



Dick Tracy

I need someone to love me
the whole day through
Ah, one look in my eyes
and you can tell that's true.

--"Old Man"

Neil Young

Xxx

Here comes the rain again
Falling on my head like a memory
Falling on my head like a new emotion
I want to walk in the open wind
I want to talk like lovers do
I want to breathe in the open wind
I want to kiss like lovers do
I want to dive into your ocean
Is it raining with you?
-- Here comes the rain again

Eurythmics

Welcome to the future

I watched the video a dozen times before I saw what I was supposed to see.

My first view was wasted on the shock of what the phone had recorded. That was hard to get over. Then, at last, I saw it, what I needed to see. A full-length mirror near the curb was leaning against the open door of a white delivery van. In the mirror was the reflection of a storefront out of the camera's view. In the reflection of the storefront show window was a woman standing looking out onto the scene in the street, her hand over her mouth. She was a tall black woman. I watched her for a few more views. This was enough to start thinking I knew her from somewhere.

The murder department of the San Francisco Police Department had received a 911 call at seven in the morning reporting a shootout outside a store in the Potrero Hill district, but an hour later when we rolled up on the scene there were no bodies in the street in front of that store. We found no pools of blood. There were red spots here and there. We did find the burner phone with the video.

A local patrol had secured the area described in the 911 call. They had arrived less than ten minutes after the call was made. When the murder squad assigned to this case showed up, that's me and my partner Blair, everything had been locked down and a witness search was underway.

That was the day before yesterday. The lab hadn't finished checking out the red spots. The morgue had not responded to finding any of the bodies that matched the video captures of the victims. Two days later and we hadn't found any witnesses much less the woman in the mirror.

This morning, local media ran her picture, a screen grab from the video, asking for knowledge of her identity. We canvassed the area with the photo. No one in the neighborhood knew her, why would they?

In a word I was disappointed. I had spent some time with the capture to reverse the image, so she looked as much as like her true self as possible. Guys like me who love to catch murderers do stuff like that to make it happen.

I returned to the office after a second canvass of the neighborhood. It was nearly 4 pm. I checked out the phone again. The call records showed it was the phone that made the 911 call. It must have been the guy who took the video.

I leaned back in my chair, trying to keep my eyes from seeing the hellish mess I was supposed to work in. Cop stations are hard places to concentrate on anything. Just saying.

Meanwhile, in the main lobby of the station a tall, black woman walked up to the counter. The desk sergeant looked up.

“Name.”

“Terrilee Flowers.” She said.

“How can I help you?”

“I saw a picture in the paper asking for witnesses. Talk to Detective Smith, it said.”

“He’s busy.”

“So? So am I. Here I am.”

“OK. One minute.” The officer turned and walked through the nearest door to talk to another officer who stood and looked at her. He picked up a phone. My phone rang. The sergeant said a witness had just come in. He told me her name. I ran to the front counter.

“Terrilee Flowers?” I said.

“Yes.”

“I am Detective Smith. Please follow me.” Normally, I would first have found an interview room, then lead her there, but I was excited. It was her. The woman in the mirror. She looked tense. I didn’t want her to escape. The first empty interrogation room smelled like piss. I wanted to impress her with competence not make her gag on my work environment. I closed the door.

“Look, keep up and we’ll go to the cafeteria.” It was the best I could do. I grabbed her hand and guided her through the knots of good and bad humans that day and night choked the hallways. Her body language went from Omagod to near calm. I could see her trust growing. I turned to face her, and she walked into me.

“Sorry.” We both said. It was an impulse to stop and turn into her path. I hadn’t been that close to a woman in a long time.

“Coffee?” I asked.

“My eyes aren’t brown yet? How about a shot.” She smiled. I was forced to look. They were gray.

“Wait. Maybe later.” I was digging a hole deeper. “For now, we stick to procedure.”

“Is it procedure to hit on a witness?” She smiled a gotcha. It just made it worse.

“Ah. We don’t have espresso. This is a cop shop. Look around. Times are hard. I mean...” Her face said I failed at spinning my answer into a less harmful arena of thought.

I looked at her with a face I hoped would stop her from wrenching me. It wasn’t her wit or her body, it was her way. I wanted to watch her

move, to hear her talk, to feel her life. I was also hoping to interview her about the murders she saw. However, I wasn't ready for questioning anybody. I was stunned.

She giggled. "Detective, you are in a state as my really old auntie might say. I want to tell you what I saw."

There are times when theme music goes through my head. I'm a black cop. There is black cop music. it speaks of struggle. But I was thinking snuggle. I snickered. She caught me. I dropped her hand.

"Why do people call cops Dicks?" She asked.

"Dick Tracy."

"Good thing you're not the witness." She sneered. "The reverse was true. Tracy was called Dick because he was a detective."

"Well that's fun. Good to know, but now let's get to work."

We walked through the line. I settled for coffee. She had nothing.

"Cheap date." She said. I clung to her side until we were forced apart as we negotiated our way through the cafeteria jumble to a table. We sat facing each other. I checked again; She had gray eyes.

I pulled a small spiral notebook from my coat pocket and a pen from behind my left ear. "Tell me." I asked.

"I work at a consignment store in the Potrero District."

"Millie's Stuff." I said. "1538 17th Street."

"Sounds right. I arrived as usual that morning before the commute really kicked in. I was working on the show window and waiting for deliveries."

As she talked, I tried to pay attention to her words. I stared at her lips. I was lost in the movement ... calling me to her chamber, to her bed and ...

“Are you listening?” Then she laughed. “Dicks are nuts.”

I must have blushed before I broke into a sweat. “Sorry. I seem to be getting a cold. Try me again.”

“Where was I last, what was I saying? Do you remember?”

“Terrilee Flowers.”

“Dang, you must have a lot on your mind.”

I always fall prey to something. A pretty woman. One more beer. In spite of it all, I do my job.

“I apologize. I feel confused because ...”

“What’s your name again?”

“Denny Smith, single, no kids, living alone waiting for a miracle in my life.” I was proud of my bravery.

“Smith, you need a date.”

“Any ideas?”

“I am going to a peace march and rally at 5:30. I can come and get you or meet you. Won’t be long. Maybe you’ll meet someone.”

“You?”

“Taken.” She lied as I’d soon find out. “Here’s my story, Detective Smith.”

She launched into a narrative that sounded like it happened every day to her. It was all ho hum with many and-thens. The gist was that a white delivery van pulled up in front of the store. Three men began

unloading the van. And then, a few minutes later a black Escalade arrived. People, all men, poured out of the vehicles. Guns. Blood. Then the survivors threw the victims in the back of the van and both vehicles left.

Two days ago, when I answered the 911 call, I collected samples of the red substance from the road surface and sent it to the lab. There was little evidence of what she described, I did find the phone lying near the curb, buried in the oak leaves the City hadn't swept up. Her story did not contradict the mayhem the video showed.

"We have a video of the scene and the action. You were in Millie's show window." She studied my face as I spoke. "We produced a photo of you from the video. That was in the papers. That was you, right?"

"Yes."

"Obviously, any information you could provide would be helpful." I hoped I smiled as I said this. "Faces? Did you see any faces?"

"I don't know. I didn't believe what I was seeing." She wasn't smiling.

I had canvassed the neighborhood the day of the murders. No one saw anything. No one heard anything. Millie's Stuff was always closed when I went by and I rode by half dozen times over the next two days.

"Do you work at Millie's every day?"

She shook her head. Something annoyed me. Like I said I was off my game. It was getting close to 5:00. I had to hurry. I took her personal info for the case record. I gave her my card with the usual call me if.

She stood and turned away, then sat turned back to sit down again.

"Denny, you are a sweet guy. You must have woken in a stupor because you never got what I had to say."

“OK. Fill me in.” Sorrow filled my mind as I wasted the opportunity of impressing her with my skills as an interrogator.

“The van had a name on its doors: Bob’s Secondhand. They were making a delivery to Millie’s. Would that be a clue?” That explained the wardrobe mirror in the street. The mirror was going into the store.

“That’s a clue.” I said. She sat quietly. I raised my voice a little. “You’d think you would have called. I left my card under Millie’s front door. I sent mail.”

“Look, its damn near five. When are you getting off? Let’s go to your favorite place. The shot, remember? Then the march.” Terrilee had a way about her. Demand came to mind. Not hard-assed or cruel. Confident and demanding. She was a few years older, but I felt old near her. She had more sparkle.

“I’ll punch out. Can you wait for five minutes?” What was I doing? I went to my locker and switched into civilian garb, adjusted my hair, brushed my teeth. Left.

I walked up behind her. “Back. Let’s move.”

She stood and stared me up. I felt touched.

“Better. That dusty old suit jacket needs a burial ceremony. Nice sweater. I like white ... in a sweater.” She seemed to speak in terms that indicated she was playing with me. Disrespect?

“You are teasing me.” I said.

“I hope so. Is it working?”

“We are heading out the door on our first date.” I checked my phone for the time. “After only meeting twenty-five and some minutes ago.”

“I’d watch out if I were you.” She hummed. She could have spat and yelled the same words at me, and I would have heard the same thing. I was wishing.

The cop bar is across the street. We were nearly alone. She had cranberry juice. I declined on the march. I told her I would call her tomorrow to follow up on the interview. Two minutes later she left; watching her walk away didn’t help my confusion.

I returned to the station to try to figure this one out. Terrilee would say it’s time to be a Dick. Bob’s Secondhand didn’t answer the phone. It was rush hour so travelling made no sense just to find a bolted door. The neighborhood where Bob’s is located in Oakland wasn’t high rent, therefore the chances were good it was high crime. I checked the records for arrests associated with stolen goods and drugs. A few calls over five years reporting a robbery at the store but no records of fencing or trafficking.

The video showed that all the men were armed and that there was a shootout. The witness confirmed this. The problem was no one knew who the shooters were, or which side won the shootout. One side clearly did win, but we didn’t know what the argument was about. I assumed the Escalade people won from the looks of it, otherwise why run and hide afterwards? I needed information.

One more watch of the video and I finally saw what I could never have seen until boredom set in. It was a matter of perspective. Someone was missing from the video: The videographer.

I ran Terrilee through records to see what-was-what. She was more interesting than Bob’s Secondhand. Undercover reported her as an organizer in BLM. There were pictures of her in action leading chants,

talking to the media. I checked the internet wires. Today's march was a BLM event in front of the City government center.

The morgue had no bodies that matched the description. No mistake there were bodies, but none that matched the time and place, never mind physical descriptions.

Next was vehicle ID. Bob's did not show a white van registered. I checked DBA's for the owner of Bob's. No listing. Then the building owner. A law office, also in Oakland. They owned the van. I checked San Francisco DBAs for Millie's and the ownership of that building. Same law office. There was no phone listed for the owner.

As a detective, I have a workspace as depicted in the TV crime dramas: Crowded, hectic and not conducive to quality thinking. To my mind that requires a beer. I punched out for real and went back to my other office: the cop bar. When I started this game, I took a spiral notebook everywhere but with smart phones there is less need. Yet, I took one anyway. Old cops have old habits.

The notion that a multiple homicide could occur in the early morning that only one person saw seemed a stretch. This bothered me the most. There were no bodies. Without bodies then, technically, the murders hadn't happened. If it were not for the phone no evidence would exist. Terrilee made it real, kind of. The 911 recorded the audio of a male voice but offered nothing new. Solving this required paper and pen with diagrams and multiple lists.

By the time, I left the building for the beer it was nearing nine. As I walked across the street my cell rang. I did not recognize the number.

"Detective Smith, Homicide."

"Terrilee Flowers, Witness. Where are you?"

I scanned the street. "Looking at you from half a block to the south."

She waved when I waved. She walked in her smooth way to me.

"Still living alone." She asked from ten feet away.

"Yes, unless I'm not. Am I?" I said. She grabbed my hand.

"We'll see. I give it a few days before a clear answer." She squeezed my fingers and lead us into the bar.

The theme music was back to snuggle. We settled in, my spiral notebook on the table with my pen.

"You were being a Dick and I have interrupted your train of thought. I'll order a rum and coke if you promise to change the subject your mind was set on."

"Not hard. I mean ... "

"My auntie was right. You are in a state." She already was holding my hand. "I think love at first sight."

"Suspicion at first site, maybe."

"I'd be in jail."

"I might arrest you tonight if you are not a cooperative witness."

"Ooh. Mr. Policeman you are being too tough with me. I might surrender if you treat me nice."

The barmaid, Gretta, came to our table.

"Whacha drinkin'." Gretta was an old-timer in the cop bar. No matter what Gretta will bring the drinks and spill a little on the table. When she was younger, she would lean across the table to spread her joy and increase her tips. No pun intended.

Terrilee looked at me.

I said, "two of what she wants."

"Quervo. One shot each with a water back." She turned to me. "Rum and coke is not enough." She looked at me and smiled. I shrugged. I knew I would not get to the bottom of this tonight. I looked into her gray eyes and wondered if this was an error.

"Doubts?" She smiled again. "Don't worry I love teasing. You already caught me. I have no idea what I did to deserve this, but I do. So, relax and have fun." She said. "You need it."

Our hands touched on top of the table.

"OK. I getcha." I'll never admit to taking drugs, but my mind exploded like my drugee arrestees talked about at times. "One thing before we go too far for thought. Who were those people?"

"An elaborate hoax." She laughed. "Let's talk about you."

The drinks arrived. We toasted our good senses goodbye.

When I woke in my apartment, I was alone. No signs of anyone else having been there. My clothes were still on. It looked like I passed out on my bed. It's not like it never happened before. With some patience, the memories of how that happened again would return.

"Oh."

I checked the clock. 7:30 ish. I looked in the mirror. My white sweater wasn't spotty. I found my wallet and keys and headed for the Muni. On the way I bought a smoothie and hoped it would stay down. I punched in as usual. There were two messages on my desk.

The morgue called saying no bodies of interest to me came in overnight. I wasn't prepared to do that identification drill anyway. Maybe tomorrow, if need be.

The other was from Terrilee saying she made it home and ‘thanks for the cab fare.’ I wanted to remember that part ... but I didn’t.

The smoothie was helping. I had a cup of coffee. There in the cafeteria a voice started in my head. A memory floated around. This memory recovery was a tricky thing for me. If I tried too hard all actual words fled leaving a helpless feeling I hated.

I tried to relax my anxieties hoping for a moment of clarity. If I can do this well then like ZAM a word pops out of the fog.

“Hoax? Why am I thinking that?” Terrilee’s face flashed into my mind’s eye. She said it was an elaborate hoax. What was the hoax? The murders? The consignment businesses and the law office? She was teasing me? I found her phone number in my cell and rang her.

“Dick! Did you live?”

“Uh. Was there doubt?”

“We spent too much time on the getting to know you part. There was nothing left of our senses in the end.” She giggled. “Looks like you are still living alone.”

“Ooh. There is just not enough time to do everything.”

“Why did you call? More questions?”

“Just trying to catch up on our last conversations.” My head was throbbing. I wished I had called in sick. I couldn’t even picture her face now much less recall our conversations.

“Let me help you. You drink too much. Loneliness is not good for you. One thing explains the other but either way you are alone.”

“I see. Thanks for that. Maybe I could call you later when my head clears.” She agreed. I terminated the call. She was right. I couldn’t

figure out what to do about it. She was the one who wanted a drink not me. I started to blame her then I realized I was wrong. It was me who needed to take better care of me.

The time passed slowly. I stared at the murder folder for ten minutes. I watched the video another dozen times. The first time the reason was so I could see her face. The words 'elaborate hoax' were in the front of my mind as I fast forwarded. It didn't help me see anything new. I waited hopelessly for the epiphany. I spent the rest of the morning outlining what the video showed, a second by second sequence.

Once the Escalade arrived, the entire scene, captured by the phone, took less than three minutes during which time it appeared three men died by gunshot wounds that splattered blood into the air. One of the delivery men had the phone on and dialed into 911 when the shooting began. He was not likely one of the victors. The last scene was disrupted and a voice saying, "No. No." I looked at each of the murders one by one searching for anything that supported a hoax.

Mentally chained to my desk, I examined the phone again, but instead of the video I looked at the early morning of the day to see what was done on the phone during that period. The phone told me there were only three texts no phone calls besides the 911 call. The last text had an attachment, the video itself. The phone from the scene was a burner as it was referred to by those who use them. Each of the three numbers went to another burner.

"That's new." The video was sent to a burner contact before the phone was abandoned presumably to be discovered. "Hoax-y looking to me."

Questions grew even as I felt my brain numbed near to death. Long ago I had the sense to make a list of questions for each situation involved in a murder investigation. This was my first video murder. Somewhere in the mush a small voice was talking about the assumptions I was

making. First was who made the video. Which side was he on? When did he decide to video the scene? Then since the video maker was on the ground how did he get there? Shot? Why did he stop recording after the white van left the scene?

Better yet why did he not stop recording if he was dead. That means he or she was left behind? Why? It was only after the perps left the scene with the dead that the vid was sent to the number on the cell. It was more like a movie than a murder scene vid.

The morning went by with more confusion about how the video was taken. Things happened before it began and after it was done. Nothing made sense except the hoax idea. I worked on that for a bit over more coffee and a donut – chocolate with shredded coconut. Hangover food.

In the early afternoon, she called again.

“Well, Mr. Tracy, or can I call you Dick, how is your hangover coming along?”

“Oh, it’s you. I was hoping for an eyewitness to three murders.”

“Do you have bodies?”

“No.”

“Do you have any idea who might have been killed?”

“No.”

“Why suspect murder then?”

“The video.”

“Ah. Point for Dick.” By now she was giggling. “You also have an eyewitness.”

“But to what?”

“Exactly.”

“Who are you really?” Most of my faculties had returned. I liked the way our thoughts wove together into a cloth.

“Too big a question. Break it down.”

“What did you mean when you said this was an elaborate hoax?”

“It was very early in the morning, before the commuters were in the streets in any number. A van that looks like a Bob’s Secondhand store van is attacked by a drug lord, judging by the choice of car. A phone has a video recording and 911 has an audio. I saw the whole thing with unbelieving eyes. What does that say?”

“When I inspected the scene, I wanted to find the traces a bleeding body or three would leave on the pavement. I found the phone and it became more important than the missing traces of blood and signs of the weapons that were used. The video is unclear about this last point.”

“See what I mean?”

“Yup, I do.” I wanted to hang up and think. “Call you back. Thanks for the conversation.”

“Hey. I am not done. Slow down.” She sounded demanding. “I have things to do but I will be free after ten tonight. Stay sober enough to keep me company and we can, you know, compare notes then. I’ll call.” She hung up.

I wanted a beer. This wouldn’t work if I followed my old habits. I needed help.

I watched the vid a few more times, then focused on the ending. Nothing new came from this. The way the video ended said its maker must be dead. How did he text the video? Somebody else sent the video. Why text the video anyway?”

Hours passed working on other cases.

My phone rang. It was her. I checked my watch 9:30.

“You early.”

“Dick, you good.” She was laughing. “Five minutes. I am in a cab. I can hardly wait.”

“Me, too.”

“Yah, for a beer.”

“You don’t know Dick.” My best line in two days of this banter.

“Soon.”

I changed out of my jacket, brushed my teeth, splashed water on my face. In five minutes, I was standing outside when her Uber pulled up. She was more beautiful than I remembered. She walked towards me and held me in a hug the likes of which I had forgotten existed, if I ever knew. Then the kiss – not an everything kiss. We had only met a day ago. I swear my toes curled.

She said, “I felt that. Maybe you aren’t alone anymore.”

“What about you?”

“Typical cop. Not happy knowing the obvious.” She snaked her arm into mine and pulled me toward the door to the bar. She grabbed the door to open it. “No work. OK.”

“What work?” I pulled back.

She looked at me with a quizzical look, the first I’d seen.

“In that cop bar is work. If we walk in any other direction, I won’t be alone. What say you?” I grinned a now or never grin.

“Nice idea. I know a place we could get massages together. Then a snack.” I loved looking at her lips move. “Your place or mine?” I heard.

“Should we make spare keys on the way?” I wished. But really said,
“Let’s walk.”

We walked towards the Mission passing twenty restaurants and even more bars. We walked around Delores Park. I pointed up the hill to my apartment. We kept walking and talking about jobs and family, funny times and disappointments. I can’t say if any of it stuck in my mind. After it all we parted company at a Muni J line stop. She went back to the East Bay and me, back up the hill to home.

The next morning at the office a new multiple homicide filled my day.

Missing

I responded to a 911 call. There were two shot up bodies. Blood everywhere. No witnesses. No weapons. There was a murder for real, not some video. It was ordinary, and everything went according to the way it worked. At 5, I punched out and headed home.

My one-bedroom place is on the edge of Delores Park. In the Castro, a block from the Muni stop. I couldn't live there on my salary if it were not for rent control.

As I walked uphill to my front stoop and door, my head was full of those thoughts that follow you around if you are longing to see a missing part reappear. Terrilee was in my mind, not a little, almost completely. When I turned off 16th St, she was standing on the first step on my stairs looking in my direction. That was the moment when I gave up wondering if I would ever see her again.

"Terrilee. Nice to see you. Really nice."

"Denny, you're dragging. Back rub?"

"Have your toothbrush?"

She was at peace. Present and focused. I was a bit wild for her, so I tacked to the peace.

"Just teasing."

"No, but I wished I had thought of it. You have a spare?"

We sat on the stoop watching whoever walked by going wherever. They might have noticed we were sitting out knowing, maybe fearing, what awaited us if we went in. There was little more to say. We sat not touching. My hands were in my pants' pockets, safely immobile. Hers

were folded in her lap. She was silent of voice, but I had no trouble imagining she was shaking with excitement. Touch rules me. I am yours. I wanted to say. If you want to be touched.

The silence continued. We sat. My stomach growled.

“I missed lunch.” I said.

“Is that all you missed?”

“Caught me. You know.”

“Say it. I want to hear it said.”

“I missed you.”

“I missed you which explains why I was waiting for you for most of the evening.”

“Should have called.”

“You are nicer after work. Not distracted by the dead.”

“Terrilee, let’s walk, find food, maybe a beer, talk about what is next if anything.”

“Next? I guess it is less clear in our 40’s than in our teens. My thoughts have drifted to bonding. Maybe we hold each other. Maybe all night.” She smiled which I only saw from the side since she was looking at her hands and not at me.

“Walk. Eat. Drink.”

“Be merry?”

“I dream about that part.”

We walked. She kept her hand on the inside of my elbow pulling me towards her. I loved that.

“Terrilee, I am sunny with you. I seek you.”

“You found me.”

“I don’t know how.” That was my problem in relationships and, of course, the dead body aspect. Maybe I attracted someone to me, but the daily carnage was tough to live with.

I told her that my grandfather was a shaman. I was born in Jamaica. Lucky to get an education in California. My poet shaman grandfather raised me as a man as he said to me as he lay dying.

My father was an asshole, but his father was a poet. There is a book. My Grandfather’s face was on the front. I lost that book and my memory of the name of it has evaporated. The trajectory is poet-asshole-dick. No offense meant. That’s how it was going.

The skill I was born with is the skill of the hunter. I have patience waiting for the fullness of wonder. I set traps.

Terrilee was born in the City. Her family all but run out by rising costs of rent and food. She lived with her Auntie, her mother’s sister, in North Oakland in the so-called Dog Town.

We walked and talked as we passed a dozen eateries.

We were back at my stoop.

It seemed like we had just left. My grandfather said, “Times of peace are slow.” Which I interpreted to mean time is short in a crisis. The unanswered questions rattled about.

We parted company without making another date. Something happened to each of us that cooled the heat. We parted friends and hungry.

Something new

A week went by. Murders came, and murders went. On a Monday morning, I punch in and checked my messages. There were two. One from the lab on the Terrilee case and another from Anonymous. The later was a URL for YouTube. I had it running within seconds. It was a murder vid. The murder vid.

Sleuthing led to finding the vid marked fiction and a director and his cast also named followed by a list of thank you too's that included Terrilee Flowers. Experience said do not jump to conclusions. I decided I would ignore the message and see what happened next based on an aphorism that doing less can get you more. I thought I would test it out on Terrilee.

Wednesday came and went. I punched out and headed for the long walk home. Walking stimulates my thinking which is to say I talk to 'my selves.' Out loud. Tonight's walk turned into an argument between those of us who wanted to see her again for the company and the others who found something to worry about like her real motive in all this hoax murder vid etc. Those last, they felt messed with and advised caution. By the time I turned onto Church Street nothing was perfectly clear. I walked the four steps to my front door and fumbled with the key.

"Detective Smith." Her voice was familiar. I didn't turn since I knew.

"Witness Flowers. Funny meeting you here." I wasn't as snotty as I hoped. Neither was I as warm as I felt.

"Don't hate me. It wasn't my idea. I didn't realize what happened until later. I really thought I saw what ..."

“Save it. Come in. I want a beer.” She climbed the steps and in two minutes we were standing in my kitchen, leaning on the chopping block sipping from foamy glasses of suds. All I had was root beer, its foam is some of the tastiest stuff anywhere.

“Did you change your name?” I smiled at her while her face changed from huh to awareness. “You know, to Anonymous.”

“Oh, the message with the video. I called and left a message. Failed on the ID part. Glad you got it.” She looked like she was glad. Some of me decided to stand down and let her have another chance to explain. She sipped her root beer. I sipped my root beer.

There is a moment in a sale involving a car, or insurance or encyclopedias where the salesperson holds the pen out to the prospective buyer. The implication is ‘grab the pen and sign.’ Salespeople are taught to be quiet after they hold the pen out. The trainer says, whoever talks buys. If that was what we were doing, then she bought.

“Denny let’s try again. I have good feelings for you. I am alone, too. You are as pretty a man as I have seen. You have a job. You have other things.”

“Like root beer.”

“Yah, like that.” She stopped and reached out to touch my face.

I had no idea what was bought and what was sold. She bought. That means I had to deliver. She reached over to find her backpack and pulled a tooth brush out of it. I had no idea what happened next. Short story we woke up together when my alarm went off.

