

# Nobody's Business

by Bob Martel

Good turned to bad and bad turned to misery

~ Blackberry smoke

"If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could then better judge what to do, and how to do it."

~ Abraham Lincoln, June 16, 1858 "A House Divided"

Jesus said: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself."

~ Matthew 12:24-26

## Gretchen and John – 1988

They were holding hands, sitting across the kitchen table in their small San Francisco apartment. The remnants of dinner lay between them. He stared down into his near empty wine glass. He did not see her smirk. She leaned forward to look up into his face as if she was searching for eye contact.

“I know how you feel.” She said without inflection, then smirked again. “It was a good six months. You know all things, even good things, come to an end. Sorry. Cliché, cliché and one more cliché.”

“Was it six months?” He raised his head to see her looking at him.

“Close, give or take. Are you sad? Are those tears?”

“Gretchen,” John took a deep in breath. “I like you. That’s not a cliché.”

“You could come with me. I must move to D.C. What I want is there and nowhere else.”

“You could come with me. What I must do is get out of The City, away from my father, but not so far, I can't help him when he needs it. He's my burden. He has no one else.” John sat at the kitchen table, nursing his glass of wine, looking at pictures of Humboldt State University from the catalogue. “I got a room in a dorm.”

“Why there? I have never understood why Humboldt County. Kinda back woodsy. I took you for a city guy.”

“I like sushi and Americanos and homebrew. Arcata has it all plus it is the headquarters of a radical political movement that rivals San Francisco's for interesting. Plus, more. It offers a doctorate in Political Science. That is me.”

“Political as in Cannabis legalization?”

“Yeah. True, but more. Community organizing is a practical art in Humboldt. Every national issue has a local organization there plus the local issues have organizations. There must be several dozen. I can hardly wait to get there and see what I can do.”

“At twenty-one, life is exciting.” She smirked again.

“What are you saying? You're twenty-one, too.” His frown was scalp to chin.

“Yes, and life is exciting, just not with the nematodes and tree frogs. Life is made up of winners and victims.”

“Or criminals and the average Joe.”

“Did you just say, 'average Joe'?” Gretchen looked as if he had transformed into Karl Marx before her eyes. She never let one of his socialistic innuendos get past her J-Edgar-Hoover-like attention for Commie infiltrators.

“Don't like that term? How about average American? Joes are people who join the military to fight for liberty and the American Way.”

“Ah, G.I. Joes.”

“Yeah, like my father. G.I.'s are forgotten because the money is more easily stolen from the government-you-want-to-work-for than spent to help him.”

“I see your predicament.” She smiled and squeezed his hand. Gretchen was the most beautiful twenty-one-year-old in John's twenty-one-year-old mind.

“You are off to join the other side.” He said without a hint of irony.

“Can't say no. F.B.I. or Die is my motto. I'll be chasing your silly ass through

the Humboldt Hills one day if you are not careful.”

“I can hardly wait. When are you leaving?”

“Tomorrow.”

“There is still today.”

“Yes, let's get busy. I have a new idea I want to try out on you.” Gretchen grinned. Caught by the usual impulses his sadness transformed until they both smiled.

“No time to lose.”

## **Humboldt County – May 24, 1990**

Nothing says wake up like when your heroes are car bombed in an American city.

News of the bombing of two Northcoast Earth First! leaders had been shocking to many and completely understandable for as many more. The FBI arrested the bombing victims. The victims' friends took offense. Vigils, and speeches were followed by meetings and more meetings as local Humboldt County activist organizers tried to defuse what they feared might be copied or repeated in retaliation. It was an election year in California and huge amounts of time and money had been invested in issues and candidates. Cries of 'environmental terrorists' would change the election outcomes.

John went to every fundraiser, every political speech. He wanted people to overcome the spiritual burden fear and death placed upon the average person. He wanted them to wait for information and evidence. After waiting for a year for sense to be regained, he graduated from HSU with a PhD in political science, then left Arcata to return to The City, to his father, to the simplicity of the over-amped life.

As he drove south through the Redwood forests that the fuss had been about, John thought about his father escaping through Southeast Asian forests to find a Marine outpost on a numbered hilltop only to be bombed and medevacked with his Corporal friend to a hospital far from the action. Sarge and Corporal had entertained themselves during the long empty times of traveling military last class planning a revolution based on the notion that they were Nobodies, and Nobody cared.

John wondered where he and the movement, his movement, were going. He wondered if he was taking what he learned back to help his father or running from the tension that filled the Humboldt County air. No answers came for years and by then the questions had changed. The two EF! activists survived the bombing to fall prey to private visions of fame and power for

themselves. Their movement died at their feet.

“Nobody wins.” Sarge had said it many times. John could list a dozen times but so what? Sarge had been incoherent to his teenage son. Now John, a fully empowered adult, was on his way home to Sarge for another go at comprehension. Travelling south on Highway 101 he passed through the Redwood Curtain into wine country and then across the Golden Gate into the gray area, as it was called by those who lived there. Why? On every BART car there is a map behind a plastic cover. The map shows the area served by the BART system. The color of that area is gray.

Eventually he stood before the door to his family’s home. He could see his father in his rocking chair watching the evening news. Every light in the house was on.

Ever the prodigal, he knocked and waited.

## **Denny and Gretchen in The City - 2014**

Late in the afternoon Homicide Detective Dennis Smith SFPD walked from his apartment in the Castro to his office in The City's police HQ on the Civic Center. He could have taken Muni downtown, but he loved breathing fog as most San Franciscans do. Last night had been an especially late one. Too tired to drive, he had taken a cab home early in the morning after booking Henry Balsac for murder.

Henry was a piece of work. He was in a drugged state when he was apprehended. Once he had assessed Balsac's mental state, Denny postponed his first interview with the arrestee until Balsac regained sufficient consciousness for a Maranda warning to be valid.

He was identified minutes after the S. Turk Street murders by an undercover FBI agent, SA Gretchen Albright. Balsac was headed home from killing eight men. He had escaped the scene on a Vespa, travelled a few blocks to the Opera House, abandoned the scooter and was dancing up Van Ness when this glammed out party girl started dancing with him. That was Gretchen, who was calling herself Sara.

She invited him to her favorite kink club. He accepted. When he walked through the door of the weekly gathering dressed as a wolf, she knew he was hers.

She assented to Henry's suggestion post Kink Club shenanigans that she accompany him to his condo, where she discovered Henry was kinkier than she was. In her best dominatrix manner, she handcuffed him to his four-poster bed with his own gear. She then gave him an injection, a little heroin, a little MDMA, a little LSD and when he slipped into oblivion she went home for the night.

Gretchen returned to Henry's condo several times during the day to keep him in the dream state her cocktail produced while she sought, first her old

friend John Wright, and then Detective Denny Smith. She reasoned she wanted to get Henry into police custody without revealing her FBI identity to the greater world. Detective Smith had become a celebrity a few weeks before by arresting the perps of a murder on a BART train. This he accomplished by being given their names by John's father Sarge aka Jonus Wright.

When he heard Gretchen's story Denny thought there was more to it than simply happenstance that led her to Henry. Denny was also certain he had a crush on her.

At the time Denny first saw him after his arrest, Henry didn't seem to mind his predicament, being spun out and loving in a way only Gretchen's party drugs could produce. Denny knew a few things about him: His passport said he was French living in the Ukraine. When Denny tried to interview him the night of the arrest Henry mumbled in what Denny took as Ukrainian, a language Denny had never heard before.

Now with the jail in view from the lower Mission, Denny's mental focus turned to Gretchen. With each step his thoughts became more lustful until he was mumbling, "Forget her. Forget her."

When he arrived at the jail, he went directly to the lock up. Henry had at least partially recovered from Gretchen's ministrations. He had been in a holding cell and had been moved, in anticipation of the interview, to a cell with a floor to ceiling metal fence dividing the room. There was no chair and table on Henry's side. He had been slowly pacing three steps one way three steps the other way while he waited for Smith to join him. Denny watched him through a one-way glass window. Observation was the first step. Denny wouldn't enter the room until after Henry had been made to wait until Denny felt the suspect was ready to his trained eye. This interview was deemed necessary before Henry would be allowed to contact a lawyer.

Smith entered the interview room. Henry stopped pacing, fixing his eyes on

Smith.

“Henry Balsac? I am Detective Dennis Smith.” He said after he was seated. The fence separated Henry from the small table with two chairs where Smith sat.

Henry had nothing in his hands. Smith had a pile of papers that he paged through as he spoke, alternately looking at a page then glancing up at Henry. Henry stared down at the detective, never taking his eyes from Denny's face.

“We found you doped and cuffed to your bed late last night. I hope you are feeling better.”

Henry's memory showed him scenes of last night's festivities. He grinned. The waves of drug effects were still flowing within him with longer moments of sense between the nonsense. As he fell to earth again, he felt the anger that was his basic survival instinct return. He stared into the detective's eyes with as much steel as he had.

“You ever wake up in jail? Probably not. It is not possible to imagine the insulting shock I experienced. You will be sued.”

Dennis had heard a nearing infinite number of BS excuses for being arrested. “If you say so. But first, you should know about the charges that we filed to hold you until the DA can determine additional charges for trial.” Denny was searching his papers for a form. “Ah, here it is. You have been charged with a first-degree murder of a local meth dealer named Lucas Krider. Had you ever met him.”

“No.”

“Then this was what? A contract murder, random mayhem?”

“How would I know.”

“Are you claiming insanity?”

“I want to call my attorney.”

“You will have that chance soon. First, I want to be sure I am talking to Henry R. Balsac from Kiev, Ukraine traveling on a French passport. You arrived five days ago on an Air Mirage jet at SFO.”

“Talk to my attorney.”

“We have to identify you. It was you who fired as many as a dozen rounds from a fourth story window across Market Street from the entrance to the South Turk St Alley. True?”

“You are annoying.”

“Humph,” Denny said. He shuffled through the paperwork again. When he finished, he looked at Henry who stood quietly watching the detective. “Says here you probably know what the letters KFF mean. Maybe you considered the eight men who died in that inferno you created to be your employees.”

“Detective, I hope I can call you Detective, I do not belong in here. I have property in The City. My brother Samuel and I own condominium buildings in the best neighborhoods. That alone amounts to tens of millions of dollars we have invested from our international businesses.” Henry said in a calm measured voice. “My portfolio is invested in private prisons and security firms, not only in the US, but elsewhere. These investments are in corporations that contract directly with the National Security Agency. When you check my credentials, you will find I personally work directly for a number of agencies that are part of the NSA.”

“Are you here in one of those capacities?”

“I am sure you are aware that I cannot answer your question in the affirmative or the negative, so I prefer to divert your attention to the most probable causes of this unfortunate event. I know nothing about it except what you have told me. And of course, every cell in this building has a TV tuned to Fox News, so I have heard whatever crap those people want to tell the masses – mostly fantasy for the opinion consumers.”

“You have a theory about who did this?” Denny asked while barely raising his eyes from the paper pile in front of him.

“I am surprised that it is not obvious to you.” Henry shifted his body from a slight slouch to bolt upright. His hands had been still at his side, now they became animated as he explained how the trap was set. “KFF was a gang of thugs who spent their time molesting the elderly, homeless vets who relied on begging to afford their alcohol and illicit drugs. The vets fought back. KFF people began to die. Some of them killed here in your jail. You personally and famously had arrested them for a murder. They died in your jail.” Henry adjusted his posture to give him more space to continue to talk with his hands.

“The newspapers have apparently been full of it for days. Anyway, the vets wanted to end the KFF. KFF brought Molotov cocktails to attack the vets, who apparently knew they were coming and trapped them. The fiery inferno that consumed their lives was caused by a person or persons unknown. The vets are trained snipers. They probably breathe napalm. Put two and two together, et voila, your case is solved.”

“Do you have a name or names?” Smith said as he was writing a note on a sheet ripped from a small pad of paper that he’d pulled from his stack.

“Detective, and I use the term loosely, I am too busy to do your job and mine. I suggest you visit The Vet Center and take names.”

“Thank you for your insightful opinion. It is a pleasure to hear the views of

such an important and informed person of means.” Denny stood as he talked, gathering together his papers, banging them on edge to align them. When he was happy with them, he turned towards the exit. “The next officer you see will assist you in making your call to your attorney. Don't forget you will be charged with eight murder ones. I'm pretty sure that is a record for this jurisdiction. Congratulations.”

He pushed the door open and held it open for his partner Detective Mark Blain to finish the opening interview. Smith handed Blain the note he'd written and left the room. Blain talked as he moved toward the table.

“Mark Blain, detective SFPD. You're Balsac. How can I help you?” As Blain was talking, he read the note.

“Do you know who I am?” Henry began.

“Let me guess. You are the wrongly accused. Like Snow White.” Blain said.

“I will walk out of here in a few hours and finish the business that brought me here. Trust me.” Henry never took his eyes from Blain's face. He spoke confidently. “I am not a Nobody. I can kick ass any day any time.”

“Good to know.” Blain looked at the note Denny gave him. “Sez here, you are a blowhard asshole and that I should tase you if I want to.”

## The Turk St Massacre Site - 2014

Within days of the murders that wiped out the gang known as Kill For Fun or KFF, the S. Turk St Alley became a tourist mecca. The national media had taken a special interest in the Turk St Massacre as it was dubbed. The motive behind the deaths of the eight alleged right-wing thugs, who had been incinerated outside the entrance to The Vet Center, became the object of speculation that would last for several months. When within days of the news of Henry Balsac being charged with the eight murders and the blockbusting facts of his lustrous past became the gossip of two continents, international interest doubled the Eastern European tourist travel into San Francisco.

The alley became legendary. The dreary dead-end alley complete with dumpsters was a photo opportunity. Heavily tattooed east European tourists left flowers at the entrance and took pictures of each other with faux Molotov cocktails in hand, looking, in their imagination, like one of the 'patriots' who were murdered in a conspiracy the makers of which only time would reveal.

From the first reports of a massacre the media lined up for outrage. Military analysts were employed by Fox News and CNN to explain how one man with a rifle could cause such an inferno. Some doubted it could be done, and even so, Obama was to blame. A few got it almost right.

"There are things we don't know and there are things we do know." One such analyst offered. "The eight men carried gas bombs called Molotov cocktails. Each man had four one-quart bombs in their back packs. The shooter waited across Market Street commanding a firing range that included the entire alley. When eight bombs' fuses were lit, he then shot one or more of the bottles to make the explosions that consumed the victims."

"Why didn't they run?"

“The first shot exploded so many bombs at once the alley's exit to Market Street was sealed in flames that reached almost 2000 degrees F.” Fox had diagrams of the alley that showed the gas flames that made escape impossible. “Several of them retreated down the dead-end alley and died there either by suffocation, flames or gun fire. There was nothing to hide behind. The dumpsters had been removed by design. The victims had no chance once the fire began. It was a complete trap. Everything was over in less than half a minute.”

The media had spent large amounts of time discussing every theory of motive.

“Why were they there, in that alley? There was only The Vet Center. Maybe the shooter was a vet. Maybe it was a set up. What explains the shooter being on the scene at that moment? Was this a coordinated attack, an example of domestic terrorism.

“Police are having difficulties identifying all the dead. Searches of the identified dead men's homes turned up right-wing extremist propaganda, but nothing specific to this event has been found as far as the police have informed us. We just don't know enough to understand what motive created this event.”

As The Vet Center and the alley had become an attraction, vendors set up shop outside the alley to sell gruesome souvenirs, scraps of clothing, pictures of the corpses and reading material with the right-wing manifestos the KFF victims said they represented.

It was a circus that drew every manner of citizen to try out their street acts. That the alley was near an entrance to BART and the Metro made it easy for the feeling of carnival to rule the scene. Every so often, some joker would drive by the alley entrance and throw a few M80s at the tourists.

The vets, who depended on the Center for food and other support, were the

animals, others pointed at and took pictures of. In the alley, the door directly into the Center was often blocked by the revelers and looky-loos. A crowd amassed beginning at dawn waiting for the evening hour and the exact moment of the attack to take pictures of the scene.

## Watchers watching

Corporal Al Muniz, John Wright and his Vietnam vet father, Sargent Jonus Wright, watched many hours of media programming on John's TV trying to imagine what the point of all the exposure was. Other seemingly bigger stories were glossed over in favor of more rumor mongering on the part of TV 'journalists'.

"Dad, why haven't any of these people read the local media? Azimov has told the entire story but these guys are missing it." Azimov was the local newspaper's star reporter. She used her connections to find Sarge and expose the Nobodies to the public.

"John, they are still trying to figure out how to blame Obama for mass murder – an impeachable offense according to one of their news models" Sarge laughed.

Corporal Muniz, Sarge's best friend, had heard this all before. It made him nervous. "Maybe that's good. We can return to normal."

Sarge laughed again. "Yeah Al, but this is the new normal."

Sarge and his battle-brother Corporal were tired of the focus being on them. Something new would happen. What it was, was uncertain. The Smilers, the Watchers and the Memory would continue since Nobody owned it. That was the problem Sarge and Corporal felt. They had begun what became the end of KFF who had tormented their brothers and sisters. To them KFF had suffocated in their own trap instead of The Vet Center and its habitués. They had survived a murderous attack.

As they watched and listened it slowly dawned on them that this was the best outcome they could have hoped for.

## **Nobody gets out alive**

One night, days later, at a Tenderloin bar, the Edinburgh Castle Pub, Sarge admitted to John that he wanted to leave The City. Edinburgh had been the only social arena in which the Nobodies and their supporters could meet. The owner was a great fan of a fellow Vet, Sarge. He kept cases of Sarge's favorite non-alcoholic brew on hand.

"Son get me out of here. Fame is not my style. It's one thing to win a battle it's another to become a general. It's not helping me smile."

"Go to Humboldt County." John said. "Stay near Whitethorn. You know, I have a dear friend with a farm and a house big enough for the four of you if Janelle and Charlotte want to go. When things cool off come back." John had 'low friends in high places' as he put it.

A centerpiece of the War on Drugs and the Culture War, the areas residents were under heavy surveillance as they earned a living as pot growers. The area was also the center of non-violent action against destroying the ancient forests and salmon streams the back-to-the-landers loved and the remaining native populations relied upon for survival.

"The hills are safe territory except for marijuana cultivation. The feds fly helicopters all summer and it is sometimes oppressive but my friend with the farm has stayed out of the business, so it is not likely to get more than a cursory flyover."

John loved his father and had stayed with him to care for his ailments which were mental even after his mother, Jonus' wife, had left him after she could take no more.

"It's perfect for you. All your friends with you. Plenty to eat. Good water. Peace and quiet. Give it some thought."

“Thanks, John. I’ll talk to the others.”

## Four Nobodies

The four Smilers sat at their kitchen table, in a small apartment near the 16th St BART. As they did every morning, they sat over a cup of coffee to plan their day. Sarge and Corporal, dressed in black suits, white shirts, ties and polished shoes sat quietly stirring sugar into the not quite hot drink. Their war experiences weighed heavily on their faces on even a normal day. Today they were more serious than that.

Charlotte and Janelle were veteran nurses from the Asian War zone. Dressed in matching flowery dresses, they sat across from each other next to the two men with whom a new life had begun for all of them. They felt trapped in battle again, people were dying, but they were no longer lonely.

The silence they shared that morning had been earned from the trust they had for one another. Each one's eyes met, held and released each other's in turn. There was nothing ceremonial in it but each one smiled a smile for the other. Smiles were complex and simple. It was their art. They were the original Smilers.

Sarge became agitated. The sugar, he thought, as the sweetened caffeine flowed across his tongue. His second cup always had more sugar. "I have been thinking, I need a break from this urban paradise. John knows people in the Emerald Triangle. He said we could leave anytime."

Listening takes time. A person talks while the listeners wait until the talker is done. When done they all wait until one of them needs to talk.

Most of the talking took the form of smiling. Smilers smile the true smiles, they thought. The message is in the muscles not the explanations. The smile speaks for you. That's how it was for them. There were many smiles that speak clearly and wordlessly the nature of communal relationships.

The Emerald Triangle between Mt Shasta, the Mouth of the Klamath River and Point Mendocino includes Humboldt County, four hours north of The City on the Pacific Ocean, forested mountains and big rivers, beaches and bays, a paradise all its own. It was also a cultural battleground. Most days the battle is far away, if you stay in the woods. Except those were the days when the Culture War brought the Drug War to the Triangle with the helicopters and armed cops from places that hated reclusive veterans of America's wars, hippies and pot.

Sarge suspected the same man who forced him into combat in Viet Nam's Iron Triangle started the War that raged in the growing season in the Emerald Triangle. Corporal called it when he said he felt that Somebody was always after his 'Nobody ass.' They read the news. The conversation was of fears of a war zone and of more helicopter raids but with live ammo. They had seen it happen in Asia.

"Sarge," Corporal wanted to remind Sarge, that he was the strongest of the four, but he led with his own strength. "We will love the time in between flyovers. We can guard our backsides watch for people coming over the ridge make sure we are clean beyond suspicion. This just might be a peace we need to make."

Sarge and Corporal had rescued each other again. Sarge thought Corporal was offering help. The farm would save them both, so it was a trade of me for you. That was why they were friends. Corporal Muñoz knew he would have died in the Asian mud if not for his friend. Sarge knew he would have died of grief had Corporal not kept him company at the end of the South Turk Street alley while John was looking for him. They thought they had a lot to smile about.

Charlotte and Janelle listened. They held hands. Longtime friends hold hands and look into each other's eyes without fear. Charlotte saw the decades on Janelle's face and imagined the scars time left on her own. They had lived together for the near fifty years from the height of the war to meeting their

two gentlemen dressed to the nines in The Vet Center. That was a great day. The next day, the women were dressed in matching flowery dresses. It doubled the number of Smilers in the field and led them all to the hope of a peaceful ending to their lives, a significant improvement over what they had assumed was their lot.

Janelle had feelings for Charlotte that surpassed any she felt for anyone else. Corporal was just happy he had such pleasant company in his dreams. Neither spoke about the high ideal of love. That's too difficult to imagine when the scars still ache, and disbelief is running rampant. Janelle loved Charlotte and Corporal. They came from the same place. They knew the vocabulary of war and pain. They knew the meaning of their smiles. Janelle knew Sarge through her loves as a kind man. Love, she thought, like hate was beyond him. What moved him she wondered.

“Sarge,” She asked. “What do you think? Stay here or go?”

“Go.” The old man was enthusiastic. “I want to go to the woods. Nothing happens in the city. Every day seems the same. The seasons change in the woods, if in no way else, I want to see the trees lose leaves. I want to feel the rain clouds blocking the sun. I want to wake with the light and fall asleep with the dark. I want my shoes muddy in the winter and my naked skin tanned in the summer. Maybe I can sleep late or spend a day without any drama.”

His eyes had watered up as he spoke. He remembered the night he wanted to die at the end of the alley. He remembered the odors in the darkness. Charlotte snaked her arms around him. She felt him shudder, but he did not pull away.

They had made their decision.

## **Nobody gets off this planet alive**

John took Sarge to Nikko's Anzu Restaurant for dinner again. They had gone there when Sarge and Corporal began their Smile Campaign over a year ago. Sarge avoided notoriety generally, so the explosion of interest in his friends and the near homeless lives they led made Sarge and Corporal nervous.

Sarge wore his tuxedo. He found it at Goodwill. It was part of his uniform: He was one of the men in black, a Smiler, a Watcher, a part of Memory.

“Son, it is wonderful to sit here with you again. I love this place. For The City it is modest in a rich Asian way, but it screams of yummy and comfort. Have you stayed here?”

“Once.” John stared into his father’s eyes hoping for clues. “Why’d you ask?”

“Can you get the four of us a room? One night. On the internet, you can see how nice the space is.” Sarge said. “I have studied the menu for this restaurant many times when I panhandled. There is one in a case just outside on the sidewalk. I drooled with imagination.” Sarge looked lovingly around the restaurant. “It's perfect. I panhandled outside the door you probably went through to get here. It was the one I went through. As I entered, there was a guy with a cup blocking the door. I knew him.”

“What did you do?”

“I said that I was ten dollars away from where you are.”

“What did he say?”

“Yah but I am the one holding the cup.”

“What did you do?”

“I gave him the ten.”

The waiter arrived and took their drink order: a martini and a tall soda with a twist. Some silence followed as John watched his father’s eyes scan the restaurant.

“Dad, you could be famous you know.” John loved his father, no matter how he looked. “I feel like your agent. I pick up your mail and other things like letters and notes left at The Vet Center. Judging by the interest the Smilers will replace the Boy Scouts and Judy Garland.”

The waiter arrived with the beverages. They ordered dinner, sipped their drinks, enjoyed the atmosphere. Sarge ordered the Shiso Crusted Beef Filet Medallions with black garlic mash, shaved purple cauliflower, baby carrots, pinot noir sauce. He could feel his taste buds enflamed by the idea of a pinot noir sauce.

“I am excited to leave The City.” Sarge announced. “I am a Nobody. That won't change. Even so, I could become a target and all that implies. Wish me well and you can answer the mail for me.”

“I will. But I have a few questions.” John was aware of Sarge’s resistance. His father was not a talker. He had always sought to hide his fears behind his silence.

“Unh. Not good for me. I am too old and stressed.” He saw John’s face object. “OK. Maybe one.”

“OK. What is it?”

“What is what?”

“What happened that made it possible to win the war against KFF?”

“I knew this was trouble.” Sarge sipped his tea and leaned back in his chair. He calmly scanned the room. They had no close neighbors. With an inbreathe, he leaned forward. “Two answers. One: I have no idea. Two: We, the Smilers, only had our faces to communicate with. We did not talk. I don't like to talk to strangers, you know, non-battle zone strangers, that is. We could not talk to anyone. We had no motive, no plan except to smile freely. But things happen anyway, and one thing leads to another. Nobody wanted it to turn out as it did.” Sarge sat back as he finished.

“Ah, the Nobodies, who are the perfect strangers who demand nothing and give the best they have.” John hoped he did not offend Sarge.

“Yup.” Sarge smiled an I-love-you-anyway smile. “Simple as pie. Even with no pie you can smile. A smile is a weapon of peace. Where we were coming from it was all we had. It was our biggest asset.”

“I still don't get it. Nobody smiles. Smilers watch. Watchers report what they see. Memory is what you made. A collective memory of the people involved in watching KFF. Oh. Now I get it. In current politics the past is being erased. Our sense of together is ruined. We can recover by acting as if we could be who we want to be.”

“Unhappy as we were, we managed to smile.” Sarge smiled. “Smiles led to black suits and the rest. Do you have that picture Azimov took of The City Hall steps? I have one here.” He pulled it from his inside coat pocket and spread it out between them.

