nodded. “I know you wouldn't do anything to hurt anyone.”

“I agree that your family's future is a serious consideration,” said Harris. “Muriel has told us all about you. I understand your concern for them. The other AGEHs are my family. I respect that you must take that into consideration.”

“Can I think about this?” Tee asked.

“Of course,” replied Harris. “All we ask is that you don't tell Simpco about us. It would mean our lives.”

“I'd never tell Simpco,” said Tee. “I'm fully aware of their ability to be physically brutal so I have no doubt that they would kill you. But I must think about whether I can risk my family's future.”

“That's honest of you and a very honorable consideration.” Harris smiled and held out his hand to Tee.

“I'll let you know,” said Tee firmly shaking Harris' hand. “May I call Muriel with my decision.”

Harris grinned, “I think Muriel would be devastated if you didn't call her.” The double meaning caused Tee to smile.

Muriel walked Tee to his car. They walked in silence. Muriel couldn't help but think that she had lost him as anything other than possibly another comrade-in-arms. He didn't look at her. He didn't offer his arm. He didn't do these things because he just didn't think about them. He was so preoccupied with his own emotional struggle – wanting to say ‘yes’ but unable to because of the tremendous risk for his family's future. He didn't realize what his absentmindedness was doing to Muriel. She started crying softly. Tee stopped, turned to Muriel and took her in his arms.

He felt her pain. It was why he was so overwhelmed and conflicted. If he didn't have to think about his family he would have gladly agreed to go to hell for Muriel, even if they had just met. There was something about her – something about the short time that they shared – which caused him

to believe that they were soul mates. They shared the same philosophy of life, the same esteem for human life, and the same love of nature.

“Oh, I'm so sorry!” Muriel cried. “I am so sorry! It wasn't all business. I mean . . .”

“I know,” Tee comforted her, kissing her gently on the top of the head. “I know. You did what you had to do. Right now we just have to take a back seat to the needs of others. Perhaps there will be some time for us when this is all over.”

Muriel kissed Tee and then hugged him so tightly, with her head against his chest, that she could hear his heartbeat.

Finally Tee had to disengage himself from Muriel's arms. He wiped the tears from his eyes and then her eyes, gave her a kiss and said, “I'll call,” and turned toward his car. Muriel stood watching totally unaware of Harris, Danny, Jaime and Tony standing behind her.

They all waved as Tee pulled away. Jaime was the first one to Muriel. He held her tight as she sobbed. They all knew that no words were going to sooth the pain she was feeling right then. They walked slowly home without talking.

Now it was up to Tee. Harris knew that he had a perfectly valid point about risking his family's future. Harris would have understood if he had just said 'I'm afraid.' It was something in Tee's handshake, the way he looked at Muriel and the way he held her before leaving that told him that Tee was a man of honor who would do whatever he could for them. It was now just a matter of waiting.

## CHAPTER FIVE.

Tee had no idea how many times he had fought and lost the battle of the guilty conscious in the three days since he had last seen Muriel. He felt bad that he hadn't called her but he didn't know what he would say. He thought about the AGEHs and how similar they were to his own tribe. For over two hundred years the Native Americans had been told that they were worthless, lazy, and dumb. They had no rights and had been indiscriminately killed. Several American folk heroes became folk heroes as a result of their "injun fighting" - more accurately translated 'killing Native Americans'. It was true, Tee thought, that if he was killed the future of his family would be destroyed. At the same time he knew that, at this time, he was the only person who had half a chance of getting into Simpco documents to provide the proof the AGEH's needed.

Sitting outside a coffee shop near the Simpco office tower staring at his worn copy of "Joyful Wisdom" Tee had an epiphany. Smiling at the relief his idea brought he picked up his smart phone and called his insurance man. Muriel, watching him from a distance, couldn't hear him ask "Mike, do you sell life insurance?"

A week later Tee called Muriel on his way to work.

"Hello," Muriel answered with fearful anticipation when she saw the caller ID.

"Hi," Tee said softly. "Sorry I haven't called sooner."

"That's okay," said Muriel.

"I had a lot to think through and a problem to solve. I definitely want to help you and your friends, and I've solved my problem. I'll see what I can find at Simpco, but it may take some time."

"Thank you so much!" Muriel said. "Please be careful."

"Sure." Tee paused for a moment. "And I'd like to see you again on a non-business basis. Would that be possible?"

“I'd love that.” Muriel could feel her pulse race. He really wanted to see her again. “You don't mind that I'm . . . I'm different.”

“According to the white man, I'm different too.” Tee tried to lighten the conversation.

“We just have to be careful. I could be a dangerous person to be around,” Muriel warned in earnest.

“That's one risk I'll gladly take.” Tee said with emphasis.

□□□□□

It was several days before Tee had the opportunity to get into any files or even any part of the giant computer system that might have pertinent information. Actually he was quite fortunate that it was only several days and not several weeks. As with any large corporation Simpco had numerous drives on their computer for organization and so that access could be more easily controlled. Tee wasn't sure which drive would be the most likely to contain any helpful documentation. The structure was typical. All of the projects were kept in one secured drive which then required further clearance to enter any particular project. Just because you had access to the project drive didn't mean that you could access all of the projects. When Tee had the opportunity to see inside the project drive he was disappointed to find that all of the projects were identified by a single letter and a nine digit number. Even if he had unlimited access to the project drive it would take days to go into each project. He was beginning to think that he would be retirement age before he was able to get the opportunity to get into all of those project files.

One day Tee was working in a drive with medium security. That meant that almost anyone with more clearance than a receptionist had access. It was there that he noticed, among a host of miscellaneous files, a file entitled “genprg”. Being a computer geek, acronyms were second nature to Tee. To Tee's experienced eye “genprg” read ‘genetics program’. When he attempted to access the file he was met with the highest level of

encryption. It was obviously a very high security and important file that was being hidden in plain sight.

While 'genprg' could have other meanings, Tee's money was on it referring to the AGEH project because of the tremendous security. The unfortunate thing was that he had no way of getting access. As he thought of who might have access to such a file he thought that somehow it would have to tie into accounting. Even if Simpco was actually keeping two sets of books, there would have to be a point of contact somewhere. You don't make billions of dollars without counting the pennies and keeping track of everyone who owes you, whom you owe and whom you own.

A few days past without any opportunity to see either the genprg file or anything in accounting. He hadn't been at work an hour when he received a call from John Hollander's office. Hollander was well up the proverbial food-chain and would most likely have access at almost every level.

Tee had no idea how much John Hollander knew about computers. He could start bluffing and Hollander would see right through him. That could be deadly, but he didn't really have any other option.

"Come in and sit down," Hollander motioned at a chair as he returned to his telephone conversation. Tee sat where instructed and waited.

"This damned computer is giving me fits," said Hollander when he got off the phone.

"What's it doing?" Tee asked.

"It's what it's not doing that bothers me." Hollander replied.

"Please explain," Tee said.

"Every time I try to work on some documents I get a message that says there has been an error and it won't let me continue."

If Hollander didn't know the most simple of jargon – 'error code' – then the chances of him seeing through any of Tee's bluff was probably quite remote.



Hollander went on to give Tee a detailed explanation of what was happening. Tee realized that it was probably very easily fixed but this was a chance to see inside “genprg”. He gave Hollander a long involved and totally bogus reason that he would need to have access to the files he uses.

“I don't look at the files, but I can't make things communicate if I only have access to one side of the conversation.” Tee concluded.

Hollander had sat listening and pondering. Tee was waiting for pointed and difficult questions. Hollander's expression suddenly changed, he threw up his hands and said “whatever! Just get it fixed!” He jotted down his user identification and password.

“Don't take that piece of paper with you.” Hollander said over his shoulder as he headed out the door. “Put it in the shredder when you're done. Just have that damn thing working by the time I get back.”

“Yes, sir!” Tee replied.

Tee found that the problem was actually a user error that was easily corrected by a few simple instructions to Mr. Hollander. He then turned his attention to the genprg file. Tee smiled as he looked at Hollander's password. Most large corporations require employees to change their password on routine intervals. Like other people who don't like to continually come up with and remember new passwords, Hollander's password was deltacompany301. ‘Deltacompany’ probably referred to a military unit to which Hollander had been attached and 301 was the number of times he had changed his password.

Tee had hit pay dirt. The genprg file was the definitive AGEH documentation. There were records, projections and analyses related to running the mountain installation. There was a file on Drs. Ronald and Teresa Smith and one on the AGEH project. Among the documents in the AGEH file was correspondence with an organization that procures organs for transplant. The only thing that Tee could think of to bring together an organ transplant organization and a security company with a secret AGEH

project was much more than Tee would have imagined. Was Simpco selling the organs of the AGEHs?

Tee heard Hollander talking to his secretary and backed out of the files quickly. When Hollander entered the office Tee smiled and told him that the problem wasn't as bad as it could have been. He gave Hollander a few tips to avoid having it happen again and left making sure that he handed the slip of paper with the security information to Hollander.

As he walked down the hall, Tee's mind was racing. He had just had access to everything Muriel and the AGEHs needed but he didn't get a copy. Of course, he thought, he didn't even have a chance to read them nevertheless copy them, and had he made a copy there was no way to get it out of the building. He had to figure out a way to copy those documents and get them out of the building.

At lunch Tee hurried around the corner and called Muriel.

"It's been an interesting morning," Tee said, hoping that Muriel would catch the subtly. "I was hoping that I could see you after work this evening. Are you free?"

"I'd enjoy that," Muriel replied. "That little place we met last time was really nice. How about we go there again."

"That sounds great," Tee said. "Seven?"

"Great. See you then."

It was set. Muriel had realized that he had important information for her. They would meet at the Starbucks at the Swedish Medical Center.



This time it was Tee who was waiting when Muriel arrived. The moment was a bit awkward. Muriel wondered if she dared give him a hug or kiss, or was that now taboo. Unbeknown to her Tee was struggling too. His heart leaped when he saw her. He knew that she cared about him but he could understand if her crusade and her AGEH family took priority. As

they came close they both compromised. They hugged but nothing like they would have liked thereby giving each other a false signal.

Before Tee could tell Muriel what he had found she suggested that they go for a walk and go somewhere where he could tell everyone at the same time. Muriel lead the way out the door. She saw Jaime as they turn east on Jefferson Street. He nodded. The two walked quietly to 19th street where they turned north and walked to Cherry Street. Tony was standing by the bus stop sign. "Good evening" he said with a smile, tipping his hat. Muriel smiled. That was the signal that they were not being followed. They turn east and walked to 20th. Street where they turn back south.

The silence felt awkward to both Tee and Muriel and by the time they had walked another block it was becoming almost unbearable. Each in turn attempted to start conversation without any real success.

"How's your father doing?" Tee asked.

"I don't know." Muriel answered.

"Oh?"

"The last time I saw him was when a radiologist sneaked me into the CT scan lab at Harborview. That was the morning we met back at the Starbucks. Simpco keeps him under constant observation."

"I'm sorry," said Tee.

"Thanks. I was so angry with them when I learned the truth about the mountain and the AGEHs that I didn't think I'd care." Muriel looked up. Tee was looking down. His face was soft and understanding. He held out his hand. Muriel took a hold of it. They continued a short distance in silence.

"I'm glad you decided to help," Muriel started. "It means a great deal to us all."

"I know. That's why I did it."

"We would have understood, you know," Muriel said. "We didn't think about your family depending on you."

"That's okay," Tee said with a smile.

"But you're right. If anything would happen to you it would destroy their futures."

"I've got it covered."

"How can you cover something like that?" Muriel was trying to read the calm and confident smile.

"I took out insurance."

"You what?"

"I was worrying so much about what might happen that I didn't see the obvious solution. Insurance. Life insurance."

"Life insurance?"

"Yes, I should have done it as soon as I got out of school. I don't have to make Clarence Simpson angry with me to die. So I took out the largest life insurance policy I could afford and put my parents as the beneficiaries. I even got an accidental death rider. So if anything happens to me they'll have the money for my brother and sister. I just hope that the insurance company doesn't call getting killed by Simpco suicide. There's a two year suicide clause."

"Don't talk about such things!" Muriel had never had such a conversation and it was extremely uncomfortable. She didn't want to think about Tee dying. She didn't want anyone to die.

Tee laughed. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make a joke of it."

"No," said Muriel, "I just have a hard time talking about dying and such."

"After what you've been through?"

"Up until last May I was a sheltered young girl who didn't have a worry in the world and never thought about such things as death and dying."

"Reality and the ugliness of the world came at you awfully fast, didn't it?"

"Yes," Muriel said. "and sometimes I wish it hadn't."

"I can't blame you for that."

At 20<sup>th</sup> and Jefferson Danny was leaning up against a light pole. That was his sign that no one was following. So far so good. From there they continued south on 20<sup>th</sup> Street to Adler Street and then west on Adler to 17<sup>th</sup>. Harris was standing at the bus stop looking at his cell phone. Tee recognized Harris but didn't say anything since Harris didn't speak to them. Harris' cell phone was another all clear sign so Muriel lead Tee north on 17<sup>th</sup> Street straight back toward the entrance to the hospital. Tee could see the hospital in the distance and looked at Muriel questioningly. Muriel just smiled.

At one time in history this was probably a very expensive neighborhood. Most of the houses were two story homes and many of them were quite large. They all sat well back from the street. Now the neighborhood was predominantly rentals, some not very well tended. Tee suspected that because so many of the yards were in need of some gardening.

About half way to the hospital Muriel indicated a house on the west side of the street. Tee had to look carefully even to see a house. The lot was much more heavily vegetated with several large trees and numerous large bushes surrounded by a very old privacy fence that was in desperate need of repair. Tee could just make out the large two story house sitting, like the others, well back from the street. Its dark brown color made it blend in with the foliage, especially at night. While Tee had never seen the movie Nightmare on Elm Street, he knew the basic story and, he thought to himself, this looked like a place Freddy Krueger would like.

"We're here," she said.

"Is this where you live?" Tee asked.

"Yes," said Muriel. "It's time for you to meet the rest of my big brothers."

"Talk about getting taken home to the family," Tee laughed. Muriel gave him an elbow in the ribs.



Harris entered the house just moments after Muriel and Tee. Danny, Jaime and Tony were sitting in the living room. Tee recognized them from their walk and looked at Muriel. "Just to be sure we weren't followed," she explained.

Harris, coming up from behind, patted Tee on the shoulder, extended his hand and said, "Glad to see you, and thanks!"

Tee wasted no time in telling the group what he had found. It was when Tee got to the part about the organ transplant organization that the faces in the room went ashen.

"They never took organs from us when I was there," Danny said. "I'd have known."

"No," said Harris, "but what about those who died?"

"Oh, my God," said Muriel. A look of total horror and disgust contorted her face. "After all they put those people through they added further insult by selling their organs! My parents are bigger monsters than I thought. And I was beginning to feel sorry for him!"

"Muriel," Harris tried to calm her, "we don't know . . ."

"Don't know!" Muriel almost screamed. "My father said that their backer wanted something and was pushing hard. He meant Simpson was pressuring them for organs. And then he said he had what they wanted but it wasn't ready."

"I'm sorry," Tee said, "but Harris is right. Your parents might have been forced. You yourself said that they appeared frightened."

Danny changed the subject. "This file has everything we need. How can you get it?"

"I don't know right now," said Tee. "The place has very tight security. We go through scanners going in and out. We're pretty closely checked."

"Could you send it to us by internet?" asked Tony.

“No. The file would be far too big and all email is monitored.” Tee paused. “These guys are paranoid.”

“I guess when your business is doing it to others you expect that others are attempting to do it to you,” said Jaime.

“I just need a little bit of time to figure out a way to copy the file without getting caught, and successfully get it out of the building.” Tee was thinking out loud.

“In the meantime,” Harris said, “there is a couple here in Seattle - Frank and Mary Fallworthy - who have a neighbor and good friend who works for the FBI. I'll get a hold of Frank and Mary and see if they can recruit their neighbor.”

After more brainstorming Tee noticed the time. “I've got to get to work early. I'd better leave.”

Muriel said she would walk him back to his car. Tony put a damper on any possible non-business activity by insisting upon tagging along as security. As the three of them started out the door Harris was already on the telephone calling Frank and Mary Fallworthy.



While Muriel was walking Tee to his car, Jaime received a telephone call from Stacy.

“I'm sorry to bother you, Jaime,” There was the distinct sound of fear in her voice.

“What's wrong?!” Jaime responded to her fear.

“There's a man here whom I think is following me,” said Stacy.

“He's a local, but I don't think he's ever given me a second look. All of a sudden no matter where I am I look up and there he is. . . and he's always looking at me.”

“Okay,” Jaime said. “Stay somewhere safe. I'll call Bells and we'll get someone out there to pick you up right away.”

“I've already tried Jason and Rhonda. They're gone for the week.”

“Oh,” Jaime's mind raced looking for ideas. “Then I'll come and get you. It's going to take several hours. Is there somewhere safe you can stay?”

“My cabin should be safe. I don't know if he knows where I live. If he's a bounty hunter he might just be trying to see if I'm an AGEH. I should be okay at home tonight.”

“Don't take any risks!” Jaime insisted. “If you even think there might be a chance that he will try anything, go somewhere safe and give me a call.”

“Okay,” Stacy sounded less frightened. Perhaps it was knowing that Jaime was coming or perhaps it was because she was beginning to feel silly making such a fuss. “It's probably nothing. Most likely just my overactive imagination . . . I mean with all of the bounty hunter business.”

“Let's not take any risks,” Jaime said.

“I'm glad you're coming. And thanks!”

“No problem. See you in a few hours.” Jaime pushed the end-call button.

Jaime explained the problem to the others. Tony lets him use his car since the likelihood of getting a rental at that late hour was probably nonexistent. He threw a few things in a bag and started off toward Shingletown. It was a 621 mile trip. Most of it was going to be on interstate so he should be able to make it in 8-10 hours.

Until south of Olympia, Interstate-5 is almost always inside a city limits or at least within sight of a sub-division or commercial area with numerous interchanges that, on the GPS device, looked like a child's scribble. Jaime marveled at the type of mind that could actually perceive such complexity.

He settled back a bit as the terrain became more rural. The traffic became much lighter until, in the early hours, it might be several minutes before he encountered another vehicle. However, from the moment he



hung up the telephone Jaime worried about Stacy and he had to fight off uncountable attacks of terrifying imagination.

The trip was long and uneventful. Jaime arrived at Stacy's cabin at about 6am. Once he stepped out of the car Stacy came running to meet him. She stopped short of a hug, but for a brief, elated moment, that's what Jaime thought he was going to get. Not that that wasn't what Stacy would have liked to do. In fact, that is exactly what she had fantasized several times during the long night, but at the last moment she was afraid that he wouldn't respond the way she wanted. She was afraid of being disappointed and rejected. Jaime let his disappointment go and was satisfied holding her hands and soaking in the warmth of her smile. Anyone watching would say that they were "love-struck", but they couldn't see it. Guess they were too close.

Stacy had a suitcase packed and ready but offered to make Jaime some breakfast. Jaime, very tired and very hungry, politely turned down her offer.

"Let's get you out of here first," he said. "We can get something to eat back by I-5 and then maybe stop to rest at a rest stop farther north. We need to put some miles between Shingletown and us."

Stepping out onto the porch, Jaime noticed that the hood of his car was up. Then a voice came from behind them.

"Leavin' already? You jest got here."

Jaime and Stacy turned to face a short, balding man with a scruffy beard, dressed in flannel jacket and jeans, and carrying a Remington 7400. It was the .30-06 high powered, long-range hunting rifle but it was not the auto-loading model. Even though neither Jaime nor Stacy were hunters, you can't live and work on a mountain without knowing rifles. The Remington is very deadly but not meant for close quarters.

"What do you want?" Jaime asks as he raised his hands.

"Bounty," said the man casually.

"Bounty for what?"

"You devils."

“What makes you think we're devils?”

“Your eyes,” said the man as he indicated for Jaime and Stacy to go back into the cabin.

“What about my eyes?” Jaime said, exaggerating opening his eyes.

“Well, hell, you ain't one of them. But she is,” waiving the rifle toward Stacy. “I seen her eyes and her devil's mark. You're jess some sort o' conspirator.”

“Who's going to pay you to kill us?”

“I don't know their names.”

“I see,” Jaime felt that the man might be easily confused and upset when he realized that he didn't have any evidence that he would get paid. “so they just told you that they'd pay you.”

“They put out a bounty.”

“Do you need to take them our heads or just some sort of proof that we're dead?”

“Well, I, uh . . .” the man was definitely getting frustrated.

“Have you heard of anyone getting paid yet?”

The man's frustration boiled over. “Shut up! I'll figer all that out later. Right now you get inside.”

“So you're going to risk the electric chair without being sure you're going to get paid?” The man started to raise the butt of his rifle, but Jaime continued. “You're no dummy. If I were you, I'd get at least half the money up front. That at least gives you some get-away money. They did give you a telephone number or something, didn't they?”

The man was furious but silent. It was as though a very dim light had come on. He had been suckered and he was beginning to realize that even though he couldn't admit it to his captives. He was sure that there must be some explanation.

“Where's your phone?” he demanded.

Stacy pointed. The man dialed and listened.

“Jerry?” the man said. “This is Buddy. I got one of them devils.” There was a brief pause. “Yeah. The girl who runs Bell's outfitters. How da we get paid? I'm not killin' nobody and not get my re-ward.” Another brief pause. “Okay. I got them at her cabin.”

Buddy looked back at Stacy and Jaime. “I guess we're going to wait for a while.” Buddy had Stacy tie Jaime to a chair.

“Follow my lead,” Stacy whispered as she tied Jaime's hands behind the chair.

“Now tie the rope around your wrist,” Buddy instructed, “sit down and put your hands behind the chair.”

Stacy knew that if he got her hands tied there was no hope. She also knew that he only had one shot and it would be difficult to get that off with any accuracy in close quarters. She knew what she had to do and it had to be done quickly. As she tied the rope around her right hand she suddenly and quickly stood up. As she rose from the chair she grasped it with her right hand and started swinging it with every ounce of force she could muster. Buddy threw up his hands to protect himself. The chair hit Buddy in the left shoulder and he staggered backwards trying to regain his balance and get control of his rifle. At this point he was directly behind Jaime. That is what Jaime was waiting for. Jaime stood up and pushed backwards with all of his might slamming Buddy against the wall. Buddy still had his rifle but he was definitely stunned. Jaime was on the floor amidst broken pieces of chair working feverishly to get free. He didn't have to worry. Stacy was on the attack before Jaime hit the floor. Stacy kicked hard, kicking Buddy between the legs. He screamed in agony. As he bent over in pain Stacy brought up her knee to meet his face. He crashed to the floor. There was silence.

Jaime stood looking at the unconscious man. Stacy threw her arms around Jaime and began to sob. He held her tight and stroked her long blond hair.

“Are you okay?” he finally asked. Stacy just shook her head as she kept it pressed against Jaime's chest. “Why are you crying? You were amazing. Where did you learn that?”

“Too much television?” Stacy looked up at Jaime and smiled.

“Well, we'd better get him tied up and get out of here.” said Jaime. “Who knows how long it will take his friend to get here.”

Stacy and Jaime bound Buddy with duct tape, grabbed Stacy's suitcase and Buddy's rifle and started out the door. A quick look in the engine compartment as Jaime was closing the hood told him that they weren't going anywhere in that car. Buddy had made a mess of the engine wires.

Looking around they spotted Buddy's truck. It would have to do. As they got near the truck they heard the sound of vehicles in the distance. There were no keys in the truck. Buddy had probably put them in his pocket which would mean that they were back in the cabin.

“I should have thought of that,” Jaime scolded himself.

“You weren't expecting to use his truck,” Stacy reminded him.

A quick look around the truck did, however, produce a box of ammunition for the Remington rifle. Jaime stuffed the box into his jacket as they hurried back to the cabin.

“We have two choices,” Stacy said. “We can stay here and try to fight him off or we can hide in the mountains.”

“The other way of looking at it is that if we stay here someone is probably going to get hurt worse than Buddy,” Jaime replied. “If we leave we're going to have to hike out. If we stay we could take Buddy's truck.”

“We don't know how many of them there might be,” Stacy added. “What are the odds that Jerry won't bring a couple of friends?”

“Yeah,” Jaime agreed, “and what are the odds that we'd get very far in Buddy's truck before half the county is looking for us?”

They stood a moment and looked at each other. They knew what the other was thinking. They both knew more about surviving on a

mountain than living through a gun fight. "The mountain," they said simultaneously.

It took only a few minutes to put together two packs. Stacy didn't have much food except energy food for trekking and the energy gels and bar she kept in her backpack. She didn't have a tent so they took a tarp that they could use to make a shelter and plenty of rope and climbing gear. There was only one sleeping bag, but that would have to do. Stacy grabbed a few pairs of socks and a heavy coat. Jaime was able to wear Buddy's jacket but not his boots. He had made the trip in a pair of moccasins. He smiled at Stacy. "Well," he said, "they were good enough for my ancestors." They knew they were running out of time if they were going to put any distance between themselves and whoever might be arriving soon. As they rounded the cabin and started toward the mountain they heard the sound of multiple vehicles. Jerry had not come alone. They scurried up the slope behind the cabin and disappeared into the trees.

As they moved quickly through the forest they made their plan. They knew that if they were to go toward a main road they could easily be tracked and run down by the bounty hunters. Their safest course was to get as far as they could by going cross country. Stacy suggested Chaos Crag. It was harsh, unforgiving terrain but it made it as hard to track someone as it did to cross.

Chaos Crag was almost due east. The middle crag was about 8300 feet in elevation. It was going to be a climb. Compared to the roads, going cross country was the hypotenuse of the triangle. After some hours of trekking they came to the Manzanita Lake Campground. They thought about stopping at the campground store but decided against it. It would take time and they didn't know how much time they had. If the bounty hunters caught up with them when they were in the store, it would draw innocent people into the line of fire. Their only hope was that they were better mountaineers than the bounty hunters.

It was mid-afternoon by the time they reached the steep ascent of Chaos Crag. They were tired. They had been moving at almost a run since they left the cabin and Jaime had not slept for almost 48 hours. Unfortunately they had no idea whether or not the bounty hunters were following them and, if they were, how far behind they were. It seemed reasonable to assume that they would be following. Firstly there was the matter of a possible \$25,000, and, secondly, the bounty hunters should be concerned about Stacy and Jaime going to the authorities and reporting Buddy. Buddy obviously believed that Stacy was the horrible creature Simpco wanted him to believe she was, and there was every reason to believe that Buddy's friend, Jerry, was equally convinced. Unless they were going to just go away and let Buddy possibly face being arrested for assault, they would probably try to catch Jaime and Stacy both for a share of the bounty and to silence them. In either case it was paramount that they keep vigilant.

Finding a sheltered recess along a ridge that looked down on the trail from the campground, they stopped to rest. They could see anyone coming for at least a half mile. Stacy broke open her supply of energy food. They each had had a couple of bags of energy gels and some water as they trekked, but now it was time to rest and eat. Fortunate for them, Stacy had just made a big batch of pinole which she had the forethought to toss in when they were gathering supplies.

Pinole is an energy food that was used by the Indians in what is now Mexico and Central America that predates the Spanish invasion. In fact, the native name means traveling food. It is finely ground corn meal, honey, cinnamon and Chia seed. Some Indians would mix it with water and make a drink, but most would use a small amount of water and make a paste that could easily be eaten on the run. The Spanish noticed the great use of Chia and, possibly correctly, believing it to be an ingredient that was giving the Indians greater stamina, made it illegal to grow. Growing Chia was, in fact, punishable by death. Today many of the more primitive tribes continue to make pinole, and many ultra-marathon runners - runners who do races of

50 miles or more - still carry pinole. The famous Tarahumara Indians of north-central Mexico, considered to be the fastest ultra-marathon runners in the world, do not leave the house without their pinole. Stacy liked it because it was easy to make, very nutritious and great for trekking.

The two of them nibbled on pinole and sipped water, looking out over the barren landscape of the side of Chaos Crags. The sweet corn flavor of the pinole tasted good and it wasn't long before they began to feel rejuvenated. They were just below the saddle between Chaos Crags Middle and Chaos Crags South. It was a good position because they could cut through the saddle and be not far from the Lassen Peak Highway.

It wasn't long before they saw figures moving toward them. Jaime used the sight of Buddy's rifle to get a closer look. There were three men. Each was dressed similar to Buddy; i.e. jeans, bright colored wool flannel jackets, heavy trekking boots and Carhatt ear-flap caps which are very popular among those who live and work in the mountains. Each was carrying a high powered rifle with long range scope. Jaime noticed that they didn't have any bags or backpacks. That meant that they didn't have supplies for any long period of time, that they would have to seek food and water or face dehydration after such a long trek and they would only have what ammunition that they could carry in their pockets. Without thinking, Jaime touched the pocket of his jacket to be sure the box of bullets was still there. As he watched one of the men pulled out some binoculars and scanned the mountain. Before Jaime could warn Stacy to get down out of sight Jaime saw the man with the binoculars point directly at them and raise his rifle. Soon came the report of three rifles firing. Dirt and rock were kicked up near them as the bullets impacted the mountain just above their heads. If Jaime and Stacy had any doubt that these were Buddy's friends, that doubt was eradicated.

Quickly Jaime and Stacy moved farther up the mountain. They had to find a good hiding place that was also a good defensive position. Besides being out gunned, they didn't want to kill anyone. These guys were just being

used by Simpco. If you could talk to them you would probably find that they were sincerely convinced that by killing Stacy and Jaime they were doing a great public service.

Even in the summer time it starts getting dark early in the mountains. It was too dangerous to attempt to outrun the bounty hunters. Not only was the terrain very dangerous but there would be places along the way that they would be easy targets for the experienced hunters with high powered rifles and scopes.

Almost two hundred feet further up the mountain they found a spot which had only one access.

“You know we're going to have to fight,” Jaime tried to sound calm.

“Yes,” Stacy said peering over a bolder into the valley and watching the progress of the three figures approaching.

“I was thinking that, if I could just wing one of them,” Jaime was thinking out loud, “they might turn back. They'd have to go for help.”

“That's awfully risking for the best marksman,” said Stacy. “The shock of getting hit by that .30-06 could be enough to kill a person.”

“True. But what other option do we have?”

They both sat silently watching the progress below.

“If I wait too long I'll lose the light and they'll gain the advantage of darkness,” Jaime continued.

“Okay,” said Stacy.

“I'm really a pretty good shot.”

Jaime lay down and steadied the rifle on a rock. There was no sense of air movement, which was actually rather unusual but it was a late summer afternoon. Through his scope he could see the three men clearly. They stood out against the very light color of the rock behind them. Jaime decided that he would be safest to attempt to shoot a leg. That way, if he kept the shot low enough and he was off a bit he would at least not hit the torso. He should either hit the lower leg or miss. At least that was the plan.



Carefully Jaime tracked his target. He was aiming for the first man. If he was the group alpha and Jaime was successful in wounding him, the others might be even more inclined to take him and turn back. Carefully tracking them as they moved, keeping his cross-hairs on the first man's lower legs, his opportunity came. They stopped moving. It took only a second or two for Jaime to put the cross-hair on the man's calf and squeeze the trigger.

The loud crack of the rifle echoed across the valley below and Jaime felt as though he had been kicked in the shoulder as the recoil of the high powered rifle slammed into him. The man on the path far below fell and a blood curdling scream could be heard. Jaime had obviously hit his target. A barrage of bullets peppered the wall of the mountain around them.

Once there was silence Jaime looked through the scope to see what was happening. He could see one man behind a bolder with his rifle aimed at the mountain. A second man was bending over their wounded comrade. The wounded man was thrashing around on the ground. The man who was probably attempting to administer first aide, had him by the leg. Jaime couldn't see any detail, but if he had hit the leg squarely, the high powered bullet would most likely have shattered the fibula, tibia or both. If he was too high it would smash the femur or knee. In any case, the man had to be in extreme pain, have tremendous bleeding, would probably pass out and needed to be taken immediately for medical attention. Jaime watched. For a short while there was no movement save the man hovering over the wounded man.

Jaime couldn't believe what came next. While the second man tended the fallen man's wounds, the third man started moving toward them. He watched as the third man moved quickly up the trail. A short while later the second man was helping the wounded man lean up against a large bolder and was also heading up the path. It didn't make any sense. They had to know that they were easy targets. What made them think that Jaime wouldn't shoot again?

Stacy and Jaime watched in disbelief as the bounty hunters approached. Since they were now a fair distance apart, Stacy came up with the idea of ambushing at least the first one to arrive. Before he had a chance to be aware of Jaime's presence behind a bolder she could step out briefly and attract his attention. Jaime would then attempt to knock him out.

As they were going over their plan and looking for a good spot a shot rang out. It didn't hit anywhere near them. Looking back down the mountain side the man farthest up the mountain evidently thought he saw them. He was standing with his rifle to his shoulder. As they watched he fired again. This time the mountain responded with a rock slide. Tons of rock slid down the side of the mountain above the two men. They both started running down the path but they were being pelted by rocks and dodging boulders. Being farthest up the mountain, the man who fired the shots was the first to succumb to the power of the slide. Hit in the back by a rock the size of a large beach ball he lost his balance and fell off the path and down the steep mountain side. A few moments later the other man fell on his face on the path and disappeared under a pile of rock and boulders. In minutes it was over. Stacy and Jaime watched in horror.

Without any discussion the two began to hurry down the mountain toward the landslide. They knew that the man who went off the path was dead. No one could survive falling from that height. But they might be able to save the man who fell on the path if he was just buried under the rock and not crushed.

As they ran down the path shots rang out. They pressed against the mountain wall behind a boulder. Using the rifle scope Jaime looked down the mountain. The man whom he had shot was sitting with his rifle. Since he was intent upon killing Stacy and Jaime he must have thought that they were returning to kill him. There was no way they could get to the buried man without being in this man's line of sight. Frustrated, they attempted to call to him, but he didn't answer, or maybe wouldn't answer. They had no

choice. Carefully they began to move up the mountain leaving the bounty hunters behind.

If the wounded gunman wasn't going to allow them near, there wasn't anything Jaime and Stacy could do for him. They definitely weren't going to risk their lives further. Turning northeast, they made their way up into the saddle between Chaos Crag Middle and Chaos Crag South. Within an hour Jaime had found a crevice cave that would provide protection. They were physically and emotionally drained.

For a long time they just sat without moving or talking. They just sat. Finally Jaime got up and began to explore the shallow cave.

"This is a crevice cave," he said as he peered into the darkness.

"How did you know it would be here?" asked Stacy.

"They're usually found on or near cliffs or steep slopes. And this is a volcanic formation. In volcanic regions like the northwest, circumferential crevices formed around the volcano craters and calderas. As time passed some of those crevices became crevice caves, like this one. The crags are an ideal place for them. I was just lucky that I found a nice one so soon."

"If you hadn't told me, I'd have thought you knew exactly where it was," Stacy teased as she began looking through their supplies. "It looks like pinole, dried fruit and energy bars again."

"That's okay. I just wish there was some wood for a fire," Jaime lamented. There wasn't anything but rock for quite some distance around them.

"I've got a few heat packs in here," Stacy said holding up a plastic package labeled 'instant heat'.

"Hopefully it won't get that cold in here."

Jaime sat back down beside Stacy. They finished the pinole and ate some dried fruit. They drank very little water to conserve it for the trek they faced in the morning.

They only had the one sleeping bag. Trying to be chivalrous Jaime offered to have Stacy use the sleeping bag and he would use the Mylar

blanket and tarp. Stacy pointed out that that was not only uncomfortable but inefficient. They needed to conserve energy and body warmth. They needed to sleep next to each other. The sleeping bag was big enough for two therefore they needed to share it. She was so matter-of-fact about this that Jaime didn't have time to get embarrassed.