You know you swear you will remember everything about episodes like those. I could make a list of the ways our senses interpret data and

then meta-interpret until the memory of the moment is lost almost entirely in favor of an abstraction such as We Became One.

“Denny, are you good at manipulation?”

“You mean getting what I want from a human being?”

“Close enough. Are you?”

“No. I gave that up long ago.” I was almost ready to go for my Saturday run. She had watched me dress and then rolled over as if to go back to sleep. A spark of paranoia flashed. “Come on. I am waiting for you. It’s coffee and bagels then hit the road.”

“Are you throwing me out?”

“I told you I was bad at getting what I want.” I shook my head. “You on the other hand ...”

She rose and started dressing. Thinking back, I was still not resisting being lonesome. I was bad at sharing.

“Terrilee, I am going to miss you. I need to go. I want to take you with me. Not part at this door.”

“Oh. Same thing but you turn out less of an asshole.”

“Terrilee, I am doing a shitty job of proposing to you.” I sat on the edge of the bed and she sat next to me. Looking into her eyes helped me come to my senses. “Stay here tonight. We can make plans.”

“Now, I want to go.” She was smiling her infinite smile. I was in a bit of shock. I assume I was smiling too. “I want to get a few things from Aunties house.”

“Here is a key. I can’t have pets.”

“Even goldfish.”

“You have goldfish?”

“No. Maybe.”

“No water vessels. No aquaria.” I watched to see if she was laughing. She was serious. “Is there a problem?”

“There are snakes. Two boas. Beautiful.”

“Ah. I’ll check the lease for terms regarding boas. Maybe we can squeak them by as a service pet if they are related?” We were hugging. Whispering in each other’s ears. “We can try that. But make it tomorrow. More time to feel what is happening.”

Nobody comes back

As she dressed, I waited by the door. The house phone rang. I picked it up.

“Denny here,”

“John Wright. How about the last train tonight?”

“Embarcadero at 11. See you then.” As I hung up, she emerged.

“I have competition?” Terrilee said.

“You have BLM. I have Nobody. You familiar?”

“Are you kidding? Take me with you. Is that tonight?”

“11 at The Embarcadero station. Ride the last train. Learn from the Underground University. Become part of Memory.”

“I’ll see you there. I’ll go to Auntie’s tomorrow.”

“Bring your action survival gear. Never know what will happen.” I imagined that Occupy built some skills for future events. Why not survival gear for urban environments. Masks, water, first aid, a burner, you know, stuff you’d need in the crowd.

“Ready to go. Peace out.”

I closed the door behind us. We went in different directions. We both turned back to see the other turned back too. That’s when I knew we’d spend our lives together.

Nobody can take over the system

Night settled on The City but the seventeen stations of the BART system from The Embarcadero through the SFO station were buzzing with thousands of Smilers, Watchers and Nobodys in general. The uniform was formal wear designed for spring carrying with it a feeling of a new awakening. Black suits, white shirts and ties or flowery dresses known as Cynthia suits named after the foundation director who funded the original Smilers and their clothing.

By the time the last train would reach the closest station to my apartment, it would be packed. My only hope was to get on before it reached the Civic Center. I travelled into town on the BART, got off at Embarcadero, went over to the other track and waited for the hour plus it would take for the last train to reach me.

The Underground University was in full operation. The stairs heading back up to the turnstiles and exits were the stages upon which the parade of Nobodys would one at a time speak for five minutes on any subject. These were people like I grew up with talking about what mattered in their lives. Most spoke about corruption, what it is and where to find it. Hundreds if not thousands of people were doing this exact same thing at all the stations in the BART system.

Where I stood a hospital worker was on the third step telling a tale about wages and profits and the value of collective bargaining when Terrilee's arms crossed my chest from behind and I caught the aroma of her skin as she hummed into my ear.

“Denny, I love you.”

A blast of sexual energy can disorient even the most resistant. I had a dim memory of something I was working on and then I turned to see her snuggled up against my hip.

“Where have you been?” I said as my mind sought the words of a thank you that credited the gods to whom all credit goes.

“Huh. You nuts, Dick.”

“Who’s talking?”

“That’s what I’m sayin’.”

John

As I was feeling Terrilee growing on me, another voice caught my attention, this one John Wright's. With Terrilee on my left John took the right for a hug.

"Denny. Glad to see you." John Wright was looking for a role in the Nobody thing. He told me he had a degree in politics. His father Jonas 'Sarge' Wright with his war brother Corporal Alfonzo Munoz aka Corporal started the Smilers and the Watchers and the Memory. After the nazi gang Kill For Fun was stopped The Underground University started organically following the rise of the Last Train meetings. Which almost overnight become too crowded for everyone who wanted to ride to ride. So the stations themselves became the place to talk and to learn.

The Last Train was the last train on any night that ran through the Embarcadero to the international airport called SFO. The Embarcadero was the first station in the City reached by the trains that passed under the Bay on their way west through The City and then south to the SFO airport. After SFO the trains continue back to north and then east to the Embarcadero heading through the tunnel under the bay to Oakland and beyond. To ride the Last Train around the 'SFO horn' had become an intense experience.

I loved the Last Train. It started as the place I met Sarge and other Nobodys who were trying to stop a gang from stealing from the homeless who panhandled near the entrances to the BART stations in the City and south to the airport.

I trusted Sarge. He had moved north. John wanted to fill in for him as I sought to bring down the corruption in the SFPD. Sarge and the other original Smilers were encamped on an old farm in the southern part of

Humboldt County north of The City. Taking it easy as seventy-year-olds like to do.

Cops usually are not seen in public being hugged by a beautiful black woman and a forty something white guy. I moved to be free of both of them as I attempted an introduction.

“Terrilee. John.” I said. “John. Terrilee.”

They nodded as the last train screeched to a stop. We boarded the last car.

There was nothing unusual about the ride. The same things that happened before happened again.

John was relatively new at the Last Train. He watched the goings on sometimes with a sign of shock on his face. The train moves. The train is noisy. There is a bit of time as the doors are about to open when riders can talk without yelling and be heard. People stood when the train stopped and made short speeches addressing Memory. Whether you were a Smiler, a Watcher or anything else you are part of Memory. There is no community without a Memory. Nobody had a Memory.

John had spent time in Northern California amongst the environmental rebels who used every tool in the book to resist degradation. “Where I come from the new people in a gathering are the most dangerous. Infiltrators, maybe every one of them.” The corporations infiltrated organizations to weaken them. “Aren’t you worried about Nobody?”

“No leaders means infiltration is harmless.” I was more optimistic than realistic. John did not notice.

The stops went by. After the airport loop, John left at 18th St. Terrilee and I left at 16th St with a few dozen others.

I and Terrilee Part

We walked up the stairs to the surface. As we were about to cross 16th I saw the tactical squad lined up on the other side of the street. Their weapons were poised for action.

“Terrilee, wait here.” She did as I asked.

I took two more steps pulled my coat back to show my badge. The shots rang out. Reports said thirteen people were shot, including me, of those three died.

Hospitalized in a coma for my own good, it was weeks before I could understand what had happened.

There comes a time when the realizations outnumber the drug induced dreams. I was injured. At the time I first awoke I didn't know that. My memory began when I woke. I was unconscious in the ER ward of an 'as yet undisclosed location' as Azimov reported. I might have been dreaming. If I was dreaming, the dreams might have been about Terrilee Flowers. It would be months before I remembered her name.

The drugs I was given through an IV drip were sure to keep me out, in an induced coma, as it was called. Whether I actually dreamt is another matter.

When I woke, I did not have a single memory of what occurred the night I received a near fatal wound or of the time I spent in a coma. The drugs saw to that as well. It would be several weeks after the injury before the doctors would let my consciousness return. Recovery depended on two things: my body needed to be immobilized. As I laid in bed restraining straps at shoulders and abdomen immobilized me. Movement was counter to the body's need to recover from my wound

and the operations to rebuild the rib cage and lung. The other need was for my mental stress level to be reduced to as close to zero as possible. A coma does that.

For almost a month, John or Sarge, sat next to the bed. Sarge said it was what there was to do and so he did it. John was attracted to my nurse, Mary, so he sat talking with her. Sarge saw his son's attraction. Mary saw his son's attraction. The only one to miss this development was me. I was out.

When I was healing, and heading on an upswing, the doctors decided to let me come to consciousness from time to time. As my mind cleared, a process that took several hours, I saw John and Sarge. I could see them, but it took time for me to remember their names. I learned Mary's name from the conversations around me when I was conscious. No one was talking about what had put me into the ER. I had nothing to say, until I did.

"Who are you?" I said, though it was a quiet grunt.

"Who are you?" I repeated when John looked up at me. John, who was reading a Azimov news report about ten million dollars missing from the Police Benevolent Fund, looked up the first time I spoke and heard me the second time.

"John."

"John." My voice was a whisper and gravelly raw. I repeated "John" in a more coherent voice.

"Oh, you are here." John put down the paper and stood up to look down into my eyes.

I did nothing.

“Water?” John asked. He got a nod for his efforts. I sipped on the water tube he offered me. I lifted my head in anticipation as if it was the first time in weeks that I tasted water. In fact, it was. Hydration had its own IV source. As soon as my throat felt better, my head went back down to the pillow.

Minutes passed as John watched me struggle trying to respond.

“Where’s here?” I finally asked in a series of grunts and gasps.

“Where’s here?” John repeated. I nodded. “A private room at the best hospital in the City.

“Oh.” I managed. “What’s your name, again?”

“John.”

“I’m ... ?” I was interrupted by a small commotion as white clad doctors and nurses entered the room.

“Denny.” John answered despite the gathering din.

“Oh.” I closed my eyes and in a few seconds was asleep. The IV fed me water, food and drugs. The drugs kicked in.

The next time I woke Sarge was standing over me looking down into my eyes, looking for the signs of life Nurse Mary had said he should look for after she stopped the drip of sedatives. In an hour Sarge saw me blink. In twenty minutes more, my eyes were fully opened. It’s in the medical report they gave me as I left weeks later.

“Denny Smith, as you live and breathe. Call me Sarge.” Sarge had fewer rules for talking to the near dead. He had been there a few times himself. He told me later that except for my eyes, I looked dead. He’d seen war wounds before, but it had been a while. If I had been wounded on his patrol I would have been like Corporal.

The nurse had told Sarge to push the blue button on the side table console 'when he surfaces.' Sarge decided I had surfaced. Sarge pressed the blue button and sat back to wait for whatever was to happen next. I waited, too, but with far less expectation.

Within a minute, a doctor, followed by a full complement of nurses and others invaded the room pushing and pulling equipment that they proceeded to deploy. Those were Sarge's words for what he saw. He was pushed back under the TV and told to stay or leave the room. He stayed where he had been put.

My reactions were slow. I took little notice of the hubbub until the doctor shined the light in the eyes and a new set of IVs were inserted. Once done the crew abandoned the room dragging out most of what they had wheeled in. The doctor, Sarge and Mary remained.

The doctor made some notes on a clipboard which he handed to the nurse as he turned to face me once more. I was increasingly alert – the effect of a stimulant.

"Hello, Mr. Smith. I am Doctor Hastings, physician in charge. You have been through a lot. At the moment, you are coming out of an induced coma. That is the upside. We are letting you out for about an hour this time, so we can examine your higher functions. Can you speak?"

"What happened to me?" I wheezed.

"You took a 38mm soft point round in your left lung. It tore an arm-sized hole in your back. We replaced the ribs and recomposed your lung. You may need more surgery, mostly cosmetic, but not soon. Recovery is a higher priority."

I felt as if my mind had stopped working, burdened by ideas beyond my understanding. I had questions. That was visible. The doctor had no more to say and waited to see if and how I would react to the news.

“Who?” I managed after some struggle.

“Who shot you? Not my job.” He answered. “Your friends are better at this than I am. All I know is if it were not for an amazing ER doc named Ken Miller, we would be talking about you in the past tense. Given time you will be strong enough to deal with it all.”

“When?”

“A month. Not less. Maybe more. Do what you are told, and the time will be shorter. We’ll keep you up for another 25 minutes and then a nurse will open the spigot to the sedative to put you back under. We’ll increase or decrease your up time depending on your reactions until you are up just like normal.”

The doctor left, and Mary began to minister to me. Sarge followed the doctor out the door.

The story I heard later was that in the hall Sarge asked, “Can I ask a question?”

“Yes.”

“Will he live?”

“Likely as not.”

“I am allowed optimism?”

“Seems appropriate. He’ll need company all day fairly soon. His nights will be dominated by the sedatives. That’s all I got.”

“Thanks.” Sarge smiled after the fleeing doctor. He decided to find Doctor Miller and thank him, but first he wanted to sit with me while I was still up.

Mary left as Sarge walked back in. I was laughing softly. When I saw Sarge standing over me, I said, “I like her. She’s sweet.”

“Watch out Detective, falling for the nurse won’t help your healing.”

“Detective?”

“Yes. Murder Detective Dennis Smith, SFPD, wounded in the line of duty or so they say.” Sarge paused to think before he said more.

“Tell me more.” I demanded.

“I only know what I read in the papers.” Sarge paused again. “Guess it can’t hurt. According to the news, you and a few dozen Nobodys ...”

“Nobodys?”

“This is getting remedial. Look, just listen. Somewhere in your head is all the information you need. Let me get it out. OK?”

“OK.”

“For some dumbass reason, a squad of cops opened fire on you and the 12 others. Three died. Twelve including you were injured. You the worst. It’s called the 16th Street massacre since you and the others were leaving the 16th St BART station when you were attacked.”

“That’s it?” I looked up at the ceiling. “I’m a cop and the cops shot me. Was I criming?”

“No and neither were the others.”

“What the hell?”

“Well put.”

Sarge smiled at me. He seemed like an old friend. He was older by thirty years or so it seemed. He was dressed in a black suit, white shirt, black tie. His face was rough which I understood came from the same place his nickname came.

“Denny, I was in a war zone and this place is becoming one. It’s getting so people are dropping around us from knives, overdoses, guns and bombs.” Sarge took a breath and looked down at me. My eyes must have been wide open. He noticed my anxiety. “There’s good news.”

“What?”

“The Smilers, Watchers, Memory, The Nobodys and the Underground University and you,” Sarge sounded optimistic as he talked, “There is a movement against corruption. You are its leader. Not exactly but you’ll see what I mean later.”

Before I could speak, Mary entered the room and moved to the controls that directed the drips that fed me. My attention went with her. She looked at me watching her.

“Time to go under, Detective. See you in a day or so.” She did her thing, smiled at me again and left the room.

Sarge patted my hand. “More next time. If you can think, try to remember the Nobodys. What you and the Nobodys did brought this massacre on. I’m off. Want to find the man who saved your life and thank him.”

The dripping sedative ended my attention to anything as I was trying to remember what the man’s name was.

The next time I woke, a woman was sitting where John and Sarge had been before. My eyes opened and there she was. Everything surprised me. I figured I must know her. I had no wedding ring, so I might not be married to her. I must have moved something because she turned her attention from her smartphone to my eyes.

“You’re back. That didn’t take long.” She rose from the chair and pressed the blue button. “I am an old friend, Gretchen Albright. The nurse said you have memory problems.”

“Are you a cop?”

“No. FBI or I was. Not sure now. I’m a bit preggers and trying to score a husband.”

“Not me.”

“No, not you though the idea did pass through your mind a time or two.”

I had no idea what to think or feel about Gretchen. Mary’s anti-memory sauce was working well and try as I might nothing formed in my mind. Looking back, I could have guessed she was special to me and me to her, after all she was there when I woke.

When I regained my full memory, I realized who she was. We first met when she was trying to pass on to SFPD the perpetrator of the S. Turk St Massacre. She had him under drugs and chained to his own bed. He knew her as his brother did as Sara purveyor of fine pleasures. Then she became Gretchen Albright FBI Special Agent to me. Her final form was Melanie Wolfson, atty at law representing Henry Balsac the mass murdered known as Satan. I know that is a lot to believe. The story isn’t complicated.

Sarge’s son John Wright was living with Gretchen Albright when they parted in their early twenties. He went north to Humboldt County and studied politics. She went east and became a special agent. The agency sent her back to The City with a special task to infiltrate the high-end sex trade. On the side she studied law under a different name. By day she was a law student. By night she was a sex worker in an elaborate sting operation.

Tube Wars

Soon I was discharged, not to go home but to move into nurse Mary's place on 18th St in the Mission District. She was growing restless. We had affection for one another but as I healed, she withdrew until one morning she announced I was leaving. I didn't need her anymore, she said. She never meant to fall for a cop and now that I was on my way back to work, she couldn't be with me. This is getting a bit ahead of the story.

When I left the hospital Sarge went back north to Humboldt. John disappeared into his world in The City. Gretchen had visited a time or two probably to see if I would recover enough to get back to arresting her favorite criminals. She was pregnant. She was dropping out of FBI she told me. Pregnant agents are forced into a leave. She said she thought it was permanent for her.

Two months later I would be alone after Mary determined I was able enough to live at home again. I wonder if we loved each other in an ordinary way. People who nurse others to health or to peacefully leave this world have a form of affection that seems close to why I am a cop and will die in law enforcement. We want to help people by using our specialized knowledge in a public organization. John would say he is that way and, of course the Nobodys, Watchers and The Memory would say the same. Maybe this is how we learn to love: humility, attention and faithfulness to our common goal. Those of us who share this condition recognize one another almost on sight.

On that principle Mary, Gretchen, John, Sarge and many others in Nobody were those people. Simpler to say we were all in some form of love.

John told me that his experience as a political organizer left him with the amazing conclusion that grassroots organizing was about making friends with strangers who often enough would be friends for life, not to mention these relationships can grow. People have become lovers and parented children. The organization had become a family.

The news had warned me that things were getting hot in the tubes, slang for the subterranean BART system. The same cops who had shot me months ago were now declaring Nobody was a terrorist organization based on some dubious claim that someone in a suit committed a robbery therefore every Nobody is guilty.

When Nobody was faced with allegations of terrorism the response was as expected. The cops planned to arrest everyone in a suit. Nobody decided to take over the tubes. Nobody was preparing to fill the tubes for the Last Train. This decision was made by anyone and everyone. As John said action organizes and the Nobodys were organized to act.

That night I walked among the police force staged at the Civic Center waiting for the inundation of the United Nations Plaza by the tens of thousands of Nobodys headed that way in the tubes, the streets, crossing the Bay Bridge to abandon their cars, taking foot to get there before they might miss the action.

My role was to talk to the other officers. I was the only cop who knew Nobody. The others appeared to rely on the worst rumors. I went to the morning meeting to see what the Captain was saying. After he stoked the fears I asked to speak and was given the floor.

I repeated my little speech throughout the day.

It was an uphill battle in the morning. Later in the evening I hoped to prevent the worst. I walked up to a group of cops and offered to give my opinion.

“Gentlemen and ladies, the role of law enforcement is to prevent violence. No matter what you've heard the Nobody Movement is simply not about action of that kind. They ride BART together and smile a lot. That's it. You have nothing to fear from them. If you remember the history, the police have hurt everyone who has been hurt in an encounter with no retaliation from any one of them including me. I lived. Three did not.”

“What do they want?”

“To ride the last BART train to SFO and back. They pay. They should be allowed to ride. They do nothing anywhere near illegal. They talk. They walk. That is what they want to do. They are not looking for anything except to be Nobodys, free Nobodys.”

There were no more questions. I shook hands with the officers and walked on to the next knot of cops.

“Hey, fellas. Want to talk about what is happening here? Any questions?”

“Who are you?”

“Detective Smith SFPD. I see you're from Oakland. Thought I'd give you a heads up on these people, the Nobody Movement.”

“We are up to speed. We will arrest all of them and bus them to Kesar.”

“Not going to happen. They have done no crime. They are citizens with rights just as if they were leaving a theater or a ball game. They are walking home. No arrests will be made.”

“That's not what the Captain says.”

“Bartholomew?”

“Yeah, your department.”

“Where is he?”

“SWAT trailer near the Plaza.”

I followed the arm of the Oakland PD officer, as he pointed at the United Nations Plaza across the Civic Center towards the BART.

Unknown to me, Gretchen was following me. The Captain was in her mind and she wanted him in her sights. No more massacres was her intention. It obviously was mine as well.

It was a two-city block walk across the plaza to the trailer. Bartholomew could be seen standing on the small landing outside the trailer door. He was talking to officers who were standing on the street below him.

“We are surrounded. There are upwards of fifty thousand out now with an unknown number in the tubes. We did not plan for this.”

“Captain.” I yelled. “May I respectfully request that my department withdraw from blocking the Civic Center BART exits? We serve no purpose within the law.”

“They might go wild.”

“This is as wild as they get. They might smile at you.” I said. There was laughter.

Bartholomew looked at me. My eyes met his. The ranking officer made

a calculation. The Captain grabbed his handheld and ordered all but normal patrol cars to stand down and withdraw to their stations.

There was a round of applause from the officers standing below the Captain. I walked away feeling good about the outcome. I was physically weak but emotionally strong. As I strolled toward the cop station, I kept an eye open for Nobodys I knew.

“Hey!” I heard a voice behind me. I turned to see Gretchen waving hello. I stopped walking. She caught up. She was all FBI. “Saw what happened. You are good. Hope you move up. Murder is not as big as corruption. You have a skill that can see the theft of the public good. Don’t know how but you have a talent for it. Might send a rec on you to the mayor see if you can get some traction. Interested?”

In a crowd scene a long speech can easily get lost in the commotion. Her’s didn’t break a hundred words. I wasn’t confident I knew what I thought I heard. “What?”

“Run for Sheriff or COP. Don’t let these clumsy assholes steal our future.”

She walked off with a wave and I wondered what had just happened.

The next morning, I received the first of many videos and audio tapes from inside Samuel Franklin’s condos.

Melanie and Samuel Tape 1

“This is bullshit, Samuel.” Melanie sat on the gigantic couch that had become her favorite place to watch the clouds stream across the Golden Gate. “You never want to leave your palace by the Bay. I love the ocean so get a limo and come visit. I promise treats.” She pressed Send.

She sat with her legs crossed facing the Pacific holding her laptop with her phone between her shoulder and her ear. She had decided not to challenge the assumption that she was not the only agent after Samuel. Nothing said cannot be heard. She knew the key words that set off alarms. She did not use them. If she communicated with someone who did use them, she started a new thread. She had studied the statistics on FBI listening set off by what behavior and felt she could avoid the most likely detection by ending comms with bad words.

Sam was still a mystery to her. He was all the obvious things, but he was not a good intellectual partner. He used his power but kept his ideas to himself. She had gotten inside his defenses to find he was missing essential parts.

Her alert tone sounded. It was an email from Samuel. “Too busy being a crime boss to mess around tonight. Trying to deal with that ahole Gerome. Will you shoot him for me?”

She ended the thread and saved the emails to her heavily protected cloud account.

She clicked compose on her new message and began typing.

“You fascist pig. I do not put holes in people. That’s you and your brother.”

Revisiting the scene

16th St is my usual stop on BART. After I left the hospital I was literally carried to Mary's apartment. When I returned to work, I took cabs or Mary drove me. When I moved back to my apartment, I was taking the Muni J line downtown. I began walking to work again when my strength returned.

On the first anniversary of the massacre, BLM held a memorial so that anyone who cared could share stories about the victims. I had heard about it from the cop news that followed BLM's activities as if they were continuously under investigation.

I had no intention of going.

John invited me to rejoin the last train and he took me to the Civic Center. We sat on the train and talked about the last time I disembarked on at the 16th St station.

"Denny are you ready to exit at 16th St?"

"Ah. OK. Has to happen. I am not excited. But OK."

He showed me the silhouettes. We found mine. It was blue. We stood by each of the other silhouettes. Some were red and a few were black. The black ones stood for the dead. It was obvious that the squad had been instructed to kill me and those near me paid a price for it.

On the afternoon of the memorial John called and asked if I would go with him. It was a Saturday. I was bored and thinking about going back to the cop station.

"Wear sunglasses and a sun hat. Don't act like a victim. You'll be fine."

John is a natural people manager. He calls it politics. I think of it as

friendship. I have never heard him rough talk anyone but then again, I don't remember the last time I did. Maybe that's why we get along.

We walked slowly from my place across Delores Park to the station. About two blocks from the station and it was obvious that something big was happening. The number of people walking toward it was over the top even for a Saturday.

When we were in sight of the station, we saw that it was the Underground University on the surface. Each of the silhouettes had a speaker who repeated a story about the person memorialized at the spot. The speaker asked for others to add what they knew.

We walked around listening to a few of the presentations.

Discussion was about the forms of corruption and how the corruption had caused the deaths and maiming of all the 16th St casualties.

We walked slowly. I had taken John's suggestion of a mild disguise. I stared down at a silhouette in red – a wounded but survived. The silhouettes each had the first name of the victim.

This one, a black one, said Terrilee. It sounded familiar. The talk was about an organizer with BLM who led marches. A well-known BLM organizer stood talking to the group of the rest of us.

"..... was an attorney in training. She worked to pay for the training to bring suits against the purveyors of corruption."

John had moved a few steps away near the curb. I looked up and he waved me over to him.

As I was walking, I was going to ask him about the color of that silhouette. The name felt familiar, but he spoke first.

“Denny, come listen to your memorial.” I wasn’t sure about this, but I did as he asked.

There was a representative crowd compared to the other stations. The speaker was a tall black man.

“Detective Dennis Smith survived. His wound was nearly devastating to his body. It took almost a year to recover and return to work for the citizens of The City.

“One of his first walking days was spent in the tubes outflanking the corrupt Captain Bartholomew and saving the day for peace. Just as he did with the Bart Security officers the Detective found the ones who misused their power for their own gain and is using the system to get them removed.

“It is thought that his work to defeat KFF was the reason he was targeted by corrupt police in revenge. There is much more to do to strengthen our government. He is back at work. I wish him the power he deserves if he will put it to good use.”

One of the people in the group listening to the speaker pointed at me. Normally that is OK, but I took it a little poorly. I stepped back up against John who felt my fear.

