

Pit Deception

William L. Silber



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Prologue

CNN news anchor Barry Saunders stared from the TV monitor as though a gun were pointed at his forehead. It was a pose perfected two years earlier from his perch atop Baghdad's Al-Rashid Hotel during the Gulf War. Saunders' close-cropped hair had grayed considerably since bursting into American living rooms during the 1991 conflict. His uneven mustache sported spidery streaks of white. Saunders punctuated the fifteen seconds of silence with two throat-clearing coughs, adding weight to his considerable credibility. He sipped a glass of water and began his baritone rumble.

"Ten minutes ago we received a communication from the *Palestinian Brotherhood* threatening to destroy a New York City landmark. The attack will be carried out within twenty-four hours unless New York's Commodity Exchange, known as Comex, rescinds emergency regulations denying Middle East investors their rightful profits."

Saunders cupped the light brown receiver wired to his ear. He nodded his head and continued.

"This is not the first threat directed at New York City, but it is unfolding as the most serious. The terrorists have just delivered a severed female hand to Mayor Carmine Rizzo. A note charges the Comex with theft and cites amputation at the wrist as the Koran's punishment. We now switch to Gracie Mansion, the Mayor's residence."

Carmine Rizzo's pasty skin clashed with the shoe-polish black toupee plastered across his forehead. He adjusted his black-frame glasses and spoke in a high-pitched staccato.

“Citizens of New York. We will not be intimidated by this cowardly threat to our city. Please remain calm and proceed with your daily business. I’m ordering the police to cancel all leaves and to increase their public presence. I’ve also contacted the Exchange chairman to determine what their response will be. Thank you.”

The Mayor sat awkwardly for five seconds. He fingered the knot on his tie, dwarfed by the unfashionably long collar on his white shirt. His eyes darted sideways.

“Are we off the air? Good. . . Get that sonofabitch Harris on the phone.”

The TV screen blanked momentarily before Carol Lane, CNN’s New York correspondent, stood with a hand-held microphone in front of the Empire State Building. She blew cinnamon bangs from her forehead and faced a curly-haired deliveryman carrying a carton of coffee containers into New York’s most famous building.

“You don’t seem concerned by the terrorist threat. How come?”

The deliveryman flashed a crooked grin for the camera. “They’re gonna need their coffee today. Business should be good. . .”

“What about the bloody hand just delivered to the Mayor?”

He shrugged his shoulders. “Maybe it belongs to the lady police lieutenant running the Fulton fish market sting.”

Carol Lane spoke into the microphone, still flanked by the smiling deliveryman. “It seems New Yorkers require more than just a threat and a little violence to upset their daily routine. This is Carol Lane at the Empire State Building returning you to your regularly scheduled program.”

* * * *

Few people expected the blast when it came. Fewer still knew the events leading to the amputated hand and the ensuing disaster.

Chapter One

Jason Novack slipped his key into the lock and heard Sparks yelping inside. As he entered the tiny foyer cluttered with doll carriages, tyke bikes, and teddy bears, the golden retriever puppy scratched its paws against his leg.

“Hi ya, boy.” Jason knelt to pet the dog. “Anybody home?”

The patter of feet and bedlam coming from the bedroom made his heart beat faster.

“Yay, Daddy’s home.”

“Daddy, Daddy, Daddy. . . .”

Andrew and Faith, three-year-old twins, scampered out of the bedroom and hopped into Jason’s outstretched arms. He lifted them like a pair of kittens. Faith wrapped her arms around his neck, while Andrew climbed onto his father’s shoulders and sank his fingers into Jason’s shaggy brown hair. Jason stared at the full length wall mirror to enjoy the sight of his blond haired imps turning him into a jungle gym. This is how it should always be, he thought, as he smothered them with kisses.

“I miss you guys.”

“Daddy, Daddy. Look at Sparks, he made a pee on the floor,” Faith screeched while covering her mouth with her hands. “Mommy’s going to be angry.”

“Maybe we should rename him Puddles in your honor,” came Dana’s voice from the bedroom doorway.

Jason turned to see Dana standing in the archway, hands on her hips, wearing a flared denim skirt and matching sleeveless blouse. Despite strands of gray only partially concealed by blond streaks, she looked younger than thirty-six. The sharp contours of her chin and neck, combined with a narrow nose, projected a gymnast's trim appearance. "I guess the shock of you walking in at five o'clock on a Friday afternoon stunned everyone," she continued. "Mrs. Archibald thought you were a burglar. She's still hiding in the bedroom."

"Great. . . I've been trying to get the upper hand on her." Jason ambled towards Dana while tickling the kids. His wiry six-foot-four frame towered over her, even with the help of high-heeled shoes. She stretched on her tiptoes and kissed him squarely on the lips, depositing a sweet peppermint flavor. Jason then watched Dana's disapproving eyes wander toward his neck where his hands clutched Andrew and Faith.

"Something wrong?" he asked without a clue.

"Did you spend the entire day in the office like that?"

"Like what?"

"You've got paper clips where your cuff links should be. Is that the new style for associates at the firm?"

"Oh, that. I couldn't find mine this morning so I improvised." Jason avoided Dana's glare; she had prescribed a set of gold cuff links when he began working. He felt that only prissy prep school boys decorated their sleeves with jewelry, the legacy of a childhood groomed with hand-me-downs.

Dana wrinkled her nose with displeasure and began cleaning up after Sparks.

"Daddy, could you give us a horsey ride?" Andrew said, pulling Jason's ears.

“Okay, here goes.”

Jason put both children on the floor and got down on his hands and knees. Andrew jumped onto Jason’s back while Faith said:

“Daddy, please help me up.”

Jason ached at having forgotten to help Faith. She had been born with a missing fibula in each leg. She had adapted, as only children can, by hobbling on her misshapen limbs, but she could not jump. No one was to blame; it was simply an act of God. Nevertheless, Jason’s impotence in curing Faith’s handicap made him feel as guilty as if he had transmitted a crippling gene. He recalled conjuring up devilish self-mutilations to rectify matters when she was born. Now he prayed for a medical miracle in her upcoming surgery. He was prepared to sacrifice everything for her happiness.

Jason moved his hand to Faith’s bottom and scooped her up behind Andrew.

“Everybody ready now?”

“Yes, Daddy,” they shouted together.

The kids braced their boney knees against their father’s flanks as if expecting a stallion’s gallop. Jason crawled through the hallway towards the children’s bedroom, neighing and whinnying.

“Faster, faster,” yelled Andrew, whooping and hollering like a rodeo star. He blinded Jason by wrapping his hands around his eyes. Jason accelerated; his thirty-three year old knees scraped painfully against the hardwood floor, until his head crunched against an unanticipated dead end.

“Well, now, Mr. Novack, I think my turn has finally come. If you’ll just hold on a moment, I’ll get on there behind Faith.”

Jason pulled Andrew’s hand from his eyes and found himself staring at Mrs. Archibald’s kneecap, half covered by a green housedress. The portly Irish

Nanny with geriatric blue hair had become part of the family when the twins arrived. So far Jason had escaped most of her outrageous requests.

“That’s exactly what I had in mind, Mrs. Archibald. . . except the kids want their bath.” Jason helped Andrew and Faith slide off his back and stood up.

“Daddy, could you come into the bath with us?” Faith screeched.

“Mrs. Archibald has only two hands, honey.”

“I’ll behave, Daddy, I promise.” Faith clasped her hands together in mock prayer.

“I’d love to, sweetie, but Daddy has to go back to his office.”

“I hate Daddy’s office.”

“You’re not the only one,” Jason mumbled as Andrew and Faith fell into the anxious arms of their Nanny, who nuzzled them against her marshmallow chest.

As Jason watched his children disappear into the bathroom, he envied their attachment to Mrs. Archibald. He resented the fifteen hour days and six day weeks that robbed him of their company. He shuffled down the hallway determined to cure the problem. It wasn’t the first time he felt this way.

Dana followed Jason into the master bedroom that barely qualified for the name. Three-bedroom apartments on Manhattan’s Upper East Side provide expensive accommodations in doll house proportions. The huge canopied bed Dana had bought dwarfed everything in the room, even Jason. The frilly ruffles of the white satin bedspread, combined with the mahogany double-dresser, completed the image of eighteenth century royalty.

“I can’t believe another weekend’s down the drain,” he said, flinging underwear, socks, toothbrush and shaving gear into a small black gym bag.

“What happened?”

“Your friend Whitehead has us working on the tax consequences of a merger that our biggest client just announced.”

“How many did he assign to the case?”

“In honor of the Memorial Day weekend, only six associates and one junior partner.”

“Who else got lucky?”

“All of us who were scheduled for Sunday night’s junket to Atlantic City.”

Jason looked up just in time to see Dana swallow a smile as she sighed: “It’s probably just as well.”

Damn. . . why did she say that, he said to himself. She should know that the trip was a harmless diversion. After all, it was more than ten years since they struck their prenuptial bargain: Dana would support them during his three-year stint at Harvard Law School if he gave up seven card stud. Jason’s word was as good a nun’s vow of chastity. He successfully suppressed what Dana considered a dangerous addiction. He thought he had earned her trust. And now it seemed as if she had conspired with Whitehead to steal his nostalgic one night stand at the poker table. But by the way she was looking at him, with the apologetic eyes of a penitent, he knew she regretted saying it. He decided to let the remark pass unnoticed.

“Doesn’t it bother you that they’ve blown a three day weekend for us?” Instead of waiting for an answer he added, “I doubt I’ll be back before Monday morning.”

“C’mon, Jason, another two years of this and you’ll make partner. After that we can begin a new life.”

“At the rate I’m going, you’ll have to start without me.”

Jason disliked Dana spinning the fairytale about a new life whenever she sensed his waning commitment to the firm. Even if he made partner, the

grueling pace would continue, like a never-ending marathon. Junior partners were little better than associates. Only the take-home pay would change. Jason knew that's what held Dana's attention, but it just wasn't enough, as far as he was concerned.

Jason zipped up the gym bag and turned to leave the room. Dana stood in the narrow aisle between the bed and dresser, blocking his exit. As he closed the distance between them, she waltzed backward, hands clasped behind her, staring at him with walnut-sized brown eyes. When she nudged into the bedroom door, she eased it shut with her back. Dana rested her shoulder blades against the door and arched her back slightly. A smile simmered across her lips as she wriggled her hands behind her. Jason then heard the faint click of the lock, his stomach fluttering. He hadn't felt this way in a long time. Dana brought her hands forward and let them flirt on her hips. Then she slowly reached up and began to unbutton his shirt.

"This is one thing I'll never start without you."

Jason's mind floated back to his undergraduate days at Duke. He recalled his ecstasy when Dana asked him out as he served her in the Campus Eatery. He had been surprised by her sexual advances, but surrendered with pleasure. Now, of course, he expected to be surprised, and was disappointed when he wasn't.

Jason completely missed Mrs. Archibald's rendition of "When Irish Eyes are Smiling" as she bathed the children.

* * * *

More than the usual resentments escorted Jason up the office elevator at ten o'clock Friday evening. Andrew and Faith led the list of missed opportunities. Every weekend at the office leached away his life with them.

Dana's seduction had been an exciting send-off. But it reminded him that sex with Dana had become infrequent these days. And much as he hated to admit it, he would miss the canceled trip to Atlantic City. He wondered whether he still had the skill to dominate a poker table.

As Jason entered the reception area, decorated in dark oak paneling, he nodded to the other inmates milling about the food cart. He suppressed the scent of the smorgasbord, knowing from past mistakes that communal snacks undermined his productivity. Jason mingled for less than half-an-hour and then disappeared into his office for three days, subsisting on cheese curls, coffee, and the tax code.

By Monday morning his mind was numb and his throat felt like sandpaper. Jason sat facing away from the door, with his feet propped up on a short lacquered bookcase beneath the window. He leaned forward in his chair to relieve the knot that ached in his lower back; the firm's sleeping facilities were as comfortable as a pup tent. Three temporary steel gray files, each about five feet high, were jammed in front of his oversized wooden desk. As a fifth year associate at Bartlett and Taft, the white shoe law firm, Jason was entitled to a big mahogany desk, but was still stuck in a birdcage-sized office.

He stared out the window overlooking Central Park and dreamt about tomorrow's escape from the office. He was scheduled for an all day visit at the Commodity Exchange with Ted Harris, an important client of the firm. Ted had agreed, after considerable badgering, to explain how his commodities business worked as a reward to Jason for saving Ted millions of dollars in taxes. He considered himself lucky. Self-made men like Ted Harris are a silent breed. This is especially true in the cryptic world of precious metals. The Gnomes of Zurich are notorious for burying the secrets of their success.

He anticipated his meeting as though he were about to receive the keys to Fort Knox.

“Is there something out there I should know about?”

A familiar deep voice came from behind him. He turned and cringed at the aristocratic gray eyes of Robert Whitehead peering at him from above the temporary files. Whitehead’s silent stare pressed him to respond. He knew that silence was a WASP’s favorite torture. It made him regret joining a firm dominated by Boston Brahmins rather than the loquacious descendants of Ellis Island.

“Too bad you had to cut short the extended weekend.” Jason stood up to face Whitehead, who wore his country-club attire. He could not believe that the fifty-eight year old Chairman had returned to the office on Memorial Day morning from his five-acre estate in the Hamptons. This will cost the client as much as a year with a courtesan, Jason thought, knowing Whitehead fed his expensive tastes with outrageous billing rates.

“Not much I could do about it once we set up tomorrow’s meeting,” Whitehead said.

“What meeting is that?” Jason’s fingertips went cold.

“With the target company. . . . You’ll have to present the tax side of the picture.”

Jason felt as though he had been punched in the midsection. Whitehead was about to destroy another trip. He could not take the chance that his opportunity with Ted Harris might disappear.

“I’m afraid I’ve got a major conflict tomorrow,” Jason began.

“Really?”

Jason watched Whitehead’s brow furrow in disbelief. He then charged ahead.

“Ted Harris needs me to finalize the agreement on back taxes with the IRS,” he lied. “The negotiations are at a critical stage.”

Beads of perspiration formed on Jason’s upper lip. Whitehead’s response took forever, like the deliberations of a hung jury. Even if Whitehead freed him from the merger meeting, Jason knew his record would be tainted. Whitehead expected obedience, not excuses. Jason’s intestines wavered but he maintained a poker face to mask his bluff.

“Okay, let’s see what you’ve prepared on the merger,” Whitehead finally said.

Jason felt as though he had been reprieved. He picked up the twenty page report he had prepared: “This spells out. . . .”

“No, just summarize the main points.” Whitehead waived away Jason’s three day magnum opus on the tax consequences of the merger, deflating his ego in the process.

After listening to Jason’s five minute summary, Whitehead said: “Fine. I’ll do the tax presentation myself. Just prepare the slides for me so there’s no mix up.”

Whitehead turned to leave and then added: “And from now on, I want you to report daily to Ann Fricke so there won’t be any more surprises.” Whitehead walked out of Jason’s office without another word.

Jason plopped down in his chair, his shirt sticking to his sweat-soaked armpits. Anger burned inside. They already knew his schedule in detail, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Making him check in felt like he was on probation, with Whitehead’s executive secretary, Ann Townsend Fricke, as the monitoring officer. Jason recalled with distaste his weekly trips to the local precinct after he and his neighborhood delinquents were caught sneaking into Yankee Stadium. He vowed never to be shackled again. Whitehead had

gone too far this time.

Jason stoked his rising indignation. He resented the years incarcerated at Bartlett and Taft. He resented Whitehead behaving like an autocratic warden. He resented the weekends spent in solitary confinement. And he resented wearing ankle chains, with Ann Townsend on patrol. Jason wanted out of the penitentiary. He needed a permanent change.

Chapter Two

Jason arrived early at Four World Trade Center, the short flat building next to the twin towers, home to the New York commodity exchanges. He checked in at the reception desk and was told to wait in the visitors' gallery.

Jason bounded up the short flight of stairs and entered the small gallery that was empty except for three clocks on the wall showing the time in London, Tokyo, and New York. The glass enclosure looked down on a room about the size of a football field that served, for nearly twenty years, as the combined trading floor of Comex, the New York Mercantile Exchange, the Cotton Exchange and the Coffee, Sugar, and Cocoa Exchange.

At first glance, the trading floor resembled a political convention rather than a business meeting, especially since traders in flamboyantly colored jackets painted a kaleidoscopic image. Having been on the floor briefly with Ted Harris during his last visit, Jason could discern somewhat of a pattern. At equally spaced intervals were nearly a dozen circular arenas, each a little bigger than a boxing ring. Inside each ring was a dense concentration of people facing each other and waving their arms in confrontation. Between these arenas were booths with telephones and computer terminals. The walls of the trading floor were covered from floor to ceiling by black tote boards with words like coffee, cotton, heating oil and silver appearing at the top in large white lettering.

Jason watched clerks scurrying within the life-size maze, avoiding

groups of two or three traders standing in the few open spaces. The only chairs on the trading floor had clerks standing on them to gain a better view into the crowded circles. The floor was littered with paper scraps that were added to at irregular intervals by a shower of confetti thrown from the open booths and trading rings.

Jason stared, mesmerized by the frenzied activity. His concentration was interrupted by a female voice.

“Hello, you must be Jason Novack. Sorry to have kept you waiting.”

He turned and saw a tall woman in her late twenties, wearing a black tailored skirt and v-neck white blouse. She wore no makeup but her face radiated an unusual combination of color. She had smooth olive skin, large sky blue eyes, and pink lips that were too wide for beautiful but just right for sensuous. Jason focused on her jet black hair gathered tightly in a french knot, exposing an inch long scar just below her hairline. This was a confident woman, he thought.

“You *are* Jason Novack,” the woman said somewhat louder.

“Yes,” Jason recovered. “I don't think I caught your name.”

“Oh, I'm sorry. I'm Lisa Allen and I work for Harris Trading Company. Ted asked me to give you a guided tour of the floor. I understand you were here Friday morning.”

“I was on the floor for just a few minutes.”

“Well, then, I must have just missed you.” Lisa turned and chuckled: “You'd better follow me closely or someone might grab you and sell you to the highest bidder.”

Lisa glided down the stairs towards the Exchange entrance. As Jason passed through the swinging doors he was energized by a cacophonous roar that replaced the artificial silence of the visitors' gallery. He followed Lisa

through the accumulated litter and noticed that much of the racket came from a boisterous mob of about 200 traders, mostly in their twenties and thirties. They were pressed together in one of those circular arenas, called pits or rings, that had at least three levels, with the highest one on the outside and the lowest, obscured from view by the dense crowd, in the middle. Like gladiators preparing for combat, the traders screamed and gesticulated at each other. It reminded Jason of the crowd at a cockfight he had witnessed while playing hookey years ago with his Puerto Rican classmates. He tapped Lisa's shoulder and shouted:

“What's going on over here?”

Lisa turned and stepped close enough for Jason to smell her perfume as she explained:

“This part of the floor belongs to the Coffee, Sugar and Cocoa Exchange. Two years ago in the sugar pit, prices doubled because of damage to the Cuban crop. Now it's coffee. They're going a little crazy because of a rumor that the coffee exporters cartel will cut production next year.” Lisa pointed to the wall behind the pit. “Take a look up at the board that says coffee and the various delivery months--September, November, January and so on--across the top. Below each month are numbers. The first column says 110.30, 110.31, 110.33, and 110.35, which are the last four prices for delivery of coffee in September.”

“The numbers keep on changing,” Jason yelled so that Lisa could hear him above the racket.

“And that's because the prices recorded on the board report what's going on in the ring. The scramble to buy coffee right now is forcing up prices every second. Take a look around the walls and you'll see that most other prices are barely changing.” Lisa's eyes scanned the room. “That's why this pit is so

crowded. The successful traders go wherever they hear the most noise because that's where the action is; and right now it's coffee.”

Jason was impressed. He could barely keep up with what Lisa was saying. Confused by the multitude of delivery months and distracted, like a shy teenager, by her physical proximity, Jason wondered where Lisa Allen acquired her Wall Street brain. “I hope you don’t mind my asking, how do you know all this?”

“Don’t be discouraged. This is new, so it’s confusing. I didn’t catch on for more than a month. But it’s been two years now and I pay attention--to every detail. That’s the only way to survive around here. Besides, now I run the Comex trading booth for Ted. That means I do everything--from back office accounting and margin requirements to clearing, customer service, and even clerking.” Lisa then tugged at Jason's sleeve. “Let's go, we're almost there.”

She led him into a booth crammed with telephones and computer terminals. The computer screens flashed prices from the exchanges in Chicago and London as well as news stories from both Dow Jones and Reuters. Talking on the phone was a man about thirty years old, with wiry black hair, small brown eyes, and a closely cropped full-face beard. The picture ID badge pinned to his black trading jacket read Bashir Ismail and below that was printed: “Harris Trading Company.” He had the serious look of an ascetic, Jason thought.

“Welcome to the Comex headquarters of Harris Trading Company,” Lisa said. “Say hello to Bashir. You'd better be nice to him because his uncle Ali owns the Olympia Grill downstairs, the best restaurant in the building.”

“Nice to meet you, Bashir.” Jason nodded towards the trading pit located ten feet from the Harris booth. “Could one of you explain exactly what they're

yelling over there?”

“It’s probably better to wait until Malcolm--he's our trader in the silver pit--has a customer order to execute.” Lisa rolled her eyes while looking over to the ring. “Speaking of the devil.”

Malcolm Thorndike sauntered over like a star quarterback, sporting a perfectly matched burgundy stripped shirt and tie, and slipped his arm around Lisa Allen's narrow waist. Jason saw a suppressed grimace on Bashir’s face that matched the surprising sag Jason felt in his shoulders. Lisa rectified the situation by discreetly taking hold of Malcolm's fingertips with hers, lifting them from her waist, while pirouetting away slowly.

“Malcolm, you're just the person to explain to Jason what's going on in the pit. Ted says there's no better place than silver since the explosion in trading volume.”

Suddenly Malcolm yelled to Bashir, who had been standing quietly watching the interplay, “C'mon dirtbag, stop daydreaming and answer the fucking phone.”

Bashir swallowed hard and picked up the phone on the second ring. He pulled a trading ticket off the pile on the shelf, grabbed the pen resting behind his ear and very quickly wrote something down. Bashir then repeated the order into the phone, “Sell 300 July silver at the market.” He hung up the phone and handed the ticket to Malcolm, who snatched it impatiently, leaned across Bashir and jammed the ticket into a nearby time stamping machine.

“How about remembering to time stamp the damn ticket.” Malcolm turned and muttered, not quite under his breath, “Fucking foreigners.” He then added in Jason's direction, “Let's go hotshot, just pay attention to what happens now.”

Jason's stomach churned as he watched Bashir's menacing stare stalk

Malcolm to the edge of the silver pit. It wasn't just the frat house bigotry that repelled him. He also detected the slight trace of a redneck accent in Malcolm's voice, an accent that Jason had become familiar with at Duke. It brought back bad memories: the smoke-filled room in a wooden shack just outside Durham where he spent every Thursday night in a table stakes game of seven card stud. Thursday night poker with the locals provided much needed spending money. Until they got tired of losing to the "Yankee Jewboy" and nearly clubbed him to death with the help of the local deputy sheriff. That incident provided Dana with ammunition to purge poker from his life.

"July, how?" Malcolm yelled, his blond wave bouncing across his forehead as he jumped up two steps and looked into the pit.

"Two bid, at three," came the frenzied reply. Most of the traders were now looking at Malcolm, waving their hands to get his attention, and shouting almost in unison "Two bid, at three, two bid, at three. . . ."

Jason felt a surge in energy as he stood at the edge of the pit, crowded with clerks who gathered to gawk like sidewalk superintendents. Most of them were twenty year old females dressed like temptresses. He sensed a sexual current electrifying the air. Not a surprise, he thought, considering that sex follows the scent of money.

Lisa pushed through the clerks and stood beside Jason.

"Let me help you break the code. When Malcolm yelled 'how's July' he asked for the price of silver for delivery in July."

"I see \$6.21 per ounce up on the wall."

"That's good, just like over in coffee they post the last price traded. But Malcolm wants to know the price he can transact at right now. Things change pretty quickly in there."

"So, what's this 'two bid, at three' they're all yelling?"

“There’s a price you can buy at and one you can sell at, like with a used car dealer. The word ‘bid’ implies buy and ‘at’ signals sell. So ‘two bid’ means they’re ready to buy ‘July’ silver by paying \$6.22 per ounce and ‘at three’ means they’re ready to sell at \$6.23. The ‘2’ and ‘3’ stand for the last digits.”

“Hmm. . . I think I understand, but how do they know that an ounce of silver is worth between \$6.22 and \$6.23?”

“That’s a question that would stump Einstein,” Lisa laughed. “No one in there knows any more about silver than what their dentists tell them, which is nothing. But they do know that over the past few minutes some brokers for public customers have bought ‘July’ at \$6.23 while others have sold at \$6.22--probably in about equal amounts. So the traders in the pit will continue to quote ‘two bid, at three’ until the balance of orders change. “

Malcolm slowly lifted his right hand, intensifying the racket, and waved as if saying goodbye-in-disgust to someone. He then yelled: “Sold 200, sold 40, sold 10, sold 50,” and turned to Lisa. “I just sold 200 contracts to the Wizard, 40 to Mom, 10 to Doc and 50 to the Train.”

Lisa scribbled on the pad in her hand: Sold 200 to OZ, 40 to MA, 10 to MD and 50 to RR, and then smiled at Jason: “Everybody’s got a nickname around here, usually related to the symbol on their trading badge. You know, OZ is the Wizard. . . .”

“I’ve got the idea,” Jason said as his pulse quickened with the surrounding clamor. “What happens next?”

“Well, the traders in business for themselves, Wizard, Mom and Doc, are like professional ticket scalpers. In fact, that’s what they’re called--scalpers. And just like ticket scalpers before a big game, they want to unload before getting stuck. Since the traders just bought July silver from Malcolm at \$6.22 they’ll want to sell immediately at \$6.23 to book a profit. Keep your eye on

Wizard. I don't know if you can see the OZ on his trading badge from here, but he's the tallest guy in there so he's easy to spot."

"I see him." Jason noted that Wizard's unblinking light green eyes, beneath a mop of brown hair, surveyed the pit like beacons.

Lisa paused, then lightly prompted Jason with her elbow. "I think they're about to get their chance to sell. Can you see the guy wearing a gray striped tie around a neck the size of an oak tree--over there on the top step?"

Jason just nodded as Lisa's gentle nudge flustered him.

"Well, that's Train. He's a broker for Barr and Company, just like Malcolm is for us. His clerk just handed him a ticket. That means a customer order. Let's see what happens."

Train's thick black mustache, bushy eyebrows, and powerful neck reminded Jason of an old fashioned coal-driven locomotive.

"How's July?" Train yelled in a booming voice.

"Two bid, at three," came the response from the crowd. The scalpers were still ready to buy July silver at \$6.22 and sell at \$6.23, although according to Lisa they would rather sell than buy.

"Buy the 'threes'," Train shouted at the scalpers signalling they were sellers by holding their hands up in the air. Train just bought everything that Wizard, Mom and Doc wanted to sell at \$6.23.

"Did you see that?" Lisa said almost breathlessly, "The Wizard just made \$10,000."

"What?" A mixture of excitement and confusion swirled in Jason's head.

"He just sold the 200 contracts to Train at \$6.23. You know, the ones he bought from Malcolm at \$6.22."

"That's a penny in my book."

"That's a penny *per ounce* on a million ounces of silver. Each of those

200 contracts calls for the delivery of 5000 ounces,” Lisa said. “So. . . for a minute’s work, the Wizard made \$10,000.”

“Jesus, you can make a lot of money in there very quickly.” Jason’s eyes popped open.

“Trust me, it isn’t easy. If Train had been a seller rather than a buyer, Wizard and the other scalpers would’ve been stuck. They were lucky this time.”

“Is it luck or skill?”

“A little of both.”

“Sort of like poker,” Jason smiled, recalling the gold Star of David he carried whenever he played.

“Exactly. In fact, to be good consistently you’ve got to know when to trade and when to sit on the sidelines.”

“Y’gotta to know when to hold ‘em and when to fold ‘em,” Jason sang.

“Sounds like you’ve got poker on the brain,” Lisa said. She stared at Train who was still looking at the center of the pit. Lisa rested her hand lightly in the small of Jason’s back. Her touch teased up and down his spine. He wasn’t sure whether she was purposely enticing him or simply doing her job. Then Lisa leaned close enough so her breath brushed his ear. Jason’s neck tingled with goose bumps.

“Watch very carefully now,” she said in a strained whisper. “Train looks like he has more to buy. I told you he works for Barr and Company which belongs to the Kraft family--you know, the right wing fanatics who own Texas. They’re not scalpers looking to make a penny or two but big speculators trying to anticipate a three or four dollar price move. Fifteen years ago the Krafts tried to corner the soybean market. For the past six months they’ve been big buyers of silver and don’t care who knows it. Sometimes they even purposely

push up the price. A scalper could get steamrollered if he's not careful."

No sooner had Lisa finished when Train yelled:

"July, how?" Train again wanted to know where the scalpers were ready to buy and sell.

"Two bid, two bid," everyone shouted, indicating they wanted to buy at \$6.22 but had no interest in selling. Jason knew the stakes were about to increase.

"Three bid," Train yelled, raising the price he would pay to \$6.23. Lisa was right, Train had more to buy.

Jason heard a meek 'at four' response from the rest of the pit. The scalpers were offering to sell July at \$6.24 per ounce but sounded like they were doing Train a favor.

"Buy the 'fours'," yelled Train while waving his arms inward like a burly traffic cop. He just bought everything offered at \$6.24.

Jason tensed, as if it were the final round at a heavyweight championship fight. Lisa's insights implied that Train probably had even more to buy and would not be afraid to show his muscle. He looked around the pit and knew that it was about to become still more expensive. All of the sellers had disappeared. And then, as if following the script, he heard Train screech:

"Four bid, four bid." Train had raised his bid once again, indicating he would pay \$6.24 per ounce for July silver to anyone wanting to sell.

The entire pit finally got the idea and joined in: "Four bid, four bid," they all yelled. Now, every trader wanted to buy at \$6.24.

Train then screamed, spraying saliva on surrounding traders: "Five bid, five bid." He pushed up the price he would pay to \$6.25 per ounce because there were no sellers.

"Six bid, six bid," came even louder because there were still no sellers.

A fleeting pause in the crescendo made Jason shiver. He could not believe Train singlehandedly drove up the price of silver by four cents an ounce. Jason knew that obscure commodities like titanium or lithium could be easily manipulated. But this was silver, consumed worldwide by Fortune 500 companies like Kodak. He shuddered knowing that Train acted on behalf of the Kraft family of Texas, suspected of bankrolling much of the extremist literature blanketing the Midwest in the 1970s.

Just when Jason feared that Train had scared away all sellers, he saw the Merrill Lynch broker, who stood next to Malcolm in the pit and weighed at least three hundred pounds, grab a ticket from his clerk. They all perspired despite the arctic air conditioning.

“Looks like a customer order coming from Merrill,” Jason shouted like an excited sportscaster calling the play-by-play.

“That’s paying attention,” Lisa said. Jason delighted in the compliment.

Lisa’s eyes remained glued to the action. “I’ll bet it’s a sell order, too. Only a customer would be dumb enough to get in Train’s way.”

No sooner had Lisa finished when the Merrill broker yelled: “At seven, at seven.” Lisa was right, it was an order to sell July at \$6.27 per ounce.

“I’ll take ‘em Tiny,” Malcolm said, poking his rotund friend in the ribs. He just bought everything Tiny had for sale at \$6.27.

“Sold 300,” Tiny said out of the corner of his mouth, confirming the trade.

Jason felt certain Malcolm was about to flip those 300 contracts to Train for a \$15,000 profit. Malcolm had just donned his scalper’s hat.

“At eight, at eight” Malcolm screeched less than a second later in Train’s direction. ,Malcolm offered to sell the 300 contracts at \$6.28 per ounce.

“Buy the eights” Train yelled at Malcolm. Jason was right--Train bought

all of Malcolm's contracts at \$6.28 per ounce.

Malcolm turned to Lisa. "Put that down for my account, honey. Bought 300 from Tiny at \$6.27, sold 300 to Train at 6.28." He added in Jason's direction, "That was like having sex in public and getting paid \$15,000 for it."

Lisa, flushed with excitement, yelled to Malcolm: "Nice scalp. It took guts to buy those 300 at \$6.27."

"Not when Train is buying silver," Malcolm said as he jumped down from the top step, flecks of perspiration flying from his forehead, and stood next to Lisa and Jason. "You know--go with the flow is the most basic rule of trading."

"You're certainly right about that," Lisa said, and then added: "Train's making it obvious that a squeeze is coming. I hear the Krafts have enlisted some Arab money to help corner the market."

"That's news to me," Malcolm mumbled.

"Well, if there's any truth to it, we haven't seen the end of this price move."

Malcolm just nodded and turned one of Lisa's trading cards into confetti.

Jason's heart was beating so hard he was afraid that Lisa and Malcolm could see it pounding on the outside of his shirt. He thought about the athletic reflexes required to execute Malcolm's trade. He thought about the juggernaut triggered by Train's relentless buying. And he thought about the pressure that would emerge if Lisa were right about the Krafts. Jason sensed that the silver pit was like a boiling cauldron.

The last time he was this excited his four queens beat a full house and he scooped up a \$1300 pot. But that was a long time ago. And those stakes were peanuts compared with the big poker game in the pit. He could almost taste the competitive challenge.

Jason realized that pit traders succeeded by following their instincts. They exploited opportunities without hesitating, like gritty platoon sergeants in the heat of battle. He had learned that lesson the day his high school principal told him of the scholarship opportunity at Duke. It meant leaving family and friends in the Bronx for foreign soil filled with risk and opportunity. It had been the defining moment in his young life. The gnawing mixture of fear and hope accompanying his decision still lingered. He had no regrets.

Jason felt a similar combination of anxiety and excitement confronting him. He could remain tethered to the familiar at Bartlett and Taft or try to transform his life in the silver pit. An inner voice left little doubt about the proper course. As he left the trading floor for his meeting with Ted Harris he decided to ask for a job at Harris Trading Company; it was an opportunity he could not let pass. He would love to assimilate Lisa Allen's market analysis. And, much as he disliked Malcolm Thorndike, he could swallow hard, just like Bashir had done, and absorb every detail of Malcolm's trading technique. His biggest problem would be to prevent Dana from filing for divorce.

Chapter Three

“Discipline, discipline, discipline,” Ali chanted like a revered scholar lecturing a restive pupil. He sat on an overstuffed faded green sleeper couch in the living room of the five room apartment he shared with his nephew, Bashir, in Brooklyn’s growing Arab neighborhood along Atlantic Avenue. The room was illuminated by three unshaded bulbs from a pole lamp, spilling a harsh glare across the naked whitewashed walls. A red Persian rug covered the center of the room, leaving exposed a heavily varnished oak trim around the perimeter. Three wood frame upholstered chairs, with hideous plaid seat covers, were arrayed in front of the couch.

Bashir Ismail sat facing his uncle and stared at Ali’s clean shaven head. He focused on the charcoal-colored eyes burning on either side of a hawk-like nose, noticing creases in Ali’s cheeks that made him look older than thirty-seven. Ali’s request for discipline reverberated in Bashir’s brain like a muezzin’s call to prayer. Ordinarily, that would have been sufficient for Bashir, even though his uncle was only six years older. But Bashir could not contain his rage.

“The lawyer that visited the floor today--his name is Novack--actually felt sorry for me. Holding my tongue in the face of those insults makes my backbone feel like jelly. I want that pig Thorndike to pay.”

“Your job is to see everything and to say nothing, Bashir. We have too much at stake. Do not let this fly Thorndike distract you.”

Bashir pressed his lips together as if he swallowed some vile medicine.

“All I see is Thorndike making money. Where are the millions this scheme is supposed to bring us?”

Ali rose from the couch, put his hands into the side pockets of his tan slacks and paced slowly, staring at the Persian rug.

“Do you think I’ve enjoyed running a restaurant for nine years? You’ve only been at the Exchange for--what is it now--four years? Some moles stay buried for twenty before emerging. Be patient. Pokie Kraft will be here shortly with his lieutenant from the Exchange. After I introduce you, feel free to ask Kraft whatever you wish.”

“Kraft’s accomplice is a fool.”

“How do you know?”

“The Krafts buy everything through their firm--Barr and Company. I’ve told you about this broker called Train who knows nothing except how to buy silver with other people’s money. I still don’t understand why we need partners in this thing.”

“You forget that one of our greatest successes--the Tel Aviv airport massacre--was carried out together with the Japanese Red Army. And cornering the silver market requires collusion. That’s why Kraft asked us and two other groups to participate.”

“Who are the others?” Bashir interrupted.

“I don’t know their identities, except that we are the only Palestinians and Kraft’s is the only American group. The others may be called upon to help if they’re needed. . . . And we, of course, will do anything that’s necessary to protect our main objective.”

Bashir perked up at the last point:

“But if . . .”

Ali silenced Bashir by raising his index finger to his lips and then pointing to the door. A second later Bashir heard a faint knock that required almost a canine's eardrum to detect. Ali whispered:

"That's Kraft. I will introduce him as Parker Kraft. Do not, under any circumstances, call him Pokie, unless you want his henchman to pay you a visit."

Bashir watched Ali open the door and embrace the fifty-year-old, pear-shaped, Texan as if Kraft were a visiting Muslim dignitary. Pokie's face was round like a pie, with features resembling mashed potatoes. His head was crowned by a white ten gallon hat that pressed down on large floppy ears.

"C'mon, Ali," Kraft drawled as he wriggled out of Ali's grasp. "Ya gotta drop the middle-eastern bear hug. This is America, though ah couldn't really tell by the looks of the neighborhood. There's A-rabs in caftans, Jewboys in big black hats, and Pakistanis in them Saris swarmin' all over the place. Ah wore my Stetson so's ah could be part of the masquerade."

"You are quite right, my dear Parker. Hiding in the crowd is the best disguise."

Bashir recoiled as his uncle inflated Pokie Kraft's already bloated head. A cowboy hat in Brooklyn was as unobtrusive as a Kaffiyeh at the Exchange. But then again, Bashir knew that in America, terrorism was not considered a daily threat; the Stetson would be dismissed as a fool's fetish. Bashir rose from his chair and stood next to his uncle.

"Parker, let me introduce Bashir. He is my flesh and blood at the Exchange."

"Pleased to meet you, B'shir." Kraft shook hands.

"Weren't you bringing someone from the Exchange?" Ali asked.

"He's trying to park the car so's it'll stay put for a while. Ah hear that'll

be damn near a miracle in these parts.”

“Please come in, then.” Ali closed the door. “In honor of your coming to my home, Parker, I’ve prepared some of your favorite food.”

Ali led the way into a dining area off the living room that was bathed in the aroma of pungent spices. There were six brown wicker-backed chairs surrounding an oval table, covered with an array of middle eastern dishes-- *humous, techina, kuba, babaganoush, felafel, lahmajeen, bakhlava, and pita* bread. The only hint that Kraft was the guest came from a six pack of *Coors* at the far end of the table.

“The hospitality is worthy of a Texan.” Pokie wiped his oversized middle finger through the *humous* and stuffed the chickpea paste into his mouth.

“I recall from our first London meeting at the Libyan embassy that you enjoyed middle eastern delicacies.” Ali motioned to both Bashir and Kraft to sit.

Bashir sat next to his uncle, who occupied the only chair with armrests, at the head of the table. Pokie sat at the other end and filled a large bone-colored dinner plate with a sampling from each dish. Bashir watched the *techina* sauce dribble off Kraft’s plate and felt repulsed by his ill-mannered gluttony. He wondered whether they were violating the Koran’s prohibition against consorting with pigs.

Ali poured himself a cup of espresso from a silver plated urn and sipped the thick brew in silence as Kraft stuffed himself. Bashir inhaled the strong scent and digested his uncle’s restraint, contrasting it with his father’s impetuosity. How differently the two brothers behaved, he thought, despite their shared devotion to the *Palestinian Brotherhood*, dedicated to destroying peace prospects between Arab and Jew. After raiding Israeli settlements from terrorist bases in Jordan, the *Brotherhood* was nearly decimated during September 1970 by King Hussein, lackey of the Zionists. Ali bided his time

while Bashir's father intensified his terrorism. If his father had some of Ali's prudence he might not have died in an Israeli jail. Bashir vowed to emulate Ali's self control so that they could avenge his father's death.

"Parker, I wonder if you could tell us how long it'll take to complete the plan," Ali said as Kraft paused over a nearly empty plate.

"Well, as near as ah can tell, we need at least two or three months to accumulate a big enough position. So it ain't gonna be 'July' silver that's gonna feel the big squeeze. My guess is that the September contract will be the nutcracker, if ya know what ah mean."

"How much money do we have to put up?"

"Ah said last time that \$50 million is all we want from ya. That'll return \$500 million if ma bookkeeper can count straight."

"Plus the muscle, as you called it."

"Now, Ali, that's what y'all bring to the party. If them Jewboys on the Exchange board try any fancy dancin', we may need some rough stuff to get our money."

"What makes you think they. . . ."

"Ali, ah told ya before. Ted Harris screwed ma friend the p'tata king in 1976. Back then ma buddies owned every p'tata in Idaho and just about every contract at the Exchange. Ted Harris and his cronies changed the rules at the end and ma boys lost everything. You're gonna make sure that won't happen this time."

Bashir was disappointed that Ted Harris could become an adversary. During his four years with Harris Trading Company, only Lisa Allen treated him with more respect than Ted. Before he could say anything, loud banging at the door interrupted the meeting.

"Hmm. . . . Sounds like ma sidekick's here," Kraft said.

“Bashir, please let him in,” Ali said.

The banging continued so Bashir yelled out, “Hold on. I’ll be there in a moment.”

The blood drained from Bashir’s face when he opened the door. A tingling sensation erupted on his skin as though he were being pressed against a bed of nails. His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth so that all he could utter was:

“You?”

“Well now Bashir, it looks like we have our work cut out for us.” Malcolm Thorndike slipped into the apartment, leaving Bashir flatfooted in the doorway.

Bashir’s disbelieving eyes tracked Malcolm’s swagger to the dining area. He felt betrayed, but not sure by whom.

“Ali, ah want ya to meet Malcolm Thorndike. Ya might’ve heard his name from B’shir since they both work for that scum Harris.”