“A classic. All the Smilers, gnarly homeless vets looking like a choir on the stairs” Azimov's picture was the Sunday front page. A couple hundred Nobodies dressed in suits or flowery dresses, standing like its graduation in neat rows all smiling into the camera.”

“Remember me that way. Fifth row, second from the left.”

The food came. Sarge had focused on the Pinot Noir sauce as if it was his last meal. John watched his father eat, remembering the recent past, seeing his father as a hero. He smiled at the older man with a smile of life renewed and purpose rediscovered.

“Dad, I have been thinking about continuing in your footsteps. I talked to Cynthia Goodall. Her foundations want to help the Smile Campaign go on even without the four of you. People want to form Memory in other communities maybe using internet resources to help the idea spread. Cynthia was very upset by the cop killing that kid in Furgeson. She said a community memory there would bring the situation to a head.”

Sarge shook his head, chewed a new fork load of the purple cabbage. He talked in between swallows “Nobodies are killing Nobodies, allowing the Somebodies to suck them all dry. African Americans were being farmed to benefit the owners of the prisons. Did you know in Furgeson the average household got three tickets or warrants a year? Three. Damn near all the cops were white. The City government was almost all white. The 70% black population was at their mercy. It was business, and I do mean business, as usual. They had no voice.”

Sarge looked around again, leaned forward and whispered. “If someone stood up the cops flattened them. Just like the KFF did here. Probably cops behind KFF too.”

John leaned forward and spoke softly into Sarge’s good ear. “That's what Denny said. He says he has evidence and the names of the corrupt ones.”

“What's he going to do with those names?” Sarge said. “He is a Nobody. He is as visible as he has the comfort to be. His superiors are saying move on. He needs an outside support group. He asked me to help. I told him I was out of here.”

“Hmm. Maybe I should look him up.”

“Last train to SFO, last car, as usual.”

## How it began

To no one's surprise Sarge and his friends headed north leaving the raucous S.F. scene to others. They took a Greyhound bus to Garberville, where one of John's friends took them to their new home in the Humboldt Hills, as John called Whitethorn.

When the four nobodies left, John stayed in The City. He had an idea about how the campaigns his father began might evolve to move the political needle in The City. John called it Nobody's Business.

As John knew the story, Sarge and Corporal dreamed up Nobody. It was a manual to stay alive in a war zone or a city. 'Nobody cares about you' was Sarge's way of describing who he was and how he felt about life. 'Somebody's always after you' was Corporal's way of telling about his experience in war.

After a year of what the vets called the Smiling Campaign did not end in the death of thirteen neo-Nazis, eight of whom died in thirteen seconds in the Turk Street Massacre. It had made the Smilers famous: Men in black suits and women in flowery dresses walking The City during the day and smiling. There was no intention beyond the sharing of the beauty and wonder of life with a free smile.

Nonetheless, the Smilers became the Watchers who met every Thursday night at The Vet Center to share food and download their observations into the Memory which is to say they met and talked about the threats to homeless vets that were rampant around BART stations from The Embarcadero to the SFO airport. The people at the meetings were the Memory. The Watchers watched, listened and remembered what they saw.

The Watchers were watching the KFF, Kill For Fun, a neo-Nazi gang that extorted homeless vets who begged near the stations. They enforced their rule with violence, sometimes beating the men so badly they were

hospitalized. Memory included photos taken by Watchers of the KFF members in action and of their meetings with corrupt cops.

John had been a Watcher during the last days before the KFF murdered one of their own members in a BART train car. Five members were arrested. Four of them were murdered in jail within days of their arrest for their fellow's murder. Then eight more dead from Turk St.

Of the two KFF members remaining, after the Turk St Massacre, one was a protected witness Jeremy Richards the other, Billy O'Neal in the SF County jail charged for the BART murder.

## Good For Somebody

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

He never built a condo like Henry's though. He was jealous and wanted it. Henry was his younger brother and business partner.

Samuel had called the FBI to tell them how to catch him. Now that Henry was safely in jail the coveted condo was closer to being Samuel's.

Samuel afforded the best security, most of it to protect him from his inner circle, including Henry. They guarded him next to invisibly. Gerome Leffingwell, Samuel's personal security director saw to it the way Samuel liked it with security and other more lucrative endeavors.

Henry saw things his own way. Samuel thought him extreme. Henry was impatient preferring to shorten their family members' lives for the sake of speeding the delivery of the family wealth to his pile, rather than to wait for it or even work for it.

Henry and Samuel were close, but Samuel could feel it coming, the day when Henry would turn on him, decide he was dispensable, and get all the money for himself. Samuel could see it in Henry's eyes. He saw it a week ago when Henry arrived from Europe in answer to Samuel's call. Having an assassin for a brother was probably fatal, he thought. He decided to act preemptively. He emailed Henry to set up the murders. In one of the later ones he discussed the last part of the escape route. He bcc'd that one to the FBI. The FBI did the rest.

Samuel Franklin knew a good deal when he saw it. With Henry in prison, he,

Samuel, would keep all the profits. He would double his money with no effort. All Henry did, he figured, was kill and take care of their mother.

He would work on the killing part and the mother part. But first he wanted to inherit his now famous mass murdering brother's condo. When Henry had been in Europe, Samuel had tried to get comfortable in his brother's master bedroom. He didn't feel at home. He thought he might leave without ordering from the menu he found in the bedside table. Then he found the book in that drawer that described how everything worked. He tried a few things. He tried the Champaign. He tried a party drug administered by a lovely woman - in his estimation. He felt awkward. Henry's fixations were not his. Still, it was the exciting place it was designed to be. The only problem with the plan to inherit the condo was that Henry was still alive, just imprisoned, not yet convicted much less executed.

Samuel was proud of the actions he took after five of the KFF were arrested for killing a traitor in their ranks on a late-night BART train. He read the local paper's accounts of the gruesome murder. He used his connections to kill four of the gangsters in their cells. Jail homicides are relatively easy to arrange he found out. Money was the name of the game and he had money.

Later at home while he was sitting in one of his living rooms rolling these thoughts around in his head, his cellphone buzzed. He looked at the number. County Jail it said.

"Henry," he said. "At last. Do you have an attorney? Can I help?" Samuel thought his voice betrayed the smile of victory rather than a deep concern for his brother's unfortunate fate. Henry will not tolerate the fact that Samuel invited him into this.

"My dear brother. I knew I could count on you." Henry whispered into the phone which gave his voice a hissing sound that grated Samuel's ears.

"What can I do?" Samuel freely raised his middle finger to his brother's antic

filled life. Henry in a jail cell left Samuel as free as he's been since he could remember.

"I will be here for years." Henry hissed. "Tell you what. Take my condo. I know you want it. There is a manual for it in the bedside table. It has all the codes for locks etc."

"Henry, I will get the best attorney in the world to get you out. You won't be there long."

"No. I want to stay here. Life in the wild vexes me. My life destroyed me. My death is the most exciting thing left to experience." Henry said.

The thoughts that went through Samuel's head were too embarrassing to say out loud.

"Henry, I, ah."

"Just say thank you."

"Good night, Henry."

Samuel slowly put the phone on the end table. He grinned. Instant gratification, he thought. He stared off into the distant corner of the room.

"He is trying to keep me from killing him." the sound of his own voice made him stand. "No chance."

He sat back down. He began to make a mental list of who he needed to eliminate after his brother was gone. He came up with three names.

"Gerome can fill out a list." He hit GL on his cell's speed dial.

## Two Murderers meet

“Nothing personal.” Henry said when he ‘accidentally’ walked into the tall, tattooed killer as the prisoners were coming back from moving about in the halls. Henry knew him on sight. He was expecting to see him since they were in the same violent felony department of crime.

“Boss. Saw you on the news.” Billy O'Neal thought he was bullet-proof. He was the last of KFF, if you forgot about that traitor Jeremy.

Henry was off his meds. He wanted to kill everyone he saw. This was his normal. He'd been so good lately, in his own estimation, leaving all sorts of people un-killed. He didn't know Billy's name but the demeanor and the body art creeping up onto his face from beneath his clothing made it certain it was KFF's lone jail survivor.

Samuel had told Henry a little about what had happened to the other five arrested for the brutal murder of a mate, another member of KFF. Samuel was bragging for taking up the slack that Henry had ignored.

“Who cares. It's not on you.” Henry spoke in as masculine a way as he could imagine. Jail he thought is a place for acting. He would play insane, when off his meds it was easy. “You know Addy? My lawyer?”

“Mine, too.”

“He's here today. Try and see him. He might have news for you.”

“Boss, I will. I forget his name.”

“Adolph Schultz. A good German.”

Billy made his walk to his cell in silence. He was a celebrity but nothing like Henry. As he approached his cell, he noticed Henry being taken towards the

visitor's area. Ten minutes later, as Billy practiced his yoga breathing, a guard rattled his door.

“Lawyer's here. You're next after Balsac.”

## **The devil made me do it**

An hour passed; Billy mulled his situation over. The lawyer had told him to expect to decide soon about the defense his lawyer would plea. Addy favored the Satan made me do it defense. Henry was Satan. Billy did not want to plead insanity though one look at the BART tapes of the mayhem that ensued leading to a man's brutal death clearly showed he was.

He heard Henry being returned to his cell.

Billy's door opened.

"Your turn." He was escorted by guards to an interview room. Addy was sitting at the table on his side of the room. A metal fence ran down between that table and the table on his side. Billy sat.

"How are you doing Billy?"

"Not well. My mates are all dead. You are still my lawyer. I am still in here."

"Just say the word, asshole, and I am gone."

"I doubt that. You will be killed, and you know it. Remember Satan? He is two cells away from me. He tells me you have a message for me."

"Maybe Satan will be a good witness for you."

"I think he wants me on death row with him."

"That is the message. That's why you both are my clients. Henry wants death row."

"If I am insane, under someone else's control, then I had no choice but to do as I did for fear of my own death. Proof: thirteen others are dead. Almost

everyone. I was nuts temporarily, but I could not be held accountable for my own actions.” Billy began to giggle as he spoke. “What will Henry do?”

“Testify that he is Satan and you were under his control.”

“He is insane; therefore, I am insane?”

“Close. I wondered if you got the picture last time we talked. You have nothing on Henry. He has nothing on you. This could work out well.” Addy stood. Billy stood. Addy was under six feet tall and slim. He liked his physique. Billy was six five. He did nothing but pump iron. He was massive. Addy saw him standing over him. Billy saw fear cross Addy's smiling face despite the safety the fence provided.

Billy turned and walked out of the room. Addy watched him go. Henry better watch out for Billy. He is one scary dude, he thought. But then Henry didn't care.

## **Nobody gets a second chance**

The last BART train to SFO was the new meeting place for the Memory that was originally formed at The Vet Center. The meetings were growing and the space at the Center was no longer large enough to accommodate all the non-vets. With all the attention the alley was getting after the murders The Vet Center was not the lowkey place it had been.

The Last Train Last Car worked as a meeting place. Each BART car holds 200 people maximum. Meetings were held every night as more from other Bay Area communities joined in to see how the Watchers and Memory worked.

The underground train stations became even larger meetings. Nine out of ten people who attended were dressed in black suits or flowery dresses. As word spread the Watchers began to see new people. Who were these new people? They were dressed like Smilers. They smiled. The BART stations beginning with Civic Center became crowded after dark.

As people gathered something new occurred: People began giving short speeches to those on the platforms. The people old and new stood on the platforms waiting for the last train and listened as Smilers stood on the stairs to speak their 5-minute pieces. Many of the new people would eventually stand on the third step off the floor and speak the experience they held into the Memory.

John was in the last car every night. As a rule, he did not talk. Denny was there every night. They often sat apart. This night John sought Denny out and sat next to the detective.

“Detective Smith, I want to help with your investigation. I have some skills as an investigator.” John spoke into Denny’s ear, so he could hear over the noise of the train. “I found Sarge in the Turk St Alley behind the dumpsters after looking for two years. I can do more than I am doing. Can you put me to work?”

“John, your dad is special. He saw it happening in front of him and fearlessly went in for their throats. Do you have that in you?” Denny spoke quickly after the train came to a stop. “The next step will be tricky. To pull the corrupt cops off the force will take a power greater than any of us have. Do you have any ideas about how we can get that power?”

“Nobody watches and has a Memory for everything.” John said.

“Sarge would have said that. Maybe this will work.”

As the train pulled into each station, one or two people rose to their feet and reported what they were seeing as they traveled across The City. There were tales of police brutality, things that needed fixing, great yard sales with low prices and black suits or flowery dresses. This had been going on night after night. Watchers saw and heard things.

This night as the train arrived at the Colma station, a man dressed in black with a white shirt and tie stood. The train stopped. He raised his hand over his head as if to call for the power to speak.

“Memory exists in many places. Human memories exist in other groups. The black community has tales to tell of how we came to be as we are, living in an apartheid state. In this City, it is apartheid even though this is a great liberal city. The Memory says so.” He sat down as the train continued south to SFO.

At South San Francisco, a black woman stood. She wore a flowery dress. She was a Smiler and a Watcher like so many others. Something pulsed through the cars. It was perhaps a realization or the step right before, maybe anticipation.

“The homeless veterans, some black as I am, stopped an evil that was oppressing them by becoming Watchers and Memory. My community is

oppressed. We have Watchers and Memory. We remember how crack took over our streets. We remember how private prisons have increased the arrest of black fathers and sons. More than half of our men have spent time in prison. They cannot vote and cannot get jobs because of it. We remember this.”

The train continued to San Bruno. No one rose to speak. John stood after the doors opened.

“I occupied Wall Street. I occupied my street. Everywhere we occupied the cops came. They were not there to care for us, to listen to us, to join us in our crusades. They were there to move us along, to send us back to our cages. I rise because I want to throw my body on the gears of the machine that sent them to beat us, to gas us, to send us to jail and maybe to prison.”

As the train lurched towards SFO, John sat. Denny gave him a quiet five. “Not all cops are bad.” He said.

“Not all cops are good.” John replied talking directly into his ear.

Denny smiled. Denny knew John had his father's gift.

## **Life in the woods**

John was impressed by history. On the same ballot in California that had the initiative permitting the medical use of marijuana was a measure to allow corporations to control property taxes and thus public education. Both passed.

The changes he saw were bending history towards the end of democracy with important decisions being made by people whose names are not known to the people ill-affected by the decisions taken. Few complained, being, by definition, powerless to alter what they were kept ignorant of, and kept ignorant by the people who benefitted from the decisions made in private.

San Francisco State University was once the center of the radical redefinition of society in the 60's and 70's. People of that era felt their freedoms were more expansive. Their connections with other communities, white and black, were stronger than ever. Many expressions of life were allowed. People occupied the parks and they were allowed to stay. Now the laws are changed, no one has a right to be anywhere, if a cop says move on.

That defined corruption for John. Corruption was the force that took from the Nobodies to enrich the Somebodies.

John remembered his high school years when he was confined by his father's needs. He dreamt about power, a teenage impulse to conquer the world. The remnants of his desire surfaced into the world of Nobody. With his father in the Humboldt Hills, he was as unconfined as he could be for the first time in his life. In a reversal, considering matters of Nobody, he had no confidante other than his father. Two weeks after his father left, John traveled north by car to visit him. He needed Sarge's advice.

Southern Humboldt, as the Garberville area is known, must have been an amazing place before it was logged and re-logged and fished out of salmon

and steelhead. People lived in forests so lush there was a systematic pattern of fog and rain that happened every day in the dark forests, the redwood forests. The tall trees never lost their leaves. The sun was always filtered and rarely was the forest floor in direct sunshine. Life there was connected. Fish went to the ocean and returned to the rivers and streams to spawn and die. This death was of the fish whose bodies had grown large on the nutrients the forests and the Pacific Ocean produced. It grew big fish whose deaths, in turn, fertilized the forests.

The human tide had swept away much of the life of the region, yet there were still 'pretty places' where people lived in the hills, down dirt roads that did not invite strangers. There were No Trespassing signs. There were ruts, unnerving washboards, steep drop-offs without railings and crazy people doing crazy things behind chained and locked gates. All of this and more made life in the sparsely populated hills sheltered and sometimes lonely.

When John came to the end of the road, he parked near a small barn away from the house. The way the yard looked; no car had been closer to the house in a while.

Solar, water and wood provided the energy that cooked their food, heated the house or lit up at night. There was no TV. No freezer. No computer. A Spartan existence to be certain but a free one. Money was not an issue here. Time was. The friends of John that built the place were Buddhists, split wood and carry water kinda people. There were vegetable gardens and small fruit orchards, berries and nut trees, and a fishpond with catfish.

He walked to the front door and knocked. Shouts of surprise were followed by noisy hellos. It was plain to John that Sarge, Charlotte, Corporal and Janelle were happy to see him or anyone for that matter.

The five walked around the gardens and orchards singing the praises of the earth and fruit it grew.

“We could live here forever.” Janelle said to John. “We'd never go hungry.”

“I tried that. I lost weight, but my health improved.” John said. “What I found was my hungers changed. I went back to The City hungry for laughing and other non-material things people produce.”

“John,” She said. “I am hungry for solitude and safety from aggressive cops and gangs of ideologues.”

“You could live happily here forever.” John felt a pulse of jealousy that passed with thoughts of what he was set upon doing before he would dare return here. The Farm it was called. Not huge. A place without neighbors within sight or sound. The farmhouse was a small two-bedroom house built over the years, piece by piece as needed. It began as a kitchen with a bed in it. Now the kitchen took that whole room. The house grew with the addition of a living area, a wood stove, a bedroom and a stair to another bedroom. There were decks and awnings, a hot tub next to a pond that raised the catfish amply surrounded by blackberry bushes. The bears ate those blackberries and the huckleberries that grew wild nearby. It was a Darwinian competition with the humans who shared the bears’ desire for sweet fruit.

To John’s eye Sarge was smitten with the place. At his age the work had to be easy enough and this little world was easy to live in with most food wild or a snap to grow.

“Dad, it is easy to fall in love with the forest and live with the salmon. It is. I spent a few years roaming these hills. I fell in love over and over again.”

“Why did you go back to The City?”

“To be near you.” He said smiling the son-who-loves-his-father smile. Sarge knew. “And because I was hungry and still am.”

“Ah, the hunger for too much humanity? We've been on the farm for almost

two weeks. Corporal and I have had considerable outdoors experience. It is coming in handy.”

“Asian wars?”

“Didn't think of that.” Sarge got that far away look in his eyes. It took a few seconds before his mind returned to the present. “I was thinking about the street life. We have had to endure privations. In two weeks, I have had no desire that was not satisfied in a minute or less. Comfort. Warmth. A neighborhood I understand.”

“I sure don't wish you back in The City. This place was given to me for my lifetime, and now I give it to you for yours.” John hugged his father.

“Two years ago. I was near dead at the end of the alley. You saved me. I am happy.” Sarge hugged his son.

“Dad, Nobody can be happy.” They all laughed at this funny truth.

Conversations were easy. The stories were about the things they learned to do. Charlotte became a pastry chef making a fruit pie every day John was there. Corporal tried a flute. He sat in the woods, mimicked the birds and bugs. Janelle swung in the hammock reading Siddhartha. Her eyes have changed, John thought. In their daily life there wasn't much conversation. Everyone knew what to do without talking. Except John.

“Sarge, I need your help.” He said one day, the day before he had decided to go. “I need to feel free to continue. I need your advice as to how.”

“I can't help you. What Corporal and I did was to start smiling. We had no objective at the time beyond our Nobody's rebellion. We smiled without provocation. We acted out of our reality. Maybe we chose life is a way to put it. Here we are. We went from poverty to heaven, smiling all the way.”

“KFF. What about that? Do you have a new revelation? In The City, you were unsure.”

“Yeah, I do. Don't mess with Nobody. We went from smiling to watching. Then from Watching to Memory. That was where the power was. We had pictures, proof of our oppression. Then we were lucky. We messed with a few of them and they broke ranks. It all came from that conversation you and I had about action and safety.”

“Oh, yeah. I remember that. You arrested slash kidnapped someone.” John said with humor in his voice.

“Yes. He was the BART murder victim a few days later. Set off the cascade that led to the massacre. We were lucky again when we caught the boss on camera as he was trying to photograph us.” Sarge flashed the smile of a warrior at peace.

“Denny is working the corruption angle for all he's worth.”

“Join him. Make what he needs happen to uncover the corruption.”

John hadn't known what he wanted or needed from his father until he heard the words. He thanked his father and rushed to his journal to record the sensations he felt.

## The Last Train Last Car

The Embarcadero Station, the first station after the tunnel, under the San Francisco Bay, from Oakland and the East Bay began to fill with watchers at about 11:30 PM. They stood in groups talking as they waited for the next train to arrive. Because the Last Train had been so full BART put more trains in service making the Last Train later and longer. The time it would arrive was 1:02 in the morning.

Few passengers other than the uniformly dressed Smilers came and went on whatever business moved them. About midnight, a man and a woman dressed in Smiler garb rose to the third step of the stair that went down to the platform floor from the turnstile area above. This was the third night they spoke. Tonight, many people had come early to hear more of the Memory the black community kept about their life in The City.

“Last night we described the rise of crack cocaine in the community. There is nothing more devastating to a community than the scourge of illegal drug use especially a drug which is highly addictive. Able bodied, well intentioned neighbors became weak and secretive, abandoning their duties to their families leaving children at home alone. There’s more harm to the family, but you know that already.” The black man said. He stood tall. He had a good eye, he smiled even as he said words the true meanings of which, his personal meanings, brought tears to his eyes. Then she talked, a woman in a flowery dress whose face told the truth about lost children and a long-time suffering. She smiled as she began.

“Tonight, we spend five minutes on the next tragedy. In the drug war, minorities have become profit centers for prisons and police. The drug laws were ratcheted up so that teenagers are sent to prison for life for possessing a controlled substance. We all know people, our people, in prison for life for marijuana convictions.

“Do the crime. Do the time.” She said. “Taxation without representation. We made no such laws that resulted in a disproportionate number of our community imprisoned in private prisons. We did not control the flow of drugs into our communities, yet we paid the price. There were laws to enforce and enforcers to enforce them. Instead of stopping the flow, the enforcers harvested our brothers and fathers and sons to fill cells to move tax revenue into private hands.”

Another woman stood to take her place.

“Stop the flow of drugs and we stop the flow to prisons. Stop the flow to prisons and our community can recover from this 35-yearlong assault. Someone says, even so, you could have benefited from capitalism and white rule. We'll remark tomorrow night about how that went.”

They walked down the three stairs when they finished. A tall white man stood next and climbed the stairs. Others would follow telling stories into Memory.

John walked slowly from one end of the platform to the other. He knew the problem of re-establishing fairness required an end to racism because stoking the anti-otherness in individuals allowed corruption to thrive. What racist would not support who ever introduced crack into black communities to create large numbers of new prisoners, too many for government prisons to handle without help from the so-called private sector, such as hotel corporations, building prisons guaranteed to have maximum occupation. The ‘rent’ paid for by the government? He knew few white people questioned the way money flowed from taxpayer to prison corporation or why.

Denny caught him as he approached the end of the platform lost in thought, wondering how a white man like him could be effective in reversing the trend towards filling jails and prisons with black men and women.

“Hey, Bro, Wassas?”

“Denny.” He said as he was startled from his meditations. “Wassa? My head hurts.”

“Nothing new, I’ll bet.” Denny paused and considered what his friend John might be so wrapped up in. “Want to talk?”

“I am struck with the futility and then, how could I not be, if the world is anything if it is consistently unfair. It’s a weight ...” John spoke with a sadness like a drape over the corpse of his childhood dreams.

“A burden we carry. The unfairness is the problem we are supposed to solve not enhance.” Denny spoke outside his realm of murder cop. He knew the dead better than almost everyone. He knew their age, sex, and color. He knew how they got dead. He drank every night after work trying to find an alternate world where everything was okay, since it is not in this one.

The train came. They boarded the last car. Silence followed as their moment of reality soaked into their minds.

## **Nobody No Way**

Sarge woke suddenly, a feeling of fright, his eyes searching the darkness for clues for his alarm.

“Dreaming. Jonus lie back down. I'll hug you.” Charlotte's quiet voice broke his rigid body into the supple one that relaxed onto the bed again. She hugged him slowly inching closer surrounding him with the safety he craved, but in degrees to not startle him into defensiveness. She thought she did this for him because she could, a gift for someone who needed someone to do this for him. It was love she said. He might have used the word once; she did not remember the time. He gave her everything he had to make her life content. She hugged him with grateful hugs returning kind for kind. They went back to sleep.

The sun brightened the morning from the edges of the eastern horizon. The roosters crowed. A breeze rustled the leaves. The mice went to sleep. The cats begged for food. Another day began.

“I dreamed a dream I have a hard time with.” Sarge said as she listened to the cats beg.

“Tell me.” Charlotte said as she woke her energies for the new day.

“I throw something. A baseball, a grenade, maybe. I watch it knowing ever more fearfully that I am the target of my own weapon.”

“The wheel of Karma.” Charlotte said.

“Yikes. I remember that. Something like what goes around comes around.”

“Guess, so.” Charlotte had the same sense of what goes around comes around.

“What should I do?”

“Do some good.” Charlotte gave him a three count to respond. “Look honey, we took a big step out, coming out of The City for the near wilderness experience. Takes time to adjust.”

“John told me to expand to go beyond my reach, to listen to myself.” Sarge sighed in relief at hearing a good idea. “I don't understand what he meant. I thought I would figure it out. I don't want to be a burden. I am 70 next month. Seven. Zero. When I was 30, I thought I wouldn't see 35. Almost right, but here I am.”

“You are here and now. The past happened, now is here.” Charlotte rolled over to look at his face.

“I have no reason to be here and now. There and then I did, but now I am unable to be here now.” Charlotte giggled when she heard him speak this way.

“We sound like two old hippies.” She said.

“Must be the smoke in the air.”

“Would you like some? John told me where it is. And the rest of it.” Charlotte said.

“Heard it's good to overcome the PTSD panic.”

“Some say.”

“OK.” They rose to feed the cats and each other. Once all were fed a return to their past conversations brought out a small tin, taped shut.

Charlotte introduced the box to the others. “Look what I found under the

catnip?”

“No. Where did it come from?” Janelle grinned as she talked. “I heard you talking. I hoped I heard right. We live in a great place with the space to expand ourselves. Maybe my reluctance will be overcome by the flavor of smoke in my mind.”