“Denny, it’s Stevie. He was waving hello. Deep breath.” I tried. I calmed and then others saw me, and a line formed to stop to shake my hand. Stevie came by and said he was sorry he scared the piss out of me. He hadn’t, thankfully, so I was able to be generous and forgive him. He laughed. I tried.

Gerome and Samuel Tape 2

The truth to Samuel was useless unless he could expand his influence. He needed trusted people to do that.

“Gerome, answer this. Why in hell would I want to give you money for nothing?”

“Well Sir, it looks like you have no choice.”

“I have a lawyer that says you are full of shit.”

“I have two lawyers that say you’ll die in prison.”

“So what?”

“Good point, Sir, however I am not with you to die with you.”

“You are kidding. Who the fuck are you but a servant?”

Gerome had been stripped of his physical weapons when he entered the condo. He had no signs of aggression. Samuel thought of him as loyal and manageable despite his sharp mouth and his erstwhile plan to assassinate him.

Gerome Leffingwell had been Samuel’s security chief until Samuel’s brother Henry Balsac bribed him to kill Samuel. Gretchen intercepted him on his way to Samuel’s Market Street condo. She took him to Henry’s Van Ness condo and convinced him that he had made a grave error. She knew he will be a good boy but would be a better boy if kept close.

Melanie entered the main office Samuel kept at the 1 Market Street condo. It was on the 39th floor and it looked onto the business district and the Coit Tower. Samuel found it comforting that he could look out

of his windows and be at or above the level of the board rooms of The City's leaders in banking and law.

She could see that Samuel and Gerome were trying to get along with the new rules imposed following the end of Gerome's treachery.

She started talking before they noticed her entrance.

"My good fellows, how are your refreshments doing? Refills?" She grabbed and shook the empty Champaign bottle.

Gerome looked to Samuel. Samuel was an addict. Melanie knew. Everyone knew.

"Gerome." Samuel had his torturers voice, a relic of the first Bush War. "Your hands are still shaking. Yes, Melanie dear, he'll need more."

Melanie walked the three steps to the wet bar refrigerator, found an unopened bottle and brought it back to the board room table the men were sitting near. They rose to come to the liquid they both wanted.

As Samuel did the honors and focused on the opening. Gerome stood near holding his glass.

Melanie began walking around the table to open some distance from them. She had an agenda.

"Gerome, you need a job." Melanie said.

"What do you have?"

"Someone needs to do some thinking."

"Sounds good. Cogito ergo sum."

"Whatever."

"I have a short audio for you to listen to." This woke Samuel.

"What tape?" Samuel demanded.

“Let’s hear it now. OK?” She said.

“Let her rip.” Samuel said.

Melanie and Samuel Tape 3

“It’s the art of the steal.”

“Steel?” He said.

“Steal?” She asked.

“E,e or e,a?”

“Hmm. Both.” She said.

“I think so. Rotten steel sold as good steel. That’s a steal. Then install it incorrectly another steal.”

“How’d they do that?”

“If you know steel you know it has to have a certain chemical composition and it has to have been produced in a way that gives the finished product specific properties. Short story it has to be heat treated properly. Sometimes that means spending a lot to get steel with the properties the engineers require. That is the art of the steel – two e’s. And not getting it is the art of the steal. Rhymes with bad deal.”

“Maybe the engineers are to blame. They required the wrong steel.”

“Nope. The bids were to meet the engineers’ specs. The design chosen did not meet all of the required physical standards. They called it a thing of beauty meaning big corruption. The low bidder could never supply the right product for the bid price. They had to cheat. So deficient product was said to be the right stuff.”

“How are the steel companies reacting?”

“Blaming the US Navy.”

“Is that where the money is?”

“Seems unlikely. Unless ...” Sam rubbed his chin. “The fix is the certification of the steel’s physical qualities. Whoever did that got the money.”

“Sam, they are gone. How do we make bank on what we know?”

When the tape finished Gerome sat holding his empty wine glass, his mouth agape. Samuel was also a little taken aback.

“That was us.” He said.

“Yup. From the other night. Glad you remembered.” They both turned toward Gerome.

“Well?” They demanded of him.

“Good Morning, Viet Nam.”

On a late summer Monday morning, commuters on the Bay Bridge got a huge and shocking surprise. The car radios in every car blared with a deep male voice, probably an AI by the sound of it.

“Not today, but very soon, this bridge will come down.”

The shock was limited to the people who heard it. But the cells and smart phones lit up with reports from the bridge leading millions to become concerned leading to demands for inquiries at every level of government and effectively leading to work stoppages everywhere in the Bay Area.

The media went wild. The daytime talk shows made up whatever ‘facts’ they needed to blame all the usual suspects. As the hours passed the analysts became increasingly diverse in their views until all that could truthfully be said was the voice created confusion blowing all the stories of the day out of prime time.

The evening commute was uneventful. After which most talkers thought it was a one off, not likely to be repeated. The Mayors of Oakland and San Francisco ventured that it was a prank. Nothing more.

Tuesday morning came and went with no repetition. Talking heads bragged on their good guess of a prank. By mid-afternoon they changed the subject.

Later, on Tuesday, during the evening commute, another broadcast rattled the drivers and their passengers.

“This bridge will fall! The bombs are placed only the hour is unknown. I am here to help.”

The broadcasts were heard in every car on the bridge. The anonymous source appeared to have the technology to invade every car whether the drivers had the radio on or not. That is what the news said.

For the next ten hours the word 'terrorist' was broadcast at least a million times. People had for months called the new Bay Bridge span the Chinese Bridge because the steel and construction were provided by Chinese firms. Much was made of the China connection.

For the next seven days the two messages were repeated at each morning and evening commute not once but every fifteen minutes until millions of motorists had heard with their own ears the warnings loud and clear.

Efforts to find the source were launched at several levels: City, State and Federal agencies. Responders were everywhere swarming the Oakland side of the bridge watching cars as they approached the toll area. The only exit from the bridge between the toll area and San Francisco is Yerba Buena and Treasure Islands and it too was wall to wall vehicles with red blinking lights and uniformed personnel from numerous groups carrying equipment of all types. No one except first responders were allowed off the exit. Hiding the panic and confusion was considered a security objective. 'No witnesses' was the rule.

The Bay Area Toll Authority met almost continuously to examine their options. After the first two days they met only in private. They issued no statements. When it didn't stop after the fifth day and the calls continued to block all of the Authorities phone lines daily alerts were issued.

After ten days of the barrage of the two messages, the morning commuters were delivered something new.

“Tired of this yet? Today could be the day things change for the better. Something like peace, not bombs. You were hoping. I need your cooperation, or you can forget hope today. If you venture across this bridge again you are taking your life in your hands. The bridge will fall soon. I know when and you don’t but like I told you I am here to help.”

The message ended. The media replayed it within minutes. The talkers said terrorist immediately. They were wrong.

One-half hour after the first message a second was broadcast into commuters’ cars.

“Tonight, at exactly 10:01 pm, a single bomb will go off to demonstrate the bigger possibility. No one will be hurt. The bridge will not fall. Tomorrow the bridge will be safe. Trust me. The bridge authority has a decision to make and you can make a difference in the outcome. When the bomb explodes it starts a 72-hour notice. I just gave it to you. You are most welcome. The day after tomorrow we’ll see. Things could go boom.”

Panic ensued. People on the bridge who heard the broadcast first, left the bridge and headed home. Within an hour few ventured across. The authority said nothing as they waited for whatever would happen next.

Experts were consulted.

The bridge was completely closed at 9 pm. Bomb squads from most of the free world scoured the area at the base of the bridge. The ten days they had to gather and visually inspect the bridge structure were put to good use. The authority announced how pleased they were for having such a response coming as it did from the ends of the earth.

Nothing was found.

At ten on the dot, the alert sign on the Oakland side of the bridge was pulsing with a warning: “Warning: take the next exit. The bridge is closed.” There was not one car on the bridge. Every approach was blocked by at least a dozen vehicles with their sirens blaring and warning lights ablaze. Helicopters buzzed around the bay, the bridge and the approaches. It looked a bit like a war zone to some.

There were two hundred sets of binoculars searching the bridge for signs of saboteurs.

A crew from the Authority was personing the security room with monitors on fifty-seven cameras glowing in the main Authority offices. Every single board member and executive officer was in the room.

It had been a long evening requiring a catered dinner with a beverage option that some board members enjoyed, perhaps too much.

Camera 27 was on the Oakland side tollbooth approach lanes. At 10:01 pm a bomb exploded. The sound of it was lost in the wind, the sirens and the absence of anyone to hear it. On the screen a burst of what would have been orange flame burst from the alert sign. The monitors were black and white. Camera 27 caught the explosion blowing the top off the alert sign, but the flames were difficult to see.

One of the more jovial and heavy beverage partakers, a commission member saw it. After a few minutes he realized what he had seen and began bellowing about it until the other commissioners stopped laughing and on review saw it for themselves. Panic broke out again.

No one was near it. No one was hurt. Another bridge search following the bomb found nothing and the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge was re-opened for the commute. The bridge commute was sparse. Not everyone went to work.

So many of the commuters took BART that the system was heavily burdened. Others took another bridge to stay away from the possibility of death.

Then at 7:30 am, a new message was broadcast through the car radios on all the bridges, freeways and into the BART system through cellphones.

“Good Morning Viet Nam. Remember that? Well, I’m back. You are stressed out. I can tell. I am driving across the Bay Bridge now. Lot’s fewer cars but going as fast as ever, maybe ten miles over the speed limit. Thanks for making this possible.”

Law enforcement rallied to the emergency, blocking the exits from the bridge creating the biggest traffic jam in history. For hours they searched cars at both ends hoping to get lucky.

At 10 o’clock a new message.

“Your dragnet missed me. Here is the news. Your lives have been kidnapped. Your economy is sucking eggs. The Bridge Authority is losing millions a day in fares. But it can end. I have a map of the bomb locations. I will give it to you for a small fee. I was thinking one billion in crypto. If you have it make yourself known or ... well, you know.”

Guccifer 2.1

The text had arrived by a private DM.

Basket read it silently.

“Damn. This is some mean shit.” He read it out loud.

“Let’s tone it down a bit. Pretend more. Offer more love.” Rivets shook her head. “Hard to believe this ends well. You know.”

They were twins and all that implies. The recording of this conversation was difficult to interpret. The coded words they used to hide their intention did just that but from later interviews coupled with Gretchen’s other recordings made this possible to interpret.

“This is not in my interest to read aloud for broadcast. The content sucks. I like hacking dumbass systems.”

“I have the feeling whoever wrote this material is not interested in anything else from us than to spread the message in any conceivable way we can.”

“I was having a good morning until this new speech. I have gained entrance into the music web that supplies damn near every restaurant and bar in the Bay Area.” Basket boasted.

“Hmmm. You know, dear brother, we should learn from our masters and use an opportunity to our advantage.”

What the Hell!

That night John and I watched the late-night news in a fusion restaurant in the Sunset District.

“What’s the play?” He asked.

“It’s a ransom note. He stole our lives. We’ve been kidnapped. If we pay, we will get them back. If not our 6.7 Billion dollars goes down into the bay. Life will change for the worse. He wants a billion. It’s a deal.”

“Who pays?”

I pondered my answer. “The Authority.”

“Will they?”

“Pay? Maybe. But think about it. The new span was built by corruption. In a way figurative bombs were built into all the steel and concrete used in the structure.”

“The danger might be more inuendo than ordinance.”

“That’s my guess. Someone was left out of the payday and so they are back ending a big profit. They know only what we know but that’s enough to pull this off. The Authority is corrupt, the steel is corrupt, and each piece of steel is a potential bomb.”

As they sat enjoying their sushi and their bottles of Sapporo, a new message came through the radios of every car on every bridge, every music system in every bar and restaurant in the Bay Area. Every tv carried it live whether they wanted to or not.

“It’s me again. You know me – call me the Radio Man. Somehow, I managed to get into your cars, homes and businesses to deliver this

and other messages. Now, somehow, I am everywhere across all the bridges in all the homes and businesses in all the Bay Area counties.

“Somehow, I know where the bombs are. Somehow, I figured out when they will go off. With the access to your tv, phone, mobile etc. equipment things those are three big deals. I have made a map showing where and when each one will explode. Give me what I want, and I will give the map to everyone. If not, then you lose big time. Let me know what you think. I’ll be back atcha.”

The music system in the Vivaldi's Sushi and Wine played it loud and clear as did most of the music system in the 100’s of thousands of homes and businesses in the Bay Area.

The phone systems were immediately overloaded with cell phone calls and panicking homeowners checking their emails and social media accounts.

The electronic media found a new level of hysteria no one suspected existed. One talking head put it very clearly.

“What is going on? Where the hell is our government? If this goes on much longer we’ll all go mad. I want to know where this all headed.”

The next day was worse.

Radio Man solves the mystery

In an astounding escalation, on the next day the Radio Man spoke for twenty-five minutes at 7:30 AM. It was total coverage by every piece of equipment capable of broadcasting.

“Hello. Radio Man here. I may have a good news update for you. I am all for the Bay Bridge falling. San Francisco needs to close its borders and the destruction of the bridges is a high priority to make that happen. Then walls along the south with our own air force and we are almost free.

“But then we need cleansing.”

He reviewed the history behind the exclusion of the Chinese at the end of the 19th century. He claimed a federal law passed in 1882 resulted in the banning of Chinese entering the US. It was not repealed until early WWII when the Chinese were allies against the Japanese. His story was about entire Chinese communities being uprooted and sent packing back to Asia.

“Now it’s time to block anyone but white from The City by the Bay. Remember I hold the key. Your lives are meaningless. Frisco will be white.”

Some people swore they could hear the collective intake of breath of the seven million residents of the Bay Area who simultaneously heard what Radio Man was up to. People had heard about all of this they cared to hear.

“I know what you are thinking. I am standing on the Golden Gate bridge, looking back at the City. It is a nice view. Someday soon this spot will be impossible to stand on. I’ll miss it, too. But think about it.

The gains will be huge. The Free State of Frisco will be born and, I know you know this, I will be in charge.

“But I am getting ahead of myself. You’ll be happy to know for the time being you are safe. The very important people who run the authority are coming to their senses. The billion crypto is being arranged and when I get it, I’ll let you know. Until then stay afraid.”

Comparative Corruption

“We are treated like dogs. We are being led by a bell rung by Pavlov’s Russian inheritors and beaten with a stick by Putin’s US puppets. Both of these are a form of social terrorism according to experts.

“My adult life has been about the bust out. Bust out? It’s a fraud tactic, commonly used in the organized crime world, where a business’ assets and lines of credit are exploited and exhausted to the point of bankruptcy. If the business is a bank, then the theft if of public money.

“There are laws to protect banks. If the banks owners conspire with officers of the government set to oversee banking and with money launderers, well this is the mix that brings poverty to our communities.”

“The Pavlovian bells are rung, and we put our hard-earned money in a bank account. We demand safety for our money and the government guarantees it against theft. Then the bank invests in losing securities and goes insolvent. Is your money safe. Nope it is stolen in a backdoor kind of way. The government replaces the lost money which comes from our taxes. Did we lose anything in the bargain? Yes. We lost it all.

“None dare call it corruption. it’s just a different business model.”

“When elected officials sworn to enforce the law look the other way when their friends break the law yet arbitrarily punish their enemies with nonjudicial means for licit acts such as free speech then there is no rules except that of the powerful.”

Azimov’s column was the plasir de jour for Bay Area citizens. She laid out a path to this place where officials participate in corrupt schemes without fear of legal consequences.

John was excited about what Azimov was working towards. We talked about how such an effort to extort the public is underway. We decided to act.

“Let’s find Brad.” I said.

“Ah, I have lost touch.”

“Nobody can find him. I want to breakfast at the Vets Center tomorrow. 8AM. Up for it?”

John reached out his hand we shook. “8AM. I hear the coffee is the best, but the company is better.”

The Nerds strike back

Brad aka Mr. Bradley Hutchinson Esq, the poverty lawyer, lived in a one room apartment. He had moved out of the Hastings 'Tower' when he graduated so that he could focus on passing the California Bar exam. One year later he managed the feat.

He had become a bonafide lawyer in the State of California and a dues-paying member of the Bar, whose exam he had passed, if only by a few points. He had holed up in the cheapest room he could find which fit the constraints of his nearly nothing income.

When John and I visited him, he was eating at Brenda's French Soul Food in the Tenderloin District. He had taken a table in the remotest corner of the restaurant. From what I saw it appeared to be 'his table' covered with his work files, a laptop and a bowl of black-eyed peas. His focus on a document was total. When John pulled a chair from the table to sit with him, he was startled.

"John! Detective Smith! How did you find me?" He stood up and offered his hand to each of us.

John was shaking his hand and saying, "I don't know how we found you. I followed the cop." He pointed at me.

Brad shook my hand.

"Not difficult. We needed to talk to you about low people in high places. Some Nobodys passed a few sightings of you on to me which lead to the door up to your room above here." I smiled to try to relieve his tensions. "They said you had an office in the restaurant during the afternoon."

Brad checked his watch, asked John to confirm that it was Wednesday. He did.

“You guys are lucky. I only see clients on Fridays, so I have a couple days free. What do you need?”

I had known Brad for a year or more. The first time I ran into him was as a witness in the bust of the Bart’s security chief. Brad had brought a packet of photos showing security officers trading drugs for money to my office in the Murder Cop Shop downtown. He rode the Last Train a few times. He was definitely a Nobody. He had been a visiting paralegal in the Vet Center before there were Nobodys. He was in on the ground floor so to speak.

“Radio Man is part of a plot by the same people who formed KFF. Remember Them?”

“Kill For Fun. Run by Henry Balsac. He’s the ...”

“No, Samuel Franklin his half-brother. Same unpleasant type of person.”

“New to me but I follow you. Putting one and one together you are looking for a skilled person who can decipher the internet and every related thing to connect Samuel to the Radio Man.”

“A Hacker, who’ll do it for Nobody.”

“Gotcha. At the usual rate of pay.” When he said ‘pay’ he did the air quote thing. Brad had spent enough time in The Vets Center helping homeless vets deal with all their routine correspondence with government agencies, banks, hospitals and other such agencies that their lives intersected.

“All the same rules apply. If you and your hacker follow them, you will be unsung heroes if that is your choice. Officially, we make no comment

on citizen informants.” After many years of running snitches, as this activity is called by my colleagues, I knew nothing mattered beyond getting the info.

John knew everything there was to know about the City’s internal structure. He would work with Brad and his crew to find a link if one could be found. The three of us talked about how to communicate and developed a timeline so everyone knew what was happening with the least number of alerts to our foe. We had 30 hours to meet Radio Man’s deadline.

We parted, leaving Brad to his devices. John headed away to meet Mary for a beer. I went towards the Civic Center. My phone rang. It was an alert from the FBI regarding a download containing audio recordings I had requested. I didn’t remember requesting anything from the FBI. I assumed it was Gretchen’s doing. I closed my phone and headed back to Brenda’s. This was right up Brad’s alley.

Nobodys reaction

The Vets Center was the central location for Nobody's response to Radio Man. It was the birthplace of the Watchers and Memory. It was the location of the S. Turk St Alley Massacre. The word spread rapidly that a meeting was to happen.

John's view was that by moving rapidly and unrelentingly the foe they were seeking would be surprised by the knock on the door that I would promised them, if Nobody could find which door to knock on.

Brad's reaction to the audio that Gretchen sent to us was perfect. Lawyers love information especially tape recordings of conversations. When we listened to them, the voices of Samuel Franklin, Melanie Wolfson and Gerome Leffingwell as they documented the plan to run an extortion scheme on the corruption that surrounded the Bay Bridge expansion.

"This is great stuff." Was his reaction. "A piece of the puzzle but there has to be more. Elements of a crime are needed. This is intention to conspire. Big deal." Then we planned a meeting of Memory to share what was known about the Bay Bridge as Hostage.

The night before the planned unveiling of Memory regarding the Bridge Kidnap the vets, all Smilers, met at the center to organize the material they had gathered from Memory. Brad ran the operation.

"We need a reporting organization. There are a lot of data points." He stood up when he spoke. It was a tradition of Memory that the speaker stands. This night every table in the Vet Center's dining room was filled. As were the extra chairs that lined the walls.

“There are a few hundred photos. We have interviews with dozens of witnesses. Lots of data but little analysis. We do not know what the info is worth. We need hands and eyes to sort through all of it.”

Things broke into discussions.

John had meetings with small groups who had ideas about who might be involved in the Bridge Kidnap. Organize was his key word.

“We do not need secrecy we need focus for the next week or so and I swear we will figure this out.” John was excited by the effort he imagined would result in arrests.

“There are few here who believe that the local and State governments are able to function well enough to stop much less find and arrest the culprits.” He was in an unusual mood. “I have an announcement to make. If we bust this case wide open, we will keep the momentum to take control of San Francisco’s government in the next election.”

The normal murmur rose to a round of applause and some head shaking. People shouted out their approval and calls for the needed focus that could overturn the corruption that portended the destruction of The City and all that implied.

Brad stood up again in what was a loud murmur, like white water he thought. He held transcripts of several tapes I had received from Gretchen. His nerds used their computers to turn audio to a transcript in the hour that had passed since he emailed them to Brad while sitting across from him at Brenda’s. As people became aware that he was waiting for them. They quieted.

“We are looking for an organization that is at least unusual. We need to find method, means to implement their plan, then location, staff and boss. That’s where this is going.”

“Here in my hands are transcripts of incriminating meetings held by our suspects. The photos and video, the firsthand accounts are more powerful than these. As events unfold over the next 72 hours, we will read in the paper that arrests have been made.”

First is method Tape 4

Gerome sat on a couch staring out towards the Bay Bridge. From his vantage point from a living room in Samuel's condo at 1 Market St, he had a great view of the SF end of the bridge and he could see fog hanging off the high point of Yerba Buena Island above the entrance to the tunnel that took the traffic through the island and onto the Oakland side and the Chinese Bridge.

He was standing in the same spot a month ago when the idea came to him. Samuel had been threatening to kill Gerome for trying to kill him at Henry's order. At this point, Gerome was growing discouraged about his chances of success, this was perhaps his last hope. Since the idea came to him, he had worked to try to iron out some of the rough spots in his pitch to Samuel.

His problem had begun because of Samuel's brother who forced Gerome to agree to be the assassin who would take Samuel out. Gerome had decided to not kill Samuel even as he was on his way to do the deed. His mind changed when he was 'taken into custody' by Samuel's GF Melanie. Gerome was impressed by her calm but deadly attitude. She would kill if she wanted to kill. He could feel that right away. In the final analysis Gerome hoped Samuel would cut him some slack. Especially now, when he had come up with a Billion Dollar idea that was right up Samuel's alley, so to speak.

In his mind it would be a piece of cake to devise a threat to the bridge, especially the new section what with the scent of scandal hanging over the construction costs and defective materials used to build it.

“Listen, Mr. Franklin, I am bringing this idea to you to get back in your good graces. Henry was forceful. He grabbed me by the throat in the death grip he bragged about having used on a 90-year-old woman.”

“That was our great aunt. He thought she was a great ass sitting on the family’s crown jewels. When we broke into her safe, we were dazzled. She had been hiding some beautiful stones.”

“Better off dead. That’s what he said of her.”

“She didn’t like him either.”

“So, as you might guess, I didn’t resist much. He gave me a handgun – one that Melanie said would shoot my dick off – and he sent me to hunt for you.”

“Since Henry had your balls it wouldn’t have done you any good to keep your dick or your stupid life.” Samuel was laughing.

Gerome was open to a positive outcome for this. He was averse to humiliation.

“Fuck it, Franklin, kill me if you want but you’d be passing up a made for you scheme.”

“Tell me.”

“I know these guys who have a tech trick they have taken years to work out.”

“What is it?”

“Two minutes.” Gerome pulled his phone and tapped a text out. When he was done, he went to a couch and sat as if he were exhausted from the effort.

“Waiting.” Said Samuel in a sad voice.

Gerome checked his watch and his phone and his watch again.

“Twenty-six seconds.” They waited.

“Five, four, three, two...”

The comm systems in Samuel’s condo all went wild. Music played. News was broadcast on TVs. A speech was being made on the condo wide sound system. The sounds became a cacophony.

The sounds ended but the speech went on.

“The gains will be huge. The Free State of Frisco will be born and, I know you know this, I will be in charge.”

Gerome was smiling. Perfect, he thought.

Samuel was unaffected, bored. Gerome watched him hoping he was being coy.

Samuel was waiting for a moment that was coming just not yet there. His emotions were cycling through the options when he knew which one was correct for the moment, he would be all over Gerome for this insult to his privacy.

The moment arrived.

“I would kill you but then your guys would know their tech trick worked.” Samuel began shaking in what seemed to be anger then maniacal laughter until he settled into a knee slapping uncontrollable laughing frenzy. “You son of a bitch. Do that again and I’ll feed you to Henry.”

“What if we did it to everyone else except you?”

“Gerome, are you telling me that I can be the ruler of The Free State of Frisco?”

“Only if you don’t kill me.”

“You must think I’m stupid. We’d need an army to defend turf like The City. This is just a dumb idea.” Samuel spoke as if he was bored and wanted to dismiss Gerome and the idea.

“Mr. Franklin, there is more to it than that. What you heard was the last words of a script. The earlier parts talked about a ransom.”

“A ransom?” Samuel was sputtering trying to talk while finding Gerome’s thinking rather laughable. “A kidnapping? Who? How much?”

“Depends how you see it. We kidnap the bridge and make the authority pay one billion in crypto. So, in fact we kidnap most of the Bay Area.”

Samuel sat up when the word billion was said. “Billion.” He said.

“Yes, sir.”

Second is implementation Tape 5

Rivets, a young woman, sat at a keyboard and measured the vital signs for evidence of uncool. Seeing none she flashed a text to home base.

“I’m at work.”

“You’re a sick bitch. You know that?” Was the return text. “If I was your brother, I would kill myself.”

