

# Nobody

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A novel by

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## **1971 Somewhere in a war zone**

He was not clean. Fed. Contented. At home. With loved ones. There are more. More words for the same thing. He had none of those things.

As the sun rose, its life-giving rays fell upon a darkness they could not penetrate. Everyone knows this darkness.

“Shouldn’t we surrender before we starve to death?”

“Death? Captivity is death. “

“I am hungry. We weren’t supposed to go hungry. An army travels on its stomach and all that.”

“We cannot surrender for food. We will be beaten by the damn villagers whose cattle we killed and huts we burned down. I doubt they will waste food on either of us.”

“What are we going to do?”

“Our options are limited. We are miles behind the lines. We have no transport or communications. Everyone we came here with is dead. The officers, anyone with a map, are gone.”

“They’ll look for us.”

“Maybe, but not now. Not in time to save us.”

“Why? Aren’t we part of the team?”

“Team? What team? They put us out here to die. They could give a shit. We’re nobody.”

“Nobodies? I get it. Just like the villagers.”

“Yeah, except we follow their orders.”

“Is that better or worse?”

“They ordered us to kill and we killed.”

“Worse. We are worse than nobodies.”

“Nah. There is nobody worse than nobodies.”

The corporal began to laugh. The sergeant stood and offered the younger man a hand up. He pointed to the west. They began to walk.

## **Occupy Somewhere 2012**

Nobody was there when the first homeless veteran showed up.

The sign said 'Veterans Breakfast at 8 AM.' The clock above the door said 3:27. It was dark. The door, clock and sign were only visible in the dim light from a streetlamp on the main street. Everything in the alley, past the door was sheltered in darkness.

He sat down on the cement step with his back against the door. His pack was still on his back.

"I am going to eat first this morning." He said under his breath. He was wearing an army ranger uniform so ragged it looked as if he was born in it. His face was not a uniform kind of face. A large scar deformed his nose and the left side of his mouth. He'd lived with the scar for almost two-thirds of his life. He never looked into anyone's eyes. The faces of strangers might tell him how ugly he had become. That was his fear. Mirrors and windows were avoided for the same reason. He had no idea what he looked like.

"Good morning, Corporal." A voice from far down the alleyway drifted by. "It's me. Sarge. I let you be first today."

"Why?"

"I am too sick to eat. Cancer's got me."

Corporal rose and walked to sit beside his friend.

"I've got a few pills. Want one."

"Nah. No point. Won't be here long enough to swallow it. Haven't swallowed in a few days already."

"Sarge, I'm not silly. You are trying to kill yourself by starvation. That's so against my religion, it pisses me off."

Sarge was a disaster. The corporal looked healthy by comparison. The older man laid next to an overloaded dumpster at the end of the alley. The darkness was near complete. An hour more to go before the darkest moment.

The sound of footfalls drew their attention. Trained to hide, they closed their eyes and shallowed out their breathing. They were dark and dull in the shadows at the end of the dead-end alley.

The flashlight walked slowly down towards them swinging side to side searching the spaces where a man could lean against the walls of the buildings that towered above the alley.

“Stay back.” Sarge said aloud. “I have the plague.”

The light turned off.

“I am looking for people sleeping outside tonight.” A male voice said.

Sarge and Corporal had been found a few times and knew how to evade capture.

“I’m just drunk. I don’t live here. Go away.” Sarge said.

The footfalls drew closer.

“We are crazy and dangerous. Stay back.” Corporal offered.

“Oh, there are two of you. My name is John. I mean no harm. Who are you?”

“Nobody.”

“Nobody.”

“Two nobodies.” John said. “Are you veterans?”

The veterans waited silently. Corporal wished the damn goody-two-shoes would go away.

“Go away.”

“No.”

“Then sit down and be quiet.”

About two hours passed before anyone else arrived. The three men stayed in place. No one said anything. Sarge slept. Corporal sat listening.

Another hour and the reflected sunlight revealed what the darkness concealed: An alley ended in a three-sided, roofless brick cell without doors or windows.

It was not completely a cell. There was a way out. One might physically escape yet if one was there, at the end of the alley, there was something stronger than brick walls that imprisoned. It was a dead end.

At the door with the sign ‘Veterans Breakfast 8 AM’ a line was forming, almost entirely men, entirely nobodies. Or so it seemed by comparison to Corporal and Sarge.

Further down the alley sat a man with a hat, coat and umbrella. His flashlight was in his overcoat pocket. It was one of those big ones, long with four D batteries. Big enough to be a weapon. In alleys things happen. Sometimes dogs. His name was John. He was 42. He was looking for his father who had disappeared into the darkness a few years ago.

Further yet was the end. There was an array of trash bins, arranged by whoever used them in an arc leaving two hidden places in the very corners at the end. Sarge laid on his back in one of the corners. Corporal sat next to him his back against the wall. This was the last place the light could go.

John could not see them. The line of hungry veterans did not seem to notice. He rose and moved towards the corner.

“My name is John Wright. I am looking for Sergeant Jonas Wright.”

Corporal heard what was said. He was sober and clean. Nonetheless, his mind did not process sound and speech in an unbiased way. He did not enjoy the company of others. He could not converse without emotional pain.

“Sarge, what’s your name?” He shook his friend’s body. “Someone’s looking for you, maybe.”

The Sergeant sat up, his mouth struggling against dryness that made speech difficult. He had been at the end of the alley for four days trying to die in the darkness.

“Name. Master Sergeant Jonas Wright.”

“Did I hear that? Is that you Dad?” John said.

## **Nobody is saved**

Sarge knew he had a son. He knew him as a baby before he deployed and was MIA, lost in Asia. The son never saw his father again once he left for the battle field. He had to settle for the wounded man who was sent back to his family to care for, for the rest of his life.

Sarge was not a returning prisoner. He was just a survivor. If he was a prisoner, he might have been somebody. His amazing escape from capture drew no notice. The army discharged him within 60 days of his walking into the outpost with his corporal, Corporal Alonzo Munoz, who was cut on the face and bleeding still.

He slept for almost a week. The seventh night the outpost received over 50 rounds of 30 mm rocket fire. His hut was hit. He and Corporal were medevac'd out. They could not fight. They could only die there. Someone made a calculation and they were safe at last aboard a ship bound for Okinawa and Hawaii.

"The universe aligned to help me. Imagine that." Sarge said to his son, John who sat by his bed.

John was 5 at the time.

"Trust yourself, Johnny boy." Sarge would say. "We are nobodies. Nobody helps us. Nobody is perfect. We help each other."

More than ten years passed. Sarge did nothing. He sat and stared. He would mumble. As John grew up, he spent less time with Sarge. Sarge's now ex-wife and John's mother had moved on when he was MIA. She was so lonely. When John graduated from high school she moved out. That left John with Sarge. John, too, grew lonely. There were feelings hurt. Words were exchanged.

Ten more years passed in silence or horror. One morning John could not find his father.

His bed was empty. John thought it might be a sign of the existence of a god. When Sarge did not return as he had in the past when he had gone on a night

patrol, as Sarge called his wanderings in the darkness, John began to worry. The search for his father commenced.

Five years later the search ended in the dead-end alley.

## 1988 The Left Coast

John sat at the bar sipping a draft beer. He had been on his feet for almost six hours. Happily, nothing very disturbing had happened. He and his friends had organized a huge turnout for the federal hearings on offshore oil drilling. They had organized their own non-violent security force.

The site was a hotel auditorium in Eureka, California. It seated 750 people. All the seats would be taken that day.

As the morning began the first arrivals entered the lobby. These were three dozen law enforcement officers from surrounding communities. John met with them in the lobby to explain the non-violent security force, to introduce the 'chain of command' and to answer questions.

"Any questions?"

"Please, don't throw rocks at me." Said a female officer from a local logging community with its own city police force. "I have two children at home."

John had not thought a concern like that would come up.

"Ah, we, as I said, are non-violent activists. We are trained to keep the peace in crowds without any use of force. None of us is going to throw anything. Where did this idea come from, officer?"

"We were told you made threats to police officers."

"Not us." John said. "If threats were made, someone may be planning, but it is not us."

"What do you want us to do?" Another officer asked.

"We will keep the doors to the auditorium. If we have a problem, we will need your help. The outside is yours by law?" John spoke slowly. "Inside the auditorium, we will be everywhere. If you see a problem inside the auditorium calls us and we will defuse it."

“Or die trying.” Someone said.

“This is a public meeting. We are the speakers. The guests are the hearing officers. No one is encouraged to do anything, but to state their opinions in an orderly and timely fashion.”

The meeting with the LOEs ended with a cooperative tone shared by all that this would be a good day. It was. Except for the woman dressed like a mermaid who poured maple syrup on herself as a demonstration of what an oil spill meant to her. The officers’ concern was that she was pouring actual oil on herself and she would torch herself in protest. John led her out and away.

When he returned, he went to the hotel's bar and a beer.

Five minutes he sat alone. Then two men entered and sat two seats away at the bar. John knew one of them was a hearing officer, probably on a break. The other was a major owner of a large lumber mill who knew him well from prior activities. John’s presence went unnoticed.

“I don’t have to tell you we are in favor of offshore drilling.” The landowner said. “There isn’t a landowner in the county who isn’t for it.”

“Looks like everyone else is against it judging by what we heard this morning. Wasn’t that mermaid and her syrup nuts? People like that are hard to figure.”

“Harold, from the Washington DC perspective things can be confusing. But from here it is not.”

“What do you mean, Woody? These people are constituents. The law says we must listen to them or we wouldn’t be here.”

“You don’t get it? I have trouble with that.”

“I am missing something?”

“Yes, you are. Those people filling the auditorium all together do not own what I own. They own nothing. They are nobodies. Is that clear now?”

“Got to go. Thanks for the drink. See you again I am sure.” Harold, the hearing officer, left.

Woody stayed in his seat, sipping his scotch and water.

John ordered another beer.

Woody turned to see him as if for the first time.

“Oh, you.”

“Hi, Woody.”

“Don’t Woody me, you asshole.” He shot up off his stool, quaffed his drink and ran for the door.

“Sir, your bill?”

“Call a cop.” And left.

“What a piece of work.” The bartender said.

“You know him?”

“And plenty like him.”

## **Nobody's Plan 2013**

"Nobody's perfect."

"Dad, the notion of perfection is about becoming a god." John said.

"What about the notion of 'nobody'?"

"Nobody?"

"Yah. Nobody's perfect says there is a perfect being and its name is Nobody."

"If we could find a perfect being, we would find Nobody. I like it. Perfection is the opposite of power, since the powerless are nobodies. Right?" John laughed at the thought.

"They came to crush the nobodies during Occupy."

"Kinda, but they chose the leaders to pick on. They weren't nobodies. They were becoming somebodies by leading. Oh, and it was nobodies who attacked the nobodies in Occupy. The order came from 'above.'"

"The powerful made a distinction between the nobodies and their leaders? Or did the leaders forget who they were and drew attention to themselves through action?"

"As in if it moves crush it. Power teaches the nobodies, yet they misuse what they have learned?"

"Yeah. Like there is no room among the somebodies so every new candidate must be able to defend themselves against the attacks the somebodies will bring. If the force used is economic, it is defeated by competition since the existence of economic power means money and therefore there must be a somebody involved."

"So, for a nobody to challenge economic power it must be with the power of the many nobodies. To recognize this power means to become somebody and

therefore a threat to the somebodies. Dad, where does this go do you think? Popular rebellion? Or being a nobody is to accept one's lot in life."

"Nope. No one, but a nobody, has the power for perfection. Perfection is not about anything other than being perfectly free of other interests, interests described as interests of the somebodies. A perfect being would thus be unassailable."

"They would have nothing to steal. They cannot be discomfited. To be imprisoned is the same as not."

"Don't be silly. That's a somebody belief. Some say slavery is better than freedom. As long as it is the nobodies one is talking about, then it doesn't really hurt anyone at all."

"The powerful need rationales for crushing the nobodies. The powerful always send nobodies to do their dirty work. It's a noteworthy skill for a patrician to control the plebes. Patrician success amongst the patricians requires an army of nobodies fighting for rationales, operating against themselves for the benefit of the patricians. The rhetoric is about the strength and glory the nobodies represent. They have their egos inflated. Death becomes an award."

"God is on our side, blah, blah." Sarge said.

"For the nobodies, the only reward the somebodies offer is heaven. Be good. Don't steal from your betters. Fight for lies. Eat other nobodies' food. Bring back wealth for the somebodies. Die without complaining." John took a breath. "Sarge, you know, I love you."

"Son, as one nobody to another, don't speak a word about our conversation no matter who asks."

"What does that mean?"

"Secrecy is our weapon. When Corporal and I humped out of Asia we talked for hours about our predicament. We were nobodies and all we had was each other.

If we were carrying gold or drugs we would have been attacked by our own helicopters, killed and robbed.”

“I believe you.”

“Not required. There is a plan. We called it the Nobody Wins plan.”

“Nobody Wins?”

“Yeah. Run it around your head for a while. See if it feels comfortable.”

“Sarge, I found you in an alley.”

“Yup. We were perfecting ourselves. A nobody seeks a sign from above, if you know what I mean, a sign means we are saved.”

“Saved?”

“A euphemism about how we transform ourselves into perfection beyond the view of the somebodies with something to lose. We are still nobodies, but we have a plan.”

“Two nobodies with a plan. Pardon my disbelief, Sarge.”

“Belief is poison.”

“What is there then? What can I do?”

“Nothing, like every nobody.”

“I am confused.”

“Hopefully, everyone else is.”

Sarge finished his beer, slapped John on the back, pulled his ranger jacket on, looked at himself in the bar mirror.

“What do you see?” He said.

“A nobody.”

“Good. You know how to reach me.” He left without paying. John was ready for that.

### **Dawn Two weeks later 2013**

Sarge came back to the room he and Corporal shared.

He pulled a small mirror out of his pack and put it on Corporal's bed.

"Look at this."

"No."

"Look at yourself."

"No." Corporal was not completely awake. Sarge had gone on a night patrol, his name for dumpster diving. It was better when no one could see and the temperature was at its lowest. At 4:30 in the morning the smell was at its best.

It was near dawn as the light grew. Sarge could see nothing had happened while he was gone. Corporal had slept.

"Let's review our plan."

"Sarge, it feels like bullshit to me."

"I guess. Would coffee matter?"

"Maybe. Why the mirror? Is that in the plan?"

"The plan is we have coffee and talk."

Corporal rolled over and tried to find sleep again. Sarge ran water into a sauce pan from the bathroom sink. He put the pot on an electric hot plate. Stood back and plugged it in. It made some clicking sounds and began to glow red.

"Give it ten minutes."

"Unh."

Time passed. Sarge sat quietly until the water boiled. He prepared the beans and poured the water through a paper towel.

“Listen carefully. We have been through a few things together. We’ve kept each other alive for almost 40 years.”

“More than 40.” Corporal said.

“OK. I lost more than a few, but that’s over for me. John finding me changed things for the better. You need saving too. I am your only friend. True?”

“Sadly.”

“You wouldn’t be a nobody if you had another friend.”

“Doubt that unless it was the President of the United States.”

“Corporal you made a funny. Let’s take a big step.” Sarge picked up the mirror. He looked at himself. As he did his face began to change. “Wow. I’m old.”

He turned to look at his best friend laying on his left side trying to burrow into his pillow. Sarge saw the young kid he first encountered during the war. The kid was looking like he needed help.

“Corporal, the plan said that one day we would begin. It has been a long time since we made this plan, so interpretation is needed. How I recall it: The first step was to rise up. Now that we have been beaten low that doesn’t take much.”

Corporal rolled over, looked at Sarge then sat up against the wall. Sarge looked right at him.

“It’s not so bad. You aren’t handsome. You look distinguished. You were something somewhere at some time. Your face says that to me.”

“Sarge, I can do it. Give me the mirror.” Sarge did. Corporal raised it to his eyes in an instant. He looked.

“There I did it.” He said as he pulled the mirror down again. “That’s the first time in four decades I have seen myself.”

“What do you think?”

“That must have hurt.”

“You screamed like a mad man for an hour.”

Corporal looked Sarge in the eyes. Two brothers in battle, veterans of a life of disability were closing in on retirement. They sat on the edges of their twin beds facing one another. They had been there a week, sobering up, shaving in the shower, sleeping undisturbed. Sarge had new clothes. Corporal wanted new clothes. His hesitation was about his ranger uniform.

“Sarge, I never want to forget. I wear my uniform because I don’t want to forget the men we lost in battle.”

“I was there. Could have been me.”

“Something in us died there, too.”

The coffee was deemed ready. Sarge poured it.

“Corporal, let’s get back to the plan. Remember how we were not going to let them get us. No matter how we died we didn’t want to die by their hand.”

“I have been confused by that memory. I say those words. ‘I won’t let them get me.’ Well, I don’t remember the names or faces of anyone who was actually after me. Once we stumbled on that Marine outpost, things did not change. Whoever was after me was still after me.”

“I remember having to separate the nobodies from the somebodies. The somebodies have names, as you know. They would say they have good names. They live in nice neighborhoods, send their kids to fine schools and then onto elite colleges and universities. The buildings are named after them.” Sarge stopped.

“Now I remember. It was from far up the chain of command that the order came. Way above our heads. That was forty years ago. Those people must be gone.”

“Corporal, they are not part of the plan.” Sarge stood and dressed himself. As he did, he made certain everything he wore was uniform perfect.

“Sarge, you make that look easy.”

“Nobody said it would be easy.”

“I think we’re onto something. This Nobody business could work. Nobody is the new equality. Nobody wins.”

“I’ve been thinking. This nobody business is funny. It’s like a series of jokes. And more.”

“Sarge. Cease and desist.”

“What?”

“I feel like I am running downhill. My legs are moving faster than is comfortable. I feel a bit out of control.”

## Rise up

Sarge started his life again. The next morning, he jumped from his twin bed with a new mission, he felt new, risen or at least rested and ready to go. He stood in the bathroom at the sink and slowly closed the medicine cabinet door and stared at the mirror image of himself. He smiled. He frowned. He laughed. He asked a question. He felt anger and sorrow. In between, he made silent comments about his reaction to himself.

“I need to get my teeth fixed.” He offered. He wrote it on a mental list he had been working on. He wrote it under 'Haircut' and added 'Girlfriend' below it.

“That's funny.” His thoughts went on to some play on words with rise up. He thought about how to find one and woke Corporal. “Am I too ugly for a woman?”

The drowsy Corporal tried valiantly to grasp his friend's question.

“Are you too ugly for a woman? Ah. Dunno, maybe. You are too ugly for me. That I know.”

“Too ugly for you? What the hell does that mean?”

“Don't get your hopes up, Sarge. You might start drinking again. That alley is still out there.”

“Corporal, roll out. Let's get a move. We begin the plan in earnest today.”

“The plan? Sounds familiar. Does it include breakfast?”

“The Vet Center is having Vet Breakfast.”

“Coffee is weak. I was thinking that when we rose up, we could do Starbucks. I'll buy.”

“Nah. Nobodies don't go to Starbucks.”

“IHOP?”

“Better. They have free coffee for vets.”

“Sarge, I am confused. The two of us are going to start a rebellion? A rebellion of the nobodies like ourselves. We are not trying to be somebody since we see too much danger in it.”

“That's it. Do whatever without drawing any notice.”

“Yet somehow the people who feed on the nobodies will be repelled, as if by magic. Is that it?”

“When we were making our way back into friendly territory, we passed villages and villagers. We were passed by patrols, unseen. I like to think we survived because we were smart enough to avoid detection. The plan demands we remain under the radar.”

“This is where I get confused. What the hell does one do to rebel without being detected as a problem? Do we get guns? Do we form an organization? Get a bank account?”

“Corporal, whether we meant it or not we have been working on that problem for 40 years.” Sarge said. “Ideas are hard to come by. Do nothing and nothing will happen. Do something, something happens. Then you're a somebody and become a target.”

“The trick, I think, is finding something every nobody can do that will be a sign of rebellion.” Corporal said.

As the conversation ran its course Corporal got out of his bed, dressed himself and stood in the doorway of the bathroom. He looked happy. He was clean, rested and, if not raring to go, at least, loyal to Sarge and the idea of starting a fight – the one he and Sarge had dreamed of as they struggled out of one trap after another.

“Sarge, I am happy we are both alive. What can I do to rebel that can be done by any nobody? Is that what we are looking for?”

Sarge stood in the bathroom still watching himself make faces. Corporal stood watching Sarge grin, smile, laugh, express sorrow and every form of emotion he knew. As Sarge continued mugging for the mirror, Corporal sidled closer to him,

until they were standing side by side. Corporal turned to see himself with a grin on his marred face.

“It helps to smile. It helps to see oneself greeted with a joyous face.” Corporal said as he moved his facial muscles to see if he could look happy to see himself.

“Hmm.” Sarge reached for his chin and rubbed it looking for hairs his razor missed. “That's true.”

They stood together until the urge to move out overcame them. Sarge pushed past Corporal until he was nearer the front door. Years of soldiering had left him habitually finding the clear path to the door before issuing an order. Corporal felt him pass behind him while he was still trying to find a smiling face he could present to another's smiling face.

Sarge turned back towards his friend.

“The smile makes a man, the man a woman could want. There is a secret somewhere in there.”

Corporal turned to him and unmasked the smile of a lifetime. “Let's be beautiful human beings. It will shock the hell out of them.”

Sarge laughed.

“Let's move out. I'll walk point and smile at people. You watch them. If they smile at me, you smile at them. Try it a few times. By the time we get to the Vet Center, we'll have something to talk about.”

“The Vet Center? I have been in there damn near every day for a decade or more. I doubt anyone has ever seen my eyes. We are dressed in new clothes. No one will recognize me.”

“Good. Stay a nobody. Be yourself. Smile your ass off. It should be fun.”

“I'll let you know.”

## **Girl Friends**

Charlotte and Ginelle had watched the two nicely dressed men – the men in black suits, white shirts, polished shoes, a tie and a hat when it rained – come and go from the Vet Center for weeks. Charlotte liked the older one. She had sworn men off because they could never appreciate what her nightmares were about. She and Ginelle had been nurses in a Danang hospital and had seen many wounded soldiers. Ginelle had helped a few heal their physical wounds. The non-physical ailments were the scary injuries. She had sworn off men to hang with Charlotte. They had lived together for a long time.

“Ginelle, I want to talk to him. What's his name?”

“His friend calls him Sarge. And he calls his friend Corporal. Don't know their story. They look better than most, like they are up to some good in the world. Corporal has such a beautiful smile.”

“So does Sarge.” Charlotte said.

The two men circulated in the dining area having a few laughs until everyone was gone. Except for them, the two women were the last to move towards the exit and the alley beyond.

Corporal stood at the door, saw them coming, offered his best smile as they approached. He looked them both in the eyes.

The women stopped in front of him.

“Where are you going next?” Ginelle asked. She stood within arm’s reach.

Sarge walked towards them after a short visit to the men's room where he adjusted his smile for the randomness of the City streets. He saw Ginelle and Corporal grinning and talking. He saw the smile on Charlotte's face. He saw her look at him. He smiled towards her, a general smile, not meant to be an invitation, a statement, nonetheless.

Charlotte guessed what was going on. Sarge had a beautiful smile, his teeth looked healthy. He had a nice haircut. His clothes were clean and pressed. Corporal was engrossed in Ginelle's voice and her question.

"Walking." Corporal said.

"Where?"

"With you. To the park. Listen to music. Find sunshine. Grow older."

"OK." She said.

"Let's walk. It will warm a bit today. Sarge and I do this every day, rain or shine." Corporal smiled.

From the moment he opened the door, Corporal knew that Ginelle knew.

The sunshine blinded them.

"Too much of a good thing." Ginelle said as she held her hand up to her eyes. Corporal saw her grimace.

"I never get used to that." he said. This was the rebellion full blown. He was helpless. Nothing he could do would bring a smile back to her face. "Walking to get back in the shadows is all that helps."

"Shadows?"

"Back into the alley. Stand on the East side. When I come out, I look north into the alley, then cross into the shadows. Waiting there is best until the eyes get accustomed to the glare."

Ginelle began to laugh a low and slow laugh as if she was being lightly tickled. Corporal followed her through the door as Sarge walked up from his trip to the head. Charlotte missed the conversation as she was tracking Sarge's steps towards her. They left the alley and its darkness behind them.

Ginelle knew then. Charlotte, too.

Sarge looked at the smile on Charlotte's face. She had never smiled that smile before. He smiled a new smile, one he could not remember having crossed his lips before.

"Sarge," Charlotte said. "I am tired of being lonely."

"Sunshine." Sarge said. It was part question aimed at Charlotte whose smile exceeded any Sarge had seen in the last half century.

"Yes, please." She said. "Where are we headed?"

Sarge knew not to answer that question.

"Ahh. Hmm." Sarge said. "How about following them. They look happy enough for me."

Charlotte turned to see her longtime friend walking hand in hand with Sarge's longtime friend.

"Can I hold your hand? Let's try." She said sticking out her hand. "My name is Charlotte."

"I am Jonas."

"I have questions for you."

"Not good for me. Questions are like live rounds dropping into my hooch." Sarge had not talked with anyone who did not share his life. Corporal was it and he never asked questions about Sarge. The plan yes. Sarge no.

"Still hurts?"

"You know?"

"I know."

"Keep it to yourself. I will. I am different."

"You are right about that. I love the suits. You, two, make a delightful pair. Enough to draw our attention."

"I am afraid of riddles. I silence the voice that speaks that way."

"Am I speaking that way?"

"No one has taken an interest in me in a very long time. I want company more than life." Sarge smiled his most sincere smile.