They looked around for the 'softest' hard spot they could find. Once a suitable spot was found they used the tarp as a ground cloth and unfolded it enough that they could fold it over them. This would be like having a tent. The tarp would help retain heat. They put Jaime's jacket at the foot of the bag for extra foot warmth and used Stacy's coat for a pillow.

Jaime was removing his shoes and ready to slide into the sleeping bag when Stacy stood up.

"Be a gentleman and look away," she said.

"What?"

"I can't sleep with this prosthetic on," she explained. "It would be horribly uncomfortable, and I'm hoping we're safe enough that I can take it off."

"Oh, sure." Jaime turned and faced the cave wall. He could hear the zipper and was aware of Stacy removing her pants. Now he felt uncomfortable.

In a few moments Stacy gave him permission to turn around. She was sitting at the top edge of the sleeping bag folding the empty pants leg. Next to the sleeping bag her prosthetic leg was lying on a Mylar blanket. She carefully wrapped the leg and put it close to the sleeping bag. Once Stacy had finished they slipped into the sleeping bag, pulled their backpacks near, laid out two heat packs in case they needed them during the night, and pulled the remainder of the tarp over them.

It was dark and quiet. They were very close and there's no doubt that both of them were exceptionally self-conscious. They both said 'good night' in voices that said 'I'm afraid to speak. I'm afraid to move. I'm afraid to think about how close you are.' If they had at all been reading the other

person's body language - rigidity based upon fear of what they wanted - they would have put that together with the sound of the simple 'good night' and known that they wanted to embrace.

Jaime lay there desperately wanting to take Stacy in his arms. He wanted that so desperately that it physically hurt. He wondered if she could tell. What was his body telling her?

Stacy was so distracted by her own thoughts; by her own desire to be held, to hug and kiss the man next to her; that she didn't notice. She had been so drawn to him from the moment they met that she had spent countless hours thinking of him, of how she might be with him. Now here was an opportunity that she had never fantasized. And what was she doing? She was lying there, she thought to herself, so stiff that he probably thinks she doesn't want him near.

Jaime too had spent a lot of time thinking about Stacy. Every time he thought of her he smiled at the way he had been caught admiring her when they first met, and more times than not a snicker passed through his group of friends if he mentioned her name. Everyone else seemed to know. Did Stacy know? Would it be so inappropriate to put his arm around her or offer his shoulder for her comfort?

It was Stacy who finally broke the silence. "I've been told that I snore," she said. "If I do, just poke me."

Icebreakers don't have to be clever or sophisticated. This one sure wasn't, but it was enough. "Sure," said Jaime raising his left arm, the arm nearest Stacy, and put it above her head. She didn't need any more than that. She's a genius you know but that didn't take a genius to understand. They turned toward each other and embraced.

As they embraced and kissed there were no words. There would be plenty of time to talk later. Now they just needed to hold each other.



Back in Seattle Muriel, Harris, Tony, Danny and Tee were beginning to get anxious. It had been almost 24 hours since Jaime had left for Shingletown. They knew that he would not have any cell tower in the mountains, but they didn't think that he should be out of contact that long. If he had decided to stay with Stacy for a while and hadn't bothered to call them from a land line, they were going to be very angry with him. None of them, however, actually believed that that was the case. They were worried that something had happened.

Tee was on the computer when their worst fears were realized. A news story made the wires.

**Shingletown, CA.** Four more deaths attributed to mystery bounty.

A young woman and three men are presumed dead and one is seriously injured in what appears to be yet another of the mysterious bounty attacks. From what authorities can determine, Stacy Smitty, the manager of Bell's Outfitters near the Lassen Park entrance, had a male visitor when they were attacked by three men identified as Jerry Drewy, Abel Rass and John Grimbly all from Shingletown. Police found blood from the victims and one of the attackers in Ms. Smitty's cabin where there were signs that the couple had been tied to chairs and that there had been a struggle. At least one person was injured. It is being hypothesized that the couple worked free when there was only one man guarding them, overpowered him and fled. Witnesses at

the nearby Manzanita Lake Campground said that they saw the couple "almost running" toward the Chaos Crags followed closely by three men with rifles. The witness called police who found Jerry Drewy with a wound to his left leg at the bottom of the crags. He reported that there had been a rock slide during which Rass was pushed over the side of the mountain and Grimbly was buried. At this time only Grimbly's body has been recovered. There is no signs of the couple. Authorities continue their search but there is growing fear that they too are buried in the landslide. Drewy said that they were trying to catch the couple for the \$25,000 bounty. His rifle had been fired several times. Authorities believe that he might have caused the slide. Drewy is in the hospital in good condition. He will be detained by police for questioning following his release.

Muriel screamed. Her body went limp. Tee caught her before she hit the floor. He sat on the floor cradling her as she sobbed hysterically. Tears were running down his face and he looked helplessly up at the others who were gathered around them. They too were in shock.

It was Danny who was finally able to speak.

"The article said that there is 'growing fear'," he pointed out. "There is evidently no evidence that they were caught in the land slide. The survivor only saw his friends get hit. Let's not give up yet."

Muriel knew that he was right. Even the authorities hadn't given up yet. Jaime and Stacy were good mountaineers. They knew how to survive. Nevertheless the pain in her stomach bespoke her fear and her sense of loss. She was closer to Jaime than anyone in the world. She couldn't imagine life without him. He was family. The thought of him being dead was unbearable. So while she acknowledged the validity of Danny's words the pain continued. She found herself gasping for air and sobbing as Tee held her tight - rocking back and forth in an effort to comfort her.

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The next morning it was Jaime who awakened first. Stacy was still snuggled against him with her head on his shoulder. He smiled and decided to lay back and enjoy the moment for as soon as they got up survival would take precedence. Stacy shifted slightly as Jaime closed his eyes and allowed himself to go back to the land of dreams.

They were both startled awake by the sound of a helicopter. Jaime stepped to the entrance of the crevice cave careful not to expose their position. Flying low - almost at eye level to their position - a police helicopter was searching back and forth through the saddle. While Jaime was watching the helicopter, Stacy had put on her leg and joined him.

"They're looking for us," she said matter-of-factly.

"Yeah," Jaime replied. "It's a good thing we found this cave or they'd have us."

"I wonder if there are hunters on foot out there too."

"I wouldn't doubt it." Jaime turned and faced Stacy, "The problem is that we don't know if they're trying to arrest us or rescue us."

"It doesn't really matter. It would be bad both ways."

"That's true," said Jaime reaching in his pocket and pulling out his cell phone. "I just wish we had cell tower so I could call Muriel and the others." He looked at his phone. "Oh, my God!"

"What's wrong?"



"It's broken!" He said. "My cell phone is busted." He held the phone up for Stacy to inspect. She could see the crack that went across the screen and the spot where the case was separated.

"Can you use it without a screen?" Stacy asked.

"I don't know." He attempted to turn it on. There was nothing.

"Don't worry," Stacy consoled him. "We'll just have to wait until we can get to a pay phone."

"That would be fine if I knew their telephone numbers," Jaime said in a disgusted tone of voice. "I don't know any of their telephone numbers. I just always push speed dial."

"Well, I'm a mountain girl. I don't have a cell phone and I know Bell's number," Stacy put her hand on Jaime's shoulder. "We'll just have to camp out until they get home."

Stacy looked over her shoulder at their packs and added, "We're going to have to get some food."

"I'm more worried about the search parties." Jaime had turned his attention to the valley below. "I'm going to climb up higher to see if I can get an idea whether or not there is a search party heading our way and, if so, how far away it is."

"Okay," said Stacy. "I'll get us ready to move."

Jaime carefully poked his head out of the crevice cave and looked around like an animal checking for danger before leaving its borrow.

Surveying his surroundings Jaime came to the conclusion that if he were to climb to the top of the ridge opposite their cave he should be able to see much of the west side of the mountain. He figured that it was the better part of 100 feet and there was no cover, but he had to look. They couldn't risk starting out and running right into a search party.

The terrain was barren and rocky. Jaime had to pick his way carefully, but once at the top the view was magnificent. He couldn't help but take some time to admire the beauty of the panorama below.

To his south was the majestic, snow-covered Lassen Peak. It was so massive and strong that it gave Jaime a sense of security and strength. Before him a lush green carpet lay running up to the foot of the mountain. He could see the side of the mountain where the landslide had buried the bounty hunter. Even with powerful binoculars it wasn't easy to see, but it did look like there were people there. He scanned the mountain, following the ridges that were the only ways to ascend. He could see no people. If they were searching for them they were focusing somewhere else.

Returning to the crevice cave Jaime found Stacy packed and ready to go. She handed him a small bag of dried fruit and a power bar. He started unwrapping the power bar.

"I couldn't see any signs of a search party," Jaime said as he tore back the wrapper. "That doesn't mean that they might not be out there."

"The helicopter hasn't been by for quite some time. That's good," said Stacy.

"Well?" Jaime looked at Stacy. "Which way do we go?"

"We can't go back to Shingletown."

"That's a given."

"We can either go north or south." Jaime cocked his head as though questioning Stacy's stating the obvious, but Stacy continued unperturbed. "If we go south we will run into highway 36 that takes us southwest. We'd end up in Red Bluff, well south of Redding." She paused. "If we go north toward Old Station we could cut across country to Round Mountain which is on highway 299 which takes you right into Redding."

"It sounds like north it is," Jaime popped the last bite of his power bar into his mouth and picked up a pack.

"It won't be too bad once we get off the mountain," said Stacy picking up the other pack. "If we go northeast from the east side of this saddle we'll run into highway 89. It would be easiest if we could go north on 89 for a while. Just before the switchback we can head northeast again and should run into highway 89 again near Old Station. Sugarloaf Peak is a

good landmark. It rises about 1,000 feet above Old Station. There's a campground near there called Hat Creek."

"You think we might pick up some work?"

"Could be. There are scads of tourist this time of year. I know the area and you know the science . . . we should be able to get some work."

The beauty around them and being in the mountains they loved helped Stacy and Jaime forget their dilemma. They chattered and talked as they made their way down the mountain with Jaime, to Stacy's delight, going off on long 'lectures' about the formation of the mountain and what they were seeing. They soon lost track of time.

When they arrived at the highway they decided to go ahead and follow it so that they didn't have to traverse the difficult terrain around Raker Mountain. There was a fair amount of traffic, but they were definitely tourist. The nice thing about them being stranded in this area is that no one thinks a thing of people hiking. They hiked along highway 89, waving at passing tourist, until they could see Sugarloaf Peak in the distance. There they again set off cross country.

It was mid-afternoon when they came to the highway near Hat Creek campground. They had been having so much fun that they didn't realize that they had been trekking for over five hours.

They stopped at the campground store to get some staples. Jaime had a crumpled up \$100 bill tucked into a corner of his wallet. He kept it there for emergencies. He guessed this qualified. The campsites cost \$30 a night, so that took care of any idea of toilets and showers. They did, however, invest in some toilet tissue and toiletry items they hadn't thought about when they were packing. Beans, instant potatoes and similar items that wouldn't require refrigeration were to be their entrees. Jaime picked out a small hatchet, Stacy decided that a collapsible water bucket would be good and they got a cheap camp cooking kit.

As they stood at the counter a newspaper caught their attention. The front page was about them.

Noticing them looking, the proprietor said “dang shame, isn't it?”

“What?” said Jaime trying hard not to show his shock and fears.

“That young couple,” said the proprietor. “Having somebody break in on you and then chase you into the mountains where you get buried in a landslide. And for what? A bogus bounty?”

“Is that another one of those bounty hunter killings?” Stacy asked.

“Yeah,” said the woman behind the counter. “Sure nasty business. Don't know what they're after.” She paused and looked at her cash register. “That'll be 53.48.” Jaime laid the paper on the counter. “Plus another fifty cents.”

Jaime smiled and handed her the \$100 bill.

“Woah, that the smallest you've got?”

“Sorry!”

“Where you two from?”

“We're from Seattle. We're students at University of Washington.”

They talked a bit more about the poor couple from Shingletown. Obviously the world thought they were dead. That was good news as far as having search parties looking for them, but bad news in that their friends were going to think they were dead.

Stacy and Jaime headed uphill again, making their way toward Sugarloaf Peak in search of a place to camp. It would have to be far enough away and far enough off the beaten path that they could leave it set up and actually have a fire. It also needed to be near water, unless they wanted to carry water from the campground below. It didn't take long to find the seclusion they needed but it took a lot longer to find a place that offered some natural protection.

They finally found a spot where there was a wide ledge and the sheer wall of the mountain had an overhang that would protect them from the weather. Less than 30 yards away was a spring flowing from the side of the mountain. They weren't going to find anything better.

Setting out with the hatchet he had bought, Jaime cut some small trees. He wedged them into the opening of the overhang so that they enclosed the area under the overhang. Then they tied the brown and silver tarp to the trees with the silver side facing in. They put branches against the tarp which served not only to hide the tarp but to give more insulation. The summer temperatures in this area ranged from 40 to 80 degrees so the nights could get really chilly. Because of the slant of the overhang, they would be able to build a fire protected by the overhang and the smoke would be able to escape without filling their sleeping area. Keeping the fire under the overhang would also keep it from being visible very far away.

Jaime started a fire. He continued to work on their shelter while Stacy prepared their first hot meal in almost three days. Jaime cut branches and gathered leaves which he covered with one of the Mylar blankets to make a soft place for their sleeping bag. Stacy had bought the makings for pinole and made up a batch before starting on the culinary delight that was to be their dinner - instant mashed potatoes covered with black beans. At least they didn't have to skimp on the water this night. The fresh mountain spring water made everything better.

After cleaning up, the two sat gazing into the fire. If they didn't have to hide and if their friends didn't think they were dead, this would be perfect, Jaime thought. He reached his arm out to Stacy. She moved close to him, put her head on his shoulder, and the two enjoyed the stillness of the mountain evening as they watched their fire die.

In the morning they had to go find work so that they could raise the money to get to Redding or survive until Bells returned from their business trip - whichever came first. They wondered, as they talked, what was happening in Seattle. Jaime told Stacy about Tee finding out about the sale of AGEH organs and Harris trying to get a couple to recruit an FBI agent. He wondered if they were having any luck.

## CHAPTER SIX.

In life, one's nemeses and enemies often seem larger, more powerful, more dangerous, more ominous and more frightening than they really are until one is ready and willing to physically face them. It is then that the person sees another human being with feet of clay. Muriel and the others, while not backing down from the inevitable confrontation with Clarence Simpson, still visualized him as a bigger than life leviathan capable of unimaginable destruction and death. Muriel had no idea what the man even looked like. None of them had bothered to look at a picture. There didn't seem to be any reason. However, as Muriel thought about this heartless and malevolent excuse for a human being, she realized that he had become larger than life and the more they struggled against him, the more that fallacious image grew. She realized that she was partially responsible for this perception when she portrayed him as Goliath in the David and Goliath story. She began to believe that if Clarence Simpson were to prevail it would be, for the most part, because they did not keep the man in perspective. He was perceived by most as indestructible and all-powerful, and that's exactly how he wanted to be perceived.

Muriel couldn't help but to think of the movie Wizard of Oz. Everyone assumed that the wizard was all-powerful but all people ever saw was the smoke. Once they actually saw the wizard his power over them, created by fear, ceased.

She knew that Clarence Simpson was really quite powerful. She knew that he was unbelievably ruthless. She would not underestimate him. At the same time she felt they had begun to visualize a legend and not a real man. She sat looking at an article in the newspaper. Clarence Simpson was going to be a speaker at the Mercer Chair of Political Science Lecture Series at the Xavier Auditorium of Seattle University. She had to go and see this man for herself.

Obviously there was no telling anyone, especially Tony. There would be no way the others would allow her to go, even if it was just to get a look.

The lecture was in two days, so she had to act quickly. It didn't take her long to plan how she was going to get in and out without being spotted, but she had to buy some clothes and accessories to make it happen. She talked Tee into taking her to a mall. Like most men, even the most attentive, Tee was unable to keep his attention on shopping and soon started looking for the nearest chair or bench while Muriel shopped. She had actually never shopped before in her life, but she knew what she needed.

Getting away to the lecture was much more difficult. Muriel left a note saying that she had to do something personal, was okay and would be home in a few hours. She slipped out the door with her bag when no one was looking.

Muriel went to the hospital where she changed her clothes in a women's restroom. She went in a brunette with brown eyes and came out a blonde with green eyes. She was dressed in very popular clothes that looked like every other college girl and carried a large monk's bag. A general description of her would match almost every blonde on campus, or so Muriel hoped.

The sense of fear did not begin until she got off the bus across the street from the auditorium. The reality of what she was doing was beginning to sink in. However, she consciously thought, 'this fear is why I'm here. I want to see the real man.'

Her plan was that she would sit at the back and slip out before Simpson finished speaking. They wouldn't think of watching for her there. Simpson's men would be certain that she would never get that close.

The auditorium was designed for orchestra concerts not lectures, but the Mercer Chair of Political Science Lecture Series was a major academic event and the auditorium which seated almost 3,000 people was almost filled when Muriel sat down.

Soon Dr. Randall Klug, Mercer Chair of Political Science at Seattle, approached the podium to the applause of the audience. He wasted no time in introducing Clarence Simpson. The introduction made Simpson appear like a really great person, which had the effect of making Muriel harbor some rather strong negative feelings toward Dr. Klug. She had to remind herself that Dr. Klug probably didn't really know Clarence Simpson, and, if he did, he wasn't going to say anything bad.

Simpson was a good-sized man. Muriel figured that he must stand at least 5 foot 10 inches tall and was well over 200 pounds. His hair was quite short. It was the type of haircut she saw in pictures of soldiers. It was a bit hard to tell with the stage lights, but it seemed that he was greying at the temple, and he pulled a pair of reading glasses from his inside pocket along with his speech. With the glasses, she thought, he definitely didn't look like a Goliath.

Even from where she sat she could tell that his suit was expensive. It hung perfectly from his stocky frame and had four buttons on the coat sleeve. She couldn't remember where she learned it, but somewhere she had learned that you can tell an expensive suit from the number of buttons on the coat sleeve. Three or four buttons were a sign of an expensive suit.

Off to the side of the stage Muriel could see the guards wearing their black 'hey-I'm-a-Simpco-undercover-agent' suits. They never looked at their boss but constantly scanned the audience.

Simpson's speech was just what Muriel expected and it took all of her self-restraint not to jump up and challenge him right there. He, of course, did a lot of flag waving and talked about how his company was saving the lives of American soldiers and how thankful the US government was to have them. Thankfully his speech ended before Muriel's self-control.

She was about ready to leave when Dr. Klug ask for questions. Muriel froze in her tracks and looked around. She noticed microphones scattered throughout the auditorium. 'No. That would be a silly thing to do,' she thought with all intentions of walking out the nearest exit. Students



began to line up behind the microphones. The next thing Muriel knew she was standing in the nearest line.

No matter what the question, Simpson seemed to turn it back to, ‘you need us for national security.’ Muriel was working on how she could ask a question that would make these students look more deeply at Simpco – look past all of the red, white and blue propaganda.

Muriel heard Dr. Klug say “microphone four.” She realized that she was standing at microphone four.

“Mr. Simpson,” Muriel started. “I’m Sara Forester, a poly-sci major at Bellingham Community.” She paused to give herself one last moment to put the words in order. “I can understand why you would not mention this evening that Simpco has had more law suits, complaints to State Department by friendly governments, and investigations into excessive force than all of the other DOD contractors put together. What I would like to understand, from a political science standpoint, is how you were able to navigate such legal challenges without as much as a censor?”

Simpson held his hands above his eyes in an effort to see Sara Forester. “I bet you’d like to see me,” Muriel thought with satisfaction. Even though he would undoubtedly be successful in side-stepping the question as he had done so far, she had put Goliath on the defensive.

“Young lady,” Simpson started with a stern fatherly approach, “I don’t know where you got your information . . .”

“Government archives,” Muriel interrupted.

“Well, Simpco has been an integral part of the defense and security of our great nation for many years.” He went on to wave the flag and spout emotional patriotism. Muriel enjoyed watching him squirm.

“That’s all well and good,” Muriel kept on the pressure, “but many good and patriotic companies have lost government contracts for lesser charges or offenses. I’m really interested in how your company survived when others didn’t.”

That was more than Simpson could handle. "I think we need to move along and let others get a chance to ask questions," he said attempting to appear as gracious as possible.

Muriel moved away from the microphone totally satisfied. She had seen and even spoken to the man who had put a bounty on her life. She wished that the others could have been there to see. Yes, he was powerful but he was still a man and he could be rattled. "That's probably one of the dumbest things I've done in my life," she was thinking to herself as a broad smile crossed her face, "but it sure was fun!"

As she started out of the auditorium she noticed the reception being prepared. She had already gone far beyond her plan. She stood a moment looking as the university staff sat out drinks and snacks. Did she dare?

It was almost twenty minutes before Clarence Simpson entered the reception hall. There was an immediate line to speak to him and Muriel was at the front of the line.

Stepping in front of Clarence Simpson, Muriel did feel like David standing before Goliath. He was physically bigger than he had appeared but also older and heavier. Even a \$1,000 suit doesn't hid being out shape. He held out his hand. Muriel shook hands. Simpson's smile faded a bit when he recognized the student who had made him so uncomfortable.

"Sara Forester . . . Bellingham Community." He said with a humorless smile. After her question he wasn't going to forget her name and school. "Somewhere in the back of that maniacal cranium," Muriel thought, "he was probably already plotting what he might do to punish her for publically pointing out his transgressions."

"Yes, sir." Muriel did her best to smile.

"You were very pointed in there."

"Actually I thought I was very civil in the way I worded my question."

"How's that?"

“I could have asked if you really believe that your interpretation of national security takes precedence over fundamental human rights and life. I know some of your victims.”

Simpson’s faux smile disappeared completely. Muriel’s smile was real, not because she enjoyed talking to Clarence Simpson but because she had so obviously hit a nerve and he was having trouble with a rebuttal.

“But I must apologize, Mr. Simpson,” Muriel continued, “there are many other who wish to meet you. I’m so glad I had the opportunity to meet you.” She turned and walked away.

Once she had disappeared into the crowd Muriel headed toward the exit and the nearest women’s restroom. When she left Simpson, she had purposely walked in the opposite direction she intended to go. As she changed directions, she tried to get a glimpse of Simpson. When she did she saw him whispering to one of his guards who immediately started off in the direction she had gone.

In the restroom Muriel got into the large monk’s bag she had brought. She got rid of the blonde wig and replaced it with a red one that looked like a coed who had been messing around with hair color and screwed up. Her eyes went from green to brown and her clothes looked like something a student would wear knocking around campus, not attending a prestigious lecture series – a t-shirt, worn jeans, and sandals.

As quickly as she could she got out of the building. As she was walking toward the bus-stop she saw two of Simpson’s goons. She had no choice but to walk past them. It was an unavoidable risk. They had the sidewalk almost blocked and trying to go around them might draw more attention to her.

“Excuse me,” Muriel said walking up behind the men. The two men grudgingly stepped to one side so that Muriel could pass. They gave her a brief glance and then went back to scanning the surrounding campus.

Muriel stood with the others at the bus-stop. The Simpco men never gave her another look. She could see them talking and gesturing in anger.

She could only imagine their conversation. They had lost her and were probably talking about how they were going to explain that to Clarence Simpson. She relaxed and smiled as she took a seat on the next bus, which, she was pleased to note, was going in the opposite direction of home. She rode it a few stops and then changed so that she could make her way home.

She knew that she was going to be in trouble with the others. It had been a very risky scheme but it had served the purpose intended. No matter how powerful Clarence Simpson was, he was still human and therefore capable of being defeated. Granted, it was a simple skirmish on neutral ground but she had definitely drawn first blood and Simpson's pride was clearly damaged. Psychologically that generally causes the person to become more aggressive. That is definitely not a desirable thing when you're dealing with a person like Clarence Simpson. However, it also tends to cause the offended person to be more impulsive and not take as much time thinking through their moves – hence more likelihood of mistakes. They will often start fighting the battle with their emotions instead of their brains.

When she got back she gave a detailed account of her adventure. While it didn't seem to lessen their anger with Muriel, the others could not help laugh and clap with glee at Muriel's description of Simpson's attempt to side-step her question and the look on his face when she said "I know some of your victims." She didn't like the others being angry with her, especially Tee, but she had to admit that the opportunity to confront their adversary was worth it.



While Muriel was being chastised by Tee, Harris, Danny and Tony, the Simpco guards were being reprimanded by Clarence Simpson. That had to be much worse.

"What in the hell happened in there?" Simpson demanded as soon as they were in the limo and headed to the office.

“What do you mean, Sir?” asked one of the guards.

“I mean that little girl who made such a fool of me in front of a couple thousand people must have been Muriel Smith!” Simpson screamed.

“But, Sir.”

“But nothing!” He rolled his eyes up in anger and frustration. “I knew something was up with that question but I didn’t think she’d be so brazen as to actually walk up to me.”

“You mean she’s an AGEH?” asked one of the guards.

“Where have you been, Johnson? Haven’t you paid attention to anything that’s been going on.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“That had to be the AGEH that the Smith’s raised as their daughter. She’s a damned genius. She helped the AGEH’s get out of the mountain.” He leaned back against the leather seats. With his head against the head-rest and looking at the ceiling, he spoke to himself as much as those around him. “I should have known when that bitch showed up in the reception line. I should have had you grab her right then.” He paused. “And then she says ‘I know some of your victims.’ She might as well have stuck out her tongue and said ‘I’m Muriel Smith and you can’t catch me.’”

“What do you want us to do, Sir?”

“Start looking harder.” Simpson appeared almost resigned. “They know how to stay under the radar. We’re not going to find them until they make a mistake. And when they do, that little tart is mine. She’s going to beg me to die.”

## CHAPTER SEVEN.

Recruiting help was always a risky business. If the person you're attempting to recruit isn't totally convinced or has a problem with AGEHs or isn't as trustworthy as you thought, you have a big, big problem. Now, with a \$25,000 bounty on your head, it was even more delicate and the stakes higher. Harris thought about how much easier it was when he was the Watcher and would recruit people to help AGEH's start new lives. The worst thing that they could imagine happening was getting caught and sent back. The idea of being killed never occurred.

Frank and Mary said that they would be happy to try to recruit their friend.

Robert Henderson and his wife, Lisa, spent a lot of time with Frank and Mary. They had been friends and neighbors since both of them were young couples just buying their first home and starting a family. Now they had teenagers.

Robert had been a field agent with the FBI since the Fallworthy's first met Lisa and him. He never talked much about his work. He had always said, "there are things I can talk about and things I can't talk about. So to avoid making a mistake and talking about something I'm not supposed to, I just don't talk about work." It made sense.

Frank and Mary had invited the Henderson's over for the evening. After a nice dinner they sat around sipping on wine and talking.

"Do you know a company called Simpco?" Frank tried to ask casually.

There was a long pause. Robert looked shocked. "Yes. Why?"

"We've got some friends who are having a problem with Simpco."

"Man, those guys are bad news," Robert said. "your friends don't have a problem. They're in serious trouble."

"Is Simpco that bad?" Frank asked.

“Let's put it this way,” Robert lowered his voice as though he was telling a secret and afraid someone would hear. “I think the Joint Chiefs are afraid of Simpco and for good reason.”

“You're kidding,” said Frank.

“Not in the least. Simpco has been investigated for excessive use of force countless times and the governments of every country in which they operate have asked for them to be removed. But Washington keeps paying them. 'National Security' is always the reason.” There was a brief pause. “They're kind of like one of those stories about the person who creates a monster to defeat their enemies and then can't control the monster. Simpco's such a monster.”

“So my friends are in really deep trouble?” asked Frank.

“I hate to say it but they might as well bend over and kiss their asses good-bye.”

“Robert!” his wife reproofed.

“Well,” he said, looking at his wife, “It's true. I'm really sorry for your friends.”

There was a long silence. Then Robert spoke.

“Okay, what kind of problem do your friends have?”

“We've been friends for a long, long time, right?” Frank starts.

“This doesn't sound good.”

“It isn't,” said Frank.

Frank and Mary told the AGEH's story finishing with the great escape, the killing of the people in the van, the \$25,000 bounty and the file Tee found. Robert and Lisa Henderson sat and listened.

“That sounds like Simpco,” Robert said when the Fallworthys had finished. “That sounds just like them. So I'm guessing that you're telling me because you want me to try to get the Bureau to do something.”

“No. We're just looking for an ally inside the system,” Frank stated honestly. “We know that no government agency is going to take on a

company the likes of Simpco without proof. Like you said, even the Joint Chiefs are probably afraid of Simpco.”

“Okay, and ...”

“And,” Frank concluded, “we'd like to ask you to help us investigate Simpco to learn who they've got in their pockets in Washington, and who might love to get some dirt on them. We're working on getting the proof, but we don't want it to disappear or get buried.”

“Frank, I hate these guys,” Robert said. “I hate mercenaries in general, and Simpco is at the top of my s-list. At the same time I'll admit that I'm afraid of them too.”

Robert looked at his wife, Lisa, then back at his friends.

“You're telling me that you have untrained kids in there trying to mix it up with Simpco?” he asked.

“Yes,” said Frank. “The inside person is a 22 or 23 year old IT.”

“Oh, my God. They're dead.”

“They don't feel they have a choice. There have already been at least three people killed for the bounty - maybe more - and only one of them was a AGEH. Simpco has every lunatic in the country hunting down AGEH's, but they're killing anyone with different colored eyes. They know that it is just a matter of time before Simpco finds them, so they have no choice but to try to get something on Simpco before Simpco finds and kills them.”

“Okay,” said Robert. “I'll see what I can find.”

“Thank you!” both Frank and Mary said, “Thank you so much!”

“So how did you get involved with these AGEH's?” Lisa Henderson asked.

“Well,” Mary said looking at the family room where their teenage children were watching television. “Do you remember when we adopted Becky?”

“Sure,” said Lisa and Robert.



“Did you ever notice her eyes?” asked Frank. Their friends looked puzzled and then glanced in at the children who, being aware that they were being watched, turned and said “what?”

“Becky wears a contact now,” Mary continued, “but she has different colored eyes.”

“And a sun burst birthmark,” Frank added.

“And she's a genius,” Mary finished their sentence.

Lisa and Robert Henderson sat speechless. Finally “Becky?! How!”

“Becky's cancer was actually discovered when she was still in the mountain,” Mary Fallworthy started. “Since they didn't have the facilities to treat it, the scientists were just going to let her die.”

“The man from whom we got Becky said that they didn't usually try to get children out because it is so dangerous but they didn't have an option,” Frank interjected. “But Becky was a trooper. She made it over the fence as well as the long, hard climb over the mountain.”

“Remember,” Mary continued, “just before we told you about adopting Becky we went on a trip to the mountains with the Rollins?”

Robert and his wife nod.

“Well, it turns out that they are a part of a network to help AGEHs who escape. They weren't able to take Becky and they thought of us. Since we already had two children just a bit older most people would just think she was our third child.”

“They approached us, very much like we're approaching you, and asked for our help. We went way up the mountain to a small cabin where we met Becky. She was beautiful and happy, but you could tell that she was frail. We immediately fell in love.”

“The man, whom they call 'The Watcher', told us about her escape.”



“Becky was just eight years old.”

Larry was sitting in the dayroom when Becky came through the door. He knew that she had been to the lab. She wasn't feeling well and the doctors had called her to the lab to do some tests. She looked upset to Larry.

"Hey, Becky," he said cheerfully, "how'd it go?"

Becky didn't answer. She started crying and ran to her room with Larry close behind. They had to stick together in here, and everyone looked out for the young ones.

"What's the matter?" Larry asked as he sat down on the edge of the bed next to the sobbing child.

"I'm going to die," Becky blurted out as she started sobbing harder. Her body shaking.

Larry didn't know what to say. The only thing that came out was "what?!"

"They said I'm going to die." The frightened, weeping child turned over and looked up at Larry. "They said I've got cancer and I'm going to die."

By this time others had come to the young girl's aide. Larry looked up at Olivia, an older teenager. "Stay with her. I'm going to find out what's going on." Olivia took Larry's place on the bed. She held Becky tightly and stroked her head as Larry grabbed a broom and headed out the day room door.

As Larry stood near the door to the laboratory pretending to be sweeping he could hear two of the scientists arguing.

"No that wouldn't work either," the first scientist was saying with a twinge of anger in his voice. Larry identified the voice as that of Dr. Vandermann.

"I just don't feel right," the second scientist, whom Larry identified as Dr. Rosen, said. If anyone was arguing for Becky, Larry knew that it would be Rosen. Definitely not Dr. Vandermann.

“Don't feel right about what?” A third scientist, Dr. Rogers, interrupted. Dr. Kurtis Rogers was a senior researcher and was the immediate superior of both Dr. Rosen and Dr. Vandermann.

“We did some tests on the little girl named Becky and found bone cancer,” explained Dr. Rosen.

“So?” said Dr. Rogers.

“So, we can't treat that here,” Rosen continued. “I say that we should try to find a place to do a bone marrow transplant.”

“And I said,” Dr. Vandermann interjected, “that we can't take the risk.”

“But she'll die!” exclaimed Rosen.

“So?” Dr. Rogers didn't seem too concerned about what Dr. Rosen obviously saw as a dilemma. “You could always try doing the transplant here and see what happens?”

“Our chances of success are almost nil here,” Rosen objected.

“That's true,” said Rogers, “but she's going to die anyway.”

“That procedure takes a very sophisticated setting and then the patient has to be isolated for weeks following,” Rosen argued.

“We can't afford the cost or the risk of going outside,” Rogers said firmly. “Get over it. She's just going to die sooner. We've got more important problems.”

There was a finality in Dr. Rogers words.

Larry returned to the day room. His anger was evidently quite obvious.

“Whoa!” one of the AGEH's said. “What's up with you?”

Larry related what he had heard. “We need a meeting!”

The AGEH's had a group that planned for escapes. Generally escape was by age and general health - that is, the ability to run and climb the mountain once they got over the fence.

The escape group got together around the television after dinner. A football game was great cover for them to talk, although most of the guards

didn't pay much attention to what went on in the living quarters. Larry had spent the entire time from the moment he returned to the day room until then developing his argument for putting Becky over the fence. He didn't have to use it. They all agreed that despite the risks, they needed to try to get Becky out to help. The only alternative was to just watch her die, and they had had to watch too many of their friends die.

The biggest problems were Becky's size, physical condition and the fact that security was particularly high because Tonya had just gone over the fence a few weeks before.

The next morning, during exercise time, Larry used the sat-cell to call The Watcher. While the AGEHs were kept against their will and were frequently mistreated, the scientist didn't want them just sitting around like in some prison. In fact, part of the research was to watch how the AGEHs learned and functioned as a social group. The AGEHs had radio, television and computers. The computers were, of course, just hooked into the facility's server so they couldn't communicate with the outside world. The Watcher, a person who had escaped the mountain himself, lived hidden nearby. This Watcher had procured a sat-cell and left it on the inside of the fence for the AGEHs. Whenever they wanted to talk to the Watcher they dialed a number on the sat-cell, let it ring once and hung up.

Larry was waiting for the Watcher to call back. It was only a few minutes but it felt like hours. He sat with the bluetooth at the ready. When the Watcher called Larry explained the situation. As with the others, the Watcher was not in the least hesitant to attempt to get Becky out. His only concern was that she had to know that he could not come out in the open. She had to make it from the fence to the trees on her own. They decided to try the next afternoon. That would give them over a day to get ready.

Everyone was aware of how risky this escape was going to be. They had never tried to send a child over the fence. She was only eight years old and not feeling well. It was a lot to ask, but she knew the alternative. It's sad how quickly some people are forced to grow up.

The group agreed that the usual distraction probably wasn't going to work, and if it did it might not give them time to get a child over the fence.

It was Larry who came up with the idea of a second distraction.

"Look, if we have a fight or any of the distractions we've used in the past the guards are going to be on to us, so we've got to come up with something different."

"How about something happy and fun?" one of the girls suggested.