“Then do it.”

“Ah, maybe we should get simpler pass codes. Or maybe I should look for other work.”

“I think encyclopedia sales is an open field. Everyone needs info.”

“Are we done yet? It is me your beloved brother and you are my sister or someone as mean and low down as she is.” Basket was his handle.

“OK. Funny guy get to work. Today we need to hack a path to the emergency on switch on the most popular cell phones used in the area.”

“Yesterday I got into every elevator in The City that used Acme Security Systems for elevator safety messaging. How wild this gig is?”

“Right. We’ll get back to you around noon.”

“What are you doing today?”

“My goal is to turn the sound system on in any car within ten miles of ground zero.”

“What’s the ultimate goal?”

“Control everything in sight.”

“Why didn’t we do this before?”

“Might be we have to pay rent, and this is not a hobby. Who really gives a fuck about broadcasting guerilla shit into those cars on the bridge?”

“Then what?”

“I want to exploit the emergency broadcast system.”

“What? Sirens and shit don’t communicate our message.”

“Thinking about the newest wrinkle which allows the feds to exploit all cell phones. Means they can send texts and audio.”

“We have access through our employer into very large data pools. If we begin there, we can do the same thing. I have been there. In the data pools and in the Fed system. If we do it ourselves no one will be able to trace us.”

Two hours after this conversation, Brad and his people had a copy and were busy watching Rivets’ and Basket’s on-line action.

Third is location

Brad read the first report from his nerdy friends displayed on his laptop. He was in the corner of Brenda's looking a little stressed. He was holding his smart phone in his right hand. In his left hand he held a land line phone which was connected to Cayla Smith's computer based comm system via MaBell. She was talking. He was nodding.

"I did that already. My cell is powered down." He looked at his cellphone as he listened to her on the landline. "When will that happen? ... Twelve seconds and counting." He tapped his right foot to count down the time.

His cell suddenly powered up and within seconds more we were hearing some North African ethnic music. He hung up his cell and talked into the landline.

"That was easy. What about the rest? Car radios, restaurants, elevators. The lot."

He stared off as he listened.

I was sitting across from him. At this point if there's gonna be progress in the case it would come from Brad. We had to know the how and where of the Radio Man before the who would be certain.

The problem I faced was the time problem. Radio Man had given us 72 hours to make a payment which meant we had less than twenty hours remaining to answer enough questions so that we could trace the funds when they transferred.

"OK, my dude. Tell me what to think."

"Radio Man is like Guccifer 2. First there is a boss below which is a nerd who hires hackers to attack specific targets. If you are in on the secret,

you can access anyone's comm equipment. It's called an exploitation. Normal is to listen. This is the reverse. Works on most equipment produced in the last ten years. It's a gift of the GRU and China. Their stuff is cheap, but it is loaded with hackable software."

"We know how Radio Man was done?"

"Now we do. But it means little, since remote actors could be anywhere."

"My instinct tells me the actors we want watched the whole drama unfold. There is too much of con job in the broadcasts. They assume too much information. Locals could do that but not a room full of Macedonians."

"Instinct? Is that like a dog knowing which way to get home?"

"Brad, its cop code for inside source."

"We have inside sources?"

"I am an SFPD Detective. That's inside."

"Can I ask?"

"For details?"

"Yes."

"I can tell you the information is from very high up. As high up as you can get around here." I wanted to laugh and tell him what we already knew thanks to Gretchen. "Can't give you details except to say that we only need to use internet data to identify the hackers and we can use probable cause to get a warrant for our suspects."

"That's the source of the audios? You suspect the voices on the audios are one and the same as those exploiting so many comm systems?"

“Or close enough for government work.”

Fourth is staff Tape 6

Gerome Leffingwell stood in Samuel's favorite living room – the one on the third floor of a three-floor condo with an unimpaired view of the Bay Bridge.

Samuel had two condos in The City. One had a full view of both the Golden Gate Bridge and the Pacific Ocean. This one was a mansion built within the largest residential tower in The City. This condo was so big it had two tennis courts and an Olympic pool. There were 16 bedrooms, three kitchens and six living rooms with amazing views it covered the top three floors of the 40-story building.

Gerome had been talking for some time when Melanie interrupted him to have him repeat his explanation of just how they would get the money.

“Melanie, as I said, the Authority will fold after a little demonstration of our power to destroy. The notion that the bridge is a bomb is not a far stretch. The last message insinuates the Bay Bridge is going down anyway.”

“Why pay if you promise to destroy it? Seems backwards.”

Samuel raised his hand off his lap as a sign he wanted to talk. They both gave him eye contact and silence.

“We're inside. Those who are steering the discussion at the Authority are operating under the usual rules of silence with payoffs for success. The timing of the messages means the Authority will be forced to give up the Billion in coin within 50 hours or so.”

“Day after tomorrow?” Gretchen was in her finest Melanie mood. Her lawyer was more believable than her sex worker self, Sara. Neither one

knew the Killer in her was an FBI agent. Her voice was solid, fearless and her eyes and ears were attentive to her partner's face and opinions. "Or else?"

"Or else we'll drop a section of the bridge to make our point." Gerome interjected.

Samuel nodded. As he did, he began to snicker then he stood next to Gerome. He leaned into his face and spoke in a low voice, so low that Gretchen had to crank up the volume to max when she reviewed the audio files her equipment had made of that moment.

She called me moments later. We hadn't seen each other since my hospital adventures and the tube wars when I was trying to get used to a lung and a half instead of two. She had shared her insights a time or two but via cop email and then so heavily encrypted with abbreviated key words only the two of us would be likely to understand. A few times she sent messengers other times she just showed up.

"Hey, Denny." I knew it was her. I had gone through the cop café line and ended up with a salad and potato chips. There was an empty table I was there by myself. She talked I looked up as she sat down. She smiled. Always the fool I asked.

"Still preppers?"

"Nope. Turned out a cute one. Looks just like John. Samuel thinks the kid looks like Henry. I say nah. But I think he's trying to keep me in line by threatening Henry and then his kid. I keep the Sig handy."

"I'll keep an ear out for the sound of Samuel being perforated. Shoot straight."

"You ever going to forgive him?"

"Why?"

“Asking for a friend.”

“No.” I didn’t mean I would kill him. In my view that would escalate things but if I did have the opportunity he would get to watch. It would not be a long-distance affair, more likely face-to-face. I have nothing against him. He is just an ordinary over-blown gangster. I am, of course, doing my job for the city and county of San Francisco.

“Leave it to me.” She said. “He will die and slowly if I have anything to do with it.”

“What about the Radio Man thingee?”

“Sam’s favorite project of the moment. He says he has insiders working for the scheme. Says the deal is over in fewer than 48 hours, so sometime day after tomorrow.”

“We are searching for the IT setup that has produced the results we have heard and seen. Any leads?”

“Look up as far up as you can look.”

“A riddle. What fun. Let me guess Number One Market floors 38-40.” I said. “I am a cop.”

“So? I am the perp’s mistress. Silence is assumed.”

“I see. Deniability is bigger than the Law Enforcement world. Gotcha.”

Fifth is Boss Tape 7

Samuel was in his late fifties. He was new at growing older. He resisted the signs with a dye to hide the graying. Like every effort he made to hide his aging onset made it more obvious.

He cared about his looks and his wardrobe. The power he wished to possess was generated by drama of the sort that required the costume of successful men.

He dressed well. When he was in his Presidio condo with the view of the ocean, he had tailors stop by for fittings. These often ended in arguments about sizes. It was bickering between tailor and a client with onset obesity.

Sam had loved the military. He was a complicated guy with complicated tastes. Where his brother Henry liked weapons of assassination, Sam liked electricity. To him, death was not a teacher, pain was. Henry's methods were swift. Sam was careful in his work and enjoyed the intimacy of torture.

He would stand looking into the full-length mirrors in his fitting room. His view of himself as a military officer required a military cut for the suits he wore. Though he was Army he liked the blues the Navy wore. His ties were always red white and blue. The country implied was unclear. There are twenty-eight countries with those colors which left him feel that when he took over what he took over wouldn't matter. As long as the colors were his no one would be surprised. What the mirror could not show him was that the hair color, the cut of his suit and the color of his tie were just masks for his cruelty.

Watchers get the dirt

The San Francisco Mayor Ralph Goodwin was on the news shows every night and morning from day three of the Radio Man phenomenon. Goodwin acted as if he was taking personal control of locating and destroying whoever had pranked the Bridge Authority of which he was a member.

Now that he was up for reelection, he turned his attention to the failure of law enforcement. He cautioned people to continue using the bridge so as not to give in to silly children and later 'the terrorists' who were surely trying to break the back of his administration. He said nothing had been found. "It is a hoax." He said.

Reporters asked how the messages were being delivered. He did not respond to the questions asked but diverted attention. The Mayor responded with a carefully crafted statement indicating that arrests "of the hoaxers" were imminent.

The Mayor was in his realm with the media. His staff blocked Azimov from attending his news conferences because she was biased, he said. John knew there was more to it than the alleged 'bias.' John kept in close contact with her trusting that she would be the journalist who would solve the mystery if any of them would.

Azimov waited outside the latest so-called press conference from which she was barred, as if the First Amendment was optional. Having little to do left her with time to see who else was waiting outside. The main hallway of the City Hall was always busy. The conference room the Mayor used for speechifying has two sets of recessed double doors. She was standing in one of the doorways.

Directly across from her was a guy with a camera. He looked hip i.e. long gray hair and that reddish glow in the eyes that said Cannabis. Azimov knew most every TV camera operator in the City. He was new to her.

When the flow abated for a minute, she crossed the hall and stood next to him. He noticed.

“Hi. You’re Azimov?”

“Yup.” She said. “That was my Daddy’s last name.”

“Did he write a few books about space or something?”

“That’s my uncle. You’re thinking about Foundation and Empire. My father was an academic but in economics.” She gave him more information than she had shared with anyone recently. “What’s your name and claim to fame?”

“Name’s Deuce, like the card. Fame? I make movies with a crew.”

“Films? Can I see them? Maybe I do a story.”

“YouTube. Look for a channel called ‘Instead of News.’ You’ll see my credits.”

“Who you work for now?”

“Don’t know really. I was sent to record who comes and goes around this presser.”

“Then what?”

“I have a schedule that was given to me by the guy who pays my bills.”

Azimov leaned against the wall behind them. She began to put the two and two together to get the four she was after. Her first question was who gave him orders. The next was why?

'Think' she said to herself. Who would do this to the Mayor? Campaign related? Her instinct was to figure it out before she asked the hip guy another question. He saved her.

"Azimov, can we get together?"

"A date?"

"Hmm. Sounds like it would be interesting. Especially for me."

"Talking?"

"Yes. I know things, seen things. I have a story."

"This is becoming bribery."

"Ah. What can I say?"

"I work. It's all I do. My curiosity is unending at least in my imagination."

"You are famous."

"Deuce, you are playing a good game."

"How about a beer when this over. There's a bar not far from here. Would take half an hour. Yes or no."

Deuce pulled a 3 by 5 card from his breast pocket. He studied it for a minute.

"Depends. Might work. Where are we talking about?"

"Edinburgh Castle Pub"

"I know it."

"Here's my card with my cell number."

As they agreed to meet, the other set of double doors opened, and the media burst into the halls headed for their pressrooms and all the connectivity with the virtual world they needed.

Deuce went into action catching the media as they exited and then bursting into the room as they thinned out and capturing the Mayor Ralph Goodwin and several of his aides in a discussion of what was next.

“We received another text message from him.”

“What does he want? No more money. Tell him I need to see some in my campaign committee bank account.”

“Who are you? Get out.” This last was his campaign manager Paul Manafort. The mayor turned to see Deuce and disappeared. Manafort came toward Deuce demanding the camera. As Deuce backed up, he explained that the camera was in broadcast and kept no data as it was transferred to the cloud.

“Sorry, Dude. Maybe you’ll be a famous crook one day and have the physical weapons you’d need to stop me but today isn’t it.” He turned and was in the hallway before Manafort could take another step.

Azimov watched Deuce head down the hall and turned to see Manafort on a cellphone. She pulled his card and dialed his cell.

“They are after you. There is a women’s room at the end of the hall. Wait for me there.”

“Done.”

She waited in the hallway staring at Manafort, watching for any changes in the law enforcement detailing. Manafort left and she walked to the women’s room. Deuce was standing on a toilet trying to go unnoticed.

“Deuce. Let’s have a beer.”

“OK.”

He came down and stood next to her.

“What do we do?”

“If anyone comes in just kiss me until they leave.”

“This works?”

“Not every time. Remember it is not a joke.”

“Can we practice?”

“No. It is art not a prelude to sex.”

“If we get out of this...”

“Don’t say it. The coast is clear by now. Let’s get to that beer. We can talk.”

She burst out of the door and almost crushed a potential user behind the door.

“Ouch.” The woman, a security officer, was rubbing her head.

“Oh, no. Are you going to be OK?” As Azimov talked she blocked her view of the doorway as Deuce moved past them and out the nearby exit.

“Sorry. Forgive me.”

“You must have been in a hurry.”

“Was. Sorry.”

Azimov was out the door and near trotting towards the Edinburgh.

The Story comes into view

Embarcadero Station was crowded. Every one of the station's stairways to the loading platform was used as a podium by the Watchers to speak their experiences into the Memory.

Every Smiler and Watcher was a part of Memory. Everyone was a student at the Underground University.

The last train brought a new twist to the story. Watchers were telling the story from the commuters' perspective.

A Watcher said to Memory. "The Chief of Police is hiding from the media. I work under him and this is not normal. There may be an internal investigation underway."

That night on the last train I sat with John.

"Somethings up. I saw things at work that felt like the Mayor is a perp."

"Our mutual friend called yesterday from her perch above us all."

Gretchen called from Samuel's condo on Market street. That's what I wanted him to get out of that.

"He's back at his old tricks."

"What do you hear? Mayor and SFPD?"

"Multiple sources from within City Hall."

"Money is flowing."

"Round up the usual suspects."

"There is more. Lot's more but I fear speaking will spook someone we need to remain calm."

Since we were in the neighborhood we checked in with Brad. He had set up shop in the Vet Center since his room above the restaurant was a

24 hour listening station for the nerds Brad organized to follow the data and crypto traffic.

He was asleep on his keyboard when we arrived. He was slow to arise so we waited.

“Sure wish he’d wake up and talk. Do you think he will?” John has a streak of meanness in him that makes politics a sport because, as he explains, there could be injuries.

“Let’s make an effort. He is not any fun to watch sleep.” I stood and touched his shoulder. He did nothing. I took a step back and texted him. A single tone signified that he had received it. He sat up, grabbed his phone and looked at the text. Then he looked up and saw us.

“Oh, should have called.”

John laughed and said we were just walking by, wanted to check in and see what was new.

“New? New. Yes. Ah, we found interfaces with servers in the COPS office.”

“With who?”

“Ah, Radio Man.”

“What?”

“Don’t know the answer to that question but maybe by tomorrow morning we’ll have more. Hadron is working on it.”

Murder it wasn't

There was a large hubbub surrounding the announcement that I was the policeman after the Radio Man. There were many press interviews about the KFF and the corruption busts within the SFPD. A face that looked familiar appeared at the edge of a press gaggle on the city steps.

When I saw her, her name came into my mind. I knew it could not be. I smiled at her. She saw me, a look of recognition crossed her face and she smiled back.

The conference ended. The gaggle dispersed. I was still standing where I was when I first caught sight of her. She was still standing there, and she was still staring at me.

Alone, as if the passing strangers did not exist, we moved towards one another.

"I am Denny." I said putting out my hand.

"Terrilee Flowers," she said. "Where do I know you?" She grabbed my hand.

I saw her gray eyes. I felt her near me. I hoped I knew her. "Your name is familiar. Your eyes even more."

"I have trouble with my memory sometimes."

"Me, too. Mine's the result of extreme trauma. More than a year ago I was shot."

"Me, too. At 16th Street ..."

"Me, too."

“I am going to cry.” She shuddered. Her eyes watered. Her grip on my hand grew stronger. “It’s you.”

“Me?”

“You have my toothbrush in your apartment.”

“We lived together?” I was stunned. “Might be ... Yes. It was you. I saw a silhouette painted at 16th Street. ‘Terrilee’ it said.”

“Yours is in the street.”

“I thought you were dead.”

“Here I am.” She said. “You have anything to do? Are you with someone else? Can we start over? Can I visit my toothbrush?”

“Now I am going to cry.”

We hugged and turned towards the direction we would walk to get to my apartment. She held onto my hand with an unbreakable grip.

“Denny, I have a memory of loving whoever has my toothbrush. If that’s you, it makes sense to me. If it is not you, I should tell you I feel in love at first sight.”

“Either way I am holding onto you for dear life. I hope it’s your toothbrush. But who cares either way?”

The walk would be too far for us, so I caught a cab and ten minutes later we stood on the stoop.

“I remember this.” She said as her hands caressed the railing on the stair. “I waited for you here.”

The door opened with my key. She stopped me from entering by closing the door and then locking it and unlocking it with a key from her wallet.

“It’s you.”

“It’s you.”

It Wasn't That Much Fun

Even now, several years later, I have no idea how to describe the feelings. What I saw on her face and what she could tell me about her experiences as we rediscovered who we were to each other was too complicated for words.

What happened when we sat at the table was easier.

Her nagging memory was more nagging than mine. I knew her first name from the painted shadows at 16th St BART. I had no idea that I knew 'Terrilee.' There was no one in her life who knew about me and her as an item. There was only the chance meeting we had with John just before the massacre. John, like me, forgot all about that event until days after we re-met and I reintroduced them on the Last Train. He was the only witness to the fact that we knew each other.

We had not taken pictures of each other. Neither of us thought, post recovery, to search our text messages for people we lost. Once we talked out all the tearful realities, catching up, telling our histories since the event there was a long pause.

Then came the memories we shared from before when we were meeting and finding commitment and 'the toothbrush.' We didn't remember much so we decided to start over.

"Maybe our bodies remember?"

We tried that out. We tried out saying "I love you." We tried to imagine a future together.

Then a memory nagged at me. Hoax. Elaborate hoax.

"Terrilee, do you have anything that says 'hoax?'"

“Hoax? Hoax?” She and I were sharing a coffee the morning after we re-met. She had not returned to a job and was essentially disabled. She studied law on a slow path. She went to the local coffee shop with me and then onto BART for the ride to the cop shop.

We walked through the front doors passed the Sargent and headed to the cafeteria where she became very agitated. I thought it might be all the uniforms and firearms. As we moved to an empty table she started laughing.

“I know you, Dick.”

“Oh yeah! Dick Tracy?” I was laughing so hard with us both laughing in the cop station’s cafeteria where whispered conversations were the norm, we disturbed a bunch of people who turned to look at us just as we kissed.

“Detective Dennis Smith will you marry me?” She asked.

The room fell silent. I held onto her. She was smiling a smile of the greatest simplicity.

“Terrilee Flowers, I will.”

The applause was loud and full of the usual cat calls one expects from criminals and cops. We sat. Said thank you about a hundred times. The room returned to normal and we left.

I had accrued about two years of vacation and sick leave, so I asked and received the day off. No one asked why. I was running for office and the understanding was that I would be in and out as needed to campaign.

There were no campaign plans for the day. We walked toward our apartment talking about what to do now.

“What were we planning before?”

“I want to be with you otherwise I’ll miss you and be alone. How about you?”

“I suppose that is why my toothbrush was in your bathroom but nothing else of me. We were just about to cohabit.”

“There is no one else in my life. Not yours either. I’m for it but I want to know about the hoax and how we met and why.”

“Cops.” She said with a voice heavy with seduction. I laughed. She stayed quiet.

“Well?”

“Nothing. I know nothing. I might have known something, but it is gone for now. What do you know?”

“Same.” I knew there was more but what? Then it dawned on me.

“When I returned to work it was all new cases and the Tube Wars. I never looked back. I was gone so long my desk was clean.”

“Ooh. You’re the detective, Dick.” Terrilee leapt from her chair. “Let’s go.”

“Where?”

“Back to work. Must do research. You wanna wait til tomorrow? No? Up.”

I obeyed and we arrived at shift change. Amid the confusion we sat at my desk with its computer with access to everything. We sat staring.

“Search for my name.”

“Good idea.” I said as I typed her name.

I could explain about how the cop data system was vast and slow. We sat and watched the little circle spin. Then her name appeared on the

screen with several items below. One said she was a witness and I was the officer in charge.

“Ah.” We said. We read the entries which were all labelled as mine. Between entries we exchanged our takes if we needed to do so. In the end we agreed on how we took what we had read about the ‘murders,’ the tape and then the date of the last entry which was the day of the 16th St Massacre.

“So apparently I am Murder Detective Dennis Smith and you are Witness Terrilee Flowers. There was a hoax snuff film that include a few felonies in its aftermath including hoaxing 911. Wasting my time and the County’s money.”

“Are you angry?”

“Should be but that is not what I came here to do. I wanted answers. Got ‘em.” I was at peace with the idea that I had lost some mid-term memory and now was happy to find the answers I had sought. I was OK with the idea that we would never recover that part of our life together having lost the sensations our early romance had afforded. All that was OK but mostly because no matter how you see it our re-meeting was as romantic as any.

“So?” She asked. “What’s your pleasure. Should we get together? Can we live happily ever after?”

“I am willing. But I must warn you that the management does not allow aquariums. So, fish are out.”

“How about two boas?”

“Uh. I’ll check. Maybe they fit under another category.”

“Service pets?”

“I’ll look at the lease.”

“I am off to my auntie’s to get some stuff. I won’t bring much.
Promise.”

Nobody busts the PD

Terrilee came to life before my eyes on our way back home from the office. She had somehow reconnected with Millie's and the lawyer who owned it. That was where the crew came from for the spoof film. Within hours she was back on the video team and ready to work.

We talked about the plan to remove what we would later call 'the tops of the pyramids of corruption.' Terrilee knew what she wanted to do and set off within minutes to make some news.

Her BLM friends found her target hard at work making peoples' lives miserable. She walked right into the scene with her rant running hot and takeover.

"Wait a minute. Who do you people think you are?" The uniforms did not affect her. "We want a first amendment solution to your second amendment abuses. Stop killing POCs and we'll take the cameras away."

She was yelling directly into Bartholomew's face.

"Did I say fuck you? I meant to. Fuck you." Was the Captain's response.

"Nice. Shows maturity and leadership ability. And you have what rank? Captain?"

"I am a Captain. I lead the Tactical Squad."

"See this motherfucker?" she pulled back her hair over her left ear. "It is where one of the departments bullets entered my skull. You missed my brain and for sure you missed my heart. You are dirt."

The cameras followed the Captain as he turned away from them to seek some cover behind doors that closed to block the video crew.

Deuce and Terrilee laughed their asses off.

“Great scenes. The ‘did I say fuck you’ scene will be over the top. Denny is going to love this stuff.”

Azimov was standing off to the side gathering images for her story on the confrontation of the soon to be infamous Captain Bartholomew and a victim of his Tac Squad’s murderous actions. Azimov had never seen Terrilee Flowers before. Her notes on the 16th Street Massacre had Flowers as dead. But the obvious said she was still alive. She would be a great story.

The morning paper was headlined with an Azimov special. “Nobody busts SFPD – Is it racism, misogyny or just bad optics? See Inside Politics.”

John and I travelled the Last Train nearly every night. It was usually on the return trip from SFO that the discussion turned towards corruption, suspects, scams. After a few weeks the subject of the corrupt within the police forces in The City became paramount. Then the idea of replacing the corrupt with Nobodys was mentioned.

Once it came out of John’s mouth there was no way of unsaying it.

“Wow.” He said. “That fits. If we knock off the tops of several small pyramids, we should take over each pyramid so that the corrupt cannot regain control. Makes sense. Wow.”

“John, it’s called projecting power. Nobody can lead government.” My enthusiasm for busting the corrupt in the SFPD was enhanced ... No, more like multiplied by 10 to some large power by the assassination called the 16th Street Massacre. “We find them. We fuck them. We

forget them. We never forget where they came from. They can't figure out where we came from."

We were so engaged in our wild imaginings we missed our stops and laughing we managed to surface in Civic Center. It was close to 1 in the morning. A small tent city covered United Nations Plaza from which the lights of The City Hall could be seen.

As we walked, we could hear voices.

"Go get'um detective."

"It's Sarge's son John."

"Go get'um John."

Soon many people were standing out, encouraging us. It was humbling. The stakes were high.

The next morning was a very new morning.

The Captain had been fired. His commander had been forced into retirement.

I was still on partial disability, so no one expected me to have engineered their demise. It didn't matter. Maybe I didn't have anything to do with it. If I had the last thing to do was to brag about it. All you need to do is act surprised, say something nice about the guy. Then shut up. It's over. On the verge of who can care. Move on. It's politics of deniability. A game we all play.

A notice for Commander exams was posted that day and the position would be filled tomorrow. I applied immediately. The game was afoot. The future was Nobody's to grasp.

I had made some new friends on the force after being nearly killed by it. There were others like me – fed up and wanting to see change. These included the lead officers in the murder department. Evidence from cameras around the City showed the passing of money from Samuel's people and the lead officers. I made stills with faces clearly visible. My recruitment method was simple.

"Hey Lieutenant, check this out." I show a picture. "Let's replace the commander. What do you say?"

"He's my cousin. But you have a picture."

"Yeah, we can work something out after. What you say?"

"Damn. Damn. I have no choice."

"I was thinking the same thing."

My new friends at least kept to the side while the rest of us, the Nobodys, could increase the pressure to clean up a government whose cops were killing them in the streets. Abandoned by the larger game of politics people converted the last train into a movement base.

That night the Last Train was an outpouring of the hope that the path forward for us might be opening. The debate was about how avoiding fame produces more power for others who ultimately are the beneficiaries of the work.

Dozens of black suits and flowery dresses rose the three stairs and told their story. The applause was the loudest I remember.

That night on the Last Train, John and I made our decisions.

