

Avi Wolf

The Dance of the Balls

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Letter from the Author

Trembling and fearful I set out to do the unbelievable – to write. To write a book, from my current point of view, was in the realm of science fiction only.

After I overcame the writing bloc, I gathered my courage and sat down at the keyboard. I was swept into a new world, in which the letters and words I had were as musical notes to the composer, uniting into sentences, and the lines started to fill chapter after chapter.

I followed my imagination to its furthest boundaries, and this gave me rich ideas that surprised even me.

Slowly the story was created, which awakened the joy of creation in me and led me to the meanings beyond the works and pretty pictures. These I would like to share with you the readers – my audience, this symphony that I have composed, and to dedicate my book to you with my gratitude and appreciation.

Avi Wolf.

1. The Big Drawing

The hands of the clock moved slowly towards 11:00 p.m., the time for the big drawing, that so many people all over the country were waiting for. The whole week before the drawing, the headlines and billboards screamed: “50 million dollars.”

The television had been broadcasting clips starring a handsome couple in an exotic destination, spending the money they had won in the lottery and enjoying the good life. There is no doubt that the advertising department of the Lottery Company does a spectacular job of painting the illusion that all you have to do is purchase the lottery ticket and reserve a vacation in the Caribbean. Of course, this dream fades immediately after the drawing. Then you return to reality and anticipate the next round, where again you try your luck and perhaps this time your dream will come true.

David Johnson felt nervous as he sat quietly in the fourth row of the small lottery auditorium in the main building of the Lottery Company studios in One Broadway Center, Schenectady, New York. This wasn't the first time that he had been in this place. Two days ago, he had worked here feverishly, by himself, when he carried out the first stage of his plan. Now the moment had come to reap the reward.

There was commotion in the auditorium. The spectators were excitedly showing each other their forms and explaining their methods. Several were enthusiastically revealing their plans about how they were going to fulfill their dreams.

David sat closed within himself. He felt his heartbeat, his sweaty palms and his churning stomach. He occasionally glanced at his watch. He knew that this prize was his. All that was left to check was if some lucky person would share his winnings or if he would rake in all the money himself.

Jeff Klein, the manager of drawings and prize money department at the Lottery Company, sat nervously at the front of the auditorium, in the row reserved for the members of the Supervisory Committee. Now and then he turned his gaze back towards David, who tried on his part to avoid eye contact.

Suddenly, a multitude of bright lights lit up the auditorium. The television cameramen stood ready, the stage manager, armed with a tiny earphone and microphone, gave short commands to the pretty master of ceremonies, who had a wireless black microphone pinned to the lapel of her suit. She knew her role well, but even so, a monitor was placed opposite her with prompts of what she was supposed to say to the

audience. She was experienced with the routine that she did every week, but this time she was a little excited because of the high stakes.

Exactly at 11:00 p.m., the stage manager raised his right hand. A hush fell over the auditorium. When he lowered his hand, red lights flashed on above the heavy television cameras and a red sign lit up the words: "Live Broadcast". The master of ceremonies advanced towards the gleaming machine and with a slight smile, she opened with the announcement: "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, welcome dear viewers to the Lottery drawing. Today, the prize money stands at 50 million. I repeat, 50 million dollars. I am sure that each one of you has already made plans about what you will do with the money should you win." While she said these words, she put a meaningful look on her face.

Then the master of ceremonies spoke about the contribution of the Lottery Company to the community, education, culture and sport. To herself she thought: 'Nonsense, a deception'. But now was not the time to get distracted from the job at hand.

The audience in the auditorium listened impatiently to what the master of ceremonies was saying with such conviction. The viewers at home cursed her for delaying the drawing that they were anxiously waiting for.

"And now for the drawing," she said and pressed the red button on the side of the machine in order to release the 59 balls from the transparent sleeves. Each ball was numbered from 1 to 59. The balls fell to the bottom of the transparent Plexiglas container. The three blades around the central axis in the container started to move and spin the balls quickly, as if they were dancing. All eyes were focused on the balls. David started to sweat and he waited for the first ball out of six that would enter into the transparent chamber that was located on the bottom part of the container, and then roll into a transparent sleeve.

To be on the safe side, he took out his form that had 11 numbers marked on it, the numbers that were supposed to contain the 6 winning numbers. He knew that if the first number was among the numbers on his form – success was guaranteed.

Another second... another second... and here comes the first ball, and floating on it, the number 25.

"Here is the first number and it is 25!" the master of ceremonies cried, and continued: "Write it down, ladies and gentlemen, 25."

David breathed a sigh of relief and a faint smile crept into his face.

“1, ladies and gentlemen, 1 is the second number that was drawn” announced the master of ceremonies. The smile on David’s face widened a bit and suddenly his gaze met Jeff’s who had turned to look at him to assess his expression. David erased his smile and turned his gaze towards the machine which continued to spit out balls into the sleeve while the master of ceremonies announced the next numbers, until the sixth and final number was called. She repeated the numbers again and again.

In the auditorium, groans could be heard from the throats of the disappointed gamblers, who had invested their money for the umpteenth time to win fast and easy money, but to no avail. There were those in the audience who angrily crumpled the tickets in their hands, threw them in the trash and muttered a juicy expletive. It was evident that these same people would return tomorrow to the nearest lottery station to start the day with the same dream and renewed hope.

Jeff turned around in his seat. He tried to read the expression on David’s expressionless face. This time David spared him the suspense and he nodded slightly, as an acknowledgement of “yes”. Jeff sat back in his chair and released a pent up gust of air from his lungs.

“We still haven’t finished ladies and gentlemen, now we will proceed to the bonus number.” said the master of ceremonies in a loud voice and she looked into the television cameras. Again, all the viewers’ eyes focused on the spinning balls in the container, until one of them was sucked through the bottom opening into the transparent sleeve where it rolled until it came to a stop in the adjacent chamber, separate from the six other balls that had been chosen.

David wasn’t interested in the supplementary number. Even though he could have also known the bonus number ahead of time, he wanted to avoid winning this number too, as that might arouse unnecessary suspicion for a relatively small gain. However, he had filled out a “systematic form” A form that increased his monetary investment, but a worthwhile investment, since he had known ahead of time the return on his money.

“Ladies and gentlemen, 48 is our bonus number,” the master of ceremonies said excitedly and she repeated all of the numbers that were drawn that evening. She continued to praise the activities of the Lottery Company and all the good they did for society in general and for the community in particular, but the audience ceased to be interested in this speech and they began to leave. It is likely that the viewers at home

had already pressed the remote control and changed to another entertaining program that would take their minds of the weekly disappointment.

The bright lights were turned off and the light in the auditorium returned to normal. The technicians and cameramen began to take down the equipment and they peeled off the earphones and microphones that were pressed to their bodies. The disgruntled people, who had just left the little auditorium, walked slowly and muttered complaints about how close they had come to winning, only two or three numbers from the prize and they complained loudly about the slim chances of winning. They swore that they would never return to this damned place. There were also those who felt a little encouraged by the partial return they got on their investment. They lingered by the long counter in the lobby and requested to trade in their lottery card for their meager winnings in cash, which was supposed to improve their mood a bit, but they were requested to wait patiently until the next day, when the main computer would process the data of the prize money and they would send this information to the lottery points of sale.

When David left the crowded stuffy auditorium, he breathed a sigh of relief. He took a breath of fresh air and filled his lungs to capacity. He walked quickly towards the adjacent parking lot, where he had parked his old car. He got in, sat in the driver's seat, closed his eyes and tried to calm down a little, but he wasn't successful. The powerful, tremendous, indisputable feeling inundated him. His broad smile and his racing pulse attested to his excitement about the life of happiness that awaited him.

Only after several attempts did his old car start, as if the car was reminding him, here, the time has come to change cars. He looked at the steering wheel of his old Chevrolet, he stroked it and whispered to himself: "Thank you, my dear, that you brought me to my destination, soon we will part." He thought about the expensive SUV that he intended to buy. Lately, he had been thinking often about the life that awaited him after the big Saturday night and he had begun to plan his moves that would change his life. First, a car- he remembered two days ago he had seen a Hummer H2 on Broadway, bright shiny yellow. He had said to himself, "Soon we'll be in a different league, man we also deserve a taste of the good life."

A light rain started to fall. Tiny drops fell on the windshield. He turned on the old wipers, but they weren't up to the task and they created limited visibility, but for David this didn't present any obstacle, as he was very experienced in difficult off-road

driving and driving in heavy fog from the days of his army service in the elite Navy Seals unit.

He started to drive slowly in the direction of his rented apartment in Manhattan. His crummy apartment was located on the fourth floor of a grey, run-down building with no elevator. Pieces of plaster peeled from almost every wall. Beyond the appearance of this miserable building, David thought about the danger of living in such a building and he began to imagine his new apartment - a spacious expensive penthouse in an exclusive building near Battery Park in south Manhattan near the Bay. He had recently run across a two page color advertisement in Time Magazine that advertised the sale of a penthouse on the 35th floor. The apartment had exquisite detailing and the best, most recent innovations for the comfort of its residents. It had a separate floor for an ornate spa, including a pool, gym, sauna, jacuzzi and all other kinds of pampering. These luxuries were justified considering the high price of the apartment. 'There is no doubt that these amenities will allow me to realize my dream.' he whispered to himself as he continued driving.

Despite the darkness, the buildings and the world around him looked bright, as if he was wearing glasses with rose colored lenses. He enjoyed thinking about his beautiful girlfriend, Sandy, who he loved so much. He knew that she was waiting for him at home and he thought of how he could hide his excitement and the turmoil in his soul from her.

When he arrived at the apartment, he stood in front of the door, drew in a deep breath and let it out slowly to regulate his breathing and to calm down, so that Sandy wouldn't notice his excitement about the dramatic events that so recently had occurred. He put his key into the lock and opened the door quietly. He didn't want to wake her up, because he knew that tomorrow she was taking an important exam at the university and her success in the exam was more important to him than anything.

"At last you're here; look what happened, David," he heard Sandy's desperate cry from the direction of the kitchen. "The refrigerator stopped working. All the food is spoiled! The meat stinks and I have been wiping up the endless puddle of water for half an hour already. I can't take it any more, I've had it!" She burst into tears and asked, "What are we going to do, David?"

He went over to her. He hugged her warmly. He pressed her head to his chest and stroked her hair and whispered calming, soothing words. "Don't cry, honey.

Tomorrow morning we will go and buy a new refrigerator.” He said in an effort to appease her.

“We don’t have any money, did you forget, David?” she cut him off and released herself from his embrace.

“It will be OK,” he promised her in another effort to calm her down. He was almost tempted to tell her about the drawing, but he immediately overcame this impulse, although it seemed natural that he should share his secret with her.

“Leave everything and come to sleep. You are exhausted and you have the test tomorrow morning.” He held her by her narrow hips. He led her to the bedroom, to their temple of love. The way in which she responded to his touch told him that he had succeeded in his mission to calm her down. He understood that she felt protected in his embrace.

When he heard the tango music coming from the radio-tape, he started to dance. At first, Sandy refused to join him, but his magic softened her. So, she found herself being led in the dance steps in his arms. They floated as one body. Sandy gave herself to him and together they danced in perfect silent harmony...

2. The Party

The continuous annoying ring of the cell phone forced David to answer the call while he was driving home from work. “Hello...”

“I desperately need your help David. it’s urgent!” exclaimed his good friend Paul.

“What happened?” asked David in a worried tone.

“My wife gave me a mission and I won’t be able to do it without you. You have to help me!”

“What’s the mission?”

“To organize a surprise party, tonight, at my place, for Sandy, her childhood friend.”

“So, what’s the problem? Call a catering company and the subject of food is closed, call a D.J. and you have the music; call an event planner and you’ll get lighting and decorations. All that you’ll have left to do is to get dressed and come to your party.”

“Big wise guy. You’re single, no girlfriend, no kids, no worries on your mind. I’ll be home in five minutes. My three daughters are waiting for me, demanding attention and quality time. The little one, April, is only a year and a half. She isn’t interested in a party and certainly not in work; she wants her father, who will be hers and only hers! When you get married, you’ll understand what I’m talking about...” said Paul and suddenly an idea popped into his head. He knew how he could get David to help him with the project and he told him: “Before you refuse me, you should know that all of my wife’s friends are models, some of them the most famous in the city. It should be a fantastic party! And as a bonus, maybe we’ll find you a bride...”

David smiled and said: “Bastard, you know very well that I would help you, even if it was your grandmother’s and her friends’ party. So when should I come over?”

“Now!”

“I’m filthy from work, let me shower and get dressed for the occasion.”

“After you finish preparing for the party, throw on something of mine,” said Paul and hung up.

David changed direction and drove. Anyway, there was no one waiting for him at home; one of the advantages of being single. He didn’t have to report or give explanations to anyone! A schedule without restrictions.

Already on his way to nearby Long Island, where Paul’s large, elegant home was located, he called Richard the D.J. Richard had recently begun to organize events. He had acquired a quality sound system and a modern lighting system with special

effects. He controlled everything through a laptop, which helped him to produce parties and events professionally.

Richard called his friend, who owned the company “The Red Balloon” and asked him to design the decorations with different sizes and colors of balloons, with special attention to the well-groomed garden that was designed by a certified landscape architect. Every plant and flower was planted in an area that was carefully chosen in order to evoke a sense of quiet and calm and of delicate beauty for the residents of the house. The grass was trimmed short, as if it had undergone treatment at a professional grass stylist and The exotic plants were all imported. The strong colors of the flowers in the flower beds gave testimony to the individual care each flower received.

Especially prominent was the gorgeous swimming pool with internal lighting. The tile surrounding the pool was made of fine Italian ceramics. Elliptical stone steps, adorned with ancient embossments, led the bathers towards the clear water, as if they were ancient roman emperors who had come to dip into holy spring water. Water fountains discharged and spat streams of water to the rhythm of coordinated music. Clay jugs were placed on copper bases and in them were sheaves of straw and dry wheat.

David called a friend who owned a catering company, but his request was turned down due to a prior commitment. He tried his luck with a new Japanese restaurant and the response was positive, so he ordered a Japanese buffet at a cost of \$50 per person. ‘He’ll pay through the nose’, David thought to himself. ‘Whoever wants an event at the last minute has to take that into account.’ When he arrived, he began to clear the garden furniture to make room for a temporary dance floor next to the pool. He dragged an extension cord for the sound and light systems. The Japanese restaurant sent a scout to decide on the placement of the tables for the buffet and for the portable bar, which was stocked with the best imported alcohol and soft drinks, as well as an interesting colorful punch. Slowly, his work began to pay off and it started to take shape. By nine in the evening, the place was ready to receive the guests.

“Fantastic! Well done David!” exclaimed Paul and his wife Lisa in amazement. They were dressed in their best clothes. They kissed and hugged David, while praising his organizational abilities and quick execution.

“I have a few more minutes of work and then I’ll go to my apartment to shower and get organized. What time did you invite the guests for?” asked David.

“They’re already here.” they replied and suddenly four especially attractive couples appeared. The men were dressed in tailored suits, wearing ties and were clean-shaven.

When they passed by him, he smelled the expensive cologne that emanated from them. Their bearing radiated wealth and self-assurance. The women, who accompanied them, were beautiful and impeccably groomed. Clearly, they dedicated themselves to appearing in society with their rich partners. David sensed the men's look of disdain for him, even though he was ten times more handsome than them. His shabby and scrubby appearance in combination with his stubbly chin and sweat, dressed in his blue jeans, white T-shirt and sport shoes accentuated the difference between him and the other arrogant men. The flow of guests increased, so that within half an hour there were about 20 couples scattered about. Some gathered in small groups and discussed various topics. They would occasionally sip a quality alcoholic drink and snack on small sandwiches of fish delicacy and small strips of sushi. On the dance floor, opposite the loudspeakers and the colored lights, five couples danced to the beat of disco, until the dramatic and decisive moment, that as a result of which, the whole party changed.

When Sandy entered the spacious home, from the front door to the garden, it was as if everything stopped moving. Although the music continued to play, everyone's attention and all eyes were turned towards the queen. It was a royal entrance, an apparition that suddenly appeared in its full glory of 5 feet, 11 inches of beauty divine, heart-stirring beauty, beauty that hurts. Venus, the goddess of beauty and love, herself in person. Every description would only detract from the completeness of the vision. A dimple adorned her right cheek. The green in her eyes shone from a distance. Delicate makeup, precise. A sweet smile. Red lips, luscious and full. A small nose and a proud, swan-like neck. Long blond hair, smooth and luxurious, turned into gold curls by a famous hairdresser. A shapely and perfect body, a present from God, presented in a short flowered dress, exclusive and expensive, whose brown and orange colors, like the colors of earth, and a plunging neckline that fit her body so well.

You could discern not only her protruding breasts, young and firm, but also her nipples, whose points stood out from afar. David noticed how delicate her hands were, like a princess in a fairy tale. All this beauty carried on a pair of long, shapely legs ending in a pair of high-heels. Her shoes were like jewelry for her feet, the heels glittering like rubies, as if they were meant to emphasize the grace of her ankles.

David, like all of the guests, watched her movements and regal walk. He looked at her body and her buttocks, that protruded from under her tight dress and he wondered

how they would look without the flowered covering. 'I want her.' David murmured to himself. He simply looked at her, at her face, her hair, her provocative breasts, her perfect legs, her sexy feet, at every part of her separately and at all of her, as an entirety of beauty and perfection. She was so attractive that the word sexy did her an injustice, because it couldn't describe even half of the burning desire that she aroused in him. 'I can't deny it; I am dying to sleep with her. To give her everything I can.'

Lisa walked over to her. She took her hand and kissed her on the cheek and complimented her about the way she looked. She led her towards a group of women who were jealously checking out every inch of her body. Later Paul introduced her to the rest of the guests. When they reached David, he stretched out his hand to her and said: 'Nice to meet you, my name's David. Excuse my appearance, but it's his fault,' he pointed at Paul in anger together with a smile and he mumbled to Paul: "You'll pay for the embarrassment you're causing me." Paul volunteered the explanation that he had asked David to organize the party which prevented him from properly getting ready. Sandy smiled and gave him a prolonged look, even after she was dragged off to other guests.

David felt that he had missed the opportunity to win the heart of the girl of his dreams, due to his appearance in contrast to the selection of the other men who were properly attired. His less than "brilliant" appearance prevented him from asking her to dance. Disappointed, he went over to the bar and poured himself a glass of red wine. Beautiful Sandy was asked to dance without a break. It was impossible to reach her. She was surrounded by men, who incessantly tried to impress her and to win her attention or perhaps to sleep with her.

Suddenly, a scream pierced the dance floor, a bloodcurdling scream of one of the guests, who yelled with all her strength: "Help! Help! A girl fell into the water!" Three tailored men in elegant suits, joined her and also yelled, "The girl ran after the balloon and fell in the water!"

David dropped the glass from his hand, strode two steps and dove into the pool towards the spot where the guests were pointing. The music stopped. Everyone stopped dancing and crowded around the pool. They watched as David dove towards the silhouette of the girl's small body that was lying motionless.

"Save my daughter, my April. How did she get into the water?" Lisa's crying could be heard.

“She probably woke up because of the music and went out to follow a balloon towards the pool.” answered her worried friend.

Every second seemed to last an eternity. Suddenly David appeared on top of the water holding little April in his arms. While still in the pool, he started to give CPR, as he had learned during his army service. After a few seconds, she spit up a stream of water mixed with vomit. David ignored all the advice and directives that he heard from all directions around him. He raised her head a little to create a clear airway for regular breathing. He opened her mouth, closed her nostrils with his fingers and breathed two strong breaths. The child started to show signs of life and broke out crying. All of the guests started to clap and some cried from emotion about David’s resourcefulness which saved the girl’s life.

He clutched her to his chest and moved towards Lisa who was overwrought and crying as she walked down the steps into the pool towards him. He handed April to her and she covered the child with kisses and warmth. Paul laid a towel over her wet body.

When April uttered the word “balloon”, everyone breathed a sigh of relief and cried with her as if she had told a touching story. All of the guests gathered around them, stroked them and expressed their happiness. Paul returned to the pool. He went over to David and gave him a long, warm hug and whispered emotionally: “Thanks pal” and he put a dry towel on his shoulder.

“I took a bath after all.” said David smiling, as he looked at the water pouring out of his clothes.

Beautiful Sandy, who was watching them from the side, approached them with tears in her eyes and she said to David: “Congratulations on the initiative and the perfect execution. From all of the refined men, there wasn’t one who would dare get his precious suit wet. Weaklings. How lucky there was a real man around.”

“Thanks for the compliment.” said David.

“Would you be so kind to save me too- from the terrible boredom I’ve been suffering from lately?”

David couldn’t believe his ears, he looked at Paul, smiled and said to him: “Is what I just heard true, or is the water in my ears causing me to hear imaginary voices?”

“God repays good deeds immediately and in cash. Sandy is the angel who was sent to you from heaven. Don’t lose her!” Paul answered and left them alone. Sandy dried his

wet hair, his face and also his neck. He felt the jealous stares of the scheming men who stood on the side and waited for her to return.

“Go in the house and change clothes. You might catch a cold.” she said.

“There are no clothes here my size; it doesn’t matter. I was going to leave early anyway. I’ve done my bit for today, so it won’t hurt me to rest a little and calm down after the dramatic event that we had.”