"You are a prize, Jonas." She said. "And I don't mean cracker jacks."

Sarge looked down at his hand still holding hers. She looked at his eyes as they fell to see their hands joined. With a sigh they turned out of the alley to enter the outer world, seeking happiness, if not contentment. Unusually good and unexpected things happen. When they do, they end with a sigh, a recognition of the wonder the universe can bring.

"What is your first question?"

"What is your favorite color?"

"Blue."

"Do you like to dance?"

"I have no idea." He said. "I have one for you."

"Lemme have it."

"What if Corporal and I had a plan. We have one last mission."

"Combat?"

"Bloodless, at least."

"What's the point?"

"Rebellion."

"Who is speaking in riddles now?"

"Sorry. No riddle. We are nobodies. We want to stay that way, but we want to rebel."

“Hmm? Pretty riddle-y if you ask me.”

“A bit sketchy yet. I'll grant you that, Charlotte.” Sarge was pulling her along the sidewalk, now almost a block behind the others. He motioned towards them.

“Shall we catch up?”

“No and no more questions, Jonas. I need to think.”

**In 500 words state your plan to save the world.**

He stared at the request for information. Forms. The military and poverty required many forms to be completed. That was long ago. He was not military and hadn't been for decades. He was poor yet he managed on his pension. The four of them lived together. The sum of their income made their lives easy as long as there was no need for privacy or material goods beyond tap water, toothpaste and toilet paper.

Sarge was sitting in front of a computer in a downtown office provided by a group of local foundations to help him and others make their dreams come true, if money could do that. Charlotte sat beside him. It was a still-life. His hands did not move. Their breath rose and fell. They squirmed a little. There was life.

He looked out the window onto California Street.

Sarge looked very suave in his newly acquired tuxedo. He had a carnation in his lapel button hole until it fell on the floor as he anguished over the questions on the form. He noticed, but it didn't matter. Things change.

The questions came and Sarge mumbled aloud each one. Charlotte listened and added her thoughts.

“Organization name.”

“I like the Smile Campaign.”

“What about Nobody.”

“Jonas, dear, who will get that? Just leaves too many questions unanswered. Smile Campaign is easy to get.”

Sarge typed The Smile Campaign in the virtual blank.

“In five hundred words or less describe your idea for a non-profit organization?”  
Sarge said.

“Too hard. Break it down.”

“I am a nobody. I want to stay that way. I want to rebel against a world that wants to defeat me, to destroy me. For some reason I still live. One day I stood in front of a mirror and I saw a smile cross my lips. A new day began. I taught my best friend to smile. We bought suits. We taught ourselves to smile for friends and strangers.” His fingers followed his words. Charlotte sat back listening to him.

“I found life changed. Charlotte is my girlfriend's name. She liked my smile. She smiles back at me. Now there are four smilers in the campaign. Smiling is what we do. We walk the streets offering smiles. In exchange we get smiles. For a nobody, finding other smiling nobodies is like finding a long-lost friend or brother. The smile is the beginning and end of the smile's intention. Names do not matter. Life stories do not matter. Nobodies all have names and lives but without the smiling I have nothing.”

Sarge stopped to reread what he had written. “There is more. I humped my way out of the jungle in Vietnam with my friend. We were given up for dead. We had killed. We had destroyed the lives of other nobodies. Eventually, the way we act as a society comes into question. How are we better than them? The answer is we aren't. We are all nobodies. The danger is in wishing we were somebody. Somebodies hire bodyguards. They are afraid of other somebodies.”

Charlotte waited for him to stop. “Hon, you have tears in your eyes. What is the upside of this?”

“We can change. If we were a nation of smilers, we would be better off. Cambodia.” He wrote. “Pay attention to their ability to forgive. Chile. Pay attention to their desire to expose the past to the present. The Smile Campaign has no such goal. All we will do is smile at you, if we see you coming.”

“Jonas, what is the next question?”

“How much does your organization need to achieve your goal?” Sarge sat silently. His fingers at rest in his lap. He looked down at his hands and saw the flower on the floor.

“Oops.” He leaned over and picked it up. He twirled it between his fingers and placed it behind his ear. “Money won't help.” He said.

“Write that. Tell them.” Charlotte had come to love this messed up old vet. She was a year younger and had not slept for years, until recently, when she surrendered to it in his arms. Sarge turned to look at her. He smiled. She smiled. “They might understand.”

“How many smiles can you buy for a dollar? How many smiles do we need? What we need is suits: Black with white shirt and tie for the men. Flowery dresses for the women. The people who have time and opportunity to smile are all poor as dirt. Give them the clothes and they will smile.” Sarge stopped typing. He sighed.

“That's pretty. Any more questions?” Charlotte said.

“Nope. Done. Press save. We're done.” Sarge stood. Charlotte stood. As they moved towards the exit onto California Street a young woman walked up to them.

“Are you Mr Wright?”

Charlotte chuckled. “Mr Right? He is for me.”

The joke was not lost on her. She smiled. “My name is Cynthia Goodall. I am the assistant director of the foundation staff. I have been looking over your shoulder as you entered your responses to our questions. It is not often that applicants wear tuxedos. I have good news for you. We will help you.”

The suits became known as Cynthia suits. Sarge and Charlotte left wondering if they had done something.

## **Nobody loves me**

Charlotte went everywhere Sarge went and Corporal was always there too. Ginelle was a yo-yo according to Corporal.

“Yeah, sometimes I see her hand in my hand, next second she's off to return again.”

Sarge had thought about the question, 'Do you love her?' or 'Does he love her?' Nothing came of it. That was not what this was about. This was a mission like many before it. Know your role. Play your role. Do not fail.

The new foursome was noteworthy in the Vet Center. They took up an entire table at breakfast, always dressed for a party, smiling at each other, sharing their happiness in portions available to everyone around them. It was their practice as Ginelle called it. It was the way they rebelled against the anxiety and panic history had left them with.

Their days became copies of the one before. Ginelle noticed first.

“We do the same thing every day. We eat three meals here. We walk the same walk to the same place smiling at the same people. We sleep and then do it again. It's like a job.”

Charlotte smiled, a knowing smile. “You having trouble with commitment, honey?”

“No. I am having trouble being in a rut, doing what I did yesterday and kinda wondering if it is enough to matter or even if that is the point of it.”

Corporal knew Ginelle was more damaged than even he was. She needed time to work things out. He needed time, too. She needed more. He was already patient when he met her. Of course, he had 40 plus years of the nobodies before she came around. He had become a much more interesting person once he began to smile again. Left to himself he might never have considered his life a rut.

“Gin, I am glad we are no longer lonely. Together feels safer. With all the smiling ... life is better.”

“But still, maybe something will change every once in a while.” Ginelle squeezed his hand and slowly drew a small heart shape on the back of it.

Sarge sat listening to their talking. He saw Ginelle draw the heart.

“Be careful what you wish for. I am happy for the chance to have a stable life. We have been good for each other. Whatever changes, I hope we keep what we need.”

## Homeless

“Name?”

He was old. He was weak. His wounds had not healed. He had not recovered. When he went to war, he was married. When he came back, he was beyond love. He needed care no one could give. He waited. He waited for years. He had never told others how he felt. No one cared about that either.

“Stephen Black.” He said.

“Age?” Asked the young clerk at the Vet Center.

“60 something. Maybe 70.”

“Address?”

“91 South Turk.”

“No, Mr. Black. That is the address of the Vet Center.”

“None.”

“Where are you staying tonight?” The clerk was used to hearing the often rambling, explanations from the vets who came for food. He was a law student who gave a few hours each week to the nearby center. Poverty law it was called. He imagined he would use the law to help the weak, protect them from the power of the greedy. His adviser had suggested he could begin by seeing who his clients might be. It had been a good choice. Every Tuesday he spent breakfast and lunch with the vets. At least once an hour he was shocked by the reality of poverty.

“91 South Turk.”

“Mr. Black, is there anyone you know living within 50 miles?”

“No one I know of. No one who has a place. I know you. But you are a student living in a tower with a guard who won't let me sit in the lobby even if it's raining and I am cold.”

“How long have you been in the area?”

“Long enough to get hungry and find this place.”

“One day? One week?”

“Sir, I drink wine. Yesterday and last week are about the same.”

“That would be a week then.”

“Four days give or take.” Stephen Black sat still enough to stay seated. The two vets who wore suits came in and his agitation grew. The older one came over. He was smiling. Stephen hoped he was smiling in his direction. He hadn't seen one since the last time he saw Sarge. That was yesterday.

“Mr. Bradley Hutchinson, almost attorney at law, how are you and Stephen. How you gettin' on?” Without waiting for an answer, he went on. “Stevie, you are looking good. Brad's good he just hasn't learned to smile in the face of hunger and need.”

“Sarge,” Stevie said. “Thank you for showing the love. Brad is full of questions I can't answer very often.”

“Trust your instinct soldier.” Sarge said as he turned to greet others.

Corporal went directly to the table with the two women seated and watching Sarge as he moved around being friendly, offering a smile and a word of hope or whatever entered his mind to say.

“Don't mention the flies in your soup. Everyone will want some.” He was heard saying followed by laughter.

Brad and Stevie both watched him move.

“What is he about?” Brad asked.

“He's a nobody. Wants to stay that way.” The older man answered.

“He is up to something.”

“Happiness.”

“Does seeing him help you? You seem amused.”

“Amused? Sarge is a very serious person. He is sowing rebellion like grass seed.”

Brad had never heard that a rebellion was growing. He had planned his life based on a stable world. Rebellion would foster instability. He made a note on Stephen Black's interview form.

“I am tired and hungry. I am going to eat. OK?”

“Sure, Mr Black. We can talk again later.”

“Next week?”

“Yeah, next week.” Brad was lost in his thoughts of rebellion. He had studied poverty as a Sosh major in college. He knew the peasants revolted against their masters. He could feel from his interviews that many men and women returned from war seeking revenge against those who perpetrated the wars. His grandfather had served in WWII and returned angry and soon died of alcoholism. His father returned from Vietnam whole in body but challenged by the simple things. 'Suicide' they called it when he died. Sarge would eventually teach him that Brad's father was murdered for money like half the fathers of the men who ate the Vet's Breakfast.

He sat at his little folding table near the door to the alley until his time was up. He rose and carried the folded table back to the closet and put the folding chair back in the dining area. Sarge saw him getting ready to go and gave him a wave. Brad was lost in his thoughts but even though he didn't see Sarge's high sign he turned and smiled into the room. Corporal saw that.

## **Skin in the game**

It was getting late.

Brad was drunk. Too drunk to study and almost too drunk to walk. He started going out late at night to do research, he would say, then laugh. It was true. He learned many things about poverty from frequenting the bars around the Tenderloin.

Tonight, he was overwhelmed by the stories he was hearing. Skinheads had beaten a man almost to death in the alley that was the home to the Vet Center dining room. No one knew the victim's name. There were witnesses. He heard the story about four against one, the one being an elderly homeless Vietnam vet, more than once in whole and many more times in part. It happened that day in the late afternoon.

The story would not be in the morning paper, or any paper. The victim was a nobody and the skinheads were thought to be sons of police officers. No one would care. Nothing would happen.

“Damn. This is my chance. I have to help.” Brad was speaking out loud as he headed home on the route that would take him past the alley. As he got closer, he could see there was no crime scene tape. No signs of any one investigating. He had his flash light. He decided to search for clues.

'Stumbled upon' was the way he would describe his finding a wallet in the darkness. It was black and worn. His light missed it. He kicked it. It scattered in front of him. He reassembled it and put it in his pocket.

Bending over set his alcohol abused head to spinning. He decided to head home. As he walked, he began a slow stagger, feeling ever more unable to navigate, when he felt arms holding him steady. He heard Sarge's voice. Corporal's arms were on him, too. He passed out.

When he woke he saw Sarge's back.

“Unh. Where am I.”

“You mean what are you?” Sarge responded. “You are a rescued inebriate. I caught you before the cops or the skinheads could get you passed out on the cement.”

Bradley Hutchinson, age 23, had been saved. He rose from the floor where he apparently spent the night. He went to the head and returned straightening his clothing, searching his clothes for his wallet.

He found two wallets. One he knew the other was a strange thing in his hand.

“What's this.” He said, his hand extended to Sarge who interpreted the gesture as a gift, and he took the wallet from the young man.

Sarge looked inside. “No money. No cards. Just some photo ID from a private club or something. A few names, no phone numbers. A receipt for a contribution to the Storm Front website. A picture of some guys who look a bit rough. Skinhead wannabees by the looks of them.”

“Oh. Skinheads? Now I remember. Someone was beaten by Skinheads. Yesterday. I heard ...”

“That was Stevie. He is in bad shape. Alive. Fewer teeth. A flatter nose. Hard for him to be uglier than he was, but he is.” Sarge spoke with no negative undertones. This happens, he said. It happens to our friends.

“Stevie. Poor bastard. How could life be crueler?”

“Brad, you are a piece of work even for a young guy. Stevie is a lifer on the street. No home can hold him. He rolls out in an alley. He is always near home.” As he spoke, he spread the contents of the wallet onto his bed. The picture ID showed a young, stern man. “Where did this wallet come from? The alley?”

“Uh? I remember finding the alley last night.”

“This guy was one of them. Maybe.”

Sarge, Corporal and the hungover Brad sat on the twin beds. Sarge was dressed for the Vet Center. Corporal was working on it, polishing his shoes, a white shirt and tie and he'd be ready to go. Brad looked sick.

"We should call the authorities." Brad said. "We have an ID."

Sarge smiled his best 'It's OK' smile. "You're late for class. It's 8:30. Breakfast time."

Brad turned a brighter shade of green and left for the head.

"Ready, Sarge. Let's go." Corporal tied his tie up against the collar of his shirt. He was looking into the mirror over the bureau, smiling at his memory of Ginelle who had left with Charlotte, before the boys awakened, headed for a VA appointment for Ginelle.

Sarge opened the door. Corporal walked through. Sarge followed to the elevator that would take them to the lobby of the Tenderloin hotel the four of them had inhabited for the last six months since they determined in an avalanche of smiles that they would live together until they didn't.

Every morning Sarge and Corporal made the four-block walk across the rotunda at City Hall and the United Nations Plaza. The homeless often owned it. For nearly thirty years encampments sprang up to be dismantled in a few days to reappear in part or all in a few days more. They walked without dialogue. Their focus was on others. New faces were met with smiles. Old faces were met with smiles, handshakes and some kind words about food at the Vet Center.

This morning the walk took longer. Old faces of old vets wanted information about Stevie, about skinheads, about anything to tell about the future of safety and sometimes justice. As they approached Market Street and the stop light nearest the alley entrance, a new face approached them.

"Are you Sarge." He asked them. "I saw them. I saw their faces."

Sarge was smiling at the younger man. Corporal stood aside, shaking his head until Sarge began to talk.

“That's me. What is your name?”

“Doesn't matter. I am gone from here as soon as we part. I am afraid for sure. Who cares? I want to help get the punks who did Stevie.”

“We are not involved. I can listen but there may not be anything we will do. We are nobody. Just like you.” Sarge did not sound apologetic. He was proud of his identity. “Tell us what you saw.”

“Four men. Young. Probably street kids by the look of them. They didn't see me. I was deep in the alley, in the darkness. Stevie was asleep on the step at the entrance to the Vet Center. You know what I mean?”

“Yup. Been there.” Sarge said.

“Skinheads.”

“Looked like skinheads. Couldn't be Skinheads. They are gone, part of history.”

“Yeah, looked like skinheads. You know Nazis. You are shaking your head. You weren't there asshole. I was.”

Sarge stayed quiet and smiling. Corporal took a step forward and drew the younger man's attention.

Corporal was smiling. The witness became agitated. “No problem.” Corporal said. “Tell us what you saw.”

“Faces. I heard names. I hid. I could hear them hitting him and his cries of pain and pleas for an end.”

“Names?”

“I heard Billy. I heard Amos. That's all.”

Sarge pulled the wallet out of his inside jacket pocket. Pulled out the photo ID. “This one of them?”

“Yeah.” He said. “That's one. He was the quiet one, I think.” He turned the ID over in his hand. “Says here his name is Amos Wells. That fits.”

Sarge reached out to take back the ID. “Are you hungry?”

“Yeah.”

“Follow us. We are headed for breakfast. Are you a vet?”

“Yeah.”

“Come along. It's pancake morning. Lots of fruit and syrup.” Sarge said.

## **What Now?**

The dining room was empty except for Sarge and Corporal. The entire breakfast crowd had departed. The witness stayed for a few minutes. He put a few pancakes wrapped in a napkin in his coat pocket and left without ceremony.

Corporal was cleaning his nails using a butter knife. Sarge was looking at the contents of the wallet, turning each piece of paper over in his hands, looking for missing clues.

“Find anything new?”

“No.” He said. “We have fifteen names. One is a Billy O'Neal. One is Amos Wells. Nothing in any of the names to help us understand. They could be cops' kids.”

Corporal looked at the list Sarge handed to him. He read each name under his breath.

“All these names are old local names. All very white and right, if you know what I mean. Remember Garberville? The cops' kids, kids of ministers and even a vet's kid ganged up to beat some poor bastard nearly to death right in town. The cops never investigated.”

“Corporal, I did not need to remember that. It is not smiling material.” Sarge put the pieces of paper back into the wallet.

“What would the cops do anyway?”

“Maybe we should interrogate these boys. Maybe that would help us understand.”

“Did I hear an emotion in that? Are you angry?”

Sarge did not respond.

“Afraid.” Corporal said. “I am afraid for you.”

“Me? Huh. What do you fear?”

“You are too interested in them. You could go on offense. You will be noticed. Become known. TV and all that. They could target you. The plan is at risk.”

“I see. I'll calm down. Let's go about our business. Do what we do. Say nothing.”  
Sarge put the list back into the wallet. “In a couple days, we could put an ad in the paper or find the address in San Bruno that's on his ID.”

“Or not. Sarge, we have some saving to do.”

## **The Lone Patrol**

The address on Amos Well's ID was a cemetery near downtown San Bruno. Jonas found a family plot with the Well's family name. Once he did, he left to find a computer cafe with access to the internet. A nearby bookstore rented computer time. He searched for addresses for the other names on the list. No Amos Wells was listed. Several others exact names and a few more maybes, all in San Bruno.

He had left Corporal and the women asleep as he went on his patrol. BART took him to the San Bruno station. When he arrived, he saw a number of men flopped around the entrance. On his way back, he smiled. When he got close to the station, he saw they were still there.

As he walked around the little rotunda at the BART station, he looked into the faces, searching for an opening. He smiled for one entire lap. His second time around he spoke to two older men who were hanging together.

"You a vet?" was his question.

"So what?" was one response.

"Army Rangers. You?"

"Semper Fi."

"Vietnam."

"Operation Phoenix."

"I'm looking for somebody? Seen him?" He asked as he flashed an enlarged picture of Wells that he made from the ID at a copy shop on the way.

"Can't see close very well. Got any cheaters?"

Sarge handed his reading glasses to the Marine.

"Yes. I've seen him. He runs with a white gang. They threatened me and Rolly here couple of days ago."

“What did they say?”

“Said some hate stuff. Used the words they were taught to say. They think we are ruining their lives by being disabled and visible. Ever hear of a gang called KFF?”

“No.” Sarge said.

The Marine pointed over Sarge's shoulder to some graffiti on the station's wall.

“See that? KFF: Kill for fun. That's them.”

“Where they from? Homeboys?”

“Cops won't touch them. Some say they are family, sons of cops. I do not know. I have heard a dozen stories about them hurting people and getting no hassle.”

“We saw them in the City a few days ago. They stomped a vet just a block away from a BART station.”

“They come through here pretty often. I see them maybe twice a week.”

“How do they get around?”

“The train, just like you. Look, my name is Smith, first name John. This is my brother Rolly Smith. This is our living room. Come by any time. We'll keep our eyes peeled for these people.”

“Good to meet you Rolly. Thanks John. My name is Sarge.” Jonas turned to go expecting nothing more could happen. He boarded the train heading into the City.

“Damn. I wish Corporal was here.”

“You talking to me?” A fellow passenger on the inbound train said.

Sarge smiled a sorry smile and then a smile of recognition. “You. I know you.”

“Not me. I don't talk to suits. Suits don't talk to me.”

“Names Sarge. I saw you years ago at the Vet Center on Turk. I didn't wear a suit then. You're called Grease.”

“Caught me. What did I do?”

“Nothing.”

“Who are you really?”

“Nobody.” Sarge said and on a whim continued as he pulled the Wells photo from his jacket inside pocket. “Know him?”

“You a cop?”

“Nope. Looking for people who have seen this fellow and his friends, a gang known as KFF.”

“My stop ahead. Sorry.”

Sarge watched as Grease left his seat before he jumped up to follow. Once they reached ground level, Sarge caught up to him.

“Sorry, I need your help.” Sarge said this to Grease from behind him. The equally old man was moving fast as if someone was after him.

“No. I know nothing.”

Sarge said, Please, with a smile in his voice and the man stopped, turned to look into Sarge's eyes. “OK.”

“Did you recognize that guy?”

“Look, Sarge, if I ever knew you, you are different now.”

“I was saved. I am a Nobody.”

“Saved?”

“My son found me at the end of a blind alley. Now I am working on a rebellion of people like me.”

“What is it called?”

“Hmm. Maybe Nobody can help.”

“You're nobody and nobody can help.” Grease smiled his first smile to Sarge. “You are crazy.”

“Dead or crazy: I made my choice.” Sarge knew some battles are won with smiles and honesty.

Grease waved him to a bench near the entrance to the station.

“That guy, the one in the picture, he runs with KFF. They come through here once in a while. Sometimes they rough someone up to show us who is in charge.”

BART stations have their own security. The timing of the incidents was deviously smart. No security had seen them at work in the months Grease was sure the KFF gang had been active.

“Grease, I have been to three stations and there have been three witnesses of incidents involving KFF.”

“They piss me off, but they haven't hurt anyone badly that I have seen. I travel quite a bit on the train, and I have seen their graffiti wherever I have been from Milbray to the Embarcadero stations.”

Sarge needed to talk to Stevie. An idea had formed. With promises to look him up again Sarge left Grease in the morning sunshine and headed back to the boarding area headed to the Vet Center. When he arrived, he walked towards the Center to find Corporal, Ginelle and Charlotte walking towards him.

“Hey, Sarge we were headed out to look for you. Are you OK?”

“I have a story to tell, but I need to see if Stevie can talk to us about what happened to him. I went on a patrol this morning and found other stories about this group. They call themselves KFF. Stands for Kill For Fun. They spray those initials in the BART stations and rough up homeless men.”

“Sarge, where is the smile?” Corporal said. “Is this part of the plan?”

Charlotte squeezed Sarge's hand. “Really, you are doing too much. Maybe a walk in the park would be better.”

“Nope. Something is happening. I can feel it. KFF are nobodies who are being led to feed on other nobodies. I want to know who, and I want to know why.”

His three companions looked shocked. Corporal's face was taunt with nervousness.

“This reminds me of ...”

“Nam and how we were led to feed on others.” Sarge interrupted.

“Yeah, that.” Corporal said. “This is a difficult thing to imagine doing. We need to see the cops.”

“Won't help and you know it. Nobody will help. Nobody is us.”

They walked together towards the Muni that would take them out to the Presidio hospital where Stevie laid. No one said anything. The silence was filled with private thoughts about the danger Sarge described. There was the danger of exposure to the powers that ran things and the danger of being a target of the KFF.

On the Muni they sat across from one another. Ginelle held Corporal's hand in hers. Her eyes traced the scar across his face. She thought about the wounds inside him that had not healed entirely. She saw him as vulnerable.

Corporal felt her hand and the warmth she had for him. It was more than he knew he missed of human kindness. His gratitude to his friends for their company and smiles was greater than he remembered his loneliness to have been. He followed her eyes as she studied him.

Charlotte had her arm through Jonas' arm, her shoulder next to his. Corporal looked across the bus to see his old friend's face twisted in anxiety. Sarge smiled at nothing. Charlotte saw what she had missed of him when she woke up alone that morning. She smiled at him. Sarge woke from his pain to see his friends around him. He smiled back at Charlotte, a small smile.

Corporal looked across, saw the smiles and smiled his own which made Ginelle smile. For a few minutes they had their smiles going full blast.

When they arrived at last at Stevie's bedside, the shock at seeing him strained their belief in happiness. Sarge had seen him days ago, so he was ready for the sight of his black and blue faced friend, swollen past recognition. He was sleeping.

The two ex-nurses had seen much worse in their lives. Corporal knew how it felt from the inside to have a wretched face. Sarge knew his intuition was correct that Stevie needed Nobodies help.

Despite the discomfort the smiles were unmoved.

Stevie stayed asleep for a long time as the four friends sat with him. When he woke, he did not open his eyes. They were swollen shut. Sarge saw him stir to reach for water. He reached it and held it for Stevie to find.

"Who's there?" He said.

"Nobody." Corporal said. "Four nobodies here to help."

"Oh, you guys. Sarge, Corporal and the ladies? Am I right?"

"Yes." Charlotte said.

"Wish I could say it's good to see you but ..."

"Me too. I wish I could say it's good to see you. It is good to see you still alive. I worried." Sarge took the water glass from him. "Do you feel like talking?"

"About what? About those aholes that beat me up in my sleeping bag. Bravery is not their strong suit."

"Did you know them?"

"Afraid so. They had been harassing people at the Civic Center BART Station and must have followed me to the alley." He tried to animate his face but gave up with a grimace even his swollen skin could not hide. "Ow."

"Why you?"