Commander Smith is born

The next afternoon after the exam, I was on my way across the floor toward my desk. There was a problem. I could tell from far away. People were laughing and sipping 'special' coffee. When I got closer, I saw balloons.

When I considered a career in Law Enforcement there was never a day when it was an easy decision to join the force. As I recall I could not imagine that my job would energize me. I wanted to be a murder detective. First step is patrol cop where the murders are up front and dirty. Blood everywhere with various shredded body parts strewn about make eating difficult and drinking all but necessary. I know that is not approved to say but after ten years of it, honesty requires me to say it.

After patrolling for a decade, I took the exam for murder cop and passed. Then the fun began. The A on the list of weird is that the patrol sees the murder results, then move on to the next one. Murder cop lives with the body until bad dreams cleanse the mind of all peace and happiness. At some point unless the job is changed the detective moves on to a different job like driving a bus or writing novels no one likes.

Me, I found a home in murder and a stool at the bar. No wife. No life. Terrilee changed that. The 16th St Massacre pissed me off. Once I recovered physically and recovered some of my memory too, I had nagging sensation that my future laid elsewhere.

Most times I did not confront the murder suspects. Immediate danger from anger was unlikely. They were in orange and standing behind a metal fence before I met most of them. I can't say I ever made a friend among them.

Every month I would get a printout and then an email telling me my monthly output – like a salesman I was encouraged to get convictions with anything short of murder which was better than not closing a case.

There is no way to rise in the management without commitment to the process of jailing perhaps innocents in private prisons. I noticed an increasing affinity to imprisonment and over sentencing. The love of punishment seemed to overtake the wisdom of forgiveness.

Now I was the new Commander in what had to be the quickest decision making any cop shop is capable of.

Next stop COP.

Gathering the Nobody forces

Stevie, a 70 year-old Vietnam Vet, stood on the 3rd stair where a resident of the Mission had stood to talk about the rise in rent forcing her away from the City. Her story was one of the easy to believe heart rending tales of what life in the Kleptocracy was like.

Stevie took her place. He had imagined he would be a math teacher until he was drafted out of a teacher college graduate program.

“We are in a campaign the likes of which Nobody has seen before. We know how this works and it is simple. Everyone is free to play. Smile and Watch. Read your memory into the Memory. These are the things you already do.

“These are the things the victims of the 16t Street Massacre were doing the night they were killed or maimed by a SFPD Tactical Squad while under the command of Captain Bartholomew. I am glad to report that his employment will soon be terminated.

“I have a list of the victims’ names in my hand. I won’t read it. It has been read many times from this stair. Many of you know one or more. Nobody is just that Nobody. Let their names rest in your memory as they do in the Memory of the many communities from which they came.

“One more idea. Take photos. Submit them to Radiomaneatshit@gmail.com and we will have the photo team compare and contrast.

“Denny, John and Brad are organizing crews to surveil, that’s a term of art, at several locations in the City 24-7. If you are up late anyway, why

not spend your time at the best locations. See John he has a list and resources you will need.”

Stevie was on fire since the S. Turk St Massacre. He took it personally.

His speech was a new thing. Affirmative speech was seldom used on the third stair at the University because it wasn't strictly speaking a report to Memory. Stevie might have defended it because he was at a meeting everyone needed to hear about.

The Last Train came and went: Stevie was still there, on the platform, repeating Radiomaneatshit to everyone who needed to hear it again.

Stevie waited for the train to return from the airport. There were hundreds if not thousands of people milling around. People were speaking from the stairs. Others were just speaking. It was a bit of cacophony.

Stevie recognized Deuce. Saw his crew. There were other crews. All the crews were photo'd by Nobody. Stevie had PTSD and thus paranoia. Sarge had taught him how to make it work for him. He became a lookout. The guy on the wire keeping the sleeping soldiers safe against surprise attacks. Sarge had told him just because you are paranoid doesn't mean no one is after you. Outside a laugh that worked for Stevie. He came up in the world.

The vast right-wing conspiracy

As I went to work the next day my head was full of the unfinished dreams I was in the midst of when the alarm went off. This morning when I woke, I reached across the bed as I had done for so many years and unlike the past few decades of mornings, she was there. She groaned and went back to sleep. I rose and was out the door in under ten minutes.

Those dreams that moved me were about a crew making a spoof vid. There is a lawyer, two businesses and two vans. They make street films as an art, therefore equipment.

About the time I reached the cop shop the meaning of the dream was clear. At my desk I pulled up the file I created for the murders that weren't. I found the lawyer. He was on the horn in two minutes and I was out the door headed for Oakland to have a face-to-face with the counselor.

In the normal course of business, there are many threats expressed and unexpressed. I, a servant of the State, could not in good conscience use my power of position to force anyone to do anything. Sounds idealistic? Well, the exceptions are real. In a case like this I wanted something from a possible law breaker. I was going in with all the cards and I was willing to bet heavily if he did not fold immediately.

The lawyer, a UC Bolt product named Bill Simpitch, owned a few pieces of real estate, including two buildings in Oakland and the one in the Potrero that housed Millie's Stuff.

His office was an unusually chaotic scene. Papers everywhere. Coffee cups on top of several piles. I would guess he was raised by a single

parent who neglected him. We would become friends though our initial meeting was difficult.

I handed him my card.

“Sez Detective Sargent but I got pushed up to Commander a few hours ago.”

“Saw you on the news. Running for something.”

“Chief. How’d you know? Anyway, I have a few questions.”

“I can’t vote for you.”

“That wasn’t on my list. No campaigning until 5:30. A rule.”

“Whose?”

“Mine.” I said.

He sat behind his desk, leaning back towards a window that had a very nice view of the Bay Bridge’s Chinese span. He had his hands clasped behind his head with a grin that said I know a secret.

“However, your play is perfect if you can make $1+1=2$. Prove your point. Bang you are gold.”

“I am here to do that. A few questions.” I saw him sit up straight and become more intense. He likes questions. “First question: Do you control a film making operation in the Bay Area?”

“I might. It depends upon definitions but roughly yes subject to etc.”

“Got it. Do you hire the crew out for projects?”

“No weddings. Only creative projects.”

I could have gone either way. First start with the snuff film and the felonies and work up from there. Or the “this is about a business deal to make a film for evidence in a court” approach.

“I was told by a witness you were making snuff films.”

“Never made one.”

“What about a spoof?”

“No crime there.”

“Unless you made a 911 call for this spoof murder.”

“I see. Point there. What do you want?”

Honest people are always willing to help. So are some guilty ones. Long ago I learned to act on what are known as context clues.

“There is a situation that requires photographic evidence to cure. We want what you have at your disposal to be at our disposal for the next 24 to 48 hours. Sometimes when you act in favor of justice, justice will act in favor of you.”

“I’ve heard that.” Simpitch was basically a good guy yet his political anarchy had trapped him and now he grasped at paying his way out.

“Bill, this is important to many people, as you will see. There will be a reward for your help.” I was ready to do what I could do to inspire him. He was ahead of me.

“Commander, I think you are after Radio Man. If you get him, it will be a famous takedown and you will be Chief. I am in.”

“Good to hear.” We set a schedule for the next 24 hours. I left walking out of his building onto Broadway Ave and the new buzz the tech sector had brought to Dog Town.

There was enough crew and equipment to stakeout three important doorways. With Gretchen on the inside we had our suspects surrounded.

I went back across the bridge to the Vets Center and hopefully Brad.

Samuel wants to kill

It is a long ride from 1 Market Street to St Helena and his mother's house.

As he drove, he wondered about why he was going to see her. There were several irons in the fire, as the saying goes. He was up to his ears in Radio Man. He knew Henry was jealous and therefore dangerous. He hoped he wasn't over his head with his brother after all Henry had started it.

Traffic wasn't so bad that he was frustrated by the halting movements of people he was convinced were too stupid to drive in civilization. Then he turned onto Highway 29 and his free thinking disappeared in traffic so dense no forward motion was noticeable.

He had a choice and he made it. He turned away from 29 and took the path less taken. He raced on the hilly, twisting roads that would take him around all the little towns to rejoin 29 in a far better place and a ten-minute crawl to his mother's turn.

As he drove through the hills he felt freer. In his condos there were no windows that opened to the outside world. His Aston Martin let the wind and sun in with the flick of a switch.

He was braver when the wind rustled his military-style, shorn hair. He thought his mental ions moved faster in the wind. But then he was fixated on his brother and the night he, Samuel, had to inherit his mother's entire estate. He hoped his mother would be open to a change to her last will and testament. He practiced his lines.

"Cross off his name." He yelled into the roar of his car and the wind.
"Or I'll kill him."

Like a bolt of lightning Billy O'Neill crossed his mind.

"Of course, Satan dies at the hands of his acolyte. Perfect."

His mind went spinning flushing champagne induced memories to flutter through his head.

Billy was KFF. Heavily tattooed and heavily muscled. He led a part of KFF to kill a traitor in their midst. He escaped conviction with a claim that Satan had control of him during the murder. Henry is the Satan in this story.

"Fucking Nobodys." He said. "Who cares? ... Nobody!" He howled in laughter.

He at long last rolled up on his mother's home. He had been there many times before. He picked her up at SFO and limo'd out to her location when she first arrived. He set up the security to keep her safe from Henry's influences.

"Nice house." He said when it came into view. When he saw the security that was around him both near and far, he wondered why he had alerted none of his staff to his plans.

"Not thinking."

As he exited his car, a valet took his keys and left in his ride. The doorman with an ear plug and mike led him into the house. Samuel was then confronted with four large men in black on white.

"Good afternoon gentlemen. I am here to see my mother, the Lady Goronchova."

The gentlemen made demands. Samuel stripped and in his bare skin and bare feet he entertained his mother at her table by the pool.

As he approached and attempted to kiss her, she stopped him.

“You smell of fear. Daniel!” she hollered, and a large male approached to escort Samuel to a shower.

Humiliated and in a bathrobe too small to hide his girth he sat before her. She knew from her knowledge of his lifetime that she controlled him. To her he was as complicated as any male.

“Mother. It is good to see you as always.”

“Tell me something that matters.”

“I want to hire Billy O’Neill.”

“For what? No wait. I think I understand.”

“Ah?”

“You want me to approve your killing half of my children.” She stood appearing stunned and yelled “Charles.”

Four men ran to her side and drug Samuel across the deck and out the front door.

Two men took custody and the valet brought the Aston Martin to the front. Samuel safe in his car left immediately.

As he took the turn onto 29, he wondered at the dark windowed Mercedes flashing past him headed where he had come from.

The Mother

“Madame, your youngest son is here to see you.”

“Is he armed?”

“As madame wishes.”

“Naked carrying nothing. I want a marksman across the pool in the Honeysuckle.”

“He’ll see the marksman.”

“He’ll behave then.”

“Maybe not.”

“I’ll signal for a warning shot.” Natalie laughed. The aide grimaced. “Tell him to miss.”

The aide disappeared. Melanie came onto the pool deck from a guest area in the house and joined Natalie. They sat in the shade of a large umbrella.

“Natalie, what are you thinking letting Satan into your home.”

“I let his father into my ... well, you know.”

“Which was the larger mistake?”

“We’ll find out. Seems you made the same mistake with Henry.”

“Just a rumor. He preferred a savage beating while in chains. He is odd that way.”

“You are teasing. The two brothers are similar. Neither wants to be beaten in pursuit of pleasure. They are like me – a bit sado. They don’t mind pain and blood as long as it is not theirs.”

Melanie enjoyed these talks with the older woman. Natalie Goronchova was an anachronism; a courtesan without a court. Her royalty was worn in her hair, her face and her clothing. She proved her power by ordering her staff to do menial tasks. Her age made belief difficult, but she knew it was always about money.

Natalie wanted her gone. Melanie could feel it. She left a bug behind and stood as she delivered her goodbyes. Natalie was pleased that Melanie knew the way it had to be with Henry; Just mother and son for some final words.

As Melanie turned the corner of the deck to enter the house, she was out of sight of the storming Henry who waked onto the deck as if he were in charge. For a naked man this is a feat not to be underestimated.

As he approached his mother, she stood to greet him. She held out a tea towel. He grabbed it and hid his embarrassments from his elder.

“Such a good boy.” She said as she tried to suppress her grin. “Sit. Talk.” She motioned towards a chair – the one Melanie had inhabited just a minute ago. “Before you get started let me warn you that this is my party not yours and you will behave.”

Henry was silent and bewildered.

“Short on words? Say yes Mother.”

“Damn you.” He started to stand and thought better of it. He began instead to wave his tea towel above his head. Henry was making the gesture of a weapon to beat his mother.

“This may end badly.” She raised her hand in the unmistakable gun gesture. The sound of the shot trailed the effect. A small hole appeared in the tea towel.

He felt the bullet pierce the towel. He then heard the shot. She saw his face change.

“Say yes Mother.”

Henry stared bullets into his mother’s eyes. She looked at him with what she thought of as love which means she had him the way she liked her men ... under her control.

“Say it.”

“Or die? As if this is our last conversation on earth?”

“Might be. Try your luck?”

Her arm was moving up again.

“Yes Mother.”

She smiled and relaxed her arm.

Melanie was listening and laughing.

“Good Boy. Now listen carefully because in a minute a nice man is going to come and take you to your car.” Natalie sounded condescending.

“What about my clothes?”

“Depends on your attitude. Are you ready?”

“OK.”

“Your brother is trying to kill you.”

“No shit.”

“He has hired Billy O’Neill.”

“That bastard.”

“No. He’s legit. You? Another story.” Natalie was obvious in her joy at getting the best of him.

“Remember when you bribed Samuel’s aide, Gerome someone.”

“Gerome Leffingwell.”

“Yes him. Or how about the time you wanted to meet Henry in BART and stage a shoot out to the death. Remember that? How did that work out?”

“He is hiring killers to eliminate me.”

“Backfired.” Natalie was laughing so hard she thought she might not be able to yell her order. She was motivated.

“Charles.” The crew was all around poor Henry. He was gone within minutes in his black Mercedes with the blackened windows.

A meeting with Melanie/mother

Natalie watched as her second son was dragged from her presence, both on the same day. She was once more alone. She whispered.

“Are you still listening, Honey? Come let’s talk.” She leaned back in her chair. She snapped to attention to yell, “Leopold.”

When Melanie turned the corner where she could see Natalie, she also saw a pitcher of lemonade with two glasses headed towards the sheltered table by the pool.

They arrived at the table at the same time. Melanie had figured out the code Natalie used to get the attention she wanted. ‘Leopold’ was her word for lemonade with two glasses. Charles was the bouncer.

Melanie sat facing Natalie. She leaned over and removed the listening device she had planted earlier. She held it up. Natalie nodded a knowing nod and a new affection formed for such able play and honesty.

There is more to life than sex

The belief in mystery can sometimes block the solution to a simple problem. A friend of mine, maybe I should call him a long-lost friend, a mathematician told me something that I have enjoyed repeating to myself “Make assumptions. Try them out. Abandon them if need be. Assume again.”

The path to certainty in my line of work is jagged and over emotional. If you see the dead in their last position, squashed on a road or bled to death in a dirty fucking alley and you suspect that half of humanity would have run them over or fired the bullet that pierced the victim’s brain it doesn’t matter who is convicted of the crime there is a fifty percent chance you are right. Considering that proving someone murdered victim A rather than victim B maybe we cheat and fix it so even though many vics have no named perp, fixing a conviction based on false info may not be that wrong. Except when it is.

Look at the Central Park 5. Wrongly convicted. Decade behind bars. Freed by an appeal to justice. A good story. Plenty of racist assholes, I deny using that term, say that they are guilty still. Black cop to white assholes: Fuck you. I mean it, figuratively. I would never touch you except to cuff you. Like I said this gets emotional for me.

For years I held firmly to the don’t mess with me mentality but now I had a singular but important exception: Terrilee Flowers.

I have never been wed. Neither had she. I had lived without room in my life for a mate. Deciding to marry was easy. Making room was difficult. We opted to think about it again when the Radio Man thing was over.

The Hunt begins

John was on fire. In the regular Watchers meeting at The Vet Center he led off with his take on who we were hunting.

“Nobody is gearing up with our allies.

“We will be on the trail of Radio Man.

“The trail leads to a door. Behind the door are the remnants of KFF. KFF was a band of bad people, organized by Henry Balsac, brother of Samuel Franklin. Together with their mother, Natalie Goronchova. The tip of a small pyramid. Radio Man is a scheme to take from the many for the sake of the schemers.”

“This is a corrupt scheme. A form of kidnapping.” Brad said.

“We are meeting with hackers from around the Bay Area putting a team together.” I said.

John figured out a stakeout to watch Samuel’s movements. I had Simpitch’s video crew on that and Stevie.

The Watchers were enthusiastic which multiplied the number of stakeouts we could do. The main spots were double or tenfold covered. Memory would know everything.

A supportive foundation brought video equipment and other communication tools that would help us coordinate our work.

We were loaded for bear. I was afraid we would catch one.

The Trail

Number 1 Market Street was not happy when a person dressed in street garb sat down in front of their front door. They called a patrol car to remove him. 'Him' was Stevie.

Stevie explained that he had a right to be there.

"What is the concern? My looks?" Stevie had stopped mumbling after he was attacked by KFF. He spoke with a clarity that surprised the cops on patrol. Stevie knew they were the most dangerous. That's why he had used his cell to call for back up as the officers were approaching him.

The cop asked him if was under the influence. Stevie said, "I asked you a question first. The law does not recognize your rights as broader than mine unless there are circumstances." Stevie had asked him for a description of those circumstances.

The officer retreated to his car and by the time he reemerged Stevie had ten new friends standing with him. All of the friends were dressed in black suits or flowery dresses. More were walking towards them.

The cop saw the change and called his superior to complain about all these Nobodys. Whatever his super said to him resulted in him driving off. The Smilers all left leaving Stevie to sit on the curb taking candid shots of everyone entering or leaving.

That night at Brad's office we sorted out the Stevie photos. We shared a beer while he told the story of the stakeout.

White supremacists, strict constitutionalist and just plain racists showed up at the tower that day and entered as if they owned the place. The faces of the locals were easy to identify. The people who

accompanied them were as well, but only to me. Everyone knew the local and some knew a few of the bigger fish. I kept my identifications to myself under cover of the badge.

Then someone got onto Reddit hate groups and found more faces. I enjoyed this part of the hunt because resources available to all were making the Nobody stakeout useful.

The Watchers brought the stories with receipts in the form of photos and tapes to the nightly meeting.

The Memory collected these, and many other, stories and soon after evidence of conspiracy including phone conversations and taped meetings reached critical mass. The hackers discover threads that lead directly to the security firm that is generating the Bridge threats.

The Door

“We got it.” Brad’s voice was as high as I have ever heard it. He was wildly excited. “Top floor of Number One Market St. Owned by a Ukrainian-American with all the network connection into white nationalists.”

One of his crew yelled. “Got him. Samuel Franklin. A big mover in NRA and in arms trafficking.”

“I know him.” I said. Brad’s face contorted into a question.

“If you raid them now, you’ll find them all there including the Mayor and members of the Authority board. Isn’t that the goal?” Brad was truly excited.

“I have staked out that building. We have vid of them entering. How did you find him?”

“We were monitoring Authority banking traffic and saw a ping. We followed it as it bounced from here to there to end at Number One. It was probably a test to see if the connections worked. The next one will be the coin itself.”

“Nice. I think you are mostly correct about timing, but Henry is elsewhere beyond my reach.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Call my friends.” I looked at him softly. “Brad, the trap is already set.”

Nobody meets the video makers

I met again with Simpitch at his Oakland office. As soon as John and I had laid plans, I had Bill on the phone. I asked him for his entire crew from the spoof film. By the time I parked and found his front door all the gears were turning.

His office is nice since it is high above the ground floor, but it is a gigantic mess. Simpitch has troubles letting go.

“The scene we want to make the most of is The City.” Simpitch had put some thought into the project. “We’ll need to double our crew. You have people. A meet and greet is next. Millie’s Stuff is the place.”

“Why there?”

“Outfits. People will need clothes. Change often and avoid detection. It’s 9:30 how about noon.”

I texted the details to Brad. He would find John. We need Brad’s tech friends and Stevie at the noon meet.

We sat and talked theories of the crime until Brad replied.

“We are on.” I said as I rose and walked to his office door. “I am headed to Millie’s now if you are. Could give you a lift.”

“You are on. Give me five to tie off my day. He made calls. I texted Brad to alert him to an email. The email I was about to send. “Brad please lead this part. I will be there to hand off the Oakland lawyer, Bill Simpitch. Be kind. You’ll get your way.”

The ride across the Bay Bridge was an education in the political attorneys’ life. He regaled me with his past so he could demonstrate

how excited he was to once more be at the center of a 'vast left-wing plot.' Not my words.

We rolled up on Millie's Stuff. It was just after ten and there was a small crowd waiting for us.

Not everyone got the time message. Simpitch said it measured enthusiasm for the job.

Bill opened the storefront and we entered. For curiosity I went to the show window to find the place Terrilee stood in the murder spoof video.

In the center of the front room was a board room table with laptops at each position. One back room was the video studio which was to an untrained eye a hodgepodge of random equipment. Another was a costume shop.

Bill invited us to sit at the table. Introductions began.

"My name is Bill. This is my crew leader Deuce. Later you will see Terrilee." He looked at me and I followed his lead.

"I am Denny. I have the badge in this crew. Brad is our attorney and evidence manager. Next to him Stevie of the original Smilers and Watchers. Later Our techies will show to share data and technique with Bill's tech researchers."

Brad was next. "The project is specific to one person and to one mystery. We are hunting Radio Man. Who are they? We think we know, and we think we know the leader.

"The question is how do we prove our suspicions?"

For the next hour as more of the various crews gathered, work teams were formed with plans and timelines established. I left when people dove into their tasks.

Radio Man's Back

That night Azimov planned badly. She had stayed in the East Bay with an old college friend after they had opened a second bottle of chardonnay. She was thinking that couches were not good places to sleep. Her dreams had been nightmares about a disaster scene.

She was driving to her office in the first moments of the commute traffic. It was 6:45. The City was draped in a blanket of fog lit by the sunrise behind her. She calculated that she would be late for her morning deadline. Her story? The Drought is in its seventh year. She felt underwhelmed. Then her phone lit up and a ringer she did not recognize sounded. Then the blaring voice that demanded attention.

“Radio Man here. Listen up because your lives depend on it.” Then the sound lowered. ‘Your elected representatives aka The Bridge Authority are dragging their feet. Imagine being in their shoes. They are managing a bridge that was built by some of the most corrupt people in the world.

“There have been credible threats to the Bridge. Including claims that there are bombs ready to blow with enough power to drop a span or two.

“Now the Authority board members are acting like they do not care about the people who put them there. Very bad. Maybe the worst.

“You can help yourselves because we know where we are headed: The Free State of Frisco.

“So, fear not because there may need to be sacrifices and there may be some today. The only people who are hearing this morning’s broadcast are on the Bay Bridge. It is up to you to make a difference. Or, and I hate to say this, else.

“It is possible that a small detonation might be all it takes to save the bridge until we have our Free State.

“Wait. Wait. I can hear you panicking. Those are screams. You cannot help yourselves if you are screaming, so stop. Every minute counts.

“Listen up. I am uploading the phone number you need to call or text and an email address for you so-called smartphone people. Follow the instructions and you will soon be in The City and safe from the evil grip of the poorly run Authority.

“The message you must send is one word. Three letters. ‘Pay.’ Send it by phone, text or email. Do it now.” He paused for a deep sigh.

“Pull over and do it or else.”

The next few seconds were the strangest ever recorded on the Bay Bridge if one overlooks the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake which claimed dozens of lives including one on the bridge.

As if by magic traffic came to a standstill while motorists focused on their choice of means to say ‘Pay!’ No one pulled over. Everyone just stopped. There is no ‘over’ to pull towards.

Azimov was just about to enter the tunnel on Treasure Island when Radio Man gave his instructions. By then she was going forward at ten miles per hour. When he said ‘or else’ she was at a complete stop. When radio man began, she called her office and recorded the message. When it was done, she emailed her story from the bridge.

As she neared The City’s end of the bridge her phone lit up again.

“Thanks for your efforts but I must report it is not enough. Sadly, the board ordered their comms systems disabled. Your calls and texts were all shit canned. And these are public servants.

“That’s why I got back to you so fast. You need to do more, and you need to do it now. I want you to send the same message you sent to the Authority on to the various news outlets including the paper and the TV stations. I just uploaded those numbers to your phones.

“The ‘more’ part is a small task. The new text has two three letter words. Pay Now. Press send. Pray you can get home to your kids tonight.

“Got that. I’m on your side but noon tomorrow is my end time for receipt of the money. I get it. I am happy. If I don’t ... well If not, we’ll catch up in the afterlife. Thing is you’ll be there first.”

Brad's tech staff

Brad's tiny apartment over Brenda's had become the busiest place in the neighborhood. It was advertised as a one-bedroom studio which was interpreted to mean If you looked one way in the room you could see the kitchen and the other way the bed.

That is how it was when he found it. Now in the hunt for Radio Man, things were different. The kitchen table was covered with internet equipment and monitors. Five folding chairs surrounded it. People with cool names surrounded it. Spicy, Hadrons, Mad Dog, Tryme and Gotcha. The bed was covered with sleeping bags.

"OK. People." Brad began. "We are on the path to the truth. We need to follow their pings. We've got two that follow the same path from the Authority to 1 Market and back. That's the one we cover. Everybody in?"

A chorus of mumbles followed as the clicking of keys drown out any meaning.

"We expect the packets we are interested in will be sent tomorrow morning to meet the noon deadline set by Radio Man. Spicy is after an exploited cellphone so we can be in the boardroom. Hadrons has the ping chaser. Mad Dog and Tryme are all over 1 Market. We have a camera on every exit, and we have audio devices throughout the top three floors. Gotcha is after a physical location that will receive the packets.

"Anyone have anything else?"

“Brad,” said Hadron. “Radio Man left a switch open and we have a location of the source. If there is another transmission, we will be able to take his temperature we are that close.”