Sandy was disappointed by his intention to leave and she shook her head in disagreement. David took courage, took a deep breath and said: “I would like to invite you to my small, charming apartment in Manhattan, tomorrow evening. I take upon myself the difficult, but challenging task ...to cook an intimate dinner. By the way, I’ve never cooked before.” He examined her eyebrows and her body language and continued: “Are you willing to take a chance? At any rate, I will prepare throw-up bags, in case we need them.” He smiled and tried to use a little humor in order to relieve the tension.

Sandy laughed out loud. After she composed herself a little, she kissed him lightly on the cheek and whispered in reply: “I was worried that you weren’t going to offer, David.”

“It was harder to say than jumping into the water,” he said and added with a smile: “before I go, maybe I should spray the area with Raid to remove all of the parasites around you.”

Sandy smiled and said: “Fancy clothes don’t impress me.” She kissed him on the cheek and added: “I can’t wait to see you tomorrow.”

He went to say good-bye to Lisa and Paul. They thanked him again and again for saving their little girl. They parted from him with a kiss. His mind was preoccupied with the mission he had taken upon himself. ‘How did I get myself into this predicament? This is doomed from the start, especially in light of the fact that I’ve never even fried an egg before.’ On his way out, he went up to Sandy to say good-bye again, with the goal of trying to change the plans for tomorrow to a play or a movie, but she refused. The idea of an intimate dinner with a romantic atmosphere appealed to her. They exchanged telephone numbers. He gave her his address and left her with a light kiss on her sensuous lips. He lingered a moment to breathe in the scent of her fragrant perfume that surrounded her. These sensations and his heartbeats, which were new to him, illuminated the path of true love.

3. Job Opening

Jeff Klein was discharged from his army career service at age 45, after 27 years of service in logistics. Most of his service had been in field units, but five years before the end of his service, he had been injured in a bad traffic accident. The impact caused him moderate disability, but crucial from his perspective was the impact on his sexual functioning. As a result, his self-image plunged to the depths. The situation undermined his self-confidence and completely changed his behavior and way of life.

In his youth, Jeff had been a “pistol” due to the obvious advantage that he had over his peers. Obvious meaning his magnificent penis, perfectly formed, that couldn’t be hidden or ignored. His big advantage evidenced itself mainly during the period of his service in combat divisions, far away from American soil. There, the communal army showers were a kind of meeting place to release tension. After operational or physical activities, the shower filled with soldiers who came not only to bathe, but also to let off steam or to tell stories. Without a doubt, Jeff was “king of the shower”. His name, or more precisely his reputation preceded him...really... soldiers on the base came to see the unusual sight that hung down between his legs and they left frustrated, envious of the immense gap between him and themselves, to their disadvantage. The guys told jokes and laughed uproariously in the shower. Thus, Jeff gained appreciation and admiration mixed with jealousy. He became the topic of conversation. The news of his impressive statistics spread through the base like wildfire. The girls who heard about it whispered among themselves, ‘Size isn’t what counts’, but their curiosity overcame their embarrassment. They pacified themselves with the thought that they were far from home, family and friends and it wouldn’t leave a trace on their bodies; so they didn’t miss this one-shot opportunity that they might never run across again. These thoughts about the special sized organ imbued them with an uncontrollable desire to experience something different, something enormous in its potency, something that would endure in their memories for a long time.

There was concealed competition among the female soldiers on the base as to who would capture, or more precisely, who would be the first to catch Jeff in her net, in her bed. The temptation was great and imaginations even more so, as each one

began to fantasize how she would realize her personal fantasy with the most famous male organ on the base.

Immediately at the beginning of each encounter, Jeff and his young partner tried to overcome the embarrassment by turning off the bare light bulb that illuminated the room. In its place, they lit a small candle. Despite the dim lighting, when Jeff took off his pants, a terrifying bulge was immediately evident, trapped in his brown cotton underwear, a bulge that wrapped itself around his pelvis, like an anaconda snake that was trapped in a sack and was threatening to tear the thin material and burst out in order to bite its victim. Both sides realized that Jeff's big advantage was in reality a big disadvantage, as he was not able to fully penetrate the recesses of his partner's body. Every attempt by the girls to absorb the length of his huge member utterly failed, which caused frustration and disappointment. Jeff and his partner were forced to give up on the sexual act, thus ending the girls' fantasies, unfulfilled with a sense of missed opportunity.

Thus Jeff passed his army career in the same routine, until the day when the traffic accident occurred, which as mentioned before, changed his life beyond recognition. It was Friday afternoon, a rainy winter day; the street was wet and slick. At the end of an exhausting week, Jeff was driving home to New York City. He stopped at a red light. A young driver, driving a pickup truck on Route 95 fell asleep at the wheel and crashed into his car from behind with tremendous force. He realized that he began to lose feeling in the lower part of his body. He wasn't able to move his pelvis or legs. An ambulance rushed him to the hospital and there the magnitude of his injury became clear: "Irreversible damage to the lower spinal cord." the doctor broke the news to him. The injury caused him localized partial paralysis in his pelvis and hips and inability to function sexually. All of the attempts by the doctors to treat the problem and help him regain sexual functioning failed and caused him great frustration. His wife, Danielle loved him and appreciated his being a wonderful father to their two daughters. She remained faithful to him, despite the limitation which prevented her from having sexual satisfaction, as Jeff had given her in the past. She was the owner of a famous fashion house, "Danielle Klein", which was located among the stores of prestigious fashion designers on 5th Avenue in Manhattan. In fact, she was totally preoccupied with the fashion house. She was involved with ordering fabrics, choosing styles and determining next season's collections, which filled her day.

When she arrived home in the evening, she dropped on the sofa in the living room, totally exhausted. She fell asleep in front of the T.V. and sometimes stayed there until morning.

After the accident, Jeff served another five years at the Pentagon in an administrative capacity. He sat in his spacious air-conditioned office until he retired. When he retired from the army, he thought he could occupy himself with things that nurtured the soul; activities that weren't conditional on earning money. He was sure that the fashion house would provide the required income to maintain their lifestyle without pressure, but he was mistaken. The fashion house hadn't brought in one single cent into the household for a long time. When Danielle decided to expand from a small successful store into an exclusive fashion house, it required a large space, hiring a big staff, paying salaries, high maintenance, purchasing high quality fabric from abroad and holding frequent prestigious fashion shows, all of which required tremendous outlays that were greater than the income and she incurred heavy losses. Fortunately, Danielle had been able to save a sizable sum from her regular clients who paid in cash at a reduced price without invoices or receipts, before she made the big changes in the business. With this money, they had purchased a nice apartment in a high-rise in Manhattan and they were also able to help finance their daughters' weddings.

Days turned into weeks and weeks dragged into months since Jeff had retired from the army. His pension and disability payments that were deposited in his bank account on the first of every month enabled them to barely get by. All the inquiries he made to his former colleagues who he had served with in the army and who had promised to give him a job in their companies when he retired were not fulfilled. He began to look for a position befitting his qualifications. He turned to an employment agency, he sent resumes to companies and factories that placed ads in the classified section of the newspapers and he even looked on several internet sites. He was invited to several first interviews for positions that he found desirable, but after the initial interview, he was politely rejected.

He began to realize that he wasn't worth as much as he had thought. He felt that there wasn't appreciation of his abilities and there was no need for him and his services. But in conjunction with this, he started to enjoy his free time, when he had it. Leisure time that allowed him to do many things he hadn't been able to do during his military service. He even began to take an interest in a painting and

sculpture class. He particularly enjoyed the introductory meeting at “Studio D”. It was in a small auditorium with a little platform in the middle, upon which a fat, ugly girl lay naked in a provocative pose. She emphasized her ample, fertile hips, while 20 men and women around her tried to draw and sketch her on white sheets of paper attached to wooden easels.

His daily routine started with a cool shower, after which he sipped his coffee and read the headlines of the sports section of the newspaper that was delivered every morning on his doormat.

One morning, as he got out of his shower, he discovered quite by chance, an “emotional goldmine”. Something that moved him like nothing else had for a long time. On his way to the filing cabinet, which stood under the window in the hallway next to the shower, he pulled back the curtain a little and suddenly he caught some movement out of the corner of his eye which attracted his attention through the window in the building opposite his apartment. He looked and couldn't believe his eyes. On the 10th floor of the building facing him, in the bedroom, on a bed with white linens, lay an attractive woman, naked as the day she was born, masturbating pleasurably. He froze in his place and watched quietly. He looked to his right and left fearful of getting caught, but then he remembered that he was alone at home and he relaxed. He tried to improve his position, ‘perhaps I could see better from a different angle’ he thought to himself. He took a few steps sideways and the picture which appeared in front of his eyes through the window was wider. Also, the sun's rays that penetrated the margins of the room illuminated natural light on the exceptional sight and enhanced the view that was revealed to him. He clearly saw her hands slowly sliding over the length of her body and advance to her pelvis, which was raised a little by a pillow placed under her buttocks. Silence enveloped him. Jeff couldn't hear her breathing or her groans, but his brain began to create the sounds. He heard sounds from heaven that perfectly coordinated with her body's sensual movements. Jeff hadn't felt this sense of arousal for a long time and it led him to decide to take advantage of the excellent location of his apartment and to transform the perversion of voyeurism that had aroused him so much, to an artistic level. ‘I have just discovered New York’ he thought to himself. ‘This is how Columbus must have felt when he discovered America... a new world.’ His body was flooded with sensations he hadn't felt for a long time. He started to scan the adjacent buildings. He mostly

saw routine snapshots of everyday activities in apartments, but he knew that most of the interesting activities would take place in the evening and at night. And so he waited for the right time.

The evening fell like blue-scarlet velvet that darkened the rooftops and windows of the buildings and only concrete and glass differentiated between darkness and darkness.

Webs of passion were woven into the forming darkness and they were separated into what was visible and what was hidden from the eye, but not from Jeff's eye. Once in awhile when he scanned the area, he saw people dressing and undressing in bathrooms and in closets. Some of them he would have preferred to erase from his memory. He checked the capabilities of his telescope to a distance of 1.4 miles and he succeeded without difficulty and with great clarity to see through windows and into rooms. He saw people walking around freely in their apartments. It didn't occur to them that they were the stars, center stage in "Jeff's theater". Of course, these actors didn't hear his applause for their impressive performances.

He found the pursuit challenging and enjoyable, as every day he concealed new images and excitement that had been lacking for so long.

One autumn day, the phone rang suddenly in the Klein's residence. "Hello, is this the Klein residence?" asked José.

"Yes, who's speaking?" answered Jeff, who didn't recognize the speaker on the other side of the line.

"This is José Ardelas speaking, the sergeant from the base in Arizona."

"Hello, my friend José!" replied Jeff and he laughed loudly as he recalled the sentence: "An outstanding soldier" and he remembered an event that occurred ten years ago in Nevada:

José had been an army driver, not particularly talented, who suffered from a lack of coordination, especially between his brain and the rest of his body parts. He was like a sloppily dressed clown, but he aspired to prove his seriousness and his worth to his commanders, despite his limitations. The unforgettable event happened one Saturday morning, a morning in which tens of thousands of vacationers and tourists were going to relax and enjoy Hoover Dam- one of the modern engineering wonders. Hoover Dam is located in the Black Canyon on the Colorado River. The dam created Lake Mead and an amazing nature reserve - with the contrast of the blue water merging into the dry, desert mountains. The

view is spectacular, dramatic and breathtaking. That day the roads were jammed. The traffic crawled, especially on the main road, Route 93 which ran from Las Vegas to Phoenix, Arizona. On this winding mountain road, there was only one lane in each direction. This led to congestion, especially on weekend mornings.

José received the order to tow a half track that had a serious problem with its gear, from the arid training area to the workshop off of the mountain road. He hitched the half track up to a heavy armored vehicle with the aid of a tow bar and he headed off. When he reached the traffic jam, in the most congested part of the road near the dam, the tow bar disengaged from the vehicle.

José continued to drive without the half track in tow. He didn't notice that he had left the heavy iron monster in the middle of the road blocking the main road between Nevada and Arizona. Reports immediately started to arrive to the traffic police communication center about an obstacle on the road. All attempts to push, tow and remove the obstacle failed. Only a designated heavy armored vehicle could accomplish the complicated task. However, it was impossible to reach the area because of the horrible traffic jam.

José continued to drive, while he hummed songs to himself that helped him pass the time pleasantly. Suddenly, a police car passed him with its red and blue lights flashing and its siren blasting. The police car stopped in the middle of the road. The police officer ran over towards José and signaled him to stop. José braked and waited to hear why the police officer had stopped him so dramatically.

"What did I do?" José asked the police officer and waited for a traffic ticket which would get him into trouble with his commanders.

"Look soldier," said the police officer excitedly: "You have to save us. A half track is stuck by the dam and it's blocking all of the roads in the area. Only you can solve the problem."

José didn't want to believe it, but to be sure, he got out of his armored car and walked around to the back and saw that the towed vehicle wasn't there. He said to the police officer: "Look, I have another mission, but for you, I will change my plans."

The police officer kissed José on the cheek and thanked him for his help. He asked José to follow him back, while he cleared the way with his wailing siren. After 40 minutes, they finally reached the vehicle. They removed the stranded vehicle and the road opened up.

The next day, the Chief of Police of Nevada, Commissioner Richard Kahan called José to present him with a certificate of appreciation for his good deed for the benefit of the public. Photographs of the event appeared in the local newspapers which decorated José's room for a long time.

He received praise from his commanders and he was awarded the title "outstanding soldier" on Independence Day in the office of the Governor of Nevada.

José and Jeff talked and laughed about their experiences from their army days. Finally, José got to the point why he had called Jeff. "A relative of mine is a prominent figure in the Mega Lotto Company, which owns and operates the Lottery Company that consolidates several lottery companies in different states. They told me that they are looking for someone to manage their Drawings and Winnings Division for the New York Lottery, a job that suits you, so I called."

"Very nice of you to remember me, I have been looking for a job for three months already, with no success." said Jeff happily and added: "When can we get together José? Do you sometimes come to New York? Let's have a cup of coffee together."

"OK, let's meet at Café Philadelphia in Times Square, tomorrow at ten o'clock in the morning. Is that OK?"

"Great, I'll bring my resume and letters of recommendation from my commanders."

"Nonsense, Jeff," José cut him off and added: "The job is yours. Understand, that's how it works in the system. You have connections, right? Then you get everything. See you tomorrow." and he hung up.

A feeling of happiness and satisfaction filled Jeff. He immediately called his wife Danielle and told her the good news.

4. Failing Business

A silver BMW SUV, one of the prestigious X5 series, lurched onto the sidewalk on 5th Avenue and stopped with screeching brakes in front of the brightly lit stylish store window of the famous fashion house, “Danielle Klein. It looked like a scene out of a good action film to the passersby on the street. Five stocky men, armed with heavy baseball bats got out of the SUV while the motor was still running. All of them were dressed in black; they were unshaven and they an angry and impatient look in their faces. They brutally pushed open the heavy glass doors of the main entrance which led to the showroom on the ground floor. The forceful push caused a big glass vase to crash to the floor. It had been purchased for a considerable sum in France by the architect who had designed the fashion house in excellent taste. It had been placed in the entryway in order to transmit a sense of uncompromising exclusiveness and quality to the customers. It shattered into a thousand pieces with a loud crash, the commotion was in stark contrast to the calm atmosphere of the store and the soft classical music piped in by tiny speakers in the ceiling. The thugs didn’t even bother looking at the damage they caused and they strode straight towards the manager’s office. All of those present in the showroom, salespeople and customers alike, froze in their places. One of the thugs was ordered to stand in the entrance to guard and be a lookout. Next to the office door there was a gold-plated sign with specially designed engraved black letters “Danielle Klein-Manager”. The men kicked open the door as if it were made of cardboard.

Danielle sat bent over in her tall leather upholstered executive chair behind a large mahogany desk. She was shocked and she started to perspire. Her personal assistant, who was examining different fabrics with her, quickly rose from the elegant chair in front of the desk and ran from the room as if her life depended on it.

Tony, nicknamed, “the Scorpion”, was the only one who didn’t carry a bat; instead he held colorful worry beads in his hand, which he fondled between his fingers. He asked gruffly: “Where’s the money?”

Danielle shifted uncomfortably in her chair and said: “I don’t have the money; you can take the whole store.”

The answer made Tony’s blood boil. He couldn’t believe his ears. He grasped a crystal glass that was on the table and he threw it forcefully at the television screen in the corner of the office, which was repeatedly displaying pictures and clips of the

fashion house's shows. The laws of physics didn't leave any doubt about the results of the impact between two objects colliding; they both shattered into pieces with a loud noise. The liquid that had been in the glass caused the TV to short circuit and smoke rose from the wreckage.

"You're trying to sell me these rags?" Tony hissed between his teeth. He grabbed an expensive dress and threw it contemptuously on the floor. He continued in a high-pitched voice: "I want money!! Money, you understand?" He pointed in her direction and spat out: "You have only two weeks to arrange the money- in CASH!" He emphasized the last word. "Next time, your head will fly instead of the glass." he threatened and left the room. The four other men followed him as they looked threateningly at Danielle's stunned face. They quickly got into the SUV and they intentionally screeched the tires as they sped off.

The customers hastily gathered their belongings and left the store, except for one, who had come to visit Danielle. When Danielle was busy in her office, Sandy had spent the time trying on a red dress with a sexy cut, yet classy, which flattered her perfect body. The salesgirls, dressed in their tailored uniforms, didn't know how to act and they looked at one another. Sandy came to her senses first and ran quickly to the manager's office. She opened the door and saw Danielle with her head in her hands, crying bitterly with heartbreaking sobs.

"What happened?" Sandy went over to Danielle and tried to uncover her face in order to see if she had been hurt. She asked again: "What happened, Danielle? Are you hurt? Let me see; it's me Sandy. Don't be afraid; they left."

Danielle cried loudly. The last thing she wanted was somebody to see her in this condition.

She whispered: "Go away. I don't want to see anyone." Her personal assistant entered the office: "I'll send the employees home, enough for today." she said. To herself she thought: 'It is ten to seven and we close in another ten minutes anyway.' She left the room without waiting for an answer. She announced loudly: "Girls, we are finishing a little early today; don't worry, we will solve the problem. Come to work tomorrow as usual."

Sandy went over to the water cooler and filled a plastic cup with water. She walked over to Danielle and gave her the cup. She stroked her head and whispered: "Drink a little water and calm down; you are still alive and as long as you are, I will help you. Don't be afraid."

Danielle calmed down a bit and sipped the water. “Maybe it would have been better if he had killed me.” she said through bitter tears. The tears streamed down her cheeks, leaving grey streaks of heavy make-up, like a sad clown. She asked her assistant to go home, lock the door behind her and leave her and Sandy in the office. The assistant turned off the lights in the showroom, left the store window lights on and went home. A feeling of helplessness about the situation that she faced flooded Danielle. She tried to recover from the trauma she experienced a few moments ago.

Her disgrace was exposed by her weakness and presented her as a speck of dust in the eyes of her employees and customers. Her business that she had established herself, which was poised to collapse soon, made her regret that she had decided to enter the playing field of the big and strong players.

Sandy handed her another glass of water and she heard from Danielle the chain of events that had led to the financial downfall and the need for taking many loans in the grey market.

“Even if I sell the business, I won’t get the amount to cover the deficit and financial commitments that I’ve taken upon myself.” Danielle said quietly to Sandy. She continued: “I need a million dollars; otherwise my life is in danger.”

“What does your husband Jeff say? Maybe he can help you out financially?” asked Sandy.

“He doesn’t know; I hid the facts from him. Besides, he doesn’t earn a lot in his job at the Lottery Company.” she said and after a few seconds of silence, she added: “The only solution I have is to commit suicide. The insurance will cover the deficit.”

Sandy was shocked by the desperation that took hold of Danielle. She went over and stroked her hair and encouraged her. “Give me the telephone number of the man who is threatening you. David, my boyfriend, was a fighter in the Navy Seals, he will take care of the threat.”

“I don’t want to involve other people in my problems; I will deal with it alone.” Danielle said, and she began to check the financial data in the accounting books.

“OK, I respect your decision, but no nonsense; you promise?” Sandy asked and received a positive reply from Danielle by way of a nod.

She looked at this great successful woman, who suddenly was transformed into a broken vessel and she persisted: “Give me the opportunity to help you. I believe we’ll find a solution.”

Despite the age difference between them, there was true friendship, sincere and real between the two women. Danielle felt encouraged a bit. She believed in Sandy's ability and intentions to help her. It was time to go home.

They left the store arm in arm. The lights illuminated the store window in front of the fashion house, where the beautiful high-fashion clothes were displayed. The frozen smiles on the faces of the mannequins didn't attest to the drama that had taken place a short while ago.

5. A Happy Childhood

“Please tell me about your son, Mrs. Johnson,” said the school psychologist at David’s school. Mrs. Johnson was frequently summoned to school in order to explain her son’s actions. She was embarrassed and apologized: “I don’t know how to explain his behavior in school. At home everything is fine. Normal. There aren’t any unusual circumstances that could explain the incidents that you are talking about.”

