RUN

Charlie

RUN

A

novel

by

Charles diOrio
Query: Run Charlie Run

_Run Charlie Run_ is a contemporary allegory focusing on Charlie Bates, a fugitive seeking freedom in a modern America where freedom itself is fleeting.

I am seeking a courageous publisher or literary representative for this important work of socially progressive fiction; a publisher seeking a dark, topical, provocative novel about society’s discontent.

_Run Charlie Run_ speaks to our national anxiety exploring our evolving personal liberties and institutions. I need a publisher who is seeking a character driven story that’s politically and socially explosive: _Run Charlie Run_ is such a story.

Thank you for reading and I do hope you may request a copy of the manuscript, along with synopsis and author info. This novel does run at 80,000 words. I am currently a prisoner in a Massachusetts jail. This work was written under difficult circumstances and at great personal sacrifice.

Yours truly,

Charles Diorio W103769
MCI-Shirley P.O. BOX 1218
Shirley, MA 01464
RUN CHARLIE RUN

Preface


Written by a man who's been through the system, this is a raw perspective – a view from behind bars – from a cinderblock cell in a jail. Characters in this allegory were all born behind bars in a controlled society of forced association, assimilation and direct government supervision. Yet, this isn't a book about incarceration it's about life and surviving.

We live in a society where press and government shape moral certainty. Charlie Bates running from scrutiny only to have it drop on him at every turn. Morality is used as a weapon. A gun killing with a label or by proxy: a Cops official duty to protect and serve the interest of the state.

In each case living is frustrated, effectively snuffed out. Thriving is defeated. All these characters are flawed, as most are in any worthwhile book about life. Characters with a taint of incarceration, lack of money, sacrifice and duty. In this context hysteria of modern economy, political uncertainty, self serving: a modern inquisition: law breakers rather than heretics; demonizing man's frailty. Setting us up for an inevitable fall then arrested, photographed, fingerprinted, DNA catalogued and put into a computer data base.

This work moves urgently because it was written urgently. Permitted to be written knowing it will face a stormy journey of rejection; a work written by a criminals hand conceived by a convicts mind, executed at tax payer expense. A perspective owned by a mind allowed to roam only behind bars. As a privilege – a project permitted.

If this work makes it from manuscript to press this alone is a victory. Run Charlie Run will be labeled along with its author. Adhesive labels designed to stifle individual expression. Free speech is not free at all. Now more than ever our "gotcha press" hand in hand with law enforcement, legislatures and all that make up America's not so anonymous authority will act against this work; this novel thrives on adversity.
Uncomfortable procrustean challenges – events become a square peg in a round hole metaphor. Breaking law is necessary in this fiction. Breaking law is essential otherwise there is no novel.

Public opinion is unimportant in a climate of fear. Power alone counts; as arrests are made and more American’s experience jail and prison fear becomes dissipated, and a callous scab develops against police power and practice.

This book is about Zero Tolerance and total control. Modern politics elevates virtue over vice to a degree it can never be attained, yet in our collective quest for moral virtue we all ultimately must fail. This failure is expected and figured into an equation fueling institutions like the current industrial prison complex. I’m reminded of the Book of Job, and Satan’s conversation with God – modern culture seems to be the bet and moral ambiguity a tool of the Devil.

There is always in my mind a knowing my work will be dismissed casually with the words: “He’s a criminal ranting, who cares what a felon, a jail bird, has to say.” Yet what can’t be ignored is the truth of the work: warrantless wiretapping of private conversations, or airport surveillance systems photographing our naked bodies, would have been an unthinkable overreach when I was a child. Today we’ve come to accept them. These are but a few products of a vast bureaucratic momentum coupled with fear. Once in place it’s hard to imagine any security measures ever being scaled back.

As novels of literary fiction go, Run Charlie Run, may not be dystopian in a classic sense; as say Orwell’s 1984 or Anthony Burgess’ A Clockwork Orange or Huxley’s Brave New World. Here there’s a robust energy set in the here and now. Characters exist in a context of melancholy reality insisting contemporary culture is more frightening than an after-the-holocaust tension filled nightmare. We no longer need an anticipation of evils visiting us for a government vacuum to suck us all up. Charlie Bates’ search for freedom in our wholly crafted police state where facial recognition software, media double speak and ineluctable police power rule: Homeland Security is here and now.

Gore Vidal in his work Imperial America, {Vidal, Imperial America: Reflections on the United States of Amnesia. Nation Books, 2004.}, p.6-7 seems to nail succinctly the evolution of culture:

“In the decades since this State of the Union [1972], the United States has more people, per capita, locked away in prisons than any other country while the sick economy of ’72 is long forgotten as worse problems – and deficits – beset us. For one thing, we no longer live in a nation, but in a Homeland. In 1972: “roughly 80 percent of police work in the United States has to do with the regulation of our private morals. By that I mean, controlling what we smoke, eat, put in our veins – not to mention trying to regulate with
whom and how we have sex, with whom and how we gamble. As a result our police are among the most corrupt in the Western world.

I don’t think this would get the same gasp today that it did back then. I point out police collusion with gamblers, drug dealers, prostitutes or, indeed anyone whose sexual activities have been proscribed by a series of state legal codes that were – are- the scandal of what we like to call a free society.

Courts stocking cookie cutter pre-fabricated McJails: a prison complex so vast and sprawling it would frighten us all if not so carefully concealed – hidden in plain sight. Federal and state courts provide unbridled power. Politicians provide unfettered control with budgets for Correctional Services in the billions. Massachusetts, at the time of this writing, is wrestling with a prison expansion of $2.3 billion dollars by 2020 according to Governor Deval Patrick’s “Corrections Master Plan.”

Alas, this novel is not about prison, it’s about a character fleeing not just cruel conditions, but cruel circumstances. Compelled to exist – perhaps forever – under the radar and outside the law. A man without a country yearning for safe harbor: some peace. A peace once described as an American Dream. Only, perhaps even this is too much for Charlie Bates to hope for.

My Charlie Bates has more in common with his Oliver Twist namesake. He’s a modern pickpocket with larceny in his heart. He’s a con artist making ends meet. A rogue seduced by the lure of the World Wide Web: the internet.

I make no excuses for my Charlie Bates. He lacks the youth of the Dickens character or influence of a Fagan exploiting his sticky fingers. My character is past middle age making crafty choices hoping for some kind of redemption. Of course the whole point of Zero Tolerance today: there can be no redemption for a cheap hustler or any lawbreaker for that matter in our enlightened modern culture.

This work is purposeful, sparse, economical, most of all urgent. It was written at the mercy of a modern correctional institution.

If any dystopian elements exist, it’s in our culturally zealous insistence for a utopian ideal. Modern America – that period after the end of World War II – struggles to be all things to all people. An ideal once referred to as a New Frontier, becoming The Great Society, finally diminishing into a not so great society failing because such a goal may only be satisfied by pushing undesirables out, ostracizing others or carefully registering still more with technology: This is total control.

Prison expansion; Homeland Security are but a few tools to achieve a modern global imperative. Make no mistake all has been tediously constructed in other parts of
the world: the United Kingdom with its far flung network of closed circuit video becomes a handy example.

We may look forward to a future without currency. Today’s media is carefully using the euphemism: “certain financial instruments” instead of “cold hard cash” in its collusion with government to stamp out currency. Already there is a push for alternative payment methods such as debit cards. The campaign has begun with casual innocent sound bites along with short punchy print articles boasting “experts” assuring us the future will be a better place without dirty old fashioned paper money.

Homeland Security reaches into the most sophisticated servers and home computers capturing information searching hard drives and turning on and off video camera’s methods known and unknown. Cell phones capture every means of communication: sanctioned eavesdropping. Facial recognition on public transportation has been around for years. Passports and identification are mandatory virtually closing the door on unrestricted movement in America. Run Charlie Run is a work of fiction, for non-fiction visit the Patriot Act I and II.

Of course, I’m getting ahead of myself. This novel is literary fiction after all. Most American’s should embrace this warm blanket of government security right? And let’s face it should you balk, well, you must have something to hide, right? It is this same rational a good detective uses on a suspect: “Why do you need a lawyer if you didn’t do anything wrong?”

It’s a curious observation, in Massachusetts recently – on the same day – a Casino Bill passed (H3087) allowing three Casino’s and one slot parlor in the Bay State. A bill to Combat Human Trafficking (H3808) passed unanimously. In addition to creating “the crimes of trafficking persons for sexual servitude” it “increases punishment for individuals who pay prostitutes for sex...”

Zero Tolerance puts us all in the same boat, and that boat is cast adrift.

Media may be the culprit behind all that is afflicting our culture of ambivalence and fear. A not so subtle symbiotic relationship exists between politics and the fourth estate.

Broadcast media and legislation: can one exist without the other? Look no further than the current movement designed to restrict and regulate the World Wide Web. Recently, in the name of protecting the integrity of intellectual property lawmakers crafted a bill to limit internet freedoms. Internet giants such as Google and Wikipedia among others quickly pushed back: The legislation was quickly shelved.

Think tanks and brain trusts worldwide must now contain and construct some means to address an obvious threat to a media and political status quo which global internet now challenges.
We are all naturally curious creatures. Information is essential when making an informed decision. The media prey upon this necessity. Our primitive urge to know—to be informed—is exploited. This exploitation of our need to know allows “misinformation” or “doublespeak” foretold in Animal Farm and 1984.

Media traditionally take an issue and simplify it to a point of absurdity; reducing issues to simple choices while presenting complexity in terms of good or bad, right and wrong. Often presenting an issue so skewed as to be indefensible. To question in any way the press’s position—particularly law enforcement decisions or legislation targeting crime and criminals—is un-American.

Stories fed to the public at large are aimed at the heart, a knee jerk appeal leaving an uphill crawl by thinking people to overcome rationally irrational press reports.

Being an informed author, I found myself thumbing through Star Magazine on page 36 of the December 26th 2011 edition an article innocently focusing on popular actress Sandra Bullock and her recently adopted child Louis. The article began as an upbeat fluff piece about her child, her wealth and career. Then suddenly on the very next page of this glossy picture driven pop zine an article within the article: “Is Luis In Danger? Fugitive Sex Offenders Are On The Loose in Sandra’s Neighborhood.” The article darted dramatically into this diatribe. It seemed as though someone was working very hard to punch up what’s essentially a modest article aimed at a day in the life of Sandra Bullock. Sex offenders were living near every home Sandra Bullock owns the article continued: “It’s every mother’s worst nightmare....” The article went on faithful to the fraud.

The “we-must-protect-our-children” slant is a popular one used regularly by politicians like former actor turned Governor turned actor again Arnold Schwarzenegger, (R.CA), who used fear to pass repressive legislation aimed at an entire class of offender.

A look at the so called “Jessica’s Law”, a proposition passed by California voters by 70% percent of the vote a few years ago is an expensive draconian law exploiting a collective fear of child predators, yet used as a scalpel against any one with any kind of sexual offense it remains perhaps one of the most reprehensible laws on the books in America today.

Particularly able demagogue and presidential hopeful Newt Gingrich said recently, and reported widely: “I think the destructive vicious negative nature of much of the news media makes it hard to govern the country, hard to attract decent people to run for public office.” I found this in the Boston Herald; January 21, 2012.
Occasionally media hype backfires. In Massachusetts recently a bill was proposed requiring a “G” designation attach to all drivers license’ so law enforcement may immediately recognize a “Gang Member.” This proposed bill, a modern variation of the scarlet letter, was immediately shelved and quietly forgotten by the press. Turns out the “G” designation would be welcomed by gangsters and gang members because it offers immediate street credit, a kind of badge of honor among this class of underground criminal.

This novel remains fiction. Fiction is forgiving, so if one of my characters accuse the police of being “fascist bastards,” it’s not me, it’s the character. Much like when a ventriloquist puts words in a puppet’s mouth. He can’t be charged with sodomy for having his hand up a puppet’s ass, not that sodomy doesn’t get an audiences attention.

Using current events such as the Occupy Movement or internet phenomena such as Craigslist, even institutions like the Division of Parole are employed as literary license.

Some fiction in our culture is destructive: legal fiction for example. A Grand Jury that hands down an indictment – the first step in a criminal process – is a kind of legal fiction. Witnesses may say anything which may or may not be true. Prosecutors may lead witness testimony; they may ask and answer their own questions. A Grand Jury is a kind of theater of the absurd a mummyry tying an indictment into a neat little bow giving the state a nice stamp of approval.

This novel is a work of imagination framed against a contemporary backdrop. A glance at institutions, of places and activities recognizable; just as any novel must employ some point of reference – but for magical suspension of disbelief notwithstanding. It’s an allegory hopefully allowing a reader to think: “oh yeah, I get it.” Others will read it as a fraud: a fraud because it reads like something manufactured from the pages of the daily paper and local news.

Most of all, I must recall something I read in Time Magazine recently: “What divides American’s most isn’t race, gender, geography or ideology. It is the year we were born.” So says Michael Crowley, November 14, 2011. If Run Charlie Run has a central theme this may be it.

Charles Nicholas Diorio
Winter 2012
The Dedham House of Detention
Dedham, Massachusetts
Run Charlie Run
A Novel

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are
the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any
resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business, companies, events or locales
is entirely coincidental.

California's Department of Correction's men's colony at Chino, I absconded from
the gate; how else can I tell this story without starting half way from the beginning.

Chino took it all out of me. An evil malicious place. A prison that is cruel, racially
divided, poorly managed - a filthy camp which is so overcrowded even the United States
Supreme Court said it and all California prisons violate the Eighth Amendments cruel
and unusual punishment clause.

......

"If I thought for one second this simple Simon knucklehead was a threat to me, I
would kick his ass all over this jail cell. But he's not. You on the other hand may be a
threat. You have a big mouth and I think you got a glass jaw. That's what I think."

......

"Every day I stay is one more day away from L.A."

......

This is not the world I grew up in, Charlie Bates thought as he drove in a cautious
fever heading east on I-80. It's moving too fast. Computer's knowing too much about us
all. Video camera's capturing too much. A hyper economy allowing no room for
mistakes, was all that crowded his thoughts as he tried to think of his next move.

Charlie picked up interstate 80 in San Francisco. He spent the first leg of his
escape on the 5 that snaked from San Diego to the top of the state. Numb from his
decision, he expected flashing lights from a state trooper to light up his rear view. It never
came. California became Nevada then Utah.

Maybe if there was no promise there would be no expectation. Maybe if he had
been born into a simple home in a quiet out of the way place with a loving supportive, but
poor family, he would feel no loss or misplaced sense of entitlement. This need to drive
from his past would all be unnecessary. As Reno Nevada became Salt Lake City, then
Denver and east past fast food restaurants and gas stations, he tried to figure out how he
will live as a fugitive from justice.
His escape feels so right. This breaking away from the grid, living outside of the law just feels right. It feels like freedom, he thought. After all, he’s been running from his past since he was old enough to rent a place. A three hundred a month box with a kitchen and toilet. It was his. It was his escape from a neurotic violent mother and irresponsible old man deluded that the world was going to slow down for him alone.

As his foot became used to the steady pressure of the accelerator, Charlie just let his mind wander. All he’s really giving up are his memories of a privileged upbringing on Fifth Avenue and sheltered security of a few private schools. Those sacred memories were stolen from him during his first prison term.

As the road moved, Charlie could feel moving east not only away from California and its lie of liberty but toward a place comfortable. Those east coast cities with public transportation. He just allowed this mind to roam freely.

There’s a feeling of being allowed to make his escape. Thinking back to his arrest; his zero tolerance arrest, he like to call it. That arrest in the parking lot of the Day’s Inn in Pico Riviera. Being thrown to the ground, told “when you get out of jail get out of the state”!

Cuffed, thrown down, stripped and searched. A crowd just watched. Mostly immigrants, some legal others illegal, just watching naturally while hulking plain clothes goons with tat’s arrogantly go about their business of locking away another parole violator.

“Is that your car”? The angry cop spit. “The one you’re gonna use to run?” He accused Charlie through clenched teeth looking and bending his thumb at Charlie’s old black Jag.

“Hey, I showed up when you called me. I didn’t do anything wrong”, Charlie’s words just hung in the air. Made no difference anyway, cops could care less. There’s a process to follow and this arrest just gets the process going.

As much as he tried to put those memories of that ugly scene behind him the more it haunted him. He could remember every detail. The call from the Pico Riviera detective asking to see him. The cops laying in wait then throwing him to the ground. The ride to the L.A. County jail at Twin Towers downtown. The dungeon like holding cells packed three to a bunk.

And the racism. My God. Black’s on one side of the room, Wood’s with their own, and the Mexican’s. A White phone, Black phone, Mexican phone.

Aryan Brotherhood trying to recruit incoming Peckerwoods, Mexican Mafia posturing with unaffiliated Paisa’s who sweat being deported. Filth; a mold patching the
walls of this violent modular housing unit: a ghetto of contempt. A place from another century, yet it exists today in Los Angeles.

Charlie tried to think only of his freedom now – desperately trying to avoid remembering that cruel nightmare he is driving from. Soon he would have to think about a motel for the night. What to do? He has no identification he would dare use. A useless California license and prison I.D. a social security card he can never again use. He is off the radar.

Reno Nevada would be his first night on the lam. He needed a motel that would take him with cash only and no questions asked.

On the run meant worrying about his car being spotted; cops being notified to be on the lookout. His ‘89 Jaguar was respectable. He was clean cut, white, blond, average. Looked like a middle class man, like so many. Not a drug user. A man addicted to independence. Charlie sought freedom from, not necessarily freedom to.

Freedom from being a victim of another person’s expectation. Freedom from being harassed by cops, and a government that more and more wants to register and catalogue us all. It seems maybe the word itself: “freedom”, has become something over used. A trite phrase hoping for some result. It’s used to sell vacation time shares and convenience items in stores, or used by big business to promote products. So really maybe there’s something about freedom which is not only fleeting but perhaps does not truly exist.

Maybe it’s not getting caught that gives Charlie his feeling of freedom.

Dusk quickly became the night. The lights of Reno fell on either side of Interstate-80. Soon he would need to find a motel. Hotel and motel advertising littered every artery of every exit along the stretch of highway. Fast food and convenience signs seemed to be posted closer than in the past. Where once these clusters of hospitality were staggered today they fall at every off ramp. This is modern enterprise.

Charlie had to feel right. He needed an anonymous room with an attendant who wanted cash more than the security of identification. He had to have an anonymous bed in an out of the way place. It would be a long trip back east. It was all he could do to avoid a corporate motel. He sought out a privately owned and operated motor lodge. How hard could that be along this crowded stretch of Reno interstate.

Nervous as a cat Charlie pulled into a motel that seemed out of the way. It was a split level semi-corporate transient style Inn. His eye was attracted to the words “independently owned” below the sign.

Forty dollars and a weary smile got him a key. The room was typical. His sleep was fitful. Lights from cars woke him constantly. He felt that at any moment a fugitive retrieval unit would crash the door and haul him back to California, back to that dangerous overcrowded dungeon at Chino.
The next day, before dawn, after a shower he drove off.

There was no radio in the old Jag. So his mind just wandered. Reasons he’s running. All the while shaking his head at the grotesque policy that has now made him a fugitive from justice.

"Three year tail", he was told. “a three year parole commitment imposed by the California bureau of prisons on all convicts released”, Parole Officer Bennett carefully explained.

Bennett’s a big man; a pluralistic man with so many ethnicities that the name “Bennett” belies his actual background. Something about Bennett screamed diversity. It would not be surprising if his Spanish was as good as his English.

The California Parole office, where Bennett worked is an out of the way bunker in Pasadena. A poured cement single story building that looked like it was built with funds left over from a jail project or by some relative of the Governor who may have been in construction or studying institutional architecture in some local community college.

“Zero Tolerance” Bennett said. “If for any reason you violate any of the conditions of your release you will be violated”.

“But I don’t plan to violate any of my parole conditions”. Charlie said.

Zero tolerance seems like it should apply to the next guy, Charlie thought then realized that in fact today it applies to us all so he just sat and cooperated with Bennett and his lecture.

“You will have restrictions on your residency, where you will work, no alcohol, and who you can associate with”, Bennett said shuffling papers on his crowded desk. All the while he glanced at his computer screen as if he were reading from a script. “Do you have a place to live?”

“Yes....”
“Where”? 
“5417 Norspring Street, Pasadena.....”
“I will have to approve it”, Bennett seemed as if the decision to approve or disapprove was pre-established.

This Zero Tolerance policy strips away individuality. Charlie felt. Though putting that notion into some clear recognizable understanding was still only a germ of an idea.

More government, more welfare, more social programs equals less individuality. This Zero Tolerance philosophy reinforces an already established social plan. A plan which corrals us all into a narrow insular world.
Really, besides regulating lives, destroying families and crushing dreams and hopes it just chases people - forcing people to flee.

Zero Tolerance is just a government policy that like a pogrom chases undesirables from nation to nation, state to state. Undesirables like Jew's and Gypsies, Criminals and Aliens. California's Zero Tolerance of certain criminal classes does little more than force people to flee to survive.

It is under Zero Tolerance Charlie Bates has decided to flee - To run - to get in his car and just drive as far away from Los Angeles as possible.

He will run until some day in the future he will be re arrested. Because no matter how far any of us will run in America there will always be plenty of money for law enforcement, jails, prisons, parole, probation, court's of justice. It is big business and for those members of the ninety-nine percent controlled by that one percent it is laws and law enforcement that keeps the lid on civil society.

Where there is no choice there can be no regret. His escape; running from Chino and parole is necessary, he felt it to his core. He survived three riots and two assaults in a matter of a few months. This last assault almost left him blind. In the melee that followed his assault - the one where the South Sider, Mexican gang, put a green light on Woods, all white inmates affiliated or not; his eyes were sprayed with mace.

It was in this riot of fists and jail house weapons his property was destroyed. A book he had been working on had been ripped. Torn then thrown in the garbage by guards separating the bodies afterwards.

Prisoners were flexi cuffed, screaming from the pain of pepper spray. Made to wait for each man to be removed and escorted to a water station. Of the forty men trapped fighting, each was made to wait. A chaos of curses until relief. Then each man removed to a steel mesh dog cage and the long wait for a rack in Administrative Segregation.

Meanwhile Charlie cried for his book. It was gone he understood through the painful beat from the mace. He realized the many months of putting his ideas to page. Begging paper from anyone and anywhere, and stealing pencils and hoping an inmate would sharpen those pencils, then pouring his words onto a page were gone. Over three hundred hand written pages were gone in a matter of moments. All because of the senseless riot of racism that dictates life in California prison.

Anyone who has not experienced this level of mob hatred would never believe it could truly happen in America in this day and age. Never could a thinking person understand why this could happen. Only, today the rule of the hysterical mob flourishes.

Perhaps it is because these jails and prisons are removed - isolated as death itself. Islands of social welfare existing to warehouse humanity.
Sleep was practically impossible. Every noise managed to wake him. Still he had a good clear dream, a good sign. His mind raced with what he should do next. Somehow Charlie felt that without any plan at all everything would turn out right. Everything was going to be fine. That next morning at dawn, after his shower he drove on.

He managed to find I-80 east. Consciously he stayed on track. There would be no toll till maybe New York or the Mass Pike. No camera’s at any toll booths for three thousand miles. No toll collectors and their prying eyes. No state troopers with their be-on-the-look out sheets tacked to their dash.

His heart jumped each time he would see a state trooper or local cop. He tried putting the thought of getting caught out of his mind. Yet, he lived now knowing full well there’s a power warrant for him out of California; a State that prides itself on demanding rendition from every State in the union.

Charlie recalled speaking with his friend a Rabbi, a gentle man who was a client and supporter who helped with money.

"Where will you go and what will you do"? Mike asked. Charlie realized his friend the Rabbi used the name Mike to shield his identity. After all that he used Charlie and his service in the past was incidental to his friendship over the past few years.

"I only know I’ve got to run. Abscond. Get out. And not look back". Charlie said in a fit of honesty.

The two men met in a parking lot at a pharmacy in Pasadena. It was a crisp May afternoon - the day he was released from Chino. The day he got off the bus. It was the day he made his decision to live for ever as a fugitive. He realized he needed cash and he needed cash quick. He made a few calls. Most were willing to help. Even those who were unwilling gave something.

"Mike it’s like Auschwitz. Let me try to tell you. Men are packed like animals. I barely survived. It’s filthy"

"But if you run they will find you and bring you back".

"I have to. Do you know what Zero Tolerance is?"

"Yeah, I did teach a course to law enforcement on ethics…”

"No matter what I do they will just violate me and send me back to Chino. I barely survived this time. Next time I may not be so lucky”.

"But where will you go?"
“I’m going to drive east. I don’t have a plan. But I need money for gas and food. I need a chance”.

“I’ll give you money, but I think your making a mistake”.

“Look, Rabbi, if you were walking on a road in Poland in 1940 and a hapless emaciated man stumbled out of the woods and told you a fantastic story about vast camps where Jews were being herded like animals, forced to sleep in dormitories stacked three high, and the conditions where so cruel and filthy that you had to die or escape would you believe that man?”

“This is not....” The Rabbi’s voice trailed off.

“I’m telling you the conditions in these jails and prisons are the same. They are just not gassing or burning men yet. But the conditions are the same. And I’ve decided to run”. Charlie tried desperately to tell Mike the Rabbi - tried to make him understand that human beings are treated as little more than inhuman animals. “I was almost killed, and nobody gives a shit”.

Rabbi Mike could only listen and nod taking out his wallet, peeling off a hundred dollar bill and handing it to Charlie with excuses why it can’t be more. They embraced with good wishes. This would be the last time Charlie and Mike the Rabbi would meet.

Interstate 80 moved unobstructed through Utah. Salt Lake City would be his next stop. His old classic car had a reliable engine. It had been sitting for over seven months while he did his parole violation, yet once its battery picked up a charge and all the fluids were replaced - it ran great.

It was all he could do to move his post traumatic thoughts of Chino way into the distance. The car moved forward and so did his memories. He tried to remember his lessons taught at school about rocky mountains, vast clay cliffs and great salt lakes. He was trying to push toward freedom. Yet he could not run from flashes of that terrible time.

...........

Charlie recalled moving from a single cell reception unit into a general population dormitory. A loud chaos of men living in common. cards, men milling about – all languishing helplessly yet desperately trying to posture with some dignity behind a steel enclosed cage.

A screw checked Charlie’s property – what little there was of it. Then a young man heavily tattooed met him at the front gate pulling him to the side.

I’m Twister,” he said, “I’m shot caller. You know what politics is? Well, we got mandatory politics on this block.”
Charlie knew what politics is. He had just finished his eighteen months upstate in a fire camp. There was very little politics at that medium lock up, but that place was not Chino.

“Let me see your papers.” he said critically. Twister’s attitude indicated he was not taking no for an answer. Charlie removed a folded pink commitment sheet from a manila envelope handing it to the young Aryan Brotherhood rep. He took it casually. Both his strong arms were sleeved with tattoos. “White Pride” tattooed to his neck from shoulder to ear. An Iron Cross of the German military patched his chest at his heart.

Twister focused his blue eyes intently on the crinkled pink sheet: Pandering – 18 months – and a California Legal Statute.

“You a pimp?”

“No, the charge is pandering – I pled no contest, I owned a dating service – cops entrapped me....”

Twister could care less. Charlie’s words just fell away into the noisy din of the crowded dorm.

“OK. you know there’s politics. Everyday one-hundred-and twenty-three Navy Scale Burpee’s. No interaction with Black’s – don’t eat behind them, no cards, no chess, no nothing. We got no problem with them and we don’t want any. Stay with your own race.” Twister’s words seemed to come with some violent caveat. “It’s a good block.” Just then the AB rep shook Charlie’s hand, turned and moved into the crowded room.

Watching with interest several white inmates between narrow spaces of bunk beds working their daily burpee routine, standing their feet slightly beyond shoulder width apart; raising their hands over their heads lunging into a squat, kicking their legs backwards into a pushup and immediately reversing the move – that’s one rep. Sweat poured from each man. These are men preparing for hand to hand combat, Charlie told himself.

A few minutes later Twister returned to Charlie’s bunk with a piece of paper. On it the names along with inmate numbers of the white men on the unit. He was told to write his name and number. Charlie understood what was up. He and the other men were going to be checked out by his Aryan Brotherhood handlers just to be absolutely sure they had no snitch or rape on their prison jacket.

Charlie made his bed. He was on the top of a three man rack. He was not approached immediately. He hoped his go along to get along attitude and age would keep these young gangsters who have made a life of crime and coming in and out of these prisons away from him. Or so he hoped.

Slowly, most of the Wood’s – the white inmates – introduced themselves.
No matter where a white prisoner may be from, no matter his economic background or social position— in California prisons he is just another Peckerwood: poor white trash.

AB – Aryan Brotherhood members virtually all are heavily tattooed with “White Pride” or some variation. Nazi symbols: lightning bolts of the S.S. are big here. Often they take their street names or jail house names from the city they come from.

There is Pomona. Baker is from Bakersfield. Cowboy or Karma. Wood’s just say “hi, I’m Bob”. A peckerwood may be poor white trash here but he’s still not affiliated and therefore just passing through. No matter, affiliated or not – all inmates obey the politics of a jailhouse code.

Here in the shadow of the San Bernardino mountains, Chino Men’s Colony is a castaway island of racial hatred, violence and corruption. Charlie will fight for his life here. And sadly, it will come close to destroying his spirit. This spirit that now has him driving relentlessly east to some kind of future.

........

“Carl I can run because I have no use for what the system has to offer. I don’t want their welfare, or medical care, or their food stamps or housing vouchers. I don’t want to be taken care of from cradle to grave.” Charlie said.

Carl Bayer seemed to be one of those elusive gentlemen who step from luxury cars and personify an image Hollywood studios have for years been exploiting throughout the world: the successful American.

Snow white hair and even tan, Carl’s blue eyes were kind welcoming eyes that seemed to speak integrity. He is Charlie’s friend. A go to friend who has been a rock of unconditional support for years. A stock broker, that’s about all Charlie cared to know. His kind support in the past never wavered. It seems fitting he will be the last person he would meet before getting started on the 5 north.

“But how will you live? Get an apartment? A car? There’s no way you can live in this country as a fugitive. I just think you are making a mistake.”

“I don’t know, I’ll find a way. The alternative is to stay here and go through it all again with parole. I don’t have another parole violation in me. You don’t know how bad it is. I do! I just barely made it out alive. And right now there are over a hundred thousand packed away in jails and prisons. It’s out of control.

Carl you have always been there for me. Please don’t give up on me now.” Charlie said. His emotions raw. The look of the huckster gone. The optimistic
entrepreneur selling the dream faded long ago. There’s only the desperate man convinced that his next move is a long drive east.

“Of course I’ll help,” Carl said. “I can’t do much, my wife is watching our checking account.” He removed two one hundred dollar bills from his shirt pocket. “Just call me along the way, I’ll see what I can do for you.”

Both men sat in an outdoor café in Burbank. A once agricultural center, it is today a hub for entertainment and wealth. Both men seemed remarkably comfortable with each other. In happier days Carl was a regular guest in Charlie’s home in Elysian Park. There were women these men would share. It was an adult friendship. And for Carl who is married and yet still a man Charlie was not only permissive morally, but procured from his dating service members a host of eager sporting ladies who like Carl were married and just seeking a little adventure. It is based on this Carl now assisted Charlie in his next big step.

Over coffee and bagels Carl and Charlie casually spent their last few moments together. It would be the last time they would meet. It would very likely be the last time Charlie would spend any time in Southern California ever again with any luck.

......

Slowly the old car began to climb over mountains still pushing along toward eastern states.

He could feel there was something wrong - a sluggishness about the acceleration. It was only noticeable when making a steep climb. No matter, Charlie pushed on.

......

Fights were common here in Chino. Because of politics most beef’s are handled in the yard. Sometimes on the stairs leading to the yard. In the alcoves and blind spots on stairs or at doorways. In the mess hall. Fights break out anyplace there is a chance for two men to throw a punch. It is a way to settle a score. Sometimes assaults are just a way to prove to the group a willingness to fight. A culture of violence. Senseless. Gratuitous. Politics dictates that fights stay within races. A fight outside of race is a riot. If a Wood and Crip fight there is a facility wide lockdown and investigation. Race riots in prison is significant involving longer than usual lockdowns.

After a fight there is a lock down. Steel mesh makes looking onto the yard difficult. Prisoners jockey for position, a spot where to watch a fight. Or just see who is playing the yard. It was then that tensions pollute the already hostile dorm.
Shooter was a young man in his early twenties with a high tight fade and solid build. He was another AB soldier who like Twister seemed to thrive on this place. He has a kind of maturity from living in stir and doing his duty. His reward is respect. He’s a dangerous Aryan Brother who knows no matter what they got his back.

“Yo wood get out of the way.”

“I’m standing here...get off me.”

Whatever happened next occurred so fast Charlie did not even know what was going on. Fists began flying. Bodies seemed to move instantly.

Words became blows being thrown, punches everywhere. A wood was knocked to the ground and was being kicked by a Mexican South Sider. He was being stomped. Quickly without thinking Twister and Shooter jumped into the fray. Guards began yelling to separate. Beds and anything handy was being used as a weapon.

Charlie looked to the Wood knocked down – an old guy with tattoo’s that looked like an old school convict.

A swarm of Mexican’s surrounded him, Twister and Shooter were beating their own opponents. Charlie punched at least one of the Mexican’s beating the poor old guy who was now just laying helpless.

Charlie’s punch landed square on the side of a Mexican’s face. It was just then the mob’s attention turned from the helpless Wood to Charlie. They pounded away pushing and hitting him relentlessly. After all when fighting South Sider’s you don’t get the bean you get the whole enchilada.

Twister and Shooter found themselves fighting a group of the old school MS-13 gangsters. They would use the bunk beds as weapons, climbing to the top then jumping down onto their victims. Guards began spilling into the frenzied unit shouting: “Get Down!”

Being beaten relentlessly is not like the movies. There is no one-at-a time. It is like being tenderized. An op-art of pounding raw meat; feeling blood fill your eyes and mouth and knowing you are being severely hurt. And the mob does not stop. In fact fists seem to pick up steam the more they realize they are getting the upper hand.

Corrections Officers yelled deeply to separate. Almost at once they began spraying the entire dorm with mace. Tear gas filled the now helter-skelter living area. Beds were toppled and inmates clung to their fight like crabs clinging to a fish head.

Charlie felt blood under foot. He was slipping, his right arm numb and useless. Finally the ones beating him moved on to Twister and the remaining Woods and AB
gangsters. Every Mexican gang member participated, even unaffiliated Mexican nationals. It only ended when every member of the riot was blinded and helpless.

........

Driving over a mountain these recollections left him shaking his head. He's still alive. But his spirit remains bloodied, hounded and taunted by so many ordeals over such a short period of time. His experience has taught him this drama is played out in virtually every prison in California at one time or another.

Men ripped with razors, stabbed with shanks, or bloodied by fists or hand made weapons. It's only after a lockdown that once more the dormitory comes alive with card games and television - men trying to posture desperately living with some kind of dignity - a pathetic farce which tries to mimic living.

Officials pick up the pieces. File reports and remove the dead or injured to medical or morgue. It is business as usual marked by indifference or contempt. It is man's inhumanity to man magnified and personal. It is what is going through Charlie's mind as he pushes himself away from that nightmare he has just escaped from.

........

There are moments when we - each of us - know we have an angel watching. Charlie would come to feel this for a second time in his life. The roads leading away from Salt Lake City - Interstate 80 and all the rest - become a riot of signs pointing in every possible direction. Distracted, he managed to head east only on the wrong highway; he was heading toward Denver only he did not know it. All the while his mind raced along with one eye over his shoulder.
In a time of universal deceit, telling
The truth is revolutionary.

Chapter 2

America has lost its sense of humor. Charlie thought. Maybe great minds anticipated after World War II it would all fall apart what with air travel and unbridled production bringing the world that much closer.

Globalism, fair trade and multi-culturalism created an America which is a little more than a revolving door economy. He felt he and so many others are nothing more than surplus labor swept into jail, then prison, parole supervision; finally some appropriate social programs. Programs designed to track the disenfranchised, disgruntled or poor saps that just don’t get our modern America.

Charlie could not fully grasp his relief from finally escaping all this. One eye always watching over his shoulder. Living outside of the law. Jumping each time a siren wailed. No matter, he will live free on the lam; grateful for some fleeting unchained period no matter how long it may last.

The more he moved away from cities, the easier it became finding motels willing to take cash for a bed. It seems none of these caretakers or owners or front desk clerks cared about homeland security. Cash got a key, a safe night of sleep, then a shower. Charlie soon discovered that cash makes friends. Cash is king in this economic miasma that has gripped the country.

Driving toward Denver he felt his car was dying a slow death. The wilderness of for sale signs along this stretch from Salt Lake City foreshadowed a blizzard of foreclosure signs he will see once he hits Ohio and eastern states. At the moment his car in on his mind; money is low. Anxiety is tapping against his already nervous head.

It is here in Denver that the engine would shudder, choking for fuel. He looked – there’s half a tank of premium. He could feel his Jaguar lurch in starts like a tired horse. He negotiated the closest next exit hoping there would be someplace to park. There were only a few short hours left in the business day.

At a corner, only a short distance off the exit a restaurant with a parking lot. He just made it before he parked stalling helplessly. It was as close to a miracle as he had come in many years. He felt for a fleeting moment an angel sat on his shoulder, that this safe harbor was a gift.
Charlie rushed to the crowded restaurant. It was Sunday and brunch was in full swing. He looked at so many friendly attractive faces—so friendly. No convicts with menacing stares or sullen turn keys, these are happy clean people that live to be happy and helpful.

“My car died, do you have a phone book?” Charlie asked a lovely Hispanic bartender. Her jet black hair framed a pretty face with native Indian features.

“Oh, your car,” she seemed genuinely concerned, “if it’s in the lot it will be safe.” She handed a yellow pages from behind the bar then looked with a blank questioning that said “drink?”

“I’ll have a beer to be social.” He said placing ten dollars on the long dark well worn bar.

“Mile High Jaguar,” a voice answered.

“My car is stalled, I need a tow,” Charlie said into his throw away pre paid cell phone.

He gave the address of the restaurant then called Carl.

“Carl, I need your help. My car died. I called a tow. Please help. Can you put the repair on a credit card? I’ll pay you back as soon as I land.” He asked knowing the answer would be yes. And it was a yes. Little if any reservation in his friends voice only a sigh that a Jag repair may be costly.

The wait allowed for a deep long breath. For a moment it felt like he’s on a kind of vacation. He sat alone at the bar but for couples or families waiting for tables but not drinking. This place was a restaurant on Sundays yet the bar looked like a place for happy hour or those nights the Bronco’s were in town. The stadium was an imposing structure about a mile away just across the freeway.

........

“I tried starting it multiple times,” the mechanic said. He was a ruddy faced portly man immaculately dressed. Not a square of oil on his uniform. “But it rattled, just not getting fuel.” he continued.

“Can you fix it?”

“If the impeller is cracked, that’s the internal part of the pump that actually pushes the fuel, it will need to be replaced.”

“Well, please. I need the car. Please fix it.” Charlie sounded defeated. “How did this happen?”
“It just happens due to age and use.”

Mile High Jaguar is a clean glass dealership like most upscale auto showrooms impeccably cared for. Friendly sales people all eager to make their experience better than all others.

Across the street sat a pawnshop. Balloons blew in the wind, cheesy plastic pennant flags were strung with signs of deals galore. Crossing the highway, he needed to kill time at no better place than a local pawn shop, he thought.