“Hard to say. Some of the people who hang at the station have seen these thugs before. Called them Skinheads. Told them to crawl away and die. They cursed us. Ripped a few people's packs apart. Then they walked away. The BART cops showed, saw nothing, heard nothing, did nothing. Those people are not on our side. They want us gone. That's for sure.”

“There is a pattern.” Sarge said. “Other men at other stations have been hurt. All vets. All homeless. No help from the cops.”

No one said a thing until the staff nurse came into the room and she asked the four to leave so Stevie could be cared for.

“I'll be here for a few days then back to the Vet Center. I have no other place to go that feels safe.” Stevie might have been crying. His voice was sad when it had been mad just seconds ago.

They left him to the nurses' attention.

## **Nobody likes a loser**

The four friends walked out of the hospital wards into the main lobby through the exit doors into the sunshine of a surprisingly warm summer afternoon unusual for its lack of fog.

“Nice day.” Ginelle said. “Sad about Stevie. How can we help him? He's getting the best care for his injuries. The cops won't help. We know some names and we have a picture.”

Sarge told them about his morning hunt to ending in a cemetery and his meetings with the Smiths and Grease.

“Do you get a feeling that someone is using thugs to clear the streets of vets?” Ginelle said. “How do we stop that? I want to stop that.”

Corporal wished out loud that he had the power to do just that: find them and give them a lesson in revenge.

Sarge waited until Charlotte agreed with Corporal that it might feel good to find them and “F'em up a little.”

He gave her a hug.

“My thoughts exactly. Anyone want to do a few morning runs to see if we can find a pattern to their movements.”

“Then we can lay in wait for them.” Corporal said.

“Hmm. Maybe we save that for later. First ID them.”

“Photograph them in action.”

“Build a book on them. Follow one of them maybe. Find their lair if they have such a place.”

The ideas flowed but as each new one came, the path they spoke of seemed ever more foggy and impossible. As suddenly as they began to talk the four became silent again.

The ride on the Muni ended at the tenderloin hotel they lived in. They sat in their room. No one spoke about the KFF. They talked about their lives together and how much better they were since they hooked up. Sarge talked about the plan he and Corporal had made to rebel without becoming targets of the Somebodies.

“We wanted a way to escape harm and still have an effect. We came upon the smiling game, the one that brought us together. We suited up to make a good impression. It worked. We wanted friends and we found you.”

“Well, Sarge, we should stay with the thing that works.” Ginelle said.

“Yeah, Ginelle and I noticed you and your good nature. We also saw you were up to something. You invited us in, and we loved it.” Charlotte was giggling all the time. Her smile was as big as her face.

“So, we succeeded with the plan but now it seems we need something more.”

“Maybe another act of kindness. Maybe we save them instead of hurt them.”

“What do other people do? Rely on the justice system. In this case that won't work. Maybe we form a new justice system, one without cops or jails.”

“Wow, we are over the edge again.”

The conversation went on for hours, through the Vet Center dinner and into the night hours.

About an hour after dark Sarge began to pull out his old uniform. He put it on as the others talked. They watched him dress in the rags he wore for the five years he and Corporal lived in the allies of the City. He returned to that era in his mind trying to find the face that lived that life. It was a face without smiles.

“OK. I am ready. We go in pairs. We hit the stations one by one until they see me and approach me. They will make themselves known. They will do their thing then leave. When they leave my partner will follow them.”

“Sarge,” Corporal said. “That idea sounds dangerous.”

“Yeah, it sounds painful to offer up myself for Stevie.” Sarge stood at the mirror smiling, then unsmiling hoping he would look natural. “I want to look like a loser.”

“I get it.” Ginelle said. “Nobody likes a loser.”

Sarge and Corporal made the night run. Nothing happened. The KFF did not appear. They returned home and to bed.

## **Nobody gets hurt**

Sarge and Ginelle left at ten in the morning. Sarge was his old self, clad in the remains of his old uniform. His unhappiness written in deep lines on his face. Ginelle was dressed in her best. Her smile beaming.

They headed into the Civic Center station and boarded the first train going to the airport. The plan they worked out with Corporal and Charlotte was simple. Once twenty minutes had passed after the other two left, Corporal and Charlotte would head away from the airport and disembark at the Embarcadero station. Their route would be to hang out for thirty minutes at each station working their way towards the south as Sarge and Ginelle rode to the airport station and moved north back towards the City.

They rode the train back and forth all day and met for dinner at the Vet Center. They had no direct sightings of the KFF. The value in the first day's exercise was the identification of 'watchers' at each station.

“OK.” Sarge said. “We have eyes in all stations. That's a good thing.”

“We need more. We have no guarantee that those guys will be at the stations when we return or when the KFF shows up. It's iffy at best.” Charlotte hoped often, yet she knew people like her could be gone in a moment. Homeless meant foot loose.

Corporal sat quietly as the talk went on about the names of the watchers and how re-contacting them could be accomplished.

“What I see is that we need to invite the watchers to a meeting. If they come, they count. If they don't, they might not.” Ginelle said.

Sarge wanted to plan the first steps well. “OK. Where? How about the Vets Center. We can ask for a special night and invite the new recruits as we see them in the next few days. The stations have become important to homeless vets as places they can meet with one another.”

“And panhandle.” Said Charlotte. “I keep wondering why this is happening. Why was Stevie targeted and why did the KFF follow him to the South Turk St alley?”

“Panhandle? Could they be trying to control panhandle areas?” Sarge looked serious. “Hmm. I don't know.”

Charlotte smiled at Sarge. Sarge smiled back at her.

“Hon, there must be a reason. Homeless are helpless often as not. Why target them? KFF hasn't killed anyone. They harass old vets. The cops don't care. Are they in on it?” Charlotte spoke with animation, her hands waved in the air in front of her.

Corporal listened to it all. Sarge was making notes. Ginelle leaned against her old friend showing obvious signs of tired.

They agreed to do the same routine in the morning. Without further discussion the returned to their hotel and sleep. All except Sarge who wished them goodnight and left in his uniform to retrace his route of the day.

Ginelle wanted to go, too. Sarge said she needed sleep. She stayed.

He knew he had danger in mind, a kind of danger he could not find if she was with him. He grabbed a train heading to the East Bay and got off at the Embarcadero. The crowds were heavy because a Giants game had just ended: folks were headed off in all directions going home. Sarge pushed through the crowd towards the exit and went to the surface.

Some chaos is good, he thought, but this was too much and now he was stuck here waiting for the crowds to thin. He searched the usual places homeless hung around the station. They were against the walls of buildings, trying to remain untrammelled by the often drunk baseball fans. Some had signs most said Help.

Sarge found a spot against the wall and settled down into a form he had once been used to keeping. He had no sign. No one offered him anything, even eye contact.

Fifteen minutes passed and the crowds were diminishing. He stood and walked close to the walls silently surveying the men and women who still sat. No one recognized him. After two blocks he turned and walked back towards the stairs to the underground he had ascended earlier.

Continuing past the entrance he went another two blocks, then turned again to walk back to retrace his steps. This time he sought eye contact with the people against the walls.

“Can you help? God Bless.” A man with crutches lying beside him said. He acted blind. Eyes covered with cheap sunglasses. When Sarge smiled he smiled back. Sarge sat next to him.

“I have a question.” Sarge said. “Are you a vet?”

“Navy. Wounded in the Delta. Who are you?”

“Nobody. Looking for some people. Wondered if you can help.”

“What? Who?”

“KFF.”

“Ooh. Don't know them. I know this: When you see the walls painted, sit elsewhere.”

“Why?”

“Bad things happen. Thugs. People get hassled or hurt.”

“Thugs? Have you seen them?”

“I see nothing. I get along.”

“Gotcha.”

Sarge searched his jacket, found three quarters and added it to the Navy vets tin cup

“God Bless.”

“Be well.” He stood and continued his walk and his modified, smile campaign.

He walked and smiled, no one else smiled back. He continued to the eastern most Montgomery Street entrance and descended the stairs into the underground. The first level was the Metro and BART entrance turnstiles. He circled the area surrounding the turnstiles and the route further down to the trains. As he walked, he looked for signs near the western entrance. He saw KFF written in crayon on the plastic cover of an advertisement touting an upcoming movie called The Fallen. He sat beneath it. He kept his eyes on the floor.

He fell asleep.

“Hey, you lazy, old bum. Get your ass up. You are in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

“Huh?” Sarge looked up into the faces of three young men. “What did I do? You a cop? Take me to jail. I'm hungry.”

“Get up and move or you'll go to the hospital.” One of them said as he grabbed Sarge's jacket and pulled him up.

“OK. Sorry.” Sarge said as he looked them in the eyes.

“Amos, kick him in the balls.”

Sarge doubled over as Amos kicked him in the groin. He lost his breath and fell back to the floor.

“If you are still here in two minutes when we return, you will have no teeth to eat with.” The speaker kicked him in the back of the head.

Sarge managed a groan, waited for them to move along, then he stood and hobbled off in the direction of the exit. He sat on the stairs leading to the surface and tried to track the thugs. He saw them speak to another floor dweller who quickly stood and ran from the area. His pack was grabbed and strewn around the floor. The thugs turned and moved back toward Sarge, who seeing their intentions, began to move up the stairs. He reached the surface and lost himself in what remained of the post-game chaos.

From a safe distance he saw them emerge from the station. As he watched them look around, he stripped the jacket from his back stuffed in his small backpack, put on a baseball cap and followed them.

They walked towards the Powell Street station. As they did, they stopped to greet the occasional panhandler. From a distance Sarge saw them take money from each one. Once, they beat a man until he begged them to stop. They moved on. Sarge waited for them to go. They went down into the Powell Street station.

He walked up to the groaning victim.

“You OK? No, you look hurt. You a vet?”

“Go away.”

“No.” Sarge squatted near him inspecting his condition. “I am nobody. I am trying to help you. Will you help me?”

“Help you? How?” The man was poor beyond Sarge's imagination. He had been panhandling with a paper coffee cup. His sign was the back of a pizza box. His clothing was thick even in for the coldest day San Francisco could have. He had no other belongings with him.

“Where do you sleep?”

“Right here. What do you want?”

“I want to know what happened to you?”

“I was beaten.”

“By who?”

“See that?” His hand raised over his head and up onto the wall. There it was: KFF.

“KFF?”

“Kill for fun.” He said.

“What's your name?”

“Skitter. You?”

“Jonas.”

“You a vet?”

“Nah. I work with a church. Grace Cathedral is my home”

“There is no room for me there. Tried it. Too crowded.”

“Best place in town.”

Sarge wondered if there was more to do. As he was mulling it over, Skitter rearranged himself, found his cup and sign and set himself upright as if he would begin again to solicit handouts.

“Look, Jonus, I have to go back to it. It's all I got.”

“I am not far from this.”

“Yeah? Look at me. I am the one with the cup in his hand.”

Sarge nodded, stood and walked down into the Powell Street station. He returned home and to sleep.

**Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. Nobody knows my sorrows.**

Ginelle and Corporal left earlier than Sarge and Charlotte. Charlotte had been missing him and wanted to be on his team today. They would meet for lunch. Sarge had sketched out his experiences from the prior evening. KFF signs became ever more important. Charlotte and Ginelle had the idea that mapping the placement of the signs might help them figure out how to track the thugs. Mapping became their work for the day. Corporal and Sarge decided to continue to invade KFF territory by meeting those who were under the signs, looking for panhandlers who might work with them. They left in their Ranger jackets.

Corporal was caught in Colma by four KFF members and beaten. Ginelle saw it all. She had a cellphone with a camera that Sarge borrowed from a Vet Center staff member. They had pictures of them.

Lunch was no fun.

The four sat together as usual. Sarge and Corporal in their uniform parts, looking homeless, helpless and very unlike the men who attracted Charlotte and Ginelle. The photos were printed by the Vet Center staff. Charlotte and Ginele made a map as they talked about their experiences.

“Step one is over,” said Sarge. “I need a break from being beaten...”

“Me, too,” said Corporal.

“... but we got what we needed.”

“Let's go home.” Ginnelle said. “Tomorrow may bring a new inspiration.”

“Ginelle,” Charlotte said. “Let's go home and change and go visit Stevie. See how he is.”

General agreement followed and in an hour they were Presidio bound. The men were dressed in the smile campaign uniform black on white with a tie and a smile. The women wore flowery dresses. They rode the Metro in silence.

Then Stevie was waiting for them. He looked better than anyone remembered he did. Stevie had a black suit, white shirt and a tie which he put on as soon as the four arrived. Charlotte noted that the clothes made the man and the three men looked equally beaten, equally pained, equally resolved.

"I've got my Cynthia suit. Count me in," he said. "I am ready to do what needs to be done."

"I doubt that crew will recognize us like this. They just beat us. They didn't expect to ever see us again." Corporal said. "I want to get into the tubes and get on with step two. We should find good vantage points so we can view the areas under the KFF signs. It's just like combat patrolling. We move, hold positions for a spell, then move again. Sightings and schedules are what we are looking for. Photos may help. Keep a log of sightings and photo locations. Any questions?"

Sarge clapped his hands. "Well done. If you weren't a Nobody you'd get a promotion in rank."

The women thought they had an idea of how they would proceed. Each carried a camera phone donated for the afternoon by the kitchen crew who didn't know much except that the old vets were onto something.

"Whose in charge.?" One asked.

Nobody, was the answer.

Stevie was ready to go. Checked out and dressed to impress the five rode the Metro back towards the City's center.

Sarge sat with Stevie and told him what they had learned since they last saw him.

"There are thirteen stations. We have watchers in some, if not all. We want watchers in all, all the time. Today we will invite those we see again to dinner at the Vet Center. That will be tomorrow's dinner. Today we will work through dinner. Hunger will be good for us. Sharpen our minds."

Stevie seemed sharp enough already. Sober and rested he looked like a new man. His bruises were still there but not the bright purple they had been. Nothing hurt so much that he could not walk without a limp.

They arrived at the Civic Center BART entrance. Sarge, Charlotte and Stevie headed towards the airport. Ginelle and Corporal went towards the Embarcadero. Every station had KFF signs. Some had more than one. Watching and taking photos, talking to homeless vets they knew and recruiting more watchers took almost a hour per station. The teams split up, one person per station. Four hours later they were back at Civic Center.

Twelve watcher recruits were invited to dinner. Hungry and tired they went to sleep. Stevie slept on the floor on a mattress the hotel offered to them.

Tomorrow would be exciting. The dinner would be step three.

## **Nobody's business**

Being destitute did not mean life was not worth living. The men and women who have nothing to their names have a lighter load to carry through life. There are definitions of freedom that include the freedom from burdens. In a manner of thinking the homeless are free. Charlotte thought of it as footloose and fancy free. Ginelle said it was uncomfortable at first because so much of what she was taught in her youth was about buying and owning.

“Once I learned to get along without, I didn't need. My friends changed. The ones I thought were good friends went on to own as much as they could. My new friends had more time. They had homes every once in a while, when the weather was harsh but mostly California was so mild those times did not even amount to two months a year.

“Did we have an income? Did we save money? Maybe some of us did. I have my military pension now. I had disability for forty years before that. When the war ended for me, I was free of all that discipline. But I was a mess, too wild in my mind to hold on to anything or anyone. I was lucky Charlotte and I had met in Vietnam and remet in the hospital stateside where we decided to hold onto each other.

“One friend was all I needed. We have been together ever since. I think about what we are doing as finding more people like us and finding ways to be of service to one another because we know each other's pains and there are many.

“I hope we do what we need to do to bring this scourge of the KFF to an end without making any one of us a special target. We have learned that once we are individually identified we come into danger. Being anonymous will be our safety. There is nothing special we must do. Stay aware. Watch what happens near you. Come to the Center for a meal each day. Bring what you learned and share it with others here. There is no call to arms. No need to be any more than eyes, ears and memory.”

Ginelle had stood at the head of the table to deliver her speech. Fifteen people attended the dinner. It was spaghetti with a watery red sauce and a slice of

sourdough bread. Once everyone was finished, she had been moved to stand and speak. There was no agenda.

There were the five smile campaigners dressed as was their new custom. The other ten were recruited by the smilers. Everyone knew someone.

“Why are we here?” Said one recruit. “I ate. I want to do what needs to be done. What is it?”

Another homeless vet rose. “I know what needs to be done. I would do it, but I would be targeted and left for dead. Who thinks they want to lead? Not me.”

Sarge rose. “I was a sergeant in the Rangers. I killed peasants for the government. Probably we all did. None of that matters any more. Now someone is targeting us. We are nobodies in somebody’s way or we are being harvested for somebody’s gain.

“We all know about KFF. A gang of young men roaming the BART stations hassling homeless vets. I have been beaten. You may have been beaten, too. I and my four friends were recently homeless, but we teamed up to rent a room. That is the difference between us. We are all nobodies and want to stay that way for safety’s sake.”

Charlotte stood next to Sarge. “I don't think anyone should lead. The way things work in the City, if someone tried to lead, they would be subjected to things none of us are prepared to withstand. Many of us are on medications or should be. We are not individually strong. We do not easily trust leaders.”

The first recruit rose again. “Then, what do we do? We can't lead. No one would follow. The KFF gang is real. We are their victims. Nobody will stop them. Now what?”

“There is an answer.” Corporal said. “The danger to me is the same as the danger to you. Rule one must be to not draw attention to yourself by standing up to them. Rule two must be to use your eyes, ears and memories. Don't become a witness of the KFF crimes. Become a memory of their actions. Do not find a cop.

Find a way back to the Vet Center and share your memories with the others here who you see around you.”

“Then what?” The first recruit said. “I don't get it.”

“You said it. 'Nobody will stop them.' I am a nobody. So are you. It might sound tricky but we – the nobodies – can stop them.” Corporal smiled his best, warmest smile. “I see the KFF signs in the stations. We all see them. I know that if I panhandle under their tags either I give them a part of my money or I will be beaten by them. It is a turf battle with the KFF turf being the best sites for panhandling.

“There are things to see and hear that will help us. We need to know the KFF gang members better. People have heard their names. People might know where they come from, where they sleep or maybe even who is the somebody that protects them. Nobody will help us, if Nobody knows who they are.”

Sarge rose once more.

“Go back to the station where we found you. Watch. Remember. Return here. Take no risks. Before you go be sure to know who your friends are.”

The five smilers cleared the tables and washed the dishes. The recruits talked a bit then left.

## **Sometimes Nobody is all you got**

Stevie was a different person from the one Brad first met in the Vet Center. The law student had kept his schedule, yet he had not seen Stevie since the day he was beaten by the KFF. Now Stevie was a smiler.

“Brad, long time no see.”

“My God, Stevie, you are a sight for sore eyes. It has been at least two months.”

“Been busy. I have joined the rebellion. I have been smiling along Market Street this morning and mapping KFF tags.”

“I guess I have been missing something. I see Sarge and Corporal once in a while dressed up like the Blues Brothers except for the shades. You look the same. Can you sit and talk a bit?”

“One thing first and I'll be back.” Stevie crossed the dining room and sat with a small group of older vets. They talked for a few minutes. Stevie got a cup of coffee and sat next to Brad.

“How is school?”

“Good.” Brad said. “I am in my last year and the work is getting easier.”

“Sounds like a good sign. I have been better. Out of the hospital. Still sober. Working every day on the smile campaign. Keeps me happy.”

“What a funny idea. If I had not seen how Corporal and Sarge have changed I wouldn't give it another thought. How many people are in the campaign now?”

“Don't know. It is not for everyone. Some start and stay. Some start and go. Maybe 20. If you add in the watchers maybe 50.”

“Watchers?”

“It's a long story.”

“I have time. Tell me about it.”

“Watchers watch. Smilers smile. Simple as pie.”

“Watchers watch? What do they watch?”

“KFF. Kill For fun. A gang. The one that beat me.”

“Smilers?”

“That's the rebellion.”

“Sarge's rebellion?” Brad said.

“Not exactly. It is nobody's rebellion.”

“I'm confused.”

“Brad, I was too.” Stevie would have tried to explain, if Brad had asked him. Brad was contemplating what Stevie might have meant. Brad scratched his head looking like the ideas were swimming around behind his eyes.

“Are you a watcher?”

“We all are.”

“Ah, what are you watching? A gang. The one that beat you? Now I get it. Sorry.” Brad looked excited. “Tell me more. Is there a plan?”

“Become one and you will see.” Stevie was enjoying teasing Brad. “Nobody gets a free lunch. In this case, it's a free dinner. We get together once a week and talk about what we remember of what we saw or heard.”

“Become a watcher? So, when I go to the BART station, I watch what is going on around me ...”

“And listen.”

“And listen.”

“Then there is memory: eyes, ears, memories.”

“Nice. Makes sense. Then I get a free meal.”

“That's it. Eat together. Share what we saw. No one leads. Everyone knows.”

“Safety in numbers?”

“Yup.”

“Is there a goal?”

“Rebellion and self-government.”

“Smiling and watching lead to self-government?”

“Think. We are vets because we had no choice.”

“GW Bush was in the National Guard and escaped Vietnam.”

“Then he invaded Iraq with the National Guard. Those guys didn't escape.”

“One of life's ironies.”

“Hardly an irony. More like repression. Many people are angry still about that bait and switch. Nobody is on my side. Nobody is all I got.” Stevie knew Brad had found the wallet and taken it to Sarge and Corporal. He knew Brad had been looking out for him in some way. Brad was too under the influence to be acting bravely – alleys are often bad places after midnight. Brad hadn't given it a second thought. He barely recalled much of that evening.

“How do I join? Get a suit?” Brad said.

“Wednesday this week is the dinner. Nobody is in charge. You get a Cynthia suit and a BART and Metro pass. I'll give you the address.” Stevie still grinned when he said 'nobody.' He thought the contradiction to be as humorous as Sarge's new knock-knock joke: 'Nobody Who?' 'Nobody knows my name.’”

## **Nobody's gotcha**

“Sarge, I am getting nervous.”

“I thought we'd talked this over and we were ready to act.”

“Yeah, but our plan is as bad as the Iraq invasion. They said Iraqis would greet us as liberators. Whoever said that was crazy or a liar.” Corporal liked arguing against the US invasions of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Sarge had heard it all before. Corporal was correct to remind him that action defines you, he listened again. Sarge smiled his brotherhood smile, accepting his friend’s reluctance as his own.

“We will let him go, unharmed, if I am wrong.”

“We'll no longer be nobody. We will be kidnappers, even if we do release him.”

“Then we cannot act.”

“Sarge, you know I love you. You saved me. More than once.” Corporal smiled his best loving smile. Sarge sent it back to him.

“Corporal, if you do not live, then neither do I.”

“OK. So here is what we can do. We should try to talk to him first. If he would greet us as liberators, if we kidnap him, then let's try to talk to him. No fear. No shame. No violence.”

“We know where he lives. We know where he does his business. We know where he gets drunk.”

“Let's go to his bar. Hang out. Wait for him.” Sarge said. “We could ask him to join us. We could say, look you deserve better. Nah. We could ask him who he thinks he is in the grand scheme of things. We could ask him if he is a nobody. Ah ...”

“Hmm. No way that works. He is a meth freak. He is high for days on end. He has lost his awareness of himself. Addiction is a sentence to solitary confinement in

your own head.” Sarge loved the way Corporal could be poetic, connecting the invisible to the visible.

“Sarge, say we get close, so we can tell him we know about his life. We could tell him about nobody watching the KFF. All true.” Corporal's mouth was close to Sarge's ear. The sound of the Metro train car taking them out to the Castro Metro station drown the conversation from those who filled the seats and the others hanging on to the bars that ran the length of the car. Whispering in each other's ears is the only way to talk on the Metro. The younger riders texted to one another, even if they were sharing the same seat. Nobody heard them.

“Yah, but that's telling him to fear us. To be with him we must be him. Wait. Wait. Let's say we try to be him in a way that he recognizes but does not fear. Let's say we noticed he was selling meth and wanted to join forces with him.”

“Not true. How about we noticed that he runs with KFF but is a loner otherwise. The other gang members do everything together. He stands alone after they end their day. That is how we chose him as the target.”

“Maybe, his affiliation with KFF is different. Maybe, he is the connection to the somebody in charge of the KFF.”

The Metro stopped at the station. Sarge and Corporal left the car and headed to the stairs along with half the other passengers.

“Let's go for a diet coke at his bar and see what's what.”

“No diet coke. That stuff can kill you.” They laughed together and headed for a look around on the surface of the most famous City street in the famous Castro District.

“Nice night.”

The bar, Twin Peaks Tavern, was also famous for its clientele so many of whom had passed in the plagues of HIV and AIDS. Sarge and Corporal stood at the light at Castro and Market at the top of the ramp leading up from the underground Metro station. Twin Peaks was across Castro from their position.

“I remember that place.” Corporal said. “I would panhandle up Market and when I got here, I would go in and buy a vodka tonic. I sat upstairs with a view of the main floor bar.”

“Hard for me to be here at all. Guess I have problems with gender issues, as my son John puts it.” Sarge had never spoken like that before in Corporal's memory. The look on his face alerted Sarge. “I'm getting too old to care. It's not a real solution to my problem but the dullness of desire makes it seem less important. Let's go get a soda and wait for our guy to show.”

They crossed Castro. Sarge went in for a looksee. The Tavern opens onto the corner. Corporal held the door. Sarge made a slow cruise of the often-cruised bar. It was a normal night with the normal crowd. The Castro had changed since its post-Vietnam War height of the lifestyle, then through AIDS and Harvey Milk.

“He's not here.” Sarge said as he exited.

“Look upstairs? Not there? Let's get a drink and sit there if we can find seats. We'll see it all from there.” Corporal led the way. The two old friends dressed in the smile campaign uniform sat above the mix of revelers and waited for the KFF member to show.