"Yeah," said another girl. "The guards like to watch us. We could give them something to watch."

"Like what?" asked Larry.

"I don't know," the girl said. "It was just an idea."

"Not a bad idea, we've just got to come up with whatever it might be that would get them to stop and watch you."

"I've got an idea," said one of the younger girls. "We could be like Jane."

"Jane?" came several replies.

"During World War II there was a British cartoon about a young female British soldier. Her name was Jane. At least once in every episode she would get her dress or uniform caught on something or somehow torn off leaving her standing there in her underwear. One of us could have our dress come off."

"Great idea, Nancy," said Larry. The other girls looked skeptical.

"Great idea to you, but you're not the one who's stripping," said one of the girls.

"Sorry," Larry apologized, "but it is a good idea. One of you who is a bit more . . . well, more . . . I mean . . ."

"'Stacked' is the word I think you're looking for," said one of the girls  
sarcastically.

"Yeah," Larry said sheepishly. "That's what I mean. In any case, one of you who is more endowed could have your dress torn off. The other girls

could gather around to shield her. The guards should work hard to get a glimpse. They might even go out to her.”

The girls gave him a look.

“Oh, come on.” said Larry. “It isn't like you'll be naked. You'll have your underwear on. Besides you know most of these guards have peeked at all of you.”

They agreed and the plan was made. Loretta, a pretty and 'well endowed' girl of 19 was going to be wearing a long dress. While they were playing, one of the other girls would step on the dress and it would rip away. Loretta was going to be standing there in her undies for a short time, to be sure to get the guards' attention, and then other girls were going to make a circle.

“Any way,” Larry returned to his second distraction idea after they had talked about how to make sure the dress ripped away, “when that happens I'm going to be at the lower end of the exercise area, short the fence and throw a blanket over the barbed wire. That's really a horrible place to go over and if they aren't trying to get a look at Loretta almost naked, they'll notice me trying to go over the fence. If they realize that the power has been cut they won't think to look anywhere else. While they're coming after me Tim and Eddie will be boosting Becky over the fence close to the entrance. She should be able to get to the tree-line before they've 'apprehended' me.”

“What if they don't notice you?” asked Loretta throwing her hip out and striking a glamor pose.

“If they don't notice me I'll see all of you on the other side.”

The group laughed. It was all set.

□□□□□

The next day was rainy. That was going to make travel in the mountain more dangerous for a young and inexperienced hiker, but it also helped to lower the visibility of the guards and dampen their enthusiasm for going out into the exercise yard.

Becky knew what to do. She had practiced many times with Tim and Eddie. She knew that once she was over the fence no matter what happened . . . no matter what she heard or saw . . . she was to run to the trees and not look back. She knew that if the guards would happen to see the Watcher no one would ever get out again.

The kids started their game. It was loud and active. Loretta made a point of yelling "Come on, let me show you how it's done." She ran into the midst of the game. A moment later a girl stepped on Loretta's dress and, as planned, it came ripping off. Loretta screamed. All of the guards looked. There stood Loretta in bra and panties looking very distressed trying to retrieve her dress. The other girls started running toward her. The guards gawked.

On that cue Larry shorted the fence and started to throw his blanket over the barbed wire. Just to be sure the guards had time to notice he purposely missed the first try. At the same time Tim and Eddie threw Becky's blanket over the barbed wire within feet of one of the guards who had been watching Loretta and just noticed Larry. They lifted Becky up so that she was standing on their up-stretched hands. She slid over the blanket, swung her legs around and dropped to the ground.

Trying to watch Becky's progress while appearing to try to escape, Larry was playing the bumbler. It took a moment for the guards to react and for a short time Larry wasn't sure whether they were going to bother with him. He started to climb but feigned getting his foot caught so that he fell back. As he lay on the ground he could see Becky disappear into the woods. The guards arrived moments later and hustled Larry into the compound. The show was over.

The guards herded everyone inside. They didn't care whether or not Loretta had regained any clothing and they didn't seem in the mood to watch her dress. They wouldn't know that Becky was missing until they did a head count.

The Watcher at that time was a young man named McKenzie, who was known to his friends as Mac. Mac was in the tree-line watching and waiting for Becky. He smiled as Loretta lost her dress and how long it took for them to notice Larry purposely bumbling his escape attempt on the far side of the exercise area. Becky was running toward him. She had done everything exactly as she was told. He could tell that it was really hard for her to run, but run she did.

Mac greeted Becky with a hug. He had a camouflage poncho for her. She was a rather tall girl for her age, but the poncho was still like wearing a tent. They quickly started up the mountain.

It was tough going for Becky and they had to stop frequently. Mac could tell that she was feeling sick but she didn't complain. It was always Mac who suggested that they rest. They had pushed rather hard until they got to the top of the first ridge. If guards were sent out that gave Becky and Mac a distinctive advantage.

Mac led the way north along the ridge toward the summit of the mountain. They would have to skirt around the northern end of a valley and onto the ridge which formed the eastern side of the valley. Then they would have to make a rather tricky descent into the valley where he lived.

With the rain, visibility was getting difficult by mid-afternoon. They were beginning to traverse the mountain at the top of the valley. It was not safe to walk side-by-side so Mac decided that it would be better for him to keep Becky in front of him and give her directions. There was a lot of loose rock. Becky stepped on a loose rock, twisted her ankle and started falling. Even as light as she was, her weight caused the edge of the path to start collapsing and falling down the mountain. Mac fell forward on his stomach and reached out and grabbed Becky. He could feel his right shoulder give. He could feel it give before he felt the pain, and the pain was excruciating.

Becky lay spread-eagle on the side of the mountain with Mac holding her by the arm. She was crying.



“Just lay still,” Mac tried to say in as calm a voice as possible. “I know it's scary, but it's going to be okay.”

He tried to ignore the pain as he rolled so that he could take hold of Becky with his left arm and slowly lift her back to safety. He sat holding the sobbing child against him with his left arm while his right shoulder burned with pain and his right arm hung almost uselessly. The only thing he could think of doing at this point was hold Becky tightly, kiss her on her forehead and assure her that everything was going to be okay.

Once Becky had an opportunity to calm down, Mac had them continue until they reached the top of the ridge. They sat quietly and looked back at the rather treacherous terrain they had just traversed. Mac's shoulder was so painful that he was afraid that he was going to faint. Becky had some scrapes and bruises but nothing serious. Even if he didn't faint, Mac knew that he would not be able to make the descent into the valley safely in this weather with only one arm. There was only one thing to do. He had to try the Milch Technique.

“Look, Becky,” Mac said, “my shoulder is dislocated. I'm going to have to do something to put it back in place.”

Becky just looked at him. He was afraid that she might be in shock.

“Do you understand me?” he asked. She nodded.

“I'm going to do something to put my shoulder back. There is a chance that I might pass out.” Becky looked frightened. “Don't worry. If I do it won't be for long. Just stay right beside me. I'll be okay. Do you understand?” Again a nod. Mac tried to give a reassuring smile.

He laid back and tried to allow the muscles around his shoulder to relax. Mac had been through this before - never, however, alone - and knew that that is an important step. He did some deep breathing and visualization. He reached his injured arm out to the side and over his head keeping the movement slow to avoid any more pain than necessary. Once he had his hand in place he started moving it behind his head and then started reaching for his left shoulder. He waited for the pop. For an alarming few moments

he thought it had not worked. Then there was the pop and a sudden relief of his pain.

He looked over at Becky who had not moved. She was looking at him and obviously trying not to cry. He could hear a soft whimper.

"It's okay, sweetie," he said gently. "That really didn't hurt much and my arm's okay now."

She nodded her head. Mac noticed that she was shivering. All she had on under the poncho was a sweater and it was beginning to get cold on the mountain. Mac decided that she would probably do better with his sweater than his jacket, so he stripped off the sweater and had Becky put it on under the poncho.

They still had almost three miles to go. Mac felt that he could manage almost anything for that time. He helped Becky down the path into the valley that had been made treacherous by the rain. Once they were on relatively level ground Mac had Becky ride the rest of the way piggy back.

Cold, tired, muddy and hurting, they arrived safely at the Watcher's cabin. Mac hadn't had a chance to gather any clothing for an eight year old girl. Despite the poncho, Becky was soaking wet. He pulled out a heavy flannel shirt and had Becky put it on as a night shirt and hung her clothes above the fireplace to dry.

She was a tired and frightened little girl. Even though freedom is every AGEH's dream, she was away from everyone she knew and loved. Mac did his best to comfort her. He had some black beans and rice. Becky ate a little. He then tucked her into his bed which he had moved a bit so that she could see the cheerful light of the fireplace. As he pulled the covers up to her chin she reached up, put her arms around his neck, kissed him on the cheek and said, "Thank you." It was the first smile he had seen. Moments later she was asleep.

Mac went to the kitchen, reached into one of the cabinets and pulled out a bottle of Jack Daniels. He kept it for special occasions because it was so expensive. Looking down at the sleeping girl and rubbing his sore

shoulder he decided that this was a special occasion. Pouring himself a couple of fingers worth, he wrapped up in a sleeping bag and sat down in the oversized wooden rocker by the fire. Savoring his whiskey as he sipped it, he started thinking about who could help him find someone to care for Becky. Making the warm, smooth drink last as long as possible, he held the glass with the last sip up in the air and quietly said “to all of you who risked so much for this little girl,” and finished his drink. Putting his glass on a nearby table he drifted off to sleep.



“Frank and I walked together for hours,” Mary continued their story about meeting Becky. “We talked about all of the potential pain and danger - Simpco could find us, Becky might die of the cancer despite our best efforts. Despite all of the reasons not to take Becky we knew that there was only one right thing to do. We told the Rollins that we would adopt Becky.”

“The plan was that we would return home and start telling friends that we were adopting the daughter of Frank's cousin - a single mother who had recently died. At the same time other volunteers were preparing the documents that we would need.”

“We had to act surprised when we took her to the doctor and they told us that she had cancer.” Frank picked up the story. “As you know it was touch and go for a while. That was probably because we couldn't take her directly from the mountain to a hospital as we would have liked to do. But she survived and has been our daughter ever since.”

The four adults looked into the family room. There were the Henderson's two pre-teens, Fallworthy's two teenagers and Becky all sitting watching television. The children again sensed that they were being watched. They looked up and almost in chorus, as before, emphatically said “what?!” The adults looked at each other and laughed.

“The schools don't look that closely at birth certificates, so their acceptance helped authenticate Becky as our daughter. She actually has a legitimate Social Security card. That's because the only counterfeit document was her birth certificate and somehow the people who handled the documents made it so if you go to the Jackson County courthouse you will find her listed as having been born there.”

“That's quite a story,” said Robert shaking his head.

“We really appreciate any help you can give us,” Mary said. “We really need to bring Simpco down so that all of the people out there like Becky can live in peace.”

“I can't even imagine what those poor people are going through,” said Lisa Henderson, looking at her husband with admiration.

“I can't promise miracles,” Robert said as a disclaimer to all of the hopeful looks. “I'm going to have to be very careful. It won't help at all if they figure out what I'm doing. That would make matters worse for everyone.” He paused as the others kept looking at him. “I know some people who don't like the mercenaries any more than I do, but we've got to keep this quiet. We can't spook them. These mercenaries are total paranoids. They spook easily.”

## CHAPTER EIGHT.

Sunlight danced around the tiny shelter directed by the sway of the branches above. It looked to be another beautiful day. Jaime hoped that it would bring some good fortune for them. It was definitely starting well. Stacy was snuggled up against him, the sun was shining, they had food and a good shelter with water nearby. He could handle this until they had to leave. He glanced at his watch. It was already after six. They really needed to get down to the campground as early as possible if they were going to catch any tourists who wanted a guide. Campground tourist have a habit of starting early.

“Stacy,” Jaime said as he gently shook her shoulder. She wiggled a little, made a sound, and snuggled her head up against Jaime. How could he not like that. “Stacy, we've got to get going,” he said with just a bit of insistence.

This time Stacy opened her eyes and looked around. She smiled and was about to put her head back.

“Stacy, the campers are going to be leaving for the day soon, so we need to get there if we're going to get any work.”

“Uh huh.” Stacy lay still for a few moments and then her eyes were wide open. She unzipped her side of the sleeping bag and reached for her leg.

“Oh, God, this thing is going to be cold,” she complained.

“Sorry,” said Jaime sympathetically opening his side of the bag and starting to put on his socks. Stacy had obviously decided that they didn't have time for modesty. She unfastened her trousers and doing a modified bridge, slipped them down far enough that she could get her prosthetic leg on and put it into the pants leg. In all, she was up and moving before Jaime.

“Do you want me to make some breakfast?” she asked.

"I don't think so," replied Jaime. "We need to get down to the campground as soon as possible."

"How about some pinole?"

"Sounds good. But let's remember to get some fruit and cheese if we get any money today."

"Ooh, yes," Stacy said. You would have thought that Jaime had suggested a five star restaurant. "That would be so good."

While Stacy threw some pinole and essentials in one of the backpacks, Jaime cut a couple of walking sticks.

"We need to encourage trekking poles, so we need to have something ourselves," he explained.

They hurried down the mountain, checking their compass and leaving themselves markers that would help them get back to their camp. As they got close to the campground they checked each other and tried to look as presentable as possible. Jaime's beard was a little scraggly, but there wasn't anything they could do about that right then. Maybe if they made enough money he could buy a razor, but Stacy had to admit that she rather liked him with a beard.

The campground was buzzing. The smell of eggs and bacon filled the air. Campers were out cooking and preparing for the day's adventures. Jaime led Stacy to the campground office. For years he had made his school money guiding campers through the mountains. Even when he was well known by those who ran the campground, he would go to the campground office and tell them that he was there and that he was going to offer his services to the campers. Of course, after doing it for several years the campground staff around his home knew that he wouldn't bother the campers. Here was a different situation.

"Good morning," Jaime said in a cheerful voice as he entered the campground office. "How are you this morning?"

"Fine," the middle aged woman at the desk looked up and returned his smile. "What can I do for you this morning?"

“My name is Jaime Lopez,” Jaime started. “My wife and I are students at the University of Washington. I’m an orology major. We’re down here studying the area around Lassen.”

“Oh,” said the woman, “that’s great.”

“Since we’re not here on a grant, we’ve got to come up with our own money.” The woman listen intently. Her facial expression showed that she was very interested in hearing what Jaime had to say next. She probably expected him to try to sell her something. “I have been doing trail and mountain day guides in the mountains up north since I was in high school. Whenever I arrived at the campground I would check in with the person in charge. They knew that I would just make the campers aware of my services. No hard sell.” He paused. “I want to do that here.”

The woman looked skeptical. “I don’t know,” she started.

“I can understand,” said Jaime. “You don’t know us. But I can promise you that I will not disturb your campers and the service I have to offer is not only reasonably priced but very much worth it.”

Still some skepticism.

“My wife can tell you all of the geological and social history of this area, and I can handle any question one might have about the mountains themselves. I can promise that, if they take one of our excursions, they will be telling their friends to stay at Hat Creek Campground.”

“Okay.” It was the advertising that probably convinced the woman. “But if I hear of you bothering anyone, I’ll have the cops here to escort you off the property tomorrow.”

“That’s a deal.” Jaime smiled and held out his hand. The lady relaxed, returned his smile, and shook his hand. “And to show you that we know what we’re doing, you are welcome to come along and see us in action.”

Jaime and Stacy headed up the rows of campers and tents. They greeted everyone along the way and told them about their tours. They offered long and short walks. For people with children they offered fun and

education. For others they focused on beauty and understanding nature. Everyone said how great it sounded but they all had plans. They were in the second of three camping areas before they got a taker.

“Let me ask my wife,” said the young man in his late 30s. As he went into the camper to get his wife, Stacy and Jaime turned to two children sitting at the picnic table. There was a teenage boy, maybe fourteen or fifteen, and a preteen girl. The boy looked extremely bored. The girl was looking at a book about the park. Before they could get a conversation started the man was back with his wife. She too was in her late 30s. They both presented as the business types. If they weren’t business owners, in sales or management, he’d be surprised, Jaime thought to himself. He went through his pitch for the woman. Both parents looked interested and would occasionally glance over at their children who were ignoring the proceedings and playing with iPhones.

“It sounds great to me,” said the woman, “but what about the kids?”

“Forced family fun?” said the man smiling sheepishly.

“Oh, Lord. That’s all we’ve had so far,” the woman lamented.

“If we can get your kids interested, would that help?” asked Stacy.

“Sure,” they said in unison.

“If you can do that, we’ll be eternally grateful,” said the woman.

Stacy headed right to the teenage boy but addressed both of them. She spoke in a soft voice that Jaime had to describe as seductive. She never talked to him like that. Of course it was also too soft for the parents to hear, so Jaime picked up a conversation with them while Stacy talked to the kids.

“We’re mountain guides,” Stacy started. “Your parents really want to go on a half-day excursion up the mountain, but they’re worried about you.”

The boy listened but definitely looked bored. The girl smiled.

“We have two choices,” she continued. “You can go along and have a really good time or we can leave you with the ranger’s day group where you can make little houses out of Popsicle sticks.”



“And why should it be any more fun with them?” said the boy looking toward his parents.

“Because I'll be with you,” said Stacy sitting down on the bench and sliding toward the teenage boy.

Jaime was watching out of the corner of his eye and saw the teenage boy's jaw drop. He didn't know what Stacy had said but he could see the boy not so subtly scan Stacy from top to bottom and his hormones go into overdrive.

“Besides,” Stacy went on, “think of the reaction at school when the others learn that you climbed a mountain with a hot mountain guide.”

The boy almost began to drool. The preteen girl started to laugh hysterically which caused the boy to act impulsively. “We'll do it!”

Stacy turned to Jaime and the parents, gave the thumbs up, and smiled. They had their first job. Jaime worked out the price with the parents. They settled on \$100. It was much less than Jaime would normally get, but, even as much as they needed the money he had a soft spot. This couple was having financial troubles. They had borrowed the camper so that they could have a vacation. They would have paid almost anything, but Jaime couldn't push for more.

The couple was Evert and Lori Norris. Their children were Billy and Tracy. Billy asked Stacy, in the most mature voice he could find, to call him Bill. Evert and Lori smiled knowingly. Evert was a math teach in San Diego just hoping to keep his job. Lori was an account executive who was suffering because of the economy and the fact that her company had done some extremely dumb things - euphemism for unethical - before the financial crisis of 2008 and didn't have the greatest reputation. Unfortunately she couldn't change companies without taking a severe drop in income. She owed her soul to the company store. They came to the mountains to truly get away but Billy wasn't making it easy. He had no comprehension of what his parents were going through.

“Since we're giving you such a deal,” Jaime said to Evert and Lori without the kids hearing, “you'll need to get your own provisions.” The couple gave a look of concern. “We'll help you. It won't be too much.”

The first thing they had to do was to get them dressed correctly and ready to go. The day-time highs in the mountains were in the high 60's, so a flannel shirt over a tee shirt should do. The biggest problem was going to be footwear. Lori and Evert had good substantial boots. Tracy and Billy had sneakers.

“You're going to need some decent shoes,” Stacy said to Billy, who responded with a grunt.

“Look,” she said sharply, putting her booted foot with the accompanying feminine leg on the edge of the picnic table almost in his face. “You don't kick ass with sneakers!”

The impact was somewhat similar to the first time a drill sergeant calls you a wimp.

At the store Jaime introduced the Norris family to the lady with whom they had spoken earlier. He explained that they were new to camping and trekking and needed some supplies for a day on the mountain. The lady beamed. This was a bonus she hadn't considered.

Stacy helped the kids pick out some reasonable 'kick ass' hiking boots. Billy was loving it. “You'll need them for the rest of your stay here,” Jaime explained to his parents. “And after he's spent the day with Stacy, you'll never get him out of them.” They laughed.

An inexpensive ruck sack, some light weight but highly nutritious food they could fix on the trail, a couple of trekking poles, and they were ready. Stacy had them get the makings of pinole and showed Lori how to make it. You could tell that Lori and Evert were extremely pleased. If they hadn't met Stacy and Jaime they could have had a horrible vacation.

Sugarloaf Peak is about 6400 feet. The campground's elevation is about 4500. If Jaime and Stacy took these people all the way up it would be a long 2,000 foot climb. There was no way. But if they could get this family

above the tree-line Stacy and Jaime were certain they would be thrilled. The plan was to get above the tree-line, eat a trail meal, and return.

As they headed toward the mountain Stacy told the family about the Lassen Park and all of the fascinating things there were to see in the area. Billy, aka Bill, was her constant companion. Since buying trekking poles for the kids would have been too expensive, Stacy helped Billy pick out a staff like hers. Jaime would occasionally interrupt when he saw an interesting geological formation. Lori and Evert hiked along looking happy and relaxed. Every time they would make eye contact with either Stacy or Jaime they would smile broadly.

As they moved up the mountain they introduced this city family to plants and animals. They discovered a spring and introduced them to totally natural water. They didn't make a big deal about the climb but suggested rest stops frequently. They broke out of the tree-line just after noon at about 5500 feet. The panoramic view was awesome.

"This would be a good place to stop," said Jaime.

"Aren't we going to the top?" asked Billy giving Stacy his most manly look.

"No," Jaime replied. "We're over 5000 feet up now and that peak is about 6,400 feet up. We don't have the time or equipment to go the rest of the way. It would be too dangerous."

"Awe," said Billy. Obviously disappointed.

"You've already climbed about a thousand feet up a mountain," said Stacy. "How many guys at your school can say they've done that? And you did it without any special equipment." Billy stood a little straighter. His parents smiled while his little sister sat mesmerized by the view.

Stacy and Jaime gave the family a lesson on eating on the trail. It isn't a picnic. It is a matter of nutrition and revitalizing your body. The family enjoyed the view and Billy enjoyed sitting next to Stacy as they ate.

Back at their camp site the Norris' thanked Stacy and Jaime profusely for a wonderful day and gave them an extra \$20. It had been an

enjoyable day for Jaime and Stacy as well. 'The Norris' were nice people and Stacy had to admit that she enjoyed being admired by Billy. 'Admire' wasn't the word Jaime would have used, but he didn't mention that. They had gone almost all day without thinking or worrying about Simpcos or bounty hunters.

They spent the \$20 tip on fruit, cheese and some other items to make their camp a bit more comfortable. They were in a great mood as they made their way back up the mountain. By their calculations, if they could get a couple more jobs they would have enough to take a bus to Redding as well as money for food and a motel if they needed. They didn't dare get into Redding and find themselves without a place to stay. There weren't any places there to camp.

Back at their campsite Jaime started a fire. Stacy fixed a heat and serve Indian bean and rice dinner that she had bought earlier. It was a feast for them. Jaime surprised her with a bottle of wine. He had slipped it in when she wasn't looking. It was just a very inexpensive bottle of local table wine, rather on the sweet side, lacking in bouquet and with a vintage figured in hours, but it made the evening special and lifted their spirits.



Stacy and Jaime ended up staying in the mountain above the campground three more days. Apart from the fact that they were finding the experience quite enjoyable, they had learned that no buses passed through Old Station. They couldn't rent a car. That was too risky. Besides the nearest car rental was in Redding. In talking to the lady at the campground office, whom they got to know as Wilma, there was a truck that delivered supplies for the store every Monday. If Jason and Rhonda weren't home by then they'd see if they could hitch a ride. Until then they were safer and definitely happier here than they'd be anywhere else.

Their reputation as guides was growing rapidly. The day before they had five families make the trip up to the tree-line. This morning looked to be another busy day. They had stopped by to say good morning to Wilma, pick up a couple of items and were heading toward the camps to organize their day's tour. They didn't even notice the man pumping gas in front of the store, but he noticed them.

When they returned that afternoon he was there waiting.

"Good afternoon," he said cheerfully approaching the two as they headed down the campground road.

"Good afternoon," they responded.

"I understand from the lady at the camp office that you're looking for a ride to Redding."

"Yes," said Jaime, then more cautiously, "we were trying to get to I-5 to meet some friends heading toward San Francisco."

"I'll give you a lift," the man said good naturedly.

"Thanks, but the friends are going to pick us up here."

"I don't think so," said the man showing them a revolver aimed at Jaime's stomach. "I think you're going to go with me."

Jaime and Stacy looked at each other.

"Don't think of doing anything silly," said the man. "I'm not as dumb as my brother, Buddy. You try anything and at least one of you is dead. Understand?" They shook their heads. "You scream, yell, or do anything to draw attention and you're both dead. Understand?" Again they shook their heads.

The man led them to his nearby car.

"You drive," he said to Jaime. "And you, Missy, sit very still in the back seat. I'm very nervous and the slightest move and ..." he waved the barrel of his gun.

The man held his gun close to Stacy as Jaime walked around the car and climbed into the driver's seat. He then kept it trained on Jaime while Stacy got in. He slipped into the passenger seat sitting sideways so as to fully

face Jaime. He handed Jaime the keys and gave him instructions to drive south to the first road.

Jaime followed instructions. They turned northeast on McElroy Road. They were heading toward the seclusion of the mountain. He had to think of something fast. It would be a very short time before they were in very isolated surroundings.

“Well, Missy,” the man said aiming his gun at Stacy. “I’m going to finish what my brother bungled. You really messed him up good. He’s got a broken nose and jaw.” Stacy couldn’t help but smile.

Jaime made a decision. He had noticed that the man did not have his finger inside the trigger guard. That meant that it would be a conscious act to pull the trigger. He looked at Stacy in the rear view mirror. Almost as if she could sense that he wanted her attention she looked up. Once they had made eye contact Jaime tugged on his seat belt strap as subtly as possible.

“Eyes on the road,” the man barked when he saw them looking at each other in the mirror.

Stacy got the message. She put on her seat belt keeping eye contact with the gunman in the hopes that he wouldn’t think about what she was doing.

“Why do you want to kill us?” she asked.

“For \$25,000 I’ll kill anything,” said the man.

“In that case,” said Jaime, “you either do it now or you’re going to die as well.” Jaime hit the gas sending the car speeding down the narrow, winding road.

“What the hell are you doing?” demanded the man.

“You kill us. We kill you.” Jaime pushed the peddle farther.

“You’re crazy!”

“No. You give Stacy the gun and I’ll slow down.”

“Forget it. Stop this car.”

Jaime stomped on the gas, jerking the car forward. Before the man could correct for the sudden acceleration Jaime slammed on the brakes sending him flying into the windshield and the car careening back and forth dangerously. Again he hit the accelerator and then the brakes. By this time the windshield was cracked from the impact of the man's head and there was blood on the dashboard. The man was fighting a losing battle to remain conscious. As the car skidded to a stop, sliding along the mountain wall, Jaime grabbed the man's gun hand and forced the muzzle of the gun toward the car ceiling slamming his wrist against the dash several times. Reluctantly the man released his grip on the pistol and slumped against the door.

Little did Stacy and Jaime know how close they had come to going over the side of the mountain. The car came to a stop just yards before a switch-back. They looked at each other, the switch-back ahead and at the unconscious man.

"Let's not do that again," Stacy said with an ashen smile.

"Deal," said Jaime.

Just ahead there was an overlook. They pulled into the parking area, got the man out of the car and wiped the blood from his face. He began to regain consciousness.

"Now, friend," Jaime said holding the revolver on the man, "you can be very grateful that we aren't killers."

The man sat glaring at the couple.

"We going to leave you here and we're going to leave your car down the road," said Jaime.

"If you say anything to the police or anyone . . . and I mean anyone else, I'll identify you and your brother. You'll both go to prison." Stacy spoke slowly and emphatically. "So keep quiet about seeing us. If we ever see you or your brother again we will not be this nice. Do *you* understand?" The man nodded.

"Do you have a cell phone?" Jaime asked. The man nodded. "Hold it with your finger tips and hold out."

The man reached in his pocket and came out with a small cell phone. He handed it to Stacy, as instructed, who was careful not to get close enough for him to grab her.

Stacy got into the back seat of the car. "I'm not sitting in that mess," she said.

Jaime waited until Stacy was settled and then made his way to the driver's seat without taking his eyes off Buddy's brother. The man sat watching them without speaking.

Jaime headed the car north to Highway 89. They decided to get rid of the car as soon as possible just in case Buddy's brother decided to call their bluff. They both knew that a local police officer would probably be more likely to believe a local man who had spent his life in Shasta County as opposed to two people with false identifications. They parked the car just off the highway on a road called Cassel Road and sat off on foot, intersecting Mount View Road which they followed westward into the town of Burney.

Fortunately Jaime had kept all of their money in his wallet. They got a room at the Green Gable Motel on Main Street. Wearing the backpack that Stacy had absentmindedly put in the car when they were abducted and plenty of road dust, the proprietor didn't seem to have any problem believing that they were hikers stopping for the night.

They were tempted just to lay down and sleep but they knew that they had to try to make contact with Jason and Rhonda. Even if Buddy's brother didn't go to the police they could count on him finding some friends and trying to track them down. Their only advantage was that it would take him a long time to get off the mountain where they left him. They cleaned up, asked the desk clerk for places to eat, and walked up Main Street to a Subway.

The first couple of tries ended in getting the Bell's voice mail, but the fourth try got an answer.

"Hello," came Rhonda's voice.



“Rhonda!” exclaimed Stacy. “It's so good to hear your voice!”

“Stacy! Stacy, is that you!” Rhonda cried.

“Yes. It's me.”

“Thank God you're alive! Where are you? Are you okay? What happened?”

“We're fine. I'm with Jaime in Burney. Can you come get us?”

“Of course,” said an excited Rhonda. “We'll be there as soon as we can.”

“We have a room at the Green Gables Motel on Main Street. Room number 21.”

“It will take us a couple of hours, but we'll get there as soon as we can.”

Jaime and Stacy had actually enjoyed their time on the mountain above the Hat Creek Campground, but this was exciting. They could hardly contain their excitement as they ate their sandwiches. It was too late to go to a grocery store. The Safeway they passed on their way into town had already been closed, so they bought some extra chips, refilled their drink cups and headed back to their motel to wait for rescue.

## CHAPTER NINE.

Elsewhere things were moving much more quickly than anticipated. Tee figured a way to get the files out of the Simpco building. When he went to work that morning he was sent to the office of the mountain installation project manager - Robert Trent. He was to be in a meeting all day and wanted Tee to have his computer running right by the time he got back.

Tee still had John Hollander's password. He knew that the system didn't care which computer Hollander was using to get access but he didn't know how often Hollander changed his password. The system default was every six weeks. He didn't waste any time once Trent had left the office. As usual the problem was relatively simple.

Each of the ITs had a laptop that they carried with them in the building. It never left the building. Tee quickly downloaded the files onto the laptop. He figured that Simpco might try to destroy any incriminating files if they thought that the feds might actually come after their computers, so he copied the files to a shared drive in the corporate server under an innocuous name and buries them deep enough that they weren't easily noticed. He was banking on them not thinking about duplicates but put three sets in different places just to be safe.

Tee was just finishing one of the duplicates when Robert Trent returned. He questioned Tee about the laptop hooked to his computer. Tee explained that they use the laptops to carry drivers, patches and other files that they might need to fix a computer in case the computer can't access the server. He went on for some time about the technical aspect of the computer system, giving Trent much more information than he wanted, and finally trying to get Trent to look at something on the laptop. Trent was not interested and by that time was getting a bit tired of this IT so he sent Tee, and his laptop containing the files Tee had downloaded, away.

As he closed Robert Trent's office door he smiled and said to himself, "no one ever want to see the good stuff."

He returned to his office and started putting his plan in place. Tee had realized that he had carried his smart phone in and out of the building every day since he was hired. They would run it through the scanner but it was looking for bugs or bombs, not files. So Tee built a program for his smart phone which contained a security program. He loaded the files behind the security program. Even if they would want to look at his phone they shouldn't see any Simpco files and he could tell them that it was encrypted for credit cards and passwords. He could even let them look inside the program without showing them the Simpco files. He was really quite proud of his work.

After loading the files onto his phone he erased them from his laptop and ran an over-write program called a shredder to permanently cover any signs of the files on his laptop.

When he was done, he went to his supervisor and asked for a few days for a family emergency. He took his supervisor's approval to the human resources department where he left a telephone number that had a Lummi prefix but which would forward to the cell phone he carried.

Even though there was no reason for anyone to be suspicious of Tee as he left the building he felt uncomfortable. He knew that the information he had in his pocket could bring this giant to its knees. If he was caught there would be no other chances.

Tee evidently looked like he felt.

"Are you okay, Mr. Mason," the security guard asked politely.

"Not really," Tee said truthfully and with a bit of a smile. "My grandmother's really sick. We were very close and I'm taking a few days off to be with her."

"Sorry to hear that," the guard said as he handed Tee the basket containing his key, smart phone and incidentals. "You take care. Hope your grandmother gets well soon. See you when you get back."

Tee smiled and thanked the guard. "That's the greatest expression of humanity I've seen since I've been here," Tee thought.

As soon as he reached his car he called Muriel. He was excited and anxious to share his success. Muriel shared his excitement and arranged to meet at the Seattle University quad in an hour.

Tee arrived a bit early. The university quadrangle, or quad, is a courtyard similar to those found in many medieval colleges going back to Oxford and Cambridge in England. The Seattle University quad is a beautifully landscaped open area surrounding a fountain. There are buildings facing into it on all four sides. Besides its beauty and calm, the quad would only take two people to stand guard due to its limited access. If anyone was following you, it would be easy to spot. As it was, Tony and Danny were already strategically stationed and called Muriel to tell her that Tee was by the fountain and that he hadn't been followed.

Muriel ran up to Tee and gave him a hug. It had only been a week since he was at the house, but it seemed like an eternity.

"It's so good to see you," she said smiling.

"Aw," Tee teased, "you just want what I've got."

"That too," Muriel blushed as she realized how that came out, even though she said exactly what she meant.

They started walking arm in arm toward the south end of the quad.

"Any news on Jaime and Stacy?" Tee asked.

"No," Muriel's smile disappeared. "Jason and Rhonda get home today. They said they'll drive out to Shingletown but there isn't anything any of us can do."

They had decided to get a cup of coffee at a nearby Starbucks. There was one on the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> and East Columbia. Ironically it was across the street from the Seattle University Law School. It was another good place since 12th Street didn't go through, so it was easy to watch from in front of the Law School. Tony passed them as they entered the shop. He had bought a cup of coffee and was taking it with him to his post across the street. Harris and Danny were waiting at a table inside. They got up and gave Tee a hug.

“What'll you have?” asked Danny, pointing at the coffee menu.

“Just a cup of coffee. Black,” replied Tee.

“A decaf cafe latte, grande with one sweetner,” said Muriel.

Danny went to get the coffee while the others sat down near a window. They could see Tony across the street sipping his coffee. There was small talk, mostly about Jaime and Stacy, until Danny returned with the drinks for Tee and Muriel.

“So,” Harris started, “tell us about your adventure!”

Tee gave a detailed account of his day at Simpco with lots of questions, oohs and awes from his audience.

“And I need to get home so that I can download this and put in on a flash drive,” Tee concluded.

“What are the chances of them discovering that you've made a copy of their files?” questioned Danny.

“Extremely slight,” Tee replied. “The only way they might realize what happened is if they check access times. Since that's separate and doesn't come up when you actually access the files, they shouldn't notice it unless, for some reason, they feel the need to check to see who opened it last. Even then it won't show that it has been copied.” Tee paused and looked at the concerned faces at the table. “I really don't think they have any reason to be worried about the safety of their files, so I don't think they're going to notice.”

“How about you take Tony with you just in case,” said Harris. “None of us should be going off by ourselves anymore.”

“Where should we meet after I get it on a flash drive?” asked Tee.

“How about the hospital near the house?” Danny suggested. “We'll be sure you weren't followed and then head home.”

“Sounds good.”

“Oh,” Harris added as Tee started to get up. “Bring your laptop with you. You should probably stay with us for a while. Remember, you're

supposed to be out of town.”

“Right,” said Tee and headed out the door.