Bashir watched his uncle’s eyes for a flicker of recognition. Ali simply nodded to a chair next to Kraft. “Please sit and help yourself.”

“Thanks.” Malcolm sat down, straightening his pleated slacks and popping open a can of *Coors*.

Bashir, seething, slipped into a chair next to his uncle. He vowed to exercise restraint, as if he were defusing a bomb.

“Could you explain for us, Parker, what role Malcolm plays in this business?” Ali asked.

“My pleasure, Ali. We shouldn’t have secrets between us. In fact, Malcolm’s ma eyes and ears at the Exchange, just like B’shir is yours. Well, maybe that’s not exactly right either. Ya see, ma Daddy had two wives. Malcolm’s momma lives in Arkansas and mine lived in Texas. During the last twenty years of his life, Daddy shuttled between his two families while he was

buyin' up all those oil fields. Malcolm's momma came second. Ma momma made sure they got nothin' after Daddy died. Of course, I didn't know any of this until ah set up ma soybean operation in Chicago. That's when Malcolm came in barefoot applyin' for a job with us and ah discovered ma baby brother." Pokie then clapped Malcolm on the back and added: "Ain't that right, Mal."

Bashir watched Malcolm grin away the embarrassment in silence. He wondered about the resentment Malcolm might harbor and decided it might be useful some day.

"It's good to have family where you need them." Ali refilled his coffee cup half way.

"That's why we brought Malcolm to New York. Ah called that money hungry Harris and promised him some of our business in exchange for him hirin' Malcolm as a broker. Now between B'shir and Malcolm we got Harris's Comex operation tied up and can hurt 'em when the squeeze tightens."

"By the way." Malcolm interrupted, gulping his beer. "The girl's making noises about you looking for Arab money to help corner the market. She's a clever one, you know."

"Now, now, you tol' me not to worry about that little darlin'. I thought you had her under control." Pokie's exaggerated smile censured Malcolm.

"Not to worry, Parker, I'm gonna take her wherever I go, but the Arab connection's out."

"That's fine. Rumors serve our purpose, as long as the Exchange can't prove nothin'. Just remember, America's a great country. That's why the *Viper Marshalls* aim to keep it pure."

Bashir savored the tangled web spun by the Texas terrorist. Pokie's *Viper Marshalls* skirted respectability with contributions to sympathetic political candidates, alienating America's more militant hate groups. Bashir

understood Pokie's balancing act and thought about explaining the tensions between the *Palestinian Brotherhood* and other Arabs, but declined. The less the infidels understood the better, even if they were co-conspirators. Bashir's pleasure was marred by Lisa joining Ted on the enemies list.

Parker Kraft pushed his chair away from the table and prepared to launch himself into an upright position. He floated up slowly like the Goodyear blimp.

"By the way, Ali, will you fellas be ready with our insurance policy before we turn the screws in the September squeeze?"

"We've already begun to expand the restaurant. Everything will be in place within two months."

"The Port Authority can be real pains, ya' know. We tried to put another TV signal on top of the twin towers and they blocked us."

"I've been a model tenant for nine years, my dear Parker. The building inspector has never paid for a meal," Ali smiled. "Everything will be ready before the August 1 deadline."

Chapter Four

It was ten o'clock in the evening and Jason managed to slip into his apartment undisturbed. Andrew, Faith and Sparks were fast asleep, having long since tired themselves out. He noticed it was dark under Mrs. Archibald's closed door. The only sound came from the master bedroom, where Dana indulged in her favorite evening activity--wrestling with the *New York Times*.

Jason hesitated to confront Dana with the day's events. He headed for the kitchen and brewed apple cinnamon herbal tea. He sat at the checkerboard-sized table with his back to the doorway, facing a refrigerator decorated with a rainbow of magnetized note pads. Jason hunched over the dark blue mug and filled his head with the cinnamon fragrance. The sweet aroma blended with thoughts about his day at the Exchange. He then felt a feather-like touch brush his neck, sending chills from shoulder to shoulder.

"Are you avoiding me for some reason?" Dana stood at Jason's side, her hands settling in the hair spilling over his collar. She wore a red silk slip that hung loosely from her breasts and ended about three inches above her knees.

"Should I?" Jason slid his arm around Dana's waist.

"Let me see." Dana nudged his chin. "Hmm. . . looks like you got fired today."

Jason's facial muscles slumped. Although he believed in women's intuition, Dana's perceptions always surprised him. He knew it wasn't magic.

Women were simply more sensitive to their surroundings; their antennae picked up muted messages. In a way he was lucky because she gave him an opening:

“No, I wasn’t fired. But I’d like to make a change and I need your help.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Dana’s eyes widened as she slipped from his grasp.

“I want to leave Bartlett and Taft, but I can’t do it without your cooperation.” Jason sensed a quiver flit across his lips.

“Very funny.”

“I’m serious.”

“If I thought you were, I’d sit down and cry.”

“Well, then you’d better sit because it’s the truth.”

Jason watched Dana stare in disbelief, almost afraid to move. She shuffled to the chair opposite him and sat down, tucking one leg beneath her body. She spoke slowly, like a psychologist examining a deeply disturbed child.

“Now, why don’t you tell me what you’re talking about.”

Jason welcomed the condescending tone rather than the tirade he had expected.

“You’ve heard me mention Ted Harris.”

“Sort of.”

“Well, he runs one of the largest commodity firms in the country. And he’s offered me a job.”

Dana’s eyes brightened. “As general counsel?”

“No, as a commodities trader.” Jason anticipated the grimace that groped across Dana’s face.

“Now, why would he do that? You don’t know anything about

commodities.”

“Because I twisted his arm.” Jason’s blood jumped through his veins. “Look, I spent the most exciting day of my life today at the commodity exchange. I watched people trade for a living. They enjoyed themselves and they made a lot of money. I loved every second of it. Ted gave me an insider’s view of the business. It was an eye-opener. At the end I asked him to train me as a trader.”

“Didn’t he suggest that you see a psychiatrist first?”

“Not quite, but he spent about an hour trying to talk me out of it.”

“And. . . .”

“I told him I hated working at the firm--the hours are ridiculous and my boss is a shit. I said that I planned to change jobs with or without his help.”

“Does he normally hire malcontents?”

Jason was disappointed in Dana. She sounded like a prosecutor purposely misleading a witness, but he forced himself to respond.

“Ted knows that I work hard and don’t complain. . . and so do you.”

“But this is a trading job. What makes you, or Ted for that matter, think you’ve got any aptitude for that?”

Jason shifted uncomfortably in his seat, toying with the handle of his cup. He knew that Dana would pounce on what he was about to say. He started slowly.

“Ted asked whether I had the discipline to concentrate while engulfed in the chaos of the trading pit. So I sketched my background. He liked that I fenced at the Pan American games.”

“And that makes you a candidate for trading?” Dana looked like she caught Jason selling snake oil. “Let’s get serious.”

“He especially liked that I worked my way through college playing poker.”

“Ah. . . now I see what’s going on,” Dana said, like a school teacher uncovering a cheater’s crib notes. She stood, turned her back towards Jason, and folded her arms across her chest. Her voice rose. “So trading is just poker in disguise. If that’s what this is all about. . . .”

“Stop making me pay for your father’s gambling losses,” Jason interrupted, having gone this route before. “This is about *my* life with you and the kids. Trading at the exchange ends at two-thirty in the afternoon. Even with back office work I’d normally be home by six. That means I can be a proper father to my kids and more than a part-time husband.” Jason was determined to avoid a gambling confrontation so he added: “This couldn’t have come at a better time, either. God knows Faith will need both of us to get through the next few months.”

Dana turned and faced Jason with a bemused smile. “Suppose you went into this trading thing. Have you thought about the risks you would subject us to--including Faith? I assume you can lose a lot of money.”

Jason thought about explaining that trading was a business where skill dominated luck in determining success. But he already lost that argument to Dana’s phobia ten years ago in connection with poker. Instead, he took a more pragmatic approach.

“Of course you can lose money, especially if you’re undisciplined. And it’ll take time to learn the ropes. But the income of a successful commodities trader makes even a partner’s take home pay at the firm look like a welfare check.”

“And what do we do while you’re learning the ropes?”

“Ted promised me a draw against my share of future profits.”

“How much?”

“Five hundred a week.”

“Have you lost your mind?” Dana’s facial muscles tightened. “That doesn’t even cover our rent. How do you expect us to get by?”

“We’ve got some savings, but this is where we really need your help.” Jason fought to restrain himself.

“This I’d like to hear.”

“I’d hoped you’d take on some copy editing jobs until I really get going.”

Dana stared at him as though he had violated a vow. “That’s not fair. I think that after putting you through law school I’ve earned the opportunity to finish my book . . . And I’m not letting you gamble away our future trying to score in the commodities market. Everyone else in this house will suffer the consequences if you fail. Where’s your consideration? Where’s your concern for your precious Faith if we wind up in the poor house?”

Jason was devastated, not believing that she would throw up the law school arrangement. That had been her suggestion, so they could start out fresh. She had worked hard and they both benefitted. Something changed her perspective, he thought, but now everything was fair game.

“Spare me your ideas on poverty. You forget that I’m the one who grew up in a slum. The closest you’ve come to deprivation was making do without the butler on Sundays. If I fail I’ll fight my way up again. Faith will be no worse off than now.”

Dana leaned forward, her hands flaring to her hips. “That’s easy for you to say because you think you’re too smart to wind up in the trash can.”

Jason wondered whether he overestimated his chances. Fewer than one-in-twenty new traders last beyond six months. Among the most recent casualties was a physics professor impaled on one of his fancy equations. Jason hated the thought of starting over. His embarrassment when arriving at Duke with one threadbare suitcase containing all of his possessions shrouded

his memory. He had vowed to make it easier for his children. That left him no choice.

“No, it’s not easy for me to say. I’m worried about succeeding in this job and I need your encouragement. Don’t you see, we’ve got to take a chance--for us and for Faith. We need more time together to rebuild our life. And Faith needs a small fortune to compensate for her handicap.” Jason shook his head when realizing Dana had missed a potential roadblock. “What bothers me is that you haven’t raised the one thing that’s most troublesome. It’s the very first question I asked Ted. . . and you still don’t know what it is.”

Dana eyed Jason, searching for a clue. He continued:

“Don’t you think medical coverage is of some concern here? Why didn’t you ask me about that instead of obsessing on this gambling thing. Or. . . maybe you forgot about Faith’s surgery in September.”

Dana seemed worn down. “You seem to have all the answers.”

“At least I’ve got my priorities straight.”

Dana sat at the table, massaging each of her temples with her fingertips. Jason lowered his voice to a conciliatory tone and added: “Ted’s HMO coverage doesn’t include the surgeons at Lenox Hill in their network. But he’s agreed to an advance for that as well.”

Dana slumped forward and spoke in measured tones, as though reading a prepared statement.

“A lot’s riding on your success in trading. I think that’s irresponsible. I also think it’s irrational to throw away your legal career on a whim. If you want my cooperation you’d better mull this over.”

Jason knew his behavior seemed capricious. He had considered letting his plans simmer. Unfortunately, delay could destroy the opportunity: “I’d like the luxury to think about this, but there’s urgency on Ted’s end. He

needs immediate help in silver and he'll hire me if I can join him within two weeks."

"I see." Dana's faraway glaze was magnified by a light crimson border that now framed her eyes. As the crimson deepened, a teardrop erupted and rolled down her cheek. She brushed it aside as though it were a fly and raised her voice: "This will ruin us and I'm not going to let it happen. My father destroyed my mother with this type of thing. I won't let you do that to me."

Jason watched tears run down Dana's face. They gathered at the tip of her nose and the bottom of her chin to test his resolve. He knew her father had lost millions in every type of white-collar gambling, from penny stocks to baccarat. He had avoided implicating him in their current predicament, until now.

"Listen to me." Jason reached across the table, took Dana's hand in his, and stroked it with his thumb: "We can't let your father destroy our dreams again. "

"What's that supposed to mean?" Dana tried to pull her hand from Jason's grasp.

He tightened his grip. "You know very well that I wouldn't have gone to the firm if your father hadn't been a partner and pressured me. Weiss and Handlemen was my first choice."

"So."

"I was stifled at Bartlett and Taft. With the entrepreneurial challenge of a smaller firm I might not be looking to change careers now."

"But the prestige and security. . . ."

"C'mon, Dana, that's nonsense. Look, I didn't have the courage to resist you and your father's arguments five years ago. And now we're paying for it. Help me pursue my passion. Let's not make the same mistake twice. I'm

pleading with you.” Jason would have dropped to his knees to beg if it would have helped.

All the color had drained from Dana’s face. When she spoke it sounded like a deathbed request.

“I want you to promise me one thing.”

“Anything,” Jason interrupted, sensing a concession.

“Promise that you won’t burn your bridges at the firm. I want a safety net.”

Jason resented Dana’s irrational attachment to Bartlett and Taft, especially since her father had been edged into early retirement. But it was a small price to pay. “I’ll do my best.”

“Would you mind if I spoke with Whitehead myself?”

Jason recognized the desperation in Dana’s suggestion. She surely knew he would be irritated if she meddled with Whitehead. “Look, you’ll have to trust me.”

Jason knew he had to end the discussion. He cupped Dana’s face in his hands, leaned across the table and kissed away her tears. “You won’t regret this. I promise.”

Relief rippled through his body. It was as though he had survived the Civil War unscathed. He envisioned a fresh start--for himself and his family. The only minor disappointment was that he had to postpone skewering Whitehead.

* * * *

Jason feared losing focus, watching the floors flicker by on the elevator ride to Bartlett and Taft the next morning. He had to reconcile his resignation from the firm with his promise to Dana, without missing Ted’s timetable. It was a delicate balance that could explode if he lost concentration.

Jason exited the elevator and skipped his friendly banter with the receptionist. He headed directly for Whitehead's corner office, usually guarded by the pit bull, Ann Townsend Fricke. She was nowhere in sight. Probably having her teeth sharpened, Jason thought.

He poked his head into Whitehead's windowed chamber and saw the managing partner of Bartlett and Taft sitting behind the desk in his usual uniform: a starched white shirt, burgundy tie and gray tweed suit. He spoke on the phone while motioning toward the high-backed leather chair in front of the desk, swept clean of everything except a Tiffany clock. Jason wondered how Whitehead managed his salt and pepper hair so that each strand knew its proper place.

"Nice to see you," Whitehead said, hanging up the phone. "You were missed at the merger talks yesterday."

Jason knew this was meant to put him on the defensive, so he countered:

"I heard it really went well."

"Quite well. How about your IRS negotiations?"

"Excuse me?" Jason had lost track of his lies.

"The Harris tax business?"

"Oh that." Jason recovered. "No problem. In fact, things went so smoothly that Ted offered me a job."

"Not a surprise. Lots of our clients go after our associates."

"Well, this is an opportunity I'm having difficulty passing up."

Whitehead put both of his hands flat against each other and pointed them at the base of his chin. He targeted Jason with a laser-like glare. Jason felt as though he might be incinerated until he heard Whitehead say:

"I hope you won't throw away your future with us by letting Ted Harris

steal you.”

Jason’s confidence surged when realizing Whitehead wanted him. The subtle accusation was designed to make him retreat. It was Whitehead’s favorite litigation strategy. Jason was supposed to take refuge in Bartlett and Taft. It was too late.

“I remember that when Dunhill went to American Express you said it was good for business. When I go to Harris Trading the firm will probably become their exclusive outside counsel.”

Whitehead’s thin lips narrowed to a straight line. He nodded his head, suggesting that Jason was right. Jason knew that was a bad omen. Whitehead never let his body language telegraph his thoughts.

“I’m afraid that’s not the direction we want to pursue. In fact, we decided in the executive committee to phase out our commodities practice. There are more lucrative opportunities elsewhere that may pose a conflict. Besides, I’ve never really been comfortable with the rough and tumble image of the industry.”

The revelation stunned Jason. Until now, outrageous fees tranquilized Whitehead’s feigned disdain for the commodities business. As he sat forward to bolster his resolve, Jason wondered who had purchased the loyalty of Bartlett and Taft’s managing partner.

“Well, in that case, perhaps I won’t be missed around here. This isn’t an easy decision for me. But I’d like to wrap things up during the next two weeks so I can join Ted Harris by June 15th.” And then to uphold his bargain with Dana he added: “If you need me after that, I’ll come in at night or on weekends for as long as necessary to tidy up.”

Jason felt the patrician silence indict him. When Whitehead finally spoke he sounded like a judge imposing capital punishment: “Quite frankly, I

hoped you'd join the merger practice after this past weekend. But it sounds like your interests lie elsewhere. I won't stand in your way."

"I appreciate that," Jason interrupted, sensing victory.

"In fact, don't feel that you have to stay the two weeks. You're free to leave whenever you wish."

Whitehead's knife-like smile sliced a hole in Jason's chest. Allowing him to leave immediately was like a dishonorable discharge from the armed services. He knew he could not leave before June 15th. Not because of the money. And not out of loyalty to Bartlett and Taft. It was Dana. He could not tell her that the safety net had disappeared.

Chapter Five

Lisa Allen walked up West Third Street towards *Milano* on the evening of August 14, two months after Jason Novack arrived at the Exchange. A dry summer breeze brushed her skin through her white cotton dress, bathing her in the fragrance of sugar coated peanuts roasting in a vendor's pushcart. The sidewalk resembled an outdoor café, with alfresco diners from a collection of coffeehouses decorating the walkway. She loved the bustling street life of Greenwich Village.

Lisa passed a clutch of teenagers with punk haircuts dyed various shades of green and blue. A bearded guitar player in scraggly clothes sat nearby on a plaid blanket, his melody obliterated by a jack hammer's beat. She spotted the light blue Con Edison truck and watched the rhythmic vibrations of the shirtless repairman operating the jackhammer. He had strong arms, she thought, just like Jason Novack.

Lisa recalled her mixed feelings two months ago when Ted charged her with Jason's commodities education. His boyish enthusiasm and penetrating turquoise eyes attracted her from the beginning. She thought his slightly unkempt hair made him ruggedly handsome, despite a nose that was too long and pointy for his oval face. His height hatched an imposing presence. But it was his sinewy forearms, with bulging veins, that took her breath away. He reminded her of a lumberjack.

Lisa recalled blushing the first time Jason rolled up his sleeves to

analyze the day's events with her. She tried to curtail the flirtations that spiced their first encounter. The teasing became too dangerous, as though she were skirting a whirlpool. She concentrated on restraining herself to avoid the emotional swirl.

“Excuse me, Ms. Lisa, but aren't you coming in here?”

Lisa recognized the familiar Italian accent of Vittorio. She snapped back to reality and saw her favorite chef standing outside *Milano* smoking a cigarette.

“I'm sorry to intrude on your thoughts,” Vittorio continued, “but you were passing us and your friend is already seated.”

Lisa felt embarrassed at missing Vittorio as she daydreamed past the restaurant. He had black wavy hair, a pencil thin mustache, and wore a tuxedo topped with a red bow tie. As the owner of *Milano* with his brother Carlo, he often doubled as Maitre D' on Tuesdays, when Carlo was off.

“On the contrary,” Lisa smiled, extending her hand to Vittorio, “I'm grateful that you caught my attention.”

Vittorio kissed Lisa's hand as only European men can without appearing foolish. “Allow me to escort you to your table.”

The restaurant was living-room size, with about two dozen tables packed together so that intimate conversation was precluded. As Lisa's eyes adjusted to the dimly lit room, whose walls were covered by ornately framed oil paintings, she noticed that every table was occupied. Although there was a two-week waiting list for reservations, Lisa's requests were honored immediately, as though she were a movie star. Ted Harris was a silent partner in *Milano*.

Vittorio twisted towards the small table in the corner and held the chair for Lisa.

“Enjoy your dinner. May I bring drinks to welcome you?”

“Thank you.” Lisa sat down. “I’ll have the usual.”

“I’d like Jack Daniels on the rocks,” Malcolm said adjusting the handkerchief in his blue blazer.

“Stop worrying, Malcolm. You’ll make a good impression as long as you don’t order grits,” Lisa said.

“Very funny.”

“Gosh, I’m starved.” Lisa picked up the menu.

“I’d like to talk first.” Malcolm grabbed the menu from her.

“The last time you did that was the last time we had dinner. D’you want to wait another year again?”

Lisa wondered whether it was a mistake to meet Malcolm. She remembered when they both arrived at Harris Trading two years ago that he exploited every opportunity. Lisa was a vulnerable twenty-six back then. She knew nothing about the commodities business and had just gone through a wrenching divorce from her high school sweetheart after five years of marriage. Malcolm’s trading experience in Chicago was a valuable resource, but his ego and immaturity rendered him unsuitable as a mentor. It had taken too long to extricate herself from his clutches. She had vowed to keep her distance.

Malcolm flashed an apologetic smile. “Listen, I appreciate your agreeing to have dinner on such short notice. I said I had a business proposition that you’d find attractive. Let me give you the details first and then you can think while we eat.”

“Fine.” Lisa sipped the scotch and soda Vittorio brought.

“You know I’ve made a lot of money the past two months.”

“I see our daily reports, Malcolm. And your red Porche has made a hit with everyone. Congratulations.” Lisa remembered transferring \$5 million

into Malcolm's personal account at the end of July. She also recalled seasoned traders complaining that his *nouveau riche* spending habits drew unwanted attention to their good fortune.

"Everyone's just jealous. They should know that my 911 needs a reserved spot at the garage. Those cowboy attendants can't park a bicycle without nicking it."

"Sometimes it's better to keep a low profile, but that's your business. Why don't you tell me what's on your mind."

"Okay. About an hour ago I told Ted I'm resigning to head the Comex trading operation for some Zurich-based investors. This is a phenomenal opportunity and I'd like you to join me." Malcolm quickly held up his hand like a policeman stopping traffic. "Please don't say anything till I'm finished. I remember what you said last year. But this isn't personal. I need your expertise in the back office. We'll double whatever you're making and give you a bonus based on our total profits." Malcolm smiled and raised his eyebrows. "Now. . . . What d'ya think?"

Lisa thought about laughing as she watched a nervous smile fidget across Malcolm's lips. She felt that only the Marquis de Sade would be a less desirable boss. But commodities had taught her that dross can turn into diamonds overnight. And Malcolm was a skilled trader. It made sense to hear more. She gulped her scotch. "When is this supposed to happen?"

Malcolm stirred the Jack Daniels with his index finger. "Tomorrow."

"What?" Lisa shouted as Malcolm's selfishness surfaced in her head. Out of the corner of her eye she saw diners at the neighboring table turn towards her. She lowered her voice. "How could you do this to Ted? Silver volume is through the roof. We can't process the trades. And now you're leaving and want to take me along. . . . Don't you have any loyalty?"

“Listen, this is business. In the big banks traders clean out their desks within an hour after they resign. No one wants turncoats hanging around.”

“I owe Ted for giving me a job on a whim. I can’t leave.” Lisa recalled how Ted hired her after a fifteen minute telephone interview arranged by her college roommate, Fae Parker. Ted explained later that she was his contribution to the Michigan alumni campaign.

“There’s more. “ Malcolm smiled like a psychic conjuring an irresistible message.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” The scotch sloshed in Lisa’s empty stomach.

“We’d put you in the pit within three months.”

Malcolm’s offer touched a nerve, just as intended. Everyone at the exchange dreams of this opportunity. Lisa often wondered whether she could compete with the ferocity needed to succeed, especially since fewer than one in ten traders at Comex were female. Her head throbbed, as though magnets attached to each ear were pulling apart her inner loyalties. Allegiance to Ted on one side countered by personal advancement on the other.

The liquor lowered Lisa’s resistance to Malcolm. She knew confusion followed drinking on an empty stomach. This time she would stop before doing irreparable damage.

“I’m flattered by the offer, but I’ve got to let it sit a while.”

“Take your time. You can tell me at the end of dinner.”

“No, I’ve got to sleep on it.”

Malcolm bit his bottom lip while staring with predatory eyes. Lisa had seen that look before whenever Malcolm was denied instant gratification. It made her shiver as she heard him say:

“Fine, but I’ve got to know first thing tomorrow. I’ll want you to start

right away.”

“Good,” she said without conviction. Lisa felt as though a tornado had twisted her thoughts. She needed guidance as she opened the menu. She knew it wasn’t there.

* * * *

As Jason Novack walked towards the Harris booth at seven-thirty the next morning, sifting the familiar babble from the trading floor, he overheard Malcolm’s name in three separate conversations. They echoed a summary judgment about yesterday’s news: “Malcolm must’a got a piece of the action to shaft Ted Harris like that.”

Malcolm’s resignation confused Jason, considering how profitable last month’s trading had been. Switching jobs seemed irrational. But he buried those thoughts to focus on the silver lining: this would accelerate his entry into the pit.

Jason was ready, having received his brokerage license from the CFTC--the Commodity Futures Trading Commission--along with an approval from Comex’s membership committee. And he had apprenticed for two months in the Harris booth under Lisa’s tutelage. Now he would ask her help in removing the one roadblock that remained: Ted Harris thought he needed another few months of seasoning.

Jason’s relationship with Lisa tingled with complications from the very first day. During the past two months, the surge in silver prices smothered the emotional fireworks, which simmered beneath the surface. At their daily meetings Jason and Lisa bantered about the colorful history of squeezes and corners perpetrated by unprincipled commodities speculators. Jason recalled last week’s game:

“I’ll bet you don’t know the answer to my question,” Lisa said.

“Okay. What are the stakes?”

“The winner decides what the loser owes.”

“Hmm . . . Now you’ve got my attention.”

“Since we’ve talked about the 1977 soybean squeeze, can you tell me what was the highest price recorded for beans in the twentieth century? And for extra credit, when did it happen?”

Jason suppressed a smile, watching the tip of Lisa’s tongue caress her lips with cat-like grace. He wondered whether she practiced that seductive gesture or whether it came naturally. He could barely contain himself. “I think you owe me. The highest price for soybeans was \$12.90 a bushel in June of 1973. That’s when we sold grain to the Russians.”

Lisa nodded her head in agreement.

“That’s impressive. Knowing the details makes me confident you’ll succeed as a trader. Now comes the interesting part. What would you like as your prize?”

Jason wondered whether she let him win just to hear what he would choose. He avoided committing himself by playfully asking for time to consider a proper payoff. And now, after a week had passed, he knew exactly what he wanted. He would ask her to convince Ted that he was ready to trade.

As Jason entered the Harris booth he saw Bashir speaking on the phone.

“She’s not in yet. I’ll ring once when she gets here.” Bashir hung up.

“Anything wrong?” Jason asked.

“Nothing really.”

“When did you hear about Malcolm?”

“Yesterday at Olympia.”

“Me too. By the way, the renovations really look great. It’s more like a sports bar than a restaurant.” Jason noticed a bouquet of long stemmed white roses perched on top of the time stamping machine. “Are those flowers from a satisfied customer?”

“I don’t really know. They were delivered moments ago and the envelope says Lisa Allen on it.”

“G’morning Bashir, Jason.” Lisa entered the booth on cue.

Jason did not like surprises, especially ones with thorns: “How about revealing your secret admirer?”

“Excuse me?”

“The dozen roses.”

“Oh gosh, they’re magnificent.” Lisa closed her eyes and inhaled the fragrant bouquet.

“C’mon Lisa open the card,” Jason prodded with a balance of anxiety and curiosity.

“They’re really for me?”

“Anyone else named Lisa Allen around here?”

“You’re not kidding.” Lisa detached the envelope from the pink bow and opened the card.

“I hope you like them,” Malcolm said, popping up at the edge of the Harris booth.

A flush purpled Lisa’s olive skin. She stood with her back to Malcolm while stuffing the card back into the envelope. She turned and said: “They’re quite beautiful, Malcolm. Thank you.”

Jason’s eyes darted between Malcolm and Lisa, a dizzying confusion dancing in his head. He braced himself for an unpleasant revelation. He hated being blindsided.

“You’re welcome,” Malcolm said with a self-satisfied smile. “Would you join me for a cup of coffee before the opening?”

Lisa looked at the time stamping clock. It was seven-forty. “We open in forty-five minutes, Malcolm. I’d like to talk with Jason first.”

Malcolm looked at Jason as though he were trespassing on private property. “You’re gonna have to live without her as a nursemaid from now on. The sooner you get used to it the better.” Malcolm sneered at Jason and left.

Jason felt betrayed. Malcolm’s smirk loitered in his brain. He looked at Lisa in horror as her eyes searched the floor for a place to hide. Jason rested against the back wall of the booth to steady his wobbly knees. Lisa moved next to him and leaned against his upper arm. She spoke in a barely audible voice.

“This is not the way I wanted you to find out.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means that I was going to call you this morning to tell you that I’ve accepted an offer to work with Malcolm.”

Jason heard the words but refused to accept their reality. A void swelled in his stomach, ushering in a wave of nausea that almost made him retch. “What happened, did you lose my number?”

“Please Jason, don’t make this harder than it already is. I wanted to speak with you in person. I had no idea Malcolm would send flowers. I just spoke with him about half an hour ago.”

“How long has this been in the works?” Jason’s mind raced through recent conversations for traces of Lisa’s treachery.

“Since last night.”

“That’s a little quick, isn’t it?”

Lisa turned and looked at Jason with eyes that craved compassion: “I

seem to remember someone I greatly admire acting impulsively when confronted with an irresistible opportunity.”

Jason recalled his confrontation with Dana two months ago. Now he understood how she felt when he assaulted her with his impetuosity. It made him regret their harsh encounter.

Lisa smiled as though she knew her message hit home. “I spoke with Ted last night after Malcolm offered to double my salary and sponsor me in the pit”

“Can you trust Malcolm?” Jason interrupted.

“Look, he’s putting his money where his mouth is. And at least he’s promised to let me trade. I want that opportunity. I think I deserve it. And it’s more than Ted was ready to do.”

“Why? What did Ted say?”

“All he promised was a modest increase in pay. He said he’d think about letting me trade but implied I was too valuable running the back office to guarantee anything.” Lisa paused and then added: “That’s all very nice but it won’t help pay my mother’s nursing home bills.”

Jason knew Ted bristled even at the hint of blackmail. He had refused to cave in years ago during the potato squeeze and was rewarded with millions. No matter how valuable Lisa was, Ted’s instincts were to stonewall an ultimatum. Still, Jason wondered whether Ted was stubbornly spiteful and thought he could salvage something:

“Is there anything I can do at this point?”

She nodded her head. “Yes, there is.”

Lisa’s arm slipped around Jason’s waist, snuggling between his back and the wall. She continued: “I want you as my close friend. Please do not let this come between us.”

Jason shuddered as the feelings he had suppressed during the past two months percolated through his pores, making his skin tingle. Unspoken emotions erupted, transforming his anger into understanding.

“I think you guys should be fined \$1000 for lascivious conduct on the trading floor.”

Jason’s face reddened as he looked up to see Ted Harris sporting an impish grin that fit his five-foot-four inch frame. Ted wore a black trading jacket and black bow tie. When combined with his cherubic face and dark hair parted neatly on the left, he resembled the groom on top of the wedding cake, despite his fifty odd years of age.

“I don’t want to break up this love affair,” Ted continued, “but we’ve got work to do here. I’m bringing in Tony Salieri to do our customer business while there’s a lull in the heating oil pit. Jason, I want you to take over Lisa’s responsibilities. And Bashir, you watch Jason whenever he moves to make sure he doesn’t make any mistakes.”

Jason marveled at Ted’s management style. He tickled an awkward situation into a business meeting. Jason stepped away from Lisa’s semi-embrace and said in Ted’s direction:

“You’ll be in your office later?”

“All day. And if there’s a problem don’t hesitate for a second.” Ted then turned to leave. He paused and said to Lisa:

“Good luck in your new job. I think your booth is across the pit.”

Jason watched Lisa disappear into the crowd of clerks and traders, wondering whether his opportunity to trade had vanished as well. With Lisa’s expertise lost to the firm Ted could easily refuse to implement his plan. Jason felt as though he had been orphaned.

Chapter Six

Jason could not afford the luxury of self-pity. With the silver opening less than one minute away, he positioned himself behind Salieri's tall and thin frame. More than 200 traders were packed shoulder-to-shoulder, a tension-filled silence engulfing the pit. Jason watched the scalpers strain to determine whether buyers or sellers would predominate. He smelled a touch of nervous perspiration escape the crowd, numbed motionless by the air conditioning. He knew there would be trouble.

At precisely eight twenty-five, a jet engine roar muffled the opening bell, as bids and offers fired out of the trader's mouths. The rippling shrieks stiffened the hair on Jason's neck. He was not surprised that Train, the locomotive-sized broker for Barr and Company, led the frenzy with bids for thousands of contracts. Everyone knew that Pokie Kraft had been using his family's brokerage firm to accumulate his silver hoard and drive up the price. The juggernaut had been successful, with the price of an ounce of silver doubling since Jason arrived two months earlier.

It took Malcolm less than five minutes to publicize his newly-acquired power. Whenever Train paused for a breath, Malcolm jumped in and jacked up the price. At one point Malcolm screamed: "\$12.90 bid, \$13.00 bid, \$13.10 bid, \$13.20 bid," with no one brave enough to stand in his way.

Jason realized immediately that Pokie Kraft's squeeze had garnered support from Malcolm's Swiss investors, whoever they really were. Instead of

delicately scalping a penny or two, Malcolm plundered like a pirate through the pit, with ammunition from his backers. Jason could barely conceal his desire to slash Malcolm down to size. But for now he simply had to stand and wait.

By the end of trading at two twenty-five, September had jumped a dollar, to \$13.65 per ounce. It was the largest one day price move of the year. If Pokie Kraft owned as little as 10,000 contracts, representing fifty million ounces of silver, that meant a profit of \$50 million for the day. Jason heard rumors that Kraft controlled more than ten times that amount. But he knew that gossip about money, like sex, is titillating and unreliable. No one knew for sure the size of the Kraft position.

Jason smelled the footprints of a squeeze. Throughout the day, Train and Malcolm had bought only the front month, September, leaving the price of the next nearest delivery date, the December contract, virtually unchanged at \$12.65. They had driven silver into “backwardation”--the front month was higher in price than the back month. That was exactly what they wanted: upward price pressure on silver for delivery on September 1.

It was also exactly what Jason needed to implement the trading strategy he had developed. His heart pounded, knowing he could capture the one dollar per ounce price difference between September and December silver. On 20,000 contracts, representing 100 million ounces of silver, that would generate \$100 million in profits. If he could do the trade at a two dollar per ounce price difference, his profit would double.

Jason could not execute from the sidelines. He had watched helplessly all day as Tony Salieri filled Harris customer orders like a robot. Salieri was a nice guy but a lost soul, without a clue and without a plan. Jason wanted to present his case to Ted, but his new responsibilities prevented him from breaking away. It was four-thirty, a full two hours after the close, before the

clerks from Harris Trading's heating oil operation arrived to help.

With the paperwork under control, Jason sped towards Ted's office, Lisa's absence his only baggage. He wondered whether he jeopardized success by jumping into the pit without her collaboration. He had no choice. Seizing the opportunity before it disappeared was a trader's creed. Failure to exploit the squeeze would make him a sinner. He had to convince Ted to move ahead.

* * * *

Bashir left the trading floor right after Jason, walked past the Olympia Grill in the World Trade Center underground concourse and entered the Chambers Street subway station. He stood at the front of the long platform, away from the crowd, as the sound of screeching trains assaulted his ears and the stench of stale urine insulted his nostrils. Bashir stared ahead into the tunnel's blackness and saw a blue electrical spark from an oncoming train illuminate the tracks like an explosion. Bashir hated the subway and drove to work each day on his Yamaha 650. But for his trip uptown there was little choice, especially since Ali refused to arrive at their meeting with Pokie on the back of a motorcycle.

Bashir waited patiently until Ali approached, his clean shaven head reflecting the uneven lighting. They both wore the identical outfit: a white dress shirt open at the neck, black chino pants and thick-soled black shoes. "We must talk." Bashir said.

"Leave it until we're inside." Ali nodded towards the train entering the station. Bashir wondered why Ali took this nearly meaningless precaution. Out of respect he waited.

The train rumbled out of the station and Bashir watched a one-legged passenger steady himself with crutches against the swaying subway car,

launching an appeal for funds. Bashir strained to make himself heard above the clacking wheels.

“I’ve told you before that I don’t trust Malcolm. He’s lined his pockets the past two months with at least \$10 million that belonged to us. I think Malcolm’s as interested in supporting Pokie’s *Viper Marshalls* as Kaddafi is in buying U.S. savings bonds. And Pokie doesn’t have an inkling that”

“Don’t underestimate Pokie,” Ali interrupted, raising his index finger for emphasis.

“Fine, but Malcolm’s motives are suspect.”

Bashir watched a frown furrow Ali’s brow. “You’re quite right about Malcolm. Under the circumstances, your move to New Jersey may pay great dividends.”

“But everyone still knows we’re related.” Bashir tried to minimize his contribution.

“Even so, this gives us added flexibility. It was a brilliant suggestion.”

“Thank you.”

They rode the rest of the way to the Fifth Avenue station in silence. Bashir basked in his Uncle’s respect. He had waited for this day since arriving in America. Now he had to show he was worthy.

* * * *

Pokie and Malcolm were already seated at a table as Bashir and Ali entered the vest-pocket park at One East 53rd Street. Bashir inhaled the freshness of the oasis, about the size of a small one-family home, amidst Manhattan’s skyscrapers. A canopy of foliage from nearly a dozen thin-trunked trees filtered the sky, sending sunbeams skipping across the ground. Most of the twenty or so wrought-iron tables, with four chairs each,

were occupied by tourists toting cameras and backpacks. Pokie with his Stetson and Malcolm without socks fit right in. Bashir and Ali joined their table, sprayed by a fine mist from an artificial waterfall decorating the park's rear enclosure.

"Welcome to ma favorite Manhattan waterin' hole," Pokie chuckled. "Ah think you'll forgive me not invitin' ya to the Waldorf this time 'round."

"You've chosen well, my dear Parker, especially with the shower to drown our conversation. It's no longer wise for us to meet in familiar surroundings," Ali said.

"Would you like Mal here to get ya a snack from the vendor?"

Bashir smelled the grilled meat from the kiosk in the corner, watching Malcom wince with Pokie's offer.

"We're fine." Ali nodded in Bashir's direction.

"Well then, let's get down to business." Pokie wiped away his smile with a mustard stained napkin from his hot dog. "Ah asked that we meet one last time to make certain everythin's in place. We can't afford miscues from here on."

"You can be certain that we consider errors a moral offense."

"That's why ah like ya, Ali. But ya can't be too careful when billions of dollars are at stake. We'd like to have some back-up plan for lightin' the fuse, if ya know what ah mean."

Bashir watched Ali's eyes bore into the Texan. A speck of orange sunlight danced on Pokie's forehead, as though he were marked by a modern assault weapon. Bashir wondered whether Ali would attack.

"My dear Parker, Bashir has just completed his work. He's been called the Master Electrician by everyone. I guarantee we can destroy everything if the Exchange tries to escape paying its liabilities."

“Ah’ve no doubt that B’shir’s as good as his reputation. But ah’d like Mal over here to be the back-up trigger. Just in case somethin’ happens to put B’shir outta commission. Not that ah’m wishin’ anythin’ bad, ya understand. But just in case.”

Bashir seethed at Pokie’s blatant attempt to insinuate Malcolm into his business. It was fortunate he had convinced Ali of Malcolm’s duplicity. Bashir maintained his silence, as he had promised.

“We’ve already planned for a back-up,” Ali said. “You’ll contact me if there’s something to do. Bashir is the safety valve. He moved to New Jersey last month to put some distance between us.”

Pokie swivelled his huge frame, gathering giggles from children playing near the waterfall. He glowered in their direction and said to Ali: “Listen, this is important. Ma partners insist that to protect their investment they want me to control all”

“Excuse me, Parker,” Ali interrupted in an indignant tone, as though Pokie accused him of treason. “We had agreed that you would execute the squeeze and we would engineer the explosives. Nothing has changed so there’s no reason to alter the scheme.”

Pokie sat motionless in a Buddha-like trance. It was the first time Bashir had seen him without the germ of a grin on his face. He knew from Ali’s expression that Pokie’s next words were crucial to preserving the conspiracy.

“Ah’m afraid there *have* been some changes.” Pokie’s semi-smile returned. “But they’re kind’a technical, so’s ah’m not sure ya wanna hear ‘em.”

“My dear Parker, technical explanations are exactly what I require at this point.”

“Fine. But ah’m about to share stuff with ya that’s borderline on a need-to-know basis. Ah’m doin’ it to show ma good faith. And t’ clear the way for Mal here to be our emergency explosives expert.”

Ali nodded. “Let me hear the developments.”

“Well, about a week ago the Comex Clearin’ Corporation said ma company’s bumpin’ up against position limits. That means we couldn’t buy much more September silver without violatin’ their rules. That’s why we joined forces with the *Swiss Consortium* and put Malcolm there to execute.” Pokie tugged at the fringed sleeves of his beige field jacket. “It’s also why gettin’ the girl was so important. She has great credibility with the clearin’ people. She can help us avoid a charge of collusion down the road by convincin’ ‘em that Mal buyin’ for the Swiss has nothin’ to do with Train buyin’ for Barr and Company.”

“All this is very interesting, but why does it mean that Malcolm must be the back-up trigger?” Ali forced a smile, his charcoal eyes smoldering at Pokie.

“That was a requirement of our new investors.”

“Don’t they trust us?”

“Ah doubt that’s the problem, Ali. They come from the Middle East so’s ah’m sure they’re kinfolk.”

Bashir puzzled over how Ali would answer Pokie’s blunder. Despite his position on the International Terrorist Council, Pokie behaved like a Texan as far as Arabs were concerned. The distinction between the Palestinians and the Persian Gulf sheiks escaped him. Bashir knew the sheiks were Pokie’s new partners in the *Swiss Consortium*. The oil princes had been seen prancing with Pokie in European playgrounds--from Gstaad to the Riviera. It was no surprise they insisted on Malcolm knowing how to detonate the explosives. The princes simply did not trust the Palestinians, suspected of murdering a

favorite son of crown prince Ibn Daud.

“What else can you tell me, Parker?” Ali stalled in an obvious attempt to buy time in formulating a response.

“Ah’m sorry, Ali. Ah think ah’ve said more than ah should already.”

“That may be, Parker, but I’m not sure what we get in return for this accommodation.”