Corporal laughed and called her a poet. She laughed and kissed his hands. Janelle opened the box and laid out its contents: a pipe, a lighter and several small bags containing greenish grey organic substances.

None of them had ever smoked anything but cigarettes since they left Viet Nam. They stared down at what must have felt like an abundance of wealth in their minds.

## 2015 And God created Exxon

Jesus Saves, the sign says. The TV minister was pointing at the sign and laughing as he did.

“Do you think Jesus is so foolish that he would save your soul just to let you die of hunger? That's not the Jesus I know. He wants you to be great, to prosper. He led his people to control both Houses of Congress. He blessed the members with the wisdom to declare The Prosperity Gospel and Dominionism the law of the land. Then the antichrist raised his ugly head and vetoed God's law.”

The TV minister was working himself up to his money pitch. “Obama is your enemy and he must be defeated by you. Jesus talked to me after Satan's veto, his voice filled my head. He said, Bill, tell your audience the time is now. Every dollar they send to spread the name of Jesus, will be returned to them tenfold by the end of the week.”

John pressed the mute button. He hurried about his apartment. He left to meet the last train. As he walked, he remembered something he said before the murders began.

“What is the point? We smile and watch. They raise and spend billions to keep people scowling.” He was talking to the Thursday Night meeting of Memory the week before the Turk Street Massacre. “This next election is an initiative that declares the Prosperity Gospel to be the law of the land and another that declares corporations who are already powerful to be created by God and thus free from all man-made laws.”

He reached the station and the last train. He sat next to Denny, his nerves jumping. He had said something important. He felt it but was having trouble identifying what it was. The movie Z, one of his father's favorites, was running at breakneck speed through his mind. Caution might be in order.

“Sarge was right.” He said as the train sped towards the airport. “Rebel against oppression, do not raise your fist, they will break your arm, just smile at the other oppressed. They cannot kill smiling. The bastards.”

“Potty mouth.” Detective Smith said. “I could have told you that. Think about the movies. The cops are deranged. The criminals are meaningless. You could catch every one of them, cops included, and not make the world better. On second thought forget about the movies. Think about the people who are seeing death damn near every day and no one is there to help them.”

They endured the oppressive noise the train made that rendered speech near impossible. As they pulled into the 16<sup>th</sup> Street station, some silence returned.

“Denny, I think I have a plan.”

“Plans can kill.”

“This one will not.” John said. “At least not me.”

Denny offered a scowl in return. “Where have I heard that before? OK. I’ll bite. What’s the plan?”

“We have the photos of BART officials being in on the KFF loot taken from the vets. If we all press for indictments and interrogations, we might be able to crack open the pot of gold feeding the corruption.”

“That’s a plan. Who brings things to the fore? I have documents that identify some of the bad actors. Add the photos and it smells like a plan.”

“It’s the next step in a bigger plan.”

“This will not make any friends for me in the department.” Denny looked this way and that searching for another idea. A look of resignation crossed his

face and then one of resolve. "Let's get started."

## Back and Forth

The next day John drove in the early morning darkness north to the Farm. His mission was to bring the four old vets south again to help with the Plan or at least the part he promised to deliver to Denny.

Denny had his own set of information including some inside information about the corrupt cops who worked the KFF gang. John knew there were photos and he would need Sarge to help.

He arrived as the mice were going to sleep and the four were in their favorite spots waiting for the sunrise colors to brighten up their day. The surprise of his arrival was the cause for great celebration. The four had already enjoyed the pleasures of a morning puff so the hilarity of the moment lasted longer than it might have.

Sarge noticed that John had not explained his appearance, but he had his own idea about what it was about. He had been waiting for his son. It was a matter of time if John and Denny got along well enough, they would seek the photos the Watchers had taken of the KFF and the cops interfacing.

“John, do you want just me or everyone?” As Sarge talked Corporal joined them.

“Dad, you are amazing. The photos...”

Corporal had figured it out days ago. He and Sarge talked it through and decided that it was a tough decision for the women. They might not want to go back so soon after finding such a peaceful way to live free of the chaos the City presented them. They still had their apartment in the Mission. It would not be hard to uproot themselves again if only for a few days.

“We are ready to go.” Corporal spoke with the voice of a commander not a corporal. “We will need to keep a low profile. Maybe a separate place to

sleep in case we have been found out. Maybe Cynthia can help but I am for getting this part over. Let the fireworks begin.”

No one else spoke and in minutes they were heading back south to the City.

The room they found was close to the marina. John paid for three nights hoping Sarge and Corporal could do their thing quickly.

As soon as Charlotte and Janelle were comfortable on the balcony the men left. The plan was to go to a safe apartment near Hastings in the Tenderloin, gather the pictures from Brad and Sarge and Corporal would work to find the best ones to indict the cops who had been corrupted by the money the KFF scam raised.

## The Photos

Corporal answered the knock on the door. Sarge would not have knocked he thought. When he opened the door, he was not surprised to see Janelle's face smiling at him.

"I missed you." She said as she handed him the morning paper. It had a front-page story by Azimov about the search for the corruption that must have caused the KFF mayhem.

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

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

"That is impressive."

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

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

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

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

“I'm on it.”

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

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

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

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

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

A two block walk behind them. Their package delivered. They stood at the main entrance to the Tower as Brad's building was known.

“Dinner?” He said.

“Let's go.”

“Vet Center?”

“Best food in this part of town.”

“May I take your arm?”

“Of course.” She said. “Al, why did you never marry anyone?”

“Same as you, I'll bet.” He squeezed her closer to his side. “Present company excluded, I never met anyone who had a chance to be both with me and happy to be with me.”

“Maybe we should ...”

“Yeah? I thought that thought after you two moved out before we went to the Farm. That's when things got busy as all get out.”

“Think that thought again. OK.”

“You really are lonely, aren't you?”

“Not this minute, but I keep thinking about tomorrow. I want to wake up next to you.”

## **We the people**

Brad, Janelle, Corporal, Sarge, John, Charlotte, Stevie, Denny, Gretchen, Azimov were in one room in a location chosen by Cynthia. Sarge had spent the day contacting each one to be sure they would be up for this meeting.

Cynthia had been prepared for the moment when they would meet in secret to plot what was to be done. The room was in a bank building down the street from the foundation office she directed. She thought that no one in the bank was likely to listen in and if they did, they were unlikely to be impressed by the content.

Denny would lead the meeting. Brad would bring the photos. Azimov would write timely stories to continue what the TV had been blaring for days but this time name names. The rest were Nobodies and Watchers. Some had taken the photos that were the underlying evidence.

“I am here to work with you to make a decision about what we know and how certain we are that we are right to make allegations against each of these well-connected men.” Denny was standing while the others sat at a table big enough to hold them all.

Brad offered the packet of photos to Sarge. Sarge opened the envelope and handed the photos to Corporal.

“Al, tell us about the photos and why you and Janelle chose them.”

“We found many different people meeting KFF’ers. We had numerous photos of a few people. These are the ones we have here.”

The meeting did not last long. Azimov wished she could jump right in and take the photos for tomorrow’s paper, but she knew she had to follow Denny’s lead.

Once the photos were in Denny's hands the meeting was over. The plan had been implemented. The evidence was going to fly up the chain of command. John would secret the four back to safe turf while Denny and Azimov handled the media end.

There was a belief that the proverbial shit would hit the fan within hours. The hugs and well wishes touched everyone who had dared to fight back with smiles, open eyes and the company of Memory.

It was the best day for Memory in memory.

## Backlash

BART Security Director Stuart Crandall was white with anger. He hung up the phone, stood up, slammed his fists on his desktop upsetting his coffee and brandy that years ago he substituted for food at breakfast.

Director Stuart Crandall and Chief Ogden Branch were the number one and two in BART security.

The Watcher's Memory had uncovered three photo sets of each gentleman on three occasions each passing an envelope to a different KFF member and receiving a much larger envelope in return.

On the phone, Branch told Crandall that these photos had risen through many hands to reach the ethics committee's front door. Crandall at least had a warning from Branch who sat on the committee where the shoe was about to fall. A hearing was called for that afternoon. Crandall was being summoned.

At the meeting, Crandall, alone with the committee, took the dais.

"My friends," He said after he was told the issue and shown one of the photos. "Is this all the fuss? I'm sure this is a photo shop job. Why would anyone want to do this to me? That's where I am going with it."

The four officers of the five departments associated with law enforcement nodded as he spoke. One of them, the Fire Chief pulled another photo out of a folder. It was from the series of three. It was Crandall again with a different KFF member in another station exchanging envelopes. In these pictures, Crandall has pulled open the envelope he received and pulled a bundle of bills into view. In the other picture the KFF member, Lucas Krider, the meth dealer, had pulled a fistful of dime bags out of his newly received envelope.

"Ditto." Crandall said.

The third set got the same reaction.

“We have also been given the names and disposition of the three KFF men seen in the photographs. One died in jail of an overdose. The others in the Turk Street massacre.”

“Where did this come from? I want to know who is slandering me. I will have their asses.”

“No worries.” the Fire Chief said. “The District Attorney's office shared these with us so we could understand the indictment that is going to be served on you as you leave this room. I understand you will be perp walked as you leave the building.”

“Preposterous.” Crandall said in a rage.

“We can give you the opportunity to resign immediately before you are disgraced, if not we will fire you after the walk.”

Crandall looked around at the faces of the men about to dismiss him. His contact was the fifth member of the committee, but the missing man.

“Where's Chief Ogden Branch? He sees things my way.”

“He was here before you. He is in a nearby waiting room.” The Fire Chief didn't tell Crandall that there was a struggle over a gun as Branch was attempting suicide. He was now in handcuffs and sedated. “He took it badly. He is sedated, and we are still waiting for his response.”

The Fire Chief waved at a clerk and the clerk opened a nearby door to let Detective Denny Smith in.

“Detective Smith will take custody of you for corruption and engaging in a

fraudulent scheme involving the conduct of a felony.”

“Mr. Crandall, you have a right ...” Denny began.

“Shut up, Smith. I wave my rights to make you stop.” Crandall stood, and Smith stepped forward to handcuff him.

“Have it your way. Cameras await you.”

“Nah., I resign. Where's the paperwork.”

“Sorry, too late.” Smith said as he pulled Crandall out the door Smith had entered. Smith led him out the door to the Civic Center exit, walked him two doors down and into the police headquarters. In between was every media outlet with a camera snapping and taping Crandall in cuffs for the news at 6.

Denny walked behind the glowering Crandall. His I-got-him smile beaming across Crandall's shoulder. That was the picture that accompanied Azimov's front page story.

## Someone's scheme has died

Later that night Denny and John watched the Cable news media at a fusion bar in the Sunset District.

"Sushi's good here." John said. "People who live in this area are all fogheads and a little grim by nature but occasionally, the sun's out and everything is shiny and newish looking again. It's a great moment. There even may be dancing in the streets."

They both got a chuckle from the thought of such an idea being true. They ordered a few sushi rolls and small cups of Saki. The TVs drew their attention again. Their food and drink arrived as they were engrossed in watching Detective Dennis Smith smile into the camera, as the talking heads hemmed and hawed about what this arrest portended.

"I like the TV news." Denny said. John knew Denny was being sarcastic unless there was a value for him in it.

"You are gaining some fame, no doubt. It could be the end of a Nobody."

"The corruption is way more than those two. I have more names." Denny sipped his Saki. "We can say the BART scheme is D-E-A-D. But there are others doing other, just as horrible, things."

John was part of Memory. He was a witness to very little, but a part of something bigger than his experience. "The BART scheme had a Somebody involved. The guys you have in jail aren't they Somebody?"

"Henry? He may be the boss." Denny ate a bite of sushi.

"I don't know how I know this, maybe from you, but his attorney is the same as Billy O'Neal's. How'd that happen. Somebody did that. That's what I'm

talking about.” John waved his hand in front of his face and then squeezed his nose. “Wow. The wasabi got me.”

He sipped his Saki. Denny filled in while John recovered.

“I knew that they had the same attorney. Hmm?” He pulled his cell from his pocket and texted half a dozen words. He looked at John enjoying himself. He listened to the restaurant's music, some classical tune he couldn't identify. “Whose music are we listening to?”

“This place is called Vivaldi's Sushi and Wine. It has been here about two months. I've been here three times counting now and that piece has been playing every time.”

The music played. The food was good. They ate and drank, watching people come and go.

“I miss her.”

“Uh oh, Denny. That scares me. Who you talking about? Not Gretchen.”

“Gretchen. I miss her.”

“She said about a hundred words to you and now you're hooked? Nah.” John wanted to laugh but he could see a yearning in his new friend's eyes. “I should tell you; we are friends. Last time she was here we were together.”

“Sorry, not a big deal. I will get over it.”

“No, you won't. We are old friends and flexible, if you know what I mean.”

Denny had a faraway look in his eyes, looking for a happy day ahead.

“Den, you are tired. You need sleep. Me, too. I am going home. Want to

travel together?”

“I'll get a cab.”

“I like the Metro.” John said. “Something has been bugging me. Where did Gretchen come from to show up in the exact right place at the wrong time? Did you call in the Feds?”

“John, that is not in the manual for case management. No.”

“Then how did she get into Henry's world?”

“Don't know.”

“Well, see ya' round the BART.”

“Night.” Denny sat ordered another Saki. He stared for a while, then pulled out his wallet and out of his wallet he pulled her card. He turned it over in his hand. He reached for his phone and dialed her number.

It was eight thirty at night. He thought she would be gone, and he would leave a message.

She answered. “Gretch.”

“Denny.”

“Help me.”

“SFPD Henry Balsac.”

“Detective Smith, I presume.”

“Exactly.”

“How can I help?”

“Two things. One, how did you become involved in the Balsac thing?”

“And number two.”

“Can we get together tonight.”

“Well put. One is easy. I cannot share that information with you. Number two, is harder. I am in DC so if you are in DC ...”

“No. West coast watching the last of the sunset.”

“As for number two. I am indisposed as it were. I missed my period and now I face that grim task.”

“Or not if you love him.”

“Not me. He is too left and annoying at times.”

“Can we go back to number one. If you cannot tell me, then someone informed on him.”

“Logic.”

“Law enforcement is not an informer, so it was a citizen. Therefore, it was someone who knew what he was going to do and where he would go after.”

“Brilliant.”

“Who?”

“That's the part I cannot tell.”

“How interesting. There is a Somebody. Thanks for the info and I wish you the best.”

“Thanks Denny.” He listened as her breath rushed across the speaker in her phone. He felt it tickle his ear. Now what, he thought. Gotta get over this.

He called John. He must have been in a tube or something. It went to voice mail. He left a message. “You were right about Gretchen. I think she is pregnant. Congratulations.”

## **When Somebody Goes to War**

Samuel had been in the military. He liked to think he understood what the mission was. As an officer, he was trained in intelligence work. He liked intelligence work. He especially liked the idea of interrogation of an enemy combatant. He was in Kuwait interrogating men who had nothing in common with him. They were not tall, not particularly muscular, and not white. He didn't call them dogs. He had other, more personal insults, less verbal, more physical. He liked it rough. He was a master at using electricity to loosen tongues to speak in any language.

His favorite memory was of an old man who no doubt had many secrets. Samuel hooked him up to his apparatus and without an interpreter, without asking a question, he simply let 'er rip. The old man started talking immediately after the first jolt. Samuel had hoped for some resistance. He fired another blast through the man's nervous system. The victim immediately changed languages, now speaking French instead of Kuwaiti. Another jolt got him German. Samuel spoke some French but otherwise it was all for naught. Another officer in the room speaking Standard Arabic determined the old man was a spy for Kuwaiti royalty and had been yelling that information at the top of his lungs. Even in French this had no effect on Samuel. He packed up his gear and headed to the next interrogation.

When the war halted, he joined Henry in the family businesses. At the time, Europe's borders were changing. Armed groups were moving around the Ukraine region attempting to drive ethnic enemies apart so that some clean land would be formed for the real Ukrainians. Samuel and Henry were not Ukrainians. Their mother was. Samuel was American. Henry was French. Mother knew how to get around in the world. She was special that way.

In the ten years, he had been a civilian he had grown very wealthy. The family businesses were very lucrative. Arming the Ukrainians had netted half a billion dollars. As an American ex-military, he got a front row position for every eastern European contract.

His brother liked crime. Henry preferred vices, especially the ones that attracted violent men and very kinky women. Not everyone could enjoy Henry's pleasures. He searched the world over for the enclaves of like spirited people and wherever he found them he built a business to provide what they desired. When he came to The City, he built his condo. The two of them bought the building through their partnerships. Henry had taken management and the kinky menu under his wing. He made it to his tastes.

After things cooled down temporarily in Europe, Samuel headed home to San Francisco. He wanted to arm whites to fight blacks. He saw it as a niche business. He began slowly working his way up into the circle that ruled the National Rifle Association. From there he bought out a Marine General for his share of a private prison corporation aptly named PPC. His aim was to control Stratfor and Xi who were odds on favorite for the private worldwide leader in enhanced interrogations.

His thoughts returned to his walk across The City from his bay front condos to Henry's special place near the Opera House on Van Ness. It was a long trudge through a rough part of town. He looked around and he knew he was glad to be packing his Glock. As he approached the Civic Center, he turned north to go to his favorite pub, The Edinburgh Castle Pub, for a beer to help him go the last mile.

## **Nobody Has a Name**

When Samuel finally reached Henry's condo, he felt differently this time. Samuel knew it was all his. He walked out onto the sixth-floor roof top balcony that had a commanding cultural and governmental view: Opera House, City Hall and the State and Federal courthouses were directly in his view. The jail where Henry lived was a sliver seen between two taller buildings.

He went back inside found some champagne in the fridge poured a flute full and went to the chair beside which was the end table with the manual. He sat and read the manual with all its playful suggestions about various equipment and techniques. Henry must have been busy. It would take Samuel a lifetime to try half of this stuff.

Then he read the menus: Food and Service. Food was good. The condo had a chef on site 24/7. The services were unique and mundane. Back scratching was one service. Meditation was another. Tickling, licking, dressups and role playing. On and on it went until Samuel muttered and rose to get more wine.

The sun had set out of view behind the buildings above and behind him as he sat studying the playground rules the manual assured him would keep him and the condo safe from official notice.

He picked up the house phone, pressed menu and the chef answered.

“Yes, Sir, the specials tonight include Filet Mignon with asparagus and watermelon in a sauce of ...”

“Do you have fresh lobster?”

“Yes.”

“I will have that and scalloped potatoes. I want it exactly at 8 PM, delivered

by a nude model named Sara. Can you do that?"

Assured it was doable, Samuel hung up the phone and waited for his pleasures to arrive.

When Samuel decided he would stay in San Francisco with all its quaint liberal tendencies, he chose to do so because the blacks had been bested. Oakland was different. The City had been tamed by past generations. It was safe ground for supremacists such as himself. The cops had not tried to stop him when he built the KFF. He was hoping the members would grow into a force to be reckoned with. "Oh, well." He muttered.

He had no one he could talk to about his life's work. He spent many hours talking to himself. As he was noticing his solitude, a very beautiful Sara arrived with the lobster. She had red hair. He liked red hair. She laid out his meal at the dining room table.

"Anything else?" She said. She smiled.

The smile made him look at her.

"How old are you, Sara?"

"Forty-three."

"I'm forty-nine. I imagined they'd send someone younger. Have you worked here long?"

"I knew the last owner of this condo."

"What was he like?"

"Professional duty, sorry."

Samuel grinned. "A good practice I'm sure."

"It is a rule. Did you read the manual?"

"Yes. Sorry I asked. Curiosity I guess." Samuel sounded over it, but he never gave up. "Could you show me?"

"The rule is you order the service you want. The people below will send the service provider right for you." Sara smiled a smile only a naked, slightly pregnant redhead dominating a larger man could smile.

She excused herself and went out of the condo. He picked up the phone. Changed his mind, deciding to take things slowly. He liked Sara. Maybe he would order and get her one day, he thought. He ate. He drank. He mulled over his options. He tired of his own company.

Thinking he wanted the sound of human voices he headed back out towards the Edinburgh Castle Pub. This wasn't really his neighborhood. With his size he was unconcerned and, of course, the Glock.

As he hit the sidewalk, he saw her waiting at a bus stop.

"Sara." He said as loudly as he thought necessary.

She didn't turn. He walked towards her saying her name again as he neared her. That's not her name, he realized. He stood next to her as if he wanted the bus, too. She turned to look at him.

"No." She said.

"What?"

"There's a rule."

“I hate that rule and will change it by morning.”

“What's your name?”

“Samuel.”

“You mean Colonel Samuel Someone ex-military, not Marines, Army, maybe Iraq War One with no battlefield experience.”

“Franklin. What is your name?”

“Top secret.”

“You are funny. I'll see you later.” He said as he walked across Van Ness on his way to a small brandy and maybe a cigar.

## **Nobody Gets the Goods**

Denny walked home from his office. He needed to think. His phone toned a text.

“Henry bro Samuel Franklin mean sob at heart.”

He texted back, “Franklin. Good. Saves six months. Thanks. See you?”

“Still preggo. Give me a year.”

Denny snorted. Guess it's not you babe, he thought, gotta move on.

Smith was dark skinned. He was considered black. He said he passed for black. He felt himself to be different. Avoiding the black experience of the system that destroyed the black community made him unusual. He still had problems because of his color. When he walked home, he would be profiled. He wore his badge in plain view. It made those stops easier. But he was an escapee from the major oppression, nonetheless.

The Watchers and Memory were getting a large participation from his brothers and sisters. He wanted to help.

The next morning, he walked back to his office, drinking the fog for breakfast.

His memory was crowded with this new way of seeing the effects of corporate control. Whites are taught every Saturday to fear blacks, tune into cable TV where images of angry black felons being arrested by white cops are broadcast week after week. There is more: Religious fundamentalism is at the core of racism. Clannish and exclusive, TV hucksters and faux religionists preach lessons claiming other humans were not god's people or American.

Corporations were adopting religious fundamentalism into their business model since it justifies racism, greed, lying and murder. Prisons were being built to house citizens of color caught up in the drug war. The detective had been part of the crack down on crack in the black communities. Sentences had skyrocketed producing a steady stream of 'guests' and prison labor to the private prisons whose corporate stock was providing tidy profits to the banks and institutions known as Wall Street.

He sat at his desk remembering the faces of the dead that had crossed his desk during that time. No one was smiling.

“Hey Smith.” Blain said as he walked towards Smith's desk. “Daydreaming? Thinking about someone soft and willing? That's my guess.”

“I wish. I was praying for a raise. No pun intended.”

“What's going on with the KFF case? Did you close it yet?”

As Denny started to tell him about Franklin, he was interrupted.

“Nothing. Nobody cares except you. Get it?” Blain was red-faced. “You and that bullshit. Hope you didn't mortgage your mother's house to join the new religion.”

“Blain, you need help.”

“No, you do.” Blain said. “Saw it this morning, maybe fifty black clad blacks. Women in those damn dresses. Walking. I circled the block. They were everywhere. They were heading for a church. Reform Bible Baptist on Diviz. Know the place?”

“I thump not.”

“Lest ye be thumped.”

“Not funny. What are you up to?”

“I'm working a homeless murder. Thanks to your friends, no doubt.” Blain said.

“I'm sure you'll do a fine job.” Denny responded. Blain moved on and Smith checked his email for traces of who and where re: Samuel Franklin.

“Nope.” he mumbled. “Hmmm.” An email from the FBI popped onto his screen.

“I looked for his profile. Very light on specifics. You won't find anything. His property holdings are in an LLC called King's Fraternal Fund. Attached is our list of same.” from the Scarlett Harlett, or so it said.

He was thinking about her alias when his phone toned a text.

“Damn, it's her.” He opened it.

“Samuel likes guns. He sells them to interested parties in civil war situations. Attached is his photo.”

Denny was never going to be a true professional if this weird agent from the dark side attracted him. He swore her off again.

His return text: “Go get 'em tiger.”

“For what?”

“Point for Scarlett.”

“He is yours.” She texted back.

He wrote "But not you." He studied it. He deleted it. He downloaded the attachments, printed the photo and pinned it on the board behind him. He was putting his gear together for a day on the streets looking at this guy's scene, building by building, when the homicide department chief stopped at his desk.

"Why is that there?" He asked pointing at the photo.

"Trying to find out who he is. Know him? He might be related to the Turk Street Mass..."

"Ah. Stand down soldier. Remember you were told to wrap up that case and move on. I see nothing keeping you from moving on, do you?"

"No, Sir." The Chief moved on and so did Denny, out the door down to his car. In less than ten minutes he was standing in front of the building Agent Gretchen had led him to the night they arrested Henry Balsac for the eight Turk Street murders. In under two weeks he had arrested the perps in the two most publicly gruesome murders in The City's recent history. He got no props. He got told to stay in his room.

"Nothing new here." He mumbled when he saw Samuel standing at a bus stop Van Ness with the Scarlett Harlett. He knew to leave and not leer. The rest of the properties were even more not interesting.

## Last Train Again

The third step easily held the weight of the five vets who stood on it. The black and flowery clad men and women stood on the boarding platform below waiting for the train, listening to a five-minute riff on the role of the military in controlling the teenage population.

John stood with the other watchers, looking over heads to see the speakers taking turns with one-minute pieces of observation.

“I woke one day in a ditch in my little hometown of Cedar, Michigan. I had partied late, spent all my money. I had no job except working on my father's farm and now I had nothing. He kicked me out for drinking and that was that. I joined the Army the next afternoon.”

“There are choices.” Another began. “Jail or the military. Already angry, already violent in intention. It is a no brainer. One more arrest would be too many. Now or never. Prison could be a death sentence. The streets could be a death sentence. Teamwork, combat, sounded fun by contrast, a chance to gain some cred. Maybe a job with a security firm, if I survived.”

They went on for the full five minutes. Then without applause or ceremony the five walked down the three stairs to join the others to listen to the next speaker.

John watched. He listened and heard his father's voice amongst them as if his father had a doppelganger. He knew there were only a few stories that covered most of the vets. One joined, or one was drafted when there was a draft. Joining came at the end of only a few processes. Sarge had joined. His reasons he had not shared with John, but it must have included patriotic feelings. As Sarge's friend Corporal was fond of saying his country was his first love and look how that turned out.

The next speakers talked about the experience of poverty. The stories

seemed endless, each one needed to be heard to be remembered and memory, the sake of memory, motivated each speaker.

The Embarcadero Station had never been so busy so late.

The train arrived, and the last cars quickly became filled to capacity. The place everyone desired was the last car. The Watchers had grown to fill the last three cars from this one station with more riders joining at each station on the way to the airport. No one counted them. The cops ignored them. Good thing.