Colorado had clean crisp air. May seemed to be particularly pleasant in these parts. The pawn shop seemed to have something for everyone as a sign out front promised. Charlie noticed immediately it was sectioned according to electronics, musical instruments, lots of work tools especially chain saws and weed whackers. He loved anything in a glass case. He looked at rings, gold coins, jewelry – there were two guns for sale: a Smith and Wesson forty-five semi-auto and a Glock forty caliber with laser sight.

“The Glock’s the way to go,” a salesman said. He was at once friendly yet had suspicious eyes.

“Just looking.” Was all Charlie said.

He felt he shouldn’t be in this place. Camera’s everywhere. He casually moved from the gun case to the gold jewelry.

“The Glock’s on sale,” the salesman persisted.

“I’m just driving through.”

“Laser sight alone cost over two hundred.”

“Just passing through, besides I’ve got an out of state license…”

“Where? From what state?”

“New Mexico…”

“What brings you here?”

“Car broke down, just getting a repair.”

Now Charlie began to sweat. So many direct questions. Maybe friendly, he thought, or a trap to keep him talking and in the store till cops show up. Quickly he decided to go.

“Well thanks a lot.”
"What kind of car?"
"Down at the end –a Lexus. Ok good luck."

Charlie waved friendly like. He casually started out. He felt heat from the stores cameras all over him. He didn’t feel safe. It was all he could do to walk slowly deliberately from the store.

In the screaming sunshine of late afternoon he looked up and down the four lane boulevard searching for a Lexus dealership. After all, his lie was a fast uninformed one. A lie easily found out especially from a local with suspicious eyes.

........

The road from Denver picking up Interstate 80 east was rural with little traffic. He was cold with thinking of all the mistakes he had made so far. Amateur mistakes which could hem him up – work a citizen into thinking – then a fast cell phone call to the authorities.

Charlie understood we are living in a culture where America’s Most Wanted and Cop’s invite citizens to inform, watch and tell. See something say something. A nation of tipsters eager for reward dollars or just a pat on the back from law enforcement, perhaps just a sick desire to destroy another human being with no chance of retribution.

He allowed his mind to trip over the mistakes back in Denver. What was he thinking going to a pawnshop. Calling Carl from a manager’s office, a phone call easily traced from the dealership to his goose laying the golden eggs; and of course the lie about his car, and the camera’s. It was enough to make the acid in his stomach crawl into his mouth.

His old Jag was rolling smoothly through the Great Plains. The distance to Cheyenne Wyoming was several hundred miles of open space. He could not help feel he had been saved by his awkward mistake. Had he broken down along any of this barren stretch of wheat country he would have been stranded too many miles from anywhere carrying a fuel pump for a classic Jaguar.

Suddenly he remembered the lyrics of songs. He tried to make the radio of his car work. It was a bluster of static. Some faint tunes on a few stations came through and he distinctly heard the song California Dreaming. He laughed. All he could remember was its nightmare.

........

North County Correctional Center sits perched above the 5 freeway at Magic Mountain. It is Los Angeles’ most modern answer to the perpetually overcrowded Twin Towers. A catacomb of dorms housing pre-trial detainee’s facing courts downtown.
Institutions holding human beings have become remarkably uniformed in our modern America. These cinderblock tombs appear drawn from the same architects' hand and merely constructed anywhere a sheriff may have spare land in their jurisdiction. Money and political influence is all it takes.

The Color scheme of the North County Correctional Facility in Los Angeles is the exact same paint used at the Norfolk County Correctional Center in Dedham Massachusetts. The layout, bars on the windows, cement and design is exact to the screw and bolt from coast to coast.

A tornado of economic destruction greeted him along his drive from Denver through the Great Plains: for sale, for rent, lease, foreclosure – rusted cars behind dilapidated homes – a revealing spectacle of disestablishment.

Charlie’s mind focused on cruel memories; violent ugly remembrances. Long stretches of Interstate 80 east acted as a hypnotic trigger just as a magician uses a coin to put their subject under, this drive allowed his mind to re work memories that made him run.

Shackles falling, or really thrown to the concrete then dragged is a sound every prisoner is familiar with. Leg irons and handcuff, tools of the trade. Sounds of steel chain being dragged advertise justice here in court houses all across this country. Inmates wait for this sound, it says their day in court is either beginning or ending.

This is the sound greeting him this day of his preliminary hearing at Los Angeles Superior Court. It was to be a simple obligation, a show up in front of a magistrate. Two cops who arrested him would be there; “got ya” looks on their faces. Both would lie through their testimony then a Judge’s gavel would fall – if there had been one – and a judgment entered: The State of California had enough evidence to proceed; a formality really.

Charlie and three other white inmates were unchained then led to a holding tank. Loud concrete cells with heavy steel doors that slide mechanically closed.

Immediately he saw two white inmates sitting at a far end of the dimly lit squalid bull pen. They were both leaking blood – one from his nose, the other from an open fresh gash above his right eye. They were both young. They just sat dazed staring at the grey floor of the cell. Blood dropped forming a tapestry at their feet.

First impression suggested they had a fight with each other and settled their differences. No matter, Charlie and the three had no choice but to enter and sit and wait the several hours for their hearings.

“You a Wood?” A South Sider approached asking.

“Yeah – I guess so…” Charlie said.
In that instant a blow struck the side of his head. Not a solid blow, but a missed shot grazing him. Charlie was caught by the South Sider’s fore arm, not a solid fist.

Instantly, he stood knowing that to be knocked down could be a death sentence.

All at once, every Mexican gang member and unaffiliated national in the cell, some eleven or so jumped Charlie and the rest of the white inmates. It was an unprovoked riot of punishment.

Throwing punches wildly, Charlie felt himself connecting blow after blow — angry, his frenzy did not care who he hit, only that he make each shot as strong and accurate as possible. He realized instantly he was fighting for his life against savage, cold, calculating criminals who believe in only one code: white America is soft, Wood’s are suckers and they know to their core this is war.

Their hatred poured from them in this isolated forgotten holding cell.

Charlie did see one of the three knocked down, his head hitting the stainless steel toilet that was the only object in the tank. He was getting stumped. Fighting his way to help the kid, Charlie yelled for the guards to crack the cell door.

Fists connected to his body from all over, he took shots to the back of his head. The leader of the MS-13 gang encouraged scared Mexican nationals to throw a punch. Most did not, or threw a faint shot to appease the South Sider’s blood thirsty encouragement.

Finally, guards hearing the cries opened the steel door cautiously entering. All at once the Mexican South Sider’s and illegal nationals stopped. Instantly they returned to their seats at benches as though nothing at all had occurred.

Charlie and the other white inmates made their escape. His last look was of the South Sider and Paisa’s posted up, or sitting as though nothing had ever happened; as though the fight in that filthy enclosed concrete holding pen had never occurred. It was as if their appearance of being simply harmless bystanders made it so.

"Are you hurt?"

"I’m ok," Charlie told one of the guards, “but those two are bleeding pretty bad.” He pointed to the ones bleeding from their nose and eyes.

“What happened?”

“I sat, and a South Sider comes up to me, asks if I’m a Wood then just starts swinging – next thing they all jumped us – we could have been killed in there!”
“It was crazy,” the skinny young man who was knocked down hitting his head on the toilet said. “I’m just here for a hearing - I’m getting out today! They were like animals...”

“Do you want to press charges?”

“I do!” The guy said emphatically. “I’m just here ‘cause I had an argument with my girlfriend last night - I was almost killed!”

“Wait,” one of the other men said. “If you pick these guys out, you’ll be a snitch...believe me they will get you....”

“I’m getting out today! These Assholes got to get punished for this bullshit!”

“What’s your name?” A supervisor finally asked.


“I know. Well do what you want. These guys are a gang and you just have to know – if you testify against them they can get you – here in jail or on the street.”

Again the inmate advised Walker. He reminded him about the jailhouse code about snitching.

He was a young man in his thirties. A meth head. A Yankee face pockmarked with red scabby pimples. Acne scars clustered a face which was sucked up and old before its time – missing teeth – a ghastly mask of methamphetamine abuse. He accepted his beating from the South Siders as part of being in jail. “Don’t come to jail” he has been told all his life. Today, like all the other days locked up, he just takes what comes. “Snitches get stitches” is the code he knows and lives with.

“Look if you’re scared.” Mitch said, “don’t do anything! I’m from Malibu...no fucking gangsters going to get me...”

Turning to the guard he indicated he would pick out the hoodlums who attacked him and the rest.

Charlie just looked at the others silently. The young man was eager to get involved and point and testify. He seemed a well educated intense guy, well groomed with a dark full head of hair. He had slight delicate hands for a man with fingers tapering gently to a recent manicure.

“Why are you here?” Charlie finally asked.

“I had a fight with my girlfriend – a domestic. Cops cuffed me! No questions asked. I spent last night at Rampart station. I just got to see a judge then I’m out.”
“Oh, I see....”

“I was told they would no bill me....”

Charlie understood, as did all the others in the small crowded cell. Domestic violence is an automatic arrest. Cops must put the guy in front of a judge. Courts take the heat now-a-days. A no bill means no prosecution. Most men will just be released after getting a taste of L.A. County justice. Mitch from Malibu just got a stronger taste than most. Usually it’s just the usual humiliation of sleeping on the concrete bull pen floor for a few hours then ordered to see some detective or social worker.

“I’m an actor,” he said. “I just did Pirates of the Caribbean with Johnny Depp.”


“I don’t.”

Emergency services arrived, fire department paramedics carrying medical equipment, wheel chairs – a gurney; fireman each as tall and wide as the cell doors.

“Who wants the hospital?” A paramedic asked as casually as business as usual in this dark forbidding place.

“These two took it hard - they got head injury.” Charlie spoke up clearly. The others in the cell were either dazed or just afraid to say a word. “I’m ok, I got a hearing...”

“Bates!” A guard yelled down the stone and tile corridor of cells.

His name, he immediately realized he must go. Two court officers showed up with hand cuffs ready to escort.

Bruised, he appeared in front of a magistrate. His hearing lasted all of maybe five minutes. A determination was made there was sufficient evidence to proceed in Superior Court. No one noticed or mentioned the red abrasions on his face. That he looked like Hell. That he was disoriented. His hair disheveled – his face swollen or that his head was lumping up from the heating he had just taken. No one said a word – no one cared. Just business as usual after all it was almost lunch and the cops, attorneys and judges must break for a nice long lunch in the southern California sunshine.

Later, at Twin Towers jail he would be called by a gang investigation unit detective who would ask him “what happened?” It was a brief meeting; a formality really. Maybe fifteen minutes. Then he would be returned to his four man cell in the bowels of the monstrous old facility.
Later still, Charlie would learn from jail house gossip a Mexican, possibly associated with a gang was killed by a known white supremacist. He was killed over some food and soap and shampoo that he purchased through the jail store: canteen. A green light on all Woods was mandatory.

From that day on – at least while he was detained at North County Correctional Facility, white inmates remained segregated from South Siders and Black inmates when transported to Los Angeles County courts.

This green light would remain in effect until some counsel of gangster elders made peace. No white inmate would be safe. And so it goes in L.A. County – and really most jails and prisons across this nation. In California segregation is the answer to most of life’s problems especially in its jails and prisons.

400,000 – The number of illegal immigrants deported by immigration control agency’s in 2011. The highest number deported in United States history so far.

A day in America does not go by without some editorial in some local paper stating emphatically lawmakers have taken an eternity to produce a crime bill aimed at tightening the shackles on habitual violent offenders, but with the exception of several concessions to prisoner advocates and the defense attorney’s lobby the result seems worth the wait.

Bills that ban parole eligibility for violent criminals are always popular. Three strikes laws receive kudos like “about time” and “never ever open cell doors”.

These editorials ultimately end with the words: “the good of the bill out weighs the bad. Senators who negotiated it managed to secure tough, important reforms that should become law.”

Editors get their copy straight from press releases sent from Capital buildings all across the country. Newspapers ignore heart wrenching letters from mothers, wives, or sons and daughters of men thrown into these brutal prisons then warehoused for years often behind one stupid mistake.
“A dull ache of the soul, a longing with nothing to long for, a sick pining, ennui, boredom” – Vladimir Nabokov – {Toska}

Chapter 3

Charlie woke up in Cheyenne to wide open daylight. His money is low. How to make money occupied every thought. Cash is his only fuel driving his freedom on the run.

At every stop he would pull into a hotel or motel offering free internet. At virtually every exit some national chain hotel had a business center of some kind allowing anonymous access to e-mail, online bulletin boards: the World Wide Web. Most importantly it’s a real time means to make money.

His tool for fast cash has always been Craigslist.com. Craigslist is an online bulletin board serving every major city in the United States and around the world. Charlie used it in Los Angeles, Reno, Salt Lake City, Denver, Cheyenne; Omaha – he will use it when he lands then lives as a fugitive. He will use it until he dies or is captured.

Craigslist and all the other independent online bulletin boards are hated by politicians in modern America because they are so damned democratic. Free. Anonymous! A threat to the American way. This is the reason these online bulletin boards are targeted fiercely by state’s Attorneys General for government regulation.

If you can’t get a job, he told himself, create one. After all, his goal is to make money to eat and survive. He could care less about career, major medical or a 401k. It’s all about making cash for gas and food and night stay in a cheap motel.

........

It’s getting harder to find an anonymous off the books job in this country. Unemployment, underemployment it’s on the news so it must be true.

Charlie did find work. Day work: eighty-dollars in cash a day work. Climbing ladders, taking old shingles off roof’s using a hammer and crowbar.

Young people are frustrated they can’t find work, a simple job where they may get some experience – some pride in themselves, some kind of dignified springboard into life. McDonald’s did it, so did the long chains of organized business shackling young people into a routine of producing identification, social security cards, paychecks and conformity. Mom and Pop are dead, so is their nice little business that employed a world of young people back in the day.

Climbing a ladder here in Nebraska or Iowa or where ever he is now, ripping off ancient green roof tile there is a feeling of venting. Venting anger. Will this become his
life now? A common laborer? Earning ten dollars an hour anonymously - working for contractors across this country to pay for gas, food and lodging.

Charlie arrived at the job site early. He found work on Craig’s List; two young sub contractors in jeans and checkered shirts were pulling tiles off an old colonial next to a local bank. He parked his car rear in so any local cops won’t become curious running his California plates.

The old distressed house sat on a small plot in a village halfway between Lincoln and Des Moines. He could see a main street with quaint shops equidistance a crossroads and entrance to a freeway. Otherwise it’s America! Middle America. As far away from his destination as one could find in this wide open country.

“Charlie, I’m Chris – that’s Frank. Have you ever done any roofing?”

“No... it’s not rocket science right?”

“No it’s not,” Chris laughed nervously. “just be careful... don’t fall off or nothing.”

“I’ll be fine.” Charlie said looking up at the distressed two story house.

Another car pulled up, two men ready to work had their own tools.

“Ok, let’s get started...” Chris yelled over to them.

“Let me ask you... I’ll get paid today? Right...? In cash...? Charlie double checked cautiously.

“Yeah... starting now.”

Charlie climbed the ladder carefully negotiating the lip of the roof then cat walked to the crest. He used a flat scraping tool starting to clear his corner section then pulling nails with the hook of his hammer. It was easy work. Brainless repetitive work – totally satisfying work with lots of fresh air.

Men work out in gyms across the country trying to get this kind of exercise, he thought. It allowed his mind to roam. He looked for as far as he could see. Across the street a local bank, a pretty tree lined main drag with small storefronts along a brief center of town. He could see the on and off ramps for a freeway.

He was soon joined by the two other workers each claiming their section. There’s a chorus of scraping, hammering, nail pulling filled this small section of town.

Chris and Frank stood around. They were so young, Charlie thought, each making their money off the top of the job: a trickle down enterprise. Bank foreclosed, sold the property, a speculator buys it for a fraction putting a new roof, fresh paint; a modern
kitchen maybe then flips it selling to a nice family or a speculator looking to squeeze even more equity from the carcass. It's a money game where everyone is happy but for the poor family who lost it initially or the bubble bursts.

It is here staring off into Indiana or Iowa that he thought of his own mortality; his future. On this roof perched precariously with a hammer in one hand and tile scrapper in another he wondered what would happen if he fell? What name would he give an ambulance driver? What name would he use when filling out forms? Who would he become now? He can't use his own name. Anybody with a computer can put his fractured name into a search engine discovering his flawed sordid past. His unsavory history of convictions and prisons: his outstanding warrant - his flight from justice.

It is impossible to remain anonymous in our modern America. With the computer anybody can be anyone. It is the name we are born with that is our undoing. Social Security numbers tied into government computers. What a paradox, he thought as he worked. He worked diligently: day's work for a days pay. He focused on the nuts and bolts of his decision to run.

"Hey Charlie – how you doing up there? Frank waved with a big smile of encouragement.

"Good! It's fun."

"Nice! Glad to hear it!" He said waving a bottle of water in his direction.

"Thanks!"

He was momentarily taken from his thoughts. So he focused on Chris and Frank's conversation. They spoke loudly; theirs was animated talk waving their hands and small bottles of water kicking the dirt at the torn up tile and wreckage.

"It's all about banks making home loans to poor people with weak credit."

"They're foreclosing so many can't keep up – we got that job next week. Did you advertise for next week? Chris asked casually.

"Yeah, got a crew all next week..."

"Bank's making money – believe that! Slap a new roof and paint...no worries..."

The boys just kicked their heals all the while licking their lips cause they have lot's of work pulling lots of roof's off lots of foreclosed properties.

Charlie just kept telling himself that if he can't get a job, he will create one. After all, his goal is making money to eat and survive. There is no career in his future. No major medical or 401k retirement fund for him.
His hammer pulled nails from rotted plywood sending debris to a plastic tarp covering a wide lawn front and back of the house - dirty time consuming job.

"Charlie...what about tomorrow? Chris asked yelling up.

"Maybe." He said knowing he was going to take his cash and use it to travel east.

Eighty dollars is only enough for a night's stay, three-quarters of a tank of gas – maybe a happy meal at Mickey D's.

After a day of roofing his old body will need a soak in a tub of hot water. Stripping the roof to its skeleton of two by four's took nearly all day. From dawn to dusk it was hard labor.

Charlie felt every old tired muscle in his body. He took the eighty bucks with a thank you from Frank. A few words were exchanged about "tomorrow". He just looked at the four twenty dollar bills then folded them put them in his torn jeans. Getting in his old car he looked left to right for any local police car that may be around then drove off never looking back.

........

That next day he showered and shaved rushing to hit the road. He had Chicago in his sights. He realized it'll be a pass through city - too expensive to stay the night, too dangerous to hang around.

Where he felt on vacation driving through rural pastoral towns like Cheyenne or Ames or Lincoln, his nerves seized up closer he came to Chicago.

Chicago had to be his next stop along Interstate 80. He hoped it would be a quick pass through. Still he tried to find some day work none the less.

He worked Craigslist hoping to find a gig. Stopping in a hotel about fifty miles out he searched part time and gigs sections. Both were designed for quirky opportunities for fast cash jobs. There was one of interest: a guy seeking a driver with his own luxury car. Quickly Charlie sent a picture of the classic black Jag along with a vague image of him behind the wheel then called using his prepaid anonymous cell phone.

"I saw your post on CL are you still looking?"

"I am, can you describe your car...and yourself?"

"I'm a mature man almost fifty, blond with blue eyes...educated. The car is a late model Jaguar Van der Plas XJ-6 with lot's of chrome. It definitely makes an impression."
“Where are you now?”

“I’m on my way into Chicago...”

“Sounds good – give me a call when you’re in town...”

A gig, Charlie hoped. Some cash he could use for his night stay at the Illinois-Indiana border. A night sleep then coffee and Danish complimentary before his ride east. He’s making excellent time, he thought.

Interstate 80 quickly merged into a concrete and steel mess of urban on ramps, exits – arteries leading to and from local freeways – everything coming and going through one of America’s premier metropolises. This is a city, Charlie thought, a city that means business. He stayed on point doing all he could to exit safely. He needed some idea of where he was. Some point of reference. Quickly, he made a fast call to his gig.

“Hello it’s Charlie...we spoke earlier...I can drop by if your still interested? You are...Good! Your address? Uh huh...I’m now close to State street exit...ok. I’m close to that exit? Ok...sounds easy...I should be there within the hour. Oh...I’m sorry...what’s your name? Ok Rob...ok...I’ll call you when I get there” Thanking Rob he hung up.

Rob’s office was in a nice area of Chicago. Confusing turns with traffic lights crowded crosswalks with distracted excited people rushing from corners with or against green lights a corner coffee shop marked the building; Charlie turned into a parking lot behind and parked.

There’s energy here in Chicago, Charlie felt it immediately. He felt it yet knew instantly it’s not for him. He’s a New Yorker to his bones and Chicago will always be a second city – a big town - only not his style and not his town. He felt an instinctual urge to grab a cup of coffee and sandwich and head toward Lake Shore Drive and east toward Indiana. Only he didn’t. He stayed for his appointment; deciding to relax: make a little cash. See the city.

Rob’s small office was on the second floor of a multi use commercial building. It was a walk up. Old wooden stairs led past a gypsy horoscope reader, her door wide open and red light on. An Asian wellness studio also kept its door wide open hoping for traffic. Rob’s office looked like a front for an escort service -- which it was.

“I’m Charlie, we spoke on the phone.”

“Sit.” Rob said. He was working his cell phone. Waving, he pointed to a sectional leather couch. A fish tank splashed color and depth. Rob was a tall light skinned African-American equal parts menace and charm.

Charlie gleaned from Rob’s call he ran a kind of massage parlor of some sort. A pimp Charlie judged. A business man behind a desk working the worlds oldest profession
discreetly. He’s a middle man running a massage parlor that perhaps starts with a massage but most likely finishes with a happy ending.

“Where’s your car?”

“In the lot around back.”

“Let’s have a look.”

Rob stood. He’s well over six feet tall. Slim athletic build, he’s handsome with a dangerous edge.

In the light of day Rob looked hard as nails. No nonsense business in flesh, he opened the rear door as if he owned the vehicle. “Clean” was all he said.

“Yeah, no one ever uses the back seat... it’s pretty clean – leather’s like new.”

“How long will you be in town?”

“Not sure.”

“Well, I’m looking for a regular.”

“Do you have a job for me today?” Charlie finally just came out and asked.

“Come up in an hour.” Rob said. He seemed pensive. Not the type who telegraphs his thoughts.

Charlie took the time to wander around the neighborhood, his first stop a hotel with a computer business center. Checking e-mail he then scanned Craigslist for another gig – even posting an advertisement. He liked the idea of using his old car for a driving gig. Asking twenty an hour it’s a bargain all things considered. Three hour minimum ought to cover gas and a motel in Indiana.

After an hour he returned to Rob’s second floor office. Three women sat around each ignored the stranger. Rob again was behind his desk, his cell phone firmly planted in his ear.

Feeling oddly out of place, he looked at the girls, their looks of desperation. These are the eyes of the hustler pining for dollars.

“I can arrange an hour appointment now, yes she is very open to that,” Rob said casually into his phone working hard to hook a client whom he knows has nothing but opportunity in this windy city. “She can do that. Half and half is her specialty...yes.”

Charlie remained standing. The women all sat waiting patiently each hoping this client will pull the trigger that one of them will be chosen to do the job.
“Fine! She can leave now and be at your door in thirty minutes.”

Charlie understood. Rob closed the deal. He realized the man’s game. It had been his own hustle before the Los Angeles Police started knocking on his door.


“Ok.”

Rob and the ladies piled into the Jaguar. Its dark tinted windows allowed an anonymous intimacy. Rob sat up front, quickly each lit up a cigarette fast filling the car with acrid smoke. Both men cracked their windows.

“You know Chicago?”

“No…”

“Just pull out and turn right – Whacker is the high rent district. Tourist central. Field Museum around the corner. Close to Rush street, it’s kind of the center of town. A tourist hang.”

“Cool.”

“You got music?”

Rob fiddled with the radio set into the walnut dash board. Quickly he managed to set up tunes. It seems it was locked on some auxiliary station. The system is a complicated digital one. Adjusting treble and bass where all messed up. He easily pushed all the right buttons re-setting the car system. Soon music pumped loudly into the car just as it had months before his arrest.

Rob tuned into a local hip hop urban station. Lot’s of Jay-Z, Fifty-Cent, and whoever else is flavor of the month. The world of contemporary urban filled the cabin of the car like the smoke choking off the fresh air.

Charlie seemed glad knowing he’d turn the station as soon as he could. His music will always be American Popular Standards: Sinatra, Bennett, Billie Holiday and all the rest. He yearned for the mellow melodies of non threatening sounds that allow his tired thoughts some kind of peaceful reference.

Soon the ladies in the back seat became comfortable. Their fast talking killed time - a kind of sap rap where the sound of their voices masked their nervousness. For a brief moment Charlie felt a part of their conspiracy, only he wasn’t. He just needed fast
anonymous cash. He worried too much about parking, waiting. He worried about getting a ticket. Anxiety gripped him all at once. His demeanor changed to one of alert professionalism.

At the Hyatt he was given every courtesy by a very gracious door man. He was allowed to park his Jag right in the front entrance area of the expansive half moon driveway.

A slick hustler, Rob got out and greeted the door man with a fist bump. His charming smile made people feel a welcome part of his enterprise. The door man flashed a knowing and welcome smile. All was right, Charlie thought.

Looking at Jade in his rear view he saw a pretty slim light skinned girl of maybe twenty-two. Her kinkiness hair was relaxed. Extensions gave her a full glamorous look making her kitten face look small, submissive and sexy. Perhaps it was her lost eyes Charlie focused on too long. She was searching for a kind of direction, something far away she may never find with Rob or his small business.

He turned off the car leaving the radio on. Rolling down the window so he could rest his elbow on the ledge of the door, all the while the ladies smoked relentlessly. Rob stood talking to his acquaintance at the bell hop station. Jade made a bee line through the glass and marble lobby to vaulting exposed elevators then disappeared for about forty minutes.

Across the street a meter maid with an official checkerboard cap tilted to one side used her portable hand scanner no doubt validating vehicle identification numbers up and down the entire block of Whacker Drive. Charlie’s heart jumped into his throat knowing his car is as wanted as he is. He’s driving dirty. No registration or insurance. Nothing is linking him to civil society but for a blue and white California license plate which is suspect.

......

Afterward, Jade returned looking no worse for wear. Forty-five minutes passed, maybe. Nothing about her seemed out of place. Her faded jeans or flimsily bright polyester blouse were unruffled. Her lipstick was carefully applied. Discretely she handed Rob cash as we drove off. We simply reversed direction heading back to the office. All in all the job took an hour and a half with traffic. Rob broke him off two twenties – forty bucks for a fast adventure, Charlie thought. Not bad, only not for him.

Charlie couldn’t knock the hustle. Rob seemed to have a good thing going. An office, a stable of eager hookers: it’s a dangerous hustle, he thought, who’s getting hurt? Adults living as adults. what’s the alternative really?

People locked in frustrating jobs conforming; politically correct anonymous authority forcing us all into narrow roles: never be offensive to another’s sensibilities.
America has spent its existence being all things to all people - Charlie conceded
this notion has grown a nation. Only today don’t pitch a tent or occupy a plot of land in
protest: cops with chains and mace and batons will show you why.

Make money – that’s the American way – but heaven forbid it’s done selling
grass or pussy – a jail cell is waiting if you do.

Politicians today use their elected office to gain access to vast sums of tax dollars.
It’s an age old cycle. Fear has become such a useful tool in elections, the politician able
to scare the public the most win.

A glance at America’s collective fear of terrorism, sex offenders, drug dealers,
illegal aliens all allow Homeland Security to strip liberties, registration acts to tag,
monitor, perpetually incarcerate, deport foreign nationals – all in the name of what?
way…..? A collective need for security – real or imagined.

What it really is: collective security for Republicans and Democrats – all
politicians no matter their ilk. Their machine must remain well oiled with plenty of tax
dollars.

Parking behind Rob’s office the three ladies rushed out leaving their cigarette
butts crushed in his ashtrays. Rob just turned to Charlie saying: “It’s not working out.”
Charlie understood. He pushed two twenties into his hand saying good bye with his eyes
and body language then closing the car door behind him.

……..

Potholes on Lake Shore Drive punished Charlie’s tired old Jaguar. He just
decided to move on. His first instinct was correct: Chicago is a pass through city.
As he drove east rounding the great lake he thought only of needing another rural out of
the way motel along some out of the way stretch of Illinois or Indiana.
Chapter 4

So many words have been written about coming home to New York City, so many songs sung, poems, movies; such a body of work focusing on that return to the greatest city on earth.

To have been born on the Upper East Side of Manhattan - educated in its best private schools - lived in its museums, restaurants, parks; running around its reservoir or just walking its streets: his return to his home is a victory in itself.

He would return home to a city he abandoned year's earlier spitting blood at its evolution of culture. It's selling out to wealth, selling its soul to land developers building too expensive luxury towers. Too expensive shops - too expensive restaurants. He cursed the police state its become in the 1980's, 90's and today. Lost neighborhoods like his childhood Yorkville - all gone.

Charlie reflected honestly during his lonely drive to some discreet motel: New York's his home, he sighed. A city so disconnected it embodies the phrase: "the more things change, the more they stay the same".

Out door cafe's - more than any other place on earth. A Times Square that in his youth was edgy, dangerous, today an armed camp: still dangerous. A maze of controlled chaos. A crossroads where no matter how many cops patrol or barriers erected remains his spiritual center of the universe.

Charlie cursed he would die in Los Angeles. Now he's running home like a wounded soldier knowing there's only one place on earth he can get his hustle on. There's only one place where he can make some money to survive. A city so dense he can survive anonymously. A city where he would easily re-invent himself - where he can land - knowing he would make all the right moves. He felt it in his soul: New York City would be his landing zone. Somehow his old home would take care of him one last time.

......

Feeling himself leaving the prefabrication of middle-America, he entered the east approaching Ohio then Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Red brick is his first clue. He's entering the red brick east coast. Federal style tenements and offices, worn old pointing
of solid cornerstones. For sale, rent and leasing signs seemed oddly smaller more dignified as though placed out of embarrassment or from some tedious necessity.

Worry overwhelmed him finally. Toll booths were his real fear. Toll booths are little more than government weigh stations monitoring carefully people and their cars – collecting revenue – tracking the coming and going of citizens. In the past this was accomplished with the words “papers please”. Today high definition camera’s capture license plates, facial recognition software pick out scofflaws or dead beat dads. Naturally, mothers against virtually everything clap their hands and smile hooray! That is until it is their son, or husband, or father who is trapped in the net.

Charlie would try to avoid the net for the rest of his life. Living simply, living in plain sight – modestly. He thought constantly about identification, social security, where would he live? The “Real Identification Act” passed lately causing real problems. It all seems somehow secondary to his real alternative: prison in California.

Ohio seemed remarkably hard hit by this economic maelstrom. Here “out of business” signs mingled with “closed”. Signs also reflected local opinion blaming local politics, or the President himself. In Ohio for the first time the economy has become personal, not an abstraction found on the evening news or daily papers. Here Charlie saw actual angry messages trying vainly to pin their economic result to someone. Sadly, he thought, it’s impossible to attach blame to some oily mechanism of politics. Nothing sticks to such a well greased system. So these hopeless messages only fade into memory with each passing car along the interstate.

…………

An early morning gig had Charlie in front of a distressed house surrounded by homes equally dilapidated. Dawn light in about an hour. He watched while men were already hard at work.

Out front of the house, at the sidewalk, a dumpster was hooked to a tractor trailer. “Your late dude.” a local said turning as Charlie sidled up. “Shit, if I ain’t late too!”

Their words spilled from them like old friends, instead of two strangers standing in the middle of pre-dawn somewhere in Ohio.

“But the call times six o’clock…” Charlie just said glancing at the time display of his cell phone; hot coffee still burning his fingers.

“Slow you blow, dude. That crew’s been at it since Three A.M!”

Both Charlie and this stranger watched idly as several men, all looking from south of the border, gutted the first floor and basement of the old abandoned home. Moving like termites carrying off chips of wood dust. It’s an assembly line removing bits and pieces to the dumpster.
Charlie tried recalling the post. He was sure it said six am: “Construction gig – no experience necessary – ten dollars cash per hour...four hour minimum.”

“Well, it ain’t no construction dude...more like destruction.”

Charlie just listened sipping his coffee. Being told what’s what from a seasoned local. “Ok, so who do I see?” He moved a bit toward the cab of the rig.

A big man in a flannel shirt held a flashlight, a list of papers. He’s cradling a cup of coffee. Up ahead of him men worked uninterrupted. Moving like ants. Moving scrap metal from the old house, from the basement – from anywhere men were able to rip at its guts. A human conveyor belt tossing scrap into the long container jacked to the back of the Petersbuilt rig.

“Sorry mister, you’re late. I got all I need on this job…”

“What’s this anyway?”

“Scrap metal – simple shit. We call it salvage ’round here. No one wants the house plain and simple. Banks don’t want it. Families paying the mortgage don’t want it. City has to rip it down at their expense. So before they get at it we tear out all the metal.”

Both men watched while the kitchen sink went by. Thrown with all the rest into the dumpster. They watched like it was a sporting event or some live theater. He tried wrapping his head around this. Trying to figure out why these ten or so men were ravaging this old carcass. Then it finally hit him – all this metal he’s taken for granted all his life like copper and tin, brass and steel have a value today. All recycled at a profit.

“...scrap metal, we pull every piece of scrap out of this old lady – every nail, piece of copper, sconce, bathroom plumbing. It’s hard work believe that. We take the hot water heater, shit – we take the kitchen sink – see look there!” His voice stopped just as the kitchen sink was tossed into the dumpster.

“No shit.” Charlie said standing sipping his coffee from a paper cup, “copper plumbing, of course, why not.”

“Yeah, banks made a ton of liar loans – now these people can’t pay their mortgage...or don’t want to pay! Hell, cheaper for the banks to abandon than tear down or even try and re-sell.”

“No shit,” was all Charlie could say just thinking ‘it’s far more shameful to owe money than it is to steal it.’

“Yeah, what’s funny, when we get done – town rips it down at tax payer expense.” The foreman said matter-of-fact, then took another sip of his coffee.
There's no work here, he thought. Their hopelessness became his. Why bother checking Craigslist again. Ohio will be an all day drive through. He hoped Pennsylvania would prove a bit more optimistic.

Finding himself driven to get to New York City as fast as possible; a feeling he had not felt in many years. Not since he put himself through college. He remembers driving a yellow taxi cab then.

He had just started his night shift. It was late afternoon. He will always remember that day. He needed desperately to drive fast and hard just to earn ninety dollars lease money - after the lease all the rest was his profit; his take home pay. Yet something pressed his thoughts tugging him home.

A constant nagging he simply could not identify, yet urgent told him to return home. Somehow he managed to follow it instinctively. Once in his small studio – not a moment after opening his front door – his telephone rang. It was New York Hospital. His grandmother whom he loved and called Mimi had a stroke. A doctor was calling to notify him. Permission was needed immediately from a family member to administer a necessary experimental medicine that may, or may not, stop the spread of the disaster to her brain.

"Yes! Charlie said. "Anything, give her any medicine she needs! I don't care how experimental it is. She must get it."

And so Charlie drove his taxi to New York Hospital staying all night until he had to return his cab twelve hours later. He stayed at his grandmother’s bedside holding her fragile hand all the while she slept. That week she died. That was the last time he saw his grandmother.

Forever afterward he realized there is something or someone looking after him. Some power, some supernatural angel. He knows he is not alone.

......

Lancaster Pennsylvania is Amish country; quietly peaceful farmland with quaint intimate roadside motels. Off season these lodgings are desperate for stragglers with paper money. He found an over night stay in an out of the way location: twenty-nine dollars a night for cash. Here the nice family from India made no bones about it they don’t want to be bothered with credit cards with their fee’s nor identification that needs to be registered. They cheerfully took Charlie’s cash with smiling eyes hopefully asking: "how many nights sir?"
Pennsylvania would be his last night on the road. He realized by this time tomorrow he would be in mid-town Manhattan and home. Not nervous – anxious. He realized he would be forced to drive through the Lincoln Tunnel or over the George Washington Bridge. Both ports of entry are minefields of cameras, police on the look out, curious intrusive eyes searching for anyone or anything out of place.

Using his last hours before his nerve wracking drive through New Jersey, Charlie that next day did as much maintenance as possible on his Jaguar. He would change oil, filling tires, anything at all which could lower his profile. Once in Manhattan, he would park on the Upper East Side then do the alternate side of the street parking juggle. A dangerous routine, yet less risky than a parking lot which would want proof of license, insurance – money.

His reckless mind raced along. He built a future for himself on shifting sand. He would land, then park, then visit or call some old friends from so many years ago. He would crash on someone’s couch imposing on some old acquaintance. He had no job, no papers, no place at all to sleep. He just wanted to be free living on the streets of New York rather than trapped waiting for some next fight at Chino.

Wandering wide open streets where the very poor mingle with the very rich casually, he thought. Live anonymously by his wit, breeding and education. Charlie felt something was pulling him home. Something like the phone call from New York Hospital. The same power that pulled him to his telephone and his stricken Mimi is today pulling him back to the upper east side of Manhattan.

New Jersey quickly grew dense with traffic closer he approached the Lincoln Tunnel. Lovely neighborhoods faded to more urban commercial tracks of highway, shopping malls, truck stops and billboards of every kind. He saw from the last leg of interstate 80 jets taking off from Newark Airport and the distant Statue of Liberty and lower New York City. Charlie is almost home.

On the Jersey Turnpike now he recalled his days pushing a taxi, taking passengers to and from Newark International. It’s the same route he remembered. His mind raced with throw away thoughts. Looking at the city from New Jersey it suddenly hit him: he is seeing the Manhattan of his childhood. The Empire State Building remains the tallest building on the island; the Chrysler building, its tower again mocking its majestic upstart neighbor. Those twin towers of the World Trade Center are gone. Manhattan is as it was when he was a boy. Sickening circumstances returned its famous skyline to those days when he was young; when the world was younger before the rollercoaster ride of misery had not yet claimed his spirit and enthusiasm for a bright future.

“Now I’ve seen everything” or “I thought I’ve seen it all” were common sayings from his boyhood. He heard his mother and father say it so often it was like a day did not go by without it. he recalled to himself peacefully as traffic passed him slowly. Today, hardly anyone uses these expressions. The world is simply moving too fast. Virtually everything is captured on camera shamelessly exploited. Nothing is sacred, he told
himself. There is no crossing the line – as the line has shifted to include every profane act imaginable. Apathetic indifference guides most affairs today. It's only money which matters. A paycheck or payday; this country better never run out of the ink it uses to print money, he thought with a smirk. He removed three dollars from his pocket preparing to pass it to a toll booth collector. Finally entering the Lincoln Tunnel and the entrance to Manhattan under watchful eyes, video surveillance, marked Port Authority patrol cars and the blanket of Homeland Security; Charlie is coming home.

Considerate Reader:

I do hope you have enjoyed these few short beginning chapters of my novel Run Charlie Run which I do hope will someday be published.

This work will run in excess of 100,000 words. An expansive narrative exploring the harrowing circumstances of Charlie Bates as he runs through America. Run Charlie Run is a dark, topical, provocative piece of literature which I do hope captures the imagination.

I am eagerly seeking representation, a mentor, or any assistance toward publication.