Ali’s resistance to Pokie’s pressure swelled Bashir’s pride. He thought that giving Malcolm access to the storeroom would jeopardize the mission.

“Ah’m afraid all ah can give ya are added responsibilities. Now that Mal’s left that scum Harris, it’s likely that the lawyer fella, Novack, will wind up tradin’ in the pit. That means B’shir over here’s gonna have t’ watch him real careful.”

“What makes you concerned with the lawyer, Parker?”

Pokie shifted his bulk, straining the wrought-iron chair like plastic. He rummaged through the battered brown leather briefcase that lay at his feet. He picked up an inch thick blue binder with a clear plastic cover and handed it to Ali.

“This here’s a copy of the report ma private investigata’ produced on Jason Novack. The lawyer grew up on the wrong side of the tracks, so he’s street smart in addition to bein’ book smart. And Ted Harris is no fool. He’s gonna use Novack. Ah suggest both of ya read this thin’ real careful. Otherwise we won’t need ya t’ explode nothin’. There won’t be any money.”

Bashir was stunned, recognizing a flicker of surprise in Ali’s eyes. He recalled Ali saying not to underestimate Pokie, but Pokie’s commissioning a private investigator revealed uncommon cunning. Bashir now expected Ali to accept the amended plan, so he focused on the silver lining: If Malcolm jeopardized the mission, Bashir would have a chance at Muslim immortality.

“My dear Parker, you have done your homework. We’ll read your report with great interest. If the information is as important as you imply, Bashir will show Malcolm whatever he needs to know.”

* * * *

Jason approached Ted’s office, rehearsing his words as though he were preparing a courtroom brief. He felt vulnerable on two counts: he had lost expertise in the back office and gained a dangerous predator in the pit. Lisa and Malcolm unwittingly conspired to stack the odds against him. He suppressed the gnawing doubts that threatened to sap his confidence.

Jason entered a room with paneled walls that advertised photographs of Ted with just about every politician, both national and local, who had been elected during Ted’s twenty year tenure as exchange chairman. A huge picture window overlooked New York harbor to Ellis Island, where grandparents of most exchange members passed through U.S. Immigration half a century earlier.

“C’mon in. Have a seat and I’ll be with you in a moment.” Ted pointed to a small sofa in front of his desk. Newspapers from just about every major U.S. city, as well as the English language editions of the foreign press, were piled neatly on the desk. An oversized computer hanging from the ceiling on Ted’s left projected both the Dow Jones and Reuters news services.

“Quite a day out there,” Ted said, removing his reading glasses and putting them on top of the CFTC document he had been reviewing.

“It felt more like a week,” Jason sighed. “There was very little two-way business. All we saw were buy orders.”

“Not a surprise given the price run-up over the past two months. My eighty- year-old aunt wants to know if she should melt down her candlesticks

to cash in on the bull market.”

“Yeah, but today was really dramatic. We’d move twenty cents without any trading. Malcolm was worse than Train in scaring away sellers.”

“I’m afraid that’s gonna be a real problem for the Exchange if it continues.” Ted took a Macanudo from the monogrammed humidior on his desk, waving it for emphasis as he spoke. “I raised the whole squeeze issue at the last board meeting. That’s bad enough. But the public’s gonna disappear if the word collusion hits the headlines, especially if we can’t do anything about it. And once the public’s out, it’ll take years to get ‘em back. I know from bitter experience.”

Jason’s heart raced as he saw his opening. He knew Ted’s life revolved around business. The Exchange was his only family. In 1976, when the potato squeeze drove away traders, threatening to close the Exchange, Ted convinced the Board to alter the rules to neutralize the manipulation. He then risked all his wealth lending money to the Clearing Corporation to forestall bankruptcy. Jason understood Ted’s fear of squeezes and collusion. He locked eyes with his boss.

“I’ve got a trade that can make us a lot of money and break the squeeze before it threatens the Exchange.”

“You’ve got my attention.” Ted licked the tip of his cigar and griped it in the center of his mouth.

Jason had anticipated this moment for weeks. He concentrated on not rushing his words.

“I’ve read up on just about every attempted manipulation since futures trading began in the 1850s. The only sure way to break a squeeze is for the sellers to deliver the underlying asset. I loved when the speculators who sold wheat hired ice-breakers to plow through frozen Lake Michigan to deliver the

crop to Chicago. That broke the back of the squeeze at the Board of Trade. It also made them a bundle as prices tumbled.”

“Yeah, but we’re trading silver. I hope you don’t plan to harvest a bushel of metal,” Ted chuckled while igniting what resembled a blow torch on his desk and lighting his cigar with three long puffs. He held the cigar between his index and middle finger and watched the smoke curl upwards and vaporize.

“You’re right to be skeptical. But I know where to borrow up to 100 million ounces of silver bullion for up to three months. I can deliver the silver as long as I replace it three months later.”

Jason watched a smile wrinkle the corner of Ted’s eyes. He was certain that the multi-millionaire had already calculated the potential profits.

“That’s a pretty sizable stash of silver. Who else knows you’ve got access to it?”

“No one,” Jason said and then quickly added: “Except for one person and I don’t think she’s a problem.”

“Now who might that be?” The glimmer in Ted’s eyes dimmed.

“My wife Dana.” He realized that Lisa’s departure meant he would have to comb two months of conversations for traces of a leak.

Ted looked at Jason as though he were guilty of a sexual indiscretion. “Not that I’m an expert in marital affairs, but why would you tell your wife about silver inventory?”

“Well, my resource is the Peruvian finance minister”

“Raoul Alvarez,” Ted interrupted.

“Yes. He and I were classmates at Harvard Law school. While in Cambridge, we lived in the same apartment building for three years and became best friends. In fact, their three-year-old daughter actually lived with

us when Raoul and Isadora spent two months at the hospital with a premature baby.”

Jason watched Ted clench the cigar between his teeth so that it jutted out the side of his mouth. Ted now resembled a bookie rather than the groom on top of the wedding cake. As Ted spoke Jason knew the odds of moving forward had increased dramatically.

“I like what I’m hearing. Your ties to Alvarez mean that we’re unlikely to get screwed by legal bullshit. I hate the clauses and sub-fucking clauses the lawyers dream up to nullify their client’s contractual obligations.”

Jason recalled that Ted’s antipathy towards lawyers deepened after Whitehead dropped him as a client.

“I’ve already spoken off the record with Raoul,” Jason said with victory in sight. “He’s ready to commit Silarco, the government-sponsored mining company, to a three month loan of up to 100 million ounces of silver.”

Ted put his cigar in the ash tray on the desk and walked around to where Jason sat. He placed his hand on Jason’s shoulder.

“I want you to listen carefully now. This transaction represents the most perilous journey you’ll ever take. Not because commodities are hazardous and not because you’re new to this business. Both of those are reason enough. But because Pokie Kraft is on the other side. He’s nasty, dangerous and devious. And he hates me. I tangled with his old man, T.J., when I applied for membership thirty years ago in Chicago. He blocked my application because I was Jewish. I brought him before the business conduct committee of the exchange and won. Before he died, T.J. supposedly made Pokie promise revenge. We’ve done business until now because Pokie likes money too much. But if there’s an opportunity to profit and nail me in the process--he’d stop at nothing.”

Jason felt Ted's grip tighten on his shoulder, making him backtrack.

"Are you sure you want to risk Harris Trading in this confrontation?"

Ted stared ahead, sliding his arm into a fatherly embrace.

"I've spent thirty years building this business and this exchange. I'm ready to risk what's necessary to prevent those bastards from destroying my life's work."

Jason sensed the pressure of added responsibilities. Ted had launched him on a new career and now needed his help. He could not fail.

"Is there something we can do to minimize the danger?"

Ted smiled. "Yes, there is. I want to hear every step of the transaction, like when you detailed the tax straddle strategy. I also want to know exactly what your buddy Alvarez gets out of it. Then, if all bases are covered, I'll describe a financial package that will knock your eyeballs out. And that. . . .

"Yes." Jason wondered why Ted hesitated.

"And that will convince you to focus on nothing else for the next ten days--till after the first delivery date for September silver. I don't want anyone else doing the job here. I can't trust anyone with the details."

Jason fought to suppress the cold sweat that surfaced on his skin. The pit now resembled a raging rapids--enticing but potentially deadly. He needed strength to confront the dangers that swirled before him.

Chapter Seven

A hint of scarlet sunlight glistened from rooftop windows as Jason emerged from the subway after his meeting with Ted Harris. He brushed past shoppers dawdling along Lexington Avenue and sped towards his apartment on 81st Street, hypnotized by twilight's checkered patterns. His brain flitted between ecstasy and apprehension over tomorrow's debut in the pit. Jason had anticipated a challenge but not the struggle for survival depicted by Ted. A drop of sweat trickled down his underarm as he accelerated homeward.

He entered his apartment and a gust of air conditioning swept the dampness of his shirt against his chest. Dana sat facing her portable PC at a small teak-colored desk in an alcove near the kitchen. A collage of family photographs decorated the wall above the desk. Dana's new pixie haircut, with even more blond streaks than usual, transmitted teenage spunk.

"Hi ya," Jason said, bending to kiss her. Dana offered her cheek, continuing to stare at the monitor.

"Sorry, but I've got to finish this."

"That's okay. What are you up to?"

"The dwarf just hijacked a 747 with the Secretary of State on board."

"Hmm. . . I knew that. It's much too obvious." Jason rolled his eyes at the bizarre twists Dana injected into her novel. "Were you able to keep the kids up? I ran the last two blocks."

"Are you kidding? You've created a pair of monsters." Dana finally

turned toward him. “They’ve been in bed for half an hour but refuse to sleep without your story.”

Jason laughed. “I guess they’ve forgotten what the old days were like.”

Dana sat back in her chair, stretching seductively towards the ceiling. “Me too. . . You’ve really thrown my schedule off by coming home so late today. What happened?”

Jason turned towards the children’s bedroom, avoiding an immediate discussion. He would need time to convince Dana to accept Ted’s proposal. The profit-sharing package was phenomenal--but she would focus only on the downside, however improbable it was. “It’s a long story and I need your undivided attention. How about we talk after I’ve finished with the kids and you’ve disposed of your scheming midget.”

Jason entered the darkened bedroom, painted with dancing circus clowns. Beneath the window were two tiny desks topped with identical cigar boxes filled with thick crayons. As his eyes adjusted, he was disappointed to see Andrew and Faith sleeping side by side in twin beds that were pressed together in the center of the room.

Jason tiptoed to the edge of the bed, leaned over and smelled Faith’s baby soap skin. He grazed her cheek with a kiss and watched her eyes pop open.

“We’re not going to sleep until you tell us a story.”

Andrew wrapped his arms around Jason’s neck and chimed in:

“C’mon, Daddy, where’ve you been?”

Jason laughed and crawled between Andrew and Faith into the center of the two beds. He lay on his back and cradled each child with his long arms, their delicate heads resting on his chest.

“You’re wet, Daddy,” Faith said.

“That’s because I ran home to see you.”

“Can you tell us a scary story?” Andrew hugged Jason in mock fear.

“Okay. Here goes. Once upon a time there were three bears, a mama bear, . . .”

“Oh, Daddy. Not that one. It’s not scary enough,” Faith pouted.

“Okay, you asked for it. Once upon a time there was a very mean pirate, with a front tooth that stuck out of the top of his mouth and reached the bottom of chin. . . .”

Jason felt Andrew and Faith burrow their shoulders into his armpit, huddling for protection like newborn chicks. He wished he could safeguard their future as effortlessly as he nestled them against his mythical sabre-toothed pirate. The story ended with Darrel the dentist subduing the marauding buccaneer with an overdose of novocaine. The children applauded as Jason tucked them in and kissed them good night. He wondered whether the next two weeks would also end like a fairy tale.

Jason left the bedroom and glimpsed Dana still fiddling with the PC. He slid into the chair adjacent to her desk and waited. He admired Dana’s progress on her novel during the past two months, contributing by arriving home each day no later than five-thirty. His household responsibilities were especially important on days like today, when Mrs. Archibald disappeared with Sparks for her rendez-vous with a geriatric dog-walker from Park Avenue.

“I give up.” Dana finally turned off the machine. “By the way, any reason you had to miss Faith’s doctor’s visit? I thought four o’clock was okay for you.”

Jason was embarrassed. He had left a message on the answering machine for Dana to go without him. But the day’s turmoil had obscured that memory.

“Last week four o’clock was fine. Today it was impossible.”

Dana cocked her head to one side and flashed a mischievous grin.

“Hmm. . . sounds like your priorities got compromised.”

Jason recalled with discomfort his conversation two months ago when he questioned Dana’s priorities. Now that the pit swallowed his obligation to Faith his accusation taunted him. “You’re right. I don’t know what to say. The problem is that I’ve got a very intense two weeks staring at me. . .”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Dana interrupted.

“I’ll explain in a second. First tell me what the doctor said.”

“They’ve scheduled the surgery for three weeks from today. But Toliver wants Faith off her feet as much as possible to minimize any further deterioration.”

A cold sweat iced the dimpled skin on Jason’s neck. It sounded like her condition had worsened.

“Why didn’t you say something when I walked in?”

“You didn’t give me a chance. Besides. . .”

“Do you have Toliver’s number?” Jason interrupted. “I’d like to talk with him.”

“There’s not much he’ll tell you, other than what I’ve just said. But if it’ll make you feel better about missing today’s visit. . . it’s 769-8245.”

Jason knew she was right but dialed the number anyway. The answering service asked if it was an emergency and took his name. He hung up the phone.

“Unless you’re already dead these guys don’t call back.” Jason shifted his lanky frame and stretched his legs. “Maybe we should talk about what happened at the exchange. I need your input.”

Dana folded the monitor of the PC. “Now *that* sounds ominous.”

“C’mon inside. It’ll hurt less if you’re comfortable.”

Jason took Dana’s hand and led her into the living room. He sat in the arm chair, crossed his legs and felt his shins jut up against the matching hassock. Dana kicked off her shoes and slid onto a heavily embroidered couch set against the wall at right angles to the chair. Jason watched Dana tuck her legs beneath her body, wrapping one hand around an exposed ankle. The light of a porcelain table lamp, softened by a cloth shade, flattered Dana’s satin skin. Jason focused on her chocolate-colored eyes that stared hungrily.

“Alright,” Dana said. “You’ve got my undivided attention.”

Jason felt uneasy. On the way home he deluded himself into thinking that Dana would find Ted’s proposal irresistible--an opportunity to guarantee financial security for life. Now he was less certain. He had to convince her that the trading plan was riskless, beyond an unreasonable doubt.

“Ted’s letting me trade starting tomorrow. . .”

“That’s two months earlier than you thought. You should be ecstatic.”

“I am. But there are a bunch of complications. This happened because Malcolm left.”

“You’re certainly not sorry about that.”

“No. But he took Lisa with him. And I needed her help.” Jason watched for Dana’s reaction. He recognized her ambivalence towards Lisa ever since the two met at Ted’s July fourth barbecue.

“I guess her loyalty to Ted was less than it should have been.” Dana sounded like a charter member of the business ethics review board.

Jason refused to defend Lisa. There were more important items on the agenda.

“Whatever. . . The real problem is that I’ve got a trading plan that can make us a fortune, but requires a huge commitment of both time and money.”

Dana leaned against the back of the couch and folded her arms across her chest. She stared at Jason.

“Tell me about the money part first,” she finally said. “I’ve got a feeling I won’t like it.”

Jason knew Dana’s gambling phobia was the major stumbling block. A direct confrontation, like with aversion therapy, was his only chance of success.

“Ted’s agreed to let me do a trade that will generate at least \$100 million, maybe more. He’ll give me half the profits if I invest \$100,000 in the strategy.” Jason paused and spread both palms defensively in front of his chest. “Before you say anything think about what this means. With \$50 million, we’d never have to worry about anything--for the rest of our lives.”

Jason watched Dana bite her bottom lip and nod her head slowly.

“I know you can’t be serious because we don’t have \$100,000.”

“Yes, we do. We’ve still got \$50,000 in savings and you’ve got another \$50,000 from your grandmother’s trust account.”

Panic captured Dana’s eyes and twisted her voice into a shriek. “You’ve lost your mind. There’s no way I’m risking our money on some harebrained commodities scheme. And how dare you ask me to touch the trust fund?”

Dana paused and then added. “D’you think I’m stupid? If \$100,000 can turn into \$50 million it can probably disappear just as easily. How about telling me what happens if your scam blows up?”

Jason’s palms moistened. “You know I don’t think you’re stupid,” he began softly. “And I’ll tell you about the loss sharing agreement in a second. But it’s not relevant. My trade is an arbitrage--it’s riskless. That’s the only reason I’d ever suggest we do it. There’s no way we can lose money on this. . .”

“Then what’s the \$100,000 for? “

Before Jason could answer Dana added:

“What’s the matter, cat got your tongue?”

Jason smiled. Nothing got by Dana. “The \$100,000 is a show of good faith on my part. If this trade somehow goes bad--and neither Ted nor I can see how--the losses are unlimited--a billion dollars easily. Although the profits are split fifty-fifty Ted proposed a ninety-ten split on losses. Of course, my ten percent would wipe out our \$100,000 net worth and then some. That puts Ted and me on equal footing, more or less.”

“Yeah, you’re both sick. . . . But you’re worse because you’ve got a family to worry about.”

Jason restrained himself. “You really didn’t listen to what I said. This is an arbitrage. . .”

“Don’t people go to jail for that?” Dana interrupted.

“Only in Afghanistan,” Jason smiled. “Listen, there’s only one way to convince you. Let me explain the trade.”

“Don’t waste your time. You’ll never convince me.”

“You’re making me bring up something that you’d like to forget.”

Dana said nothing. She just stared.

Jason continued, knowing he had no choice. “Who convinced us to do nothing after we saw the sonogram?”

“What’s that got to do with this?”

“Just answer, please.”

“You know very well, who.”

“Was that the most important advice we ever had? Advice that we’re both more grateful for than anything else.”

“You know it is.” Dana cast her eyes downward.

“Well, that’s the same person who’ll guarantee that this trade works.”

Dana looked bewildered. “What does Isadora have to do with commodities?”

“There were two people on that long distance call four years ago. Both of them lost a premature baby after a fruitless vigil. And both of them told us to keep what we had. If you’d trust Raoul with the lives of your children, and I know you would, you can trust he’ll do what he says in this trade. And then it’s riskless.”

Dana’s shoulders slumped in exhaustion, as though she had just lost a tug-of-war. “I don’t know why, but I’m ready to listen.”

Jason could barely contain himself. He bent forward and kissed her on the cheek. “You won’t regret this. . . Can we begin?”

“Do I have an alternative?”

“Divorce.”

“Hmm . . . I’ll keep that in mind.” Dana winked.

Jason took a deep breath and wondered how to proceed. The more she understood the better, so he decided to include every detail.

“What I’m about to describe is not hard--you’ve got more than enough intelligence to understand it. . .”

“So why do most normal people find it confusing?”

“Because they don’t pay attention. But that’s not a problem when your own money is on the line.”

“I understand *exactly* what that means.”

“Good. You’ve heard me mention that there’s a squeeze going on in silver.”

“Yes. But I really don’t understand it.”

“A squeeze occurs when a trader--in this case, Pokie Kraft and his family from Texas. . .”

“Didn’t he testify in Senate hearings into paramilitary training by . . . what’s that group called?”

“The *Viper Marshalls*?”

“Right. Is he against you in this?” Dana’s eyes widened.

“Don’t worry, Raoul will neutralize him . . . Anyway, the Kraft’s are buying up September silver futures to drive up the price. In fact, it looks like they’re getting some help from my good friend Malcolm.”

“Why is that called a squeeze?” Dana frowned.

“Good question. During the past few months, another group of speculators, called short sellers, have sold September futures in anticipation of lower prices. They’ll have to deliver physical silver bars starting September 1 or buy back their contracts before then to cancel their obligations.”

“What’s the problem?”

“The Krafts now own just about all the silver bars on the planet. So they’re forcing or ‘squeezing’ these so-called short sellers into paying ever higher prices to buy back their contracts before the September delivery date.”

Dana sat back and scratched her chin. “Are you one of those short sellers?”

“I’m not a speculator.”

“Sounds just like Nixon saying ‘I’m not a crook’.”

Jason laughed. “Well, it’s true. I said my trade is an arbitrage. That means I don’t sell anything without simultaneously buying it--that way I guarantee a profit no matter what happens.”

Dana arched an eyebrow. “D’you want to explain that a little?”

“Sure. Let’s be specific. The Krafts have focused their squeeze on the next two weeks--silver for delivery starting September 1. They’ve driven up the price of September silver to \$13.65 per ounce. On the other hand, they’ve left

December silver untouched because they can't really squeeze the short sellers three months out. There's too much wiggle room for the shorts between now and then. So December silver is priced lower, at \$12.65 per ounce."

"I'm with you so far."

"Well, if prices stay the same tomorrow, I can go into the pit--with your blessing I hope--and sell September silver for \$13.65 and simultaneously buy December silver for \$12.65."

"What counts as simultaneously?"

"Within the same nanosecond."

"Can you do that?"

"That's my job in the pit. Plenty of 'spread' traders do the same thing--buy one delivery month and sell another. It requires good reflexes."

"Alright, suppose you sell September futures at \$13.65 and buy December futures at \$12.65. Exactly what does that accomplish?"

Jason smiled. Dana *was* paying attention. He knew then he had a decent chance. "This is great. You're really listening to this."

"How about fighting for my life?"

"Well, it'll be worth it. . . The best way to understand what that transaction accomplishes is to recognize that futures contracts are real contracts. So selling September means that I'm obligated to deliver silver bars starting September 1 and buying December obligates me to take delivery of silver bars starting December 1. Unless, of course, I offset the trades before then--which I have no intention of doing."

"Why would you obligate yourself like that?"

"Because with Raoul's help I'll meet my obligations and make a lot of money. . ."

Dana sat forward in the couch, rubbing her hands together. "Don't stop

now. Get to the punch line.”

Jason could see the tense excitement building on Dana’s face. “Okay, here it is. I borrow silver bars from Raoul and deliver them to the Krafts on September 1. Actually I deliver the bars to the Comex Clearing Corporation representing the Krafts. By delivering the silver, I’ve satisfied my September obligation. So, I get paid the agreed upon price of \$13.65 per ounce. That’s step one.”

“Step two?”

“Well, Raoul has only lent me--Harris Trading, that is--these silver bars for three months. So three months later, on December 1, I’ve got to return the silver to him. That’s where my earlier purchase of December futures comes in. On December 1, I take delivery of silver from the Comex Clearing Corporation and pay the agreed upon \$12.65 per ounce. . .”

“I’m beginning to see what’s going on,” Dana interrupted with a satisfied smile.

A warm glow spread through Jason’s abdomen. “That’s great. Now you see that I’ve locked in a profit of one dollar per ounce--the difference between selling September silver for \$13.65 and buying December silver at \$12.65. No matter what happens to the price of silver after the initial transaction, my profit stays the same. That’s what’s called an arbitrage.”

Dana rubbed her chin as though puzzling over a riddle.

“I’ve got a few questions, if you don’t mind.”

“Shoot.”

“As silly as this sounds, now that I understand it, the transaction seems almost too easy. Why doesn’t everyone do it?”

“First, they’ve got to execute the trade properly--selling September and buying December simultaneously. You can’t do too many contracts at once or

you'll scare off the December sellers."

"Could that become a real problem?" Dana looked genuinely concerned.

"No. In fact, I expect the speculators who are still short September to do the 'spread' with me. They'll buy September from me to cancel their obligation to deliver and simultaneously sell me December because otherwise I won't do the trade."

"Well, if execution isn't such a big problem, then I still don't understand why everyone doesn't do the arbitrage?"

Jason smiled, impressed by Dana's persistence. "Ah, the big problem is anyone doing this needs silver bars starting September 1."

"So."

"They'd need Raoul and only I've got him." Jason watched Dana digest Raoul's central role, wondering whether she would take the next step.

"Well then why doesn't Raoul do the trade himself? I know he's your friend, but. . ."

"You're good," Jason grinned. "Raoul would love to, but the Peruvian government prevents Silarco, their mining company, from dealing in the futures market. Too risky."

"They're dealing with you."

"I represent Harris Trading Company--a triple-A rated company."

A frown creased Dana's brow. "Does that mean Raoul's doing this as a favor? That worries me. . . for his sake."

"Not at all. After receiving \$13.65 per ounce of silver on September 1, I invest that money for three months, until I need it on December 1."

"And. . ."

"I pay Silarco the interest that I earn--that'll be about thirty cents per ounce of silver. And that makes Raoul a hero. He winds up in December

with the exact same number of silver bars as he started with plus an extra thirty cents per ounce.”

“That doesn’t sound like much.”

“Well I plan to execute this trade over the next week for a total of 100 million ounces of silver. That’ll bring Raoul \$30 million for doing absolutely nothing.”

Dana sat back in the couch and exhaled a smile. “And you make a dollar per ounce, or \$100 million.”

“Harris Trading does. . . We make \$50 million.” Jason savored the exhaustion that soaked his arm pits. He watched Dana nod her head with pleasure. Slowly her smile twisted into a grimace. “What’s the matter? I thought this made sense to you.”

“It does. But I just had a horrifying thought.”

Jason sat forward in his chair. “What’s that?”

“I’m embarrassed to say.” Dana picked at the embroidered floral design on the couch.

“C’mon, Dana. It can’t be that bad. Just say it.”

“First, tell me what would happen if you couldn’t deliver the silver on September 1.”

“That’s easy. I wouldn’t do the trade.”

“Suppose you did the trade already but just can’t deliver.”

“Oh. . . Now that’s the disaster scenario I mentioned before. I’d have to buy back my sales of September silver to cancel my obligation to deliver. The Krafts would literally squeeze higher and higher prices out of me. In short, our losses are theoretically unlimited. In technical terms, we’re fucked.”

“Well, if that’s the case, although I know I shouldn’t be thinking like this, what would happen if disaster struck Raoul. Suppose he were killed in a car

crash--God forbid.”

Jason stared at Dana, admiring her insight. “I hate to say this, but you’d make a great arbitrageur. . .”

“A fate worse than death.” Dana winced.

“Don’t be ridiculous. You’re not wishing anything bad on Raoul. You’re just testing the trade to see if it’s really riskless--no matter what.”

“And. . .”

“And it is. The contract for borrowing and returning silver is between Harris Trading Company and Silarco. So even if Raoul and I were both killed in a car crash, the arbitrage would live on. Now isn’t that a comforting thought?”

“You’re really sick.” Dana said with a smile. And then she added: “Well it sounds like everyone lives happily ever after.”

Jason debated for a second about whether to respond and then said: “Not quite everyone.”

“Go on.”

“The squeeze will fizzle and Pokie Kraft and Company will lose a fortune.”

“Does that bother you?”

“Not at all. They’re getting exactly what they deserve.”

Chapter Eight

By seven o'clock the following morning Jason was at the Harris booth on the Comex floor. He had been jarred awake at five by tension over his trading debut combined with concern over Faith's medical prognosis. The anxiety dissipated as he reveled in the financial security awaiting his family.

Dana becoming a full partner in a joint venture delighted him. Not just because of her financial contribution. She also volunteered to suspend writing so that he could focus exclusively on work. When he left the house at six-thirty she was still asleep. He missed her wishing him luck.

The Harris booth was empty. Bashir usually arrived about seven-thirty, depending upon how well his Yamaha negotiated Holland Tunnel traffic. The other clerks dribbled in slowly after that. Jason had more than enough time alone to finalize arrangements with Raoul. He dialed his private office number.

"Good morning, Mr. Minister."

"Ah, I was hoping for someone interesting."

"Sorry about that. How come you're in so early?"

"Well, this is Anna's first day in school. As a third grader she insisted on walking the three blocks by herself. I couldn't help following her in the car."

Jason smiled to himself. The last time he had seen Anna was a little over three years ago, right after the twins were born. Isadora, a Latin beauty

with green eyes, visited for a month to provide moral support, bringing Anna along for everyone's comfort.

"She must be big already. Does she still remember me?"

"Are you kidding. Riding on Uncle Jason's shoulders and touching the ceiling is her fondest memory. I've tried to duplicate it with a leap but can't come close."

Jason laughed. Raoul was five foot seven, with tangled brown hair and matching handlebar mustache. Jason imagined him jumping in vain, with Anna's golden-hair-from-nowhere bouncing like a spring.

"I'm glad she's inherited her mother's good judgment."

"So, to what do I owe the pleasure of speaking with you. . . what is it now, twice this week?"

"You recall the details of our last discussion." Jason felt foolish following Ted's instructions to speak sparsely in public. He thought the precaution lent credibility to Ted's rumored CIA connections.

"Of course."

"Good. We're ready to begin today." Jason lowered his voice while nodding to a babble of clerks arriving at the Merrill Lynch booth next door. "A faxed copy of the contract is sufficient."

"Excellent. It's in the machine as we speak. I'll send out a hard copy by overnight courier. Just tell me where it goes."

"Call Dana. She has the information. And during the next two weeks if you want to talk, call her or one of the numbers she gives you." More secret agent shenanigans from Ted.

"Is Dana your new security chief?"

"Partner and benefactor is more like it."

"Hmm. . . that's quite a development. How'd you do it?"

“It’s a long story,” Jason said, catching Bashir’s thin swarthy image entering the exchange floor behind the coffee pit across the room. “But I can’t speak much longer, and I have one more question.”

“Yes.”

“Are the items we need available here?” Jason was not sure where Silarco’s silver inventory was located. Ultimately it would have to be delivered to Comex approved warehouses and then reassigned to Harris Trading.

“Not to worry, my friend. I’ve already checked. Everything will be in place by tonight.”

Jason was ecstatic and smiled at Bashir, who had just entered the booth.

“Look, I have to go now,” he said into the receiver. “Thanks and I’ll talk with you later.”

Jason hung up, nodded in the direction of the phone, and said to Bashir: “Dana wishing me luck for the second time today.”

“Let me add my congratulations.”

“Thanks. I guess Ted spoke with you last night. Did he tell you that you’re in charge of the booth?”

“Yes. And he said that you’d be trading for the house account.”

Jason thought that Bashir looked annoyed, exaggerating his normally austere appearance. He wondered whether Bashir was more disturbed by Lisa’s departure or Jason’s promotion.

“That’s right. And I’m going to need your help in tracking our positions.” Jason tried to enhance Bashir’s contribution. “You know that Ted’s in Washington testifying at the CFTC Hearings.”

“He mentioned something about it. When’s he coming back?”

“About seven tonight.”

“Oh. . . I wanted to talk with him about Salieri. There were some

customer complaints yesterday.”

“Look, you know Ted’s gonna call five or six times anyway,” Jason said, knowing Salieri belonged in the minor leagues. “You can mention it then. In the meantime, try to keep things under control. We have no choice. Salieri’s got to do the customer business while I’m trading for the house.”

Jason noticed Bashir staring over his shoulder and then heard a familiar voice.

“Well now, where’s my present?”

Jason turned to see the curl in Malcolm's lip taunting him. Malcolm continued.

“I saw your trading badge posted on the bulletin board. You owe me big time for giving you a shot.”

Jason restrained himself, deciding to let his trading do the talking. The eight o’clock signal bell offered a cue. “Maybe I’ll buy you a watch. You’re twenty-five minutes early. I guess now that you don’t have Bashir to rely on you can’t roll in at the last second.”

Jason saw Bashir perk up, as traders in the background filtered into the silver pit to claim their preferred real estate.

“But my floor manager’s got bigger boobs than Bashir,” Malcolm said while glancing across the pit to his empty booth. He looked at his watch and snickered. “If Lisa doesn’t show up in two minutes she gets fined. Eight-oh-two is the cut off time for both of us.” Malcolm turned and headed towards his booth, while yelling over his shoulder.

“I’m giving lessons next week if you screw up today.”

Jason masked his nerves beneath a brave smile, primarily for Bashir’s benefit. The stomach cramps he felt earlier returned with greater fury. He excused himself and spent the next twenty minutes in the men’s room, the

most popular spot in the building. Experienced traders dashed in and out to relieve their bladders while the neophytes took longer to prepare for a day in the pit.

Jason returned to the trading floor with the silver opening only three minutes away. His fingertips felt like icicles. He approached the pit, jammed with over two hundred traders jostling for position, and squeezed into the Harris slot on the top step. Tony Salieri's skin and bones poked into his ribs on the right, while three-hundred pound Tiny from Merrill Lynch cushioned his left side. It reminded him of cattle packed in a holding pen.

No sooner had Jason poked his head into the crowd when Wizard, the skyscraper scalper and resident comedian, shouted for quiet.

"Everybody better behave, 'cause here comes the Judge."

Jason joined in the ensuing whistles and catcalls, somewhat embarrassed by the reference to his legal training. He had wondered what would be his nickname in the pit since nothing obvious fit his trading badge, JN. It could have been much worse. In addition to Wizard, Mom and Doc, the pit was home to Butthead, Pinhead and Mr. Big. Grade school humor, with a heavy dose of scatology, camouflaged the ever present tension.

The shrill of the one minute warning bell silenced the crowd. Traders focused on each other to anticipate intentions. Jason concentrated on Malcolm, his blond wave framing his forehead, located directly across the pit. Two spaces to Malcolm's left stood Train, his thick-necked collaborator. As Jason's eyes jumped between his two adversaries, Lisa's face emerged, whispering in Malcolm's ear. Jason's stomach twisted into a knot. He was disappointed that Lisa had not wished him luck and wondered whether a day with Malcolm had dissolved her sentiments. Jason noticed a redness to the inch long scar near her scalp. Lisa looked like she had not slept much.

Jason's eyes finally locked with hers. He thought she winked as the opening bell jolted him with a cannon-like explosion.

The deafening salvo from traders launching their bids and offers riveted Jason in place. He wondered why Ted advised him to remain silent during the opening. After two minutes he had his answer. Malcolm and Train scooped up September silver as though it were a fire sale. The price of the September contract soared \$1.50, to \$15.15 per ounce. Even December silver responded to the onslaught, rising fifty cents to \$13.15.

Jason felt a smile fight through the fear that had immobilized him. By selling September silver at \$15.15 and buying December at \$13.15, the profit on his strategy would now be two dollars per ounce. Harris Trading's prospective profit jumped to \$200 million and he would earn \$100 million if he could execute the transaction.

"What's so funny?" Salieri yelled, his breath brushing Jason's ear.

"I want to buy some 'Dec' silver."

"Oh, that's really hilarious."

"No," Jason laughed, still hearing Salieri's echo. "I just want to do the 'Sep-Dec' spread for two dollars. If any sellers come in offering 'Dec' just poke me."

An elbow jabbed Jason's other side.

"Dec'?" It was Tiny shouting into the pit, having overheard Jason talking with Salieri. Jason's heart pounded.

"Four hundred 'Dec' to go at fifteen." Tiny screamed. It meant Tiny had four hundred December contracts to sell at \$13.15.

"Buy 'em," Jason screeched even though Tiny stood right next to him. Jason's blood coursed through his veins, knowing he still had to sell 'Sep' to finish the spread.

“Sep’, how?” he yelled.

“Fifteen bid for as many as you’ve got, rookie.” It was Malcolm mocking that he would pay \$15.15 for as many September contracts as Jason wanted to sell.

“Sold four hundred.” Jason heard himself shout.

A hiccup of silence swallowed the pit, as two hundred pairs of eyes stared at Jason. It was his first trade. It was for significant size--400 contracts, representing two million ounces of silver. And Jason had slammed the scourge of all short sellers in the teeth. Even Malcolm seemed momentarily stunned.

A sense of accomplishment absorbed the adrenalin streaming into Jason’s stomach, making his skin tingle. Lisa had taught him well, he thought, while steeling himself by tightening his fists. He had to remain focused, knowing that Malcolm could not stay silent. Weakness might embolden others to sell September silver, threatening the squeeze. He stared at Malcolm’s malevolent smirk and watched Lisa’s face emerge from her perch behind Malcolm. She seemed mesmerized, as though watching a high-wire circus act. On Malcolm’s left, Train’s oak tree arms rose upward.

“Fifteen bid for one thousand ‘Sep’,” bellowed the broker from Barr and Company. Train would pay \$15.15 per ounce for one thousand September futures. Jason thought that Malcolm and Train resembled a tag-team duo in a wrestling match. When one tired, the other jumped in to pummel the opposition.

Any doubts about Pokie Kraft’s resolve to ramp up the price of silver disappeared beneath Train’s flying-buttress-like arms. Within seconds, everyone who was still short September recognized that Jason was their only hope.

Traders swarmed across the pit to gain the spotlight, tugging at Jason's sleeves to signal they wanted the 'spread'. Crushed by the crowd surrounding him, he sold September at \$15.15 to anyone ready to sell him December at \$13.15. The shorts were getting out of their September obligation to deliver, transferring that responsibility to Harris Trading Company. This is exactly what Jason had expected.

The frenzy continued for the next five hours. Jason could barely keep track of his positions. He understood why pit trading was not recommended for senior citizens. With four minutes left to the trading session, sweat soaking his underarms, he turned to a haggard-looking Bashir standing behind him.

"How many spreads have I done?"

"My last count shows six thousand."

"Jeez. . . that's twice as many as we expected to do. " Jason knew he had exceeded Ted's guidelines for the first day, but with good reason. He had locked in a two dollar per ounce profit. He then heard his nemesis.

"Looks like you'll make rookie of the year if you keep this up."

Jason turned back toward the pit and found Malcolm on his doorstep, having pushed his way through the crowd. "You sound disappointed."

"On the contrary. I'd like to make your life easier. You don't have to trade with all these dickheads. I'll do however many spreads you'd like at two dollar per ounce."

A chill cooled Jason's confidence. He wondered why Malcolm would accommodate him on the spread, handing him a two dollar per ounce profit. Unlike the traders who had been short, Malcolm was not pressured to cancel his obligation to deliver. It made Jason suspicious that his plan suffered a critical flaw, triggering a touch of caution. "Thanks but I'm done for the day."

“Hmm. . . your balls stuck in your throat?” Malcolm laughed and turned to the center of the pit. The one minute warning bell sounded and Malcolm bellowed for all to hear: “‘Sep-Dec’ at two dollars.” Malcolm continued to shout until silenced by the gavel pounding trading to a close.

Jason’s shoulders slumped forward as he crashed from his adrenalin high. He was disappointed that his spectacular debut had been spoiled at the end by Malcolm. Jason’s first priority was to speak with Ted. He approached Bashir standing at the edge of the Harris booth hovering over a pile of trading tickets.

“When did Ted say he’s calling again?”

“He’s not.”

“What?” Jason could not believe he heard correctly.

“He’s going in to testify at two thirty and then’s heading directly to National Airport with some senator.”

“And?”

“And he expects to see you at seven-thirty.”

“Shit.” Jason needed a sounding board.

“Here’s something that might help,” Bashir said, handing Jason a note.

Jason recognized the handwriting immediately. He had mixed emotions as he read the message.

Jason

Please meet me at Olympia at five thirty.

Lisa

This was a distraction he did not need.

Chapter Nine

For the next three hours Jason processed trades with Bashir. Two people preyed on his mind--Ted and Lisa. He hoped both would call. Neither did.

Jason periodically glanced across the pit, now empty save for the accumulated litter from the day's conflagration, to see if Lisa had returned. He wanted to cancel their meeting, convinced that nothing good could come of it. She never appeared.

"It's five-thirty. I can handle the rest of this stuff. Why don't you go meet her." Bashir seemed genuinely concerned about Jason's dispirited demeanor.

"I think it's more important that I finish this with you."

"Look, I'll be here for a while. Take a break and then come back."

Jason brightened ever so slightly at the ready-made excuse Bashir had just suggested. He would meet Lisa and then quickly disengage himself.

He rode the elevator down to the underground concourse beneath Four World Trade Center. The Olympia Grill was located directly under the exchange floor and opposite the PATH trains, which carried 250,000 commuters daily between downtown Manhattan and Hoboken, New Jersey.

Jason entered the restaurant, inhaling a faint liquor fragrance. The brick-veneer walls were decorated with poster-size black and white photographs of Olympic track and field legends, from Jim Thorpe and Jesse

Owens to Bruce Jenner and Jackie Joyner-Kersey. A waist high partition, with a brass rail along the top, separated the dining area in the back from the bar. About twenty people, mostly commuter types with attache cases, plus a few familiar faces from the exchange, stood at the bar watching a soccer match between Argentina and Uruguay.

Jason looked past the partition and saw Lisa sitting at a table in the corner. She waved for him to join her. He skirted a table with four Port Authority policemen wolfing down sumptuous steak dinners, nearly toppled their bottle of champagne. An expensive meal for New York City's finest, Jason thought.

As he approached Lisa, he noticed she had changed into a sleeveless mint-green blouse that flattered her olive skin. A spotlight illuminating one of the wall photographs ignited an eerie blue flame in her eyes, hypnotizing him.

"Don't just stand there, superstar, have a seat."

Jason blushed as he sat down. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"You're a natural in the pit. No one in memory has ever had a bigger opening day."

Lisa's praise flattered him. "Unfortunately, it didn't end quite the way I would've liked."

"Well. . . that's a different story."

Ted's absence tempted him to follow up. He slipped into easy familiarity with Lisa. "Would you care to explain what Malcolm was trying to accomplish?"

Lisa swallowed her smile and studiously avoided looking at Jason. She focused her gaze on the glowing glass-enclosed candle in the center of the linen tablecloth. "It's probably not smart for us to talk shop."

Lisa's words wounded Jason, even though he knew she was right. "Hmm. . . Imposing a barrier between us?"

“Look, I think. . . Oh, never mind, here comes my surprise.” Lisa grinned broadly and beckoned to someone over Jason’s shoulder.

“I’ve been waiting until your conversation ended,” a man’s voice said.

“No, no. Please. First let me introduce you.” Lisa became quite animated.

Jason turned and saw a forty-year old man with burning black eyes blazing from a clean shaven head. The man’s muscular neck seemed constrained by the blue striped tie flush against his collar.

“Jason, I’d like you to meet Ali Ismail,” Lisa said.

Jason attempted to stand but was restrained by light pressure from Ali’s hand on Jason’s shoulder. Despite his frequent patronage of the restaurant, he had never before seen Ali. The references to him by Bashir and Lisa made Ali a mystical figure, more like Ali Baba than Ali Ismail.

“Well, it’s a pleasure to finally meet the famous restaurateur,” Jason said.