The numbers were growing daily, and it took more cars than ever to bring everyone along. In the early days, speakers would talk from each car but now that was difficult to do. Voices rose and fell even so as the train moved south.

The oppression didn't reach them in this place at this time. The function of oppression was to keep the many unable to compete with the few. One of the speakers put it as tax 'em, draft 'em, jail 'em. All the while there was the sound of mooing as if to say we are cattle.

John was happy standing in the overcrowded car with people who had passed the line that separated the oppressed from those who smile in the face of poverty. But he couldn't help but wonder who all these people were, where did they come from? Were any of them infiltrators and how could he tell?

Then it dawned on him. They were all infiltrators. There is no distinction to be made from one to another. They were leaderless. There was no one who could or would stop them from doing as they pleased, and they were a rebellion alone and together. It was not action they planned. They did not make decisions. They could not be attacked by squads of police. They could not be told to move on. They had a ticket to ride. It was beyond a right that could be taken away from them at someone's random order.

John rode the train around the 'horn of SFO' disembarking at the 18th Street Station. About fifty people disembarked with him. The black or flowery people scattered towards their homes. The one mile walk after the cramped BART ride helped to clear his head. Arriving at home he packed and prepared to leave on a journey north to visit his father and his friends.

## **Nobody gets the answer**

Denny left the train a stop later at 16th Street. As he reached the surface, he noticed a patrol car. At 1:30 in the morning that was not unusual but the eight-man SWAT Team behind it was. Denny walked toward them. Not recognizing anyone he opened his coat to expose his badge to identify himself. It was the next moment that he learned why they were there.

The detective had believed in the justice he wished for instead of the oppressive use of power he observed. He thought the Watchers were a part of justice. By definition, he thought, we do not meet in secret, he argued. We have no official existence, no office, no officers, no leaders. We are the people of 'we' the people. We do not conspire to commit offenses; we are free to assemble and to talk.

Is this anarchy? No. It is not angry, it does not destroy, it does not seek revenge, it doesn't need permission, it holds no meetings, it pays its way. It is not a mob, it does not occupy, it is free of all restraints of capital and politics. We have no name except the people. We do not threaten government. We seek to create what we need to rule ourselves.

None of his argument stopped the bullet that entered his chest, fired as it was by a fellow employee of the SFPD. He fell immediately, unconscious. He didn't know what happened after.

By the time John had reached Humboldt and Sarge's place, the radio news was full of speculation about what had happened. Denny's name was mentioned as a wounded police officer. The talkers thought he might be an undercover officer caught in the crossfire.

“Crossfire?” John said out loud as he told them what he knew from the radio. “Crossfire? What a lie.”

The hourly headline was a sad testament to an end of dreams: 'Police kill

three wound ten.' They listened to the news as John and Sarge headed south. Corporal, Janelle and Charlotte stayed in Humboldt. Sarge moved in with John into his old room. Sarge immediately went to the hospital and sat by Denny's bedside for the four days Denny remained unconscious.

Denny was critical when he entered the hospital. His wound was severe, damaging a lung. He had laid on the road surface for almost an hour before an ambulance was allowed to move him. His blood loss was nearly fatal. Someone in the emergency room managed to do the right thing at the right time and he lived though his system was so traumatized his survival was doubtful until on the day when he was allowed to awaken from his induced coma.

Sarge was holding his hand. He smiled at Denny when his eyes opened. Sarge used his best friend I see you smile. Denny saw it. Denny closed his eyes again. He could not move, his wound required stability. He was restrained from movement by straps across his shoulders and his hips. The tubes and wires partially hid the restraints and together presented a maze of impossibility to him. He chose to return to his dreams.

When Denny woke once more, John was where Sarge had been.

“You live.”

Denny smiled his best shit eating grin smile. “Call this living.”

John laughed. Denny chocked a giggle.

“Who are you?”

“John. A friend of yours.”

“How am I, John.”

“Take it easy and you'll be out of here in a month.” John said.

“Why am I here?”

“You are a cop. A murder Detective.” John did not have the smiles his father had. Words had to say it all.

“Are we friends?”

“If you have to ask then your memory is yet to return to you.” John tried an everything’s-OK smile, but Denny had shut his eyes. Denny did not respond so John went on.

“Otherwise, you were shot in the chest by a police officer or officers acting on orders. Eight heavily armed policemen fired on the twenty or so watchers as they came to the exit from BART. Three were killed. Ten wounded. You were the first one shot. They fired at you and did not stop until no one was moving. It was a massacre.”

“No. That cannot be.”

“Yeah. The officers are on suspension. The source of the order to shoot has not been identified, publicly. You must have been getting close to them. They were only at the 16th Street station. They were after you and the others were collateral damage to cover the attempt on your life.”

“Who was the guy before you?”

“That was my father. You called him Sarge.”

“Is Sarge here?”

“No.”

“What does he think?” As Denny asked his question two nurses and a doctor entered the room and asked John to leave. John smiled his ain’t-moving-me smile. He moved to a corner, the one under the TV and they forgot about him. All but one nurse. Who smiled at him with her I have a flowery-dress-at-home smile? He saw it and studied her face.

The medical staff worked to change Denny's dressings and examine his vital signs. The doctor left first glancing at John in the corner. Then only the smiler nurse was in the room with them.

“I have seen you around the last train. I'm right aren't I?” She asked.

“I've been there.” John replied.

“He's the cop who caught the BART killers, isn't he?”

“Right. Dennis Smith.” John was tired and as he said Denny's name, he choked a little. A tear in his eye gave him away.

“He'll be OK. We sedated him for the night. He'll be here again in the morning. You can stay or go.”

“What are you doing?”

“Ten minutes until shift change. I was going to go to a late show at the Castro Theater. Want to go with?”

“Yes.”

“I know your name. You are John Wright. My name is Mary Isley. Stay here. I'll come get you.”

Sarge came in after she left.

“My turn, John. How is he?”

“OK. His brain works. His memory sucks. He is practically shot in half and lived. Amazing.” John turned toward the door as Mary came in.

“Mary is a nurse. Mary, my father Jonus aka Sarge.”

Mary smiled. Sarge smiled.

“Nice to meet you.”

“Same.” Sarge said. “Hmm. You all leaving together?”

“Yup. We are looking for entertainment. Enjoy your stay. He'll be asleep until 6AM.”

Mary grabbed John's hand. “Gotta go, if we are going to make the last show.”

“Bye Dad.”

“Bye Son.”

## **The nature of corruption**

From the beginning of time, some say, corruption existed. History defines self-government [civil society] as having the purpose of alleviating corruption. The point of forming a self-government also seemed to be focused on the production of equality.

No government has halted corruption on the large scale. There might have been periods of success in producing equality except for the failure to regulate corruption. A few low-level bad apples were sacrificed every year but that was only a public relations necessity rather than the result of effective government oversight.

To John, the motive for self-government was thus confusing. The question was about the possibility that the role of government had been reduced to distributing the corruption money to the corrupt rather than stop it. In some definitions all payments are corruption payments. Corruption became akin to tipping a waitress.

He had a degree in political science. Corruption had not been part of the syllabus, either as a good or a bad. The Watergate Scandal had been a potential case for study which none of the professors chose to pursue. The word 'corruption' was used but not defined. He decided that part of the corruption was the constant coverup and the coverup was widespread if not epidemic.

His recent experience of joining Denny in removing a few bad apples had gotten Denny shot by other cops on someone's order. He and Denny had been after other corruption targets, other bad cops. It was tempting to imagine their targets were the ones who tried to murder Denny but then maybe it was the result of discomfort for someone higher up the food chain.

## The New World

By the time Denny was released from the hospital things had changed. Azimov and others kept the crime and corruption in the public mind. Here and there in the BART system Smilers appeared from among the locals. In the City the most amazing change was the size of the Smilers. San Francisco was beginning to look like prom night every night. The last train was always crowded, and the memory was held at every BART station on the Peninsula with too many attending for the number of cars on the last train. The five-minute lectures became the main attraction at all the stations but the one's at 16th Street became amazing. The nightly crowds often extended into Mission Street.

As the number of Smilers expanded so did the need for Black suits and flowery dresses. The new Smilers were not without resources nevertheless the foundations continued to pay for BART passes and to supply the clothing that made the Smilers recognizable. The foundation director Cynthia Goodall loved Sarge and his unusual mind. Sarge and Corporal saw something no one else could see until it was pointed out.

John sat with Sarge and Cynthia at the Foundation Center as they planned a new and bigger campaign.

“The new campaign will need a new approach. We could aim at changing who is in charge, an anti-corruption campaign.” John sounded like his dad to Cynthia.

“How about 'Nobody fixes it alone' or 'Nobody makes a difference.’” Sarge offered.

“Sarge, that is wicked.” Cynthia knew she would never see a commercial with either slogan. If you got it, you didn't need to hear it and if you don't then it wouldn't make sense anyway. “I like the second one. Is that irony? At least it's true, if you know what it means.”

John wondered at the power of a suggestion. The powerless see themselves as nobody. If they can keep that idea, that they do not have to stand up in Somebody's face to feel like life is better, then what harm? Imagine that the Nobody Smilers could begin such a huge movement without any visible leadership. Or that the Watchers could gain so much power that a part of The City's corrupt structure could be stopped. There were deaths. Change is not free.

"A big part of the Nobody idea is that it cannot create leaders to become targets." Sarge stared off between Cynthia and John as if he were remembering and creating at the same moment. "No one stands up alone. We all stand together. We live everywhere. The Last Train is our train. Be there in black or flowers. Watch and remember what you see to add to the lessons taught by others. Become the Memory that will set things right. Not witnesses. Watchers."

Sarge had been the first to cross the line from the anonymity of Nobody to having his picture and name in the news. It wasn't his idea of a good thing. It had made him a target.

"I made a mistake after the KFF BART murder." Sarge said. "We stepped up and made something happen which took my Nobodiness from me. I left after they tried to kill us all. It is a crazy story. Sixteen dead. Two more headed for death row probably. And the wounded. What? A dozen more?"

John sat listening, hearing what he wanted to hear. Cynthia was doing the math. The Nobodies could top out at 2 million max just from the two counties San Francisco and San Mateo that the Last Train covered. So far, her foundation had paid for the Smiler uniform for close to twenty thousand. They got a good price on the clothes and the fittings, but at fifty dollars each that was a million dollars total, easily their biggest grant of its kind. Then there was the BART passes that let those without funds into the stations to access the Memory.

“I had no idea what would happen when Corporal and I put on our first black suits. It was just us. Then we met Charlotte and Janelle. Then there was you and the foundations. Corporal warned me not to follow up on the identities of the KFF, but I tried to keep it on the DL. I failed and now we are here. Some would say we began a good thing. It is a big thing. But good? How do we measure that?”

“Dad, you were dying at the end of an alley behind a dumpster. Yeah, others have died. The three Watchers killed in the 16th Street massacre, the 16th Street Martyrs, are the saints of this movement. Their names are out there now as identities of the Nobody movement. At least they can't be hurt anymore.” John spoke slowly. “There is something else that could be done. Memory is full of the unfairness of the economy that leaves so many without the means to have a good life.”

“Nobody cares. Nobody can fix it.” Sarge said.

“Exactly. Memory says we can be different.” John reached for a pad of paper and drew a triangle. He drew a line parallel to the base leaving a small portion of the triangle as a smaller triangle at the top. “These are our betters.” Pointing to the small triangle. “It is usually shown as on top like the eyeball on the dollar bill. They are fewer and on top. Their propaganda system makes us accept this arrangement. If we freely exchanged ideas with one another it would not be this way. We are not free thus this condition is oppressive.”

Sarge leaned over and turned the triangle one half a rotation. “We can turn it. We can turn this right-side up.”

“Some would say that's upside down.” Cynthia said. “That it's biased to assume the current arrangement is the only possible one. The economy is dictated not consensed or even voted on. It is un-democratic ...”

“Anti-democratic.” John said. “If we chose, we would choose differently therefore democracy is the enemy of the economy's masters. The masters make the decisions none of us ever hear about.”

Sarge laughed. “As many times as, I have heard this or similar conversations, I can't get over the way it is so obvious to us all on a non-verbal level. I am Nobody. I want to stay that way. Your foundation, Cynthia, will become a target since you are helping to build the numbers. What I see is that there is no need to continue doing that. We cannot have structure or leaders. No one takes a bow. No musicians singing our songs. It's been tried. It failed. We all must remain Nobodies and we will grow.”

“Then how do we campaign? How do we communicate?”

“I don't know. Maybe there is an edge over which you may fall if you do not stick to the rule. Denny paid a big price for taking the KFF and its masters on and it is not over.” Sarge said. “I say sit still. Let nature take its course. Your enemy will burn itself out trying to destroy what does not exist. Trust them to be them.”

Cynthia sat stunned by Sarge's words. “Nobody can do anything.”

“Exactly. Just be Nobody and Nobody can do anything.”

“Sarge, we want to make the economy work for everyone.”

“Stop supporting the oppressor's economy and a new one will form. There is something we do that we can stop and when we do stop, the new thing will become the new economy.”

Sarge sat next to his friend, Cynthia, looking noble and kind in her eyes. She saw his better side. He was a rough looking old man. He showed the signs of alcohol abuse and years of living in the streets. Cynthia had met him when the Smile Campaign was just an idea in the heads of the Vietnam War vets

Sarge had gathered around the notion that even as poor and unstable as their lives were, they could change that by doing one of the simplest things.

He and Charlotte, a war nurse who ate at The Vet Center everyday had noticed Sarge when he began to wear a black suit and smiled, walked into the Foundation Center, he in a tuxedo and she in a flowery dress. She and her longtime friend Janelle who had served with Charlotte in Da Nang through the worst of the Asian war had found their equivalent of the dark suits in their own flowery dresses. That morning two years ago it was just Sarge and Charlotte who came into the Foundation Center's office.

They found the computers the Foundation Center provided to drop-ins to research and write grants for public service projects the Foundation specialized in funding. Cynthia saw them working and monitored their progress in responding to the questions the Foundation asked of each potential grantee.

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

He was done. He had responded to the last question.

Cynthia left her console and walked out into the public area to meet them. That was the day the Foundation Center went into the clothing business.

Now Sarge was saying she should stop.

“Sarge, you are saying that there is nothing to do.”

“And, Nobody can do it. It's not a trick phrasing. Ego kills. Nobody has no ego. Smiling is so ordinary a thing that Nobody owns it. Smiling changed this

city in two years. There were no heroes who did more than get shot by the corrupt police force.” Sarge's stern voice, an artifact of command under stress, was firm. “Detective Smith is in the belly of the beast. How does he do it? He takes no revenge against his attempted murderer Captain Ralph Bartholomew. The Detective is a Nobody serving the real culprits. Do nothing and the culprits will reveal themselves.”

“He smiles, watches and remembers.” John said. “He is a Nobody doing anything he can.”

Sarge laughed. “Yup. Denny is a Smiler with his own suit.”

“I think I get it.” Cynthia said. “The idea that in a democracy any individual can be credited with any actual gain is a false notion. If we are all equal, we should act that way.”

“Socialist!” Sarge replied.

“OK. To not be a socialist means that anything that happens harms many to enrich the few.” John said.

“Capitalist.”

“What remains? I almost said what is left.” Cynthia asked.

“Left is anything opposed to rape and pillage. Like the '08 crash, classic Chicago Economic School rape and pillage. The billions lost their dreams and more. The few gained more than they had a right to dream. For whom is it a tragedy, if others revel in their gains ill-gotten or not? Who made the rules of the game? The winners.” John said.

“That sounds far-left.” Cynthia responded.

“How about a new way?” John felt a new way was needed. “There is, was

and forever will be rapists and pillagers, serial killers and terrorists. Sociopaths and psychopaths run the financial system of the world. It is not designed to help anybody but them. If any Nobody benefits it is seen as unharvested wealth and considered lost.

“The Bullies run the markets. Free market means free for the bullies. It’s Monday Night Football all week long. If a man with a bunch of psychopath army buddies from the Iraq war are available for odd jobs what jobs will they be offered? Killing Nobodies for Somebodies.”

Sarge looked suddenly drained. “I am done. Tired and want to go back to the Farm with Charlotte.”

## The Underground University

Every night drew thousands into the tubes. The stairs down to the platforms below became small stages from which self-identified professors used to add their wisdom to the Memory. These stations became the Underground University.

“It doesn't matter what I do. It doesn't matter what I say. Nothing will change. True or false?” A chorus of answers rang out as the Last Train listeners were responding to the third step talkers. “A government of, by and for the people is not a collection of elites making decisions for us. The routes to making any decision become the one you want it to be are few to none. If you are a Nobody... well, you know the rest.”

The talker was one of three sisters standing on the third stair in the 16th Street station. Her sister to her left took up where she left off. “There were days when it seemed things might change. There was a liberal talk radio station. At last, a voice to balance out the one-sided radio stations. Liberal voices spoke more often. New ideas were possible. Then there were the commercials. Get cash. Mortgage your homes. Times are good at last. Then 2008 and the liberal stations disappeared. The mortgages had become derivatives and the derivatives became a crash and jobs were lost and peoples' homes were lost, too ... it goes on, as you know.”

The last sister began. “Some people say the pitch forks are coming. There isn't much more to take. National Parks, the Treasury, ... They have the schools, the hospitals and the military. There are monopolies supplying food and others taking the water. Corporations are not supposed to care about people, only profits. The monopolies make the law. That is the law they made. Maybe people should stop looking after corporations. They are people, if you say so, just mean people, with no soul: The devil, if you ask me.”

Brad, aka Mr. Bradley Hutchinson, the poverty lawyer, stood with the others,

listening to the talkers, waiting for the last train, wondering at the changes from the early Smiler days when he first went to The Vet Center and met Sarge and the others. All that was before the last train and memory – the meetings in the stations, the suits and dresses and before the massacres. Now it was after the end to police repression that the 16th street massacres created. The Watchers were not terrorists. That is in the past. That was what people hoped.

The crowds grew since the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Massacre that killed several and wounded many more, including Detective Denny Smith, the crowds were a slice of it all, everyone was there if anyone was there. Still even months after the end of the terrorist labeling the last train was full. There was something special about each night and so far, no one brought violence onto the train except the now dead or imprisoned KFF.

Brad was there at Civic Center when Sarge last talked to memory. He was wearing his old Ranger uniform jacket with his stripes intact. It looked like Charlotte had used a needle and thread on it. Sarge's 70-year-old face was marked by the war and the streets. When he reached the third step there was a hush, then a few said, "Sarge." Then more until a roar rang out. He stood waiting for the hush again.

"I am Nobody. So are you. Let's keep it that way. I spent a life doing time in the streets for being in the military, in a war, where people died for reasons unrevealed by popular history. I eat at The Vet Center, me and my friends. We eat spaghetti with thin red sauce that had a piece of meat waved over it for effect. Nobody gives us anything. Nobody gives me love. Nobody cares about me and it's as simple as that. I will miss you?"

He walked down the three steps to the main floor and waded through the black suits and flowery dresses. As he moved away from the train platform towards the elevator every hand touched him, and every voice wished him well. The elevator rose to the surface. No one knew who he was. He sighed at the sight of strangers. He turned and there was Brad.

“Brad. It's you. old friend. How you doin’?” Sarge knew Brad from before the Smilers. He met him as a law student then and now he was an attorney. He served a great need for Nobody. He kept the records of the Memory such as the photos used to defeat Crandall and some others who were selling meth to KFF and gave them protection for a cut of the take.

“Heard you talk. You are saying goodbye?” Brad wanted to keep his old friend near. “Why leave?”

“You know. Time has passed. Nobody can be happy. Heading back up north to the farm and the slow life.”

There is never an argument that says, ‘stay and die.’ There is always the recognition that a warrior has fallen and shaking his body will not bring his force back to life. We offer our energy for good until the energy is gone. Nothing is left to give. Nothing more can be asked of the dead.

## **Nobody is going to beat me**

Samuel Franklin had what he considered to be a modest goal considering his inflated self-assessment. He wanted to build the biggest private military in the world, aim it at something big and take it for his own. He was a few steps away from building the base he wanted: The NRA, check. Private Prisons, check. Stratfor and Xi were next. Then he'd be ready.

During his war, he saw the private militaries expand exponentially. He wanted a piece of that action. Now he was close.

Income streams, that was his current focus. Armies cost bucks and big armies cost big bucks. He aimed at a cash flow of two hundred billion a year. In his mind that meant arms and drugs, prostitutes and security. If he could build small versions of his eventual army, he would be making progress. That was what KFF was supposed to be, but he destroyed it like no one else could – with flare. He laughed when that thought coursed through his mind.

“That's funny.” He said out loud. The sound surprised him, and he looked around to see who might have heard. He was sitting in his new condo; the one Henry gave him. The refrigerator seemed to always have one bottle of wine. “The champagne's got to me.”

He picked up the phone for service. “Send Sara, red headed Sara, up to tickle me.”

“She is no longer here tonight, Sir.” Andre the night attendant said. Samuel knew the manual forbade the ordering of a person. Once a condo owner attempts this, the person he identified is no longer available to him. He could order out for anything, but in-service had its own rules.

“What can I have?”

“Sir, order from the menu for the best results.”

“Damn. OK. I want to be tickled and whatever happens next.”

“She will dress you in diapers, then spank you until you reach climax. It’s in the manual, Sir.”

“Send her now. Ah, if it's OK with the manual.”

“Food service, Sir?”

“Champagne.”

He was too drunk to really enjoy what the service provider had to offer. He ended up pooping like now ex-Senator David Vitter into his diaper. The provider got angry, cleaned his butt and then spanked him, first with her hands then a hairbrush she said her mother used on her.

He peed on her lap by mistake. He tipped her excessively out of embarrassment. She left him near passing out.

The morning brought a hangover. He opened the daily paper delivered to his door before the crack of dawn to see if anything would make him go outside today. Azimov had a six-page expose that centered on the recent massacres which she accounted as related to the KFF and those who protected the corrupt officials that allowed KFF to grow into such a menace.

At the end of the article, she asked the questions: Can anyone rid us of the menace of corruption? Can Nobody do it?

There were pictures of the thirteen murdered KFF members. Another was of the scene in the Turk Street alley. There were pictures of Billy and Henry. There were three pictures of the 16th Street police killings. One was of Detective Dennis Smith. Another was of the aftermath with bodies everywhere. The third was a cellphone photo of the SWAT Team firing into

the crowd of black clad men and flowery dressed women. Two men and one woman were killed, but no names of the police murderers were given in the article.

“Fuck them.” He said at what must have sounded like the top of his lungs to him. Feeling guilty for being so self-abused he groaned and went to barf and to take a shower. On the way he called service.

“Got anything for a hangover?”

“We have a doctor on staff. Would you like me to call him?”

“I was thinking more like menudo.”

“I'll do what I can, Sir.” Andre laughed to himself and turned to tell Gretchen how sick this bastard was. She smiled.

Ten minutes later, Sara with the red hair delivered the most sickening mess of Andre's invention. Watch him drink it, Andre said, I want to know what color he turns.

When she reached his rooms, she hammered on the door as if she was a cop demanding entry. Ironic she thought. He pulled the door open.

“Come in.” He said. He was a funny color. She decided on gray green. His eyes were swollen, teared up and red.

“Samuel,” she said. “Here is your potion. Anything more?”

“No.” His voice was raspy from the stomach acids in his mouth drying out his vocal cords. “Maybe later. I'll order later. Things are rough right now.”

“Thank you, Sir. Later it is.” She said as she pulled the door closed behind her. He forced the liquid down his throat. In five minutes, he lost the upset

stomach. He sat in the most comfortable chair, nearest the bathroom.

Sara had placed several sensors both audio and visual around the condo. Andre enjoyed the sight of Samuel losing his breakfast into the soup. Samuel recovered from this potion and sat staring into the corner of the room. It was the only thing not moving.

He grabbed the paper from the side table and read the Azimov article again, writing down each of the names from the article with their identities. When he was done, after he had crossed out the dead, he had a list with Detective Dennis Smith, Sargent Jonus Wright, Stuart Crandall, Chief Ogden Branch, Azimov and Henry. The KFF's Billy O'Neal and the one known as Jeremy rounded out the list.

“No loose ends.” He said. The sound of his voice comforted him. At least, someone was listening. He chuckled. He looked for the names of the SWAT Team that killed some of the Nobody people. “I'll have to talk to the Chief of Police. Need to know who gave the order to them. That would bring the number to seventeen max. Seems absurd to kill so many but there have been thirteen KFF and three Nobodies killed already. A total new beginning would make it thirty-three with eleven of those being police. Doesn't make sense unless a real war begins.”

He placed a local call and left a message. Putting down his paperwork, he leaned back into the easy chair. His eyes closed. The sensation of sleep engulfed him.

Gretchen watched him work on his list until he was exhausted and fell back to sleep. The cameras she installed had digital zoom that allowed her a closeup look at the list. Her perfect memory burned the names into her consciousness.

“Nobody's going to believe this.” She said to Andre. He had been looking over her shoulder. This was his first undercover assignment. She had been at

it for over a decade. He wanted to be as excited about his work as she was. She had gone through the steps as rapidly as any Special Agent. He thought she could be holding down an office by now. She preferred field work and the rush of the undercover life.

The condo assignment came up after Henry Balsac had been arrested. Gretchen was the lead agent and Andre was her second. The day after the arrest, Gretchen entered the condo building and asked the staff to stay except for the main reception which was Andre's position and Gretchen joined the service staff. No one knew who they were however they knew they were in charge. When Gretchen read the entire manual, she felt like she found a home.

"Andre, hold down the fort. I want to consult with Nobody."

"Ah. OK. I guess. Be careful."

"Yes, Mommy." She liked working alone. Andre still too new out of the academy to get her kind. Gretchen was enjoying this assignment. Sara was a fitting role for her. Samuel wasn't her favorite kind of target. Neither was Henry. Though given how that plopped into her lap, she had no choice but to enjoy it.

She knew how to find John. He had a home, yet he wandered The City having won the lottery five years ago. Not a giant pot but enough to put him in the leisure class for twenty years. So far, he had not done much. Just before he won the lottery, his father had disappeared into the streets. He spent half that time searching for him. She suspected that was how this whole Nobody business had begun.