“Then how do you explain the fact that already on the first day of school he stood out? While all the other children in the class celebrated their first day of school, David stood on a chair and threw pieces of cake and chocolate balls out of the window at children playing on the playground, as if it were a firing range? Or when he interrupted the lesson, the teacher asked him to write, “I won’t disturb the lesson” on 20 pages. David took this literally. He took 20 pages and wrote one time in the middle of each page: “I won’t disturb the lesson.” This shows that your son is mischievous and clever, but also very lazy. The reason I called you today will attest to this fact. From a check we made among the teachers, we found that David’s test scores don’t exceed 40 or 50. At the parent-teacher conference, you were surprised by this and you reported to us that he had successfully passed the tests. To our surprise, we discovered tests in his file that show he had changed his score and had given himself a mark of 80 and he didn’t forget to write it in red ink either. After he had you sign the tests and he received praise from you about his achievements, he returned the failed tests to us with your forged signature. There is no doubt that the boy has a good imagination and vision. He will get far, either in a positive or negative direction. We must channel him in the positive direction in order for him to realize his potential. I personally like David. I want to tell you what I heard from a girl in school who wanted to be his girlfriend. She asked David, based upon her mother’s inquiry: “What do you want to be when you grow up?” He answered her: “Let me think about it for an hour.” and he ran to Peter Gordon, his studious friend in class and asked: “Peter, what do you want to be when you grow up?” “A rocket scientist” answered Peter without hesitation, like someone who knows his destiny. “Very good,” David answered him and shot like an arrow straight to the girl’s class. He informed her about his decision to be a rocket scientist at NASA when he grew up. The queen promised to pass this news

on to her mother and to get her permission to be his girlfriend. The mother received the news with happiness and she said: “Whoever aims for the moon, even if he misses, will find himself among the stars!” and she gave her consent. This brought them directly to park bench to wait for the sunset and darkness. Then David explored her crotch with his little fingers to look for treasure.”

Mrs. Johnson smiled, but she was troubled by her mischievous son. She promised to closely monitor his activities and development.

In high school, David only invested the minimum required and not beyond that. He was satisfied with a passing grade and he never saw a score of 80 or above. Even when he knew the material perfectly, he finished the test first and ran to play football with his friends. On the other hand, he put a great deal of effort into his appearance and his inexhaustible attempts to get girls, in order to satisfy his testosterone, the male sex drive hormone, that apparently leaked uncontrollably from his brain to his testicles.

One of his favorite places, in addition to public park benches, was dance parties on Saturday night. It was hard to forget one Saturday night, the end of the school year and the beginning of summer vacation. The big party night, where boys and girls release the tension accumulated during the year. It was supposed to be the “mother of all parties” and David wanted to be prepared for the challenge, to find the one special girl into whom he could empty his full testicles. ‘It is really about time I invest a little in myself and my looks’ he said to himself and he began to plan for the party. After a few telephone calls to his friends, he took a shower, washed his hair and blow-dried and brushed his long, smooth light brown hair. He carefully shaved his face smooth and he generously sprayed on men’s cologne that his parents had given to him as a present. This time he chose a pair of dark red underpants that emphasized his “package”. He wore a dark, good quality cotton shirt that didn’t hide his musculature, the fruits of his hard intensive work at the gym and on the football field, time he had spent at the expense of doing tiring homework. He packed his muscular tight butt into faded blue jeans, which gave him a sexy look, like a top male model. It looked like he had stepped out of a designer fashion magazine that specialized in exclusive men’s clothing. He met his friends Paul and Steve and together they stopped a taxi and went out “to hunt”. The party was at Richard’s big, expensive house. His classmate Richard’s father was a successful jeweler in the city. The guests were greeted with banners and

balloons in the well-groomed front yard of the house. Colored paper chains hung in the spacious living room. Colored flashing lights and loudspeakers to amplify the music were placed in the corner of the room. On the drinks table, stood several bottles of good vodka, red and white wine and soft drinks. On another table, there was a large selection of salads, cold-cuts and delicious baked goods.

Steve volunteered to be the DJ and he played soft background music at the beginning of the evening until most of the guests arrived. Slowly, couples and single boys and girls went onto the dance floor to show off their dance skills. Julie, a red-haired plump girl brought a girlfriend who nobody knew, but her sexuality projected a strong presence that impressed the celebrants. She had a model's body, 5 feet 9 inched molded in a mocha hue, an abundant bust that was poured into a black T-shirt. Her dark eyes broadcast mystery and freshness. She had a pair of red lips, succulent and sensual with a seductive smile. Her black hair flowed almost to her hips. 'Simply to devour her...' thought the boys whose bodies deciphered her code which said: "What are you waiting for?" The boys weren't ready for the sexual potency that radiated in the room. They were hypnotized by this magic which was now standing on the dance floor. The girls were frustrated by her perfection. They started to make comparisons. They reached the conclusion that for them, the party had ended before it had begun. David marked his goal and started to devise a strategic plan for a bold conquest. He saw how every moment some guy in heat invited her to dance in hopes of scoring. He understood that time was short and his task great and so he went over to Steve and asked him to play the song: "The House of the Rising Sun" by the Animals from the sixties. He walked over to the queen of the party, who was talking to her friend while waiting for the next song. He put out his hand to her and asked: "May I have this dance?"

"Sure," she answered with a heart-stirring smile and she added: "My name is Jenny." With perfect timing, as planned with Steve, the song began to play and the lights dimmed. "My name is David, nice to meet you." he answered and put his arms around her narrow hips. He hoped to press her to his body to feel her breasts that protruded from her T-shirt with a plunging neckline. He felt the firm roundness of a pair of brown, shapely breasts, like a pair of ripe coconuts, which ignited his imagination.

She had also noticed him when she had arrived at the party. Her eyes discerned a sexy boy, tall and well-built. He was busy talking with his friends by the drinks, but she watched him and was worried that some girl would ensnare him. There were some girls who weren't embarrassed to cast a longing look his way to get his attention. She asked herself, 'When is he going to ask me to dance? Maybe he's insecure and afraid of rejection.' She waited two hours for the anticipated moment. Even though she tried to hide her excitement, her heart was pounding as she accepted his invitation. She wanted him more than he wanted her and when she was in his arms, she didn't want to loosen her grip. Like a spider encircling its prey, she hugged him intensely and strongly until he could hardly breathe. Instead of enjoying his contact with her erect nipples and instead of realizing his fantasy that he had been anticipating, all that he was looking for at that moment was air to breathe. After a moment, which seemed an eternity, David removed his hands from her hips. She took the hint and she loosened her strangling grip and lowered her hand to his hips. He folded his hands behind her neck after he regulated his breathing. He whispered in her ear: "It was hard to reach you. I had to make a complicated strategic plan in order to get the chance to dance with you. Thank you in advance for giving me these happy moments that will linger with me for a long time."

Jenny smiled upon hearing his words, which were different from the compliments she usually got about her looks. At the end of the arousing dance that was watched closely by tens of pairs of eyes, boys and girls alike, David took her hand and pulled her towards the drinks table. He poured her a cocktail, a tequila sunrise; he raised his glass, clinked it against her glass and said: "Cheers."

Jenny radiated from happiness and replied, "Cheers."

"Let's get a breath of fresh air. It's really stuffy in here." David tried his luck in order to get her away from the competition, which gathered around her and didn't let up on their attempts to score.

"What time is it David?"

"Five after one."

"Oh, my father is waiting for me outside. I have to run." she said over her shoulder as she ran towards the door.

He called after her: "I don't have your phone number," but his words were swallowed up by the loud music. The boys followed her with a distressed gaze.

Some of them weren't aware that their tongues hung out like a puppy whose bowl of milk had been taken away. A frozen mask spread over David's face and he returned home with a feeling of disappointment over a missed opportunity.

"Good morning David. This is Jenny speaking; do you remember...? Last night?"

He couldn't believe his ears. He took a deep breath, recovered and answered:

"You don't forget a girl like you so easily. How did you get my phone number?"

"Your friend Richard volunteered to give me your number. I hope you're not angry at him?"

"On the contrary, I am happy and surprised that you called me, after your quick escape yesterday."

"Parents worry, you know. What are your plans for the summer vacation?"

"Lay around in bed, once on the right side and once on the left. What do you think about going to a movie soon?"

"You always want to find a way to be in the dark with me... What, are you embarrassed to be seen with me?"

"No, the opposite, the movie theater is a public place, maybe hundreds of people go there and I want as many people as possible to see us together." He managed somehow to get out of the trap.

"My father says that character is more important than looks."

"I totally agree," he said, although he didn't mean it.

"Let's go to the pool." she offered.

"Let's meet in one hour at the entrance to the pool at the country club. Is that OK?"

"OK," she answered with butterflies in her stomach.

David checked himself out in the mirror to see how his new bathing suit, which he had bought for the summer vacation, hugged his "package". He put on his black surfer's shorts and yellow T-shirt that emphasized his physique and his tan. He set out to "fish" in the shallow water.

Jenny wanted to lie down all the time on the chaise lounge and get a tan, but more importantly, she wanted to catch the eyes of the horny boys who walked back and forth in front of her in order to get a good look at her perfect body. David tried to pull her into the water, to fool around, dive around her, to throw her off his shoulders into the water...to touch, to brush against, to feel her smooth skin. Desire overcame him and his "package" began to grow to proportions that could

no longer be hidden, also not from Jenny's eyes. This caused her great satisfaction; as if she held a remote control by which she could "pump up" boys' bathing suits at her will.

"My father is picking me up at two o'clock; let me know five minutes before, so I can get organized."

"You're already 17 Jenny. You're at an age where your father shouldn't interfere."

"My parents immigrated from Morocco and it is their custom that a bride must be a virgin when she gets married."

David scratched his head. It was clear to him that he didn't have a chance of getting between her legs; not even for a surprise visit, maybe only in the neighborhood. 'If that's the case,' he thought to himself, 'I'll go with two alternatives: the oral version and the anal version, that way everyone will be satisfied.' His brain went into overtime. He planned how to neutralize the father who stood guard over her. Suddenly, an interesting idea popped into his head. He changed directions in his approach to her and said: "I also agree with the old-fashioned idea that a couple should get married as young as possible and have sex only after the wedding." he said and in his head he knew that this sentence would be related directly to her father, which would no doubt would be music to his ears. Maybe he will loosen the reins a bit and then when she's in his arms, her body and her passion will overcome the shackles of prohibition imposed upon her.

"I want to see the movie, 'Romeo and Juliet'. Do you want to go?" Jenny asked him as they were leaving the country club.

"See you at the movie theater in the mall."

"See you at eight o'clock." she said and ran towards the exit.

David again prepared for the big night. 'Maybe this time, I'll score.' he said to himself as he put on a new pair of underwear. He hoped that the underwear would be nice enough wrapping for the original present that Jenny would be opening.

"Did you shower in aftershave?" his mother asked as he passed by her and left a trail of scents mixed of rose scented soap, vanilla shampoo, deodorant and cologne, a fragrance that would trap every girl in his snare, even if she suffered from a terrible sense of smell.

Jenny arrived at the mall ten minutes before the movie started. She looked shapely, attractive and very sexy.

“Good evening David.” he heard a deep voice, instead of the feminine voice he had expected to hear.

“Good evening,” he answered and saw Jenny accompanied by her father. He was tall with a thick moustache. He had come to meet “the enemy” who wanted to conquer his righteous daughter.

“This is my father, Mr. Bakry.”

“A pleasure to meet you sir. My name is David.” he said and he shook his hand. He added in an apologetic voice: “I only bought two tickets, perhaps there are some tickets left at the box office.”

“No, there’s no need. I only wanted to meet you, since Jenny was so enthusiastic about you.”

In response, David handed a box to Jenny and said: “Here, this is for you.”

Jenny was surprised and she started to open the fancy wrapping paper and she took a big trophy out of the box. She held it as if she was standing on the podium at the World Cup final. At the bottom of the trophy, words were engraved on a gold colored plate:

To Jenny Bakry

Congratulations on winning the title:

“The International Queen of Character”

From your loving friend David Johnson July 1984

Jenny and her worried father liked David’s gesture and his original initiative. Her father shook his hand warmly.

“Daddy, could you take the trophy home with you? I don’t want to carry a package in the theater.”

“Have a good time.” her father said.

He took the package and relieved them of his presence. David waited for his good friend darkness to arrive. It would signal the start of his quiet assault, especially with a sexy bombshell next to him, who was driving him crazy. Immediately when the lights went out, David’s hand slipped into her hand. He tested, he probed and his hand was received warmly. He put his other hand around her bare, smooth tanned shoulder and stroked her. ‘There’s no doubt that the \$25 investment in the trophy and inscription were worth it. Beautiful sentiments work wonders on a woman’s heart, especially a beautiful woman who is used to getting compliments

about her looks. But a man who pays tribute to her character is another thing. It's special. It is the key that unlocks the door; it is what opens the button on her shirt and that is exactly why I am here.' he said to himself. His hand started to wander and slid down to her chest. Jenny caught her breath and her eyelids closed a little. Tingling chills of pleasure spread through her body from head to toe. His hand traveled to the valley between her breasts and sent a new wave of excitement through her body. He put his head on her shoulder. The desire to feel her heart beating burned in him. She fought the impulse, so it wouldn't overtake her.

'Moroccan, Moroccan, but she is flesh and blood; she is a woman.' David gave himself encouragement. They left watching the film to others. They concentrated on each other and they didn't pay attention to a man who was approaching them and was watching them.

"Ayeeeee..." Jenny screamed loudly as a hard slap stung her beautiful, shocked face.

"Whore! Why don't you listen to your father?" A roar cut through the dark theater. A commotion followed around the young lovers.

David, who recognized Jenny's father by his moustache, didn't want to interfere. He froze and shut up. After the father completed disciplining his daughter, he thrust the package with the trophy at David and warned him that if he came near his daughter again, he would cut off his balls. The swelling in his groin from sexual excitement deflated, as if he had been dropped into an ice hole in the North Pole. The plans he had devised, his hopes and dreams were shattered. He sat for a few more minutes in his seat and watched Romeo and Juliet, but all that he really saw on the screen in front of him was a big black moustache.

The next day, he went to the store where he had purchased the trophy and he changed the name on the inscription from Jenny to Lee.

"What's this? Yesterday Jenny won the trophy and today Lee?" His mother wondered out loud.

"Jenny's father objected to her winning and returned the trophy to me. So the trophy will go to another winner, a new girl called Lee, who I met on the bus and the trophy will be a migrating trophy."

6. The Downfall

An elderly couple in a new Honda drove slowly on the bad road that led to “Hunts Point”, a neighborhood in the Bronx. This neighborhood was infamous for the actions of its big-time criminals, who “nurtured” the local market. All of its residents were low-skilled and they lived in poverty. It was a neighborhood that perpetuated illiteracy and underdevelopment over many generations. Due to the high concentration of immigrants in this poor and neglected area, the people were unemployed and they had limited education, if any at all. The only way to make a living was to turn to crime. If there had been integration, as the experts had recommended to the government, perhaps there would be some chance for the children. But who could afford to relocate poor families to Manhattan or Long Island where rents were high compared to those in this seedy area, whose residents were unable to pay more? The children didn’t have any neighbors or friends with state of the art computers, "Sony Play Station" and afternoon enrichment classes at beautiful cultural centers, the things which provide a child with tools to develop and grow and to become good citizens, who one day will contribute to the country when he grows up at GNP per person of \$20,000 to \$50,000 annually. That’s how you build a country that is concerned with the future and welfare of its citizens. But here, whoever gets into the government, first worries about himself and his family, while calling for integration and giving lip service about the need for integration. The Welfare Department blames the Treasury Department and the Treasury Department claims that it doesn’t have enough money. Yet at the same time, the government approves a trip for six high-ranking officials to Tokyo, with first class tickets, which cost \$8,000, five star hotels, limousines, shopping, security costs, etc. As soon as they return, they’ll appear on television screens for another round of whining until the holiday recess and again they’ll fly off all over the world.

The Honda arrived in front of apartment building number 7. The neighborhood never suffered from a lack of parking places, so without difficulty, they found a spot directly in front of the entrance. The elderly people got out of the car. They headed for the Bagio family residence, which was in the third entrance on the second floor of the building. It was evident from its appearance that it hadn’t been renovated for a long time. The mailboxes in the entry were broken and had no doors. Family names were written in different sizes and colors on the peeling plaster next to the entryway, a

gloomy picture of prolonged neglect that also was expressed by the lack of a glass entry door and a broken intercom to identify visitors before they entered the building. They walked up the stairs and stood in front of the door. The man straightened his tie. The woman checked her lipstick in a small compact mirror that she took out of her black purse. The doorbell didn't work, as expected, so the man knocked on the old door a few times. The door opened.

"Hello, dear Mr. Bagio," said the man.

"My name is Mr. Mandelovitch and this is my wife Martha."

"Welcome, I'm Luciano Bagio. Nice to meet you. Please come in" said Mr. Bagio and he opened the door widely. He offered them a seat on the armchairs in the living room, which were covered with dark fabric in order to hide the holes in the upholstery which had seen better days. A white electric cord hung down from the ceiling with a 60 watt bulb at the end in order to save energy and it threw a pale light on the seedy room.

"What would you like to drink, Mr. and Mrs. Mandelovitch?" Bagio asked his guests. He turned first to the heavy-set woman who was wearing a black dress, as if she had been invited to a wedding of party member, one of the many who she knew through meetings and festive dinners at the political party's expense.

"Cold water, please" she answered and then asked, "Where is your wife, Mr. Bagio?"

"She went out to the unemployment office. She's looking for work. She'll be back in about an hour." he replied.

While this conversation was taking place in the Bagio's apartment, a few teenagers sat on the grey cement wall on the corner. They were smoking cheap cigarettes and talking about the football game on television last night. When they saw the new Honda, Tony Bagio jumped up. He was a charismatic troublemaker. He said to his friends, "I don't have a Honda symbol yet." He walked over to the unfamiliar car that had entered the neighborhood, took out his pocketknife and with great expertise, the symbol with the "H" was in his hand in three seconds. He skipped over to his friends, who cheered his execution, daring and success.

"Good," opened Mr. Mandelovitch, who finished his drink in one gulp and put down the glass on the table in front of him. "Look, Mr. Bagio, I heard that you are a clever man, a leader in the neighborhood and many residents see you as their spokesman. They'll follow you if you ask them to." he said and he watched Bagio's body

language and reaction. Bagio on his part remained indifferent and waited to hear more.

“I have an offer for you that you can’t refuse, Mr. Bagio. I will appoint you to be the regional inspector of the Agriculture Department.”

“What?” asked Bagio; as if he hadn’t understood the sentence he had just heard. “You are offering me the job of inspector for the Agriculture Department?”

“What do I know about agriculture, Mr. Mandelovitch? How could I succeed in the job with no knowledge or experience in the field? They’ll throw me out after a month!”

“You don’t understand, Mr. Bagio.” Mr. Mandelovitch answered him quietly and leaned towards him a little. “You don’t need to know anything about agriculture. All you need to do is to convince the residents to vote for our party- the Liberal Party. You will be the precinct’s representative on the party’s council. You will get an annual salary of \$120,000 in addition to living expenses, clothing, travel abroad for you and your wife and of course you will get a car.”

“But I don’t have a driver’s license.” Bagio cut him off.

“You don’t need a license; you’ll get a chauffeur who will take you anywhere you desire.” Mandelovitch said and continued: “I need ten thousand signatures from you of residents in the precinct- your neighbors, friends, relatives- who will give power to the party and then we’ll be able to hand out more appointments to your family and close friends.”

Bagio thought a little and said, as if to himself: “I never believed that I would be a public servant.”

“You, a public servant?” Mandelovitch laughed loudly and added: “The public serves you, Bagio. Understand, everyone will work hard and taxes will be taken from their salaries according to the law, which will be given to you in the form of a salary, suitable to your talents.” He observed Bagio’s astonished face and continued with a sly smile: “This is what’s nice about democracy; you don’t need to steal and break the law, you simply have to divide up the pie to the right people; people who play the game right. And you will be a key player, Bagio.”

Bagio understood immediately that this was a bluff, like on those satirical shows on TV that he’d seen recently, but this time, it was real and it was him. He was excited about the fantastic offer that had fallen into his lap. He asked: “What will become of

our neighborhood? With the teenagers roaming the streets with nothing to do? Employment for the residents?"

"It will be fine, Mr. Bagio," answered Mandelovitch, but he didn't mean what he said. "We will help them, don't worry. Take my phone number. I will send you the forms tomorrow. Get the residents to sign and start living."

Mandelovitch stood up, took out his wallet and pulled out a business card with his name and the title of his high rank in the Agriculture Department. He handed the card to Bagio and nodded to his wife to get up. They congratulated each other and the couple went on their way.

On their way back, while turning on the air-conditioning in the car, Martha said to her husband: "I don't think he is smart enough to accept the offer. He impressed me as being too honest. The welfare of the residents seemed more important to him than his personal benefit."

"Martha," he answered her with full confidence: "Money has power; it's hard to resist its temptation. If he didn't refuse immediately, he will struggle with the decision. In that case, you need to add a little more money and the obstacle is overcome." he said and he mulled things over in his mind on their way north.