Kindly write only:

Charles Diorio #39825  
Norfolk County Correctional Center  
200 West Street, P.O. Box 149  
Dedham, MA 02027
“I reckon I aint paid for setting down.”
William Faulkner – A Light in August, 1932

Chapter 5

Charlie Bates returned to the people, places and things that once gave his life hope; searching for some kind of normalcy – some stable future. Returning to the Upper East Side, to that neighborhood where his soul was momentarily happiest. Parking on East 75th street he turned off the engine then got out walking toward his friend Maurice’s place on First Avenue.

Magical Maurice, a gnome with a newyorkjewish sensibility; Thanksgivings they would enjoy Kentucky Fried Turkey laughing at the evolution of culture. Maurice would let him sleep on his couch, he hoped.

Mo’s ancient Aunt Viola owned a small storefront in their pre-war tenement. She would know where Maurice is. Her role as parole officer, Aunt and guardian would guarantee she knows where he is. Her shop is the last ladies notions store on First Avenue. Smelling of a past where merchandise had an odor of cardboard, mold, living things that cohabitated with dry goods, natural wood floors; light bulbs with filament not harsh halogen or fluorescent. Behind her perch of glass counter which held dear products – in her mind anyway – was her cash register. Not a fancy computer but a draw. This is what a shop was like before the personal computer, before politicians got away with all they have gotten away with these past many years since television brought a new world into our living rooms, bedrooms and hand held mobile wifi lives.

“Is Maurice upstairs? I’m an old friend; Charles…”

“Charles it’s me Linda.” A woman chirped immediately. She was a customer at the counter her animated conversation with Viola hushed the minute Charlie entered. “Linda! I used to work for you…at your old apartment.”

“Linda? Oh Linda, of course,” Charlie tried eagerly to search for some memory of this little old woman standing before him.

“Where have you been? Where are you now?” She pried diligently.

“Well, I just got back into town – actually I was looking for Maurice, I was hoping to stay with him for a few days…till I get settled.”

“Maurice doesn’t live here anymore.” Viola finally spoke up. She seemed to be getting her balance trying to figure out how this storm of conversation erupted in her small unassuming notions store.
“I can maybe help you,” Linda said sheepishly. “Do you have money?”
“Yes.”

“I have a friend Cynthia Barnes at the Breckenridge. She needs money. She’ll let you stay at her place I know it.”

Like words coming from Heaven her yenta mind worked its maven ways insinuating herself instantly into Charlie’s little existence. Normally he would avoid her, crossing the street, in this case on this day he welcomed Linda’s prying ways.

She is exactly whom he needs at this very moment: a dynamo. A woman with contacts on the street; a flea on the dog of the Upper East Side hoi polloi: thank God for Linda, Charlie thought.

“My friend Cynthia – she has a big place at the Breckenridge on fifty-fourth, she needs money real bad, how much can you spare?”

“I guess for a couch, a few days? Five hundred...reasonable....right?”

Linda’s eyes widened and a smile tilted her thin lips. She had not aged so much, Charlie thought. He recalled her being a fixture on First Avenue – one step up from a homeless bottle collector he remembered. It occurred to him that she did clean his small apartment for a few months. Somehow he tried to remember if there was more to it than just cleaning?

Her face was pasty even for the beginning of summer in the city. A rat nest of brown hair framed a body that may or may not be skin and bones under layers of hand me down second hand clothing. “Charlie, you look really good, you’ve lost so much weight.”

“Thanks you too. Have you seen Maurice?”

“Not for a year. When you’re the center of your own universe the world is wonderful.” She sighed.

“Well, Mo did march to his own drum, right?”

“He’s not here.” The Aunt pressed through critical lips seemingly shooing away both chatterboxes distracting from a sale.

“Do you have a phone number?”

“I really do need a place right away, Linda. Otherwise, I have to pay a hotel. I’m sure your friend needs the money more than a hotel...” Charlie tried to work the word “does” out but was immediately stopped.
“...she does.”

Making a fast phone call, Linda called Cynthia. As she did, Charlie tried to recall the building. He remembered it as a nice upscale luxury apartment complex in the fifties off of Second Avenue. It seemed so much of that world was flooding back to him.

He could feel his circumstances changing. He felt this meeting was a moment in time somehow destiny. This is the reason for his hurry. Rushing in a fever to get to this point at this exact moment; meeting Linda in this antique shop selling needles, buttons and thread: leaving with a place to land. A roof over his head, a new friend who will help glue his life back together; hopefully, a fresh start, a new start in his beloved New York City.

“Cynthia, it’s Linda, listen I just met my old friend Charles. He’s just returned – he needs a place – your couch? Yes? Yes! Your couch is fine. He is going to pay...three hundred? Ok – three hundred! He’s nice....very nice....a gentleman. Yes! I know him. He doesn’t! No! No! No stuff...No he doesn’t, Yes! He’s on his way.”

Charlie listened, watching Linda’s dancing wet blue eyes while she played matchmaker. Living for making a marriage work this day on east 78th street on First Avenue she saved a life.

They exchanged phone numbers. Linda would be the first phone number saved in his throw away cell phone. He removed a one hundred dollar bill pressing it into her small soft hand. Her little fingers grabbed it eagerly. She only looked at Charlie respectfully knowing she did not need to ask shrewdly acknowledging the mitzvah. Both somehow felt they were merely picking up where they had left off so many years ago.

He waved thanking Viola, Maurice’s old Aunt acknowledging sadly that thread of his past is severed. Maurice has disappeared, perhaps forever.

Returning to late afternoon sunshine, First Avenue choked with its traffic, noise, people moiling about rushing back and forth, he returned to his Jaguar where he removed his modest possessions. Checking alternate side of the street parking rules, he would have to move his car every two days. Weekends were free. A ticket would be a critical yet avoidable mistake. He would simply immediately abandon his car knowing a careful traffic cop would notify some fugitive retrieval team that would lay-in-wait paranoia reminded him.

Walking down First Avenue he passed his old apartment house on 74th street. It was still there, a shabby but respectable walk up next to a pizza parlor and upscale Italian restaurant. It seems only their names have changed. Bar restaurants had their front windows opened to the spring day begging to draw a customer. There is little bar crowd this early in the day.
Passing the Roosevelt Island tramway under the Fifty-Ninth street bridge, he could see little has changed from Sixtieth street to the neighborhood where the Breckinridge is.

Fifty fourth street remains as it was ten years earlier. Scaffolding seems to suggest improvement, or change whether cosmetic or infrastructure. The Breckenridge remains the same an elegant driveway a carefully landscaped entrance. A notable better address confirming affluence in a city of conspicuous consumption where an address tells a story of whom one is.

From the sidewalk in this neighborhood Charlie tried desperately to remember what went where in his jigsaw puzzle of memories. There is still the public school at the corner of 57th street — a model city school for the arts that brings high school age minority kids from every borough to the high rent district. Neery's pub is still around, always will be whether the youthful old Neery is living or dead. A CVS that was a Woolworth's that was a string of tenements bulldozed by developers. What is important is the hustle of anonymity constant where he will hide within its ebb and flow.

"Ms. Barnes please"

"Whom may I say is calling?"

"Charlie Bates"

The lobby of the Breckenridge is an opulent tasteful entrance. Two elevator banks allow for residents to reach lower floors, a Latin American embassy keeps its consular general on upper floors. Wealthier residents have several floors. Again, door men and staff judge guests based upon what floor and whom they will be visiting. Charlie was instantly judged poorly by the well pressed carefully cared for attendant as another of Cynthia Barnes' flotsam and jetsam washing up on the shores of her doorstep.

Charlie took it all in. He waited as the door man in his brown uniform with yellow piping — a name tag read 'John' — called up announcing him. "Sixth floor" he finally said offering an apartment number and little else. "Thank you," was all Charlie cared to say.

Cynthia Barnes opened her door. She started with “I can’t say I’ve been a devotee of Truman Capote” stressing each rhyming word with a heavy accent on ‘devotee’ as if the humor lay in that word couplet. “Come in Charles.” She clearly had been on the phone with Linda so long it seems she considers herself old friends real or imagined. ‘That hundred dollar bill certainly went far toward establishing his pedigree’, he thought to himself.

Cynthia continued: “diction is essential to good speech, I’ve written a book or two on it.” She pulled from a cabinet two glossy paper backs titled “Proper Oral Technique”. Charlie took the two books — thumbing through them — each were thinly veiled pornography. Both illustrated with elaborate manuals on fellatio and cunnilingus saying dead pan: “my publisher insisted my observations on diction and proper speech not be
dry reading!” Her brown eyes sparkled. ‘Charming, this old lady is a hoot,’ Charlie came to realize instantly. Eighty years old and filled with life. Charlie tried smiling, his old creased eyes having seen so much anger and pain lately tried desperately to return her bright unblemished look. He wondered if her years of living could tell he had a well worn soul, that he is a man at the end of his emotional rope.

“Come in, sit down.” She pulled Charlie into her large unkempt apartment. Her over sized living room seemed unnecessarily dark. A piano stood off to one wall, a couch and love seat occupied the middle of the rectangular room along with two low yet plush chairs. It all seemed as if it was placed in a past which dictated uniformity. All wood all expensive in its day, all in good taste.

Cynthia herself wore a faded garment, a rag thinning from wear, a sort of house dress. In it she seemed remarkably dignified, perhaps in its day a decade ago.

Charlie felt immediately comfortable. So comfortable that he walked the full length of the long carpeted living room to the front windows opening the drapes then blinds and for what may have been many months or years let sunshine flood into the living room and adjoining dining area.

Surprised, Cynthia only looked astonished as though what Charlie had done was as natural as his walking into the apartment. A foregone conclusion or modern miracle: “It’s bright out, I thought it was raining. It’s been raining lately. Honey where do you come from”? Was all she said of the whole recent event.

“Florida, Cynthia – the sunshine state.”

“And what do you do?”

“...Linda didn’t say?”

“No...well? No...”

“I’m only passing through – but I won’t be a bother – is this the couch?”

“Linda did say you had something for me...”

“I do, darling.” Charlie removed three hundred dollar bills. With a warm smile he handed it in her frail hand and like a squirrel she moved through a door to her room where certainly she was tucking it away carefully.

Charlie took a moment to observe every detail of the apartment. It was large at least two and a half bedrooms, at least a bath and a half, most likely one in her master suite. Nothing seemed well kept. Newspapers, sales circulars, old bills some opened most unopened. All sorts of paper and plastic bags littering everywhere his eye could see. It
was cluttered as only an elderly lady without assistance could accumulate. Years of neglect, he thought, a shame.

“How long will you stay Charles?” Cynthia talked walking back joining him once more having socked away her cash.

Suddenly a buzzer rang – Charlie jumped suddenly aware of his fragile place in this world. She moved carefully toward the door. Asking to see the rest of the apartment he moved swiftly past the door that led toward Cynthia’s room.

A delivery, his startled mind raced: where to run? He wanted desperately to hide. He moved casually past the set of doors where he discovered a small den. A desk with a computer, a couch, a large television: an office. On its walls pictures of prize race horses – jockeys: Eddie Arcaro mounted a thoroughbred. Standing amazed he just searched the office with his eyes. ‘Must have belonged to Mr. Barnes,’ he thought.

“Lovely lady, how are you today?”

“What ya got for me today?” Her bright voice ringsonged, such a happy voice; all is right with the world.

“Three today.”

“Oh…lucky me…”

Cynthia sounded like a woman always gracious. Gracious eternally. Her years have been kind yet lately a bit rough.

Once her front door closed, Charlie again returned to the living room casually as though his return was merely a normal exercise. Food delivered in a plastic bag like the ones now cast away littering this old apartment. Meals on wheels or some other service provided to the elderly.

“Let’s see what we got.” Excitedly she walked with her catch to her kitchen. It was a dirty mess needing a good scrubbing. Her oversized refrigerator was well stocked – ‘someone was shopping for her at least.’ He thought somehow relieved. His relief may have been from hoping he would not turn into a de facto houseman or butler to this infirm old shut in. “Let me just put this away then a little nip. I nip, is that ok?”

“I nip too.” Charlie understood immediately: she drinks a bit.

“Oh good then you won’t mind going to the store for me – I would enjoy something like this….,” she sheepishly removed from a lower cabinet under her sink a hidden fifth of Grant blended Scotch whisky.

“Grant’s, no worries, my gift – I’ll be right back.”
Watching her put on hot water, she took from her refrigerator a plastic jar of Folgers instant coffee, then carefully removed her meals on wheels pre-packaged dinners stacking them carefully in her own fashion; one in the fridge two in the freezer. Charlie at once felt at home – he was now doing what he had hoped he would not be called on to do: become a delivery boy for this lovely aged doyenne.

He fast removed himself, but before he could actually leave the expensive cluttered apartment, just at the front door practically, Cynthia began making gentle requests from her place in front of the refrigerator. She called out for smoked salmon, crackers, some sweets a bit more coffee, something called marzipan and just in case: ice cubes.

Finally out the door Charlie understood this little old hostess – his savior – had in mind a swell happy hour of cocktails and conversation. Company! He could only think of his good fortune having a safe place in which to sleep that night. His alternatives an uncomfortable cold back seat of his Jaguar on east 75th street.

Standing at the corner of 57th and First waiting at the corner of cross and don’t cross he looked around. Always banks on the southeast and southwest corners. Today the names have changed. He stood as though in a parallel universe. Everything resembled his past. A pizza parlor where a clothing store had been, a sundries newsstand, there’s a Middle Eastern flavor to it, no matter cigarettes, periodicals gum and candy are sold no matter what Allah says of tobacco products; a little sliver of a liquor store between 58th and 59th remains today in the able hands of South East Asians.

Buying a fifth of Grant’s, he then walked across the street for Lox and crackers. A nosh, some conversation: sympathy. Then his phone rang. “Hello… darling, I owe you – I’m on the hook… reel me in. I love her…yes. A hoot! She’s a hoot! Lunch? Lunch? Yes of course anywhere you want. What? Anywhere…sure…lunch….Ok!”

Charlie seemed to be moving swiftly into a life. He could not know squares and citizens, he looked around knowing that only a few short days earlier he had been in the grip of incarceration. He could only look at the world through eyes that see injustice. Suspicion is his prism. He had to shake it off. He had to just to survive he realized.

Returning, Cynthia Barnes sat in her favorite chair, an Empire style plush firm green piece of furniture on rollers. It may have been her favorite because she easily maneuvered with the help of a cane sitting and lifting. Her eyes danced in dewy pools focusing on her scotch with water and lots of ice.

“I want to help you Charles.” She insisted on drawing out the name with an expressed interest with the last letter. “I think you are a talented man who needs a helping hand.”

“You are helping me Cynthia. You are letting me sleep on your couch.”
"I mean, with a business or anything...."

"Well, if you have that kind of money, then sure let's get something started."

"I don't have any money...."

"...then are we going to build a staircase to paradise? And bake pie in the sky?"

"I'll build a staircase to paradise, with a new step every day..." She began to sing. The scotch was working on her musical repertoire; 'A musical woman with no radio but a piano.' Charlie thought. "I want to take you to my club...," she continued.

"I want to go."

"....the Friars Club, have you heard of it?"

"...of course I have," Charlie said toastingsipping his drink doing all he could to affect some kind of gentle patrician sensibility. Some semblance from his past that may remain the mark of a gentleman.

"We really must do something with you." She said. "Clothes, we do have plenty."

Charlie just listened looking about. Recent baggage of strewn leavings turned her lovely place into a hoboden fit for a low rent drunkard or lazy self absorbed bachelor. This is not the home of an elderly respectable woman of substance...but for the address.

It seemed clear Charlie's mission was to rehabilitate her living room at the very least. Suddenly, all at once, at her front door he heard house keys on a chain turning the lock.

"That's Artie. It's his time to come home." Cynthia said. Her face turned a bit sour. And her smile tightened curling into a thin taught line.

Startled, Charlie stood watching its inward push of the front door then a large figure backing into the apartment like a fat man who must lean backwards into a compact car seat. He stood like a creature dressed completely in black, a black toupee tossed across a completely bald head. A shaving brush of hair marked his oversized ears. A round jowly face red from years of booze and the street, he had a look of sad rejection and sheer terror upon entering upon the stranger standing with Cynthia a drink in his hand.

"Artie come meet Charles, he will be staying with us."

"Cynthia come in my room, let me talk to you." A plea as much as a firm request.
Doing all he could to ignore this seagull who found a perch at Cynthia Barns' garbage dump, Charlie immediately recognized this Artie for what he is: a bum plain and simple. Another of Linda’s saved souls; a derelict of First Avenue from some soup kitchen or Alcoholics Anonymous meeting salvaged by her yenta referral service.

Foisted on Cynthia Barnes, poor old Cynthia; he’s now living as under a bridge in her spare room in the lap of luxury on East 54th street. Now he’s instantly about to launch his campaign against this wrong decision – that this stranger Charles must go. This intruder may be dangerous, a thief – or worse.

Still, Charlie knows as sure as he’s sitting on the couch with a scotch in his hand Cynthia for all her obvious short comings – most not at all her fault but the fault of growing old – in her simple mind of eighty-four: she has cash in hand. This alone trumps any poison which this Artie character plans to spew forth.

There remains in her something of the nurturing mother. Judge Cynthia Barnes holding court as she had years ago lunching at her club. She hobbled along into Arties portion of her apartment; a room smelling of manstink.

His room’s dark, dirty clothes thrown to the filthy carpet. A travel cot of the kind most people fold up and roll away in a closet or basement was his bed. No sheets, just an exposed sodden mattress, gross brown blanket – no pillow.

“Cynthia who’s this guy? I don’t like him...”

“Linda’s friend...”

“....Oh that explains it...”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“Linda, you know Linda...come on Cynthia...”

“I know, but he’s a very nice man.”

“How much did he give you?”

“That’s none of your business.” She was firm on this point. Even Artie understood not to press this matter. Cynthia’s money is her money. Only Artie persisted because for him Charlie represents a threat to his own small piece of mind. His little filthy living area is now in jeopardy.

“How much Cynthia!”

“Three hundred dollars if you must know.”
“So you will get your throat cut for three hundred dollars. Or worse!”

“Your Wrong,” she stood. “He is my guest, I won’t be rude.”

“Cynthia…”

“I won’t be rude, just mind your own business.”

……

Clearly upset, she returned to her cozy empire chair working hard to shrug off her buzz kill conversation with her seagull. She reached for her tired watered drink.

“Cynthia – let me freshen that for you,” Charlie said taking her floater to the kitchen then rinsing her glass adding new cubes, adding a touch of Scotch with a splash of water. “Is everything ok?”

“Yes, certainly – of course! This is my home after all!”

“I just need your couch a few days…”

“You will stay as long as you want.” Cynthia spoke as much for the benefit of her eavesdropping squatter as for Charlie’s ears.

Returning to the couch, handing Cynthia her fresh drink, he just played along knowing this show of recalcitrant autonomy is but an act in three parts all played out by dame Cynthia Barnes.
“I have no peace nor ease;  
I have no rest, for trouble has  
Come!” – Job 3:26 (New American Bible  
Rev. 2010)

Chapter 6

Artie Siegel sat almost asleep in an orange colored plastic chair, part of a row of plastic chairs of different colors in perhaps New York City’s busiest office: The New York State Division of Parole on west 40th street. Here adjacent to Port Authority bus terminal he is waiting along with many others who on this day must report to a parole officer or be violated; sent right away to Rikers Island then back to some upstate prison.

So Artie will wait. He will sit for as long as it takes until his regular P.O. calls for him. And he will wait, as will every man and woman will wait this day and every day. Failure to wait; failure to comply with every mandatory condition of parole supervision results in possible violation – this is zero tolerance. And each person here just waits.

“Siegel”

“Yeah, that’s me.” Artie stood – yesterdays newspapers fell from his lap. Getting up he shuffled to the front desk.

“Third floor” a receptionist with a gold badge said. Behind her right shoulder the great seal of the State of New York. He just walked to a glass door that locks behind each man acting as a trap preventing escape. Elevator doors will not open without this door being secure. It’s a more pleasant maximum security experience than say the Clinton Correctional Facility or Sing Sing; this parole office on 40th street is a reporting point for every ex-con in Manhattan no matter their classification.

“You again,” Whitey said. He had a snide look of a convict just released.

“Yeah me again” Artie said trying to avoid the man.

“You look like a mess, you working?”

“Yeah same thing”

“What’s that?”

“That building up there – you know”

“Oh yeah – well hope your staying out of trouble; drop the candy and let the little girl go.” He made a depraved kind of laugh mocking Artie openly.
“Shut up,” Artie told him softly under his breath almost. “That’s not funny”.

“Siegel” A tall portly man opened a door calling. His parole officer stood with a clip board. His gun holster filled with a heavy automatic, a large gold six pointed badge clipped next to handcuffs.

Artie was not waiting long at all. Escorted to an office off the hallway, fluorescent lighting created a cruel yellow harshness to this place. “Siegel you still working?” he was asked.

“Yes”

“Same place?”

“Yes”

“You living at the same place?”

“...Yes...”

“I will be by to visit this week.”

“Ok”

“Are you still going to your sex offender program?”

“Yes”

“How’s that going for you?”

“Ok”

“You know the law is changing – you guys have to wear GPS bracelets now. Monitoring is mandatory. I’ll have to come by and approve your residency location too.”

“But what happened was so many years ago,” Artie knew better than to object only somehow he felt he had to.

Somehow every time he went to his parole officer, each time he was forced to address that crime, that rape so many years ago – each time he had to again defend himself it was like pulling a bandage off a wound. A wound that will never heal, a wound oozing from every kind of painful accusation reminding him of the truth of his past.
He realized it will haunt him forever. That horror thirty years ago when in that moment he was drunk and raped that woman. That day so many years ago that will never go away. Now having to register, this Meghan’s law taking effect the last year of his sentence today has him trapped as if the crime happened yesterday. Registering every year as a sex offender, his face with a caption Rape 1st degree. A home address, his age – everything. ‘We have become such an unforgiving nation’ he tells himself.

He remembers it was Clinton who signed this Meghan’s Law just months before his release from prison. That bill named after a little girl who had been killed by a sex offender. Clinton signed legislation giving states the power to notify communities of the presence of violent sexual offenders; how many must be held liable all because one president was told and believed “several studies had shown sex offenders are rarely rehabilitated.”* (* William Jefferson Clinton, My Life, (2004 Knopf), p.713)

“Have you been drinking?”

“No”

“Ok see you next month. I will be at your place for an inspection sometime during the month – ok.” With these words Artie Siegel is dismissed.

His monthly meeting completed he rushed from this obligation. Now he must walk to a bus stop and back to work.

West 40th street is lousy with men and women on parole. A circus of criminals, fugitives, office workers: a whole crisis of humanity coursing through a main artery of Manhattan. Artie walked as fast as he could away from this place. An ugly monthly curse! Now he is told he must wear forever a GPS devise. ‘It’s not enough,’ he thinks, ‘he must be registered every year, placed on a sex offender website all because so long ago he tried having sex with a drunk woman who pressed charges! ‘He was drunk too’ he told himself over and over again. What should have been a nice afternoon turned into a nightmare which is going to last the rest of his life: ‘now an ankle bracelet’.

Walking to 8th Avenue, he took any uptown bus crawling up Broadway or Central Park West. Any crowded bus dropping him to west 76th street; rushing to return to work. An occupation he knows to be safely approved by his parole officer: a janitor in a brownstone.

739,853 – the number of sex offenders registered in the United States and its territories in 2011, according to the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children – source: Time Magazine, December 12, 2011

“You back?” A door man in a pre-war next door to Arties brownstone asked.
“I’m back” Artie said.

“...parole?” The door man continued. He asked knowing all about Artie. A parole officer questioned him years ago. Most of the neighborhood knows. Only with shifting population nobody around here really cares.

“Yeah,” Artie shrugged, “Parole Officer.”

Artie kept no secrets about his past. He didn’t advertise it either. He only entered the brownstones side service entrance, down stairs to his small utility room where he spent most of his days and some nights especially when drunk before heading back to his cot at Cynthia’s.

Never challenging him for rent, a few dollars here and there kept her happy. Occasionally a trip to D’Agostino’s market filling her fridge, maybe a little company over a bottle of her whisky. In return he lives like a citizen at the Breckenridge.

Lately he’s fallen down. Sinking! Nothing about anything seems to be breaking for him. Instead he’s washing clothes less than usual. Wearing the same black outfit like a degenerate western outlaw; some days a tie would complete his creepy ensemble. When he can’t afford to set his toupee – not a partial, but full on – it balanced awkwardly on his big round head.

“You got a visitor.” Again the door man spoke up. Artie only hung his head walking through that service door heading back to his utility room where he would change from filthy street clothes to filthy work clothes. He realized his visitor was owed money, he would return.

Among his too many vices, drinking; chronic masturbation to internet porn - he gambles on horses. Loses often, his bookie comes all the way from Lennox Avenue especially to cash his paycheck. All Artie can wonder is why payday and parole day always fall on the same day.

Knowing hope is lost seems to sit well with Artie. He has his bottle tucked away, a lap top and his paycheck. At seven o’clock he goes home to Cynthia where he will drink her booze from a bottle under her sink till its so practically gone even her Alzheimer’s will disappear long enough to buy a fresh fifth. Drunk he stumbles to his cot, maybe taking his clothes off maybe not. At least he’ll have a shower when he gets up.

Between food stamps, public assistance, disability supplementing his janitorial paycheck he also gets social security. He’s better off than most even if he’s held on a tight leash. That old rape conviction has him hemmed up. Lately it’s been threats of civil commitment under some mental hygiene law. Now it’s an ankle bracelet tracking his every move. He just removes his bottle from its hiding place drinking straight.
It is just at that moment a knock instantly freezes him with fear. He’s horrified thinking its Goff his parole officer. Panicked he does not know what to do with his open pint of whiskey. His breath reeking of cheap hooch he starts to throw the bottle to the garbage when he hears that it is his friend the bookie yelling: “It’s the cops…drop the toy doll and back away from the sandbox!”

“Not funny, I told you not to do that anymore…”

“…And I told you I would be back here for my vig and principle,” An older man said squeezing into the cramped room. “Art the fart…damn if this place don’t stink.”

“Here just give me the difference.” Artie Siegel pulled from a worn old overstuffed wallet a folded payroll check endorsed. “You know you’d think at least my bookie and bartender would like me…”

His wallet’s a grip of receipts, papers, identification; fat with everything but money.

“What ya talking ‘bout Artie, I just run down here from uptown to do you a solid, ‘course I like you…I’m just having a little fun is all.”

Taking the check looking at it carefully, he removed from his trousers a roll of bills thick as a baseball.

“Why you do this Art? Why you use me to cash this?”

“‘Cause I’m lazy…”

“Well, shit! You aint a liar”

“I just got back from 40th street.”

“How’s old Goff?”

“Same scumbag – always an asshole”

“Thought you were done with all that nonsense…”

“Never done, never, Gonna get worse – tell me they want me on a bracelet”

“Shit, well you are a skinner.”

“I aint no diddler – and its been thirty years ago and she was in her thirties! Not like a kid or anything!”
"You know they don’t give a fuck."

"Yeah"

Artie did know the government didn’t give a fuck. States passing more and more laws: ‘set up a god damned ghetto for sex offenders,’ he cursed. ‘Just get it over with.’

America has constructed an elaborate hatred for sex offenders. It has designed laws specifically established to place them in a category so despised that politicians may use them in ways so reprehensible only the National Socialists – the NAZI party – use of the Jew in 1930’s Germany can be described as more deplorable: forced residence restrictions, draconian parole supervision, electronic monitoring, yearly registration at local police stations and internet web sites. All legally constructed designed to track and classify an entire class of criminal no matter that the individual completed his or her prison sentence or judicial decision.

Taking his bottle of whisky out once again he tossed back as much as his throat could stand. The fire from the rot temporarily caused his stomach to turn then settle. One drink is not enough he knows two is too many. He will stay in his stinking room in the basement of this brownstone until tenants begin returning home from their straight jobs, then he’ll stumble back by cross town bus to his only bit of solace: that luxury apartment where he pays practically nothing; living well at one of New York’s most exclusive rentals, practically being kept by kind Cynthia Barnes.

After his bookie left finally – a litany of not so subtle insults later – he realized he had little time left. He stood removed his pants – pissa in a jar that he then poured down a slop sink. Already the air in the dank storage room reeked of ass and urine. A zoomusk found only in these places men hibernate their lives away toiling, hiding, giving up on themselves and their hygiene. Then he decided to finish his pint, rub one out and leave going back to Cynthia’s and bed.

Arty walked from his utility room, locking it from the outside, walking up through the lobby and out the front door. Why he did this after every day he was not sure. Since he’s usually drunk it never really matters. Perhaps it’s some need to see something other than that grey exposed brick of a basement.

This brownstone walk up was shabby but respectable. That it was built during W.W.I on a lovely tree lined block between Columbus and Central Park West allowed any landlord to charge a small fortune – in the past it was little more than a cold water flat. Worn stone, worn wood, replaced glass; aged. Only fire codes needed to be maintained for a certificate of occupancy. Gone are the days of liberal tenants rights in New York City.

On his way home he decided to walk to 57th street and a cross town bus; such a great day, warm with a promise of summertime. At a glance Artie Siegel could pass for another pedestrian coming from work, going someplace special – only on closer inspection his black clothes were filthy, shoes with torn leather. Remnants of effluence
for anyone to see only anyone would not look. No one would look at him for more than an instant. In this city of so many beautiful people he moves about it invisibly.

Only if something terrible or criminal occurs would he be recognized. Only then will witnesses easily pick him from a lineup. “It was him officer” with these words he would be noticed; then and then alone. Otherwise, he’s but a shuffling ghost walking down Central Park West to the 57th street cross town then the rear entrance of the Breckenridge – never the main lobby – door men roll their eyes knowing he goes to the sixth floor.

This evening he returned seeing a stranger! His heart raced with fright! ‘His parole officer making a visit,’ he thought immediately. Then he noticed the man had no gun, or badge at his waist, or bullet proof vest as most now do when making field visits. Instead this man had a drink in his hand, wore casual jeans; a mock turtle neck shirt. ‘A man who looked like a citizen,’ he recognized. A bit thin for his height and age, like someone who was on an extended camping trip or doing some kind of extreme adventure involving weight loss. His face is not gaunt it’s seasoned; creased from something resembling extreme living, a serious man who is at once holding a look that is critical, unyielding and judgmental. Artie just turned and sighed knowing something was wrong. Something is terribly wrong.
“These were the years of the 1960’s: 
Restlessness of almost earthquake proportions; 
Riots in the streets; fires burning on campus; the sense
Of oncoming ecological catastrophe; a government paranoid
With fear of its subjects; an almost physical fear of crime, which
stalked the streets like the Black Death.” - Lawrence M. Friedman,

Chapter 7

“What will I get?”

“What will I get?” Linda thought, “these men always want to kiss on the lips and
always want to know what they will get.” She shrugged the question off. She knows just
what they will get – a safe uncomplicated experience – a fleeting orgasm. It’s what she
will get that really concerns her. She’s searching for a guy with a spare hundred bucks
who just wants a safe afternoon delight plain and simple.

“What do you think you’ll get?” Linda answered.

“You’re not a cop?”

“No”

“I’m married, I’m just nervous…,” her caller finally said honestly.

“You’re coming to my place, if your nervous maybe you should really just think
about this…”

Linda understood exactly what to say. She has been advertising on Craigslist for
about a year. Since her first client reached into his pocket giving her a hundred bucks for
what seemed like nothing.

“Ok, I’ll come over,” he said finally convinced.

“Good, you won’t be disappointed. I’m looking for a nice time just like you.” She
sounded sincere. After all this is a job. She’s always frustrated about money, especially
lately. It finally dawned on her at forty-two years old she’s sitting on a cash machine.

That morning was busy with calls, although most were just curious. While eager,
one took her to the alter. While she needed cash, she needed a voice that she felt is safe,
sincere: ready willing and able. A mature gent looking to come and go, generous – a guy who knows time is money; a hobbyist into sex for cash.

Hanging up, instantly her phone rang. “Linda here,” she put on her sultry voice trained to sound smoky deeper more sophisticated.

“Linda what time are we meeting?” Charlie Bates asked talking fast into the phone.

“I may have an appointment today,” she said, “so tomorrow – I’ll call you...how’s Cynthia?” She switched to her natural voice all adenoids and Ozone Park.

“Good...Great!” He hung up on his last word. A fast call keeping her on a string; they’ve been playing tag trying to get together since that day two weeks ago when they met.

...........

He moved into Cynthia’s nicely. Taking over her den, her computer, her phone and couch, he thought long and hard about making money. He found himself broke. This need for cash drove him to extremes. Looking around at where he is living it occurred to him he is surrounded by money.

Everywhere his eye looked he could see opportunity. He would see in her unused possessions fast cash. So he used his place in her den, at her computer to sell away her unused property. Things collected over a lifetime today forgotten. Things which are now collecting dust cluttering up her expensive home. Things of value to someone; someone on Craigslist or Backpage, or EBay or any number of other web sites that have become our modern day answer to the corner thrift store.

Afraid of entering her sacred bedroom – for the moment – he carefully quietly rummaged through draws, closets; under tables, on top of nooks. Anyplace where over so many years stuff was stored: ‘one man’s junk is another man’s treasure,’ was his rule of thumb.

Cynthia’s place is a veritable “antiques roadshow” of tasteful pieces. He found in a round end table games from World War II – antique monopoly, bridge sets; poker chips housed in a glass and brass caddy. An entire collection of gaming paraphernalia – he sold it cheap online.

Most items sold same day. A picture taken with his cellular phone, a brief description then e-mail messages flooded in. Her walk in closet was a treasure of classic Chanel, Hermes, Christian LaCroix. All designer, all expensive in their day, he carefully folded them placing them in a shopping bag as if throwing them away removing them piecemeal to consignment shops all up and down Third Avenue, Second Avenue and
Madison Avenue. These items are highly sought after especially in the silk stocking 70’s and 80’s Upper East Side.

He merely told managers and owners: “mother passed”. His merchandise was eagerly accepted with a nod and the thoughts: ‘a son’s loss will be their gain’. Charlie happily accepted a small percentage. Beginning as a legitimate effort at cleaning her living room led quickly to this adventurous sordid doing away of things that to him was meaningless, but for Cynthia represented the outskirts of her past life and home.

......

“Come in”

Linda opened her door inviting her gentleman, she took his hand leading him into her one bedroom apartment.

“Are we alone?”

“Yes,” Linda lied. In the next room sleeping is the old man who’s name is on the lease. He’s nearly eighty years old and completely oblivious to her prurient enterprise.

“Yes, we’re alone...come in”.

‘An old lady,’ the man thought. She’s small, skinny; intense with a wan face and diminutive appearance. What kept him from leaving is her eagerness at once sexual invitation which told him instantly he is safe, she is not a cop or looking for anything more than a little cash for sex. There will be no game playing, he felt. ‘This will be worth the money,’ he thought so he stayed.

“Please, take off your coat, and clothes.” Linda said laughing nervously. She motioned her gentleman toward a couch set against a mirrored wall. Her apartment spoke of a period in Manhattan where men wore sideburns and women wore tie dyed skirts and flowers in their hair. “Now, don’t be shy...I’m not.”

‘He is what he seems,’ Linda thought, ‘middle aged, middle class business man taking an early lunch, most likely married, who was searching Craigslist personals.

Linda’s message caught his eye. Her picture, or what he was able to discern: her pubic mound still with a bit of hair, a milky white buttocks – skinny – his type. His hard on convinced him to call – her voice and location sealed the deal.

She pushed him onto her couch smiling lasciviously. “Let’s get the business out of the way,” She said.

Removing from his loose fitting slacks a grip of twenty dollar bills he handed her one hundred dollars with the words: “I’m a Republican, I honestly don’t do this...”
“Honey, I don’t talk politics or sports...just a nice time...,” she quickly stood taking her loot to a chest of draws where she socked it away. Returning she saw her clients erection just hung excited waiting for service.

Admiring him, he’s uncircumcised; in her youth she harbored a distaste of this, only now it doesn’t matter. Linda grew up with such strict morality about holding out for a husband, waiting for Mr. Right - firm rules on courtship and dating - rules that were enforced by a look from a parent or neighbor or at school. At school in particular by other girls who judged till it became a sick bullying. She took her client in her small hand. She put her face on it, pulling his glands back over its head, smelling his musk.

‘What is appropriate when on a first date,’ haunting her teenage years she recalled taking him in her mouth for the first time. ‘What conduct would label her a slut?’ She thought now.

Her trick just sat tense his head straight taking in her performance. ‘You are ready,’ Linda said taking her time. He wondered just how far she was going to go. Whether this would be some elaborate scam. She had not removed her skirt or shoes or blouse - or anything. All she did was tease him with her hand and kisses to the crown of his erection. His organ moved with the excitement of his beating heart. Finally she knelt working him deeply into her mouth.

Linda saw that her gentleman was very nervous. She took her time. Experience told her if she moved too quickly he would pop jeopardizing her money. Too fast he may balk, too slow he may lose his ability to release - she realized after so many times this had to be done just right.

“Does that feel good?”

He strained against her. She tapped his organ against her cheek and lips.

“Yes”

Reaching for a condom, Linda removed her black panties in one swift movement. Her peasant skirt lifted, rolling the rubber onto him, over its full length which she thought was too large for her, but decided to get it over with anyway. She deftly straddled, easing him carefully into her - still not fully ready herself she realized she was less moist than usual. Maybe nerves, she thought. As fast as she took his shaft, he bucked ejaculating excitedly. Rushing his orgasm until his spasm concluded in gentle pleasant release. Linda felt it. She felt the end of it. She felt him fade, till there was nothing.

Hating himself a bit he pulled himself free from her. A sick self loathing overwhelmed him. He removed the soiled condom, its leavings spilling on the carpet carelessly; quickly he dressed.
Charlie Bates spent his time cataloguing Cynthia Barnes’ possessions, photographing them, posting them in various sections of Craigslist. He sold her record albums, her pictures of race horses from the 1950’s, flowered horseshoes ‘round their necks. Starting with musty crowded closets he sold old leather travel cases, many from the 40’s. Some valuable, most with Pan Am stickers, others with the Leonardo DaVinci Italian Line, he sold them as vintage and got paid. A set of golf clubs in what looked like an expensive leather carrier went for three hundred dollars from a man who seemed too grateful. Certainly he should have charged more, Charlie thought afterward, only he never played golf.

Charlie’s virtual yard sale on Craigslist, Backpage, and E-Bay all made this uncluttering of Cynthia’s life too easy. From her den he picked away carefully. Several lovely boxes of Hermes scarves brought nearly four hundred dollars. A collection of pill box hats that must have been from the Kennedy Administration - in vogue today - sold for three hundred, Givenchy accessories sold well. Belts, books, ornaments; all sold piece by piece. As she would roam her home in her rag schemata occasionally going for fresh air throwing on only a rain coat she was happy. Cynthia was happy for company, a drink, good cheer and friendship. She saw her apartment return to a lovely place to live. It was cleaned, dusted. Her living room was no longer an obstacle course of garbage but a nice place to sit and entertain. To remember when she was Mrs. Barnes returning from the Friars Club prae omnia fraternum to a home that is again warm and busy.