In an article published after the BART car murder case that the Watchers busted open, Sarge said it all began with smiling. Gretchen liked to think she had a good grasp of motive. All crime had a motive. Find the motive and there is the criminal. John had saved his father from death. His father began

to live again. A homeless vet, Stevie, who was beaten led the Smilers to form the Watchers. The Watchers led to exposing the KFF. The KFF imploded, then were assassinated. Now the cop who arrested the mass murderer who killed KFF had been shot in an ambush blamed on a SWAT Team going wild in the streets. Two massacres and no motive, except for Henry who just loved to kill for fun. With no known motive, there would have been no solution to who set off the inferno at The Vets Center. She had been told by an anonymous informer where the killer would be after he killed. She waited until she saw the Vespa, knew it was him, and followed up in her own way until he was arrested by the local cops. That was fun. But now? New questions. Azimov was right. She had no suspected motive either except money. What was this about?

John might help her sort this out. She needed to talk to him anyway. Life was getting complicated. Lines had been crossed. Anyone-night sex fest could turn into a future human life.

She checked her watch. "Still morning. John is sipping a latte, nah its white wine at the wine bar at the Ferry Building. Be there for me, John."

A cab ride for fifteen minutes, a walk across the Muni tracks and Embarcadero Blvd, through the big doors into the Ferry Building, a nod towards the law firm of Coblenz, Patch, Duffy and Bass and there he was sitting at a table near the walkway down the middle of the ground floor. He watched it all. She snaked through the entrance and slithered into a seat opposite him.

"You need company." It wasn't a question.

He didn't need to answer. He smiled his I loved you then smile.

"You look lonely." Then it hit her, he is pining for his new love. "What's her name?"

“Observant you are. Mary, a nurse, she's taking care of Denny. Does it show?”

“You are a book.”

“You'll like her.”

Gretchen changed the order of her discussion points.

“Talk shop?”

“If I have to.”

“Shit's going to hit the fan. I don't know how it will go but your daddy's name is on a list. So's Denny. And Azimov.”

“Sarge was right. When Azimov writes, someone is making a note of the names. That's how Henry found The Vets Center. That's how they found Denny. When a nail sticks up, they hammer it flat. Denny stood up. So, did Sarge and the Vets.”

“Yeah. That is how this looks.” She said. She thought of the pain as felt by both the victim and the caught criminal. The victim wanted to transfer all his pain back to the criminal. The criminal only wanted to escape. Samuel wanted to get rid of anyone who would block his path out.

“There is no KFF anymore.” John said. “Whoever is using the hammer must be up the food chain. It is too late for the skin heads to seek revenge. They would come in the crosshairs immediately.”

“If you say so.”

“Well, I will say this. Something bigger than KFF almost killed Denny. Henry is in jail. Who else is there?” John said.

“His evil brother Samuel Franklin.”

“Franklin runs the SWAT Team?”

“He put them on the list too.” Gretchen concluded. “Clean slate.”

“What?” John sounded shocked. “He is trying to remove every exposed part of his network.”

“John, thank you.”

“What?”

“I thought he was a brainless weirdo but now I see he is a serious megalomaniac.”

She pushed her hand across the narrow table to touch his hand.

“I love you, John. I had a stronger urge than marriage. It was fun to touch again. I'm glad you have fallen for someone else.” She patted his hand and stood to leave.

“Aren't you going to tell me? Denny said you are or were pregnant.”

“Still am.”

“He said 'congratulations' to me. I can count.”

Gretchen sat back down. She smiled her open for anything smile.

“You are going to be a father by circumstance.”

“What other way is there?”

“You don't have to be the father.”

John knew he loved her. She was his first love. He was her last love.

“What do we do?” He asked.

“What do you want to do?”

“Push a little kid on a swing.”

“Really? Does that mean ...”

“Means whatever we can make it mean.”

“Can I kiss you?”

It was too late. She jumped out of her seat and swept her arms around his shoulders. She had not planned to do anything like that.

“Let's do it again.” He said.

She immediately wished she could take it all back. The kiss especially. She had to be free of John to follow her plan. She mumbled FBI or Die.

“Sorry, I missed that.”

“John, your father is in danger. I got too excited. We can circle back around on this someday. Sorry.”

“Cliché, cliché, cliché.” He said. “OK. What can I do?”

## **Nobody's going to like this**

Samuel Franklin woke with a fully formed plan. As he congratulated himself, the phone rang. It was Gerome, his security director.

Samuel loved the study of military leadership. He didn't really know anything except the meanings of the terms. The Army Officers Training courses touched on them. He thought of his future as a game where he who controlled lethal resources would control the world. Government had been converted to military, from citizen controlled to corporate controlled. Money was the name of the game. His money was his weapon.

“Gerome.”

“Sir, how are you?”

“I have time, for now.”

“Your email was instructive. I am gathering the power we will need. The prices are high for the eleven, but the rest came in under our estimate. Timing will be difficult. There is another matter.”

“Go ahead, Gerome.”

“Budget considerations.”

“Not for this op.”

“Correct, Sir. It is our developmental needs. A stock purchase of shares that just came up. A partnership in Stratfor Security.”

“Did you pass this to our broker?”

“I need your order. My role is to find opportunities in security firms and to

bring them to you.”

“And you did. Call Stanley Rosenberg. He is the bank today. Tell him I said get this one.”

“Thank you, Sir.”

“Good-bye.”

Samuel wished his brother Henry wasn't such an asshole. He would love this. He might like planning his own death. Maybe I should visit Henry and ask, he thought.

The phone rang again. It was his Mother.

“Mother, how nice for you to call.”

“Sammy, I am sick. I called to tell you to get your brother out of jail or prison or wherever and send him to Kiev. I need him.” Natalie Goronchova, his mother, claimed to be Ukrainian royalty. Her name was royal. She sounded and acted royal. Samuel loved her manners, but he knew she was at best a courtesan and he a bastard prince. It didn't matter to him. He and Henry had taken all the family money and invested it as they liked. She controlled nothing except his affections.

“Henry is headed to the tower I am afraid dear Mommy. Best to cling to what is left.”

“Sweetie come to the palace. There are empty wings.”

“Do you have Starbucks? No. Why don't you pack and come west?”

“I am sick.”

“Get a US visa and call me back.”

“Sick.”

He knew she needed help to make such a move at her age. He did not want to go to Europe to get her. He had things to do.

“Ma, I’ll call you back in ten.” They hung up and he called Gerome.

“Sir.”

“Need someone to go get my mother and bring her here. Who you got?”

“Hmm. She needs a visa. I’ll send one of Henry’s cousins. Give me two days.”

Without saying good-bye Samuel hung up and redialed his mother.

“In two days, a French compatriot of Henry's – someone you will recognize – will be there to move you nearer your sons.”

“Do you mean San Francisco?”

“You would prefer...?”

“Napa. The weather is more like home and the wine. Is there a Starbucks?”

“Yes.”

“Then Napa. Thank you.”

“It will be fun to have an excuse to drink wine. Goodbye, Mother.”

He set the cellphone on the side table. The manual was on top. He picked it up and set it on his lap. Since he first walked into what was Henry's, now his

condo, he had not gone out except to have a beer at the Edinburgh. Every day he tried one or more of the services available to him from the menu. He had taken to a random selection, flipping through the pages stopping and pointing.

“Ah, Happy Ending. Sounds relaxing.”

He dialed, spoke convivially with Andre and hoped redheaded Sara would be the servicer.

After he hung up the phone, he passed out grinning at the ceiling.

Gretchen saw this on the feeds from her ‘bugs’ that she called features. Andre chuckled about how easy it was to reduce the powerful to drooling. She chuckled about how easy it was to recreate her joy in a recruit. She began to dream bigger than ever before.

## Memory

Memory was not political. Memory was not self-conscious. It did not decide anything. It did not create conspiracy. It did not want or need.

Several months after the shooting, Detective Denny Smith reappeared on the last train last car. It was as he remembered it and somewhat more. A lot more. The last train was now the longest train that traveled the BART system: Ten cars. Every night five of the ten were filled with Smilers and Watchers numbering 1,000 riders. The platforms were crowded as the last train traveled through the fourteen stations from Embarcadero to the SFO. The total number was estimated at two thousand at each station.

The nightly phenomenon had drawn huge attention from the people of the Bay Area. Copycat Smilers began appearing at every one of the forty-four stations in the system as the fame of the Nobody movement spread.

Denny sat with John who had helped Denny at every step to get him on the train car. Sarge had gone back to Humboldt County when Denny began to walk again. John thought his father would be safer in the woods rather than exposed on the sidewalk. They were taking the threat, implicit in a list in the hands of Henry's brother, very seriously. Sarge had lectured memory about his story. How standing up could be dangerous. That Denny had no choice, which made Denny a sainted figure. Those who had been killed or wounded in the 16th Street Massacre are heroes not of their own choosing. They were the Nobodies to be remembered.

Denny did not hear Sarge's speech to Memory, but he heard about it first from Sarge and then tonight from a dozen others as he rode once more around the horn with the Nobodies. The dead and wounded Nobodies had all been shot by SWAT Team ordered into action by a Captain Ralph Bartholomew. The families of those shot had sued the Captain and the SFPD for the damages they suffered. The Captain's name was on Samuel's list by implication. He was 'the cop who ordered the hit,' Denny thought.

The 16<sup>th</sup> Street Massacre doubled the Last Train ridership overnight. It was not a media event per se, yet the media treated it as if it had been. Denny watched the news all day every day of his convalescence. Azimov had the most accurate in-depth stories. The TV tried to make it a circus. They tried to find spokesmen. They tried to record the speeches to Memory. What they recorded was unacceptable to the corporate TV moguls. All that they had left was trying to smear the Nobody Movement. Problem was the TV audience was the Nobodies. With no one to interview, no video they could play, TV lost interest.

As Denny and John neared the Embarcadero station that night after a cab ride from the Mission District, they passed the late-night panhandlers. Most of the signs said something like 'Broke. Need BART money for Last Train.' John told him everyone rode or sat for the speeches. It was always amazing.

The speeches were defiant that night. John said it was because Denny was there. People were still hurting from the failure of The City to even punish one person for the murderous 16th Street attack. Corruption became the central theme of the speeches. Names were being named. Memory would remember them.

Station after station the crowds waited, first for the train, then for its return, when they would all leave the station together as a symbolic action of unity. No one said that. It just was that. No cop ever dared to be near. Nobody likes peace in the streets.

After they climbed back up to Mission Street at the 16<sup>th</sup> Street station, it was after one in the morning. It had been three months ago; Denny made this walk only to be shot down. As he looked across the street, there was no patrol vehicle or SWAT Team. He breathed a sigh.

John had walked out into the street and pointed down.

“This is you, Denny.”

Denny saw a profile of his body or someone’s body in blue paint. Given the hint, he looked around the station door and there were more profiles painted either red or black with more red than black.

Denny walked slowly around the station. When he reached a black silhouette, he saw the name had been hand painted where the heart might have been. He stopped and mumbled the name, tried to remember the face. John came up to Denny’s side.

“Do you remember Terrilee Flowers?”

“Did I know her?”

“Yes. You introduced us the day of the shootings.” They stared down at her shape. “People won't let them fade. The profiles get repainted every month. Same elsewhere, the alley, various other police killings related or unrelated.”

“Wow. What the hell is going on?” Denny asked.

“So far, no police trying to make us disperse. I think it's because we are such good BART customers and that BART is deep into being a problem in this. We stumbled into the last car ... “

“That was Sarge following the KFF.” John interrupted.

“... and now we are untouchable. If we marched down the street as anything but Smilers, they would smack us down. I think they are planning to hurt us but now we have them on their heels, and they have to stand down.”

“What is next?” John asked.

“Nobody knows what they are doing. I do not know how the next move

works. So far, the other side acts first. Then Nobody gets bigger. Right now, I am guessing a hundred thousand Smilers and Watchers minimum. Two thousand on the train every night. Twenty times that in the stations.”

Denny and John walked slowly along 16th Street, past the apartment Sarge shared with the other original smilers, two more blocks, a left and they were at Denny's front door.

“I don't like leaving you here alone.”

Denny reached for the nob. The door opened. Mary the nurse stood smiling.

“John, how are you?”

“Mary, Sarge told me you were helping Denny. It's good to see you.”

“Thanks. You, too.”

Denny smiled. Mary smiled. John smiled. Good nights and John was walking home. There were still Nobodies walking home. He sensed them around him. He felt at ease for the first time in The City. It was comforting.

## **Somebody is angry**

The next day changed John and Denny's hopes into something more dangerous.

"Troubling news this morning. Two members of the so-called Nobody Movement were seen robbing a liquor store in the Sunset district last night. Arrests have taken place. Law enforcement has put out an APB for any Nobody members to be arrested, citing the Patriot Act." The Male News Face said.

"Does that make them terrorists?" The Female said. "They have no history of violence. Apparently, the police know more than they have told us.

John muted the commercial that followed their exchange. He found his cell and called Azimov.

"No one is talking to me. There's a Homeland Security press conference scheduled for Noon. What do you see?" She said in answer to his question.

"Black suits and flowery dresses make terrorists. This cannot be serious. Tonight, will tell. The Last Train. It will be a circus and more. I have no idea what will happen. We will be surprised." John said it in short bursts as if he were breathless. His thoughts were of more senseless death from angry reprisals.

"My editor is not being helpful. When the fix is in, we usually stand tall. Not today, I'll bet." Azimov was an investigative reporter. She took chances knowing her career was likely short anyway. She thought about a book or two. Somebody had to write a book about the Nobodies. She chuckled under her breath at the irony of it. "Keep in touch. Gotta go."

John called Denny's cell. It went to voicemail. He looked for Mary's number. Couldn't find it.

“Sarge.” He said as he grabbed his gear and headed for the door.

The road north was bumper to bumper for almost one hundred miles. He had misplaced his cell in the stuff he took with him and would have to wait for someone to call him to find it. It didn't matter. There was no one to call.

Past Santa Rosa the road narrowed, the traffic thinned and the three-hour drive along the Northcoast rivers to the little farm was both a pleasure and a challenge, as the colors on the roadside became greener as each mile passed. John began to sing to himself, pieces of old songs. With each new piece the questions about the name of the song and the singer needed answers. He knew from past experiences of this kind he was seldom right in his guesses. It wasn't his strong point. It was his game to pass the time while driving long distances.

The miles ground on. The road became a seemingly random curve following the meandering Eel River. He stopped in Willits for road food. Willits is in Mendocino County the county south of Humboldt. From then on, every twenty minutes of driving meant one reached the next town. Laytonville, Leggett, Piercy, Garberville, then ten miles to Whitethorn and up a gravel road to the safety of the Farm.

He stopped in Garberville for supplies. As he entered the market, he realized what his father would tell him to do. No matter. Maybe he won't. He's older, wiser, not as wild as he once was. Despite his doubts he bought more road food. The interior argument about what would happen continued until he reached the door of the farmhouse. Within minutes all five were heading to The City and the Last Train. John's hunch had been right.

“It is a simple maneuver: When ambushed fight your way out moving forward or you will die.” Sarge was matter of fact as his experience of fighting his way out of traps in the Asian war had taught him.

“Who did this?” Charlotte asked.

“That is simple, too. You had this experience once already. Look at your enemy. If you act fearlessly then you are a threat. Their remedy, more fear. They killed some of us already. We grew.” Sarge was staring out the side window of the car. John drove. Janelle and Corporal Al Muñoz sat in the back with Charlotte. Several months of country living had cured them of a hundred bad habits and they all fit in the back seat.

Corporal spoke. “This is rebellion. It is only chaos when the cops make it chaos. It is also democracy, which is called socialism, because the inequalities can only be maintained by making all complainers into anti-capitalist heretics or criminals.”

The road south reversed the twenty-minute new town pattern until Willits and the first stop lights south of Eureka. The five prayed for a bypass to be built.

As they reached the edge of Santa Rosa the traffic increased but lanes were added to the highway. There was clear sailing in between the stretches of stop and go. Reaching the Golden Gate promised them they would make the Embarcadero Station and whatever would happen then.

## The police

Detective Dennis Smith headed directly to his office when he heard that the Nobody Movement had been declared by a right-wing website to be terrorists followed by a report of an APB to round up the Watchers. Mary drove him in from his home in the Castro District.

It was 7:30 AM. Mary had worked the night shift at the hospital and arrived at his apartment as Denny was heading towards the front door.

“Good Morning.” She said when they met on the front porch.

“Not really. Hear the news about the Watchers being declared terrorists. Something about a robbery last night. I want to go back to work.” Denny said.

“I'll take you. The car is still warm.”

In twenty minutes, he was at his desk. His last partner Detective Mark Blain was reading the morning paper when he arrived.

“Blain, hard at work I see.”

“You back or is this social?”

“I'm back. Maybe a little slow but I am back. What is going on?”

“Nothing much in homicide so I've been temped out to cover this Nobody problem. There is a meeting in five minutes. You may as well come along. The officer who is leading the charge is your old friend Captain Ralph Bartholomew.”

They walked down the hall to the elevator. The meeting room was a floor above. They rode the elevator with several other officers. There were rounds

of welcome back. No one joked that Denny had been nearly killed by Bartholomew's Swat unit.

A few minutes passed. The Captain entered the room. He said good morning, saw Denny and offered a welcome back to him. All in attendance clapped. Denny smiled.

“We are forming a new command based on the impending problem this new gang of terrorists presents. As you know, two of them robbed a liquor store last night. The department’s reaction has been swift. Contrary to news reports the perps in the robbery have not been identified much less arrested, but that is not our problem. We are to protect The City and government center from a threat of a mass riot tonight.” The Captain stood before a completely clean cork board. For the next five minutes he pinned pictures of people's faces and crowd scenes on the board.

“We brought a few of these folks into the station last night following the robbery. Under questioning we learned a few things about them. Their leaders are diverse and undercover. Here are pictures from BART cameras from the Civic Center last night. The people in the pictures are unidentified but each one of them gave a speech last night. We are to find and arrest these people. Photo packets are being made now and will be in your hands before we disperse. As you can see, they all dress in a uniform. Both men and women participate. There are some people that the San Francisco paper has identified by name, a few of them identified as leaders. They have no addresses and are believed to be hardcore homeless vets.”

Another officer entered the room and paper began to circulate though the room.

“We are going to prepare to do battle tonight. We are going to deploy all our power to keep these people in line. We will deploy at 9 PM in the United Nations Plaza to seal off the access to the government center from the BART station's exits. The station will be declared closed at about 11 PM. We will

seal off the exits keeping them inside. Buses will be dispatched to carry them to the football stadium Kesar Stadium. We will hold them there until we have removed the source of the threat to order in The City. Any questions?"

Questions about the command structure, individual responsibilities and overtime pay were aired. There was joking about the black suits and flowery dresses. Denny sat through the meeting without uttering a word.

An officer near Denny raised his hand and asked the question. "How many people are we talking about?"

"The estimate we are working with is 2,000 max."

Denny stirred.

The officer followed up. "Is that all of them? Are you counting the other stations?"

"Yes, we figure the terrorist label will keep the numbers low. Plus, we shut the system down so people cannot come from other stations, especially from Oakland. We don't need those people in The City tonight." The Captain was adamant. "Anything else?"

No one said anything, no one wanted the meeting to drag on.

The Captain turned to Denny. "What about you Detective? You know them."

"Captain," Denny said. "It's your show. For what it's worth, they are not terrorists. They are unarmed. There are no leaders. A show of force will look imbalanced and leave The City looking paranoid. Besides you have the numbers wrong."

"What should the number be? 4,000?"

“Try 100,000 to 200,000. People will come from everywhere and are probably entering The City now.”

“We don't agree. Brighter minds have done their calculations. Thank you for your input. Dismissed.”

They left the room. Denny returned to his desk. No one talked to him. He shuffled through the files on his desk. Nothing screamed out at him for attention. He reached for his cell phone and couldn't find it. “Dang, I left it home.”

After a few more inspections of the drawers, he decided to take a taxi home and fetch his phone.

## The media

Azimov had a good feeling for what the Nobody Movement was about. She had talked to dozens who identified with the notion. Sarge and Corporal had hit a nerve in the numerous communities that felt oppressed by the corruption at all levels of the government and businesses. Occupy had demonstrated a few things to her. First, people want to do something to change the political world. Second, holding turf only drew the attention of the cops, and third, the cops are at war with the rest of us in favor of protecting the property of the wealthy.

As she left the Homeland Security's news conference, it was plain as the nose on your face that the cops were setting The City up for another nightmare. They so easily remade the victims into terrorists. There was no evidence of anything except the same old game being played.

John had called her as he was headed back to The City. Sarge and the Smilers were with him. The six of them met for an early dinner in the Mission.

“Rebellion. It is rebellion.” Sarge said.

Azimov shook her head. “I have heard you say that. The first time was after the BART murder. Then after the S Turk Street Alley massacre. I saw the movement was growing but after the 16<sup>th</sup> Street massacre things went exponential. I worry now that you have control of the Last Train, they will try to take it from you. There was a news conference today. They are warning people to stay away from the Last Train.”

“I am only a Nobody. All the others are Nobodies, too. We only have one right and that is we can ride if we have the fare. We have the right to buy the service.” Sarge could see the hope in Azimov's eyes. She was a dreamer. “If the Nobody Movement is real, then they are all Smilers and Watchers, participants in Memory and not infiltrators. The speeches that work are informational, not motivational. It is Memory at work, not a mob.”

Charlotte sat sipping a coffee. Janelle and Corporal were focused on eating. Sarge liked talking with Azimov. Charlotte thought it was Sarge's inner child looking for attention. She lifted the cup to her lips with one hand while the other firmly gripped Sarge's hand, holding him as close as she could.

“What if it was normal for people to care about one another so that we could meet without effort and very simple things like smiling and the Cynthia suits were enough to bond us.”

Charlotte spoke quietly. “Now, the cops are being told to put an end to us. It says to me that we are in rebellion. At least the cops are saying we are.”

Azimov nodded. “They act that way. Denny called this morning telling me what was being talked about. He thinks they will back down. I have trouble believing him. He seems to forget who nearly killed him and did kill and maim him and a dozen others.”

“This rebellion,” Sarge said. “Is about doing the easy thing. The simple thing every Nobody can do. I would say people are tired of corruption. If the cops, try to take this simple thing from us it will be a lesson Nobody will learn. They are willing to let us live in a managed society where we have only the freedom to do as they say and nothing else. This will be a telling moment.”

“Are people angry?”

“Each one feels what they feel.” John said. “The speeches are not angry. There have been no calls for action. The last train phenomenon is a simple thing and the people on the train are more solemn and determined than angry or violent. It's more like church services than a political rally.”

“Have you been infiltrated?”

“There is a Memory at all forty-four stations. One speech I have heard at

several the stations on the West Bay is the infiltrator histories. It may be that we have been warned. The 16th Street massacre was caused by the cops thinking violence was next. Maybe they had something in mind like a provocation. Didn't happen." John said.

Corporal stopped chewing and swallowed. He took a sip of water. Everyone at the table waited for him as he wiped his lips with his napkin.

"Must be my turn. You all are looking at me." Corporal paused for a small chuckle. He cleared his throat. "I bet you're thinking, this better be good."

The others laughed. He turned serious.

"The Last Train was the way we all met other Nobodies with a very few exceptions. As we grew, people naturally knew what to do. The suits and dresses. The Smiling and Watching. The Last Train and Memory." Janelle squeezed his hand. Al turned and smiled the smile of utmost respect. "Things didn't rise to the level of interest to the powerful until it was not just homeless vets. Other oppressed communities joined in. We made friends in a lot of low places, so many the people in high places began to worry and then to act against the Nobodies."

"How do we get through this?" Azimov asked.

"To win, we continue to include." Corporal's voice sounded like a prayer. "Remember the picture. A young blond woman with flowers in her long hair. She was pictured placing a Shasta Daisy in the barrel of a rifle a National Guard soldier was pointing at her from very close range. The cops are Nobody. Treat them that way. If we see them making a mistake, we should help them correct it."

No one spoke for a while.

Azimov stood up. "Gotta go. Be safe tonight."

A round of hugs followed. The Southern Humboldt hugginess had rubbed off on the vets. Sarge thought of it as another form of smile, anyone could do it, a hug without expectations, a gift for those who knew how to accept it.

## Back to the Last Train

At nine in the evening Sarge and friends arrived at John's apartment. They dressed in the Smiler garb and decided to walk Mission Street to downtown. When they reached the Civic Center BART the police cordon kept them away from the Civic Center itself. They went into the station at about 10:30.

Sarge looked around at the wall to wall crowd in the station. All black suits and flowery dresses. He pulled on Corporal's sleeve.

“I feel a trap. There are no exits. The cops could control us all from above.”

Corporal knew what Sarge said. He thought it true. BART could shut down the line in an instant. The thousands of Nobodies would be trapped.

They took the next train to Embarcadero Station. The crowd was equal to Civic Center's. The speeches had begun when they reached the stairs.

“I don't get what they will accomplish by this.” A speaker was on the third step. “Calling us terrorists because we are dressed the way we are is ludicrous but for the sake of the Memory, the SFPD and neighboring police forces have cordoned off the government center of The City. When the Nobodies come out of the Civic Center BART the cops will have the exits controlled. An arrest on sight order has been issued for any of us without any specific offense being named. Lawyers say this is unconstitutional. Random arrest orders, why?” He stood down.

Another rose. “I am a so-called American Indian. I am a tribal member of the Ogallala Sioux. My father was one of the occupiers of Alcatraz. We learned soon after about Cointelpro and its aliases. We saw it operating under Reagan, under Bush, under Clinton and Obama. People try to avoid pain. When they came for the communists, we said nothing. When they came for my brother Leonard, we said nothing. Now they are coming for everybody except cops.”

The BART station's automated announcement system with its well-known voice was interrupted by an uncharacteristically authoritarian voice informing everyone no more trains would run and that under order from SFPD everyone was to leave the station in an orderly fashion.

The speaker on the third step when the announcement ended echoed the message, adding some more of his own. "Spread the word to remain calm. The trains have stopped running. BART has said service is canceled for the remainder of the night and perhaps tomorrow. Nobody controls the platforms and turnstile areas up to the surface or down to the surface in all stations from Embarcadero to the SFO." The speaker sat. Another and another followed.

"That means they will close the stations. We will be trapped. As we rise, we will be controlled by law enforcement. The veterans amongst us have suggested a course of action for those who are willing and able-bodied."

"Those who cannot walk a mile are asked to move towards the exits. Do not leave the stairs. When the stairs are filled, the people on the platforms will move into the tube walking down the catwalk. We are meeting at Montgomery Station from both directions and then we will exit together and walk to Civic Center to free the station."

Word spread through the crowd. Nobody did what they were asked to do.