Tony savored his success this time as in the previous times. He was proud of himself, especially when he saw his friends' looks of admiration. This encouraged him to go foraging during the day, but mainly at night. Every morning when he and his friends met at the corner, he showed his take from the previous night. In time, he progressed to car antennas, electric side-view mirrors, hubcaps and the rest of the car accessories that could be "peeled" off the cars. One day, he found an unlocked car in the neighborhood. He opened the door and removed the radio-CD player. He used the opportunity to empty the glove compartment and thus his pastime became a profession. He felt invincible until it reached epidemic proportions.

Many complaints started to accumulate at the local police station, which pointed to an active gang of thieves that were terrorizing the residents and threatening their property. The assignment of cracking the case was given to the chief inspector who questioned several youths who all fingered young Tony. The next evening, as Tony left on his criminal endeavors, the inexperienced youth didn't notice that he was being observed and photographed by two men riding in a dark sedan with civilian license plates. They documented his activities from a long distance with a small, advanced video camera, equipped with night vision. It was already 2:00 a.m. and Tony had

finished hiding his stash in the basement of his building and he was planning to retire to his home.

“You’re busted, Tony.” the two detectives blocked his way and displayed their police badges. They read him his rights and put handcuffs on his hands and legs. The stolen goods were photographed and taken with Tony to the police station in a squad car that had been summoned. A new way was paved for Tony; the youth was transformed into a crime organization leader and a celebrity.

7. An Intimate Dinner

Sandy didn't sleep well; David also tossed and turned in his bed. Nervousness about their date intensified. She debated what she should bring with her, a bottle of cologne or a nice cotton shirt. In the end, she decided that a good bottle of wine would be appropriate for the occasion and she planned her attire. She wanted to look her best. David, on the other hand, didn't stop fantasizing about the sex that he anticipated after dinner. He began to plan what he had to do in order to reach his goal, like a spider spinning its web to catch a butterfly. He was bothered by the fact that he'd never cooked before, except for the slices of Spam he burned in a frying pan during his army service. Several ideas crossed his mind. He even considered ordering dinner from an exclusive restaurant that would be delivered just before Sandy arrived. Or he could call his friend who went to chef's school and was working as an assistant chef at the Plaza Hotel in Manhattan. In the end, he decided to wait until morning and consult with his mother. Persistent ringing woke his mother early the next morning. David was nervous and confused. "Mom, I'm in a bind... you have to save me." he said, without saying good morning. She interrupted him and asked in a worried tone: "What happened, David...are you in danger...drugs? Tell me sweetheart. Don't hide anything from me. I'm your mother and I'm only concerned about your welfare."

"No, Mom. Calm down. I met a beautiful girl, like out of a fairytale. I want to marry her."

"A surprising answer from someone who has a sticker on his car: 'Stop marriage.'" she said.

"Mom, she's gorgeous, but more importantly, she's very smart. I invited her to an intimate dinner at my place. I don't have anything in the refrigerator and I don't have a clue what to do. I'm afraid of blowing it. Help me, Mom."

"Relax, David. Make one single dish, but an impressive one, something unique, delicious and interesting and something gourmet for dessert. Believe me, she won't forget it easily. Here, start writing down an interesting recipe that's easy to prepare. Even you will be able to prepare it. It is important for you to realize that the food isn't as important as the setting and atmosphere that you create. That is what will determine the success or failure of the evening. So, get a pen and paper and start writing..."

"Wait, Mom, let me get something to write with, OK, I'm ready, shoot."

“First, let me give you a few important tips about setting the atmosphere: You should light long colored candles in small glass candleholders. Serve red wine, a good California Cabernet Sauvignon or a Merlot, preferably a 2003 vintage, which was a particularly good year. Put a white tablecloth on the table; use attractive dishes and matching napkins. Prepare the serving dishes ahead of time, so you won’t have to look for things and leave her alone. The background music should be soft. Even though it won’t be the dominant element, it will definitely give tranquility and depth to the evening. If this sounds too complicated for you, I can come and prepare the meal and leave before she comes.”

“No, no, Mom, even if I fail, I don’t want to lie to her. Anyway, you said that the food wasn’t the most important thing, so don’t worry; it will be fine.”

“For dessert, make a chocolate mousse on a big plate and decorate it with drizzles of chocolate syrup. It will look as if it were made by a professional chef.”

“Thanks Mom. What’s for the main course?”

She dictated the recipe for “Hreime” a spicy fish dish from Tripoli. “You sauté 10 cloves of minced garlic in 1/3 cup of olive oil in a large frying pan with 1 teaspoon of salt, of course over a low flame. Add 1 teaspoon of salt, 2 teaspoons of hot paprika, a small can of tomato paste, the juice of half a lemon, ¼ teaspoon dried red pepper flakes. Then add ½ cup of water and cook for 20 minutes. Add 1 tablespoon of cumin and cook for 1 more minute. Arrange the pieces of fish in the pan. You can use any white fleshy fish you like and cook covered for 30 minutes until the fish is tender. It’s important that the fish won’t fall apart and that the sauce won’t evaporate. Serve it with fresh bread.”

“OK, Mom, and what about the mousse?” David asked as he wiped the saliva that had formed at the corner of his mouth.

“Write,” she said, “For the mousse- whip 2 cups of whipping cream until it is stiff. Gently stir in a jar of ‘Nutella’ with a spatula until it is blended together. Add 1 tablespoon of rum or liqueur and mix. Pour the mixture into a rectangular aluminum loaf pan lined with plastic wrap. Don’t forget to leave margins on the side to aid in removing the mousse from the pan after you take it out of the freezer. When you take the mousse out of the freezer, set it on an elongated platter and cut it into slices with a knife that was dipped into boiling water. Place the slices on a big shallow white plate and drizzle chocolate syrup on the mousse and on the plate. The compliments will quickly follow.” she added and waited for his reaction.

“Thanks, Mom! You’re great!”

“Good luck, dear. Give me an up-date when you finish cooking.”

“Sure, Mom,” he promised and he started getting ready.

First he thought, cleaning. This time he added cleaning liquid to the bucket that gave off a fresh, pleasant smell. He changed linens and sprayed a little cologne with a special scent on the bed in order to entice her to get in the bed and not leave. He scrubbed the floors and vacuumed the carpet and then he left excitedly to go grocery shopping. He took advantage of the opportunity to buy four new plates to differentiate between the everyday dishes and this special occasion. When he returned, he began to prepare the mousse, which needed to be frozen ahead of time. Now and then, he tasted the mixture with his finger and he praised his mother: ‘Mom, you are spectacular. What would I do without you?’ He put the pan in the freezer and went on to prepare the main course. With great patience, David rigorously followed his mother’s directions and he carried out each step to the last detail. He read the directions twice so he wouldn’t skip over any step that might influence the final result. After an hour of intensive activity, the kitchen was filled with the scent of the spicy sauce that turned the fish into a delicacy. He cleaned and put the dishes away and prepared two white large plates for the dessert. Then he started to create the environment that his mother had spoken about. He spread a shiny white tablecloth on the table and in the middle he placed a vase with 9 long-stemmed red roses. He placed the silverware next to the plates. He folded the napkins in the shape of a miniature shirt and placed one on each plate. The dessertspoons and wine glasses also found their places on the table. He dimmed the lights and lit the red candles that were set in glass candleholders next to the vase. Soft, pleasant music played in the background and completed the romantic atmosphere. He took two steps back and looked at the festive table. He rubbed his hands with pleasure and he went to make the last preparations because his mother’s words rang in his ears: ‘...prepare the serving dishes ahead of time, so you won’t start looking for things and leave her alone.’ David certainly didn’t want to leave her alone for even a second. He took out the mousse from the freezer. He transferred the fish to an elegant covered glass-serving dish and placed a serving spoon next to it. A quick glance at his watch showed him that he only had half an hour to get showered and dressed. After a close shave and a refreshing shower, he put on a little cologne. He wore a white button-down shirt, tucked into blue jeans with a belt that emphasized his pelvis. His shoes added to his height, which at any rate was

not lacking. He checked himself out in the mirror and the strong feeling of “soon I’ll be having sex”, inundated him. He tried to conceal his feelings and he went to check the table for the last time. A quick glance revealed that he had forgotten the salt and pepper shakers and freshly squeezed lemon juice to put on the fish in case it was too spicy. He placed these items on the table and looked at his watch. The appointed hour had arrived. He didn’t hear a knock at the door. He checked the time again on his cell phone, in the event that his watch wasn’t set properly. Five minutes had already passed. ‘I hope she doesn’t intend on standing me up after all of my preparations...’

The loud ring of the doorbell interrupted his thoughts. He went to the door and opened it widely; his heart skipped a few beats. Sandy stood on the threshold, beautiful and radiant; she greeted him with a warm smile from her sensuous lips. In one hand, she held a small, black trendy handbag and in the other, a gift bag. He kissed her lightly on the cheek and invited her into the living room. The candlelight and music set a relaxed and inviting atmosphere, but at the same time, an atmosphere of romance and desire. She handed him the bag with the bottle of wine accompanied by a note. He thanked her and complimented her on her stunning looks. He led her towards the black leather sofa that his parents gave him and he poured her a martini in a small glass, an aperitif to stimulate her appetite, as is customary in France. He hadn’t forgotten to put a small dish of green pitted olives and a small bowl of pretzels.

“You’re probably tired because you were running around all day thinking of me” he said.

“Einstein said once, that it’s all relative, but your looks are absolute!” she complimented him in return. They talked about her studies at the university and tuition costs, their living conditions, about their families and David’s military service. After a half an hour of getting acquainted, David stood up and whispered, “It’s time to eat.” He meticulously adhered to gentlemanly behavior as he led her to the table and pulled out the chair for her.

The table setting impressed Sandy. The candles threw a soft illumination over the table and created a festive and special atmosphere. The aroma of the roses penetrated her nose and then her heart, which started to pound as she realized the great effort he had made for her. While she smiled in embarrassment and tried to hide her emotions, David returned from the kitchen with the serving dish of fish. When he removed the cover, the spicy fragrance of the fish permeated the room. He put the bread basket with a freshly baked baguette on the table and he opened the bottle of wine she had

brought. They held the wine glasses with incontrollable excitement and David whispered, "Cheers". Sandy rose from her chair, her eyes shining brightly, and went over to him. She kissed him on the cheek and said: "You really moved me, David, cheers." To them, the sound of the glasses clinking sounded like bells heralding the coming of spring. They sipped the wine and praised its delicate taste and smoothness. It was evident that it had been aged a long time in an oak barrel, which imparted it with aroma and full body. David picked up a piece of fish with a serving spoon and placed it on Sandy's plate. He poured some of the red spicy sauce over the fish and passed her the bread basket. Sandy took a slice of bread, broke off a piece and dipped it in the sauce. David waited for her reaction. She suddenly pulled back her hand and waited until he served himself. "Bon Appetit," she said and she took a bite of the fish and the bread dipped in the sauce. David waited patiently for her reaction which quickly followed: "Who made this wonderful dish? The truth please."

"Me and only me." David answered proudly and he added: "But I will pass the compliments on to my mother, who gave me instructions how to make it."

"If these are the results of something you don't know how to do, it is a sign that you are talented." she said and she took another bite of the succulent fish.

"I must admit that I enjoyed the day, making an effort for you and I would enjoy doing it again many times." he said and took another piece of fish.

"I have eaten fish many times in my life, but his is the best by far. What did you put in it that makes it so good?"

"Love, a lot of love! When you make something with a lot of love, it has to be delicious." Sandy's eyes shone with happiness. She was overcome with emotions and she wanted to hug and kiss him, but she stopped herself and replied with looks of gratitude and love. After they finished the main course, she wanted to help clear the table, but David politely refused to allow her to help. He cleared the plates and silverware and went into the kitchen to get the dessert. While he was doing this, Sandy closed her eyes and listened to the pleasant music that was playing in the background. She hoped never to leave this place, full of desire and romance. David returned from the kitchen with the dessert plates. He had sprinkled chocolate flakes on the mousse and drizzled chocolate syrup on the mousse and plates with crisscross lines. He placed the plate in front of her. "Wow," she said in amazement and added, "I have to go in the kitchen to see if there isn't some professional chef hiding there, who made all these wonderful delicacies."

David smiled and said, "You are welcome to check at any time, but first taste the mousse, maybe you won't find it to your liking."

"Only from looking at such an impressive display, I am melting. I can already taste its sweetness, even before I touch it." she said and with that she put a spoonful of mousse with chocolate flakes and syrup into her mouth.

He enjoyed watching her savor the mousse that he had made especially for her. She closed her eyes and her tongue sensually licked her lips. He was jealous of those lips. He too tasted the mousse and licked his lips. When she recovered from the sweetness, Sandy cleared the dishes and on the way to the kitchen she said: "Allow me at least to do the dishes and you bring the rest of the things from the table." Without waiting for his answer, the water was already running from the kitchen faucet. David put the rest of the dishes in the sink and he pressed his body against hers from behind. He hugged her lovingly and said, "Allow me to help you. I'll hold you so you won't fall."

"You're getting me excited, David. If you carry on like this, I really will fall." she said and she almost dropped one of the new plates. She turned around facing him and put her arms around his neck and hugged him warmly. They were silent. Long moments of silent touch passed until she found the courage: "Thank you for the wonderful meal. I feel...that I...am falling in love with you." she said and pressed her sensuous lips to his lips in a passionate kiss.

In his imagination, David saw how she slipped out of her dress, but his rapture cooled due to Sandy's sober face as she gently, but firmly pushed him off of her. He was surprised. He didn't expect such a reaction, but Sandy tried to explain: "I have to tell you something important, David." She led him to the black leather sofa. In one hand she held his hand and with the other hand, she stroked the back of his hand. She lowered her gaze and continued: "I have to confess something to you... a few years ago, I experienced a traumatic event. A crazy psychopath tried to brutally rape me. He abused me, humiliated me and trampled my dignity to dust. Because of this, I lost my faith in humanity in general and in men in particular. So I ask and expect you to understand me and to take this into consideration. Understand, I really want you, I am falling in love with you, but please, give me the necessary time to restore my confidence that is lost somewhere out there in the tangle of dark memories."

David had a serious expression on his face. It appeared that he was disappointed over the tragic conclusion of the evening that was supposed to end differently according to his plans. Although there was a bit of this in his face, the tragedy that Sandy had

experienced swept his thoughts away to what he would have done to that despicable psychopath. Sandy saw his expression and apologized: “I know...I know, David. I’ve disappointed you. You invested a lot of time and energy for the success of this magical evening and you accomplished the mission. Please, try to understand me. You know, they say that happiness fills our lives when we learn to love unconditionally.”

He placed two fingers on her mouth. He hugged her and kissed her on the cheek. Sandy suddenly felt so safe in his arms. She kicked off her shoes, stretched out on the sofa and pulled him next to her. They wrapped themselves in each others arms. The beating of his heart matched the rhythm of her heartbeats. Dressed and loving, they wandered in thoughts of tomorrow that held a promise of a shared future.

8. The Hunter

The howling of sirens reverberated in the streets of Manhattan. All of the squad cars in the area were directed by the South Manhattan operations officer to the diamond and jewelry district on 47th Street, between 5th and 6th Avenues. The police communications network reported a robbery in progress at a diamond polishing factory on West 47th Street. Employees shouted from an opened window on the second floor: “Robbery! Robbery! We’ve been robbed; call the police.”

Three detectives ran out from police headquarters in Manhattan and jumped into a white Ford that had civilian plates. They put a red flashing light on the roof of the car and sped off, running through red lights and weaving through traffic.

“This is Tony’s job,” said Allen Peterson, nicknamed “the Hunter”, who was the oldest of the three. “According to the intelligence reports that I received, Tony needs big money in order to pay for the team of bodyguards that he maintains 24 hours a day.”

The Hunter had recently been appointed to the prestigious position of Chief of the Vice Enforcement Division in the NYPD. This was after he had proven himself as an intelligence officer in the Drug Division. He had undercover agents among the drug deals that caused a shortage in the drug market and raised the price of cocaine and heroin. The Hunter had a degree in criminology and he knew how to integrate the theory, skill and experience he had accumulated. Beginning with his service as a soldier in the military police, in the secret police of the Marines and up to the time he had served in the undercover unit of the FBI which deals with gathering intelligence about organized crime by tracking, wire tapping and use of advanced technology. He excelled in his talent to uncover criminals’ secrets, to interpret their body language and to understand their mode of operation. He was the one who waited for them, more than once; he was at the scene of the crime before the crime took place. His considerable patience helped him to react properly and to complete the case, which meant he photographed the crime and all that was left to do, was to bring the criminals to justice with all of the evidence and proof in the file.

Being an intelligent and ambitious man, he quickly understood how the system worked. More than once he had caught criminals in a daring operation, which was broadcast that same evening on all of the TV stations in a live broadcast from the South Manhattan Headquarters. During the press conference, the New York City

Chief of Police and his assistants sat on the stage; they congratulated themselves on their success in front of flashing cameras and journalists. The next day their pictures were splashed across the front pages of all the newspapers.

Hunter recalled the day that Richard, a New York Times crime reporter, arrived at his office. Richard told him straight out: “Look Hunter, our success in our jobs are interdependent.”

“Explain” Hunter replied and his foot pressed a button that started the concealed digital tape recorder that was hidden on his desk.

“All the glory for your successes is stolen from you by your superiors. Isn’t it fitting that you should also gain some of the recognition?”

“How do I do that?”

“Tell me ahead of time where the police are going to raid an escort service that uses prostitutes who were smuggled into New York, or illegal casinos and I will report that the police are fighting tirelessly against trade in women and illegal gambling. Your picture will appear in the newspaper. This will benefit you, the police and the newspaper.”

“You know that I’m not allowed to do that without the permission of the police spokesperson.”

“Listen,” Richard said with a mischievous smile on his face, “everyone does it, from your superiors, the Chief of Police, government Secretaries and even the President. Everyone uses the press as a means to transmit manipulative messages. I reward them with articles that give them a positive image, which they don’t always deserve. Those are the rules of the game. If you want to play, OK...if not, I’ll find someone else.”

Hunter knew very well that Richard was right and that was how things were done. Perhaps it would be a technical violation of the regulations if he cooperated with the sharp journalist, but in the equation of “risk vs. gain” the answer was clear. As a police officer, he knew better than anyone else that if he didn’t use deception and questionable practices against the sophisticated criminals, he wouldn’t reach the desired results in the complicated investigations. The risk wasn’t great, especially taking into account that this newspaper reporter, Richard, was known for religiously guarding the sources, who fed him with information. In return he refused to expose them. He extended his hand towards Richard and said: “We have a deal.”

They stood up and as they walked to the door they agreed not to use their cell phones for this purpose.

Immediately after Richard left his office, Hunter returned to his desk. He searched for the name "Richard Bell" in the police database. Ten single-spaced pages appeared on his screen with information about Richard, his family, his bank accounts and more, that might be useful to him one day. He printed the pages and put them in a new file on which he wrote in big letters: "Richard Bell". He had learned from his experience and his instincts that he had to prepare a trump card in case he needed it in the future in order to get what he wanted and he could always play the card when the time came. Suddenly he heard an announcement on the communication network: "A robbery in progress at a diamond polishing plant in the diamond district". He called his two assistants to join him and in seconds they were out. On the way they heard that two robbers were escaping from the scene, They heard over the system: 'They are riding on a large motorcycle, wearing black jackets and dark helmets. They are speeding and driving wildly south on 6th Avenue, towards the Lincoln Tunnel and New Jersey.'

The Head of the Detective Division of the NYPD, Chief Bill Carter, started to give directives over the network: "Traffic, Bill here Group your squad cars and prepare for a chase. Immediately block Dyer Avenue in the area of Lincoln Tunnel, the exit of 495 in the direction of Union City, South Marginal Highway and Route 95.

"Central- Bill here, requesting a helicopter immediately to get a fix on the robbers. Confirm receipt." The Head of the Detective Division finished in an excited but determined voice. The Head of the Traffic Division in the area reported on the preparations to put up the barriers; he estimated four minutes to carry it out. It was clear to those listening that four minutes was too long. A large motorcycle traveling at 170 mph only needs 30 seconds to pass the first barrier, while the helicopter requires time to get permission from the air controllers at the airport, to do safety inspection before take off, to feed navigation data into the computer and time to take off, all of which wastes precious time and takes the sting out of the operation.

The robbers were familiar with police procedures. They had prepared an escape route and exchange of vehicles. The robbery was executed by the book. The robbers' helmets had dark windshields that concealed their faces from witnesses and especially from the security cameras in the diamond factory and in the office next to the safe, which was required by the insurance company. They had inside information about the presence of a big stock of high quality unfinished diamonds. The robbery didn't look complicated, if there were no unexpected glitches. The owner of the business, who arrived from the neighboring diamond exchange with an additional stock of

unpolished diamonds didn't realize that he was a target of a robbery and that he was being observed the whole way. His movements were being reported on wireless devices not connected to the cellular phone system. He went up the elevator that stopped on the second floor. When the door opened, a 9mm gun was pressed into his back. He opened the double entry doors with his key according to the specific directions that the robbers gave him. He understood what was going on, He was frightened, but he knew that, the security cameras were filming him, so that he would be compensated for the loss. All that he asked was to get out alive. When the robbers entered with the owner, with the gun pressed to his back, they shouted: "Robbery, don't move!"