“Thank you. I’ve heard so much about you from Bashir that it’s nice to attach a face to the image. Unfortunately, I’m no longer up-to-date now that Bashir has abandoned Brooklyn in favor of Hoboken .”

“Come now, Ali, you do know something new about Jason.” Lisa smiled, her eyes radiating mischief.

“Of course. I meant until you called me today.” Ali turned and lifted a stand holding an ice bucket containing a bottle of champagne and placed it next to Lisa.

“So this is the surprise,” Jason said with considerable relief. He had come prepared to protest Lisa snubbing his trading debut. Luckily the conversation never got that far. He watched Ali place thin-stemmed champagne glasses in front of them and commence the ceremony of uncorking

the bottle.

“Ali, please join us in celebrating Jason’s inauguration.”

Ali smiled as he filled the glasses. “You’ve forgotten my religion and my diabetes.”

“How stupid of me,” Lisa shook her head. “I hope you’ve been well lately.”

“Now that Nadim’s running the place, I don’t forget to take my insulin. Although I’ve just sent him to Pakistan to find a wife, so I’ve got to be careful.”

“I hope so.” Lisa fingered the stem of her champagne glass. “Does that mean you’ll be around for a while?”

“Yes, until the first week of September. Then I return to my work at the hospital.”

Lisa lifted her glass and extended it in Jason’s direction. “Let’s just congratulate your launching a new career. Good luck.”

“*Mabroukh.*” Ali said, standing at Jason’s side and inclining his head towards him. “That means congratulations in Arabic.”

Jason lifted his glass and toasted once towards Ali and then at Lisa. He sipped the sparkling wine while watching Lisa practically gulp hers down in one long swallow. “Thank you for your good wishes,” he said in Ali’s direction. “This is really quite good.”

“I’m glad that you like it. Please indulge as my honored guests.”

“Ali, please don’t,” Lisa protested.

“I insist. It’s the least I can do. Enjoy.” Ali nodded to Lisa and Jason and then disappeared through the swinging door leading to the kitchen.

Jason realized then that the Port Authority policemen also received champagne compliments of Ali. He knew they would repay his generosity with

a wink at some impropriety and wondered what it might be. He also wondered why Ali was so solicitous of Lisa, but let it slide for a moment as the champagne simmered in his empty stomach. Jason noticed that Lisa's eyes had softened. "I appreciate your thoughtfulness," he said.

"Thank you. I felt terrible about not seeing you before the opening. It's the first time in my life that I overslept."

"Not to worry. I really didn't notice." Jason sat forward in his chair.

"Liar." Lisa laughed and refilled her glass.

"By the way, how come you and Ali are so friendly? I've never seen him before."

"Oh, we go back aways." Lisa took another gulp of her champagne.

"How's that?"

"Right after I got here I had to take him to the hospital when he went into insulin shock."

"How'd you wind up in that situation?"

"Well, part of my job for Ted was to arrange catering for all exchange committee meetings. You'd be surprised how many there are. Ali had some special deal worked out with Ted. So. . ."

"Was Bashir here already?"

"Yup. That was part of the deal, I think. Ted hired Bashir a few years earlier at Ali's request."

"So Ali repaid Ted with free bagels?"

Lisa giggled, her cheeks flush with champagne. "I think Ali threw in the coffee, too."

Jason felt lightheaded and laughed loudly. "And what's happened to Ali the past two months?"

Lisa touched her forehead as though checking if it were still there.

“Are you okay?” Jason asked.

“I’m fine, just a little dizzy. Too many bubbles on an empty stomach, I guess. . . Now what did you ask?”

“It’s not important.”

“Oh, I remember. What happened to Ali? Actually, he left on a *hajj* soon after we met. You know, that’s the Muslim holy trip to Mecca. When he returned six month’s later his sacred vow had been to do volunteer work at the Muslim Children’s Hospital.”

“Ah, that’s when he hired Nadim to run this place.”

“See, you’re right up to date. Actually, right up to the minute,” Lisa chuckled.

Jason looked at his watch. It was six forty-five. “Gosh, time’s really flown by. I’ve got to get back to help Bashir.”

Lisa looked sad, as though she didn’t want the party to end. Jason continued. “This was delightful. I hope to reciprocate some day.”

“That would be very nice. “ Lisa patted her lips with a napkin, rose from her chair and straightened her black tailored skirt. She stepped forward and stumbled into Jason who had just gotten up.

Jason supported Lisa’s elbows as she faced him with her hands resting on his forearms. Her eyes were unfocused. “Are you okay?” he asked.

“I’m afraid to let go. I’ll lose my balance.” Lisa had an unhappy smile.

"I'm a little woozy myself. Where are you going now?"

"Well, I was supposed to go up to Lincoln Center but I think home would be much better." Lisa articulated each word as though undergoing a sobriety test.

"Fine. I'll put you in a cab."

Jason turned as Lisa slipped her hand into the crook of his arm. Her

body pressed against his side, sending goose humps down his leg, as they walked towards the exit. Lisa tugged his arm.

“Yes?”

“Don’t look at the bar. Malcolm’s sulking in the corner.” Lisa whispered.

“Jesus. What’s he doing here?”

“I don’t know but let’s move.”

They exited the restaurant and threaded their way through the underground shopping mall, emerging at Three World Trade Center, home to the Vista Hotel, facing Battery Park City. Jason remembered when this newly-constructed residential community, extending into New York harbor, was nothing more than Hudson River landfill, created from the excavated earth of the World Trade Center. He approached the queue of yellow cabs with Lisa in tow and opened the door to the first in line.

"Just make sure you've got your key," he said.

Lisa detached herself from Jason and rummaged through her black leather handbag. She giggled. "It's hiding from me."

"Let me look." Jason pulled the bag, spilling the contents into the back seat of the taxi and the street.

"Now look what you've done." Lisa leaned against the car door and laughed hysterically.

“You guys wanna play while the meter's runnin'?” The cabbie, a beefy old-timer with just a fringe of white hair, was not laughing.

"Don't worry chief, I'll take care of ya'," Jason said while kneeling to pick up the debris: two lipsticks, hairbrush, compact, tissues, nail file. . . no keys. He glanced at his watch and looked up at Lisa.

"Slide in and I'll make sure you get home." Jason had shared a taxi with

Lisa once before, dropping her in front of her apartment at Eighth Street and Fifth Avenue, on his way to a Harvard reunion. It was a ten minute trip. He had more than enough time to get back to the Exchange.

Jason dumped everything back into Lisa's handbag and slid into the seat beside her. She leaned her head back and closed her eyes. Jason said to the cabbie:

"Two Fifth Avenue, right off Washington Square Park."

"Just where I wanted to go." The cabbie was not pleased with a ten minute ride after waiting in line in front of the Vista.

Jason ignored the remark and played with the cosmetics poking out of Lisa's handbag in his lap. He heard raspy rhythmic breathing coming from Lisa as her head grazed his shoulder. Strands of her jet black hair fanned across his neck, triggering a tingling sensation from his shoulder to his wrist. He could almost taste her apple blossom shampoo. Jason held Lisa's lipstick and compact in his hand, closed his eyes and drifted aimlessly.

"It's gonna be expensive to spend the night here."

Jason's eyes popped open to see the cabbie looking at them over his shoulder. The taxi stood in the semi-circular driveway in front of Lisa's apartment.

"Okay, okay. Just hold on a second." Jason could feel Lisa's eyelashes flutter against his shoulder.

"Sorry, I must've dozed off," she said sitting up. "What are you doing with my make-up?" Lisa reached for her lipstick and compact, knocking them to the floor of the taxi. The well-worn compact opened and out popped a small house key.

"Looks like your key was powdering itself."

"Probably because it knew you were looking for it," Lisa chuckled while

picking up her key and cosmetics. She looked into the compact mirror and powdered her nose. She then put the case into her lap, held back her hair, and dabbed her scar. "I forgot to do that this morning."

"You looked great anyway."

"Stop humoring me. I'm fine."

Jason sat quietly. So did Lisa.

"What's it gonna be folks?" The cabbie now sounded like he wanted a happy ending.

"Thanks for taking me home." Lisa's eyes bore into Jason's.

"Can you manage by yourself upstairs?"

"We've got two doormen just for that purpose. . . Thanks and I hope things work out for the best." Lisa kissed Jason on the cheek and left.

"Four World Trade Center," Jason said to the cabbie.

"Whatever you say, Pal."

Jason felt Lisa's presence as the taxi drove down Broadway. Her telltale musky perfume lingered in the air. He looked around to see if she had forgotten anything. The seat was empty but the scent intensified. Jason sniffed his jacket's shoulder pad and inhaled Lisa's cloying fragrance.

"I better light up one of Ted's foul smelling cigars," he laughed to himself.

Chapter Ten

Jason's watch read seven forty-five as he jumped out of the taxi and raced into Four World Trade Center. He rode up the elevator and trotted into the Exchange to see if Bashir still needed help. The floor was empty, a strange silence replacing the usual bedlam. Jason was surprised but relieved, knowing he was late for his meeting with Ted.

Jason approached Ted's office, hoping he had been delayed on his return trip from Washington. No such luck, he realized, tasting the stale cigar smoke. He entered the room.

"You're late," Ted said, clenching a Macanudo in his teeth while leaning his diminutive frame against the picture window overlooking New York harbor.

Jason could see a police helicopter fly past the opening, its lights twinkling in the dusk. "I had a problem. . ."

"Never mind. I've just reviewed the day's trading. You did a great job. Six thousand spreads at two dollars per ounce is phenomenal."

Ted's approval melted Jason's concern about overstepping the guidelines. Now he had just one worry to fret over.

"Thanks, but we may have a problem."

Ted arched his eyebrows and took the cigar between his index and middle fingers. "Sit down and tell me about it."

Jason plopped into the black leather couch against the wall. Ted joined him in an adjacent club chair. "Malcolm threw me a curve at the closing bell."

“How’s that?”

“Well, after it became obvious that I had interest in doing the spread, Malcolm announced he’d accommodate me.”

“Go on.”

“He must know I’m locking in the two dollar spread.”

“And he and everyone else expects us to deliver come September 1.” Ted waved his cigar as though orchestrating the conversation.

“Exactly. So why’s Malcolm helping us out?”

Ted stuck the Macanudo back into the side of his mouth and smiled.

“You know I like you. And I think you’re smart. . .”

“Uh, oh. . .”

“Well, you’re treating this trade like a legal brief, where all that matters is dotting ‘i’s’ and crossing ‘t’s’. . .”

“I thought that was important.” Jason did not know where Ted was headed.

Ted folded his arms across his chest. “This is not a courtroom debate, Jason. It’s a gang war where fear and greed prevail.”

Jason just stared so Ted continued. “Pokie Kraft’s doing exactly what I’d do in his shoes--use Malcolm to send everyone a message.”

Jason finally understood. “That the squeeze’ll work even if we intend to deliver.”

“Precisely.”

“I think I’m gonna be sick.”

Ted laughed, depositing the cigar stub in a crystal ash tray on the corner end table. “That’s just what he wants. We’re supposed to hesitate and second guess ourselves.”

“Which is exactly what I did at the close.” Jason shook his head in

disgust.

Ted turned solemn. “Unfortunately, it’s unclear whether Pokie’s bluffing or we’ve really missed something.”

Jason was confused again. “Well, do I vomit or not?”

Ted nodded his head but did not laugh. “We proceed as planned.”

Jason winced. “Does that make sense?”

“I’ll put it in your terms. Suppose you have an ‘aces over’ full house in the world championship of poker. Do you fold just because the other guy might have a straight flush?”

“Not if you’re a professional,” Jason said with renewed confidence.

Ted stuck out his chin and scratched it slowly. “But I mean everything stays the same. We execute the 20,000 spreads but resist doing more just because Pokie and his crew appear accommodating.”

“What about the timing?”

“Let’s finish off with 2,000 per day over the next seven days. “

“That brings us to August 30, the first notice day for September delivery.”

“That’s right. And I want to deliver everything on September 1. We leave nothing for the rest of the month.”

Jason knew that although they could deliver during the entire month of September, it was uneconomical, and dangerous, to delay beyond September 1. Timely delivery permitted them to earn interest immediately by investing the proceeds of the sale. Failing to deliver on September 1 would be interpreted as weakness. “In other words, we notify the Clearing Corporation on August 30 that we intend to deliver all 100 million ounces.”

“Here’s how important I think that is.” A big smile broke across Ted’s face, creating crow’s feet on his otherwise smooth skin. “If I’m dead, don’t come to the funeral until you notify Clearing.”

Jason laughed uncomfortably. He understood Ted's obsession. During the soybean squeeze of 1977, Ted had beans to deliver to Chicago warehouses to satisfy his short position when a wildcat rail strike delayed him. The loss of credibility caused prices to skyrocket, triggering a margin call that exceeded Ted's financial resources. The Clearing Corporation liquidated Ted's position before he could deliver, spoiling his arbitrage and wiping out his net worth. Unsubstantiated rumors blamed T.J. Kraft, Pokie's father, with inciting the wildcatters. Ted would not permit weakness and delay to ruin him again."

* * * *

Bashir had waited as long as he could for Jason to return to the trading floor. He left at seven-fifteen and had slipped an envelope summarizing the day's trading records under Ted's office door. Now he stood just inside the delivery entrance of the restaurant. The white-washed dimly lit vestibule was no more than six feet long, with a barred steel door at each end. One door led into the kitchen area and the other opened into a back corridor facing the PATH trains. A set of steps near the kitchen led down to the storage room.

Bashir fidgeted in the cramped quarters, waiting for the delivery bell to ring. Malcolm should have arrived fifteen minutes ago. Bashir thought the fool had forgotten that the delivery entrance was in the back passageway.

The harsh ringing jarred Bashir's nerves. He unlocked the door and Malcolm slipped inside. Bashir could smell liquor on his breath.

"Any reason you kept me waiting?"

Malcolm shook his head. "Lay off. I don't need any more bullshit today."

Bashir wondered what had upset Malcolm. He probed delicately, remembering to call Malcolm's half-brother Parker rather than Pokie. "What's

the problem? I thought Parker's plan went real well at the end. You should've seen Novack's face when I told him Ted wasn't calling back."

"Parker's plan my ass. How about my execution?"

A smile bubbled in Bashir stomach. Pokie must have denigrated Malcolm's trading contribution just as he had patronized him two months ago in Ali's apartment. Bashir goaded Malcolm further. "Well I hate to say it Malcolm, but you wouldn't be here right now without Parker's report on Novack. We'd all be in big trouble without it."

Malcolm nodded with a reluctant grin. "I've got to admit that Brother Parker outdid himself this time. I could hardly believe all that stuff he dug up on Novack's wife. She was a wild one back in college."

"Well, that's not what I had in mind, but. . ."

"C'mon, Bashir. That's the shit that made Parker a multi-millionaire. You and Ali better be careful yourselves. . . He's got the nitty gritty details on just about everyone."

"What about you?"

Malcolm bit the inside of his lip. "How about we get down to business. Parker said you'd explain how to blow this place into the next century."

Bashir suppressed his mounting curiosity about the tension between the two half-brothers. Rumors at the Exchange had Malcolm released in Pokie's recognizance after receiving a suspended sentence for aggravated assault. During his two-year probation, Pokie had treated Malcolm like an indentured servant. Now that it was over, Bashir felt Malcolm had turned into flash powder and doubted Pokie's power to control him. He expected Malcolm's volatility to launch him into Muslim immortality.

Bashir led Malcolm down the stairs into the storage room, the glow of fluorescent fixtures bouncing off whitewashed walls. Industrial-sized cartons

with sugar, ketchup and other foodstuffs were piled on six-foot high open shelves extending the length of the room. Bashir walked towards a door at the end labeled with 'Restricted Access: High Voltage' in large red letters. He inserted a key into the lock and noticed that the fluorescent lights reflected a greenish hue from the thin film of nervous perspiration on Malcolm's forehead. Bashir realized that Malcolm's bravado was merely a facade.

Bashir pushed open the steel-plated door and led the way into an empty ten foot square room, illuminated by a single, unshaded, bulb. He felt moisture on his skin and a drop in temperature rooted in the two-foot-wide cinderblock walls. Malcolm's hands trembled. Two ventilator shafts, one in each corner of the ceiling, were the only openings in the room. Bashir finally spoke.

"What do you know about high-order explosives?"

"What do I have to know?"

"More than you do. This isn't like whacking people with a baseball bat. It requires some finesse." Bashir paused to let the snub sink in. "Do you see those ventilator shafts?"

"I see two."

"Good. One leads up to the exchange floor and the other extends into the PATH station. I've packed each one with ammonium nitrate. D'you know what that is?"

"Yeah, it comes from fertilizer."

"Malcolm, stop sounding stupid. It doesn't come from fertilizer. It's an ingredient in most fertilizers. Ammonium nitrate is a high-order explosive, meaning it's very stable and requires a powerful detonator to set off the charge."

"Where's the detonator?"

Bashir pointed to a dull gray box hanging on the wall. He unsnapped the metal cover, displaying a twenty-four hour time clock.

“This is it,” Bashir said, raising his palm to stop Malcolm. “Don’t touch anything, just listen.”

“Fine.”

“D’you see the switch at the bottom?”

“Yes.”

“Now it’s in the ‘off’ position. When you flip it ‘on’ the timer is armed.”

“That’s it?”

“Malcolm, just listen and say nothing. . . The dial in the center has twenty-four hour markings with pinholes at half-hour intervals. The arrow points to the current time: eight o’clock. To trigger the detonator you insert a pin into the desired time slot. That gives you a twenty-four hour window for arming the system after you’ve thrown the switch.”

Malcolm stared for a moment and then said. “I see everything except the pin.”

“Here it is.” Bashir held up a half inch steel wedge between his thumb and index-finger. “Only two of these have been made to fit this timer. You’ll have one and so will Ali.”

“What about you?”

Bashir grinned. “I’m no longer responsible for this part of the operation. You’re Ali’s back up, just like Parker wanted.”

“You don’t seem upset about that.”

“C’mon, Malcolm. We both know that Parker’s report is now the main source of muscle.” Bashir paused, recalling that as one reason Ali cited for accommodating Pokie’s request. He then added: “It’s a shame that all this ammonium won’t be used.”

“I’m sure it won’t go to waste.” Malcolm extended his palm towards Bashir. “Let me have the keys and the pin.”

Bashir hesitated, just to irritate Malcolm. He then placed the keys to the delivery entrance and to the “high-voltage room,” as well as the timer pin, into Malcolm’s unsteady hand. “What’s the problem, Malcolm, losing your nerve?”

Malcolm steeled himself with a forceful swallow. “I’ve got a question.”

“Yes.”

“How do you know that the Exchange and the PATH station will bear the brunt of the blast?”

Bashir was impressed. For an explosives novice, Malcolm showed some insight. Bashir could not help showing-off his expertise.

“That’s very good. I spent the last two months lining the ventilator shafts with two-inch steel plate. And after packing in the ammonium nitrate, I sealed the bottom with twice that thickness.”

Malcolm smiled. “So the ventilator resembles a shotgun.”

“More like a rocket launcher, but the same idea. Technically it’s called a shaped charge to direct the blast up and out.”

“I see.” Malcolm paused. “Does that mean I could actually survive in this room if I triggered the blast manually?”

Bashir stared at Malcolm. He had underestimated him again. “I’ve designed it that way. The room was constructed like a bomb shelter during the renovation of the restaurant. It should withstand an earthquake.”

“That doesn’t exactly answer the question.”

“No, it doesn’t. But it’s the best I can do.” Bashir thought for a moment and then added “Let me put it this way. If you’re here for detonation, prepare to die. But don’t be surprised if you survive.”

Malcolm chuckled. “So I won’t contribute my trading profits to the

Salvation Army before coming down here.”

Bashir wondered why Malcolm was so inquisitive. He realized too late that he had been flattered by Malcolm’s curiosity into revealing more than necessary to detonate the ammonium nitrate. Bashir pondered the damage Malcolm might inflict with his newly-acquired information.

Chapter Eleven

“I can’t tell you how disappointed I’ve been,” Dana said, stretching away her sleep with a loud yawn.

Jason sat in his undershorts at the foot of the canopied bed, his back to Dana, putting on his socks. Slivers of sunlight filtered through the vertical blinds, warming his arms. “Sorry I can’t accommodate your prurient interests, but it’s been boring the past week. Most traders seem immobilized.”

“You make it sound like they’ve lost interest.”

“It’s more like the initial standoff at a Sumo wrestling match.”

Dana giggled as Jason considered the eerie stalemate that had stifled the silver market. During the last seven days he had executed the remaining ‘spreads’ without a hitch. It seemed as though Pokie suspended the squeeze with uncharacteristic respect for Harris Trading. The daily volume in the silver pit dwindled to almost zero. Yesterday, August 29, Jason’s ‘spread’ trade with Malcolm was the only transaction in September silver.

“Is this the proverbial calm before the storm?” Dana finally asked.

Jason had worried about that. Everything had proceeded almost too smoothly. “We’ll know more when we notify the Clearing Corporation after the close that we’re delivering.” Jason felt a chill shimmy up his spine. “What the devil is that?”

“My feet,” Dana laughed as she waltzed her ice cold toes up Jason’s back.

Jason jumped off the bed, feigning terror that was easily aroused.

“What are you doing?”

“Making sure no one else walks all over you today,” Dana giggled, “and heating up my toes.” Dana then snuggled beneath the blanket, protecting herself from the air conditioning. “How about warming up the rest of me?”

Dana’s spontaneity always stimulated Jason, but not this time. “Too bad for me, but I’ve got to check the inventory once more.” He buttoned his blue pin-striped shirt, slipped into gray slacks and tied his black thick-soled bucks. He watched Dana wrinkle her nose. “Stop making faces, these are comfortable no matter how they look. Besides, they’re my lucky shoes.” Jason slung his blue blazer over his shoulder, bent down and kissed Dana on the cheek. “Don’t forget to hug the kids for me. And keep Faith in bed. You remember what Toliver said when he called. She can ruin her chances.”

“Any other instructions, General?”

Jason shrugged. “Look, I don’t mind saying that I’m nervous.”

Dana rose from the bed, brushing her white silk nightgown below her thighs. She stood on his shoe tops, clasped her hands around his neck, and leaned against him. Jason’s heartbeat fluttered, reminding him of the first time she embraced him like that, during their courting days at Duke. Her five-foot body somehow managed to fit perfectly into his six-foot-four-inch frame. His neck tingled as she smothered it with kisses. “I have great confidence in you . . . I love you very much.”

“I love you, too,” he said, lifting her back to the bed. And he knew he did, despite her pampered materialism. He loved her because after plucking him from the Campus Eatery she refused to discard him despite family pressure over his improper pedigree. She had earned his trust and his love. She seduced him easily.

* * * *

Jason rode the Lexington Avenue subway downtown. He arrived at the Exchange and headed for Harris Trading's computer and compliance room adjacent to Ted's office. It was empty. The computer staff would arrive in the spartan windowless room at about eight-thirty. Jason did not envy them. They were bright college graduates toiling for a pittance in an industry where boorish traders wallowed in opulence. When Jason asked Ted why the computer people weren't paid more, he answered that their skills were easily replaced. It seemed unfair but true to form.

Jason sat at the nearest of six terminals, entered his security code and summoned two files to the screen. On the left appeared Raoul's inventory and on the right the Comex depository list. The 100 million ounces were distributed evenly among four warehouses: Republic Bank, Chase, and Morgan in New York; and Wilmington Trust in Delaware. Jason compared the serial numbers for the bullion shipped by Raoul with the depository entries, just as he had every day after the close for the past week. Ted had insisted on a final verification this morning, just to confirm nothing had disappeared. Nothing had.

Jason exhaled a whistle.

"Sounds like the inventory's intact," came Ted's voice from the doorway.

Jason turned to see a smile crinkle across his boss' impish image. "Just the way it's been since we started."

"Good. Today begins the end-game."

"Should I come into the office?"

"It's eight-fifteen. You'd better get to the floor. Besides, there's not much to add. We've been through this already. They need over \$1.5 billion to

pay for the silver. Pokie's piggy bank isn't that big."

"So you still expect them to sell off some contracts?"

"Absolutely. I'm kind'a surprised they haven't already." Ted shook his head, frowning his brow. "Just stay focused and let me know when they start getting out."

Jason mistrusted this refrain Ted repeated each day. Although their arbitrage profit was impervious to Pokie's trading, Ted's unfulfilled expectation suggested something was amiss. "And if they don't reduce their position?"

"Then Pokie's gonna attend every dental convention for the next century." Ted laughed as he disappeared down the hallway.

Jason disliked the jocular response. He rose and headed towards the floor with a gnawing fear that Ted's judgment had been distorted by conflicts with the Kraft clan.

Jason entered the Harris booth and saw Bashir whispering on the telephone. He thought his wiry-haired clerk looked as though someone had died.

"Everything okay?" Jason asked.

Bashir hung up and nodded toward the silver pit. "You'd better get to your spot. Rumors about a Harris-Kraft showdown have attracted the usual vultures. Traders from everywhere are circling for the kill."

Jason crammed into the Harris slot as the one-minute warning bell triggered rising tension. He saw Malcolm and Train sandwiched across the pit, obscuring all but Lisa's jet black hair flitting behind them. He wondered whether she still wished him luck as he felt the explosion accompany the opening bell. Blood curdling screeches bolted through the air from scalpers flailing their arms to attract attention. Someone tugged Jason's sleeve. He turned and heard Bashir buzzing in his ear.

“You’ve got a phone call.”

“Are you crazy?”

“Sorry, but it’s your wife.”

“C’mon, tell her the market’s already open.” He dismissed Bashir with an over-the-shoulder wave while concentrating on the raucous screaming surrounding him.

“I already told her,” Bashir yelled. “She insists.”

Jason’s annoyance thickened into anger. Dana knew never to call during trading hours. He glared at Bashir, as though he were to blame. “Shit. Find out what’s wrong.”

“She says it’s an emergency.” Bashir shrugged his innocence.

Jason’s irritation rose. “I don’t believe this,” he muttered while sprinting towards the Harris booth. He grabbed the phone from the shelf and barked: “What’s the problem?”

“It’s Anna.”

“Who?”

“Anna, Anna. Raoul’s daughter Anna,” Dana shrieked into the phone.

“Anna? What’s happened to her?”

“She’s been kidnapped.”

Jason heard his heartbeat in the ensuing silence. “What do you mean kidnapped?”

“Just what I said. Raoul’s on the other line. He’s nearly incoherent but insists on speaking with you. . . Now hold on while I conference you together.”

“Dana.”

“Yes.”

“Please stay on the line and listen. Just in case I miss something.”

Jason heard the click and barely recognized Raoul.

“Please say you’ve done nothing.”

“Excuse me?”

“Tell me that you haven’t traded.” Raoul’s voice rose.

“I haven’t. Dana caught me just as the market opened.”

“Thank God.”

“What’s that got to do with Anna?”

“Everything, my friend. Everything.”

Jason’s stomach cramped with confusion. “What’s going on, Raoul?”

“Anna was abducted on her way to school this morning.”

“How’s that possible? I thought you followed her.”

“Please, Jason. I had to chair an early breakfast meeting of Silarco to review our bullion loan. . . They pulled me out about half an hour ago with the news.”

Jason clasped one hand to his forehead. “Who’s responsible?”

“You’ve heard of the *Righteous Path*?”

“Only from your stories in law school.” He recalled the Peruvian guerrilla group Raoul had tangled with during his military service.

“That’s why this is so bizarre. They’ve been dormant for at least five years. In fact, I’ve supported their welfare programs.”

“Then what do they want?”

Jason waited for a response. Raoul’s silence magnified the sound of his breath brushing the receiver. He finally spoke.

“The *Path* is ultra-nationalistic, with ties to tribal religion. They’re demanding that Peru sever all foreign commercial exploitation of our natural resources.”

Jason squeezed the next two words, fearing Raoul’s response “More specifically?”

“They insist that I rescind the bullion loan.”

“But that’s already done.” Jason’s voice rose in disbelief. “And the bullion’s at Comex depositories.”

“But the transaction can be easily reversed if you don’t deliver.”

“How do they know that?”

“Please, Jason. This is 1993 not 1893. Every terrorist group has its Harvard PhDs.”

Jason hoped for an accommodation. “Exactly what do they want?”

“They’ll kill her if I reassign the Comex receipts today as required by our contract. They also want a clear signal you’ve surrendered claim to the bullion.”

“What’s the signal?” Jason still hoped.

“You’ve got to mount a convincing effort at buying back your September position before today’s close.”

“My God, that’s suicide.” The unfolding trap terrorized Jason. Everyone had seen Harris Trading sell short thousands of contracts. He looked towards the rabble in the pit, scrounging like scavengers in search of their next meal. Mercy was never offered nor expected. Jason knew that trying to cover his shorts would unleash frenzied buying. Everyone would know that Harris Trading could not deliver. The price of September would skyrocket, triggering a margin call and a replay of Ted’s 1977 soybean debacle. Only this time he would be ruined as well. Jason felt nauseous.

“My friend, you’re talking financial suicide while Anna’s life hangs in the balance.”

Jason knew it was more complicated. He pictured a blond haired three-year old on his shoulders. Although she was eight, her profile remained frozen in time. Anna’s giggle directed him to her smile, as her face faded.

Jason fought to restore focus. . . and then gasped. Anna's curly blond hair framed Faith's image in his mind's eye. He shuddered, realizing that Anna's life and Faith's future were now inexorably intertwined.

"Raoul, I love Anna like my daughter. I'll do what's necessary. . . but how do you know they'll keep their word?"

Raoul sighed. "Their leader, Domingo Hernandez, belongs to the same native clan as Isadora. He guarantees Anna's return within two hours of the close if you cooperate."

The speedy resolution promised by the terrorist group stunned Jason. "It sounds like they want this over with as much as you."

"I met Hernandez two years ago at the opening of a medical facility we financed together. I brought Anna along. He knows that my daughter is my life. Believe me, he wants this resolved quickly."

Jason felt a fist squeeze his stomach. "You have my word. Anna will be with you by the end of the day. Now, I've got work to do. Please don't worry. Anna is like my daughter."

Jason hung up the phone praying for divine inspiration. He saw Bashir standing behind Saleri, glancing at him out of the corner of his eye. "I'm going inside to Ted," Jason said. "If anyone asks, tell them I'm sick."

Jason headed for the exit as bile burned his throat. He accelerated past the swinging doors, skirting traders gossiping in the hallway, and detoured towards the men's room. It was empty. Jason flew into the first stall and braced himself against the tan partitions.

* * * *

The retching relieved Jason's stomach but nothing else. He lurched towards Ted's office, dreading a confrontation that combined personal and

professional calamities. Ted's parental passions were primitive. He had conceived Harris Trading not Anna Alvarez. Jason prayed Ted could work a miracle to guarantee Anna's survival while salvaging their resources.

Goose bumps tingled on Jason's neck as he knocked and entered the office. Ted glanced up from the Reuter's screen.

"What're you doing here?"

Jason shut the door and smashed his fist into the wall, splintering the veneer paneling. "We're fucked."

Ted's eyes widened at Jason's uncharacteristic display. "That's not what I wanted to hear."

"I just can't believe what's happened. "

"Let's hear," Ted grimaced while pointing to the small black sofa in front of the desk. "Sit."

Jason shook his head and dropped into the seat. He repeated Raoul's conversation. Ted did not interrupt. When Jason finished Ted rose slowly and walked towards the picture window, darkened by an inclement sky. "Kidnapping children is a new low for the Kraft clan."

Jason had not made the connection that now seemed natural. "How do you think Kraft knew about the Raoul relationship?"

Ted turned towards Jason and leaned against the window frame. "Anyone trading silver knows of Raoul. And your life isn't exactly a military secret."

"No. But I've followed your instructions. I'm certain that even Bashir doesn't have a clue and he's the most likely source of a leak." As soon as the words slipped out Jason realized that he misspoke. "Except for. . . I hate to say it, except for Lisa."

Ted arched an eyebrow and cocked his head. "Why? Have you spoken

with her about the trade?”

Jason’s mind flipped back to the months of playful contests with Lisa. She had tried to trip him with a question on the three largest foreign suppliers of silver to U.S. refineries. Jason correctly identified Peru, along with Canada and Mexico, and then flaunted his relationship with Raoul to impress her. And now he would pay for his foolish bluster. “We’ve never discussed the arbitrage, but she knows that Raoul is like a brother to me.”

Ted grunted. “Lisa’s not ruthless enough. My money’s on Pokie.”

Jason chafed at Ted’s soft spot for Lisa. Before her defection, Ted had coddled her with parental tenderness. “How can you be so sure?”

“Rumors had Pokie’s *Viper Marshalls* financing *Righteous Path*’s terrorist activities years ago. Now he’s probably calling in his markers.”

Jason knew that Lisa could easily have triggered Pokie’s plan by trumpeting her information about Raoul to Malcolm. He resented Ted’s blind spot and vowed to pursue the connection. But he had a more pressing agenda. “I guess the source of the leak is unimportant at this point. We’ve got to play the cards we’ve been dealt.”

Ted spawned a half-smile. “Spoken like a trader and poker player. I’ve got a few. . .”

“Can I say something before you begin?”

“Of course.”

Jason spoke slowly. “I’m embarrassed to say that I owe my children’s lives to Raoul and Isadora. Without their guidance, Dana and I would have terminated her pregnancy.” Jason paused and glanced at Ted, framed by the gathering storm outside the picture window.

“You’re telling me this because. . .”

“Because I’d sacrifice everything for Anna.”

“I see.” Ted said folding his arms across his chest. “And you think I need a lecture on the value of human life?”

“No, but. . .”

“Or am I deficient in parental instinct?”

“Ted, please. . .” Jason felt as though he had accidentally wounded his only ally.

Ted raised his hand like a traffic cop. “You’ve said enough already. I’m well aware of my responsibilities here.” Ted paused to glare and then continued. “Blindly following Raoul’s request could easily bankrupt me and endanger the Exchange. And that affects many more lives than your insolvency. I have a responsibility to my employees and to the Exchange’s employees to explore every option. I intend to do so and I expect your cooperation.”

Jason’s emotions were in turmoil. He knew Ted had still another conflicting preoccupation--Pokie Kraft. But he could not raise that now for fear of further alienating him. “I apologize for lecturing you. That wasn’t my intention. Just tell me what you want.”

Ted’s facial muscles relaxed. “I’ve got contacts in Washington who’ve dealt with these guerrillas before. They’re our best bet for saving the girl. Let’s see what they can do. If they free her, we might avoid a financial debacle. . .”

“And in the meantime?”

“In the meantime, you monitor Malcolm and Train in the pit and do nothing, and I mean absolutely nothing, until after two o’clock today.”

Ted’s words intimidated Jason. He wondered whether the delay would leave sufficient time to mount a credible buying effort to satisfy the kidnapers. “Isn’t that cutting it a little close?”

“Twenty-five minutes is a lifetime in the pit,” Ted said with a faraway gaze. “Just wait for me before trading even half a contract. If we have to start buying back ‘Sep’ I don’t want to give those fuckers too much time to ram the price up our ass. . . Now go.”

Ted pointed towards the door.

Chapter Twelve

Jason staggered towards the Exchange floor, hoping Ted could rescue Anna and foil the plot. As a successful trader, Ted had prospered by beating the odds. Jason quickly stumbled over his selfishness. He knew that if Faith were threatened he would never allow Ted to gamble with her life, especially against Pokie Kraft. Ted had been bankrupted before by Kraft treachery. Jason dreaded the conflict pitting his mentor against his ward.

“Are you okay?” asked a familiar female from behind him. He recognized the voice and continued walking. “Hold on Jason, I heard you weren’t feeling well.”

“Please Lisa, I’ve got to get back to the pit.” He doubted that he could control himself.

“Hey, what’s the matter with you? I’ve just jeopardized my job looking for you during trading hours and you’re blowing me off.”

Jason turned, catching Lisa’s ice blue ire, and blurted. “Your guilty conscience is showing.”

Lisa stood with hands on hips. “I’m afraid you’ve lost me.”

Jason seethed but regretted his half-hearted confrontation. He tried to buy time to confirm his suspicions. “Let’s give it a rest and talk later.”

“Nice way to treat your friends,” Jason heard Lisa say as he headed towards the Harris booth.

Jason arrived at the pit to a chorus of simulated heaving and gagging by

his neighboring traders. Bashir looked on sheepishly and shrugged his shoulders. "I said you were sick."

"That's okay. No one expects them to behave like adults."

"How are you feeling?"

"I'll let you know later," he said, squeezing into his spot.

The banter made Jason feel like an alien, his personal turmoil clashing with the continued calm of the silver pit. September was stuck at \$15.50 per ounce while December tagged along at \$13.50. The vultures visiting for the kill had flown to more fertile pastures, while he began his lonely vigil. The clock ticked in slow motion torture. Two o'clock seemed a century away.

Jason strained to see Malcolm and Train sharpen their knives. He was stunned by their nonchalance. Malcolm actually sat on a stool outside the ring, surrounded by several traders, playing liar's poker with one of Train's clerks. Perhaps Ted's obsession with Pokie Kraft was misplaced, Jason thought for a moment before realizing that was precisely the plan. Pokie the puppeteer had instructed his marionettes to keep their distance. They could sit back and rely on Jason to self-destruct trying to cover Harris Trading's short position.

He imagined what would happen. Malcolm stood on his stool holding a stack of silver bars over his head. Jason jumped unsuccessfully to retrieve them, shackled by chains immobilizing his ankles. Malcolm laughed and juggled the bullion as Jason felt the chains grow tighter, twisting their way up his legs and around his waist. Jason gasped for breath, his chest collapsing under the mounting pressure. Malcolm dangled the bullion in front of Jason's nose, snatching it away at the last moment.

"Are you okay?"

Jason panted heavily and focused on Bashir standing next to him. "I'm

fine.”

“You’ve got a phone call from Lima.”

“What?”

“Raoul is on the line.”

Jason swallowed hard, pushing through a crowd of clerks towards the booth. “Any news?” he said into the receiver.

“How could you do this to me?” Raoul hissed.

“What are you talking about?”

“Hernandez just called and demanded that the CIA suspend its dragnet here immediately.”

He realized this was Ted’s offensive. “I’m sorry, Raoul. I didn’t know. . .”

“Listen to me, there’s no time left. I beg you. Call off the CIA and start buying back your contracts so they can release Anna. I beg you. . .”

Jason heard Raoul sob, raising a lump in his throat. He looked up at the clock. It was two-oh-three. Ted should have been here already. Raoul was right. There was no time. “I’ll do what’s necessary immediately.”

He hung up the phone, blood coursing through his veins, and dialed Ted’s private line. Busy. He slammed down the receiver. Jason’s brain urged him towards Ted’s office, but his heart stopped him after two steps. Anna was in imminent danger from Ted’s intricate agenda and a complicated confrontation would waste precious time. Silver trading ended in twenty-two minutes.

Jason spun towards the pit where he could control Anna’s destiny. Four strides took him to the top step. He hesitated; Ted’s image reminded him that discipline was the trader’s credo. He then felt Anna on his shoulders, straining in vain to reach the ceiling. He supported her by clutching Faith’s

misshapen limbs attached to Anna's body. He trembled at the thought of losing her. Risking a human life was irresponsible rather than courageous.

Jason drove Ted from his mind and focused on the pit. He saw his favorite scalpers, Wizard, Mom and Doc, idly chatting in the center, oblivious to the unfolding disaster. He yelled to Bashir over his shoulder. "Get ready."

"Excuse me?"

"Get over here now, I've got some business to do."

"But. . ."

"No buts. Let's go." Jason faced the pit, Bashir breathing into his neck, and hollered: "I need a market in 'Sep'."

Wizard, the six-foot-six scalper, stared at Jason while poking Doc in the ribs. "Wake up. Looks like the Judge wants to sell some more."

"Fifty bid, at sixty, 'cause I like ya" Doc sang, indicating he would pay 15.50 per ounce to buy September silver and would sell at \$15.60.

"I'll buy whatever you've got at sixty," Jason screeched.

Every trader in the pit stopped to stare at Jason. Not only was he a buyer rather than a seller, but he wanted to buy in substantial size.

"Holy shit," Wizard yelled, as a frenzied buzz broke out. "I think Harris Trading just blinked."

"Sold one lot." Doc protected himself with an upraised index finger to reinforce that he sold just one contract.

Traders pushed into the pit like predator sharks stalking wounded prey. Jason knew he was the quarry, surrounded by a ravenous mob, but thought he could escape fatal injury. He had expected Doc's defensive market in 'Sep'. Scalpers were middlemen. They did not want to trade after first notice day since they were never involved in physical delivery. But Jason thought Pokie Kraft was a natural seller of September silver, especially if Ted were right about

Pokie not having the \$1.5 billion to pay for the bullion. Jason had just sent Pokie a message that Harris Trading would buy as much as he would sell. Pokie could make a killing without spending a nickel. Jason waited for Malcolm and Train to register Pokie's response.

Jason watched the scalpers scrambling for an edge, waving their arms while screeching his name. He saw Wizard's veteran eyes sweep the horizon, stopping at Malcolm who just entered the pit.

"\$16.00 bid for 'Sep'," yelled the Wizard, while staring directly at Malcolm and Train to gauge their reaction. Jason cringed, knowing Wizard sensed weakness in his position. Wizard wanted to buy 'Sep' at \$16.00 and flip them to Jason at \$16.50. Friendship was forgotten in the pit. Trading for a profit was the only goal.

Jason focused on Malcolm, hoping to hear an offer to sell September.

"That's right. \$16.00 bid for 'Sep'," Malcolm shrieked.

Jason's shoulders sank. His eyes shifted to Train, standing next to Malcolm with hammer-like arms poised to strike.

"\$16.50 bid," bellowed the broker from Barr and Company, strengthening the squeeze.

Jason trembled, knowing that with Malcolm and Train buying rather than selling, the squeeze would turn into a rout. Scattered sellers of September were mobbed by waves of buyers. Jason heard bids of \$21.00 and \$22.00 leap from the stormy sea. He was mesmerized by the spiraling prices.

"Get the fuck out of there," broke the spell. It was Ted, yanking on Jason's sleeve and pulling him out of the pit. Ted's fury matched the surrounding turmoil. "Have you lost your mind? I told you to wait for me. . ."

"\$26.00 bid," roared up from the raucous crowd, drowning Ted.

"Sold at \$26.00," came an unmistakable shout from Train.