## The people in the tubes

As John, Sarge, Corporal, Janelle and Charlotte stood at the foot of the stairs watching those who would not make the walk move towards the stairs, the steady stream of Watchers moved towards the western end of the platform. As the gate to the catwalk was negotiated and the black and flowery people began to move through the tube under Market Street towards the Montgomery Street Station, people moved up the stairs toward the exits.

They decided to stay together. Sarge had to admit that being in one's 70's cut into one's desire for physical adventure. Janelle wouldn't leave Corporal's side, nor would Charlotte leave Sarge's. They moved in the crowd, John right behind them, and eventually entered the tube walking two by two steadily moving, quiet, solemn towards Montgomery Street.

Sarge thought about the troops entering ships for an invasion. Like Normandy, like Iwo Jima, like numerous other places with men and women dressed for battle walking through the night to surprise their foes. He kept it to himself. He had joined the Army to conquer the world for democracy only to find that it was like Corporal's first love, love of country, just a tool in the hands of the manipulators who practice to deceive.

Charlotte walked with her arms laced through Sarge's. Vietnam had left her awash in memories of pain and death. They were her experiences. She made a necklace of them that she wore every day. It held her anguish. Without it she could never have spoken of love again. First Janelle. She loved Janelle, a friend who shared her nightmares. They slept next to each other for forty years like sisters in a nunnery. They had each other for comfort. They understood each other's fears. And then Sarge, Corporal and the Smilers, and the hope to have another love, now come true. A woman in love with a man. The man a man who survived the carnage that gave her nightmares. He was the embodiment of her passion to save lives during a mass murder. As hopeless as her hope was, he fulfilled it. She was his. He was hers.

They had driven all day to be in this crowd walking through the BART tunnel practically chest to back people dressed as they were, thinking their own thoughts as they marched together into a battle, they had not chosen but which may await them when they reach the surface again. She thought about the protests during Vietnam. She felt an affinity with those who faced the guns carried by their brothers and sisters. She knew the war was a mistake. It was, for her and Sarge. Yet here they were in the tube, old hippies and veterans along with the numerous communities of the Grey Area in a common troop heading into an uncertainty.

Corporal was a natural mathematician. His sense of being was numerical: size, weight, volume, elapsed time, average, mean, median. He counted his steps and elapsed time as he walked. He knew how far it was from Echo Base Camp 1 to the center of a little hamlet in the DMZ, the one he and Sarge had been sent to kill and die in. They escaped the trap. It took a long time. This march was shorter. It was one hundredth the distance. They would stream out onto Market Street. The first watchers might be a mile ahead of them but that wouldn't matter. No one had ever seen such an event. If the police were not provoked, they might keep their line and not create their common chaos and excuse to hurt others. Fear ran heavily through the police he guessed.

Janelle walked a half step behind him. She held his hand, reaching forward as he reached back. She needed more space than most, claustrophobia had a strong hold on her. She closed her eyes hoping to see the light ahead. She thought about institutions how they had stopped being useful. In the semidarkness of the tube she smiled, nonetheless. Her nature was to be happy even if she had to fake it. Her experience with Charlotte as a frontline nurse in Vietnam taught her about the meaning of war. Only those who had not been there could want to send others to it. Corporal was a learned man. He had killed and suffered near death himself. He said nothing he saw was very creative. It was confusing at best, being put in harm's way in order to kill others similarly put in harm's way.

John was two steps behind Janelle. He was happy to keep moving. He worried the BART people would run them over, or try to, by sending a train through for no reason. They had done that last year killing two BART employees near where they were walking. He thought about the police and how fearful they were outnumbered five hundred to one in their minds. He imagined a patrolman knowing tens of thousands of people, known as terrorists, were underground about to leap out like a zombie mob and devour civilization.

Then forward movement stopped. Everyone stopped. The five did not know where they were.

They waited. Comforting words were shared. Little cries for mercy rose and fell. In the darkness twenty thousand people waited.

Ahead were voices encouraging people to keep moving and in minutes all were going forward through the darkness into the flurry of light and energy the Watchers in the Montgomery Street Station offered the flow of thousands of people with a similar mind for perfection in being. In six months, the Nobody Movement had become a local sensation; they were controlling transportation in the Bay Area.

## **Nobody on the stairs**

On the stairs, no one blocked the exits of the Embarcadero Station. No cops were visible. The station below was empty. Everyone had gone either into the tube or up to the first underground level and onto the stairs to the surface.

Bradley Hutchinson, the Hastings graduate and now, new lawyer, waited at the top of the stairs with a view west toward the Montgomery Street Station two blocks away. Nothing was happening there. No cops, no Nobody. Time passed. Thirty minutes. There were Watchers visible on the street. For the hour there were many people on the street. Occasionally a cop car went back or forth. There was nothing to see and they kept on moving.

From his vantage, Brad saw the first of the thirty thousand Watchers rise from below. He was excited to see the vets' plan unfold. He had spent the afternoon at The Vet Center with a room full of Watchers considering what might happen that night. He knew many of them well because he spent a day each week interviewing homeless vets to help them get the legal services they needed. Poverty law he called it. He was there when Sarge and Corporal first began the Smile Campaign. He had been the safe deposit for documents and photos the watchers had accumulated as they watched the KFF.

As he saw the watchers move towards the Civic Center, he pushed himself onto the sidewalk and began to walk to catch up. He had been following the hashtag #nobodytotherescue. He read that thousands more were streaming down 2nd Ave from the freeway and the Bay Bridge. Brad had organized his fellow poverty lawyers to observe the events at each station. Civic Center was going to be a showdown Nobody-style. The cops were swarming above ground, blocked from going down into the station by thousands of 'trapped' Nobodies. There was nothing for the cops to do except start a war.

As he walked along at an almost run, he began to approach the stream of

Watchers coming from below at Montgomery Station. Patrol cars began to line the curbs as Watchers walked ten abreast up the sidewalks on both sides of Market. They did not chant. They had no signs. They smiled at the cops and at each other. Everyone acted as if no one had the power. Short of having an order to oppress, the cops watched and took photos. Watchers made note of this as they chuckled about the irony of it.

As the crowd approached the Powell Street station another 10,000 joined the promenade. The sounds of shoes shuffling across the cement and a low rumble of conversations filled the air. The Watchers walked unmolested toward the Civic Center. The occasional siren framed the state of law enforcement. It was an eerie almost quiet like a wind which at times would rustle the leaves enough to be heard over the constant drone of shuffling feet.

At Twelve-Fifteen in the morning, the police surrounding the Civic Center BART station were themselves surrounded and vastly outnumbered by an estimated 95,000 Watchers all moving quietly smiling and greeting the cops as fellow Nobodies.

Watchers gathered into groups that included the cops and began to feed their memories of the night into Memory. There were no angry speeches. The vets were present reminding everyone that it is always the Nobodies who are set upon one another while the Somebodies gather in their secure residences, most ignoring the horrors they set loose for the sake of their entitlements.

## **Samuel Franklin remembers his hero John Connally**

He had returned from Henry's pleasure condo to what he considered his home. Henry's was too close to the action for his mental state. He walked back from the edge of his sky-high penthouse balcony with its view of just about everything worth looking at in the mouth of the San Francisco Bay. Henry's condo had been interesting enough. It was confusing and tiring. It was hard to pick a new pleasure every day and the nearness of them made temptation too hard to endure. He went home for a rest and maybe to do some work. He had long ago installed a powerful telescope for satisfying his voyeuristic urges. But in comparison watching others or experiencing it directly were two different things.

He had been at Henry's for almost four months, ever since his felonious brother had given it to him. Samuel's business life began to suffer. Since he was taking all the money now, he had not noticed the decrease. Not that he was paying much attention.

The champagne was probably the most irresponsible part of his stay away from home. His mushy mind was lost in the fizz and the fuzz. He remembered that he had set up a new project, a project with a list of the dispensable to be dispensed. He wondered where that had gotten to.

When he walked through the door, he went to the roof balcony through his private entrance and looked around, while the staff unpacked him and made dinner for him. As he looked across The Cityscape he realized he hadn't read any news, he hadn't even begun to plan his mother's trip to the US to a residence in the Napa Valley he only recently acquired. A shudder of fear came on him. Had his inattention harmed his planning? Had people acted without his knowledge.

He searched back through his emails. He read Azimov's articles on the 16th Street massacre, again. He had seen today's paper. The cops are planning to confront those BART riders. He had inside information. Where did such

things come from? Gerome, his personal security director.

His hand found the phone. Gerome answered in one ring. Samuel asked two questions. Gerome answered in the affirmative.

“So, you are telling me that I am responsible for slaughtering innocent people? And more is about to happen?”

“Well, Mr. Franklin, we see it a bit differently. Bartholomew is the commonality. His supervising officers are in your pocket. They thought you were asking to takeout Smith. They set it up, Bartholomew was given an order that may have been ambiguous at least.”

“I see.”

“Tonight's actions are still in play. This thing has a life of its own.”

“I see.”

“Thousands will be arrested. No physical attack is being contemplated but it depends since defensiveness could come into the picture, then who knows.”

“Where are you?”

“Oakland.”

“Get over here. I want to have a face to face with you.”

“Hmm. Might be too late. Its 7:30. The bridges were to be closed at some point to keep people out of The City. BART will run for a few more hours. The traffic looks like a baseball game and a football game at the same time. Heavy. No one's leaving The City by comparison.”

“Get in your car. Get here.” Samuel hung up the phone. He was not angry. He

turned on the TV. Local news was on a 24/7 BART watch trying to scoop each other. He watched for a half hour.

“Shit.” He said as he muted it and dialed Gerome's cell.

“I am on the road. Highway sign says forty-five minutes to downtown. See you about 2100 hours.”

Samuel clicked off. He picked up the house phone and called Service.

“Champagne, Sir? Yes, Sir. Several kinds. We have ...”

“One of each. Cold. ASAP. No food. Big tip.”

“I'll be there in ten minutes, Sir.”

He slammed the phone down. He realized he hated cellphones. He had broken one trying to slam it down. *Pissed me off*, he had said to himself.

The champagne came. The clock ticked the minutes down. 2100 hours came and went. Gerome was late. He picked up his cell and called him again.

“They raised the barriers. I am stuck on the top of the span. I brought a blanket.”

“TV says people are moving towards The City on foot. Do you see them?”

“Sure, I do.”

“Get walking then. Go to the Ferry Building. I will meet you at the wine bar.”

## **What happened at 16th St.**

As eleven o'clock came and news of the BART closure became known, Nobody left the station as directed by the announcement. They emptied out onto Mission Blvd. For a few minutes they circulated around the area honoring the 16<sup>th</sup> St Martyrs.

Nobody owned that stretch of Mission Blvd. The newly repainted memorials for the Nobodies massacred by the tactical squad blazed with candlelight. Hundreds of Cynthia suited men and flowery dressed women milled about the entrance, many walking in a line that visited each of the silhouettes of the dead and injured.

Nobody began moving down Mission towards the Civic Center. They were in the thousands. The cops stayed back away from the 16th St Station. They were in the dozens. Seeing themselves out numbered and their commanders shy to engage a peaceful stream of smiling people they stood down and Nobody kept moving towards the main encampments of cops at the UN Plaza.

As they walked others joined them until their numbers were doubled.

The traffic on the streets was abnormally light. Cop cars buzzed around. The highways into The City were blocked. Both bridges were closed as were the highways from the south. People from the east who would have travelled on the Bay Bridge walked the 5 miles from mid span to the Civic Center – an act of courage and persistence.

The steady stream from the Bridge met the 16<sup>th</sup> Street group as the people in the tubes moved down Market street from above and below.

## **Gretchen does Samuel**

There was no limit in Gretchen's mind. She enjoyed being pregnant. John was sweet but not her kind of partner, she thought. Denny had asked her, and she demurred hoping he would find someone else to play with. The FBI had taught her how to deal with people in various situations. Her undercover work for which she was becoming famous had led her to other more diverse environments. She found a part of herself loved adventure. She was confident that the perfect answer was coming to her in due course.

Samuel hung up his cell after Gerome told him it might take a while to get to the Ferry Building from the bridge. Gretchen called him from the entrance to his condo's high-rise.

"Sara, here. I have been looking for you. Can I come up?"

She arrived at his front door, sat in the middle of his gigantic sofa, in the living room he chose for her.

Samuel asked her outright, "Who are you?"

She told him she was pregnant and single. He laughed at her, or with her or by her side, reached out for her hand and slipped a big diamond ring on her finger. He didn't ask. He just did it.

'You are a surprise, but I have been preparing to meet you again.' He smiled a not quite a lecherous smile.

"Oh, I should tell you." She said romantically impressed.

"Yes, dear."

"My name ..."

“We can change it. I like Sarah. For the last two months I have been wondering if I would ever get the chance to tell you that I ...”

“No, don't.”

Samuel's face dropped from a sincere loving smile to a bewilderment.

“But ...”

“Samuel, you have a choice to make between fantasy and reality. I don't want to be real unless you do.”

“Hmm. What do you want?”

“Marriage. Full partnership.”

“Hey, why should I ...”

She interrupted him by pulling her Sig Sauer P229 9mm from her hidden belt holster. A beautiful piece of work. It's power obvious in its shape. She field stripped it and reassembled it, loaded it with slow, careful, yet determined movements. She replaced it in the holster that laid across her pregnant belly.

“Not a toy.” She said. “I am real and real serious, just in the wrong field of work. I have degrees but no pedigrees. I want up to where you are. I want you and your history.”

“What do you know about me?”

“Guess.” She said. He shrugged his shoulders. “Your mother left the Ukraine yesterday at 4 PM local time. You will need to leave for the airport in twenty-four hours, twenty-two minutes and drive for 1 hour 40 minutes, according to Google Maps, to get to her new home in the delightful community of St Helena. The key is probably in your left pocket with your private cell number

510 – 290 – ... ”

“Sara, ah,..”

“Gretchen.”

“Gretchen, you are as exciting as I hoped you'd be. Maybe a bit more.”

“You thought you were the hunter and I the prey?”

“Yeah. I am always the hunter. Marriage is the easy part. The partner part not so much.”

“You have a complicated life.” She shook her head as she spoke. “Your brother Henry has a love-hate relationship with you. He knows you want to kill him and now he wants to kill you. He could have sent me, but he sent someone else who also knows about your mother's travel plans. You will not live the night through as things stand.”

Samuel was way past his comfort zone. Gretchen made him nervous.

“How the hell do you know any of this? Henry is in jail awaiting trial. Why would he kill me?”

“He likes killing especially people he knows, and especially his kinfolk apparently.” Gretchen was rethinking her offer. “You know, I think I'll call it a night and head home. “Call me tomorrow, if ...”

Samuel was spinning.

“Gretchen. Thanks for the heads up. I'll call. You know the name of the killer?”

“Gerome somebody or other.” She said. “You are waiting for him to call you

from the Wine Bar at the Ferry Building. His car is abandoned on the Bay Bridge. He is carrying a PK 380. Henry promised him two million dollars if you died slowly.”

His cellphone rang.

As Gretchen reached the door she said, “That's him now. Have a fun night.”

“Don't go. Let's work this out.”

“Aren't you going to answer your phone?”

“No.”

She walked back to him and picked up his phone.

“Gerome. Gretchen here. Sam is busy up to his midsection in something he can't break away from. He asked me to meet you instead. Get a table. I'll be there in ten minutes. Promise.”

She clicked off the call and headed for the door again.

“Gerome.” She said as she pulled the door open. “How would you like him? I was thinking about Henry's if you are into torture.”

“I don't care.” He said.

“Yes, you do. You're just shy.” Gretchen closed the door again. “Dead or alive?”

“Dead.”

“50% or I'll bring him back here.”

“OK. Coming back tonight?”

“Don't wait up. These things take time and fore thought.” She was out the door.

## Gerome

It is a long way to walk, over four miles from Yerba Buena to the Wine Bar. He caught a taxi by luck at the foot of Embarcadero. Suffering was for others in his estimation.

He was excited to be in The City and looking forward to killing his boss. His PK 380 was enormous near his thigh. He wanted to pull it out and show everyone what he had. Gerome found a seat at the bar. The bar is only one table away from the busiest open walkway he had ever seen. The Ferry Building was wall to wall humanity shuffling, carrying bags and doing touristy stuff like taking pictures of what would later be inexplicable things. Sitting at the tables on the edge was a pleasure he could afford but for the work schedule. Today all those seats were taken.

He had planned to tell Samuel when they met about his brother's order. Then he changed his mind and thought he would find a table with a clear running path into the crowds, fire a close range shot with the PK and run for it. Then he decided he would tell him. When she answered his phone call everything changed again, and he became more insecure and thought if confronted he would deny everything. He did not know her, so he wasn't really looking for anyone. He ordered the daily, manager's favorite wine and began sipping it. It was a Zin. The crowd in the bar increased. His back had felt more than a few people go by brushing up against him, even talking behind his back. He ignored them.

“Recognize that?” A woman's voice from behind him said. “A hint? It's not a hard on.”

He tried to turn but when he did, she moved in the opposite direction. He saw her right shoulder, the one with the hand and the not a hard on.

“Feels dark and dangerous.” He said. “I'd guess a Glock.”

“Nope. A Sig.” She said with a little laugh in her voice. “You are not a pro. Why are you here?”

“Samuel is upset about the goings on. A bit out of his control so he wanted to meet and browbeat me, I guess.”

Wisely, Gerome sipped his wine as if all was A-OK. The truth be known he was more than a little excited about this encounter. It was the most exciting thing that had happened in recent months.

“I take it you surrender. Feeing no resistance, I am going to take your piece. I won't drop it so relax.” She reached across his stomach and pulled the PK from his belt. “I should tell you this cool story about how these PK's fire on their own and shoot dicks off. A warning to the wise.”

“What now?” Gerome was not humored by her manner. Sometimes he wondered what in the hell he was doing in the business when he could be singing karaoke and sleeping with anyone, he wanted without fearing Samuel's anger. Now Henry would whack him. Second thoughts made the excitement far less interesting.

“Buy me a wine and let's talk. What are you drinking?”

“Manager's daily pick of the best. I think it's called.”

“I'll have it. Is it good?”

“Good enough for me.”

They sat for an hour. Gerome was afraid to go to the bathroom, so he nursed the wine. He could not imagine what she would do to continue controlling him. She might use her weapon. She talked about how life worked in her view. He listened but she would lean over and whisper some deadly phrase about loyalty and assassinations and how one could fail and die honorably.

She called a cab. He clinched his teeth ready for the last second in his life to tick by. All the time he is sitting there he felt the Sig in his ribs.

A cabby finds her by phone, she pays the wine bill, stands up and announces, "Let's go. Mess around and your clock strikes twelve. Questions?"

"No."

They walk to the cab like normal couples do. She gives an address on Van Ness. They travel down Geary and then down Van Ness pulling to a stop in front of Henry's condo building. She pokes his ribs and says, here we are.

Paying the cabby, she slid across the seat pushing him out the door. He stood passively assuming the worst was about to happen.

"Not here, stupid. Go in the building like you own it."

They walk to the door, she punched in the code, the door lock clicked open and they entered. She pushed him to a private elevator. She entered the code, the elevator opened, they entered, the door closed, she pushed the only button in the elevator, and they rose to the penthouse level. The elevator opened into the apartment.

"This is ours, Sweetie." She says as she pulled her Sig Sauer from her coat and pointed it at his nose. "You, me and the Sig. N'est pas?"

She offered him a seat in the blowjob chair as she knew it to be. It had cuffs and manacles. He sat. She ordered him to clasp himself in and she did the last one with the pistol jammed into his throat.

"Hope you are comfortable. Let me introduce myself to you. My name is Sara. I work here. I pleasure the owners with sensualnesses of their design. It's a customer is always right kind of business. You have been ordered a

pleasure of Samuel's design. Guess what it is.”

“See God.”

“Nice guess. Nope. He likes to think you'll go to Hell. So, no. He's thinking other thoughts.” As she spoke, she wandered around the condo living room disabling the cameras and microphones she had installed.

Gretchen moved to the comfortable chair with the menu and looked through the book in search of just the right companion for the moment.

“Ah.” She said at long last. “This is what you need.”

Picking up the house phone from its cradle, she dialed Andre. “Andre, we have a special guest. He needs the Drug Store.” She paused. “Ten minutes? Thank you.”

He was sure he would die by gunshot. Now he was uncertain. She was being seductive, and the equipment was more whorehouse than slaughterhouse, so he had a hope.

“Well, sweetie, here is the game we are playing. A sweet young guy who has everything you've ever imagined will come through the door and offer you anything you may want. You are going to get crazy wild on hallucinogenics, saying things even you don't believe. Then eventually you will tell me where the secrets are buried.”

“How does this end?”

“For you? Well, Sam and I are partners now. You are his – and now my – employee, yet Henry tried to use you to kill Sam. We need to explore a new role for you since you essentially quit the one you had. Remember the security thing? Poor boy.”

A knock at the door and Andre walked through the door pushing a cart that looked like a room service dinner cart. Andre introduced himself as a master doser who had a broad array of interesting substances.

Gerome sat still as Andre read through a list describing each with the flare the best supper club waiter might describe a new sauce, or a wine steward might describe a rare Zinfandel.

As Andre went through his stuff, Gretchen moved around the condo looking for the unusual. Henry was very clever. Sam was not so clever. Henry built hidden cabinets and safes. During his recent brief stay, Sam left his underwear in one of the bathrooms. Samuel had armed himself to the teeth leaving weapons here and there. Gerome could not be allowed to wander about freely.

“Andre, I am leaving Gerome in your capable hands.” She smiled as if pleased by the experience Gerome was about to undertake. “What’s he getting?”

“He picked mescaline. I picked MDMA. Taken together he will be very friendly. Anything you want to know?” Andre grinned as he talked.

“How did Henry get to him and when? I suspect the attorney Adolph Schultz as the go between. Details will be very helpful.” She said. “Don't let him get up from that chair until you get them. Or afterwards either. There are weapons everywhere.”

“What do I do when he is done?”

“Take him to the curb. Tell him to walk home. His car is parked on the Bay Bridge.” She looked Gerome in the eyes. “I’ll catch you later.”

Gretchen returned to Van Ness Avenue and walked towards the Civic Center. It was nearly 12:00. The streets were crowded. There were hundreds if not

thousands of well-dressed couples and singles, walking slowly, talking softly and smiling. It was as if the Summer opera had just ended and the opera goers were emerging from the Opera House. She knew who they likely were.

Scanning the area, she saw police vans and buses parked near City Hall. As she passed through the cordoned off area using her FBI identification, she saw a huddle of officers talking strategy. She decided to join them. As she approached, she slowed. She saw that Detective Dennis Smith was talking to the other officers.

“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 any 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 Nobody and there has been no retaliation from any one of the injured 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 Nobodies, free Nobodies.”

There were no more questions. Denny 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.”

Denny followed the arm of the Oakland PD officer, as he pointed at the United Nations Plaza across the Civic Center towards the BART. Gretchen followed him. The Captain was in her mind and she wanted him in her sights. No more massacres was her intention. It obviously was Denny's 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. 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.” Denny 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.” Denny said. There was laughter.

Bartholomew looked at Denny. Their eyes met. 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 below.

## On the surface

When Sarge's company hit the top of the stairs and the relatively fresh air of The City's streets, the scene was beginning to clear. No one was standing still; all were walking towards the Civic Center. All the Nobodies on the surface were on the sidewalks. The patrol cars were driving back and forth up and down Market Street at normal speeds with no warning lights or sirens.

John looked for someone who knew what had happened while they were below but there was only Watchers, walking west, no one nearby saw it. He tried to estimate the numbers, but his view was blocked in all directions by people. If he could have seen from a bird's eye view, he would have seen the throngs stretching from the Civic Center BART east to the Embarcadero and across the bridge, blocked by abandoned cars, into Oakland. The bird would never have seen the people still walking through the tubes from both directions into the heart of The City.

He turned to Janelle whose smile was ear to ear, tears coursed down her cheeks, Corporal's hand clasped tightly in her own. The old vets were in their own version of heaven. John thought he could hear Corporal giggling.

Charlotte was singing a song under her breath; a Beatles tune about a submarine. Sarge wished he had a flower to put in her hair. Next time, he thought.

When they reached the Civic Center, the crowd was proceeding very slowly. The bird would have seen that the cops had withdrawn, and the plaza belonged to the black and flowery clad people who milled about smiling in enjoyment of their conquering moment. Sarge was clutching Charlotte's hand. Her head was resting on his shoulder as they shuffled forward with the crowd. They reached McAllister Street and turned with part of the crowd to enter the Civic Center from the north.

Their path passed Hastings Law School and as if it had been arranged Brad stepped from the entrance way onto the street as Sarge walked by.

When Charlotte and Janelle reached the surface, they saw the throngs in the street and eventually the plaza. The fact that there had been no violence because the crowds had defused the police reaction left them pleased in a sad sort of way.

“You know if the hippies could have done this, we might have been spared the Asian wars and all that implies.” Janelle was unable to smile. Charlotte knew firsthand the regret Janelle felt.

“Honey, those were different times.” Charlotte hoped as she did that the tube wars would end in a victory for every Nobody, but it was a long way off in her view. She said nothing of that. “Let’s celebrate the peace we have.”

Sarge overheard Charlotte’s last sentence and joined in a group hug that Corporal quickly included himself in. Years later Sarge remembers that they began to hum and smile and soon there were dozens then hundreds in concentric circles that grew as others realized what had happened, all humming, all smiling. There were pictures of the thousands hugging and sounds of them humming. But Sarge thought you had to be there to really get it. A combat vet thinks that way.

At that time, Gretchen had returned to Samuel's condo and Denny back to his apartment, waking Mary, who welcomed him to bed without a thought or a question.

The morning dawned. It was a sunrise morning in The City. The cars stuck on the bridge for six hours were free and most were gone as the morning commute began. The tubes were opened an hour late as BART officials wanted to assure themselves that they once again controlled their nether regions. The last of the Watchers had left hours earlier, returning to their homes for a short night’s sleep preparing for the day ahead of them.

Even the police went home.

## **Mother knows best**

Melanie Wolfson was an attorney. As Sara, Special Agent Gretchen Albright had been tasked by the FBI to infiltrate the corrupt night party scene in San Francisco, while in the day she attended a small law school as Melanie.

Gretchen the FBI Special Agent was a credit to the Bureau. She was loyal and though her Sara role was easily compromised. Her training helped her manage to keep failure away. The height of her career was the day she found Henry outside the Opera House as he parked the Vespa he was riding as he escaped from the scene of the massacre of his invention. She was dressed for a party and drew Henry's attention by joining him as he danced and spun his way up Van Ness Ave towards his condo.