Alzheimer’s did not entirely kill her mind. She lived with a serene security. ‘A kind of permanence’, so Charlie told himself. What he’s doing is a kind of pre death estate sale of things only. Cynthia no longer remembers or cares about her bottle of Dom Perignon, for example, the one tucked away in 1992, the one sitting on a top shelf in her hall closet since that day she must have put it away – on a New Years Eve, or anniversary. Today Charlie sold it on Craigslist for two hundred dollars to a man who intends to surprise his wife on their anniversary. A nice man in a Paul Stuart suite, meeting in the lobby of the Four Seasons Hotel on 57th he asked: “is this legal? Buying alcohol off Craigslist?” Charlie only shrugged taking his money, “I don’t know.” Another done deal.

An album way in the back of Mr. Barnes’ closet – a closet virtually inaccessible, blocked by Cynthia’s too much junk; Charlie cleared away a mountain of dreck opening the door to the closet. In it was men’s clothing: a navy blue wool New York City Police dress uniform. It had buttons tarnished. His eyes searched deeper. Posters, shoes, more luggage. Odds and ends including belts, hats, braces for trousers; many boxes filled with papers, files and so Charlie went about carefully pulling apart this dust bin from decades ago.

He hoped there may be some treasure. Maybe gold tucked away or stocks and bonds hidden for that rainy day. A day her dementia, his death concealed until now.

Now Charlie Bates is picking at their lifetime together as she sits watching local news over a cup of instant coffee. He silently rummages through her past. In a box tucked
away he found a jewel: A police special. A five shot thirty-eight caliber New York Police department vintage service revolver.

Charlie looked, held it, thinking for a moment absolutely nothing. Thinking absolutely nothing but knowing everything. He removed the piece from its box. Twenty rounds of ammunition appeared in good shape; as is the weapon. ‘Heavy’ Charlie thought, ‘very solid.’ He cocked then rolled open its cylinder. Clean. It had been oiled. Looked as if it had never been fired; a pistol issued or purchased by a man who may or may not have ever needed to carry it. ‘Such a mystery,’ he wondered.

Worried where could he hide this pistol without Cynthia accidentally stumbling on it? This deadly relic would come in handy Charlie realized instantly; an insurance policy, an ugly tool for redistribution of wealth; a way out of trouble, or a trap back to prison. All this he realized all at once. Removing his prize to his travel bag out of the way; putting his find out of his mind focusing on digging for more valuables in this closet that so obviously Mr. Barnes hid away and now became Charlie’s.
“This is the age of the housing project. Which is always a prelude to the age Of the cave” – Ayn Rand, The Fountainhead (1943)

Chapter 8

The day Paul came home from the Police Academy with word he was accepted his mother cried. She was so proud. Proud he was going to be a New York City Police officer. Proud that he would have a career. A place with a future; and Mrs. Goff looked at the picture of Mr. Goff, Paul’s father, who was killed in Korea and cried some more – he didn’t make it back to see their son become somebody.

And she rushed to tell everyone on the block. Everyone but Henry Waters and Linda; their son cut his eyes as though she were the one new to the neighborhood and not them. And Hector Mercado and Elaine; their son brought friends around the block she didn’t like at all. So much that she felt things. Feelings that she believed she would never say out loud. These were her dirty opinions. Long before prejudice or bigotry had become household words she had only her senseless opinions. She only hoped it would never cross her door step. Their long dark arms, she was afraid. She understood she may be a bigot in her mind, but in her heart she’s generous understanding and gracious: she loved her son Paul.

Loving her son was a project. Keeping him on track. Catholic schools, good private Catholic school. And Church. And that summer camp. She made sure he went for a month each summer for three years. Praying a month away from the Grand Concourse, away from the Bronx would be enough to give him a chance. She sat with tears now knowing it had.

Paul Goff followed his track. He took his civil service exam when Lindsey was Mayor. There was some concern he would be a rookie cop under this player – he didn’t care. He’s a police academy recruit. And there will be a lot of Mayors coming and going. His is a lifetime commitment. Today, he’s an old parole officer, still on track. “Too old a cat to get fucked by kittens,” he’d say.

Goff retired from sex crimes, then a slot at parole opened. As did a flood of convicts released; a whole new attitude about what to do with them. Society feeling around in the dark; state legislators knowing the cell door must stay closed only not sure how to do it. He tried understanding daily meetings and memo’s which led to the same result: zero tolerance. He’d ask, “Why let ‘em out in the first place?”

Only being a parole officer is just a job. A swift job of doing his duty; these ex cons are all dirty, the luck ones spend a few months free, then screw up. The unlucky ones return with new charges.
He loved his youth on the job. He lived for the ceremony; although what he lives with lately is mummery. He’s close to retirement. And the hundred or so men and women on his case load can not wait. His retirement will pass with a whimper. He knows his job is thankless – he’s expendable; a man at the beach returning sand to the sea with a tablespoon.

Coming up he recalled ceremonies. St. Patrick’s Day parades ending on Eighty-Sixth Street in Yorkville. Green beer with his precinct buddies. Friendly fights with fire companies. And there were women, so many women at Barney Google’s, or the Little Finland or the Bavarian Inn – drinks if not free where close to free. Every joint with an Irish band, bag pipes at the very least. Today no more, rules restricting participation in these festivals are firmly obeyed. What is not in dispute is a slavish devotion to zero tolerance.

It’s not sure where or when this intolerant policy became tacitly then officially rule number one. He recalls the media had a hand in it. Then politicians adopting if from fear of media scrutiny, not to mention hysterical politically connected grass roots groups screaming about crime, criminals, sex fiends, guns; gangs, drugs. He also thought technology played a role. Big business promoting its cutting edge tools which monitored life and living. GPS monitoring bracelets. Automobile breathalyzer devices that turn on or off a vehicle with an approved breath. DNA testing. A plethora of law enforcement technology driven to limit individuals, monitor catalogue and imprison. Money thrown with reckless abandon at every social ill.

‘He’s grown old,’ he knows, ‘senior to most’. ‘He knows life goes on, but what kind of world will it become after he’s dead?’ He wonders.

At the Police Academy when he was a cadet so long ago there were twenty five thousand convicts in a handful of upstate prisons. Today there are nearly one hundred thousand in almost seventy secured facilities thousands more on probation, more on parole, a never ending rope tethering thousands to some kind of state supervision.

Today’s ball and chain: mandatory minimum sentencing, lifetime registration, three strikes legislation not to mention money and political will to lock up and throw away the key.

.....

“Paul, ready to roll?” Russo asked considerately.

“Yes”

Paul Goff got up, adjusted his bullet proof vest. In the car he had his primary vest he will wear when actually knocking then entering a parolee’s residence. He will look
like a major league umpire behind home plate. His vest acts as a shield stopping slugs from more powerful 40 and 45 caliber weapons.

"Got the sheet?"

"Yes, got it." Goff said tapping his clipboard.

"Where to first?"

"Pitt Street Projects"

Paul Goff liked Mike Russo. He’s younger, came up the same way. Dinkins was Mayor then during his Academy days.

Both realized parole is a state paycheck – a lot more security than one from a city that’s usually bankrupt.

Walking from the rear of their offices an elevator put them at the street. Their ride an unmarked Crown Victoria; they would fight traffic all the way to the Pitt Street; lower east side.

"What’s our sheet look like? Russo asked. Watching Ninth Avenue traffic as it moved downtown. He would pick up the West Side Highway then swing under the island at the financial district onto the FDR drive to South Street exit. Pitt street was eminent domain back in the day. Condemnation turned blight into socially responsible things like housing the poor and working classes.

"Fuck it – two tears in a bucket Paul. You know it’s your last rodeo when they practically got your next up sitting at your desk,” Russo said as a point of conversation.

"Yeah – subtle they ain’t"

"What’s you’re plan Paul?"

"Tonight or the rest of my life"

"Ok…we don’t have to talk” Russo conceded. It seemed Goff was thinking far away thoughts anyway.

Paul Goff only looked out the car window onto a city that’s crowded and different. Yet it’s the same city. It’s a place that has become a kind of experiment for zero tolerance. This is a means to re-arrest; a way to evenly distribute enforcement without showing preferential treatment to one group at the expense of another. ‘Zero tolerance began really with Lyndon Johnson’s war against poverty back in 1964’ he realized. It was to be a mopping-up-exercise; it turned into more of a war than its proponents bargained for. To many people it seemed as if somebody opened Pandora’s box: out of it came hate, class struggle, backlash, and despondency to poison the national air. It’s now a political
panacea telling constituents, black, white, Asian, and Hispanic that we are all equal: “see your son and my son share the same prison cell”. It is the ultimate pandering tool designed to win elections, stem race riots and pacify hysterical grass roots coalitions. Blocks of voters! Mostly little old citizens voting from nursing homes across this country; mothers of children with self righteongous voices grow louder upon giving birth. Property owners with a stake in an ever shrinking middle class dream.

He realizes finally that there is a sick kind of acceptance that crime’s a business that being arrested has become as much a part of doing business as supply and demand. It is glorified in song. It is street credit. It is a grotesque graduate school where those who play the game treat jails like a place to catch up with homey’s.

Today there are no hard feelings. This was usually the way only hard assed seasoned criminals thought. Old guys in the racketeers, but today its crept down to the teenager on the corner.

For Goff, or Russo or the cop on the beat it’s a paycheck – that’s all. ‘In fact,’ Goff thinks, ‘when was the last time he was even called “the man” or a honkey? Or Pig?’ Fact is everyone knows. This is no longer about racism it is all about government control of everyone. That promise of freedom is nothing but selling a dream to school children too young to know better. Here today Goff and Russo are the reality

Here on Pitt Street everyone watches Goff and Russo climb out of their unmarked. They know it will be a night of ringing door bells and asking questions: business as usual for the New York State Division of Parole.

“Glad I’m getting out with two pensions,” Goff finally says. “A city and state should do me nicely.”

“Just a few weeks Paul, then the gold watch”, Russo laughs.

“Yeah, the gold watch” Goff says under his breath.

Goff knows every public housing project in all five boroughs. He knows the good ones where mothers, grandmother sisters and brothers do his job for him. He knows the families who watch their own. He also knows which projects are malicious evil places where he must watch his back.

‘The days of the second chance are over; these people know it,’ he says to himself. ‘This new America is relentless’. Providing a government check, medical programs in return it demands everything. It wants the body – habeas corpus. He realizes he’s a soldier on this front line. Today it’s a criminal conviction putting a person on his list – tomorrow even this pretense may not be necessary.
about living as New Yorkers in the city that never sleeps; moving here, building a life in this great city; packing a lifetime into their vacation.

"I'll call Cynthia." Linda finally said. Her eyes watering seemingly close to tears. "It's been nearly a year...I guess I just didn't know..."

"I guess so." Charlie just said leaving no room at all for her feelings of regret or remorse.

Both nursed drinks. Each not knowing what to do, only that both want to make something happen – hoping that by simply being together a spark could start a fire that may ignite some kind of life for both of them. This Artie mess has become a grotesque kind of catalyst drawing one to the other. Each felt it their own mission to manage this Artie away from Cynthia Barnes, from her comfortable nest on east fifty-Fourth Street.

Linda looked around wondering if any of these people suffered any of this kind of drama. So much energy to experience – experience something. Women wearing trendy clothes, smart handbags – exquisite shoes – ‘it seems these people don’t have a care in the world’ she told herself.

Knitting her brow, looking at Charlie, looking at each other; ‘he’s so damned confident’ she thought. Yet he’s defeated as only a strong man can be... inside. Steel blue eyes keeping secrets, she wondered about him: curiously. Where is he originally from? As much as she thought she really knew him – she knew nothing. ‘Nobody seems to really know anyone’ she thought taking a drink. Then recalling flashes of him from years ago when they first met on First Avenue telling her he needed a housekeeper. Feeling such warm feelings from that time, remembering his small one bedroom their talking; nothing sexual she can recall. She feels it should have been. Never shy... he walked around naked she remembered. His body masculine, toned. A man comfortable in his own skin; this made her want him now. So naïve then, so stupid about herself, about men in general – scared.

Today her fear is of failure. Being poor, homeless, of growing old alone – these are her fears. Like so many, thinking being popular means the world. Popularity is her key to lifetime security. A formula of chastity, popularity marrying Mr. Right was her retirement plan: ‘what a fool,’ she thought.

Her world has turned. Today this world has become an insular computer game of internet dating, a selfish self centered world wide web of deceit, social networking tricks seeking a fast fuck and faster exit. A culture of false promise and struggle, Linda turned looking for a waitress ordering another drink.

Charlie Bates sat oblivious to Linda’s daydreaming he just droned on about Artie Siegel and what a hazard he is, how appalling a situation for Cynthia. This situation with parole officers making Cynthia Barnes’ apartment a pit stop – he must move. He must
find a new place...a new life...a new future. Linda at one point was not sure if he was
talking about Artie or himself.

Paul Goff did notice Charlie Bates; instantly recognized the look of a man who
had spent time in stir. Those eyes which are at once angry, bitter lined with years of
suffering. Suffering which only comes from corrections. From hypocrisy. From knowing
the inside of prison cells – day in and out over years. Goff recognized that look because
he sees it daily on the faces of men recently released. He sees that ennui in eyes which is
a kind of hopeful hopelessness men praying for better days having seen bad ones. Goff
registered the look. He put it to a face then just went about his appointment.

Rapping on the front door he was greeted by a little old lady supported by a
walker. She didn’t stop talking for a moment. “You must be friends of Arthur’s...just a
moment please...please come in,” she droned on with almost childlike abandon.

“Mr. Goff” Artie said, his look a guilty one of sheer terror.

“Is this where you live?”

“Of course this is where he lives...” Cynthia chimed in.

Parole officer Russo only stood stone faced just inside the apartment. His dark
eyes saw a clean well kept living room. It appeared to be regularly cared for. On a coffee
table in front of a plush cream colored couch sat a drink on a coaster.

“Is that your drink”? Goff asked.

“That is my drink!” Cynthia said loudly. “Is that alright? I’m eight-four years old
and I like to enjoy a drink...is there some kind of law against that...?”

“Have you ever seen Mr. Siegel consume alcohol?”

“Why? Why do you ask...am I on trial here?” Cynthia said as only a righteous old
lady can say.

“Cynthia, Mr. Goff just wants to make sure I live here and that I’m ok...” Artie
finally grew a pair of balls and said.

“I’ll thank your Mr. Goff to mind his own business...I’m eighty-four years old
and this is my home! I’ve lived here for forty years! Cynthia continued on, as she did her
voice grew louder more theatrical.

Goff realized this Mrs. Barnes is like so many elderly. No matter, he got the
picture instantly. Stepping toward Siegel he walked following him toward his room. ‘A
pig sty with a cot” he thought. Turning he returned to the living room – he got what he came for...he got what he needed.

........

Charlie looked over the scene, over his drink, at Linda. She seemed to be embracing him with her eyes, or so he thought.

“I have to ask Linda... did we do anything at my place? You know... when we were together...”

Laughing she said “no, oh that’s funny. If we did would you forget?”

“I remember you differently I guess. More struggling, more, well, confused.” Charlie said trying hard not to be offensive; yet somehow hoping to recall their time together... that time in his past that now is a blur.

“Well, I was confused, as you put it. I lost my husband. Loss is the best word. I was broke, still am, but I think I grew up. I grew up a little bit since then.”

Linda let her drink work on her. Letting it relax her after a whoring day. Three needy clients; thinking how she has grown, knowing it’s not a good thing. Jaded, yes. Knowing the internet has become her high tech pimp. Cheesy advertisements shamelessly posted: “I really feel like playing today,” one begins, “I have a small clientele but every now and then... anyway if you find yourself attracted to a petite brunette, mature 42 years old – svelte and affectionate – write me and introduce yourself”.

Her postings linger. Headlines saying: “what would it be worth to you?” or “do you need a break”? Attaching pictures of herself – leaving nothing to the imagination. Truth is, these men don’t have time to use their imagination – they expect a fantasy realized. Knowing this, maybe this is where she has grown. She’s put away her toys knowing finally sex sells and she’s open for business.

“Well you seem focused, in a good way.” Charlie just said. Watching crowds swell, knowing he would have to return to Cynthia’s soon. Knowing her apartment isn’t safe. He can’t shake the drill sergeant look of that parole officer. The one with a bullet proof vest that could stop a rocket, he’s genuinely scared. Afraid this Artie will bring unnecessary scrutiny; trying so hard to forget his fugitive status. Tonight brought it all back, brought it back all at once like that arrest itself. Like that terrible zero tolerance arrest in that parking lot in Pico Rivera. Anxiously he decided to walk back to Cynthia’s try sorting out his life. Linda walked with him. Somehow this felt like a date on a summer night like so long ago in his past.

........

A tortured thrashing about – sounds coming from Artie Siegel’s room were so loud it interrupted Linda and Charlie on the couch. Cynthia, still awake, walked into the
living room ahead of his adjusting his pants zipping and buttoning, and Linda hitching up her blouse and bra.

"Is he ok?" Cynthia asked; her torn rag of a housecoat barely covering her, propping herself on her cane – her mascara a mess.

"It’s been like this a half an hour...." Linda said.

“He started drinking right after his visit from that Mr. Goff and his friend.” Cynthia seemed to recall this visit clearly.

“That Mr. Goff,” Charlie said pointedly, “is Arties parole officer – Cynthia did you know Artie is on parole?” stopping just short from using the word rape.

“I knew...of course I knew...this is my home....""

"Cynthia, I didn’t know...” Linda said, she sat curled on the couch emotionally deflated wishing this scene would just somehow just go away.

“Well do something!” Cynthia finally said.

Charlie made sure his pants were buttoned, going toward Arties room he walked down the narrow hall, past the kitchen, past the guest bathroom. In darkness a chiaroscuro figure appeared concealed still dressed in black clothes, his socks still on. Tossing violently, maybe asleep, an alcohol stench like a bar at closing hung in the air. Looking in – on a round table Artie Siegel’s wallet sat open – a cell phone, keys among a rash of papers; junk and filth – slowly he crept in reaching for the wallet he rifled through it. Finding a driver’s license, social security card – a credit card; taking these he turned removing himself from Arties hovel.

“He’ll be ok in the morning”, Charlie said. “He’ll be ok, he’s drunk. This guy’s a real problem Cynthia honey.” Turning to Linda with a look saying “time to go” she just nodded understanding.

In a way Linda understood Charlie’s a man ruined by too much sex with too little feeling, it helped her leave knowing it’s nothing personal. Cynthia’s wide awake, haunts her apartment, this Artie’s nightterror destroyed any intimacy they could have had. So she just kissed Cynthia on her make up smeared face telling her: “I promise I’ll come over in the morning...we’ve got to talk.” A promise she may or may not keep.
“Privacy is a luxury of moral consensus. Nobody would have thought
To politicize the premature birth and death of John F. Kennedy’s son Patrick,
because abortion wasn’t a polarizing issue in the America of 1963. But if
a white politician in the Jim Crow South had married a black woman, the
relationship would inevitably have been seen as a political gesture as well as
a personal decision. Today, we are less divided over race, but more divided

Chapter 10

“Is this the line for a chauffeur license”? Charlie Bates asked. He looked into a
massive institutional room that glared with brutal white light flooding down onto a
congested mass of tediously bored faces.

“Take this and have a seat”

He was handed a form, told by a beautiful woman with a creamy dark complexion,
manicured fingers pointing toward a section of blue plastic seats where he must go to
wait.

The department of motor vehicles at Herald Square’s a swarm of people snaking
through crowded lines or sitting with their eyes glued to a big board telling everyone who
is next or whose number is up. Charlie only did as he’s told; filled in his form. ‘A perfect
place to develop a new identity, ideal for identity theft,’ he told himself, ‘crowded to a
point staff could care less about which face went with which form’. An ideal place for a
new identity even if it is one belonging to Artie Siegel. His whole miserable unlucky life
stolen from under his nose.

With Artie Siegel’s drivers license in hand he would pay a few dollars for an
updated picture and change the class of license to livery or chauffeur. A subtle yet
important distinction allowing Charlie Bates to drive a taxi cab in New York City. More
importantly he now has a picture identification: a valid drivers license acceptable from
coast to coast and around the world.

......

The more he tried to build a life for himself, the more he realized he couldn’t.
Setting up a private address at a local mail box parcel and photocopy store a block from
home; his new drivers license arrived soon after. It’s his face on Artie Siegel’s
information. ‘A tainted identification is better than nothing’ his mind figured.
"Without money, prospects," he thought idly, people passing him on the sidewalk drifting by in a hurry without stopping, all in a fast rush somewhere, "he could never be that person, that guy with a straight job: a citizen."

Spending time at Cynthia's computer, in her den seeking an angle - a hungry hustler - he became a hungry hustler searching like a cockroach in dirty corners. He trolled Craigslist or Backpage or some other local web site scheming, searching for a means to make cash.

"Charlie are you ok"? Linda asked sounding genuine; her voice a rushing anxiety of trouble into his cell phone.
"I'm good," he paused then said, "crazy... the other night..."

"Yeah..."

"...Cynthia has been asking for you..."

"Can I come over..."?

"Ok", Charlie said. It seemed more an order than a request. Linda had something on her mind, he suspected. Still early, just after noon he started drinking. His first Scotch of the day seemed decadent. Medicine; a trigger letting him act impulsively. He felt he may need to be impulsive this afternoon. She seemed insistent. Knowing both of them had left unfinished something which somehow needed closure. She maybe needed to remove in her mind once and for all what she suspects.

Charlie took a deep drink allowing ice to rattle picking away at Craigslist postings, erotic services, gigs; casual encounters. He clicked on what seemed like desperate appeals from men, women, even couples. He allowed himself a sort of luxury; he let his mind just consume these sexually explicit advertisements posted by hopeful strangers. He made himself a second drink - extra ice - then carefully clicked practically every kind of sexually adventurous come on. He sat with his drink waiting for Linda. And he did wait for what seemed like hours.

"That call seemed long over do," Linda thought, hanging up quickly. Her lecture from her host - her keeper - is not over. She understood she must sit obediently until he finishes. At forty-two years old she knows she must remain submissive to this old man's tantrum. So she sits perched on her couch taking his abuse, his humiliating vitriol; his yelling at the top of his lungs.

Only after would she walk in the summer sunshine to fifty-fourth street to Charlie hoping for a plan along the way. Some plan steering a course away from this bitter angry old man harping on the same theme: her conduct, her sideline - her occupation.
“Stop this”!

“Stop what”? 

“You’re a fucking’ whore Linda!” John Silverman’s voice became loud cutting with accusation. “I’m not blind!” He said feeling he would have yet another heart attack.

“You said I could have company…you said I could have friends!” She only said sheepishly.

“I didn’t say you could be a fucking whore screwing these bastards in my apartment while I’m sleeping!”

“I’m not doing anything…”

“Do you think I’m stupid! I’m not deaf! And I’m not blind!”

“What do you want me to do?”

“I want you to stop bringing strangers to my apartment… I want you to stop…,” his voice fell silent. Linda knew his next words would be: “being a fucking whore!” or “fucking strangers in my home” or finally: “Just pack and get out”! Linda was afraid of this last insult; fearing it as a child fears darkness.

Terrified of being ordered out by Jon Silverman, her old angel who at seventy-five is not blind or deaf who let’s her live rent free. Who needed his own angel as he neared that day when he would have to have daily assistance he took in this Linda gladly.

Jon Silverman, who five years ago hired her as a home care attendant, then after a campaign of handjobs – occasional cocksucking – a glancing whiff of her then thirty-seven year old pussy became a live in situation where she exchanged sweat and blowjobs for free rent in a luxury condo on East Seventy-Seventh Street.

Sex for rent is not unique in Manhattan, only she got no cash allowance; no mad money. No cha ching like hot young princesses who get it all: cars, cash and cock. She settled for free rent with a lecherous geezer’s smelly old tool in her mouth; a marriage of sorts – only no allowance. She needed to make ends meet: she needed money! Then she discovered Craigslist.

............

Linda could smell Charlie’s breath – he’s been drinking. She thought for a moment how odd, ‘it’s still early in the afternoon’. Finally, becoming comfortable as he looked good to her, he looked healthy – in control – a comfortable man. She sensed he’s
vulnerable somehow. As if he has had a troubled life: that he’s a survivor who’s cool. A cool which comes from being comfortable with himself; she decided to have a drink too.

She felt she needed one. Needed to rest after her crisis. Leaving her argument with Jon just hanging awkwardly, an argument that should never be allowed to stay open ended; hard feelings affecting her living situation – her apartment. She needed a drink because it helped ease a truth she keeps tucked away in her selfish brain: that her life on East Seventy-Seventh Street is very fragile. Her relationship with Jon Silverman is flawed. He’s now old, but in his decrepit mind he’s still a young Jon Silverman, millionaire, with an enormous ego and cock to match who will always be that sturdy voracious real estate speculator making money when rentals go co-op or condo’s are bought and sold and money is made relentlessly.

“Honey what’s the matter?” Charlie asked. He saw a Linda close to tears - eyes a puffy mess of concern.

“I’m fine, just stressed”

“You stressed, that’s funny. You have a happy life – a social butterfly flitting from flower to flower.”

“Is that what you think?”

“Ok…so tell me what is it?” Charlie understood he must stop. She’s not looking for light repartee but solemn palaver: a shoulder to cry on or maybe a friend.

Linda turned asking: “are you gay?” She asked in a gentle way, not mocking but real. She asked knowing of no other good way to ask, yet compelled to know.

“Gay?” Charlie sat silently, jaw dropped.

“It’s ok if you are…”

“Linda…where the hell did that come from?”

“It’s ok if you are….”

“Well, I’m not! Where is this coming from?”

“The other night I practically threw myself at you. And when we first met, we never did anything – and you didn’t seem…”

“Wait a minute you think I’m gay because I didn’t jump all over you the other night? When that idiot in the next room was squawking…Because I didn’t make a pass five years ago when you worked for me? Come on Linda! Truth is I didn’t think you
liked sex! You seemed so uptight. Let’s face it...the other night – how could we? It was like Grand Central Station here.”

“Charlie I mean it as a compliment,” Linda persisted, “if you are. I mean look at you. Your fifty years old with a great build, lean muscular.” She looked at him hopelessly taking a sip of her drink. She sat on his couch with her legs wide as if presenting herself to him.

How could he explain he’s lean and muscled from doing push ups and pull ups all day long with racist neo-Nazi skin heads in a California lock-up! How could he explain he was forced to eat minimum rations of soy based gruel fed to him by indifferent prison officials.

He looked at Linda who’s as wide open a woman as he had ever met. Placing his drink on his desk, turning to her on the couch moving closer - he felt for an instant a resolve he needed to hold her.

She needed to be held, he unbuttoned his jeans pants taking her small hand, placing it inside. Her eyes lit up, she felt him becoming aroused. “Linda I’m very heterosexual – I’ve just got a lot on my mind, maybe we need to bond.”

“Oh that’s what you call it...” She said helping to pull his pants off, kissing him with reservations no warmth – just a quixotic prelude – a pretense really. “Where is Cynthia?”

“Next room”

He felt her body move over his it felt like as many job interviews – a sex act to satisfy some trust between them – ‘if she screws him she’ll screw anyone. ‘Maybe she may be into this for money later – with a stranger’. In his mind Linda could prove to be useful. A useful moneymaker; not his first choice – yet here she is taking him in her mouth.

‘Such a shame,’ he thought. He’s so sexually indifferent a shame he’s associated sex with money so closely he’s no longer able to enjoy this act for its sake. He realizes he uses it to earn a living. No joy. A means of paying bills; how can he possibly explain this to Linda whom he feels is only a naïve woman seeking Mr. Right’.

Finally, he ended this sensual exercise, removing her skirt, using his mouth, she shuddered; he then asked her suddenly: “are you ready?”

“Yes,” she said looking into his eyes grateful for such a considerate question. Feeling most men never do ask. Most men only selfishly ram it home. Indifferent to whether she’s ready, care less whether she’s moist or dilated to enjoy that instant moment of pleasure associated with first contact.
Entering her carefully Charlie thought he heard her say quietly: “I need this.” He didn’t understand her? Why did she “need this” he wondered. He felt women don’t really need sex or even want it. Charlie felt to his core, from his experience over too many years women only tolerate sex for some quid pro quo. Something in return for the pleasure they know men crave. He knows women crave cash, or security, to reproduce or some other selfish consideration: never for the sheer reckless pleasure of it.

Charlie’s confused: sex, sexual politics, sexual expectations: what’s consent today? He’s had too many years of media shoving sexual opinions down his throat; associating sex with death in a worldwide war against AIDS; media campaigns focusing on virtually every aspect of sexual prohibition short of destruction of marriage, family values or moral imperatives. He’s not even sure if he should be using a rubber or not. He’s sexually numb. His sex with Linda is pro forma.

Feeling oddly used, not even sure of any expectations beyond his getting hard, moving between her legs – proving he’s not gay. He felt like he did at Chino’s Men’s Colony when he had to prove to skin heads he’s willing to fight. Had to fight, proving he’s not a coward. Now he must fuck to prove he’s not homosexual.

Charlie began moving into her, as he did he became angry. He screwed her harder as though stabbing her with it. ‘This is not enjoyable,’ he thought, ‘he’s proving a point!’ She pulled him into her. “That’s how I want it! Harder...like that...I need this,” was all Linda said in response to his angry movements.

Sawing into her, urging him self to finish finally knowing his release is approaching – he just pulled himself free from her; knowing he’s close – he stroked himself off. Finishing on her; feeling he had to do it this way. He had to satisfy her need to know. Linda watched him his viscous leavings spotted her belly, somehow knowing finishing in her would have been an unspeakable intimacy; somehow he understood she needed to feel used, appreciated, cared for. That this is as much a test for her, of both of them, a test telling both they may share in deceit together.

Afterward, he cleaned his mess from her with a towel, taking a sip of whisky he lay on the couch naked, exposed as she was. He decided on his plan: his plan to use her as his whore. His plan to advertise her on Craigslist or Backpage or any other website where clients are procured; his plan to use her as a sexual inmate here in Cynthia’s home; he would use this time just after boning with her to talk about his plan and see what she says.
Chapter 11

Summertime in New York City can be oppressive, lonely, sticky; a boring lazy time when anyone with any disposable income travels to the Hamptons, or away from its sweltering sidewalks. For Charlie Bates it's his first summer back from Los Angeles where every day is summertime.

-------------

His postings on Craigslist advertising himself and Linda as a swinging mature couple offering an ultimate taboo experience struck a chord. His anonymous pre-paid cell phone did ring all day; he decided on a gentleman named Mark.

'Perhaps it's the nature of this unique experience,' he mused, 'maybe that the post is oriented toward mature men eager for a threesome experience'. Perhaps it's the nasty image of Linda and him together or his lean muscled physique - a sordid picture leaving nothing to imagine - a cuckold husband. Every man's primitive urge to defile another man's wife, this alone is worth the price of admission: no matter what motivates the request of three hundred dollars for the hour is non-negotiable. 'Inexpensive,' he says to himself. Even splitting fifty-fifty with Linda it's a deal. She seemed delighted.

Linda seemed not only happy, she's ecstatic. She's taken to his salacious gig like an experienced pro, he marveled. Patting himself on the back he felt himself a Svengali of sorts ordering her to a hair salon, paying for a manicure - French tips. He needed her to transform from a First Avenue pedestrian into a wife! Charlie Bates' wife; a swinging wife who's sensual, permissive; an attractive lady: a permissive couple.

Charlie needed Linda to be the kind of mature wife who may walk into the Plaza Hotel without drawing any awkward attention. He needed to dress her, she needed to play the part - it's a hustle nothing more: a short con only there is a payoff for the men who pay. It's a means to make daily cash safely fun where everyone is happy. A necessary hustle for him - a fugitive who can never use his social security number, only he does not know exactly what Linda's motivation is, maybe he never will.

-------------

"This summer is kinking my hair Carol," Linda told her stylist. "Baby powder under the arms and lot's of relaxing spray - hot and sticky..." She just talked oblivious to the cut she is getting.

Linda only knows Charlie wants it short, he wants her frizzy mess managed. She knows it's a genetic curse from her Semitic ancestors. "Make me look Shiksa Carol..." she begged.

Loving this attention, being pampered in a salon all the while around her people sweat it out. Knowing she has found Charlie Bates discovering he's bent. A man with a
plan to make money; a generous man. She finally felt comfortable with a man who used her for all the right reasons to make money. ‘If a relationship develops’, she did sigh, ‘then so much the better’.

Looking at herself as Carol cut knowing she wanted to be beautiful for him, ‘she never allowed a man inside her unprotected,’ she thought, ‘not even Jon – he had to wrap it’. Every trick had to use a condom! What happened? she just thought watching Carol paste on color and foil. She wanted to feel him. She trusted him. Trusting this man, she just felt it’s right he felt so good inside – unprotected, raw: natural. ‘So risky,’ she thought blushing, ‘no latex pretense! So out of control’! She just smiled loving it.

She used her time in the chair being pampered to remember his body being strong, their lovemaking tense yet out of control somehow. Recalling him respecting her enough to pull out! Knowing she wanted to feel everything too. Knowing she hadn’t felt a man in so long, especially one so comfortable. Intimate private memories now making her moist even now, wet now as she is foiled and colored. Then his proposal: a husband and wife couples situation! How funny he would come up with such an idea. Swingers for pay; naughty performing for likeminded twisted adults: her hysterical thoughts rushed over her all at once.

......

Charlie spoke with Mark for only a few minutes. He’s seeking two unrushed hours. ‘His expectations are high,’ he thought, ‘but he sounds good’.

If a client sounds nice, he usually is nice. A luxury address in the financial district sealed the deal; a complex of expensive modern glass residential apartments most with fabulous river view. A short walk from Wall Street close to the tip of the city a nice two hours and six hundred dollars. “A good first job,” Charlie told himself.

......

Mark opened his door, his smile a bit apprehensive, then full. A tall man, lean with short silver hair. ‘A gentleman’s haircut,’ Charlie thought immediately. A professional man with clean ruddy skin who appeared relaxed as only men with money are.

Mark’s apartment is beautiful. A minimalist spacious home overlooking Hudson River with hardwood floors, immaculate detail. Scandinavian furniture spoke of understated elegance. He’s a mature man who has reached a comfortable place for himself who now just wants to explore.

“How long have you both been doing this?”

“We are new to his, please be gentle…” Charlie said while Linda excused herself for the bathroom.
Her pre-arranged trip to the bathroom allowed for time and privacy to take cash, count it and pocket it. Always good to get the business out of the way, both agreed.

With finances complete Mark only asked: “care for a drink”?

Linda arrived fresh looking relaxed. Charlie took her little manicured hand and just said: “Honey your hair looks great”!

“You like it”

“You both look great,” Mark said watching actively.

Charlie walked Linda to Mark who offered drinks. Brazenly he took his wife’s hand and placed it on Marks crotch. “Oh this will be nice…” was all he could manage to say. Linda rubbed his turgid organ calmly. Mark just accepted her touch with quiescent resolve feeling himself aroused.

Linda felt him through his soft expensive trousers. She reached for Charlie without any cue feeling submissive to both.

Looking around Mark’s apartment out his large windows onto the Hudson River, the Statue of Liberty – across commercial ports of New Jersey, she could only think of herself. Her situation, her sexuality, her femininity unencumbered. Knowing she’s here for their pleasure both men: she’s the center of attention. An object to be used then paid. Her duty, she mused, turned her on so she wanted a climax. She wants to be used, touched put on display then told by Charlie of their next job and next.

No more Jon Silverman or his condo. No longer must she endlessly deal with vetting these creeps on Craigslist trawling desperately daily for a hundred bucks. Here she feels safe. She feels like a precious commodity, at least this evening, with these two men, in this place. A present to be toyed with then absently forgotten with all that remains: money!

Mark’s handsome she thought immediately. Wealthy, tall; a face telling of Ireland or Scotland or UK her greenblue eyes talked to her. She gladly followed every instruction Charlie urged on. Putting her hand on him shamelessly, feeling it grow; tugging it gently till he pushed her away begging to watch: “I want to watch,” he said.

Charlie Bates watched Linda, a drink in his hand casually slipping his shirt and pants off. Naked he took it all in as a voyeur. Removing her shear summer dress he noticed she’d waxed clean. She was smooth. Her bright dress fell to her feet. Seeming giddy, Mark turned to him wanting to watch – to exchange places – he wanted to see husband and wife copulate until it would be his turn – until he was invited.

Linda felt selfish giving herself wondering: ‘is she Charlie’s partner? A lover…a friend? She took this time to piece some feelings together.
Against a summer dusk of magenta sky ‘he’s just another man using her,’ she thought, ‘for his benefit’. She then moved in a way which made it clear she wanted Mark now. Needing to feel both at once: together. For now it’s her moment to let go. She climaxed here in this lovely strangers home between both of them relishing the idea it’s for money. Guttural, intense flowing with indifference her release always denied – she allowed it to come on her this late afternoon taking it as an entitlement. Gripping whichever man was in her – it is Mark – all the while nursing Charles till he finished selfishly. All at once Mark loudly reacted to his own spasm like a man finishing a marathon. Afterward she just laughed saying something corny knowing instantly she could never take it back: “thank you... thank you for making me feel like a woman again”.

.........

Laughing afterward, Charlie split their take fifty-fifty. Not a word was said about what had transpired. Instead both walked casually as co-conspirators heading toward Wall Street hoping to find a café or bar, a meal before returning to the Breckenridge. They followed a path of the sinking sunset walking briskly with purpose.

At Church Street looking for a subway a rush of people appeared as groups moiling around. A scene as only could crop up in Manhattan on a warm night. A frantic scene of insistent crowds seemingly making a home down in this place, Charlie thought.

Walking through what appeared to be a growing movement of men and women, old and young, a pluralistic assembly of tents, crowds, makeshift shelters many just tarp on sticks all talking about Occupy Wall Street.

People held signs that would make Karl Marx blush through his shaggy grey beard. Signs held up by people screaming about banks, the wealthy, poor, haves and have-nots. A tent city appeared practically out of nowhere, amazed Charlie took it all in. Occupy Wall Street a mantra of sorts; slogans speaking of ninety-nine percent at the mercy of one percent.

“Anarchists,” Linda said. “Hippies... it’s a movement”

“I’ve read about it, but seeing it is a different story”

Charlie saw only police. Too many police – his hair on the back of his neck stood up. ‘He’s a fugitive from justice and there are too many cops, too many cameras – it’s a field day for police intelligence. He saw all he needed to see,’ he said to himself. One man held up a sign: “You Can’t Evict An Idea”

Sighing, he knows: ‘Madison Avenue has been evicting and constructing ideas for years’. And he turned to Linda and said: “Linda, let’s grab a cab and get out of here”.

Passing a wake of construction equipment cutting through a massive foundation where Twin Towers had stood is all Charlie sees reminding him... reminding him of his
days where he'd visit Windows on the World looking over unobstructed everything as far as the horizon.

Linda hailed a cab quickly. She sensed Charlie's anxiety. Somehow the back of the taxi felt safe; a safe comfortable place where both could finally manage to relax. A fat driver with jowls had on his radio loudly. Indifferent to his passengers, unconcerned, he just punched his meter for a long trip uptown.

"You are listening to Sweet and Sower on New York's number 1 talk radio station...here now Sweet and Sower live:

"When you live in a capitalist society and it's impossible to compete with one percent of the population controlling capital then of course there's going to be a movement...Karen! In any other country we'd call it a revolution.....

Sarah holster your liberal agenda! Occupy this...Occupy that. This crowd aren't revolutionaries they are bum's plain and simple...hippies who've been living rent free in tents because they don't want to work! When was the last time any of these people had a bath?