Ted stood in the Harris slot shouldering the mayhem as Jason loitered at the edge of the pit, jostled by clerks racing in and out. When the gavel ended the slaughter, September silver settled at \$25.50, exactly \$10.00 per ounce above its opening level. Twenty minutes of chaos sparked the largest daily move ever recorded.

Jason was dazed by the conflagration. He watched traders seep from the pit, avoiding him as though he were contagious. A sour twinge curdled in his stomach as Ted shook his head in disgust.

“Have you any idea what you’ve just done? Get into my office before you cause any more damage. . . if that’s possible.”

* * * *

Jason pressed his forehead against the rain-streaked picture window, as gale force winds whipped across New York harbor. He watched a tugboat fight to stay afloat, defying the angry waters. He had been waiting more than half an hour in Ted’s office, buffeted by emotional crosscurrents. He soared over saving Anna and then sank over destroying Ted. He knew the firestorm was the price of Anna’s life, but had not anticipated how expensive it would be.

Jason heard the office door click shut. He turned as an ashen-faced Ted Harris walked behind his desk and gripped the high-backed leather chair. Ted shook his head as though constrained by a neck brace. Jason knew the damage was life threatening.

“I’ve never witnessed a more irresponsible act,” Ted rasped.

Jason sighed heavily. “I had no choice.”

“You had an obligation to wait for me.”

“It was already past two o’clock. . .”

“I told you to do nothing until *after* two. And then to wait for me.”

“But I received a phone call from Lima. . .”

“So did I.”

Jason’s eyes registered surprise, as Ted continued.

“That’s right. The embassy’s political officer relayed Hernandez’s threat.”

“And. . .”

“And nothing. Hernandez wouldn’t have done a thing.”

“What makes you so sure?”

“Our assessment was that Hernandez didn’t want to create a lifelong enemy of your friend Alvarez.”

“Maybe and maybe not.” Jason resented Ted’s willingness to speculate with Anna’s life. “Look, I called your office about two o’clock. It was busy and time was running out for mounting a credible effort. So I went into the pit. . .”

“You’re a fool,” Ted hissed, leaning across his desk. “I told you that twenty minutes is like an eternity in commodities. Hernandez said Anna would be freed if we began buying before the close. We could’ve started at two-twenty and still complied with his demands.”

Jason heard the wind howling outside. He knew they had reached the eye of the storm. Ted wanted to skate near the edge while Jason demanded safety first. Waiting until two-twenty might have triggered a smaller price increase. But it would have caused Anna’s death if their buying effort was suspect in Hernandez’s eyes. He knew it was pointless to argue.

Ted continued, his face reddening with rage. “Have you any idea what your fucking twenty-minute buying spree has done?”

Jason stared at the floor while whispering, “No.”

“I need one billion dollars by tomorrow morning. And I don’t have it.”

Ted’s response stunned Jason, even though he knew the arithmetic.

Jason had bought only a smattering of contracts during the twenty minute carnage, leaving the firm with the same 100 million ounce short position. The price of September silver rose from \$15.50 per ounce yesterday to \$25.50 today. The Clearing Corporation required a margin payment equaling the \$10.00 per ounce price increase. If Harris Trading failed to come up with one billion in dollars in cash by ten o'clock tomorrow, Clearing would liquidate Harris's position, bankrupting the firm.

"I don't know what to say." Jason continued to stare at the floor. "I'll do whatever you ask." He lifted his eyes imperceptibly and caught Ted choking back tears. He had not expected to destroy his benefactor. Ted had rescued him from the oppression of Bartlett and Taft and furnished the opportunity of a lifetime. Jason demolished it all with twenty minutes of mayhem.

"I want you out of here." Ted said forcefully. "Go home. . . Do you understand that?" Ted was nearly shouting now.

"Yes." Jason mumbled, shuffling towards the door. Nothing he could say would rectify matters.

"One more thing."

Jason stopped and turned towards Ted, hoping for some encouragement. "What's that?"

"Did you prevent Bashir from warning me?"

"Excuse me?"

"I was worried that you might do something stupid so I told Bashir to let me know if you started to trade." Ted's eyes narrowed.

"Absolutely not." Jason combed through the blur and recalled Bashir's halfhearted protest when Jason told him to get ready. A sixth sense alerted Jason to a more troublesome memory. Bashir sounded unnaturally familiar when announcing 'Raoul is on the line.' It was almost as though he had

expected the call. The crisis had suppressed Jason's suspicions, but now they unnerved him.

"Is there something else?"

Jason looked at Ted, wondering whether his speculations would be interpreted as evading responsibility. He decided he could not be worse off than he already was. "I think Bashir knew what was coming."

Ted arched his eyebrows while staring at Jason "What makes you say that?"

"He seemed to know Raoul when he called."

Ted waved in disgust at Jason and snorted. "I told you, everyone in silver knows Raoul. . . Now get out."

Jason reached for the doorpost to steady himself as he left the room.

Chapter Thirteen

Jason emerged from the subway as the hurricane unleashed its fury on the storefronts along Lexington Avenue. Awnings flapped noisily, splashing bucket-sized puddles in his path. He wiped the hair matted across his eyes and gazed at the empty thoroughfare. He felt deserted. No one was foolish enough to venture out in the storm.

It took him twenty minutes to cover the four short blocks to his apartment. His waterlogged clothing soaked the hardwood floor as he entered. Dana was on the phone. He wondered how much she knew of the day's disaster at the exchange.

"It's me."

"Come here," Dana yelled from the kitchen. "You're a hero."

Dana stood in the archway, wearing a pleated navy skirt and matching blouse, and covered the receiver with one hand. "It's Isadora. She wants to speak with you." Dana handed the phone to Jason and slipped her arm around his waist, hooking her fingers on his belt. Dana's affection soothed him.

"Isadora?"

"Jason, I can't describe our happiness. Raoul just left to pick up Anna from the police. She was freed just moments ago."

"Is she alright?"

"They said she's smiling and is anxious to see us."

“Thank God.” Relief rippled through Jason’s body as Dana pressed herself against him.

“You know, Raoul and I want to . . .”

“Please, Isadora. There’s nothing to say.”

Isadora spoke in a whisper. “Raoul told me what happened at the Exchange. . . I’m sorry.”

“Look, this is a crisis about money, not about a child’s life.”

“I know. But you’ve made a great sacrifice.”

“You would have done the same.”

“Raoul said to call if there’s something he can do.”

“Thank you.” Jason watched Dana frown as she gazed quizzically at him. He arched his eyebrows and cocked the phone to see if she wanted to talk. Dana shook her head with a grimace. Jason continued: “Give Anna a kiss,” and hung up the phone.

“What’s this money crisis all about?” Dana looked confused while disengaging herself from him.

“Anna’s life didn’t come cheaply.”

“Hmm. . . it sounds serious.”

“It is.” Jason dreaded breaking the news. “Let’s go inside and I’ll explain while I change.”

Jason piled his waterlogged clothing on the floor near his mahogany dresser. Dana sat at the edge of the canopied bed, staring as he stumbled through the crisis. She froze when he bumped against Ted’s bankruptcy. Dana shook her head.

“I knew this would end badly. I just couldn’t figure why. . . Have we lost everything?”

Jason realized Dana had forgotten their contract with Ted Harris. “I’m

afraid it's much worse than that."

"How's that possible?" Dana bit the bottom of her lip.

"D'you remember I told you about the profit-sharing agreement?"

Dana nodded her head imperceptibly.

"Well, we're responsible for ten percent of losses." The lingering dampness on Jason's skin shrivelled his confidence. He forced himself to continue. "So our share of Harris Trading's one billion dollar loss today is \$100 million."

Dana stared at Jason. "That's not possible, it's just not possible. . . everything's gone, everything's gone forever. . ."

"Listen to me. . ."

"No, you listen to me," Dana's voice rose to a shriek. "This happened because you lied to me."

"Excuse me?"

"You told me this was riskless--some nonsense about arbitrage. And I was stupid enough to believe you."

"No, you weren't stupid at all. The arbitrage was undone by an act of violence. No one could have anticipated. . ."

"That's not the way I see it."

"Really?"

"We're bankrupt because silver jumped ten dollars an ounce and you don't have the money to pay. That's got nothing to do with violence. . . Silver could've jumped by ten dollars because Kodak decided to stockpile the bullion. You told me that *anything* is possible in commodities."

"I certainly did. . ."

"So you were just gambling that prices wouldn't increase." Dana shook her head at Jason's apparent duplicity.

Jason had worried whether his trade could survive a massive jump in silver prices. He knew the Clearing Corporation's rules about margin payments. And he had prepared. "That wouldn't have been a problem."

"I'd like to hear this."

Jason sat down in a chair facing Dana. She glared as he spoke.

"Under normal circumstances we could've raised a billion dollars by pledging the silver bullion at Comex as collateral for an overnight loan. I had arranged the credit line with Chase."

"So what's the problem now?" Dana perked up.

"We don't own the bullion. We don't have collateral. So we can't borrow the money to meet the margin call. Tomorrow morning the Clearing Corporation liquidates our position, locking in a one billion dollar loss."

Jason slipped into black loafers and watched Dana slump forward. She grabbed at the white satin bedspread and punched a hole with her thumb in the embroidery. Jason sensed her smoldering anger when a glimmer of hope ignited in his brain. "There may be a way. . ."

"You should've followed Ted's instructions." Dana hissed like a viper.

"What?"

"I said you had no right to disobey Ted. We could've avoided this if you had just listened to him."

Jason could not believe Dana's words. "How can you say something like that?"

"It's easy. You were panicked by Raoul's call. Ted paid you to act like a professional not like an amateur."

Jason's blood boiled with Dana flailing like a child. He knew her volatility went with her spontaneity, but he resented how quickly she twisted him from hero to villain. He was determined to set the record straight. "I

expected that from Ted not you.”

“Really? I heard your story. And I heard that Hernandez insisted you buy before the close. But Ted felt two-twenty was early enough. I’ll take his years of experience against yours anytime.” Dana sat up straight and stuck out her chin like a prizefighter.

Sadness swirled inside Jason’s head as his eyes raged with anger. “You heard only what you wanted to, just like Ted. Hernandez demanded a credible buying effort. And that’s a matter of interpretation, not clock time. I couldn’t risk Anna’s life on Hernandez’s dissection of our buying program. There was no room for uncertainty. I had to buy as soon as Raoul called. He would have done the same if our roles were reversed and Faith had been kidnapped. . .”

“Daddy, . . . what’s kidnapped?”

Jason turned toward the bedroom doorway where Faith leaned against the frame, wearing ruffled pink pajamas. He scooped her into his arms with a tight hug, pressing her tiny body to his chest.

“Daddy, you’re squeezing me. . .”

Jason relaxed his grip. “Sorry, honey. I’m just happy to see you. . . Now, why aren’t you in bed like Dr. Toliver said.”

“Oh, Daddy, there’s nothing to do there. Mrs. Archibald took Andrew to play group. . . Besides I heard you and Mommy yelling inside.”

Jason kissed Faith on the forehead. He carried her to the bedroom and slid her into bed, covering her halfway with the white bedspread. He sat with his hand resting on her knee. “Sweetheart, it’s only two more days before Dr. Toliver makes you better in the hospital. Please stay in bed to help him, okay?” Jason realized that he needed to borrow the \$15,000 deposit required by the surgical group before the operation. Ted had promised to advance him

those funds, but now he would have to look elsewhere. . . The timing could not have been worse.

“Daddy, can I be a ballerina after Dr. Toliver fixes my feet?”

Jason ached. “Of course you can.”

“That’s not what Andrew says.”

“Andrew doesn’t know. You can be whatever you want if you try, sweetie.”

Faith glowed. “Promise?”

“I promise.”

Jason stared at Faith’s innocence, his eyes swelling with tears. He blinked them back as the telephone jarred his thoughts. He hoped it was Raoul with Anna. That would save him a call.

Jason kissed Faith and headed for the kitchen. He grabbed the phone on the third ring. “Hello.”

“Jason, it’s Ted. I want you at the Exchange in half an hour.”

A warm glow spread through Jason’s stomach when he heard Ted’s voice. It meant there was hope. “What do you want me to do?”

“Just be here. I’ve called an emergency board meeting and you’re needed to present our account of today’s trading.”

“I’m on my way.”

“Come to my office before going to the boardroom.”

Jason heard the phone go dead and hung up the receiver. He lifted his eyes and saw Dana standing trance-like in the foyer.

“Ted’s just asked me to attend a board meeting. Maybe we’ve got a chance.”

Dana did not react.

“Did you hear me?” Jason put his hands on Dana’s shoulders and

shook her gently. She shrugged him away.

“When you first told me about the agreement with Ted I said you were both sick. I think events have supported me. You’re compulsive gamblers who don’t know when to quit. He risked Anna’s life and you’ve squandered ours. It’s time to fold your cards Jason. I thought you agreed to that ten years ago. . .”

“This wasn’t a gamble, it. . .”

“Who cares what it was.” Dana wailed in disgust. “The stakes have risen from money to human life and you’re still playing. It’s time to quit, Jason. It’s time to quit before someone winds up dead.”

Jason recognized Dana’s gambling phobia provoking her into submission. Despite the glimmer from Ted’s call she surrendered to Pokie’s intimidation. He knew she was right about the danger. A counterattack would surely escalate the violence, but he could not quit. Ted needed him. Jason could not concede while there was still hope. He spoke softly.

“I’m sorry, I’ve got to go.”

Dana folded her arms across her chest and turned away from him. He reached for her shoulder. She slipped from his grasp and walked towards the bedroom.

Jason watched Dana disappear through the doorway, dismayed by her confusion. She left him no choice. He grabbed his blue blazer and headed downtown.

* * * *

Bashir left the Exchange floor amidst news of the emergency Comex board meeting. Despite the chaotic trading session, Harris Trading had done little business. Bashir had lingered primarily because Ali had instructed him

to monitor trader sentiment. He would have stayed longer except for the meeting at the mosque. That took priority.

Bashir exited Four World Trade Center just as the hurricane wilted to a fine mist. The streets were strewn with twisted umbrellas, torn boots and other debris discarded during the storm. His drive on the Yamaha would be perilous.

Bashir approached the nearly fifty motorcycles lined up beside the greenery of Battery Park at the tip of Manhattan. Branches from trees overhanging the street toppled half a dozen bikes, with tangled handlebars resembling an untamed field of chrome.

He searched among the rubble for his red Yamaha 650. At least three other identical bikes were parked in the same area, but his sported a decal with the black, white, and green stripes of the Palestinian flag on the rear fender.

The Yamaha 650 was sandwiched between two black Harleys near the center of the line, their kickstands successfully supporting them during the storm. Bashir donned the gray helmet that had been locked in its holder and mounted the bike. He felt the waterlogged leather seat moisten his backside as he eased the motorcycle from its slot.

Driving uptown was always a thrill for Bashir. It wasn't the speed that swelled his senses, but the acceleration. Stop and go traffic provided more frequent rushes than cruising at highway speeds.

Bashir drove through the Holland Tunnel and turned right at the first intersection on the New Jersey side. He sped along Observer Highway, made a left on Washington Street and parked his bike at the corner of Second Street. Twenty minutes had elapsed since he left the Exchange.

Bashir smiled, looking down the tree-lined block. The nondescript

converted storefront serving the small Hoboken Palestinian population as community center and mosque seemed deserted. But Bashir recognized the five-year old dark green Chevrolet van and the beat-up blue Honda Civic standing near the corner. They belonged to two members of the *Brotherhood* from Jersey City who were awaiting his instructions. They would not speak again unless something went wrong.

Chapter Fourteen

Screeching subway cars sapped Jason's strength. Sadness simmered from his quarrel with Dana while he focused on the upcoming Board meeting. He smothered the domestic dispute with resolve to rectify the day's wreckage.

Jason surfaced from the subway's darkness and spotted spokes of sunlight puncturing the clouds. His spirits rose as he sprinted towards the World Trade Center.

Jason entered the Exchange and collided with a six-foot-six barrier near the elevator. It was the Wizard, slightly stooped from the day's struggle, leaving the floor. For a moment they stared and then Wizard said:

"Sorry about jumping all over you before. . ."

"What're you talking about?"

"You know, leading the attack after you turned buyer."

"Oh c'mon Wizard, if not you it would've been someone else. Once Malcolm and Train started bidding there was no hope."

Wizard smiled. "For someone who's just lost a fortune you're remarkably objective. I hope for your sake the rumors are true about the Comex's initiatives."

Jason warmed to Wizard's compliment but was more intrigued by the gossip.

"What've you heard?"

“Reuters reported the Board’s gonna force Malcolm and Train to liquidate their firm’s positions.”

Wizard’s words dazzled Jason. Train had accumulated Pokie’s huge position at Barr and Company and Malcolm had done the same for the Swiss Consortium. The price of September silver would collapse if Comex forced them to liquidate, resurrecting Harris Trading. Jason stuttered: “Can Comex actually do that?”

“After today you should know that anything’s possible.” Wizard laughed and disappeared into the elevator.

Jason’s heart raced as he flew into Ted’s office.

“Are the rumors true?”

Ted sat with his elbow propped up on the armrest of the charcoal gray club chair, his palm supporting his chin. He nodded to Jason. “Close the door and sit down.”

Jason complied and sat at the edge of the black leather sofa adjacent to the club chair. He knew from the creases in Ted’s pale profile that celebrating was premature. Jason’s fingertips ached.

Ted finally spoke. “Tell me what they’re saying.”

Jason repeated Wizard’s message and watched Ted shake his head in dismay.

“Fucking rumors, I wish it were that easy. I’ve asked the Board to consider charges of price manipulation against Pokie and Malcolm. But that’s a long way from imposing a liquidation order. The last time the Exchange changed the rules at the end, during the potato squeeze, the press crucified us.”

Jason felt deflated, but knew the Board was Ted’s personal fiefdom. “Aren’t you the chairman?”

Ted scowled, as though Jason had labeled him a mobster. “On something like this, only the public members of the Board act as judge and jury. Congress made the Exchange an SRO--a self-regulatory organization--but Washington carefully monitors our proceedings.”

Jason wondered whether Ted understated his influence. “What’s the main roadblock to getting a liquidation order?”

“Winslow Guthridge.”

“Who?”

“He chairs the three-person committee hearing the charges.”

“So what’s the problem?”

“He’s a retired Congressman from Texas. Pokie’s old man, T.J., financed every one of his campaigns. Before they kept records, of course.”

Ted paused, his eyes boring into Jason’s. And then he added:

“You’ve got to convince Guthridge that Pokie and Malcolm colluded to manipulate the price of silver.”

Adrenalin squeezed into Jason’s stomach and energized him. He relished the opportunity to repair the damage.

“When’s this supposed to happen?”

“About half an hour from now . . . I know it’s short notice, but I filed charges with the compliance department right after the close and they notified Pokie and Malcolm.”

Jason’s brain shifted into overdrive. “Who’s invited to the hearing?”

“The principals--Pokie, Malcolm and me--plus one other person each. I’m bringing you. I expect Malcolm to have Lisa--after all she’s his clearing and compliance expert. And I guess Pokie ‘ll bring Train since he executed the orders.”

Lisa’s presence disappointed Jason, recalling their earlier harsh

encounter, but he had no say. “What about lawyers?”

Ted frowned while shaking his head. “This isn’t a judicial proceeding, as you’ll see. I’m sure Pokie won’t waste his second slot on an attorney. But feel free to check for legal loopholes.”

Jason worried more about his credibility than the commodities code. “Isn’t there someone else to help buttress our case? I’m not exactly an unbiased witness.”

Ted sighed heavily and looked toward the picture window where the sun sat low in the sky, foreshadowing twilight’s treachery. “Testifying against Pokie is life-threatening. I’d rather not involve anyone else--unless I have to.”

Ted’s warning froze the hair on Jason’s neck. He recalled Dana’s premonition, as Ted continued.

“I’m also worried about the Exchange’s reputation for fair play. If there were any other way . . .”

“Holy shit, I forgot about Raoul.” Jason looked at his watch. It was six-forty-five.

“What about him?” Ted’s eyes widened.

“Damn . . . Right before you called I wanted to contact Raoul. I think he can help.”

Ted clasped his hands in his lap and cocked his head towards Jason. “Let’s hear.”

“I assume you know they released Anna.” Jason paused but Ted remained immobile. “That means, and I know this sounds crazy, that Raoul can reinstate the bullion loan.”

A smile crept across Ted’s lips. “You refuse to give up. I like that. Do you really think he’ll risk it again?”

“We’ve got nothing to lose by trying.” Jason savored Ted’s praise. He

knew Raoul would not hesitate.

Ted picked up the receiver and handed it to Jason. “This would solve everything.”

Jason dialed, praying that Raoul could reinstate the bullion loan by tomorrow morning.

“Raoul?” Jason heard only static silence. “Raoul, are you there?”

“I just walked in and was about to call you.” Raoul spoke in a staccato. “I wish you could have seen Anna’s face. You deserved that reward more than anyone.”

“Her smile was my strength since this began.”

“Let me put her on the phone.”

“No, Raoul, not now.”

“Oh. . .”

Jason sensed Raoul’s letdown. “I need your help.”

“Of course, how foolish of me. What can I do?”

“The bullion loan, Raoul. We need it reinstated immediately to save our company.”

Jason glanced at Ted, his black hair spackled with gray and parted neatly on the left, sitting pensively in the club chair. He wanted desperately to rectify the rift and reverse the ruin. He knew Raoul was the antidote and heard him exhale into the receiver. The silence sent a chill through Jason’s spine. “Did you hear me, Raoul?”

“All I have I would gladly give you. But this I cannot do. . .”

“How can you say that?” Jason’s heart pounded in protest.

“Please, Jason. Right before returning Anna they forced me to resign from the Silarco Board.”

“C’mon Raoul. You’re still the Finance Minister.”

“That’s true, my friend, but Silarco’s an independent agency. D’you remember that Anna’s kidnapping occurred during a board meeting?”

“Yes.”

“Well, my enemies had voted to terminate the bullion lending program. Yours was the last one authorized. I’ll settle the score here, but I’m afraid not in time to save your firm . . . I’m sorry.”

“My God.”

Jason knew from the cold sweat on his brow that his face had turned pasty white. The escalating conflict with Pokie Kraft continued unchecked. He saw Ted pointing to his watch and knew that time had run out. He apologized to Raoul and hung up the phone.

* * * *

Jason and Ted walked towards the Comex boardroom at the end of the corridor and entered the high-ceilinged room. Former Comex chairmen gazed from antique-framed portraits towards a lacquered rosewood table, decorated with gold inlay. Black velvet upholstered chairs lined the perimeter of the room, with fewer than a dozen arranged at the table. Stained glass windows, bordered by plush purple drapes, created an almost regal setting.

The imposing room, together with the tension of the moment, sent a tingling sensation across Jason’s chest. He knew the next few hours would determine his fate, as he observed two men and a woman standing near a ornate credenza in the corner.

“Win, I’m glad you could make it on such short notice,” Ted said shaking hands. “Jason, I’d like you to meet Congressman Winslow Guthridge.”

Guthridge flashed a politician’s smile beneath perfectly coifed white hair. “Pleased to meet you, young man.”

Jason engaged Guthridge’s steel gray eyes with apprehension, knowing

their insincerity. “Congressman.” He could only hope that Ted had overstated Guthridge’s connection with the Kraft family.

Ted introduced David Yorick, Dean of the Faculty at Princeton University. His bushy black eyebrows and a floppy ivy league bow-tie lent a rumpled appearance. Everyone knew Yorick’s definitive biography praising Teddy Roosevelt’s trust-busting activities. Jason expected a sympathetic ear from the Professor.

Ted turned toward the only woman on the Comex Board. “Jason, this is Sally Coopersmith of Darby and Coopersmith.”

“I’ve heard your work for Citicorp saved the day,” Jason said. He knew that beneath Coopersmith’s blond hair, refined cheekbones, and tailored beige suit lay the most powerful public relations person in the country. The forty-year old former Yale Law Review editor singlehandedly resuscitated Citicorp after its Latin American loan disaster. Jason knew she would be the swing vote on the committee--a difficult one given the public relations nightmare a Comex liquidation order would unleash.

Before Jason could pursue the conversation, a Texas twang made him turn towards the doorway.

“Well now, if it ain’t ma favorite Congressman.” Pokie Kraft entered the room wearing his trademark white Stetson, followed closely by Malcolm and Lisa. Pokie clasped his beefy hands around Guthridge’s and pumped until the Congressman looked faint.

“Wi . . . ah mean, Mr. Congressman, ah’d like to introduce Malcolm Thorndike and Lisa Allen. They represent the Swiss investors in this heah misapprehension.”

Jason watched Malcolm’s wavy blond hair fall across his forehead while greeting Guthridge. He had become accustomed to Malcom as an adversary,

but watching Lisa at his side, her blue eyes acknowledging Guthridge with a blink, saddened him. The saving grace was the tactical error of Malcolm and Lisa accompanying Pokie into the room. Only Train, who was missing, belonged with Pokie. He knew from his litigation days that Pokie should have physically distanced himself from his alleged co-manipulators. This was their first mistake, he thought, as Guthridge introduced the entourage to Yorick and Coopersmith.

“Well now,” Guthridge intoned surveying the group, “It looks like we’ve got a quorum.”

“Mr. Congressman, ah’d appreciate holdin’ on for a coupla’ minutes.”

“What’s the problem, Parker?”

“Well, ya see, ah tol’ ma attorney about this hearin’ and he’d like to join us.”

Jason watched Guthridge’s eyebrows jump as Pokie’s grin broadened. This caught everyone off guard, he thought, as his palms moistened.

“Now, Parker, you know we don’t follow courtroom procedures . . .”

“Congressman, ma attorney’s comin’ as friend and personal advisor. He’s replacin’ ma broker, Train.”

“Well then, I have no objections. How long do we have to wait?”

Pokie looked at his watch and glanced at the door. “Oh, here he comes . . . Congressman, ah’d like to present Robert Whitehead, managing partner of Bartlett and Taft.”

Whitehead carried his trim six-foot frame towards the assemblage as Jason staggered, suppressing the sickness that swelled his stomach. His mind reeled to Whitehead dropping Harris Trading as a client to pursue more lucrative opportunities, with feigned disdain for the commodities industry as a smokescreen. He knew Whitehead’s services were for sale to the highest

bidder and should have suspected he would follow the money into Pokie's bed. The word "whore" bounced in Jason's brain as Ted's clenched teeth muttered:

"Fucking snake."

Jason leaned towards Ted. "His camouflage is corroding."

Guthridge broke through the crowd and extended his hand to Whitehead. "It's an honor to meet the dean of the American Bar Association. I very much enjoyed your work on the hill."

"It's a pleasure, Mr. Congressman. Senator Helms was kind enough to let me tag along on his whirlwind tour."

Jason knew Whitehead shared the same conservative streak as the reactionary Republican from North Carolina. Helms apologized for the tobacco trusts while Whitehead fronted for tycoon terrorists.

"Nonsense." Guthridge waved his hand. "The Foreign Relations Committee exploited your contacts in Europe and Latin America."

"I'm honored." Whitehead inclined his head, with its perfectly groomed salt and pepper hair, and charmed Yorick and Coopersmith with a smile. He then turned towards Ted and Jason.

"I wish we could've met in other circumstances."

In a dark alley, Jason thought, as Guthridge, recovered from fawning over Whitehead, asked everyone to sit at the table. Jason feared their prospects had worsened.

Lined pads and number two pencils marked the place settings around the rosewood table top. The three board members sat at the head of the rectangle, with Guthridge flanked by Yorick and Coopersmith. Whitehead and Pokie maneuvered to one side, while Malcolm and Lisa captured the other, forcing Jason and Ted to sit at the far end opposite the committee. Jason recognized Whitehead's subliminal litigation tactics at work. He was a

formidable opponent.

Guthridge called the meeting to order. “I’d like to remind everyone that we’re here to consider the manipulation allegations by Ted Harris against Parker Kraft’s Barr and Company and Malcolm Thorndike’s Swiss Consortium. We’ll examine the charges first,” Guthridge said, nodding toward Ted Harris. “But I want to emphasize that diversionary testimony won’t be tolerated.”

Jason wondered whether Guthridge’s admonition was designed to exclude mention of Anna’s kidnapping. Reuters had reported the Peruvian events as a domestic dispute with international ramifications. Without proof of Pokie’s complicity, Jason knew it would be a fruitless strategy.

“I can assure you, Mr. Chairman, that we won’t stray,” Ted said, picking up a pencil and pointing the eraser at his chin. “I’d like to ask Jason Novack to describe how Parker Kraft’s broker, known as Train, and Malcolm Thorndike colluded to manipulate silver prices.”

“Does Mr. Novack have any expertise to judge collusive behavior?” It was Sally Coopersmith slinging the first arrow, removing any doubt about her initial sentiments.

“He’s Harris Trading’s broker and chief trading strategist,” Ted said without hesitating. The exaggeration please Jason.

Guthridge nodded in Jason’s direction. “Well then, let’s hear what you have to say, Mr. Novack.”

Jason smiled at each committee member to smooth the chronicle ripening in his brain. “I’d like to begin by describing how Parker Kraft’s broker drove up the price of September silver from the six dollar range in the beginning of June to over thirteen . . .”

“Excuse me, Mr. Novack.” Guthridge shook his head. “But this hearing focuses on *collusion* between Malcolm Thorndike’s Swiss Consortium and

Parker Kraft's Barr and Company. It's my understanding that the Swiss group didn't exist until mid-August, when they hired away Mr. Thorndike and Ms. Allen from Harris Trading. Your story may be interesting but it's irrelevant."

Jason sensed Ted's body brace with concern. Out of the corner of his eye he watched his boss scribble the word "careful" in capital letters on his pad. Jason had anticipated Guthridge's objection but knew the background was important for the other committee members. Guthridge was already a lost cause.

"I apologize, Mr. Congressman, this preamble is a brief but necessary historical framework for understanding why Parker Kraft would collude to manipulate the price of silver. My entire presentation will take less than ten minutes."

"I'm not inclined . . ."

"I think it's crucial to hear Mr. Novack's entire viewpoint." Yorick interrupted. "A ten minute time limit seems like a reasonable allotment."

Jason knew the historical perspective would appeal to the Professor. He watched Guthridge suppress a glare, while saying, "Very well, but ten minutes is all you'll get."

Jason exhaled and began his tale as though he were narrating a documentary. He described the trade-by-trade purchases of Pokie's broker between June 15 and August 15, giving not only the prices and the amounts purchased, but also identifying traders in the pit who had been steamrolled by Train's relentless buying. Jason had learned during his first visit to the Exchange that he had total recall of every single transaction. He could literally see the unfolding drama flicker across his brain.

David Yorick and Sally Coopersmith consumed Jason's script as though it were a detective thriller. Jason knew his photographic record was the only

trail left by Pokie's rampage. In the commodities markets, unlike the stock market, individual trades were not recorded on a ticker.

As Jason launched into the late-August collaboration between Train and Malcolm's newly formed Swiss Consortium, he watched Yorick and Coopersmith sit forward in their seats, resting their elbows on the rosewood table. They grimaced when he explained how Malcolm and Train bullied their opposition with tag-team wrestling tactics. Out of the corner of his eye he watched Ted inscribe the word "brilliant" in large block letters on his pad. He relished the tribute and rested his case.

Guthridge broke the silence following Jason's summation.

"That was quite a tale, Mr. Novack. I'd like to give the alleged conspirators a chance to defend themselves." Guthridge glanced towards Pokie and Whitehead on one side and then to Malcolm and Lisa on the other. "Anyone care to respond?"

"Ah'd very much like ma friend, Robert Whitehead, to share some information with ya to put all this in perspective. Will that be alright?" Pokie forced his grin on Guthridge.

"As long as it's to the point, we'd be anxious to hear it, Parker."

Whitehead sat back in his chair, squared his shoulders towards the committee, and engaged their attention with his confident posture.

"This committee is charged with determining whether Parker Kraft's Barr and Company and Malcolm Thorndike's Swiss Consortium colluded to manipulate silver prices. I don't envy your predicament because your findings have ramifications beyond the narrow confines of this room. Comex's silver market is worldwide in scope. Mr. Thorndike represents Swiss investors and Parker Kraft's partners in Barr are Middle East oil sheiks. I have a communication from them which I'd like to avoid publicizing because it's so

inflammatory. Please bear with me, therefore, while I make two points--one legal and the other personal.”

Whitehead waited for the committee’s acquiescence, surveying the room as though it were his fiefdom. When Guthridge nodded his approval he continued.

“Thank you. Let me begin with the rather stringent standards required to prove manipulative behavior. You must be convinced that Parker Kraft purchased silver with the *intent* to distort prices. It’s not sufficient to know that he bought, or even that he purchased quite a bit. He’s been doing that as an investor for at least five years, as have millions of other inflation-wearing Americans. You must look inside his head and be convinced of manipulative intentions.”

Whitehead paused and fingered his burgundy tie. “So disciplinary action may be uncalled for even if Mr. Novack’s tale of Train’s purchases were true. But there’s good reason to suspect that Mr. Novack fabricated his story. And unfortunately, to convince you of that I must raise some rather painful personal issues.”

Whitehead turned towards Jason, tugging his french cuffs so they extended the requisite half inch beyond his jacket sleeve. Whitehead’s glare singed Jason’s confidence. He had not anticipated a personal attack. Whitehead spoke softly.

“Mr. Novack’s finances are a shambles and his daughter faces life as a cripple unless she’s miraculously cured in surgery scheduled two days from now. In my heart I wish him well but my head says this is a desperate man. It’s no accident that his trading yarn is impossible to verify. If there were formal records of individual transactions I’m fairly certain they’d contradict every word he said. . . You see, Jason Novack is a congenital liar. He lied

while working for me at Bartlett and Taft when the stakes were much lower. That's why we let him go. He would surely distort the facts to avoid . . ."

Jason jumped from his seat, unable to restrain himself. "You're a disgrace to the legal profession . . ."

"Silence, Mr. Novack, and sit down. You'll have your chance to respond," Guthridge shouted over Jason's shriek. "Continue Counselor."

Whitehead then turned to the committee. "Unless Mr. Novack's story can be corroborated, I urge you not to interfere with the marketplace. It would be a travesty to sink Comex's hard-earned reputation for fair play on a fairy tale."

Jason seethed as the sound of air conditioning dominated the room. Goose bumps erupted from his elbows to his wrists, stiffening the hair on his arms. He knew Whitehead's international reputation had impugned his testimony. Jason hated him for perverting his exit from Bartlett and Taft. But resurrecting his credibility could not nullify Whitehead's point on proving manipulation. In a court of law Jason's trading recitation would convict no one.

A sharp crack broke the silence as Ted's thumb snapped his pencil in half. Everyone stared at him when a female voice announced:

"I can corroborate Jason Novack's testimony."

Jason could not believe what Lisa Allen had just said. His heart blushed, heating the blood rushing through his veins. Lisa was about to throw away her career to save him. He held his breath as all eyes shifted to the raven-haired compliance expert seated beside a suddenly glum Malcolm Thorndike. Pokie Kraft smothered his grin and punctured the numbed hush with a peremptory challenge.

"Ah'd like the committee to impose a gag order on this woman. She's a

former employee of Harris Trading and they musta' paid her to spy on us."

Guthridge cleared his throat. "Perhaps we should take a break . . ."

"Mr. Chairman, the hour's late and we've still got a way to go. I can assure Mr. Kraft that we'll weigh Ms. Allen's testimony accordingly." It was Sally Coopersmith saving Lisa's treachery.

Pokie's stare slashed with deadly intent between the two women. It was useless intimidation, as David Yorick chimed in.

"I'd also like to hear an unvarnished version of what Ms. Allen's got to say."

Guthridge fought for breathing room by stretching his shirt collar. "Very well, Ms. Allen, you may proceed, but I warn you of legal consequences to your testimony."

Lisa's wary blue eyes focused on the three committee members. She caressed the inch long scar near her scalp and spoke with a strain.

"I had no intention of speaking here tonight, but I refuse to endure this malicious attack on Jason Novack's credibility. Although loyalty often dominates integrity, Robert Whitehead's scurrilous accusations prompt me to defend Mr. Novack."

Jason's spirits soared with Lisa's support. Whitehead's pallor proclaimed she had won the committee's attention.

Lisa moistened her lips with a sip of ice water. "It's impossible to reconstruct the precise trading chronology, but I can document another dimension of collusion between the Swiss Consortium and Barr and Company. I was hired by Malcolm Thorndike to handle all back office functions, most importantly, relations with the Clearing Corporation. Among other things, Clearing monitors whether traders violate the maximum number of contracts permitted under Exchange rules. Everyone in the silver pit suspected that

Barr had bumped up against the ceiling. I knew the rumors were true on the first day we opened for business when Malcolm authorized Barr's trades transferred to our account at the Clearing Corporation. He doctored brokerage slips after the close of trading to justify the transfer . . ."

"Excuse me, Ms. Allen, but that's illegal. Why didn't you protest?"

David Yorick arched his bushy eyebrows while leaning forward.

Lisa exhaled. "I did, but Malcolm explained that he was supposed to execute the trades himself. He promised it wouldn't happen again."

"Did it?"

"I'm afraid so."

"And did you report it then?" Yorick pressured Lisa further.

"No, there was always an excuse to justify the ex postea transfer of trades to our account . . . My employment blinded my judgment, I guess."

A pause in the proceedings opened the way for Guthridge. "Is there anything else you care to reveal after the fact, Ms. Allen?"

Lisa flushed and lowered her eyes. "I think I've said enough."

Jason noticed Pokie's glare shifting to Lisa's right, marking Malcolm for failure to control her. Thorndike bit the inside of his cheek, brushed back his blond wave, and addressed the committee.

"I've been in this business for over four years and have never been disciplined--not here or in Chicago. I categorically deny the allegations that I falsified brokerage statements. I don't have to cheat to make a great living in this business." Malcolm then twisted his seat so that he faced Lisa next to him. "I think the committee should know that Lisa Allen spent the past two months trying to seduce Jason Novack. She can't be trusted."

Lisa's eyes fumed at Malcolm as Jason's pulse raged. He wondered how to respond when Sally Coopersmith mocked:

“Is that why you hired her, Mr. Thorndike?”

Jason watched a smile flicker across Ted Harris’ lips as the fragile-framed public relations superstar skewered Malcolm. Pokie’s dagger threatened to riposte but Ted took the offensive.

“Mr. Chairman, I think the committee has enough evidence to consider sanctions against Parker Kraft’s Barr and Company and Malcolm Thorndike’s Swiss Consortium. The only way to undo their scheme is to force them to sell their positions. I urge that you issue a liquidation order immediately.”

Guthridge seemed offended by Ted’s request. “I don’t think a rush to judgment makes sense. The stakes are too high . . . Does anyone have anything to add?”

Everyone’s eyes toured the table, except for Robert Whitehead, who cleared his throat.

“Mr. Chairman, I’m afraid that I must raise an issue that I’d hoped to suppress. Mr. Kraft’s Arab partners in Barr and Company have sent a warning concerning the rumored liquidation order reported by Reuters. I’d like to read the communication.”

Guthridge waved his approval.

Whitehead donned his half glasses and read from a sheet of paper.

My Dear Parker,

We were greatly saddened to hear that Comex is considering a liquidation order threatening the phenomenal profit we earned today. You assured us that, unlike stocks, silver futures traded in a freely competitive environment. We will hold you personally liable for regulatory interference and will employ every means at our disposal to prevent such illegal confiscation of our rightful profits.

Prince Jabri

*Managing Partner,
Pan Arab Investment Company, Ltd.*

Whitehead slipped off his reading glasses and placed them on the letter in front of him. “I mentioned earlier that this committee’s decision has worldwide ramifications. My experience in international affairs suggests that a liquidation order of questionable legality based on flimsy evidence could trigger a crisis of mammoth proportions. I urge reason and restraint in your deliberations.”

Jason cringed as Whitehead’s words twisted Pokie into a helpless victim. The glum expressions of the committee members telegraphed their concern. Ted broke the silence.

“Sanctioning collusive behavior simply because foreign investors threaten reprisals spells the end of Comex. I hope this committee will do what’s right given the evidence presented, rather than what’s easiest. Our very existence as an exchange depends on your courage.”

Guthridge’s eyes darted between Yorick on his left and Coopersmith on his right. Neither moved a muscle, as he announced:

“Give me a moment to speak with my colleagues.”

Jason watched the committee members huddle at the head of the table. He wondered what common ground could unite their disparate views when Guthridge signaled for order.

“We’ve agreed there’s sufficient evidence to determine whether a liquidation order is appropriate. We’ll release our decision at eight o’clock tomorrow morning. This meeting stands adjourned.”

The sound of shuffling shoes rustled through the room as everyone stood. Jason felt Ted tug his sleeve. He bent so that his boss could whisper

in his ear. “Bashir ‘ll be in at seven. Why don’t you help him prepare and then come to the office around seven forty-five.”

“Fine.” Jason pulled away but Ted held his arm tightly and added:

“Meanwhile, I’ve got some negotiating at the Clearing Corporation. Make certain Lisa gets home safely . . . Do you understand me?”

“Absolutely.” Jason’s spine shivered with Ted hastening from the room.

Chapter Fifteen

A sinister stillness smothered the deserted building as Jason paced the lobby waiting for Lisa. He had left her in the boardroom with the three committee members present to avoid any hint of impropriety between them. Malcolm had exited with Pokie and Whitehead, distancing himself from Lisa's treason. Jason worried that his easy familiarity with Four World Trade Center had dulled his vigilance. The nighttime hush magnified the ringing arrival of elevators from the exchange floor. His heart sank each time Lisa failed to emerge.

Jason conjured up images of Pokie's henchmen lurking for Lisa in darkened hallways. He considered searching upstairs but could not risk missing her in a passing elevator. Jason pressed his forehead against the glass wall facing a lonely Liberty Street, the cool surface taming the tension, when a poke in the ribs jolted him. His pulse quickened until the familiar musky scent soothed his nostrils.

"Waiting for someone?"

"Please don't ever do that again," he said, facing Lisa.

"What's that?"

"Sneak up behind me . . . How'd you get here anyway? I didn't hear the elevator."

"The stairs work in this building, in case you didn't know. Four flights is just the right amount of exercise."

Lisa's eyes wore a weary shade of blue; Jason sensed her unease. "I don't think it's smart for you to frequent deserted stairwells."

"There were two people I didn't recognize upstairs standing near the elevator bank. I thought the stairs were safer."