He accepted her invitation to her Thursday Night Kink Club. It happened to be Thursday. She hailed a cab and they sped off to Telegraph Hill and the basement of a small bar passing through a costume room and into a small meeting hall.

He dressed like a wolf and told stories of the fiery deaths of the gang at The Vet Center off Market Street just a few hours ago. Henry was special. His descriptions of each death was firsthand and at times startling, if not nauseating. That's when Gretchen decided to dose Henry in his own condo.

That was then but now Melanie was being employed to grasp the opportunity a good attorney would recognize. Melanie Wolfson wanted to save Henry from a life in prison or the gas chamber.

She found Henry's mother where Gretchen and Sara knew she would be in her 16-room 'cottage' in St Helena, nestled amongst the vineyards, wineries and restaurants that lined State Highway 29.

Natalie Goronchova was sitting near her pool under a lanai that reminded Melanie of Hawaii. As she stood at the front door Melanie could see her in

the back. The doors and walls were all glass. The light was right. Melanie looked through the house and saw Natalie sitting on a deck. Not finding her knocks being answered she walked in and around without notice as she planted her bugs and cameras wherever she could then out to the deck to stand before the seemingly unaffected Natalie who looked up from her novel into Gretchen's eyes. Natalie's silent demand for information was unmistakable.

"I want to get your son out of jail. I have an idea. If he buys it, he could be out tomorrow. Can you help me?"

Natalie was in her 70's. She imagined death every day at least once and now a well-dressed 40ish woman was standing in front of her and asking her for permission to do what Natalie had hoped someone would do: Get her son out of jail. She began to laugh and wave her left hand. In seconds a butler exited the house bringing a tray of lemonade.

"Bring another glass." She ordered.

"Yes Mam." He said.

"Sit." She ordered Melanie. "What are you? Who are you?"

"A lawyer. Melanie Wolfson. You are Natalie Goronchova. Henry's mother. I found you because I have insider status with the FBI. Obviously, I cannot talk about that. I also have a friendship with your other son, Samuel."

"Sammy? You seduced him? I can see that in your eyes."

"He knows me as Sara, a sex worker, and sometimes as Gretchen, an assassin. I want his power and money. He knows that. His big problem is that he wants to kill Henry. Henry knows that and is trying to kill him. It's all about money."

“Those two are playing King of the Hill. If my hearing still works, you want to marry Samuel, get Henry to kill him and you'll inherit the family fortune. That's what I would do if I could.” Natalie leaned back in her lounge chair, put her large sunglasses over her eyes. “I did that twice, actually. The first time was Samuel's American father who died unpleasantly in a bombing. Henry's met a similar fate, but that father had built the bomb himself using plans I provided him. You know what happens when you mistake the red with the blue wire. Boom. Everyone likes an occasional boom.”

Melanie chuckled with Natalie.

“Listen, dear.” The older woman said. “There are many secrets. I know some of our family secrets but there are many more about other families and I know some of theirs as well. Charm me and I'll let you in on a few that will be of value to you.” She waved her left hand and a different servant came out from the house.”

“Yes, Mam.”

“When is my massage today?”

The butler checked his watch. “Ten minutes, Mam.” She did not respond. He returned to the house.

“You have staff here. It is good to have help. Leisure is difficult to arrange alone.”

“They are all security people, hired by Samuel. I wouldn't be surprised if the whole property wasn't bugged.”

“Me, too.” Melanie said thinking that she hoped her cameras and listening devices were in service. She wanted to know what the staff was telling Samuel. Maybe they are talking to Henry.

Natalie looked nervously around as she pulled herself to standing.

“I hate being late for anything, especially pleasure.”

Melanie said her goodbyes and walked to her car. A staff member was standing near her door. As she reached for the release, his hand held the door shut.

“Sorry, miss. I have a call for you.”

“OK.” She held her hand out for the cell. She looked at the number. It said Balsac.

“Yes. Wolfson here.”

“Henry Balsac. I thought if I invited you to visit me, we could meet. You know I have an attorney, some guy named Addy.”

“Happens to be the best.” Melanie said. “He will punt your case tomorrow. I'll be there to pick you up if you'd like.”

“Yes.” He said. “You sound warm and cuddly. Mama was impressed, according to my sources.”

“They are well represented today. I would guess you own this place. It's fitted for royalty.”

“Exactly. See you soon.”

He rang off. She reached for her door as she handed the phone to the guard. She hated being messed with. Her instinct was to slam the car door into his knees and cuff him to the fence not five feet away. She thought it would be too much. He was only following orders. She said thank you and drove away.

## Henry waits

Henry watched the news reports on the battle for the tubes and read Azimov's take on the events. "Blin." He said showing his distaste for the outcome. He had just begun his recreation period, when his morning workout was interrupted by a visit from his attorney. The trial began tomorrow. Henry didn't care. Addy was a bitch.

"I can't represent you anymore. Billy O'Neal is going to argue that you are the devil, Satan actually, and that you had control over him and the others when they killed fellow KFF'er Amos Wells." Adolph Schultz said.

"Why should I care? Maybe it's true."

"Maybe. But look you aren't a fool. I represent him, too."

"I get it, but I want the Chair."

"You don't get it. The courts do not want to give you what you want. They want to give you what they want."

"Now, what? A long delay?"

"No, just two trials. First you. Then Billy. You'll need a new attorney but if you don't care the trial can start tomorrow."

"I do not give a ..."

"Yeah, I thought so. Your new attorney's outside waiting for you to sign this release."

Addy left. Henry waited. Ten minutes later a woman entered, one he felt looked familiar, then maybe only another woman in a suit with a red cravat at her throat. Style not substance.

“Mr. Balsac, please sign these agreements for me. Here and here. Thank you.”

Henry did as he was asked without a second’s hesitation.

“As you know, my name is Melanie Wolfson. I have practiced law for about two months. You are my first mass murderer.”

“Happy to help.”

“I have read some of the record to date. I have a few questions.”

“Shoot.”

“Ah, I wish I could. First, did you confess to the murders?”

“No. I confessed to being Satan. Billy doesn't deserve to die.”

“Maybe so, but I am fascinated by the fact that there is no evidence you did anything re the so-called Turk Street Massacre. You are here because someone arrested you while you were under the influence of drugs that were administered by an agent of some kind, as far as I can tell.”

“A one-night stand, I deeply regret.”

“Are you saying you want to leave jail?”

“It is terminally boring here. Until now, I thought about the Gas Chamber being a delightful release from this life, then I realized I had things I did not do that I now wish I had the time to do.”

“Such as?”

“Kill my damn brother. Just kidding. I want to marry and have children.”

“I see. Well, have it your way. I suggest filing a motion to dismiss for lack of evidence. You will be out tomorrow. Don't get too excited. Be humble and quiet in the court room. The DA has shown me nothing against you, therefore nothing exists. This could be your lucky day.”

“I want you to talk to my brother and tell him I want my condo back or I will be pissed. He'll understand.”

“That would be another attorney. I will file this motion and get you out.”

“Wait. I don't want out quite yet. It occurred to me that I owe Billy what's his name my testimony in favor of his form of insanity plea. How is that going to work do you think?”

“Like everyone else you will be subpoenaed, and you come to court and answer the questions put to you. What are you thinking?”

“Satan doesn't do it that way. Who is going to believe good-citizen Satan could cause – how many? Fifteen grown men, albeit, mis-educated American white neo-Nazis to kill one of their own and then themselves, and then come to court to tell the truth?”

“No one, but that's not my problem.”

“Yes, it is. If you file that motion, I will confess. You know we can win so if you cause me to lose you will lose.”

“Henry, I am new at this, but I am willing to wager I never see a client like you again.” She was beginning to find him attractive – the younger but wiser, murderous maniac. She had been raised in the Presbyterian Church. Except for a lecherous teacher in law school she had never felt Henry's energy in anyone ever. “Here is my card. Call me when you are ready to proceed. I will

stall your trial saying that yours should trail Mr. O'Neal's. Is that what you want.”

“Yes. How bad can I be for Billy's sake if I am innocent of the massacre. Without that doubt Billy will fry.” Henry began a maniacal laugh that echoed joyously in the otherwise bleak environment, often filled with the screams of the crazies trapped behind bars. “I like this game. Maybe I will go to law school when this is buried in the books.”

“That notion is too wild for me to contemplate at this moment. Sounds like you want to trail Billy. I can file a motion this afternoon to that effect. I'll get back to you very soon with the result.”

“How old are you?”

“Forty something. You're thirty-six?”

“We are not made for one another. You cannot withstand a small dose of me. The real me would overwhelm you.”

“Good keep that going and Billy will see the sun again.” Melanie stood, packed her things and left without any good-byes. Henry had been taken away as she was putting her paperwork away. Deep in her thoughts about having sex with him, she missed his departure. Addy had described what Henry had told him of his arrest. His condo was quite the pleasure palace. Her memory confirmed this. She stopped at her home on the way back to her office for a little relief from her tensions and to prepare the motion.

## Billy's Trial

Melanie took a cab to the State Court building. She carried the motion to set Billy's trial ahead of Henry's directly to the judge's courtroom hoping to have a chance to catch the DA and the judge at the end of the day. As she passed through the main lobby a reporter who had seen her entering the jail lockup where lawyers go to see their clients, came up to her already knowing her name and the client she visited.

"Ms. Wolfson, do you have a moment? My name is Frank Ralston with KTTV San Francisco. Are you here representing Henry Balsac?" She nodded as she noticed other reporters were gathering some with cameras. She fluffed her hair as she waited for the crowd to form.

"Yes, Mr. Ralston, I am at the court today to make a motion to Judge James Pickering who will sit for trial in the matters of Henry Balsac, my client, and William O'Neal. The motion is to change the order of the trials so that Mr. Balsac will be available as a witness in Mr. O'Neal's trial."

"Ms. Wolfson," rang out as the other reporters pushed ahead wondering what this was about. Melanie pointed to one.

"Why do that? What are you trying to accomplish?"

"As you will soon learn, there is no evidence to hold Balsac for trial. Mr. O'Neal's attorney Adolph Schultz will file a similar motion tomorrow stating that if Balsac is freed there is no way he will be available for O'Neal as a witness."

"What will his testimony be?"

"He is Satan." Melanie knew something very interesting had happened. "Thank you, I am due, so more later." With that she fled the reporters as she entered the elevator to take her the three floors to the Judge Pickering's

chambers.

She made her motion to continue Henry's trial to follow Billy's for the simple reason that if Henry was found not guilty his presence as a witness would be in doubt. The media picked up her intentions immediately. The evening news blasted it across the Bay Area and beyond. "Satan to testify in BART murder case."

Melanie Wolfson with her large blond hair, ruby lipstick and fabulous vocabulary became front page news. The trial would have been page five, but the optics put her on top in the Bay Area. She was Henry's attorney; he was Satan, a witness for the defense in Billy's trial.

Billy's attorney, Addy, hung in the back. She had the media's attention. He was happy to be low key. There is no way to compete with Melanie and besides, he thought, she is going to make him look good once Billy walks, if he walks.

## The Judge

Pickering was one of the most corrupt judges on the SF courts. He didn't think justice was about fairness. Power came with office. The office was corruptible. Money flowed around the courthouse like a breeze through the trees on his property in Pacific Heights. Justice came from his growing wealth.

He was not innocent. He knew that but he also accepted that no other man was more innocent than him.

When Melanie's and then Addy's paired motions appeared, he saw that given the Balsac name and fame there was no actual argument against granting the motions. He called his assistant in.

"Please notify counsel that we will hold a hearing at 8 in the morning tomorrow. Their presence is required."

"Yes Sir."

That is how easy it is. In the morning he would grill them. One of them would have a motive that can be massaged into a small gift that he would find when he opened his re-election campaign's PAC mail. He would wait two days to see the check cleared and grant the motion. Standard practice, he thought.

## **Billy's Trial**

As Billy's trial began Addy was in control. Melanie was in the back. It was Addy versus a rising star prosecutor who had sent many men to death row.

The first order of business is jury selection. Sixteen men and women are empaneled. That's twelve jurors and four alternates.

For the prosecution jury selection was a simple matter. In its zeal to execute Billy the prosecutor was selecting the most religious, most zealous Christians in the jury pool.

Addy eliminated atheists and liberals. The prosecution thought he would angle away from a hanging jury. But he was acting like he was on the prosecution's side. The prosecutor knew his craft, but this baffled him. He made a note to self to research cases where the attorney sabotaged his client in jury selection.

Melanie watched the goings on as the jury chairs filled with solid anti-Satanists. Bingo, she thought. She left the courtroom, and in the elevator, she did her victory dance.

Once the jury was sworn in it was time for opening statements. The prosecutor delivered the speech of his life, nailing Billy as a psychopath who the jury would see in action in the BART video from the train car depicting Billy taking the life of a troubled soul who nonetheless did not deserve to die.

The jury was going to find him guilty. They all knew the Fourth Commandment. They all knew what the video would show. The four others who had aided O'Neal in the murder were themselves killed by murder or by their own hand while in custody. O'Neal sat unflinching as the prosecutor spoke. Addy took notes.

The prosecution's case was obvious. With their opening arguments over and Addy having delayed his opening remarks until the prosecution was finished. The DA presented the BART security tapes, a letter from Sarge that identified the five killers he had sent to Detective Dennis Smith. Smith was the only witness. The forensic discussions were in depth and gruesome. The motive was about loyalty to KFF and a traitor in their midst. The video showed the murder and the jurors heard the killers yelling 'Traitor' while they wielded their knives. Billy was the loudest and the most articulate of them.

Addy kept his head down making an occasional note. "No, your honor" was all he said during the two days of the prosecution's presentation. The State rested.

In the early morning, on the next day, Addy stood before the jury box. He greeted them all by name. He told them that the prosecution's case was good. They told the story from their point of view, and as far as what he knew, they didn't miss a thing. The video tape was the key witness, needing no expert interpretation to understand that Billy had stabbed Amos five times with a look of fury that shocked the jury sending one to the hospital with a stroke and leaving the rest convinced of the State's case. The still shots of each blow were mounted on display boards and stood facing the jury as Addy began his opening arguments.

"You might ask, why didn't your client plead guilty to avoid execution and in trade get life in prison with no parole? I know this is going to be tough for you to accept all at once. I figure that my job today and maybe a part of tomorrow is to help you accept what I am about to say in answer to your question.

"Satan made him do it."

"Temporary insanity? Is that what it's called? Maybe. I prefer to think that he was possessed and not himself. Therefore, it wasn't my client on the train that night. No matter what the pictures show, it was Henry Balsac. Henry

Balsac is the name Satan assumed to cause the five alleged gang members to kill Amos Wells. That is why William O'Neil pled not guilty. Thank you for your time. I will review this small speech at the close of arguments. By then you will see things my way, God willing.”

Melanie in the back of the visitor section wished she could see the look on the prosecutor’s face as he listened to Addy explain why he wanted no atheists or liberals on the jury. Only some ideologies would allow for a belief required to vote not guilty in this case.

Turning to the judge, he said, “I would like to call the defense's first witness, Henry Balsac.

Henry was brought into the courtroom under heavy guard. He walked slowly, his legs shackled his wrists restrained with a belt and handcuffs. If his nose itched, he couldn't scratch it. He was led to the witness stand by two guards and assisted into a sitting position.

The jury recoiled at his features. He had stopped shaving and cutting his hair. His face was locked into a grimace. He looked and acted like Charles Manson on his worst day.

“Will the witness please identify himself.” Addie requested in a meek voice with only a hint of a smile on his lips.

“Henry Balsac. Who are you?”

“Mr. Shultz. You know me. I was your attorney.” Addie was playing his role confidently. “Tell the jury about yourself. Your age. Occupation. Nationality. Family condition.”

“Hmm. None of those things matter. Look at me. The goings on in this room are not as important as doing battle against the enemies of the white race.”

“You are a supremacist. A white supremacist, who preaches hate. Is that what you are saying?”

“Yes. It is a good first step in my recruitment campaign. Hate is good.”

“You were waging a campaign to recruit white supremacists? To what end?”

“I made a gang. The KFF. Perhaps you've read about it. It stands for Kill For Fun. We made millions thugging beggars. We sold them drugs, gave them safe places to panhandle and took what we wanted from them. I became rich doing this, among other things.”

“My client may testify later that you are Satan. What is your reaction?”

“I am. I answer to Satan. No one here calls me that but still true.”

“Did you manipulate my client?”

“Look at him. When we met, he was a tall skinny nerd who knew next to nothing. I picked out his tattoos. He believes what I tell him to believe. You want to know if I told him to stab Amos to death? Not even. By the time, he was getting onto the BART train he knew on his own what to do. So, did all the others. They were brothers in hate.”

“That's our direct examination on this witness.”

The prosecutor rose. He knew the defense was trying to confuse the jurors.

“Your testimony is that you caused the defendant to hate, so much that he in union with his brothers killed another brother. Yes?” The prosecutor asked.

“Yes.” Henry raised his hand as high as the chains allowed as if he wanted to be called on in a classroom. The prosecutor asked him if he was finished.

“No. Everyone knows hate does not kill. I am an expert on this. My power is

beyond hate. I free good people to see the Ten Commandments in a new way. Thou shalt kill the people God tells you to kill.”

The jury did not flinch, intently listening, intently watching as Henry squirmed in his chains. When he spoke, it was as if to himself, his eyes turned up and his lids half open, he spoke to the inside of his head.

The prosecutor turned from the witness, he knew he had lost what was an open and shut case. He saw the pious faces of twelve Christians turned to abject fear. They saw the devil. The devil overpowered them.

“I can make anyone kill. Even you.” He said pointing with his chin at the jurors. It was dramatic, fifty years ago women would have swooned as if the breath of Satan had unsettled their hearts. The spectators were unsettled, their voices raised in prayer to thwart the evil spirit loose in the courtroom.

The judge graveled for order. The bailiffs cleared the room of spectators. The drama escalated as guards scurried about the room with their mace spray cans at the ready. Henry sat in the witness chair. Addy continued his note taking. The defendant Billy picked his nose, laughing as the slapstick comedy continued. Melanie decided to go for a cup of coffee. The judge watched her leave and decided to join her. He ordered an hour break and the jury sequestered.

As she turned the corner, she saw him coming down the hall. He had a condo just a floor below Henry's. As he approached, he reached out his hand. “Sara. Jimbo. Number 601.”

“Your honor. I am Melanie Wolfson, attorney of record for the witness Mr. Balsac. It is my recollection that the court rules forbid us to talk without the presence of the District Attorney.” She smiled the I-just-nailed-your-ass smirk. He reddened.

“Sorry, Ms. Wolf ...”

“Wolfson. Maybe we can confer with the prosecution re Mr. Balsac. I have a motion to dismiss with prejudice. You have it on your calendar following this trial. Maybe another time.” She turned slowly without a nod. He turned and went for coffee. She left the room.

She wondered if she could get away with a gotcha dance and waited until she was alone in the elevator. “You are mine.” She was referring to Henry as she spun on her toes.

She walked toward the courtroom door where she saw the daily paper's headline: Devil To Testify. Her thoughts predicted tomorrow's headline: Satan Wins. Killer Not Guilty.

Henry's testimony did convince the jury. It took one hour to decide. Billy was found not guilty. Melanie filed her motion to dismiss based on no admission and no evidence such as witnesses or weapons as she was leaving the building following the verdict.

Henry was closer to release.

## **The verdict: Billy**

No one expected that the jury would take more than an hour to find that Billy O'Neill was anything but guilty of first-degree murder. Question was of what would he be found guilty? Was it the chamber or the five and dime crime?

Some political commentators hoped that some god would prove that justice was real and send both O'Neill and Henry Balsac into the fires of hell where they belonged. Others commented that Satanic possession was not in law as a tool for lawyers to get their murderous clients free from the accountability of a civil society.

Social commentators promised that when the jury returned a verdict the reading would be a circus. People would gather from all over the heathen areas of Berkeley and The Haight-Ashbury. Others hoped it would not overwhelm the poor police who had their hands full with the Nobodies and the terrorism the homeless brought to the streets in a major city.

Azimov and her reporting were invisible and silent.

The closing arguments were delivered on a Friday morning giving the jury about four hours to find a verdict or be shut in a cheap hotel room for the weekend.

The State wanted to help the jury find the evidence that fit the definition of murder. Their close was about facts in evidence including the video and the seemed acceptance that the accused appeared to make in not mounting any defense.

The Defense in the person of Addy hoped the jurors saw through the 'innuendo' in the State's closing arguments. No one is disputing the facts, so the facts were not at issue. This is not a confession because if it were then a jury would not be needed, just a jailer.

“No. Your job is to determine whether or not my client was really the one depicted by the State or not. In his defense, a man, his superior in the gang, the ...” Addy stopped to glance at his notes. “... the KFF, ordered my client to kill, to ruthlessly stab to death a compatriot in the gang. Henry Balsac ordered him to do this despicable act and, as you know, from Balsac’s dramatic testimony that Billy O’Neill had no choice.”

Melanie was near the back of the room and she could not be certain, but that Addy had tears in his eyes. She had a clear look at the jury who rose in their seats as Addy described Henry. The juror heard him say Satan. He didn’t but the look in their eyes made it certain that they heard it.

Billy was quiet in his seat. He was in tears which he wiped away with a handkerchief showing a new tattoo on the back of his righthand. Melanie couldn’t get a good look at it at her distance, but it looked like, and she would bet the farm on it, a crucifix, with the letters JIL.

The jury was sent off to a jury room to deliberate. They would get a late lunch of a processed meat sandwich and a corn syrup infused fruit juice. The homeless ate better, they would grumble.

When the judge left the room, it was a signal to Melanie to follow him and the Prosecuting Attorney to an auxiliary hearing room. The Judge called his court into session and asked both sides if they were prepared to hear the motion for a dismissal with prejudice against the State’s charges against Balsac.

As the Prosecutor rose to speak, the judge was interrupted by his clerk. When free he asked the Prosecutor to forebear and called the hearing suspended pending a more pressing case. The gavel knocked. He rose.

“Your jury has news. Good luck to you both.”

They all rushed from the room to their three destinations in the courtroom. The room was near empty but filling.

Judge Pickering mounted his chair waited for the bailiff to be present and called the court to order. He announced that the court would wait at order until the defendant was present with his counsel and then the jury would be brought seated. Then whatever business they had would commence.

Melanie checked her watch. Forty-five minutes since the jurors left. *Wow.* As she contemplated the possibilities it seemed that the niceties of what degree of murder to find against O'Neill could not have occurred. It was gas or air. Death or free. Unless they had a question, or someone was sick and needed to be replaced.

Addy arrived and his face showed he had the same thoughts. He looked at Melanie with an inquisitive look. He gave her a thumbs up and thumbs down and asked with his shoulders what she thought. She shrugged her shoulders and gave him a thumbs up. He walked to his chair hoping she was right. As she watched him move, she hoped that too.

Billy was drug in by the bailiffs and dropped into a chair, cuffed and leggings clanging as he settled into the chair. He spoke to Addy and Addy requested an audience with the judge. He was waved forward, and the prosecutor followed.

“Your honor, can my client be as he was at trial free to move his hands and feet?”

The prosecutor made a face made by authority that doesn't care what decision was made. He was thinking it will be O'Neill's last moment of freedom no matter how slight until the sentencing hearing a month away.

The bailiff was standing at the bar waiting an order and when the judge gave him the hand gesture of a key in use, he jumped to the task and Billy freer.

The bailiff ordered quiet. The judge gaveled a concert and called the court into session. He then ordered the jury into the room.

By this time the media had entered hyperdrive with a massive amount of repetition and hot air. The result was a monstrous crowd of Satanists, street gangs, skinheads and Nobodies which was not abnormal in The City.

It is only during events like this one that the failures of the justice system are obvious. People would get through it. They would grumble about press manipulation to show people were listening therefore this entire case was a media circus and because of that no one was free.

Azimov was in the courtroom. The system wanted her to be silenced but she had too many years in this fight against the powers, as she thought of them, to be pushed aside. She saw the movement as other media did. They hurried and jammed the door. But the door opens outward and requires a bailiff to open it from the outside to control the crowd. She went to the bailiff's office and waited. Azimov followed the bailiff through the crowd and was the first one in the door. The bailiff is her cousin.

One could hear a pin drop as anyone who wanted to stay in the room must be careful not to cough too loudly or a bailiff would help you out of the room.

When the jury entered everyone moved at once. It was only a rustle. No one spoke. The judge gaveled quiet. The jury, who was making most of the sounds by walking and accidentally kicking chairs as they passed to their seats sat. Everyone took a breath. The bailiff asked for quiet. All was ready. The judge looked pleased.

Pickering said, "We are all here. Mr. Foreman, please stand."

The foreman stood. He held a piece of paper in his hands. He was shaking so

fast that the paper was noisy. He folded it again and continued shaking.

The judge had seen this hundreds of times. *When are they going to get used to it?*

“Have you reached a verdict?”

“Yes, your honor. We have.”

The judge reviewed the charges noting that there was only one count of murder one.

“Have you a verdict as to this charge.”

“Yes, your honor.”

“Is it written on that piece of paper.”

“Yes, your honor.”

“Please give it to the bailiff.”

The bailiff, who had been in this scene many times, was standing in front of the jury box from the moment the jury entered the courtroom. He approached the foreman as the judge asked for the piece of paper. He took the paper to the judge who looked at it fully opened for a few seconds. He handed it to the bailiff who gave it back to the juror.

“Mr. Foreman, what is the jury’s verdict.”

“Not guilty, your honor.”

The courtroom was instantly loud. People wanted to leave immediately to spread the news and get the cred. No one except Melanie, Pickering, the

lawyers, and Billie stayed. The bailiff was at the door to close it against intrusion. The crowd was gone.

There was more to do. The judge had to be sure the verdict was agreed by all, thanked them for their service and off they went under the bailiff's tutelage.

The prosecutor, Melanie left following the judge to finish their suspended business.

Addy had won a few cases where an incarcerated defendant was freed in the courtroom. Billy was in shock but not enough to keep his jail clothes on. He began to strip.

The bailiff had seen everything happen, so he was ready and waked up to Billy.

"You are free but, if I know Addy here, he has brought you another set of clothes. We have the ones you were arrested in back at the jail. Maybe going back for those is uncomfortable for you. I suggest that for the common good you would come with me and I'll take you to a witness room. You will be free. No chains. No cops. Maybe food and water. Jail food. Addy will fetch the cloths, maybe some food. No drugs or alcohol. OK."

"I'm ready to go but OK. Addy get me something to wear."