Karen maybe when you were growing up reading Atlas Shrugged dreaming of an elitist utopia the rest of us were protesting! We were the hippies...I was a hippie protesting the war! Nixon! And yes the economy! Remember OPEC Karen? Well me and millions of others remember...what goes around comes around....

No one has to remind me of OPEC Sarah...of gas lines, inflation and hippies! And I'm proud to have read everything written by Ms. Ayn Rand thank you very much. Occupy Wall Street is a rabble of discontents with a catchy slogan that's all: The ninety-nine percent versus the one-percent?" Make no mistake it's the one percent fueling the engine of the economy! Ronald Reagan proved this! Remember...trickle down...economics....

His voodoo economics! Get it right Karen, I remember it trickling down alright...to banks, oil companies and investment firms! The one percent who has us in this mess...

Wait just one minute comrade Sweet...

No you wait Czarina Sower it's hording of capital by this one percent...

No you wait comrade...did I say discontents - I meant malcontents! This is the greatest country on earth and they should kiss the ground their tents are on for the privilege to occupy, or protest or whatever it is they are doing.....

At Times Square the cab driver had enough with Karen Sower and Sarah Sweet's brand of talk radio. Their discussion devolved into an angry screaming contest. With a touch of a button he filled the cabin of the taxi with grunge sounds from some kids
garage. Another kind of loud noise Charlie and Linda thought. Their trip was virtually silent each only satisfied with the way things have been going so far.

Cynthia was wide awake when Linda and Charlie arrived. “What a nice surprise,” she said, a drink in her hand. “Why don’t we entertain more? Tell me Charlie, we need to have company all the time…” He just gave her a warm kiss telling her; “You know your right honey”.

“You’re a gracious hostess…” Linda said.

“I’ve got an idea,” Charlie said, “let’s set things up so traveling business men have a comfortable place for daytime meetings. Or cocktail parties…”

“Now you’re thinking…” Cynthia’s words fell short as her front door rattled open. Artie Siegel pushed his way in. He did all he could not to be seen. He practically drew his face into his chest. Cynthia, Linda and Charlie watched silently.

Immediately they noticed his face. His face is bruised; bleeding at the bridge. Congealed blood tattooed his face as if he had been in a fight, or fell or thrown against something like a sidewalk. Artie looked mugged – and drunk.

Cynthia watched this. Her bright hopeful demeanor crashed watching her charity case ignore her. Ignore everyone. He quickly passed to his room. “Arty’s home,” is all she said. Yet she also had a moment where she realized something must be done.

“He looks like he’s been in a fight…” Linda said.

Each only looked at one another silently with knowing looks over their drinks. Charlie’s mind worked as quickly as possible. He realized at this very moment there is an opportunity here. Afraid for Cynthia, aware Artie must go he stared at Linda, then at Cynthia while he schemed.

Cynthia’s moment of clarity surfaced; ‘Artie is in trouble’. A day has not gone by she does not use the phrase; “That Goff this” or “That Goff that”; “This Goff is a threat to her,” she reasoned helplessly. A threat to her, her home even; her dementia cleared from a haze. She has begun to realize removing Artie removes this threat of Goff.

“Cynthia, something must be done – this guy is on parole – a simple phone call…” Charlie said casually under his breath – just a whisper.

“I am not making any phone call”

Linda’s eyes studied Charlie. Instantly she realized with Artie out of the picture she could use his room – use his room – during the day. Anytime! To see clients. She embraced an idea. Hoping it was one her partner may have also realized. “Cynthia, you
must call the police...he’s a danger to you and to himself... just look at him...” Linda finally said above a whisper.

Charlie sat knowing such a call requires courage. A conviction which comes from being an informant, knowing Cynthia doesn’t have the stomach for it.

“....a phone call is all it will take” Charlie said to both women. Then his eyes did wrest on Linda. His words evaporating like her scotch and water. Disappearing with similar results. Comforting momentarily yet maybe unrealistic a proposal sounding as if it’s a reasonable solution. Making such a call requires not just courage – it takes an event.

An event – a trigger! Charlie Bates felt a bit of prodding may finally put dear Cynthia over the edge – enough maybe to make a call. Drop a dime on her Seagull. After all, he knows from his own experience with parole, any police contact or drinking alone or practically anything becomes an automatic violation now a days. Any alarm may become a mandatory return to custody – a zero tolerance arrest.
Chapter 12

Looking past Hell's Kitchen, past a west side under construction; past the palisades; below are commercial ports of New Jersey. Ports that in the past -- not too long ago- ships muscled into slips where men earned a wage. Now, Paul Goff looks at splintered boardwalks lamenting an unforgiving economy next to luxury riverview condo's. Condominiums marketed with a promise of looking onto New York's grand skyline minutes from downtown Manhattan.

Goff reflected looking into summertime sunshine moments before a staffer pulled closed blinds blocking sunlight leaving only dull fluorescent lighting. He looked over this morning group -- "his last lecture, his last breakfast. One last report from senior parole officer Goff," was all he thought.

"Parolee's slipping through the net..." Goff told his audience, maybe his last before retirement. He looked at some familiar faces. Politicians, law enforcement, the press and fellow officers; a focus meeting with coffee, Danish and bagels a New York tradition. A discussion on policy from a senior officer, Paul Goff just stood tall at the podium flanked by two commissioners at either side. Reporters eager for a sound bite on what passes for broadcast news held tape recorders. "We are facing a thirty-seven percent violation rate this quarter. I worry about this. It's my job to worry, and I do worry." Pausing, he took a moment, saying, "but, it's also my job to reduce that possibility.

"Our focus at parole is on evaluating inmates to make sure they work their way out of prison through meaningful programs," he watched their concerned faces. "We're on the look out for inmates who think they can talk their way out... men who have a 'get over mentality,' men trying to work the system. We watch carefully for these inmates..."

"Most parolee's who fail fall down before they hurt somebody. These parolee's often fail alcohol tests, lie to parole officers or skip work." Goff told his audience slowly, deliberately, carefully.

Finally, he told his audience; "we're trying to be more careful, more methodical about who we're releasing." After about half an hour he finished up optimistically. Telling anecdotes of successful captures: re-arrests. He spoke of a parolee convicted of kidnapping -- raping a nurse at knifepoint whose now locked up after his parole officer caught him with a knife and pornography. Spoke of a parolee charged with assault and battery after a fight with his girlfriend. Others picked up for crimes such as drunken driving or witness intimidation or a litany of other offenses.

Of course never a mention that as definitions of crimes broaden -- more people become trapped in a wider net of crime; of criminal behavior -- seeding a bigger pond so that no matter how often a fishing lure is dropped in the pond, a fresh fish will be caught. No matter where there is law crime will be found.
When he was promoted to sex crimes, Goff remembered, law defining rape was
carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will, today it’s any kind of
penetration of another person regardless of gender, without the victims consent. He just
knows today as laws become more broad, a spate of laws are being re-defined, definitions
will come to include virtually any sordid contact and our society will become a nation of
victims and offenders.

Sarah Sweet sat watching Goff. Looking over these cops, parole officers and the
rest indifferently, never thinking she’d become the kind of reporter who’d have to defend
individual liberties so strongly. Never suspecting she’d be labeled liberal, that she’d be
described as having a left leaning bias. Yet here she sits seemingly swallowed up by our
modern culture.

‘There’s no doubt if we lived in a police state it would be easier to catch terrorists.
If we lived in a country where the police were allowed to search your home at any time
for any reason; if we lived in a country where the government was entitled to open mail,
eavesdrop on phone conversations unfettered the government would probably discover
and arrest more terrorists or would be terrorists, just as it would find more lawbreakers,
parole violators generally,’ she thought silently listening to Goff. ‘But it wouldn’t be
America! Not the country she was born into. Not the country she was promised as a little
girl.’ Sarah Sweet bristled at how this country has managed to lose itself so quickly.

‘What does being an American mean now?’ She asked herself. ‘What is this
Or does it leave the same sense of dread the Enabling Act must have had on politicians in
1930’s Germany.

Afterward she and Karen approached Paul Goff both acknowledging he’s a
popular speaker. Tall, imposing with a long considerate face, he spoke wisely as only a
man facing twilight can.

Goff engaged both ladies knowing they are syndicated in print and radio. He loves
to listen to their angry program wondering, like most New Yorker’s, if it’s all an act. He
carefully engaged them equally. Always in the back of his mind asking himself if they
truly hated each other as their venom suggests – or if it’s just an act - another humbug in
a city filled with phonies.

Finding Sarah the more attractive, Goff never dismissed Karen Sower whom he
felt merely dressed conservatively. Both had their style, he thought. Sarah’s cosmopolitan
chic; a woman ready for a lunch at a Central Park Conservancy fundraiser or covering a
shooting. Sower by contrast is all business never seen in an outfit a lighter shade than
Navy blue.

“Do you really think parole is making a difference?” Sweet asked holding her
micro cassette recorder just under his chin.
"I do," Goff said tersely uncomfortable with his words being so carefully recorded knowing he’s short to retirement and his mouth can get his ass in trouble.

"Convicts you release have raped and murdered!" Karen Sower said with contempt. "Isn’t it time we close down and re-tool parole..."

"That is simply not realistic." Goff conceded. "Besides that’s a question for the legislature...I can not speak to political questions. As I’ve said, we are trying to be more methodical..."

"Yes of course ‘methodical’ careful and these convicts who should be locked up are out raping and murdering..." Sower interrupted relentlessly like a bully who taunts a victim it’s never enough.

No amount of venom is ever enough to satisfy, not until the victim crumbles, cries or takes their own life. Even then there’s some part of the bully simply not satisfied. This is Karen Sower. She’s a woman who exploits fear.

Never in her nearly sixty years has she ever been a victim of crime. Not once. However, she’s felt the sting of a slight occasionally. A venal fraud perpetrated by a lying cell phone company or cable television promotion. In her long life she’s never been raped, assaulted, beaten, robbed or set on fire. Still, her drum is crime and punishment. She beats it loudly. A criminal with evil intent lurks at every dark crossroad – be afraid. Be very afraid.

Born Karen Sorer to proud Norwegian parents she worked her way out of Barnstable Massachusetts, a sizable town on the coast where winters are brutal ice storms whipping off the Cape and summers become warm wonderlands for Boston tourists.

Most locals dream of one day putting Barnstable in their rearview; escaping a banality trapping like a prison sentence if not run from early.

Accepted to Amherst she was saved from a life married to a slack jawed Yankee fisherman’s son. She majored in journalism today writes news – a pundit on radio shackled to Sarah Sweet because her editors feel Sweet and Sower is catchy.

Karen Sower feels deeply this country’s in a hole and in pathetic shape. She knows it’s a dispirited funk. A malaise. She works herself up into a froth blaming those damned Democrats: “if we continue to do what were doing,” she says to whoever will listen, “the results are that the dollar is destroyed and the whole thing comes apart and its going to be a worldwide phenomenon.”

Using her column and radio show as a pulpit, she preaches a message sadly lost on today’s America. A nation seeking a next payday, not some political bromide.
“Mr. Goff,” Sarah Sweet finally asked. “Parole has many success stories does it not?” She asked trying to save the poor old guy from Sower’s vitriolic questioning.

“We like to think so. After all, if the latest numbers tell us of a thirty-seven percent violation rate there is nearly a sixty percent success rate. Men and woman following our program and hoping for better lives; ex offenders with jobs, families and some kind of future.”

Paul Goff was interrupted by a loud ringing from his cell phone. “Excuse me please…Hello,” he said into the phone. “Yes, he’s one of mine…yes…hold him…yes flush him…” He then hung up abruptly thanking Sarah Sweet and Karen Sower and excusing himself.

Walking toward a younger man in a suit standing at a long buffet table, Paul Goff carried on an intense closed conversation. A private conversation where he instructed the man, a subordinate: “Artie Siegel is under arrest prepare a revocation order right away.”

The mood in Cynthia’s apartment as decisions were made shifted from comfortable, predictable even cozy into a house of strangers each with their own selfish agenda.

Cynthia sat crying. Frustrated, confused knowing she must be strong. Looking every day of her eighty-five years; propped on her cane taking the phone from Linda calling the police reporting a disturbance: “My name is Cynthia Barnes. Please send a car there is a man in trouble.” She carefully managed to say.

Linda watched carefully knowing a disturbance call is all it will take. “It’s all right it’s for his own good,” she told Cynthia thoughtfully. All the while she looked to Charlie who was agitated. Watching him collect his travel bag he was making excuses why he must leave.

Charlie spoke of his car, needing to move his car immediately. Linda only nodded all the while listening to him make excuses: he would not be able to stay and talk to the police. He “had to leave right now.” She watched him take his bag of clothes, more than he seemed to need. More than anyone would need to merely move a car, she thought. It was clear to her she would have to stay and manage whatever crisis was about to jump off. She must deal with this drama of police, of Cynthia and Artie Siegel. Instantly something occurred to her: Charlie seemed to be hiding something – hiding something entirely.

She had to ignore this feeling because all at once she understood she was now meant to carry on and in a twist of irony clean up the mess she herself created when so many months ago she made the marriage between Artie Siegel and her friend Cynthia Barnes.
Charlie Bates pushed to collect his belongings before cops arrived. Knowing he
can't stand a frisk or questions or produce identification he must now flee. Any reason to
get out fast: his car! He must move his car, he reasoned. Taking his bag with the pistol,
clothes and ammo he made excuses – telling Linda especially to "be strong."

"Call me when Artie is gone." Charlie Bates said. "...Move the car...this process
may take hours – or moments...hours of explaining or a moment of simply being
handcuffed then evacuated to a station house..." he explained to both ladies believing the
Lie.

He believed his own lie and decided to actually check on his Jaguar. "You
understand Linda if I don't move my car it'll be towed – you know New York, Linda. If I
don't do it now it'll cost a fortune tomorrow. .."

His lie had just enough truth to be believed, so he thought. Just enough truth and
urban legend to be genuine; he felt himself constructing a pyramid of lies. He couldn't
tell Linda or anyone any part of the truth of his past. Or plans for his future for that matter.
He couldn't stick around knowing he's got a concealed unregistered .38 special and
twenty rounds in his satchel. After all, he knows this alone breaks enough laws to send
him away for many years.

His ken dictated he not be anywhere near the Breckinridge once cops are called.
He knows exactly what's going to happen to this unfortunate Artie Siegel. The police will
show up ordering him to turn around, cuff him up, finally flushing him down the toilet of
corrections. He'll be taken to the Tombs – an aging Klink in Chinatown then transported
to Rikers Island, the largest penal colony in the United States; a series of eleven jails at
the edge of the East River in Queens. He'll face a parole revocation hearing in one of
those pre-fab trailers like so many at construction sites or on the wrong side of the tracks
finally sentenced to the maximum: one year.

His conviction by a tired magistrate politically appointed will be based upon:
"The serious nature of his criminal history. His old rape charge will be used against him
as if it happened yesterday. Finally he's shipped by bus to a state prison on the Canadian
border in a part of New York State called a Thousand Lakes: a modern Siberia where
prisons exist as islands of social welfare. Artie Siegel will become just another one of
thousands of convicts returned as a result of a simple phone call.

Rushing from the Breckenridge, looking over his shoulder for the inevitable
police cruisers, he began walking up town all the while reasoning this Artie Siegel – this
bum fortunate enough to get his foot inside a softy's door and stay there no longer must
face daily persecution. No more scrutiny by parole, registration by the state, used as
fodder by an outraged media or even live under economic woe. Artie Siegel is going back
to prison and no longer needs to worry about politicians biting at his heal 'cause he's a
sex offender-at-large. He's going home to secure arms of corrections; a cell, a bed – three
meals and not a care in the world but for the predictable predators of jail itself.
Artie made it home washing the blood from his face in the small bathroom that’s just off his room. He looked in the mirror trying to piece together all that had recently happened. Feeling the sting of his nose and eye cut and bleeding, he recalled bits and pieces. His friend, the door man across the street calling out to him...the warm quiet of his block...his bookie. He looked at his face in the mirror hoping Cynthia had a drink for him, hoping that Charlie and Linda would just go away. And thinking about his money...thinking hard about his money.

“Artie your pal came ‘round.”

He just nodded toward the door man standing under his awning a hose in hand clearing dirt from the sidewalk.

A cock of his head silently told his friend he understood. He just stood wondering why his bookie would show up today.

He realized instantly he lost again. Must have lost – he put a hundred on a spread, he thought. His memory’s as blood shot as his eyes. Still, he checked the Daily News. Checked carefully: discovered he won! He won! Suddenly, he found himself flush with enthusiasm.

His chronic hangover disappeared suddenly. His spread hit twenty-five to one! A trifecta: “a big payday,” he’s not seen one in too many years, he thought.

‘What will he do?” He worried when he’s got so much cash in hand? Cautiously he waited for his bookie to show worrying down several shots of liquor from an almost empty fifth. He even stood outside, something he almost never did. “He’s most likely watching from a doorway.” Artie told himself in an odd whisper. And it was the case for the bookie appeared diligently crossing the narrow Upper West Side Street. “Art the fart smelling like a rose today!” He practically shouted for the whole upscale neighborhood to hear.

“You know it, brother....”

“Damn, your trifecta hit fair and square. You can buy yourself a nice piece of pussy now ‘stead a tacking it.”

“Look, I never took’ no pussy – that was a long time ago. You have my money?”

“Right here...you know I’m just kid din’ round Art – don’t get all in a twist.”

“You know I’m sensitive, that shit’s been following me round for thirty years! That one stupid thing.” Artie said as they both walked to his broom closet of an office.
“Damn shame too, nothing worse than a rape charge Artie...nothing worse,” he said sounding sincere. “Here’s your money.”

Pulling a brick of currency strapped with bands of rubber from his loose shiny rayon slacks he broke off twenty-five one hundred dollar bills saying: “It’s a known fact touch’n cash makes a man feel better. You must be feel’n real good ’bout now Artie.”

“Money smells good.” Was all Artie could say.


“No I’m good,” Artie said cautiously. “I got plans for this...”

“Plans...maybe you should decorate this broom closet, hell you can get you some bed bath and beyond up in this piece. You got yourself a nice little dividend – damn get yourself a little Ho to clean and give you a happy ending just break her off a crumb.”

He just said again. “...Plans.”

“Plans, you got plans Artie. Well, well, well. Ok. I got to get back uptown – too many citizens down round these parts. Be in touch. Plans...” He just said in an almost mocking bold ghetto voice deeply sarcastic, sly.

And with a slam of the door Artie’s bookie disappeared as he came: loudly. His obnoxious presence seemed to hang like the stink and dust and dim grey light from the sixty watt bulb burning lazy against the field stone and brick foundation of the old brownstone.

Carefully, quickly, Artie looked about. He searched as he had so many times in the past where could he stash his cash. He finally decided on a loose brick. He removed a brick, counted out half the money placing it flush into the cavity. Taking the rest he tucked it in his filthy black sock.

And, after scanning his slovenly little room he left. He decided to leave from the basement, not even checking on the condition of the main lobby. He just wanted to get out, take a nice walk through Central Park - feel the last hour or so of sunlight on his face.

.....

Now looking at his bruised face he tried seeing something of his youth only there was nothing. His money’s gone at least the cash in his sock. They it took. Bitterly he had his suspicions, hoping it was random.
Remembering feeling eyes feeling paranoid, walking a little faster, his paranoia helped him survive so many years of jail and prison. Walking toward Central Park he couldn’t help but feel he’s not alone.

Looking around, he was struck from behind! Two men, both fast – an all at once attack. An assault like the ones in stir: a beat down! No words, only pulling and pushing, beating: so fast! Lumps telling the story now: his money stolen.

A knife cut his pockets – searched quickly – as a pro would. Money in his sock gone: taken. Like a screw searching a con it was gone immediately.

Left with only a swollen face, a face grated across concrete pavement. He can only look now at his face having his suspicions. Worrying about the rest of his money; worrying about Cynthia, what must she think? Most of all worrying about this Charlie Bates, and why is Linda suddenly hanging around. Most of all he just worried.

All at once the door to his room was pushed open. Familiar static from a police radio took his breath away instantly. Two uniformed officers walked up on him. Turning lights on. Artie looked over their shoulder seeing Cynthia and Linda behind a third cop who only stood saying something into his radio.

Cruelly intoned, rough as a brick hitting glass: “Turn around! You’re under arrest!”

“You fascist bastards”! Artie struggled out the words. Cops in the hall rushed in. He heard that familiar sound of handcuff’s catching behind his back he knew instantly he’s finished.

In a choke hold, lifted, he was taken away past Cynthia and Linda both crying: “Don’t hurt him! You’re hurting him!”

Afterward, after the police and Artie and Linda all were gone Cynthia sat with tears in her eyes asking herself: “what just happened? I don’t understand?” Why were all these nice police officers in my home? And where is Arthur? He should be home soon…”
"Today, at long last, the FBI completed
Its review of my recent career...found me
Virginal – the proper reward for years of
Conformity." – John Kenneth Galbraith
(Ambassador's Journal, Houghton Mifflin, Boston)
1969, pp. 39-40

Chapter 13

"Last U.S. troops slip out of Iraq," Eric Stengel read from his computer. "The war
cost nearly forty-five thousand American lives and well more than one hundred thousand
Iraqi lives..." he read this knowing it's not knowledge that's power it's information.

Here in his office at Homeland Security, an office shared with immigration
enforcement – ICE - on Hudson Street in Tribeca; a building that remains unobtrusive
but for concrete construction barriers meant to resist car bombs or thwart suicide bombers
and mobs; he's searching for what his next move will be.

There are no fixtures of long visible tracks of fluorescent bulbs. Instead there's a
sterile innocuous built in system keeping light regulated for maximum comfort when
spending many hours in front of a computer screen.

Eric, young and taciturn; a gatherer of information. An entry level freshman here
in Homeland Security where young recruits are plucked from signal and intelligence of
all branches of service; where universities train and the government recruits; where the
age of the brave new members of law enforcements sticky web is any time born after
1980.

Cyber crime is his desk. Always an eye on who's making money, who's taking it
and where is it going? Web sites are the target. He's watching producers and consumers.
He has lot's of help from sophisticated programs developed by software developers to
government agencies duplicating his effort world wide. He watches both the consumer
and producer. Lately he's been watching Craigslist.

Like a horny hobbyist Eric targets erotic services, adult gig's, casual encounters
even therapeutic services where most illegals live on cash from organized massage
parlors coast to coast. Eric knows this is the gritty beginning of making money in
America. He know this because it has been inculcated into his young mind from the
moment he accepted his assignment with this nations modern day Gestapo: follow the
money.

What Eric Stengel does not know, or care, is how this all began. He only cares
about his paycheck, knowing the day it should arrive, withholding; most important he
cares that he's working on computers. The very heart of information gathering: a steady
secure government job with reliable paycheck.
He could care less about the Comstock Law of 1873, which made it a crime to send obscene, lewd or lascivious books in the mail or any article or thing designed or intended for the prevention of contraception or procuring of an abortion. Eric doesn't care at all about any of the human suffering, time, money or effort invested striking this law and others like it from the books. No, he only cares about watching daily commerce. Watching men and women trying to make ends meet through erotic service.

Eric of course has heard of Prohibition, that “noble experiment” championed by Senator Volstead. It was back before he was born, so really, it’s not important. What’s important for him and most born after 1980 is the here and now. Surviving day in day out hopefully with a reliable paycheck. He could care less what happened in 1919 or 1933; that’s before computers…right? They didn’t even have cell phones back then.

Here at Homeland Security why would it matter that a national ban on liquor did nothing more than feed a federal colossus. Who really here cares if prohibition was a costly failure filling federal jails, jamming federal courts making mammoth changes to our system of criminal justice.

What is important today is getting a record of suspicious postings on Craigslist to the local cyber crime task force coordinator. For Eric Stengel and too many others, this is what is important. His job is simply to discover and track anything remotely looking like human trafficking or pimping or pandering or any commercial sex for money scheme.

The United States Patriot Act was rushed through Congress and signed forty-five days after the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. Three hundred and forty two pages allowing agents to break into anyone’s home, conduct a search and keep a citizen indefinitely from finding out about warrants against them – if any.

It’s a sweeping law compelling librarians to offer up reading lists of suspects, collect credit reports – in fact all sensitive information without judicial or any consent at all. In fact, just so the law is carefully stitched the Patriot Act II or Domestic Security Enhancement Act of 2003 allows American citizens to be included as well as suspicious foreigners.

Deportations become an ancillary benefit, American citizens may have their citizenship stripped and they may be exiled: “to any country or region regardless of whether the country or region has a government.”

“Eric, meeting in ten minutes”

“Yes sir.” Eric said snapping out of his zone; knowing a bit about this meeting. Knowing in the next few weeks the department expects to launch an electronic
monitoring system that will automatically flag State Troopers nationwide who are showing consistent signs of poor conduct: a program designed to detect corruption.

Carefully, he returned to his own task: gathering names and phone numbers of possible suspects. Quickly he organized his list of names from a number of disparate postings on various internet bulletin boards. With a keystroke it was sent to his counterpart at One Police Plaza for their consideration. There it will be filed, investigated, enforced or considered for enforcement.

He feels himself a true patriot. In high school he felt oddly drawn to the power of authority. Mandatory blood testing or urine testing or lie detector testing never concerned him: routine he felt. An administrative necessity; nothing more.

In his mind he’s preserving the American way.

Quickly, he saved all files. Encrypted passwords change upon shut down of his computer, a necessary protocol beyond human influence for saving and closing sensitive documents. Eric then worked his way to the upper floors for his meeting. It’s not good to be late, he understood.

"Wuss Up?" Eric asked a tall colleague Rand Reese.

"You still phishing?" Rand asked Eric.

"Uh huh... you still pretend to be fourteen years old?"

"Till next week." Rand said with a sigh. "How longs’ this meeting? I’m trying to get face time with Allison..."

Eric just looked at Rand who seemed the tallest man in the room at six foot seven inches and shrugged.

Both young men, not more than out of college, took their seats in this windowless auditorium. A kind of meeting room. A long rectangle listing at an angle similar to a theater with fixture seating.

Facing a desk and behind that a series of state-of-the-art LCD monitors already throwing images into this sterile conference room.

Faces of men, mostly Troopers in uniform from across America splashed across screens, but for this the room is unremarkable.
With images crossing monitors, agents took their seats. A man as big as a bear, his head shaved till it shined stood stuffed into a small dark suit. Purposely he said: “I’ve got a hard on for dirty cops…”

This alone got every agents attention. “These officers are all under arrest or investigation all across this country.” His voice, not loud as much as deep and pained; a lion entering as a lamb: “They are – or were – elite State Troopers from Main to New Mexico, Massachusetts to Seattle who have disgraced their oath, their respective law enforcement agencies and themselves.”

Pausing, he held his tongue just looking over the twenty or so faces seated in the theater. He used a remote control turning off the monitors saying finally: “Most of you know me, I’m Deputy Director Campbell and my department investigates cops and crooks. I’m not popular – it is necessary. It is our duty to assist local jurisdictions, we will spend the next few hours analyzing tools for flagging dirty or downright incompetent State Troopers – so pay attention.”

Eric and Rand turned to one another knowing there would be no face time with Allison. No exiting this meeting. Eric knows, as does each man and woman in the room; Homeland Security has the tools and political mandate to watch everyone cops and robbers alike. The Patriot Act was constructed as a hammer. A Zero Tolerance tool meant for everyone in America.

“STEP ON is the operation.” Campbell said as LCD monitors lit up exposing an elaborate plan. “STEP ON, ladies and gentleman, stands for State Trooper Enforcement Program Oversight Network.” Taking a breath, Campbell studied each face in the room. “A tool designed to flag any officer who accumulates complaints; in house grievances or misbehavior reports. Once recognized we go to work using GPS tracking along with financial analysis, vices, friends; associates – everything.” Campbell’s voice was diligent. His lecture would continue till nearly the end of business day.

Afterward, Eric, Rand and Allison met in the hall.


“It’s not just a vagina it’s a cash machine.” Eric said even softer knowing how vulgar it sounded. Relishing its effect, disguising the truth of his work: of all their work.

Eric knows the game he and all the analysts play. Discover Symantec source codes then hack into networks. Attack holes in servers and penetrate user computers. Once inside lurk unobserved in hard drives gathering information. All information. This is the job. No network or line of communication or ISP or bank account or private property is safe from their surveillance. If it’s known, or is discovered it will be compromised.

98
“I saw your name in the paper…” Eric said to Rand.

“Another crackdown,” was all Rand said knowing his involvement in the departments Child Exploitation Program is just window dressing. He was quoted saying: “What we’re seeing now is production,” reflecting on the article.

Rand Reese remembered the interview, it was a long one. The reporter used a couple of quotes. His favorite was: “Pedophiles are going live and sexually abusing young kids. Some of these chat boards require content for entree. These children are traded like gold. Pedophiles with quality material are put at the top of the totem pole.”

Rand gathers information, chat’s; downloads; all in the hope of breaking rings of offshore accounts or help put an occasional molester behind bars.

Like Eric and Allison Moor, he too has an assignment a step-up-a-ladder task; nothing more. A paycheck silently earned; a career in a distressed economy.

......

The three agents had a detached indifference, certainly professional. An intensity of purpose – not animated or social: aloof.

Allison Moor is tall, over six feet in heels. She looked into Rands eyes with something resembling worship. Eric felt odd man out.


“If I tell you, then you will know…” Allison said, a bit chilly.

“Still on Tag-You’re- It?” Eric pressed.

“I’ll tell you…” she just stood with her pale eyes dancing. Not saying another word, only looking tall, beautiful and silent.

Tag-You’re-It is Eric’s nickname for the departments shady pseudo legal practice of attaching GPS devices to cars, planes, boats; anything that moves a suspect from point A to point B.

Everyone, including Allison, know it’s a matter of time before the Supreme Court stops this practice as a kind of trespass. Till that day comes it’s Homeland Security that has the authority and technology and political capital to do it. Allison’s drudgery is the routine monitoring of hundreds of these devises.

Erick, Rand and Allison are modern techwonks indifferent to the method. They are only following orders and cashing their pay checks, like most in government today.
Ominously, as troops withdraw from Iraq our garrison state is now turning inward to create a police state. Administrative units like these three providing tools growing our jails and prisons keeping our courts busy: our economy thriving.

First Avenue is busy always; summertime it's active with practically every - and any - municipal or corporate entity cutting into streets and sidewalk, construction work together with utilities pock with steel plates under heavy equipment.

Street parking takes a hit. Signs go up giving little if any notice. Blocks are closed and cars towed leaving property owners scratching their heads and car owners cursing and threatening to leave New York Forever! Parking in the city is a leap of faith that would challenge even St. Augustine.

On this afternoon, parking violations officers worked East 76th Street between First Avenue and York. A quiet tree lined block of Brownstone tenements - a luxury high rise and school; a Chinese laundry and little else. Parked between a Cadillac and Chevy sat Charlie's Jaguar. Blue and white California license plates begged to be investigated. And so they were run.

A uniformed ticket agent punched in Charlie's tag's, then scanned his vehicle identification number on the dash and continued walking toward York Avenue. Along the way posting NO PARKING - TOW AWAY posters for the not too distant future; for the moment anyway, this black Jaguar is in compliance. Meanwhile, its information has been reported to the vast network of computers run by the Department of Motor Vehicles.

Charlie's spirit is as cold as the plastic keyboard of his computer, as indifferent as his postings for clients, as apart and away from here and now as those anonymous responders searching.

Anonymous e-mails hopeful or merely manipulating in a cloudy world where anyone can be anything on the World Wide Web.

It's cold, it's inanimate - anonymous. It's indifferent, yet Charlie lives off of it. He's controlled by it. Waiting for e-mail as patiently as a convict waits for a parole hearing. Pining for clients as a prisoner yearns for his release date.

"We have a job tonight - want to work?" Charlie asked knowing Linda's answer would be a big yes.

Linda did answer "yes" before she was even told what the job was.
“Good – it’s at the old Statler at Penn Station. I don’t know what they’re calling it now a day’s but the client sounds good....”

“Good What time...?” Linda sounded rushed or anxious.

“...a double header,” he continued. “Seven o’clock. I’ll meet you in the Lobby on the Seventh Avenue side.” Was all he said then clicking off.

Lately he’s been getting too many creepy calls. Cops, he suspects; too many senseless questions, too many direct questions from strangers; all causing him to think twice. Politely he just thanks them for their call finally hanging up. No need to be rude or antagonize them. After all, in a pissing contest he’s a loser. They should just be treated like mushrooms: kept in the dark and fed shit.

Checking in with Cynthia, he held her hand and asked for her list of goodies. He would make a store run.

“D’Agostino time, honey...what-ya-need?”

“Herring in cream,” Cynthia began as if her list would be a long carefully conceived one. “And crackers and we need Grants...”

“I just bought you a quart of Scotch...” Charlie said knowing his outburst would fall flat. She expects Scotch and this is what she’ll get. That’s that.

He made a run to the supermarket, picked up a Daily News for his trip cross town, getting dressed for a nice hotel job on a pleasant night, deciding to walk to Grand Central instead of a cab; grab the shuttle to Penn.

Grand Central Station had an entrance on Lexington Avenue he remembered. At a side door of polished brass he saw what would be a first sign of renovation. In fact, the entire rotunda had been carefully renewed. Restaurants, from four star to hot dogs and pretzels welcomed twisting crowds of hurried commuters.

Charlie never recalled Grand Central ever being so clean. So well cared for, as if a conservancy decided to actually improve this old glory rather than use it to enrich their own selfish political ends.

He found familiar ramps, a sign with a yellow S led to a long concrete tunnel. The Shuttle is a short line. A convenient subway hop between east side and west for commuters landing by Amtrak or coming from Jersey. Commuters needing a means to the East Side and Mid-town and vice versa.

Suddenly a hot flash hit Charlie in the face. A bright warm light just to his left. He sensed instantly it’s some kind of facial recognition device. A camera – high definition camera – and it took his picture fully in profile.
Turning instinctively away from the light he wanted to know if he was the only person in this long silent tunnel – a uniformed NYPD patrolman was twenty five yards or so behind him but ducked away suddenly behind a private door.

And he still felt heat from that instant of light. He was made! He realized immediately.

Not surprising this camera was in this location, in this particular tunnel. He felt trapped. No exit. Nothing but utility doors marked official only.

Cool as he could, he walked steadily to the platform where the shuttle was waiting. Realizing that whatever lay ahead for him, whatever this facial recognition turned up would be meeting him on this platform or the next. He got on the short subway – only four cars length – for the ride to the West Side.

All the while he planned his escape. He’d bolt. As soon as the subway doors opened – looking nowhere but down – chin in chest he would flee. Find an exit and hope to escape. He’s made he knows. Knows his image is in every data base from New York to Los Angeles. Knows its catalogued with the National Crime Information System of the FBI. Knows its all he could do to struggle an escape.

At Penn off to his right, beyond the turnstiles cops rushed down stairs trailing a man with a video camera at ready.

Sure enough Police were rushing to meet the shuttle. Charlie watched them at the front car – video camera turned on – this arrest will be broadcast. His heart leaped into his throat. He stood watching without looking – seeing the team of Cops rush just as the subway stopped. Charlie deliberately, casually; yet as any busy commuter would, stepped lively toward the stairs to the street.

Fresh air! He found an exit – careful not to look back, or around. Looking only ahead he breathed deeply the city air of West Thirty-Fourth street and in that instant realized he dodged a bullet.

Managing to escape – knowing it was too close a call he walked as fast as possible away from Penn Station. Away from the Statler Hotel and away from Seventh Avenue entirely: he walked as fast and away as possible only thinking over and over: ‘He’s been made! New York City is not safe!’

Feeling heat on his cheek like a scorching microwave, instinctively he realized this is facial recognition. Like a fingerprint this system needs a full capture. It must use intense light like a fingerprint needs dust or ink and damn it he gave it to them! Unknowingly, foolishly he gave it to them.
He paused finally thinking. He felt he had time before his tryst – not sure whether or not to expose himself at the expense of his liberty. He needs the money – only not at the expense of his liberty.

Finding a crowded bar he ducked in for a drink and think. Carefully considering what had happened, weighing the Statler gig. With drink in hand he wrestled with his decision to proceed. Thinking of the camera; the flash – a good long second – alerts telegraphing intent. “This is why it’s in a tunnel” he said to himself over the crowd of voices. A trap: only luck allowed his escape.

Time worked for him. And location. His fate would have been sealed if he chose the first car of that short shuttle instead of the last. Instinctively using crowds to his advantage – Charlie made up his mind. “Linda the client cancelled.” Was all he said into his cell phone.

“Do we have another lined up for tonite?”

“Maybe, I’ll give you a call,” then hung up cementing his decision. Feeling suddenly fear. Fear from being discovered. Feeling New York City closing in on him: fear gripping his heart. Paying for his drink he carefully yet confidently left. Stopping at a souvenir shop he purchased an I Love New York cap and Statue of Liberty tee shirt. Next door, another bar, waded through the crowd to the bathroom where he changed then walked out into the hustle and bustle of Macy’s traffic, of Herald Square and commuters fighting their way to Pennsylvania Station. Tourists rubbernecking he walked amidst the swell of Madison Square Garden the busiest place on earth at five o’clock on a Friday evening and drifted lost away.

.......

In conjunction with police intelligence working fugitive retrieval, Officers Gilroy and Martin occupy a dark sophisticated post in transom number three linking Grand Central with a shuttle to Penn Station.

Most shifts are routine in a city where homelessness is criminal. Gilroy and Martin profile and photograph anyone they suspect may be wanted. Facial recognition linked to Federal Bureau of Investigation, Homeland Security and every other law enforcement entity in America search for hit. A hit is delivered immediately to a tactical retrieval unit who respond with a team apprehending the suspect for further questioning. This is what Gilroy and Martin do all day long from a dark post behind an inconspicuous graffiti marked door in a tunnel.

Facial recognition is cheap and easy. A capture may be full face or profile then in milliseconds points are selected and matched to a vast library of images captured during booking photographs taken across America – across the world.
Gilroy and Martin capture the usual vagrants, then report. Maybe a dead beat dad with an outstanding warrant; lately the crackdown has been on the homeless. Since most have some kind of outstanding legal entanglement they can happily report to their supervisors they are doing their job and earning their paycheck.

Here on the New York City subway there is no begging, no loitering – it is illegal to sleep in public places. It matters little this may be bad public policy. Gilroy and Martin would rather blame the victims of the economy rather than put their own secure paycheck in jeopardy. After all a police paycheck comes with a pension and job security. It’s the politicians that have made it a crime to be homeless not them.

An arrest has long term effects. Background checks of those arrested may make most ineligible for public housing. Draconian regulations impede access to social services and reduce job prospects.

Most jurisdictions just shepherd the homeless to the outskirts of cities or throw them in jail letting the courts sort it all out. America loves its institutions.

Officer Gilroy sat silently waiting for Martin to return with coffee. He patiently tapped away till in a few short minutes his shift would end. Watching two figures enter the tunnel from the East he recognized one as his partner. The other was a lean mature man in blue jeans and black tee shirt moving purposely. Gilroy followed him knowing he would be the last high def image of the day – a clean image was what he was looking for. He set up his system already suspecting the result would be negative – like most. Still, he set up the computer, began calibrating his system. Officer Gilroy took the image just as his partner Officer Martin opened their office door. Reaching for his cup of coffee he sat tapping away as the image downloaded and the process for recognition began.
The Soul that has believed  
And is deceived  
Thinks nothing for a while,  
All thoughts are vile.

And then because the Sun  
Is mute persuasion,  
And hope in Spring and Fall.