The others watched as he approached Tony and the two headed off toward Tee's car.

“Now what?” Muriel broke the silence.

“Now we need to set up a meeting with our FBI contact,” said Harris pulling out his cell phone. Muriel and Danny sat and listened to half the conversation as Harris talked to Robert Henderson, the FBI agent who had agreed to help expose Simpco.

“He said that we should meet on the ferry to Vashon Island,” Harris told the others after hanging up. Muriel and Danny looked puzzled.

“Isn't that a lot of cloak and dagger?” Danny commented with a smirk.

“Could be,” Harris replied without smiling, “but he thinks it would be safest since Simpco has people out looking for us everywhere. He said that we have no idea the manpower Simpco is putting into finding us. If we make sure that we get on the ship without being followed we'll have plenty of time to talk before arriving at Vashon Island.”

“Okay,” said Danny. “So when do we meet him?”

“The 4:50 sailing on Friday.”



Tony and Tee called about two hours later. They would be pulling into the hospital parking garage in about fifteen minutes. Muriel and Danny walked to the corner to watch for anyone following them. They spotted Tee pull into the parking garage. They looked around. No other car entered the garage or pulled over as far as they could see in each direction. A few moments later Tee's car emerged from the garage and pulled out onto Jefferson Street heading east. Muriel and Danny watched carefully. No other car started up or pulled out onto the street behind them.

Danny called Tony.

"It looks clear," said Danny. "we'll have the garage doors open."

Muriel and Danny went back to the house and opened the doors to the garage. The property had so many trees and shrubs that once a car was off the street, it was hidden. A few moments later Tee's car appeared from Alder Street and pulled into the garage without stopping. Danny quickly closed the door while Muriel watched the street for the signs of any vehicle. There were no cars to be seen in any direction.

Tee entered the house with a laptop and small suitcase.

"I put the files on four different flash drives," Tee explained. "I figure we need to put one of them in a bank safety deposit box."

"Good idea," said Harris. "How about we mail one to one of our people in Europe?"

"I like that," Tee agreed. "If we give one to the FBI agent, who's going to carry the last one?"

"I think we need one for everyone," Danny suggested.

"Why?"

"The more copies there are," Danny explained, "the less likely Simpco is of getting all the copies and not getting exposed." He watched everyone's reaction. "It isn't like we don't want everyone on the planet to see this stuff."

The others agreed. If there were too many copies the worst thing that could happen would be that it would hit the media before they were ready. If there were too few copies, Simpco might get lucky and get all of the copies.

With great ceremony Tee opened his laptop and brought up the first of the Simpco files. The group sat for almost an hour reading through the files, commenting and talking about the effect the information would have on Simpco. These files definitely linked Simpco to the AGEH project as well as the black-market sale of human organs. If they could get their hands

on the AGEH project's research files, Clarence Simpson's entire empire would come crashing down upon him.

That night Tee and Muriel sat in the dark on the back porch. They didn't talk much. Muriel leaned up against Tee, who had his arm around her. Tee knew that she was still upset. He also knew that there really wasn't anything he could say. He just needed to be there. If it weren't for Jaime and Stacy missing, Muriel thought, it would have been almost perfect.

Occasionally she would tell Tee a story about Jaime and she growing up on the mountain. She even told him the story about kissing Jaime and feeling like she was making out with her brother.

Then Muriel's cell phone rang. She looked at the caller id. It was Rhonda Bell's phone. Muriel tensed. She held up her hand to Tee.

"Hello?" said Muriel.

Tee sat quietly and listened carefully, hoping to be able to hear. He heard Jaime's voice. "Muriel?!"

Muriel didn't hear any more. For a brief moment she cupped the phone in her hands and stared at it. Then laughing and crying hysterically she grabbed hold of Tee. "He's alive," she shouted through her tears, "Jaime's alive!"

Muriel was laughing and crying so hard that Tee had to take the phone and talk to Jaime who gave him a thumbnail version of what had happened to them. The others in the house, hearing the commotion came running onto the porch. Tee gave them the thumbs up sign. After several minutes Muriel was able to listen as Jaime repeated his story in more detail and Tee was telling the others. They were safe and, even though he was anxious to see Muriel, Jaime felt that they needed to stay in Redding for a while.

Muriel read between the lines. She had probably teased him the most about his infatuation with Stacy. "Did my big brother find romance on the mountain?"



“Sometimes good things do come out of horrible situations,” Jaime said without answering Muriel's question.

“That's great!” exclaimed Muriel. “It's been a great day! Tee struck gold, you're home safe, and you and Stacy . . .”

“Tee struck gold?”

“Yeah! He found the rock to bring down Goliath.”

“That's wonderful!”

“I'll send you a picture of it,” Muriel promised.

Tears of joy and relief began again. “I'm just so happy,” she blubbered. “You're not dead.” There was a short pause as Tee helped Muriel wipe her tear. “I love you, Jaime!” she said.

“I love you too, Muriel,” said Jaime.

“Take care of Stacy.”

“I promise.”

“Good night.”

“Good night.”

Muriel closed the phone, looked up at Tee with a broad smile, kissed him and then hugged him so tight he could hardly breathe. With a smile he tenderly enfolded Muriel.



Puget Sound is crisscrossed with ferries. There are five routes with numerous boats just to and from downtown Seattle. Tee had insisted that he take the information to Robert Henderson and Muriel had insisted that she go along. Harris, Danny and Tony learned how stubborn Muriel really was. Tony drove them to Seattle Pier 50 and watched over them as they bought their tickets and boarded the M/V Tillikum.

The Tillikum is a 310-foot, 2000-ton ferry that can carry 1200 passengers and 87 vehicles and plow the water at a respectable 13 knots. It was actually built in Seattle in 1959 and had been making the trip to Vashon

Island three to four times a day ever since. Tony watched as people boarded. No one seemed to pay any attention to Muriel and Tee, and he didn't see any black suits, but that didn't make Tony feel any better. He was opposed to the two of them going alone. He shook his head as they disappeared from view. "Kids!" he thought to himself. "Those two just want some time alone."

Tony didn't know Robert Henderson so he didn't see him board the ship. Nor did he see the two men who drove past him.

Robert Henderson had been right to be concerned but he didn't realize that Simpco had noticed his information gathering activities. The Simpco type of people give the word paranoia an entire new meaning. To survive they must assume that everyone else treat people in the same way as they do. Because of all of their illegal, brutal and inhumane activity they must be constantly vigilant lest any person in authority gets too close to the truth. For most of us the truth does indeed set us free. However, for the Simpco's of the world, the truth is a terrifying exposure of their true nature which imprisons them in a cocoon of lies, deceit, murder and fear. When someone starts asking questions, the answers which begin to paint a picture of you or your activities, you start to get nervous. At first you must follow them to see if they're a threat. If the questions continue, you must eliminate the threat. At this point Simpco was following Robert to see if he was a threat. If he was, these two men had been given orders to kill him.

The two men assigned to follow Robert were not the run of the mill Simpco agents. They were among the elite because Robert was FBI. If Robert was asking questions on official business, it would require the utmost skill to stop him. So far this hadn't seemed like an official investigation. Simpco had informers inside the FBI and they hadn't heard anything. If Robert was, indeed, investigating them unofficially, they needed to find out why before they stopped him. Ergo - the elite agents.

Actually Robert had done as much as he could to watch for a tail. In this case the two men following him were ahead of him - literally. They

had anticipated when they followed Robert to the ferry, purchased their tickets and took their car on board the ferry before Robert. He didn't see them because they were in a car.

He had given Tee and Muriel instructions to go to the news stand on the passenger deck, buy a Vashon Island tourist map, open it, tap a spot three times, fold it back up and have Tee put it in his right rear pocket. They followed their instructions and soon a rather large, balding, middle aged man approached them.

"My name is Robert Henderson," he said. "I think you're looking for me."

"Yes," Muriel smiled. "I'm Muriel and this is Tee."

"Let's find a place to talk," Robert said looking around the main passenger cabin until he spotted some rather isolated seats.

"So you're the children who are taking on one of the biggest, baddest, toughest, most dangerous companies in the world." Robert looked at the two young people sitting across from him.

"That sounds about right," replied Tee without flinching at being called a child. "You're obviously the crusty, cynical old FBI agent."

Robert smiled. "Touché."

"We've got information that can definitely bring down Goliath," Muriel handed Robert one of the flash drives.

"What!?" exclaimed Robert.

"Don't worry," said Muriel. "We've got plenty of copies."

"You're kidding me."

"Since we don't care if every person on the face of the earth has a copy, we made plenty."

"So why the secrecy?"

"Partly to keep people from getting hurt and mostly because we want to orchestrate things so that Simpco will be isolated and have nowhere to hide and no one willing to hide them."

"Okay, so timing is important. Why give it to me now?"

“We think you need to have this information. It might give you names or information to help you identify who's on the take, who's a weak link or anything else that might help bring them down.”

Muriel paused and Tee continued, “You can make as many copies as you like and leave them with people whom you feel might enjoy taking Simpco down.” He looked at Robert studying the chip in his hand. “I'm sure you know plenty of people who'd like that opportunity.”

“Okay,” Robert looked up and smiled. “So, you kids got lucky and got some good dirt on Simpco without getting killed.”

“Lucky?” That did annoy Tee. “There wasn't any luck! It was a lot of risky hard work. We have back-up systems in place and when you look at those files you will see there's no way Simpco can say that they don't belong to them.”

“Sorry. I know you worked hard to get this stuff, and I'll believe you that you have a back-up.”

“Do you have anything for us?” Muriel asked.

“Actually I do,” said Henderson. “Not a lot, but it's a start.” Henderson pauses and looks around. “Simpco has been very successful in playing the 'you-need-me-more' card. The government equivalent to outsourcing is using civilian contractors for anything from scientist and engineers to soldiers. When the economy is poor, the government can get the contractors to do anything because they're afraid of starving. When the economy is good, the contractors can demand anything. Simpco has much of the government convinced that the government needs Simpco more than Simpco needs the government. The government types are so narrow minded and myopic that this terrifies them.

“There's also the 'I've-got-the-dirt-on-you' card. This is Simpco's second most important card. Simpco knows all of the government indiscretions and where the bodies are buried. If anything can terrorize a bureaucrat or politician, this is it.

“The Simpco's of the world are experts at subtly making bureaucrats and politicians dependent. The next thing such people know they are owned by the company.” Henderson paused for affect.

“One such person is Lt. Gen. James Patterson who is in charge of security for dignitaries and others who travel in areas of military conflict as well as security for supply convoys. Of course most of the supply convoys are civilian contractors, not military.

“I don't have any proof that Patterson is on the take, but every time Simpco has been under investigation Patterson has done everything in his power to derail the investigation in the name of 'national security.'”

“Can you get proof?” Muriel asks.

“It could take a long time,” Henderson said. “But you might be able to bluff him into turning on Simpco when the time comes.”

Muriel looked disappointed.

“Hey,” said Henderson, “there's more than one way to skin a cat.” Muriel's interest is again peaked. “I found a Senator and a few Congressmen who would love to shut Simpco down permanently. Simpco can't touch them. They're powerful enough that Simpco has put out a lot of money trying to keep them from getting re-elected but has failed.”

“That's great. Thanks!” said Muriel.

When the ferry arrived at Vashon Island the three had time to walk down to get something to eat before catching the return ferry. They decided upon the LaPlaya Mexican Restaurant which is right at the end of the long pier. It was within easy walking distance and had a good reputation among locals.

It was dark as the three made their way back to the ferry. Suddenly one of the Simpco agents stepped out from behind a parked car holding a gun. A second man came from behind and pushed a revolver in Tee's back. Before either of the agents had a chance to react, Henderson stepped between two cars. This was unexpected. Henderson pulled a gun and fired

at the first man. The man fell. This distracted the second man enough that Tee grabbed him by the wrist. They struggled.

Holding the man's gun hand by the wrist with two hands, Tee held his hand straight up. Tee was larger than his opponent. The Simpco agent had no alternative other than use his free hand in an effort to control the gun. Practically holding the gunman off the ground, Tee stepped across with his right leg, putting it down at an angle behind the gunman's right leg. Striking at the gunman's face with his right elbow Tee forced the gunman to shift he weight backwards and loose his balance. Tee took advantage of his imbalance and pushed, causing the man to fall. As he did the gun went off. Tee let go and fell back as he grabbed his arm. The gunman began to regain his balance but Muriel had picked up a large stone to help Tee. She hits the gunman in the head with the stone. It knocked him off balance as he turn toward his new opponent. He was bringing up his gun when there was a crack. The gunman became almost statuary and then slumped to the ground.

Muriel ran to Tee.

"It's okay," he said. "It just grazed me."

"Are you two okay?" asked Henderson putting his gun back in his holster as he approached. They both nodded. "You two need to get out of here. We're not ready to go public with this battle, so I want you two to disappear. Make your way to the other end of the island and take the Point Defiance - Tahlequah ferry to Tacoma. I'll clean up this mess and talk to you later."

Henderson looked around. He checked the pockets of the two men and pulled out a set of keys. He pushed the unlock button on the car remote and the lights of a nearby car flashed.

"Damn that was stupid!" he said.

"What's stupid?" Tee asked.

“I didn't spot them because they drove their car onto the ferry.” He thought a moment. “Well, we're going to take them back in their car. You guys go on like I told you.”

“But what's going to happen to you?” Muriel asked.

“I'm going to have Tee here help me put them in the trunk,” Henderson explained. “I'll take them back to Seattle. I have a colleague whom I can call for help. I'll be okay. You two just need to get out of here.”

Muriel watched as Tee helped Henderson put the two men in the trunk of their car. She knew that Henderson didn't have any choice but to shoot them. In fact, if he hadn't shot the second man he would definitely have killed either Tee or her. It didn't really matter though. Her stomach still lurched. The vomit came. She felt the strong arms of Tee holding her as wave after wave of nausea pass over her. When it was over there was silence. Slowly she stood up. Tee didn't let go of her. She could see the tail lights of a car moving off down the pier toward the ferry. Otherwise, she and Tee were alone. She tried to look at Tee's wound but he insisted that they get off the pier first. They headed back to a secluded tree covered area almost across the street from LaPlaya and next to the Second Wind Café where they used Tee's t-shirt to bind his wound. It was a nasty looking wound about two to three inches long. It needed to be cleaned out and properly dressed.

The great thing about smart phones is that you're not only able to hid massive files that you smuggled out of a hostile mercenary's office but you can find anything anywhere. Tee used an application called Yelp that allowed him to find all of the B&Bs, hotels and motels on the island. As it turned out there were only six places to stay on the island. This was high tourist season so most were full but they were fortunate enough to get a room at a B&B called Artist's Studio Loft. Tee didn't even ask the price.

Tee called a cab. While they waited for the cab Tee called Harris and told him what had happened. Harris would call Tony, who was still watching for them at Seattle Pier 50, and tell him that they were safe. Tee explained

that Henderson said they should take the ferry to Tacoma. They would call as soon as they were boarding the ferry and someone would meet them there.

The cab arrived and took them to the Vashon Pharmacy in the village of Vashon. The village was not a tourist trap. At least this part of it appeared to be definitely focused on the locals. It had a definite frontier town flavor to the store fronts. It didn't take long to get the items they needed - antibiotic cream, gauze, tape and some ibuprofen for pain. They called a cab from the pharmacy. The Vashon Island cab company was either not very busy or not very large. They got the same cab.

The Artist's Loft B&B was a collection of six suites set amidst winding paths, ponds, trees and beautiful gardens. It was a paradise. An AAA Tour Book three diamond hotel, it was not the type of place you stay for the night. They did get a bit of a glance when they checked in without luggage.

"We missed our ferry and decided to take advantage," Tee told the proprietress, who gave a weak smile. The idea of the owner thinking that they were young lovers looking for a place to escape gave Muriel a sense of adventure. Well, at least it was an adventure preferable to the one they were actually having.

They were led to "the loft" in Aerial cottage. According to the proprietress it was a former artist's loft and commanded a view of the flower gardens and meadow. There was a four-poster bed, kitchenette, fireplace, and a Jacuzzi on the private deck. Robes were even provided. It was a steal for \$159 a night. Thankfully, Tee thought, his Master Card was still good.

As soon as they were alone Muriel insisted on cleaning Tee's wound. Tee removed his shirt. Washing the wound with soap and water, Muriel applied antibiotic cream and taped a gauze 2x4 over the wound. Tee watched silently. Muriel was aware of how muscular Tee was. It was something one would only notice if he was shirtless, and this is the first time she'd been



this close to a man stripped to the waist. Well, that is, except for Jaime, but he didn't count. Her hands barely stretched around his biceps. His chest was large and muscular tapering down to a six pack and slender waist.

"You work out," Muriel said very matter-of-factly.

"Yeah," Tee said, a bit embarrassed. "I confess . . . I'm into Iron Man races and ultimate marathons."

"Ultimate marathons?"

"Those are races that are over fifty miles."

"You're kidding!" Muriel exclaimed.

"No," said Tee. "I just love doing it. I'm an Indian!"

"No wonder you tossed that guy like he was a bag of feathers."

They talked about iron man races, marathons, mountain climbing and everything they loved. They probably weren't consciously avoiding talking about what had happened and what was yet to come, but they did. Tee started a fire while Muriel made some hot chocolate. Muriel held up one of the robes that came with the room and gave it a hug. Still carrying on her conversation with Tee she stepped into the bathroom, slipped out of her clothes and into the soft warmth.

"Well," she said noticing Tee smiling at her, "we might as well avail ourselves of the amenities."

"True," Tee agreed. "I just wish there was some way we could use the Jacuzzi."

"Ooh, that would be nice."

They both looked out at the Jacuzzi on the deck. It was in the 50s, so the warm water was giving off some of its heat and looking so inviting.

"We could wear towels," offered Tee.

"Works for me," said Muriel again disappearing into the bathroom and emerging with a large bath towel wrapped around her. She blushed when Tee gave her an approving look.

Within minutes the two were enjoying the warmth of the Jacuzzi. It was a beautiful night. Seattle was bright enough that it was a glow above the

trees to their north, but the quiet gardens of the Artist's Loft afforded them a panoramic view of the sky. The moon was almost full and the stars shown in all their glory.

Tee and Muriel sat side by side admiring the night sky. They weren't talking much. Just enjoying peace. If they were thinking about what had happened. If they were worrying about the next day, they didn't let on.

After a long silence Tee spoke. He was hesitant. It was that hesitancy that grabbed Muriel's attention and caused her to turn to look at him.

"You know," he said, "I was terrified this evening."

"You and me both," Muriel smiled.

"No I wasn't scared of what might happen to me," he said. Muriel looked puzzled. "when I grabbed that man's arm all I could think of . . . well, . . . all I could think of was you." Tee looked back up at the sky. There was a glint of moisture around his eyes.

Muriel didn't know what to say. She reached out and gently touched his shoulder. Tee looked at her.

"I didn't care what happened to me. I just knew that I couldn't let him hurt you." Muriel smiled as Tee struggled for words. "It wasn't heroics. It was . . ." Another long pause. "I figured it out. I love you."

Tee took her hand - the hand with which she had reached out and touched his shoulder - and kissed it. He tugged on it, pulling her toward him, all the time watching for a sign. How did she feel about him? It didn't take him long to find out. Muriel almost lunged into his arms. They kissed passionately. This isn't, Muriel thought, like making out with your brother. Her towel slipped and fell. She didn't care. For this moment the world was perfect.



It was just before 6am when the sun started streaming through the windows. The comforter on the four poster bed was warm against her bare

skin. Tee was sleeping peacefully next to her. She lay there wondering if this was just some wonderful dream mixed into the terror and nightmares that had been her life for the past weeks. Tee opened his eyes, smiled, closed them again and snuggled down under the comforter. Muriel reached out and touched him. No, she thought, it wasn't a dream. She smiled, cuddled close to Tee and closed her eyes.

By 7am they were up. There was a continental breakfast in the room that consisted of large, fluffy muffins, LaCreme yogurt, fresh fruit, orange juice, milk, cereal, coffee and tea. They enjoyed it on their deck.

"You know," said Muriel, "I do feel a bit guilty enjoying myself so much."

"Why?"

"Because we're in the midst of fighting for our lives and the lives of all AGEHs," said Muriel. "It just doesn't seem right to be enjoying anything now, but I am. I love being with you."

Tee smiled. "You don't need to feel guilty. No one knows how long a war will last, and we're fighting a war. We think it will be over in a few weeks, but that might not be true. Wars in history have gone on for years and decades and even centuries. If you didn't allow yourself to find some peace and happiness, you would soon be unable to carry on the fight."

"I guess," said Muriel.

"Where do you think they got the term R&R?" said Tee. "Soldiers must be pulled away from the battle to rest and recuperate. They must have time to escape the fear and the tension and the strong emotions or they would crack."

"You're right," Muriel smiled. Looking around "but look at this place! While the others are probably worrying about our being safe through the night, we've got this." She smiled, put her face close to his, and with a kiss said, "are you going to tell them how we spent our night?"

"Not on your life," Tee mocked pushing Muriel away.

Making themselves as presentable as possible, being the second day in the same clothes, they called a taxi and went down to the front to wait. They told a beaming proprietress how they loved their room and promised that they would return when they could spend some time.

The cab took them to the Tahlequah ferry port. It was nearly 10am. The next ferry was at 10:30. Unlike its northern counterpart, Tahlequah had no amenities. Tee and Muriel found a place to sit down and watch the cars lining up for the next ferry.

The MV Rhododendron was much smaller and older than the Tillikum. Of course they didn't have to go nearly as far. In fact, they could see Port Defiance in the distance. Muriel noticed on a brass plate that the Rhododendron was built in Baltimore in 1947.

The crossing was short and uneventful. They looked around for a place to wait. A short distance from the terminal was a restaurant - Anthony's at Port Defiance. It was an all glass octagonal building built on a pier commanding a spectacular view of Vashon Island and Mt. Rainier in the distance. Tee called Tony to tell him where they'd be waiting.

Tony arrived a short while later. Tee and Muriel convinced him to take time for some lunch. The restaurant smelled great and he needed to eat. Tony was nervous and jumpy. He definitely needed some R&R. A good meal in a calm environment was the best they could do.

Tee and Muriel gave Tony a detail accounting of the night before, with the exception of their accommodations. Tony had spoken with Henderson. Henderson had told him that if there was anyone from Simpco when he landed in Seattle they kept well out of sight.

His partner of many years met him and was now a part of the team. Henderson needed him. They wiped the car down very carefully and disposed of it.

"Cops survive by sticking together," Tony said with a smile. "If you can't trust your partner explicitly, you're in deep shit."

There wasn't anything on the news this morning about any shooting on Vashon Island or a car with two bodies being found.

"You two are lucky," Tony scolded. "Just damn lucky. I should never have let you go alone."

"No one's safe now," Tee looked Tony in the eyes. "Not you. Not me. None of us! But we were with a highly trained FBI agent last night. We were as safe as any of us is going to be until this is over. And you can't carry the burden of everyone's safety just because you were a cop."

Tony listened in silence, looking out the window but not seeing the expanse of beauty before him. He knew that Tee was right but he still couldn't bring himself to see anything out that window or in that room as anything but threatening. Maybe it was his cop instincts or maybe it was a paternal instinct. After all he had a grandson that was almost as old as these kids. Yes, he thought to himself, he called them kids. At his age he was entitled to call them kids. He felt responsible for them. He wondered if this was how a military leader felt when he took young soldiers into battle. If it was, it sucked.



Everyone knows Murphy's Law - if something can go wrong it will go wrong and at the worst possible time. Now there are those statisticians, eternal optimists and such who will argue the validity of this law and can statistically prove that it is wrong. That, however, doesn't help the everyday person who so frequently feels that the definition of morning is that time when one is forced to rise and face all of the major and minor crises, problems, inconveniences, trivial or consequential trials, and the constant stream of tests of one's character, strength, courage, resolve, endurance and sanity. That Sunday morning was proof.

Danny walked up to the Providence Market at the corner across from the hospital. It was a rather typical neighborhood corner market from

many years back, with vertical wood paneling painted a washed out yellow with white trim. There were advertisements tacked on much of the wall and bars on the windows. Inside it had that little grocery store smell which can only be described as a little grocery store smell. Perhaps it's a combination of produce, boxes and a host of products that all add their special aroma to the mix, along with the inevitable mustiness that comes with an old building in a very humid climate. Danny bought milk, bread, coffee and some locally made doughnuts. That's what he was really there to get. Doughnuts. What was a Sunday morning without doughnuts? Of course, he thought as he stood at the counter, you also need the Sunday funnies. Next to the counter was the news rack. He added a copy of the Seattle Times to his purchases.

The smell of coffee brewing brought the house to life. Everyone knew that the smell of brewing coffee meant that Danny had walked down to the Providence Market, and that meant that he also had doughnuts. Soon the dining room table was surrounded by half-awake bedheads, still in their pajamas, pouring coffee, selecting doughnuts or grappling for their favorite section of the newspaper.

For this band of warriors, who lived in the pressure cooker of constant danger and threat, such times were rare. Thankfully they weren't thinking about how seldom they could sit down, laugh and talk, or how rare it was that they could just enjoy a cup of coffee and a doughnut. Danny was beaming with pride as everyone praised his coffee. He and Muriel were scanning the news. Harris was trying to snatch a portion of the funnies from Tee, while Tony had the sports section and was carrying on a conversation with everyone in general and no one in specific about the Mariners winning against Boston the night before after two defeats. It was as close to happy and normal as these five could hope for, but it would soon come to an end.

Without warning a cup and saucer crashed to the floor. Everyone jumped. Muriel was sitting, covered in coffee, with a look of shock and horror. In an instant she was crying. She turned and clung to Tee who was

the first to her side. They all looked at the newspaper page she had been reading. They all saw the small headline - "Prominent scientist dies".

No matter how hard we try to insulate ourselves, there is no insulation from death. Its sting ... its pain ... are universally terrifying and disabling. It doesn't seem to matter even how estranged we are from people. As much as she tried, Muriel could never hate Ronald Smith. She hated what he did. She hated who he became and what he represented. But he was still daddy.

His funeral was to be held on Monday morning at the Evergreen-Washelli Cemetery. Muriel knew that there was no way she could get close to the funeral home or the funeral. At the same time she had to see, even if it was saying good-bye from a distance.

The five of them drove out to the cemetery to scout out a way that Muriel could see the funeral. Tony and Tee dropped Muriel, Harris and Danny at a nearby Arby's while they drove through the cemetery. They spotted a new grave being dug. With the size of the cemetery, there was a chance that there could be two funerals but it was not likely. Looking around to be sure that the cemetery staff were the only people there, Tony decided to take a closer look. He walked up to the grave diggers and picked up a conversation. While they were talking he got a look at the name on the vault - Ronald C. Smith.

They picked up Tee and Muriel at the Arby's and drove to the back of the parking lot behind Polyclinic Northgate. From there they could see the workmen setting up for Dr. Smith's funeral. As they watched, they realized that there was a large wooded area running along the south edge of the cemetery, and where they were parked was blocked from view by trees and buildings.

Muriel insisted upon getting out and walking along the tree-line. Tony objected even though he knew better. Someday she might listen, but not today. With Tony staying by the car to keep watch, Muriel and the others walked along the edge of the woods until they came to an area that was used

to store large quantities of gardening materials - mulch, earth, gravel. Just beyond they could see the grave site. With a good pair of binoculars Muriel would be able to watch.

Tony didn't like the idea.

"That place is going to be crawling with Simpco agents!" he said. "And I wouldn't be surprised if they don't have guys in the woods or at least infrared detectors."

Again Tony was over-ruled. He grudgingly helped Muriel pick out a good pair of binoculars at a sporting goods store on the way home. If she wasn't going to do what he thought she should do, he was going to be there to protect her.

□□□□□

The funeral wasn't large but it was larger than Muriel had expected. Living with Ron and Teresa in the mountains she never realized that they probably had friends and colleagues in the city.

It was a bright sunny day and almost 80 degrees. A number of Simpco agents were spotted watching the gate and along a wall. Harris leaned over to Muriel.

"After all those years of you running around those mountains you'd think they'd know where to find you," Harris laughed. "Do they think you're just going to walk up to the gate?"

"Actually," said Muriel, "I don't think they think I'm anyway near here."

"Hope you're right."

The only people Muriel recognized were her mother and her sister. Tears filled her eyes when she realized that a seat was left vacant next to her mother. It was her place. Her mother seemed drawn and old. Her eyes were sunken, she had lost a lot of weight and her skin, of which Teresa Smith had always been so proud, looked dry and blotchy even from a distance. There was no life in her eyes. Muriel's sister, Katherine, had led her from the limousine to her chair. Teresa had put her hand on the empty seat where



Muriel would have sat and began to cry. Katherine put her arm around her and Muriel could tell that Katherine was talking to her. Katherine glanced around as she spoke. Muriel wondered if she wasn't telling Teresa Smith that her daughter was probably somewhere nearby watching.

As they watched Muriel noticed that Katherine's right hand seemed constantly but very subtly in motion. It was a pattern. It was sign language. There were only three letters but they were in a sequence.

"Meet me," said Harris. "She's saying 'meet me'".

Muriel couldn't help but smile. Her sister wanted to see her. She knew that Muriel wouldn't be far away. Muriel watched carefully. Katherine took a handkerchief from her purse. As she did so she also had a folded piece of paper. She looked subtly around and then stuck the paper under the seat of her chair.

When the ceremony was over Teresa was led off by Simpco agents. Muriel noticed that she didn't return to the limousine in which she had arrived but was whisked away in large black Hummer. Katherine returned to the limo.

Muriel and Harris ran back to where the others were waiting.

"Quick, Tony," she shouted as they got near. "Katherine left me a message stuck to the bottom of her chair. Can you get around there in the car and get it?"

"I can try," said Tony jumping in the car. "Call me and give me directions." Muriel waved.

Muriel returned to her vantage point in the woods. The grave site was abandoned. Only the cemetery workers who were putting the lid on the vault and back filling the grave were there when Tony arrived. He called Muriel's cell phone as he walked toward the chairs.

"She was the fourth from the left," Muriel instructed. "She used her right hand."

The workmen only looked up as Tony approached. There were no questions as he went to the fourth chair from the left and felt under the seat.

He stood up and put his left hand in his pocket as he waved to the workmen with his right.

A short while later Tony picked up the others in the parking lot behind the Polyclinic Northgate and headed back to the house. He handed Muriel the note. It said "Suzzallo Library by 931.01s tomorrow 10am." Suzzallo Library was in the heart of the University of Washington where Katherine was a student.



The University of Washington campus was one of Muriel's favorite places. To her it was what a university campus should be like, and Red Square - officially Central Plaza - was its heart. Tony didn't want to use the underground parking since it would be too confining in the event they had to make a hasty exit. Instead they parked by the Guthrie Annex and walked from there. That really made Muriel happy because they could enter the square from the west, between the more modern Odegaard Undergraduate Library and Meany Hall for the performing arts. Coming in this way they saw the Suzzallo Library at the other end in all of its gothic glory. It is a prime example of the Collegiate Gothic architectural style which started around 1894 and dominated American collegiate architecture well into the twentieth century. If Muriel had her way it would still be the official style of college buildings. This wonderful building, built in 1926, housed almost a third of the university's entire collection of books.

Muriel agreed to get there early so that they would have plenty of time to be sure that Katherine hadn't been followed. Muriel also had ulterior motives. She wanted time to just sit for a moment in the Graduate Reading Room. This magnificent room is 250-feet long, 52-feet wide, and 65-feet high. The ceiling is painted and stenciled timber-vaulted, and there are tall leaded windows with stained glass panels. At each end of the room are oriels - a type of bay window - that have painted world globes bearing the names

of European explorers. To look at it you would swear that you had just been instantly transported to one of the true Gothic halls of Oxford or Cambridge.

Tony tried to keep Muriel focused on the task at hand. He was concerned. They had no idea how much Katherine knew or even if she might be working for Simpco. Muriel had noticed that the Simpco people left Katherine fairly well alone during the funeral. Was that because they didn't think she was of any value, that she was already cooperating with them or they were dangling her out there like bait. Tony's money was on b and c, i.e. that she was working for or with Simpco and being used as bait. That would definitely explain why there weren't more security people watching for Muriel at the funeral. They wanted her to get close enough to get Katherine's message.

"I appreciate your concern," Muriel said for the second or third time within a few minutes. "I know you're probably right, but it doesn't really matter. This is my sister and I have to take the chance."

"I know," Tony complained, "but that doesn't mean that we can't be careful. Let's go over it again."

"Okay," said Muriel. "Okay." She stopped and counted off the procedure. "One. You stay out here and watch for anyone tailing Katherine. Two. I go inside check the area around the meeting point for anyone or anything out of the ordinary. Three. I go back and watch for Katherine as she enters. Four. If you call me, anything doesn't look right or anything goes wrong I'm to get lost in the stack, call you and meet you in the most crowded area I can find where, five, if they try to grab me I'm to start yelling."

"Right." Tony's voice belied his annoyance.

Muriel put her arm in his as they walked across the plaza. "Look, Tony, I really do appreciate what you do, but I got your plan the first time you told me. I just want to take a few minutes to admire what we have in front of us." She gestured to the buildings around them. "I have no idea whether I'll ever get this chance again, so I want to take it all in."

Tony smiled. "Yeah, I understand. I just worry a lot."

As they arrive at the steps of the Suzzallo Library, Muriel gave Tony a kiss on the cheek, waved and disappeared into the library. Tony looked around. The plaza was a large open area. There weren't even any benches. It wasn't going to be easy.

By the time he saw Katherine entering the square he had decided that he'd play tourist and act as if his phone had a camera. It took only moments to see that Katherine was being followed. They had to be carrying weapons since they were both wearing jackets and it was 78 degrees out. That's why Tony was wearing a jacket. Tony casually fell in line behind the men. He saw them talking. As Katherine entered the building one of the men continued behind her while the other headed off toward the north end of the building. Tony had to make a quick decision.

He decided to follow the man who was staying outside. It would be easier for him to incapacitate the outside man and then go hunting for the one who went inside. The outside man walked over to some trees and pulled out a cigarette. He had a clear view of anyone entering or leaving the library. He was obviously there watching for Muriel to arrive.

Tony walked past the man and turned around. With a quick glance he saw no one nearby. He thought about just pulling the trigger as he walked by and keep on walking but he needed to retrieve the dart. It would have their fingerprints. Keeping the tranquilizer gun close to his body he fired. The man staggered and fell.

Being the closest to the fallen man, Tony ran up, quickly removed the dart and looked around. Some people were close enough now that they could be useful.

Tony called out, "This man just collapsed!" Others came running and a number of cell phones emerged. Rolling the man onto his back, Tony made sure that his jacket fell open exposing his revolver. "Oh, my God. He's got a gun!"

That was enough to cause panic in the rapidly gathering crowd. Tony used the panic to disappear. He ran to the front of the library and went in. He had no idea where to start looking for the other Simpco henchman.

"Where would I find the 931 stacks?" he asked the student working at the information desk.

"Third floor in the back."

"Thanks," Tony waved as he hurried off toward the stairs.



Muriel had already checked out their meeting area and was standing near the reference desk when Katherine entered the building. Since the elevators were across from the reference desk, Muriel stepped back into the reference area where she could see the elevators without being seen. She watched Katherine get on an elevator. Muriel preferred the stairs, and headed toward the third floor. Perhaps she missed Katherine's tail when she was standing in the reference stacks. Perhaps she missed him because he lost track of Katherine when he entered the building. It didn't really matter. Muriel missed him and was hurrying up the stairs to meet her sister totally oblivious of the Simpco agent looking for them.

Muriel slowed her pace as she approached the stacks. She hadn't spoken to Katherine since her Easter break. A lot had happened and suddenly Muriel wondered what Katherine thought of her. Did she blame her for their father's death?

Katherine was standing with her back to her when Muriel came around the corner.