"C'mon, let me take you home." Jason held Lisa's elbow, escorted her outside and into a passing taxi.

Street lamps glared as they drove uptown; Jason considered where to begin. Lisa's rescue had overwhelmed him. He broke the silence as they approached her building. "Your courage is exceeded only by my gratitude. I still can't believe what happened back there."

Jason glanced sideways and caught Lisa weighing her words. "I had no choice. I did what was necessary."

"That may be but you've endangered your life while preserving mine."

"Let's not get melodramatic, Jason."

"It's not just me. Ted's been worried about Pokie's vindictiveness."

"I'll be fine."

The taxi stopped in the driveway. "I'd like to come up and see that everything's secure."

Lisa hesitated while opening the door. "I've got two doormen for protection."

Jason chuckled. "If it's the same old geezers you're probably safe from a frisbee attack."

"Fine. Let's go."

Jason paid the cabbie and entered the building. A glance at the uniformed mustaches guarding the mirrored lobby made him wonder whether he had exaggerated their competence. Only the half-dozen surveillance monitors surrounding the reception desk comforted him.

They entered the elevator and Lisa pushed twenty.

“Hmm. . . top floor. What’s on the roof?”

“Pigeons.”

“Damn. They could be armed. I’d like to examine the access door.”

Jason knew the banter masked a shared tension.

They exited the elevator and Lisa walked down the well-lit hall to her apartment. She pointed to the fire stairwell.

“This leads to the roof. Why don’t you check it and then come to search the closets.”

Jason watched Lisa disappear into her doorway and then entered the stairwell. A short flight up was the steel fire door to the roof, with the standard sign: ‘Alarmed: Open Only in Emergency.’ He found it securely fastened, restrained himself from testing the system, and returned to Lisa’s door. He knocked while staring at the peephole. He waited impatiently for her response.

The methodical click of the lock’s tumbler triggered his stomach acid. He knew he should have escorted her inside before going to the roof. Jason’s shoulders slumped in relief when Lisa opened the door, holding a half empty glass.

“I feel safer already with the help of Southern Comfort.” Lisa toasted him with a smile.

Jason entered an airy room bathed in beige, with a contemporary cream sofa softened by plush caramel carpeting. Straight ahead the yawning glass doors to a terrace invited a soothing breeze.

“Care for a drink?” Lisa walked towards the built-in bar and stereo.

“Coke’s fine, thanks.”

“Oh please, I’m adding rum whether you like it or not.” Lisa handed him

the mixed drink while sitting on a barstool, its bleached wood framing her fitted black skirt and matching blouse.

Jason swallowed the sweetened liquor and felt the draining adrenalin enervate him. "Today's roller coaster ride took its toll."

"You don't have to tell me."

"Actually, I think I do because I owe you an apology."

Lisa smiled. "Only one?"

Jason accepted her challenge. "Well, at least let me start by apologizing for saying you had . . ."

"A guilty conscience?"

"Hmm . . . I guess you remember that one."

Lisa laughed deep inside her throat and gulped her remaining drink. "At the time I was mortified, but when Reuters reported the kidnapping I understood what had happened"

"Was it so obvious?"

"Only because I knew about your relationship with Raoul."

The liquor in Jason's empty stomach simmered through his veins. He put down his glass as a thin film of perspiration covered his brow, and steadied himself against the bar. "It sounds like my buying spree didn't surprise you."

"Excuse me?"

"Ted blasted me for accommodating the terrorists while saving Anna."

"I don't know if I'd have waited as long as you did."

Lisa's compassion warmed his wounds and withered his spine. "Thank you." He leaned over and grazed her cheek with a kiss. Lisa's perfume enticed him to linger. She tugged at his shaggy brown hair and slid his lips toward her neck. Lisa cringed with the spark of smoldering electricity.

"God, that feels good," she murmured into his ear.

A warm breeze from the balcony dried Jason's damp forehead as warning bells blared in his brain. He pulled away with fear. "The terrace."

"What?"

"It's only a short jump from the roof to your balcony."

Lisa caressed her neck and chuckled. "Is that what's on your mind?"

"Your safety's more important than anything right now."

She stared at him. "The former tenants had those sliding doors alarmed, but I've hardly used it."

"Well, you will tonight." Jason sat on a bar stool.

Lisa shook her head. "Do you really think all these precautions are necessary?"

"All I can say is that Ted suspects that Pokie was behind Anna's kidnapping."

"Any reason you didn't raise that at the hearing?"

"Why, so that Whitehead could label me a lunatic? We don't have a shred of hard evidence."

Lisa nodded. "I guess that's reason enough."

Jason took Lisa's hand in his. "I can't let anything happen to you. If you promise to set the alarm, I'll pick you up around six forty-five and we'll have breakfast downtown."

"Fine, but it's the last favor I'm doing for you."

Lisa walked Jason to the door. He left, heard the tumbler click, and headed home.

* * * *

The blackness of the room ignited sparkles in his eyes as he stared at the ceiling. Confusion covered Bashir as he lie in bed, replaying the telephone

report from Ali about the Comex board meeting, courtesy of Pokie Kraft. He agreed that Lisa Allen's betrayal combined with Sally Coopersmith's sympathy could easily sink the scheme to corner silver. But he resisted Ali's support for Pokie's countermeasures.

Ali correctly argued that an uncontested liquidation order could sow dissension among their group. Bashir knew that Malcolm forged a fragile link. But he resented Ali endorsing Pokie's reprisals designed simply to bolster international terrorist cooperation. The problem was Ali adopted Pokie's vision of terrorist unity, just as he embraced the Texan when they met in the Brooklyn apartment. Bashir feared that preoccupation with terrorist unity could subvert their mission of mass murder. Money was less important to him than mayhem.

The six-year age difference between Ali and Bashir explained their disagreement. Ali had participated in the Tel Aviv airport massacre with the Japanese Red Army, indelibly imprinting the power of international terrorist cooperation on his impressionable teenage mind.

Bashir, in contrast, had experienced nothing but frustration from attempted coordination, even among Arab guerrilla groups. The *Brotherhood* still smarted from their arch-enemy, *Hamas*, undermining their effort to overthrow Jordan's King Hussein because of clan rivalries.

Ali bought Bashir's cooperation with a concession. A short circuit in the storeroom would turn Malcolm into a target. Bashir almost wished for a mishap.

Chapter Sixteen

Jason arrived home with Dana already asleep. He slipped into bed and sweated through a fitful night tossing the day's trauma in his head. His nightmare of Pokie and Whitehead burying him in the pit dissolved with Lisa delivering him from death. His pulse rose and fell with the ruin and resurrection.

Dawn filtered through the curtains, bringing relief from the recurring drama. He rose quietly and dressed quickly, ruffled by Dana's rhythmic breathing. He wanted desperately to wake her to defuse the tension, but there was too little time. He left with an undercurrent of unfinished business.

Jason hailed a cab and rode down the East River Drive towards Lisa's Greenwich Village apartment. Broken clouds chiseled an orange sunrise into the whitecap waters of the East River, reflecting the mixture of promise and peril swirling in his head. He knew that if Sally Coopersmith followed her sentiments, Harris Trading would prevail, despite evidence beneath courtroom dignity. As a self-regulatory organization, Comex's disciplinary proceedings were immune from judicial injunction. A liquidation order ravaging Barr and reviving Harris Trading could not be restrained.

Jason knew victory would precipitate violence. Kidnapping Anna proved Pokie's proclivities. But this was New York, not Lima. And Pokie already camouflaged his inclinations with Prince Jabri's threatening letter. He would sustain the subterfuge by waiting until after the verdict to avenge Lisa's

treason. But neutralizing Sally Coopersmith was more pressing--it could deadlock the hearing and destroy Harris Trading. Jason realized she could be Pokie's immediate target.

Jason told the cabbie to wait after arriving at Two Fifth Avenue. He sprinted into the lobby, hoping to alert Comex security without tampering with the committee's deliberations.

"Hey, could I use your phone," he said to the doorman. "I'm a friend of Lisa Allen in 20B."

"Ah, you must be Jason Novack."

Jason forced a smile, wondering how the midnight-to-eight shift knew his name. "That's right. It's urgent but just a local call."

The doorman turned the phone on the desk towards Jason. "Is it the same emergency as Ms. Allen's?"

Jason's hand froze on the receiver, as his throat went dry. "What emergency is that?"

The doorman raised his eyebrows. "Ms. Allen flew out of here about ten minutes ago, saying there was a minor crisis and to tell you she'd meet you downtown."

Jason's heart pounded despite his brain's instructions. "Was anyone with her?"

"No . . . she literally jumped into a taxi out front while telling me to give you the message."

Jason dialed the Comex front desk.

"Security, Lofton speaking"

"Hi, Bill, this is Jason Novack with Harris Trading."

"Yes, Mr. Novack, what can I do for you?"

"Say, have you seen Lisa Allen this morning?" He knew it was a long

shot.

“Hmm . . . it’s kinda’ early for her, Mr. Novack. She’s usually not . . .”

“I know, but today’s different. Has she arrived yet?”

“Not while I’ve been here . . . since six o’clock, that is.”

“I see.” Jason’s voice trailed disappointment. “Could you check the sign-in sheet?”

“Sorry, I don’t see her name at all . . . Try around eight o’clock. That’s when she gets here--everyday, same as Mr. Thorndike.”

This Lofton guy always talks too much, Jason thought, and then realized his opportunity. “Bill, could you tell me whether last night’s board meeting is still going on?” That would be a lucky break, Jason thought.

“Naw . . . everything’s quiet now, as far as I know.”

“Then when did Sally Coopersmith sign out?”

“Geez, I don’t know, Mr. Novack, that’s before my shift . . .”

“Listen, Bill, this is an emergency. Is Chief Sullivan there, I’ve got a problem.” He knew he could not trust Lofton with his suspicions.

“Eight o’clock, Mr. Novack, just like the other big shots . . . But being that it’s you, let me check last night’s log for Ms. Coopersmith.”

Jason listened in silence, while picking at the phone cord and noticing the anxious look draped across the eavesdropping doorman's face.

“Okay, Mr. Novack, I see that Ms. Coopersmith left at eleven-thirty last night.”

“Anyone with her?” Jason hoped she had an escort.

“No . . . Congressman Guthridge and Professor Yorick checked out at eleven-fifty.”

Jason realized he had to get downtown. “Listen, Bill, when Lisa gets there don’t let her out of your sight. I’ll be there in five minutes. And if Ms.

Coopersmith calls, find out where she is and ask her to stay put. Okay?"

"But . . ."

"Bill, just do this and you'll be a hero . . . trust me." Jason hung up the phone, left Lisa's lobby and entered the waiting taxi.

"Four World Trade Center, and step on it."

* * * *

It was seven-fifteen when Jason entered the Exchange. Bill Lofton's linebacker body guarded the front desk, a bewildered look on his face.

"Sorry, Mr. Novack. Nothing to report."

Jason expected little, but was disappointed nevertheless. He paused while walking towards the swinging doors. "Listen, Bill, call my booth if either woman surfaces." He then accelerated onto the Exchange floor to see if Bashir knew Lisa's whereabouts.

Jason wove through the maze of trading booths, as clerks and traders girded for the day's battle. He strained for a glimpse of Bashir, who should have arrived at seven. It would be a real disaster if he were delayed, Jason thought, while approaching a Harris booth bereft of his head clerk. It was uncharacteristic of him to arrive late. He looked at the surrounding booths for a trace of Bashir when a soft voice from below startled him.

"Are you looking for me?"

Jason glanced at Bashir, his wiry frame crouching on the floor, holding a stack of trading cards. "I think we're gonna need our reserves for today's trading," Bashir added, closing the storage bin beneath the computer terminals.

"Gee, I'm glad to see you. Have you seen Lisa?"

Bashir seemed flustered. "Was I supposed to?"

Jason shook his head. "No, I was. Has she called?"

Bashir rose while turning towards the shelf. "Not since I've been here."

"Shit . . . I'm going into the cafeteria to see if she's there. Come get me if she arrives or calls. Okay?"

Jason backtracked through the floor towards the members' cafeteria, agitated by Lisa's absence. He expected Pokie to avoid vengeance before the verdict, but he knew Pokie's vindictiveness could easily dominate. Jason's concern mounted as he entered the cafeteria and searched in vain for Lisa's image. He caught Wizard waving frantically at him and approached a raucous breakfast gathering, hosted by the skyscraper scalper. Containers of black coffee and cans of Coke controlled the table of veteran traders.

Wizard spoke first. "It'll cost ya' five bucks to join the pool."

"What pool is that?"

"Whether Lisa shows up?"

Jason paled. "That's not funny."

Wizard reddened at the reprimand. "After her performance at the hearing you shouldn't mind if she returns to work with Malcolm."

"You know about the hearing?"

"C'mon Jason, there are no secrets around here."

Jason knew that among junkie traders, where betting was like breathing, anything uncertain was fair game. And even he did not know whether Lisa planned to arrive for a formal firing. It was obvious Wizard had no idea she was in any danger. "So I guess you haven't seen her yet."

"Nah, but some of us are hopeful." Wizard laughed.

Jason could not resist milking the rumor mill. "Is there anything floating around about the committee's decision?"

Wizard scowled, as though he were accused of espionage. "They're

guarding that like the Coke formula."

"Well, you'll have to forgive me, but I'm just a little concerned."

"It hasn't stopped Bashir from betting."

Jason was surprised that Bashir avoided discussing last night's hearing. He obviously knew about it. "What side did he take?"

"Hmm . . . that might be privileged."

"Cut it out."

"His crumpled five bucks says she's gonna show."

Jason produced a five dollar bill as Bashir's earlier silence gnawed at him. "I'll take the same bet."

"Why don't you join us for some pre-trading caffeine?"

Jason looked at his watch. It was seven-forty-five. "I've got to meet Ted. See ya' at the opening."

Jason left the cafeteria and hurried towards Ted's office, hounded by Lisa's disappearance and the committee's scheduled announcement. He passed Bill Lofton at the front desk. "Anything?"

"Sorry, Mr. Novack. Eight-oh-two is my best guess. Ms. Allen's never missed Mr. Thorndike's grand entrance."

Jason appeared at Ted's office, knocked on the door and turned the knob. It was locked. "Ted?"

He waited for an answer. He pressed his ear against the door and thought he heard voices inside. "Ted, it's Jason."

Without a response and hoping that Lisa had somehow secreted herself inside, Jason withdrew to the dark-gray leather couch outside the office. He plopped down in the center, wrestled Lisa's crisis to a corner and speculated about a liquidation order. If Comex forced Pokie and Malcolm to sell their September contracts, prices would topple. A decline to the fifteen dollar range

would revive Harris Trading by wiping out the billion dollar liability. A drop below fifteen dollars would be gravy. He could simultaneously buy back their short positions, eliminate their obligation to deliver, and lock in a profit. If September futures declined to the same thirteen dollar level as December, he could unwind his September-December spread for the \$200 million profit he had anticipated at the beginning. That would be a sweet victory, he thought as a familiar voice boomed.

“Stop counting your money.”

Jason looked up as Ted approached. “Am I glad to see you . . . Say, who’s in your office?”

Ted smiled. “I left the TV on in case someone snooped around while I was at the Clearing Corporation.”

Jason’s hope for finding Lisa faded. “There’s a problem . . .”

Ted held up his hand. “No, there’s good news and better news . . . Which do you want first?”

“I’m afraid . . .”

“Okay, I’ll give it to you piecemeal so you can enjoy it,” Ted said, unlocking the door and entering the spacious paneled office. “The good news is that Clearing just gave us until the close to settle up.”

Jason’s eyes widened. “What’s made them so accommodating?” He followed Ted inside and watched his boss grab a Macanudo from the humidor.

Ted grinned while lighting up. “They’re nervous . . . The second worst thing after owing a billion dollars is being owed a billion.”

Jason swallowed the pungent smoke, stinging the back of his throat, and wondered whether Clearing had become flexible because a liquidation order was in the offing. “It sounds to me like they’re expecting a favorable decision for us.”

Ted nodded with mock respect for Jason's perception. "Shrewd observation . . . That brings me to the better news. When I got there they disclosed the decision. Barr and the Swiss Consortium must liquidate, but they gave them a week to unwind to soften the blow."

Jason's shoulders soared. "That's phenomenal. With all that selling overhanging the market, prices will plummet immediately." And then he coughed with concern about Lisa. "Did you call anyone?"

Ted withdrew the cigar with his index and middle finger and blew a smoke ring that lingered in the air. "Nah, they wouldn't let us. We were locked up there from six-thirty until three minutes ago, when they issued the press release." Ted picked up the TV remote control and flicked on the Financial News Network. The on-screen clock read eight-oh-three and Barbara Stewart, the blond anchorwoman in a navy suit, continued her announcement.

". . . The unprecedented liquidation order, coming on the heels of yesterday's record-breaking jump in prices, promises a chaotic silver opening at Comex."

The screen switched to archive footage of Comex traders jostling for position in the pit. Stewart continued in the background. "We'll bring you more analysis in a moment, but first we have exclusive interviews with the Comex committee that rendered the liquidation order. The screen returned to Barbara Stewart flanked by Winslow Guthridge and David Yorick.

"We have with us Congressman Winslow Guthridge on my right, Chairman of the Comex committee, and Professor David Yorick of Princeton, a committee member, to help explain the reasoning behind . . ."

The absence of Sally Coopersmith from the screen sunk Jason's spirit. "Was the committee with you at Clearing this morning?"

Ted frowned. “No . . .”

“Then who were you locked up with?”

“The head of Clearing summoned Malcolm, Pokie and me for breakfast and a reading of the verdict. Why do you ask?”

Jason stared at Ted. “We have a problem . . .”

Jason described Lisa’s disappearance along with heightened concern for Sally Coopersmith’s safety. He watched Ted circle behind his desk, crush his cigar in the ash tray and smolder with rage.

“I’m going to destroy that motherfucker,” he said, gazing towards the picture window with a vacant stare.

As scarce seconds ticked away, Jason broke the silence. “I think I know where to start looking for them. Lisa entered a cab at about six-forty in front of her apartment and Sally Coopersmith left here at eleven thirty last night. We can try to trace . . .”

Ted turned towards Jason. “I’ll handle the search. I want you in the pit to unwind our positions.”

“But . . .”

“No arguments. I need you to exploit the liquidation order to save Harris Trading.”

Jason knew they had to divide responsibilities. “Fine, but give me Salieri in case . . .”

“Done,” Ted said with a perfunctory wave. “Just make sure the selling kicks in before buying back our spreads.”

“You can count on me.”

“I know.”

Jason glowed, realizing his trading responsibilities had been redeemed by yesterday’s hearings. Still, he wanted to help rescue Lisa. “Any thoughts on

where you'll begin?"

Ted drummed his fingernails on the desk. "I'm assuming he's got both of them. Pokie inherited a fondness for exploiting women from his old man . . . In fact, I don't want to alarm you but you're the only 'Pokie ambusher' who's remained unscathed."

Jason shuddered. "D'you think Dana's vulnerable?"

Ted pointed towards the phone. "Call home and check on your family."

Jason's hands trembled as he dialed. He regretted leaving home without patching up their quarrel. Their disagreements had always dissolved under the bedroom blanket, but last night's responsibilities had delayed their reconciliation. He hoped he was not too late as the phone rang a fourth time.

"Hello."

Jason blanched at the strain in Dana's voice. "Is everything okay?"

"Not really."

"What's the problem?" His heart raced.

"Toliver's office just called. They want Faith in the hospital this afternoon. He's leaving for a conference later this week and will operate tomorrow morning. I just spoke with Raoul and he wired the \$15,000 deposit."

Faith's surgery stormed to the surface, having shrouded Jason's subconscious until now. "Is she there?"

"Of course, where should she be?"

Jason realized Dana knew nothing about the danger. "Listen to me carefully . . ."

As Jason explained he heard Dana cover the receiver and tell Faith she would have to wait. When he finished, she said: "Okay, now here's your Daddy . . . Say hello and then give me the phone."

"Daddy?"

“Yes, sweetheart.”

“I’m going to cry.”

“Listen, Honey. I want you to be a big girl and do what Mommy says. She’ll get you ready for Dr. Toliver to make you better.”

“What about you, Daddy?” Faith’s voice quivered.

“I’ll be there later, right after I finish work.”

“Promise?”

“Yes, I promise.” Jason ached at missing Faith’s departure for the hospital. He wanted to comfort her with a hug but he had to settle for second best. “Okay, now here’s a big kiss and then let talk to Andrew.”

“Sorry, Daddy, he’s punished.”

“Why’s that?”

“He locked Mrs. Archibald in the closet. They were playing soldiers.”

“Alright,” Jason chuckled. “I’ll give you an extra big kiss for both of you then put Mommy on.” Jason smacked his lips against the receiver, sending a loud smooching sound into the phone. He saw a reluctant grin grind across Ted’s lips.

“Well, now,” Dana said. “At least I get one second hand.”

Jason smiled. “There’ll be lots more if we get through the next day or two.”

“You hold up your end and I’ll do my part.”

“It’s a deal . . . just be careful.”

“Okay. Good luck.”

“You too. I’ll see you later at the hospital.”

“Oh, one more thing. Thank Bashir for giving you the message.”

Jason’s stomach heaved at Bashir’s name. “What are you talking about?”

“I called the booth and asked Bashir to tell you I was taking Faith to Lenox Hill . . . I assume that’s why you called back so quickly.”

Jason trembled. He had forgotten to share his earlier suspicions about Bashir with Ted. He could not alarm Dana with this speculation, but had to take precautions. “Call Ted’s office if you want me later. The booth will be too busy. Okay?”

“Fine.”

Jason hung up the phone as Ted furrowed his brow. “Now, what was *that* all about?”

Chapter Seventeen

Ted slumped down in his high-backed leather chair as Jason chronicled Bashir's blunders. He pursed his lips while shaking his head. "It's hard to believe he could be involved in something like this. I've known his uncle for nearly ten years . . ."

"I'm not saying he's guilty of anything. I have no proof."

"But you've raised serious concerns with his credibility. I owe you an apology."

"For?"

"Dismissing your suspicions yesterday."

"Please . . . everything about Pokie and Bashir is rank speculation. It's not even clear that a crime's been committed. There's an outside chance . . ."

"That Jimmy Hoffa's still alive."

"Fine." Jason should have known better. "Who can we enlist at this point?"

"I've got some friends at the Midtown South precinct who owe me. Meanwhile, keep Bashir's nose out of anything sensitive. You can trust Salieri to . . ."

"Holy shit," Jason said, looking at his watch. "Silver's been open for ten minutes already."

"Unbelievable. It's the first time in thirty years that I've lost track." Ted viewed the screen and smiled. "It's just as well. 'Sep' is trading at \$13.15,

same as 'Dec'. Now you can go out there and lock up our \$200 million profit. Congratulations."

"But what about . . ."

"Jason, just do it and let me take care of this. Go."

* * * *

Jason sailed onto the trading floor as the sound of screaming silver traders signaled his victory. He elbowed his way through the crowd, squeezing next to Tony Salieri.

"How could you miss this?" Salieri asked.

"You don't want to know."

"Bashir's been to the cafeteria four times looking for you."

"I'll bet . . ."

"Excuse me?"

"Never mind. Just tell me what happened." Jason turned slightly and saw Bashir in the booth talking on the phone.

"Goldman Sachs and Salomon Brothers tried to sell 'Sep' right from the opening bell," Salieri snorted. "But with no buyers the price just collapsed."

"What about Malcolm and Train?"

"They're standing around like spectators."

"Hmm . . . Salomon and Goldman are probably brokering their orders."

Jason knew it paid to mask a retreat by letting brokers unwind losing positions.

"It's possible. Either that or they're selling for commercial customers. Nobody's talking out there."

Jason looked across the pit and caught a vengeful stare from Malcolm. He longed for a trace of Lisa's hair flitting behind him--to no avail. He then

turned to Salieri.

“I want you to start buying the ‘Sep-Dec’ spread for the house account.”

“Something wrong with your voice?” Salieri’s eyebrows twitched.

“No. But Bashir looks busy in the booth, so I’ll track our position.”

“Okay. The problem is the ‘spread market’ is all over the place right now. Too chaotic.”

“I see that the last trade in both ‘Sep’ and ‘Dec’ is \$13.15. Those look like good prices to me. Let’s unwind the spread at ‘even money’.” Jason did not disclose to Salieri the \$200 million profit calculation of buying September at \$13.15 and selling December at the same price. Only Jason knew that buying back September at \$13.15 per ounce, having sold it two weeks ago at an average price of \$15.15, and simultaneously selling out December at \$13.15, the same price he bought it for, yielded a profit of two dollars per ounce. Two dollars per ounce profit on Harris Trading’s 20,000 contracts, covering 100 million ounces, would make \$200 million.

“How many spreads should I do at ‘even money’?” Salieri sounded nervous.

“Tony, I’m standing right here. When you get to 20,000 contracts I’ll stop you.”

Salieri’s eyeballs nearly popped out of his head when Jason said 20,000. He turned to the pit, raised his arms and yelled.

“‘Even’ bid for ‘Sep-Dec’.”

A second of silence greeted Salieri’s screech and then he was surrounded by a sea of sellers, led by Goldman Sachs and Salomon Brothers. Jason could barely record the transactions, as thousands of contracts flew with frenzied arm-waving. He knew they were about half done when a familiar voice fumbled in his ear.

“Your wife called before and I . . .”

Jason shook his head. “Not now Bashir, I’ve already spoken to her.”

Jason suppressed Bashir’s irritating interruption and fought to remain focused on Salieri’s trading. The selling seems to have subsided, he thought, when he heard Wizard shout from his spot at the center of the pit.

“Fourteen dollars bid for ‘Sep’.” It meant Wizard just jumped the prevailing price for September silver from \$13.15 to \$14.00 per ounce.

Jason watched the six-foot-six scalper stand motionless, without anyone selling to him. He knew that meant trouble. A successful scalper was more sensitive than a smoke alarm. Jason glimpsed clerks tumbling towards the pit clutching order tickets. A chorus of bids rang out from brokers on the top step. “Fourteen-fifty bid for ‘Sep’.” The price just increased another fifty cents. Jason realized Wizard must have seen the flurry of activity in surrounding booths.

Only one explanation made sense to Jason. The liquidation order, which had triggered the selling, must be in jeopardy. He yelled to Bashir, standing behind him. “Find out what the fuck is going on.”

Bashir scrambled into the Harris booth and then waved at Jason to join him.

“Damn it . . . Listen to me,” Jason said to Salieri, “Don’t do any more spreads. The price has gotten away from us. I’m going to check out what’s happened.”

Jason worried about leaving Salieri alone, but he had no choice. He jumped towards the Harris booth as a somber Bashir pointed at the small TV amidst the computer screens. Jason turned up the volume and heard CNN News anchor Barry Saunders, with the sober stare mastered during his Gulf War broadcasts, speaking in a deep baritone.

“Ten minutes ago we received a communication from the *Palestinian Brotherhood* threatening to destroy a New York City landmark. The attack will be carried out within twenty-four hours unless New York’s Commodity Exchange, known as Comex, rescinds emergency regulations denying Middle East investors their rightful profits.”

As Saunders paused and cupped the light brown receiver to his ear, Jason’s heart accelerated into emergency gear. He realized this was Pokie’s ultimate manipulation. It was just as he had thought. Sellers of September silver turned into buyers because Pokie’s Arab partners threatened the liquidation order. Now he understood why Pokie and his cohorts had been so confident of success. They had prepared violence to counter a rule change by the Exchange. Jason watched Saunders nod his head, preparing to speak, and felt the adrenalin squeeze into his abdomen.

“This is not the first threat directed at New York City, but it is unfolding as the most serious. The terrorists have just delivered a severed female hand to Mayor Carmine Rizzo. A note charges the Comex with theft and cites amputation at the wrist as the Koran’s punishment. We now switch to Gracie Mansion, the Mayor’s residence.”

Jason fought to suppress the retching in his stomach. He broke into a cold sweat, with his pasty skin matching that of Mayor Carmine Rizzo on the screen. As he watched the Mayor adjust his black-frame glasses, Jason prayed he would somehow eliminate Lisa and Sally Coopersmith as the most likely victims. Rizzo spoke in a high-pitched tone.

“Citizens of New York. We will not be intimidated by this cowardly threat to our city. Please remain calm and proceed with your daily business. I’m ordering the police to cancel all leaves and to increase their public presence. I’ve also contacted the Exchange chairman to determine what their

response will be. Thank you.”

The thought of Lisa’s severed hand nauseated Jason. He concentrated on Rizzo, sitting awkwardly on the screen. Seconds slipped by, with Jason immobilized by terrifying images, when Rizzo’s eyes darted sideways.

“Are we off the air? Good. . . Get that sonofabitch Harris on the phone.”

Jason tore himself from the TV screen and ran towards Ted’s office.

* * * *

Jason knocked on the door and pushed it open. Ted sat in the club chair staring at the TV, with CNN correspondent Carol Lane interviewing a deliveryman in front of the Empire State Building. He nodded for Jason to enter, a cadaverous pallor covering his usually vibrant image. Jason thought he had aged ten years since he saw him at eight-thirty-five. The stale cigar stench reminded him that was only forty-five minutes earlier.

“I can’t believe what’s happened. Do they know if it’s Lisa?”

“Who’s they?” Ted asked while clicking off the TV.

“The Mayor.”

“I told them to hold my calls.”

Jason could barely hear Ted. “Why’s that?”

“Before I speak with him about responding to the threat, I’ve got to know for sure if it’s her.”

Jason had never seen Ted paralyzed before. Lisa’s bravery at the hearing must have touched a nerve, he thought, while leaning his backside against the desk. He probed slowly. “How will you know?”

Ted lifted his eyes. “A limo picked up Sally Coopersmith here last night. She supposedly flew to Chicago on a charter. I’m waiting for a return call from

her office confirming she's at her nine o'clock meeting with the Pritzker family."

Jason's shoulders sagged. "What about Lisa's cab?"

"It's a dead end. The dispatchers won't get today's logs until the cabbies return to the garage. That'll be after four o'clock this afternoon."

"Then how will you know if it's her?"

"I've spoken with my friend, Captain Cartwright. He's heading over to the trauma unit at Bellevue to examine the hand."

"And?"

"And then we'll know."

"I see," Jason said even though he didn't. "That's why you're waiting before getting back to the Mayor?"

Ted just stared. Jason continued. "We're losing precious time here. Why don't you let . . ."

"No!" Ted jerked his head while gripping the armrests until his knuckles whitened. "You don't understand. This is all my fault."

Jason shook his head in confusion. "Your fault? I'm the one Lisa stuck her neck out for last night."

Ted exhaled. "But I talked her into this mess."

Jason rubbed away the rising tension in his neck. "Now, you've lost me completely."

"Do you remember when Malcolm offered Lisa the job two weeks ago?"
A tremor tugged at Ted's chin.

"It seems more like a century ago."

"Lisa called me that night."

"She told me."

"But she didn't tell you what I said."

"Oh yes, she said you couldn't guarantee that she'd get into the pit."

Ted grimaced. “That was the cover story . . . I asked her to go with Malcolm.”

“What?” Jason could not believe Ted’s words.

“I suspected Pokie had set up the Swiss Consortium and installed Malcolm as his lackey. I needed someone on the inside to protect the Exchange from Pokie’s scheme.”

“That’s quite a sacrifice on Lisa’s part.” Jason crossed his arms in front of his chest, resentful of his exclusion from Ted’s manipulations. “I don’t know if I’d have done it.”

“How about if your father had asked?”

“Excuse me?”

“You heard me.” Ted whispered.

Jason’s head swirled like a cyclone. “I don’t understand.”

“She’s my daughter.”

“How’s that possible?” The words squeaked out of Jason’s mouth as reality turned topsy turvy in his brain.

“It’s complicated. It took until four o’clock in the morning to explain everything to her.”

Jason recalled Ted’s parental tenderness towards Lisa, but nothing else made sense. “You mean she just found out?”

“The night she called with Malcolm’s offer.”

“I can’t believe you could keep this from her.”

“I promised Lisa’s mother ten years ago that I wouldn’t say anything until after she died.”

“I thought Lisa’s mother’s in a nursing home?”

“Elizabeth’s as good as dead. It’s the final stages of Alzheimer’s.”

The ringing of Ted’s private telephone silenced both of them.

Chapter Eighteen

A thin blanket provided scant protection from the cool moisture covering her clammy skin. Her eyelids felt drugged, reminding her of the hospital recovery room after her appendectomy. Only this time the dull pain sliced through her left wrist rather than her abdomen.

She fluttered her eyelids as the searing glow from an unshaded bulb nearly blinded her. She turned away from the light, heard air hissing into the room, and viewed a damp cinderblock wall. A time clock enclosed in a metallic gray box hung in the center. This was not the recovery room, she realized, but her bloated brain dulled her memory.

She squinted to protect her eyes and, with great effort, turned back towards the light. Two ventilator shafts in the ceiling came into view. Another quarter turn and she peeked tentatively at the bulb hanging from the ceiling. It burned her eyes. She lifted her hand to shield her view but it felt immobilized, like in a vise.

Her eyes darted towards her heavily bandaged forearm, ending in a tinge of crimson. She could not see her fingers. This must be a hallucination, she thought, as a sharp pain shattered her consciousness.

* * * *

“I think you’d better answer the phone,” Jason said, still reeling from Ted’s revelation that Lisa was his daughter.

Ted lifted the receiver. “Yes.” He listened in silence and finally said into the phone: “I’m sorry to have alarmed you for no reason. Give her my best.”

Jason knew the news was bad. “Who was that?”

Ted whispered, his eyelids drooping. “Sally Coopersmith’s executive assistant just spoke with her in Chicago. She’s at her scheduled appointment.”

Jason’s knees weakened as he realized the severed hand was Lisa’s. It was time to turn their attention to rescuing her. “Listen Ted, I’m afraid we’ve got to . . .”

“I’m waiting until Cartwright calls before I do anything,” Ted snapped.

Jason recognized Ted’s rejection of reality. “Do you think that’s necessary at this point?”

“I know it looks bad, but I must be certain.”

Jason saw there was little alternative. “How will Cartwright know for sure?”

“I told him she has a small scar on her left thumb.”

Another scar, Jason thought, as a more pressing problem surfaced. “Does Cartwright know Lisa’s your daughter?”

“No.”

“Good, let’s keep it that way. If Pokie discovers Lisa’s identity . . .” Jason cringed as Ted’s shoulders sagged. “Does he know already?”

“I’m not sure.”

“What do you mean?” Jason’s heart pounded.

Ted shook his head. “It’s possible that Elizabeth’s husband knows.”

“So.”

“Sylvan Allen worked at the Chicago Board of Trade when I started thirty

years ago.”

Jason’s stomach sank with despair. “And he knew Pokie’s father . . .”

“Everybody knew T.J. Kraft.” Ted sighed.

“I think you’d better tell me everything.”

Ted rested his elbow on the club chair’s armrest and supported his cheek with his fist. He spoke in a monotone.

“Sylvan Allen was a marketing executive for the Board of Trade when I applied for membership. He was a smooth-talking salesman who suggested I hire his wife, Elizabeth, as my clerk. Two weeks later she came to work with a black eye. I begged her to report it but she refused, having been taught in her Irish Catholic home that marriage was to be endured--forever.”

Jason caught the faraway gaze in Ted’s eyes. “When did it begin?” he asked softly.

Ted cocked his head. “I can’t say when we fell in love, but it was the most powerful emotion I’ve ever felt. For six months we just talked. That may sound quaint by current standards but Elizabeth’s religion was a powerful influence--she had considered becoming a nun. The pent-up passion finally exploded into a three-year affair . . . But my real mistake was asking her to marry me.”

Again Ted paused, this time with a wry smile, forcing Jason to ask: “Because?”

“Because a few weeks later, without warning, she and Sylvan moved to Detroit. She wrote saying she wanted to raise a family without distractions and begged me not to contact her. I loved her enough to respect her wishes.”

“And then?”

“Eighteen years later she called here to say she had Alzheimer’s and had something to tell me. After swearing me to secrecy until after she died she

revealed I was Lisa's father."

Jason's eyes widened. "What did you do?"

"Everything I could short of breaking my promise. I arranged for Lisa to receive a scholarship when she applied to Michigan and had a family friend, Fae Parker, assigned as her roommate. When Lisa needed a job after her divorce I mentioned to Fae that I needed a clerk. That's how Lisa got here. And until two weeks ago she thought I was a benevolent bachelor looking for a surrogate daughter."

Jason realized that he too had drawn that conclusion. Almost everything fell into place. "What about the scars on her forehead and thumb?"

Ted's mouth twisted with pain. "A drunken rage by Sylvan. He discovered somehow that Elizabeth contacted me, accused her of infidelity, and attacked them with a broken liquor bottle. It was the last time Elizabeth saw him."

"Did you ever hear from him? I mean, if he knew for sure . . ."

"It's been ten years and no one knows where he is."

Jason sighed, his concern with Sylvan Allen subsiding, until realizing what Ted said. "Have *you* tried to find *him*?"

Ted laughed at himself. "Not recently. Elizabeth forced me to stop years ago. It was another promise she extracted. I haven't decided whether the statute of limitations has expired on that one."

"Ted, now's not the time . . ."

"Please, Jason, all I'm interested in is getting Lisa back. I've missed too much already. I'd give everything for her safe return. Do you understand that?"

Jason understood all too well. He understood Ted's loss at having Lisa snatched from him. He understood wanting to sacrifice everything for her

safety. And he understood the feeling of impotence, as the jarring ring of Ted's private line interrupted them.

"Yes." Ted trembled while picking up the receiver. His pallor sickened to gray as he listened. "She used to work for me," he said, beads of sweat gathering across his upper lip. Finally, he clenched his teeth. "I'll be here for a while, Captain."

Ted let the receiver slide into his lap. He closed his eyes, tears streaming down his cheeks, as he mumbled. "God, this can't be happening. Please don't let it happen."

Ted's refrain reminded Jason of the day Faith was born. He had repeated the same plaintive prayer when they told him of her disability. He cried then because he blamed himself for complicity in her crisis. He wept the same way now.

* * * *

The squeaking sound of rusty hinges startled Lisa. A breeze blew across her brow and the metallic clank of a heavy door banged in her ears. She sensed someone hovering over her as she woke from her drug-induced slumber.

"Who's there?" Lisa heard her voice like an echo. The distinctive smell of leather swelled her nostrils. She turned her head, felt her cheek rub against a raw mattress and cranked open her eyelids. She saw a pair of black thick-soled shoes less than a foot in front of her nose. She lifted her eyes to see who it was when the glowing light bulb blinded her.

"Please tell me where I am and why I'm on the floor.."

And then she heard a familiar voice. "My dear Lisa, I apologize for the accommodations, but circumstances do not permit my usual hospitality."

The voice and the accent stimulated her brain. And then she remembered.

“My God, Ali, are you alright? I came right after Bashir called.” Lisa remembered leaving her apartment and speeding towards the World Trade Center to take Ali to the hospital. After that she recalled nothing.

“I’m fine. It is you that I’m concerned with right now.”

“I don’t understand.”

He squatted beside her. “I’m sorry Bashir had to trick you into coming here. But we had no choice.”

Lisa focused on Ali’s charcoal-colored eyes burning before her. “You mean you didn’t go into insulin shock?”

“The last time was more than two years ago. You were most helpful then.”

“I remember when it happened . . . God, why does my hand ache.” Lisa stared at her heavily bandaged left arm listing across her chest. “What’s happened to me?”

Ali pulled a syringe from his breast pocket and squirted liquid into the air, spraying Lisa’s face with a fine mist. “I don’t know if you’re well enough to hear, just yet.”

“Please, Ali.”

“I had to perform surgery on your hand, my dear Lisa.”

“What are you talking about? You’re not a doctor.”

“You forget I’ve been at the Children’s Hospital.”

Lisa’s eyes darted between Ali’s face and her throbbing wrist. “There was nothing wrong with my hand.”

“I’m afraid it sinned.”

“You’re not making sense,” Lisa wailed, as Ali’s needle pricked her skin,

warming the vein in her arm. Her head started to spin. “Why me?”

“Ah, my dear Lisa, that has caused some controversy among my colleagues. The Coopersmith woman came first for . . .”

Lisa’s eyelids drooped with a drug-induced slumber. Ali’s voice vanished into a vacuum.

Chapter Nineteen

Three persistent knocks at the office door startled Jason. He blinked back his dismay. "Are you expecting someone?"

Ted rubbed his forehead. "It's probably Quinn Farley. I told him to handle the Mayor, and anything else, as best he could."

Jason recalled Ted saying he would have resigned the chairmanship years ago if Farley, the executive vice president of Comex, had less outstanding administrative skills. Jason locked eyes with Ted. "Maybe we should talk first."

Ted mouthed: "Let's see what he wants." He then raised his voice. "Who is it?"

"Quinn."

"The door's open."

Quinn Farley entered, his dark blue suit and thin frame projecting a boyish-looking forty. He acknowledged Jason and turned towards Ted.

"I've got an Inspector Sheffield outside wanting to speak with you."

"Anyone else?"

"No. The Mayor's on hold, now that we've scheduled a Board meeting for eleven o'clock, and the floor committee's relieved that trading won't be suspended."

"Good work." Ted's strained expression softened. "How many Board members do you expect?"

"We've already confirmed twelve."

"Only six unaccounted for. That's more than enough." Ted waved his hand. "What's Sheffield want?"

"He's in charge of the investigation and is interviewing everyone from last night's hearing . . . Actually, he wants to see both of you." Quinn nodded towards Jason.

"Okay, bring him in," Ted said.

"There's one more thing we should discuss, but it can wait." Farley poked his head out the door to summon the inspector and Jason whispered towards Ted. "I'd like to get our story straight before . . ."

Ted shook his head, stopping Jason in mid-sentence, as Sheffield ambled in. His portly frame, thinning hair, and granny glasses, belied his position with New York City's finest.

Ted stood and extended his hand. "Inspector, I'm Ted Harris. And this is my associate, Jason Novack."

Jason exchanged nods, walked towards the picture window and leaned his shoulder against the frame. He watched Sheffield plop into the leather couch adjacent to Ted's club chair, remove a small note pad from the breast pocket of his gray tweed jacket and flip it open.

Ted looked at Farley standing in the doorway. "Quinn, we'll talk right after the Inspector's finished." Farley left and closed the door behind him.

"I'm glad you're here, Inspector," Ted said, sitting down. "We just . . ."