"Just for fun since you will get drunk and stoned within the hour and laid by a proper female sex worker within the day, say thanks. You can whisper it."

"Addy you are a cunt. No matter what I could never believe this could happen. I hope you know what you've done."

"Huh."

“It’s a Karma thing. I could explain but ... who cares. Move it so I can get out of the clutches of these assholes.”

“You are welcome.” Addy left alone. The bailiff stayed.

## Henry's Hearing

"Your honor one bad jury doesn't mean there will be another." The prosecutor plead.

"Is that your argument?"

"Is there a problem?"

"Guess not." Pickering moved his attention to counsel for the defendant. As he did his stern face changed to almost a romantic smile. "Ms. Wolfson."

"Melanie Wolfson, your honor, for the pleadant in the motion. I believe we set forth all the evidence the State admits is in its possession that indicates he committed a crime. That is the blank page in the moving doc. We say the charge should never have been brought. We ask to court to set my client free." She thought about calling the judge Jimbo for the record but that might keep dear Henry behind bars for a few more days instead of in front of one.

"Motion granted. The State has no reason for charging. They cannot recharge unless his mother would find him guilty. Thank you for your appearances in the pursuit of justice."

The court cleared.

Melanie kept back to talk to the judge. She had wicked thoughts.

He noticed her.

She said, 'Night, Night, Jimbo.' She turned and with a wag of her derriere she left him in fear and delight.

By the time Melanie left the Court, the festivities, as Azimov famously

referred to the celebration/protest/confrontation, were well underway.

As she walked out the main exit, she saw the bank of media equipment. She refused the first two requests for a short speech but when she realized Samuel and his mother would be listening, she reluctantly agreed.

"Did the devil win? Did bias lose? What if Satan wins does that make god afraid?"

A few near the speaker could hear what was said. Otherwise the mob voice chanted whatever could be chanted by a mob. Nothing seemed to make sense in the scene.

Melanie left the microphones reentered the court and exited on the other side of the building where a demo against animal experimentation was in process. Melanie left without further trouble.

## John

John was on the last train the night after the Nobodies defied the tag of terrorist. Azimov had an extensive article the next morning focusing on the use of the pejorative to attempt to destroy the Nobodies. She touched on Bartholomew's odd stand-off in the Plaza ending as the smiling Watchers surrounded the LEO's. Cooler heads prevailed and an anticipated slaughter had turned peaceful when the cops retreated from an oppression of the Smilers' civil rights.

Without the media's 24/7 attention – after all what was there to talk about? No one died in the 'Tube Wars' – the number of riders on the Last Train remained the same with a max of 2000. The train before the last was getting crowded too. Nobodies were travelling in from the East Bay and others were picking their stations for Memory speeches. The stations had become marketplaces of memories. Someone called it the Underground University with the slogan 'get trained on the train.'

That night John stayed at 16th Street. The speeches were about the martyrs, recounting lifetimes, describing their deaths and the names of those responsible as far as they were known. Red carnations with black lace bows first made their appearance as boutonnieres and corsages.

The train was full when it arrived. The speeches went on until the train returned disgorging its riders. The BART announcer announced the station closed and Nobody left, silently, in honor of the heroes who had been wounded and killed on the surface.

When he went to the surface John stood in the middle of the road looking at Denny's blue silhouette. A passing car honked. John waved and continued across the street as he reached the curb someone was calling his name.

"John, John." It was Azimov.

“Nice to see you.”

“Business. Have time.”

“I am your humble servant. Coffee or wine?”

“Too much caffeine. Alcohol.”

They walked the two blocks to Monk's. It was almost 1 in the morning. The bar was packed with people in black suits and flowery dresses. Monk was playing bouncer. The big smile on his face betrayed his intentions. Happiness, even the semblance of happiness was good for bars. When Azimov figured out who he was she left John to order and approached Monk to see if he could talk. He loved talking.

John took the drinks to a suddenly, open table for two. He sat and watched her interactions with Monk who had turned solemn. They shook hands and Azimov found her drink with her eyes and joined John.

“He is a friend of Denny's. Lives around the corner. He's been delivering drinks to Denny for months. Don't tell anybody. He made me promise.” She lifted her drink. They clinked. “Cheers.”

“Cheers.” John sipped watching her sip.

“That's good. I try not to drink in the daytime, but I am on tomorrow already, so I guess I can have one for yesterday. What a day that was.”

“How did they stop Bartholomew from pulling the trigger. I am sure the huge crowd did not deter him.”

“His CO was forcibly retired after the afternoon press conference. The Captain was isolated and would have been held responsible, so he stood down.”

“Really? Nuts, I was hoping for a moral struggle and maybe a priest from his past revealing ...”

“Your imagination is more fun than my reality. Write much?”

“Every day.” John didn't want to get into a conversation about him. “Not as much as you.”

“This morning's article was almost 3,000 words. I had help.” She was an obvious workaholic. Her marriage had ended last year when she began sleeping in the office. She was so tired from work; she forgot his name. They parted. She moved closer to work.

“How do you do it? You must eat. Do you go to a gym?”

“Caught me. No gym. I live to work. Most days I have to be taken to meals and maybe even forced to drink water.”

“Azimov. You aren't serious.”

“No. I live a normal life, alone. How about you? We're about the same age. Same shape.”

“I walk all over The City.”

“Doing the Smiler thing.”

“Often but I like food. I walk and find restaurants to walk back to for meals. A hobby. I write Yelp reviews occasionally.”

“You live to eat.”

“Want another one?”

“No, that was enough.” She pulled out her phone and ordered a cab. “Can I drop you?”

“This is my hood. It's a block away.” John might have invited her over, but she gave her office as the end of her cab ride. “See you another time.”

“Maybe for breakfast. You pick. Call me.” And she rose to leave when she saw a cab driver talking to Monk and Monk pointed at her. “Gotta go. Thanks for the drink.”

## Denny

Denny regretted overworking his wounded body. He was excited and was having wild dreams while he was awake. Things about cleaning up law enforcement. The Azimov article in the morning paper said he had gone to work at dawn and stayed until nearly midnight. That was way more than he was advised to do. He couldn't help that the timing was bad. The dreams he couldn't help either.

“Mary,” He said as she served him a cup of coffee. He liked to wait until after he read the news. It keeps it hotter in the pot he said. “I am very tired. Don't get shot in the chest. It's ugly and it can kill you.”

“It is ugly, but you aren't. Can I give you a sponge bath?”

Denny loved sponge baths if Mary gave them to him. Last couple of weeks they were very cleansing and satisfying.

“Only if I can give one to you. I noticed you liked that the first time we tried it.”

After bathing and coffee, Mary went to sleep to be rested for the nightshift. He dressed and ordered a cab. He'd hoped to get his 'company' car back today.

When he arrived at the 16th Street station for the short ride to Civic Center, he saw the station as it ordinarily would be, the general bustle, same number of people, dressed as they always might be. There were Watchers. There were Smilers. Everybody he saw was a Nobody. No changes there.

The train was the usual standing room only. Then he arrived at the Civic Center. The turnstile lobby was packed. When he rose from below, he slowly moved up the escalator until it stopped midway. People wanted the one's above them to move but no one was. Over ten minutes he rose a step every

so often until after ten minutes more he reached the lobby.

He saw no BART cops. The ticket booths were shut. The ticket machines were working. The surface looked a mile away and the going was slow. He sat down to rest. The crowds moved very slowly. People tried to use their phones to get information. The service had been cut by BART. He listened to the bits of conversation around him. No one knew what was happening.

The minutes passed. News came back slowly that the police had blocked the exits. They were searching everyone with a wand, looking for bombs. This news was greeted with increasing panic.

Forty-five minutes later he reached the surface and the barriers that led the crowd to the security block. The person in front of him was complaining about the delay.

“Blame it on the Nobodies.” The cop said. “You're next. Step up.”

Denny took a step forward and two officers standing nearby moved rapidly to his side.

“This way, Sir. Just a few questions.” He was whisked without resistance to a patrol car and pushed into the back seat.

“Am I under arrest?”

“Just a minute, Sir.”

Bartholomew slid in beside him.

“Smith, do you see what is happening around you? Your friends are acting up. Time to put a stop to it.”

“Captain, I have a few questions for you. What is going on?”

“The Plaza is full of Nobodies. They are scaring the powers. We have been ordered to treat the situation as terrorism under the Patriot Act. We have no choice.”

Denny looked at Bartholomew. Straight into his eye. “You are full of shit. May I leave?”

“If I could fire you I would.”

“Which is why you can't.” Denny spoke with a calm almost loving voice.

The detective asked the driver to release his door. He opened it and stood outside. The sounds of the crowd were joyous. Something good had happened. He leaned back in and looked at the Captain.

“You are a Nobody. Live up to your potential.” He slammed the door and waded into the mob of humanity. He was already dressed to smile.

He walked slowly. He was not used to long walks. He wished Sarge were here. He fell. He woke up in an ambulance. He had flashback images of gun fire. There were words encouraging him. He woke. It was Mary.

“You forgot to drink water. A day in the BART cavern can kill you if you don't drink water. It was a corporate trick to have few restrooms forcing you into the parking lot to embarrass yourself. Why would anyone be that mean?”

“They make you buy depends.”

“You're OK.” Mary said. “No joke. No life. You live.”

“Looking at you? Is this Heaven?”

“San Francisco. It's somebodies Heaven.”

## **The Underground University and the Watchers' Memory**

### **The nature of corruption**

From the beginning of time corruption existed. To John, it was confusing. Why form a government except to regulate corruption? Government never has halted corruption on the large scale. A few low-level bad apples were sacrificed every year but that was only a public relations necessity rather than the result of effective government oversight. The question was about the possibility the role of government was to distribute the corruption money to the corrupt rather than stop it. Corruption payments would be akin to tipping a waitress.

John had a degree in political science. Corruption had not been part of the syllabus, either as a good or a bad. Watergate had been a potential case for study which none of the professors chose to pursue. The word was used but not defined. He decided that part of the corruption was the constant coverup and the coverup was widespread if not endemic.

His recent experience of joining Denny in removing a few bad apples had gotten Denny shot by other cops on someone's order. He and Denny had been after other corruption targets, other bad cops. It was tempting to imagine their targets were the ones but then maybe it was the result of discomfort for someone higher up on the food chain.

## Cynthia

Two weeks after the tube wars settled into a norm, the Foundation Board met with John and Denny and invited members of the City government. Cynthia took the first part of the agenda giving awards to John and Denny. After praising their work and reminding the members of the history of Sarge and the Smilers she launched into her remarks to the board from the Executive Director.

“I want to have a happy message for you, one with good news about past works that will change our view of the future.

“What I have is the most disturbing description of what is to come.

“Our philanthropy has disturbed the natural flow of change. To help we have sometimes harmed. We harm because we empower an idea or an organization but not ourselves in the most inclusive sense possible.

“I have heard the arguments. The fault is with corruption. There is a beautiful satisfying image of everyone happy. Then there is the corruption of it. We are living in the most wonderful time. Some say it is the highest civilization has reached. I believe this. Technology alone has elevated so many yet has also enslaved so many. Happiness is double edged. It is only in contrast with pain that it is defined.

“Unfortunately, the happiness is not shared by the victims of corruption. And oddly, the corrupt are also not happy.

“I guess I have learned from the Nobodies, that happiness is a practice and that is the best peace keeping that we can do.”

## **Cops [follows end of Henry court case]**

Captain Bartholomew was pissed off, to use his phraseology. He was being made to take the fall for the 16th Street thing. He could read the tea leaves. The Commander who had ordered the SWAT team to punish the Nobodies had moved onto bigger and better things. He had received a commendation for bravery, given a bonus, early retirement and his photo had been placed in the hallway of heroes the Chief instituted to reward his co-conspirators' silence.

News reports had been very critical of the DA's office for losing two murder cases in as many days. The prosecutors had been played by a clever witness with a photogenic lawyer. The media criticized the DA's staff as fools for following a sensational suspect and never investigating the Turk Street Massacre for perpetrators. "We have taken a giant step backwards into corruption," Azimov had written.

No one would believe Bartholomew if he dared to point a finger at the Commander. He gave up, decided not to fight it. He would lose so he did the next best thing. He began looking for a long-term rental in La Paz, where hot people go to cool off.

Three blocks away, Samuel sat with Gerome and Henry. It was two days since Henry was released following the judge's ruling that the prosecution had not presented enough evidence to convict Henry of anything except annoying rhetoric. He had not been charged with bad logic.

They were meeting in Samuel's new favorite place the Edinburgh. Henry thought of it as a dive. Samuel liked the street quality. The food was bland. They served beer and dry champagne. After a round of toasts to Henry's good luck, Samuel moved onto his agenda.

"Our friend the Commander is out from under which leaves the Captain as a sacrifice to cut our connection to the Nobody thing to zero." Samuel sipped

his champagne. As he spoke, he thought about Gretchen, Sara or Melanie and how she was drawing him into retirement.

Henry did not care. He had tickets to Ukraine and a nice vacation from all the drafty cells and bad food.

“Gerome,” Henry said. “The Captain is yours. I suggest an accident. Maybe a head-on. Maybe he falls from an open window after getting a blowjob from some lowlife in a Tenderloin hotel.”

“I’ll leave that to you.” Samuel said. “Only a few ends left to be tied. Thank you for lunch, Henry. Gotta go.”

“Sammy,” Henry said. “I will miss you.”

Samuel knew what Henry meant. “No, I will miss you.”

They rose from the table, shook hands and departed, each in their own direction. As Samuel headed towards his three floors of penthouse living, he hoped either Sara or Melanie was there to meet him. She with her various personalities had won his affection. He wanted to please her, whoever she was tonight.

He would wed Melanie in public, and bed Sara in private. What a funny woman, at once smart and sexy, with a large dose of secrecy that made him trust her as his new partner. Of course, Gretchen was frighteningly violent which was interesting, he thought.

Henry would be safely back in Europe in a matter of hours. His mother had taken a liking to Melanie, she had achieved what Samuel said he could not, and now Henry was out and about and probably hunting for Samuel. As his brother walked freely about, he realized that he would not terminate the people on the list. It would upset everything again and it carried a risk with paid personnel doing the deeds. When he went through the list from

memory there was only Henry that needed to go. The rest was a sideshow.

He speed dialed GL.

“Change of plan,” he told Gerome. “Cancel all the purification projects. Pull back on the good captain.”

“Can’t say I was looking forward to it. Yes, Sir.”

## **Somebody isn't kidding**

Gretchen sat with Samuel looking out towards Berkeley and Oakland with the Bay Bridge blocking out most of what was known as Dog Town. He had been stewing about some trivialities regarding a new acquisition Gerome had lined up. The buy was for a portion of an international security company Samuel wanted more than he wanted her. She saw his anxiety at making the buy at a price he thought too high.

Sam had gotten so nervous he leapt from the couch at one point while yelling into his phone. Gerome was on the other end and probably sputtering his apologies at the state of the negotiations.

Samuel was saying that it was too high. He listened to Gerome for 30 seconds. Then he unleashed a torrent.

“Fuck you, Gerome. Why didn't you tell me that was the opening offer?”

He listened. “Damn you.” He said. He threw the phone across the room. It bounced off the granite floor, hit the corner of doorway and went in various directions as it shattered.

“Sorry dear. That guy is more trouble than I can bear at times.”

He took a sip from his champagne flute he had been holding in his other hand. He had been careful not to spill as he had gyrated around hating on Gerome. When he finished his drink. He looked as if he was to throw it after the phone. She interceded.

“Dear, would you like more?” He turned towards her extended his glass and stood shaking while she poured half a glass. Without a thank you he sat and leaned back on the couch again. She knew he was afraid.

“What’s on your agenda?” He did not look at her when he spoke. He was not as brave as he was rash. Her view of the situation was what was called fluid as in if she was too real with him that he would lose his liquids.

“Honey, Henry is out. Henry will kill you before he flees to the Ukraine. Act now or you are rotting meat.” His head spun to look at her. She had control as soon as he saw how calm she was even as she spouted the very reality he feared the most. It gave him some courage.

“Gotcha. Maybe Gerome ...”

“More likely to shoot his dick off on the way across the Bridge.” They laughed together at the picture in their imagination.

He said. “Good.”

She said. “He would miss most likely.” They laughed again. She sat quiet. They stared out at the night lights growing stronger.

“Well, considering your opinion of the Gerome idea, perhaps your Sig can bark at him.”

“I’ll lend it to you.” She answered. “Remember I am pregnant. Don’t want to hurt the kid.”

“Wow. You are good as a mommy.” He smiled at her like an expectant future father might. She smiled back.

“Do you want my piece?”

“Nope. Have my own. Thanks anyway.”

“Better get on your running shoes on if you want to catch up to him. My experience is to aggress – not wait. He is very aggressive so you must work faster.”

“What should I do first?”

“You could play dress-ups and hide your easily recognizable self. You could get the cops to stake out his condo and tell you if he is in or on the move. You could ...”

“Lay a trap.”

“Good. Think ahead.” Gretchen was enjoying this, but she realized her role was a bit conflicted. On one hand she wanted to score the big bucks a dead husband would yield but there was a downside to getting that close and it involved being complicit in murder.

Sam was becoming deflated as he tried to come to grips with the situation. Gretchen saw her only chance was to go large and tell him what to do.

“Look. If you want to do this the best place is in a hidden location.”

“Like?”

“The BART tubes.”

“Hidden? How?”

“Invite him to meet you at Civic Center station.”

“Oh. That shithole is full of Nobodies at this hour. Why would he come?”

“That’s ideal. You can blend. Dress up. Hang with them. When he shows maneuver him to the rails and put a hole in his forehead. Sigs have power

enough to push him into the train track from a body length away. It will be about timing.”

“Nice. Remind me not to piss you off.”

“Done.” She laughed and offered to call Henry and invite him to meet her.

“Ah. If he shows I will hate him even more. What else.”

“It is about distance. If you are too close you become a bloody mess. At five feet the splatter might hit your shoes. Seven feet is the best for accuracy and cleanliness.”

“What about witnesses?”

“They will not remember enough to identify you being so busy trying not to be collateral damage.”

“Oh my god. You think of everything.”

“Throw the gun after him and remember once you walk back even a few feet you will be invisible if you dress like a Nobody. Use the escalator to merge with the disembarking passengers. Act normal. Do not look behind you. No one will see you.”

He started laughing. He stood and went to his clothes rooms downstairs on the next floor. She sat back and hoped this would work.

He kissed her forehead as he passed behind her dressed like Nobody. He stood in front of her for approval.

“Pull open your coat.” He did. “Nope won’t work. Lose the shoulder holster. It smells. A dog would notice. If suspected and stopped the empty holster is evidence.”

He stripped off his coat and removed the offending apparatus.

“Now?”

“Go get him cowboy.”

“Call him in ten minutes. Tell him you are on your way.”

“Good call. Bye. Bye.”

He smiled turned and left for the elevator down.

She spent the ten minutes waiting. She pulled her burner from her furry vest pocket and speed dialed Henry’s.

“Ya.”

“Darling, Sara here. How’s freedom treating you? Wanna play?”

“You. Yes. Come here.”

“It’s a long way. I’m off the train at Embarcadero. Wanna meet me and walk with me?”

“Civic Center?”

“Yup. Train in three minutes. Be there.”

“How exciting. See you soon, love.”

She dialed Denny’s work number.

“Denny, Gretch here. Gotta problem.”

## **Brothers in Combat**

Nobody in the BART station saw what happened because nothing happened.

Some angel, in the form of a BART cop, inspired from above, stopped Henry as he reached the turnstiles to go down to the platforms.

“Sir. Please identify yourself.”

“Why?”

“Please, sir this is just procedure. You fit a profile. Sorry. Not my idea.”

Henry pulled his ID from his coat pocket. He thought for a minute about corrective action but hoped for the best as jail was still very much a bitter memory. Avoid capture was and had always been his first rule.

“Sorry, sir, I recommend a cab and not BART. Thank you, sir.”

“Damned inconvenient. But OK.”

He backed-off and as he walked out of the station he pulled out his phone. He called the number Sara had used to reach him.

“Baby, they won’t let me in. I will wait up top.”

“Gotcha, she said. Almost there.” Gretchen knew by the timing that Sam was downstairs waiting for Henry. “Let’s meet at Edinburgh Castle.”

“I will be there.”

She terminated and called Sam.

“New info, Honey. He is headed for Edinburgh. Go to his condo. I will send

him home in fifteen minutes. He will be all yours.”

She sat back and watched the clock.

Her phone rang. It was Henry.

“Can I order for you?”

“Problem. You are close to becoming a father. Morning sickness has hit me. Takes a bit to recover. How about your place, maybe a half hour?”

“I’ll be there. Anything you need?”

“Won’t need a condom. Guess that’s good.”

“I can hardly wait.”

“I hope you do wait hardly.”

They both laughed as she terminated the call.

She called Sam. “All’s well. Happy hunting.”

Gretchen sat quietly thinking about things. She thought about how messy life would be if there was blood everywhere. She picked up her phone again and dialed a number from memory.

“Andre, we have a situation.”

## **Samuel's second chance**

Sara had been right in her assessment of his military skills. Great at torture. Weak on combat. As he rode in a cab towards Henry's condo, he considered his options.

First, he thought he made a mistake not bring a larger weapon. Then he thought if his brother expected her, he would be laid back and surprised to death at his entrance accompanied by the rapid fire of the Sig.

He had no idea whether Henry was wicked or, alternately stupid, enough to invite Gretchen into his lair without precautions. Was sex important enough to him to risk his life? Nah, he thought. He does not expect Gretchen is on the way. Probably it was sensual Sara was on the way. He grew angry and possessive.

His second thought was that maybe he did not need to murder his brother. He considered that maybe as a business decision killing was not financially a good move. He wondered if his brother's will would make him an inheritor or whether the brotherly jealousy would make him give it to some charity such as the NRA who wastes money by the bushel.

## Sara and Mother

“Well you know dear that you are a complicated person. Samuel, I am afraid, has figured out who you are. It took him awhile, but he saw your face at Henry’s condo building, he saw you as Henry’s lawyer named Melanie and now you are some thuggish assassin named Gretchen. Let’s see that makes you a sex worker and a lawyer. For those roles you used two names. But then the boys saw you in the courtroom so you couldn’t change it again for your role as thug.”

“How do you know there is something bad in that. I had to put myself through law school. Besides you know how fun thugging can be especially if you can thug on thugs. It seems just.”

“You do have a way with words and a skill for adjusting the emotions of others. I saw how you amazed Sammy and how you messed with Henry. You have more ability there than I have.”

“Don’t sell yourself short. You drove rich men to their deaths for the inheritances. Your past was easy enough to trace through court documents and death notices. If I had been French security, you might still be in prison.”

“But you weren’t. I guess I should be happy that though you put Henry in jail, and then you freed him from prison.”

“Put him in jail?”

“Mais oui. You are a lawyer and a sexworker. The thug part is difficult to separate from your other role at the condos. You see the management group that handles the condos was purchased by a federal agency so that you and others could monitor Henry and all those who own the condos themselves. That last part is a guess. But I think it is a good one.”

Gretchen raised her glass as to toast her good guess.

“You are your sons’ mother.” Gretchen felt at home, but she hoped for more information about her situation with Sam and Henry.

“Samuel was wise to buy into private security firms so that he could rummage around and find your photograph in an FBI school for agents. Apparently, you are a graduate.”

There was a silence that started with eye to eye contact which in a poker game was a means of figuring out the emotional condition of one’s opponent. Gretchen loved the game but only played the eye to eye contact part.

“Natalie Goronchova, you worked for the reactionary forces in the Ukraine. You were captured and turned against them in favor of the Russians. How do I know this? I read the newspapers in several languages. Did you know you were famous for your black widow status?”

“What is your name? Do I call you Sara or Melanie?”

“Try Gretchen, agent for good.”

“Huh. So now, I know you. Gretchen it is. Well, dear Gretchen there are a few surprises in store for you.”

As Gretchen stood in front of Natalie who stood a bit taller than Gretchen remembered, her mind passed over the conversations they had had. The image of the mother and her two sons crossed her mind. They parted.

She would say later in a conversation with John she wondered if she was in a trap.

John said something about karma. She thought he was unhinged then. Now she wanted to talk to him about the years they were apart. She picked up

her phone. "I need the company of a soul I understand."

## **The Four Nobodies watch the sunset**

The memories Sarge held silently, for the good of all, he thought, kept his mind searching for solutions to the problems that spawned the unspeakable secrets in the first place. He was not into confessions of sorrow which was the burden he carried. "No one deserves to hear it," he often said when asked about his life before John saved him while he laid intent upon dying at the end of the S Turk St Alley.

He was sitting on the back porch of the farmhouse. There was the front porch. In the morning, he sat there on a glider to watch the sunrise. That morning Charlotte sat with him from 4:30 AM on. The Dark Time, she called it. She sat and slept with her head on his shoulder until the first bird's song woke her.

After dinner he sat alone on the back porch, comfortable on the glider, waiting for the sky colors to change as the yellow sun disappeared into the Pacific Ocean in the blaze of glory that drew him to the hard cane chair on the front porch with a view looking west.

When he first set foot on the Farm the cane chair was on the front porch and the glider on the back. He watched a few sunsets, fell asleep swinging lightly in an evening breeze and woke up mosquito bitten to the point of pain. The next day he talked the others into exchanging the glider and the chair. Corporal and Janelle laughed at his whining about itching. His face was swollen and red but Sarge had been swollen and red for years before he was saved from the alley. They accused him of hiding the wine.

Sarge's mosquito theory involved the habits of mosquitos to stay up late and get up late. "They are just like teenagers," he'd say. Watching a sunrise was considerably less dangerous than a sunset. Charlotte didn't care because she fell back asleep in the morning and Sarge kept them off her anyway. She didn't like sunsets. It was a spiritual thing. Sarge assured her he had figured out she was living the best possible life. She sat inside near the window and

watched the sun dip down into the sea from a safe haven. She could hear the mosquitos banging up against the screens. Sarge looked happy swatting them as he wiggled away the discomforts of his decision to sit in a bad chair.

At dinner that night they had talked about their little commune. Now that they were months into it, they had little phrases to describe it. Nobody thought this up. Nobody is as old as us. Nobody is as fun as us. Their ages made self-examination sometimes a tricky conversation.

“I am worried.” Sarge said. “One of these sunsets is going to be mine.”

Charlotte gasped in a faux humor sort of way. “Jonus don’t worry, take your time.”

Al squinted his eyes and smiled widely making the scars on his face, disappear in favor of his beatific grin.