Muriel stood for a moment and then quietly, "Katherine?"

The young woman turned around.

“Oh, my God, Muriel,” Katherine cried, running up to her and hugging her. Through her tears she said, “I’m so glad to see you. I was so worried.”

Katherine was a tall woman, like her parents, with light brown hair, which she wore long, and very white skin. She reminded Muriel of their mother, or at least the woman she remembered as Teresa Smith. Muriel always thought Katherine should be a cheerleader, but Katherine was the consummate student who got her brains the natural way.

“Dad told me all about you and the others,” Katherine said. “When I was visiting him in the hospital he told me that he had seen you and made me swear that I’d keep it a secret. Then he told me why you disappeared and why all of those awful Simpco people were asking about you. I was shocked!”

Katherine’s affection for Muriel seemed real. Muriel had grown up with this young woman and she was totally incapable of hiding her feelings.

“You and me both,” Muriel tried to smile.

“I can’t imagine what this has put you through,” Katherine continued.

“Did he tell you what was on the other side of the mountain?” Katherine shook her head. “Did he tell you that Simpco killed seven innocent people the night they escaped?” Again Katherine acknowledged her. “Did he tell you that Simpco was selling the organs of AGEHs who died?”

Katherine’s face didn’t naturally have a great deal of color but what little there was drained. “Oh, my God, no!” Her eyes filled with tears.

Muriel went on to tell her about meeting Harris, about being called “the success”, about what she saw inside the mountain and their escape.

“I know you must hate him . . .” Katherine started.

“No,” Muriel interrupted her. “I don’t hate them. I hate what they did and who they became, but I don’t hate them.”

“Well if it makes any difference, Dad took complete blame, acknowledged that what they had done was monstrous and could not be justified, and said that he had put the most important documents on a flash drive and hidden it up under the desk in the lab behind the house. He wanted to do more but he was too sick.”

“Those documents would go a long way in stopping Simpco from hurting anyone else,” said Muriel. “But I have no idea how we're going to get it.”

“I could try,” Katherine offered. “So far they've left me fairly well alone.”

“How's Mom?” Muriel asked.

“You saw her at the funeral. She's a mess. She doesn't take care of herself. She looks like death warmed over, and mentally . . . well, at times she thinks you and I are little girls.”

“You were with her when you arrived at the funeral and then the Simpco people took her away.”

“Yes. I don't know where they're keeping her. When she was more lucid she said that she wanted to see you. She wanted to tell you that they really did love you.”

“Katherine, I have to admit that I don't know why they have kept Mom alive this long.”

“What?”

“They're willing to kill anyone who might get in their way or expose what they were doing. Did you know that Simpco put a \$25,000 bounty on our heads?”

Katherine just stood and looked. After a long moment, “No. I heard the news stories about people being killed for some mysterious bounty but I didn't realize they were after AGEHs!”

“My friends are dying. Innocent people are being killed. The killing won't stop until we're either all dead or we stop these monsters.”

“How can I help?” Katherine had overcome her shock and now looked angry. Muriel couldn't remember her ever looking this way.

Before Muriel could answer the gunman Tony had watched follow Katherine into the library stepped around the end of the stacks. He was pointing a revolver at the two women.

“You can start by keeping your hands where I can see them and walking slowly and quietly toward the stairway,” the gunman ordered.

Muriel's first instinct was to start running and screaming like Tony told her to do, but she noticed that the gun had a long thick extension on it. It must be a silencer, she thought. He wouldn't hesitate shooting one or both of them. She wasn't going to let Katherine die.

As they turned toward the elevator a young Asian man came around the corner looking at a piece of paper and the books high on the stacks.

“Excuse, please,” he said as he appeared to be comparing a number on the paper with a number on the binding of a book.

The gunman pulled his gun inside his jacket and out of sight. Muriel thought this might be a good time to run. The gunman was obviously thinking the same thing. The young man was bent over at a 90 degree angle between the gunman and the two women. The gunman was reaching out to push the young man aside but before he knew what was happening the young man's left leg came out from the side of his body with such tremendous velocity that, when it struck the gunman in the diaphragm, the gunman became almost airborne and landed in a pile on the floor. As he lay gasping for breath the young man quickly and adeptly rendered him unconscious with one well place kick.

Before Muriel or Katherine could react, Tony appeared around the corner with his tranquilizer gun. He had been trying to catch the gunman before he found the women. Now he had his gun pointed at the young man.

“Are you okay, Muriel?” he asked.

“Fine,” Muriel exclaimed. “This man saved us.” Tony put down his gun.



By this time Katherine was hugging the young man. “This wonderful man,” she announced with great pride, “is my boyfriend, Morita Isamu.” The young man beamed in an embarrassed manner and acknowledged Katherine's introduction and accolades. “He was keeping an eye on us.”

Both Tony and Muriel thanked the young man profusely. Looking down at Morita's handiwork he said, “it looks like this guy's going to sleep for a while.” Waiving his tranquilizer gun as he stuck it back in the holster under his jacket, “there's another one outside that won't be waking up for a while either.”

“I'm sorry, Katherine,” Muriel said, “but you're on the run now too.”

“No,” objected Katherine.

“She's right,” Tony and Morita agreed. Tony went on, “they've obviously been following you because they suspected you'd try to see your sister. You're not safe going home.”

Katherine stood in shock. She hadn't thought about being in the same spot as her sister. Morita comforted her as she began to cry.

“I don't mean to seem insensitive,” said Tony, “but we need to get out of here.”

They went down the stairs and out through the Allen Library. Katherine didn't dare return to her car, so they went to where Tony had parked.

“I'm so sorry,” Muriel said as they walked toward the car. “I didn't mean for you to get sucked into this.”

“It's not your fault,” said Katherine. “If they knew enough to follow me they've probably figured out that Dad told me the truth, and, like you said, they're going to kill anyone who knows the truth.”

“They don't know me,” said Morita. “I'll go to Katherine's place and pack some things for her.”

“No,” Tony interjected. “You might end up picking up a tail. Is there anyone there who could bring you some things?”

“My suite-mates. I live in a woman’s honors dorm.”

“That’ll work,” Tony continued. “Have them pack a suitcase and we’ll find a place for them to leave it.”

Katherine called and spoke with one of her suite-mates. She explained that it was very important that the suite-mates not mention to anyone that she was going away. She explained that she had to get away from all of the problems surrounding her father and that she was going back east to stay with some friends. She arranged for them to leave the suitcase at the lockers in the student union and said good-bye.

The plan was for Morita to watch for the suite mate and follow them to the drop-off spot to make sure they weren't being followed. He would then take the suitcase to the hospital near the house and go through their security procedures - i.e. take the long way to get to the house with three check points.

When they got to the car and were preparing to leave Katherine held tight to Morita for a long time. Tony and Muriel could hear him comfort her. They didn't bother them. Both of them knew what Katherine and Morita were going through. Morita lived in a nearby dorm and would use his car after he picked up the suitcase. Katherine sobbed as they pulled away from the lone figure.



Katherine was still sobbing when they arrived at the house. She tried valiantly to smile and speak as she was introduced to Harris, Danny and Tee. As Tee approached to take Katherine's hand, Muriel put her arm around his waste in a 'this-one-is-mine' manner. That did get a real smile from Katherine.

There was a large package wrapped in butcher's paper on the table. She looked at the package and then up at Tee who simply said “salmon.”

That meant he was planning to cook, and that, in turn, meant they were going to feast.

“Lummi?” Katherine asked. Tee smiled.

“Katherine's an anthropology major,” Muriel explained. “She's doing her honor's thesis on northwestern native tribes.”

“That's great,” said Tee.

“I've spent a lot of time in the Lummi nation,” Katherine said.

“My parents live just off Smokehouse Road.”

“Kinley Way?”

“You have spent some time there.”

As the men left the two sisters to talk, Muriel related everything that had happened since she met Harris on the mountain. Katherine sat speechless hanging on every word. From time to time there would be an exclamation or comment, but, for the most part, she sat silently.

When Muriel had finished Katherine shook her head. “I can't believe what all of you have been through in the past three months.” Muriel had to agree. She hadn't really stopped to think about it until she just told the story.

“But now it's confession time,” said Katherine giving Muriel a rather wicked smile. “What's with you and that gorgeous Lummi boy?”

Muriel could feel herself blush. She had never had this type of conversation with her sister. Neither of them had had any real interest in boys as they grew up. Katherine admitted that she had had a brief crush on Jaime but, like Muriel, had found him to be more of a brother. Because Katherine was such an academic and Muriel had been the naturalist always off with Jaime, neither of them had attracted what few males they encountered. Now her older sister was insisting upon all of the details about Tee. Muriel's mind flashed back to their stay at the Artist's Loft and her blush deepened.

Katherine must have noticed the deepening blush because she reacted with “oh, my gosh!”

Muriel told her about how she met Tee. She had already told Katherine about how he had stolen the files from Simpco and was wounded on Vashon Island. Now, with some hesitation she told Katherine about the Artist's Loft. It was definitely a modified account. It was the one you'd tell your parents. Katherine wasn't buying it. She was definitely reading between the lines and filling in the blanks all of which brought an emphatic "Wow!"

"He's beautiful," Katherine went on. "Is he really as sweet as he appears?"

"Yes," Muriel was grinning from ear to ear.

"I couldn't believe the way he looked at you when you put your arm around him. That was marvelous. I'm so happy for you!!"

"Now you have to tell me about Morita." It was now Muriel's turn to grill Katherine. "A casual 'boyfriend' doesn't just take on an armed mercenary."

"He's a pre-med student. We met a couple of years ago when both of us were taking pre-reqs. We started dating regularly over a year ago and things got serious last August."

"I was going to have him visit us at Christmas but Mom and Dad were so preoccupied and you couldn't stop talking about mountains with Jaime, I . . ." Muriel interrupted with a look of disbelief. "Okay," Katherine recanted. "I didn't take him home because I was afraid of what Mom and Dad might say about me getting serious with an Asian."

"Really?" Muriel asked.

"You obviously never saw it," Katherine continued, "but they did have their prejudices."

"Is that why he wasn't at Dad's funeral?" Katherine just nodded.

The two sisters talked more than they had most of their lives. Muriel was impressed by the depth and maturity of her big sister and thought several times about how glad she was that Katherine approved of her. She was so glad that Katherine still considered her a sister and not the cause of some great nightmare that ultimately cost their father's life.

After some hours of talking Katherine's cell phone rang. It was Morita. He had her suitcase and was on his way to the Swedish Medical Center. Tony got on the telephone and gave him instructions. He was to park on East Jefferson St. and wait for someone to collect him. He said that he would be there within fifteen minutes.

Tony and the others went over the routine with Katherine. They talked her through the same routine that they had used with Tee except this time Tee would be the one who would let her know if it was safe to approach Morita. They would leave her suitcase in the car. There was no reason to carry it on their long walk. Besides, it would draw attention.

Everything went smoothly and Morita arrived at the house with Katherine. Danny and Tony took his keys and went to get Katherine's suitcase. Muriel could tell by the way that they held hands coming down the street that they had done a lot of talking during their walk. They had done a lot of serious talking.

After introductions and Morita telling about getting Katherine's suitcase Morita blurted out, "may I stay with Katherine?"

"I'm rather glad you came to that decision on your own," Tony spoke up. The others looked at him rather puzzled. "I was thinking about what happened today and realized that that goon you took down can probably identify you. It won't take them long to find out that you weren't just a passing hero and then you'll be on their list with the rest of us." Tony paused. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be," Morita replied. "It's a small price to pay." He looked at Katherine. Yes, there had been some serious talk.

They told Morita the entire saga as Tee cooked dinner. Having just heard the account Katherine helped Tee in the kitchen, asking him lots of questions about how the Lummi cooked certain foods and how his mother taught him. Occasionally he would look at Muriel and smile. It was kind of an "I-like-your-sister" smile.

As they sat down to eat Harris said, “you know, our extended family is really growing.” He looked around at the collection of people at the table. “For most of my life the AGEHs in the mountain were the only family I knew. Then I became the watcher and started meeting others who joined hands with us. Now look at this table. We're like a mini UN.” Everyone smiled and laughed. “Did you ever think that the male WASP would be in the minority, Tony?” More laughter, but everyone sensed that this was going somewhere serious.

“We are family. Sitting around this table we are proof that the most basic human instinct is that sense of oneness and that desire to enable others to live and be happy.”

Harris paused and Morita offered, “A Buddhist teacher once talked about us being like a wave on the ocean. The wave can worry about whether it is the biggest wave or the best wave. It can worry about what happens when it hits the beach and no longer exist. But if the wave realizes that more importantly it is a part of the water, even if it no longer exists it is water, then it knows peace. It knows oneness.”

“Amen, brother,” said Tony.

“In the mountain,” Harris continued, “the closest thing we had to religion were some people who called themselves Christians and told us how God hates us. Then,” he laughed, “they wondered why we didn't want to be Christians. But I think we all believe that there is something more. Maybe it's a god. Maybe it's this oneness. I've read the Christian's Bible and according to John, oneness was a really big thing to Jesus.”

“And again,” Tony chimed in, “I say 'Amen'.” Everyone smiled and some repeated, “amen.”

“We've had so much grief and trial. We've lost so many of our family. We've taken on a task that most sane people would say is impossible in the hope that we can save the rest of our family. Now we have in our midst the natural child of the couple who, for some of us, was our creators. More proof of our oneness. I think it is fitting that we take a moment to be

thankful for our growing family. I think it is fitting to pause and remember those who have died and sense their presence with us.”

One by one they reached out and took the hand of the person next to them. Katherine, with tears streaming down her cheeks, looked fearfully at Danny sitting next to her. Here was a man who had suffered so much because of her parents. Here was a man who had never known the childhood, the love, the joy of living she had enjoyed. Could he accept her?

Danny could see the fear in Katherine's eyes. Taking her hand he smiled at her and kissed it gently. Then taking the hand of the person on the other side he closed his eyes.

There was silence. There was oneness.

## CHAPTER TEN.

Two things weighed heavily on the minds of the group on 17th. Avenue - viz. the fate of Teresa Smith and how to get the flash drive that Ronald Smith hid. They were obviously connected. The odds were great that Teresa Smith was being held at her home near Kittitas. If she was there they could combine a rescue and search for the flash drive. If she wasn't, they risked losing one or the other. Despite what she had been to them, no one was willing to surrender Teresa Smith's life. Not only did everyone agree that that would be wrong but to do so would be to act just like the evil they were out to destroy. There are those who would argue that acting like your enemy is sometimes justified but not even the AGEHs could agree with that. If you claim to be trying to save people ... save the world ... from a horrible evil, and you act in the same way as that evil, who is going to save the world from you? Lives had already been lost despite their best efforts. They were not going to purposely sacrifice a life even if that person had done them great evil. There had to be a way. They just hadn't thought of it yet.

“You know what I just thought of,” said Danny. The others looked. They waited for him to tell them. “If they have Dr. Smith at the cottage there will be people there.”

“Duh!?” Harris teased.

“No,” Danny complained, “I mean it!” He paused. “Let me put it this way, if they don't have her at the cottage would there be any reason for anyone to be there?”

“You're right,” Muriel agreed. “You're absolutely right! There would be no reason for anyone to be staying at the cottage unless they were using it to keep my Mom.”

“I guess that makes sense,” Harris conceded. “so all we have to do is get someone to see if anyone is staying there.”



They decided to call upon their old friends, Ted and Carl. They could check to see if Teresa Smith was at the cottage and, if so, how many people were with her.

Harris called Ted. He said they'd be happy to help out. They said that they'd drive over the next morning and call Harris with a report by late afternoon.

Everyone felt better.



Late Saturday afternoon Ted called. The house was definitely occupied. They had seen two special forces types, a young female and an older woman.

"We're assuming that the older woman is Dr. Smith," Ted said. "She seems to be fine. She walks very slowly but we did see her outside a couple of times. They don't seem to be keeping too short of a leash on her, but then, where could a woman that age go?"

"That's great, guys. We'll get things together here and be there by Sunday evening. Can you two hang around?"

"Sure," said Ted. "No problem. We'd love to have another crack at a couple of these Simpco goons."

Harris laughed, thanked them profusely and hung up.

They were sitting around trying to figure out how they were going to pull off a rescue without putting Teresa in danger. Muriel came up with the idea of entering the house through her room. She used to sneak out of the house by climbing out onto the porch roof and going down a trellis. If they waited until Teresa went to bed they could get to her before they had to engage any of the guards.

It might have been a good plan. They wouldn't know because Katherine's telephone rang. No one had thought about getting rid of

Katherine's cell phone so Simpco couldn't use it to trace her. Katherine looked at the caller id.

Her face grew pale and tear came to her eyes, "It's Dad's phone!" She pushed the talk key. "Hello?"

"Katherine, dear," Teresa Smith's voice was clear and calm, "I just wanted to call to see when you were coming home."

"Where are you, Mom?" asked Katherine, not knowing what to say. She switched the phone to speaker so the others could hear.

"We're at home, of course," said Teresa. "Your father is still in the lab and I'm sure your sister is chasing around outside with Jaime. But I was worried about you."

"I'll get home as soon as I can." Katherine said as she looked around the room. The others looked sad and worried. Teresa Smith sounded like an old woman with severe dementia.

"Dr. Smith?" a woman's voice was heard. "Dr. Smith, what are you doing?"

"I'm calling Katherine to see when she's going to get home," said Teresa Smith. "Are you one of Katherine's school friends?"

"Yes," said the woman. "may I talk with her? Would you give me the phone?" There was a silence then the voice. "Hello, Katherine?"

Katherine pushed 'end'.

"I hate to go into panic mode," said Tony, "but we need to get rid of that phone quickly!" Harris nodded in agreement and Katherine handed the telephone to Tony who took out the SIMS card and battery. "That may or may not stop them. They could be on their way here right now."

"How?" asked Katherine. "You've turned off the phone."

"It depends," Tony explained. "You've had it on since you've been here so they could have easily traced it by triangulating. Your phone is always connecting and re-connecting with the nearest tower. They can only get within a block, but that's too close for us."

"I'm so sorry!" Katherine exclaimed.

"It's okay," Tony continued. "We'd all have done the same thing. People don't generally think about it. If they didn't think about tracing your cell phone, which, at this point I'd guess that they didn't since they haven't shown up and we haven't seen any signs of them looking around the neighborhood, then they'll probably think about trying to trace your Mother's call to you. They didn't have time to do it while you were on with her, so the only way they might be able to trace it is by getting telephone company records. Again I'm guessing, but my guess would be that they can only find out which tower your phone used. But that, again, would put them far too close. We would be at high risk any time we left the house."

"Then we need to leave," Harris said. "Tonight."

"We've got another problem," Tee pointed out. "What do you think they'll do with Dr. Smith now?"

"I know this is hard to hear, girls," Tony said looking at Muriel and Katherine, "but I really don't know why they're keeping your Mother alive." Tee stepped over and put his arm around Muriel's shoulders. She looked up at him with tears in her eyes. Katherine had turned and buried her head in Morita's shoulder.

"Right now I bet they think they've got the bait," said Morita.

"Correction," Danny looked out the window and then at Morita. "They know they've got the bait."



Hurriedly the group packed. They hated to give up the house but they couldn't be sure that it was safe any more. They packed the cars. Katherine and Morita suggested that they all go to the Café Presse, a French restaurant near the university that they knew was open until 2am. Without a backward glance the group set off. Harris was busily going through his database to see if he could find anyone who could either hide them or help them find a place.

In the US, if you give a restaurant a French name, everyone expects something fancy. Café Presse had the name and the menu required either a working knowledge of French, a translator or a French-English dictionary, but the restaurant was anything but fancy. It was on the ground floor of what had been a factory. There was one shop next to them and the rest of the building was a self-storage company. The seven of them took up a good portion of the available seating.

Danny looked at the menu as he sat down. "What? You've got to be kidding me."

"It's really excellent," said Morita. "My favorite is the soupe aux potirons - a roasted pumpkin soup with port and red wine poached pears."

"Yeah, and only seven dollars," Danny mocked.

"Hey," Tony chimed in, "how about some pommes frites - fried potatoes with mustard, catchup or mayo, or an \$11 salad."

The joking began. Katherine and Morita started taking it personally, began to pout, and Harris called a halt.

"Okay," he said. "Okay. Enough."

A server came to get drink orders. As it turned out, everyone except Danny and Tony order some French dish that was a bit out of the ordinary for Seattle. That made Katherine and Morita happy. Harris was making telephone calls while the others talked quietly. "Great!" they heard him say. "That would be wonderful."

All eyes were on Harris. He was smiling and giving them the thumbs up sign. "Okay. We're still in Seattle. We'll met you there in about two hours. And thank you so much!"

"We've got a place to stay," Harris announced. "That was Andy Small. His parents left him a house on the east side of Lake Sammamish. They've been remodeling it little by little but he said that it's furnished and we can use it. We're to meet them there in two hours."

"Now that we've got a place to stay, what are we going to do about Muriel and Katherine's Mother?" Tee asked. The group became quiet.

"We'll have to rescue her right now," said Danny.

"Let's be realistic," said Muriel. "after catching her on the phone, she might already be dead."

"Don't say that!" Katherine insisted. "Don't say that!"

"I'm sorry. It's the truth."

"Perhaps not," said Tony. "They could see it as a way to lure us into a trap." He paused a moment to organize his thoughts. "They know that you two girls still care about your Mother. They know that we went back and rescued Jaime and his Mom, so we're not inclined to leave people behind. So my money is on them waiting for us."

"I agree," said Harris. "So it's going to be tough."

Harris called Ted and explained what had happened. He told Ted that they were meeting a couple to get another place to stay and would leave from there within three or four hours.

Ted pointed out that they would have surprise on their side if they attacked immediately.

"They know that you're probably in the Seattle area since you had that little encounter at the library. They know that it's going to take you several hours to get here if you left immediately, so if we go after them as soon as possible they won't be expecting you yet."

"Are you talking about just the two of you?" Harris asked.

"No, we've got a couple of others here." Ted said. "We can do this. You guys can start this way and we'll call you when she's safe."

"Those guys are trained killers," Harris argued.

"Sure are," laughed Ted. "The same type of trained killers that we left sleeping on the mountain. The same type of trained killers that we outfoxed at the superstore."

"Okay," Harris conceded. "Just be careful and keep us posted."

"Will do! And don't worry. We'll enjoy this."

Harris related to the others what Ted and Carl were planning. He had to agree that the Simpco guards wouldn't be expecting an attack so

soon. Muriel called Ted back and told him about her bedroom window above the porch and the location of her parent's bedroom on the second floor.

Finishing their meals they headed toward Sammamish, a town on the east side of Lake Sammamish. It was a very upscale community that was incorporated in 1999 and grew from around 34,000 people to over 42,000 people in under ten years. The area where the Small's home was situated was on a hillside southeast of the town. There was a steep escarpment that ran south and east from the town of Sammamish which was heavily wooded. All along the East Lake Sammamish Parkway there were homes built up in the woods on the hillside. Most of them were large and expensive and designed for privacy. Andy had told Harris to watch for North East 28th Place. Their private lane was the next road to the left and was very easy to miss even when you know where it is. Just past NE 28th Place there would be a break in the trees where they could see the lake. When they reached that spot they should start watching for the lane. The lane would go off at an angle. They should turn up the private lane and drive to the top. The Small's house was the last one on the lane.



Andy had not overstated the difficulty of finding their private lane. The parkway was tree covered and dark. They couldn't really see the lake but the break in the trees was enough to cue them. Even then they almost passed the small, tree covered lane. If there had not been a trash can and two mail boxes, Harris was certain that they would never have found it.

The lane was very steep and almost a double switch-back. The first house was right at the first bend. The road disappeared into the tree and didn't emerge again until the clearing, about half way up the escarpment, in which was situated a large home. There were lights on in the house.

They had hardly turned off their engines when the door opened and Andy and Sarah Small came out to meet them. One obviously didn't sneak up on this place.

"Welcome!" Andy said enthusiastically. "Come on in."

The group followed Andy and Sarah into the gorgeous home.

"My parents left it to us," Andy was saying. "We're going to move here when we retire, but right now it's our getaway."

They entered into an enormous open plan area with the kitchen to their right and dining room, living room, library area to the left dominated by a giant fireplace flanked by great double-doors opening onto a deck. They could see a hallway that they learned lead to four bedrooms and a master suite.

"We've had AGEHs stay here before," Andy said after pointing out the features of the house. "Some even stayed with my parents."

"This is awfully nice of you," Muriel said.

"It's our privilege," Sarah finally spoke. "You kids have been through so much. We're just glad to be able to help. We brought some food with us and stocked up the pantry."

"That's really sweet," Muriel insisted. Sarah just smiled and insisted that it was the least they could do and that the group should make themselves at home.

Insisting that they knew that the group needed to rest and they needed to return to Seattle, the Small's dropped the key into Harris' hand and left.

Having waved to the Small's as they drove off, Harris turned to look at his group. Each had slumped into the nearest chair and now looked like a flagging collection of rag dolls. Katherine and Morita were cuddle up on one of the large sofas while Tony was stretched out on the other. Tee was sprawled in a large over-stuffed chair with Muriel sitting on the floor with her head on his knees. Danny was the only one who had his eyes open. He had turned on the gas fire-lighter in the fireplace and was sitting on the

raised hearth watching the fire. Plopping down on the sofa at Tony's feet he made a general announcement, "you know, we need to go to Kittitas yet tonight." He got six affirmative grunts. Satisfied with that he put his head back, closed his eyes, and rested.



Carl and Ted had a plan. They had left for the cottage as soon as Ted had finished talking to Harris. To them this was another opportunity to strike a blow at Simpco. Three other cousins had joined them by that time and within a few hours they were sitting in the woods not far from the cottage making final preparations.

As soon as it was dark Carl and one of the cousins quietly climbed the trellis, cross the porch roof and climbed into Muriel's room. Listening at the door they could hear the voices of the Simpco guards downstairs. They crossed the hallway and entered Teresa Smith's room. She was already in bed asleep.

Ted found a spot near the small building that had passed as Smith's laboratory. From there he had a clear view of anyone coming out of the back side of the house and could easily move to where he could cover the driveway. One of the cousins drove up in a four-wheel drive truck with the headlights on high and stopped. The lights illuminated the house and much of both sides. If anyone was to leave the house without being visible to the driver of the truck they would have to go right by Ted.

The lights went out inside the house. Ted smiled. He knew that meant that in a few minutes there would be someone trying to circle around behind the truck. He waited patiently. His wait was not in vain.

A lone gunman, crouching very low and watching for danger in every direction, came out of the kitchen door and started moving around the extension that was Vargaz's apartment. Ted waited until the man was around the corner from the main house and out of sight of anyone inside



who might have been watching his progress. He raised his tranquilizer gun, took careful aim and fired. The man fell.

Inside the house the female guard ran up the stairs to Teresa's bedroom. As she opens the door Carl shot her. The agent below heard the thud as the woman fell.

"Jackie?" the man called. "Jackie!" There was silence.

Carl, retrieving the tranquilizer dart from the female guard, slipped quietly into the hallway. As he made his way to the stairs he knew that the remaining guard would be using live ammunition.

There was a sound at the front door. Someone was coming in, or so the Simpco gunman thought. There was the deafening report of a fully automatic weapon and the door was destroyed. Carl quickly leaned out and shot a dart at the muzzle flash.

Silence.

The back door opened and the gunman responded. Again Carl leaned around the corner and shot a dart at the muzzle flash.

Again silence.

For several minutes there was no sound. Then came the crash of a window. For the third time the gunman opened fire with the automatic weapon shattering windows and furniture, and for a third time Carl quickly leaned out and shot a dart at the muzzle flash. This time he heard the heavy weapon fall to the floor.

They waited. The cousin outside the front of the cottage threw a large rock against the wall. There was no response. Ted threw a piece of wood into the kitchen. No shots were fired. Carl reached around the wall in the dark and felt for a light switch. Finding it he flipped the switch. The lights came on in the room. Debris filled the side of the room where the gunman had fired at the window. In the opposite corner lay the last gunman with Carl's dart in his chest just below the collar bone. Just above his head two darts were lodged in the wall.

It would be several hours before these three regained consciousness, but the makeshift SWAT team had a lot to do. They bound the Simpco guards, not sparing the duct-tape, and, to emphasize that they had once again thwarted the highly trained Simpco mercenaries, draped them in the Gadsden flag. During the Revolutionary War, Colonel Christopher Gadsden designed a flag for the Navy Commander-in-Chief which was a yellow flag, with an Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake poised to strike, and the motto 'Don't tread on me.'

"Do you think they'll get the message?" Carl asked smiling at their handiwork.

Ted led the way to the laboratory to look for the flash drive Dr. Ron Smith was supposed to have hidden in his desk. They were very careful in entering the building since they knew of the passage to the underground installation. Once inside one of the cousins guarded the storage room while Ted, Carl and the other two looked for the flash drive. They turned Dr. Smith's desk upside down and taking it apart piece by piece finally discovered a small area where a panel had been inserted at the back of a drawer to create a secret compartment. If you were to take out the drawer and look in, it would appear that you were looking at the inside of the desk's back panel. Inside was a flash drive. Eureka!

Carl and Ted sent the cousins home while they headed toward Seattle with Teresa Smith and the flash disk. On the way Ted called Harris to let him know that Teresa was safe and that they had the flash drive.



Nothing invigorates a weary group like exciting good news. That was definitely true of the group at the Small's house. Since not everyone could make the trip, it was decided that Katherine would probably be the best person to go. Teresa was obviously suffering mentally, and they all agreed that she would probably recognize and respond best to Katherine. They

were going to meet at the Summit Inn in Snoqualmie Pass. Morita would drive and Danny would go along as their guide.

It wasn't until they were well on their way that it hit Danny that he was on his way to pick up Dr. Teresa Smith, one of the two most hated people in his life. She was one of the people who made him what he was and one of the system that denied him a normal and happy life. She had help create him so that he was considered a freak by society. She had taken him from his mother so that he would never know the love and nurturing of a mother. She had held him prisoner under the care of guards and scientists who either told him that he was an abomination detested by their god or observed and ran tests on him as though he were a non-being.

What was he going to do when he saw her? He hadn't thought about that. What was he going to say? Katherine knew what she had done to him and the others, but could he confront Katherine's mother?

Anger. Revenge. Forgiveness. Hatred. They began to become a blur. Something inside him wanted to hurt this woman, but then he saw the faces of Katherine and Muriel. If he hurt Teresa he would also hurt them. He couldn't do that. Anyway, what could he do to this woman that would make up for what she had done? Nothing. There was nothing that was going to make him 'normal'. There was nothing he could do to her that would make up for not having a mother or being held captive or being verbally abused by people who had the audacity to call themselves religious people.

It was funny, Danny thought, the society that he saw around him was so full of anger and hatred and preached revenge when they were the wealthiest, richest, most free, best fed people in the world who had relatively minimal knowledge of suffering compared to the rest of the world. Some of it was their history and religion. This society was still dominated by religions who trace their roots back to a vengeful god. How could they avoid being a people of revenge?

Even in the isolation of the mountain in the midst of suffering and tormented by anger, Danny and his friends could understand that anger and

revenge create victims. Then they enslave and slowly kill the victims they create. When your anger is so great and you give into the desire for revenge our society teaches, you want to pick up a red-hot coal and throw it at the object of your anger and rage. What do you think are your odds of hitting a person with a piece of coal? They'll probably duck. But what happens before that? Your hand is severely burned. You suffer more than they even if you were to hit them with the coal. No, Danny didn't want to be destroyed by his anger. He didn't want to succumb to revenge. He had suffered enough already.

Somehow society has the idea that if we forgive we are weak. How can a society be so naive? Forgiveness takes great strength and courage. But aren't all great battles in life determined by strength and courage whether you are fighting a disease or an injustice? Forgiveness is a matter of letting go of the past - the pain, the hatred, the anger. It does not mean that we condone the injustice or injury. We may even vow that such an act will never happen again and spend our lives keeping that vow.

Danny remembered a story that he read about two Chinese men who ran into each other long after World War II. They had been in a Japanese POW camp together. The first man asked the second, "have you forgiven our jailers?" The second man spat and said, "I'll never forgive them," to which the first man replied, "Ah. I see. You're still a prisoner."

Danny wanted to be free. He had risked his life going over the fence to be free. He had risked his life to help others. He had risked his life helping the other AGEHs escape and several times since then, but he knew that true freedom was at hand. He knew that whether or not he experienced true freedom depended upon what happened when he saw Dr. Smith.

While Danny was still thinking about what to do or say, Morita was exiting the interstate highway and slowing down. Summit Inn was just ahead. Danny didn't have time to make any fancy plans or prepare a speech.

Ted, Carl and Teresa were already at the Inn. Katherine ran up and hugged her mother who, to her surprise, was very oriented and lucid. They said good-bye to Carl and Ted and thanked them again and again.

“Oh, I'm so glad you're here, Katherine,” Teresa exclaimed, taking her daughter by the arm as they walked toward the car. “It was a nightmare.”

Katherine looked at the car. “It's not over yet,” she said quietly.

Morita stood by the driver's door watching. Danny had not gotten out of the back seat. He would give his place to Dr. Smith so that she could sit with her daughter.

As Katherine and her mother came close to the car, Danny opened the door and got out. He stood there facing Dr. Teresa Smith. There was a long, awkward silence as she recognized Danny.

“Hello, Daniel,” Teresa said.

“Hello, Dr. Smith,” is all that Danny said. Saying that he stepped to one side and held the door open.

Dr. Smith started to get in and then stood back up. She was face to face with Danny.

“I don't blame you for hating me, and I know you'll never forgive me, but I want you to know that I am eternally grateful that you are helping my daughters.”

Danny looked back at the woman whom he had hated for so long. He could not remember the last time that he was this close to her. Back then he would have been filled with anger, hatred and fear. Now he looked at an old woman; a woman who had lost everything except her two daughters; a woman who was trying desperately to retain some grain of self-respect in the face of total humiliation; and all he could think of saying was, “Dr. Smith, I can't even hate you.”

Teresa Smith almost staggered with astonishment. She had braced herself for the tirade of anger and hatred that she believed she deserved. She was speechless. She could only look and wonder at the calm almost tranquil expression on Danny's face.

Katherine helped her mother into the car. Teresa Smith was still trying to look at Danny to understand. Katherine leaned over the door and kissed him on the cheek.

“Thank you so much!” she whispered with tears in her eyes.

“I’m sorry,” Danny replied. “I like you very much but that was for me. I’m free.”

Katherine gave him a quizzical look as they closed Teresa’s door, and Danny smiled as he climbed into the front passenger seat.



On the way back to the house on Lake Sammamish Katherine related her sequester in a very clear and precise manner.

“We were taken from the cottage that night after the AGEHs escaped and taken to Simpson’s compound on Bainbridge Island near Port Blakey. We were terrified. They put us in a house and left us alone. The beds were made and there was food but we were too frightened. We slept on the sofas that night.

“The next morning Clarence Simpson himself came to see us. We knew then that we were probably going to die. He was angry.”

“What are we to do with you?” he asked us. “You let them get away.”

“Ronald made the mistake of saying, ‘but security was your responsibility.’”

“All Simpson had to do was nod at one of the men with him. The man hit Ronald in the stomach so hard that Ronald couldn’t breathe. One of the other men had to hold him up and another kept me away from Ronald.”

“Simpson got up close to Ronald’s face and said, ‘You were outwitted by a bunch of freaks who, as far as I can tell aren’t good for anything except, perhaps their organs. We even think that that AGEH you treated like a daughter is in on it.’”

“We were both tossed on one of the sofas like a couple of rag dolls.”

“This isn't what I expected for my money,” Simpson said. “You promised me super-humans. No one is going to buy the formula for deformed geniuses. Why shouldn't I just cut my losses right now?”

“We knew what that meant. He was ready to kill us right then and there. You can imagine how terrified we were.”