## **Nobody's going to get caught**

Lucas Krider was a busy boy. Sarge had seen him help to beat Grease. The Watchers followed him and the KFF through the night as the KFF made its rounds through the stations. The weeks of watching and meeting to share memories was beginning to payoff. The Watchers had the Embarcadero to the SFO stations covered for every hour of operation. The Watchers numbered over 70 with an even distribution of smilers and others. The black suited men and the flowery dressed women traveled in pairs throughout the daylight hours. At night the smile campaign was inappropriate for the misunderstandings that they experienced. A smile at night was an invitation that was unintended. Smilers worked the day shift and the 'irregulars' ruled the night.

Sarge and Corporal traveled together at night. They followed KFF and then they followed the loners, first, Amos Wells and Billy O'Neal. That led to literal dead ends in the cemeteries of Colma and San Bruno. Lucas was next. The Memory was clear on Lucas: he was a dealer. He hung with the KFF and distributed meth to the homeless. He might be gay, he drank at a gay bar. He connected daily with the KFF but beyond one round of the stations, he spent many rounds at the Twin Peaks Tavern. When he left, invariably in a cab, the Watchers had no ability to follow him. Cab chases weren't in the budget, Sarge said.

"We've been here for an hour. Just about everyone who was here when we arrived has gone." Sarge was working up to a suggestion that they call it a night when a loud voice brought his attention to a new customer pushing through the front door.

"Georgia." Lucas said to the bartender. "A double usual." Everyone heard him, many turned their heads to look at him. He ignored them.

"It's George to you ungay boy." George poured the whiskey and set it on the bar near the door and near Lucas. He was high already. A double whiskey would maybe kill him, George thought. "Good luck."

Lucas grimaced as he sipped his drink. George left him alone.

Sarge and Corporal had a good view. Lucas sat by himself. No one hailed him. No one came by to talk. For a weekday night the Twin Peaks was busy. All the tables were taken by small groups talking and reveling in a controlled but happy scene. There were other singles at the bar besides Lucas. He was the only one who looked like he wanted to stay that way.

Fifteen minutes passed. The smilers bought another round of sodas and moved down towards the bar. Sarge sat next to Lucas. Corporal sat next to Sarge. Lucas turned to look at them. He stared at Sarge who caught his eyes.

“Names Sarge and that's Corporal.”

“What are you? Salvation Army?”

“Nope. We're nobody. Just looking for some advice.”

“Shut up and go away.”

“We're looking for some blow.”

“Dude, you're kidding me. Over half the people in here would get you off. Not me.”

“Gotcha. Sorry to bother you. Guy said you were the one he knew had little baggies.”

“Not me.”

Corporal put his hand on Sarge's forearm. Sarge shrugged and turned back to his soda water with a twist.

“So much for the Victors' will be welcomed idea.”

“I liked it.” Corporal said. “Now what?”

“Plan B. Amos. We could have a trial of those he has beaten as jurors.”

“And witnesses, plaintiffs and judge. Sounds like it could be fun.”

“Al, we need to try this on for size. See if it fits. Amos is special.”

## **Nobody escapes death**

John knew that his end was near. His father had warned him very clearly.

Sarge found him at the bar in the Hotel Nikko.

“Dad!”

“John. Can I join you.”

“Sure. Absolutely. I'm buying.”

“Good. I'm selling.”

John looked at his father and Sarge looked back at his son and savior. There is some wisdom that a doctor saving a life becomes responsible for all that person's debts. John had an Oh My God moment. Sarge didn't notice.

“Wow, it's you. You look great. Tell me what's up.”

“John, I have been busy. Working day and night.”

“Dad, that sounds exciting. Let me look at you. You're dressed for a ball.”

“It's a tux. It is the way I dress to respect those who see me. It says something about the expectation of a smile.”

“How did you find me?”

“Watchers.”

John took a second too long to offer a response. Their waiter who introduced himself as Francis, announced that he was ready to take their order.

Sarge was immediately ready for the moment.

“I'll have the Filet of Sole.”

“Dad, you've been here before?”

Sarge turned to Francis.

“No, Sir. I would remember this man.”

“I do not think the Hotel Nikko restaurant serves the homeless.” Sarge said.

John shook off his concern for Sarge's new manner. Sarge was different. The clothes made the man. Here is a man in a tuxedo with a haircut and a smile. The last time they were together Sarge was still in his uniform.

“What's new, Dad?”

“The smile campaign. The three rules for watchers. The Memory.”

“I have to catch up. What happened to the nobodies?”

“They aren't new.” Sarge said. “More each day. Smilers everywhere. The nobodies are coming out of the woodwork.”

“Smilers? You said that twice.”

“Close enough. The tux, or any dark suit, white shirt, a tie, polished shoes, a haircut, shave and a smile. That is the smilers look. No pretense. No interference or talking points. A smile for no reason. It's for everyone and received by those who know how to accept the unconditional.”

“Very philosophical. Can I ask a question?”

“Quod erat demonstrandum.”

“Dad. What has happened? It's not bad but ...”

“Son, I have practiced thinking. I have time. I've been thinking for most of my life, thinking about the things that make me confused, or angry, or lonely. With a mind free of alcohol there is more room for ideas.”

“I should try that.”

“It's not for everyone.” Sarge laughed. “I need your help, John.”

Francis returned with John's beer and Sarge's coffee.

“We have a situation. I am seeking advice.”

“You need a lawyer?”

“No. I need someone I can trust who has no skin in the game.” Sarge said. “John, I owe you my life – the one I am now living. I have gotten into a bind and before I go too far, I wondered if you would be my BS filter and tell me what doesn't sound right to you.”

“Dad, I hope I can help you. Tell me what's up.”

“I was beaten by a gang, the KFF. I had been following them, watching them. The Watchers watch them, follow them. We dress down and go undercover to build our memory of their actions hoping we can figure out what drives them.”

John reached out to touch his Father's hand. “What drives you?”

“They beat someone up just about every day. Nearly killed more than a few vets mostly my era.”

“Nobody cares?”

“Exactly.”

“I think I get your drift.” John said. “Cops are not interested. Maybe even involved. Few people outside the homeless see this stuff. Everyone else walks by, uninvolved. Only nobody cares. That's you and your friends, the smilers. Smiling is passive. To fight the KFF nobody needs to act. To act ends the nobody status of the actors. You have a plan to act. I am guessing you want to succeed in the action and not turn out to have foolishly wasted your status and endangered yourself.”

“How does that sound to you?”

“Self-defense is your right. It sounds like someone's idea of a pecking order. Self-defense means fighting the pecking order. You'll become somebody when you do. I see the problem. Or do I?”

“Yes. I love being nobody. I might hate the results of my actions and to a degree it is too late. Action has begun. The Watchers have mapped the entire KFF life-style and routine. The Smilers, all old vets, have begun to plot a counter-offensive.”

“The Watchers?”

“KFF is all about BART stations on the Peninsula and in the City. The Watchers are in all 13 stations from opening to closing. We watch and remember what we have seen or heard that might help us understand how to defeat the KFF. The Watchers meet one night each week for dinner at the Vet Center. We talk about what we have seen. The meetings are called the Memory.”

“Do you consider this a form of justice system?”

“My question is about conspiracy. Are we conspiring to break the law?”

“Defense of necessity is what it's called. You are conspiring to defend yourself out of necessity. Nobody cares. The cops don't care. City Hall doesn't care. Your actions are necessary to save yourself. Nobody must act to save themselves.”

“Like the Vietnamese?”

“And a long list of others, all of whom are under attack without any possible appeal to a higher power for assistance.” John reached out for his father's hand again just as their food arrived. The focus changed in favor of silence.

John chewed his cucumber salad deep in thought. Sarge ate slowly not having tasted any sauce besides tomato sauce since he could remember. John had a realization, then he saw the importance of it, and it was then that he became aware of his end.

“Dad, there are some dangers in acting from necessity. You cannot, for instance, decide to form your own gang to beat the KFF up.”

“Can I interrogate one of them?”

“Like on TV?” John was smiling at Sarge. “This is one hell of a problem. How does a nobody protect himself against assault without giving up his right to be free? I

saw a few things happen in or near Eureka while I lived up there. A man was killed in a campground by a group of drug addicted men and women trying to protect a child from sexual abuse. Their lives were so legally complicated that they felt they had to act on their own. They killed the guy and were soon arrested for it. Everything they wanted to accomplish, wanted to protect was destroyed.”

“We have taken one into custody. He is a loner. No friends. He has a home, an apartment out near Colma that he pays for with KFF money. We invaded his home when we were sure he was drunk, off speed and sleeping. He knows nothing about us. Not even our voices. That was last night.”

“Whoa. What are you after?”

“These people are nobodies, too. Nobody cares about them.”

“How ironic.”

“Maybe irony has an evil form. We are thinking torture, if necessary, to find out who is creating this KFF and the circumstances of protection they are enjoying. Who is the somebody behind these nobodies?”

“Where does it end?”

“We are also thinking about convincing him to join us, though that seems unlikely. He won't go to the cops or his gang buddies. He is an addict who knows he is hurting people. He will know what we know about him. Short of torture and this hope for conversion is what I am working on.”

“Short of torture?”

“Yeah. No worse than boot camp. Is that torture? It is all political.”

“Listening to Republicans talk about anything is torture.”

“Haven't had that pleasure.”

“Take my word for it. Save yourself the pain.”

“I promise.” Sarge sat back from his plate. “I have never eaten in such a beautiful and tasty restaurant. My eyes and tongue are going crazy. Once we pay, ah, you pay, we will leave the building and enter my world. I liked sitting here. I will remember it always. Being on the street outside feels the opposite. There is no beauty or savory flavors. There is only the people with loose change and the coldness of the city street. That is where we know we are nobody.”

“Gripe, grope, grasp is what I know.”

“I am with you there. Nobody can change the world. That is where I am.”

## **Nobody will miss you**

Charlotte looked as sad as Sarge had ever seen anyone look.

“I gotta go, Sarge. Sorry.”

“OK. I understand. Every day past a week seemed like a gift.” Sarge sounded as if he meant what he said.

She had often said she had a limit. What it was she did not say.

“I liked when we were mellow, smiling on our walks. Remember when we held hands and followed Ginelle and Al into the park. The sun was shining. I fell in love.”

“Everything was new. It was a great time for both of us.”

“But now ... Someone is going to get hurt. I don't want to see that. I mean, it could be you.”

“Charlotte, it already has been me. Not just last month but, you know, the war. Things that happened afterwards, the slow recovery of enough energy to imagine a positive moment in my future. You were part of that. Corporal and I were hoping for a beauty to find us.”

“One did. The smiles made you guys so different, new and wonderful. There is beauty in that, but it's over. Somehow necessity has trumped love and beauty.”

“Someone is being hurt. They are my friends. Nobody will help them.” Sarge said.

“I see no choice.”

“Neither do I.” Charlotte said. Sarge reached across the table to touch her hand. She pulled her hand away.

“I get that. Maybe I will see you around.” Sarge withdrew his hand.

“Ginelle and I are heading East, someplace without mass transit and KFF.”

“I will look for you with my best smile ready.”

“Is going a mistake? I am already lonely again.” Charlotte stood and walked slowly out into the alley. It was raining lightly. The light did not blind her. The door closed behind her.

Sarge watched her go. He thought about running after her and promising he would stop. He stood and looked around the Vet Center. No one else was there.

“Nobody's here.”

## **Nobody knows your name**

“I aint nobody. I had a father and mother. My father was an Iraq War I vet. He committed suicide from effects of a TBI. You assholes survived a war you lost. Traitors. That is who you are.”

“What is your name?”

“Clark Kent. KFF is my blood, my new parents. With KFF I am someone. I represent. My friends represent. You feel me?”

“Are you Amos?”

“Amos? Sure that's me, but who wants to know? Let me guess ... nobody. Well, if I get the crap I have heard you do I'd say nobody knows my name. I'n't that clever. Got a better one for you. We are ruled by anger that's who we are. We kill for fun. How's that?”

“Seen it before. Might have done some myself. Amos, we need you. Your life is shit. You have little. Never going to have more the way you are going. You need to see who is hurting from your gang's actions.”

“You have a kid?”

“Yup. One son. He's in his forties.”

“My father died from a brain injury.”

“I died from PTSD.”

“You're alive.”

“Just parts. What I was died as surely as not.” Sarge never took his eyes from Amos' face. He never blinked.

“You're Sarge, right?”

“Jonas Wright, Master Sargent, US Army Rangers served in Vietnam. Died in Vietnam. Sent home to rot. I'd guess your father was the same, a big drag on the family. My wife left me when our son was old enough to take care of me. I hooked up with a vet who served with me, who escaped the enemy and barely had a body to ship home. A real ugly guy who learned to smile with me and we overcame our deaths, like the phoenix we rose to fly again. You can, too. We need you to rise up in rebellion with us.”

“Rebellion? Smile? What a dumbass idea. Where the hell will that get anybody?”

“Less anger, more love. Stop hating your father. Stop taking it out on older homeless vets.”

“Who really cares? No wait, I got it. Nobody cares.” Amos exhaled. His eyes went to his feet then up to the ceiling. He looked like he wanted to say more but after a few false starts he exhaled again and looked back at Sarge as if to say, your turn.

“You got my message. Now what? What is left?”

“I want out of here. It smells bad. The ropes on my arms are hurting me. You know Sarge, what you are doing isn't right. You are not the cops. You have nothing to charge me with. This might be kidnapping.”

“Amos, we are trying to save you, give you a new life that is worth living.” Sarge was sitting in a straight back chair. His arms were over the back. His legs straddling the seat. “I don't want to see you leave until you have made the breakthrough.”

Sarge moved toward a door that connected to the next-door motel room. He opened it and in filed twelve men. They stood around Amos. They were not angry. They smiled. Sarge wondered if Amos was angered by the smiles on the victims' faces. Was he enraged by love?

“You beat me.” Stevie told Amos.

“I remember. In the Vet alley.”

You beat me, too.” Corporal said.

“You! You asshole. I kicked you in the balls. You are that smiling shitforbrains. Has it occurred to you that people have taken notice of you? Your name is on a list.

“Where? Heaven?”

“God, you are a difficult POS.”

“In this room are twelve people you have beaten. Three were hospitalized. One more has not recovered enough to be released. That's six months now.” Sarge said.

“You O.G.s are strange dudes. I work hard to make money. Whaddayathink this is? The boss explains it so smooth, about how everyone gets a win from this. We encourage good behavior. Beggar vets have protection and discipline. Everyone takes 20%. Win.”

No one responded.

“Have you ever seen such a business? Try every business is this way.”

Grease spoke up. “You're saying thuggery is capitalism? Is every job a capitalist job? Should we blame you for the harm we felt from you? Was it just business?”

Amos was angry and ferocious. He looked right at Sarge. “When I saw you around the stations, I found your crib. I wanted to deal with you, but the boss said no.

“Boss? Who is that?”

“No way am I going to give the boss up. The whole bunch of you couldn't bring him down.”

Amos was getting bored. The signs of defeat were beginning to show. His wrists were rubbed raw from the rough hemp rope that was used to bind him.

“You are nuts.” Amos struggled against the ropes, but the apparatus of the restraints left him helpless. Sarge and Corporal had chosen to treat Amos as if he were a prisoner of the NVA. A broomstick sized metal bar held his arms at the elbows behind him while his hands were tied together in front of him. His ankles

were tied together in a pair of loops that let him shuffle forward or backward but never a full step. He was naked from the waste down. He was sitting on a small port-a-potty.

“I can wait. I am comfortable. I sleep in a bed, eat homemade food at the Vet Center. The walks I take show me the world as it is, tormented but healing. I spent the morning trailing your pals. I have photos of them hassling one of the old vets.”

“I can't wait to get out of here. I have been patient with you, old man.” Amos furiously writhed against his restraints standing up and kicking the potty across the room. “When I do, I am going to find you and KFF, asshole.”

Sarge stood and helped Amos to sit back down on his little seat.

“Patience my young friend.”

“I almost fell for your shit. But I won't fall. My anger is better than your BS.”

“I believe you. Amos, I don't want you to suffer. We did what we hoped would be enough to convince you. So, we will release you and you'll leave. Good luck.”

In seconds Amos was freed. He left through the only door in the motel room. He had no idea where he was being kept and when he emerged out the front door, he realized he was in Oakland's China Town near the Nimitz Freeway.

“Damn, how crazy is that?” Amos muttered. He began trotting through the streets heading north towards the City Center Bart station a dozen blocks away. As he ran he thought. No money. Jump the turn style. Keep moving.

## **Kill For Fun**

Detective Sargent Denny Smith had seen videos of dozens of murders. When the SFPD found the body stuffed into a maintenance closet at Mission St BART, he was tasked to review all station tapes to find visual evidence of the stabbing.

There had not been many murders on BART. All of them were captured by the state-of-the-art camera systems 1980's style. The BART security forces made much of it since they thought people knowing how good the system was would reduce crime.

Smith watched the station videos on fast forward as the figures moved rapidly across the area outside the trains toward the exits while other passengers moved onto the train from the platforms. It was the final train to the airport last night that drew his attention and the figures of three men, apparently staggering drunk, one unable to walk as his two companions held him up.

He stopped the playback and found the trio leaving the train. He played it at regular speed. The inert one was red from blood, his clothes soaked.

“How did everyone miss that. The car must have been soaked in blood.” He leaned over and dialed the BART security looking for any news of the train cars condition and location.

The line was busy. He sent a text and returned his focus to the video. He halted the video to make screen images of the suspects. The victim was probably dead, he thought, as the two pulled him off the train, moved towards the closet, opening the door with a key and pushing the body in. They stripped their bloody outer clothing, threw them in, closed the door and moved back to the platform waiting for the last train into the City.

His phone alerted him to a text. It was BART security with a cell number. He dialed the number and reached a BART supervisor who informed him that the car was being held near the airport. There was blood everywhere on the floor and two seats. Blood had been used to write the letters KFF on one of the windows.

“Someone went crazy,” the Bart cop said. He promised photos when available. San Mateo police were running an investigation assuming murder. The discovery of the body at 16<sup>th</sup> St Mission station made it obvious there was a connection.

Smith began to search the video of the train's prior stops looking for signs of the suspects boarding the train.

“There they are. Ah, there were six walking together. They all boarded the car. No blood on anyone.” He made notes of his discovery. “They all boarded at Civic Center.”

A series of freeze frames and he had face views of all six. He had a picture of the live victim and the two who stuffed him dead into the closet. He isolated the other three. Then he began to search for their exits from the train. Two hours later he thought he knew what happened to all six.

The video from the train car would be decisive. Smith left BART HQ and headed towards the car's location. As he walked through the front office door to BART Security and to the car repair yard beyond, a BART cop whose name escaped him was walking toward him waving a large envelope.

“Hey, Smith, got a package for you.”

The envelope was open. It was addressed to BART, but according to the BART cop, it was hand delivered by an old man in a black suit. He did not give his name. The BART cop passed it to Smith. He explained that the cover letter said it was about last night's murder.

Smith pulled out a thick stack of photos printed on paper. Six pictures resembled closely the ones Smith had made from the videos. On the back of each of the six was a name and phone number. Some had addresses.

“Bingo.” Smith said as he rounded a bend in the hallway and entered the office of the head of BART security. No one was in the office except a cute secretary Smith immediately wished he knew. She asked his name.

“Denny. What's yours?”

“Mrs. Marvin Pritchard, secretary to the Executive Director.”

“Oh. How about Detective Smith, SFPD about a car housed nearby that was the scene of a murder.”

“I was told you were on your way. Here is a map to the location. Exit to the east. It is on track 17. San Mateo PD has a guard on it. I'll text him that you are on your way.”

“Where is the security tape from last night?”

“Still in the car. Ask SMPD.” Mrs Pritchard said. “Nice to meet you Denny. Have a nice day.”

“You, too. Marvin.” Smith said. She was chuckling as he left the room.

He walked down the hall as he looked more closely at the photos. They were all taken in BART stations. Some showed the suspects beating old homeless men. Most were group shots of six or seven men in their twenties. There were several pictures of graffiti: KFF.

“Someone has been following these boys. Curious.”

The car was a bloody mess. The SMPD officer knew nothing about the security video for the car. Smith phoned the Executive Director's office.

“Christine here. How can I help you?”

“Nice name. Better than Marvin.”

“Oh. Denny, did you find everything?”

“I need a security tech to get the tape. Can you help?”

“I will have someone there in a minute or two.”

“Much obliged.”

The tape was missing. The tech found an empty slot where it should have been.

“Strange.” said the tech.

The officer gave Smith the name of the investigating officer. Smith called. The investigating officer knew nothing about the missing tape. SMPD took finger prints but everyone must have been wearing gloves.

Smith looked at the blood smearing. He looked at the graffiti KFF. He saw attempts to lift prints. He saw no obvious prints.

Smith rode BART back to his office. He ran the names on the photos and found the identities, as given, matched with driver’s license photos, a few prior arrest records, and determined that these indeed were the men he saw entering the car at Civic Center headed towards the airport.

The next morning the Chronicle headline was “Five men arrested for grizzly BART murder.”

## **Nobody can do it**

Sarge reached for a copy of the SF Chronicle that was being handed to him by his friend, Alphonso Munoz.

“What's in this, Corporal?” Sarge said as he grabbed the paper.

“Headlines tell it all.”

“Oh.” he said as his eyes scanned the large words in the 26-point headline. “Says the police were tipped off by an anonymous person who provided critical information.”

“Yeah, it goes on to say it might have been an eyewitness. Quotes a detective, guy named Smith, who arrested the five suspects.”

“Wonder if they will talk. Probably not. They wouldn't talk to us. They thought we were joking.” Sarge stopped talking as he continued reading. “The victim was Amos. Stabbed twenty times.”

“What happened there? His pals killed him. Weird.”

“Grease saw them get on together at the Civic Center. They were arguing. Amos was being bullied to go along. There were no others in the car they entered. Probably only ten people on the whole train. John Smith saw them get off at 16<sup>th</sup> St Mission Station. There were three guys who came up the stairs. The other two went elsewhere. I was on night patrol and we talked after. No one saw Amos get off.”

“We had that train covered. Wonder what will happen today.” Corporal said.

“What do you have in mind?”

“KFF may be over. Six are now in custody or dead. What will the rest do?”

“Good question. Watchers meet tonight.” Sarge slowly read the article again. Nothing new came to him.

Corporal was still. Sarge looked up at him. Smiles were traded.

## **Nobody feels good**

Detective Denny Smith walked through the Civic Center station looking for signs. He carried a police camera. Every so often he aimed the camera and snapped a frame. After he walked the Civic Center Station, up and down the stairs and around the entrance areas above, he went on to 16<sup>th</sup> St and did the same thing.

He returned to Civic Center, walked the few blocks to his office, sat at his computer and downloaded the photos he had made.

He sorted them into two folders. 'KFF' and 'men in black.' The first was obvious the second an inspiration. Something was happening under Market Street that he could not see. He reviewed the second file and then he did.

“There you are,” he said, as he pulled the files showing at least three old guys dressed like morticians and acting like spymasters, watching what was going on. “You aren't watching everything are you? Nope.”

He matched the KFF graffiti files with the men in black he had selected.

“Nope. You are watching the KFF signs. Why?” Nothing in his pictures would answer that question. “Who are you? How many of you are there?”

Smith rarely rode BART. He had a 'company car,' nothing fancy, with a siren. He could park anywhere.

For the next three days he rode the trains back and forth across the City. He took hundreds of photos of men in black and KFF graffiti.

## **Men in black**

The Memory saw no KFF thugs on the day after the arrests. The watchers continued watching.

The meet had a new wrinkle.

“Saw this guy walking the stations. Took lots of pictures. I took one of him.”

“Me, too. Saw him once taking pictures of KFF signs. I think he's looking for us or just at us.”

Both speakers passed around photos of the man they were speaking of. Others as they saw them nodded in agreement.

“Yup, this guy took a picture of me. I am sure.”

“I saw him at 16<sup>th</sup> St.”

When the picture reached Corporal recognition hit him. “It's Smith,” he said as he handed it to Sarge.

“Yeah, that's him. Detective Denny Smith. Probably looking for his informant. When I delivered the photo set to BART, I was wearing black. Now he's looking for us.”

The diners, all watchers and smilers, broke into mumbling conversations which reduced to now what?

Stevie stood up to gain the floor. He waited for the mumbling to subside.

“Nobody will be hurt again by the KFF without the cops taking notice. We've always wished the cops were on our side. Now they are. But what was the cost? A murder? Sarge revealed? If KFF is done and not replaced by a new gang then maybe the watchers can retire.”

Stevie sat down. Grease stood.

“We could change our uniform. Try other types of outfits that amount to the same thing but not black. Watching is what we do no matter what we wear.”

Sarge was silent. No one else stood to speak. The meeting ended.

Sarge and Corporal walked home. When they reached the hotel door, Sarge stopped.

“Not tired. I feel like walking. Might be right for a night patrol. I am dressed in black but what of it?”

“Hey, I'd join you but I'm coming down with something. Sleep will do me good.”

They smiled and hugged their brother hug and went their ways.

BART would run until past mid-night. He took the escalator to the platforms below. The first train was heading east out of the Civic Center station. He boarded the last car.

## **Coincidence meet opportunity**

Smith smiled as he saw the man in black enter the car. He took a picture of him. The man in black saw Smith and recognized him immediately. Sarge sat across from him raised his camera and took a picture of Smith.

The train started to move. The shrieks of the car began anew.

“Detective Denny Smith, how are you tonight?” Sarge said. His voice was near yelling volume.