One of the robbers gathered all of the employees in the corner and ordered them to lay facedown on the floor. "Whoever moves or screams will get a bullet in the head." He started to quickly collect the "brifkes" the small envelopes that contained dozens of stones at different stages of processing. He opened all of the drawers on the polishing tables and he took off the medium and large sized brilliant Marquise diamonds from the polishing machines.

The second robber and the owner entered the office. The safe was open and the robber collected all of the metal and plastic boxes that contained thousands of polished and unpolished diamonds into a bag that he had prepared. The robber turned to the owner and roared: "Where are the keys?"

"The safe is open." the owner answered in a trembling voice.

The robber pressed the barrel of the gun to the owner's nose. The smell of the gunpowder registered in his nostrils and made it clear to him that the distance between the bullet and his brain was not far and there was no room for mistakes. The robber commanded in a decisive voice: "Take out the keys to the internal safe inside the safe, now. Do you think I was born yesterday? Or would you prefer that your brain fly out the window and you won't even feel the pain?"

"The keys are in my bag, in the inside pocket with a zipper." he answered quietly He knew the size of the haul that was falling into their hands.

The robber tore open the bag; he took out a key ring and with one of the keys he opened the upper compartment in the safe. Inside was a small grey cardboard box labeled. "Sight" which means that was purchased from "De Beers" the largest diamond mining company, for 4 million dollars. He opened the cover and smiled. He grabbed the owner and put him with the rest of the employees who in the meantime had been

bound together with plastic handcuffs in order to delay their call for help. The robbers hadn't cut the phone lines because they knew if they did, a red warning light would go off at the security service center with the business' address. When this happened, the security company would call the owner's cell phone and request the official password and if not received, they would immediately send a security patrol car with armed guards.

They warned the employees not to move for 10 minutes and they ran out of the factory. They used the stairs instead of the elevator. One of the robbers tripped at the bottom of the stairs and he slipped on the diamonds that scattered on the floor. The robber, who was in charge of the heist, came back and helped his friend up. He limped and moaned in pain. They didn't bother to pick up the diamonds that were scattered on the stairs.

On the way to the scene of the crime, Hunter directed his assistants to find out the kinds of vehicles that belonged to Tony and their license plate numbers.

In the meantime, the employees opened the window on the second floor and shouted: "Robbery! Robbery! We've been robbed; call the police! There are the robbers; catch them!"

Pedestrians froze in place; they didn't want to endanger themselves, but the employees continued to shout. The more senior of the two robbers aimed his gun upwards and shot one shot in their direction. The employees pulled back and hid. The people on the street took cover and phoned the police. The robbers got on their large black motorcycle and sped off towards nearby 6th Avenue. They turned southward and in 20 seconds, they entered the Lincoln Tunnel from West 42nd Street in the direction of New Jersey. After they exited 495, that connected Manhattan to New Jersey, they pulled into a parking lot and stopped behind a brown commercial vehicle with no windows. They opened the back and lowered a metal ramp. The motorcycle drove into the vehicle and the doors closed behind it. They took off their black jackets and dark helmets and they moved forward to the driver and passenger's seats. They put on sunglasses and drove slowly westward. They saw the police cars and barriers and the helicopter circling overhead. They were all looking for a large black motorcycle, which was already covered with a tarp. When they passed near a temporary police barrier that had been hastily erected, they saw the faces of the policemen who were searching for a motorcycle. They smiled at each other and went slowly and calmly on their way; however, their hearts were beating fast from the tension.

“Bird, Hunter here,” he said to the helicopter pilot on the communication network.

“According to the robbers’ mode of operation, I expect that they have already dumped the motorcycle. Look for a brown GMC commercial van, plate number DGV4952.”

“Bird here, got it.”

Chaos prevailed at the diamond polishing factory. A team from the Crime Identification Division, wearing white coveralls, took fingerprints, samples of fabric fibers, threads and hair that were spread everywhere. High ranking NYPD officers and undercover police raised different hypotheses about the identity of the robbers, based upon the evidence collected so far. The security company was requested to bring the video tapes from the security cameras that had filmed the crime scene to the police station. The journalists, who started to arrive, filmed and asked questions of the employees and police officers. The police responded with terse statements that a chase was in progress and an investigation was underway. Chief Carter told the journalists: “If we have any new information, we will notify you.”

“Hunter – Bird here, I have located a brown GMC with two men inside, traveling now on Route 95, west of Union City.” the pilot’s voice was heard on the communication network.

The Head of the Detective Division announced to everyone that he was taking charge of the chase and he directed: “Bird, Bill here. Continue your tracking. Traffic, Bill here; send all of your forces, including motorcycles to the escape route on westbound Route 95 and request back-up from the New Jersey Police. Set up barriers on the North New Jersey Turnpike and also on Routes 2, 120, 17 and 21.”

“Traffic here, got it, carrying out.”

Hunter called Tony’s cell phone number in order to establish legal evidence in case his suspicion proved to be true, but Tony’s cell phone played a recorded message: ‘The subscriber you are calling can not receive your call at the moment. Please try again later’ He swore and hung up.

The Head of the Detective Division appointed his deputy and two additional officers to form a special investigation team and recommended that until the chase was over, to continue with intelligence gathering. The deputy and the officers combed the adjoining streets looking for closed-circuit security cameras. They found three: One on the front wall of a bank that filmed the street and sidewalk. The second on an exterior wall of the diamond exchange, that filmed the entrance to the exchange and the third on the wall of the “Diamond Disco” that filmed the street in front of the

disco only at night. They collected the computers where the files with the pictures that were taken in the past hour were stored. They found what they were looking for. In two out of the three cameras, there were pictures of the large motorcycle with the two robbers riding on it. But they could not be identified and therefore, it was not admissible evidence in court, due to the fact that the dark windshields of the helmets concealed their faces. However, the motorcycle was identical to the one used by a criminal who was serving a six year sentence in Sing Sing Prison for robbery.

“Bill- Traffic here. Hunter’s hunch was right. The vehicle has been apprehended with the two robbers, the motorcycle and all of the diamonds that were stolen. You got it? Over.”

“Bill here, good work. We’re on our way.”

The journalists, who witnessed the unfolding drama, broadcast live and their cameras recorded the events directly to the networks.

Bill Carter went over to Hunter, shook his hand and said: “Great job Hunter. Congratulations on your resourcefulness. We are fortunate to have an officer who thinks fast on his feet. You can expect a promotion. Come let’s see the merchandise.”

Bill slapped him on the back and ran to his car.

Hunter also ran to his car and tried to start it, but the engine didn’t turn over. Hunter got angry and spit flew out of his mouth onto the inside of the windshield. He asked himself out loud: “How do they want us to chase after criminals who have fancy new cars and we have to cope with old clunkers that won’t even start?”

His young assistant calmed him down and said jokingly: “I’ll ask them to install additional wipers on the inside of the windshield to wipe off the spit of the frustrated drivers.”

With the help of two police officers pushing the car, Hunter was able to start the car and drive quickly to see the results of his work with his own eyes.

9. The Dilemma

David wasn't able to fall asleep all night. He was thinking about his winning 50 million dollars in the Lottery earlier that evening. He went over and over it in his mind. He was bothered mostly by what awaited him tomorrow and over the next few days. Even though he closed his eyes, pictures passed in front of him like in an action movie. He considered the possibility of getting up and taking a sleeping pill, but he passed on the idea, because it might wake up Sandy, who had finally fallen asleep. The thought of getting out of the warm bed was enough to nix the idea. He looked at Sandy's beautiful and relaxed face in the dim candlelight that emanated from the large candle that stood in the corner of the room, which gave off an enticing vanilla scent. He was close to her face and he enjoyed feeling her regular breathing, which radiated tranquility and pleasantness. David experienced an internal conflict- to tell Sandy or to hide from her the dramatic event that had just occurred. On the one hand, he didn't want to involve her in the lies and in the crime he had committed. He knew that she wouldn't accept it and she would demand that he return the money that was gained by illegal means.

Sandy was raised in a wealthy family, in a mansion in an exclusive suburb of Long Island, in a home where there was nothing lacking. Maids immediately fulfilled every whim. There was everything in the home, everything except for love, loyalty and happiness. Sandy had told him that she said to her parents many times, while sitting around their pool, that she would be willing to give up all of their wealth for a little happiness and love, like she saw at her friends' houses. Money ruined all of the relationships in the family.

In order to gain the happiness she was seeking, she decided that she didn't want her parents' money, not one single cent. She wouldn't allow money to change her life and her plans. 'That's Sandy,' David thought to himself and he admired her for being like that. On the other hand, he wished to involve her in everything, to share his feelings with her, because she was part of him. On the scale were laid weighty arguments. His thoughts wandered and he searched his memory from the depths of oblivion, if he had ever faced a similar dilemma in the past. 'Yes!' He recalled the period of his army service at the United States Military Academy at West Point, the officers' training school in upstate New York.

In the first course that he instructed, his best friend from childhood, Steve Cooper, was placed in his class. They had grown up together in Williamsburg; they were classmates and they shared many experiences during their teens. Fate decreed that they meet again in the officers' course. This placement put David in a predicament, which he wouldn't forget for a long time. Steve didn't take the course too seriously, even though he wanted to be an officer. He didn't invest time or effort and he thought that he would easily pass the course; however, it didn't turn out that way. The commander of the course, Major Jefferson, who was particularly strict, considered dismissing him from the course, but he waited for the right moment.

That moment came exactly when the end of the course was in sight. On Friday, before leaving for the weekend, two weeks before the end of the course, Steve and three other cadets were called to the commander's office. It was a typical military office; code maps hung on the walls, with red and blue arrows and various tactical symbols drawn on it. Pictures of former graduates hung on the other white walls. Also there were medallions and trophies from military sport and fitness competitions proudly displayed on a shelf behind the commander's chair. His chair was placed at the head of a table in the shape of a "T" and there were black metal chairs on either side of the table. Major Jefferson sat at the head of the table and next to him sat the three instructors of the department. The four cadets from the course were sent in one at a time for a personal interview, escorted by a staff sergeant.

Steve entered first. He saluted the commander of the course and sat down. David felt embarrassed by what was going to happen, but he was silent. The commander addressed Steve in a harsh tone that could not be misinterpreted: "Steve, we are considering if we should allow you to complete the course, or to dismiss you," he said and looked Steve straight in the eyes.

Steve's face turned red, like someone who had been shamed in front of his friends. He was agitated by this pronouncement, but he controlled himself. He sat quietly and listened and occasionally glanced at David, who lowered his gaze.

The commander continued: "On Monday, when you return from the weekend, there will be a test summarizing the course curriculum. If you don't pass the test successfully, you will be dismissed and you will not be an officer in the American Army, period! If you pass, you will be made an officer and you can prove to us and to yourself that we weren't wrong about you. Dismissed."

The staff sergeant indicated to Steve that the meeting was over. Steve stood up, saluted and left the room quietly. From there he went quickly to gather his belongings so he wouldn't miss the transportation home. At the conclusion of the meetings with all four cadets, the commander gave a few directives to the rest of the officers. He turned to David and said: "Go to the print shop and take out all of the test copies. Make sure they are clearly printed and lock them in your drawer. On Monday, they will be given the test in the classroom at the "university" site. We will be in the field marking the area for navigation, which will take place next week. We'll arrive later. At the end of the test, you start checking the exams and we will help you when we get back."

"Yes sir!" David replied. He rose and wished all those present in the office a pleasant weekend and went off to the print shop. He pulled out one copy of the test, folded it and put it in his pocket. He walked quickly towards the parking lot to the bus that would take him home to his family, to his girlfriend at that time, sweet Sherry, who waited all week for Friday to be with him as much as possible and to make up for the time that he was on the base. His friends, who were soldiers and students, spread out all over the state, also waited for him. They gathered on the weekends to share their experiences and to have a good time.

David laid down on the last row of the bus. He wanted to sleep on the way home to catch up on a few hours of sleep. That way, he would have more time to spend with his family, girlfriend and friends. He closed his eyes, but before he could fall asleep, an internal conflict aroused his conscience. 'To give or not give?' was the question that nestled in his soul. On the one hand, the army perceived him as an honest man; it had complete trust in him and gave him authority and weighty responsibility. If he gave a copy of the test to his friend Steve, he would be betraying the army's trust in him. He would feel dishonest towards the army and himself. On the other hand, he weighed the value of friendship. If he didn't give Steve the copy, he would be failing his best friend, exactly at the time he most needed his help. David didn't want to abandon Steve at this critical time. Two important values loomed before him. David saw a balance scale in his imagination, on each side a heavy weight. He couldn't discern towards which side the scale was tipping. He thought and thought until he found a solution that satisfied him and only then did he fall asleep.

When he arrived home, his mother, Sonya, burst into shouts of joy. She hugged him warmly and covered his cheeks with kisses, until David had to pull her off of him. She

held his hand and pulled him towards the kitchen; so that she could complete the work she had started in the morning. She had made the meatballs that her beloved son liked so much, along with white rice with raisins, peas and vegetables. She also baked a cheesecake. David would usually finish half of the cake himself over the short vacation and the other half he would take back with him for his friends on the base. He sat next to her and told her about his experiences on the base. Now and then, he popped a warm meatball into his mouth that had just been removed from the boiling oil.

“What’s that smell Sonia? What are you cooking that smells so good?” Naomi’s voice could be heard suddenly. Naomi lived next door and was Steve’s mother. She came into the house on the trail of the delicious aromas of cooking and baking that filled the house and spilled outside. The women exchanged a few pleasantries and then Naomi turned to David in a voice trembling from emotion and worry. “David, Steve told me what happened on the base. You of all people should know that he has no intention of studying at the university after his service. His chances of advancement as a career soldier are zero if he is dismissed from the officers’ course.” she said and looked into his eyes. She tried to pull at his heartstrings and she added: “Look, David, Steve and you have been friends since birth. You were raised like brothers. We need your help; only you can save us. Please, help him with this test; give him the questions...he has to pass it, David. His entire future rests in your hands.”

Naomi’s words began to peck at his conscience. He understood that if Steve failed the test, all of the guilt would be thrust upon him. He knew that it wasn’t fair to blame him for Steve’s dismissal, but he chose to keep quiet in light of Naomi’s worries. He shifted in his chair and said: “Relax, Naomi, it will be OK. I’ll finish my lunch and then I’ll come over to talk to him. I’m simply starving.”

“Naomi wasn’t satisfied with his indefinite answer and she again tried to make him feel guilty: “David, Steve’s whole future is in your hands; you must help him!”

David got up and accompanied her to the door and promised her that everything would be fine. After she left, he returned to the table, to his mother’s special dishes that she loved to make for him. She watched him and enjoyed seeing him eat quickly and with a big appetite. She felt content and amply rewarded for her efforts. She wanted to give her son warmth and a sense of “home”.

After the meal, David called his girlfriend Sherry, who waited impatiently for his call. She usually kissed the receiver as if it were his tanned and chiseled face that she

missed so much, but she had to wait until the evening when they would go out and intertwine. She knew that the afternoon hours he would spend with his family, especially with his brother Robert, who was serving in the army, in a tank regiment. He was stationed in conflicted areas outside of America and he was involved in dangerous operational activities, but he found them challenging and interesting. David loved his brother very much and admired him for his intelligence and bravery. He enjoyed his company and listening to his stories about what was happening in his unit. "Mom, I'm going to go talk with Steve until Robert arrives. I'll be right back," he said and left the house. He knocked on the door, but as was his habit, he didn't wait for an answer and entered the Cooper's house. Steve's parents indicated with a nod that Steve had shut himself in his room. Steve sat next to his desk. In front of him were thick books on the subjects of systems of warfare, military history and others. He looked helpless facing the task imposed upon him this weekend.

"What's happening, Steve?" David asked and he shook his hand.

"Don't you see? I don't have chance to learn all this material in two days. You have to give me the test questions. That's the only chance I have to pass the test," he said and waited for David's reaction.

"Listen, Steve, ...I can't give you the questions to the test, but I will guide you about what to focus on and what to study. There's a lot of superfluous material that you don't need to study and waste precious time on. Steve, I intend to help you. You should know that I will be in the classroom during the test and I will pass by you occasionally to see if everything is OK. I am also going to check your test and if it's necessary, I will go easy on you." David told him. He looked into Steve's eyes and added: "I don't think that you're not suitable to be an officer. All you have to do is to 'sit on your butt' this weekend and study."

Steve wasn't happy with the answer, but he understood his friend's dilemma and he respected it. David removed most of the books on the table. He opened three of them and pointed out to Steve the relevant material. 'From here, it doesn't look so bad' Steve mumbled to himself. After everything was clear, David stood opposite Steve, looked him in the eyes and said: "Steve, you're my best friend. I won't let you down!" David's words calmed Steve a little bit. "Thanks David," he said and they parted with a strong handshake.

As expected, Steve didn't join the weekly Friday and Saturday night entertainment with his friends. Instead of going out, he studied hard all weekend. On Monday, at

noon, all of the cadets from Division Two entered the classroom. Each one sat in a separate chair with a writing table. David entered the classroom, with a brown paper bag with the tests in his hands.

In the class, the call “Attention!” was heard. All of the cadets stood on their feet. The cadet on duty saluted David, who returned the salute and told them to be seated. He walked over to the table next to the board. While he passed out the test to the cadets, he clarified a few directions.

You could cut the silence and tension in the class with a knife. Everyone was bent over their writing tables and was quickly writing their answers in order to complete the test in the allotted time. David walked among the rows. From time to time, he peeked at Steve’s answers. He was pleased with what he saw. At the end of the two hours, the appointed hour to end the test, David collected all of the test forms and he gave orders and instructions to the cadets about how to prepare for the night exercise that was planned for them. Mainly, he reminded them to study navigation. They were supposed to go on a night march, at the end of which they were required to execute a raid on a fortified position. David left the classroom and went quickly to his office. His curiosity overcame his hunger and desire to eat. When he sat down at his desk, he pulled out Steve’s test and started to check it. Slowly, the picture became clear. The tension he had been holding inside was released and a small smile rose on his lips. He made a checkmark in red pen next to most of the answers and he added remarks here and there. After he totaled up the points, he wrote on the top of the first page: “78, you improved. Keep it up!”

When the instruction team returned from the field, preparations began for the night exercise. The cadets stood around a sand table, a model of the topography they would encounter, in order to simulate the exercise. They went over the route and the approach to the position. Also they went over a simulation of likely events and reactions that the fighters might come up against during the operation. Steve watched David’s face at every moment. When their gaze crossed, Steve moved his head from side to side in question: “Did I pass?”

A slight smile crept into David’s face and he nodded slightly, but to erase all doubt, he gave him a “thumbs up”. Steve smiled, nodded his head in gratitude and returned his gaze to the sand table.

Suddenly, Sandy woke up. She opened her beautiful eyes and saw that David was wide awake. She stretched and asked him: “David, what time is it? I hope I’m not late for my exam?”

“No, honey; it’s three in the morning. Go back to sleep...I will wake you up at six,” David answered and stroked her face.

Sandy threw back the blanket, got out of bed and walked towards the kitchen and asked: “Do you want some Coke? I’m dying of thirst.” Without waiting for an answer, she returned with two glasses. After she took a few sips, she climbed back into the warm bed, cuddled up in David’s strong arms and said: “It looks like you didn’t fall asleep at all tonight. Aren’t you tired David?”

David told her about the dilemma he had had during his military service. She listened to him carefully. Sandy was glad to hear that he had done the right thing. She was proud of him and she kissed him lightly on the mouth. When he noticed that she was amenable to talking, he asked her in a whisper: “How would you invest a big amount of money that fell into your lap?”

Sandy turned towards him, looked at him with eyes wide open and asked: “Is there something I don’t know, David?”

“No, sweetheart, I’m only toying with thoughts...Listen to a real story that I heard from old man Mundek, my parents’ neighbor. He immigrated to New York from Poland with his brother in 1946. With the money they brought with them, each one bought an apartment for his family. One started to work at a Coca Cola factory and the other at the New York Harbor. With the remaining money, around \$10,000, which was a fortune in those days, they decided to invest in a long-term investment that would yield profit, if not for them, for their descendents. When the two brothers met at Easter dinner, Mandel asked his brother Mundek: “So, Mundek, where did you invest your money?” He hesitated a moment and answered: “Look, Mandel, don’t laugh at me, but I bought ½ acre of land in South Manhattan. People say that maybe some day it will be worth something.” Mandel got angry and scolded his younger brother. “Mundek, why didn’t you consult me? What will you do with that dirt? Can you change your mind and get your money back?” Mundek lowered his head and answered: “No, it’s not possible. What will be will be...What did you buy?”

“Oh,” answered Mandel in a confident tone. He was proud of his wise investment, “I bought 3 ½ acres of forest in New Jersey, Mundek. Do you understand the difference? A forest is trees. Trees are wood for making tables and furniture and also my area is

seven times bigger than yours!” Mundek was embarrassed and said: “We’ll see what time brings, everyone with his own luck.”

David smiled and continued: “About a year ago, I met old man Mundek and I asked him what was the fate of his and his brother’s investment.

“Don’t ask,” he answered me with a broad smile and pleased with himself. “I sold the land not long ago and I got 10 million dollars for it. I divided 5 million up between the children and I kept 5 million for myself for hard times.”