“First we tried to convince him that the AGEH's escape wouldn't cause any problems for the project. After all, we told him, who would believe them. He didn't buy that. Besides, he told us, he could take care of them. So Ronald started talking about how we were on the brink of discovering what made Muriel successful. I went along with him. I knew that he was trying to save our lives. I went on for a long time with some genetic bull shit about how we had found an abnormality in Muriel's DNA that we hadn't seen before. Ronald told him that we were in the midst of seeing if the others had the same anomaly. If they did it meant that the anomaly wasn't the key. If they didn't, it might mean that was what made Muriel a success and not the others. So far, we said, none of the others had the same anomaly. We had to keep our BS as close to reality as possible in case he decided to get a second opinion.”

“We told him that we just needed some time to finish the comparison, and that we could do it without the AGEHs being there since we had DNA samples.”

“Do you have surrogates?” Simpson demanded. We told him that we had a couple of women who had passed the screening and would make suitable subjects. “Then you've got three months to find out and get that new egg in her.”

“We had bought ourselves a little time. Simpson sent us back to the mountain. We lived in the installation. We knew that if we didn't get away within three months we would be dead. That's when Ron decided that we should put as many records as possible on a flash drive and hide it. He

decided to hide it in his old desk in the little building behind the cottage. It would be easier for someone from the outside to get to it there.

“That's about the time Ronald started having chest pains. I wouldn't have known if I hadn't caught him holding his chest and taking a nitroglycerin. He had asked one of the lab assistants to get him some without telling anyone. We were both under tremendous stress. His hypertension was out of control. He wasn't eating properly nor was he taking his medicine.

“Simpson used the heart attack to try to catch Muriel. He made sure that she would hear about it because he figured that she'd probably try to see him. Personally I didn't follow his logic. If she had found out the truth and was working with the AGEHs, I figured that she would be very angry with us. Maybe even hate us. Why would she care about us? Simpson was right. But Muriel slipped the trap.”

“We were sent back to the mountain far too soon. Ronald was in no shape to be working but Simpson didn't care. We had been talking about the girls. The guards had been giving us a bit more freedom since they knew that Ronald wasn't going anywhere on his own. We knew that we couldn't save ourselves but we had to save our daughters. Ronald had another heart attack that night and died.”

“I was devastated by Ronald's death and I noticed how they treated me differently. I knew that I couldn't fake keeping up Ronald's work. That's what we had realized the night he died. That's when I decided that I would fake dementia. What is known as pseudo-dementia is often caused by severe depression, so any physician would tell Simpson that's why my dementia started so suddenly. I was hoping that they would see me as a broken old woman and just put me somewhere, not kill me and leave my daughters alone.”

“That obviously only worked to the extent that Simpson didn't kill me. They purposely had me ride to the cemetery in the limo and then leave Katherine standing there as they took me off in the Hummer. They were



hoping that Muriel or someone who would tell Muriel would see that and start looking for me.”

“They took me to the cottage instead of the installation so that it would seem easier for a rescue. They set me up to make the call. They made comments about Ronald being in the lab and Muriel out running around but I didn't know where Katherine was. Someone with some knowledge of dementia must have coached them on how to get a demented old lady to make a call, and I had to stay in character.”

“They weren't expecting the rescue attempt so soon. If you had waited until the next day there would have been people all over the mountain.”

“Why didn't you tell Ted and Carl that you aren't demented?” Katherine asked.

“I was afraid that they might be AGEHs,” Teresa replied. “I didn't know if I could trust them.”

At that Danny looked over the seat and smiled.

Teresa Smith looked at Danny. She wanted to ask him why he was smiling. She wanted to ask him how he could smile. When he first stepped out of the car and she recognized him standing there she could see the posture of the defiant youth who had been so difficult in the mountain. Then he changed. What did he say to Katherine? “I'm free.”



It really wasn't until they turned into the private lane and started up the hill to the Small's house that Teresa Smith realized that she hadn't seen Muriel since the day she helped the AGEH's escape. Anxiety began to set in.

What did Muriel think about her? Ronald and she had been so preoccupied with Clarence Simpson's demands when Muriel learned the truth. She wondered if things would have been different if they had been

more attentive. Ronald had told her that Muriel had called them monsters. Muriel had called them monsters yet she didn't hate them. She risked her life to be nearby at Ronald's funeral. Then they had rescued her. She thought of Danny's comment, "I can't even hate you." Where had they learned such forgiveness? How can you love someone you believe is a monster?

By the time the car stopped at the house Teresa's anxiety had turned to pure, unadulterated fear. She was afraid of Muriel. She was afraid of being told the truth about how Muriel feels. She was afraid of having her daughter call her a monster. But perhaps what unnerved her most was the power of this unconditional forgiveness. She would have felt better had Danny made some demand in return for his not verbally abusing her. She realized that any sane person would call her crazy but she was terrified that Muriel would forgive her. If Muriel were to forgive her it meant that she would have to give up all of the excuses, all of the rationalization, behind which Ronald and she had hidden for so long. Giving up the safety of the excuses and rationalization would mean that she would have to face the monster. If she faced the monster could she forgive herself? Perhaps Muriel would assault her with her anger and indignation, then Teresa could hide in her self-pity.

Teresa Smith was so frightened when she got out of the car that her knees felt like they were going to give way.

"Are you okay, Mom?" asked Katherine, noticing Teresa's unsteadiness.

"Honestly," Teresa looked squarely at her eldest daughter. "I'm terrified."

"You have good reason to be," Katherine said bluntly. It sent shivers up Teresa's spine. "You can be thankful these are very forgiving people. They consciously decided to risk their safety to save your life. Just be honest with them. Don't give them that bull shit that you tried on me." Teresa looked at Katherine. Katherine's face showed almost no emotion. In fact Teresa thought she perceived sternness. This was not the comfort for which Teresa Smith had been hoping.

Unbeknown to her the conversation in the room just before they arrived had been about how they were going to deal with the tremendous mix of emotions. No one in the room knew what to suggest. "We'll just have to play it by ear," Harris had suggested. Everyone had agreed. When they heard the car pull up no one moved. When they heard the door open they all stood up. All except Muriel who sat with her back to the door staring.

Teresa stepped in, followed by Katherine, Danny and Tony. Teresa looked around the room. She realized that only one AGEH was facing her. She recognized Harris. He had been a leader before he fled the mountain. She wasn't surprised to see him. She could see that he was working hard to control his emotions. Next to him was a large, handsome Native American. Teresa wondered how he had become a part of the group but his facial expression told her that he wasn't a fan of hers. She could only see the top of Muriel's head. No one moved. No one said anything.

Finally Muriel stood up and moved toward her mother, stopping next to Tee. She struck that 'I'm determined' pose, with her head erect and her feet slightly apart, which her mother knew so well. She reached over and took Tee's hand. This almost unnoticeable movement wasn't lost on her mother.

There was more silence which was finally broken by Muriel. "Hello, Mother."

"Hello, Muriel," Teresa replied. "I can't tell you how much I appreciate the risk all of you took to save me."

"That's who we are," said Muriel.

"Yes, I understand that. Nevertheless, I'm grateful." Teresa paused. "I recognize Harris. Would you introduce me to the young man whose hand you are holding?"

"My name is Ts'huahntli," said Tee. Muriel had never heard him introduce himself with his Lummi name. She liked it. He sounded proud

and strong. "You can call me 'Tee, because that's usually too hard for white people."

"Very nice to meet you, Ts'huahntl." Teresa's pronunciation was almost flawless.

Again there was silence. Everyone stood without moving.

"Muriel," Teresa began, "as we were coming in the door just now I told your sister that I was terrified. She told me that I had good reason to be. She wasn't saying that I should be afraid of what you would do to me but she was telling me that I was frightened because I deserve . . ." her voice trailed off. She couldn't finish her sentence.

After a few moments to regain her composure Teresa continued. "Katherine told me that I should be thankful that you are forgiving people. She wasn't just speaking of you, Muriel. She was talking about everyone in this room and perhaps more. She told me that I should be honest and, to quote her, 'don't give them that bull shit that you tried on me.'"

Teresa gave a feeble smile as she said that. It seemed to ease the tension a bit. The faces seemed a bit less stern and behind her Tony punctuated it with a quiet "Amen, sister." She turned to him and gave a more relaxed smile.

"Your father and I had a dream. We didn't intend it to end this way. It was a dream, so it was supposed to have turned out perfect ... like you. No excuses. No bull shit. We were so excited when Clarence Simpson wanted to fund us. The next thing we knew he was having us do things we didn't want to do but we were too afraid to say 'no', unlike you and your friends who have shown unimaginable courage. We made excuses and we rationalized. The last time you saw us we were about ready to crack. We were trying to gather the courage to expose Clarence Simpson. But we didn't. We were cowards."

"It would have been much easier for me if you had assaulted me with your anger and hatred when I walked through the door. Then I could have slinked off and wallowed in my self-pity. But even Danny said 'I can't

even hate you.” There was a long pause. Teresa Smith didn't notice the softening of the faces of the people around her. Teresa began to blubber. “I'm so sorry. I don't want to be the monster. I don't want you to hate me, but I can't change what I've done.”

Teresa Smith slumped to the floor sobbing. Muriel was the first to get to her. She took the broken woman in her arms and said “I love you.” Teresa cried all the harder.

As she looked back up she was looking into Harris' eyes. They were kind and filled with emotion. “We will always hate what you did to us,” he said. “You can't blame us for that. But every AGEH should hear what you just said. That's what we need to hear.”

Teresa gave him a weak smile. Tee and Muriel helped her into the large overstuffed chair facing the fire. The sun would soon be coming up but now it was time to talk.

Danny started making coffee. He smiled to himself as he thought of the impact his freedom had on others. As the tantalizing aroma of the coffee filled the room and someone commented on Danny's remarkable coffee making skills, Teresa looked around the edge of the chair at him, smiled, and said, “you know, I was always proud of you.” Danny gave her a perplexed look.

“I know it is hard to believe,” Teresa said, “but I was very proud of everything each of you did. I knew you'd be a leader, Harris. When I walked into this room you were exactly the person I expected to see. Danny had a determination I don't think I had ever seen and haven't seen since. He would lock his jaw and you knew that nothing was going to deter him.”

“You have no idea. Ronald told me that I didn't dare show my feelings, especially as Simpson took over and had scientists he hired running the program. When they took over they treated you like lab animals. I hated that but I was too cowardly to even try to do anything. I really am proud of all of you.”

“When we first started and we were all idealistic, thinking that we were going to change the world for the better, I would get very emotionally involved with the children. I would cry for days when one of them would die. I never did get hardened to the realities of what was going on. I just spent more and more time in the lab and less time with the children.”

“Jackson was one of the first of the children who survived but it was immediately evident that he was physically quite frail. I felt horrible. I tried to make it up to him by taking care of him and working hard to correct whatever I'd done to cause him to be so frail.” There was a brief pause, “by the way, how is Jackson?”

“Jackson died during the escape,” Harris told her.

“Oh, no!” Teresa's eyes filled with tears. “Did Simpco kill him?”

“No,” said Harris. “He was so ill he would probably have died if he has stayed in the mountain. He was in the first van to leave. He died at a rest stop in Snoqualmie Pass. He was happy when he died. All he wanted was to be reassured that he was free.”

“I'm so sorry,” Teresa Smith said through her tears.

“We couldn't take time to bury him so we found a nice spot and left him sleeping up against a tree.”

“By the time your generation came along I was almost banned from the dormitory. That was a convenient excuse for not trying harder. I always hated it when I did get to see the children and they seemed to be afraid to be in the same room with me.”

“We were terrified to be with you,” Danny interjected.

“Why?” Teresa could hardly be understood for the tears. It was as if that truth cut deeper than anything said so far. “Why?” she begged.

“We thought you were the one who ordered the experiments,” Danny said with as much gentleness as he could. “It seemed that almost every time one of us was sent to see you they'd disappear soon thereafter.”

“Oh, my God!” Teresa put her head in her hands. “This is so much worse than I'd ever imagined.”

“Why didn't you say something?” asked Harris.

“I really didn't realize that was why you seemed afraid of me,” Teresa began. “Besides, I was trying to stay away to avoid the pain. I was afraid that, if I said anything or objected, Simpson would hurt Ronald and the girls. I know it was cowardly. If it was only a matter of him hurting me, I truly believe I'd have stood up to him, but I was terrified that he'd do something to Ronald and the girls . . . especially Muriel. Simpson knew that Muriel was an AGEH child. He wanted us to put her back in the mountain with the others. That was the only time I stood up to the man.”

“Of course you never knew,” she said looking at Danny and Harris, “that I was at almost every birth.”

“Really?” they said in unison.

“I hated the fact that those young women were having their babies alone. Even when I idealistically thought we were doing great work, I hated that the mothers didn't have any family with them and they had to give up their children. Of course they knew that beforehand, but that doesn't matter after you've held your baby.”

“I would sit with them and coach them through the delivery. I'd tell them how their child was the most beautiful baby I'd seen. But I couldn't stay around when they took the baby. I couldn't bear that.”

“Ronald and I kept a diary of all the mothers.”

“You know our mothers' names?” Muriel asked.

“Yes. At first we tried to keep in touch and help them. We paid for psychotherapy for many. Simpson put a stop to that. In fact, he thought he took away our list and forbid us to follow-up. Ronald put the list on the flash drive.”

The three AGEHs looked at each other. The names of their mothers were on the flash drive Ronald Smith had hidden, and now it was theirs. Tee could see where they were going. He put his hand on Muriel's shoulder.

“Hold on, you guys,” he said. “You can't just go running up to some poor woman and say 'hey, I'm the child you gave up.' That would be cruel.”

“Why?” demanded Danny.

“Because these women have had to work hard to learn to live with what happened to them.”

“But what if they haven't learned how to live with it,” Danny insisted. “This could be relief for all of us.”

“That may be true, but we have to be sure. There could be some who have moved on, have new families and haven't told them about you. You'd better believe that Simpco has probably threatened them if they talk.” Everyone had to agree with Tee. “I suggest that we wait until we've brought Simpco down and then figure out a way to give all of the moms a chance to meet their children.

“In the meantime,” Tee continued, “I need that flash drive so I can make copies and add the files to our ever growing collection.”

Katherine reached in her pocket and came out with the flash drive that Ted had given her. She handed it to Tee. Everyone looked at it as though it was somehow different. It was different in that on it was the names of their mothers.

Muriel looked at Tee and noticed that he was looking at Teresa. Muriel turned and looked at her mother. Teresa had an anguished look on her face as one would have facing the loss of someone very dear. Muriel had been so excited about finding out about her natural mother that she didn't think of what it would do to Teresa Smith. Teresa tried to smile but it wasn't much more than bearing her teeth as she gasped for air. Teresa's heart was pounding and her sobs were being more and more difficult to control.

Without hesitating Muriel went to her mother's side and put her arms around her. “No matter who or what you've been, you're still my mother. I'd just like to know my birth mother.” Teresa shook her head.

The catharsis went on until the sun was well up. Teresa Smith looked much older and much more tired than when she had arrived, but she also



looked at peace. She had not only been able to face the monster but she had learned much more about her daughters and her AGEH children. She was proud of what they were all doing. She saw strong, determined and talented women in her two girls. She also saw love in their eyes when they looked at Morita and Ts'huahntl and that love returned. Katherine showed her to a bed where she quickly fell fast asleep. It was the best sleep she had had for years.

Muriel had also learned a lot about her mother and herself. She learned her capacity for forgiveness and understanding people at their worst. In her mother she saw not only the horrible potential for causing suffering and pain through omission as well as commission, but she also saw how compassion is not something which is artificial and calculated but an innate part of being human. The proof was how that compassion did not give up inside her mother, despite her mother's efforts to hide, but was, on the contrary, what eventually brought her mother back to humanity. Muriel realized that her own capacity to forgive, step back and try to understand what drove this woman was not a weakness but a strength. She realized how forgiving her parents lifted a great burden from her.

*Compassion is the antitoxin of the soul:  
where there is compassion even the most  
poisonous impulses remain relatively  
harmless.*

Eric Hoffer.

*We have to have a deep, patient compassion  
for the fears of men and irrational mania of  
those who hate or condemn us.*

Thomas Merton

## CHAPTER ELEVEN.

Monday morning was cloudy but the temperature was rapidly pushing its way to the expected high of 73. It was almost noon when everyone started to move around. None of them had had more than four or five hours of sleep but there was a lot to do. As usual it was Danny who was up first and fixing coffee followed shortly by Katherine and Tee. A hearty brunch was in order. The last one in the room was Teresa Smith.

Teresa looked horrible. As she looked into the mirror her eyes seemed darker, her face more drawn than usual. After all of the emotional catharsis had only ended in the early morning hours. When she heard others starting to get up Teresa had laid there for some time before rising and even then stood looking out the window at the panoramic view of Lake Sammamish. She hardly saw the expanse of forest and lake in front of her because she was so preoccupied with her thoughts and worries. She worried about whether or not she had dreamed some of the night before and whether the group would be as open and forgiving this morning. She finally splashed some water on her face and ventured into the kitchen area to face the others. As she walked into the kitchen everything stopped and everyone looked. To Teresa Smith it was an eternity but in reality it was but a few moments.

“Good morning, Dr. Smith,” came a chorus of voices.

Over brunch the group started talking about the final phase of the plan to bring down Goliath. David, they noted, probably also had a bag full of rocks just like them. He just needed one. Like David they might only need one but they weren't going to take any chances and would take advantage of their entire arsenal. The newcomers to the group - those who had not been there the day after the escape - gave Harris, Danny, and Muriel a baffled look as though to say “David, who?” So the three had to take a

few minutes to explain how the ancient boy hero, David, who had defeated the feared giant, Goliath, had become their inspiration.

It was time to meet Goliath on his own turf. The first thing they needed to do was to bring Robert Henderson to the planning session. A great part of the basic plan depended upon what information he had been able to gather on the various players. To be able to isolate Simpco they would need to know whom it was that had to be targeted. Henderson still had the details.

After putting the principal players - those who would otherwise support Simpco - into the position of making a choice between giving up Simpco or facing a national scandal and/or a public investigation, they would give government agencies the opportunity to start investigating Simpco. Of course part of the plot was to distribute enough of their information to the media to force an investigation in case the government agencies were to drag their feet. They had to decide who was going to receive their packets.

"The Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs is the committee that has the most direct jurisdiction over private armies," said Tee

"That's true," Katherine agreed, "but the State Department is undoubtedly the one that catches the flack directly when Simpco gets into trouble or causes trouble."

"Yes," Harris interposed, "but both of you are talking about international affairs. That is important but we need to make sure that there's a lot of grass roots indignation."

"Such as?" asked Katherine.

"I suggest the Seattle DA's office and police, Washington State Patrol and the State Attorney General, to start with," Harris responded.

"It seems that we have at least four groups that we want to involve," said Muriel. "We want to put them out of business. That would seem to indicate Congress and the military. We want to send them to jail. That

requires legal institutions. Since they've undoubtedly broken state and federal laws, we need to get state and federal agencies.”

“Congress and the military would mean Congressional committees and the Joint Chiefs,” Danny offered.

“We obviously need to include all of the law enforcement agencies - state police and FBI - but I wouldn't leave out the CIA,” Tee suggested.

“Good idea,” said Muriel.

“So what does our list look like?” asked Harris.

“The way I figure it,” said Katherine scribbling on a tablet, “we've got the Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs and the Armed Services Committee. Then we have the State Department. For law enforcement I have the CIA, FBI, the Washington State Patrol and Seattle police. Legal entities would include the US Attorney General, the Washington State Attorney General and Seattle DA's office. Did I forget anyone?”

The group agreed that Katherine's list was quite comprehensive.

“Now what news media are we going use?” Tee queried.

The group started listing off important news media when Teresa spoke up. There was instant quiet and a bit of surprise.

“I'd suggest that you find out what newspapers have the greatest circulation. You might be surprised,” said Teresa. “Then stagger your distribution by media type.”

“What do you mean?” asked Tee as he was Googling newspapers by circulation on his laptop.

“Well,” Teresa continued, “I'd do newspapers first followed by radio and television, and then internet. The reason is that newspapers are going to take a bit longer to come out with hard copy. They also have radio, television and internet connections or branches.”

“I'll be darned,” Tee interrupted. Everyone looked at him. “Sorry Dr. Smith, but guess who has the greatest circulation in the US.”

There were a number of suggestions - the New York Times, Washington Post, Chicago Tribune headed the list.

“Nope!” exclaimed Tee with a grin. “Number one is the Wall Street Journal, followed by USA Today.” Looking at Teresa, “good thinking Dr. Smith. Thanks.”

“Call me Teresa,” a clearly embarrassed but pleased Teresa Smith said.

“She's right about their connection with other media,” said Morita. “You can get any newspaper on the internet, and all of the major papers are owned by media conglomerates.”

“I'd suggest that we also think regionally as well as by circulation,” Tee said, still studying the list of top newspapers. “Some areas, like New York City, have more than one paper in the top twenty.”

The discussion continued until a list of newspapers was determined. They decided upon the Wall Street Journal, USA Today, New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, Chicago Tribune, Houston Chronicle, Philadelphia Inquirer, Denver Post, Arizona Republican, Dallas Morning News, Cleveland Plain Dealer, Seattle Times, Boston Globe, Indianapolis Star, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, Orlando Sentinel, Cincinnati Enquirer, Atlanta Journal-Constitution and St. Louis Post-Dispatch.

The discussion about media coverage of Operation David and Goliath was just winding down when Robert Henderson returned Harris' telephone call. He had sent his family to stay with his wife's parents. He wouldn't mention where over the telephone. He and his partner, Victor, would meet with the group. They decided to have Tony meet them at the Family Pancake House, just off the 520 exit to Sammamish. He would then lead them back to the house.



By five o'clock Tony was back with Robert Henderson and his partner, Victor Abel. He also had Jaime in tow. Robert and Victor had to wait for the reunion.

Jaime was hugged at length by Muriel and swarmed with hugs and back-pats by Harris, Danny, and Tee. He then turned to Katherine, whom he hugged and teased as he was introduced to Morita. Jaime was still shaking Morita's hand when he noticed Teresa, who had stepped off to the side. There was a momentary silence.

"Hello, Dr. Smith. I'm glad that you're safe." he said as he walked up to her and extended his hand.

Jaime sat by the fire and recounted the adventure Stacy and he had had a little more than two weeks previous. As he told of fighting bad guys, hiding in caves, and being a mountain guide, the three ladies and Tee fixed some supper. His account and the plethora of questions lasted well into the meal.

"Why didn't you bring Stacy with you?" Muriel asked giving Jaime that little sister 'I'm going to embarrass you' look.

"Because I didn't want her to have to put up with your teasing." This brought a roar of laughter.

It felt good for the group to relax. While Jaime was brought up to date on what had happened during his absence, Robert and Victor were brought into the group and made to feel a part of the team. They could sense the comradery of the group and soon found themselves taking part in the goodhearted joking and teasing as they felt incorporated by the group.

Robert and Victor gave a detailed update on what they had learned from their investigation. They had followed up on the Kortzikian Clinic, the company which had been buying the organs. Its founder and CEO was Dr. Herman Kortzikian. He had started doing business with Simpco because he was in financial trouble. Once out of trouble he was obviously enjoying the profits. He had a very elaborate estate and a very large bank account. His senior surgeon was Dr. William Dunn. Dunn was aware of the source of

the organs but he was so intent upon helping people that he rationalized that if he didn't use the illegal organs they'd probably be sold to someone who wouldn't use them properly.

They had confirmed two Senators and a Congressman on Simpson's payroll. The most senior was Senator Albert Laskin. Simpson owned him after he sold his vote on the Armed Services Committee. Laskin was pure and simply on the take.

Next in line was Senator Montgomery Bakin. He wasn't in it for the money but to stay in office. Simpco made illegal contributions to three of Bakin's campaigns then they used that to blackmail him into doing favors and throwing votes.

Congressman Riley Thurmon got caught by the oldest trap of all - gambling, booze and sex. Simpco took him on a trip where they got some great pictures. Thurmon has done whatever Simpco said ever since.

Lt. Gen. James Patterson, whom Henderson had suspected before, was also on Simpco's payroll. He started out innocent enough. He really thought that organizations like Simpco were necessary for national security. They took a lot of pressure off of the military and they can do some things which the military can't do. He went along with them quite willingly until he tried to refuse some things which he thought were unethical and learned that they owned him. His assistant, Col. Edward Trank, knows the truth about Patterson but doesn't tell because he believes the 'national security' story.

They also found that Special Agent Frank Stuckey was the reason that Simpco had started following Henderson. Both Robert and Victor expressed a strong desire to deal with Stuckey's treachery and abuse of the agency, but they realized that he could be quite useful if they wanted to feed Simpco false information.

Robert and Victor felt that they had just exposed the proverbial 'tip of the iceberg' but they didn't think that we would need to go any deeper.

These were major players and if they could be turned, they would be the most valuable.

From that point on it was brain-storming 101 all afternoon. By 4 p.m. Danny had had so much coffee that he was walking in a circle around the outside of the group. Katherine had become the group scribe and was hanging pieces of tablet paper from the fireplace mantel. Harris and Tee were each standing at a window on opposite sides of the fireplace. Harris was rocking back and forth from heel to toe, while Tee stood like a cigar store wooden Indian. Morita, who had demonstrated himself to have the most diabolical imagination, was literally hanging upside down from the back of a chair. He claimed that it helped him think. He accredited his mephistophelian ideas to too many revenge movies.

Muriel sat lotus style in the middle of the commotion. She sat quietly and listened. At times two or three people were trying to talk at the same time.

“Is this getting out of hand?” she thought.

In her mind she heard Harris' voice, “Yes, I think so but we've got to give them this opportunity. After all, they've spent a lot of time and taken a lot of chances to get what we need to strike back. This is almost therapeutic. It is definitely empowering.”

“Okay,” she thought without saying, “but we need to get it under control soon.”

“I'll take care of it,” she heard Harris' voice say.

Harris turned from the window and asked everyone to stop talking. Muriel looked at him. Her head cocked. It was as though her conversation with him in her mind had been real.

“We've got lots of ideas and I'm sure we could come up with many more, but it's time to narrow it down to a workable plan.” Harris took charge. Teresa Smith smiled as she watched him skillfully lead the group to decisions. Often times leading them away from foolish mistakes or over exuberance without demeaning or minimizing anyone's idea or input he



would guide them into selecting the best from all the ideas. She wished that Ronald had been alive to see this.

Within a short time they had decided upon four individuals whom they would want to have ready to testify against Simpco - Kortzikan, the pilot who flew the helicopter that killed the AGEHs, Col. Trank, and Senator Bakin. Then they turned their attention to how they were going to orchestrate the coup d'grace.

Muriel got up and walked over to Tee, who was still standing looking out the window.

“What's so interesting out there?” she asked.

“Nothing,” he replied. “Just thinking.”

“And?”

“When you fell a tree, you must make sure that it doesn't fall on you.” He paused. Still looking out the window. “When you shoot a bear you'd better make sure that your first shot kills him because you probably won't get a second.” Tee looked down at Muriel and put his arm around her. “I sure hope that we're ready.”



Their plan was good. Even Victor and Robert had to admire the subtle manipulation, leverage and detail. However, they all knew that they were amateurs playing with the pros. One slip and banner headlines of the giant's demise could be turned to a back page article about the tragic accident that killed them. No one underestimated the savage, ruthless and unholy way Clarence Simpson dealt with people who got in his way. His \$25,000 bounty made it perfectly clear that killing innocent people to get what he wanted was perfectly within his purview. He was obviously exploitative. He had a strong sense of entitlement; i.e. he believed that he deserved special and favorable treatment and that even governments should comply with his wants and expectations. People who had met him said that

he demanded excessive admiration, was arrogant and totally lacking in any sort of empathy. He was rich and powerful. People in authority feared him. This was the man this small band was going to confront. He was truly a political and business Goliath that struck fear into the hearts of everyone who had the misfortune of standing contrary to him. Like the Goliath of old, he taunted would be adversaries by his blatant and open encroachment on fairness, rules and common decency.

Nevertheless, the tiny band was beginning its crusade. It had a few people to convince that they didn't want to be left too near Clarence Simpson and Simpco, then it was time to walk out onto the field of battle and answer the giant's challenge.

The first person the group went after was Dr. Herman Kortzikan. They had Simpco documentation linking Kortzikan's clinic and Simpco in the sale of human organs. They also had Dr. Ronald Smith's documents. That was good documentation but the team felt that they needed to have personal testimony. Dr. Teresa Smith could testify as a third party, but Dr. Kortzikan had been a party to the exchange. He could say 'I did this.' That would be irrefutable. All they had to do was to convince him to testify against Simpson.

Under normal circumstances there would be no way to get Dr. Kortzikan to testify against Simpson - that is, unless he believed that Simpson was trying to kill him. The team had two options. They could set up a situation, by feeding false information to Simpco via Special Agent Stuckey, whereby Simpco would actually attempt to kill Kortzikan. That was too big of a risk. If they succeeded, then the team would be short one witness. Consequently they decided upon the second option; viz. making Kortzikan believe that Simpco had attempted to kill him and that he had been rescued by the FBI.

Robert Henderson went to visit the not-so-good doctor.

"I'm sorry," said the receptionist, "you can't see Dr. Kortzikan without an appointment."

"I'm sorry," Henderson repeated back, "but you are going to tell Dr. Kortzikian that the FBI would like to talk to him about some organs that appear to have been obtained under unusual circumstances and that he can either talk to me here or I'll be back to take him downtown."

A short while later Henderson was shown into Dr. Kortzikian's opulent office. It was larger than most people's homes and done all in highly polished hardwood. There was a gigantic ornate desk that was perfectly clear except for a telephone, laptop and pen set. Across from the desk was a bar complete with high backed chairs and large screen television. Across the room was a sitting area with leather sofas, several chairs, oriental rugs and a marble fireplace. The paintings on the wall appeared to be original oils.

"Good morning, Special Agent," Dr. Herman Kortzikian smiled.

"Good morning, sir," Henderson replied.

"From the message you sent in I'm wondering if I should have my attorney present."

"Hear me out and then you can decide."

"Fair enough," Kortzikian directed Henderson to the sitting area. "What's this all about?"

"It's about black market organs, Simpco, and documentation that show your involvement."

"Oh?" To Henderson's trained eye, Kortzikian was working awfully hard to appear surprised.

"I'm here to talk about a way for you to stay alive."

"Am I in danger?"

"Let me put it this way, Dr. Kortzikian. We have documentation that links you with Simpco in illegal trafficking of human organs. That means that you're going to jail. Whether you live to go to jail, and, if you make it to jail, how long you will survive in jail will depend completely upon your willingness to cooperate with authorities."

"This sounds like a threat," Kortzikan was now working hard not to look worried. "and that's when I call my attorney."

"Is he someone you can trust?" Henderson asked. "You see, the reason we believe that you have a greater chance of being killed before you ever get to jail is because the word is that Clarence Simpson thinks you talked."

Kortzikan was physically shaken. It took him several seconds to regain his composure. "That's absurd."

"It may be," Henderson continued, "but you know how paranoid Simpson is, and if he thinks it might be true he's probably watching this place and saw me come in. He's already tried to kill me."

"I don't have any business with Simpco," Kortzikan insisted.

"Have it your way, Dr. Kortzikan. But if you cooperate I'll give you protection until the trial and may work out a deal for your testimony."

"Thank you for coming, Special Agent," Kortzikan was being overly flamboyant. Another indicator to Henderson that he had struck a nerve. "I wish you the best on your investigation. If anyone here is involved, we will be glad to cooperate, but Kortzikan Clinic has no dealings with Simpco and I assure you I don't need protection."

While Henderson was talking to Dr. Kortzikan, Tee and Danny had been looking for Kortzikan's car and driver. He had his own little area on the first parking level. The limo was backed into a stall where there was a gasoline pump. Through an adjoining door there was a room for the driver to wait which also contained oil, tools and other supplies for the limo. The driver had a large screen television, a recliner, a complete kitchen and a bed. It was obvious that Kortzikan's driver was expected to be ready at any time.

Staying out of the line of the security cameras, Danny and Tee found that the door nearest the door to the driver's quarters was open. Inside the door they found that there was no entrance to the driver's quarters from the inside. Returning to the parking garage, and again making

sure they kept their faces away from any security cameras, they approached the door to the driver's quarters. They knocked.

It was opened by a small, middle aged man. He was no more than five foot six inches tall and had a significantly receding hairline. What hair he had was salt and pepper. He opened only far enough to see the two men. He was being very suspicious. Undoubtedly few people, if any, had every knocked at his door. Danny noticed that there was no chain.

"Sorry," Danny said, as he pushed in the door and jabbed the surprised driver with a tranquillizer dart he had taken from the gun. The driver fell back with an expression of surprise and fear. "Honestly, we're not going to hurt you!" Danny reassured the frightened man as he slumped to the floor.

They carried the man to his bed, secured his arms and legs, and sat back to wait for Kortzikian to call for his car. In the closet Danny found a chauffeur's uniform that he could wear. That decided who got to play chauffeur. It was a bit short on him but otherwise quite roomy. If they were lucky no one would really get a good look at him in it anyway.

They didn't have to wait long. A short while after Henderson left Kortzikian called for his car. Danny put on his uniform jacket, hat and a pair of sunglasses and went to pick up Kortzikian.

A man at the entrance to the building opened the door for Dr. Kortzikian. He got in and said "home" without looking. The door closed and Danny started pulling away.

Suddenly Kortzikian looked up. "Who are you? You're not one of my drivers."

"Just a last minute substitute," Danny smiled. He didn't give Kortzikian a chance to think about calling anyone. He put the barrel of the tranquillizer gun over the privacy wall that divided the driver and passenger compartments, aimed at Kortzikian and pulled the trigger. He looked around. Not only was traffic very light, but the extra dark windows hid what

had just happened from anyone's view. Danny pulled around the block and picked up Tee who was waiting.

The team had decided to use the garage at the lakeside house for their drama. Danny dropped Kortzikian and Tee off at the garage. He drove the limo back to the Kortzikian Clinic, parked, wiped it down, cut the still sleeping chauffeur free and returned to Sammamish with Tony.

Meanwhile Tee, Harris, Morita and Jaime had secured Kortzikian to a chair, covered his head and prepared for show time. They watched to see when he started to move.

"Hey, doc?" Tee said, doing his best to sound like a movie version of a New York hoodlum. "Yuh awake." He gave Kortzikian a little nudge.

"Where am I? What do you want?" Kortzikian was awake and quite frightened. They knew that he was awake because he spoke. They knew that he was extremely frightened because he had wet his pants.

"We jess wanna talk," Tee gave a long pause. "We saw the fed at yer office. We don like feds, and my principal don like yuh talking to no feds."

"I didn't tell him anything," Kortzikian. "You've got to believe me."

"Oh, I'z believe yuh," another pause, "but my principal ... well, he ain't as understandin' and trustin'."

Tee's phone rang. He answered and started talking about how Kortzikian had just awakened and hadn't told him anything yet. He stayed as far away from Kortzikian as he could so that it would appear that he didn't want Kortzikian to hear.

"We'll find out what he told them," Kortzikian heard Tee saying. "Yes, sir. I understand. No loose ends. We'll get ridge of him as soon as Eddy gets back."

"Sorries about dat," Tee returned to Kortzikian. "where was we?"

"I really didn't say anything to the FBI. They were just trying to get me to talk and I refused. They were fishing. You can check for yourself. Just ask your man inside the FBI."

"How'd yuh know about Stuckey?" Tee demanded.

“The agent must have said something.”

“Dat's not good. Dat's not good a-tall.”

Kortzikian was allowed to sit and think about what he had just heard. As Tee and the others watched the frightened doctor they prepared for the next part of their drama. Kortzikian was breathing hard. In fact, they noted, he was almost hyperventilating from fear.

As Henderson poured a large pool of blood-red liquid on the floor, Tee whispered, “do we need that much?”