Most natural,  
The soul grows calm and mild,  
A little child,

Finding the pull of Breath  
Better than death…

The Soul that had believed  
And was deceived  
Ends by believing more  
Than ever before. – “Psyche” by Virginia Moore

Chapter 14

Parole officer Bennett sat alone in his small shared office in Pasadena. Knowing he must face another day of lies and chasing ex-convicts who don’t want to be found. Another day in his pill box bunker on Olive Street handing out checks or vouchers for approved housing, piss tests and questions answered by lies or deception.

He turned on his computer checked e-mail. A curious first message officially from the New York Police Department intelligence surveillance division: a sighting of a suspect. Bennett quickly opened the electronic image – it’s Charlie Bates in full profile.

Reading: “per BOLO request possible fugitive sighting of suspect wanted by the State of California....” Bennett continued reading with rapt interest, “a retrieval unit was dispatched but suspect escaped...” it said matter of fact. He read all the relevant particulars; “facial recognition, twelve point match.” Scrolling down he looked again hard at the bright image cast against a black backdrop. A modern day etching scrimshawed on a concrete tunnel wall. ‘It’s Charlie Bates,’ Bennett thought: “but how did he get all the way to New York City?” Was all he wondered almost silently.

Bennett looked at the photo knowing a digital camera imaging system can spot minute differences in facial characteristics such as freckles, skin pores or curve of an eyebrow.

But so far even the most advanced commercial systems can be tripped up by changes in lighting, facial expressions or some other complication. Complications like
beards or glasses pose a particular challenge. Sure enough, Bennett did see Charlie Bates clearly in profile; and he’s in New York City.

Immediately, he updated his profile. Moving a cursor to his Be On The Look Out form he carefully keyed in all relevant changes updating then sending it instantly to all major law enforcement agencies, local parole jurisdictions and Federal Bureau of Investigation fugitive retrieval unit.

Finally, he moved on to his next and first parolee of the day. A thick folder of a recently released inmate, Bennett just looked at it thinking “another day starting the same way as every other day in L.A.,” he sighed.


High definition digital technology is not just for football games and favorite movies. Law enforcement agencies tag, identify and catalogue us all routinely. Carefully methodically governments track us – citizens and visitors alike. There are no distinctions any longer. Naturally, we all want to believe the lie this technology is benevolent – for our own good: “This way to the gas chambers ladies and gentleman...”


Charlie Bates could only put geography between him and that horror of California prison. He could never distance himself from that nightmare regularly crawling into his thoughts.

While he settled into a long bus ride back to the Breckenridge he remembered too much. Sick inmates coughing, spewing disease everywhere; bronchitis so common, if left untreated: pneumonia.

Tuberculosis – an angry red boil erupting where a sub-dermal shot on the left forearm raise upon indication of exposure. Fear crowds dormitories. A sneeze, cough or fart all contribute to a powder keg. Inmates cruelly intone: “Who shit himself” when catching a gross whiff of bowel.

It’s a kind of legal hostage taking. Sanctioned and ancient in design remains morally suspect when conditions grow sadistically. This isn’t some Dickensian fiction from a fetid gloomy place in history, it’s today in places like the Men’s lock up at Chino, and too many correctional facilities across this nation.


It starts with bull pen therapy, dungeons that are the shame of court houses everywhere. No inmate has ever seen a judge visit one of these nasty holding pens where accused must sit till some judgment is rendered.

Snapping from his thoughts – as if pulling a scab from a wound – he watched buildings and tenements, brownstones and people pass along while the loud city bus
lumbers in fits along narrow two lanes of midtown traffic. Horns go, cars double parked; he felt like an idiot in his tourist cap and Statue of Liberty tee shirt.

Wearing anxiety like a shrouded angry memory, he needed to think of his next move. His next escape; where to go? Yet all he could think about was that horror of Chino and what he's running from:

"On the Chow!" guards yell announcing meals. Inmates are allowed to line up then as a group taking a dangerous walk through dim narrow tunnels. Down a set of stairs men enter one of two mess halls.

Prisoners flash gang signs so carefully guards don't see them. Some inmates who may know sign language communicate across the surprisingly cramped mess hall. Most pass kites – a wire – some scandalous message about other inmates or news of the streets. Time out of the unit is precious. Chow is short. A few minutes until a guard taps a table or nod's instructions to "move out": "Take it back to the block!"

A wire sometimes comes with instructions to check a prisoner off the block - a snitch or rapist – some beef from another block or just bad blood on gang instruction.

These tunnels here in Chino are not forgiving. The victim is always the last to know, but always the first to be allowed to go or last one out of the mess hall or yard.

Fights in prison are never fair. Never one-on-one; these are all at once beat downs. Violence erupts unannounced. Victims sensing tension, may feel hot eyes or menacing looks, yet no victim can ever prepare for a full on assault.

And this is what Charlie Bates dwelled on as he sat recalling this heat on his face. That facial recognition in that tunnel under Grand Central Station. Knowing it could not be avoided. He's got made! New York's no longer safe.

......

At home Charlie removed the gun from its box. Checked it was loaded. Holstering it between his skin and blue jeans. It felt cold for only a moment – then comfortable. Ergonomic against his hip and pelvis. As if its design was immediate or forever.

Fear lived with his desire to survive: to thrive. Knowing carrying would risk his freedom something primitive told him he's already lost that. Freedom's been dragooned long ago. Now he can only sit in front of old Cynthia Barnes' computer working Craigslist for a right away client. Living in a vacuum he waited for the phone to ring.

......
In Chinese characters, a pop up shot across his computer screen where; in English incidentally, was an advertisement for the Chinese Bus.

The Chinese Bus, Charlie's attention focused instantly. Online he learned of this cash only way out of the city. A means of leaving anonymously. And this in itself intrigued him.

A shuttle bus service running from Chinatown at the corner of Bowery and Canal Street literally arrived and departed from the mouth of the Manhattan Bridge. A no questions asked commute from New York City to Boston or Philly. Cities offering excellent anonymous public transportation.

Anonymous and cheap; the Chinese Bus: a fresh start was all that occupied his thoughts from that moment on.

Quietly, he went about planning his departure. Online he visited housing in both cities. Rents in Boston and Philly. On Craigslist he visited rental properties, short term rentals, swaps, shares; roommates and in fact any situation remotely offering inexpensive living.

He sent cut and paste e-mails to dozens in both cities. Finally deciding to check on his car; he's now resolved to move on. He's just not decided entirely upon how. He must move his car no matter what this he knows he must do. In fact his car, he thought, is a loose end with great sentimental value.

.....

He woke up early after a fitful sleep without dreams. He made ready for his walk to East Seventy-Sixth Street. Alternate side of the street parking is like taking care of a child in this avaricious crowded city.

Balancing money and escape with Linda, Cynthia and tension filled knowing he's been identified crowded his mind. At 76th street he saw a fleet of construction equipment. Yellow earth movers, dump trucks filled with asphalt. Tar trucks and Rollers and alone in the middle of the block sitting like a blemish – his old Jaguar.

"Alone." His mind raced, "why on this block would his car be the only car allowed to stand alone?"

And as if suddenly on alert he kept walking without even looking at his car. Instead he watched every other vehicle; every tractor, dump truck, door man, dog walker and pedestrian on this frowzy side street. "His car has been discovered," he told himself urgently.

Whether paranoid or fear, instantly he decided to abandon his car. Leave it a mystery to be towed: and good riddance.
Charlie walked casually away from his faithful car that carried him away from California. His tired old Jag that climbed mountains and led him on the lam back home. Walking west toward Fifth Avenue and Central Park away from what is surely a trap he thought only of nothing and of everything.

........

Stolid he looked at his city. At mothers pushing carriages, their dogs accessories trailing while anonymous faces in a hurry moved purposefully; realizing he no longer belongs in this place. He’s an illegal alien on the run unable to work. A fugitive without papers. He can only look the part. Maybe resemble what was once described as an American. Today it’s a look of a tired last generation.

His great society is not so great anymore. Charlie walked alone toward the park thinking all the while of his next step, his escape on the Chinese Bus.

........

At the Carlyle Hotel it seemed important to take a moment. Bemelman’s Bar’s closed – much too early for a stiff drink – looking into its rich oak bar; dark leather and elegant woods; quaint murals remain as they have for so many years of café society. Gone is Bobby Short, Charlie thought. He settled on a cup of coffee in a cozy art deco lobby.

Sitting for a moment looking at a glossy black and white checkerboard marble foyer perfect for relaxing silently or with conversation he reflected. He ordered coffee then stepped into a hotel business center for a moment of checking e-mail.

Messages from prospective clients, prospective landlords, roommates, spam, phishing; schemes: most dubious and deceitful. Some so blatant the internet provider scrubs them automatically sending them to the oblivion of a spam folder.

His eye landed on an e-mail which seemed refreshingly genuine. A sympathetic woman named Raven in Cambridge Massachusetts who’s sixty years old with a spare room.


Settling on Ravens house in Cambridge with every ounce of determination: it just felt right. It felt as right as his escape from California. He responded gently with a phone number then read over her e-mail until he had it practically memorized. “Take the Bus to South Station, then a Red Line MBTA train to Porter Square. It’s a short walk to her
single family home and a bed, hope you like dog's, I have two..." It read compassionately. This Charlie thought is an escape with no strings.

Obsessed, he thought of nothing but when and where he would take this mysterious legendary Chinese Bus. Students seem to know all about this commute. A fifteen dollar cash only ticket to Boston. An eight hour non-stop coach to South Station in the heart of that old city.

Reviews online call it a "dangerous rattling death trap," but for fifteen bucks it's a trip to a new life, or maybe just a weekend get away. No matter it's his escape.

Sitting in the elegant deco lobby with his expensive coffee in a porcelain cup he just thought. Thinking silently about what has happened. 'So clean and elegant,' he thought. 'A gracious old world hotel.' Marble polished as glass against woods so rich he just let himself think; lost in what was and may have been.

And he thought it all started with a broken window. *

That in the early 1980's this city was a colorful human place where we all took our chances. Sure, Times Square was seedy, charming, edgy with smut theaters, pool halls and graffiti; soon an idea developed. A notion that a broken window invites crime; graffiti on a wall welcomes criminals. Soon this philosophy quickly became a big broom sweeping undesirables into our jails and prisons.

(*attribute to: James Q. Wilson; George L. Kelling, Atlantic Magazine “Broken Window”, 1982)

New York City became a laboratory under a practically fascist ex-prosecutor with presidential ambitions. Politicians who addressed minor crimes and major severely. Mandatory minimum sentencing and over zealous prosecutions expanded prisons along with ancillary industry until putting people away became a big profitable business.

The idea disorder and crime are inextricably linked that one broken window invites urban blight may be true only New York City and police agencies and sheriffs across America took this philosophy to grotesque extremes building carefully and systematically a vast industry based upon arrest and incarceration.

Police and politicians responded in subsequent years with changed tactics bringing police closer to communities in many cases with fearful results. Us against Them developed into an urban pejorative. “Snitches get stitches” a mantra held in many communities where a shadow economy flourished. Drugs, prostitution and crime festered loudly. Today Times Square is clean; it is also boasts the heaviest concentration of closed circuit video surveillance in the world. And it seemed to begin with one broken window, Charlie smiled at the irony.
Charlie finally calmed down enough to walk back to the Breckenridge.

The Breckenridge, long on formality, short on tolerance toward transient strangers or those unknown; he passed the doormen both gatekeepers opposed to refugees of any sort.

Suddenly he caught out of his eye a big man who did look familiar. Charlie’s eyes set wild. Glaring – absolute hate cut with contempt: a killer one look. A look unmistakable in prison yards or school yards or junk yards it said: “Say something stupid!” only not in words. It spoke in his whole tense body. A body attached to the .38 special.

Goff just heard its dry crack before the first shot hit his right arm shattering his humerus. Two more reports struck him at his hip just below his vest. Finally the third wild shot pierced his throat just at a vulnerable gap between his chin and his Kevlar insurance policy. Paul Goff died instantly.

Charlie ran wildly away. What to do? “Run down town!” he told himself working past his fear. Running past both startled doormen; running into the late afternoon haze of a summer heat wave. Running into an unaware hustle of Second Avenue, quickly hailing a taxi cab. “Second and Forty-Second,” he ordered firmly.

Acutely aware sirens faintly rampaging were for him he sat back gathering himself. He still smelled gun shot residue on his hands and clothes.

At Forty-Second he handed the driver ten dollars telling him to keep the change, stepping onto Second Avenue where he worked his way through a crowd and hailed yet another taxi.

“Beekman Hotel please.”

“Mister, it’s a short walk…” The driver said hoping for a longer trip and more money.

“I know, it’s my leg, I have an old injury…” Charlie lied indifferently. Emergency vehicles vomited their noise loudly. No one paid attention as usual.

Momentarily he arrived, paying the driver with a five he told him to “keep the change.”

From the Beekman he took still another taxi hoping this shell game would create for him a clean escape.

“Fourteenth Street and Second Avenue please…”

“You want the Drive?”
“...yes.”

Charlie let the drama of minutes earlier rattle around his exhausted brain. He’s drained. As if his thoughts are shutting down after an overload remembering that man’s look of terror screwed to his long florid face.

“There can be no reasoning with blind ineluctable power,” he told himself. That cop was on him; knowing there’s no taming a tiger by petting it like a kitten. He watched police cars screeching up First Avenue toward the Breckenridge. A paroxysm of frenzied ambulances, unmarked Crown Victoria’s, blue and white cruisers – a sea of red and white emergency lights crowded Sutton Place.

“Something must have happened?” The driver said negotiating away from the traffic cautiously heading toward the FDR drive south on ramp.

“You know, you can make that 21st Street and Second,” Charlie said feeling he may have made a mistake taking the drive – once on it’s impossible to get off.

At Twenty-First Street he would again pay, then grab another cab and move taxi by taxi until finally he would arrive in Chinatown and any bus out of Manhattan.

As he sat back knowing he had made some kind of get away, he wondered what had happened to him and to that promise made. Something like greed replaced an ideology of hope. Change for the sake of change. So many demanding a piece of the pie only crumbs remain. Charlie just sat watching his city move by him passively. He felt in this very moment what it meant to be cold blooded.
Chapter 15

Few Elms remain here in Elmhurst. Construction crews, gypsy moths, arboreal neglect; these great Elms have been taken for granted. Blight took most leaving one tall tree draping shade like an umbrella protecting homes from another hot day. A heat wave is gripping the city and he’s determined to head into work early.

Goff starts his day in a satellite office in the Anna M. Kross detention center. Cop’s and prisoners know it as C-95, the largest of several jails housing men on Rikers Island.

Driving from Elmhurst, a quaint middle class bedroom community, to East Elmhurst a zip code with just a jail and mental hospital is a drive from one world into another.

Today his ride will be fully air conditioned, on the radio: Sweet and Sower. A daily dose of just enough angst, agony and politics; their shtick braces him for his day like a black cup of coffee:

“It’s just wrong, Sarah Sweet said passionately, states struggling to reduce prison populations...now this!” She seethed indignantly. “Private prisons demanding states guarantee a ninety percent occupancy rate for twenty years as a condition of privatization! You’ve got to be kidding me...”

I don’t see the problem,” Karen Sower said nonchalantly. “These rapists and murderers and drug dealers already pack prisons coast to coast. Most exceeding one hundred percent occupancy; all this proposal means is more money for schools, child care, healthcare and roads...it’s a winning formula...”

“My concern is our state would be obligated to maintain these high occupancy rates...pressure...pressure would be applied making sentencing laws more severe...just to drive up prison populations....” Sweet was cut off as she was making her point.

“Drive up! Please Sarah, prisons and jails are packed with these hoodlums. Inmates are being double and triple bunked. Please...if these criminals didn’t consider a jail sentence “street credit” or prisons country clubs, we wouldn’t have these problems...”

Paul Goff only thought these two never visited the inside of a jail in their lives. The House of Detention for Men is no country club.
“Karen, I don’t want the goal of these prisons to become maximizing profits... I want these places to be educational, correctional, rehabilitation... not some money making warehouse run by fat cats on Wall Street...,” again Sarah was cut off.

“...And I want them to be prisons for criminals, not some college campus educating rapists and murderers to be better criminals...” Karen yelled so loudly even the microphone she was using screeched.

Finally, Goff thought, these two have hit their stride – they’re at each other’s throats. He listened remembering them together just the other day. His mind’s eye recalling their smart tailored suits; he could just imagine them now at this moment – faces red, veins bulging from their long delicate necks – no compromise in sight.

Producers knowing this decide to go to a caller: “Go ahead caller...” Karen said passively dismissing Sarah Sweet mid-sentence.

“Hello. I’m a first time caller, you two are not considering it’s an investment initiative...an option for states...states that are broke or running deficits who need money from anywhere they can get it....” His point was cut off callously; as if he had said just enough for them to divine grist for their vitriol.

“I have considered it caller,” Karen said. “And that’s my point...”

“I’ve considered it too, Sarah Sweet chimed in and that’s ridiculous. If states can’t run these prisons then privatize them but don’t expect cops and judges to stock them like a fish pond.” She said working hard to get her point out. “Look, New York’s closing prisons, and reform is working...”

“Where? Where is reform working?” Karen asked angrily more as an accusation than anything else.

“You don’t want to see it...”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

Goff finally had enough quickly turning the station to soft relaxing music. Experience taught him this is the point in the show where Sweet and Sower begin their personal attacks and character assassinations until a half hour of commercials separate the two like a bell between rounds at a prize fight.
His small dark shared institutional office is a halfway point for every parole officer who may make a drop off or do an intake, check e-mail or just write daily reports.

Checking e-mail and updates on BOLO notices his eye touched on a familiar face. A face he knows he has seen. A face and description he just knows he knows from someplace. Goff vaguely recalled seeing this character, just not sure where.

He stared into the yard of C-95 watching inmates work their routines. Pull ups, dips, push ups and jogging around a track that had a million dollar view of Harlem and the East River.

The Breckinridge! It occurred to him instantly. He saw this guy the day he did a field investigation of Siegel the tree jumper. So this Charlie Bates was in this building, on the very floor where this Siegel lived. Too much of a coincidence, he thought, a visit to the building manager and talk with the door men will put his mind to rest.

Resolved to swing by the Breckenridge he continued on with his e-mails, phone calls and violations in the works.

........

Central air was cool in Jon Silverman’s Upper East Side apartment creating a sublime distraction from today’s hundred degree heat. Linda worried down a vodka and Redbull, smoked one cigarette after another thinking just thinking.

She wanted to write on the walls in bright red lipstick: “It ain’t cozy here!"

Rent is due and Jon expects attention be paid. Unable to sever the relationship doing this is as unfulfilling as chasing sunlight around the living room. Linda accepted her tedious obligation. She considered it her duty. Liking it less and less, she realized the alternative was the street.

Money is never just enough to survive; impossible to tell her old angel to “jerk himself off.” It’s impossible to break free completely of this relationship. His demanding, her dependence seem unavoidable.

It’s hand job day and afterward his bath. Time to clean his catheters, make small talk, change his bedding and do all she can to get rid of that familiar stink of piss which hangs in every corner of his room. Today is that day.

She worked through it with vodka, cigarettes and wondering where Charlie Bates could be. She tied herself in knots emotionally distracting herself idly.
Almost noon and almost drunk, Linda called Charlie Bates who's cell phone keeps going to voicemail.

Calling Cynthia was easier with Artie Siegel gone.

"Honey, it's Linda..."

"...What's cooking?" Cynthia said optimistically.

"I want to help you today..." Linda said meaning she wants to help herself "clean up that room, also, I may have a meeting with a friend..."

"Oh goody, I do want to help you..." was all Cynthia said in her enthusiastic almost child like chirp.

"Have you seen Charlie?"

"Who"? Cynthia searched her memory deeply as though off guard by the question.

"Charlie..."

"I don't know..."

"...I'll be down this afternoon honey."

Hanging up, she posted on Craigslist for a hundred dollar client or two. Bracing for her routine with her angel Jon, she made another vodka and Redbull thinking: no man wants a relationship with a whore till he needs a gentle touch from one.

........

Eric Stengel is doing double duty staying cool in a carefully climate controlled windowless office. Monitoring and dispatching the commerce of adults trafficking in flesh on multiple websites. Although its work on an elaborate duty which at the moment has him preoccupied.

He injects a computer worm which sabotages equipment by inserting bad codes into logic controllers.

Only Homeland Security in conjunction with the National Security Agency has the talent and resources to manufacture and deliver this complicated malware.
What he’s doing blurs the lines between white collar crime, international spying and even an act of war. These attacks are well known in the intelligence community and tactics are inherently difficult to trace.

Choosing targets that are susceptible to cyber intrusion, as Eric knows, is like a rat infestation problem in a slaughterhouse. For every rodent caught thousands thrive out of view.

Concluding his efforts, Eric will meet Rand and Allison for a long drive to a seminar at Columbia University on plausible deniability in digital espionage. Knowing it will be informative it examines complex ghost programs mimicking networks. A shrewd method of deception with global implications: is the computer hacked really the system targeted or merely a decoy?

Turning off his computer systems Eric rushed to meet his colleagues for a long ride to Broadway and 116th street. Standing on Hudson Street watching Allison and Rand waiting he just thought it’s one of those hot New York City days where the sun turns angry baking streets and people.

In the car he smiled at Allison who seemed disappointed. One of her GPS tracks – a suspect wanted – abandoned his vehicle frustrating her and an entire retrieval team dispatched to apprehend him. “What’s the word Allison?” Eric tried to be sympathetic knowing she will coolly ignore him.

“Eric, oh, one of my “tag you’re it” guys shook us loose…” was all she said then turned to Rand with her long willowing look of adoration.

Cynthia Barnes hung up her phone confused. She did know a visitor was coming to see her, only not sure who. Folgers coffee and television news is what occupies her.

She must find her Chanel scarf, the one her son gave her on her birthday: “now where could she have put that scarf.”

Water in a sauce pan boils away on the stove. A loud commercial in her kitchen television draws her back to her cup of coffee – it must be Folgers was also she cared.

Cynthia knows nothing of a heat wave choking the east coast. Or where Arthur has disappeared? Or when Charlie is coming home, or where he’s gone for that matter. She does recall he’s from Florida, and he did have a car. Naturally, Charlie is driving his car to Florida. It must be winter time. “Now where is that scarf?”

“Mrs. Barnes, this is John in the lobby… I’m sorry Mrs. Barnes,” He said confused, “I don’t know where your scarf is…” The door man hung up shaking his head and rolling his eyes knowing that in less than fifteen minutes Mrs. Barnes will again call down and ask about “her scarf, her husband, her meals on wheels.” She will order him to
tell her children they are no longer welcome, all the while he will hold the phone to his ear in the dramatic marble lobby afraid to laugh knowing he may cry. Deep down knowing we may all be in this dark confusing helpless place someday.

........

After Goff received an updated BOLO from California parole he ran a III on the name Charlie Bates. He discovered that Bates was issued an FBI number which was connected to California and has a lengthy record and is a fugitive.

Armed with this information he turned off his computer then walked out his office onto a long dimly lit corridor of C-95. He walked toward an exit reserved for staff past two inmate trusty’s sweeping and mopping:

"Bust it yo. Cuz fronting...." One with a mop said to another.

"Check it, I know what time it is...I’m hip...niggaz’ from round’ my way...

Each man was familiar kicking the willy bo bo. Both wore orange jump suits. Goff listened to their loud conversation echoing through this long narrow tunnel. A language from streets foreign yet intimate; a language resembling a revolution. He listens because he must.

"G took a body – popped a cap in Scram Jones ....money facing a state bid – life up in Clinton, yo!"

Goff understood. He had an ear for this reckless dialect. He remembers not too long ago “word” or “my word is bond” was popular, but no longer.

"Bitch said she’d break me off..."

"Baby Momma?"

" My ho, nigga! My piece from round’ my way, representing on the dividends..."

Listening, he just walked through the halls on his way out. Time to drive into the city, he seemed to know to his bones: a new language of strong words, a combination of menace and contempt.

Reaching the first set of gates he waved his shield to a closed circuit camera. “It’s time to get out,” he said under his breath. This new culture is going to devour the world he remembered.

Holding his tin up to a second camera at a second heavy steel door it unlocked automatically with a heavy mechanism. “Any culture but this new one is held in
contempt. Materialism, drugs, money, and get over mentality coupled with an undeserved sense of entitlement seems to thrive.” He told himself.

He settled into his ride for a bumper to bumper trip across Queens. The Fifty-Ninth Street Bridge was not too far. Hot streets filled with exhaust and traffic, Queens a borough of two million and they all seem to be heading to Manhattan via the Queens borough bridge, he thought.
“I cannot praise a fugitive or cloistered virtue, Unexercised and unbreathe, that never sallies Out and sees her adversary.” – John Milton, Paradise Lost
Quoted in Bookforum.com

Chapter 16

Some days living with secrets, Charlie Bates thought, are easier than others. Some days the pain strikes his heart, others it’s his eyes with a pressure that brings him close to tears. It’s not guilt or remorse, it’s a sick kind of fear of being discovered. Of having to address all he knows is wrong.

Charlie got off the bus nervously expecting any moment to be thrown to the ground. He had no memories of anything – just that zero tolerance arrest in the parking lot of the Days Inn long ago in Pico Rivera. Only this goes so far beyond that. He’s dumped his past in a garbage can. Tossing his cell phone, identification, anything tying him to New York City or California or any place he’s ever been. He tossed off his past like a smoker throwing away an ashtray praying to quit the habit.

Massachusetts, a commonwealth with nearly seven hundred crimes considered felonies – fifty-nine would trigger a three strikes life term, he knows he’s violated most of them.

Camera’s in South Station lurked passively watching everyone move from commuter rail, Amtrak and busses to Massachusetts Bay Transit trains – the T. The T feeds into Boston, Cambridge, Dorchester, Somerville and other cities that make up the rich quiltwork known as Boston.

Making his way methodically to a Red Line train just as Raven instructed, he made a point to keep his eyes down. He looked at everything only not directly. He looked for exits, entrance to the T, to cops on patrol, coffee stands, information kiosks and homeless camped out on sturdy wood benches. Realizing no matter what he did or how he did it he was a wide open target just as hundreds of others visiting or returning, living and working are.

“If you see something, say something. Now more than ever we rely on your eyes, your ears. Please report any suspicious behavior to an MBTA police officer or T official. Your tips are important to us. And thank you for riding the MBTA.”

Charlie Bates listened to this loud penetrating announcement as he boarded a Red Line train for Porter Square. His mind raced, his heart was in his mouth. He looked around the large carriage of the subway judging no one listened or cared about this announcement he took so personally. So he did nothing with them. This announcement,
so directed towards him was little more than a public service designed to be played over and over. He sat back tense yet aware of each station that passed.

South Station then Downtown Crossing became Park Street. Each stop drew greater crowds. Soon the car he was in was full of young people, old people, a crowd of Bostonians, tourists, students; it’s a vibrant life with an energy Charlie fed off of. He was again anonymous and alive.

Park Street opened up to become Charles MGH. He could see the grand old Mass General Hospital against the Charles River. Sailboats sallied gracefully moving along with punters and crew. Everything about Boston is alive and diligent. Passing the Charles street station he entered Cambridge: Kendal-MIT, Harvard and finally Porter Square.

Raven looked from her door cautiously. After all “this is Craigslist” she told herself. A stranger named Artie was all she really knew, wanting to rent her spare room for six hundred a month. Craigslist so far has been a delight. She’s cleaned out her basement thanks to Craigslist. Since her husband’s death she’s needed money desperately. She’s rented her parking space to a Harvard University student; she’s put her resume on Craigslist hoping someone may want to hire a vibrant sixty-two year old woman who’s hopelessly social.

Looking out her living room window, her new tenant seemed in a hurry. He managed to walk from Porter Square to her house quickly. Most people take longer, she thought. Streets in Cambridge can be confusing twists of dead ends and brilliant parks. Rows of houses all as quaint and refined as Yankee America could provide.

A handsome face, she thought. Masculine; an appealing face she imagined because it’s a face that requires so much attention. A face appealing in a way she sensed she wanted to know more about. Curious, it was a face demanding to be explored further.

Introducing himself as Artie, he continued a fraud begun with his very first e-mail. Charlie Bates knows anyone can be anything on the internet. He had the seagulls drivers license – a tainted one – just tangible enough to land in a share or roommate situation. Hoping desperately it would be enough for this Raven in the event she demands identification.

He hoped he can make some escape from his past, and that cold blooded murder; that killing of that parole officer in that clean marble lobby of the Breckinridge.

“So you’re Artie? I’m Raven, is that all you brought with you?”
"Yes, is that ok?" He said managing a smile. "I left my things in a locker at South Station until after we met..." he lied. He rushed through South Station afraid to even look around. The entire terminal was lousy with cops and cameras.

"Well, if that's all you have then that's all there is...right...?" Ravens eyes searched him. She was genuinely trying to find some common ground.

"I'm so glad," Charlie said, "you posted short term. I just need your room a short while. I'm only here a short time..."

"Oh, where are you from?"

"Originally from New Mexico," lying. His deceit feels as comfortable now as his morning cup of coffee.

"I did visit Albuquerque once..."

"...and did you buy native American craft at the train tracks?"

"...I did, oh Artie let me show you your room."

Raven finally felt she had found some common ground. She escorted Charlie toward a room at the end of the entrance foyer. Two dogs decided finally to investigate.

"This is Tabitha and Stevie," Raven said. Both black dogs waded as cautiously as their owner.

"Artie, these are my children, both fourteen -- that's old..."

"Well, your children look all grown up," was about all Charlie was able to say stepping into the room.

Looking into the semi-furnished space, it's a shell of a room taken up by a bed, dresser, hardwood floor distressed from many moves over the years with a solitary window facing a driveway.

"It's just fine," Charlie said removing three hundred dollars from his pants pocket. Counting off almost all of his money he winced at how fast its gone with no prospect of more. "I know we agreed on six hundred...please hold this...I will go to the bank for the rest..." he lied hoping it would be a good faith deposit till he can call Carl Bayer in Cali for a fast money gram.

Taking his cash, Raven tripped over apologies for even asking so much for her sparse musty room. Quickly she agreed to wait a day or two. She ordered Charlie to stay and feel at home. Graciously organizing the bed she couldn't have been a more sympathetic landlord.
Charlie for his part summoned as much charm as he could under the circumstances. He worked hard to engage this slatternly lady but he could think of nothing but laying on the bed closing his eyes and pushing his life a little farther away with sleep.

..........

Next day waking with the dawn he remembered instantly everything. Sleeping in a strange new room did wonders for him. Practically alert he lay in bed thinking of what to do. Calling Carl Bayer for cash is an essential first step. Needing a new throw away cell phone and new plan, his life is hanging by a thin thread. He’s a hunted man in a strange home using a phony name belonging to a criminal.

He looked around needing to take a piss. Raven’s home is all of the first floor of a large two story house converted to condominiums.

Knowing with sickening certainty he’s maybe the most wanted man on the east coast he shook his head over his swift escape. A lucky four hours on a Chinese bus. A wonder he managed to evade law enforcements net. A cop killer’s dragnet grows tightly quickly.

In his cluttered mind he worked through this process. A process obfuscatory shrouded in secrecy; their tactics have been studied over years of incarceration. Years of observing their stoic practice: “law enforcement is predictable” he told himself, “fallible.” Technology has provided idiot proof tools even the laziest of them can use. Charlie just knows all their technology is useless when hiding in plain sight. Deep down he realizes to his core he’s wrong. He knows there is no longer hiding in plain sight for him or anyone today.

Taking a long loud piss he could smell Ravens apartment. It smelled of dog. An unkempt, ill smelling place he could only judge as neglected. She’s lovely yet slovenly. She’s an innocent allowing him a fresh start, he decided gratefully.

He felt if he believed the dream he’d never wake from it. Her maturity – easily past sixty he reckoned – her availability’s appealing. Hers is a simple life: old dogs, a musky home – it all appealed to him.

Charlie felt safe, as safe as a murderer could under the circumstances; as safe as any American can feel who is on the run.

Carefully avoiding television, radio; he didn’t dare check the internet. His crime has gone viral, he’s sure. Feeling just reading reports of the shooting, his depraved culpability; he’s a culprit. No longer just a man longing to live free he’s now being
hunted, this he knows. Any hope for some happy ending disappeared the moment he heard the first loud crack of his .38 special.

And suddenly he recalled he can’t remember or even care what has become of Cynthia Barnes or Linda or any memory from New York City. As though that tortured Chinese bus ride drove his past into some place in his mind now closed. As hard as he may try he can’t even recall what Linda looks like. “Isn’t that strange” Charlie Bates said to himself under his breath.

.....

Raven’s first meaningful talk was that next evening. She felt a twenty four hour grace period was enough space. She eagerly decided to talk with her new tenant. Eager to learn who he is: all about him. Although she would not admit it she’s lonely. Here is a chance to make a friend; a friend beyond her home and dogs and worries about money and future.

“Artie how was your first full day?” Raven asked. She stood at his door frumpy in a housefrau grey sweat pants and tee shirt.

Charlie looked sympathetic. Feeling she wanted to be more than a landlady, only he was not sure how much more: “Good, I slept sound, I do have your money....”

“Oh, that’s not why I asked, I just wanted to say hello....”

“Of course”

Charlie had a long first day. He was tired. Feeling if he stayed in doors away from Porter Square or Downtown Boston he would let time work its magic. Determined he sought out quiet discreet shops knowing a low profile coupled with passing days fade memories.

While he may have fled New York, its grasp is worldwide. Law enforcement will never forget Paul Goff or allow his killer to escape: this he knows.

“This was my husbands study,” Raven finally admitted.

“Oh? And what happened?”

“I lost him two years ago, a heart attack.”

“I’m sorry...”

“He was a conductor with the T for over twenty-five years.”
“No kidding.” Charlie said trying desperately to be emotive. Although it wasn’t working. He had much too much on his mind. He was broke, wanted desperately, and needing a plan. He’s grateful for a roof over his head. Grateful this naïve old lady is warm and lonely. He was just not sure if she is being friendly or if she’s emotionally vulnerable, craving more than a landlord tenant relationship. Charlie sat up in bed unsure and afraid. Afraid of making any untoward mistake; afraid of losing his living situation. Confused and haunted by making any kind of inappropriate mistake under the circumstances.

“Would you like a drink?” She finally asked.

“Yes, that would be great.”

“My husband worked on the Red Line,” she said. He was a conductor. We practically moved as it moved.”

“Really…”

“Yes. And my family was responsible for building the Porter Square station.”

Charlie only nodded and smiled waiting for his drink and her story which was sure to follow.

Intimately, Raven sat on the end of the bed drink in hand. Talking about her husband and family and their deep roots here in Cambridge. How they were practically born into the Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority. How her younger brother was named for the song Charlie on the MTA. She seemed to know it was called the Cambridge Line until 1965 when it was renamed the Red Line for Harvard’s color crimson.

She talked about Porter Square being over one hundred feet below ground. And at one time the Red Line was the largest trains running on track in a major city. “Porter square was completed in 1984 and then everything around here changed.” She said.


“The Red Line is a work horse not a show horse…” she said taking long sips of her gin and tonic.

Charlie hated gin so he nursed his. He watched her become so comfortable lying across the foot of her bed. Charlie felt she is seeking something more than just a drink and chat.

His body moved to lay parallel with hers. And he just asked: “Raven, do you miss being with a man?”
Her eyes went dull. Her face turned into a porcelain plate. All expression drained from her like a defeated victim. And Charlie took her hand and placed it on him. He took her drink and put it with his on the dresser next to the bed. Pulling her to him, she silently allowed this. A look of an injured woman sadly disappointed over years of loss, rejection and patient wait steadied her.

Charlie summoned what was left of his sexuality begging himself to feel just enough to become aroused.

Kissing her was only part of his performance. He made himself feel her. And she moved under covers with him, feeling him. She moved her hands over his body looking more deeply into his eyes. Deeply she looked into those steel blue eyes of the stranger she only knows as Artie. Moving her now naked body over the hard body of her tenant who only yesterday handed her three hundred dollars and a promise and little else; she took now his body. And Charlie Bates felt this.

Raven felt Charlie. She wanted intimacy at any cost. She needed to feel this delicious sensation of being filled. With this man she felt it would be good. Looking into his eyes there were tears. A gratitude this is safe and comfortable and good.

Charlie only felt her urgency. Seeming to crave immediacy; he pulled himself on top of her. Raven with an aching gasp accepted all of him. Accepted him as she hoped it would be: a full comfortable pregnant feeling that reminded her of her husband in those early good days. Silently she prayed this stranger Artie will hold himself forever just this way. And tears and his strong experienced movements at once filled her then retreated till a next pregnant push took her breath away. She said under her breath loud enough for Charlie to hear: “Thank you for this.”

And Charlie only thought: ‘Thank you for harboring me and concealing me from the vast apparatus of law enforcement now searching entirely for me.’ He let this devilish thought contain his urge to finish in her. Instead he made this entire evening last. She demanded to make love and explore, so he yielded to her desire. He made love over as long a period as she demanded. As her husband must have on their honeymoon, he wondered, or as she may have with a special boy back in the day when she was young and gay.

“Your wonderful Artie….really wonderful…I want to know all about you…”

“This is who I am.” Was all he said locking himself to her.

“I want to know more.” She said coaching herself to release.

“I know what you want,” he only whispered lifting her legs wildly, finishing deeply just as he felt her peak yelling: “Yes!”
He finally finished, not a pleasurable climax as most. But as a point made, a deal done; a promise kept. He finished in her marking his territory as a big dog would claim a yard or street corner. And Raven unconsciously realized it. She only watched Charlie through her wet blue eyes knowing she's been taken and owned and somehow she casually felt good about it.

She would spend the night alone with him in her spare room feeling everything he could give her. Wet until the morning when she will shower and begin a life intimately associated with Charlie Bates. A life of sex and secrets; a life of cash only - of living cheap hustle - life on the edge: underground.

Charlie Bates felt this woman Raven will be all this to him. And somehow Raven felt this too. She felt it the moment he entered her life then connected so delightfully, so intimately with her flesh healing temporarily her broken heart syndrome.

She felt alive. Safe knowing she had not felt this since even before her husbands death - before his illness - years of dysfunction; feeling heat of a man swollen inside of her. This Artie fits so well, she thought.

......

All she could do that next day is glow. Her intimate connection with her new stranger will somehow continue. She woke up hoping this would last, feeling she did not want this to end.

......

That week Charlie Bates, on edge, felt he could only defeat high tech tactics with low tech or no tech. He would need the computer to make money. He needed again to reinvent himself. Needing money fast - Raven would carry him only for so long – his mind turned desperately hoping to discover some way of making cash with no questions asked. Needing again some safe, discreet and under the net means of making a living.

Sadly, its’ impossible today, he thought, America is divided between those who find social media threatening, confusing, unnerving and those who find it exhilarating – convenient. Those who find the internet as natural a place to mingle as when we all visited fairs and dances or a church congregation to meet a spouse or bar stool for a one night stand.

......

Days moved to weeks, Raven and Charlie Bates developed a familiar relationship based on little except satisfying her years of intimacy lost.
He couldn’t bring himself to sleep with her in her bed. Choosing instead to live and sleep and entertain her in that small room close to the entrance foyer with a clear view of the front door and small bath.

Once, only once, he met her in her frowzy room where her dogs lived with her comfortably. Old and incontinent the urine stench was unbearable. It made him sad to look into her personal life.