“Great! Well done, Mundek. You foresaw the future. Tell me, what happened to Mandel’s investment?”

“Oh,” he sighed and a look of disappointment clouded his face: “The area he bought became a nature reserve! He can’t even pick one leaf off his trees. He is devastated.”

Sandy listened to the story ardently. David looked at her and said: “That is an example that should be taught in business school. In my estimation, business sense is an innate talent that requires vision. Billionaires, who didn’t even finish high school, occupy key positions in the American and world economy, good timing and a little luck always help.”

Sandy was tired by this time. She rolled over on her side and curled up. David covered her with the blanket and put his arm around her. She closed her eyes and said: “It’s a good thing we don’t have money David. I prefer to be poor and happy than rich and unhappy. David, you’re dearer to me than anything. I hope that this moment will never end.” She kissed his hand and fell asleep.

10. The Plan

David returned home earlier than usual from work and decided to surprise Sandy with an intimate dinner, which they hadn't done in a long time. He drew confidence from the special meal that he had prepared in his apartment for her after they first met, about which he received many compliments. He kept the flames of their love alive by showering presents on Sandy, which included little surprises of paper hearts. He placed them under her pillow and in her purse; he drew hearts on the car window and on the bathroom mirror. 'Routine and boredom are the enemies of love,' he told himself and he went to prepare the dinner.

He defrosted chicken legs and he marinated them for awhile in a mixture of ketchup, soy sauce, honey and garlic. After baking them in the oven for an hour at a medium heat, he removed the aluminum foil and returned the pan to the oven for an additional half hour until they were golden brown. At the same time, he fried some sliced garlic in olive oil, added a package of frozen peas; he stirred a bit and added $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water, pepper, salt, 1 teaspoon of powdered bullion and a little lemon. He cooked it over a medium flame for 20 minutes. While he was waiting, he poured a little sunflower oil, two sliced garlic cloves and 1 cup of Persian white rice into a pot placed over a small flame. He stirred gently for 3 minutes. He added $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups of boiling water, sprinkled in some salt and black pepper and covered the pot. He let the rice cook over a small flame for a quarter of an hour.

A white tablecloth was spread on the table. Two long, slender candles were lit and an incense stick was lit, which gave off an intoxicating scent of roses. David poured a bottle of wine into a carafe and placed it on the table. He arranged the silverware and wine glasses and he went to put on the tape-radio. Pleasant, quiet music played in the room and the lights were dimmed.

"What are we celebrating today?" Sandy asked in surprise when she entered the apartment and saw the table set so festively.

"I simply love you; a good enough reason for a special dinner." he smiled and answered her.

"I adore you," she said and hugged him warmly. She kissed him on the lips and asked: "How did you know that I'm dying of hunger? I planned on devouring you, but thanks to the delicious smells coming from the kitchen, I'll put that off for another time." She said and she walked over to the oven. She helped him serve the rice and peas and she

placed the glass serving dish with the browned chicken pieces, which gave off a splendid aroma, on the table. The dishes were excellent. They ate with good appetite and occasionally sipped the fine wine. Sandy was still agitated by the events she had witnessed at Danielle Klein's fashion house only an hour ago. She told David what happened and she asked him for his help.

"I have a million dollars in my pocket," he smiled and added, "Take it and give it to her."

"That's not funny." she answered with a serious look on her face. "She is in danger of losing her life and you are joking around."

"She should turn to the police." David suggested.

"That will only make the problem worse." she said.

"What is her husband doing about it?"

"Her husband, Jeff, works for the Lottery Company and salvation won't come from there."

David began to dig in his rich imagination, which sometimes provided him with brilliant ideas. He thought about Sandy's words and about the Lottery Company... 'a place with an inexhaustible source of cash...' he said to himself. He looked into Sandy's shining eyes and said: "Actually, the solution might lie there."

"I don't understand how a salaried person, who earns a couple of thousand dollars a month, could raise a million dollars in cash."

"Let me check a few things." he said as his thoughts drifted towards a crazy plan that just popped into his head.

"Arrange a meeting with Danielle's husband, Jeff." he said and he listened to every detail that she knew about Danielle's family.

Sandy phoned Danielle. "Good evening, Danielle. I spoke with David just now. He said that he is able to help you. Could he come to your office tomorrow at noon?"

"Yes."

"Ask your husband Jeff to join you."

"OK, he'll be there and thank you for your help." she answered and hung up.

The next day at noon, David left work and was standing in front of Danielle's fashion house. Suddenly, he noticed a moped rider who stopped on the sidewalk next to the entrance of the fashion house and entered Danielle's office. He wrote down the license plate number and called his friend Bobby, who had been his deputy in his

special military unit. Bobby now worked as a detective in the drug investigation division of the NYPD.

“Bobby my friend, this is David. How are you?”

“David, life is good. How are you?”

“Great, I just need a little help. Who owns a black Suzuki moped, license number GHB5842?”

“I’m next to the computer, give me a second to enter the database and I’ll have the answer for you...here...are you taking this down? The owner is the company T.B. Properties, Ltd. They are located in the Diamond building on 47th Street in Manhattan. The owner is Tony Bagio. That’s it. I hope that I helped you. David, in return, I’d love to get the names of the drug dealers and users around your friends at the university.”

“I see that there’s no free lunch with you, my friend. Thanks Bobby. You helped me a lot! Bye.”

David wrote down the details. As soon as the moped driver left the fashion house with a small envelope in his hand, David entered directly into Danielle’s office. On his way, he surveyed the details of the beautiful clothes on display on mannequins that rotated on small circular platforms. Dried rose petals were strewn at their feet, which enhanced the fashion’s exclusivity.

When he entered the elegant office, the loud argument that had been taking place between the two people ceased immediately. Danielle received him with a forced and phony smile. David introduced himself and Jeff got up and stretched his hand towards David. They shook hands and they sat next to each other facing Danielle.

“Sandy told me about the difficult situation you are in, about the million dollar debt hanging over your head, which might cause the company to collapse. As I understand, this is the easy part of the story. The heavy debt that you incurred and the accompanying high interest have created a threat to your life. That’s the heart of the problem that needs to be solved immediately. Have you considered involving the police?” asked David.

“No, no. I don’t rely on anyone and I don’t want to involve the police. I will sell the business and our apartment. We’ll rent somewhere.”

Jeff moved uncomfortable in his chair and he thought of all the hard work he had invested his whole life to buy this beautiful apartment in an exclusive neighborhood. Thought of the disgrace and humiliation in the eyes of his neighbors, friends and

family caused him to sweat in spite of the comfortable temperature in the office. He looked at David and expected salvation.

“Jeff, let’s go to a nearby café. We won’t disturb Danielle’s work and we can talk about finding an immediate solution to the problem you have been drawn into.” David offered. Jeff accepted the offer and he promised to keep Danielle posted about any developments. They left the office together.

After they sat down on the wicker chairs around a small table and were sipping their strong espressos, David began to explore possible solutions that Jeff was thinking of. He listened to Jeff and rejected his propositions one after the other, from the possibility of killing Tony to Danielle committing suicide.

“Listen closely to my crazy idea and if you reject it, forget it, as if I never said anything. OK?”

“OK” Jeff said. He leaned towards David, so that he could speak in a whisper.

“I am a professional electronic engineer and I develop video games for the international gambling industry. At the moment, I am developing a gaming machine, a kind of computerized, automatic electronic roulette, based on 37 lottery balls, which replaces the conventional roulette wheel. The players don’t have faith in the outcomes anymore. They are suspicious that the wheel can be rigged to their detriment. Therefore, we found a method that will replace the wheel with balls, which represent the 36 red and black numbers and one green ball with the number 0.”

“Why does it matter to you if it’s a wheel or balls?” asked Jeff naively.

“With the roulette wheel, there’s hardly any chance to control the results of the numbers that the wheel stops at. Additionally, not one casino owner would want a machine that could be controlled, because he would be the first one to lose. However, if there’s an automatic machine that is calibrated to give 80-90 percent winnings to the players, that would leave 10-20 percent of the total sum of the players’ turnover in the pocket of the machine’s owner, which isn’t a small amount of cash. In contrast to the roulette wheel, with the balls we can control the results and therefore, we can introduce a game into the market wherein we determine our desired percentage of winnings.”

“I recall management discussions at the Lottery Company, in the supervisory committee, about methods and possibilities of cheating and skewing the results. By exchanging a few balls with alternate weighted balls, the heavier balls would get

closer to the transparent chamber of the bottom of the container where the winning numbers are displayed.” said Jeff.

“Exactly, the game we are developing now is very similar to the machine you use for the lottery drawing, the one you have at the Lottery Company.”

Jeff understood the crazy idea. He began to shift uneasily in his chair. The possible scenario of a long prison sentence, his picture in the media, loss of his pension, his benefits and most importantly, his good reputation arose in his mind. In spite of that, he asked: “So what are you suggesting?”

“You will get ten million dollars in cash if you give me the opportunity to make changes in the hardware and software of the lottery machine. Your risk won’t be big. You could always claim that you didn’t know that it was possible to do and you certainly wouldn’t cooperate with such a scheme.”

“What would I have to do?” asked Jeff.

“To cause a technical failure of the machine, ask me as a technician to come to fix it and mainly to keep quiet.”

“How can I cause a failure?”

“Disconnect an internal wire, that’s all.”

“I have a technician in the company whose job it is to fix the machine.”

“Send him on vacation or to a training course in Japan, to the company that produces the machine.”

“It doesn’t sound so complicated.” Jeff whispered.

“No one in the world ever got so much for so little.”

“Are you sure that you are capable of pulling off this crazy plan?”

“Very sure.”

“Look, David, I don’t know you. How can I be sure that you won’t vanish with the money and you won’t recognize me the day after? You know that I won’t go to the police to complain that you stole ten million dollars from me, my share of your winnings as your partner in crime...”

“A good question: A: check out my reliability. B: You don’t have another choice...Go with your instincts and decide.”

“You have a lot of nerve and guts. You’re claiming to be honest and reliable, while at the same time you’re planning to steal 50 million dollars!”

David smiled and said: “You are also an honest and respectable man, Jeff. Circumstances have brought you to deviate from the straight and narrow and so it is with me.”

Jeff thought for a few seconds, held out his hand and said: “Good luck.”

David shook his hand and said: “I won’t disappoint you, Jeff.”

Jeff stood up, put a twenty dollar bill on the table, said goodbye to David and returned to work.

‘Good luck’, David said to himself as the plan began to unfold.

11. Crime Pays

At the entrance to the courtroom in the Manhattan Criminal Courts, the policemen removed the handcuffs from young Tony's hands. This was the first time in his life that he had been in this situation. He felt humiliated by the looks of people in the courtroom, but his friends and neighbors called out words of encouragement. They signaled with their hands and winked at him to convey their support.

More than anything, he felt that he had betrayed his father, Luciano Bagio, who sat with downcast eyes and refrained from looking at his wayward son.

"Court is in session, all rise!" the clerk's loud call was heard in courtroom number 7. The judge, Thomas Hoffburn, entered the room wearing his black robe, which gave him an air of authority and respect. He looked down at those present from high up on his bench. The people rose to their feet and then sat down again, only when directed to do so. The judge took his place in the middle of the platform and sat in his high-backed leather chair. The state symbol and the national and state flags were displayed on either side of the platform. There were two tables in front of the platform, one for the prosecution and one for the defense. The head of the defense team was the well-known attorney, John Fisher, who Mr. Bagio had hired to represent his son. Tony sat pale faced on a wooden bench at a table next to the witness stand. On either side of him sat two heavy-set uniformed policemen, who were ready to react to any unexpected behavior on his part.

"Case A5734/06, The State of New York vs. Tony Bagio," the judge opened the trial and turned to the prosecutor: "Is the suspect in the courtroom?"

"Affirmative, your honor," the prosecutor answered. He stood up and pointed at Tony.

"Are you Mr. Tony Bagio?"

"Yes," Tony nodded his head.

"Stand up when you address the court," the judge rebuked him. He then read the bill of indictment from the file lying in front of him. "You are accused of breaking into a car, theft of car parts and accessories and property damage worth thousands of dollars on November 7, 2006. Do you plead guilty to these crimes?" the judge asked and looked at Tony.

"Yes," Tony answered and he sat down.

The judge addressed the prosecuting attorney and said: "Such being the case, will the prosecution please present before the court the arguments for punishment?"

The prosecutor rose and began to detail the criminal incidents that had occurred in the Bronx neighborhood: “As a young man, Tony chose crime as a way of life. He struck terror into the hearts of citizens of New York. The mayor received many complaints from the residents who suffered from a wave of break-ins to their apartments and to their cars. Extensive damage was caused to their property. Many residents even wanted to sell their apartments and move to a safer area. However, lack of demand in this area led to a discernable devaluation of apartment prices. Fear is prevalent among the residents. Some are afraid to cooperate with the authorities, lest they be harmed. This time, unlike in the past, the police took serious action in this case. After preparing the groundwork and gathering intelligence, they began to track the criminal and film him. They clearly filmed Tony committing the crime swiftly, efficiently and professionally. Your honor, I request that the court show this film to those present at the trial.

The judge approved his request and the prosecutor asked that the video in the envelope be admitted as “Exhibit 1” and he handed it to the court clerk. The judge indicated to the court reporter to enter into the record “Exhibit 1, video tape showing evidence in the case was given to the court.”

The prosecutor added a few more words to emphasize the gravity of the offence and the need to remove the offender from the midst of the terrified public and to put him behind bars and then he sat down.

The judge invited a representative of the defense to make his opening remarks. The attorney, Mr. Fisher, whose picture appeared weekly in the newspapers and the television newscasts as the criminal attorney of the “big fish” in the New York area, rose and quietly and submissively said: “The defense waives the viewing of the evidence in the video.” He knew the outcome of the trial already, but in spite of that, he did not give up. He tried to convince the court and he opened an academic monologue: “It is my desire to inform this distinguished court about professional research that was conducted by the head of the Criminology Department at Princeton University. This research discovered that the likelihood of a first-time offender leaving the cycle of crime is reduced by tens of percentage points if he is imprisoned with hardened criminals. Therefore, I ask the court to have mercy on my client, taking into consideration that this is his first arrest. I ask that he be released immediately to his family under the supervision of a probation officer. If the court doesn’t accept our request, it is certain that American society will have another dangerous major criminal

on its hands, whose first lesson will be tonight within the confines of prison.” said the attorney and handed a copy of the research to the judge.

The judge looked at the study’s conclusions. He knew that the defense attorney was right in his claims. He stated his decision in a loud voice: “The court is faced with two arguments that are equally important. On one side, we have a criminal who trampled the foundation of the law, caused property damage and shook the public’s security. It is the right of every innocent citizen to defend his freedom, property and security. When this basic right is breached, the offender must pay for his crime with the punishment he deserves. On the other hand, the damage has already been done and it can not be reversed, but if this young criminal will be incarcerated, the damage that will be caused to society in the future will be much greater. In light of the increasing violence on the streets of New York and in the Bronx in particular, and in light of the Justice Department’s decision, and the recommendation by the Supreme Court to commit the legal system to dealing with the increasing crime rate, I sentence the accused to three months in prison and 12 months probation.”

“Save my son!” a cry was heard from the back of the courtroom from Mr. Bagio, who rose and strode towards the judge’s bench. “You will ruin the boy.” he continued to shout at the shocked judge, who pressed the distress call button with his right foot.

Two security guards dressed in grey uniforms immediately burst into the courtroom and apprehended Mr. Bagio, who started to curse the prosecutor.

Tony, who was watching the spectacle, ran towards the guards and began punching them, but the two policemen, who had been sitting on either side of him, chased him and handcuffed his hands. The wise judge didn’t want to add fuel to the fire, so he exempted Mr. Bagio from punishment for causing the turmoil in the courtroom, as he took the father’s natural instinct to defend his son into consideration.

The arguments and disputes between the Bagio family and the residents who wanted revenge continued after the accused was removed from the courtroom. The residents approached the defense attorney: “Tell us, Mr. Lawyer, how can you defend such scum? Is your conscience clear?”

“Yes,” he answered dryly, “it’s clear because I don’t use it.”

After the father was removed from the courtroom, Tony was taken to Sing Sing Prison in upstate New York to start serving his time. This correction facility was considered to be the “University of Crime”. Tony, who was talented and caught on fast, proved to himself and those around him that a new star had arrived on the

American crime scene. Right from the beginning, he learned the rules and codes of a different world, a cruel and alienated world.

On the first night, when he sat alone in his cold, grey cell, he made the decision to pay back society for putting him away, as opposed to trying to rehabilitate himself. He whispered to himself: 'They can take away my freedom, my rights, arrest me and trample my dignity, but there is an element stronger than them that they can't stop. An element that the police, the chief prosecutor and even the president himself can't stop and that's time...time is on my side. This period will pass and in two months, I'll be free and then we'll meet again. Wait for me, my fellow Americans; I'll return big time.'

Luciano Bagio couldn't bear the pain. Thoughts about his eldest son doing time in the infamous Sing Sing, among hardened criminals who might victimize the young man with physical or sexual violence, distressed him. 'I must do something for my son,' Bagio said to himself and he sifted through the contents of his pockets. He pulled out a business card and called Mr. Mandelovitch from the Agriculture Department. He told him about the disturbing events that had happened and he said: "Help me get my son released from prison."

"The chief prosecutor was appointed by a different party, which is still in power and I don't have any influence on him. It's not so bad, Bagio; he'll learn a lesson. Maybe he'll return my car emblem that he stole from my car." said Mr. Mandelovitch in reply.

"If that's the case, you are welcome to come to our neighborhood and go door to door to ask for the residents' signatures who already have willingly signed for me. You can find the 9,600 forms that they filled out in one of the dumpsters." and he hung up. Bagio was restless. He felt helpless that he couldn't help his son. In order to ease the pain, he began to drink alcohol, which only aggravated his situation.

In his cell, Tony received a package now and then from friends and family with coffee, candy and cookies. His stay in prison strengthened him. After a few brawls, in which he took the upper hand, he got the point, which would help him in the world of crime. 'The strong and cruel rule. There's no room for the weak and good hearted!' he said to himself. This idea was reinforced by a program he saw on the National Geographic Channel, where a mature lion killed a huge bison, without mercy and by that created intimidation and a reputation among all of the animals on the Savannah.

‘The lesson for humans is the same,’ he determined and he decided to behave like a lion and not like an ostrich.

The intention of the police and the legal system was to punish him and to deter him in order to teach him a lesson and thus prevent his return to prison. However, the damage caused by his time in prison in the company of the best of the criminal world, led to the exact opposite effect.

When the time came for his release, Tony went straight home. He was welcomed with hugs and kisses by his family, who were anxiously waiting for him. He ate a hearty meal that his mother had prepared especially for him, while his father, Luciano watched him. Tony told about his experiences in jail and towards the end of the meal, his father pleaded: “Tony, my son, I beg of you, please stop stealing. Start a new life. You shame the whole family. Haven’t you learned your lesson? Do you want to go back there again?”

Tony answered his father respectfully, but with conviction: “Dad, what will I do? What future awaits me? If I were a doctor or a lawyer, I could find work. But who will hire me with nine years of schooling? Look, Dad, where did your choices get you to? You’ve been unemployed for years. We live in poverty that is passed down from generation to generation. I have to do something that will get us out of this endless cycle of poverty. I promise you Dad that everything will change soon.” He walked over to his father, hugged and kissed him on the cheek and left the house.

His first stop was to go to his friend’s house and buy an old moped for a few hundred dollars and then go to Manhattan. After a half an hour ride and endless thoughts, he entered a store which sold cell phones and bought a phone with an easy number to remember that blocked his caller ID. He paid in cash and got the receipt on a fictitious name. He bought a pre-paid calling card limited to only \$50. From there, he went to a small printing shop and ordered 5,000 flyers of an advertisement for professional fumigation services for the very cheap price of \$60. He purchased an exterminator’s tank with inexpensive poison, which he diluted with water and he set it in the small crate on an old moped. From there he rode out to an exclusive area of Long Island and put the flyers in mailboxes. Then he returned home. to the Bronx. The next day, he already received three calls to fumigate exclusive homes. He arranged appointments with the homeowners for the following day in the late morning. He didn’t forget to ask them to open all of the cabinets, closets and drawers, including the kitchen.

The next morning, Tony rented a cheap, old warehouse across the river in an industrial area with convenient access and a ramp for unloading trucks. He ordered a truck and two movers from a moving company in the city.

When he arrived at the first house, he went to the door with his tank on his back. His nose and mouth were hidden behind a white air filter. He explained to the lady: “The fumigation time is 35 minutes. It is dangerous to stay in the house. I have to seal it up for three hours afterwards.” He convinced the elderly, wealthy lady to go shopping at the nearby mall and to return in around four hours. “I’ll close the door behind me,” he promised her. He asked for \$60 for the service and entered the kitchen. After he was certain that the lady had left the house, he called the movers to come in and empty the house. The electrical appliances and the expensive paintings on the walls comprised the bulk of the valuables. He left the heavy, bulky furniture behind. He left the house before the movers had finished their work. He kept the cell phone number of the driver in order to update him about the time of unloading the contents of the truck. Tony operated in the same manner at the other two homes. He quickly and efficiently emptied the houses and he paid the movers with a new refrigerator that was worth more than the price they had agreed upon. Everyone was satisfied.