“Gotta look gross,” Henderson smiled, pouring a bit more on the spreading puddle. “Show time!”

Morita opened and closed the man-door of the garage.

“Eddy, is dat yuh?” Tee said, giving Henderson a disgusted look and lying face down in the pool of fake blood.

“Federal Agents. Hands up,” Henderson shouted from across the garage.

“Damn it,” said Tee as he fired a blank pistol. Two shots were heard in reply and all Kortzikian could hear was the sound of a body falling to the ground. Actually it was just a couple sacks of mulch. Morita and Harris smiled and gave a thumbs up. They had practiced making the mulch sound realistic the entire time Danny and Tee had gone after Kortzikian and they were pleased with their performance.

The next thing Kortzikian knew he was looking at Robert Henderson and Victor Abel. He looked down at the ground. There lay a man in a large pool of blood.

“Well, well,” said Henderson as though speaking to Victor. “Look who we have here.”

“Oh, thank you Special Agent,” Kortzikian groveled.

“You know, Victor,” Henderson said without acknowledging Kortzikian, “if we take Dr. Kortzikian downtown, Simpco's mole in the agency will probably arrange for an accident.”

“Oh, that's a given,” Victor replies. “But if he wants to continue to deny any part of the black market organs that's our only choice. He has his rights.”

“Oh, I'm not going to violate his rights, but if he were to agree to tell us the whole story and promise to testify against Simpco, we could take him to a safe house.”

“Take me to a safe house!” Kortzikan pleaded.

“We don't want to violate your rights.” Robert said. “You have the right to deny everything and we'll just take you downtown for questioning. Are you sure you understand what it means if you tell us everything?”

“Yes,” Kortzikan drops his head. “I'll tell you everything. Just don't let Simpson get to me.”

After a brief confession and statement that he understood what he was doing, which Robert and Victor taped, the two agents had Kortzikan call Dr. Dunn and tell him that he would be out of town for a few weeks. Then they put him in the car which was parked in the garage.

“Keep your head down until I tell you to come up,” Victor said as he slid behind the wheel. “I don't want to take any chances that someone spots you and follows us to the safe house.”

Kortzikan laid down on the floor of the car as they drove off. Victor would keep Kortzikan at a safe house until Stuckey was exposed and it was safe to turn him in. While at the safe house Victor would make tapes of Kortzikan's account of his acquisition of the AGEH organs.

After the car drove out of the garage Tee sat up.

“That stuff is nasty,” he said with a big smile, “but it was worth it.”

“One down, three to go,” said Harris standing in the doorway.

Robert Henderson just stood there shaking his head. “I don't believe that I just did that. That will cost me my pension if anyone ever finds out.”



“We'll take up a collection,” said Tee putting his hand on Henderson's shoulder, being sure that he smeared a bit of the fake blood on Henderson's cheek. They all walked back to the house to tell the others.



It had been five days since they had “convinced” Herman Kortzikian to cooperate with the FBI. With him tucked safely away they turned their attention to phase two.

Tee had been able to find out that one of the pilots the night of the escape was a man named Brian Wilson. Since Simpco had quite a few pilots they couldn't be sure that Wilson was the one who attacked the van, but they could use him to find out who was flying the helicopter that attacked the van.

Tony had made an imprint of Henderson's FBI badge and sent it to the ex-counterfeiter, Johnny, in Redding. Johnny made Harris, Danny and Jaime some FBI badges and ID. Johnny made sure that there were some definite imperfections that wouldn't be noticeable to casual inspection but would keep the real FBI from asking how they got such perfect identification. Tony also did it without Henderson's knowledge so that they could honestly say that Henderson had no idea and did not play a part in the fakes. Plausible deniability.

It didn't take much to get an address for Brian Wilson. Harris and Jaime knock on his door. When he opened the door they flashed their fake badges and said, “we need to talk to you.” They never identified themselves as FBI agents, they just let Brian Wilson arrive at the wrong conclusion.

“What do you want?” Wilson demanded.

“You're a pilot for Simpco Incorporated?”

“Yes.”

“Was Randy Gregor ever your crew chief?”

Brian Wilson stood looking at them. He was trying to decide how much more to divulge. There was a long pause.

“Well, was Randy Gregor ever your crew chief?”

“I don't think I should say any more until I get authority.”

“That's fine. We can all go down to FBI headquarters and call Simpco from there.”

“Okay,” Wilson said.

“That's where Gregor told us about your mission.”

“What mission?”

“He told us that you were the pilot of a helicopter that, last June sixth, attacked and destroyed a civilian van in the mountains north of Kittitas.”

“That's absurd,” Wilson almost spit the words. “I've never flown near Kittitas!”

“Your tail number is G-MQPT2,” said Jaime without flinching at Wilson's growing aggressiveness. He paused for effect. “Right?”

“What if it is?”

“Then you're our pilot,” added Harris.

“You see,” Jaime picked up, “Mr. Gregor shared Simpco records that make you the pilot of that helicopter when it attacked that van.”

“I didn't attack that van,” Wilson protested.

“Then you know about the van!” said Harris.

“But he just told us he never flew near Kittitas,” said Jaime. “if he lied about that, and he knows about the van, maybe he lied about not being the pilot who attacked it.”

“I'm not lying,” insisted Wilson.

“How do we know?”

“Look,” said Wilson, “I was there. I'll admit that, but I didn't fire on the van. I was still well up the mountain.”

“Then who did?”

There was a long silence. Jaime and Harris could almost see Brian Wilson weighing his options.

“He didn't have any choice,” Wilson suddenly exclaimed.

“Who didn't?”

“The pilot flying the attack helicopter.”

“How do you know?”

“I heard the radio transmission.”

“So?”

“My friend was flying that helicopter. He reported that he had spotted a van traveling down the mountain road toward Kittitas. The controller told him to fire in front of them to scare them and order them to stop. Then our flight commander got on the radio and told my friend to take out the target. My friend objected and said that they were innocent people and he could stop them. The commander yelled at him and threatened to shoot him if he didn't destroy the van. The commander asked the gunner if he heard the order. The gunner said he had his orders. My friend had no choice but to turn the ship so the gunner could destroy the van.”

“What's your friend's name?”

“Come on,” Wilson pleaded. “He didn't want to do it.”

“That may be true, but we need to hear that from him.” said Jaime.

“And he can tell us the name of his gunner.”

There was a long silence.

“Can you promise me that he won't take the fall for this?” Wilson was showing tremendous loyalty.

“We can't promise that, but we can promise that we'll do whatever we can.”

“Okay,” Wilson finally conceded. “His name is Tim Ellis.”

Jaime and Harris wrote down the name, even though they had been recording the entire conversation.

“Please tell him that I'll vouch for him,” said Wilson manifesting extreme guilt.

Harris and Jaime got Brian Wilson to give them an address for Tim Ellis and the next stop was to confront the pilot of the deadly helicopter. It took them less to convince Ellis to talk. All they had to do was play the tape of their conversation with Wilson. Ellis quickly caved.

“Okay. Yes. I was flying the chopper, but I didn't have any choice. They would have killed me if I didn't give the gunner a clear shot.” He paused. “I know it was cowardly.”

“Yes,” said Harris, “it was cowardly.”

“You have no idea how this has weighed on my mind.” The young pilot was almost in tears. “I've never been in combat. The gunner was a vet. He let out of war-hoop when the van went into the ravine. I was so upset that I had to let my co-pilot fly home. We didn't have to kill them. I told the commander that I could stop them but he said that we had to make an example of them.”

“Will you give us a complete statement?” Harris asked.

“You're not taking me to jail?”

“Not right now, if you give us a complete statement and don't tell anyone that you've spoken to us. We want to catch the really bad guys.”

“Sure,” said Tim Ellis, looking like he had been given a new life.

“Sure! Anything!”

Tim Ellis gave a detailed accounting of the incident. His account of the radio conversation matched that of Brian Wilson perfectly. Ellis provided the name of the flight commander, the gunner and other details. They reminded him that he was not to tell anyone of their visit. If he did, they told him, he would lose any immunity he might get for helping.

As they left the stricken pilot's apartment Harris looked at Jaime. “Two down. Two to go.”

The team now had all of the details of the helicopter attack. They felt confident that the two pilots were telling the truth. Firstly, there would

have been no reason for Wilson and Ellis to have made up a story ahead of time since they could not have foreseen being interrogated. Secondly, there wasn't time for Wilson to warn Ellis. If there had been an attempt to warn him, Ellis would most likely have just disappeared. He wouldn't have stayed around to tell the team a concocted story. Now they had not only the names of those who made the decision but they had two recorded accounts of the attack to corroborate the AGEH's claim.

When they returned to the Lake Sammamish house Harris and Jaime recounted their encounters with the two pilots.

“When I first saw him,” said Harris, “I wanted to hurt him. I wanted to kill him. I couldn't believe the anger and hatred I was feeling. But after I heard him tell the same story as Wilson told us and saw his face when he admitted to being a coward, I realized that letting him live was greater punishment. There's no doubt that he will never forget what he did.”



That same evening Harris called Harry and Jennifer Grist. The Grist's were an influential couple who were very politically active and well connected. Harry and Jennifer were both from old Seattle money. Their families had made their fortunes in lumber, fishing and shipping. When she first became involved with the AGEH's cause, Jennifer had said that she wanted to try to make up for some of the things her family had done to get rich. Evidently one or more of her grandfathers had been quite happy to accept Shanghaied sailors with a bit of dabbling in the sale of Asian slaves.

Harry's family money came mostly from lumber, but that didn't exclude the exploitation of people. He agreed that their help might right a few wrongs, but he was a bit more realistic.

“I know I can't really make up for what my family did to get rich, but I know damn well that if I knowingly let the exploitation of these people go without doing my best to stop it, I'll be as guilty as my fore bearers, if

not worse. They actually didn't see anything wrong in what they did. I know better.”

Harry and Jennifer were good friends of Senator George Hamlin, a known opponent of Simpco. Hamlin was also from old money and the three of them had gone to school together. When Hamlin started into politics, Harry and Jennifer were supporters, contributors and campaign workers. Hamlin had spoken up against Simpco enough to have Simpco put out a lot of money and hard work to keep him from getting re-elected. Thus far Hamlin had survived at least three Simpco attacks.

Harris explained the documentation they had and their plan to bring Simpco down. The Grist's were more than happy to call George Hamlin immediately and arrange for a visit.

On August 19th the Grist's and Jaime arrived at the Washington office of Senator Hamlin. The Grist's had told him that what they needed to discuss was extremely important, so he blocked off his entire afternoon. He sat and listened intently as Jaime gave a detailed account of the AGEH project; the escape; the attack on the van; the attacks on Tee, Muriel, Robert, Katherine, Morita, Teresa, Stacy and himself; the confessions of Dr. Kortzikan, Dr. Smith and the pilots; and the sale of human organs along with the names of those in Washington known to be on Simpco's payroll.

“That's quite a story,” he exclaimed once Jaime finished.

“It's the truth,” Jaime insisted.

“Oh, I'm not doubting that,” said Senator Hamlin. “You have Jennifer and Harry Grist with you. But do you have any supporting documentation?”

“I'm glad you asked,” Jaime almost grinned as he handed that Senator a flash disk. “Plug that into your computer and you'll find audio files of Dr. Ronald Smith, Dr. Teresa Smith, Dr. Herman Kortzikan, Brian Wilson and Tim Ellis. You'll also find Simpco documents, and documentation from the AGEH project itself and Kortzikan Clinic.”

“Ooh, that's good!” said the Senator, plugging the flash disk into the computer on his desk.

He took some time browsing through the documents and audio files. Frequently he would be seen shaking his head in disbelief or murmuring 'Oh, my God' or looking up at the three of them waiting and saying “this is unbelievable.” After spending quite some time looking at the contents of the flash disk and then a long period of silence, he pushed back from his desk.

“How can I help!” he said emphatically. “We've got to shut these bastards down!”

Jaime explained how the team wanted to get Col. Trank and Senator Bakin to turn against Simpco. He explained how Col. Trank was aware of what his boss, Lt. Gen. Patterson, was doing but was buying into the national security cover, and that Senator Bakin was probably the easiest of the senators since he had been blackmailed and might be more interested in a way out.

“I know Senator Xavier Cruger well,” said Hamlin. “We were naive freshman senators together. He's on the Senate Homeland Security committee. We've worked together a couple of times to try to nail Simpco for its behavior. I'm sure he'll be glad to help.”

The next day Jaime, the Grist, and Senator Hamlin meet in Senator Xavier Cruger's office. Hamlin took the lead.

“Xavier,” said George Hamlin after introductions had been made, “I've got something here that I think will make whatever you've had to endure in office worth it.”

“And what might that be?” asked Senator Cruger.

“Who has been your biggest nemesis?”

“Simpco,” said the Senator. “You think you've got something on Simpco?”

“I don't think,” said Hamlin grinning from ear to ear. “I know.” He handed Cruger the flash disk. “Put that in your computer and enjoy it.”

Cruger looked at his friend's grin and then the smiles of his companions. He put the flash disk in his computer and started the process of opening it like he was expecting a jack-in-the-box to jump out at any time. When he saw the first document his jaw dropped. He looked up at Senator Hamlin.

"Have you seen this?" he said. "Well, of course you've seen it, but what the hell do we do with it?" Senator Cruger was excited.

"Oh, it gets better," Hamlin encouraged his colleague on, "you haven't listened to any of the audios"

Cruger happened to pick Dr. Kratzikan's statement first.

"Jaime," Senator Hamlin instructed, "tell Senator Cruger your story just like you told me."

Senator Cruger sat listening. His empathy of the pain and suffering showed on his face. Jaime could see the sorrow grow and the anger boil until, as Jaime concluded, Cruger jumped to his feet and yelled "how many more innocent people must die before we stop these bastards!"

Senator Hamlin stood up and put his hand on his friend's shoulder.

"No more, my friend," said Hamlin. "No more." Then turning to Jaime. "Tell Xavier your plan."

Jaime went through the team's plan with Senator Cruger who sat smiling and shaking his head in amazement throughout the presentation.

The next morning Jaime, Harry, Jennifer and the two senators met in Senator Cruger's office. The senator's secretary announced the arrival of Col. Edward Trank.

"Come in, Colonel," Cruger indicated a rather straight chair facing the gathered group. It didn't take a trained observer to see that the colonel was very anxious. If nothing else, the straight chair facing a group indicated that he was going to have to defend himself. His problem was that he had no idea of why.

"Colonel Trank," Cruger continued, "you have been General Patterson's aide for quite some time, haven't you?"



“Yes, Sir.” said the officer sitting straight. “About five years or so.”

“How familiar are you with his dealings with Simpco?” Cruger came straight to the point. Jaime wondered if it wasn't a bit too direct, but it was Cruger's show.

“Very familiar,” said the officer.

“Have you ever had any concerns about Simpco or General Patterson's relationship to them?”

“Sir?” The shock on Col. Trank's face showed that he knew immediately where the interrogation was headed.

“I think you heard me, Colonel. It is a simple question which might make or break your career.”

“Do I need counsel?” asked Trank.

“Colonel Trank. Before I ask my question again and before you call for your attorney, let me share with you. On this computer I have irrefutable documentation and audio confessions that are going to bring Simpco crashing down. They aren't going to go quietly, and one of the people whom they are going to indict is your boss, General Patterson. You can go down with your boss or you can help the authorities and save your career. Take a few moments to read some of this before you answer.”

Senator Cruger handed Col. Trank a laptop. The colonel read. The group watched as his face became red and disbelief turned to anger.

“Colonel Trank,” the Senator's tenor made it clear that he was asking the final questions. “I know that you have supported your boss in the name of national security. Is that true?”

“Yes, Sir.” Col. Trank's eyes were still glued to the laptop screen.

“Is what you are reading justified by national security?”

“No, Sir!”

“Were you aware of those activities?”

“No, Sir!”

“What can you tell us, Colonel?”

“I know that Gen. Patterson does whatever Simpco tells him. Sometimes it has been to quash investigations into Simpco behavior when there is evidence that the accusations were true. He told me that we needed to protect Simpco for national security.”

“And you believed that?”

For the first time Col. Edward Trank looked up for the computer. To this point his face had been partially hidden. Now he was exposed. His face was still red and his eyes were filled with tears. Like a soldier he put the laptop on a nearby table and stood at attention.

“I wanted to,” he said. “I should have questioned.” He glanced down at the computer. “I should have asked questions but I wanted to believe.” Then stiffening his posture, “The Senator will have my resignation within the hour. Sir!”

“No I won't,” said Senator Cruger. The colonel's head jerked around toward the Senator.

“Sir?”

“No, we all believe that you didn't know this was going on. We also believe that you may have known your boss was on the take, but we think you had yourself convinced that it was in the interest of national security. The only things of which you are guilty are complacency and poor judgment. Not career bell ringers but not worthy of sending you to the brig.”

“Yes, Sir. I mean no, Sir. I mean . . .”

“Quiet and listen. This is what you are going to do if you don't want to end up in the brig with your boss.”

The team went on to extract a statement of evidence to tie Patterson to Simpco. Trank could also tell the senators where all of the political bodies were buried - the reports and investigations that Patterson had quashed to protect Simpco. Then they explained how he was not to tell Patterson anything about their meeting and, when the proverbial shit hit the fan, he

was to refuse to make any statements but go directly to Senator Cruger's office.

With that Col. Trank was dismissed. He stood to attention, thanked the group for their understanding, and gave them a snappy salute.

On the way out Colonel Trank saw Senator Bakin sitting in the outer office. He gave the Senator a quick salute as he passed and left the office totally oblivious of the fact that Senator Bakin was the next on the chopping block.

"Oh, my," said Xavier Cruger appearing in the doorway between his office and the outer office where Bakin was waiting. "I'm so sorry, Montgomery. I didn't know you were waiting. You're here early."

With great cordiality Senator Cruger ushered Senator Bakin into his office and introduced him to the group. As before there was no time wasted getting to the point. This time, however, Jaime just sat and enjoyed the show. He had seen Senator Cruger in action and knew that he could handle it.

"Montgomery, we've got a problem."

"A problem?" the younger senator said.

"Yes. We have irrefutable documentation that you were a very bad boy on a cruise that Simpco arranged. We have further irrefutable evidence that they have some very nasty pictures of you on that cruise and that they have been blackmailing you ever since."

Senator Montgomery Bakin sat stunned. After a few moments he began to yammer at which Cruger raised his hand to stop.

"Montgomery, before you get yourself in any deeper, let me tell you that the evidence we have is beyond your explaining. We even have the pictures. So how you respond will directly affect the way we handle the situation."

"What do you want?" Montgomery asked as he dropped his head.

"We want you to give us a recorded statement verifying what we can prove, add anything we don't already know, and then testify against Simpco."

“What?” Bakin's face went pale and a look of horror revealed the extent to which he feared Simpco.

“You heard me,” said Cruger patiently. “We know that Al Laskin is on the take and there may be others. You know as well as we do that Laskin and Simpco would throw you to the wolves to save themselves.”

“More like they'd tear me apart like wolves,” said an obviously distraught Bakin.

“That's true too,” said Cruger calmly.

“You can't ask me . . .”

Cruger interrupted. “We can and we are.”

“I'm a dead man when they find out. I won't have to worry about getting kicked out of the Senate or sent to jail, I'll be dead.”

“Not if you keep your mouth shut until we tell you.”

“What?”

“We're not going to blow the whistle on you. You're going to give us a recorded statement. Then you're going to act like nothing has happened until all hell starts to break loose. At that time you're going to make a public statement, promise to testify and then disappear until it's time to testify. We'll hide you and your family.”

“If you think you're in danger before we go public,” Jaime interjected, “call either of the Senators and we'll take care of you.”

“They'll never let me live!” Bakin began to whine.

“We're bringing them down once and for all,” said Senator Hamlin. “If you see this through there won't be any Simpco to hunt you down. You'll probably lose your seat but we'll do our best to keep you out of jail.”

Bakin was defeated. “I can't tell you how many times they made me pay for that damn cruise. I was an idiot but I wasn't a traitor. I can't tell you how many times I wanted to come clean. I'd tell them that I wanted out. I told them that I'd keep their secret but just leave me alone. They told me that they couldn't do that. Clarence Simpson himself told me that he had a stable full of Congressmen and that I would do what he said as long as he

wanted. He didn't threaten to tell my family but he threatened to hurt my family. Would you take my family some place safe right now? I'll help you. I'll do exactly what you say, but please take my family somewhere safe."

Jaime pulled out his cell phone and called Harris. When Harris answered he quickly explained the situation and Bakin's request to protect his family.

"Can we hide them?" Jaime asked, looking Bakin in the eyes as he spoke. He listened without expression then said, "Thanks. See you later." and hung up.

Jaime leaned forward toward the senator. "You were the idiot and got yourself into this mess. I'm not going to pass judgment but I am telling you that what we're going to do is not for you but for your innocent family. You get them ready by nine this evening and they'll disappear until the smoke clears. I'd suggest that you tell them the truth before they go because there's no way they're not going to find out when it all hits the fan."

Bakin started to cry with relief. "I can't tell you the load this has lifted from me. If you protect my family, I can do what I knew I should have done years ago."

"Okay, then," said Cruger. "Clean up in the bathroom over there and leave this office looking like you just made the million dollar deal."

A short while later a smiling Senator Montgomery Bakin left the office. The group sat and talked. Jaime pushed the speed dial for Muriel. When she answered all he said was "three and four down. Time to bring down Goliath."



The stage in Washington was set. All that remained was to coordinate the attack. Timing was going to be crucial to keep Simpco from finding an escape route. Like military strategy everything had to come together at exactly the same time. If Simpco was to learn about one of the

AGEH's means of attack they might be able to circumvent that attack and even possibly escape the trap altogether. It wasn't very likely that they could get away without serious and most likely fatal damage but they couldn't take that risk. It would be like David not killing Goliath immediately. Had Goliath been mortally wounded he could have still killed David and many others. No, just as it was for David of old, it was essential to the AGEHs that they destroy Simpco on first strike.

Senator Cruger said that there was a Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs meeting on September 16th. With that information the team decided that they should do the government and law enforcement distribution on September 15th. That way there would be no delay before it was discussed in at least one government committee and no time for Simpco to try to prepare a defense or counter attack. Before leaving Washington Jaime made sure that Col. Trank and Senator Bakin were ready to do their part. He gave them last minute instructions.

Jaime looked down on the countryside far below as the Grist's Citation CJ-525 jet cruised high above the American heartland on its way back to Seattle. He thought about the people below going about their daily lives totally oblivious to companies like Simpco who were consuming great amounts of their taxes in the name of national security. He thought about how angry they would be when they heard the news. Then he wondered, would they really be all that angry or concerned? There was still a lot of prejudice down there. Too many times in his own life he had seen prejudice against Mexican Americans allow a crooked company to get away with atrocities because Mexicans, Native Americans, African Americans and immigrants are seen as inferior - almost sub-human. He was sure that Simpco would want to play that card. Hopefully the team had addressed that by also exposing Simpco for creating the AGEHs. If they tried to avoid prosecution for selling AGEH organs by arguing that AGEHs are created then they would have to answer to all those people who thought they were getting "human" organs. Jaime had to smile to himself as he thought about

how they were turning prejudice against prejudice. The battle over AGEH's being human beings entitled to equal rights under the law was a different battle that would be fought after Simpco had been destroyed.

That wasn't going to be an easy battle. It is strange, thought Jaime, how Americans are so prejudice when they all went through being the object of that prejudice. As he looked down he contemplated how the ancestors of the people in each of those houses had come to this country seeking life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. They came here seeking the American dream to be free and be able to make a better life for their children. At some point in their family history almost all of them spoke a language other than English and had to struggle to communicate when they arrived, yet the children of those immigrants will sport bumper stickers saying "If you can't speak English - go home." Where would they be if their grandparents or great-grandparents had been forced to "go home" because they couldn't speak English? All of them had to start at the bottom of the American social structure and withstand the name calling, job discrimination and other manifestations of prejudice, yet they do it to others.

He remembered a man with whom he had worked who had come from a small mid-western town that had been settled by German immigrants. Even though the man had been born in the United States he had never spoken English until he went to school, and that was only because it was an academic subject. Almost everyone in the county spoke German as their first language. Then came World War II and they became the object of prejudice and abuse. People stopped speaking German. His family changed their name so that it didn't sound German. He enlisted in the Army. Even though he was born and raised in the United States he was not totally trusted and was sent to the west coast and then into the Pacific Theater of battle. He told of the many times that he was derided, called names and beaten up because there were still traces of German in his English.

Despite his own experience, the entire time Jaime knew the man he used derogatory terms about ethnic groups. He talked about chinks, coons,

frogs, Micks, hymies, prairie niggers, and wetbacks, and he was happy to give you a reason that he hated each of them. Even knowing that Jaime was Mexican-American, the man would go on long tirades about how the wetbacks were lazy, ignorant, destroying the economy, and wouldn't even speak English.

The last time Jaime had spoken to him was when Jaime had had enough of the man's bigotry and had asked him, "and when did you say you first spoke English, you Hun?" A smile crossed Jaime's lips as he remembered the shocked look on the man's face and the roar of laughter that had filled the room.

What was it that drove people to subject others to the same indignities and hardships that they had suffered? Was it fear? Were they afraid that if they didn't find someone on whom to look down they would not be a viable part of the society themselves? Did they somehow believe that they could only gain stature in the society by denying their origins - 'I'm not the immigrant, they are!' - or that they could only become more prosperous by keeping the newcomer poor and denigrated?

It was an enigma. Americans could be some of the most giving and compassionate people in the world yet not want to share their dream. It is the most diverse and integrated society in the world and yet racial slurs and ethic jokes are still common in daily life. Jaime couldn't decide whether he was bitter and angry because Mexican Americans were at the bottom of the social-political structure, or whether he felt sorry for the ignorance and myopic mentality that fueled such behavior. The world was, indeed, shrinking. Everyone was totally dependent upon others for everything from their livelihood to their material belongings. If humanity was to survive and prosper, people were going to have to accept their interdependence. The "we-they" mentality had to stop.

As the sleek Citation CJ-525 sped westward, chasing the setting sun, Jaime could no longer see the land below. Despite the sunset's beauty he felt sad and frightened. It was like their little band frantically chasing the light,



desperate for a new day for the AGEHs, the Hispanics, the Native Americans, the immigrants . . . for all humanity. But before they could enjoy the sunrise, before they could revel in the warmth of a new day, they had to survive the night ahead.

## CHAPTER TWELVE.

At four o'clock on the morning of September 15<sup>th</sup>, the day before the meeting of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, six men and three women left their rooms unnoticed at the Hampton Inn Seattle South-Center in Tukwila, WA. All but two walked the short distance down South 156<sup>th</sup> Street to a small, unnamed building. One car made a quick trip to a local doughnut shop. "Essentials," Danny would explain.

The building had been rented by David and Goliath, Inc., of Forest View, GA. These nine people had made the same journey every morning for the previous week. But today was different. Today was the day that David was going to pull out his rock and sling it, with all of his might, at the giant and powerful Goliath. The difference between this modern day David and his ancient namesake was that this David hoped that Goliath didn't see it coming. Today was either the beginning of the end for Goliath or the end for David.

After passing through a small reception room they entered a large open area that was empty except for the tables, computers and line of easels clustered together. It resembled a war-room at the ready. There was a line of laptop computers all hooked to a wireless modem sitting on rental tables facing a line of five easels. Katherine, whose computer skills were limited to using one as a word processor, had painstakingly re-written the notes she had posted above the fireplace back at the house. They were now large print on large sheets of newsprint attached to the easels to give everyone a quick reference guide to their battle plan.

Harris was the first through the door. Flipping on the lights he moved toward the computers followed silently by all the others except

Danny. He went to a table near the reception room door where he quickly and efficiently started grinding coffee and laying out doughnuts. They each knew what they had to do and they went about their jobs silently. Soon the room was alive with activity and filled with the smell of Danny's delectable coffee.

Katherine stood back a few feet from the easels sipping on her coffee as she admired her work. She went over it several times to make sure that she hadn't forgotten anything.

Tee was carefully checking each laptop for internet connection. He had meticulously made sure that each laptop had the necessary and appropriate software, a complete and accurate list of contacts, and a copy of all the documents on their hard-drives. To avoid attack by Simpco, each computer would make its connection to the assigned government agency through a host in a different city or even country. It was his job to reset the computer's connection after each contact. They had practiced what they would do many times over the past week and Tee knew that he could set a connection in 2 minutes. This meant that the operators would have 8 minutes before he returned to make the next setting. Computer keys clattered as Tee went through the drill of making sure that all of the servers through which he would be going were on line. Any foul-up and Goliath could be at the door almost immediately.

The plan was that the operator of each computer would contact the assigned government office by telephone through an on-line carrier that was purchased any one of numerous places around the country. They would then read a script that the group wrote.

- "Good morning. I am calling to tell you that I have in my possession documents and records that prove that Mr. Clarence Simpson and his company, Simpco, Inc., are responsible for an illegal cloning scheme,

selling human organs, and murdering seven innocent people. This call is not a hoax. Senator Xavier Cruger, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs will make a public announcement at 10am Eastern Time this morning stating that he has a copy of this documentation and calling for a special hearing tomorrow. Please listen to his announcement. I cannot take any more time explaining this because I fear for my life. They have already attempted to kill me once to stop me. Your office will receive an email within the next 15 minutes that will contain a copy of all this evidence. To give government agencies an opportunity to start taking action before this information goes public, we will not be releasing it to the media until noon today. Thank you."

After making the telephone contact they immediately send the documentation to the agency. At exactly noon a person in Houston, TX would send a copy of the documentation to the designated media.

Tee leaned back, took a bite of doughnut and a sip of coffee as he look approvingly at his computer screen. He looked up at Muriel who appeared deep in thought, doughnut and coffee in hand staring at the game plan on the easels. She sensed Tee's look and gave him a smile.

It was now 5:30am in Seattle. That was 8:30 in Washington, DC. They had a half-hour until show time and an hour to make their contacts before Senator Crueger went public. After that the plan was to clear out as quickly as possible leaving no evidence they were there.

That was Tony's job. He paced around the parameter of the building several times checking the security. The building was situated near an exit to the industrial park. There were also two biking and pedestrian trails – the Green River Trail going north and Interurban Trail going south – that passed the building.

Like the others, he had no doubt that Simpco would show up at the industrial park. Tony's hope was that it would be after he had everyone safely far away. There were actually three possible roads to the building but only two of them were direct. Simpco wouldn't use the third unless they actually over-shot the closest, and that wasn't likely. There would be a guard posted to watch both of the two direct approaches. If they saw any signs of trouble they were to scatter road jacks – small spiked jacks that will quickly flatten a tire – on the road and run back to their cars. That would hopefully give everyone enough time to get in vehicles and escape by the back road. Morita and Jaime were his outside people. They had rehearsed every possible scenario.

Tony briefed Jaime and Morita as usual.

“Boys, every day you've been out there has been live. You've kept them safe as they prepared and practiced, but today, with those guys actually going live, means that the chances of Simpco showing up increases exponentially. In fact, my money is on them showing up. We just have to make sure that we have everyone out and safe before they get here. I want you to check-in every five minutes, no excuses. Today, if you see anything that is the slightest bit out of the ordinary, you're to let me know. If you think a guy's part is on the wrong side of his head, call me. Do you understand?” They nodded. “Did you guys check your cars this morning?” Both Jaime and Morita nodded. They had taken the time to start the engine, check the gas and be sure they were ready to go. The cars were at the hotel which would be about a four block run for Jaime. The spot where Morita watched the traffic was near the hotel. Tony gave a thumbs up and smiled.

He walked to the side of the building where his brand new Suzuki 750cc motorcycle sat waiting. He had spent all of yesterday afternoon getting to know it. He was going to be the last person out and he had to be able to go anywhere.

At 5:45 everyone took their places. Muriel, Harris, Danny and Stacy took their places at the computers and Tee stood poised by the computer designated #1 to make the first connection. Jaime and Morita went outside with Tony.

“Do you have your road jacks?” Tony asked as he put pressure on the portable road guard with his foot and watched it spring into action. Jaime and Morita held out their supply of large sharply spiked jacks designed to be thrown on a road to stop a moving vehicle as Tony reset the road guard. The portable road guard was a so-called portable version of the security device that allows traffic to go one way but will stop a vehicle from going the other. It was portable only in that it was bolted to the pavement instead of being imbedded. Tony was counting on Simpco pulling into the building parking lot when they attacked. This device would let them in but not let them out.

The group had picked up the stone, put it in the sling and it was about to be airborne. The last thing to happen before the first contact was made was for Katherine to call Senator Cruger’s cell phone and tell him that they were starting. He was the only one who could stop it now.

At 5:50 Jaime and Morita gave Tony the all-clear. He gave a thumbs up to Katherine. At 5:55 Katherine called Senator Cruger. “Sir,” she said. “We’re ready.” There was a brief pause. “Thank you, sir.” She turned to Tee and said “We’re go!”

It had started. Each “operator” had four government contacts to make. If they were able to maintain the eight minute schedule the job would take 32 minutes. They had practiced this many times and Tee had the first connection in under 2 minutes and was moving on to computer #2. He could hear Muriel already speaking as he finished the connection for #2.

Katherine stood at the ready, watching each person in case they would need anything. She also listened in to the conversations between the three men in the security detail outside.

“How’s it going Number 1?” Tony asked Morita over the radio.

“Traffic is just a bit heavier but nothing out of the ordinary. Lots of compacts and mom-mobiles heading to work and school. Nothing black, sinister or out of the ordinary.”

“How about you, Number 2?”

“Even less traffic than Number 1.” Jaime said cheerfully.

Tony sat astride his Suzuki, rocking back and forth, looking at his watch. Ten minutes had passed. Tee should be starting the second round of calls.

“How’s it going in there, K?” He asked Katherine.

“Like clockwork,” she replied. “Just like they practiced. Round two has already started and things are going smoothly.”

“I have a car turning into the industrial park,” Jaime reported. “It looks okay. Want to check it out?”

Tony didn’t answer. He pressed the kick-start, the Suzuki came to life and he quickly made his way down Nelson Place toward the on-coming car. Before Tony could intercept it, it turned into the Magic Touch Limousine parking lot and a man, dressed in a chauffeur’s uniform, was getting out. Tony did a Florida left-turn (U-Turn to the rest of the world) and returned to his spot near the building.

“Round three is almost complete.” Katherine said over the radio. Tony looked at his watch. He had started the stop-watch and it said that 23:30 had passed. They were doing a great job inside.

“Large step-van just appeared from under the 405.” Morita reported. Everyone waited. It was too far for Tony to check on, besides he couldn’t see inside a step-van. The few moments it took for the van to go the short distance seemed like an eternity.

“It’s passing. Driver’s wearing a t-shirt.” Unless Simpco was trying to sneak up on them, which probably wouldn’t be the case, the driver wouldn’t be wearing a t-shirt. Morita kept it in sight until it passed Longacres Way. That was the turn to enter the industrial park by Nelson Place.

“Mission accomplished!” Katherine announced on the radio. They would have all cheered but there was still a lot to do. Despite all of the computer shenanigans Tee had pulled to keep Simpco from tracing them, he was certain it wouldn’t take them long to find them at the industrial park. After all, he had been a part of their IT team and he knew of what they were capable.

“Exit drill,” Katherine announced.

Tony went inside. Muriel, Harris, Stacy and Danny were quickly and skillfully packing up their computer stations. Katherine was putting miscellaneous items in a storage tub.

Harris met Tony in a corner of the room where they picked up a manikin and carried it to one of the computer stations. Everyone looked. No one had noticed the manikin before and it wasn’t a part of the exit drill. Tony and Tee had inserted and practiced this part.

“I want you all to meet Dear Departed David,” Tee announced. “He will be here to greet the visitors we expect at any moment.” Tee paused. “Say good-bye to DDD. His sacrifice is great.”