Sheffield cleared his throat. "Mr. Harris, let me first ask a few questions to help clarify what happened last night." He glanced at Jason. "Under ordinary circumstances, I'd want to interview you separately, but we're pressed for time considering the twenty-four hour deadline."

Jason sensed an adversarial tone that displeased him. The Inspector

continued.

“Now, I don’t pretend to penetrate all of the financial manipulations here, but I understand that Mr. Parker Kraft’s company stands to lose a lot of money from this liquidation order. I’ve spoken with him . . .”

“That’s a good place to start,” Ted interrupted with a slight nod.

“Yes, well, he’s asked for police protection in light of the severed hand and the threat from Prince Jabri’s letter.”

Jason was stunned at how Pokie sustained the subterfuge. He watched Ted shake his head as though Sheffield were a dunce, and say: “C’mon, Inspector, that’s all a ruse. You probably won’t find Prince Jabri.”

“As a matter of fact,” Sheffield rubbed his chin, “I’ve just completed a conference call with the Prince, courtesy of the consulate. He was at his office in Riyadh.”

Jason did not like the conversation’s direction. He saw Ted’s eyes harden towards Sheffield, who continued.

“He confirms his investment with Mr. Kraft’s company on behalf of the royal family and is outraged over what he calls Comex’s illegal liquidation order.”

“What about his letter threatening to ‘employ every means’ to prevent the consequences?” Jason finally spoke.

“He stands by what he said. He’s filed for immediate injunctive relief in Federal court with Judge Pollard.”

Jason burned at being blindsided, realizing that’s what Farley wanted to discuss before he left. “That can’t be all Jabri meant. Comex isn’t bound by civil procedure and there’s no precedent for countermanding Exchange rulings in the courts.”

Sheffield’s gray eyes laced into Jason’s. “I’m not a judge and neither are

you. But the Prince says there's also no precedent for a liquidation order. And he knows Pollard considers commodities nothing more than legalized gambling. So he thinks he's got a real chance."

Jason thought Sheffield sounded like a lawyer. "What else does the Prince say?"

"He says you might know something about the severed hand."

Jason flinched as they tried to turn the tables on him. Ted interjected: "What's that supposed to mean."

Sheffield faced Ted and pushed his rimless glasses against the bridge of his nose with his middle finger. "He says you might have orchestrated this yourself to gain Pollard's sympathy."

Ted turned white and raged at Sheffield. "Have you any idea what you're insinuating!"

"Look, Mr. Harris," Sheffield held up his hand. "I'm not accusing you of anything. I'm just trying to sort this out. If I were trying to trap you I would've withheld my information"

Jason watched Ted tremble and feared he would lose control. "Jabri's accusation makes absolutely no sense," Jason said with trepidation. "The hand belongs to Lisa Allen. She's the one whose testimony last night supported our case."

"And I also understand she left your firm two weeks ago to work for the Swiss Consortium."

Jason restrained himself, knowing that one misstep could destroy Lisa. He remained silent as Sheffield picked up the slack.

"May I ask how you know it's her hand? I thought it was unidentified so far."

Jason felt as though he were walking a tightrope. He had no choice but

to proceed. "I was supposed to meet her this morning for breakfast. But when I got to her apartment the doorman said she left for an emergency."

"Any idea what time?"

"He said about six-forty."

"What happened then?"

"Considering the Jabri letter, I worried for her safety. When I got to the Exchange and she wasn't here I told Ted. He contacted Captain Cartwright from Mid-Town South who went over to Bellevue."

Sheffield had taken notes while Jason spoke. He flipped back one or two pages. "I've got some questions for you . . . How'd Cartwright identify her hand?"

Jason's stomach sank as he glanced at Ted, hoping he would remain silent. "She has a scar on her thumb."

"Are you her boyfriend?"

"No, just a friend."

Sheffield flashed a semi-smile. "Hmm . . . Alright, can you tell me when Cartwright reported back?"

Jason had lost track of time. "It's hard to say. Maybe half an hour ago, around nine forty-five." He looked towards Ted. "Is that about right?"

Ted bit his bottom lip and hissed. "Sounds like it. What's the difference?" Jason knew what was coming.

Sheffield exhaled. "Well, the Prince had speculated that the severed hand might be Ms. Allen's and that you punished her for leaving Harris Trading. There's no way he knew Cartwright's conclusions."

Ted's eyes narrow to slits. Jason heard him mumble under his breath. "That motherfucking Pokie's behind this bullshit . . ."

"Excuse me?" It was Sheffield straining to hear.

Jason knew he could win Sheffield's sympathies by divulging that Lisa was Ted's daughter. But that would sink the slim chance of seeing her alive. He had to shift Sheffield's speculations to where they belonged--against Pokie Kraft.

"Inspector, there's been another kidnapping recently that's relevant . . ."

Jason recounted his relationship with Raoul and Anna's abduction, with Sheffield scribbling away. He summed up by saying: "I know you recognize the same subtle fingerprint in today's blackmail against Comex as in yesterday's extortion from Peru. Don't treat these as isolated events."

Sheffield shook his head slowly, restored his notepad to his breast pocket, and stared at Jason. "You've got no evidence connecting these two . . . But I'm leery of coincidence. I'll contact Raoul Alvarez and see where it takes me." Sheffield then rose from the couch and straightened his unfashionably wide tie. "Here's my card with my pager number. Call me if something comes up. I'd like to resolve this before the Bureau barges in." He turned to leave and added "Is there anything else?"

Jason bit his tongue and heard Ted say:

"Two things you should be aware of, Inspector . . ." Sheffield stopped short and Jason held his breath. "I'm proposing to the Comex Board that we offer a ten million dollar reward for information leading to the apprehension of the criminals."

Ted's premature revelation surprised Jason, as Sheffield adjusted his spectacles and said: "My experience suggests that a million's enough to scare up a snitch. Ten million could start a civil war . . . And the second thing?" Ted now had Sheffield's undivided attention.

"I suggest you interview some people who worked closely with Lisa Allen."

Jason's antennae perked up as Ted paused.

“Anyone in particular?” Sheffield asked.

Ted nodded. “Bashir Ismail spent the last two years alongside her in our Comex booth.”

Sheffield dug into his jacket pocket for his pad and pencil. “How do you spell the last name?”

“I-S-M-A-I-L”

“Good. Now how do I get to your booth?”

Ted escorted Sheffield out and point him towards the trading floor. He returned, walked behind his desk and sat in his high-backed leather chair. He propped his elbows on the table top, pressed his fists into his cheeks, and said: “What did you think of this guy?”

“I’m not sure, except that he talks too much.”

“That’s why I mentioned the reward before it’s been approved.”

Jason thought for a moment. “Ah, now I get it. So he’ll leak it.”

Ted nodded. “If he’s really in a rush to scoop the Bureau, like all the old timers on the force, he’ll let it slip.”

“And if he doesn’t?”

“Then we’ve really got something to worry about.”

Jason respected Ted’s suspicions, but his fear for Lisa’s life made him pray Sheffield was on their side and the shortcut would work. “In any case, I think he’s right that the reward will catch us a break.”

Ted cupped his hands in his face. “The problem is there’s gonna be a fight at the Board meeting.”

“Over the money?” Jason was surprised, knowing that Comex ran huge budget surpluses.

“Nah.”

“Then what?”

“The liquidation order pissed some people off. You know, the usual bullshit about self-serving interference with the marketplace.”

“What d’you think they’ll propose?”

“I’m afraid they’ll use the threat as an excuse to lift the liquidation order.” Ted closed his eyes. “I’d make the motion myself if I thought it would save her.”

Jason worried about Ted’s vulnerability to an accommodation. “Make no mistake about it. That would seal Lisa’s death.”

Ted’s eyes blinked wide as he bolted upright in his chair. “How can you be so sure?”

Jason had been brooding about this all morning. He knew Ted needed ammunition to convince himself so that he could persuade the Board.

“I’ve thought about the participants in Pokie’s plot. Peru’s *Righteous Path* trumpets traditional tribal values matching the patriotic fervor of Pokie’s *Viper Marshalls*. And the *Palestinian Brotherhood* practices a religious fundamentalism that makes the Pope a sinner. Despite deep differences, these groups share a commitment to fanaticism whose common currency is violence--not money.”

Ted frowned. “Go on.”

“I’m suggesting that today’s threat by the *Palestinian Brotherhood* will end up in an explosion no matter what Comex does. The Palestinians might have been recruited by Pokie just to threaten violence, but make no mistake, they have their own agenda: killing Americans.”

Ted raised his eyebrows. “Do you have any hard evidence?”

“If they were really interested in the money they could have short-circuited the liquidation order by grabbing Sally Coopersmith.”

“Maybe Lisa was more convenient.”

“C’mon Ted, they could’ve easily perverted the loyalty of the limo driver.”

Ted’s eyes circled the room, trying to escape Jason’s conclusions. “And Prince Jabri’s letter?”

“I believe it’s real.”

“What?”

“The Prince is just a partner in Barr and Company. Pokie probably provoked the letter after rumors of the liquidation order hit the news wires.”

“But the Palestinian threat . . .”

Jason chuckled. “Pokie screwed up pushing a Palestinian threat to support Prince Jabri’s investments. The *Brotherhood* and the Prince are mortal enemies. They’re suspected of murdering his brother years ago when the royal family was nearly toppled by an insurrection.”

“How do you know all this?”

“An honors thesis on ‘World Extremism’.”

Ted scratched his chin. “And what about Pokie’s plan to corner silver? Where does it fit in?”

Jason feared that his theory wore thin at this point. “I can’t be sure about this, but my guess is he tried to combine both objectives--money and mayhem. The *Viper Marshalls* are sort of ecumenical on that score. That’s why they’ve got internal friction . . . Don’t you remember the guy turning state’s evidence after the Nebraska shootout?”

Ted slouched down in his chair with a look of exhaustion. “I guess an accommodation makes no sense.”

Jason nodded. “That’s right, but I think the Peruvian connection might prove helpful. I’m calling Raoul right after seeing how Bashir fared with Sheffield.” He turned to leave when Ted said:

“Use my office while I’m in the Board meeting. I’m grateful . . .”

Jason raised his hand. "Save it until after we have her."

Chapter Twenty

Port Authority policemen patrolled the front desk as Jason trudged towards the Exchange floor, his neck throbbing from twenty-four hours of nonstop tension. He watched officers joke with traders and clerks, while checking their ID cards, before permitting them through the swinging doors. Jason dismissed the formal precaution, designed for public consumption, while flashing his credentials. We treat terrorism too cavalierly, he thought, despite recent traumas. He hoped Lisa would not be the scapegoat.

The trading tumult energized him as he entered the floor, with frenzied shouts assaulting his ears. He squeezed past a crowded coffee pit, recalling Lisa decoding the din on the day they met. Her patience paved the way for him to digest the disorder. Jason strained to see Bashir as he twisted towards the Harris booth. He knew something was wrong when he saw Salieri's clerks from heating oil manning the operation. He sped towards the silver pit, a cold sweat icing his brow.

"Tony, why isn't Bashir here?"

Salieri's skinny frame swayed while sandwiched on the top step of the pit. "Geez, that fat detective really fucked things up."

"You mean Sheffield?"

"Maybe. He had cop written all over him . . . Did you see that tie he was wearing?"

"Who cares, Tony . . ."

“Okay, it happened right after this Sheffield guy interrogated Bashir.”

Jason worried that Sheffield spooked Bashir. “What happened?”

“Everybody was buzzing about the cop investigating Bashir when the two Mohawks from Merrill gave him a hotfoot.”

“What a bunch of assholes.” Jason knew that the lowlife clerks with the buzz-saw haircuts specialized in tasteless tricks.

“Yeah, well that was the final indignity.”

“Excuse me?”

“Before that someone hung a sign on his back reading: ‘Bashir the Bombardier’.”

Jason understood the tension-provoked pranks of the trading floor, but this time they may have caused real damage. “Okay, where can I find him?”

Salieri shrugged his shoulders. “Beats me.”

Jason did not like Salieri's answer. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Well, Bashir exploded. He said he was tired of being called a terrorist just because he was an Arab . . . and he left.”

“Left where?”

“Left as in gone for the day . . . I gave him permission to go.”

Jason could not believe what Salieri had done. He wanted Bashir under surveillance. “How could you do something like that?”

Salieri shot back . “C’mon, Jason, he was useless here.”

Jason realized Salieri had no reason to restrain Bashir. “When did this happen?”

“About fifteen minutes ago.”

Jason’s shoulders slumped, knowing Bashir must be long gone. Sheffield probably scared him away, deepening the danger. Jason realized he had nothing to lose by reporting Bashir’s disappearance to Sheffield, forcing

the Inspector to track him down if he were doing his job. And just in case, he said to Salieri. "If Bashir calls tell him Ted needs him here."

"All things considered, I don't . . ."

"Please Tony just do as I say."

Jason entered the booth and withdrew Sheffield's crumpled card from his pocket. He dialed his pager number, punched in Ted's private line, and hung up the phone. He then headed back to the office to warn Dana about the heightened peril and to hatch his plan with Raoul.

Jason pushed past a nearly empty gold pit, marveling at trader indifference. He had learned that each commodity painted its own portrait, despite public perceptions about precious metals. The unprecedented price gyrations since yesterday were largely confined to silver. And then he realized he had forgotten to instruct Salieri about their spreads. He glanced back towards the tote board and saw that September silver had risen to \$15.15 per ounce while December remained stuck at \$13.15. Market prices reflect the odds of the outcome just like the betting line at the racetrack. Jason realized they could unwind their remaining position without making or losing money. It seemed as though the market ranked revoking the liquidation order a toss up.

Jason decided to leave their spreads untouched, scoffing at Salieri's discretion, and moved towards the exit. He skirted traders plotting strategies and thought he overheard two clerks drooling over a ten million dollar reward. When he stopped to confirm they had already dispersed. He wondered whether Sheffield passed Ted's test.

Jason walked through the swinging doors and accelerated towards the office when he heard his name.

"Mr. Novack, wait up."

Jason stopped and saw Bill Lofton, the talkative security guard, heading his way. “Yes, Bill.”

Lofton’s large frame lumbered to a halt. “Sorry I haven’t gotten back to you about Ms. Allen, but it’s been kinda’ hectic, and she hasn’t shown up yet.”

Jason forced a smile and turned to leave. “That’s okay, Bill.”

“But I just asked Mr. Thorndike where she was.”

Jason faced Lofton. “And what did he say?”

“He said to ask you.”

Jason shuddered that Malcolm’s wisecrack indicted him for Lisa’s disappearance. He wondered whether Malcolm abducted Lisa to atone for last night’s failure. He doubted that Pokie’s half-brother would survive to ride his red Porche without making amends.

“Well, Mr. Novack, what do you think he meant?” Lofton repeated the question.

“I’ll let you know when I find out,” Jason said, turning to leave, and then he backtracked.

“Say, Bill, have you seen Bashir Ismail, you know, my skinny clerk with the bristly beard?”

Lofton laughed. “Did I ever. Right after I asked Mr. Thorndike about Ms. Allen, he bumped into him right over there.” Lofton pointed towards the elevators.

Jason’s eyes widened. “And?”

“Well, I couldn’t hear what they said, but I knew it wasn’t friendly. Mr. Ismail poked his finger several times at Mr. Thorndike’s chest before storming off into the elevator.”

“Thanks, Bill,” Jason said, perturbed by Thorndike’s apparent provocation. He knew it meant more trouble as he sprinted towards Ted’s

office.

The shrill of Ted's private line surprised Jason as he closed the office door and picked up the receiver.

"Hello."

"Sheffield here, who's this?"

Jason's eyes focused on the leather chair tucked under a barren desk, emphasizing his lonely pursuit. He recalled standing in the same spot after yesterday's disaster, dreading Ted's arrival. Now he longed for a surprise appearance.

"I said this is Inspector Sheffield. Who's there?"

"Sorry, Inspector, this is Jason Novack in Ted Harris' office. We've got a problem."

"I'm listening, Mr. Novack."

Jason wanted information. "Mr. Ismail was very distraught after you left, especially when some clerks played a practical joke on him. Did anything you say upset him?"

"Hmm . . . Mr. Novack, why don't you just ask what I discovered."

"Fine, Inspector." Jason should have known better than to finesse Sheffield.

"He's either a practiced liar or he really knows nothing about her whereabouts today. In fact, I got the distinct impression he's somewhat fond of Ms. Allen."

Sheffield's insight impressed Jason. "Well, Inspector, Bashir bolted right after an almost innocuous prank. I think he's hiding something."

Jason heard Sheffield exhale into the receiver. "Look, Mr. Novack, we're under lots of time pressure here and I've got only so many men to deploy. Three traders, Wizard, Mom, and Doc, I believe they're called, confirm that Mr.

Ismail was at the Exchange since six-thirty this morning. That's before Ms. Allen's abduction. I'm afraid there's not much I can do."

Jason regretted Bashir's participation in Wizard's betting pool, with Sheffield's apparent predicament disappointing him. "Okay, Inspector, please indulge me with anything that might have alarmed him."

Sheffield chuckled. "I can't say alarmed is the right word, but the ten million dollar reward caught his attention."

Jason smiled, recognizing Sheffield was above suspicion, having served as Ted's mule for the rumor. He tried once more. "But he said nothing to help locate Ms. Allen?"

"Look, Mr. Novack, Ms. Allen will turn up wherever the bomb is. We haven't got time to separate the two."

Jason realized that despite Sheffield's noble intentions, he had his own agenda. Saving the City without the FBI was all that mattered. "Thanks for your help, Inspector."

"Not at all, Mr. Novack. And please page me again if there's a problem."

Jason broke the connection, aware that saving Lisa would be a solitary struggle. He dialed Raoul without replacing the receiver. As the phone rang, he stared at the photographs behind the desk, wishing he could exploit Ted's political connections. But that could endanger Lisa's life, he thought, knowing that Pokie's tentacles touched the upper reaches of government.

"Alvarez."

Jason snapped out of his musing. "I need your help Raoul."

"Anything, my friend. I've watched today's events on CNN and was about to call you with some good news when an Inspector Sheffield interrupted me."

Jason cringed. "Have you spoken with him?"

“No, I’m calling back later. We have something to discuss first . . .”

“Good,” Jason interrupted with a sigh. “I want to manage his information with Lisa as my priority.”

“Well, you’ll have a lot to manage once we’re finished with Hernandez.”

Jason’s heartbeat fluttered. “My God, what do you mean?”

The sound of a smile spun through the phone as Raoul spoke. “You interrupted me before . . . We’ve captured Hernandez on the outskirts of Lima. He’s on his way to police headquarters.”

Jason said a silent prayer at the stunning switch. “I can’t believe how lucky this is.”

Raoul laughed. “Luck had nothing to do with it, my friend. I told you yesterday that I had some scores to settle. I hunted Hernandez because he is the key.”

“He is also the key in New York. Hernandez must have been personally pressured by a top terrorist to come out of retirement. He can foil the plot here by exposing whoever contacted him.”

“You will know whatever Hernandez knows.”

“My God, I can’t believe this,” Jason rejoiced and then sputtered. “But we don’t have much time, Raoul . . .”

“Don’t worry, my friend. We have no *Miranda* mistakes in Peru’s criminal code. Hernandez will talk moments after his interrogation begins.”

Jason smiled, knowing that the fascist wing of the *Viper Marshalls* condemned legislative coddling of criminals. Now they would be undone by an unfettered inquisition. “When do you think . . .”

“Just give me your number and don’t move.”

Jason gave Raoul Ted’s private line. “I cannot thank you enough.”

“Hmm . . . do I qualify for the ten million dollar reward?”

Raoul's words caught Jason off guard. "I'm sorry, but the Board hasn't . . ."

Raoul chuckled. "Please, my friend, I don't need Comex's money. I would spend my life savings to help you."

Jason relaxed. "But how do you know about the reward?"

"A Comex spokesman on CNN just announced it. He's about to . . ."

Jason flicked on the TV and saw Quinn Farley facing a microphone in front of the Comex boardroom. "I can't believe this Raoul. I'm sitting fifty feet down the hall from this guy and you're telling me what he said. Please let me go . . ."

"Of course, but stay right where you are."

Jason stared at the oversized TV screen that almost qualified as a home theater. He felt silly watching CNN's satellite broadcast when he could slip down the hall and participate. But he controlled the urge by sinking into Ted's club chair, as Quinn Farley read a prepared statement.

"The Comex Board continues to meet over the crisis provoked by the *Palestinian Brotherhood*'s threat to New York City. Our only decision so far is to authorize a payment of ten million dollars for information leading to the capture of the criminals. The unprecedented size of the reward reflects Comex's concern with public safety. I will keep you informed of further developments."

Farley folded his note as the camera widened to include the cinnamon-haired CNN correspondent, Cindy Lane, extending her microphone. "Mr. Farley could you discuss the liquidation order?"

"Sorry, Ms. Lane. I'll have no comment on that until the Board meeting adjourns."

"And what about the severed hand? Any information on the crippling

attack . . .”

Jason clicked off the TV, realizing that Raoul’s call had displaced Dana. He picked up the phone and dialed home, hoping he could still catch her.

“Hello.”

Not hearing Dana’s voice depressed him. “Is my wife there, Mrs. Archibald?”

“It’s customary to say hello, Mr. Novack.”

Sometimes this woman was impossible, Jason thought. “Sorry, Mrs. Archibald, but we *are* in the middle of a major crisis.”

“Not according to the ‘Noontime News Break’ on Channel Five . . . Mayor Rizzo says everything’s under control.”

Jason marveled at the public’s trust in authority during a crisis, recalling Alexander Haig’s ‘I am in control’ caricature after Reagan was shot. He saw no reason to alarm his favorite Nanny. “I apologize, Mrs. Archibald. Please let me speak with Dana.”

“You just missed her, Mr. Novack. She went to the hospital with Faith. She tried to call you but there was no answer.”

Jason glanced at his watch, realizing Dana called when Ted’s office was empty. “But it’s only twelve-thirty.”

“Well, the children’s wing has a play room to acclimate new patients and Mrs. Novack decided . . .”

“Thanks, Mrs. Archibald. I’m expecting an important call and I need a coupla’ favors.”

“Hmm . . . I knew that was coming.”

“Is Andrew there?”

“Watching TV.”

“Good. Please don’t take him to the park this afternoon. Keep him at

home until you hear from me.”

“But it’s a beautiful. . .”

“Mrs. Archibald, just humor me, please. Also, tell the doorman not to admit any visitors.”

“Fine, Mr. Novack, but your wife usually insists . . .”

“That’s my last favor. Here’s my number again. Please have her call me when you hear from her and I’ll take care of everything.”

Jason hung up the phone, exhausted from battling the Nanny, and dialed Lenox Hill. The nurse in the children’s ward promised Dana would call when she arrived. Jason had no choice. He would have to wait.

He felt the pain of patience.

Chapter Twenty-One

The scarlet signal light on the black and gray telephone panel stared back at Jason. Six separate lines stood speechless, testing his composure. He wished that Raoul and Dana would shatter the stillness.

Those two names danced in his head, having twirled together throughout his life. When Faith's deformity threatened Dana's sanity, Raoul rose to the rescue. And yesterday's abduction of Anna allowed him to return Raoul's gift. He wished for one more successful collaboration, as the click of the door startled him.

Jason rose from the club chair, watching Ted Harris unbutton his shirt collar while stumbling into the office. "Why aren't you at the Board meeting?"

Ted waved Jason back into his seat and slipped into the leather couch, as though he were a visitor. "They're discussing the liquidation order."

"So."

"My place is here, now that the reward is approved."

"I understand."

"I know you do. It's been difficult to unlearn the lessons that have sustained me. But now that I'm about to lose Lisa, I'd surrender my life's labor . . ."

Ted's transformation gratified Jason. Only yesterday he suppressed his parental passions; today the crisis ignited fatherly instincts. "Let me bring you up to date . . ."

Jason reviewed Sheffield's priorities, Bashir's exit and Raoul's conquest, focusing on Hernandez as the solution. He knew from Ted's vacant stare that he listened with his heart rather than his head. Lisa would be Jason's responsibility, despite Ted's physical presence.

"You've done well," Ted said as the telephone rang.

Jason jumped towards the phone, hoping both Dana and Raoul were calling. A solitary signal on the console subdued him. He picked up the receiver. "Hello."

"You were right, we've got our man . . . but Hernandez is useless."

Jason's hopes sank. "Is he dead?"

"Please, Jason, Peru is a civilized country. The drug just won't wear off for a while."

"So what good is it?"

"Hernandez recorded his phone calls."

Jason soared. "Pokie on tape . . . that's phenomenal."

"We'll have to get hold of . . . what did you say?"

"I said Pokie on tape . . ."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you but Hernandez received instructions from your favorite barrister, Robert Whitehead."

Raoul's words exploded in Jason's brain, shattering his image of reality. "My God, how could I have missed this so completely."

"You? What about me? I should have suspected his treachery when he insisted on touring the countryside during his visit with Senator Helms."

"What stuns me was his willingness to tempt fate by representing Pokie at the hearings."

Raoul chuckled: "Sort of like Nixon taping his felonies."

Jason knew Raoul was right. Whitehead's ego explained his impudence,

with Pokie Kraft pulling the strings. Or was it the other way around? Jason watched a confused look wash across Ted's face, matching the disorder in his own mind. He signaled for patience with an outstretched index finger and spoke into the phone. "This creates complications."

"I'm well aware of that, my friend. We don't have the tapes yet and even if we did they're probably inconclusive."

"What makes you say that?"

"Hernandez keeps referring to Whitehead as Hampton. It must be the code name he uses."

Jason recalled Whitehead's fondness for his Long Island retreat. "What about your interrogation?"

"Of course that's been recorded, but you can't push a drug-induced accusation very far."

Jason knew squeezing Whitehead was his only hope for saving Lisa. Raoul had dealt him a powerful hand, but success required blending bluff and evidence, just like in poker, in a face to face confrontation. His adrenalin rushed to incriminate Whitehead and liberate Lisa.

"Raoul, you've done more than I could possibly expect. I'll take it from here."

"Good luck, my friend . . . ah, one more thing. What about Sheffield?"

Jason refused to risk Lisa's life with Sheffield's priorities. "Please wait before returning his call."

"Of course."

Jason hung up the phone and relayed the details to Ted.

"It's hard to believe Pokie's not the mastermind," Ted said, shaking his head.

"Are you so sure he isn't? Whitehead might be an expensive sacrifice."

Ted rubbed his forehead. "I'm really not sure of anything at this point."

Jason pressed his lips together. "There's only one way to find out. I'm going up to confront him. He's our only hope for saving Lisa."

"I'm going with you." Ted began buttoning his shirt collar.

"No, I'm worried about compromising Lisa's identity. It would be too suspicious if we were both there."

"But . . ."

"More importantly, it's crucial that you return to the Board meeting to uphold the liquidation order."

Confusion furrowed across Ted's brow. "Because?"

"Because Whitehead's in this only for the money. If the Board stands fast, silver prices will drop again and the manipulation scheme will fail. Whitehead will cut his losses."

"How can you be so sure?"

Jason smiled. "Do you really think the Boston Brahman likes Texans? This was a business proposition, nothing more and nothing less. Once it fails, Whitehead will dump his partners."

Ted stared at Jason. "One piece still doesn't fit."

"Yes?"

"Why would he expose himself by calling Hernandez?"

That had also bothered Jason, until Raoul mentioned Nixon. "The arrogance of power."

Ted exhaled and shook his head. "I want Lisa back."

"So do I."

* * * *

The ache in her wrist pulsed in pain, as the drug dissipated from her body. She fought to remain conscious, suspecting that whatever she believed

about Ali was false. He sounded like a ruthless religious fanatic, rather than a restaurateur, when he said her hand had sinned. She would promise a generous contribution to his charities for her freedom, knowing Ted would spare no expense to rescue her.

Lisa shivered in the dampness while praying for Ali's arrival. Her heartbeat accelerated with the creaking door. And then the leather smell of his thick-soled shoes hovered before her.

"Ali, please listen to me. I don't know why I've sinned but I'm prepared to make amends with a contribution to the Children's Hospital."

Ali squatted. "Lisa, this is not a bargaining session."

Her voice cracked as she cried. "But don't you see, Ali, my father will make a major gift."

"I don't care about your father . . ."

"Oh yes you do, Ted has been your friend for too long to ignore him."

Lisa watched Ali's charcoal eyes ignite in flames. His momentary silence raised her hopes until the harshness in his voice assaulted her.

"Who else knows Ted is your father?"

"No one, Ali, it's a secret."

Ali smiled broadly. "Well your secret is safe with me, my dear Lisa."

"But . . ."

Ali raised his hand, silencing her. "Whitehead already tried to twist our revenge into a money-making operation by proposing that we kidnap Sally Coopersmith instead of you. Knowing Ted is your father would embolden him further. I won't permit another diversion. Your secret is safe."

Lisa's brow perspired with fear as her strength ebbed. "What does Whitehead have to do with this?"

She watched Ali wipe the floor with a towel, hiding the blood-soaked rag

as though embarrassed by his surgical shortcomings. She knew her life leeches away as he injected her. “Please Lisa, you must be silent until the explosion. Then you will die for America’s sins along with everyone else . . .”

* * * *

Jason flew out of the World Trade Center and headed toward the Fifth Avenue headquarters of his former law firm. He felt torn between attacking Whitehead at Bartlett and Taft and defending Dana at Lenox Hill, worried that Bashir knew her destination. He called the hospital no fewer than five times along the way, apologizing for pestering the nurse in charge. Jason forced himself off the subway at Fifty-Ninth Street, stopping one last time at a phone booth.

“Hello, this is Jason Novack again, I’m sorry . . .”

“Oh, Mr. Novack, just one second, here’s your wife.”

“Hello.”

Dana’s voice lifted Jason’s spirits. “Thank God you’re there.”

“Where should I be? Besides, I’ve called *you* a number of times to find out what’s going on.”

Jason did not know where to begin. “Listen, Bashir’s disappeared and might be part of the terrorist plot.”

“How’s that possible?”

“Please, Dana, it’s too long a story. Just ignore any messages from him. Also, call the apartment to make sure Mrs. Archibald understands the danger. I’ve already spoken to her about keeping Andrew home, but you know how she is.”

“My, you really are serious.”

“Absolutely . . . And please stay where you are.”

Dana chuckled. "Trust me, I'm not going anywhere . . . But it would be nice to have you here."

Jason knew a break was near but decided against discussing Whitehead's complicity. The managing partner of Bartlett and Taft had always been a sensitive subject with Dana. "I hope to be there very soon . . . Kiss Faith and . . . I love you."

Jason hung up the phone and entered the white skyscraper at the edge of Central Park. A burden had been lifted from his shoulders, with Faith and Dana safely tucked away at the hospital, allowing him to concentrate on indicting Whitehead. He rode the elevator to the twenty-third floor, thinking about the day Whitehead said Bartlett and Taft would no longer represent Harris Trading Company. He realized now that Whitehead's excuse, pursuing more lucrative opportunities, camouflaged his conspiracy to corner the silver market. He wondered how far back his relationship with Pokie went.

Jason opened the heavy oak doors and entered the reception area, intent on surprising Whitehead. He had two hurdles: the receptionist and the pit bull.

"Hi, Marianne, nice to see you." Jason waved to the friendly secretary filtering the front desk, continuing past without pause. "I'll catch up with you on my way out."

Jason disappeared into the long corridor before Marianne could utter a word. He knew she would be easy, having smiled at her for the five years he worked there. Ann Townsend Fricke, on the other hand, hated people who smiled. The pit bull guarding Whitehead's office had been known to use her considerable bulk to physically restrain junior partners intent on disturbing her boss.

Jason walked down the cubicle-lined corridor, passed the secretarial pool

drenched in a stale coffee aroma, and headed towards Whitehead's corner.

Ann Fricke sat at a bunker-sized desk, defending her territory. Her unpleasant disposition had not changed. "Well Jason, have you made your fortune on Wall Street yet?"

"Just give me another day or two, Ann, and you'll be the first to know." Jason grinned deep inside at the irony. He walked past her desk towards Whitehead's closed door. Fricke slid her chair sideways. "And where do you think you're going?"

"It's an emergency, I've got to see him."

"Oh, yeah, you and everyone else from downtown. I don't think you're on his schedule."

Jason reached for the doorknob. "I am now."

"You can't go in there," she barked.

"Just watch me."

Jason entered the office and heard the pit bull growl into the phone for security. He saw Whitehead sitting in his charcoal gray suit with his back to the door, gazing at a Reuters' screen on the short mahogany bookcase behind his desk. Jason's shoulders slumped as his eyes recorded the news headlines: 'Comex Board Continues Deliberations'. He needed the Board to uphold the liquidation order to dash his adversary's hope. Whitehead turned his neck, his eyes widening imperceptibly as they met Jason's.

"I've been expecting you," Whitehead bluffed, while glancing once more at the news before facing front and swinging under the desk.

Jason shivered in the deep freeze air conditioning, thinking about his rude reception. "Nice of you to alert the canine patrol outside."

"You'll have to excuse Ann, she's suspicious of former employees, especially those departing under a cloud."

Jason ignored Whitehead's taunt. He remained standing, rested his hands on the back of a chair, and controlled his opening. "You've been implicated in a felony."

Whitehead laughed. "And you're here to make a citizen's arrest?"

Two knocks on the door were followed by a powerful voice. "Security, Mr. Whitehead."

Jason cocked his head, challenging Whitehead to kick him out. He watched the managing partner mull his options and raise his voice. "Thank you. I'll let you know if there's a problem."

Jason knew then that his threat worried Whitehead. "I'm here to help you redeem yourself."

"Because we're colleagues at the Bar?" Whitehead forced a smile with his riposte. "You've got two minutes to make your case."

Jason stared at Whitehead's steel gray eyes, trying to gauge his reactions. "Your instructions to abduct Anna Alvarez yesterday were recorded on tape. Conspiracy to kidnap is a capital offense, punishable by death under Peruvian law. You can improve your chances of avoiding extradition if you cooperate in solving today's threat."

Whitehead scoffed. "You'll have to do better than that or I'll sue you for libel."

Jason knew Whitehead would snub a threat from missing tapes, but he had prepared his *bona fides*. "Hernandez identified you with the code name Hampton . . . That'll resonate with a jury."

Whitehead blanched when Jason said 'Hampton'. "Let's hear the tape so I can see how well you've impersonated me."

Jason's weakest card came next. "It'll arrive shortly."

"You've learned nothing in the past five years here," Whitehead snorted

while reaching for the intercom. “Go away until you’ve got something to barter.”

Jason raised his voice. “It’ll be too late for a deal if you wait. The damage will have been done .” And then he took a risk. “If the girl dies, you’re dead.”

Whitehead smiled. “Ah . . . so that’s it. You owe her for coming to your defense last night. Or have you always been sweet on her?”

Whitehead’s words angered Jason, but the unfolding Reuters’ headline energized him. It was as though the screen heralded Whitehead’s surrender. Jason pointed towards Whitehead’s hand resting on the intercom button. “I wouldn’t summon security yet. Comex just upheld the liquidation order, ending your money-making scheme. It’s time to fold your cards to cut your losses.”

As Whitehead swirled to scan the Reuters’ screen, Jason added: “I’m certain Comex’s ten million dollars will cough up someone else to incriminate you.”

Jason backed slowly towards the door, hoping he had been right about Whitehead’s motivations. And then he heard his reward.

“Maybe we can come to an accommodation.” Whitehead said, still facing the screen.

Jason stopped, leaned against the door, and suppressed a sigh. “Make it good and make it quick.”

Whitehead swivelled under the desk, rested his elbows on the top, and locked eyes with Jason. “I don’t think you’ll use the incriminating evidence you may, or may not, have.”

Whitehead’s words stiffened the hair on Jason’s neck. “And why is that?”

Whitehead removed keys from his jacket's breast pocket and unlocked a compartment on the floor beneath his desk. He withdrew a manilla envelope and waved it at Jason. "Because I've got an insurance policy to keep you quiet."

The blood drained from Jason's face at the conversation's turn. "You'll have to spell that out."

Whitehead slid the envelope towards Jason. "This is a copy of Dana's father's resignation from the firm."

Jason's skin stung as he walked slowly towards the desk. He sat at the edge of the chair facing Whitehead, remembering his father-in-law's sudden departure from the lucrative partnership a year after he had arrived from Harvard. The rumblings of a forced exit were camouflaged by his retirement to Florida, where he still lived with Dana's mother. "Why don't you summarize it for me."

"Hmm . . . I guess Dana didn't tell you," Whitehead smirked. "Perhaps because she never reconciled herself to her father's embezzling client escrow funds . . . ten million five hundred thousand dollars, to be exact. I think it just covered his gambling losses."

Jason's eyes moistened as he suppressed Dana's betrayal and focused on her pain. He recalled her irrational fear over his planned departure from Bartlett and Taft. He never understood why she wanted to speak with Whitehead personally--until now. She must have panicked that Whitehead would retaliate by revealing her father's theft.

"I would have reported it to the authorities," Whitehead continued. "Except Dana cried while begging me to find him a graceful exit. So I covered his losses out of operating funds. In exchange I have a signed confession that could send him to prison for ten years. I knew it would come in handy some

day.”

Whitehead reached across the desk, opened the manilla envelope and placed the signed confession in front of Jason. “Why don’t you read this carefully. I doubt whether this man would survive a jail sentence. And I’m sure you understand what that would do to Dana. After all, you’re something of an expert in the special bond between father and daughter.”

Jason’s stomach soured, as Faith, Anna, Lisa and Dana swirled together in his head. He had thrown away a fortune to save Anna, dedicated his life to Faith and now Lisa and Dana competed for his loyalty, with devastating consequences whatever his course.

Jason breathed heavily, summoning courage from deep inside. He knew that Whitehead would forever exploit weakness, as he rose from his chair to call his bluff. “I’m not letting you get away with this. Those tapes will go directly to the police when they arrive.” Jason turned towards the door and walked slowly, praying Whitehead would stop him. He reached for the handle when he heard the managing partner of Bartlett and Taft say:

“Ah, Jason, you’ve become such a romantic. I’ll throw in the girl as well.”

Jason shoulders tingled as he turned to face Whitehead. “You know where she is?”

Whitehead sat back in his chair and smiled. “No, but I know who does.”

Jason was unsure what Whitehead meant, but he would eagerly suppress Hernandez’s tapes in exchange for Lisa’s life and the resignation letter. He walked towards the desk and leaned on the back of the chair. “I’m listening.”

“Have your Inspector Sheffield pick up Malcolm. He has the key to where the girl’s being held.”

Malcolm's name shocked Jason, despite his obvious participation in the scheme to corner silver. "What makes you so confident he'll cooperate?"

Whitehead withdrew another manilla envelope from the floor compartment and handed it to Jason. "These celebrate Malcolm's brief but memorable stay in the detention center awaiting trial for assault. I arranged for his release in Pokie's recognizance as a favor to my Texas compatriot, but kept these so Malcolm would recall my efforts."

Jason now knew Whitehead and Pokie extended back in time, well before his retainer as Pokie's lawyer. He stared at the envelope until Whitehead said: "I'm afraid I can't describe these. You'll have to take a peek at Malcolm's secret."

Jason opened the envelope and withdrew several glossy photos of Malcolm servicing every stripe of inmate with a variety of sexual favors.

"That won't play well on the trading floor, not to mention the Ozarks. I guarantee Malcolm'll be anxious to cooperate fully."

Chapter Twenty-Two

The confrontation with Whitehead and the relentless pressure of time jarred Jason as he left Bartlett and Taft. He exited the building and waited for a public phone on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Fifty-Ninth Street, the bustle of blaring car horns and the smell of exhaust fumes niggling his nerves. He wished he had borrowed Ted's cellular as he mouthed to the gum-chewing teenager, wearing a tiny white halter top, that he had an emergency. She rolled her eyes and hung up the receiver.

"I hope it's important Mista'," she said and stalked off into the swarm of surrounding shoppers.

Jason shook his head, wondering what she would have said if she knew. He dialed Sheffield's pager, entered his telephone number and hung up. Now he would have to defend the phone while awaiting Sheffield's call.

He passed his first test easily. The gray-haired couple wished him luck after he told them his wife was calling for her X-ray report. He used Whitehead's manilla envelope, stamped with 'Do Not Fold', as a prop. And just as a tattooed tough guy approached, the ringing of the telephone saved him from a losing contest.

Jason lifted the receiver. "Inspector?"

"Who is this?"

"It's Jason Novack. I've got a lead for you."

Jason heard Sheffield perk up. "Something special, I hope."

It sounded like Sheffield's investigation needed a boost, Jason thought, increasing the Inspector's flexibility. "If you'll pick up Malcolm Thorndike, I'll bring some truth serum to help him talk."

Sheffield's silence worried Jason, until the Inspector said:

"As a matter of fact, I've delayed interviewing Mr. Thorndike until after the close of trading, at his request. We're gonna meet in the Comex boardroom in five minutes."

Jason looked at his watch. It was two twenty-five. "I'll be there in less than half an hour."

Sheffield exhaled. "Why do you make my job so difficult?"

"Inspector, I promise that stalling Thorndike will let you scoop the Bureau and save the City . . . Just wait for me."

Jason hung up the phone and glanced at the troupe of taxis parading down Fifth Avenue. For a moment he was tempted towards a cab, before realizing traffic would surely prolong his trip. He headed for the subway, knowing that was his only chance to make the meeting.

Jason arrived at Four World Trade Center with five minutes to spare and flew up to the Comex floor, clutching the manilla envelope. He poked his head into the boardroom and saw Malcolm and Sheffield sitting catty-corner at the far end of the rosewood table. They seemed dwarfed by the tall velvet chairs and plush purple drapes.

"Ah, Mr. Novack," Sheffield rose and waddled towards Jason. "We're just about finished here, but I told Mr. Thorndike you've got something of interest."

Jason nodded while exchanging an unfriendly glance with Malcolm over Sheffield's shoulder. He spoke so that Malcolm could hear what he said.

"I've got reason to believe that this man knows where Lisa Allen is."

“Inspector,” Malcolm snapped, while remaining seated. “I told you before that I saw her at last night’s hearing. I wasn’t surprised when she didn’t appear today after divulging confidential information about my company. I’d have fired her if she showed.”

Sheffield stood in front of Jason and spoke through clenched teeth. “I thought this was about the bomb.”

Jason lowered his voice. “And you told me the bomb will lead us to Lisa. I assume that cuts both ways.”