“Is it an AI or an O Breather?” Brad was grinning.

“O Breather. I like that. Yup. That’s my guess for now. We’ll scan the transmissions we have a record of and see if we can guess better.”

Hadron grinned back.

Tryme and Gotcha were life mates. They couldn’t sleep together so one or the other snooped through the internet’s signals and pings looking for the evil doers and hoping for a fight.

Gotcha raised his hand. Brad nodded.

“We have an idea. It’s sketchy but if it works, we own somebody.”

“Let’s talk but let’s get to work.” Brad heard ‘sketchy’ and had a few such ideas himself.

Gotcha and Tryme stood six inches from his ears. “We can make things disappear.” One of them said.

“Oh yeah. Show me.” Brad whispered back.

“Look in your bank account. Something weird?” He did as he was asked.

“Missing a deposit. \$1500.”

“How did you make it?”

“I scanned a check this morning.”

“Look here. It is my account. I have your \$1500.”

“Sketchy.”

Melanie and Gretchen tapes continue

“Someone is double crossing me.” Samuel’s voice had a sound that combined disappointment with excitement.

Melanie suspected he had learned her secret, but her voice was trained in deception. She knew too that to resist his moods was a greater risk than stating the obvious. “Sounds like someone you are crossing then.”

“Maybe. Who can I hire to rid me of these lice?”

“Is that Shakespeare?”

“Who?”

“William Shakespeare. Wrote plays. Never mind. He’s dead anyway.”

“I’ve heard of him.”

“You are not alone.” She said. “I’m thirsty. What’s cold?”

“Veuve Clicquot 2008 is my fav.” He was sitting staring at the Bay Bridge. She was looking in the wet bar fridge. “See it?”

She walked closer to the bar.

“Ah. Here it is. You want a glass?”

“Yeah, please. Sometimes you are silly.”

“Could be a sense of humor. My mother thought I’d be a stand-up comedian. Instead I am a lawyer with a fifty percent share of a vast empire of crime.” She popped the cork and poured the wine. She handed him a glass and when he held it, she raised her glass. “To us. We’ll be Billionaires before long.”

“That’s what I am getting to. Where is the money?”

Melanie checked her watch. “Looks like about 12 hours or less. Do you have an ear in the Authority’s boardroom?”

He looked at her. Sipped his wine. Set down the glass and turned towards her. She watched hoping he would suggest sex or a walk around the condo. He did neither.

He just stood there. In a low voice he said, “Can you follow the money? Make sure we get it as planned?”

“Already on it.” She wasn’t going to tell him about John and Brad with their crews watching the action. “Gerome has a crew watching the Authority. If he sees some activity, he will advise us asap.”

“OK.” He sipped his champagne. “Fucking lice.”

The hunt for identifying pyramids to decapitate

When I first joined the SFPD, the union was a campaign partner with the Democrats. They helped us with our elections by being our lobbying organization all year. We elected them to office along with the other so-called special interests such as schools, communities of color, women.

On the other side were the conservatives. Some of the corporations funded them. In the 90's unions became politicized battlegrounds for elected leadership. The republicans sent their hired hands to reduce our power. They won and the tenor of the union meetings changed.

The subject used to be about safety and now we are expected to campaign against environmentalists, black organizations, and the rest of the ménage I thought I was a part of. The workplace changed too. The talk was about keeping the minorities under control and the republican memes of the moment were plastered over the coffee room.

There has always been some corruption. But all of a sudden so to, speak, over the period of twenty-five years of my SFPD experience corruption blossomed in the hidden recesses of the force. Much of it had begun during the crack epidemic when huge sums of cash were being taken every day, taken for street dealers and their connections.

One of my oldest friends on the force a Captain in the street patrols told me he was worried about the morale of his patrolmen because there were so many laws that could be broken and as time passed more and more lawless behavior was noticeable.

“Assholes are everywhere.” He’d say. “I am sure they have another idea, but they are wrong. All the assholes ...”

“Wait don’t fuck up. Say it slow. It is worth thought.”

“The Republicans and many Dems are corrupt. Afterall power corrupts. And the Republicans want all of it. No sharing. They say they are real but really are made of lies.”

The political climate was having a tornado. I was hoping for more commitment to law and order from the Republicans but that was not their play. Corruption was everywhere but most was Republican.

That’s when my friend and I parted company. He decided to take an early retirement and start up his rocking chair after breakfast and go for day long runs up and down his own memory road. I was jealous but I was still in and had to make my own way.

I felt alone for the intervening years until Nobody showed up.

The Underground University became a collection of the stories that exemplified the deterioration of civil society that accompanied the seemingly endless increase in corruption.

Azimov's Report

The sky has fallen. No one who has lived through the last week in The City can doubt it.

Millions of lives are involved. Me, you, our friends and neighbors all rely on enough stability in government and society to make our lives work. The stable government is supposedly our collective tool to maintain stable communities with a stable economy. Corruption in government destroys stability.

This is not news. The news is that a criminal enterprise has taken control of our lives and is promising to destroy our stability in favor of a whites-only dictatorship where The City now exists and that after it extorts our communal wealth.

In The City we proudly live in what is called a liberal democracy where decisions that affect our lives are made in public with input from the affected people. The objective is stability. Stability we need so we can live as free people not controlled by others no matter who or what they are: corporations, other countries, or political or religious ideologues.

The solution to the problem we have is two-fold. First, preserve stability for democracy. Second, destroy corruption. Corruption is all about taking from the communal treasury in favor of private gain. Corruption is a social disease. It has infected many, perhaps too many as it seems, so many that some fear the collective effort of the corrupt may be terminal to liberal democracy. Now we have an example.

Radio Man.

At least now we know. The beauty of liberal democracy is that it can be changed for the good such as market controls to support dairy farming

or protection of civil rights. Radio Man showed the vulnerability liberal society has if communication is controlled by forces beyond the laws, we the people have made to protect stability. Laws that limit freedom are not appreciated in a liberal democracy. In this case, where our future and fortunes are at stake, if we are to limit the harm to our democracy, we will be tempted to limit freedom.

The mistake would be to further limit freedoms that affect the speech we need to make a liberal democracy work. Our condition could be laid on the past restrictions that were placed on access to publicly controlled means of communications. These restrictions magnified the largest voices by eliminating the economically smaller of us. Now the technology that Radio Man represents magnifies the criminal voices leaving the most of us voiceless and sadly helpless.

There is a notion that we cannot, should not have a government that owns anything because Socialism. Roads should be privately controlled. Hospitals, schools, bridges too. If socialism had failed according to the core of the supporters' argument then there could not be hospitals, schools, fire departments, police, bridges, roads, cities to privatize. How silly of us to build such wealthy socialist societies just to be available prey to the self-righteous, corrupt and fascist capitalists.

The news is that there are suspects in the Radio Man drama.

The reality is you will not hear their names until they are safely behind bars. It would be fun just to guess.

My first guess is that from what is known and possibly in front of a federal grand jury is the evident corruption in both law enforcement and city hall. Names? I would love to, but I can't. Truth matters and reputation matters. Not everyone is corrupt, I hope.

One more thing, those who want to limit freedom are those who want to take advantage of the others. If you give up this or that freedom, then the safety you seek will be provided. So they promise. All it takes is to be loyal to those who will save you from a fear they taught you to have. It's the oldest scam. It creates the so-called security state like the so-called deep state only real.

The worst are the ones who sell the security state and use it to become mega-rich through the corruption that secrecy and a multitude of enemies allow.

How do we get out of this?

Who is looking for the corrupt? Nobody. Who is likely to find the corrupt and bring an action against them? If the past is any teacher, then the answer is Nobody.

What is Nobody doing? My sources say that they have devised a way to unmask the Radio Man. No details. Loose lips and all. Sources say that the suspects will be named within a few days likely after the Radio Man ultimatum runs out.

Visit the Underground University for more information. Oh, just in case, you do know, if it is the deep state or the security state, whichever, if you and I rely on them to protect us, while we pay no attention and offer no assistance, we are fools or lazy or losers or hopeless.

If corruption is rampant, a fair belief given circumstances, then people in positions of power are all considered suspects. If the history of the Chinese bridge were more widely known maybe the rush to build may have slowed until more information was gathered to judge whether the contractors were meeting specifications the engineers set to ensure the bridge construction was safe.

The Radio Man claims to know where bombs are placed. How many bombs? My guess is that since there are 2306 anchor bolts and a test showed $1/3^{\text{rd}}$ are not defective. If correct, then there are 1537 bombs. Guess what? I know where they are. Doesn't everybody?

The Authority is ready to pay the ransom. I say no. Sources say the Authority has a culprit amongst them. Keep tuned. Soon you'll read it here before anyone else knows. That will be fun.

Keep tuned.

Don't forget to vote. Two names John Wright and Dennis Smith. Long live The City.

Authority Board Meet

Tryme and Gotcha took turns monitoring reports from Spicy from within the Authority board meeting. They worked in shifts spending much of the daylight together and splitting the available sleeping time between them. As they waited for news of an impending transfer of the crypto.

Spicy's reports began as the meeting began. She picked through the phones in the room to find the best broadcaster. Within the first twenty minutes the report became a real time broadcast.

"Let the record show the Chair called the meeting to order at twenty minutes before Noon. The only item on the agenda is a special appropriation under improving span safety. This is a fund to protect the bridge from terrorism. The item has a \$5 Billion expenditure for current needs."

Hands were raised. The Chair waved them away.

"We closed comments at our last meeting. A vote has been called. All in favor. All against. Seeing no hands against the measure passes."

When the vote came to pay the bribe Tryme listened intently. As she did, she dialed her brother's phone to warn him to be ready.

"Darling brother we are up to the plate. Keep up." She texted.

The streamed broadcast had a ten second delay. If the vote is over, there would be an immediate move to transfer funds to meet the deadline.

Hadron saw an uptick in the number of texts going from the phones in the board room.

“They are headed for Franklin’s phone and others to Leffingwell’s. The texts say the deed is done. Here comes the money.”

Tryme said “Seeing it now. Brother do you have it?”

The room was dead quiet except for the hum of the hardware.

Radio Man again

“You pissed me off. You lied to me. You told me you sent the crypto and I did not get it.” His tone was irritated. Until this broadcast he had been kind and caring sounding even as he threatened livelihoods and constitutional law.

“I know most everyone of you had nothing to do with any transfers being stolen enroute. That is what happened. But someone does know. I will figure out who and I will take action against the one or ones who stole my money.”

Later in the evening, I met with John and Brad to figure out how things went.

“We figure that Gerome Leffingwell is Samuel Franklin’s Guccifer.2. The tapes indict him, and the electronic path leads us to both of them.” Brad was proud of the work his crew and Simpitch’s crew did. “We nailed them every way we knew how, and we have the coin. Safe in a room that cannot be entered by anyone but the holder of this key.” Brad held up a thumb drive. “The only copy.” He handed it to me. I put it in an evidence bag all properly labelled and sealed.

“Tell your crews thank you for saving the public’s money from thieves.”

“It was a high moment when they could confirm that they had indeed quarantined the packets.” Brad was still in bragging mode. “We also think we have documented on video with stills and audio to boot how the day went down for not only the identified perps but the rest of them.”

“That would be the Mayor, the COP and the Board members?”

“And others. We covered them all on site and in the intertubes.”

“What do you make of this last Radio Man thing.”

“He said he was pissed and in a killing mode so we should care about that. The crews are looking for evidence we were followed, so to speak. So far we think we got away with it.”

Terrilee meets Gabby

We sat on a bench down the hill from our apartment in Delores Park. Terrilee would not release my hand from her grip.

“I am frightened that my brain was injured and that I am not who or what I used to be. I told that to Azimov. She wrote that into one of her stories. Giffords found me and told me I was a hero to rise from near death and that I should do something amazing.”

“Amazing? Terrilee, let’s break the corruption stranglehold and free everyone in The City.”

“Denny, my beautiful friend, how did I find you?”

“I remember sexual innuendo.”

“You started that.”

“I fell for your images in a mirror during a murder, a faux murder. Therefore, you started this.”

“If that was the way it happened, then it was without guile. I could never have created you from my imagination. But here you are.”

“Want a massage?”

“No thanks for the moment. Let’s get back to work and crush these bastards.”

Azimov's Report

The count down to the election is now a one-digit number. What do we know now that we did not know before?

Let's see. We know there are more corrupt cops including the top cop. He and the Mayor were caught working the phones demanding bribery and offering bribery to those whose vote they needed to get a part of the loot the Radio Man was demanding.

We also know that Radio Man was an inside job. Board members and staff were helping to guide the creators of Radio Man. We know leaders of the Republican Party were also working hard to easy the path for the ransom to be paid. No one would want to insinuate that we are talking top leaders without some evidence. We got some evidence, proof even.

We also know that the ransom was sent to the perps but has since disappeared into the intertubes and yet still unaccounted for.

And yet one more thing. There were heroes. The people who made the scheme visible are the same people who brought down the KFF and identified their members as murderers. That would be Nobody plus now Commander Denny Smith.

Where did the crypto come from?

Where is it now?

There is a story or two yet to be written.

Come back soon and do not forget to vote because your life depends on it.

John, Denny visit the Farm

“We all know that people without power have nothing to contribute to society. That is the Republican Party meme. That is how Nobody began. Some people with not even a home began to do things slightly differently.” Sarge was sitting with his back to the Sun. The others were in the shade of a grape vine with the remains of a bumper crop of concord grapes. The hair he had remaining formed a halo that matched the majesty he had acquired.

“Corporal and I had a little idea we hoped would change our lives. We called ourselves Nobodys. It did that. What we also did was think ahead. We wanted a revolution. That was the conclusion we came to as we struggled to escape the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong.”

“Ah. What happened between 1973 and now? That’s almost five decades?” John asked with all the love in his voice that he felt for the old man he had saved from death.

“We had a slow start. We were wounded. We needed pain killers. We became addicts and alcoholics. That took time.” Sarge grinned a don’t be so hard on these my friends smile.

“I see. I’m guessing John here found you dying at the end of an alley, saved your sorry ass and then it all began.” I loved Sarge, too. He knew we all worshipped his courage and spiritual guidance.

“Nothing we did was structured. We said nothing to others on our walks. We left membership up to the individual. There is still no structure or fund raising except for Cynthia’s funding for the black suits and floral dresses. The dues were simple. Smile for any reason or no reason.

“People like pageant so the suits and dresses were a cool addition. We wore suits to make our smiles humorous. Once Janelle and Charlotte added the dress and we all began to walk together. Things progressed. First, we took over the Vets Center and slowly gained non-vets. Once Cynthia’s foundations got into it Nobody was noticeably growing.”

John and I were politicians now. So, I was led to ask the political questions. “What about the bust of KFF and the news reports?”

“All that. Being Nobody is a full-time job. I failed and became a subject of conversation which was beyond what I considered the boundaries of a Nobody. There was one thing that mattered and that was that we changed our own lives in a way that brought us back to society in a healthy way.

“No matter what happened the four of us were victorious. We changed our lives with help from the usual suspects like John, Azimov, Denny, Cynthia, Brad and The Vets Center.”

“And you helped every one of those people and many more move on to a better way of being and helped in major ways to launch a regional battle against corruption.” John was enthusiastic.

Corporal broke in to add his special view of Nobody. “The analysis we did was in the field, literally. We were lying in a field. Bullets and bombs were distracting us. We were thinking about peaceful lives and how far they were from us, how if we lived through the war, we would do everything in our power to stop others from having this experience. We were nearly dead at the time so it might be interpreted as a confession of sins and a vow to sin no more to a distant and silent god in trade for a longer life.

“The day before it all began, I was going to sleep in a bed in a room with two beds. Sarge was snoring next to me. He was a good

roommate. John had saved us both from an alley death and helped us get a room above the street. Thank you, John.

“When I woke Sarge had come back from his night patrol. He was a dumpster diver. He always brought home treasures, made coffee and regaled me with his scores as he referred them. That night he found a hand mirror.

“The image to hold in your mind. I was wearing an army ranger uniform so ragged it looked as if I was born in it. My face was not a uniform kind of face. War had scarred me inside and out. As you see.”

A large scar tracing the path of a bit of shrapnel deformed his nose and the left side of his mouth.

“I’ve lived with the scar for two-thirds of my life. It was the last wound I received in Nam. This was shrapnel from the bombing that got us out of the country and on our way home. Since then, until the mirror, I never looked into anyone’s eyes. The faces of strangers might tell me how ugly I had become. That was my fear. Mirrors and windows were avoided for the same reason. I had no idea what I looked like.”

Corporal’s face changed as his memory brought him back to his times before Nobody. He stopped talking. John took up the story.

“I found these two characters behind the dumpsters at the end of the South Turk Alley. There was nothing pretty about them, not even a little pretty.

“The story I heard was that the mirror helped you. You smiled and no one shunned you.”

“Yup. I was the first one to benefit from the Smilers. Because that is how it began really. We weren’t nobody we were Nobodys and

Smilers.” Corporal made a signal with his hands that distinguished a ‘nobody’ from Nobody. “The Smilers were the ones people saw and as the vets expanded our numbers, we became a feature for those who knew the BART system well.”

I remembered watching Sarge, Corporal, Janelle and Charlotte walk through a park. Being a cop was not appreciated by the homeless or the vets. It was one thing or another that kept us apart but Sarge kept with it. He sought me out after the BART train murder. He, or should I say Nobody had solved the crime, and he gave me the stuff from the Watchers.”

The conversation went through its twists and turns. Sarge grew tired. He asked Charlotte if he could go to bed. The party was downhill from there. We all laughed and headed for our beds. The cats started sneaking about. One growled a low I gotcha growl. The crunch of the mouse bones jarred my senses. Then she jumped on my bed cleaned herself found her comfort spot and fell to sleep as I did.

Time to think

Natalie invited her friends and family to a harvest festival in her back yard. Her guest list was small and included only Sam, Henry, Melanie, O'Neill, and Gerome. She also hired two security agents for each of them.

As she explained it, she was new in the neighborhood and had met very few of her neighbors, so she had to rely on family and close associates for a little seasonal fun.

Her invitation was detailed describing who could come and how they were to arrive. She described body searches she required but since the weather in the Napa Valley had cooled off so drastically, she would allow clothing as long as it was not either creative or complicated. She talked about the security arrangements she hoped would keep any warring parties under control until the end of the party and the forced exit plan she had devised. She asked for their cooperation and promised party favors of insane value.

The guests arrived, were cleared by security, dressed and seated in the enormous dining room. The seating looked awkward. Each guest had his/her own security seated to their left and right. This translates into two guards between every two guests.

At the head of the table was Natalie. Her sons to her left and right. They were facing each other for dinner. Their discomfort was evident. The rest of the guests were randomly seated to avoid the appearance of intention. It was supposed to be a happy affair.

O'Neill had never seen such a place as Lady Goronchova's backyard. Nor did he expect to see both Henry and Samuel in the same place and disarmed.

Gerome thought, perhaps, that a goddess was holding up the world. He did not have a good picture of his future with all the anger amongst partners and people who otherwise must get along to succeed at a big crime.

Natalie was having fun running a crime family. She thought of herself as made for the job. She rose in her family power structure by virtue of her murderous son and her scandal free American son whose businesses expanded their family wealth.

Wine and hors d'oeuvres were served. Natalie rose for a toast.

“When I was young some of my relatives poisoned other of my relatives. It was seen as normal and that is why we lost control over millions of hectares of land.” Natalie loved talking. Her accent was famous since the FLOTUS had the very same one.

“Now one of the women from my royal family though not a royal at all is the wife of the US dictator.”

“Mother.” Samuel said. “I voted for him.”

“How many times.” she snapped back with such force several of the guards stood and reached for their weapons.

Melanie’s car had a built-in radio that broadcast signals from a mic she had cleverly hidden in Natalie’s lair. Brad said it must be like a wifi in reverse, whatever that was supposed to mean.

I was in Brad’s apartment which had returned to some normality after the Radioman related hackers had left. We heard the conversation like we were there.

“Denny, is there a timetable?”

“For arrests?” He nodded back. “We have electronic tails on all of the ones we have identified. They will not get away. Are you nervous?”

“Yes.”

“What would make you comfortable?”

“Today.”

I reached for my phone and checked email and texts. Gretchen had been busy. After the party, she was off to Paris. Lucky girl but first she and Sam were to meet for a glass of Champaign. When I put the phone down. He was all questions..

“Well?”

“Too early to tell.”

“You wouldn’t tell me anyway. Would you?”

“Nope.”

The knock on the door

“No way.” Sam was upset. Gretchen could tell. He stood. Hunched like an idiot about to attack. As he spoke, he threw his glass angrily towards her. His Champaign glass flew until it impacted something. It was behind her and her training told her she could find out what it hit later but only if she was still alive. *Do not look behind you, look behind him.* She said to herself.

“Bad messenger is what I’m fearing you are communicating. Makes the Sig itch. Trained to protect self. No one else nor any other thing matters that much. Can I get you a bowl of soup or shall I apply a valium suppository?”

There must have been a sudden realization on his part. He stood taller. He stopped drooling, she thought. Point in his favor.

“Sorry, Dear. Somethings really hurt.”

“Yeah, like lying to your brother and hiring a Mr. O’Neill, who once was again in your pay to kill your brother. That is immoral. You set another brother against your brother and got caught. It is also a crime. But beyond that you have hunted him yourself. You know how dangerous that is. Billie would have been killed by the Devil.”

“Right.” He shrugged his shoulders. “Point to Sara.”

“Gretchen.”

“Eek. Apparently, I acted poorly.”

“We’re even. Look, there is a simple way out of this. Want to take it?”

“Against my better judgement, yes.”

She pushed him backwards into a single person padded chair that commanded the best view from his Pacific Heights condo's view of the Pacific and the Golden Gate. The sun had set but the red glow still illuminated the view.

"Honey, we are not married but the papers we have notarized gave me inheritor's rights. Whatever my name I own half of you."

"Who says?"

"Your lawyer ... what's his name Addy something."

"Oh, him."

"More truth is that you are heading into a storm and you're playing in a sand box."

"Gotcha. Ah? What storm."

"Can't say it out loud but it begins with an R and ends with adioman. Know what I mean?"

"Ah?"

"You are going to be caught. Your brother will be free living in the Ukraine, leaving you to take a rap. He could have played Satan again for insurance but no. You had a grudge or a jealousy."

"I see."

"I'll bet your mother warned you a week ago to cool it. And I'll bet she told Henry what you and Billie were up to."

"She says she can't pick a favorite in our fights."

"Why?"

"She wants us both to die so she'll get all the money."

"Nice move. She is a survivor. What happened to you?"

“It ain’t over. Maybe I’ll have time later to clear that up.”

Gretchen grinned. “But now we have to get you free of the pending charges.”

“What are my options?”

“Die in prison. Always a favorite with the law and order crowd. Come to think of it they have become people like you. Smash and grab is all the rage with the Republican set. NRA for instance.”

“What else?”

“Other end of the scale we have turning states evidence, admit guilt and get out of jail in maybe 18 months.”

“Come on. You’re pissing me off again. There is no way to tie me to the crimes no what matter they may be. I am a legit businessman with plenty of powerful people nearby.”

“That is what your brother was saying except he would have been on death row awaiting the gas. Nope, he is out because he never admitted guilt and outside your assist to the FBI, he would never have been under arrest to begin with.”

“What bullshit.”

“Gretchen knows all.” She smiled at him. He looked elsewhere, not into her eyes. She felt something different happening. “Are you tearing up, Honey?”

He was walking towards the nearest source of alcohol. Samuel kept cases of Champaign in the small party room off the Livingroom. It was ten steps away. Three minutes of vocalized curses opened the bottle. He brought it and one glass to the chair as she waited. He sat. She pounced.

“Remember, Samuel, not only do I know more than you are willing to admit but I am a nasty, well-armed date. As to Henry. Bet you’re asking: Does he know?”

Nothing would have stopped Samuel from drinking his first glass dry wine while she needled him. She went on.

“Sam, you only brought one glass. That is not sharing. Half that wine is mine.” She started laughing. He poured another drink in his glass and looked over the rim as he was drinking. She waited. He spoke.

“Get your own bottle. I am pissed. You are telling me things I do not want to know or remember.” The glass filled his mouth again. She laughed.

“Sam, you get another point for resisting even if it’s foolish to do so.”

“Then get to the end of this. What option do you think I will take?”

As he asked there was a knock at the door, his phone rang, and all the lights went on. The sound system started playing Vivaldi.

“What’s this?” Samuel screeched.

“It’s from the Four Seasons. Winter. You can hear the fire.” As she said this the front door was beached and the Tact Squad under the new leadership of Commander Dennis Smith entered the room and began their sweep to control the condo. I came in wearing a black suit, a white shirt and a gray tie. Behind me was Azimov, oddly, dressed in a flowery dress.

I walked through the room to a place where the reclining Samuel Franklin could be said to be under control. Another officer came in to secure the innocent. She went to Gretchen and assisted her out of the room.

“Samuel Franklin, I am a duly sworn officer of the established legal structure in the great City of San Francisco, as such I am placing you under arrest for crimes against the people of The City.” He was a stone and I signaled to my lieutenant to secure the prisoner. As he did so I pulled my plastic-coated Miranda card from my breast pocket of my shirt and dutifully read what the State required me to say so that poor Samuel would not blurt out his guilt. I finished and the officers, all of whom were Tact Squad members lead and followed Samuel to the door and beyond.

The Squad withdrawn I was left alone with the innocent witness.

“Gretchen,” I said. “Nice to see you.”

“Excellent timing. He was about to explode all over me. I got a little scared, but you were great” She shook my hand.

“We were outside waiting for our cue.” I was shaking with excitement myself. “I don’t think you two are friends anymore.”

She laughed.

“See you late tomorrow at your shop.” She said.

“Perfect. Shaping up to be a party.”

The arrests

Henry was lounging in his night clothes as his morning coffee brewed. The TV was on with the morning news of the world on France 24 Live. He had become a fan of the all day, all night news they provided.