“Good-bye” everyone called. “Thank you,” some said.

The team didn’t take any more time than that. When they had assembled at the back door Tony headed back to his motorcycle and radioed Jaime and Morita to get the cars.

As soon as he had confirmation that the two men were on their way, the rest of the team headed out the back door and down the Green River Trail. Just as in all of the rehearsals, the small group was almost totally obscured from sight of the street in front of the building. Jaime and Morita would get the cars, still parked at the hotel, and pick the others up where



the trail ran along SW Grandy Way. This way it would appear to anyone watching that they were still in the building.

Tony sat on his motorcycle in the parking lot of Industrial Crating and Packing Co. He could see the small, now abandoned, building. He wondered how long he would have to wait. His radio cracked and Katherine reported that everyone was loaded up and on their way to the rendezvous. That made the watching a lot easier. He didn't have to worry about anyone being too near.

It wasn't fifteen minutes before two black military-like Humvees appeared on 156<sup>th</sup> Street and moving fast. As Tony had suspected, this wasn't going to be a sneak-up-on-them operation. Fast and hard was more Simpco's style anyway. Tony called Katherine and told her to relay to Senator Cruger that the show was about to begin.

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As the Humvees roared into the industrial park the radio operator in the first vehicle was reporting to their base. "No signs of vehicles. Are you sure they're here?"

"Idiot," came the irate voice of Clarence Simpson, "they're a bunch of freaks who are hiding. Just go in there and stop them from making any more calls."

"Yes, Sir!" The two vehicles pulled all the way into the parking lot and the two squads piled out. Tony smiled. No one noticed the road guard. It was activated by the vehicles running over it going in to the parking lot and now sharp spikes faced the two Humvees.

The first squad headed around the building to cut off any escape while the second squad ran in the front with guns blazing. The noise of their fully automatic weapons drowned out their dispatcher yelling "Stop! Don't shoot! Get out! It's a trap. You're on the internet!"

The squad that had gone in with guns blazing stopped. It was only then that they heard the dispatcher. In front of them was what was left of

the manikin. A message written on one of the easels was lying on the floor, riddled with bullet holes but still readable – “David 1. Goliath 0” it said.

“What the . . .” the squad leader yelled, followed by an excessive string of profanity.

“Get out of there,” the dispatcher said, “they’ve got it wired and you’re currently live on streaming video.”

The squad leader looked around, spotted a camera and raised his weapon.

“Don’t shoot it,” Clarence Simpson screamed. “That’ll just make you look worse. Just turn and leave. NOW!”



A cheer went up an IHOP restaurant about 20 minutes away. The AGEH team was watching live along with everyone in Senator Cruger’s office and other agencies and media office across the country, all of whom had been invited to watch Simpco in action.

Tony still sat waiting. There was still the insult to be added to the injury. The road guard didn’t care whether or not the Humvees were pulling out to pursue the AGEHs or to go home with their tail between their legs. Again, without noticing, the two squads piled back into their Humvees and started to back out. Tony could hear the explosions. “Sweet!” he thought to himself as he pulled out into the street and headed to the IHOP to meet the others.

It was only 7:30 in the morning when Tony arrived at the IHOP. It was the most relaxed that he had seen the team since the plan had been put into motion weeks ago. They cheered when he entered and he told them about the Humvees backing over the road guards. Tee replayed the assault so that Tony could see. The look on their faces was priceless.

All that was left of this step of the operation was to have the contact person in Houston, TX distribute the documents to the media precisely at noon eastern time.

After a hearty breakfast, the band returned to the house above the lake with a new sense of hope. There they monitored radio, television and internet news media. The story moved right to the top of the news charts.

Robert called to say that the FBI in Seattle was getting a court order for computers, etc., at Simpco, and that Special Agent Frank Stuckey had been arrested based upon the confessions of Dr. Kortzikan and Tim Ellis. Both men were happy to be safely in FBI custody. Arrest warrants were being issued for Simpson, the flight dispatcher who ordered the hit, and several others.

Senator Cruger handled the media like a pro. He shared just enough of the documentation and Col. Trank's statement to have them drooling. They couldn't wait for the hearing the next morning. Senator Bakin showed up outside Cruger's office and made his confession. The media went nuts. General Patterson just kept saying "no comment," "I have nothing to say" and "what I did I did for national security." Other federal oversight committees and agencies announced that they were launching immediate investigations in light of the documents they received and that Simpco Inc. was immediately suspended from all government operations.

The Washington State Patrol had stopped several trucks on their way from the mountain installation and some of the Simpco mercenaries had foolishly resisted when the police arrived. Inside they found most of the general staff quite ready to spill the beans to avoid prosecution. Only a few of the researchers and those afraid of Clarence Simpson were attempting to shred documents and destroy computers. What they didn't realize is that it didn't matter. The police already had everything.

Harris had to pass the word and reiterate that everyone was to remain in hiding and keep quiet until the all-clear was given. Simpco was

still very dangerous and no one was certain yet how the AGEHs would be treated.

Senators, Congresspersons, bureaucrats, military people and companies were all working to distance themselves from the falling giant. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that being anywhere near or associated with Simpco or Clarence Simpson was a very dangerous place to be.



At his fortified complex on Bainbridge Island Clarence Simpson stood on the veranda of the main house looking out at Seattle as though he was watching Rome burn. The men in dark suits were not sitting in waiting. They had all fled. Only his faithful servant, Jimmy, and the head of his personal security, Ed, were there. Radios, televisions and computers were tuned to news media and Ed was constantly on the telephone getting reports. Jimmy was taking his master a gin and tonic.

“What the hell happened?” Clarence Simpson said to his servant. “What the bloody hell happened?”

Jimmy knew better than answer a question like that. He just took a couple of steps back but remained near enough that he could attend too his master.

“I’m sorry, Sir,” Ed reported. “The FBI is at the office. Security gave them some passive resistance so that the people shredding would have some time, but I don’t think it was enough.”

“What about the computers?”

“I think they got all of the AGEH and Kortzikian files erased, but the feds just laughed.”

“Laughed?”

“Yeah, they say they have an ex-employee who made copies and put them elsewhere in our computer. Supposedly they’re still there.”

“You’ve gotta be kidding me.”

“Some Indian in IT.”

Clarence Simpson didn’t move. This is what he did when he came under attack. He would stand on the veranda, look out at the city and come up with a solution. Until today he knew that he owned or controlled everything in front of him. That was no longer true.

Slowly he sipped on his gin and tonic. Standing perfectly still it was sip and stare . . . sip and stare.

Jimmy stood quietly by. He didn’t know what to do. He knew that his master was a dangerous man. He just stood.

Ed went back into the lounge that opened onto the veranda and listened to the news. He too knew that Clarence Simpson was a dangerous man, and he knew that he would be especially dangerous as he was being backed into a corner. It was just a matter of time before he arrived at a decision, and no matter what that might be, Ed Whippet was ready to follow. Little did either of them know that they were about the only remaining loyal followers. The problem of having an organization of mercenaries is that they are mercenaries, which means they have no loyalty.

After an excruciatingly long silence for Jimmy and Ed, Clarence Simpson gave the liquor glass a toss and turned to face them.

“Here’s what we’re going to do. I’m going to leave the US and set up shop in some third world country that, if I can’t buy it, I’ll beat it into submission. The US government isn’t the only one who needs private armies to do their dirty work.” Simpson was getting fired up.

“Call the airport and have my helicopter sent over.” Ed began to move toward the phone. “Then we’re going to move some money around so Uncle Sam can’t get his grubby mitts on it.” Ed shook his head approvingly as he listened and spoke on the telephone at the same time. “But before I go anywhere, it’s going to be payback time to that AGEH bitch, Muriel Smith.”

“How are you going to do that, boss?” Ed made the mistake of asking. “We’ve been trying to catch her for months.”

“Simple,” Simpson ignored Ed’s slip, “here’s how you’re going to bring her to me.”

“Me?!”

“You.”

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The AGEH team had been enjoying the news all day. Despite the repetition, they didn’t seem to get tired of watching and hearing about Clarence Simpson’s empire crumbling. Even some of his board members were reportedly ready to testify against him for immunity.

Harris’ telephone rang.

“Hello?”

“I’m sorry.” Said the voice. “I got the wrong phone. Is Muriel there?”

“Who is this?” Harris demands.

“This is Victor. Robert’s partner,” the voice says. “He asked me to call Muriel and gave me this number. He obviously gave me the wrong one.”

“Why do you need Muriel?”

“Robert needs her to meet him at the federal building to give a deposition.”

“Tonight?”

“The sooner the better,” said the voice. “Things are happening fast, but we’re not going to be able to get the warrant for Simpson without her deposition.”

“Okay, but Simpson is still going to have people out there.”

“I know. That’s why we want you to come to the rear of the building so Simpson’s people don’t see you. We’ll meet you there.”

“Okay.”

Harris was very disturbed by the call but Muriel was excited because it meant they were really planning to put Simpson away.

"I don't know," Harris warned. "Why couldn't it wait until morning? Why doesn't he come here to get it?"

"I agree with Harris," Tee chimed in.

"Aw, come on! They probably have to see me to be sure that it's legitimate or something like that. Robert wouldn't take any chances."

"I still don't like it," complained Harris. "It just doesn't sound like Henderson's usual caution."

"Come on, guys!" Muriel was insistent.

"I'll take her," said Tee. He knew that she wasn't going to be put off.

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Tee and Muriel had just left when Harris' phone rang again. It was the same number. Harris answered.

"Tell me they didn't go!" Robert Henderson demanded.

"Tell you what?" Harris asked, recognizing Henderson's voice.

"Tell me that Muriel didn't go to the Federal Court House."

"Yes, they just left."

"Oh, God! No!"

"Calm down and tell me what's happened."

"Those bastards are sure ballsy," Robert started. "They jumped me coming out of the Simpco building. After they beat the crap out of me they took my phone. I couldn't move but I could hear them. They went through some call list on my phone and kept dialing until they got one of you."

"They got me," said Harris.

"I'm so sorry! I'm always so careful but I didn't think about your current telephone number being in my phone somewhere. I didn't know you could go back like that."

"It's okay. We all make mistakes. Just tell us what's going on."

"I played dead and Simpson's men left me. They tossed my phone. I couldn't see where it landed because I was playing dead, so it took me a while to find it." He paused. "They're going to kill Muriel. I'm going to the court house right now to stop them. I'll call the FBI and police on the way."

“We’ll be there as soon as we can!” Harris exclaimed.

“The call was a hoax,” Harris explains to the others as he heads toward the door. “Simpson is going to kill Muriel and Tee. Henderson is calling the FBI to stop them, but we’d better call Muriel and Tee to tell them to turn around and come home.”

Harris pushed his speed dial for Muriel. A cell phone began to ring across the room. “Damn,” he whispered as he pushed the speed dial for Tee. There was no answer. The call went straight to voice-mail. “No answer!”

“Maybe we can catch up with them,” said Tony. “I’ll take my bike. I can make better time.”

“Okay, I’ll ride on back,” said Harris.

“No. That’ll slow me down.” Tony grabbed a tranquilizer gun on his way out the door and could be heard exclaiming, “damn, wish I had a real gun.”

Tony didn’t look at the speedometer. He was through Samamish before he let off the accelerator and within minutes he was approaching route 520. He could take that all the way into downtown just north of the Federal Court House. As he drove he watched for Muriel and Tee but they were at least 20 minutes ahead of him and it was only a twenty-five minute drive into the city without speeding. There was a good chance that they were driving into Simpco’s trap at that moment.



Unfortunately, Tony’s calculations were right on. Tee had just taken the Stewart Street exit off of Interstate 5. They were but minutes from the Federal Court House.

While all of this was going on Robert had called the FBI who in turn alerted the police. The FBI office is in Kirkland, almost as long a drive as from Sammamish, so their hopes were resting on the local police.



Tee stopped the car at what would be considered the back side of the Federal Court House. He could hear sirens but paid no attention. He was more concerned about the lack of people around the court house. Where was Robert?

Suddenly two Humvees blocked their car and a number of paramilitary men jumped out. Tee locked the doors and attempted to get the car out from between the two large vehicles but without luck. One of the attackers fired a shot through the windshield and Tee slumped over against the steering wheel. Muriel was screaming and trying to get to Tee as another attacker broke her window with his rifle butt, unlocked the door and was dragging her out.

Police cruisers appeared from all directions. Two young officers ran toward Muriel only to be gunned down by the Simpco mercenaries. The others took cover behind their cars. A barrage of automatic gunfire left two of the cruisers in flames with one more officer down and the others fleeing. While some of the mercenaries were keeping the police pinned down, two others forced Muriel into one of the Humvees. With the quick bark of a commander the attackers got into the Humvees and started down the street. There was one police car in their way, but the Humvee merely pushed it out of the way.

The scene was chaos when Tony and Robert arrived. Right behind them were ambulances with paramedics racing to the fallen. Several FBI agents were also on the scene.

Tony looked around. Paramedics were working feverishly on Tee. He was evidently still alive, but just barely. White sheets had already been draped over the first two officers to arrive and it looked like they were losing the battle to save the third. Tony stood in shock. His guts felt like they were going to explode. He felt that he had failed Tee and Muriel. In all of his years in law enforcement he'd never become sick at a crime scene. This was going to be the first. He leaned up against a nearby tree and began to vomit. It was like he would never stop.

Robert put his hand on Tony's shoulder. "You couldn't have done any more," he said. "If you had arrived sooner you'd probably be dead as well. Besides I'm the one whose phone they used." He paused. "If it's anyone's fault, it's mine."

Tony shook his head. "You weren't to know, and I know I couldn't have changed things by getting here sooner," he said between heaves. "Ever since this thing started I've felt responsible for them. I should have been one step ahead not chasing them down the interstate."

A police officer approached. "Are you the FBI?" he asked.

"I'm Special Agent Henderson," Robert replied. He looked around at the draped bodies of the young police officers. "I'm sorry for your loss."

"Yes, Sir," said the officer working at maintain composure. "You know who those guys were?"

"Sure do," Henderson said. "They were Clarence Simpson's goons."

"Sir?"

"They were Simpco mercenaries."

"You mean as in Simpco Inc. that's been all over the news?"

"The same."

"They'll take Muriel to Simpson," Tony was standing up. If he looked like he felt, it was pretty bad. From the look on the officer's face it was as bad as he felt.

"Why do you think that?" asked Robert.

"He's going to get double duty out of this – revenge and a hostage."

"Do you think so?" said Robert.

"Sure." Tony paused. "He didn't accompany the attack team that hit the building in Tukwila but he was in the radio room. It is now very personal and Muriel has become the symbol of the movement for him."

"Where will they take her?" the police officer asked.

"Simpson has a compound on Bainbridge Island. It's like a fortress and he has the private army to defend it. That's where they'll go."

"I'll call the police on Bainbridge."

“Go ahead and call them,” said Robert, “but tell them that the FBI asked them not to attempt to enter the place.” He looked back at the bodies. “We don’t want any more dead police officers.”

“Yes, Sir,” said the officer. “but I can’t promise.”

“They’ve got to know that place is a fortress,” said Tony.

“That’s true.” Turning to the officer, “tell them that we’ll be there with reinforcements and weapons as soon as possible.”

“Yes, Sir.”

Robert talked to his FBI colleagues while Tony called Harris and reported what had happened. The closest hospital was Virginia Mason Medical Center. That’s where they would take Tee if they could keep him alive. Looking at the swarm of paramedics working on Tee, they knew that there was no lack of effort. They decided that Katherine should go to the hospital. She had legitimate identification. The AGEHs should stay at the house just in case there were any other marauding bands of Simpco goons on the street. No one had Tee’s parent’s telephone number but Harris would try to track them down.

By the time that Tony had concluded with Harris, Robert had finished talking to his colleagues.

“There’s another large estate near Simpson’s compound. We can land helicopters there. The local police have a SWAT team that will be waiting for us. The main group will take the front gate while I . . .”

“You mean ‘we’?” Tony interjected.

Robert stopped. He obviously thought about arguing but then gave up. “... we try to sneak into the main house from the other side of the compound.”

Tony gave his trade-mark thumbs up.

“You know you’re a civilian, and I’m not supposed to take a civilian with me.”

“I’m ex-military and ex-police,” Tony corrected, “and you wouldn’t want me to become equally as law-biding and tell someone about your escapade with Dr. Kortzikian.”

“You wouldn’t!”

“I’ll stoop as low as I need to go get that girl.” Tony stopped and smiled at Robert. “You know we’re both old war-horses. I’m not telling on you and you’re not telling on me. We’re going to do what we need to do and we’re going to do it together. Right?!”

Robert smiled affectionately. He knew that there was no way he could stop Tony any more than Tony would be able to stop him if the roles were reversed. He also knew that he didn’t want to. Tony was clever and resourceful. He was a good man to have at your back in a situation like this. Besides, he must be good to have kept these kids alive all these months with a company like Simpcos looking for them. “Right!” he said, imitating Tony’s thumbs up.

□ □ □

Muriel stood in the middle of the lounge of the main house in Clarence Simpson’s fortified compound. There was the armed guard that held her by the hair so that she wouldn’t move. In his other hand he had a small electronic prod which he enjoyed using to inflict a painful shock whenever Muriel didn’t obey. There was another man who appeared to be some sort of servant standing slightly behind and to the side of Clarence Simpson, who, had just come in from the veranda. He stood looking at Muriel. As she looked down to avoid looking at him she noticed the blood on her shirt. It was Tee’s blood. She looked back up. She looked him square in the eyes with a determination and anger that even Clarence Simpson noticed. It made him do a double-take.

“You’ve cost me a great deal, young lady,” he said. “How do you propose to repay me?”

“Me owe you?” Muriel laughed. “You stole our lives. You took our freedom, our dignity and when we died you sold our internal organs. It’s you who owe the debt.”

‘Smart ass freak,’ Simpson thought as he gave Jimmy the signal to get him a drink and started to turn toward the window.

“Smart ass freak,” Muriel repeated out loud. Simpson swung around to face her when she repeated what he had only thought. “Maybe. But you’re pathetic.” Muriel continued without appearing to notice Simpson’s sudden movement. “I may be a scientist’s experiment but I know love and compassion and trust and friendship and family. You, on the other hand, are a sad excuse for a human being. You don’t know any of these, do you?”

Simpson lost his composure. He flew into a rage of threats and name calling while Muriel just stood and looked. She knew she hit a nerve.

Jimmy arrived with Simpson’s gin and tonic. He took a long drink. It wasn’t until he stopped his tirade that he noticed the occasional report of gunfire. About that time Ed, the head of his personal security, entered the room.

“Sir,” he said walking up to Simpson, “we’re under attack.”

“Under attack?”

“Yes, Sir. It appears to be the FBI and a local SWAT unit.”

Simpson laughed. It was a malicious, sadistic laugh. “Well, get rid of them. They’re no match for my men. Where are the helicopters?”

“They should be here soon, Sir.”

“Good.” Another sip of gin and tonic.

“What are your orders? What are you going to do with the girl?”

“Tell the men to start falling back and board the front helicopter as soon as it lands. They’ll give covering fire for my helicopter to take off. The girl goes with me. I’m going to drop her out as soon as we’re over international water. I want to be as high as possible because I want her to have a long time to think about what is happening.”

Ed smiled. Jimmy turned a bit pale.

The shooting became more frequent. Muriel heard Simpson think ‘where are those damn helicopters?’

“Getting a bit worried that they won’t show up?”

“What?” Simpson looked at her with surprise and fear.

“You’re afraid of me.” Muriel said laughing. “You’re terrified because I know what you’re thinking and you’re afraid that I can mess with your mind. You’d kill me right now if you didn’t think you might need me as a hostage.”

“What are you talking about? I’m not afraid of you.”

Muriel only laughed and concentrated more on Simpson who was trying to distance himself from her and focus on his gin and tonic.

“You’re going out of your mind with fear. Something about me reading a report.”

“Shut her up!” Simpson screamed at the guard who took great delight in pushing the prod against Muriel’s side and pulling the trigger. She passed out. Smashing the glass on the floor he yelled at anyone who would listen. “Where are those damn helicopters?”

Ed returned to tell Simpson that the helicopters were on approach and the men were beginning their exit. He looked quizzically at Muriel who was being held up by her guard.

“No, she’s not dead, but I can’t wait until she is.”

As the helicopters landed the small group moved toward the far helicopter. Muriel was just regaining consciousness. As she did she saw Robert and Tony emerging from a line of trees. Muriel knew that stomping on the guard’s foot would probably not get him to let go since he was a highly trained soldier wearing combat boots. But the guard was more interested in the battle that was moving toward them and he didn’t notice that Muriel was awake. He was just holding her, not restraining her. She let her body go limp. She fell to her knees. She held her right arm at a 90 degree angle, made a fist, swinging it forward then, pushing with her left hand to get even more power, swung the elbow back into the mercenary’s groin with

all the power she could muster. It was enough to give her a chance to start running. She ran toward Tony and Robert.

The guard recovered amazingly quickly and was bringing his gun up. Robert saw him and fired. The guard dropped. Simpson, suddenly aware of what was happening behind him turned and aimed at Muriel. Tony, now armed with a real gun, raised his weapon and fired, hitting Simpson who staggered against the helicopter. Even before he regained his composure he returned fire and hit Tony. Robert fired again. This time Simpson fell. A man inside the helicopter began to pepper the area with bullets. Robert fired a third time and he fell out of the helicopter. With that the pilot lifted off and fled.

Looking over at the first helicopter Robert and Muriel saw Simpson's men trying to get into the helicopter and get airborne. The helicopter was rising. There was heavy gunfire from the ground. The helicopter was only about 100 feet off the ground when the engine exploded. The front end of the machine went into the ground, flipping the tail over the top in a great arch and crumbling into a ball of flame.

Muriel and Robert ran to Tony. Muriel looked around and screamed "someone help! Get a medic!"

Tony reached out and touched her. When she looked back he gave her a weak smile. "I don't think they could save me even if they were here right now." He said weakly.

"No," Muriel sobbed.

"I'm so proud of you, Muriel." He was having trouble breathing but he wanted to speak. "I'm proud of all of you."

Muriel glanced over at the body of Clarence Simpson. "Goliath is dead," she said to Tony. "And you brought him down."

Tony smiled and closed his eyes. "No, stay with us," Muriel pleaded. "Stay awake. They always say you have to stay awake. Please. Please."

Robert put his hand on Muriel's shoulder. "He's gone."

Muriel sobbed. All Robert could do was hold her.

A paramedic came running up to them. Robert looked up and shook his head. “Let me take a look at you,” the paramedic said gently to Muriel.

She was covered with blood – Tee’s blood and Tony’s blood sacrificed to bring down the evil giant who would sell their bodies for his pleasure. She looked around. The final battle had been horrific. Not as neat as the original David and Goliath. The wreckage of the one helicopter was still burning and Muriel could feel the heat even across the field.

‘Brave girl,’ Robert thought to himself. ‘and so much death and pain.’

“I didn’t really have an option, you know,” Muriel said. Robert looked startled. “There would have been so much more if we hadn’t done this.”

A couple of SWAT members put Muriel on a gurney and pulled her to a waiting ambulance.



## CHAPTER THIRTEEN.

The stretch of road from Kittitas to home always seemed so long to Muriel, especially after she had been away on one of the many extended trips to Seattle or Washington that had dominated the past years. Looking out the window down the ravine and at the monument that had been erected for the seven who died there always brought a wave of sadness despite the joy of getting home. It was no different today despite the great news she had.

Her driver, Larry Perkins, had attempted small talk a few times, but Muriel couldn't travel this stretch of road without thinking back to everything that had happened almost ten years ago. She looked at Larry and thought how he had always been willing to make the long trip to the airport to pick her up. She still wasn't allowed to drive because she didn't have valid identification – most specifically a birth certificate and evidence that she was an American citizen. That, she supposed, would be changing soon.

The last turn was coming and then it would be a straight stretch home. There was the sign to the storage cave. "Safe Haven Storage Co." the sign read with an arrow pointing straight ahead.

After Simpco fell and everyone, including the government, was trying to distance themselves from the disgraced corporation, the government was thrilled to sell the underground installation and several hundred acres of land to the newly formed AGEH Foundation for five dollars an acre. The Foundation turned the installation into a climate-controlled storage facility. Companies from across the country used their services. It turned out to be a really good source of income which was sorely needed to pay for the lengthy legal struggle that had ensued to get citizenship.

Shortly after making the turn toward home there was the marker pointing toward the spot where the escaping AGEHs emerged from the

mountain. Almost across from the marker was the sign “Welcome to Safe Haven. Population 62 and growing.”

That always made Muriel giggle. Safe Haven was only that small in the dead of winter when the students and hikers couldn’t get there. Most of the time there were several hundred people in Safe Haven.

Safe Haven was actually what one might call a privately owned community. Even though it was run by a mayor and elected council, it technically still belonged to Muriel’s mother, Teresa Smith.

Since she had broken the law and was a part of Simpco’s illegal activity, Dr. Smith had to face legal charges. Because of her part in bringing Simpco to justice and a lot of behind the scenes negotiation with the support of a couple of US Senators and a number of AGEH’s, Teresa Smith had pleaded *Nolo contendere* and was sentenced to five years of public service to be served by working for the AGEH Foundation. Yes, Muriel thought, that was rather like Brer Rabbit pleading “please don’t throw me in the briar patch,” but it did give her mother an opportunity to make some amends.

One of her first acts was to establish the valley that she and Ronald owned as a safe haven for AGEH’s. Hence the name Safe Haven. Since the AGEH had no legal status she could not just give them the property but she could let them use it and made it known that the land would be given to the community as soon as they had a sound legal status.

AGEHs from across the country came. Nestled in this narrow valley its peacefulness, sense of life and joy belied the painful history of its residents. Safe Haven now boasted a general store; groceries, pharmacy and outfitter all rolled into one; a couple of restaurants, a gas station that could do a few minor auto repairs, lodge, campground and a medical center with two unimposing buildings sitting back against the mountain.

One of the buildings was the AGEH Foundation office and community center. The foundation managed the distribution of funds for AGEH medical care, legal assistance and other AGEH needs. It also managed the research facilities which occupied the second building. In the second building

there were research facilities for biology, orography, and other natural sciences which colleges and universities leased for the use of their faculty and students.

The medical center was state of the art and prepared to provide a wide range of needs not only for emergency care of residents and visitors to the mountain but for AGEH who came to have some of their more special needs diagnosed and addressed. The medical center housed an inconspicuous and unmarked lab that continued to study the AGEH for the purpose of meeting AGEH medical and psychosocial needs. The medical center was run by Dr. Morita Isamu and his wife, Katherine. Dr. Smith worked in the research unit.

The campgrounds, and the tourist and excursion business that went with it, were the primary source of income for the town residents. Jaime and Stacy enjoyed their morning stroll to the lodge where they would collect those who had signed up for their day-long educational excursion. The campground and lodge were almost always full and hundreds of more people would come up the valley from motels and campgrounds around Kit-titas. What was originally little more than a survival camp was rapidly becoming a vacation destination for anyone who loved the out of doors.

The news of Muriel's return travelled quickly through the small town. Most of the visitors to Safe Haven knew its history, and if they didn't know before they arrived, they soon learned. Everyone was excited to hear what she had to say. She had been in Washington for the Supreme Court hearings on the legal status of the AGEH's.

Muriel was excited to share the results of her trip, but there were three people whom she wanted to see more than anything. She stood near the platform which had been constructed just for her return and scanned the growing crowd.

“Mommy!” came the duet from behind her. She turned quickly to see two children – a seven year old girl and a five year old boy – come running toward her. She crouched down so that she could embrace both of them. “I missed you so much,” she told them.

“What about me?” Muriel looked up to the smiling face of her beloved Tee and literally leaped into his arms.

“And I missed you most of all!” she whispered.

As they held tightly to each other, Tee had to ask, “Is it true?”

“Yes!” said Muriel with tear of joy streaming down her face. “Yes, it’s true!”

Muriel turned to see an expectant crowd. Hanging on to Tee as long as she could, she moved to the microphone on the platform.

“Dear friends, family, visitors, almost ten years ago I met my dear friends Harris, Veronica and Danny on that mountain.” As she pointed toward the spot where they would meet high on the ridge she spotted Harris, Veronica and their children standing nearby. She threw them a kiss. Harris was the President of the AGEH Foundation, everyday proving his exceptional leadership skills. Veronica was as beautiful as ever. Looking about a bit more, she spotted Danny. Danny helped run the storage facility.

“What followed is history that you all know. Many of you suffered and lived through it.” Muriel paused as tears welled in her eyes. “We lost many close friends and loved ones whom we will miss sorely and never forget. I only wish that they could be here to see this day, so they would know that they did not die in vain.” The crowd was hushed waiting patiently for her.

“I wish that each of you could have been in that historic and awe-inspiring court. It was an electric moment indeed when the nine Supreme Court justices solemnly entered the room to give their decision. I must believe that it was one of the rare times in history that all nine of the justices concurred.” Tears of relief and joy, pent up emotions that had collected for these many years, exploded and Muriel screamed. “You are citizens!”

A cheer went up from the crowd. They had heard this on the news but this was confirmation. One of their own was there to witness and receive the decision on their behalf. It was a time of jubilation.

When the cheers began to subside Muriel continued. "The justices determined that no matter what the means of insemination, no matter whether that insemination was legal or illegal, our mothers were no different than any other mother or surrogate mother and therefore their children would be entitled to the same rights and privileges as those of any other child born to a woman in the United States. That means that even if we were to find that some of our mothers were illegal immigrants, their children are United States citizens."

There were more cheers from the crowd.

"It is going to take some time to establish the means by which AGEHs will be able to claim their birthright, but it will happen."

"But before we begin to celebrate I want to recognize the original David and Goliath team members that are here today. The man who was always our leader and still is, Harris Smith and his beautiful wife, Veronica. Veronica had one of the hardest jobs. While we were playing with Simpco in Seattle, she was in Vancouver growing the first AGEH baby and worrying about us." Everyone laughed and cheered as Harris, Veronica and Danica came up.

"Of course, we cannot forget the man who was to be the next Watcher, Danny Smith. My life-long friend who is like a brother, Jaime Vargaz and his wife, Stacy."

One by one she called the names until the platform was filled. "These people," Muriel shouted, "are the ones who made today possible."

"Let's take a moment to remember those who are not with us." A hush went over the jubilant crowd as Muriel stood silently, with tears running down her face, working to gain the composure to continue. "Rick Evans, Rose Smith, Charles Smith, Terrance Smith, Amanda Smith, Michael

Smith, Rachael Smith, Jackson Smith, Anthony Figlioli and Ronald Smith.” The crowd stood in silence.

“Now let’s make some noise and celebrate the victory for which they died.” The crowd again cheered as Muriel held on to Tee and her two children.

As the town began to celebrate and party, Muriel looked around at the people she had known for these many years.

There was Harris. Now the President of the AGEH Foundation, he was a confident and respected administrator and leader. Veronica gave birth to their daughter, Danica, just days after the final battle with Simpco. Harris, who had missed the entire third trimester was able to get to Vancouver in time to be with her. Danica’s delivery was normal and Danica was healthy. Danica became the new poster-child for AGEH. As with all AGEH Danica had the Waardenburg syndrome and starburst on her shoulder. Apart from sharing her mother’s three-fingered right hand, she was now a healthy, happy young girl. Over the fear of AGEH childbirth Veronica had twins three years later. Perma and Phillip were now six years old. Needless to say, Veronica was a stay-at-home mother. Over the years Harris routinely demonstrated his aptitude for leadership. His ability to balance strong guidance with getting people to take ownership of an issue or project in such a way that they invested themselves, found and applied their greatest strengths.

Danny was sitting off to one side talking with Muriel’s Mother. It was interesting how the two of them had bonded. Danny had searched so hard to find himself and was so determined that anger and hatred, no matter how “justified” our society might say they were, would not destroy him. He found such peace and he was always at the ready to share it. Teresa Smith had encouraged him to go to college. With his innate intelligence and obvious aptitude at dealing with complex social and philosophical issues, he did very well in philosophy and helped to develop a psychology and philosophy of life for AGEH which would help many deal with their past and everyday trauma. Instead of a career in academia or one of the helping professions

he chose to manage the storage business. As he pointed out to Teresa, that really gives him more time to think and help people. No one who had ever spent time talking to Danny would argue with that.

Jaime and Stacy were married shortly after Simpco fell. Jaime finished his degree. Emboldened by the birth of Danica, they had a son, Carlos, about a year later. His mother returned to the housekeeper's apartment at the Smith cottage even though she was no longer the housekeeper. Dr. Smith invited her to live in the main house, but the apartment had been home for many years. Jaime and Stacy started an excursion business which combined everything they loved – being out on the mountain and teaching people about the mountain. There were other guides in the area but Jaime and Stacy were the most respected. Jaime also taught some classes for universities who sent students to Safe Haven for field work. Of course those classes never stayed in the classroom very long. Perhaps that is why they were so popular.

Katherine Smith and Morita Isamu were married after he finished medical school. Katherine finished her degree in anthropology submitting, with the assistance of her new brother-in-law, one of the best theses on the Lummi ever presented. She, however, decided to turn her anthropological skill to the AGEH research. Instead of studying the past she was chronicling their development. After medical school Morita joined the staff at the newly founded Safe Haven Medical Center where he worked with Katherine and other researchers and was the primary care physician for the AGEH community applying the knowledge he gained from research.

Robert Henderson stayed with the FBI after Simpco fell. Because of all the work he had done on his own time for the AGEHs he became an indispensable part of the FBI team that lead the government investigation. It was rumored that his superiors actually knew about all of the things he did with the possible exception of the garage episode. Nevertheless Robert's career had done well and he was now the head of the Phoenix office. Robert

and Lisa's daughter, Becky, graduate from the University of Washington and joined the AGEH research team at Safe Haven.

As Muriel was watching and thinking about all of their dear friends and comrades her gaze fell upon her husband sitting quietly nearby holding their five year old son.

After the battle at Simpson's estate Muriel was taken to a nearby hospital. Robert had stayed with her. She remembered the tremendously painful, empty feeling as she realized that not only was Tony dead but so was Tee. Robert didn't realize that she had thought Tee was dead when Simpson's goons dragged her from the car so he didn't tell her that he was alive the last time he saw him. At that point in time Robert could only think about taking care of Muriel.

The hospital had released Muriel to go back to the Small's house above Lake Sammamish. It wasn't until she was back at the house with the others that she learned that Tee was still alive. He had been badly wounded and the first night was touch and go. Many weeks of therapy and tender loving care followed.

Before Tee went job hunting he took Muriel to meet his family. It had been an instant love affair between Muriel and his parents. Before long she was speaking some Salish, the native language of the Lummi people, and totally immersed in their culture.

Since there weren't many jobs, especially computer jobs, on the reservation, Tee found a job in Redmond. The Small's let anyone of the group who wanted stay at the Sammamish house, so they had a place to live.

Tee and Muriel were married the next spring and soon were the proud parents of a daughter, Lasas (Angel), now 7 and a son, Aikh Shinám (Good Medicine), now 5.

As the sun began to set behind their beloved mountain, Muriel looked around at the festivities – the people dancing and talking and laughing. Her heart felt as light then as it ever had in her life. This was worth all of the pain and effort. The battle against prejudice would never end, she



thought. There will always be those people who, filled with hatred and intolerance for the looks or traditions or religious beliefs of others, would call names and commit heinous acts of violence. And some would even go so far as to label such ugliness patriotism or religion. Muriel knew that and it made her sad every time she thought about it. But no matter the prejudice they would have to overcome in the years ahead, this day was a day for AGEHs and their friends to forget bigotry and celebrate life.

Lasas, sitting on her mother's lap, looked up at Muriel. Without a spoken word she said, "Mommy, what is prejudice?" Pulling her daughter tightly against her, she kissed her and said, "Something I wish you'd never have to know."

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