Her private things collected during wholesome years married to her conductor husband who very likely was a good man and solid citizen. Charlie Bates only realized how dead his life is when looking at Raven’s past. Her draws with carefully purchased underwear, sweet smelling perfume; her precious possessions; a watch with diamond chips, photographs of happy days; a small diamond ring. It did break his heart.

And while he laughed when she said she suffered for years with “broken heart syndrome,” he understood too well what she meant. He avoided her room with its dogs, pictures and memories instead he would take her as she wanted in other parts of her home – on her couch, or his small rented room – all the while knowing he was being harbored and concealed. He lived knowing this charade could all come to an end at anytime with a simple phone call.
"The United States has more than 6 million
People in jail – a higher number than the Soviet
Union imprisoned in the Gulag Archipelago
During Stalin’s reign" – Time Magazine
(Source: The Week Magazine April 6, 2012)

Chapter 17

Eric Stengel, Rand Reese and Allison Moor all worked independently into the
night focusing on video tape taken from New York City’s regional intelligence center.
Camera’s mounted at key intersections operated by Homeland Security.

Since 2004, a counter terrorism center created by the Intelligence Reform and
Terrorism Prevention Act; a vast network of thirty agencies collects information on
everyone funneling information through Homeland Security computers and now accessed
as a tool to be used by Eric, Rand and Allison and any other analyst searching at the
moment for the killer of Paul Goff.

New York’s in a frenzy over the shooting death of this decorated veteran parole
officer. Every medium of popular culture is being used in a relentless search for his killer.

A barrage of propaganda on the value of informing on others has been released by
law enforcement agencies. An expectant call from anonymous authority compels
Americans to dial a snitch. Video crime happening with cell phones: tweet a clue. Drop a
quarter in a dirty old pay phone and dial 911. Local police need your help. Inform on
your neighbor. If you see something say something.

A riot of time spent watching detailed footage of cars, busses, cabs, people all
moving in stop and go moments completes a grid of the island of Manhattan. Agents
doggedly searching frame by frame: people, places and things.

After noon, indeed any time, it’s a frustrating time consuming effort. Add to this a
flurry of emergency service vehicles, an oppressive heat wave, finally a variety of ways
of escaping over a bridge, through a tunnel, a tram to Roosevelt Island and Queens. A
ferry service both public and private, helicopters too, expensive but available with no
questions asked. A reliable Path train to Jersey; in all it’s a task of little more than
searching for a specific grain of sand on a windy beach.

"People," deputy director Campbell said gravely. "A cop killer is on the run. A
manhunt is in effect for our suspect Charles Bates. A drifter with a long criminal history;
a fugitive from justice out of California."

Behind Campbell high def monitors began displaying images of their suspect.
"We are not looking for a crack head or a drug addict dirt bag in a dumpster people. We
are searching for an all American boy. A man over fifty with clean cut conventional looks as respectable looking as any one of us in this room.” Campbell said. He wanted to tell them this bastard is nothing like anyone in this room. This character is a cold murderer who has thrown his life away at the point of a gun – is on the run, desperate and dangerous. Campbell wanted to add all this but didn’t because he realized each agent in this room is well aware and need not be reminded of such an obvious point. “Agent Moor had first contact with Bates, your report Moor…” was all he added.

Allison stood. Taking Campbell’s place front and center her demeanor became clinical: “We tagged a late model Jaguar earlier in the day belonging to our suspect,” she paused. An elaborate set of plasma screen high resolution monitors displayed the vehicle. Institutional mug shots of Bates over many years: booking photo’s from as far back as the nineteen-eighties; each photo array showed a fair haired man aged from youth to middle age. An infamy portfolio from our nations prisons and jails: a road map in the making of a dissident.

“We have copies of Turret tapes from the incident” Allison said playing detailed chatter between detectives, police and control supervisors. Chatter communication between cops on scene all in real time fed through command and control.

“Alpha 4 go Bravo 2”

“No shell casings – we secured the lobby of (inaudible)...ridge. We are searching for a single white...Caucasian...fifty...armed with a revolver (inaudible)...black...”

“What’s the perp got on...Bravo...”

“Jeans...dark shirt, (inaudible) lean athletic build running west into yellow cab heading southbound on Second Avenue.”

“Alpha 4 Control this is Panther 6 victim is one of us...say again...one of us (inaudible)...His shield match identification. Paul Goff New York Division of Parole. Repeat deceased is on the job Alpha 4. On the Job...one of ours!”

An unknown voice cut into the chatter: “...Control Advise. Alpha 4 advise...”

“Alpha 4 to all units victim at fifty-four and two on the job....all units establish city wide perimeter. Every intersection stop and secure (inaudible) patrol area. All points be advised Cop Down! – all stations...notify tri-state be on the look out...stand by.”

“Bravo to Control witness’s able to make identification. Able to I.D. (inaudible)...hailed cab at Second Avenue south...am securing all video from local surveillance...”

As real time Turret tapes played against images of Charles Bates flashing across monitors a determination congealed among every agent working furiously.
“Find this son of a bitch!” Campbell cut in over the insisting chatter of radio to radio communication. Turning to the men and women now facing computer screens searching faces coming and going from the epicenter of this fresh murder scene; a feeling of profound loss swept over each person.

An unnerving sense of loss, deputy director Campbell felt it perhaps more than most of his young agents. He too is of an age where this career has become a race against a bullet. Change – not only of technology, but of ideology – of culture. An evolution of culture determined to pit us against them. Today, one of them killed one of us – this anger alone gave him pause.

As official chatter of on scene Turret tapes played loudly, a mood hushed all but sounds of computer keystrokes moving images of people and places frame by frame until hopefully Charlie Bates is revealed running, or walking, hiding or emerging from a car, bus or cab. Ducking into a subway or emerging from one. Somewhere a Homeland Security or New York P.D. or F.B.I. or any of thirty or so law enforcement entities will capture his image. Video surveillance of Manhattan – of all boroughs – of populations as disparate as Moslem or Russian, or Rich and Poor, black and white, Asian, Jamaican, Middle Eastern or white Anglo-Saxon strolling on Park Avenue – all are carefully recorded. Some neighborhoods video surveillance overlaps. And this cities Mayor defends this scrutiny; citizens vote for him for this policy never fail. A billionaire can buy a lot of votes – particularly one who controls a vast media conglomerate posing as daily news.

......

Linda first realized there’s trouble when she saw lights of too many police cars crowding the corner of First Avenue at Fifty-Fourth Street. Crowds milled at the front and edge of the New York Archdiocese. She saw young girls, all students of Cathedral High School in glen plaid skirts and white shirts walking away from the tussle of emergency vehicles choking into an already crowded block.

Immediately, she thought of Cynthia. Then, oddly, of Charlie; he entered her mind in a way pushing suspicions from far away to a place in her mind where it would grow and flourish. Soon her thoughts turned thinking: “What do I really know about Charlie Bates?”

Walking toward Cynthia’s as planned, she watched police carefully cordon off the front of the Breckenridge. Flash of red and white light from a spectacle of police cars and ambulances and fire trucks and every other significant arm of authority froze in time this scene for her.

If not for the sparkle, the coruscated insistence of police power, she would have dared try to enter the lobby. But the Breckenridge is closed. Completely and utterly closed.
Linda only watched as police investigators in blue jackets with yellow lettering announced: forensic crime investigator. They carried into a van a computer, several plastic bags filled; various phones. People watched as modern flotsam was carried away by police. “Someone must have been killed,” she finally said to herself, but looking at a woman standing next to her along with a crowd of rubber necking neighbors and local lookie lou’s.

Word spread “a cop was killed.” Linda at once needed to know. She had been too closely associated with this building not to know what happened or expect to know the whole story.

“A cop was shot.”

“My God”

“You’re kidding, in this neighborhood…oh my God”

“What did he look like”?

“A white guy…”

“An older guy…”

“He was tall and blond, and in good shape…”

And Linda at that very instant knew to her soul it’s Charlie. Turning white as blood seemed to drain from her wan face she aged instantly: “How stupid,” saying to herself. “I should have known.”

“Her mind raced: “what to do?” Finding herself standing as close to the yellow police tape as she could manage – torn between running into the crisis of cops telling all she knows – yelling everything she knows to the first cop who will pay attention! Until, suddenly in a sharp instant she realized telling everything she knows about Charlie would be telling on herself too.

Exposing her partner in crime means exposing her own dirty secret. She would have to tell the police about her sordid prostitution business; her nasty illegal enterprise which in light of day is so dirty, so morally wrong she’s ashamed of it herself.

Instantly the very question: “How do you know the suspect Bates?” becomes in itself an accusation. Guilt by association. It would only be a matter of time before she would fall under their heavy handed scrutiny. Any answer she would manufacture would in the end put her neck in a morally constructed noose. And Jon Silverman would find out. And her fragile house of cards would tumble leaving her in the gutter, this she reasoned selfishly.
Anxious, fear gripped her with the heat of a hot afternoon sun, as if a klieg light focused on her. She quickly turned full around excusing herself through pockets of people hoping for some law and order moment. Moving past elderly residents, tourists, shop owners and everyone all the while excusing herself – tears in her eyes – she walked back home. Drifting away from the Breckinridge understanding deeply she’s walking out on Cynthia Barnes and God help her.

Cynthia sat alone at her small round dining room table, her clock radio keeping her company. Yesterday took it all out of her: “why are you in my home...what do you want? I’m eighty-five years old” was about all the detectives managed to get from her.

“Who is Charlie Bates?”

“Oh you mean Charles, he’s not here...” a detective finally extracted just enough information to secure a search warrant under the circumstances. Enough to discover and confiscate her property: a computer and other material evidence

Folgers coffee and her radio program is all she has left today. She listened to Sweet and Sower because when her clock radio alarm sounds, it’s tuned on time with their broadcast:

“There are people at war with this country who are not international terrorists...” said Karen Sower. “The murder of parole officer Paul Goff is not a terrorist act, it’s a criminal act...”

“We both knew Paul Goff,” Sarah Sweet said, “we respected his honesty, integrity and professional dedication to his job and our city. Getting killed, as he did, by a fugitive; a desperate man on the run – armed and dangerous sounds like urban terror to me...”

“There are too many questions, and we know so little about this criminal Bates. How did he get the gun? Where is he from? He’s got a long record and driving here across country, now a shooting! This is going to enflame the debate about guns and gun control!”

“And shooting a loved and respected member of law enforcement...I just don’t know!”

“What’s to know, he’s an ex-con with a gun. Isn’t that enough of a nightmare! This guy should never have been let out of jail! Now a good cop is dead. Paul Goff was only weeks a way from retirement...”
"I've got to say that Karen and I have had our differences on many hot button topics but on this I feel there must be zero tolerance." Sarah's voice seemed to crack into a whisper.

"Let's go to a caller, o.k. Sarah?" Gently Karen said.

"Have you two ladies heard of the Sovereign movement?" A caller asked quickly then was immediately cut off.

"No this is no American born tax cheat hating the government, or some yokel militia member with a grudge against Uncle Sam! This guy's a cop killer on the run with a gun," Said Karen slamming the caller instantly.

"I have to agree. This is a desperate wanted criminal on the run and parole officer Paul Goff got in his way. This so called Sovereign movement is about rebel American's disgruntled angry frustrated with their own anti-government agenda. Taxes, contempt for law enforcement, it goes back to the siege at Waco Texas and homegrown terrorists like Tim McVeigh and Oklahoma. What happened yesterday in mid-town Manhattan is a ruthless crime and this Charles Bates will be found and punished." Sarah Sweet said choking up. "Next Caller..."

"Killing a cop is political. It's the height of disobedience. It's the ultimate disobedient act in a civil society. Karen and Sarah your wrong if you think it's not! This guy is angry! An angry American! A fugitive who's been living underground for a long time on purpose. Not some so called Sovereign or militia nut job, but an angry American who's broken under the pressure of modern culture..."

"Caller it sounds like you're the angry one!" Karen yelled.

"I guess I'm frustrated like a lot of people. I'm angry at times. Not sure where things seem to be moving. I'm a wage slave like most people and I can't do anything about it. I'm a prisoner of a house owned by the bank..."

"Sure the economy is in a shambles and big government controls our lives" Sarah interrupted, "there's a legitimate friction between the haves and have not's in this country. The Occupy movement illustrates that. Sure cops crack down on them especially here in New York - I object to their tactics but killing a cop, killing Paul Goff is just an act of a coward and criminal," emphatically Sarah Sweet argued.

Cynthia Barnes looked idly over her dining room table staring with glassy tired eyes into a long lost distance hanging on and wondering where she's heard that name Paul Goff.
Listening to Sweet and Sower she followed their show with each passing minute of the red display of her digital clock radio.

Each passing bit and piece meant time was passing by: “That Goff was friends of Arthur. Where did Arthur go?” She asked herself.

Her apartment seemed a mess from recently being ransacked by cops searching seeking clues about her former tenant. Her husbands den was all but cleaned out. Gone is the computer, monitor, keyboard and telephones. All relevant technology removed. All that remains besides a lonely wood desk and musty old couch are the remnants of forensic fingerprint dust and wrappers discarded from DNA swabbing kits, all debris neglected by hurried crime scene technicians.

As days passed, plastic bags began to litter her kitchen, meals on wheels continued to come and go. Dust accumulated on her coffee table, her clothes scattered and her cane stood alone by the front door.

Squalor returned slowly and deliberately. She lived as before, oblivious, drinking coffee in the morning and scotch at night. She sits listening to Sweet and Sower rant or rave about New York in the here and now. Sometimes her phone rings and it’s Linda, or one of her children. She simply has no answers and can’t recall anyone named Charlie Bates.
"...courts are in no position to second-
Guess the judgments of Correctional Officials
Who must consider not only the possibility of
Smuggled weapons and drugs but also public
Health and information about gang affiliations."
- Justice Anthony M. Kennedy (Source: U.S.
Supreme Court Upholds Strip Searches After Arrest,
The Boston Globe, April 3, 2012)

"About 13 Million People are Admitted Each Year
To the Nations Jails." - Justice Anthony M. Kennedy; (ibid)

Chapter 18

"So many people keep so many secrets," Charlie Bates thought, "that nobody knows anything." He tossed and turned alone in bed. Another nightmare had him in a twist over what to do.

Lately his dreams focus on returning to jail. Always the same, sometimes its not having a place to sleep. Lost looking for a cot or rack in a crowded block or dorm. Or being back at Los Angeles County Jail in a crowded reception intake room where many men fresh from the streets strip butt naked while guards - male and female - with flashlights between their teeth check assholes for contraband.

Naked men with their junk exposed are photographed, tattoos are catalogued. Nothing abstract about a room filled with nude accused men fresh from a holding tank or court house bull pen.

Nothing polite about stripping for search: "Hands above your head! Face the Wall! With your left hand remove your socks! Do not shake them out." A guard yells as a team of corrections officials stand at the ready for any disobedience. Failure to obey a command is met with violent force.

Guards wait with handcuffs and shackles and pepper spray for any inmate to challenge a direct order: "With your left hand remove your undershirt. With your left hand remove your draws."

A stink of ass and feet fill the room. A stench of unwashed decay, of streets where most slept. Of holding cells where most have been forced to lay for days till decisions about a bed and housing would determine which jail or prison a bed was available, where the accused will land.

Guards emboldened and empowered work day in day out, its business as usual. Herding accused from cell to cell, strip searched to chow or a bunk. Guards in our correctional facilities - back in the day called jails or detention centers - take this duty for granted. Maybe as guards since Roman times have taken for granted the process set
by law and standards playing dice, passing shifts rolling bones beneath crucified criminals. Jailors and guards world wide adopt administrative indifference which is all neatly and legally sanctioned by laws of their respective governing bodies. Following orders just as the ones establishing Auschwitz and others under an Enabling Act; well constructed laws out of Nuremberg. Laws getting the ball rolling back in 1939.

No one would ever suggest an American prison could ever compare with a concentration camp. Of course not! After all, judges and politicians remain vouchsafed to preventing the kind of atrocities which occurred then. Our judges, our courts second-guess the judgments of correctional officials... right?

A strip search in jail is more than just a search for contraband and gang affiliation. It’s a tool used to break human will. It’s a dehumanizing first step in a process designed to challenge the human spirit. This is America: this is the power and the glory. “Is this your dignity; your possessions, your self respect?” Inmates bend naked at the waist, cough – rake their hands across their cock and balls – spread their ass cheeks for inspection. “Good, now you have nothing.” (*Attribute: quotes only to Arthur Miller; Source: Frankl, Victor E.: Man’s Search For Meaning, Beacon Press – Boston)

And inmates who have been through this before no longer even seem aware of their nakedness. Men no longer seem aware of the hoarsely shouted commands, or the mocking looks and glances.

American’s too in the general population of our culture have grown accustomed to accepting the short end of the stick. Courtrooms are no longer forums for deciding liberty or basic human rights. Courts have become another form of mockery, pretentious ceremonies deciding in favor of institutional imperative rather than individual liberty.

Charlie Bates woke up trying to remember as much of his dream as he could. He could recall only bits and pieces of his nightmare. A curious trick of the mind: dreams presented so naturally, seemingly decided only upon the judgment of waking whether a dream was in fact a nightmare.

He stood at the toilet pissing. Anxiety has not yet crept into his days mind. Ravens two old dogs, Tabitha and Stevie, looked into his soul as only dogs can with weary questioning eyes: “Do you know what you are doing?” At the same time saying to him directly, shamelessly: “We know all about you – it’s in your soul” and Charlie just stood pissing understanding their doggy accusations and concerns.

He will live his life. He will not be owned by other peoples fear or hysteria. Chasing from his mind his culpability just as he chased from his mind his memory of Cynthia and Linda, wiping from the blackboard of his brain everything but his relationship with Raven and his new job and fresh start.
Understanding people want to believe they are associating with a decent upstanding citizen he took a job working with the elderly. He dummyed up a certificate from a not so local community college permitting him to be a home care provider. He worked for cash only, working for a lot less than anyone should under the circumstances.

It’s fundamental to human nature, if someone says they are a home health care provider, then by god they must be a home health care provider. After all, his computer generated certificate guaranteed he’s qualified. Certified to work with geriatric patients which amounts to doing errands and shopping for the homebound.

After a shower he felt clean and free. He tried to put in the back of his mind all that could go wrong in the course of a day. Trying to forget a simple internet background check, a kind of strip search, could raise a great number of red flags. A moment on a computer, yet as intrusive as a guard with a flashlight ordering: “bend over and spread ‘em.” He tried to push this thought away hoping to get his day off to a good start.

He could care less about jail or being strip searched now. It’s some other guys problem. All that matters is the here and now. Going to work and being on time. Making money anonymously and under the radar. As long as that institutional horror happens to some other person it’s ok with him. He’s thousands of miles from Chino and that’s all that matters at the moment.

......

Finally, anxiety grabbed him; just when he pulled on his pants shirt and shoes; just as he made his bed preparing to start his day.

Raven stood at his door awake, looking trampled and said: “You don’t have to do that, let me...”

“I want to. I’m rushing out, picked up a client.”

“A client” She asked as though finally learning something tangible.

Charlie handed Raven his manufactured home care certificate; handing it to her as a matter of fact: “I’m an overpaid errand boy who shops, cleans and holds hands.”

“I just didn’t know what you did...for a living.”

“I’m a trained geriatric therapist.” Whatever that is, he made up the title instantly. In America somewhere there must be thousands of geriatric therapists; probably a union, a political action committee and even a society of geriatric therapists someplace.
"You’re a geriatric therapist?" Raven said incredulous finally examining his fake diploma from Commonwealth Community College. She returned it to him like it was a Harvard sheepskin - handing it back to him in a way wanting to live the fraud with him.

"It pays your rent honey."

"Artie, maybe the rent is too much..."

"No, of course not" knowing it is. Knowing it’s too soon to chisel her out of her monthly revenue.

"I’m going to my son’s house," she said finally. "He bought a toy for my granddaughter. A toy, that’s a joke. It’s some kind of technological video game that requires I escort her to a course set up as a play date. A play date to learn how to use this toy; what a world we live in."

"Amazing what passes for toys today."

"Damned thing cost him a few hundred dollars including a training class."

"I’ll bet they’ll be training her to buy the next model as soon as possible." Charlie just said. "When I was a kid it was a yo-yo and a piece of string, now it’s a computer with three dimensional world wide stereophonic interactive everything!"

Picking up his bag, kissing Raven full on her lips: "I have to run, got to be someplace called Brighton..."

She took his kiss hopefully, carefully giving him directions. From Porter Square he must transfer to a Green Line trolley at Park Street: "The B Line to Boston College" she said.

Swiftly walking out without much explanation really; didn’t explain he picked up a hundred dollar client on Craigslist; an old infirm man suffering from respiratory disease. He didn’t explain it’s a cash client needing a home care attendant for about an hour and a half. In fact, it’s his first client. His first hundred dollar bill; he just knows the guys name is Dominic Somebody who lives off the B line in Brighton, an address and not much more.

.......... 

Dominic’s homebound - almost seventy years old - with emphysema. An oxygen tank hung between his legs like a big green erection. He loved to smoke and complain. Today all he can do is complain.
Charlie felt like a tourist. A hunted tourist, yet a visitor none-the-less; “Boston is a
great city” he told Dominic. “Lot’s of Universities, young people with hope, world class hospitals. Beaches with surf and lots of pubs and restaurants...”

All Dominic could do is sit and complain. For about ninety minutes Charlie got an
earful about weather — “it changes from moment to moment” — traffic, prices crowd’s,
politicians — “they’re all crooked” — the FBI, the ACC, and the fact that Friendly’s isn’t
what it used to be.

Dominic’s angst is contagious. So he cleaned, changed bedding, shopped and
stocked his cabinets and fridge. All the while listening to his theories of how to get
America “back on track”:

“Vanity philanthropy” he said, “why not just make a few mortgage payments for
American families?”

“You mean like a secret Santa at Christmas time? Just go to a store and pay off
some strangers pay away purchase? Instead of a toaster or microwave, you drop a few
hundred into his mortgage payment? I like it.”

“Right, exactly. Instead of running overseas with truckloads of dollars — let’s face
it that just gives the rich some peace of mind.” Pausing, he pulled the oxygen to his face.

He sucked up some oxygen in huge gulps. Nursing the oxygen mask like it was a
cigarette: “They make a ton of money selling computers, computer programs, social
networks then instead of plowing back domestically they go global; they go global ‘cause
they know...”

“They know?” Charlie asked. “What do they know?”

“They know America is fast becoming a nation of so many rules, regulations, and
laws that it’s like the old saying: a great place to visit, but wouldn’t want to live there.”
He finished then sucked more on his oxygen. He took from his pocket pills. Taking one
without water he just sat back and looked right at Charlie with a look of curiosity.

“I have to agree old man. You nailed it: just not enough justice.”

“When the cancer hit my chest I smoked. Thought I’d smoke to the grave. Maybe
I will. Cigarettes are ten bucks a pack! Ten bucks” repeating himself; “I started when
they were thirty-five cents and that was a lot.”

Charlie picked up his clothes starting to clean this old dying man’s bathroom. He
wiped down his kitchen and organized his living room preparing it for a vacuum before
moving on to laundry.

Listening carefully, he worked feeling he owed this kind man a good job.
“Tobacco company executives have known for years” he said earnestly. “And convenience stores and people – the government is the problem not the solution. The moment some senator or president or congressman focuses on an industry it’s a death sentence.”

Charlie listened feeling he’s right. This old dude sitting sucking air knows exactly what million dollar executives know, our government runs the show. A spate of legislation, media scrutiny, targeted taxes, market regulations and negative advertising equals death to the free market. “Nothing is free in the free market Dominic.” Was all Charlie said to his client who’s watching him with curious eyes.

Doing his thing cleaning and organizing till his time was up, till he was paid. He doesn’t have to be hooked up to an oxygen tank to feel his future’s uncertain. His life’s a fragile text-a-tip away from relevance.

…..

Afterwards, Charlie walked down Commonwealth Avenue in sunshine unafraid. Secure with a hundred dollar bill and twenty dollar tip in his pants pocket. Easier money than roofing or some other distasteful thing he’s done lately.

He’s safely anonymous. Knowing people around him are selfishly self-absorbed, as Dominic told him during one of his rants: “people today are anti-social.” He feels he could walk down Fifth Avenue or Hollywood Boulevard and not one eye would pick him out or care he’s a fugitive on the lam.

Yet he knows these same people if their entitlements’ taken they’ll charge like a bull! Scream in the night. Deny for a moment a creature comfort or modern convenience and watch out for the righteous indignity.

He walked from Brighton to Allston. Comm. Avenue’s wide, tree lined – spacious as any boulevard he’s ever seen. A trolley rail did run gracefully down the very middle where the Green Line picked up and discharged mostly students from Boston College and Boston University. Deciding to spend his tip on a haircut; he picked an Asian barber for a clean regulation cut; a gentleman’s fade.

Sitting for his haircut, picking up a discarded Globe he read: “Local District Attorney Files Complaint Against Judge” reading further it seems the D.A. out of Boston wants to remove a local judge “after years of frustration that the judge seemed to rule against prosecutors in favor of defendants.”

Wondering if it’s Boston or Philadelphia that’s the cradle of liberty, not sure, he just sat reading the article: “I cannot stand by while a clearly biased judge ignores the law and threatens public safety.” The prosecutor huffed and puffed. Finally, he gave up on the paper, it too fell into his lap with his loose clippings of hair.
Contempt for judicial independence seems universal today. If a judge doesn’t cooperate, kick ‘em off the bench. Investigate, audit, seems a natural next step the way our justice system is moving, he reckoned.

......

Raven liked her new man’s hair style, embracing him as she’s embraced his fraud, together they took a nice long walk through end of summer Cambridge. A guided tour of a park behind her house: “here,” he said, “cash makes friends” handing her the hundred dollars, she took it all while listening to him talk saying nothing. Smiling while he created a world of people and places that’s fiction – nothing real – he could have begun his fairy tale “once upon a time,” she’d believe every word.

Soon walking lazy over a bridge toward Harvard with mostly tall hedges shielding elegant homes – student residences – lawns, tree’s completed a rich tapestry which did as much to conceal as invite.

Listening to his far fetched rambling thinking, not lies he’s telling, not deceit more like a child searching for what should have been. She felt it’s his polite way of telling her: “it’s none of your business.”

“How did you get involved in taking care of the elderly?”

“My grand mother had a stroke – I held her hand as she lay dying. I figured I could do this kind of work.” Talk of death seemed to satisfy her curiosity.

“Do you have any brothers or sisters, Arty?”

“That’s a funny question...”

“Why?”

“Why do women always seem to ask this? “Do you have brothers or sisters?” Like it’s the most important thing in a relationship...”

“I guess it’s just a way of asking about family, that’s all.”

Raven listened wondering why he’s so evasive like a guy on a bar stool hoping to get into her pants, she thought. But he’s already had her, can take her whenever he wants: “Why’s he not opening up to her now?” She said to herself stymied.

Looking into his face; a face that’s had a hard life: a face with character which now in daylight against green lawns and freshly painted homes reveals pain, suspicion and distrust. She wondered “maybe he’s been to jail.” She’s never met a man who’s been to jail before. But suddenly in the silence of his conversation it dawned on her he has a
look she'd expect a prisoner to have: a far away cynical look, set jaw with strong eyes that look directly without yielding.

Instantly she convinced herself her new tenant has had a tough life. He's on the mend. A man desperate to rebuild from some hidden trauma, she let this bromide soothe her somehow.

Something kept him around. Something anchored him to her – kept him hanging on her tears. Remembering the money he pressed in her hand, now a tight knot in her purse. She looked into his face, at his smile when it was allowed to escape, when his blue eyes did light up and his face was for a moment fugitive from its sorrow and concern.

Again the bridge, tree's drooped longing for fall. Raven and her lover walked talking, piecing people and places together; pasting memories tangled as jig saw what's real....what's not.

"The leaves must be beautiful here when they turn color." Charlie said as if he'd not witnessed a change of season for many years.

Raven only wondered why he was talking about fall as though it would be the last crisp season he'd ever witness ever.

The sun seemed to set slowly – lazy – touching the tips of tree's then lowering itself like someone fat getting into a too hot bath teeter totting till fully submerged and comfortably settled.

Returning home in a new light of dusk, Cambridge seemed a different place entirely. Raven's home appeared set differently on her typical suburban block. A trendy restaurant right across the street – never open before four p.m. – now customers crowded into its café.

Neighbors walked grateful dogs. And children trucked baseball gear from a nearby ball field, their little red socks dusty from play.

And Raven nested comfortably on her couch after pouring them wine idly wandering through her e-mails and thinking about dinner. Melancholy, Charlie Bates resigned himself to another solitary evening at home behind closed door.
"When you’re huntin’ sompin’ your a hunter,
An’ you’re strong. Can’t nobody beat a hunter.
But when you get hunted – that’s different. Sompin’
happens to you. You ain’t strong; I been hunted now
for a long time. I ain’t a hunter no more." – Muley Graves
(The Grapes of Wrath, John Steinbeck. 1939)

Chapter 19

America On The Lam, a nationally broadcast cop show featuring crime and criminals offered a slick segment on the killing of Paul Goff.

On the Lam is one of many shows today exploiting America’s discontent; littering mass media with determined pitches seeking the public’s help apprehending fugitives. Charlie Bates was featured dramatically just in time for thanksgiving.

Actors re-imagined Bates, and Paul Goff and both stunned doormen of the Breckenridge. Indeed, the Breckenridge gladly cooperated with law enforcement providing its lobby for a set saying: “this is a criminal investigation and it’s the Breckinridge’s policy to cooperate with criminal investigations.”

Authorities have grown frustrated over many months of man hunting – of investigating hopeless leads and situations – growing fatigued, overwhelmed. Other priority cases developed and so, finally turning to commercial television it decided On The Lam with its national appeal would develop a feature:

“Charlie Bates is being sought by authorities in New York,” a gravel voiced host demanded with profound rectitude. “New York City detectives need the public’s help. Bates is sought in connection with the shooting death of respected and highly decorated New York State Parole Officer Paul Goff. Goff, you may recall was a veteran NYPD detective who joined parole at a time when this city’s crackdown on street crimes in the 1990’s helped make streets safe once more for families; Goff was just two weeks shy of retirement.

“This is Bates’ first appearance on our show. Until he is caught it won’t be his last. On The Lam is America’s premier fugitive retrieval program,” said the host looking directly into the camera with a firm snarl, a look designed to elicit solemn resolve; “detectives need your help,” he paused then said: “but, if you see Bates or know his whereabouts do not approach him. He is armed and dangerous. Call your local law enforcement agency or New York City detectives. Let’s get this cop killer off the streets!”

The segment ended with a phone number and e-mail address. After a spate of commercials another fugitive appeared, this one Hispanic from San Diego reputed to be our nations most wanted drug dealer ever.

......
Carl Bayer finally made it home. The 5 freeway from Burbank was a trial of stop and go traffic all the way to the 110 through downtown L.A. finally connecting with the Pacific Coast Highway and Malibu. An hour and a half waste of time, all he wants now is a tall vodka with lots of ice.

Rain and rock slides made Mulholland Drive through the canyons impossible. Going through downtown was unavoidable. He medicated himself with vodka cold and wet as he could make it. When he left his office it was still bright southern California sunshine - sunshine that turns the human brain to mush, sunshine that seems to convince everyone living here that a two hour commute is ok, that living in a city which demands a car is just fine. Sunshine in southern California is a kind of Crack that makes everything ok till the drug wears away – at night – at home. And the body craves its morning fix.

Carl relaxed with his teenage son on a wrap around couch with a look reserved for car accidents or plane crashes.

“What’s on?”

“On the Lam”

“Cop shows – did you do your homework?”

“Later...”

“How’s school?”

“Dad...later...I want to watch this...”

Carl just sat back rocking the ice around his highball glass. A dazed look from hours on the freeway screwed his face into a mask. He watched his son watch his show thinking: “is this bonding? Must be...” then to his horror he saw on the flat screen a face he instantly recognized.

Carl Bayer tensed immediately. A shock, even his son turned looking at him. In that awkward moment it seemed father and son connected, only each could not know why or how.

“Charlie Bates! Holy shit it’s Charlie Bates,” Carl whispered to himself so under his breath it sounded like an admission of guilt.

Managing to control himself, he steadied himself with a long hot gulp of vodka. Icy heat hit his throat then another as he followed every word about Charlie Bates. His head ached and muscles in his shoulders tensed. Deflated, he needed air.
Carefully, after the segment finished he casually walked to his balcony closing both French doors behind him. His wife was busy with dinner; his son remained transfixed by a fugitive drug dealer in San Diego. Carl only sat on his balcony alone in a cold sweat watching a chaos of Pacific Ocean seeing a far off vague outline of promontory Palos Verdes Estates jutting conspicuously through a veiled haze or trick of light while the dusk turned everything a deep purple.

Turning, he watched his son fascinated by the images of criminals on television. In terror he felt Charlie’s presence here with him in his home. As though His image is not some abstract story remote or apart; he’s a living breathing friend who’s been his friend for years. Turning, he looked onto a string of expensive homes guiding the crescent of Malibu beach as far as the eye could travel northward. “Did his son see fear in his eyes,” he asked himself, “a fleeting instant of recognition?” Instantly he realized Charlie Bates is a dead man.

“He’s no longer a charming rogue,” Carl said to himself. No longer a cheap hustler hoping to live free on the run: he’s a cop killer. He’s wanted dead or alive. “And he’s in Massachusetts” he said to himself. God help him.

He knows Charlie’s in Massachusetts just not exactly where. He has no address. He’s wired money – this he knows. He’s aided a cop killer, he thought. He abetted his friend with money and assistance. He’s guilty of so much he realized instantly as he looked into the churning Pacific then finished his vodka with a short final gulp.

“What should I do?” Carl finally asked himself as a prayer. “What should I do?”

Looking at the angry surf crash, he wrestled with his moral dilemma. His mind turned with its own ebb and flow. His reasoning foamed along with the sharp slapping of waves against rocks. He turned so he could look through those wide French doors into his lovely duplex. Into his hard fought home bought and paid for after years of hard work. Years of educating himself, of denying himself so he would become marketable in a world quickly evolving. He watched his wife in her California kitchen setting up plates – one last step before dinner is served.

His home, his wife his son; everything hangs from a thin thread. A web of secrets and reputation, his next move could – would – cut that thread severing it all forever. A phone call would be all it would take to dismantle his entire life.

Police and prosecutors will skin his story until every ugly truth was revealed. Until the carcass of truth lay open and bleeding: until only a revolting unbearable truth is fed into the meat grinder of a court room.

Carl could only stand at the rail of his balcony looking into the horizon. Always he searched for dolphin that sometimes trek and play in pods. He thought of that man he once knew many years ago. So many years ago it now seems.
His friend Charlie Bates with a fast smile and bright eyes as blue as the Pacific when the sky's clear and sun is shining.

"A joke on life," Carl recalled "always plotting sex for money, always managing an afternoon delight: a broker; a panderer; a discreet man who both men and women trusted to seal the deal."

Carl understood what it was: a casual relaxing taboo time with a not so pro lady looking to make ends meet safely and discreetly with a nervous randy and equally discreet business man with lots to lose.

Charlie Bates earned his fee, Carl thought; he delivered something almost gracious in a time of crass pimps and drug addled drama queens. He managed somehow to charm housewives saying "sex is a great part time job. A little slice of pie with a stranger for pay goes a long way in today's economy."

Carl remembered Sarah especially. Sarah who'd drive from Torrance once a week - she'd drink, smoke a joint - then strip taking both men with her swimmers body. Afterward her blond hair ruffled and blue eyes calmly searching would say: "Charlie can't you call someone else?" She'd point without shame to her craving gash. "....Or a woman...I want a woman too..."

Licking his lips, he smiled knowing he shouldn't. He had to run back to his office feeling dirty and spent. Only after his clothes were on and he was in his car could he delight in his moral dilemma.

On the day Charlie was arrested it was on the news. Charged with pimping and pandering - neighbors signs read: "We Don't Want Sex Crimes In Our Neighborhood!" Their hysteria was fueled by politicians' dirty tricks and self serving propositions. He remembered now as he did then their disgraceful hypocrisy. And just how the local news fed off of it. Charlie Bates is defunct.

Helping him was a way of objecting to that injustice. Only now, it's impossible. He stood up and with a long sharp throw he tossed his empty glass into the wide open Pacific Ocean. "No!" He said loudly. "No!" He yelled with the launching of the glass into the sea.

He will do nothing. He can't help Charlie. Rushing into his home - through the French doors which just stayed unnaturally open to the elements, he searched his desk for his cell phone.

"Dinner Carl..." was all his wife said.

"Dad, dinner...are you coming?"
“I have to meet Gail later – after dinner... Carl... Where are you?” She was insistent.

“Dad, I need money! Remember...” was all his son said hopefully, only not moving an inch from the flat screen monitor in the living room.

Carl took from his desk his small pre paid cell phone. The one Charlie Bates calls him on. The phone Sarah called him on. And the one all the rest of the half-a-hookers he’s met from Craigslist or Backpage or through men like Charlie met along the way. Rushing back to his balcony he stood shaking. And with a long sweeping deliberate throw he tossed it into the angry Pacific.

........

At the County Jail in Los Angeles chow was called: a slop of pink slime. Prison officials who purchase for this sprawling behemoth call it lean finely textured beef. Inmates know it as gruel and soy and slopped onto a plastic tray. It’s only now become known to the public lately because the industry slops the same swill to school children too – and we must protect the children.

Men crowd a television set or play cards or lay on their racks thinking about court or loved ones or any way out of the mess they are in.

Overcrowded conditions have become an administrative battle cry: a mantra for taking programs and privileges. Safety and security concerns trump any hope for rehabilitation in these steel and cinderblock institutions.

There’s only television. Inmates watch the show On the Lam just not for the same reason the producers of the program hope. Men locked up hope the fugitives get away. Men incarcerated root for the criminal. Most watch On the Lam to see old neighborhoods or maybe glimpse someone from 'round their way on the run.

Those miserable souls wasting away at Twin Towers or North County Correctional Center or the too many other jails and prisons across the state watch On the Lam and wish they were now free and under the radar too.

So inmates languish and scheme. New fish bring drugs – grass in their ass – or finger of dope. Hustle for works or a rig. Deals are made and getting high is not so much fun in stir. Often it just ends with a fight, or a trip to the hole or protective custody after threats. Never is getting high a good thing in any jail. So most just watch television and play cards and dream.

The night Charlie Bates was featured, more than one old con said: “Hey I know that guy!” And for a fleeting minute Charlie’s name rang bells in L.A. County Jail.
A few vaguely remembered over the yelling and fireworks of sound made by men living in common; a few vaguely remembering a guy who looked like the fugitive: "cop killer." Although, faces come and go, phantoms fleeting — like a dream is doing time. And men just passed time unable to focus sharply on people and places, dazed and confused by institutional anonymity.

At Chino voices like firecrackers pop off over the sound of television. Gangsters kick the willy-bo-bo: long meaningless rambling conversations shouted loud and live about nothing in particular.

And On the Lam was featured. A cop killer in New York; a drug kingpin in San Diego; a rapist in Detroit, and at Chino thug life is real. A lock down over a fight over a slight — property tossed and men lumped up or lugged to administrative segregation.

At Chino inmates worked their mandatory burpee’s. Living ass to balls in stinking dorms or isolation; lucky ones waste away in violent forty man cages with a television. Gang members of each race decide what to watch: tonight it’s On the Lam.