They had a special way of reporting murders that he found matched his own thoughts on the subject. His favorite, however, was San Francisco's Fox News outlet. They dreamed up more angles in the Turk Street Massacre than he had seen for any other mass killing. *It was beautiful, he thought, even if I have to say so myself.*

At 6:00 AM France 24 broke into its coverage of an overnight murder of two transsexuals to cover an arrest in progress in another part of the city. He had the TV on mute but as he sipped his coffee, he enjoyed the scenes of the police blocking traffic so the French version of a tactical squad could enter a building that looked familiar to Henry.

He became agitated and turned on the sound to hear the announcer saying that "This operation is being conducted with a team from Paris and several FBI special officers who flew in last night from San Francisco to take charge of their wanted person whose name is still a secret. We understand that warrants were issued last night. The operation is in collaboration with Interpol."

Henry stood staring at the tube with his mouth agape. He was about to move towards dressing and preparing for escape if needed when his front door was blown from its hinges. He ducked at the first sound and then was blown to the floor. Before he could recover, he felt hands on his arms and legs. Within seconds he was captured.

"That's him." A female voice said in English. "Henry Balsac wanted for murder."

A male officer gave orders in French to his troop to exercise the warrants for evidence of any type regarding financial crimes, illegal arms trafficking and assassination.

As Henry tried to digest these events the American woman spoke again.

“Henry Balsac, I am SO Gretchen Albright, Federal Bureau of Investigation. I have a warrant for your arrest and an order for deportation to face trial in the US for murder one with other charges pending for money laundering and drug trafficking.”

Henry began laughing as he saw a second chance to be electrocuted or gassed or by whatever means executed. He got an erection.

Gretchen kept me up-to-the moment by text. It sounded fun. She wished I was there.

Meanwhile, in San Francisco, it was just 9:00 PM. Samuel was in a holding cell waiting for me to interview him. We popped him about dinner time yesterday and kept him and the entire story quiet until Henry was arrested soon thereafter we rounded up a dozen of his associates including Gerome Leffingwell and his technical staff of eleven such as Rivets and Basket. I knew there were others, but they were as yet out of reach for us. We were still searching for an identity of the voice of Radio Man.

At 11 AM I was busy trying to figure out how we would survive a motion to dismiss from some of the lower echelon characters but that was not the big problem.

Once everyone was safely locked away for the night, the arresting officers and the interrogation staff met to work through what we hoped to get from each of them. By 1 PM we were ready to begin the interviews.

When I was putting the crew of arresting officers together, I worked in secret. They were grouped in pairs for security and safety. None of them knew the target until I handed them the warrants. Behind each pair were the evidence guys chosen for their knowledge of computers and the Internet.

The planning had been as good as was needed for avoiding injury to the officers and the evidence gathering had been complete as far as available information was concerned. Some of the arrestee's homes were still being searched. Leffingwell and Franklin's places were being dusted for prints to see who else was perhaps involved. So far, the Mayor and Chief of Police were identified by photographic evidence as being in Franklin's 1 Market condo.

They were arrested by the FBI under corruption statutes.

There was one break in secrecy which we monitored as it happened. A Sargent in narcotics phoned a warning ahead as the crew approached Leffingwell's apartment in Oakland. I had paired the SF officers with a unit from Oakland who Simpitch thought were straight arrows as he put it. They were at the door when Leffingwell decided to run. The SF officers were placed on leave pending an investigation.

The interviews

I wanted to begin with Samuel Franklin, just to scare his ass off but I knew he would still be in a cell later in the day. He would get no call until tonight, so I went down the pyramid until I pointed at the techies. I was after Radio Man.

Basket was first. I had learned that in brother sister pairs the brother will rat out the sister before the sister will rat out the brother.

He sat before me in the interview room. I offered him coffee. He shook his head.

“Please give me your legal name.”

“You must be stupid.”

“At this hour who isn’t. You are known as Basket. To organize your defense, you will need to call a lawyer. Your arraignment is in two days. If you do not identify yourself by your legal name, you will remain in confinement. We could release you if we know who you are and are confident you will not run.”

“Why am I here?”

“In simple terms, you participated in a terrorist act.”

“Me? How?”

“Yes. You must be stupid.” I wanted to see some humor so I could see he was human. He gave me silence.

“One answer and you are out of here.”

“Free?”

“Ah, that will take a name etcetera.” Still no humor. “Who is Radio Man?” As soon as he heard that name he changed into a captured child.

“Not me.”

“Who is the voice?”

“Me.”

“Who is the mind?”

“Don’t know.”

“Who do you work for?”

“Some guy with a gun.”

“What is your name?”

“Not telling you. Leffingwell will kill me. He has killed people in your jail before.”

“I can protect you.”

“You are stupid.”

“One more time. Name?”

“Nope.”

“You will be arraigned as John Doe. You will be charged by the DA’s office for several crimes. We hold you on a terrorism charge. You can’t hide from this. If you continue, then you will win the stupid award.”

I stood and left without another word.

Next was his sister Rivets.

There is nothing as scary to me as a smart woman. There is no scarier woman than the one that knows how to pick your pocket with her

phone. Rivets had a record. A bank robber charged and acquitted for wire fraud a few years ago because no one could prove she did it.

Smart women know who they are and who you are. A smart man is the same but as a man I faced many smart men. They are a known quantity to me. Women have a mystery to them, but then I am a man.

“Hello.” She said as I walked into the interrogation cell.

“Thank you. Usually I hear something more like F.U.”

“I was raised better than that.”

“My name is Commander Dennis Smith. I am a detective. Your name is ...” I held my pen over the paper in front of me. My move is an expectation that she will tell me her name.

“Sorry.”

“Wait. I know you and your name. If you tell me your name, we go one way but if you play hard to get, we play a different game. Will you tell me your name?”

“Confirmation is not part of my plan. I am a waiter. I will be patient with you as long as I can.”

“Why?”

“It’s a pay structure thing. I am rewarded by and for my actions.”

“Do you know Radio Man?”

“Depends.”

“On what?”

“What he said.”

“Who?”

“Radio Man.”

“Ah.” I saw her grasp of the situation then I move toward a confession.

“Won’t work. I heard his whistle in the hall. He met you and he told you things. What did he tell you?”

“No can do.”

“Did he say, ‘Man with a gun’ in the interview?”

“Why?”

“If he did then he trusted you.”

“Can’t say.” She watched my face throughout the interview. I watched hers. She saw through me. I had learned nothing by playing poker.

“Did he say Leffingwell?”

“Yes. What does it mean to you?”

“Our code.” She smiled and leaned back in her chair. “Rachael Hardy. Basket aka Randy Hardy. The man behind the curtain is Leffingwell with people above him. A man with a gun.”

“Why are you telling me?”

“We were held against our will and forced to do what they wanted us to do.” She wanted to unload.

I looked through the slim file I had on her looking for a Miranda Warning and saw none.

“Rachael, you need an attorney. I must read your rights to you...”

“I wave that right. I want to be your witness. I can lay it all out to you.”

“First a lawyer. We have been through this before and find procedure to be best. I hope you understand how a guilty party can skate on an

error on our part.” She did not react to my veiled taunt. I read her rights, made her sign an affidavit attesting to the warning being given.

She sat back when all was done. So did I. Detective Mark Blain would be in within minutes if he was paying attention. He had been my partner in the Murder Shop and now with my increased rank he had become my assistant. Of all the people in the force I did not know how to trust, I trusted him least, so I kept him close – all the better to watch.

“One question: Leffingwell is Radio Man? The brains that is and Randy was the voice.”

“Like I said.”

“OK. What did you do?”

“Turned everything on. The radios, broadcast systems large and small.”

“Including elevators?”

“That was Randy.”

“He’s good.”

“I trained him.”

“The next cop you see will be Detective Blain. He will take you from here. I trained him. He will get your statement on paper and then you and I will go over it together. OK?”

“Yes.”

I stood as Blain walked in.

Time was flying by and I needed a few hours of sleep before the main events in the morning. Somewhere around 1 AM I left to go home. Two blocks toward home she caught up to me. I didn’t see her tailing me until she hollered.

“Damn it. Slow down. I am in heels.”

I turned to see Azimov a half block behind me, leaning on her knees trying to catch her breath. She saw I stopped but stayed where she was. I went to her, grabbed an arm and tugged her in my direction until we found the last diner on Mission to offer both coffee and alcohol.

We sat down and ordered. She was relieved. I was glad to see her.

“Denny, I have ten minutes to call in the scoop. Give it to me and ...”

“No prob. Got a pen?” I was used to her manner. I watched her get prepared with her phone to record and her pen and spiral notebook at the ready. “You have your shit together at this late hour?”

The waitress came with our beverages.

“Please. Please.”

“Ok. We have captured Radio Man’s complete network. We have made arrests. Radio Man may be one of the people we have arrested. The arrests included one in Europe. It will be a few days before we can sort this out. Key figures include Samuel Franklin and his half-brother Henry Balsac. The charges include terrorism, murder, fraud, theft of corporate secrets and pissing off all the wrong people aka Nobodys. More arrests will follow including corrupt City elected officials and law enforcement. These arrests will be completed by the time your paper hits the streets.”

“Any names?”

“Azimov, you know the names. You gave them to us through your recent reporting. That’s all I got.”

“Shock me.”

“The Mayor.”

“Oh.”

“The Chief of Police.” I was hoping my face was a poker face. “See what I mean?”

“How about the authority?” She didn’t look up.

“Names later. We are not done there yet.”

“Why aren’t you giggling with delight?”

“I am a serious candidate for COP and I just arrested my opponent, the incumbent.”

“I don’t even see a smirk.”

“I am classy.”

“You are that.” She looked up and smiled. “You are a fucking amazement. A hero.”

The news

“Radio Man Arrested!” headlined Azimov’s piece published at 4:30 AM.

Then for the website at 6 AM, after the public reports of arrests were published, “Radio Man, Mayor, COP arrested this morning!”

“Anti-corruption sweep. Dozens caught. Evidence gathered.”

I walked to work that morning. It felt good. We had stopped an evil using the means we thought good.

I went back into the jail to interview the principals. Then Henry arrived. He traveled light. He was in an Interpol jet. In a cage on the Interpol jet. He went to a special hanger used for international security cases. One of our vans delivered him directly to an interview room.

I watched him in the interview room to catch his vibe. He was pissed.

Gretchen arrived. She wanted to be first. The untouched canvass and all that notion of memory creation.

“Denny, I caught him. He’s mine fair and square.”

“You have the international crime issues. We have the murder issues.”

“OK. I wouldn’t look good on the murder since I freed him from your grasp the last time.”

“People hated on you for that but now that you have delivered the network, we feel much better about you.”

“You get to be COP and my beloved ex will be Mayor. No one lost anything in the trade.”

“What do you want from Henry?”

“He is in the Ukraine networks not to mention the arms dealers. If he talks, we might learn a lot.”

“No deals.”

“No deals.” She held up her crossed fingers. “This is big enough that my uppers may want to control everything. If experience is a teacher we will lag and your State charges will go to trial first.

I went on to my office and waded through the details of the raids and the evidence gathered. There was a presser planned for 1 PM and I wanted all the names I could reveal plus an adequate rendition of how we found and destroyed the Radio Man phenomenon. As a matter of reality once we turned over the data to the DA, we would become silent. This conference was our only opportunity to preen in public.

This was not my first time before the media on a criminal arrest and as a matter of strategy it was necessary for The City. With the Mayor in jail, the ill-named Vice Mayor was representing the office. With the COP in jail I represented that office.

The Vice Mayor kept it neat and clean.

“The City has gone through a very trying time. It is nearly over, but the cost to the people has been high. Besides the lost wages and profits, our faith in government officials whose job is to keep us safe has been dashed in accusations of conspiracy in a terrorist act and financial corruption.

“On the bright side, Our great law enforcement agencies backed by citizen informants believe the SFPD has captured Radio Man and the entire network that supported Radio Man.

“The details will be provided by Commander Dennis Smith who brought the investigation to this startling conclusion.

“Commander.”

That was my cue and as I approached the mic an attempt at humor came to mind. I was smiling instead of serious. After all I had just arrested my opponent in the race for who would be the next COP.

“We won!” I said. “They tried to scare us into surrendering and we refused. Not only did law enforcement in general refuse but the citizens of The City and the Bay Area stood strong. It was the citizens who found the way to identify and trap the terrorist network that controlled the top offices in The City but also controlled the economic heights of San Francisco’s tower community.”

“The arrests were coordinated with the FBI in The City and in Europe. The arrestees include members of a corrupt crime family that traffic in arms and drugs, that use assassination as a tool to build their wealth. Their corrupting influences trapped the Mayor and the Chief of Police in a conspiracy to defraud the Bridge Authority in the plot to ransom the bridge for a Billion Dollars.”

I called on Azimov for the first question. All of the media was in awe of her reporting. They gave her the space they gave me. I was honored.

“Commander, my paper has been following your career for a number of years. The BART Murder, the South Turk St Alley Massacre, the 16th Street Massacre, and now Radio Man have all involved you. Can you wrap this into a ball for us? Are these all related and how?”

“Many of the arrestees are related to one another through one or more of the events you listed. Samuel Franklin, his brother Henry Balsac, Franklin’s employees including Gerome Leffingwell are all involved in Radio Man. It was their idea.

“The ones that worked for them are solely involved in Radio Man but the first three I mentioned were involved in all four offenses in your list. We are still looking at the Mayor’s and COP’s roles in the other crimes.

“We know of some involvement of both in one or more of them. This will take time to unravel and it will be only after they get their day in court can we say anything for certain.”

There were more questions that followed on Azimov’s.

“How many arrested in the sweep that followed securing Franklin and his securing his condos?”

“No one has given me an accurate count which says there are more warrants still pending.”

“There have been no injuries reported although one report has a guns drawn situation that is still active. We’ll keep you informed. We are looking at footage taken at the Mayor’s home where both FBI and local law enforcement are removing what looks like dozens of boxes of files and computer equipment. The mayor is famous for campaigning from his mansion home, so it is likely the boxes are of campaign records.”

When Fox News asked if I was playing politics and therefore being corrupt myself in arresting the Mayor. I answered that the Mayor’s arrest and the COP arrest were specifically by the FBI who had developed the information that led to the warrants being issued.

These were more political than law enforcement. I was tired and answered with few words. My role as Commander and my role as candidate had to be separate.

I saw Gretchen approach the mics and stand behind me.

“I must pass the podium to the FBI for these questions. Thank you for your attention. Here is SO Gretchen Albright, FBI. She can give you more on the international issues of these arrests than I can.”

As she came to the stage, she handed me a note.

“Henry in 30 minutes. Want to watch? Be there.”

I walked off and slithered through the LEO’s and the DA’s people to walk into the front and out a side door of City Hall. My goal was to beat Gretchen back to the holding cells so that I missed nothing of Henry’s great moments in law enforcement interrogations.

He had been waiting for almost an hour, walking back and forth in the same cage he had been in when I questioned him following the Turk St Massacre. Henry did not act happy. Who would? He paced, talking to himself. He was off his meds and by all accounts murderous.

If he was sitting still, I would have worried that we had nothing on him. Pacing and talking meant that he was ready to explode. I thought he may as well because he isn’t going to leave the building until his court appearances. Eventually, he will be taken to death row, across the Bay at San Quintin.

Gretchen came into the observation room.

“Denny, how’s it.”

“Take him out and I will love you forever.”

“No deals.” She laughed. This was going to be fun. I could tell.

She watched Henry for a few minutes.

“I feel a confession coming on.”

Was she ever right.

When someone knows their stuff, the rules, where the power lies, then an interrogation is a thing of beauty. The trick about a first interview is to get the confession after the Miranda and before the suspect has a lawyer to slow the process down. It's all about starting a conversation. If necessary, I will deny saying that. Kidding.

Gretchen Albright, Supervising Officer in the Federal Bureau of Investigation walked into the interrogation room and sat across from where Henry Balsac; sex criminal, murderer, drug and human trafficker, and general bad person; stood. She said nothing.

"Don't you remember me. Henry. The wolf." He smiled broadly at the word 'wolf.'

"Balsac?"

"Yes."

"You are the one. I remember you. I read the papers. The Turk St Massacre. You walked. Your file said the prosecution was dropped."

"Were you not my attorney?"

"My name is SO Gretchen Albright." She looked at the file. "Says here it was a Melanie Wolfson. With that last name you two must have got along.

"I wish. She is with my brother."

"He is also a guest here. Anyway, by the looks of the list of the arrested you, your brother and your networks have been very bus and have been forced into retirement."

"We own things in this town. Big things. Money flows to us from all over the world."

"Sounds exciting. You are very lucky."

“Not luck. Skill. I am one of the biggest arms dealers to the former Soviet states.”

“From Ukraine.”

“My home. We have been at it for generations. That’s where the money is.”

“So why do Radio Man.”

“Wasn’t my idea.”

“It’s why we arrested you.”

“My idiot brother dreams white power dreams. Leffingwell put him up to it.”

“You were in on the ground floor.”

“True.”

“Why did you walk away?”

“Sam tried to kill me and then I tried to kill him. Mother thought we should part for a while. Now here we are.”

“Thanks. I was wondering about that part.” Gretchen did something I had never thought to do. “Do you have an attorney?”

“Try Melanie.”

“You have a number?”

“Not in my memory.” He started laughing. “Ask my brother.”

“I have a list of available murder attorneys. Shall I pick?”

“Is a guy named Schultz on the list. Addy is his first name.”

“Ah, he was arrested last night, too, and it looks like he is on a cot in a cell three sliding doors away from you.”

“Oh.”

“Look I will call a starter attorney for you right now. He will interview you and make a recommendation for you. He will be your attorney. You are on the hook for his or her time. OK.”

“Yup.”

She dialed a number and slid her phone to him under the paper slot that allowed for the transfer of paper back and forth. Times have changed. A guard saw the transfer and came into the room to control any problem with a murder suspect playing with an FBI agent’s phone.

She stood and with a nod at the guard left the room to give Balsac some space. Others were listening and the whole thing was taped from beginning to end.

In less than a minute she was sitting next to me.

“I think he is looking for a career change. Maybe a deal for ten years and then he runs a shooting range for disadvantaged youth from the inner city.”

“Career change for him would be a heart stopping moment.”

“I see. So, ‘no’ is the answer.”

“Let’s convict him first.”

Samuel

Samuel was the big fish. He was also a heavy drinker. A large man who was unsubtle in his manner. Manners was not a category for him, my guess: He knew he could convince someone if he and his abdomen smashed them up against the bar until they were begging for breath.

He was building his own financial pyramid. In association with other right-wing elements he was rumored to be attempting to build a military force for his own conquest of a yet to be named country.

I knew that. How? Melanie learns. Gretchen shares.

When Radio Man was first heard from, I was without a suspect. When he said, 'Free State of Frisco,' I knew. It made sense.

My job as arresting officer is the same as always. Intro interview. Once completed the suspect is turn over to others for legal services and by implication into the DA's control. This would be no different.

He had been standing in the caged interview room for half an hour while I reviewed his paperwork. I asked the guards to bring him a chair and he was so grateful his body twitched. If I had been in the room, he would be begging for alcohol by now. The power of addiction cannot be underestimated.

Once I finished my preparation, I grabbed my disorderly pile of papers and entered the interrogation room.

As far as I know, we had never met before. I stood at the table, placed my pile on it and introduced myself.

"Commander Smith SFPD. And you are Samuel Franklin. Do you have a middle name?"

“No.”

“Mr. Franklin, you have been charged with a nonviolent crime, but the DA is preparing further charges as described in the warrant we serve to you yesterday.” As I spoke, I sat. “Sit if you’d like.” He did.

“I am going to read your Maranda Rights to you.”

“No need.”

“Franklin refused his rights.” I was writing this statement as I talked. He became agitated.

“No, I didn’t I just don’t need to hear them.”

“Franklin refused to hear his rights.”

“Now what?” He asked.

“The only question I have is what is your story?”

“Businessman. Tired of the overreaching government. My feeling is that my arrest was political. No more.”

“Sure. In a few minutes, my assistant Detective Blain will help you reach an attorney.”

“Just call Addy Schultz. He is my go to attorney.”

“if you shout real loud, he could hear you.”

“You mean he is already here. Good man, Addy.”

“He is on your side.”

“Of course he is.” He looked at me grinning, but otherwise just staring back at him. A look of a new awareness passed across his face. “Oh. I see.”

“He is on your side of the fence so you can talk to him at recreation. I can fix that.”

“No don’t.” He rubbed his palms across his face as if to awaken something within him. “That’s fucked.”

“Detective Blain will be in soon. He will help you with your dilemma.” I did not smile. No matter who he is or was there is no point in being a real dick, so I went low. “Was it worth it?”

“What?”

“Radio Man.”

“What’s that?”

“Addy thinks you are going to prison.”

“So what? He knows nothing.” He had become a snarling mess. I wanted to nail him, but I figured I would leave it to the DA and AG’s offices to complete the act.

Blain came in. I rose and left. Addy was next on my list.

He had been charged with money laundering charges as was Samuel his client. Adolph Schultz had worked for Samuel Franklin for ten years doing his onshore and offshore banking strategies involved with smurfing.

Addy didn’t look good in orange. He was pale appeared defeated and had red eyes as if he had been crying. His arrest was dicey. Shots were fired. No injuries were reported. I was hoping to get that story from him.

Grabbing my pile of papers entered the room, asked him to sit, introduced myself, asked him his name, read his rights and asked him to respond to a few questions.

“Mr. Schultz, you work for Samuel Franklin?”

“Yes. At least until late yesterday. Not a secret.”

“What was your role in his organization?”

“Banking and general counsel.”

“Defending his people if arrested?”

“Depends. But yes.” He sounded accepting. “That, too.”

“I have read a report about gunfire before or during your arrest. What was that about?”

“Mistaken identity. In the dark, a mirror, across from the entrance, will show an intruder as an armed resident resisting the intruder. It was a joke an artist friend devised to keep his rivals away from me.

“Your officer fired into the mirror. I was in the tub. He stopped when he saw the ‘resident’ fall shattered onto the floor.”

I was seeing it in my imagination. The humor in it was real only because no one died. We shared a laugh.

Detective Blain entered the room and I left. Leffingwell was next.

Gerome Leffingwell and his hit squad

My job is to process people. There was a crime. There is a victim. There are suspects.

I processed the victims. In the murder cop role, the last I see of them is in the morgue during identification. And then, of course, the photographs. Sometimes dozens. The dead never transform in my mind into friends or whatever because as is obvious, they aren't able.

At the same time, I interview the suspects. This in most cases involves a warrant which requires a narrative that may include a motive. Often the suspect denies having a motive. For every murder there is a motive.

Gerome Leffingwell was a highly trained professional manager. As I watched him watching me as I shuffled my papers, there was a hidden message: He was trying to figure a way out.

I was sitting at the desk. He stood studying me.

"I've seen you on TV. Star cop."

"I'll see you on TV day after tomorrow. Poor bastard." That wasn't a judgement as much as an observation. "You know what is ahead of you. We have the evidence. We have your own words. We have video. We have witnesses."

"I have lawyers. I have a clear conscience."

"We can separate you from the others. A separate trial. Maybe you can help us. Maybe we can help you."

"Can I go now?"

"Nope. Try harder."

“I went to Harvard. I know my language. The best I can do for you, Detective, is to offer to shorten my stay here.”

“How would you do that?”

“Samuel hates me. These arrests will condemn me to death.”

“Not surprised.”

“His brother is an asshole. He threatened me.”

“Satan threatened you?”

“Yeah. That guy.” He had been looking at the floor as he talked. As he said this he looked into my eyes.

“Leffingwell. Call your attorney. You have no clue about what will get you out. Tell me what Sam and Satan own, the mother, the rest of your assistants. Once I receive a sworn declaration that conforms with the truth then I will be happy to think about helping you.”

There are times during interrogations when the arrogant find their souls maybe for the first time. Gerome tried to resist the truth of his situation.

Stanley Rosenberg and C Edward Hurwitz Esq.

Some people are arrested along with their attorney.

Samuel Franklin was one of those. Adolph Schultz was his attorney.

Rosenberg was one of those too. His attorney, a C. Edward Hurwitz, Esq was charged with filing false information with a law enforcement organization.

Hurwitz looked good in orange. There is an attitude the powerful adopt to ensure they maintain their advantage in their game. Hurwitz had been asked by his client to be in the room for the interview.

Rosenberg looked good in orange, too. We have press photos from prior years when both Rosenberg and Hurwitz were committing other crimes that the respective justice systems failed to prosecute. No names but these systems are corrupt. Judges and high-ranking corporate figures are a club. Corruption just sort of happens in their view. No one ever did anything to encourage or support it. That would be wrong.

“I only take orders. Wiser minds determined it was legal or the order would not have been issued.” Rosenberg practiced a slick art called look them in the eyes. He was important and demanded his form of justice.

“You’re saying no crime. Right?”

“In fact. Yes. At least, not by me.”

“Could you give a list of these wiser minds? Might be your witnesses. I’ll give you a list of the lawyers in the AG and DA’s offices who respectfully disagree with your wiser minds. Deal?” Then Hurwitz interrupted.

“I represent Mr. Rosenberg. We will supply witnesses when required at trial, if there is one.” Hurwitz banged his index finger of his right hand on the tabletop to emphasize his certainty. His nail clicked on the table with each syllable.

“Fair enough. I have not seen the charging document yet.” I said.

“Nor have I.” Hurwitz, who went by the name Charlie, didn’t appear concerned. I thought he looked like a Charlie.

“The warrant described the evidence of a conspiracy on your client’s part.”

“Could be nothing since we have seen none of it.” Charlie had no trouble making up stories to protect his income stream.

“Well, before you get excited and in full disclosure mode as the arresting officer I can assure you we have audio and digital signals that indicate Mr. Rosenberg knew full well what he was involved with and he knew it was a crime for which he would be highly paid perhaps doubling his already substantial net worth.”