“Better now. I assume you are the one I am searching for.”

“Jonas Wright, retired Ranger Sargent, otherwise nobody.”

“The guy that brought the KFF to my attention is not a nobody.”

“You'll see. Nobody knows everything.”

“Jonas, you have a funny attitude.”

“Why are you searching for me? You have what you need.”

“Nope. I am missing a big piece. Why are you searching for me?”

“I am missing a big piece, too.”

“I am missing the tape from the car that would show the murder.”

“I am missing a name. Who created these gangs who feed off the most vulnerable? A guy named 'the boss' is who I am looking for.”

“The boss? Does there need to be one?”

“Denny don't mess. I have the tape. You can find the boss. I want to know. Trade?”

“Jonas, look who's messing. You have stolen property, obstructing justice...”

“I told you who and where to find them. That was the quickest arrest anyone ever made. Thanks to ... what?”

“I want that tape.”

“I want that name.”

They sat. An old man in a black suit. A younger man who was armed with the power to arrest and search.

“I have to hand it to you, Jonas. You were on them like flies on shit. Why didn't you call a cop? No, wait. I know. It is obvious from the pictures that these guys were protected. I was afraid they stole the tape.”

“I was in the next car. When they left, I went into their car, saw the shocking scene and went for the tape. I have spent thousands of hours on these trains and saw how the system worked. I was afraid BART cops would get there first and destroy it. I saved it for you, sort of.” Sarge stood as they approached the next station.

“Tomorrow night. Same place?”

“You'll bring the tape?”

“We'll talk more. Bring me a name. The tape is safe from thieves.”

“And cops?”

“Yup.”

Denny stood. Sarge was taller. Denny young enough to be his son. Sarge smiled his fatherly smile.

“Jonas, that's who you are. A smiling guy.”

“Trying to stay alive. Smiles are good energy.”

The train stopped at the Colma Station. They both left the train and crossed the platform to board an inbound train to the Civic Center. Like old friends they sat together.

At Civic Center they walked up the stairs side by side.

At the top they shook hands.

“Tomorrow.”

“I'll be there.”

They went their separate ways. Sarge to bed and Denny back to his office.

“I need a name.” He said as he waited for his computer to boot up. “KFF. Protected by BART security. Maybe Mrs. Marvin can help.”

## **Change of heart**

Charlotte read the morning paper and knew that the nobodies had dealt a blow for justice. She read the articles twice to see if Sarge or Corporal had been named. She was sure one of them was the unidentified informant. Ginelle was lonely again.

“Now, can we go back?”

“Honey, it doesn't sound over.” Charlotte said.

The second days article was more detailed than the first which reported not only the crime but the arrests of five suspects. The second, a few days later, interviewed Detective Smith in some detail giving his story of how the names of the suspects had been determined.

“People can be amazing, sometimes.” He was quoted as saying. “Before we were done with our preliminary investigation, we were handed pictures, names, addresses and phone numbers. Who did that? I do not know but someone unusual, for sure.”

Charlotte read the paragraph to Ginelle.

“He doesn't know who did it.” She said.

“Ginelle, hon, Sarge and Corporal are after something and poor Detective Denny is being gamed to get it for them. Watch.”

“You might be right. I remember a conversation probably two months ago about what the cops could do that we couldn't.”

“Interrogation?”

“And incarceration. But the point was that there had to be someone, the boss. Behind the nobodies in the KFF was a somebody powerful enough to make it easy for KFF to do what it does without fear of prosecution.”

“Who do you think it is?”

"A big cop with power over political people, Supervisors and BART executives."

"Seems possible." Charlotte said. "That's a lot of people. There has to be money in this to pay for all that protection. Where is the money?"

"Maybe what we see is a small part of a much bigger thing."

"There's the panhandlers and the meth. How much could that be?"

"Not much."

"Let's see. KFF had thirteen stations. Each station had, what, five panhandling spots worth \$100 a day. They took half of that, plus they sold meth worth say \$10 for \$60 a day times five times 13. What's that?"

Ginelle grabbed a pen and on the back of a receipt she calculated the product.

"Times 360 days a year...that's, whoa, that's ... wait let me do that again. 60 times 5 times 13 is one day. Times 360. Oh, my god, that's over a million dollars a year. \$1,404,000 to be exact."

"A tidy sum and all they have to do is look the other way for a fifty- fifty split between the boss and the gang worth three quarter mil a year." Charlotte said.

"KFF was fifteen people splitting \$700,000 for 40 some thousand a year. That's a good day job."

"Seems like too much to lose. They won't stop if they are not found and exposed."

"That means it ain't over yet."

"I am still lonely and miss the dickens out of Al."

"Jonas is always on my mind."

"Why don't we go back?"

"They don't need us worrying over them. They need their wits about them."

"Let's do the crossword."

## **Nobody goes to jail**

Corporal brought the morning paper up to their room.

“Two days in a row, front page news.”

“You are kidding, right?”

“Nope. The paper goes to bed at eleven o'clock each evening. So the murder was on a Monday night past Monday's deadline. The first one ran Tuesday. The second one, today's, was written before you met Denny last night. He didn't know you when it was written.”

“I get it. That means it could be in tomorrow's paper. I have to deal with this. We are meeting again tonight for a swap. He might talk about me today and I wouldn't know until after the swap. I have to make another move before he talks to the reporter again.”

“You could talk to her, the reporter, Azimov.”

“I'd rather go to jail.” Sarge stood and dressed in his tux. He spent a long time combing his hair and practicing the smile he imagined would make him look like an attorney. “I am going to jail. Gotta look my best.”

Corporal knew not to ask.

“See you when I see you, Sarge.”

“I'll be back for dinner.”

Sarge left the relative safety of the hotel for a brisk walk to the city jail. He carried an old briefcase. It was empty except for a legal sized yellow pad and two pens. He had a printed list of the arrestees and their personal information as far as he knew it. He had a new wallet with a copy of Bradley's Hastings law school ID that he made the night Brad spent drunk on the apartment floor.

He entered the jail, passed through the metal detectors set aside for visiting legal counsel. He asked to speak to his clients, and he passed his list to the jail staff.

“You want them all at once or one at a time?”

“All at once.”

“It'll be a wait. Room 4L. Down the hall. Follow the 4's. Through the door marked 4 and to the left first door.”

“Thanks.”

He did as he was told and found himself in a room with an eight seated table separated by a heavy wire fence from a two seated table. He had access to the two-seater and sat down arranging his tablet and pens neatly in front of him.

He waited poorly. Back and forth he walked as if he were incarcerated. He walked, then sat, then rose to walk again.

A half hour passed. No one came to tell him anything.

Another half hour passed. The second was longer than the first, he thought. The door behind him opened and Smith walked into the room and sat next to Sarge.

“Jonas, fancy meeting you here. Misrepresenting a member of the bar to a law enforcement officer can be a class three felony. Interfering in a felony investigation makes it a serious offense punishable by a three to five year sentence if found guilty.”

“Denny, it took you an hour to get here. What were you doing?”

“Looking for a name so I can get a tape. I was at the airport at BART security.”

“I needed to talk to you about something that is bugging me about tonight's swap?”

“Shoot.” He said, then laughing, “Not really.”

“Denny, cops are all crazy. I want to be sure you don't tell Azimov about me.”

“She asks. Says you are a hero and she wants to interview you. I won't tell her. She hasn't called today, yet, but I bet she does.”

“You getting a name?”

“Funny, that.” Denny said. “It's a bit tricky. I didn't come here to talk to you about it. I am putting you under arrest for a misdemeanor interference. You'll be processed. I'll give you a phone call to arrange bail and release you in time to catch our train. See you then.”

Denny left the room. In five minutes, another officer entered, cuffed him. And took him through the labyrinthian halls to processing and into a holding cell. He was allowed to call his son John who took the call in stride promising bail by dinner time.

Sarge missed the sun. He spent the day and early evening staring into the gloom of solitary confinement.

The door opened. “Jonas Wright?”

“That's me.”

“We are releasing you. I hope I don't need hand cuffs to get you out.”

“No. I am good. Just want to go.”

He went straight to the station and boarded the last car of the 11:45 train to the airport. Denny was sitting there. He raised his camera and took a picture of Sarge. Sarge raised his hands mimicking the camera, scrunched up his face and made a loud clicking sound only an imaginary camera would make.

“Did you enjoy your afternoon?”

“Maybe. Depends on how this ends.”

“Ends? I was hoping for a longer relationship. I looked up your son. He paid your bail on a credit card. Veterans Protective Fund. Says he does this a lot, pays vets' bail. Didn't know that. Not that I should but it sounds nice. He's an interesting guy. He knows some stuff about you that he freely told me so I would get what you are up to.”

“What do you mean?”

“Let's see. Nobodies. Smilers. Watchers. Memory.”

“Oh.”

“Did you know John is going to run for office? He is raising funds and plans to campaign for Supervisor next year?”

“Didn't know. I am a nobody and I like it that way.”

“He said that about you, said you want to hide but that you have many talents, which I agree with. Look let's cut to the chase.” Denny stood up as the train reached the 16<sup>th</sup> St station. “Come on.”

Sarge shrugged and followed the Detective onto the platform. He followed Denny to the closet door where Amos' body was dumped. Denny pulled the knob, but the door remained closed.

“Locked.” Denny said.

“OK.” Sarge tugged on it and agreed. “How did those guys open this door? They had a key. The station tapes are clear. They had a key.”

“Who gave it to them? Wait. They were given one key, this one. There was a plan. The murder was planned by the people who gave them the key.” Denny was emphatic. “My guess. The tape you took won't help us find out who that was, but it might make one of the killers tell more than he would otherwise. My question is why this guy was killed? Wasn't he one of the KFF and all?”

“He was but he spent some time talking to some watchers. Took him out of action for a night.”

“Which night, Sunday before the murder?”

“Yes. He was with us until BART opened in the morning on Monday. Maybe they thought he traitored them and deserved death.”

“Or the boss thought it was a calculated possibility and therefore...”

“He needed to go to protect the boss.”

“Simple enough. Let's get the boss. Want to?”

“You know I do. I dream about them. Nightmares really.”

“I am all about that. I have nightmares, too, because catching these bastards is damn dangerous. There must be something big in their game to make murder a business alternative. Wouldn't you say?”

“Power or money.”

“Same thing, no.”

“Let's see. The KFF controls the best begging places near the BART stations. They hit the beggars up for a fifty-fifty split to protect the turf for them. They also sell them meth but not such a big deal. They do this in all the outbound stations to the airport.”

“What is one station worth to them?”

“We found them controlling 60 to 70 begging locations at the 13 stations.”

“Their split is 50%?”

“Maybe.”

“You have a calculator?”

“You kidding? Use your phone.”

“Oh yeah. Let's see. 65 begging locations make 5 per on the average. What's one worth?”

“Could be good. Say a c-note.”

“You won't believe it.”

“What?”

“It is enough to kill for. Over a million.”

“Wow. Not just a punk gang.”

“What did Amos tell you?”

“There is a boss. Too big for the Smilers to take down. It was a good business, enough for everyone.”

“Fits.” Denny said. “The boss or his associates got a key, gave it to the KFF gang to use when Amos is killed. Premeditation.”

“Now what?”

## **Nobody knows what they want**

The third article was two days later. Azimov had interviewed the informant.

Azimov knew more than she was telling in that third article. Of that Corporal was sure. So was Ginelle.

“I missed you so much.” She said. “Charlotte is still hiding. She thinks things are just getting weird.”

“Ginelle, I have been so busy we wouldn't have spent much time together anyway. You would have still missed me. If you want to be with Charlotte until the coast is clear, then I will love you still. I get it. Believe me. Sarge and I have talked over this stuff a hundred times. In the end we do what we do. Life is intuitive Sarge says. He's crazy, of course, but he says really interesting things that get me thinking.”

“It's 6:30 in the morning. The paper just hit the stands. I was downstairs waiting for it. I knew you were here. I grabbed a paper and jumped on the elevator.”

“That is impressive.”

“I didn't take any chances. I watched Sarge leave at 4:00 this morning on his night patrol. You were where I wanted you: alone. That sounds eerily seductive.”

“Sarge gave me a list of things to do from his perspective. I have been working on it for the last two plus hours. There are things you could easily do as well as me. Doesn't sound very seductive. Does it.”

“How condescending of you. Kidding. What do I do?” She said. “I will do anything you think will help.”

“The big job is searching all of the watchers' photos looking for some magic something – a clue about the boss.”

“I'm on it.”

They spent all day looking at pictures and listening to the TV and radio. All day long an interview for TV played on local TV stations with sensational trailers claiming names would be named. No names were named.

Ginelle became tired and 'goofy' according by her own assessment.

They gathered the photos they felt were candidates for 'clues.' Corporal put them into a manila envelope after noting on the back of each the date, time, location, photographer.

“Sarge said not to leave important things in the room. We have to walk them over to Brad's building and leave them with the front desk.”

“KFF is the tip of the iceberg if you ask me.” Ginelle grabbed his hand and pulled him through the door.

A two block walk behind them. Their package delivered. They stood at the main entrance to the Tower as Brad's building was known.

“Dinner?” He said.

“Let's go.”

“Vet Center?”

“Best food in this part of town.”

“May I take your arm?”

“Of course.” She said. “Al, why did you never marry anyone?”

“Same as you, I'll bet.” He squeezed her closer to his side. “Present company excluded, I never met anyone who had a chance to be both with me and happy to be with me.”

“Maybe we should ...”

“Yeah? I thought that thought after you two moved out. That's when things got busy as all get out.”

“Think that thought again. OK.”

“You really are lonely, aren't you.”

“Not this minute, but I keep thinking about tomorrow. I want to wake up next to you.”

## Title

Billy O'Neal sat on a cot by himself. His first night in jail he had ripped the sleeves off his jail shirt, so his tats were visible. He loved his white pride worldwide motto around an iron cross. He bled for that one. The first night after their arrest all five suspects were together in a holding cell. Billy had seen a movie where a bunch of suspects were put into one room. He took it as a sign that bigger things were in front of them. The movie suspects planned a robbery together. His buddies slept and farted, but never said a word.

The next day they were separated. He spent the day alone. Billy rolled around all night wondering if his pals were turning on him, selling him out. Nah, he thought, they are assholes to the end. Prison or streets, it's all the same. Warehoused, Amos called it. Won't have to look at his ugly face again.

The beginning of the third day began the same. He was moved again, this time into a cell with two very large black males. He wished his shirt covered his white pride worldwide motto. They never even looked at him. An hour later he was taken to an interview room where he met his attorney, a shaky little blond boy, named Addy something.

"Addy? Short for Adolf? What a kick." Billy loved being a jerk.

"Whatever. Look your ass is grass. They say they have a tape showing you stabbing the victim, a ... ah ... Amos Thaddeus Wells, five times."

"We all stabbed him five times. Know why asshole. Simple. We couldn't all have killed him. So, none of us did. Get it?"

"Like I said your ass is grass. You are not innocent. You will never see sunshine again."

"So what? You think the sun shines in the BART tubes. Life in hell is just life in hell."

"Do you care what I think?"

"No."

“Good bye.”

“What do you mean Good bye?”

“Like I've said – and you should know I hate saying this again but – your ass is grass. Which means that for the rest of your life ... Why bother? I have said enough. There will be support for you inside. Do not talk to anyone except me about your situation. People are after you. Believe me. You killed a Storm Front member. He mattered. You are nobody even if you have a tattoo.”

Billy thought of himself as a hero. Addy knew that. Addy also knew an arrogant client would lose big. If he was humble the White Guys might figure him in once the story was told. If he was humble the jury might pity him and let him live.

“Addy, with all due respect, you have no idea what you are talking about. You will bail me out and I will do my thing. Thank you for your advice.” The lawyer stood, gathered his papers. He sat back down and waited patiently with his hands folded on his valise.

“What's this?” Billy said.

The door opened and two male cops entered.

“I'm Detective Smith. This is my partner Detective Blain.”

“Plain Blain.” Billy laughed. No one else did.

“We want to ask a few questions in the presence of your attorney. First, let me tell you a story. Six guys get on a BART train late at night. They board the last car. No one else is in the car. During the next ten minutes five of the men stab the sixth person, an Amos Wells, twenty times. Blood squirts everywhere. Three of the killers leave the train at Mission St and go up to the surface. You and a Nelson Franks pick up Amos Wells and carry him to a maintenance closet and stuff him and your bloody outer garments into the closet. Then the two of you go to the surface.”

Smith and Blain watched Billy's face as he tried to hide from Smith's words.

“We know much, much more. Wanna hear?”

“Fuck you.”

“Then what?”

“Detective,” Addy said. “My client needs to confer with his attorney. Is there an offer for cooperation I should know about?”

“Death.” Smith said. “He is not a candidate for any leniency.”

“Unless?”

“Eggs fry.”

“Meaning.”

“Crack the case so we can cook what's inside. Details, names.”

“Can you leave us?”

“Sure. I'll give you five. Then we are on our way to talk to the others.”

Addy rose and thanked the officers as they left the room.

“What a weasel you are. Fucking Smith is a ...”

“Work it out in prison. Now you should be thinking about such things as what you will need in prison. Give them something they want, and you don't get something you don't want. Get it Billy or your life is short and shitty. “

“Look Adolf, I am not going to be a witness for the prosecution. That will not turn out well for me. Besides I don't care. I am a warrior.”

Addy rose and took a step towards the door. The Detective opened it and came in.

“You need me?” Smith said.

“My client has nothing to offer.”

“There are four more down the hall. I understand that one of them asked to see us. Have a nice day.” Smith responded.

“Wait. What do I get?” Billy said.

“What do you want?”

“Freedom.”

“Solitary is the best you can get. Not on death row. Minimum twenty years.” Smith grinned into his face.

“I pick death.”

“Suit yourself.”

“What do you want from me?”

“The boss.”

“Amos was a traitor. You are saying he never told your friend, your informant.” Billy laughed maniacally. He went so wild Smith reached for the button that would have brought assistance from within the jail proper. He became recomposed. Smith relaxed. “He died anyway.”

“So will you. It's just a matter of how and when.” Smith said. “Anything else?”

“The boss isn't going down. Not by the likes of you.”

“That was what Amos probably said. Enjoy your execution. Good bye counsellor.”

Smith left the room to the lawyer and his client. He walked down the hall of interview rooms. In each of the four remaining rooms, one of the suspects was sitting talking to his lawyer.

Two doors down from O'Neal was Nelson Franks. Smith knew he had the key in his possession in order to open the door. The station surveillance tapes showed that. He knocked on the door and quickly opened it to see the female lawyer looking a bit out of her realm.

“Hi, I am Detective Dennis Smith. You may have met my partner Detective Blain. He probably explained what we know and how we know it. He was trying to impress upon Mister Franks the severity of his situation. I have a two questions for Mister Franks, if I may.”

“My name is Alicia Reynolds, attorney of record for Mr. Franks. We are preparing for arraignment. You may ask two questions. Nelson, do not answer either question until we confer.”

“Thank you, Miss Reynolds. Mister Franks there is no question you participated in the killing of Amos Wells. We know why your gang killed him from our interviews with others. We know you pulled his body from the train and stuffed him into a maintenance closet. From our interviews we know you had the key to the closet.”

“Fucking O'Neal.”

“I am sorry. Hope that didn't upset you.”

“Detective, what are your questions?” The lawyer said.

“Oh, yeah. Just trying to bring you up to the moment. Another member of your gang has said he will tell us anything to avoid execution.”

“I am instructing my client to not listen to any more of your diatribe. A question please.

“The only piece of information that will save you from execution is the name of the person or persons who gave you that key. Do you want to avoid execution?”

“No.”

“Where should we send your personal affects?”

“Don't answer that!”

“Up your ass.”

“Nice. My work is done here. Counsellor have a wonderful day. Nelson, you too.”

Smith left. He was smiling a smile he had practiced for years. It had the quality of genuineness. It gave away nothing and expected nothing. He called it smiling at the devil. He thought of it as a weapon.

Back down the hall to the next door. He knocked and entered.

He walked to the table and sat as far away from lawyer and client as possible.

“You are ... ?” He asked.

“This is my client Randal Youngman. I am Richard G. Klienman of Klienman, Jones and Etheredge.”

“I am Detective Dennis Smith. I have a few questions for your client if I may.” He smiled at Richard. Richard put on a strong face.

“Don't answer the questions.” Kleinman said.

“Randal, you know what we know. We saw you stab Amos five times. We think we know why you did it. Following orders like a good soldier, but that went wrong. Now we are here. You are on the path to death row and a speedy execution. Would you like to avoid execution?”

“Don't answer.” Kleinman demanded. Youngman pointed a dirty nailed finger at him and then at Smith.

“Fuck you both.” He turned to focus on Smith. “Simple. I am your enemy. Your order is a dying order. I and people like me, white and mighty, will bury you and all your children.”

“Wonderful answer. You pick death over life. That's clear.” Smith said. “Kleinman, Kleinman... sounds Jewish ...”

“Detective!” Kleinman said standing as he did. Denny turned towards Youngman.

“Do you think he is looking out for a Jew hater like you?”

Youngman stood up and reached across the table to grab Kleinman's coat lapel and pulled him toward him. The rear door flew open and an officer with a spray

can entered behind Youngman. In seconds he was sprayed in the face with a light aspirant that laid him out on the table top before he could recoil against the assault.

"I'll take that answer as definite. Have a nice day counsellor." Smith left with his smile intact. Blain was waiting in the hallway.

"Whoa, Denny. That did not go well."

"What? He told us he hated Jews. He'll have trouble denying that."

"So what?"

"Watch and see. These guys are not open for discussing the issues of the murder, but they will blurt their individual roles out. Time will tell."

"Now what?"

"Two to go. You want to try?"

"Why play with them. Put 'em in prison and let them kill each other."

"How progressive of you."

"Watch and learn."

Mark Blain was not a man to trifle with. He had seen himself as reserved. He also thought of himself as a white man in a world so diverse that identity meant damn near everything. Giants, 49'ers, Warriors: that was his identity.

He entered the interview room that was occupied by Wayne French and his attorney Gerald Smyers of Dewey, Jones and Howe. Blain chuckled as he thought those words, as he walked through the door without knocking. He swept to an empty seat, as far from the suspect as possible. He shuffled through the papers in his hands very slowly as if making sure of the facts. He alternately looked at the attorney and the suspect. He did not introduce himself.

"Guy down the hall. The one with the white power worldwide tattoo says you are gay and that is why you are part of this gang of yours. You'll do fine in Prison. They

are your kind of people. Sorry counsellor there is nothing we need from your client. He is meat and we are throwing him to the wolves.”

“Wait a minute. What did the others say?” French said.

“Besides the gay thing, they mostly talked about how much you enjoyed stabbing the victim. They didn't want to do it, but you egged them on.” Blain loved messing with the helpless.

“Fucking Amos was a traitor. We couldn't trust him anymore. He ratted us to that smiling nobody. He had to go down. I can tell you know what I mean. That a hole Smith isn't white. You are. Smith is a mixed breed.” French rubbed his hand across his nose and snorted.

“Got a little habit? Do ya?”

“You are still a cop, but you can save yourself from being a traitor to your race.”

“Wayne, let me put it to you nice and plain. You are two steps from the gas chamber.” Blaine looked straight into his eyes. “Step one is you don't cooperate. Step two is you are sentenced to death.”

French spit across the table but missed Blain.

“Point for me,” Blain said. He stood and left the room.

Denny was in the hall. There was a commotion two rooms down, but Blain caught only its end and not the *causus belli*.

The noise reduced, Smith turned to Blain.

“Talent. It shows in the way you ducked. Blain, there is no hope for you. But sadly, your job is over. What you saw was the body of the fifth suspect being taken from the area. He died while talking to his attorney, stabbed himself in the throat with a pen his lawyer gave him to sign their engagement agreement. I doubt he wanted to face you.”

“Don't tell me no officer witnessed the event and... and ... the tape malfunctioned.”

“OK. I won't.”

“Wouldn't surprise me. The lawyer walked freely from the building?”

“Blain, you ask good questions.” Denny smiled. “Clean up here, I have business at BART.”

Blain would do whatever he felt needed to be done: He needed to have a cup of coffee, smoke a cig, look at some porn.

Denny smiled as he left the building. He felt different. Things were crazy. It's a job thing. But he felt free of it. That smiling guy, Sarge, had given Smith a thought.

## **Nobody gets help**

Sarge knew. There was an odor in his room. He went to his bed. He looked for his tags – things he placed around to tell him if someone tossed his bunk.

“Hmm. What's this?”

He smelled a woman.

“Ginelle. Bet anything. But this?”

In the funky old hotels, the rooms are small. With two queen beds in a room there is nowhere to hide. He was hiding nothing. He had nothing to hide. It was all in the Memory – except for the photos. They were in the Tower. Bradley had a safe. Sarge was only hiding his secrets. They were little things, mostly bloody things, he mostly didn't want to remember.

When the now deceased Amos told him they had his home address and were thinking about getting him there, Sage began to leave his tags around so he could see the invisible. If someone messed up his room looking for whatever, they would have to see the invisible to keep him from knowing they had been there.

They had been there.

It was nearly eleven at night. Corporal had a patrol. Sarge was minutes from leaving for his next meet with Smith.

He took another breath seeking something else to learn about who was who in the room.

“Go.”

The walk to the Civic Center station took him past the jail and the building that housed the detectives. As he walked past the entrance Smith walked up to him.

“Hey, let's change it up. How about a beer?” Denny said.

“How about a latte?”

"I know a place."

"So do I. Great beer and real coffee."

"Take me there."

They walked toward the Bay on Market. At eleven it belonged to cabs, and revelers and the Nobodies who lived on the streets.