On The Lam is turned up loud. Contempt and tolerance kept the program relevant to these men. Most just wanted a glimpse of the street; hoping a homeboy or fellow banger is featured. Most stay tuned for the drug dealer in San Diego.

First up — a cop killer in New York — eyes searched the mug shot. Men watched teasing any memory of the old cold face with fair hair and blue eyes. A look lined with creases which each man recognized instantly as a hard knock life. A face telling of institutions — a look men in Chino wear like many tattoo’s that sleeve their arms or drape their backs. And suddenly a white inmate stood up and said loudly: "I know that motherfucker!"

Twister instantly recognized Charlie Bates. He recognized that old pimp who was too old to be down but still did his mandatory routine. "That dude was here!" Twister shouted.

"That dude jumped from the gate! We got into it with South Siders — that guy’s a solid Wood!" He said proudly.

And men reacted to Twister who much respected, who’d bet his life he did time with the cop killer Charlie Bates. "That son-of-a-bitch is done!" voices said. And stories erupted of the riot with the South Siders and pepper spray and in no time real or imagined Charlie Bates became some kind of sensation in this crowded filthy place.

"He was a pimp — I saw his paperwork." Twister insisted. "Stayed to himself, an old guy, but had heart..."

149
Twister did not mind telling all the races. He told the Whites, Blacks, even the Mexican gangsters. He recognized a “cop killer” who in his mind graduated with honors from Chino’s Men’s Colony. He stood real close to the television until the next segment developed. He could care less about a Mexican dope dealer, so he wandered back to his rack.

Twister thought long and hard about Charlie, then flopped on his bunk that was draped like some gypsy bungalow. Soon guards will turn off the television and lights out. “Two more weeks of lockdown,” he said to himself. “I’m gonna get that punk who did this shit to us…”

Comfortably institutionalized, Twister lived in lock step with his routine. Living for fighting, scheming and lock downs; and Chino happily accommodates him and all the others who pass through. Happily churning out racists and cop killers; men pining to escape then run from the gate.

Eric Stengel turned off the monitor as soon as the segment on Paul Goff was over. He felt regret – a kind of shame – that this case has not been resolved. He was ashamed that the killer of Paul Goff is at large and that his superiors passed the matter off to a television show. It made him sick; sick that with the vast resources of Homeland Security one man – a cop killer no less – could manage to escape from New York City in broad daylight. Escape and remain at large these many months.

He managed to pitch a concept to Deputy Director Campbell. An idea that seemed a kind of re-invention; something revolutionary in isolating and tracking suspects; he’s been working on web generated cookies in order to identify wanted fugitives: a digital shadow.

“After all,” Eric told Campbell, “advertisers and search engines are doing precisely this right now targeting consumers’ we’re simply targeting fugitives in the same way.” He argued.

Stengel understood there’s a sinister subterranean data exchange. This is after all an advertising ecosystem that supports free online content. So far all this data fine tunes advertising targeting demographics thus maximizing profits. What the public see is a pop up – a bit of advertisement – Eric sees something bigger: the bigger picture.

Eric just designed a program based upon existing cookies captured during crime scene discovery. His first attempt will include the computer retrieved from the Breckenridge attributed to the cop killer Bates. Suspecting its browsing history will be his online fingerprint, he will examine the computer suspected to have been used by Goff’s killer.
Deputy Director Campbell listened to Stengel. He saw before him a treacherous young man with dead eyes whose weapon is the computer. He understood fully what young analyst Stengel was attempting to do. Knowing this technology did not exist when he was an analyst under Reagan’s Administration. That such forensic intrusion existed in only nascent form when the Twin Towers fell.

One key step was the creation of the World Wide Web in 1990. Another was the opening of the internet to the public for commercial use in 1991.* (*Source: One Click: Jeff Bezos and the Rise of Amazon.Com/ Richard L. Brandt; Portfolio/Penguin 2011 p.43)

Campbell listened patiently. These tools are phenomena of young Stengel’s generation. He could only wrestle with its moral implications. Never before in the history of human existence has so much data been gathered about so many people for the sole purpose of selling product or sidestepping constitutionally protected personal liberties. He just sat back in his chair rubbing his large shining bald head recalling when he was a member of the government’s select team examining the construction of Mosaic in 1993 as a student at the University of Illinois.

As a military analyst, the Navy sent him to the Champaign-Urbana campus to listen and learn about Mosaic, America’s newest graphics based browser. He realized then as only a germ what Stengel today has concluded – what he now has constructed – As insidious as knows it to be, he must react as a cop. He must react as he’s been trained.

“Ok. Go with it,” was all Campbell said. Yet under his breath he whispered, “…and God help us all.”

The world is closing up around us all, he thought. He knows he must know every water spout a rat may drink from. Homeland Security has transformed the internet into a place where people are becoming anonymous in name only, he reasoned.

“Anonymous is meaningless,” Eric told himself as he got up from in front of Campbell’s desk “It matters little if your name is Jim Jones or John Smith, or a number, or even a symbol. It is persistence which is essential: “Tracking Behavior! This is the key to the program. Track Behavior and soon there will no longer be anywhere on earth for anyone to hide.” Eric said to himself as he moved diligently back to his desk preparing to tweak his new programming project.
“[The self driving system] has no bad habits. It doesn’t speed. It doesn’t tailgate and it has no middle finger.” — Tom Jacobs, DMV
On Google’s Toyota modified to operate without a human driver. (Source: Boston Herald; Friday May 11, 2012)

Chapter 20

Tips poured in: a man near Camelback and Central, a bedroom community in Arizona reported seeing Charlie Bates in a house across the street from his; a S.W.A.T. team was dispatched. Turned out, after a four hour stand off it was a neighbor who’s son was dating the daughter of the reporting party – they’ve had a vendetta going back many years.

In Miami Beach, a report of a Charlie Bates sighting was used as a false emergency to cover up a liquor store robbery.

Thousands of tips from across the country flooded in. Tips from concerned citizens overwhelmed detectives. Finally, leads were simply filed away into a folder that would grow inactive as time itself worked against them.

......

Eric spent weeks writing code and studying hard drives. He began developing a programming code similar to that of a search engine. A words and phrases code: words and phrases associated with a target.

Reading Charlie Bates’ e-mail, his posting from Craigslist — web sites visited — in all, Eric was pleased with his results. In a matter of a few short weeks he created a model of a new kind of killer.

“A madman is a fluke,” he told himself, “but a calculating, manipulative and emotionless killer is a danger to society now and forever.”

Based on a pattern, he tracked online behavior. A footprint to follow; and in so doing he managed to write code for an entire forensic process. A process limited to a single fugitive; or as unlimited as the internet itself.
Chapter 21

Raven walked through her kitchen trailed by Tabitha and Stevie. She walked slowly while both old dogs seemed to mock her with their sluggish morning routine. “Coffee’s brewed,” she said to Tabitha, “Artie’s awake.”

And Tabitha and Stevie searched for their morning bowls waiting till food was plopped and dropped from a big tin can.

Falling into her deep couch – sunshine filled her living room. She set her coffee cup loudly on a saucer, turning on her lap top and checked her e-mails. Most messages decidedly went to her junk folder or trash bin. A few appeared suspicious, so she outright deleted them. A few tried selling her medication for erectile dysfunction – these went immediately to a spam folder. “I have no need for Viagra,” she smiled looking toward her tenant lover’s room. “He’s awake…” she told herself.

Opening e-mails she curled her legs under herself then tapped away. Occasionally reading news on a banner; reporting streamed like a ticker, or visiting community bulletin boards. And then posting her profile on a web site devoted to employment opportunities.

“Artie, do you want breakfast?” Her call was greeted by silence. “Artie, are you home?” Only silence.

“Where is he…” she huffed getting up.

Walking from the couch, she needed to know if she’s alone. Quietly, opening his door – silently; the room’s empty. And she smelled his room: smelled him. A masculine clean smell pushed away the stale odor of her old empty room.

His bed’s made; his clothes folded. He must be at work, she figured. And about to turn, something caught her eye – something under the mattress – something catching a piece of blanket; she saw what looked like a black comb or hair brush.

She decided to fix the bed, when suddenly she realized instantly: “it’s no brush or comb – it’s a handle of a pistol!”

At that moment she felt fear and awe grip her legs, loins, chest and mind. “A gun under his mattress!” shouting to herself loudly. And her legs grew weak. Her hand reached for it, and she held it. It felt heavy in her hand. Her face felt hot – flushed with blood. And oddly, she went wet with desire.

Only after some moments of caressing it, feeling its solid construction and remarkable weight and balance did she carefully return it to where it belonged. Doing all she could not to disturb its place. Sensual, erotically forbidden – what she discovered made her uncomfortably moist.
Rushing like a trespasser, she returned to her dark room and unmade bed. In heat she masturbated furiously. Whatever gripped her felt safe, private and necessary. Every nerve was itching. All she did was focus on her mysterious tenant – her lover – overwhelmed: his gun made him - in her mind - dangerous...unpredictable...and stronger than any man she's ever been intimate with.

Hotly, she bee winged her fingers over her swollen need until she came loose convulsing in spastic starts. Her body shook 'till she was done and free to think of what she'll do. Feeling free of it all, what seemed left are only questions lingering like heat and smell and yearning. “Where is he....” She wondered. Every emotion leaving her except one: fear.

.............

Butterflies can fly because their whole modus operandi is to travel light. Charlie Bates feels at the moment he's as light as he's ever been. He feels no duty to make a bigger deal than needs to be made about anything.

Unaware of any manhunt – only knowing there's one rampaging – days spent in crowds anonymously posting on Craigslist picking up clients – enough to live hand to mouth. Comforted knowing he had Raven, her home and dogs and life.

Dreams lately grip him with terror. Vivid peeks into a kind of future. Looking into his future from stealing moments of what was his past. Moments from jail foreshadow a harrowing future.

He watched his new life as a view from the back of a corrections transport. Focusing his eye, providing perspective - separating all he knows of life and living into a dream he hoped for. Accepting promises made will not be kept. A hope once driving him toward freedom seems now a dream sold. “He was sold a dream,” Charlie Bates said to himself finally.

His mind moved swiftly. His morning walk through Cambridge allowed him a chance to think. Following the same path Raven showed him, the one taking him into Harvard. He walked past parks and bridges. Memories stirred of some hope for some kind of future. The same future each of us fight for daily - yet is fleeting.

Living alone under a bridge or by a culvert is beyond him now. Now he can only live at the mercy of Raven or Cynthia or Linda or whoever may have a couch or spare room with no questions asked.

At Harvard Square he sat for coffee in a crowded café. A chill in the air drove customers indoors. He saw in the faces of students their hope and dreams just like the ones he once had. And he wondered if they would be able to survive the same mistakes he had made? Will their future permit anything other than zero tolerance? Or will their
future be predetermined by a computer program; a DNA database; anonymous authority; public opprobrium and public policy. Sipping his coffee he just sat and wondered.

........

Harvard and institutions lie it are where public policy is ultimately shaped. Students mold futures. And there is no place in this future for the likes of a Charlie Bates and his antique notions of independence.

........

And a student sat with eyes searching for some kind of direction. In front of him every asset of our modern digital economy. Hair a reckless mop; a face unworn, unlined; a plain face anonymous. No scars from lost years or any suggestion of distress or care.

A young student with white clear eyes and ideas of collectivism having read a book about assimilation; it's the face of the world that sets the rules and stacks the deck. Today, technology strengthens its grip: an illusion of democracy.

A student armed to the teeth with the weapons of modern culture - a laptop computer and state of the art digital cell phone capable of high speed communication, application's galore. Instant images captured both still and video in high definition. This student like the rest: all connected entirely to the World Wide Web.

Eyes in the coffee shop appeared drawn to Charlie Bates. Searching this old man. Like guards on a beach searching for sharks in the water; our young student took a silent high definition image, then downloaded it into a photo bucket share network.

As instantly as the old man's image was taken and downloaded: an e-mail marked urgent demanded to know where this image was taken. The e-mail was marked FBI FUGITIVE RETRIEVAL. Momentarily, the student's cell phone chirped. The relationship in time from photo download to law enforcement contact was a swift ten minutes. The student, smug at first, irritated his important thoughts were interrupted by such an impertinent intrusion finally agreed to cooperate eagerly with the investigation.
“He was a handsome man
And what I want to know is
How do you like your blue-eyed boy
Mister Death” – E.E. Cummings

Chapter 22

A sudden bump!
A sounding squawk-
Cops at the door.

Hearing squeal...squeal...squeal – only not all at once; it could have been squeak. Squawk...squawk. Charlie thought. It was from outside his window. All over: everywhere. Ravens apartment felt empty. She’s gone and the dogs are gone and he realized he’s alone now.

Remembering that in the morning Raven sat perched on her couch like the biggest nesting bird in North America tapping away at her lap top: making friends and liking likes. Her determination focused on social media hoping her computer would guide her future like some high tech crystal ball.

Sounds from outside Ravens house suggested dead reckoning – he’s caught, he realized instantly. It seemed to come upon him with a whimper. There’s no shriek of sirens – more an elaborate exercise - business as usual. So he took a shower. There doesn’t seem to be any hurry. Not now.

S.W.A.T. operates methodically – staging areas and perimeters. Nothing special about special weapons and tactics; they’re paramilitary that’s all. They’re the ones with the expensive overkill, ones with the license to kill.

Residents were escorted to a staging area. Teams set up their ballistic blankets neatly in front and around so that at once this quaint old home took on a look of battlement at a siege.

Tethers secured doors and windows. Charlie Bates realized instantly he’s trapped so he used his moments of freedom to reflect. Perhaps as an actor on a stage would observe as he mouths lines in front of an audience. He pulled at the front door and it slammed closed firmly. He was barricaded. Trapped and contained. Police moved by degrees, fiercely.

In psychiatry there’s a certain condition known as delusion of reprieve. Delusion of reprieve is where the condemned man immediately before his execution gets the
idea he will be pardoned at the very last moment. Even he could not hope for this notion. He could only watch the special weapons and tactics team move ferociously bit by bit.

And so he looked out every window of Ravens old house and faced with being completely surrounded he decided to take a shower.

Should he leave a letter? He had little to say. How could he put gratitude in to words, in a letter at a time like this? How could he tell them that he was comfortable with women until women became complicated and relationships became complicated and he could not give them what they wanted: himself. That suddenly he grew older and realized sex and money were one in the same and that promises made in youth would fall flat with age.

In the Summer of Love the only place where any of us found our future happening was on the radio and records – otherwise it was all about exploring wildly. Today its television and computer; in the future it will only be the computer and internet: and conforming wildly.

He wanted to play music now. But he doesn’t know where Ravens radio is. She’s been a slave to digital music over her headphones. Thinking, this drama needs a soundtrack he thought about California Dreaming and thought how appropriate that was now.

........

After his shower, wet and clean, he looked again out the front window. He watched Raven point at her house. She was visibly hysterical standing next to an armored personal carrier guarded by two heavily armed police officers in body armor.

Watching her pointing at her house – the look on her face was bewildered, confused, sad and disappointed all at once. Behind her, Tabitha and Stevie looking about with little doggy smiles just pissing and telling each other: “see I told you so.”

........

So he sat back on her deep dirty couch looking into a mirror on a wall. He had a look of a man who’s faced tragedy. Not a tragedy like a hurricane or natural disaster, but a human disaster. A crisis set in his spirit; a crisis from hard living. He always could make lemonade from lemons – only now he’s done and he knows it. “Why bother,” was all he said to himself.

He could feel his hopelessness. He’s lost his heart. His beating center – everything that’s given him strength is gone. Now, not even fear seems to make it pound harder. He can’t climb that staircase of pain and suffering anymore.
Charlie Bates has allowed his past to fall heavily on him, and despair gripped him. So he just went to his small room. Not at all in a hurry and reached under his mattress for his gun.

He was not sure why he decided to even keep the gun: damned thing that felt heavy at his side. Watching while K9 units sniffed and posted; watching a bomb squad deploy. The Immediate Reaction Team moved step by step, arrogantly.

Precautions were quickly set in place. Suddenly his cell phone began to ring; a distinct sharp ringing. Not its usual ringing, but a long sustained sound as if his phone were possessed by a spirit demanding to be answered.

"Hello"

"This is Chief Russell of the Metro S.W.A.T. negotiations team..."

"What do you want?"

"We want to talk, and resolve this..."

"Resolve what?" Charlie played dumb. He always felt drunks and fools get all the breaks, so he decided to play the fool.

"Charlie, we want this to end peacefully..." Russell said friendly like, right down to using his real first name. A not so subtle clue it's all over. "We have spoken to Raven, we know you are armed and we want you to come out with your hands raised so we can end this peacefully."

There is broad agreement among law enforcement experts: if a suspect raises a weapon and refuses to put it down, officers are justified in taking his life.

"Well..." was all Charlie managed to say. Hanging up abruptly – as a sigh almost, a choking sigh cut off with nothing really to say. What is there to say: "Come get me coppers." No, he had nothing left in him to say.

Figuring he had little if anytime, he only sat with the gun in his lap. And he thought: if his death must come now, how appropriate it comes at the hands of these cops in body armor: a zero tolerance killing.

A stand off with a S.W.A.T. team – if it was not so critical it would be comical, Charlie Bates thought. Armored personnel carriers, deadly pretentious authority; an orderly lockdown of a quiet New England neighborhood.

He can at least leave this world knowing it's not the world he was born into – not a world he's prepared to survive nor thrive, nor feel at peace with.
He listened as the strong loud insistent ringing of his cell phone urgently cried out for an answer. It was the only sound in Ravens musty apartment. The long sustained chirp sadly became the sound track of this drama. He allowed the sound to blister the room.

And finally like a man possessed he stood up, the gun hanging from his arm, and walked to the front door.

He felt like he always had – the first one in the swimming pool. The first one taking the dive. He pulled the barricaded front door open. Gradually the door did give. Troopers with assault rifles aimed at him – Charlie Bates raised his gun. And as he did his life was over.
Chapter 23

Cambridge after action report narrative of Chief John Russell: My team responded to a request from federal and local agencies to assist in a joint engagement with S.W.A.T., IRT, K9 and MSP Bomb Squad and Boston Police to aid in the apprehension of a barricaded fugitive.

SWAT operators and K9 officers began to arrive at the target location and immediately set a perimeter on all four sides of the apartment building. As this was being set an immediate reaction team responded to the suspect’s apartment door and tied it off.

Once the door was secured all the surrounding apartments were evacuated and residents brought to a staging area. SWAT operators set ballistic blankets on either side of the suspect’s door, which lined the façade providing cover for the team.

After all these precautions were set in place, I did make contact with the suspect and began a dialogue with him. Once contacted by the police the suspect became quiet active in the apartment and started to look out all the windows. I engaged the suspect in conversation for about thirty minutes before he discontinued by hanging up the phone and ending all dialogue.

Ten minutes after final contact, the suspect forced open the barricaded front door, produced a firearm and advanced on officers who fatally shot the suspect dead.
Raven collapsed witnessing Arty killed. Everything happening so quickly — watching him come out expecting him to surrender. Although, something told her he wouldn’t. She judged him to be a man who’d had a rough life; a painful past he’d never return to...ever.

He buckled. Forced by bullets to his knees; accepting what he must. She’s not clearly convinced which, it all happened so fast: staccato bursts of pop! Pop...pop, and Arty or Charlie, or whoever he was slumped first to his knees as if praying, then to his side — and died. He tried getting his footing; but, when killed collapsed at her doorstep.

Over hours a victim counselor asked her if she’d be all right. After hours of tears, thinking how it all began, she blamed herself. “It was such a pathetic confused call to police setting all this in motion,” shouted her inner monologue. “And now he’s dead,” her demons telling her hysterically, all the while remembering clearly her 911 call to police:

“I guess this is not an emergency per se,” Raven told the police operator. “But, it has...like...sort of the potential for it to be an emergency.” Her morning voice was conflicted.

“Uh-huh,” was all the dispatch operator said.

“My tenant has a gun, and I’m just a little afraid. I really don’t know anything about him — and well, that didn’t matter — but then I found his gun and, well, I guess I just want to find out a little bit more about him. Is that silly? I told you it’s not an emergency.” Raven recalled saying. Knowing deep down just making such a call must inevitably draw red flags and a host of suspicions.

“So, he’s in there with a gun?” asked the 911 operator.

“Yup, he sleeps with it under his mattress.”

“What kind of firearm is it?”

“It’s a pistol”

“What kind of pistol?”
“A heavy black pistol”

“What kind of pistol?” Again, the operator pressed.

“I don’t know I’m sorry. I’m really upset.” Said Raven crying at what may be her foolishness. “I’m sure it’s nothing.”

“Is it loaded?”

“I don’t know.” Raven just answered glad to have someone to talk this out with.

“What is his name?”

“Arty... he says his name is Arty Segal. He’s very mysterious.”

“Okay. Can you come to the police station or no?”

“I can come to the police station yeah. I mean, I’m just in my pajamas so, because I dashed out. I was afraid.”

“Why don’t you come here and we’ll talk to you.” The operator finally said.

“Okay...” Raven said.

“Okay. You know where we are; right?”

“Yeah”

“Okay. Bye, bye.”

The police station in Cambridge is set on a quiet block reeking with dignity near Central Square. A landmark façade from the past today shelters a technological powerhouse. Officers, most in rich blue uniforms, one taller than the next look tight and efficient as Raven got out of her compact car and made her way to the front desk.

In her black housecoat and red pajamas Raven looked a mess. Her pale face and swollen worried eyes filled with housefro tears. She came hoping for answers. Standing waiting for sympathy and some direction she was quickly approached by a solid tree trunk of a detective in a dark simple suit.

“Raven, I’m detective Martin; I listened to your 911 call, what seems to be the matter?”

“I don’t know really, maybe I’m being silly. I rented my spare room to a man that I really don’t know...”
"How did you meet this man?" Martin interrupted. He gently paused.

"...I put an ad on Craigslist." Raven continued.

"Oh, I see."

Martin’s eyes looked down. He trained himself to always look to the ground as a technique in order to keep a poker face no matter what he may actually be thinking. He needed to maintain a detached indifference to certain facts. No matter, he was saying to himself: "here we go again, another vulnerable woman scammed off Craigslist."

"Now, let’s talk about the gun – do you know whether he has a license to carry a gun?"

"I don’t know."

"What does the firearm look like?"

"Well," Raven began, "it’s black and pretty big."

Again, Martin stopped her saying: "Why don’t we talk in my office."

Raven followed Detective Martin to a desk with a computer monitor. He turned the screen so that it faced Raven. He just asked her to look at a few images of suspects. "Now, I want you to describe Arty to me." Martin said typing in basics: race, coloring, hair color, eye color; scars, tattoo’s, age, and so on. "Take your time. If you happen to see anyone resembling your tenant just let me know."

As images crossed the monitor, Raven told Martin she suspected her tenant may have been to jail, "he has that look," she said. Suddenly, a face materialized she recognized.

"Wait, I think. Yes, that’s Arty." She spoke up casually surprising even herself.

Martin looked at the image of Charlie Bates which was provided just earlier by the FBI. "Armed and dangerous," it read.

From that moment Raven’s life changed dramatically. Sensing an intense shift suddenly in Detective Martin, words could only describe as controlled dynamite exploding deep in a shaft, it all erupted as a call to arms. And all at once events took on an inescapable sense of urgency. Instantly and quite unknown to her she felt from that moment on terribly alone - a bystander to events unfolding – she felt incidental to the entire process she herself seemed to have instigated. And she wanted to somehow shout "No! No – I made a mistake," yet even that’s impossible now she realized.
Finally Raven could only recall through tears afterwards, while she sat emotionally raw and helpless to scrutiny; after crime scene tape is gone; after bullet proof blankets have been removed; after blood has been hosed away and the siege is over: Arties dead.

Now all that’s left are neighbor’s eyes cutting the glass of her living room window. Fingers point in self righteous mockery. Her life of anonymous retreat walking her dogs, living simply with her hope and desires shattered like a scene from some formula horror show. “Arty, what did I do,” she asked herself. “Forgive me,” she said to herself only. What she learned terrified her. What she was finally told by Detective Martin horrified her. Told she was harboring a fugitive. Told she concealed a man wanted for the worst kind of homicide: killing a member of law enforcement. But, she could only remember him in her own narrow way as a man holding to life like most hold on to a summer vacation. “He was not that guy” Raven told herself. Telling herself, soothing herself just enough to live with herself.

Paradoxically, she felt she’s the last of many who’ve betrayed Arty or Charlie or whatever name he’s used, whoever he really was she felt she needed his forgiveness. Sitting perched on her couch, looking at her lap top like it was some living creature. “This generation’s grown up with this thing...this technology,” telling herself, “and as we die off so too will our values die with us.” Now more than ever Raven craved the intimate touch of sympathy, instead she is suffering the tyranny of guilt, of lonesome negativity.

And so, living as before — alone — she’s unsure of herself; afraid yet turning to her computer — leery. Web sites she once desperately fed off, she now approach with caution; dwelling now in memories which bring sharp pain to her heart. Tabitha and Stevie blinking confused, unaware, over events beyond their doggy ken. Keeping vigil all the while Raven stumbles around the internet friending friends and liking likes.
Afterward

Sarah Sweet walked from her apartment on West End Avenue near Riverside Drive to her office most mornings. Some days she’d take the bus, but today she walked because it was cool and crisp and close to winter.

Youthful even for past sixty, she’s old enough to remember the change in New York City neighborhoods. Like seasons coming and going - in her mind - it’s always winter as she walks through Times Square. Like winter, Times Square is a cold place. Recalling that in the 1990’s small businesses were plowed away like unwanted snow drifts; she walked now past a different center of the universe.

Sarah stopped for a moment in front of a trendy modern building – one built pretty recently, it was built after the last one collapsed: literally. Now a wholesome chain store takes up the location where once the Grand Luncheonette stood for many years.

There was something about New York City then – an orange Julius in a paper cup and a hot dog was all it took to be a New Yorker.

She walked from Eighth Avenue across Forty-Second Street remembering how she’d stop for a nosh at that little luncheonette with the grand name. The owner, a man with the eyes of a teacher served up food with both hands. It really seemed he took care with each order. Oh, what his eyes must have seen, she thought. She stood on the same spot where she had stood nearly a quarter of a century ago. An enamel overwhelmed her as she recalled an establishment just two-hundred and fifty square feet but meant so much as a reference point to a generation. It was an essential piece of the jig saw puzzle that was Times Square.

Sadly, the city of New York had other ideas for Times Square. The old man and his hot dog stand were evicted in 1997. In its place the city created perhaps the grandest bureaucracy ever developed swiftly: the Times Square Redevelopment Commission. Gone are the hawkers and honky-tonks. Gone is one more follicle of hair on the head of a once great city.

Sarah took a cup of coffee from a well known national brand bistro and entered her glass tower. She did present identification daily - security is video taped and she doesn’t want to get Jack the security man in trouble.

Her mind’s distracted knowing today’s show will be a two hour slug fest with Karen Sower over the cities stop and frisk program which lately has come under judicial scrutiny.
The Mayor, always finding ways to crack down on citizens in his own fashion, ordered his top cops to stop and frisk people on New York City streets. In just the first three months of this practically fascist edict two hundred thousand stops were made.

This policy allows any officer to stop a person based on reasonable suspicion, which is a lower standard than that of probable cause. Probable cause is the usual justification for making an arrest. Any cop with a gun and desire may determine reasonable suspicion. "In New York City just being a member of a minority group qualifies." Sarah Sweet said to herself.

Talk radio studios are dark quiet places. Behind sound proof doors in impeccable offices is where all the shouting and controlled chaos plays out.

"Good morning," Karen Sower said quickly. "They killed Goff’s killer," she said as she cooled her coffee with small puffs through her heavily made up lips. "Massachusetts...Cambridge no less."

Sarah just stopped for a moment pausing dramatically. "Do we have copy?"

"On your desk"

"What happened?"

"He was living with some woman in Cambridge. You remember that video wanted poster?"

"Yeah"

"Out of nowhere his picture pops up on some social networking site; ‘supposed to be the new thing with these kids – taking pictures of strangers and downloading them on social network sites,” said Karen rolling her eyes.

"A complete invasion of privacy, I know all about it."

"Well, invasion or not, it got a cop killer off the street – permanently."

"How will be present it?" Sarah just asked.

"We did good with our unified front last time – if you can ratchet down your "invasion of privacy" indignity we can get through this – we owe it to Paul Goff after all to present it with dignity."

"I agree," Sweet said. "But I don’t want to give that bastard who killed him more air time than is necessary."
“Agreed”

Sweet and Sower began their program with a fresh tag line: "It’s what’s Trending – America!"

Trends are what pass for traditions today. Long gone are so many physical links to our past. What we are left with are passing trends. Social media, social networks, all fleeting; moral imperatives and contempt for institutions like the judiciary and executive government diminish us all. Only police power is respected today. Places like sterile correctional facilities are respected. These institutions exist beyond the pale of trending America. They stand alone immutable – unchanging – and now more than ever unchangeable.

“So it seems New York City is one step closer to Berlin in 1939.” Sarah Sweet said loudly.

"Whoa...just one minute Sarah – I resent your suggestions” Karen Sower said quickly. "Stop and frisk takes guns off the streets plain and simple! Stop and frisk saves lives!"

"This cavalier attitude toward a wide spread practice of suspicionless stops displays a deeply troubling apathy toward New Yorkers’ fundamental constitutional rights.” Said Sarah doggedly.

“Sarah listen to me – stop and frisk has taken more than six thousand guns off the street in the last eight years – this city is on track to have its lowest ever number of murders. I think the Mayor’s on the right track and doing a great job.”

“Karen, if they took the Bill of Rights and threw it in the garbage you would think it a job well done.”

"That’s not true and not fair.”

"Not fair – well you don’t fit the profile Karen darling of who they stop and frisk. Maybe if you were a black woman..."

"Wait a minute now."

"No you wait, if you were a black woman in Harlem and your son or your husband came home telling stories about cops putting them against a wall in broad daylight – made to stand a frisk – I’ll bet you’d be whistling a different tune.”

“So what; it’s all about race again, right Sarah? Everything with you is about the race card, or big brother cropping in your corn flakes or anything but cops doing their job right.”
“Look Karen, it’s no secret New York cops have been described as corrupt, abusive and violent. I think you can add to that a racial bias – yes!”

“Look, I disagree entirely. New York Police patrol a jungle and I’m damned glad they do.”

“A jungle Karen? New York’s a jungle?”

“Some parts, look. To be honest, there may be something to the argument that the department has imposed a quota system. Performance goals, I think they call it. So what. It gets the job done.” Karen relented.

“Gets’ the job done – come on Karen,” Sarah sighed deeply. “The end justifies the means, that old saw. I’ve heard it too many times over too many years.” She paused. “We will take a break – we will return with breaking news, the killer of Paul Goff has been caught and killed by authorities in Massachusetts today.

Both ladies stopped talking. It was as though they existed in their own separate universe. Each just relaxed in their comfortable chairs. Perfume wrestled in the air. Soft light, rich wood and gleaming electric consoles gave the space an almost sensual intimacy.

Behind a sound proof glass an engineer carefully kept track of time and advertisement segments. Always with an eye to the business of the program, and watching power and sound checks.

Again, the announcer set up the Sweet and Sower show. America is trending as it promised:

“We in America would have been appalled just a few years ago by this nation’s demand for personal data – but just look at us now,” said Sweet, “archiving information is trendy and acceptable, treating citizens like suspicious subjects is ok today. We allow our government to archive phone numbers, birth dates, travel information – what was frighteningly intrusive when I was growing up is today thoroughly acceptable.”

“Well, Sarah – it’s necessary it seems. Look at the case of Paul Goff – his killer just today was captured and killed during an armed standoff.”

“After a long manhunt...”

“And he was only captured apparently because of a random image taken by a student who then posted it to a social network of images – so for all your objections painting the devil on the wall – in a way – it worked. It worked to take a cop killer off the
street – there is a tangible benefit to all this intrusion of privacy as you call it.” Karen said, her voice both calm and sympathetic.

“*A sane killer is scarier than a psycho,*” said Sarah morosely, “*we must look beyond madness. In my view this world we have crafted is itself creating crime and killers.*”

“Well, Dr. Freud, is that an observation or professional opinion.” Sower said sharply.

“It’s my opinion – just from my gut. And your dig about Freud – well read Society and its Discontents sometime and get back to me. I live on this planet just like you – I see it, I feel it and deep down I know it.”

“Charlie Bates was a ruthless mad dog, nothing more.” Karen said dismissively.

“A mad dog killer ... alright Karen...that’s our spin.”

“What’s that supposed to mean...our spin?” Karen’s voice raised defensively.

“Look around Karen. Too often lately we pick up the newspaper and see this trend. A guy with a gun killed after a standoff with the police. When I was young this kind of thing rarely happened. Today, it’s commonplace: as common as the news itself.”

“Sarah, you’re just proving my point – we must have strict gun enforcement – stop and frisk, and programs like it take guns out of the hands of criminals.”

“Stop and frisk is a heavy handed reaction to a deeper problem. Stop and frisk is giving a body with cancer an aspirin.”

“So what are you saying?”

“Today it’s Charlie Bates killing Goff and himself being killed, tomorrow it will be another disgruntled American killing or robbing or selling drugs or any of hundreds of other felonies designed by lawmakers. But no one is addressing the issue: it’s a break down in culture plain and simple. A world closing in – and a world where there is zero tolerance for basic human rights, dignity – there is contempt for every institution but money and police power.”

“You’re losing me Sarah, are you feverish?”

“And it is technology and a hyper economy fueling it all....” Sarah said finishing her creed.

“Hell no, I don’t even use these web sites.” Karen said trying to follow Sarah’s rant. “I hate them, because I don’t like everybody knowing my business, and I don’t think
people need to know.” Karen finally added, pausing and looking confused. “My husband does texting and downloading and surfs the web everywhere, restaurants, meetings – I can’t stand it. But for a lot of people it’s the center of the universe.”

“It will grow to become literally the center of the universe,” said Sarah carefully. “And for a lot of people it represents the end of all they know or remember. For too many it is the death knell of a lost past.”

“How does that relate to what we are talking about here Sarah?”

“I guess its all about an orange Julius and a hot dog Karen.”

“Ok now you’ve lost me…”

“What I want is to just sit in the park, stand still and let something of what was remain as it was.”

“Come on Sarah – get with it. The world is not about to slow down for any one to lament the past. You want to relive history – go to a museum. New York’s got plenty of ‘em.” Karen said indifferently.

“Yeah, New York’s got plenty.”

End
May 2012

This work was begun February 2011
Completed end of May 2012
While all original manuscript is essentially a “corrected rough draft” it is for all intent and purpose A completed master.

Charles N. Diorio

Signed in blue pen
Chapters 19-Afterward 8,354 words
Authors Note

Great Britain recently unveiled a plan to log details about every Web visit, e-mail, phone call or text message in the United Kingdom. The top law enforcement official accused those worried about the surveillance of being criminals or conspiracy theorists.

The government promises not to read the body of e-mails or eavesdrop on phone calls without a warrant. The data would be kept for up to a year.

Home Office Secretary Theresa May said, “Unless you are a criminal, then you’ve nothing to worry about from this new law.”

Privacy group Big Brother Watch said the plan could turn Britain into a “nation of suspects.” – (Source: USA Today – June 15, 2012)

----------

[On Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s ban on consuming sugary soft drinks over 16oz] “First there was Big Tobacco, and now we have Big Sugar. Your Friday interview with Katie Bayne, Coca-Cola’s president of sparkling beverages in North America, made me cringe. Is there no end to the reach of the Nanny State? I cringe because of her need to offer up excuses for the very existence of Coca-Cola. “What our drinks offer is hydration,” Bayne tells us (Money).

In the litigious and politically correct world the left has built for us, where individuals are never held responsible for their own behavior when there are deep-pocket corporations to blame and bilk, no wonder Bayne has to say soda pop has some sort of health benefit.

Big Sugar is trapped, just like Big Tobacco. I wish she had simply laid it down straight: “Yeah, sugar water is bad for you. But people love it and want to buy it. This used to be a free country.”

I hope that one day, scientists (correctly) link mainstream journalism to the epidemic of stupidity, discontent and unrest. Maybe then all the reporters, commentators and editors will have to justify the existence of their product.” – Kevin Garrett, Valencia California, (USA Today: Letters to the Editor – June 13, 2012)

It is interesting that I have spent many months and thousands of words laboring over Run Charlie Run only to have the guts of my thesis put succinctly into a simple yet compelling letter to the editor.

Charles Diorio
Dedication:
In Gratitude to
Natalie Corvington, an able lawyer
Who juggles hope with Dreams of Freedom

Acknowledgements

As with this novel, these acknowledgements are being written halfway from the beginning of my journey to the last chapter. It is Christmas time 2011 and jails, prisons, and most government institutions shut or slow to a crawl. So I must force a break until my return to a word processor which I use in this jail’s computer program.

I must first thank Sheriff Michael G. Bellotti for his progressive professional operation of his jail: The Norfolk County Correctional Center in Dedham Massachusetts. His humane treatment of prisoners is a refreshing contradiction from the cruel conditions found at the Chino Men’s Colony which is a focus of this Allegory.

Here this Christmas Day sixty-four pre-trial detainees enjoyed a peaceful confinement of cards, conversation and television. Our meal of breast of chicken, sage dressing, rich gravy with fresh steamed green beans, cranberry sauce, milk and bread with “whipped spread” was hot delicious and much appreciated.

My novel is written as an angry virus with a goal to inform an apathetic public of what it already suspects; our nation is off course - broken beyond repair. Dostoyevsky in the 1850’s famously points out a society is judged from conditions in its prisons. His dark masterpiece A Manuscript from the House of the Dead moved me when I read it as a young man – it was written under harsh conditions in a Siberian prison camp. I think of this often as I write in perhaps the safest most comfortable jail in Massachusetts. Jail inmates call the “Dedham House of Protection”. My Siberia is that cold road from manuscript to publication. I write with pen on paper then rush when permitted to a word processor. A computer provided by taxpayers of this Commonwealth; so I do gratefully acknowledge them sincerely. Massachusetts does not suffer half the problems facing states less progressive or reform minded.

I must thank the computer class supervisor Sergio Furtado who runs his program considerately permitting men to learn at their own pace whether a book like this one or a greeting card for a loved one – both are equally important.

I must gratefully thank corrections officers Tolson, Orr, and Hobart and all the many professionals who staff this jail: men and women who do their duty anonymously, consistently. While this novel may paint a sardonic portrait of law enforcement institutions my treatment in Norfolk County Correctional Center remains an unblemished experience of quality care.
This work could not have been completed without the help and support of the many inmates – men whom I met during my time incarcerated. Too many of their faces become a blur. So like a dream is being in jail. Men form fast associations then like phantoms disappear never to be seen again. Lives paused for a miserable awkward moment, days spent with coffee, cards conversation – forgotten. So many names and faces all gone. So I will capture a name or two. A few who read a chapter or let me read a few passages. Men who encouraged me. Allowed me to steal vast amounts of colorful dialogue shamelessly from them. Men like Mike Gallagher or Chris Harper: “you know what it is...” it’s this jailhouse dynamic which becomes a brick and mortar rough draft imprint when I write most of my material.

Finally, I must thank attorney John Fennel who safeguarded my manuscript; who warned me my words – these words in this novel – could be used against me notwithstanding it’s a product of imagination. To him and all I say no book, fiction or otherwise, is significant without risk or jeopardy in its making.