The next day he bought a new chip for the cell phone with a different number, in cash of course, and he left for the printers to print the same advertisement with the different telephone number. He distributed the flyers in Brooklyn. He lined up the moving company in the city. At the end of the “workday”, he sent the moving truck to his parents’ home in the Bronx, with a DVD, a new 42” screen, a two door side-by-side refrigerator with a water and ice dispenser, an expensive washing machine, dryer, a state of the art CD player and several other items. He let his parents know that the delivery was on its way. He told them that he had won the lottery and he wanted to make up for the anguish he had caused them. They were happy, but they doubted his truthfulness.

Thus, he continued for ten days in a row in different places. He exchanged the goods for cash, which he received from shrewd merchants who bought everything they could get their hands on. When he felt the police was on his trail, he elaborated on the method. Instead of fumigation services, he switched to moving services. He advertised in local papers for moving at the ridiculous price of \$400 instead of the going rate of \$2,000. He got many responses, which he sorted according to the area. He only chose the exclusive areas. He carried it out quickly and cleanly. The contents

of the house were loaded onto the truck under the supervision of the customer and it was supposed to be delivered to the new house. Of course, the truck never arrived at the correct address; rather it drove straight to Tony's bargain warehouse. He didn't pass over any carton, until he found what he was looking for. His conscience didn't bother him about the financial damage that he was causing his customers or about the loss of items of sentimental value, like childhood pictures or mementos from the past. The remainder of the contents was disposed of immediately. He threw it in the garbage dumps, so he wouldn't leave a trail. And so, in a short time, he accumulated expensive possessions and money that afforded him financial security and a life of luxury to compensate himself for the stress he had been under lately.

While he was being pampered by a massage, by two young, shapely naked girls, he closed his eyes and a feeling of pleasure flooded his body. Then he understood, without a doubt: 'Whoever said that crime doesn't pay was mistaken.

12. The Security Guard

“Help, save me... he’s going to kill me...help!” Desperate cries were heard from a curvaceous woman running naked in the corridor of the exclusive Plaza Hotel in Manhattan.

A heavy-set man was chasing her with a long sharp kitchen knife in his hand. He was shouting: “Whore, I’ll cut your throat. Come here, you piece of shit. Adulteress!” He was enraged in a fit of madness. His eyes focused on the veins of her neck and he wanted to slit his wife’s throat; his wife who he loved so much. The urgent call on the hotel’s internal communication network, reporting the dramatic event taking place in the west wing, changed David’s plans. He was supposed to finish his morning shift as security guard of the hotel and go to the university to finish studying for the upcoming test in electronics. He jumped into the first elevator and with a special key, he went directly up to the 14th Floor without stopping. The woman’s screams were getting louder. The hotel guests double locked their doors. Some even placed chairs in front of their doors out of fear.

One brave and curious man peeked from his door and directed David towards the stairwell where the woman had fled with her murderous husband on her heels. David drew his Colt pistol and ran into the stairwell. The woman was lying on the floor. She was trying to defend herself by kicking her legs upward. Blood was dripping from her feet from knife wounds. She fought for her life courageously, which angered her husband even more. He kept trying to reach her throat. Before he could stab her, David jumped onto the jealous husband’s back and grabbed the hand holding the knife. They both tumbled down the stairs and the knife flew out of the man’s hand, over the railing and dropped to the bottom floor. David easily overtook the heavy man. He laid him on his stomach and pinned his hands behind him and thus completely neutralized him. Two other security guards arrived quickly, but the situation was already under control. David told them to direct the police who were on their way with reinforcements. They had received many direct calls from the hotel guests. David also told them to report to the hotel management that the event had ended without fatalities.

One of the guards ran to find the injured and bleeding woman, who had descended another three floors. He told her that she was safe and he gave her his jacket to put on. She sat on the stairs and she couldn’t stop shaking from fear and cold, nor could she

stop sobbing. When the police arrived, they handcuffed the husband and took him to the squad car in front of the hotel. A doctor and medical team arrived, wearing white rubber gloves to protect against AIDS. They covered the woman's body and treated the wounds on her feet which hadn't stopped bleeding and left dark puddles of blood in the stairwell. The doctor blocked the arteries in order to stop the flow of blood. She was carried by stretcher to the service elevator and taken to the ground floor to an awaiting ambulance which rushed her to the nearest hospital. A policeman sat by her side and tried to get testimony as to the circumstances that had led to her husband's crazy outburst.

One of the policemen brought David to a medic. David had a cut on his arm from the knife, not too deep, which he hadn't even felt during the scuffle. After his wound was bandaged, he was taken to one of the hotel rooms to give his testimony of the tumultuous event. David requested to delay his testimony until he returned from the university. The police detective agreed on the condition that David would give a shortened version which would be completed that evening at the police station. He gave his short testimony and ran to the university, although still shaken by the recent dramatic event.

David found his job at the hotel as a security guard interesting. In spite of the low salary he received, David loved the action and the drama that took place camouflaged in the peaceful and sedate image that the exclusive hotel projected. The image didn't attest to what happened behind the heavy, dark, wooden doors. He especially loved the personal experiences that he had due to his conspicuous presence. He was a handsome, sexy man. He was 6 feet tall and muscular. The lines of his face were like a Greek god. His expensive suit and tie, his uniform at work, gave him an elegant European look. There wasn't a female and sometimes male, who didn't turn his or her head to follow him to see if he was real or perhaps a mannequin that had escaped from the display window of one of the exclusive men's shops on 5th Avenue. There were days and especially nights that David believed that he had arrived in Paradise and all that he hoped for was that it would never end. The seductions and experiences that he had had could not be measured by money, rather they were the kind of experiences that a person keeps in his memory and takes with him to the next world.

In a different incident, he came across an internal memo that was sent to room service noting that the stock of towels and sheets had been dramatically reduced over the past three days. David suddenly remembered an unusual situation where he had seen a

guest on the 19th Floor pass him carrying large plastic bags filled with something. The memo and the opaque bags were sufficient grounds for him to turn to the head of security, who joined him in his investigation of the guest.

After checking the list of guests staying on the 19th Floor, they went to Room 1924, to Natasha Golinsky's room. They knocked on the door and when no one answered, the head of security took out his master key and opened the door. The room appeared totally normal. When David opened the closet, he was amazed by what he saw. There were stacks and stacks of towels and sheets, piled up neatly from floor to ceiling, as if it were the hotel's storeroom. "We have to summon Pedro, the storeroom manager, to show him how to store linens properly." said David and he called the head of security over to take a look. The head of security slapped David on the shoulder and said: "Bingo!" He began to take pictures with the digital camera he always had with him. When he finished, he stepped out into the hall and asked the cleaning girl, who was vacuuming, to bring a service cart. David wasn't satisfied yet; he also opened the four big suitcases that were standing in the corner of the room and he wasn't surprised to discover that they too were packed with linens and towels. They loaded all of the stock onto the cart, including the suitcases and closed the door.

Six pairs of eyes followed the guest as she confidently walked through the beautiful lobby to reception and checked out. She occasionally signaled to her partner who was waiting for her in front of the hotel in a van with no windows. After she paid the bill in cash, she walked over to the elevator with two large empty suitcases in tow.

David nodded his head to the head of security who stood in front of a shop in the lobby and pretended to look at jewelry in a display window. They went up to the 19th Floor and they waited by the elevators.

"Thieves were in my room," a shout was heard from Room 1924. When the door opened, the shout changed to a combination of crying and screaming at the cleaning girl who was working nearby. The woman grabbed the cleaning girl's uniform and asked her: "Who was in my room? Thieves were in my room!"

The head of security and David appeared in front of her. The head of security asked her: "What happened? We are hotel security personnel. What was stolen madam?"

The two men looked her straight in the eye. She immediately lowered her gaze.

"Wait, I have to check..." she said on their way to her room and she opened the empty closet.

“I suggest that we call the police. They will check fingerprints and then we’ll discover the thief and the property that was stolen.” said the head of security and he winked at David behind her back.

She turned and paced around the room. She considered the new situation that was taking shape and she decided to abandon the plan. She said in a whisper: “I guess I am confused...excuse me for bothering you. No...I’m not missing anything.”

“Are you sure madam? Maybe you should check again.” The head of security said with a small smile of victory on his face.

“Yes, I’m sure and I’m in a hurry.” she muttered. Natasha and the head of security looked at each other. They both knew the truth, but neither said a word. She took out the room key, put it in his hand and left quickly.

Incidents like these got David’s adrenalin flowing. He told his parents more than once: “Why should I exert myself at the university? I have it good at the hotel.” His father, Sander, would tell him: “Son, you need meaning in your life, because without meaning, there is no life.”

“Dad, there’s a saying that goes: ‘If your father is poor, that’s your fate, but if your father-in-law is poor, that’s your stupidity’ and as you know, I’m not stupid Dad, just lazy.”

David loved his father; he valued his wisdom and he always listened to his advice; actually, not always, when it came to finding a job. Three months after his release from the army, he enrolled at the university to study electronic engineering. However, he had six months before he began his studies. At this point, he wasn’t exactly enthusiastic about studying, so he was relieved that the date was far off. He tried to convince himself that there was no point in studying because ‘the more he knew, the more he would forget, the more he forgot, he would know less. So, why study?’

He made up his mind to pass the time laying around until he got bedsores or until his family would start pressuring him. His father’s pressure came swiftly. He urged him again and again to get a job and start supporting himself.

In reply he sang the refrain of his favorite song "Delusions":

"I'll never have to work

I'll never have to serve another

My head is in the sky.

I feel good, I feel high.

Delusions..."

13. Preparing for the implant

A straw basket with two hot pitas, straight from the oven, was laid on the table laden with Middle Eastern salads in a variety of colors and flavors, at the Pita Grill. Three employees of the “Star Games” company sat around the table. The company’s business was developing, producing and importing/exporting gambling video games. David, who had completed his studies and had a BA in electronic engineering, initiated the meeting with Tommy, a talented software engineer and Jessie, manager of research and development in the company. David wanted to propose his ingenious plan to them. He chose them because they frequently complained about their meager salaries that they earned in the company, about the lack of fair compensation for their knowledge and effort and about their long work hours. Their complaints were not acknowledged by the management. All of their requests for a pay raise were rejected out of hand. However, they didn’t cease complaining, especially when they heard from their friends, who worked for start-up companies, about their high salaries and fringe benefits, like a company car and trips abroad.

After David had laid the groundwork and his friends’ hunger had been satiated, David said: “Masaru, my former classmate and friend from Japan, asked me to develop a bingo/lottery game machine for her company that she manages, which is very popular in the Far East. However, she has a very special request... that the game be completely controlled by a computer, so that the winning numbers will be planned and known ahead of time.”

Jessie and Tommy stopped in the middle of a bite and listened attentively to the rest of David’s story. “I thought about designing a machine that is based on one of the following two methods: 1. To implant a tiny chip in each ball, like a chip that is implanted in an employee ID card at self-respecting companies. The moment the card is held up to the sensors at the company’s gate or at the entrance to the building, the sensors identify the chip and open the gate accordingly. In our case, instead of burning the employee’s information on the chip, we’ll burn the number of the ball, meaning chip number one in ball number one, chip number two in ball number two and so forth for all the balls.

The second method is an electronic system similar to an identification and theft prevention system in stores, which has an alarm that sounds when an object is removed from the store. This system has three main components:

- a. An electronic chip attached to the product.
- b. Two sensors installed at the store's exit.
- c. An electronic system that creates continuous transmission between the sensors.

The system's operation is simple and efficient. It is based on a chip that also appears as a bar-code sticker which contains a printed electronic circuit and various electronic components, such as capacitors that disrupt the continuity of the transmission between the sensors that trigger the alarm with an electronic signal. I thought about implanting the chips inside the lottery balls, which are moving in the container. Two sensors would be placed at the opening of the lower chamber into which the six winning balls are drawn."

Jessie and Tommy were curious and fascinated. They were mesmerized as they continued to listen to David.

"When the sensors identify one of the balls from the series of numbers that the computer determined in the area of the opening to the chamber, it activates the blower and sucks the ball into the transparent chamber. It repeats this until all of the balls in the predetermined series are sucked into the chamber."

The two men looked at each other and then at David. Jessie, who was the senior between the two, said: "The idea is amazing! And as for the electronics, it's simple. But there is a problem with the machine's reliability, due to the difficulty of bringing the pre-selected balls to the chamber opening, where the sensors are located." He thought for a minute and then continued: It is possible to overcome this problem by increasing the number of balls that will be pre-selected to eleven. That way there is a higher likelihood that one of the eleven balls will be near the chamber opening and sensors and will be sucked into the transparent chamber.

Tommy remarked: "I'm not so sure that in the short amount of time that the spinning balls are in the area of the chamber opening that the suction system would identify and select the desired balls."

"We can overcome this obstacle by connecting a permanent air intake to the blower that would create a steady suction, thus in an instant, it could open the partition and create a vacuum that would pull the ball down into the transparent chamber. From there it will roll until it came to a stop in the transparent sleeve, where the winning balls are displayed." Jessie said, giving a solution to the problem.

Judging by their excitement and their solutions to the technical problems, David understood that they would not be adverse to cooperating. He pierced a hot mushroom swimming in onion and garlic sauce with his fork and he laid out his tempting offer.

“So, the offer I got from my friend is to develop and produce the hardware and software for this Japanese company. They will supply a prototype of the lottery/bingo machine that will be at our disposal to do the installation and make the necessary changes. They will pay us \$60,000 in cash for the development of the prototype. I suggest that we divide the money between the three of us, so that each one will get \$20,000. Not bad for two months work. Of course, the arrangement must remain a secret between us, with no leaks to any other party.”

They nodded their heads in agreement and they urged David to call his friend in Japan immediately. David looked at his watch and answered “The time in Japan is 3 o’clock in the morning and I don’t want to wake her up.” Masaru was only a cover story for his own plan, the fruit of his penetrating mind.

The two engineers agreed with him and asked: “When do we start?”

“I will give my friend our positive response later today and then we’ll wait for the required money to buy a computer, sensors and other components.”

A waiter brought a big platter of three skewers of tender chicken and 3 skewers of succulent lamb straight off the grill. Before it could cool down, they gobbled it up. They continued to raise technical issues, how to reduce the execution time and they decided to buy off-the-shelf sensors.

The chocolate mousse and coffee sweetened the meal and the deal as well. They parted with handshakes and each one went on his own way with thoughts about the generous sum of money that had fallen into their laps.

‘It’s time to spring the plan into action...I need financing.’ David said to himself. He went to the Citibank branch in Chinatown. He had a savings account there which was the money he had saved from his army service. He entered the bank and withdrew \$40,000.

He remembered how he had laboriously saved money in his childhood, coin after coin, money he had received from his parents and family and how this money saved over 15 years was stolen from him cruelly by Dr. Benjamin Moore, the first gynecologist he had found in the yellow pages. When he arrived at the doctor’s clinic with his high school sweetheart, Denise, the doctor looked at the frightened young

couple sternly and said: “Haven’t you heard of birth control? This mistake will cost you money, a lot of money!”

At the end of the gynecological exam, he said: “Come tomorrow morning with your parents and \$3,000 to perform the abortion.”

“If my father finds out, he’ll kill me!” cried Denise.

David came to his senses and said: “We will come tomorrow morning with the money. There’s no need to involve parents. The profit David had spiritually and physically from those pleasurable afternoons made up for the financial loss. Everyday after school Denise would come over to David’s house and sneak into his room and of course she didn’t forget to lock the door behind her. The passionate embracing, fondling, hugging and kissing swept them away in two hours of sensual madness, accompanied by groaning and sighing that even the neighbors could enjoy. The irony of fate was at the 10th Grade end of school party, David and Denise’s parents sat next to each other. As the proud father, Denise’s father said to David’s father: “My daughter is a good and chaste girl. She received a good education and good values at home. She comes home everyday before dark. I will be proud of her on her wedding day.” David’s father nodded, but in his heart he laughed at some parents’ stupidity and naivety. He thought how the young generation was ten times more sophisticated than the previous generation.

David also made his mistakes. Only three months later, the two appeared again at the doctor’s clinic for another abortion, which cost his parents three thousand dollars. “If you keep it up, you might bankrupt us,” said David’s father, who sadly parted from his money.

David smiled to himself while riding in the taxi. He carefully planned the anticipated steps and he made a list of things he had to do in order to execute the plan. It had to be faultless, with no screw-ups. He knew there wouldn’t be a second opportunity and the planning had to be perfect.

14. Temporary Jobs

The jeep's engine churned as it strained to extricate the jeep from the sand dune in the arid, burning Arizona desert. The tires spun rapidly, while a cloud of sand billowed from behind, but the vehicle didn't budge from its place.

David climbed out of the jeep and understood that they were stuck. "This is hard labor for at least a few hours," Jeff said under his breath, but loud enough for Yuko to hear. Yuko also climbed out of the jeep. She bent over to inspect the bottom of the jeep and saw how it was sitting on top of the hot sand. "Oh no!" she said while holding her head in her hands. The mischievous smile on her lips disappeared before David could see it. She shot several questions at him: "Are we stuck, David? Do you think we will get out of here? Maybe we should call for help? Do we have enough water if we're stuck overnight?" In reality, this was one of the adventures she had hoped for when she booked the tour with the travel agency "Arizona Tours" in Tokyo, which specialized in wilderness tours. She had asked her well-to-do parents for an unusual tour, different from the conventional summer tours in America. Her parents encouraged her to visit the States in hopes that she would find a suitable husband.

Yuko was 26 years old, attractive, she had short hair and was slightly plump. She wanted to change the routine in her life which revolved around her father's prestigious law firm "Yushimi and Associates" in Tokyo, where she worked from morning until evening. When she got home at the end of a long workday, all that she wanted to do was to watch her favorite T.V. series "NYPD" while she fell asleep on a comfortable armchair. This trip, a trip in nature, into the untamed desert, was methodically planned by her. She asked for detailed information about her personal guide, including his picture.

David had waited for her in the Arrivals Hall at the Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport. He held a small sign with her name on it. He was expecting a female tourist and hoped she would be attractive, but even more importantly, that she would be pleasant.

More than once he had had the misfortune to be in the company of a mean couple, who thought that they had purchased a submissive servant to wait on them hand and foot for seven days. When he identified her from afar, he knew that this time it would be pleasant. He thought how right he had been to look for a job after his army service that combined pleasure and interesting experiences, in addition to good pay.

Additionally, he often received a big tip in cash and sometimes even an invitation to visit the client abroad, of course at the rich tourist's expense.

Yuko exited the customs hall and walked towards him. When she saw the sign with her name, she happily called out David's name and waved to him. She had been anxiously anticipating this moment and she wasn't disappointed with the appearance of this handsome, muscular man who she had chosen as her guide for the 7 days and perhaps nights. Now that the jeep was stuck, the night was approaching and an opportunity was taking shape.

In reality, David knew very well which roads and trails were passable. This wasn't an accidental incident; rather it had been well planned. More than once, he had placed a nail in a place that was marked, but camouflaged well. Sometimes, in a ravine near a dry creek or near an oasis, that was an ideal setting for a romantic interlude, which would yield a befitting tip. The nail would cause a flat tire, in the middle of nowhere, in some isolated location. By pre-arrangement with the emergency repair service, he was told on the cell phone that they could only come to tow or fix the vehicle the next day in the morning. These kinds of events usually caused the tourists to feel anxious and fearful, even though David explained that he had served in the Navy Seals and that he was carrying a gun for self-defense. He wasn't always able to calm them, but they experienced an adventure that they would never forget.

David began his efforts to dig out the vehicle. Yuko contributed her part to the digging and also removed sand. She was dripping sweat and she didn't spare her manicured nails which she dug into the hot sand. After three hours, her whole body was covered with sand mixed with sweat. When they finished releasing the jeep, they laughed and joked about how they looked. David commemorated the experience with a few pictures on his digital camera that he always kept in the jeep. They sat on the dune and quenched their thirst with cold mineral water. They watched how the darkness chased away the last rays of light. David held her head and placed it gently on the hot sand. They both lay on their backs, side by side, with only sand under their heads. They looked at the full moon as it rose in the east and spread a pleasant and calming illumination on the peaceful environment.

"There's the Big Dipper," said David quietly as he looked up at the sky which looked like a high ceiling on which millions of glowing candles had been placed.

Yuko cuddled up next to David and hugged him. "I've never seen so many stars in my life," she said in amazement.

David laughed, took her hand and said: "I'm glad we got stuck, so that I can show you the stars, Yuko." He pointed up to the sky towards a group of stars and patiently explained their position and the elements of the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper. "You find the two stars at the end of the bowl of the Big Dipper and connect it by an imaginary line five times the distance to the North Star, meaning this stars show you the direction north. For someone who is out in nature, it's not pleasant to lose you orientation."

She enjoyed every minute, from his vast knowledge about survival in nature to his fascinating stories about his military service. She smiled warmly and said: "Even though my head is resting on sand and I am dirty, I feel wonderful and liberated."