"Smith, you better have good news for me. People are after me already."

"I'll put someone on your address."

"Cops live out front. Not any help. Look I need that name. I bet you are trying. I bet you have nothing."

"The name. Damn. It slipped my mind." Denny looked at the taller Sarge. "Sarge, smile at me. Make me help you. I have been waiting for somebody who actually cared to step up."

"I am Nobody and I like it. I stepped up and someone tosses my room. That ever happen to you?"

"Can't say." Denny said.

Sarge stopped walking. He had the serious look on his face. His smile was a straight line.

"Help me stay in this. I do not want to be captured. I will hide."

"I am only a cop. Just another Nobody."

"Tapes in the mail. Buy your own beer."

Sarge turned back to his hotel and Denny watched him go.

He watched the old man who had broken a case for him walk away into the City night with no way to recontact him. I could chase him? No. I must wait.

Smith left his car in the cop garage and walked the twelve miles home.

## **Everybody gets a sunrise**

Sarge walked two blocks up Market. He walked into the Castro District. He walked slowly down Castro then up 19<sup>th</sup>. He missed running into Denny as he walked up Church St towards Noe Valley.

“Stand and fight.” He said as he passed by the Mission Delores. He looked up at the building, its intricate detailing. People cared about it back then, he thought.

“Too old and weird.” He said as he reconnected to Mission St and the BART line. He boarded the last train to Civic Center. He sat in the last car. He was alone.

## **Nobody goes wild**

Jeremy Slate had been riding trains back and forth all night looking for the people in suits. He was scared when Sarge boarded. Jeremy had been watching the last car for two days. It was like a vision or something, he thought. They smile. They are nice. If there is anything, I want it's out of this shit. Amos was the end for me. I loved him.

Sarge knew where to sit to watch the last car. He was sitting where Jeremy was a few nights ago watching Amos getting stabbed to death. His eyes met Jeremy's eyes.

Sarge knew. Jeremy knew. They were tired. They were Nobodies. Jeremy stood and made the walk between cars to stand in front of Sarge.

"Sarge." Sarge said. He smiled his best, I smile at another being smile.

"Jeremy. KFF."

"I figured. Why?"

"You smile. I am lonely."

"I was there. The only way out is ..."

The doors opened and the BART cops entered. They were alone in the car.

"You ass fucks are out of here."

Sarge and Jeremy rose and left at a station ten miles from the Tenderloin. No public transportation was running.

"Jeremy, I have a friend nearby. Two blocks. A guy named Grease. Know him?"

"This is not my turf. I floated with the group, but these people weren't under my contract."

"Contract?"

"Yeah, I had ten spots. My spots."

“Jeremy, why are you talking to me?”

“You are the one.” He said. “I have been looking for you for six or seven days. Walking Market. Riding the train.”

“You have been looking for me since Amos died?”

“Yeah.”

“Here is Grease's building.”

Grease was home. Grease was not happy but open to housing them in his small hotel room until BART ran in the morning – 5 hours. Grease made them say 'Five hours.'

Five hours later they were walking back to the BART line. They had fare to Mission St. They got off at Mission St.

“Let me show you something.” Sarge grabbed Jeremy's arm.

A few feet away and Sarge stopped and pointed at the closet door. “There. In there he was, freshly killed and buried in the refuse. Amos.”

Jeremy burst into sobs and tears.

“Jeremy. I have a son older than you by double. I have not been there for him for a long time. He has had to take care of me. As if by magic I am here for him again. I owe him big time. If I can help you that would pay some of my debt to him.”

“Help me? You have no idea what is coming after you. I have seen it in action from the inside. We erased and replaced people like you overnight.”

“Got it. Why tell me?”

“I want out. You smiling people what have you got? Without doing much you defeated KFF. What's left is angry and mean. If you do not bring it all down, you might be in the closet next.”

“So, Jeremy, I ask again, why talk to me.”

“Warned is armed.”

“Nope. Warned is worried. Armed is ready.” Sarge smiled at Jeremy. “What is your game. Witness for the prosecution?”

“I am talking to the wrong guy for that.”

“Face it. I have an agenda even at my age and condition. I offer help. Help means help me.”

“Help you what?”

“Get the boss.”

“Boss? You want to die. You aren't safe to be around.” Jeremy wanted to run. Some force greater than Adrenalin kept him still.

“Who cares? What is there that hurts your senses, makes you cry, wants you to act? Face that thing. Lead yourself.”

“No.”

“Then death is next.” Jonas smiled. This is the authentic smile, he thought. It is me, not a part I play.

“I get it. You have nothing. I hoped you were something.”

“I am Nobody. So are you.”

“You are trash. At least I fight for my race.” Jeremy walked away down Mission towards the Civic Center.

Sarge sat on a bench. Listened to the sounds of the cab traffic. Watched the sun rise over the City. He thought about his end. Some lives are a series of escapes from death. Death was the way Sarge would go. He was tired and needed his thoughts to change. He was friendless and homeless once more.

“The alley is calling again.”

He was dressed in his tux. His black suit and his ranger jacket were under his bed in the room he needed to vacate.

“Stand your ground. Die in a volley of automatic weapons fire. Nah. Not going there.”

He stood and as he walked away, he caught sight of the Smith brothers dressed in their smiling suits. They saw him and smiled. He smiled his best hanging in their smile.

“John, Rolly how's your morning?”

“No KFF in the morning feels good. Have you read the paper today? You are all over it.”

“What? My name?”

“And pictures, too. You are a hero.”

“No. I am not. I need to hide.”

Sarge had taken his own advice and talked 'off the record' with Azimov, even let her take a picture. At the time it seemed slightly wrong but freeing. He knew this moment would come. Sarge walked to his room. It was almost noon. He grabbed his gear. Left a note for Corporal and Ginelle.

“Gotta go. KFF is onto this place. Move asap. I'm back in the alley. See you for dinner.”

“Not too riddle-y.” He judged. He pulled the door shut behind him. Dressed in his Ranger jacket, carrying an overstuffed paper bag, he descended the four floors to the sidewalk. He looked around the street hoping to see Corporal. He looked left and he looked right. No Corporal.

He looked both ways again. Neither direction was calling him. Three people walked by him going left. He stepped out after they passed and walked two steps behind them, his head down, unsmiling.

Two blocks away he began to consider where he was going. He was headed toward the Ferry Building looming several blocks away within his sight. At Montgomery Station he sat down under a KFF sign. He put out an empty coffee cup and fell asleep.

He woke with a hand on his shoulder.

“Sarge. I found you. Wake, please.”

John looked down at him as Sarge looked up at him.

“Saved again?” He said.

“You have nine lives, Sarge. Let's go home.”

Corporal stood off beyond Sarge's sight range. John had been easy to find. Sarge was even easier. Ginelle and Charlotte stood behind Corporal. Ginelle holding his hand. Charlotte sobbed silently as was her custom. Her shoulders shuddered, her arms firmly wrapped around her torso. Her eyes searching the scene for the man she loved.

## Title

Detective Denny Smith drove out to the BART security center near the airport. The morning paper was shocking. The headline story was about Sarge with a picture of him walking down Market St with a big smile on his face. "Meet the man who broke the BART murder."

"By fingering a gang of thugs who ran roughshod over the homeless, Vietnam Veteran Jonas Wright, who had been a victim of the gang, became a hero." The article said.

"Sarge is not going to like this." Denny said to no one.

He wanted to see Mrs. Marvin's supervisor, the Chief of BART security.

He had the tape in his possession. He hoped that the copy he had made was artful enough to fool the man. Why him? Easy. A guy named Bradley came to his office and threw twenty pictures of security officers talking to KFF guys. One of them was Marvin's superior. It was a series of three pix: envelopes passed between a Stuart Crandall and Chief Ogden Branch as noted on the handwritten words on the back of the photo. If true that Crandall is a KFF and a Storm Front member, then this could lead somewhere.

When he reached Mrs Marvin's office door, he was confronted by two large private security form guards.

"Who are you?"

He answered.

"Not on the list." One guard said, then he pulled a piece of paper from his jacket and read. "Please come back another day. Please make an appointment beforehand."

"Nice. You work for BART?"

"We are private security assigned to the Chief's guests. That is all I can say." The second one said.

“Sounds important. Say, you guys are pushing up against lunch. Any chance this meet is about over?”

“Lunch is catered.”

“Oh well.” Denny smiled at the guards and left the area, going first to a map of the complex he saw every time he entered. Finding his bearings, he headed to the cafeteria and the delivery area.

As he approached, he saw a caterer’s truck unloading on the interior dock adjacent to the kitchen.

“This grub for the Chief and his guests?” He asked as he flashed his badge to the people preparing the food for delivery.

“I believe so.”

“Good. I was asked to help bring it into the offices. Which of you are involved in that?”

In a few minutes he had the crew organized. He switched out his jacket for a caterer's jacket.

“How do I look?”

“You'll do. We are ready to move.” the supervising caterer said.

In five minutes the four men pushed the catering carts down the hall, past the guards who opened the doors and into the private offices. Three men sat in a closed conference room.

One of them rose when he saw the food was available. He walked as he talked and opened the interoffice door.

“... hungry as a lion. What's for lunch?”

“Crab cakes, choice of rice or noodles, a refreshing beverage and a light dessert.” The caterer said. “Bon apitite.”

The other two stood and moved towards the food.

Denny circled around them, entered the conference room, picked up the paperwork at one seat. He put the papers in his jacket and picked up empty cups and glasses, taking them to the front office to put them on the service cart. He looked at the faces for a memory shot then fled down the hall to the kitchen, his coat and the front entrance.

Driving north to The City on 101 he wondered what the papers would tell him.

## Title

Billy O'Neal wasn't in jail a week before he determined that Amos had been right. It was just warehousing. He felt stacked up and sitting like a crate of potato chips waiting for a forklift to come and get him. Since arraignment he was in solitary confinement. He was not put back into the cell with the two black men.

He still didn't know his attorney's last name. He gave his hearing no attention.

When his lunch was delivered, he asked to see his attorney.

The next day his attorney arrived. Without much of a warning he was moved from solitary to an interview room. Addy entered and they sat together.

"Mr O'Neal, I assume you are well."

"I am."

"It occurred to me you may not know my name or how to reach me." He reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a business card which he offered to Billy. "It also occurred to me that you may not be a skilled reader. My name is Adam Schultz. The card has my contact information as you can see."

"Gotcha Addy. I want to talk to Detective Smith. I want out of here."

"No kidding. So do I. You are the only reason I have to come here. Don't waste my time. Why do you want to see him?"

"He's cuter than you are."

"I am picking up my stuff. You are messing with me and I do not have to help you." Adam stood, pushing back his chair which made an unusually loud sound in the small room.

"Please ... I need your help. Get me out of here. I'll play nice. No B.S."

“Cross your heart? Look. You have the big trouble. I am a smart attorney. If I can defeat your big problem, I will be big famous and soon to be big rich. If I can defeat your problem you will be lucky to live, but I will get rich if you see the streets again without leg shackles.” Adam sat quietly looking down at a yellow legal pad.

“What do I do?”

“Convince me you know enough to make Smith happy.”

“He wants the boss. I have the boss's name. I will tell it to him when I believe him.”

“Ah, not good. You have no cards that matter except one and that's a maybe. He is looking for the big picture that would bring the boss down. He might have an idea about how that works. If you open up and answer his questions there may be a way for him to get what he wants and, then, so will you.”

“Open up? Serious? Answer his questions?”

“Absolutely. No lies. No vague. Chrystal clear. You are his best friend. Do that, he might help you. It's a risk.”

Billy didn't look smart. He didn't look happy.

“Addy, if I give up the name and I go to prison I will be dead in a day.”

“That's why you need to be wide open and friendly. He'll ask for cooperation. Go all the way. If the name kills you, then go all the way. Make him happy.”

“Can he come here now?”

Addy picked up his phone and texted Denny's phone. In a few seconds the return was 'ten minutes.'

Time passed. Billy listened as Addy outlined his plan. A knock at the door preceded Detective Smith's entrance.

“Gentlemen.” He said as he sat at the open chair. He had a sheaf of paper that he placed in front of him. As Blain did before to a different suspect, he worked his way through the pile looking alternately at the prisoner and his attorney. He did this while he listened to Addy describe what O'Neal had to offer.

“Not just a name, but as much as he knows. He wants to bring down a person or persons who abused him for years, established a devilish hold over his emotions thus making the murder of Amos to be the work of the person or persons above. My client would then be placed in a rehabilitation location under a new identity until he is 'exorcised' as it were, of the devilish spirit that rules him almost completely.”

“Impressive. Exorcism. Devil. Possession. I was thinking more along the lines of here is a name or names, this is what I can testify that they did, followed by a promise to testify at trial, if needed. For which – and as I say this realize that I do not control the outcome – the State will let you live out your life where you cannot endanger others.”

“What if he were cured.”

“Of what? Tell me his diagnosis. Mentally ill?”

“Satanic possession.”

“Really? That means he is not mentally ill with a diagnosis. Hmm. Well, you might have to see if a jury will believe you because if he wants a deal he pleads to the crime with circumstances.” Denny studied their faces for a few moments. “That's it we need a guilty plea, or we have no hold on him in case he is bullshitting us.”

“So you are asking for a guilty plea but to what? I don't see it. Absent motive and will what could have driven him to do as he did?”

“He murdered a man in a conspiracy. Premediation of the worst kind. Guilty to murder one. But I am not the DA. That decision as to charges or to plea is not mine.”

Addy asked for time to confer. Denny left the room where he found Detective Blain waiting.

“What are they offering?”

“Mark, these guys are working on freedom for the stabbers. I think they want us to laugh at them. They'll plead temporary insanity and get rehabbed. Wild idea.”

“What are you going to do. Play it straight?”

“We'll interview him and take that to the DA, just like we are supposed to.” Denny said. “Look, in a gang case the lawyers come from somewhere, they always do. Someone pays them. Work on that name. We'll need it.”

Addy stuck his head out the door. “We're ready.”

## **The Boss**

The boss was in Europe visiting his aging mother. He hadn't heard of the stabbing, the neutralization of the BART operation. He was preparing to return to California, when he received a short but informative email.

“Henry,” It began. “Things are piling up and need your personal attention. Hell is getting close to the surface of the earth.”

“Damn, bound to happen.” He replied to his personal secretary. He went back up to his room to get his special luggage with tools for problems like his. He flipped it open to see a dismantle blue steel hunting rifle. His favorite weapon, now, safely disassembled. He reached in and removed the firing pin in its own smaller case. He closed the bigger case and brought both to the main floor of the three-story mansion.

The driver was waiting and moved the luggage into the limo for the ride to the airport. Henry carried the small case in his carry-on luggage. Limos are the only civilized ways to travel, he thought. People like Henry who board planes through special 'elite' boarding gates know how to travel with guns. This was not his first time.

Then again, the plane was not from your average airline open to anyone with \$2,000 in credit. An executive airline is many times more expensive. The service was special. The passengers were special. Passengers did not think about leg room or fear a supersized neighbor or where the restrooms were. Henry had walking room in his suite with its own toilet. He stretched out on the well-appointed lounge bed.

His attention turned to an exciting thought. He would kill a few people this week. It was a good feeling. He felt lucky.

## Title

Jeremy waited in the second car for two days. It dawned on him that he wasn't watching the dress of the people who rode with him. He was stuck in a rut. He boarded a train and stayed with it. If Sarge wasn't on the train at Civic Center, he suddenly realized, he wasn't going to be on the train at all. He didn't change trains and he wasn't looking for people like Sarge. What a rut.

"Maybe they quit." He said. The rider next to him was listening to music or something and was deaf to him. Following his inspiration, he got off the train at 16<sup>th</sup> St Mission Station looking for Grease. He had seven minutes until the next train south. Grease wasn't there at the station. He hurried down and boarded the next train outbound.

A man in black was in the last car. Sitting alone. Jeremy went in and sat across from him. They looked at each other. The man in black raised a camera and took a picture of Jeremy.

Jeremy was an archetypical skinhead with a shaved head, ear rings, a nose ring, denim jacket, dirty black Levis, heavy biker boots with a chain around one ankle. He was heavily tattooed from his skull down his arms to his fingertips. The iron cross and motifs of Norse gods of vengeance dominated his thematic treatment of white supremacy. He was worth a picture or two.

Jeremy looked at the man in black. In five minutes, the train stopped at 24<sup>th</sup> St. Mission Station. It was quieter for three minutes.

"You know Sarge?"

"Yeah, happens I do. Who are you?"

"Jeremy. I have been looking for him."

"Oh, yeah? He's hard to find."

"I want to turn myself in. He said if I helped him, he would help me. I want to help him."

“Are you part of KFF?”

“Yes.”

“Why are you talking to me? You attracted to the smiling uniform. Men in black?”

“OK. You know Sarge, so get me to him.”

“No can do. Life is a bitch. Sarge is resting. He sent me. My name is Denny. I can help you turn yourself in. He told me about you and how you met. I have been on these trains for a day or so off and on.”

“Me, too.”

“I know a place that is safe and quiet, a public place where we can talk. It's open all night. Up for it?”

“No place else to go that I want to go. Beer or coffee?”

“Beer til 2. Coffee til 3. Anything after that. Beyond my bedtime. I have an hour or two left in my day. Next station we get off.”

At Glen Park they left the station and headed the three blocks to St Mary's Pub. On the way they walked one behind the other as if the shock of them being together would upset anyone who drove by.

St Mary's Pub was almost full. The window seat was being vacated and they slipped in behind the departing revelers.

“You're buying.” Denny said.

“Why?”

“You are a paid thug. I am a poor servant.”

“You are also full of shit.”

The waitress arrived. Tattooed in bright hippie designs. She looked at Jeremy. Jeremy looked at her.

"Is there a costume party somewhere?" She asked.

Jeremy looked into her eyes and saw images of wheat blowing in the wind. He was hypnotized.

Denny was not mesmerized. "Two beers. I am so thirsty and he's buying."

"OK, Agent K. I am on my way."

Jeremy studied the crowd.

"You been here before?" Denny asked.

"Nah, but who knows. Now what?"

"Depends. Amos is dead. What were you to him?"

"I loved him."

"You had a relationship?"

"Friends. Not sex."

"It doesn't matter but if you and he were lovers your testimony won't be as powerful."

Jeremy rose from his seat as the waitress returned with the beers. "Testimony? Who said testimony?"

He sat down as she put his drink in front of him. She smiled. He thought about it but didn't.

"She's cute." Denny said.

"You are the cop aren't you? Detective something who busted my brothers."

"Detective Dennis Smith. You mean former brothers. You don't like what they did to your not lover. Right?"

"Yeah ... not used to this." Jeremy looked at Denny. There is a moment of sizing up. 'Are you the one I can talk to' is the question. Denny had seen it before. It could go

either way. Over a beer he thought he would prevail. With such an interesting connection between Jeremy and the waitress, this might turn in a good direction.

Really, Denny thought, the clashing tattoos made anything possible. He sipped his beer and looked around, always keeping his attention on Jeremy, monitoring his vibe. Jeremy sipped his beer. Looked at his hands, looked at Denny.

“What does Sarge call you?”

“Denny. Detective Smith, Smith, hey you. You pick.”

“Denny works.”

“You are Jeremy?”

“Most times. I have nicknames. I hate them all. Jeremy is my favorite.”

“OK Jeremy. Talk to me. No hurry. It will not end tonight. I can't stay more than another 35 minutes and catch the last train home. So ... your turn.”

“How do I begin? There is this guy, a European guy, talks languages I have never heard before. He speaks German. The sound of German turns me on.”

“Ah, the Nazi thing.”

“This guy is the one people call boss. He is the head of a rightwing party in a small country in Europe. His people are like me tattoos and all. We fit together into a web, a world wide web of white supremacists. That's where it started.”

“Is this part of Storm Front?”

“The other way around Storm Front is part of it.”

“What is it called?”

“KFF.”

“Kill For Fun?”

“No. We are rebels. We call ourselves the Klan. Klansman’s Freedom Front we call it here.”

“Are you armed?”

“Yes. In many ways. The boss is an assassin. Someone gets in our way and someone is visited by the boss. He loves to kill.”

“He kills for fun.”

“He kills for fun.”

“Where's he from again?”

“Begins with a U.”

“Ukraine.”

“That's it. Ukraine. He has a big organization in Ukraine.”

“Jeremy, come with me, right now, let me get you under witness protection.” As Denny spoke, he pulled his phone from his pocket and texted SFPD for a special escort for an officer and a witness needing protection.

Jeremy had achieved his goal: Help. “OK Denny. I am ready.”

## **Nobody fails**

John was a teacher and a community organizer. His father, by his very existence, made sitting still and watching TV impossible. At forty-two he had more than two decades of experience to work from. Sarge was a teacher now. The smile campaign had been an inspirational idea. The watchers were his army. The enemy was KFF. Sarge, the smilers, the watchers and the Memory had brought down a violent enemy using only knowledge.

“Very impressive, Dad.” John said as he put down the morning newspaper with its special article on Sarge.

“Am I still a Nobody? Answer: No. Therefore, I failed.”

“Now you can do bigger things.”

“Nope. Now I have to hide. I was hidden until you found me in the alley. Maybe I will have to go back there to finish what I started.”

“Dad, that's backwards.”

“You aren't afraid of the same things I am.”

John knew his father was fragile in spite of his obvious bravery.

“I want to help you.”

“Don't think that way.” Sarge was standing at the kitchen sink in John's home in the Sunset District washing the dishes from their dinner together, their first since the Nikko. “Help yourself if you can. I am one of many. To help me you must help yourself. If you see me and my kind as your brothers and sisters, then you will help yourself by helping them. The alternative is a loser.”

“Power is money or many.”

“Pick the many.”

“You know I do. Teaching and organizing is about the many. Last night before Corporal called I was sitting at a union meeting when a christian minister said that

unions were evil because they take money from the Capitalists. One of the members asked the minister if he had read the bible. There was laughter. The minister looked shocked. The member asked if the minister knew who said, 'One cannot serve both god and mammon.' The minister said that wasn't in the bible. The member said Matthew and said a chapter and verse. The minister went silent."

"The many are the ones who must be served, or heaven is not open to you. Sez so somewhere in the bible."

"I know little of it really. I was impressed how christian the socialists are and how unchristian that minister was."

Sarge sat at the table. John rose to go to the toilet. It was 10:30 PM. Time for a night patrol, he thought. From the Sunset it takes about 30 minutes to get to a BART station. The last train was at about 11:45. He had no fare.

John came back to the table.

"John, I need a few bucks until I can get to the bank."

"Now?"

"I have patrol duty."

With twenty dollars in his pocket and a Metro transfer from a few hours ago, he set out to continue his habits. The idea of hiding had faded with his resolve.

He made the last train, second to last car. He saw Denny and Jeremy get off at Glen Park. He rode all the way to the airport and was heading back through the Mission stations when Corporal got on. Their eyes met.

At Civic Center they both got off and climbed shoulder to shoulder to the surface.

"We moved to the Mission, 16<sup>th</sup> St. Nice place. Nicer place, bigger, two bedrooms. Here is the key. Has the address on the tag."

"Corporal, well done. I hope I get there tonight."

“Ginelle put sheets on your bed. I'll leave your room's door open. Stumble in that direction if you can.” Corporal smiled at his old friend with his old friend smile. Sarge knew that one and gave it back.

“I failed.” Sarge said.

“Try again.”

“That's why I was riding the train, trying to find the thread of the idea of remaining Nobody. If I hide, I am over, so I must be out smiling and watching.”

“Weekly dinner for Memory tomorrow night. Nothing has changed but direction is changing. See you later.” Corporal set off walking to their new home.

Sarge watched him go. He turned to visit the Irish bar, Edinburgh Castle Pub, a few blocks away.

One beer, he thought, will do me fine.

“O'Doul's” He ordered as he went through the door.

The bartender had served him for years, was happy to see him and had a bottle on the bar before he arrived. Sarge reached for his money.

“Your money's no good here. It's on my tab.”

Sarge must have had a quizzical look because Ian the bartender explained that Sarge was the hero of the day and it was an honor to see him at his bar.

“You did a good thing for a lot of people. Those thugs will be gone for quite a while, God willing.”

“Ian, thanks for the beer.”

“You have a bunch of old friends in tonight. Stevie is over in the corner with Brad. They have been talking about you for hours, hoping you were OK with what happened. Go sit with them and I'll bring a round.”

Sarge looked to the corner table. As he did Brad saw him, leaped to his feet to come get him.

“It's you. How lucky we are. You haven't been out partying late since the smiling campaign began. Stevie and some others are talking strategy. Join us.”

“Wouldn't miss it for the world.” Saved again he thought as he felt the excitement rise in him.

Hugs and smiles, a round of drinks arrived, the talk turned quiet and serious. The heads of the six watchers and smilers were close together over their glasses.

Sarge explained his discomfort at being a hero, at being known.

“Maybe I should have stayed out of this.”

“Then we all should have but if we did, we would still be endangered by the KFF.”

“Last night I got caught up with a KFF member who wanted to help me until he found I wanted to have the name of the KFF boss. He said I was dangerous to be around.”

Brad nodded in agreement. He talked about going up the food chain and following the money.

“Good as it may sound we aren't the people to do this. It should be government.”

“Sounds good. Let the government that ignored us do what we can't do. Who is this government that will help us?”

“Same old same old.” Sarge said. “We started watching, remembering what we saw. My son says this was direct action. We had to act, because no one would come to our aid. We had to act.”

“Now what? The boss is probably pissed. He imagines revenge. Who does he seek?” Brad raised the morning paper. He pointed to the picture of Sarge. “This guy. Sarge.”