Sheffield stared at Jason and said, “Okay, but don’t interrupt me.”

Jason followed Sheffield towards Malcolm and heard the Inspector say: “Mr. Thorndike, I want to reemphasize that you’re not a suspect and can leave whenever you want. But maybe we should hear him out.”

Thorndike stood and fingered the button-down collar on his light blue shirt. “I’m sorry, Inspector, but I’ve got a business to run and don’t have time for bullshit.”

Jason held up the manilla envelope. “This contains the most important piece of business you’ll ever transact.”

Malcolm sneered at Jason’s threat and started to leave. “I’m not interested.”

“You’d better take a look before storming out of here.” Jason removed one of the pictures from the envelope and shoved it at Malcolm, with Sheffield straining for a glimpse.

“Mother-fucking bastards,” Malcolm mumbled as he paled and fell back into his chair. Jason thought he had fainted when Sheffield shouted:

“Are you okay, Mr. Thorndike?”

Malcolm stared straight ahead. “Where did you get this?”

“That’s not important,” Jason said, realizing that Malcolm had never seen

the photos before. "I'm interested only in Lisa's whereabouts. The entire collection is yours in exchange for that information."

Malcolm steeled himself with a deep breath. "I said before I've no idea where she is."

"Then tell me who cut off her hand?" Jason menaced Malcolm by leaning forward.

"You mean she's the one?" Malcolm seemed surprised.

Sheffield grabbed Jason's arm. "Take it easy, pal."

Jason shrugged away Sheffield's grasp. "He knows something . . . And unless he talks, these pictures will hang from the Comex bulletin board tomorrow morning.

Malcolm drummed his fingernails on the table top and closed his eyes, as though meditating. He then stared at Sheffield, who sat down next to him. Jason remained standing, recognizing his role as prosecutor and Sheffield's as conciliator. "I do have some information," Malcolm said softly. "But not about Lisa."

"Let's hear." Sheffield nodded in sympathy.

"I actually decided to call the number for solving the bomb threat because I think I know where it is."

As Jason watched Sheffield's eyes widen, his anger heightened over what he expected to hear.

"But I want the ten million dollar reward." Malcolm continued.

"You low life piece of shit," Jason hissed.

"Please, Mr. Novack," Sheffield held up his hand. "The Comex Board gave me authority on this. I'll decide whether his facts pan out."

Malcolm folded the picture and tore it into pieces. "I also want everything in Novack's folder, including the negatives."

Jason clutched the envelope. “I don’t give a shit about the bomb. These pay for Lisa’s life only.” He knew the negatives were an idle precaution for Malcolm, expecting Whitehead had duplicated them.

Malcolm shook his head at Sheffield. “If he holds those pictures the deal is off.”

Sheffield looked at Jason, fingering his floral print tie, and held the chair next to him. “Please sit down, Mr. Novack, so we can move forward. You said yourself that Lisa and the bomb go together. There’s no time to debate that assumption.”

Jason realized the amputation threatened Lisa’s life the longer it took to find her. He sat down to face Sheffield and Thorndike.

“Let me hold the photos until his information checks out,” Sheffield continued. “You have my word: saving Lisa will be my first priority. I won’t endanger her life.” Sheffield extended his hand for the manilla envelope.

Jason recognized his only chance for saving Lisa required that he trust Sheffield’s integrity. He had no choice as he handed the photo packet to the Inspector.

Sheffield turned to Thorndike. “Let’s hear what you have for us.”

Malcolm bit the bottom of his lip. “A few months ago, I overheard Bashir talking with Ali about renovations to the restaurant. He mentioned a bomb-proof storage room.

“Who’s Ali?” Sheffield asked.

“It’s Bashir’s uncle, owner of the Olympia Grill in the underground concourse downstairs.” Jason sighed, lamenting the terrorist web that had ensnared them.

Sheffield looked at Malcolm. “What’s so unique about a bomb-proof room? I hear the Port Authority’s considering one.”

“A few days later I heard Bashir inquire about some type of explosive--ammonium nitrate , I think--from a New Jersey construction company.”

Jason suspected Malcolm of withholding facts, recalling Whitehead’s words that Malcolm had the key to Lisa’s life. He watched Sheffield continue his cross-examination.

“Is there anything else, Mr. Thorndike?”

“Not that I can recall.” Malcolm shuffled the torn pieces of picture like a deck of cards.

“Well, I’m afraid that’s not good enough.” Sheffield started to stand, as if preparing to leave.

Jason admired Sheffield’s technique, knowing this was simply an effort to squeeze Thorndike. He watched Malcolm’s hands tremble as he spoke.

“Wait . . . there’s one more thing. Bashir discussed a steel lining for the ventilator shafts in the storeroom.”

Sheffield smiled. “Hmm . . . it sounds like that’s where the bomb is. How come you never reported this before today?”

Malcolm looked directly at Sheffield. “Because it never occurred to me this was a bomb until today’s threat from the *Palestinian Brotherhood*.”

Jason knew Malcolm had rehearsed his story, providing information without incriminating himself. He suspected Malcolm had planned to come forward for the reward even without the threatening pictures, as he heard Sheffield say:

“Very well, Mr. Thorndike. You’re free to go, but I’d advise you to stay close to home so that I can find you.”

Malcolm rose, tucked his blue shirt into dark pleated trousers and walked from the room as though he had been acquitted.

Jason turned to Sheffield after watching Malcolm disappear. “Do you think it’s wise to let him go? He obviously still knows more than he’s telling.”

“I’m well aware of that, Mr. Novack. But one thing Malcolm won’t do right now is run. That’ll tip off the terrorists that he’s the traitor. He’s gonna stick to his routine for protection. And I’d rather Malcolm’s comrades think nothing’s amiss, so they’ll remain complacent. Besides, my men won’t let him out of sight.”

Jason agreed with Sheffield, but knew he had erred elsewhere. “I guess you should’ve picked up Bashir when I suggested it earlier.”

Sheffield grinned. “It’s not a problem. I assigned Sergeant Furillio to tail him right after we spoke. The last I heard he was riding his red Yamaha through Jersey City.”

Jason had underestimated Sheffield again. “But you didn’t say anything.”

“Because you didn’t have to know.” Sheffield offered a sheepish smile. “Just like your source of the photos is none of my business. Is that right, Mr. Novack?”

Jason acknowledged Sheffield’s perception with a nod and then realized something was very wrong.

“Did you say Bashir was in Jersey City?”

“That’s what Furillio said in his radio report.”

“But Bashir lives in Hoboken. Could the Sergeant have been mistaken?”

Sheffield frowned. “I doubt that. Furillio was born there and said he wanted to visit his old neighborhood when this was over.”

Jason shook his head. “I don’t like it.”

“Neither do I, but we’ve got to move quickly on the Olympia Grill. I’ll radio Furillio to reel in Bashir.”

Chapter Twenty-Three

“Are you calling the bomb squad?” Jason asked Sheffield as the Inspector picked up the phone on the credenza behind the rosewood table.

“I wish I could.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“If these guys see activity outside the building, they’ll detonate immediately.”

“So what’s your plan?”

“I’m gonna get six volunteers to accompany me to the restaurant. First on my list is Boomer McKenzie, a booby trap specialist. He’ll short-circuit whatever surprises they have for us.”

“Can I be second?”

“Please, Mr. Novack. You’ll only get in the way.”

Jason had prepared his answer, knowing Lisa would respond best to someone she trusted. “I might save some lives debriefing her on the spot.”

Sheffield began dialing the phone and said: “Be downstairs at the elevators in ten minutes.”

Jason’s heart pounded as he left the Inspector and dashed towards Ted’s office. He entered the room and saw Ted pacing in front of the picture window, his hands clasped behind his back.

“My God, where’ve you been?” Ted said, facing Jason.

“A lot’s happened since the Board upheld the liquidation order.” Jason

then described the domino accusations of Whitehead, Malcolm, Bashir, and Ali. Ted shook his head in disgust at Bashir and Ali.

“I feel violated,” Ted hissed. “I won’t rest until they’re punished.”

“Let’s concentrate on getting Lisa and leave everything else . . . I’m heading downstairs to join Sheffield.”

“I’m going with you.”

Jason knew nothing could dissuade him. “Okay, let’s go.”

They rode the elevator in silent tension to the underground concourse and exited into a clutch of detectives, wearing worn suits in assorted shades of gray, surrounding Sheffield. Jason heard the last few words of Sheffield’s instructions.

“And after we’ve secured the suspect, we’ll clear the Trade Center complex and put Boomer to work.”

Jason trembled at Sheffield’s plan, knowing it endangered Lisa. “Excuse me, Inspector, but it’ll take too long to evacuate these buildings. The hostage with the severed hand should be rescued first.”

Jason stared at Sheffield, his eyes citing the Inspector’s promise to save Lisa’s life. Sheffield spoke while gazing at Jason.

“I think he’s right, men. Hold the evacuation until after we’ve got the girl.”

“But Inspector . . .”

Sheffield silenced the protestor with a wave. “That’s it . . . Let’s move.”

Sheffield approached Jason and Ted, as the detectives split into pairs and walked ahead. “Sorry about that . . . What are you doing here, Mr. Harris?”

“I thought he could help with Ali’s interrogation,” Jason interjected. “They go back a long way.”

“Please, Mr. Harris, one amateur is enough. Go back to your office.”

“Do you have any children, Inspector?” Ted spoke in a whisper.

“No. I’m a bachelor.”

Ted smiled. “So am I . . . Then you understand how lonely it is.”

Sheffield just stared, as Ted added, “Lisa’s my daughter.”

Sheffield blinked several times before saying: “Just stay back with Mr. Novack.” He then advanced with portly agility towards his men as they headed for the Olympia Grill.

* * * *

Commuters controlled much of the cobblestoned underground concourse, lined with stores like a shopping mall. Jason and Ted followed well behind the detectives, disguised with attaché cases to blend with the crowd. When they reached Olympia, the plate glass window provided an unobstructed view of drinkers flocking in front of the bar. Jason watched four detectives edge inside while the remaining two propped their briefcases between their legs and stood just outside the etched-glass doorway.

Sheffield waited until they were settled, entered Olympia and approached the maitre d’ seating a couple at a small table behind the waist-high partition.

Jason and Ted walked in the restaurant, sensing a faint liquor smell, just as Sheffield showed his badge to Ali. “We’ve received an anonymous tip that a bomb is planted in your storeroom and we’d like to take a look.”

“This is a very busy time for us, Inspector. Do you have a search warrant?”

“Of course.” Sheffield showed him the paper, with Jason wondering whether he had his own printing press.

Ali’s black eyes blazed at Sheffield, his veins pulsating on his clean-shaven head near his right temple. He scanned the room, catching

Jason's eye, and then bore into Sheffield. "I've got nothing to hide, Inspector. You and your men are more than welcome to look around."

Jason's antennae searched for Ali's subterfuge, considering how he hid his identity for nearly ten years. He watched Sheffield summon the detectives from the bar, asking one to call an ambulance and to radio for Boomer McKenzie and another to clear the thirty or so patrons from the room. The remaining two flanked Ali who flared towards Sheffield. "Am I under arrest?"

"No, but whatever you say may be held against you in a court of law."

"I see . . . I'm surprised that my friend, Ted Harris, hasn't vouched for me." Ali spoke while nodding in Ted's direction.

Jason recoiled at Ali's audacity, flailing like a cornered snake, as Ted trembled beside him and said: "How could you cut off her hand?"

"My God, Inspector," Ali interrupted. "You're not implicating me in today's threat, are you?"

"I'm afraid so, Mr. Ismail. We've been told that your storeroom contains two ventilator shafts packed with ammonium nitrate."

Ali shook his head with dismay. "You're speaking to the wrong man, Inspector. I've just been filling in for the past two weeks and don't know anything about the new storeroom. The renovations were handled by my manager, Nadim. Just ask Mr. Novack over here. He came to dinner with Lisa Allen on my first day."

Jason lamented that his presence contributed to Ali's misdirection, but he did recall Ali discussing Nadim with Lisa. He heard Sheffield ask:

"What about it, Mr. Novack?"

Jason did not remember who ran the renovations. "I know about Nadim, but . . ."

"There you have it, Inspector," Ali extended his hand towards Jason.

Sheffield looked around the room, lined with poster-sized pictures of Olympic track stars, and asked: “And where is this Nadim?”

“He just returned from Pakistan yesterday and will resume full-time work tomorrow.”

“I’d like his address, please.”

“Of course, Inspector,” Ali turned towards the rear of the restaurant when Sheffield grabbed his arm.

“Not yet, Mr. Ismail. First you’ll accompany me to the storeroom.”

Jason heard a clamor at the doorway and turned just as a man dressed like an astronaut entered. Coiled at his side was a hair-thin silver wire connected to a box attached to his waist. Jason knew it was Boomer McKenzie.

“I hear ya’ gotta’ big pineapple for me to peel,” McKenzie said, chomping on an unlit cigar and holding a face shield under his arm.

Sheffield smiled. “Worthy of your king-size machete.”

McKenzie discarded the cigar and spit out a tick of tobacco. “Okay, where’s the mother’.”

“We’ll find out in a minute.” Sheffield nodded to the two detectives flanking Ali, each grasping onto an elbow. Sheffield then said. “Mr. Ismail, please show us the storeroom.”

Jason watched Ali lead the detectives towards the rear of the restaurant, thinking about Boomer’s irreverence towards the bomb. It reminded him of the trading floor’s gallows humor. Jason waited until Ted stepped behind Sheffield and then he too joined the procession.

They walked down a short flight of stairs into a small room, crowded with shelves containing cartons of foodstuffs. Jason’s forehead moistened with fear as he searched the ceiling for grated openings. He saw nothing but smelled a

touch of nervous perspiration permeating the cramped quarters.

“Boomer, there’s supposed to be two ventilator shafts packed with ammonium nitrate,” Sheffield croaked.

“Hmm . . . they musta’ moved when they heard us coming.”

“Mr. Ismail.” Sheffield’s eyes swept the room and locked on the far wall. “What’s behind that door?” A sign in red, ‘Restricted Access: High Voltage’ covered the doorway.

Ali raised an eyebrow. “I think it’s an electrical closet.”

“Let’s have the key.”

“I’m sorry, Inspector,” Ali shook his head. “Nadim’s the one in charge of this.”

Jason pinpointed the lie, and knew Sheffield did as well. Even if Nadim had supervised the renovations, Ali would need an emergency key to the electrical closet during Nadim’s absence.

Before Sheffield could respond, Boomer butted in. “I guess door number one contains the booby prize.”

Jason’s confidence in McKenzie rose as he watched the knight, girded for battle, advance towards his target. “This might boomerang so you guys can go--except for Mr. Ali over here, since it’s his party.”

When no one moved, Sheffield said: “Okay, why don’t we all give Boomer room to breathe.”

Jason stepped back, watching McKenzie don his face shield and say: “When we don’t have time for blueprints, my catheter saves the day.”

Boomer then slid the nearly invisible filament from his belt into the crack between the door and the frame. Jason knew the catheter contained a microscopic camera transmitting pictures into Boomer’s face mask, similar to a micro-surgeon’s tools.

“My mother always wanted me to be a doctor,” Boomer continued his play-by-play. “Well, she’d be proud of me now.”

“What d’ya see?” Sheffield asked.

“No booby trap on the door lock . . . That’s a break.”

“How about the ventilation system?”

“I’m scanning the top of the cinderblock walls. Here comes the ceiling and now . . . there they are, one in each corner.”

Jason’s heart pounded, knowing what came next. Sheffield did not disappoint. “D’you see anyone in there?”

The silence smothered Jason even though only seconds passed. He felt Ted lean against his side and steeled himself to show support. He thought he saw Ali wipe away a drop of sweat from his chin, as Boomer broke the spell.

“There’s someone on the floor . . . no, on a mattress . . . a black-haired woman covered with a blanket.”

Jason’s blood boiled as he heard Ali sustain his act. “My God, how could Nadim have done this?”

Sheffield ignored him and asked. “Any indication she’s wired?”

“I don’t think so . . . but there’s only one way to find out.”

Boomer reeled back the catheter, pulled what resembled a small screwdriver from his belt and inserted the device into the lock. Jason watched Sheffield whisper to the detectives flanking Ali. One handcuffed himself to the suddenly subdued suspect and the other radioed for a stretcher. Ted clutched Jason’s arm as McKenzie unscrewed the tumbler from its housing.

“Okay, let’s hope the pictures didn’t lie,” Boomer said, the steel door creaking against its hinges. Jason prayed, as Boomer’s words slipped out in slow motion. “She’s breathing . . . very shallow . . . almost no pulse . . . she’s lost a lot of blood . . . Get the medics in here real quick.”

Sheffield barreled back towards the stairs just as two white-coated attendants pushed their way in. Jason heard Boomer raise his voice once more.

“By the way, the timer for this thing is on the wall. I suggest you keep Mr. Ali under wraps so he doesn’t fly in here for a crash performance.” Ali’s shoulders slumped slightly as the detective secured his grip with Boomer’s instructions.

Jason watched the medics wheel a stretcher into the ‘high voltage’ room, putting his arm around Ted to restrain him from following. He focused on preserving Lisa’s life.

“Listen, Ted, you’ve got thirty seconds to decide where to send her.”

Ted wiped perspiration from his forehead and mumbled. “Bellevue has her hand . . .”

“Yeah, but Lenox Hill specializes in reattaching severed limbs . . . I’ll ask Toliver to get his partner ready.” Jason knew at least six hours had elapsed since the hand was severed, threatening the operation’s success.

“And how . . .”

“The medics can radio Bellevue to transport it over.”

Out of the corner of his eye Jason saw the stretcher emerge from the room, an attendant holding a bag of saline solution attached with a tube to Lisa’s right arm. The bloody bandage on her left wrist contrasted with her pasty forearm. Jason paled, knowing from her ghostly green hue that Lisa’s life was very much in danger. He felt Ted tremble as the stretcher passed. One attendant said to his partner.

“The trauma unit at Bellevue, right?”

“No . . . Lenox Hill,” Ted interrupted.

“Who’re you?”

“Her father and I’m riding with you.”

Ted started to follow the medics when he spun and lunged at Ali, knocking down the detective handcuffed to the prisoner. Ted wrapped his five-foot-five-inch frame around the slightly taller Ali and began choking him.

“How could you?” Ted hissed.

Jason pushed between the combatants, trying to separate the two, when he heard Ali whisper.

“Justice.”

Jason pulled Ted away, knowing that Ali must have preached his terrorist credo to Lisa, allowing her to incriminate him. Ali needed her dead.

Sheffield scrambled to subdue Ali, helped by the somewhat embarrassed detective recovering from his fall. The Inspector reprimanded Ted.

“That wasn’t smart, Mr. Harris. He’s under arrest now . . .”

“Did you hear what he said?”

“I’m sorry, Mr. Harris, there was too much of a commotion.”

“Alright, everyone,” Boomer announced, waving his arms. “Let’s clear out so my men can get this building ready for business tomorrow.”

Jason straightened Ted’s jacket and started to accompany him in the ambulance, when he heard Ali demand:

“I want to speak with my attorney.”

Jason knew that meant trouble. Terrorists like Ali do not surrender so easily. Only if Lisa regained consciousness to indict him could they deny his lawyer’s request for bail. Even a paralegal could parlay the Nadim cover story into reasonable doubt. They needed Lisa’s testimony by tomorrow morning to restrain Ali’s retribution.

Chapter Twenty-Four

The phantom sound of the siren surprised Jason, having never heard it from inside a speeding ambulance. Its plaintive wail stoked his sympathy for Ted, sitting solemnly beside Lisa, but he concentrated on his radiophone conversation with Toliver's partner, Dr. Fabian Greenfield.

They arrived at Lenox Hill, greeted by a phalanx of trauma-trained physicians who whisked Lisa's limp frame into the emergency room. Jason accompanied Ted through Admitting and escorted him to the micro-surgery waiting room, a spacious chamber containing three bulky brown couches flanked by bargain basement end tables. A large TV sat in the center. The unusually comfortable accommodations consoled Jason, despite the antiseptic aroma, considering the twelve-hour ordeal Greenfield had outlined. He prayed Lisa's surgery would end before the beginning of Faith's, scheduled for eight o'clock in the morning. That way Ali would remain behind bars while he focused on his daughter.

Ted fidgeted in front of the TV, the World Trade Center evacuation interrupting regularly scheduled programming.

"You'll be okay here for a while?" Jason said.

"I'll have to be."

"Good. I'd like to go over to the children's wing to see Faith."

"Oh, of course."

"But you've got to do something for me."

“Sure.”

“You know some administrators here, right.”

“Well, I gave them some money a few years ago.”

“That’s what I thought. See if you can arrange some added security--up here and downstairs.”

Ted arched his eyebrows. “My God, you’re right. Lisa’s a target. I guess I’m just not thinking . . . Maybe we should call Sheffield.”

“He’s probably interrogating Ali. See what you can do here, first.”

Ted nodded. “I’ll take care of it. Go see your daughter.”

Ted sounded determined, just as Jason had hoped.

* * * *

Jason’s pulse quickened as he arrived in the children’s wing. Cartoon characters kicked colored balloons across the pink and blue wallpaper. He flew past an empty nurses’ station, trimmed with plastic candy cones, and entered a spacious playroom, crowded with parents and children toying with trucks and doll carriages. He looked for Faith and Dana, without success, until focusing on the ten foot wide aquarium lining the side wall. Goose bumps dimpled his neck when he saw Dana holding Faith as she fed a tankful of thrashing fish. He snuck up and wrapped his arms around them, his heartbeat accelerating. “I love you both . . . How about telling me what I missed.”

“I think you’re the one who has the most to tell.” Dana kissed him on the cheek.

Jason cradled Faith in one arm, clutched Dana with the other and circled towards the sitting area of the playroom. They sat on a small couch

covered in turquoise plastic, Faith cuddling in Jason's arms.

"Okay, you guys go first. What does Dr. Toliver say?"

"He says Mommy can sleep in my room tonight."

"That's a nice surprise," Jason said, eyeing Dana.

"That's right," Dana added. "Because Faith's going to take pictures of her legs, while Mommy and Daddy stay here."

"What a big girl." Jason smothered Faith with kisses as a blond-haired nurse lifted her into a wheelchair. He waved to Faith as she disappeared down the hallway.

"They do a phenomenal job here." Jason said.

"I'll be happy when it's over . . . Now tell me how you managed to save the City."

"I hope that's the case."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"There are loose ends that can still unravel." As soon as the words slipped out Jason knew he had erred.

"In that case, I insist you tell me everything. I've been in the middle of this and have a right to know."

Jason recognized his mistake, but he had no choice. He explained what had happened, avoiding the personal clauses in Whitehead's blackmail and downgrading the lingering danger.

"What a mess," Dana said, shaking her head. "But it looks like the momentum has shifted. I've heard this Greenfield is the best. He can save her . . ."

Jason heard Dana's voice trail confusion. "But something doesn't make sense."

"Yes?"

“Why isn’t Whitehead under arrest?”

“I told you, there’s no hard evidence against him. Just drug-induced allegations.” Jason sensed Dana focusing on his fib.

“But you didn’t even stoke Sheffield’s suspicion by telling him Whitehead sold out Malcolm.”

“It just didn’t seem . . .”

“Please, stop humoring me.” Dana’s irritation telegraphed her intuition. Jason knew she knew.

“He showed me the resignation letter.” Jason said it softly, regretting the conversation’s turn. “Let’s leave it for another . . .”

“No.” Dana steeled herself while staring at him. “I’ve lived with this long enough . . . I guess you think I was embarrassed to tell you.”

Jason nodded.

“Well, that’s not why. It may have been a pipedream, but I didn’t want you at a disadvantage . . . I wanted your independence . . . I wanted you to succeed.” Dana blinked back tears.

Jason rocked back and forth, recalling his disappointments with Dana. He understood her motive, while disagreeing with her tactics. “Let’s go into Faith’s room and wait,” he said softly.

“I really think Ted needs you.”

“This comes first.”

Jason and Dana found Faith sitting in bed combing her Barbie doll’s hair. Jason snuggled next to her, telling a long story; Dana clung beside them. He left only after they both fell asleep in his arms.

* * * *

Tension escorted Jason on his trek towards Ted. He hated leaving Faith, but recognized Lisa’s greater vulnerability. And he knew Ted required

his support far more than Dana, strange as that sounded.

Jason arrived at the micro-surgery waiting room, gratified by the presence of a uniformed security guard. He reached for the doorknob.

“You’ll have to show me some ID, Sir.”

“Hmm . . . this sounds serious,” Jason tested, pulling out his wallet.

The guard checked Jason’s driver’s license against a yellow sheet of paper. “Sorry, Mr. Novack, we’ve got orders to bar unauthorized access to this area . . . But you’ve been cleared.”

Ted must have called the Chairman of the Board to arrange this, Jason thought. He opened the door and saw a young doctor, clad in surgical greens and matching shower cap, towering over Ted in the otherwise empty chamber. He approached, hoping for a favorable update.

“. . . So, Mr. Harris, we’ve stabilized her vital signs and have started surgery, but she’s in very critical condition from blood loss and trauma.”

“Dr. Greenfield,” Ted said grasping Jason’s elbow. “This is Jason Novack . . .”

“Oh yes, we spoke before.” Greenfield nodded and extended his hand.

Jason hesitated, prompting the doctor to chuckle. “Go ahead, I’ll remember to scrub them.”

Jason smiled. “I thought you said the surgery started.”

“Well, yes, but there’s plenty of work for the rest of my team before I reconnect nerves and blood vessels. I’ve got to preserve my concentration, especially since we’re operating through the night.”

Jason finally understood why surgeon’s schedules start at dawn. “I may be jumping ahead, but assuming the operation’s success, when will Lisa regain consciousness?”

“Within a couple of hours . . . early morning’s my best guess.”

Jason knew Sheffield would want to know, as he watched Fabian Greenfield fading from the room. “Good luck,” he said.

“Better say a silent prayer,” Greenfield prompted as he left.

“Now that wasn’t very encouraging,” Ted shook his head.

Jason had never heard a surgeon solicit spiritual aid before. “C’mon, let’s sit down and catch the ten o’clock crisis coverage. It’s gonna be a long wait. By the way, great job with security.”

Jason flicked on the TV, sitting with Ted on the tan couch, just as the news anchor reviewed her story.

“. . . To sum up, New York City police successfully dismantled a terrorist bomb that threatened to topple the World Trade Center. This was accomplished without loss of life, except for the ruthless murder at Kennedy Airport of a police sergeant tailing one of the alleged terrorists . . . There’s no word on whether the suspect successfully fled the country. Now let’s turn to . . .”

Jason stomach sank as he muted the TV and grabbed the telephone on the end table. “I’m calling Sheffield.”

“Who do you think it is?”

“There are only two possibilities . . . Neither is good.”

Jason had barely finished punching in the numbers when the telephone rang.

“I’ve been waiting for your call, Mr. Novack.”

Jason shook his head. “I just heard the news . . .”

“We discovered Furillio’s body only about an hour ago.”

Jason slumped, recognizing the sergeant’s name who had shadowed Bashir. “With Ali under arrest Bashir’s capable of anything. I’d like you to . . .”

“There’s some good news, of sorts, Mr. Novack.”

“Yes?” Jason perked up.

“We discovered a red Yamaha, with a Palestinian decal on the rear fender, parked at the Algerian air terminal . . .”

Jason suspected the subterfuge continued. “It’s a trick, Inspector. He wouldn’t leave the country without trying to complete Ali’s work. I’ve studied the terrorist tenet . . .”

“Please let me finish . . . And he passed through passport control, according to airline computer records.”

Jason sat back in the couch and leaned his head against the wall, knowing Sheffield had deluded himself. “I can’t believe it . . . Any reason you didn’t alert airport security earlier in the day?”

Sheffield’s pause signaled his answer. “It was an oversight, Mr. Novack. I thought Bashir was a formality.”

Jason knew Sheffield relaxed after solving the bomb threat. Now they had to worry about Bashir’s legacy. Hospital security was insufficient.

“Look, Inspector, I’m not sure exactly what’s going on, but Furillio’s murder emphasizes that Lisa’s life is in danger if she survives the surgery. Her testimony’s crucial to Ali’s indictment. Please . . .”

“I agree, Mr. Novack. I’ve sent a detail to blanket the entire complex. They should be there already.”

“Thank you.” Jason hung up, encouraged by Sheffield’s recovery.

Ted shook his head. “It’s getting worse rather than better.”

“I don’t think so. The Inspector’s getting his act together. Police protection’s on it’s way.” Jason stood and walked to the couch in the corner. “I suggest you try to sleep a little.”

Jason stretched his six-foot-four inch frame across the sofa, with knees

bent, hanging over the edge. His eyelids closed themselves; the turmoil twisted inside his head.

Chapter Twenty-Five

A racket roused Jason. His hands rubbed sleep from sandpapered eyes. The windowless waiting room warped his time clock but he sensed a turn for the worse as two uniformed, ruddy-faced, patrolmen rumbled before a blaring TV. His watch read five forty-five.

“Holy shit . . . Is this the morning?”

“Sorry, Mr. Novack,” said the officer with the bushy brown mustache. “But you’ve been out since we got here last night.”

Jason sat forward, shaking his head in disbelief, and realized what was missing. He jumped up from the sofa.

“Hey, where’s Mr. Harris?”

“Oh, an orderly just came by and escorted him to the post-‘op’ unit.”

Jason’s hope for Lisa died with those words. If the operation were successful, Greenfield would have celebrated by personally squiring Ted to the recovery room. “Which way’d they go?”

Both officers signaled hitchhiker fashion. “Out and towards the left.”

Jason followed the signs to the post-operating step-down unit, fearing what he would find. A uniformed hospital security man and a New York City cop barred the entrance.

Jason showed his ID and stepped into a room dominated by oxygen tanks and medical machinery. He saw a solitary figure, hunched forlornly beside a bed, and recognized Ted touching the forehead of a waxen Lisa Allen.

Jason wondered why they had not had the decency to remove the tubes from Lisa's nose and mouth, when he heard the rhythmic beep of the heart-monitoring machine. He exhaled relief.

"Thank God she's alive," he said, putting his hand on Ted's shoulder.

"Barely," Ted sighed. "The next few hours are crucial."

The blush returning to Lisa's cheeks encouraged Jason, despite the distorting tubes connecting her to surrounding gadgetry. "Who said?"

"Greenfield. He left for a quick nap in his office. It's just a matter of healing time now."

Jason glanced at his watch. It was six-fifteen, almost too late to catch Faith before they prepared her for surgery. "I'll be back as soon as I can." He disappeared from the room.

* * * *

Bashir stared into the bathroom mirror, examining for the last time the closely cropped beard he had worn for ten years. He knew today would avenge his father's death in an Israeli jail, as he lathered his face to clear away the stubble. He would shave away the shame.

Bashir's bloodshot eyes reminded him that he had slept only an hour since arriving yesterday in the Jersey City safe house on Water Street, after shaking his shadow. It was no surprise that the police sergeant tailed Tariq, riding Bashir's motorcycle, following their switch in the gas station bathroom. Of his two Jersey City charges, Tariq was a functional clone of Bashir, allowing him to use Bashir's passport to complete the ruse. He hoped Sheffield's bluster on last night's newscast reflected the Inspector's belief that Bashir fled the country. That would facilitate today's operation.

Bashir smelled the thick espresso percolating through the apartment, as

he slowly slid the razor across his cheek. He heard Ibrahim, his second collaborator from the tiny New Jersey town, preparing what might turn into their final meal. Bashir knew he would have been captured returning to his Hoboken apartment, and was grateful that Ali had encouraged the Jersey City connection. But his uncle had triggered turmoil with last night's instructions delivered through Pokie Kraft.

Bashir winced with the nick of the razor across his neck, recalling that his dislike of the Texan extended back to their first meeting in Ali's Brooklyn apartment. That dislike blossomed last night when Pokie disclosed that Ali called him after his arrest. Bashir resented Ali for contacting Pokie until realizing his uncle suspected that police telephones were tapped, especially since they were used for supposedly privileged prisoner-attorney communication. Ali wanted to preserve Bashir's mission.

Bashir had nearly rejected Pokie's instructions from Ali, until the Texan spoke the code word, *Shatiah*, even while fracturing the pronunciation. For ten years Bashir dreamt of destroying the World Trade Center, symbol of America's might. He had conceived of the mobile bomb backup to the storeroom to preserve the target. And months ago, when Pokie pressed Ali to give Malcolm access, he refined his preparations, pinpointing the exact location for the Chevrolet van, packed with ammonium nitrate, to topple the twin towers.

Bashir examined his clean-shaven face, knowing the disguise would help him reach his new objective. He had spent the entire night reviewing blueprints of the Lenox Hill Hospital complex, before agreeing to eliminate Lisa Allen's threat to Ali. But he doubted this would save his uncle and longed for the carnage of the twin towers. He knew Americans could convict on circumstantial evidence and suspected that after discrediting the Nadim cover

story, Ali would be victimized with or without Lisa.

He lamented that his uncle's command to Pokie, 'follow the girl', left him no choice. As a soldier of God he would glorify Allah's name, restraining his resentment, and attack the hospital. The truck bomb could easily crumble the entire complex, while aimed at the micro-surgery ward.

* * * *

Jason arrived out of breath at Faith's side, just as Dana and a nurse wheeled the bed out of the room.

"How's my little girl?" Jason touched her forehead, draping his other arm over Dana's shoulders.

Faith smiled.

Jason eyed Dana who nodded towards the intravenous hook-up in Faith's forearm. A touch of Valium in the tube soothed his daughter, he thought, as they entered the elevators.

"We're heading back to where you came from," Dana said, watching the floors flicker by.

Jason had known that Faith's surgery was scheduled for the same micro-surgery ward as Lisa's. But now he worried that everyone he cared for would be crowded into one location. As they exited the elevators, he saw Dr. Toliver, wearing surgical garb, waiting to greet them at the operating room entrance.

"Is my favorite three-year old ready?" Toliver nodded to everyone, while Faith drifted in a dream.

"Can you tell us how long this will take?" Jason fidgeted with Faith's bed cover, a lump rising in his throat.

"We should be finished before noon, if all goes well." Toliver then took

hold of the rolling bed and, together with the nurse, guided it towards the operating room. He added. "If you'll sit inside, we'll keep you updated."

Jason watched Faith disappear behind the swinging doors, holding Dana close to him. Tears swelled his eyes. They walked arm-in-arm into the micro-surgery waiting room. Ted sat on the couch in front of the TV, staring vacantly at CNN's seven o'clock news coverage.

"How come you're here?" Jason asked.

"They wheeled Lisa back to cauterize her bleeding."

Jason and Dana joined Ted's vigil.

* * * *

Bashir drove slowly, perspiring in the September heat, while avoiding potholes that might jar the explosive-laden green Chevrolet van. It would be a sin to waste their preparation on an accident. He caught a glimpse of a curly-haired Ibrahim in the rear view mirror, following closely in the beat-up blue Honda Civic, serving as the escape hatch. This was not designed as a suicide mission, although he had left his last thoughts in a letter just in case of a mishap.

Bashir tensed as they entered the Holland Tunnel toll plaza, joining lines of cars and trucks honking their way to New York. He had anticipated the normal rush hour traffic, despite yesterday's danger. Americans reeked of overconfidence, thickened by last night's boasting. Today America would pay.

Bashir had budgeted an hour to reach the target. They would easily meet their eight o'clock deadline. Pokie did not want Lisa leaving the recovery room.

When his turn came to pay, Bashir glanced at the toll-taker and gasped at his picture on a 'wanted' poster plastered to the glass-enclosed booth. He

realized Sheffield had not swallowed his cover story. He paid the fare, staring straight ahead.

“Have a nice day.” The uniformed woman examined him closely.

Bashir accelerated into the tunnel before realizing he had little to fear. He would not have recognized himself without his beard.

The whooshing sound of the tunnel reminded him of the trading floor din, diverting his focus from the hospital. He recalled that destroying the World Trade Center would have settled personal scores as well as scarring America’s might. The indignities he had suffered would now go unpunished.

Bashir resented Pokie’s message just as he resented his pressuring Ali to punish Lisa Allen’s treason. And he wondered why Pokie’s revenge had not been transferred to Malcolm, who had clearly compromised the storeroom. Bashir’s hatred boiled at the thought of Malcolm’s escape. He suspected Pokie favored his flesh and blood, perhaps because Malcolm was his lackey, and wondered whether Pokie had distorted Ali's orders.

Bashir blasted the horn of the van, protesting his shackles. The stalled traffic provoked him, as surely as Malcolm’s jump from justice. He glanced at his watch. It was seven-forty. He had time to assert himself, to do what was right in his own eyes. He had already demonstrated loyalty by deceiving Lisa Allen, despite her having shown him respect.

The glare of the rising sun nearly blinded him as he exited the tunnel. A left turn uptown led to Lenox Hill, downtown to the right were the twin towers. Bashir stayed the uptown course and then, holding his breath, veered over the small divider at the last moment, cars screeching to a halt in his wake. He glanced in the rear view mirror, finding Ibrahim following close behind, shaking his head in disbelief.

A jolt of passion powered Bashir towards his original targets. He leaned

forward against the windshield, peeking up at the towers, then jammed on his brakes to avoid a taxi discharging a passenger.

Bashir saw that the dashboard clock read seven-fifty, as he approached the block before the World Trade Center. His heartbeat pounded with the profusion of policemen, circling the buildings in pairs. He knew these were Sheffield's precautions, wondering who had alerted the Inspector to their plot. Sheffield should be basking in yesterday's victory rather than trying to thwart another threat. Only someone familiar with the terrorist credo would stoke the Inspector's suspicions.

Bashir worried that the heightened security interfered with his long-standing plans. He knew that if he would compromise on the carnage he could also promote his personal revenge. He begged Allah's forgiveness and parked just outside the Vista Hotel on West Street, waiting near the underground garage. He glanced in the rear view mirror, meeting Ibrahim's gaze with an imperceptible shake of his head, widening Ibrahim's eyes.

Bashir prayed to qualify for Muslim immortality, to be designated a *Shatiah*, a martyr, as he saw the digital clock reach eight-zero-zero. His side mirror showed exactly what he expected. A red *911* Porche speeding towards the garage. Malcolm stuck to his routine, just like everyone else.

Bashir gunned the engine and accelerated behind Malcolm, cutting off a car that had been following him. He raced with Malcolm to the reserved parking spot in the basement of the World Trade Center.

* * * *

Jason's pulse pounded when CNN announced a news flash. He grabbed Dana's fingertips and Ted's eyes snapped into focus. Everyone sat forward. Barry Saunders, staring ghost-like from the screen, announced:

“The World Trade Center garage exploded moments ago, despite yesterday’s dismantling of a terrorist bomb. It’s not clear whether today’s blast, leading to an evacuation amidst smoke and steaming rubble, is related to yesterday’s threat. So far firemen have pulled six bodies from the wreckage, believed to have been triggered by a green van seen racing into the underground parking lot. We’ll bring you live coverage as the crisis unfolds.”

Jason buried his face in his hands, aching with despair. He knew there were scores to settle.

Epilogue

Six Months Later

Jason sat beside Ted at a table for six, in the rear of the dimly lit restaurant, decorated with ornate oil paintings. He peered through the plate glass window at the technicolor pedestrians passing by. The street life of Greenwich Village added to the ambience of *Milano*. He picked *Milano* because of tonight's guest of honor.

Jason nodded to Chef Vittorio, as Lisa emerged from the ladies room.

"This is where I sold out," Lisa smiled, sitting down next to Ted.

"All things considered, I thought it proper to celebrate your trading debut here," Jason said. Vittorio brought an ice bucket and champagne to their table.

"It seems that everyone wants to sponsor this event," Vittorio said to Lisa while pouring the sparkling wine into long stemmed glasses. "But Ted and I deferred to Jason."

"Shouldn't we wait for the others?" Lisa blushed a deep purple.

"No . . . this is simply making good on my promise to return your thoughtfulness." Jason lifted his glass. "Good luck tomorrow."

They drank slowly, including Lisa, who eyed the frozen fingers on her left hand, still rosy-pink from the surgery. Jason knew she would never regain control.

"I know it's early," Vittorio said. "But let me know when you want dinner." He disappeared into the kitchen.

Ted had watched Lisa's furtive glance at her wrist and asked, "Are you nervous?"

Lisa chuckled. "After last week nothing 'll make me nervous . . . I still can't look at him without getting the chills."

Jason recalled Lisa's uncontrolled trembling while testifying at Ali's trial. "You put him away for life . . ."

"But you know this isn't over," Lisa interrupted. "Why else would they have introduced Bashir's letter?"

Jason knew the defense introduced Bashir's letter, not so much because it blamed America for inviting terrorism, but to show he pinpointed the coordinates for destroying the World Trade Center. Only Bashir's vengeance toward Malcolm prevented a complete catastrophe. "That's why Pokie can't remain free. He'll finish the job one day."

Ted's eyes flashed at Jason. "I still don't agree with the prosecutor's strategy."

"Look, Ted," Jason shook his head. "There's no other way to get at him. Bashir and Malcolm are dead and Ali refused to testify."

"D'you really think Whitehead will turn state's evidence?" Ted furrowed his brow.

Jason had gone through this discussion for weeks, pressuring the prosecutor to pursue Pokie through Whitehead. He knew Dana wanted Whitehead to pay for the blackmail, not caring about anything else. But it would be a shame to waste her father's three-year prison term just on Whitehead. "I very much hope so."

"But Whitehead's lawyers have already heard enough of those tapes. They should've responded to the deal."

"Ah . . . but wait till they hear that Hernandez will testify in person."

Jason smiled as Ted's eyes popped open. "He's got some surprises for them."

"When did *that* happen?"

"I spoke with Raoul this afternoon. They've cleared the remaining extradition hurdles. He's bringing Hernandez day after tomorrow."

"Now, I think we've got a chance to clean the fuckers out."

Jason smiled, knowing Ted's vitality had returned completely. He stared at his partner in Harris Trading, grateful for their good fortune, when he heard Lisa saying:

"Well, here comes the real guest of honor."

Jason looked up as Faith waltzed into Milano, wearing a tutu and tiara, followed by Andrew's frown and Dana's watchful eyes. They still held their breath whenever she tested her prostheses.

"My, you're a pretty ballerina." Lisa added.

Jason kissed Dana, sitting down next to him, as Faith scrambled onto his lap.

"My Daddy said I can be anything I want." She stuck out her tongue at Andrew.