“Our position will be police corruption, manufacturing evidence to win a fraudulent conviction.”

“Swell. We’ll recommend no bail given your disrespect for our judgement. We’ll see how the DA handles you.” Hurwitz relaxed his clicking fingertip. “Mr. Rosenberg, Any explanation in your favor, sir?”

“You have nothing on me.”

“Sir, we have your voice. In a meeting with Franklin and Leffingwell. We have dozens. The gist is you were involved in the leadership of a criminal enterprise. That is what the warrant says. That is why you were arrested.”

Rosenberg went quiet. Hurwitz remained silent.

“Mr. Hurwitz since you are here, I should ask if you would like the Maranda Warning or not. I assume since you’ve been here before you get the implications. Will you both waive?”

“Yes.”

“Yes.”

“Good. Please sign or initial this.” I pointed the place for the arrestee’s signature. They signed.

As I remember this, I am impressed by the power of name or color. At the time I was just processing them. They might escape prosecution because they will also impress others both prosecutors and judges.

The facts we developed with the help of the FBI and other securities related agencies showed a long history of financial crimes in the Rosenberg organization many included Hurwitz. We charged the way the FBI recommended.

Blain walked in. I left. It would be Billy O’Neill next. I would have talked to him first if entertainment was the issue. But it was criming and Billy was a crimer.

Billy O'Neill

Since Billy had been a past resident of our jail, I signed off on the arrest warrant for him on suspicion of conspiracy of murder for hire.

Billy had become a literal mountain of muscle. His white power tattoos covered his large torso. He looked a bit like Bluto.



In Billy's case it was conspiracy to solicit a felony i.e., attempted murder, and second-degree murder. Gretchen will have nothing to do with Billy, because just like Henry, Gretchen freed Billy from a murder charge in the BART atrocity.

I had never interviewed Billy. I reviewed the jail tapes and only found conversations of the lawyer interviews. He stood in the interview cell. He was like Samuel Franklin. He was in charge of his emotions. After watching for a few minutes nothing was going to instruct me. I entered the room.

He watched me cross the room to the desk. I sat and arranged my papers.

"Mr. Billy O'Neill. Is that your name?"

"You first."

"I don't want to talk to you if you are not O'Neill."

"I don't want to talk to you no matter what your name is."

"Well, we have charged you with several felonies and would like to convict you and send you away, maybe far away. So, if you are telling me you are innocent, that's OK. I will write that down. But you won't leave this jail until after your trial."

"If I am Billy O'Neill and I say that, what happens?"

"You get a lawyer. The lawyer will try to figure out your plea and defense if you need one. No name. No lawyer. Back in the cage. Up to you."

"William James O'Neill. My dad was a drug dealer. My mother worked in the Mission District. A sexworker. I dropped out of school while both of them were in jail. Lived on the street. Made good friends. Some of them are in here now. This is the life I lead.

“I got off for Amos Wells’ murder.”

“This is not about that. We researched the files of unexplained beating deaths in and around BART stations. We found three in the last four years, men who looked to have been kicked to death. We searched for overdoses from meth. Many among the vet community. Your targets for larceny.

“We are still working on it. Details will follow. We’re holding you for attempted and conspiracy to murder for hire.”

“What’s your name?”

“Detective Dennis Smith. My father was a jerk, but I lucked out and have a degree. I have skills I use to help our community better. And this is the life I live, too.”

“What else do you have on me?”

“Conspiracy with Samuel Franklin and attempted murder of his brother Henry Balsac.”

“Can I make my call now?” He stood because he knew this routine as well as I did. The phones were in the hallway behind him. I wasn’t going to help him.

Blain in. Me out.

Samuel's tech network and the coin

Hidden in the bowels of offices Leffingwell maintained on the Berkeley-Oakland border was a tech center. The center had been used to create a network that served the purpose of structuring aka smurfing. This is a time consuming but effective means to 'launder' so-called ill-gotten gains.

One of Simpich's teams located the smurfing office through the data exchanges with Rivets located in 1 Market and began a 24 surveillance. His team identified several of the people who worked in the structuring shop. Warrants were issued. We coordinated with Oakland PD until we swept into the location with warrants for those we had identified, and in the process located, identified and arrested many of the others who were present. The housekeeping crew was the exception.

As we processed the principals such as Samuel and Rosenberg, the holding cells opened up and the smurfers were distributed amongst them. There were fifteen in five cells.

Blain and I met in the observation room. The first of the crew was in front of us and two more in adjoining interview cells. Blain is not a bad guy. He is limited in his social experience, so he has the expected racist and misogynist elitism. Listening to him sometimes means leaving the land of logic.

The last time he and I had so many arrestees at once was when KFF killed one of their own in the last car of a BART train. Sarge told us who did it. It was more complicated than that, but we got them in separate cells five of them. Four would die in the jail within a few days. The first one died while we were interviewing Billy O'Neill. The vic was two cells down from O'Neill. By the time Blain reached that arrestee he had

grabbed his lawyers pen and jammed it through his own eye into his own brain. At least that was the story his lawyer, Addy Schultz, told us. The video of the event was mysteriously lost.

One expects such events to be followed by an investigation. There was so much going on, other murders, a burgeoning Nobody Movement and the f'ing tube wars it was quickly forgotten. The other three died by overdose from jailhouse drugs. That seemed somehow normal for KFF members and all four deaths fell into a black hole.

The Radio Man. Then we canvassed unsolved murders in and near BART stations. Then these four deaths were added back into the bigger picture.

At first Blain's response was "Who cares. Bad rubbish." Then as he listened to the list of possible killers and the conspiracy behind the murders, he brightened up. "Samuel," he said. That's why he is my assistant.

"Mark let's go slow today. Everyone is being cared for. So far, no hurry needed. I will take them as they come until I find what we are looking for."

"What's that?"

"A finger pointing to Leffingwell and Franklin. Here I go." I entered the first cell. Of course, I carried my jumble of paper. The first cell was a woman who identified herself as Martha Hancock. Her name was so plain I googled it. Google said her handle was Fearless.

"Hey, Fearless. My name's Commander Smith. Welcome to the SFPD jail. It will be your home for a while. How long is up to you."

"How?"

“I have questions. You answer without pain to me and you’ll get a lawyer. The lawyer knows how to get you to where you will be happiest. First question: Are you Martha Hancock?”

“Yes.”

“Middle name?”

“Elaine. Makes MEH. My mother is a comedian.”

“Nice. Your handle is Fearless?”

“Your Google search was good. Yes.”

“You worked for a Mr. Leffingwell?”

“Yes. Gerome.”

“Gerome?”

“His first name. Gerome Leffingwell. Checks were issued by Franklin and Associates.”

“What was your role?”

“Identifying offshore banks.”

“Can you tell me your supervisor’s name?”

“An email address associated with Franklin and Associates.”

“Do you remember it?”

“Yes. I am getting nervous.”

“Want an attorney?”

“OK. Thanks for your frankness. Detective Blain will be in to get one for you.”

I left. Blain came in.

Henry's illicit arms and drugs network

Henry looked at me with all ferocity of a homicidal maniac.

In most situations, inmate interviews are controlled to prevent either violence or fowling the DA's plan for prosecution. This one was no different.

My role, as Gretchen directed me, and the DA cleared me to do, was to just ask one question, any question, and if the reaction from Henry was as she imagined she had a plan.

"If he is slightly off balance, we might develop a rapport. He must be mad at you so I can join him in condemning you for your arrogance or ..."

"Lack of class."

"Yeah, you won't have to act."

"Happy you trust me."

She laughed. I went into the interview room.

Henry grimaced. His eyes focused on mine as if he was threatening to suck my brains out through my irises.

"Mr Balsac, I am Detective Denny Smith."

"You are boring."

"I am here to see how you are faring."

"Feels like home."

"Good to know. My question is about your meds. I understand you have several prescriptions that control your reaction to confrontation. My question is ..."

“Stop.”

“... without those meds ...”

“Fuck you.”

“... will you kill?”

He started screaming. I knew I had finished my task.

I had heard the door open behind me, so I was not surprised when I heard Gretchen’s voice.

“Detective. I have this.”

I rose and fled without any ceremony. She sat down.

“I am so sorry, Henry. If I can help I will.”

Magically Henry stopped screaming and then after a few seconds he sat in the same chair Samuel was provided during his interviews.

“Henry,” She said. “Let’s start over. Smith can be a bit overbearing. He does not have the experience or training that I have so let’s go back and look at what matters.”

“OK.”

“Can you tell me your family history in the arms trade. The reason I asked is someone handed me a file. It mentions events in your history.”

“Bullshit.”

“Here’s your opportunity to set the record straight.”

“My grandmother loved guns.”

“Was she the leader of your gang?”

“In her time.”

“What did her in?”

“I believe it was a sniper shot from a loft window. It was strange because she was fearful of being gunned down. She kept saying Karma would get her.”

“Sounds she was right.”

“I hated to lose her.”

“But she was in the way.”

“I’ll say.”

“What type of weapon?”

“An SSG-82.”

“That’s an .308 caliber. Same one you used for the Turk St action.”

“Ms Albright, you surprise me.” He grinned a maniacal grin that she must have seen before. “Have I earned my lawyer yet?”

“Blain will come in to help you. See ya in court.”

The arraignment

The crowds began to gather at the first light. Some wanted to watch from the seats in the court room. Most were just there to lend their presence to the most important event in The City's recent history.

The trial was to be the culmination. The battle was in the district state courts in a case involving among other issues corruption in a state court. The Feds had their own issues. Those about to be arraigned organized a coordinated defense that they hoped would let Samuel control the message. They all followed the deny, deny, deflect path. The playbook they are using is as old as democracy and the corruption of it.

I had no official role except as a witness. Whether I am called to do that is an item for the future decisions of the defense.

As the arresting officer I was needed in the courtroom but before I went in, I put on the hat and sunglasses John had given me, wore civilian clothes and hung out with Azimov and Deuce. The outside was working itself out to be a major two ring circus.

There could have been a split in the crowd, but the State Courts and the Federal Courts are across the street from one another. As the time approached the opening of the courts the crowds were massive. My compatriots in the police forces had their hands full trying to tame the untamable.

Then there were the corporate TVs and the independent vid crews. Nothing I could tell you would describe the scene. Your imagination would do better. Picture a city block, two city blocks actually, the street and half of the two blocks jammed with cars and people.

I stood and watched. I walked and listened. People in black suits and flowery dresses made up a majority of the crowd. The right wing, as they call themselves, will describe this as a mob. They would be wrong. I saw democracy and people engaged in celebrating the end of tyranny.

The State Court convened first. The DA and the FBI produced a grand display of corruption, fraud, and assorted thuggery culminating in murder and terrorism. The Feds followed. Gretchen's pals in the FBI and DOJ were as good at their job as the AG.

The arraignment was by the crime so that all the defendants were not in the room at the same time. The charges were filed against the 26 arrestees within forty-eight hours.

That dealt with 21 of them.

The last were Natalie, her sons, Rosenberg, their attorneys and Gerome Leffingwell. They were charged with all the crimes or for some crimes and conspiracy for the ones they were not charged directly for. Their arraignment was scheduled after the election.

The election was less than a week away and the arraignment was the last related public event before that Tuesday.

Natalie's transition

Gretchen's aid at the Henry Condo, Andre raided Natalie's house in Napa on the same night and morning her sons were arrested.

SFPD and FBI travelled to Natalie's house to guard against escape. As they approached her house the local cops were contacted. The Napa police squad who was to provide local participation warned the staff and a dozen fleeing paid security were arrested. Two Napa PD officers were also arrested.

She and her remaining staff were detained in a house arrest until the next afternoon when Gretchen arrived to interview her and others.

There was a contingent of law enforcement that doubled the number of prospective arrestees who were detailed to guard doors and bring the food and water they would need.

Natalie was a difficult detainee. Her indictment described her attempted escape followed by a bribe. When the bribe was refused, she is accused of threats with a hidden weapon. One of her aides escaped and took another officer as a hostage demanding her freedom. When this plot was foiled, she attempted suicide. An undercover agent in her crew saved her with an antidote he had carried for this purpose.

The Sun rose and Gretchen took control of her as an arresting officer.

Natalie was being kept in a small bedroom near the pool, a one door no window place to sleep off too much sun. Gretchen entered.

When Natalie's eyes fell on her she said, "Melanie. Are you here to save me?"

"I am SO Gretchen Albright, FBI. As a sworn member of federal law enforcement, I am placing you under arrest on charges that include..."

“Do you know who you are?” The look on Natalie’s face said she had something horrible to accuse Melanie of. Gretchen understood the Ukrainian fascist front used that as its motto.

“The question is who are you and we have a partial answer. You are the head of a family criminal enterprise that has survived wars and occupation. Your family wealth has been corporatized through assassination and the use of offshore money laundering. Care to elucidate?”

“You are part of our family. By blood.”

“Ah.” Gretchen knew it was a bribe for freedom. “But I am not part of your conspiracy. I prefer democracy.”

The arraignment of the principals.

Following the election, the four arraignments were scheduled. Rosenberg and the attorneys were separated from the principals. The crowds were larger. The TVs more deranged. The truth as usual was lost in the drama.

“Natalie Goronchova you stand charged with serious crimes including conspiracy to commit murder, robbery, money laundering and arms trafficking. Have you read the indictment?”

“Yes.”

“Yes, your honor.”

“I am sorry.”

“Madame, the proper response is, ‘Yes, your honor.’”

“OK.”

“Your attorney of record who is seated next to you is a member of the California Bar. He is instructed by his membership to teach you the proper way to address the bench. Did he do so?”

“Yes.”

“And you choose to not do so.”

“You got it.”

“I would like to add a charge of contempt to your indictment. I am contemplating an additional charge against and a complaint against your attorney. Withhold your reaction and we’ll see each other two days from now, same time.”

The court observers were admonished for their outbreak.

The crowd quieted.

“Samuel Franklin. The clerk has read the charges against you which include murder, money laundering, bribery, and mahem. How do you plead?”

“I am innocent.” Samuel said.

“Not guilty, your honor.” His counsel interpreted.

“Thank you, counsellor.” The judge, the Honorable Rebecca Silveira was not a moody person. I knew her record on the bench. She had presided over a number of my cases in State court.

“Next. Henry Balsac. The charges against you have been read by the clerk. They include all the charges against your mother and brother. How do you plead?”

“Not guilty, your honor.”

“Thank you.”

“I’ve been here before, your honor.”

“I see that.”

“Last is Gerome Leffingwell.”

Gerome stood with his attorney. Gerome had never met with his lawyer, but he was sure he would be convicted if this guy was in charge.

“The charges have been read. Do you understand them?”

“Your honor, my counsel is inadequate, in my estimation, to properly defend me against the charges made against me.”

“Do you wish to enter a plea?”

“No. your honor.”

“I’ll see you back in two days, same time. Meet with your attorney and work this out.”

The last tape

It was recreation. It was drizzling. It was The City. Samuel Franklin was leaning against a wall. Adolph Schultz was standing in front of just outside the shadow Samuel found comfortable, but Addy liked the sun. It reminded him of his childhood. He would talk about it in his meetings with the mental health staff. He liked talking and not in jail away from his therapist it was refreshing to talk to the younger naïve counselors.

“Bottom line. You will serve time.” As Addy said that he is depicted as spitting on Samuel’s shoes. This of course was in an effort to prove that they hated each other. Wasn’t true because Addy feared him. Samuel hated Addy.

“Fuck you.” He said to his lawyer.

“Not me.”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“I told you what to say. You didn’t say it. Notice I fired you?”

“Thank you. I needed that.”

Samuel was in a hate mode. His lawyer knew. Lawyers get many lessons in defending anxious defendants. The jail knew these events could be dangerous to the attorney thus they provided a room for jailhouse attorneys to meet with their equally jailed clients.

“Look at the fence between us. Know why it’s there?”

“I would strangle you if I could reach you.”

“You are not as dumb as I thought.”

“Thanks. But fuck you anyway.” Hearing that said Addy decided on a new tact.

“Sir, how can I serve you ...”

“Find Melanie.”

“Be careful, sir. She’s three people.” Addy began to click them off on his fingers. “Melanie ...”

“Sara. Whoa, have you ever met her? And that merciless beast Gretchen. I think she wants to kill me.”

“I will do my best sir. Shall we meet same time tomorrow.”

John and Gretchen

We are human. We need food, water and sleep. We are male and female and everything between and beyond. We seek comfort in one another's company if willing and not if unwilling, and these are non-negotiable rights.

"Remember when we parted."

"Remember? I remember every word."

"Do you remember the night she was conceived?"

"Every second."

"Her name is Johanna."

"What's her last name?"

"Same as mine."

"Can we change that?"

"Change mine and hers will change."

"Clever."

"It's the FBI in me."

"If we marry what else will change? Will the FBI be replaced by your loyalty to your husband the Mayor?"

"The first lady of The City. I like it."

"You will probably want to help in the campaign. Not this one but the next one."

"Governor?"

“Yes.”

“I see the picture above an article by Azimov. The Mayor and his delightful wife and daughter Johanna. They are running for Governor on an anti-corruption platform.”

“I see that, too.” Her phone rang.

She answered “Yes.” She listened. She stood and walked towards the door. “Work.”

“See you later.” He said. “Only hours to go and then we’ll know for sure.”

“My heart is beating fast.”

“I’ll catch up at the party.”

“Good luck with that. Find the stage. UN Plaza.”

The Election Night gathering

The excitement of an election is matched only by the drudgery of waiting for the returns. The weather in The City in early November is usually in the mid 60's. At 9 PM when the polls closed it was 75 and windless.

The Vet Center could hold 100 people. It said so on a certificate at the entrance to the kitchen. At 6 PM Nobodys began to gather in the alley and out onto Market Street. John and I had a permit for a small stage and loudspeakers in the UN Plaza. The Civic Center Muni station was a constant flow of Nobodys going through the station to cross Market St. The street had become a constant honking mess of traffic. Muni provided an unimpeded way to cross.

The Nobodys continued to gather at the Vet Center and inside the BART station the Underground University did its thing as Nobodys rose to speak their individual experiences into Memory.

There is no easy way to take a class at the University. The teachers are all Nobodys. They rarely identify themselves by name. They do not keep a schedule. The 5-minute speeches are all memories of individuals. Together they are the memories of The City and the history its daily life replete with all the pain and agony, love and amazement we know real life to be made of.

No one ever felt the need to pray to anyone other than the Nobodys listening a few steps below. The prayer was in the growing belief that smiling, watching and remembering would save us from societies woes.

Around 10 PM news reached us that John had won. There was no real competition once the Mayor resigned and dropped from the race.

At 10:15 John made an announcement that I had bested the arrested COP. It was a relief. We 'knew' we would win. Now we knew we won.

Azimov's Report

After it was long over, the people who know said it was the indictments and the guilty pleas that led to the sweep of offices to the crime fighting democrats.

The night of the election, Azimov published her now famous rant on the future of The City.

“We dodged a bullet. Maybe more than one. The heroes that helped us were just elevated in this election by an overwhelming vote to chief administrator and chief law enforcement officer in The City.

“John Wright is the son of Jonus Wright aka Sarge. If you study the recent history of The City, you'll come across Sarge's story. Some say he was a reluctant hero who rose from behind a dumpster to become a Nobody. The deep story says he would have died and become nothing but for his son John who saved him from death to become the first Nobody. Sarge and the Nobodys led the destruction of the neo-Nazi gang KFF.

“As Denny Smith said yesterday, ‘The end of KFF was the first domino that led to the next and the next until Radio Man was busted along with the entire corrupt network eventually leading higher to the board of the NRA. In the process the Ukrainian mafia was smashed in a complete defeat. He was generous with his praise.’

“The new Chief of Police went on ‘Azimov is a hero, too. When she attacked the Mayor before the election, he attacked the press and the Republican bot army of fake internet trolls threatened her life. You know it took courage to stand before her would-be murderers to name their names and their crimes for the public to read.’

“One of the things I gladly take credit for is covering the story about the attempt to steal the election.

“At work I focused on the ex-Mayor’s office. His files the courts made accessible had documents that showed Franklin’s hand in the bridge broadcasts. Photos of Samuel and the Mayor keep the story pointing towards the Mayor as a major culprit.

“Once the corruption charges were leveled against the Mayor, he hurriedly resigned. Amid a rising call to stop all corruption the Supervisors, who would normally have fought for the office, called for an emergency election. The individual members of the Board of Supes thereby became subjects for more corruption investigations lead of course by Gretchen. In an overnight decision the California Supreme Court denied their request for a special election. The scheduled election went on as planned.

“I wake up feeling new. Nobody won and life feels better.”

Azimov's Report

The following quotations are taken from the acceptance speech the now Chief of Police Dennis Smith delivered from the stage in UN Plaza. It was a distinct pleasure to witness.

“The trials will take years to settle out. Even as important as they may prove to be, I am not the one to tell that story. Azimov knows more of it than I do, and her skills are beyond reproach. I stop here as a guy with a new job: to begin a new career as an elected public servant. Mayor John Wright and I have big ideas about recreating government from our experiences.

“There is one more part of this story to tell, that is mine to tell. It is very personal. Terrilee Flowers, wounded with me at the 16th St Massacre is standing beside me on the stage. We were parted by the trauma and only a few months ago did we re-find one another. There was something magical about fighting the PTB in favor of Nobody. Part of that magical part is the love relationships that came from it.

“The back story is that four Asian war vets did something impossible. Almost always living homeless on the streets two men and two women who had fought the war in the mud or the war in the hospitals for the wounded, met. The men had been together since the mud and the women since the hospital. They had lived clinging to one another for forty years hoping for a death with little pain. Then in a moment of resignation that death was not near they came upon an idea to change their future and with that everyone else's future as well.

“When I first saw them together only Sarge knew who I was. Corporal stood with him as the women, Janelle and Charlotte, fled the confusion a cop in their midst caused. Sarge had just given me the names of the

KFF members who had slaughtered one of their mates on the BART train.”

These were parts of what the new Chief of Police, Dennis Smith said as he accepted the vote of the people. I call him a hero, but he would remind me that he was just doing his job and it was people like Sarge and other Nobodys that were the heroes. Of course, Sarge would refuse the honor in favor of saying he smiles and watches just like everyone else.

John was short on words but struck the note people wanted to hear.

“I want to acknowledge that I am a Nobody in my heart. Those of you that know me and voted for me voted for a Nobody. When I won your vote, you chose me to lead the government away from corruption and into a more equal political and economic reality that will provide for the care for everyone.

Nobody is not a collection of heroes. It has no leaders and no followers. Now two are in public office and in many ways will guide The City and its citizens to continue and expand the war against corruption that Nobody ignited. Nobody will forget where they came from.

The Farm

After the election John invited Gretchen, Terrilee and me to the Farm as the house in the Humboldt Hills was called. That is where Sarge et al lived. The City is exciting and to survive we deaden ourselves to survive. On the Farm the opposite is true.

I brought some wine. John brought beer. Terrilee brought some spinach seeds and a bag of fertilizer. Gretchen took off her gray suit and put on a mommy outfit and brought the kid, Johanna.

Janelle rolled some cannabis sticks. Charlotte made two fruit pies. Corporal started the barbeque while Sarge sat in the shade trying to make the November day feel like spring.

We all made dinner. We all laughed our asses off. We drank. We smoked. We pledged our undying love to each other.

After Charlotte served the dessert. Terrilee slipped a ring on my finger. Gretchen stood and holding their child she announced that she and John would be married. "That is if he says yes."

There was hugging and kissing and shouts of pure joy.

As the stick passed from one to another and the minds melded into a big pile of puppies, Sarge had an idea.

"If John marries Gretchen, I hope I am best man. Charlotte let's make it a double." She laughed and then cried and then dissolved in his arms.

John said, "I'm in." More hugging and kissing.

By the time the moon rose we were all betrothed and planning a wedding in The City. The younger couples would witness the older couples and then vis a versa.

That is when we decided to have a party.

Election security

“John, The tech crews caught the hacks the Republicans made. We’ve caught them.”

“Who?”

“Looks like the same bunch of hackers that we just busted. We have them ready to talk maybe they will tell us more about this part of their show.”

“How did they hack it from jail?”

“Seems it was set up a month ago. Maybe before we announced.”

“They could so they did.”

“Why take chances?”

“My thought exactly. Now what?”

“We still won.”

“Yes, but.”

“My thought exactly.”

“More charges? It’s in Gretchen’s field.”

“Yes, she wants us to move. The State can charge.”

“What grounds?”

“They stopped citizens from voting even though it is their right. That is theft of opportunity.” I was angry about this. My voice showed it. I was talking loudly. Too loud. “It is a public fraud, a corruption we must end or not be worth our salt.”

There was a person in Vivaldi's who overheard us and began a slow clap. Others joined until some hoots and basic screaming occurred. It was short lived, emphatic and wonderful to hear and feel.

Nobody came to the party

Nobody Came. It was a meme. It was a bumper sticker. It was a lawn sign. John had business cards. I told everyone I saw.

Azimov invited the world. The party was a giant potluck in Golden Gate Park. Cynthia had given the City a grant to put the equipment we would need together. It was going to be a huge picnic.

The weather made a beautiful 70's day. I was busy doing my job until noon and then I went to the park and stood for hours serving potato salad to hundreds of people.

On one side of me serving buns and condiments for hot dogs and hamburgers was Brad and on the other was Bill Simpich who dealt paper plates and plastic forks to the masses. He threw zero roles of paper towels. At one point near the end of the day BART's new security officers came. Every vet I ever met was there and hundreds more I would never have time to meet.

Sarge and Charlotte was down the row from Brad, Bill and me. Sarge was dessert. Corporal and Janelle cleared tables. They were slow. They were holding hands.

The University was everywhere around us. John and I promised no speeches. Sarge had said that we could easily destroy Nobody if we acted in charge of anything besides coordinating the food service.

In the rejoicing crowds a few little things happened. Deuce and Azimov become a couple based on their common passion.

BART officials offered a special set of trains some start in Oakland, some at Embarcadero, running around the horn of SFO in the late evening.