Stevie stood up as if he had been shocked. "Sarge if you are the target then we can trap the boss."

Silence followed as he sat down and looked for reaction. Only Sarge's eyes meet his.

Sarge's head was nodding slowly as the notion settled in his mind.

## Title

Charlotte knew when Corporal came back without Sarge that she would have to find him. She put on her walking shoes, slipped a set of brass knuckles in her coat pocket and headed for the Tenderloin. Bars would close in less than an hour. She considered which one he would go to. Brad told her this morning that he would be out with Stevie at Edinburgh.

It is a long trudge at any hour from the Mission to the Tenderloin. Cabs and cops and partiers heading home owned the roads. People on speed trying to calm down for the night owned the sidewalks. She moved as quickly as she could for her age.

She turned the corner onto Geary and there he was, walking arm and arm with Brad and Stevie. She walked up to him. He was holding the other two up.

"I am sober. These guys aren't. I am delivering them home. Want to help?" Sarge smiled his authentically me smile.

"I want to deliver you home, too. OK."

"OK. Long walk. But you came from there on foot, so you know."

"I know a number of things. Some are good. Like your smile is back. The one I fell for."

"And like we are together again?"

"Yes, like that."

Brad and Stevie watched and listened. Smiles crossed their inebriated faces. Stevie's was just down the block. Brad's was two more. Charlotte and Sarge walked arm in arm from the Tower up Mission to 16<sup>th</sup>.

"Around the corner and up the stairs." She said.

"Home again, home again."

## **Rest for the wicked**

Henry had a good night's sleep in the lounge chair, in the 'elite' jet flying west toward San Francisco. He ordered his usual menu down to the drinks. He had a companion flying with him. He was ambivalent but hated loneliness.

He liked violence. He liked sex. There had been few return engagements, if you know what that means.

Henry was not a rude man. He came from royalty. His family had fallen out of favor before the treasure was distributed. No matter. He had seen the writing and had chosen an active approach. Now he was mother's favorite since no one else survived the hard years. Funerals were numerous. Henry was famous for his floral arrangements so common for so long. He saw the rose-colored mark on the forehead as a flower of some significance. He loved fear. He loved the end of life in the eyes, the self-awareness was emotional to him. It was a love he enjoyed.

He rarely talked to people. He never talked about books or movies. He never talked about his personal life or beliefs. He was silent about philosophy and science. If forced to talk, he chose politics. Being from the Ukraine he talked ethnicity. That discussion had many rough edges with implications of bloodshed. It was part of the times. He was a being of his times.

When his grandmother sent him to college, he went to New England to Harvard to learn with the elite of the White Culture as she referred to it. She was old school. No one talked about it anymore. That was good. The spotlight uglifies the reality of the meaning of the words.

His companion that night was a failure. Drunk and depressed, she fell asleep on the floor of the suite. The attendants put her in a lounge and belted her in. He pulled some maps from his valise and spread them across the inflight table that seats four.

"Vet Center?" He said as his finger traced the roads shown on the map.

For someone whose wealth was made by the deaths of relatives, some by his own hand, he had a soft streak for the innocent as he called them, the ones who died

for no reason, or no good reason. It would be wrong to conclude this was an idea from the conscience, it was a sentimentality he enjoyed in order to remove any stain of guilt.

He fell asleep in time to feel refreshed as he landed. She was abandoned in the plane, still asleep.

## Title

Denny was always willing to be surprised.

The morning mail brought a tape and a note signed, 'Sarge.'

He inserted the tape into the SFPD's console. It was the BART trains security tape. He fast forwarded to watch the KFF gang enter the car. He pressed stop. The BART security tapes have an audio stream. He listened to the raw sound of the train drown out the voices. There is a filter for that and once it is used one can clearly hear the voices of all the passengers.

The night of Amos' murder, the six KFF members were alone in the car. The filtered audio would be their conversation only.

He picked up his phone and texted the DA's homicide branch and requested advice about the tape which could be evidence. Diana Wheaton was on duty. He discussed it with her. She had been assigned the murder cases and was working on the indictment. She sped over to his office and they watched and listened to the tape for the first time together.

After Amos was struck the first time, there was no motion in his body. He made no defensive moves. The first blow was decisive in their judgment. The subsequent stabs were delivered to an inert body lying on the BART train seats.

The conversation was chilling as the gang turned from a joking discussion about gay sex to a burst of violence followed by the five stabbers taking turns puncturing his chest and neck until there was blood everywhere.

“The first stabber is Murder One. The others are at least accessories and Murder One.” Diana said. “If there is a witness among them, we can reduce his to manslaughter.”

“The lawyer for one of them says their plea will be not guilty by reason of mind control, under the influence of Satan.”

“Satan is a witness or a co-conspirator or what?”

“A person who the suspects refer to as the boss uses white power hate to control the gang members. One witness, a KFF member, not a suspect, believes the boss is a Ukrainian right-wing party leader. He also says the Ukrainian is an assassin who may already be trying to kill witnesses and others involved in ruining his gang’s income.”

As Denny finished reviewing what he had learned from the suspect's interviews his phone rang. Blain was at the jail and two of the suspects wanted to offer testimony about the murder.

“Which ones? Billy?”

“Billy and Wayne French, the spitter.”

“I have the DA with me should we come over now or are you waiting for lawyers?”

“We can take them one at a time. Billy O'Neal's lawyer is here. We are waiting on Gerald Smyers.”

Denny explained and Diana called her office. In five minutes, they were on their way to hear what was being offered.

Blain was sitting with Billy and Addy talking about language groups in eastern Ukraine. Denny and Diane pulled additional chairs into the visitor side of the room. Greetings were exchanged. Introductions were made.

Diana lead the discussion through the legal necessities. Billy answered the questions required of him. Addy conferred with his client after each question and before each answer. It was all very orderly.

“Mr. O'Neal, now we are coming to the difficult questions. We need your full cooperation and complete answers to each one in order to qualify you for a non-death charge. Detective Smith will lead you through this part of your testimony.”

“Hi, Billy. The DA and I watched the BART security tape from inside the BART train car where you and four others stabbed and murdered Amos Wells a week or so ago. It was a frightening scene. Were you the first to stab Mr. Wells?”

“No. I stabbed him third or fourth. “

“Who stabbed him first?”

“It was a blurr. It happened so fast.”

“Billy, someone was first. Someone encouraged the rest of you. Who was that?”

“Schroeder.”

“Claus Schroeder?”

“Yes.”

“Billy, do you know where he is now?”

“Probably Hell.”

“Do you know how he died?”

“He stabbed himself to death.”

“You probably won't be surprised to learn that the tape shows that Schroeder never stabbed Mr. Wells at all.” Denny said. “These questions will be asked again. I want to move on to the key question of who is in charge and who was responsible for the decision to kill Mr. Wells.”

“OK. Ask away.”

“In interviews with others we have learned about the existence of a person referred to as the boss.” Denny paused as he shuffle through his file of papers looking for a reference. “Yes, the boss. Who is the boss?”

“I don't know exactly. He is an assassin. I have never seen him kill but I saw him talk about killing. He called it cleansing.”

“What did he say?”

“He said he enjoyed it, when the people were trash.”

“So he enjoys killing.”

“KFF. He named it.”

“His name?”

“No. I don't know it.”

Detective Smith stopped his interrogation. He looked through his papers again as if he were looking for something else to ask. He stopped looking and placed his hands on the tabletop. He looked at Billy. He looked at the Assistant DA.

“I do not think he makes it.” He said.

“Wait a second Detective Smith, he has answered the questions.” Adam Schultz said.

“Sorry counsellor, I was speaking to the DA.” He turned to her. “Maybe we should step out for a minute and think this through.”

Addy stayed with Billy while the others left the room.

## Title

Charlotte moved into the Mission District apartment. Sarge helped her settle in. Sarge wanted to please her. He wanted to say he would quit the KFF stuff. He wanted to be telling the truth, so he didn't say it. The four of them went back to their smile campaign with Cynthia Suits and Flowery dresses. Two days passed before Detective Smith found them walking around Delores Park looking for other smilers.

Charlotte saw him first. She turned away from him as if she were going to lead her friends away from him. Sarge felt her reaction and searched for a cause. Once he looked at Denny and then back at Charlotte.

Detective Smith was standing beside the two men as Sarge turned to see him.

"Friends of yours?" Denny said.

"This is Corporal. The two women are our housemates."

"They didn't want to meet me?"

"You sound disappointed."

"Looks like I broke up a party. Neither of you are smiling." Denny smiled. The men waited while the women marched off to a safe distance.

"Some people need a break from too much reality. Ginelle and Charlotte like the smilers more than the watchers especially when plain vanilla nastiness turned to murder. That was quite the buzzkill for all of us." Corporal said, as he stared into the ground at his feet.

Sarge saw him looking down. It reminded him of the old days before the mirror became part of their life.

Denny saw the effect he made on the four friends.

"I do not always bring good news and, in case you were wondering, it's not easy for me to have friends. I envy you."

“You were looking for me?” Sarge asked.

“I was. I have a lot to share with the memory and wondered if I could come to a meeting to tell what I have seen and heard. I watched the tape you sent to me. Thank you. It helped us to understand what happened.”

Corporal looked up and into Denny's face. He smiled a smile of contentment.

“Do you have that name?” Sarge said.

“More than a name. I can save it for everyone to hear.”

“The Memory and Watcher’s dinner's not tonight. Three days from today. Thursday. Six.”

“See you then.” He left them watching him walk back to his company car.

“Well, this is getting interesting. I didn't know cops talked to anyone much less the homeless about a murder case.”

“Wonder what it's about.”

## Title

Henry traveled north from SFO on Hwy 101 in his favorite style. The organization was well-funded and moved its executives from place to place in limousines and private jets. The driver collected his bags from the isolated private international jet terminal and stowed them in the limo's spacious trunk – except for the weapon case. Henry carried it with him into the backseat where he reunited the firing pin to the case.

Once he was in the Condo near the SF Opera House he assembled the rifle and loaded six rounds into it. The familiar feel of it in his hands settled him into his task. The condo's land line rang. He answered it.

“Noel Smith, here. Hope everything is to your liking.”

“As usual. Same place. Same time.” Henry said.

“Yes, Sir. As usual.”

Henry enjoyed the affected secrecy of the modern era. His forebearers used every ruse in the book to keep their palace revolts from discovery. For him each trip began in a similar way. The first order of business is the meeting with the segment of the organization that called for his help. Nothing was said on the phone except what was just said. There were no follow up phone calls or emails. Henry would go to dinner at his favorite restaurant. The waiter would be the same as always. He would give Henry a sealed envelope. Henry would open it and read the contents. The envelope would be resealed and the waiter would take it away.

After dinner Henry walked through the Civic Center. His objective was simple. Cities are a collection of routines: Bus schedules, police patrols, the to and fro of theater goers, morning and evening rushes, the meetings of government and the Elks Club and the Vets Center.

Henry walked slowly. Timing mattered. Being part of the to and fro mattered. All around him were abuzz, walking purposely from one place to the next. He too looked purposeful, his walking was meaningful. He neared his destination. His

purpose changed. He imagined he looked like a tourist, lost a block or two in the wrong direction.

He stopped at the mouth of the dead end alley. He looked up and then down the street. He walked to the curb as if looking for a cab or a bus. He waited. No one spoke to him. No one emerged from the alley.

Ten minutes passed. Nothing changed. He turned to retrace his steps. He re-entered the restaurant and was escorted to a private dining room. His escort opened the door. He went in and the door was closed behind him.

A soccer team could have practiced in the dining room. The three men in the room stood together with drinks in hand at a long bar that ran the length of the room. The bar alone seated one hundred fifty or more. The three looked Henry's way and broke the circle to include him.

“A drink, Henry?”

“A little champagne would serve me.”

One of the three, the one dressed in a light grey three piece suit, spoke into his lapel microphone. Two minutes passed and a waiter entered from behind the bar to bring a new round to the three and a flute for Henry.

“Salute.” One of the three said followed by a round of salutes, clinks and coifs.

“Gentlemen, I arrived this afternoon. Thank you for your documentation to support your request. I have a few needs and when those are met we can discuss schedules for implementation.”

“What do you need?” The man who spoke wore the unadorned uniform of a law enforcement officer. The insignia indicated a high ranking officer. The agency was unnamed.

Henry handed the officer a piece of note paper.

“I need unimpeded access to this building.”

“Is that all?”

“A helicopter standing by on the hour in question at the heliport atop this building.” He handed the officer another piece of paper. “And a Vespa at the exit from the first location.”

“Fine.” Said the officer. He turned away from Henry to speak to the man with the lapel microphone. “Get my car.”

The third man, dressed in the casual clothing a golfer or a rich retired wallstreeter might wear, stood still while the other two moved out of the room.

“Henry, it is good to see you so healthy.”

“You are looking well yourself, old brother.”

“They deceive you? Looks can kill or in my case inspite of my looks something is killing me.” Henry's older brother Samuel said.

“I lost half of the staff of our BART operation over night. Not a big deal, only a million a year but it has us exposed. Your name was mentioned. Mine may be next.”

“My name was mentioned. Hmm. The assignment seems unrelated. The targets are nobodies. We have the law enforcement contained no matter what so I see no need to terminate the list.”

“Henry, think it through. From the street perspective we need to clear the decks to prepare to restart our operation. Besides these homeless guys are all vets, all druggies with no futures. Who cares?”

“Nobody, I would guess.” Henry noted his response. There is a problem but it comes from somewhere else. How could nobodies ever learn his name? “I am going to take my time. The Chief has some things to pull together. Makes him feel useful. My days are clear of duties A little vacation time would be nice.”

“You've been in Europe for months. What did you call that?”

“Waiting for vacation time. Look, things are a bit wild in the Ukraine. We have local business to maintain.”

“Local business? You talking about those pleasure dens?”

“Pleasure is big business, especially near war zones. Boys must play.” Henry thought about the nature of pleasure and the nature of pain. If the pain would not kill you, some people pay big money to have it done to them. “We are also into gaming in ex-soviet states.”

“Are you saying a million a year is too small?” Samuel didn't need another million a year. He would never miss the BART operation. “I thought you liked your role in the States.”

“The KFF is a joke. I am more inclined to clean the nest of those mice. There is something about the vets that bugs me. We were pushing them too hard and they fought back. Understandable.”

“Never heard you be this way before. You're getting older and more conservative.”

“Sam, let's talk as usual tomorrow.” Henry put his flute on the bar, embraced his brother, completed their childhood secret handshake, which always made them laugh and feel like having sex.

“Henry, let's change it up a bit. The waiter will give you new instructions tomorrow at dinner.”

“Until then.”

Henry left for a coffee shop. Caffeine after dinner helped him sleep.

## Title

The three days until the memory met was a long time.

Sarge took his watcher's role seriously. He rode the last train to the airport each night. There were other regular riders Denny, Jeremy and sometimes the Smith brothers. There was something edgy about being on that train. Sarge and Denny met that night. Sarge was watching from the second to last car when Denny boarded at 16th Street. Both cars were otherwise empty. Sarge moved into the last car. They rode all the way to the airport and back. No one joined them.

They sat in the last front facing seat in the last car. Leaning towards each other and talking so loudly the racket of the train was overcome.

“Denny, you look like a Blues Brother.”

“Yeah, we look like twins.”

“Born twenty years apart. Is that possible?”

“Tell you what I want to talk about what happened in the jail last night. Five fatal overdoses. The largest number ever in the jail population. Two of the fatalities were KFF members. Three out of five are now dead. Someone brought in some very hot smack and the users all O.D.'ed. Billy and the Spitter – our nickname – are still with us. Coincidentally they are the two who we think will I.D. the boss.”

“So no name yet?”

“No... But.”

Sarge had found a deep vein of patience for Denny. The detective had a steady gaze and sometimes smiled. As little as he knew him, Sarge felt friendship for the first time since he was in high school.

“Detective, I trust it is worth the energy.”

“Yes, but you be the judge.” Denny said. “The maintenance closet key was given to them by a BART cop. We have a visual in the photos you provided. That's a name we are seeking.”

“Good. This may come to an end without me coming to mine.”

The ride was longer than they cared to yell over the noise. Sarge left at 16<sup>th</sup> Street. Denny traveled on to Civic Center. As Sarge reached the surface, the cool night air and a small group of homeless men uncharacteristically up late surprised him.

“Sarge.” Someone said as he was recognized.

“They are dropping like flies. Four down eleven to go.” It had become well known that there were only 15 KFF members.

He walked over to stand with them as they read the news to one another, commenting on their own experiences in the City jail. He listened to a reading of the pertinent sentence identifying the two KFF'ers.

What they didn't know until the next day was that as they were high fiving each other, the Spitter was found hanging in his cell. Only Billy was left in jail.

## Title

Henry was busy at the moment, too. He had found a partner for his bed and with the promise of drugs, which he delivered on, and a magic weekend to come, which he failed to fulfill. They rolled around in the king bed in the master bedroom doing a light form of SM until his partner expired from exhaustion. Henry pulled the sleeping body into the elevator, threw in the effects and pushed the 'L.'

“Good-bye.” Henry whispered as the doors closed then walked back to his condo to call the main desk to warn them about the drunk in the elevator.

In the morning he read the news of the three new deaths. After reading the paper once through he went for a walk in parks around the Civic Hall. He took his camera intending to photograph the surroundings of the Vets Center. As he moved towards the alley he began to take more shots. He didn't notice that he was being watched and photographed first by Sarge and then by Charlotte as part of their early patrol.

Henry thought of himself as fitting into the ebb and flow of tourists. He didn't notice that he was one of only three photographers. The intersection of the S. Turk Alley and Market Street was not photogenic. Henry wasn't taking pictures of it anyway. He was snapping stills of the buildings that commanded a view of the alley. He had already chosen a few one he judged would work. The pictures would show him to be correct though he would need to be in them to be sure.

After his morning jaunt he returned to the condo for a nap that would last until dinner. His sleep schedule was difficult to change. No one cared.

Back at his favorite restaurant, at the same table with the same waiter with a sealed envelope he read the new plan. Instead of a slow process using rifle fire from above to kill the vets, the remaining KFF members would attack the Vets Center to coincide with Henry's attack.

“That'll work.” Also in the envelope was a note saying that the Chief had what he asked for. “Tomorrow will be the day.”



Title

Sarge and Charlotte made a deal. They would be together all the time from now on. They would not travel together. She would follow him to witness what went on around him. Sarge had told her that he was a target by design.

“You mean by default.” She said.

“Sure. No one else but me. It makes this easier. I will be stalked by the killer and by you. He won't expect you so he won't see you. He will see me and you will see him.”

“He'll stick out like a sore thumb.” She said. “He is going to be dressed like a European pretending to be a tourist.”

“Plus if he is following me he will be out of his environment and in ours.” Sarge held her hands in his. They smiled at one another with the smiles of lovers and friends.

They went on patrol hoping they would see what they saw that morning.

When they returned to the Vet Center after morning patrol, they had a dozen photos of Henry good enough for identification.

“Now what?”

“Let's ride the BART later and find Denny.”

Charlotte thought of the hours between then and the last train to SFO.

“That'll make for a long day. Let's find Brad first and drop the photos off with him. I'll take you to lunch. We can walk in the park and smile around a bit.”

The weather in San Francisco can be spectacular. During the summer, if the fog lifts, the evening hours can be as close to heaven as one can get and still be alive. With nothing special to do Charlotte and Sarge walked arm in arm through their day, through dinner at the Vet Center, a Metro ride to Sunset Beach and the romantic moments the Sun and Pacific Ocean provided.

They boarded the BART at 10:30 intent on riding until Denny showed. They both fell asleep and awoke at SFO. He wasn't onboard but it wasn't the last train. Two more round trips, the last train and there he was.

Denny saw them together for only the second time. He resolved not to scare her away this time. That he didn't had little to do with him and all to do with her.

"Detective," She said. "I am pleased to meet you. Sarge thinks the world of you and so do I."

"Charlotte, thanks for your kind words. I hope we are doing the right thing."

"We are doing since there is no choice. I happen to be fond of Sarge so I help when I can."

Sarge leaned over towards Denny to tell him about the pictures. "This may be our guy, the KFF guy. Brad will bring them by tomorrow"

Denny listened as Sarge told him what he and Charlotte had noticed.

"He was taking pictures of buildings, looking at elevations, probably calculating the speed of pursuit and how he can use rooftops to escape capture. That helps but we don't know when." Sarge said. "Denny, there are times when planning can expose your intent. We know KFF is watching us. They might figure out when we meet and will pick us off as we leave. The alley becomes a trap."

Title

That night Henry had a drink at the long empty bar with Samuel.

“Do you like the changes?”

“The attack must be controlled. The meeting starts at six and lasts an hour according to what I read. KFF is to gather in the alley at 6:30. They will have the action plan as stated and I only have to wait developments to complete my task. Simple as pie.”

“Law enforcement will be busy elsewhere so you will have the night to yourself.”

“The Chief has given me what I need. We are all set for tomorrow night.”

Samuel was not ever talkative. They spent thirty words about their mother's ill health. They talked in grunts and money jargon about the income distribution from their enterprises. They had an after dinner brandy and cigar in silence, then parted.

Henry walked out of their club into the beautiful evening and began humming German battle hymns under his breathe. He decided on the spur of the moment to visit the alley again.

When he reached the opening he decided to walk into its depths where he found something he hadn't thought about before.

“Oh.” He said. “Got to fix this.” He picked his camera out of his coat and took a few pictures, the flash illuminating the darkness. He didn't see Stevie rolled out behind a dumpster. Stevie saw him. When Henry left, Stevie packed up and headed for the BART. When he realized he didn't have fare he set out on foot to get to the 16<sup>th</sup> Street station.

Henry had no idea humans lived in alleys. Partially blinded by his flash, he left the alley for the streetlight beyond. He wanted to kill everyone when he felt ill at ease. He started in on the battle hymns again but the loudness of his voice made him nervous. He passed an adult movie theater, retraced his steps to go in. He enjoyed the hunt for short relationships. He had never killed any of his lovers. He

wondered if he could find another homicidist, as he was, to see if he could sense any danger. It was like choking your partner during climax, he hoped. One had to try it to understand it.

The film was sick by his standards. The film was not art. The subject was not sex. Whoever got off on the movie was definitely someone he would like to try out. Romance was a weakness he did not want anything to do with.

The condo's master bed had all the parts masters in bed needed to dominate their company. Henry described it as a chamber of delightful horrors. Play with fear. Play with pain. Play with pleasure.

As his eyes cleared in the darkness he saw he was alone. He wondered what orientation the projectionist had but his experience with projectionists was not good. They didn't believe in the magic. The ticket-taker was a machine. He had never tried machines. He checked his watch and left for the condo.

"Tomorrow will be a good day."

## The Day

Brad had been out late. It was after midnight. A month ago he found a Latin restaurant on Mission near 16<sup>th</sup> that had a very brown waitress whose eyes he enjoyed looking into. He was a few weeks from taking the California Bar Exam. He was a little crazy. He went there often hoping she would catch his eyes and keep them for her own. He decided he was in love.

As he approached the restaurant he saw Stevie carrying his load walking towards the BART station.

“Stevie.” He said as loud as he could.

Stevie's head rose and he caught sight of Brad. He smiled. He crossed the street to meet Brad.

“Esquire, fancy this.”

“I don't.”

“I hope you change your mind. I saw the boss. He is coming.”

Brad and Stevie had talked every Tuesday morning for a month or more. Brad was trying to help Stevie. Stevie was trying to help Sarge. Brad helped Sarge. “Who?”

“The boss. The guy after Sarge. I was in the alley an hour ago. Somebody came in and took pictures with a flash. I saw the flashes. He is preparing.”

Brad wanted to help Stevie. Brad wanted to look into the waitress' eyes.

“Stevie I have a date.” He said. “Wait. Come with me. We have twenty minutes before Sarge will walk by this restaurant. Come with me. I pay.”

“I am a bit hungry. I'll tell my story again, if you want.”

The restaurant was crowded. The waitress of his imagination was busy beyond hers. He saw. He checked his watch. Found a table on the sidewalk. The two men sat to wait for Sarge. The waitress saw him she smiled in his general direction. He saw her and her smile. He smiled as Stevie began to talk.

“Sounds crazy or something. It feels like we are at war. Man's coming looking to kill.”

Brad saw her eyes above him. “What would you like to drink?” She asked.

“Coffee.” Said Stevie.

“Oh, my god.” Said Brad. “What are you doing later?”

“Sleeping.”

He wanted to be right for her. “With me.”

“Honey, you need help.” She said and walked away.

“Brad, you are in a trance. I've seen it before. It's an elixir. A spell.”

“I am a little crazy these days. I don't even know her name.”

“Janine. She has probably told you before. How many times have you been here?”

“Ten. I see. She has told me ten times.”

“That is crazy. Good news. You recognized it. You are not crazy. Brad I know very little about love and surviving it. I enlisted to be a cog in the Vietnam wheel. That was my one chance at love. Imagine.”

“I often wondered. One of my professors talks about the client and their motives. I am the lawyer. They are the people with the motive. But what's my motive?”

“Helping others. Never going to be money. You are a nobody for life. A lawyer nobody.”

Stevie stood half upright and yelled, “Sarge.” Brad turned to see Sarge turn to see them. He smiled at them. They smiled at him.

Stevie stood and walked to him.

“I saw him. It was a bit blinding in the alley with a strobe flash camera taking pictures of it.”

“They wanted to see what's there.” Sarge said.

“Nothing there.”

“Not quite. Let's go look.”

“Long walk.”

“You have to make it. I will make it with you. Then we'll both know.”

Brad was silent. He was not a party to the connection. He sipped his drink and looked for Janine's form to cross his sight path. He thought Stevie was crazy. Stevie saying Brad was not crazy couldn't be taken as fact. He went on like that until she was sitting at his table saying, “My name is Estrella. What's yours.”

“Brad. I am a law student.”

“I am one as well.”

“Hastings.”

“New College.”

“Can I see you?”

“Do you have a lover?”

“We can form a firm.”

“Mommy and Daddy.”

“Let's.”

Henry's plan

The mirror in the bathroom was bright with the overabundance of light his condo management employed.

“Too bright.” He noted on it's Facebook page.

Henry was ready to go. Escape was easy. A matter of timing. And organization. He was the top of the pyramid that supported him and his brother. He stared past the brightness to see his paled face.

“Too much.” He mumbled.

At times like this, people like Henry depend on their plans. They were step by step, moment by moment. As trashed as he was by his jetlag and debauchery he still could perform. He was excessive by nature. He was used to his condition.

His weapon laid in pieces before him. He examined the clip with ten bullets.

“One extra.”

He would wait to assemble it when he had recovered his complete senses. A cup of coffee. A bagel. A shower.

He sat at the table, in his underwear and examined every component of the rifle. He broke it down to its miniscule parts and reassembled it. He needed perfection. Humans are imperfect. Machines can be perfect.

He had designed and built his own rifle. It did not have a name. It was one of a kind. It had a disposable barrel. The original barrel was copied and each copy rifled to leave its own marks on the bullet. He thought himself clever for having thought about that. He had the best rifle in the world and would never have it taken from him.

The room service was to his liking. He had designed it for himself. There were two menus. Column A and Column B. Food and service. This morning he chose a Bloody Mary and an older black haired woman whose specialties included pinching.

He might have ordered a kitten to strangle or a mouse to step on. He wrote to the Facebook page: Change menu. Add live animals.

Having eaten and pleased he showered and dressed. He liked himself more now as he looked into the mirror. Release of the old was beneficial. Bringing new things into your body was good. He would release the old and stale again tonight and bring new things in over the next day.

“Renewal.” He told himself.

He assembled the rifle for the second time. He disassembled it and reassembled it again.

“Perfect.”

He needed to be in place at 5 PM. He would need time to find the best window near the best rooftop escape. He had the keys and codes he needed. Everything was cut and dry.

title

Sarge and Charlotte, Corporal and Ginelle walked through the park after breakfast at the Vet Center. They smiled. They got smiles back.

"I think it's catching on." Charlotte said

"It's Thursday. People see a weekend."

"Cynic."

"You can't be talking to me." Sarge said.

"The Nobodies is cynicism itself."

"I see. I trust nobody. I was right to trust us."

"You and your vocabulary game."

"When you find yourself in mortal danger for months and years on end, words matter, meanings begin to vary according to need." Sarge spoke softly. It was as if he did not want to hear himself talk. "Corporal and I could not afford cynicism. We had to believe in ourselves even when no one else did."

Charlotte and Sarge were holding hands, walking too far behind for Corporal and Ginelle to be heard.

"Jonas, I have never heard you tell your tale of escape. I think I dreamed about it. Terrorizing feelings is all I felt."

They walked a distance with Sarge staring at his feet. Charlotte held his hand more closely to her chest as if she would hold him on the earth he seemed so determined to leave at the moment. Tears filled his eyes and his body began shaking. He stopped walking pulling her to a halt.

"I have never talked about our escape. I lived it. Al lived it. We have never told anyone about it. We stay together. Neither of us needs to ask us about it."

"Sorry."

“You were in country. You know already. I will tell the details if you want to know, if you must know. Otherwise, besides surviving it, our escape began the Nobody idea. Nobody knows the trouble I've seen. That is the trick of the smilers. We exist. We live with a smile on our faces for everyone to see. What lies behind the smile? Nobody will ever know.”

Charlotte waited for him. She stayed as still as she could feeling the trembling in his voice absorbing the vibrations in his body. Corporal and Ginelle were at the end of their walk. They stood looking back at their friends.

“It's happening.” Al said.

“Should we go back?”

“I don't want to watch them. I know what they are doing.”

“Is it sad?”

“Mostly hard. I have never managed remembering without crying. My face so scarred I could not see myself. He helped me look and smile. I owe him but then we are brothers, our battles are the same. There were days when one of us would be crying, sobbing and not even aware of it. We learned to hug each other as a means to recover our minds.”

Ginelle looked up into his face. She saw the path the projectile followed that wounded him leaving him alive. That is what she saw. He was alive. She had her scars from war. Charlotte's friendship to her was how she imagined Sarge's friendship to Al.

As they focused on each other their friends caught up. Four smiles of warmth and appreciation were exchanged. Charlotte reached for Corporal's free hand. Then they were a circle each holding onto two. No one spoke.

Detective Denny Smith looked out his office window thinking about what the day would bring. He saw them, the little circle of friends. He wished he could be there in their company. He knew they were special to each other in a way that he could not be. He moved away from the window determined to keep them from harm.

Another detective walked up to him.

“Denny, here is the passport information you were after. Twenty-five names of males who entered the US in the last week either a US citizen with a visa from Ukraine or a Ukrainian with a US visa.” He handed the paper to Denny. “There was another one we included because it almost fit the criteria. Passport photos are included.”

“Thanks George.” He had known for a week that the boss was coming. A murderer who had escaped detection. He scanned the list looking for something special to set one apart. “Delta, Air Malasia, ah. Air Mirage.”

He googled the name. “A private charter.” He looked back at the name. “Henry Balsac. A french citizen with a Ukrainian visa for life. The odd one. Where are you now, Henry?”

The City often seems small unless you are looking for a singularity trying to avoid being caught.

George came back as he was wondering how to begin. “An envelope for you. Delivered this morning by a guy who said his name is Brad. Know him?”

“Maybe.” He opened the envelope to find three photos of the same man taking pictures at the mouth of an alley. There were the ones Sarge described.

“Is this you, Henry? And look at where you are and what you are doing. The watchers found you.”

## Gathering for dinner

Sarge dressed in his smilers uniform stood in the doorway looking back into their apartment. His thoughts were excited with the possibility that tonight would see an end to the KFF saga.

Charlotte and Ginelle were waiting down stairs. Corporal was knotting his tie. He pulled it up to his adam's apple, then turned to his old friend.

“Hit the trail or they'll serve the pasta without us.”

“Al, I feel all emotional for some reason. You are a great friend. If anything ...”

“Sarge, don't say it. Everyday has been the same. We rise alive.”

The four made it to the 16<sup>th</sup> St BART and they were in the Civic Center and then the alley with all the others. No one spoke. Everyone smiled. Denny walked up to them dressed in black with a white shirt and a tie. He smiled and waited like the others for the heavy door to open and let them into the dining room.

As the door opened the men and women streamed in to find seats at the tables. The kitchen staff had placed flowers at every table and streamers ran from wall to wall making the scene festive, as if something special was about to happen. Something was: a meeting of the memory though a weekly event was now a meeting of the victors in a war for peace on the streets. The kitchen staff knew.

The kitchen itself was used by other organizations who leased rooms and offices in the old building. The Vet Center had been there in the cellar for years behind the fireproof emergency exit door the rest of the building would use if there was an emergency. There hadn't ever been one.

The staff delivered bowls of pasta, plates and utensils to each table. Tonight there was extra coffee with cream and sugar, an irregular pleasure for dinners.

Denny stood up as people were deep into eating and when most of the dinner noise had subsided. It was 6:20.

“My name is Detective Dennis Smith from the San Francisco Police Department. I asked to speak to you tonight so that the memory will know what has happened in our KFF investigation.”

He went on to describe the murders on BART and in jail. Five dead KFF members was a fact everyone knew about. Then he went on to talk about the boss and the name.

“Henry Balsac, a french-ukranian, a member of an international gang, has entered the US and is in the City. These are the photos we have of him.” He passed them on to the first hand to his right. “I think he is outside right now, tonight, waiting to take the lives of people in this room, perhaps including me.”

Murmur filled the room. Denny stood until the crosstalk ended.

“There is more. From the location we imagine he is commanding, he can target all the known exits of the building onto Market Street.” He opened a discussion. Many points of strategic importance were mentioned. The detective pulled out his cell and answered.

“We have company in the alley.”

Sarge rose. “Secure the doors.” With no other words, others went into action and spread throughout the floors looking for and securing all egress and ingress.

Denny and Sarge sat looking at each other for agreement. A things are going well smile crossed their faces. KFF was here.

title

Henry wondered what he was seeing. It was 5:50. The alley way was filling up with homeless looking people. He guessed they lived in the neighborhood, probably veterans who inhabited the center. The door opened at 6 as advertized and the homeless entered. He noted a number of men in black suits and women in flowery dresses. What's that he asked himself.

All in, he watched the emptiness. He had the dumpsters removed. The alley looked better to him: cement walls.

At 6:15, two youngish men stopped outside the alley. They looked like neo-nazis from some european country. Copy cats he decided. Several minutes later there were seven. At 6:30 he counted eight. They moved together toward the door to the Vet Center.

“Missing one. It is the appointed hour. He'll be missed.”

Henry lifted his rifle and placed it on the sill through the hole he had cut in the window. He was ready.

Brad walked up to the alley. He noticed the dumpsters gone. He was processing that the dumpsters being gone. It was Stevie's home. Gone. Why? There were men in the alley. Brad had seen a few of them before. “KFF.”

He called Denny's number.

“Detective, KFF, eight men in the alley. The dumpsters are gone.”

“Get out of the way. Something is going down.”

Brad walked on by the alley. Looking for more trouble coming. His eyes searched the buildings he had seen the man in the photos examining. Something bugged him. He crossed Market mid-block missing death by a few inches. He looked back into the alley. The men had backpacks. Some were taking things out. One tried the door. Small fires were lit. They backed up across the alley.

“What is that?” Brad said to no one. “Fire bombs.” He answered.

One was thrown against the Vet Center door. A bright explosion followed.

One KFF ran forward, a lit bomb in hand, a popping sound, the bomb exploded in his hand, engulfed in flames. Flames spreading. Screaming.

Then the popping sounds multiply. A series of small explosions as bombs are broken and the flames rise higher, blocking the exit for the few men left standing down the alley. They ran. Men falling.

More small explosions. Henry's height gave him shots over the flames Brad could not see. Brad could not see the detail of men running back into the alley to escape the fire to be fired upon with bullets.

He counted nine, maybe ten pops.

He called 911.

Henry packed his rifle in two parts in his case, then using a screw driver he picked up the barrel, placed it the hole he had drilled in the interior office wall behind a painting of a camel. He heard a reassuring thud. He replaced the painting.

“No one's going to find that.”

As he climbed the stairs to the rooftop he wondered if the Chief was going to cross him. He reached the roof with its flat top. There was a helicopter. He turned and walked back down to the street level, exited by the back door, crossed the street. There was a vespa. He revved it up and sped away.

“What an ass. A police helicopter. “ Henry spoke into a wind his speed created. No one heard. He broke into giggling. “That was fun. The cocktails were brilliant. Made shooting easy. Ten shots in 13 seconds.”

As Henry drove the few blocks to his condo and one past, he began to giggle uncontrollably. Most of this is boring. He thought about the papers tomorrow morning that would describe the mass murder of these Nazis, probably linking them to the jail killings.

He realized he wanted company. Maybe he would go to another adult theater, find that special someone. Exhausted from giggling, after circling the neighborhood, he pulled to a stop on Van Ness in front of the Opera. He stood on the curb with his case, took a deep breath to relax. then headed on foot up hill to his condo.

As he walked up the incline, he skipped and trotted, stopped and spun in circles, yelling at the top of his lungs.

In a few moments there were two of them, spinning and yelling. The woman who joined him was dressed in a lace nighty over a bra and panties. Her hair was wildly dyed. Her boots were laced to mid-calf. She screamed her laughter.

Henry woke first.

“Hey, what are you doing? I don't know you.” He said.

She spun a few more times then stopped. She timed her halt to be perfect for eye to eye contact.

“Want to know me?”

He looked at her again.

“I was hoping but I am shy.”

“There is a party. Well, why talk, here is our flyer. Come. You'll be perfect for it. It's kinky. If you know what I mean.”

“My best nights are spent in chains. Maybe we could come to my condo afterwards and have something special.”

“Hmmm. Sounds delish.” She pulled on his sleeve as if to drag him to bed. Henry was not a large person so her tug was more for him than others. She released him and left him as she skipped back down towards the Opera House. He turned and waked home with his rifle case.

## Title

Sarge stood inside the door of the Vet Center. The sounds of the explosions did not make it through either the brick walls or the fireproof door. His hand was on the knob. He felt the heat flow out into his hand.

“Ow. Damn that is hot.” He knew there was a fire. “A bomb. Wow, they were really after us.”

Corporal stood next to him. He felt it and pulled his hand away.

“What is this? They tried to kill us all in a firebomb attack. Unreal.” He said.

Denny walked up. “Brad called. He was too nervous to make sense. Said 'All dead. Fires are still burning. Probably clothing and bodies. How long do bodies burn?' See what I mean?”

Sarge looked into Corporal's eyes. There was an invisible nodding of knowing. “For hours sometimes. Depends on the fat content and moisture content.” Sarge said. “I don't want to stay in here. I don't want to give up my door. We are going out.”

He wrenched the door open and in seconds knew he was in combat the likes of which he was sickeningly familiar. He almost fell backwards from the heat and the stench. Corporal stepped forward and closed it again.

“No, Sarge. Death is that way. Follow me.”

The two old friends joined those who had decided to exit into the street behind the building as safer than directly onto Market Street. Sarge, Corporal and a few others circled around onto Market to see the alley entrance blocked by two fire engines.

Sarge and Corporal were among the early sight seers. Charlotte and Ginelle had tried to help but there was no one alive in the alley.

The detective appeared to be the only law enforcement on the scene. He ordered barriers erected.

Brad was walking around in a daze until he saw the four standing together in the middle of Market Street now totally blocked from traffic.

“Imagine if they had opened the door.” Brad said.

“We might be them?” Sarge wondered about what he was hearing and seeing. Corporal stood silent.

Ginelle said “Want to talk?”

“Like old times. Some nobodies attack other nobodies. Somebody wins. Who?”

“The boss?”

Brad had seen the eight men die in flames and some maybe by bullets. The scene was grotesque. For Brad it needed an explanation. The four had no questions they had not answer decades ago.

“How did this happen?” Brad said. “They came into the alley on their own. The alley is a trap. Someone sprung the trap. They pulled on the door to get in. It didn't open. You might have died.”

“You called. We locked it. We are alive because you were watching.” Corporal said. “They probably were doomed if there really was rifle fire. This reminds me of napalm. They must have had a lot of gas.”

Brad stared ahead. “They had backpacks. Maybe four bombs each. Most had one in each hand with the fuses lit. The door didn't open. They threw one against the door then the explosions began and in ten seconds it was an inferno no one could escape from. I wonder why the dumpsters were gone. Someone might have survived.”

Sarge had an of course look on his face. “They were all going to die no matter what. They open the door and get us. They die in the alley by rifle fire. The door doesn't open and they get hell and hell fire.”

The police arrived in force. Sirens and lights expanded by a factor of ten. The media arrived. The four walked home to the Mission. Brad stood and watched. He talked to who ever wanted to talk with him.

The next morning's paper would say the eight unidentified people had died in a fiery explosion outside the Vet Center in S. Turk Alley. Eyewitnesses thought they were all men using 'Molotov Cocktails' to force entry into the Center. One said when bomb one exploded in the hands of an attacker all of the bombs exploded engulfing them in flames.

Another thought he heard a series of pops that coincided with the attackers collapsing but the flames were so intense he couldn't be sure.

## Title

John had not seen Sarge for some time. It felt longer still when the news was filled with KFF and murders. He looked at the list of the latest victims. All eight were said to be KFF members.

“This looks like ethnic cleansing.” He told his date. They didn't love each other per se. Friends with benefits, some said. She said friends with privileges. She laughed. They lived together for a year when they were in college. They were more than twice as old and ran into each other on Facebook. Now they sat there in the Nikko's restaurant for an afternoon aperitif. He was ready for food.

“How so?”

“All victims are neo-nazi types. All in the same gang. They apparently ruled the BART stations, made over a million every year extorting beggars.”

“What happened to them? They are dead, but how?”

John thought about an entry into the subject. Truth was he didn't know what to make of her. It was too early to tell her any details.

“Some Detective made friends with some homeless vets. They were being beaten, their stuff wrecked by a gang that called themselves KFF. For some reason, they killed one of their own in a BART car. They were arrested and jailed. Within a week fourteen of the fifteen are dead, some in really horrifying ways, a few self-inflicted. That's kind of where we are.”

Gretchen, who he had called Fetchen on occasion, yawned a small yawn, her private language for I knew that, keep me awake. John knew that about her. They were in Debate together.

“You want to know how each one died?”

“Is that weird?”

“They didn't all die on the same day in the same way. The paper printed it as it occurred.”

"I read each one. I have something else in mind. A man." She said. "Since we last met, I have been into kinky stuff."

"Sex?"

"What else can be kinky?"

"Good question."

"I belong to a club down by Fisherman's Wharf. We meet Thursdays at Noon in a small meeting room. We plan our night and leave until midnight. We spend the evening roaming the City looking for kinky characters to bring to that night's festivities."

"Every Thursday?"

"Every Thursday. Every week." She said. "He sat there, the guy I mentioned, and told eight stories of what he called fiery deaths. Eight men killed by the flames of Hell with his assistance."

"He played a devil? Did he wear a costume?"

"A wolf. He said he preyed upon them to energize his penis."

"Ah."

"Oh. That's too much for you?"

"Kink is not my way. I prefer foreplay."

"That's why I want you to tell me the stories. He impressed me. I want to be impressed by you."

"I have another idea. I have to go do an errand. Can we meet for late night, say a coffee shop?"

They made plans. He went in search of Detective Denny Smith.

John called Smith's office. He left a message. He headed toward the Civic Center. Looked for him. Went on to 16<sup>th</sup> Street.

Grease was standing at the head of the station's stairs. Dressed in smiler garb he stood out amongst the hip or ethnic. John knew him from sight.

"How do I find Denny?"

"Last train to SFO. Last car. It's getting crowded these nights. Get on early."

"Sarge?"

"Same."

"That might work." John calculated the time from his encounter with Sarge and Denny and the date he made with Gretchen. "I can do both."

"John, did you hear about the stuff going on? The murders and suicides." Grease looked pained.

"Were you there last night?"

"Yah, I ran like a rabbit away from that stuff. Read the paper. Crazy shit."

"That's why I am looking for Denny. Have something that might be important about the boss."

"Last train."

"Last train. Thanks." John turned and went back down the stairs.

Denny and Sarge stood together on the 16<sup>th</sup> Street platform waiting for the last train. Last night the watchers had all taken the train to the airport and back. It was an impromptu event. Tonight they had planned a great gathering of the memory. There was more to it. The train was the beginning.

John boarded at The Embarcadero taking Grease's advice to board early. It was after 11 o'clock. By the time the train reached 16<sup>th</sup> every seat was taken in the last car. The second to last car was almost full. At 16<sup>th</sup> Street both cars were near capacity with standers hanging on to every bar and hand hold.

Every Male was in black. Every Female in a flowery dress. John was the exception. John saw Sarge as soon as the car doors opened in the station. He and Denny entered side by side and stood in front of John. John stood and told Sarge he had important news. At the next station, John began to tell the tale of the sex club gathering and the man who told the eight stories. A wolf who got off on murdering.

Denny grabbed his arm and they left the train. The others went on.

"John, let's find that woman friend of yours. I'll get a cab." In minutes they were standing in Noe Valley a block from the coffee shop.

"You go meet her. I will hold back. When she says she will help, turn and call me over."

"OK."

John saw her at a small table she was guarding against a number of invitations to join her. She was interesting looking. Sitting alone. This was a meat market on a Friday/Saturday night.

"Hey, Fetchen, what's up?"

"I am glad you are early. This place is crawling with lizards."

"My thought. We could go somewhere else."

"Your place?"

"I need your help. I want to find that man you talked about. Would you come with me and a friend to try to ID him?"

"A threesome?" She said. She didn't laugh. Her eyes looked deeper than humor. She had the images of death in her sight. "Maybe. Who is your friend? Let me guess."

She pulled a news paper from her lap and tossed it on the table. It was opened to a picture of Denny. Then she stood and walked over to the coffee bar and put out her hand.

"My name is Gretchen Albright. I am a friend of John Wright over there." She turned and politely indicated John who smiled back. "Will you join us, please."

Denny took her hand in a hand shake. She pulled him along after her. They sat. Denny grinning an I got busted grin.

"Now what?" He said.

Gretchen smiled. "You want that guy? He scared me. What he was saying was so real and more so when I read the morning paper. That's when I called John for a date. I saw his dad's picture too, a week ago. One plus one got me to you. I feel safer."

"You could have just called me."

"Detective, can I call you Detective? It's so cool. Well, I was admiring your picture in the paper even before this character rips off the eight fiery death stories. He had to have seen it happen to have beaten the morning paper for details. He claimed to have fired a shot that started the inferno off."

"That's interesting." Denny said. "Where is he now?"

"Probably where I left him this morning. He fell asleep. I shackled him to his own bed." She passed a photo to Denny of Henry all tied up with an address on the back. "He has a beautiful rifle that he said he used. It is there in the photo. I put it beside him."

"I don't get you." John said. "You caught this psycho like you knew what you were doing."

"Thank you." Gretchen said. "Can you take it from here? This is my business card if you need help." She passed a card to Denny. "Gentlemen, I am tired and want to sleep so I wish you a good night." She stood and left with their eyes following her. Denny was speed dialing 911 to give them a heads up of a man in distress and to send a unit up into the condo building to arrest the occupant.

Denny turned the card over to see her name. "FBI. Hmm. Probably undercover. Our lucky day."

It takes a while to get to Van Ness from the Noe Valley. By the time Denny and John reached the condo there were two squad cars on the curb. One had a handcuffed suspect in the back. Denny talked to the arresting officer who showed Henry to him.

"Case closed." He said to John. "We have our man."

title

As John and Denny saw from their cab as it circled the Civic Center, the watchers and smilers were standing in front of City Hall. Cameras were recording and flashing photos of the gathering. Probably a hundred well dressed smiling men and women at one in the morning. The newspapers held their editions until the picture hit their emails. Sarge had set it up with Azimov, the reporter.

The morning paper would announce the gathering as a victory for love and caring. It was a strange picture and a stranger headline. "Nobody Wins – the battle for the streets is over!" The picture looked like a graduation photo on the steps of a university library.

The picture of Henry in handcuffs ran the next day. Detective Smith was heavily quoted. He didn't mention Gretchen the federal agent's role in the capture of the shooter in the Turks Alley Massacre as the media dubbed it.

That night on the last train to SFO, Sarge and Denny sat together. Both the last two cars were near capacity. The talking was loud. The outcome was so unexpected that it felt like a gift from somewhere, a Miracle some said, Sarge and Denny knew it was not the end of it. The celebrants did not have to be reminded of it.

On the trip back they both detrained at 16<sup>th</sup> Street and walked to a small coffee shop near the station. Two cups of hot tea raised steam that floated between them.

Denny said, "Now what?" The steam roiled and fled. "What are you going to do? Go back to smiling and hiding? "

"The four of us will do what we have been doing. It makes us happy."

"Henry is probably certifiably insane though that might not save him from Death Row. He could not have acted alone so we can look for the BART cops and businessmen involved, maybe find some other criminal activity. We have some leads. Pictures the watchers took, documents with names and plans."

“Sounds like dangerous work. Me? I have a pension to live on and with the others we stay healthy and happy. We smile. We watch. We are part of memory.”

“What if ...”

“Nobody waits and hopes.”

Cover: BART map

Plot:

Expand killings in jail. Follow KFF pers more. What happened to the crankster

Expand Jeremy's role

More from John

More from Ginelle

More about Brad

Little scenes of daily life in the apartment. Break up the rush to the end.

Make the ending more breath taking. The attack is more severe and life threatening. People trying to escape from the Vet Center and from the alley. Make the trap more exquisite and difficult to escape.

The FBI issue. Denny called early. Gretchen answered by tracing Henry and getting him arrested

Page 90 what did the papers tell him? Follow the cop links

## **Nobody lives forever**

### **Characters**

Sarge, Sgt. Jason Wright

John Wright [Sarge's son]

Corporal, Corporal Alonzo Munoz

Woody

Harold, hearing officer

Charlotte

Ginelle

Stephen Black, Homeless vet, Stevie

Bradley Hutchison, law student, Brad

LOE's

Detective Dennis Smith

Detective Mark Blain

Skin heads – wannabe's wearing the style but sons of cops and fundies trying to institute god's kingdom. Losers die. [15]

Amos Wells

Billy O'Neal

Lucas Krider,, meth sales

Nelson Franks

Randal Youngman

Wayne French

Fifth suspect, dies in jail. Kevin Ellis

8 others, unnamed before arraignment

Lawyers

Addy [x] Short for Adolf, Billy, Adam Schultz

Cynthia Reynolds, attorney of record for Mr. Franks

Richard G. Klienman of Klienman, Jones and Etheredge, youngman's attorney

Gerald Smyers of Dewey, Jones and Howe.

Vets

John and Rolly Smith

Grease

Mrs. Marvin Pritchard, secretary to the Executive Director, Christine

## **Synopsis**

There must be something magical in the plan. The words play tricks on one's mind. The idea of nobodies frees people from subjugation.

Seeking perfection versus seeking power