David nodded and he relished the warm desert breeze. Yuko hoped that the evening would never end. After a few minutes of silence, while each one was absorbed in his and her own thoughts, David suggested, "We probably shouldn't head out tonight; it would be better to wait until it's light, so we won't get stuck again in another dune."

"OK," she accepted his suggestion and asked: "Where should we sleep?"

"In the jeep," David answered and he got up to fold down the back seat. In a minute, he spread out two sleeping bags and a white, clean sheet on top, which was in sharp contrast to the dirt that clung to them.

"I would pay a million dollars for a decent shower," said Yuko and she examined David's face.

He was prepared for the obvious question: "The shower is included in the price of the trip," he said. He took out a portable showerhead from the toolbox, which could be screwed onto the opening of the water tank that was always on the jeep. He assembled the showerhead with a few quick turns, then he put the water tank on the roof of the vehicle and a steady flow of warm water started to fall to the ground. He took out a white towel from the jeep and created a kind of partition between himself and the flow of water.

"Your field shower awaits you, your Excellency," said David and added: "Although it's not Buckingham Palace, the results will be the same."

"On the condition that you won't peek," she said as she undressed. She stood under the waterfall of warm drops, while David turned his face to the side, but he snuck a furtive glance or two at her full body. Yuko began to scrub away the layers of sweat and sand that were glued to her body. After she washed her hair, she wrapped herself in the white towel and took hold of his hand and ordered him: "Now it's your turn!"

David took out another towel and handed it to her. He gladly fulfilled her command. Her eyes could not keep her promise not to peek at his well-proportioned body, muscular and naked in front of her. She smiled when he caught her in her misconduct. After they dried each other off, they climbed into the back of the jeep and locked the doors. They lay down on the white sheet that shone in the moonlight which streamed in through the windows. They looked at each other silently.

“David, I feel so good with you. I’ve never felt this way before. I am completely liberated, as if we’ve known each other for many years.”

“I also feel wonderful in your company,” he answered and he put his hand on her soft cheek and gently stroked her smooth skin. Slowly, his hand lowered to her shoulders and then to her hips.

Yuko didn’t hesitate to stroke his strong, tanned face that exuded warmth. She explored his eyelashes, mouth, nose and she took a handful of his long, soft hair. She was euphoric. She felt his lips slowly, gently touch her lips, which opened wide to receive him ardently and yearningly. Their lips united and his tongue began to explore the inside of her mouth. Passion burned inside her and electric currents raced through her body. Her hands began their journey to his muscular, smooth chest, from there to his muscular flat stomach, the fruits of his labor in the gym near his house. She felt his soft and warm hand, which gave off a maddening masculine scent, feel her shoulders, neck and breasts.

His fingers fluttered on her nipples which were rigidly erect and her fresh skin tingled at his touch. He felt her body tremble with excitement and anticipation.

Their kisses became wild and sensual. Their breathing quickened and they gasped for breath. His lips left her mouth and slid to her nipples which were impatiently waiting. His delicate tongue circled each nipple, while gently sucking, which drove her crazy and caused her to make wild gurgling sounds. She pulled him tightly against her.

Slowly, his tongue slid further down. It dwelled for a moment at her navel on its way towards the paradise that awaited her. David, with great patience, began to rain down small kisses around her genitals, while he breathed warm air from his nose on her taut skin which caused her overflowing wetness at the opening of her vagina. Her body emitted a sexual scent, which carried both of them to distant worlds. With both hands he lifted her thighs a little bit and spread them. Yuko willingly assisted him and spread her legs wide open, so that David’s head was swallowed between her thighs. His tongue and lips passed over her inner thighs, around the opening and slowly

neared the spring. She couldn't bear the anticipation; she held his head and urged him towards her labia, which opened wide for him. He plunged his tongue into her in slow, circular motions to prepare the way for the climax. From there, it was a short way to the top of the pink clitoris, which waited in agony for his arrival. He knew very well the location and importance of the clitoris, particularly its ability to cause uncontrollable sensations. He always aspired to give his partner a great orgasm, after which she would repay him sevenfold.

His tongue exited in a slow dance around the clitoris that was protruding. He switched to sucking and constant rubbing that succeeded in its aim. The stimulation was uncontrollable. Yuko's wild breathing and moaning intensified the shaking of her body. She entered the endless dizziness of an orgasm that she had never felt before and emitted a powerful scream: "Oh...Ah..."

David let up and allowed her body and her breathing to calm down a little. He lay next to her on his back and felt great satisfaction that he could bring her to feel such sensations and intense bodily pleasures.

"David, I am so happy, I want you to experience what I felt," she whispered in his ear and without waiting for an answer, she sat on his muscular stomach and began to explore his cheeks with her pink lips, searching for his lips that tasted like a sweet angel. She felt her heart flutter from the excitement. Slowly and pleurably, she kissed each lip separately, while running her fingers through his curly hair. She increased the tempo, yearning and pressing against him. His mouth surrendered to the increasing lust and he let himself fall into the tempest. She tightened her body against his and he put his strong arms around her neck, groaning with pleasure. He closed his eyes and responded to her sensual movements as she crawled slowly from his sculpted chest to his muscular stomach. His head started to spin from excitement and pleasure which led to a potent erection. She felt satisfied and was happy that she could arouse him. The sight of his naked body caused her heart to throb. She held his rigid, burning penis in her delicate hands and began to move over its length. Her sensual lips and tongue also joined this expedition.

David gave into the pleasure and began to groan, which encouraged Yuko to continue with wet and deep sucking which almost caused her to choke. Yuko, who was kneeling between his legs, rose up and sat on his stomach while holding and directing his burning, swollen member into her wet and stimulated tunnel. She began to move forwards and backwards. Every movement pushed him deeper and caused her to

moan with mixed pain and pleasure. The movements became faster; their breathing and moaning carried them to an insane level of ecstasy, until they almost exploded. The pleasure that the friction between the base of his penis and her clitoris caused brought them to the longed for discharge. They both felt the spasms and strong ejaculation and the ensuing shudder that passed through their bodies. After a few seconds, they lay next to each other, exhausted from the perfect intercourse that they experience.

“David, I don’t believe that I’ll experience anything like this again in my life. I’m grateful to you for making my dream come true. You allowed me to understand the meaning of the words: passion and love,” Yuko told David, who was exhausted and drowsy from the effort that had just been consummated in a tempest.

David was awakened by the extreme heat of the closed jeep. The strong easterly rays of the sun announced the start of a new day. He got up carefully, so as not to wake up Yuko, whose eyes were still closed and he opened the windows. A slight breeze entered the jeep and suddenly, he felt Yuko’s hand stroking his firm buttocks.

David smiled and said: “Good morning, may I offer you breakfast?”

“The only thing I want to eat is you,” she answered without hesitation and she pulled him towards her, kissing and hugging in continuation from last night. They made love again, until they lay totally drained.

The strong rays of the desert sun and the heat in the jeep woke them up early in the morning after their long, exhausting night. They washed their faces with mineral water which they poured into their hands from a plastic bottle and they sped off towards the nearby road and from there to a rest stop surrounded by cactus and desert vegetation. There were wooden tables and benches in a shaded area. They put a colorful tablecloth on the table and opened cans of tuna fish and corn. Yuko emptied the contents of the cans into a bowl and she added two pickles, two tomatoes and one red onion which she cut into small pieces. She seasoned it with black pepper, salt and olive oil. David lit the small camping gas that was in the jeep and he made coffee. Before he turned off the burner, he put a few slices of bread on the flame, which warmed them and restored their freshness. He poured the coffee into two mugs. “I hope you like the coffee,” he said as he handed her one of the mugs.

“What do you think about the salad I made for us?” she asked.

“Fantastic,” he answered and he ate the wonderful salad that she served him on a paper plate.

After breakfast, they continued on their way to the Grand Canyon. They stopped at a lookout point for a breathtaking view and they enjoyed hiking on winding, narrow trails. Then they took a tour of the canyon in a small airplane. The pilot dipped right and left in the air currents at the rim and though they felt queasy, the view was spectacular. After Yuko purchased some souvenirs, they continued west on Route 15 towards the setting sun and Nevada. At the end of a six hour drive, thousands of twinkling colored lights appeared before their eyes, the lights of the huge hotels in the gambling capital of the world, Las Vegas.

They spent most of their time in the amazing city playing water and bedroom games. Once in awhile, they took a break to eat and they walked along the famous Strip. They didn't miss the opportunity to play Roulette and Black Jack.

After two days, they traveled west towards California. They drove up to the wine country in central California. They picked fruit and sang songs along the way at "pick your own fruit" farms and they visited small boutique wineries.

Thus passed 7 exciting days, collecting unforgettable experiences that they would carry with them for a long time.

When they reached the terminal at LAX Airport, Yuko asked: "Did you receive your salary from the travel agency yet?"

"Not yet, they pay me at the end of the month," David answered.

Yuko opened her wallet and took out a white envelope that she had prepared ahead of time, with \$1,000 in hundred dollar bills and handed it to him.

"What's this?" asked David?

"Money."

"The travel agency will give me a paycheck at the end of the month," he said and refused the offer.

"It is customary to give a tip for good service," she answered and put the envelope in the glove compartment and she added: "I know that you don't earn a lot for your hard work and for the overtime that you put in. I would give you \$10,000 if you asked," she said and she looked into his beautiful eyes.

"I would have been your guide for free," he immediately answered.

"Thank you, David, for the trip and the experiences you gave me. I will remember you forever. You should know, David, you have a friend in Tokyo, just give me a sign and I'll be there for you at any time..."

"I'll remember that, Yuko; who knows? Maybe our paths will cross again."

She gave him her personal calling card. She kissed him on the lips and tears rolled down her cheeks.

The American Airlines Jumbo 747 carried her to her distant homeland, but her heart remained in the blazing Arizona desert.

15. A Promotion

A knife fight broke out in the dining room of Sing Sing Prison in Upstate New York. “Honor” was the name of the game. Tony, who was sentenced to three years in prison for theft when he was caught in his moving business and fumigation business scam, acclimated well to life inside prison. Despite his youth, he was known among the inmates as an intelligent person, brave and courageous and he was able to sway a substantial number of inmates to be on his side against Alfredo from Harlem. Alfredo was a member of a local organized crime gang which dealt in prostitution and protection money from businesses in the area.

He was the product of a pimp and a whore and his cruelty was well-known among the local population. Young Tony understood that if he wanted to be among the top criminals in the state, he had to fight like a lion and even endanger his life to gain the title “the undisputed leader” of Sing Sing Prison. ‘If I’m already a criminal, I should be among the best. Enough with petty theft of radio tapes and DVDs. It’s time for the big money,’ he said to himself and was ready for the fight that would determine his future, a fight for “all or nothing.”

The fight was short and savage. Tony knew that he only had a few minutes until the prison guards heard the calls of encouragement from the two inflamed camps and they would separate the combatants. He held a long, sharp knife in his right hand. The knife was made in prison and had been concealed until the day it was called into service. He held a wooden rod in his left hand. He stood in front of Alfredo, who was a big, heavy man, who made do with a heavy iron rod that could crush skulls with a single blow, as if it were an eggshell.

Alfredo was very confident of himself and his strength in light of all the fights he had been in and the victims he had left in his wake. The lucky ones were still in rehabilitation in the hospital. The unlucky ones were lying somewhere at the bottom of the Hudson River with cement blocks chained to their legs.

The two adversaries stood and looked each other in the eyes, ready to attack. They were surrounded by noise and cheering. Tony used a known deceptive maneuver. He threw the wooden rod towards his opponent in order to distract him. Alfredo reacted instinctively; he raised his hands to protect his head from the rod cast in his direction. That’s what Tony was waiting for. He furiously attacked Alfredo’s broad chest that

was totally exposed and he plunged the knife in. Alfredo froze in his tracks; his eyes widened in astonishment from his opponent's trick and he wanted to strike back, but it was too late. He collapsed on the floor and started to grunt. A trickle of thick, dark blood flowed from the corner of his mouth.

Due to the riot, five guards burst into the room holding wooden clubs. They blew on their whistles in an attempt to disperse the crowd. Tony immediately dropped the knife and ran with the rest of the inmates to his cell, which he shared with three other prisoners. After a short investigation, Tony was put on trial for murder. His attorney, Mr. John Fisher, who was a renowned criminal lawyer, was able to prove to the court and to convince the judge that Tony had acted in self-defense. Tony was sentenced to three years in prison, overlapping with the sentence he was already serving for property damage. Not only wasn't he harmed by the murder, he even gained respect and admiration from the inmates and the prison guards alike. Because of the event, he received special privileges and better conditions in jail.

Due to his leadership, Tony was sometimes called to the prison director's office. The director tried to settle conflicts between prisoners by Tony's mediation. The prisoners accepted his decision without question. The director wanted to maintain a "state of peace" in the prison.

Grisha Linowitz, a Chechnian man around forty years old, shared a cell with Tony. He was very intelligent, but had a very short fuse. He was serving four years for cutting off a young man's sexual organ. The young man was a sexual pervert who had raped his young daughter in Grisha's yard. He wrapped the rapist's wayward sexual organ, including the testicles and sent it to the police. Before he was arrested, he hung a sign on his garden gate that read: "Caution. Here the penis and testicles of an imprudent man were cut off."

Tony and Grisha had intelligence in common and they had mutual esteem for each other. They spent many hours together in their cell, which led to sharing information. Their heart to heart talks continued late into the night. During one of these conversations, Grisha uttered a saying that Tony nicknamed, "the Golden Triangle" which he decided to warmly adopt: "There are three ways to get rid of money: women, which is the most enjoyable way. Gambling, which is the fastest way and a usurious rate of interest, which is the safest way."

When the time arrived, Tony requested, as allowed by law, to reduce his sentence by a third for good behavior. The parole board of the governorship of the prison gathered

in the prison to discuss his request. The head of the parole board opened the discussion and said: “And so, Mr. Tony, two years have already passed. You should know that the world has changed and progressed. You have skipped a segment of your life where you could have made something of yourself. I am hopeful that you have repented and that you have learned your lesson from your time in prison.”

Tony rose, looked the head of the board in the eyes and said: “Excuse me sir, but I disagree with you about the change in the world. According to Ecclesiastes in the Bible, it is written: “What has been will be again. What had been done, will be done again. There is nothing new under the sun.”

The committee members were impressed with a quote from the Bible and they listened to Tony’s continuation: “I learned many things in prison,” he said to the committee members, but he reminded himself, ‘I learned new and more daring criminal methods.’ “I am aware of the mistakes I made in the past and I will be careful not to repeat them.” What he meant was that in the future, he would be much more careful not to get caught.

The committee tended to believe him, that he had indeed learned his lesson and that his intentions were pure. The head of the prison also warmly recommended his release, because in his heart he wanted to get rid of this hornet’s nest as soon as possible. A representative of the police brought with him intelligence reports that showed that the prisoner was not sincere about changing his ways. He announced that the police recommended that the prisoner’s request be denied. The committee members’ impression, plus the recommendation of the head of the prison, tipped the scales in Tony’s favor.

Twenty four months of imprisonment came to an end. He had paid his debt to society and he left for a new path. But was it really new? Not exactly. He stopped dealing with trifles and he entered straight into illegal gambling. His friends in jail gave him addresses of companies that would send him, in return for cash, a container crammed with 120 used gambling machines. According to the law in Nevada, after two years of use, the machines must either be destroyed or shipped to another country where gambling is legal, so the supplier shipped the machines from Las Vegas out of the country and then back to New York. These companies renovated the machines and sold them to the highest bidder.

Tony paid \$100 to a drunken beggar, who agreed to give him his identity card for half an hour. Tony rented a large empty room in an industrial area in the Bronx on the

beggar's name. He installed air conditioners and wall-to-wall carpeting in the room. Heavy dark curtains covered the windows. He purchased the required furniture and he provided the gamblers with the ideal conditions for enjoyment while they were gambling. He even provided comfortable armchairs for those who lost hundreds and thousands of dollars. Once in awhile, the clinking of coins could be heard as they poured into metal trays accompanied by the joyful cries of the winners. However, everyone knew ahead of time, that the machines were calibrated to return 85% of the amount of the yield. With a big turnover, the profits were huge and the temptation to deal in this area was great. The punishment prescribed in the law for this type of crime was negligible in contrast to drugs, where the profit was identical, but the punishment for drug dealing was much harsher and was a deterrent.

In order to draw customers, Tony hired young, pretty girls, dressed in miniskirts and low-cut tops. This element drew in customers which increased revenue and also provided tips for the girls. After a few days of activity, Tony realized that the business worked well, but he knew that he wouldn't be immune from the law forever. With the profits, he purchased another shipment of gambling machines, in case the police raided the place.

In an unexpected inspection by customs, Tony's shipment was confiscated. Shrewd Tony sent documents through his energetic lawyer to several fax machines. The documents were prepared ahead of time and testified that the shipment was sent to New York by mistake by the supplier abroad. The supplier was supposed to send it to Cost Rica, where gambling is legal. The container with its contents were sent to Cost Rica and then back to New York, but this time through a different supplier's name and a different customer's name. Big money started to flow into Tony's pockets. Next to the gambling hall, he opened an escort service. He realized that married men preferred to keep company with a beautiful blond or brunette, or both of them together, during the daytime, on work time and not in the evening on home and family time. In the late evening and nighttime, the single men, divorced men and widowers came. They wanted to relieve their boredom and oppressive loneliness and so they invited a shapely escort for a one-shot release for \$100.

Tony "bought" the girls at a price of \$7,000 each, from one of his cellmates, who was serving time for trafficking in women for the purpose of prostitution. The profit was immense. The girls had to suffice with \$300 a day, when they received thirty customers a day, including weekends and holidays. Abstinence during their

menstruation was not heard of. There were attempts of extorting protection money from the girls, but when they heard who owned the business, they backed down. The escort service's success led to opening another service in a different part of the city. From the day it was established, it was profitable and all parties gained, from the owners, to the employees and to the customers, who received gratification of their every desire.

On the advice of an attorney, the phrasing of the advertisement in the paper was changed to: "Treatment of prostate by beautiful, buxom professional girls." This version softened the real occupation and was supposed to prevent their arrest as prostitutes. It was supposed to reflect an alternative medical treatment for those who suffer from prostate and require a massage at the base of the penis and testicles in order to improve their condition. This claim was reinforced by medical research that was published in scientific journals and presented to the vice squad investigators that occasionally made unannounced searches to find brothels. To their disliking, the investigators had to return empty handed because they knew that any sensible judge would release the girls to allow the "caregivers" to continue their "medical" treatment for the benefit of their patients' health.

Tony, who was cunning, transferred the girls now and then from club to club in order to create the illusion of new selections at the "meat market" at the customer's disposal. The customers were very satisfied and Tony accumulated so much cash that he had to rent a big safe at Chase Manhattan Bank. One day, the safe would contain millions of dollars.

In light of the success of two out of the three stages of the "Golden Triangle" and the accumulation of cash in the safe, Tony decided that it was time to try the third stage: the usurious rate of interest. He remembered the question that Grisha, the "butcher" had asked him in prison: "What product is in the biggest demand on Earth?" Tony failed to find the answer and Grisha told him: "Money, my friend. Money is in the biggest demand everywhere on Earth and not only..." Grisha continued to praise and glorify the product called money: "Money doesn't break down like a machine, doesn't spoil like a tomato, or have expiration dates like food or medicine. It seems like banks know what they're doing."

'That Grisha was right. You can't argue with facts. I will start to "sell" money, in any case, I have money in abundance. I will earn a little on it, instead of it sitting in the safe,' he said to himself and he went out to look for a vacant office in the area of the

diamond market on 47th Street. After he signed a rental agreement, he furnished the office according to the business' requirements. In the front of the office, he hung a colorful, neon sign "CHANGE – Foreign Currency Exchange Service". The office was divided into two by thick, reinforced glass. In the front part, a waiting room was created in which there was a small coffee table and two black office chairs. Under the glass a depression was carved and in it a moveable compartment through which bills could pass without contact between the two sides of the glass. Behind the glass was a desk with many drawers with locks and keys hanging in them. A big, heavy safe was installed in the corner that had a coded mechanism in the middle for opening and a large handle coated in shiny nickel. There was a large, imposing desk in the office with an executive chair behind it made of fine leather. Next to the desk were a small, personal safe and a paper shredder. In addition to a multi-line telephone, there was a state-of-the-art, thin laptop computer that had the currency exchange rates flashing on the screen from the National Bank internet site.

Slowly, people began to enter the office and exchange their money to a foreign currency or the opposite, but the big money Tony made came from the commission of four percent on bank transfers of "black money", which was deposited in cash into his account and from there transferred to banks abroad. Tony took two young criminals who he met in jail under his wings and offered them work in his office in the personal loan department, which gave loans at ten percent interest a month. He offered them a monthly salary of \$7,000. Even more than they were happy with the salary, they appreciated the opportunity to work with the famous "Master Criminal".

"Immediate loans of \$10,000, with daily payments of only \$200 for 60 days. In cash, with no guarantors!" This was the phrasing of the ad that was placed in the classified ads section in the daily newspapers under the section "loans". Math wasn't Tony's strong point, but his calculator showed him that the loan would return \$12,000 and the anticipated profit was \$2,000. He said to himself: 'If the bank takes five percent annual interest and earns, then I'll take ten percent monthly interest and it's unlikely that I'll lose.'

The first loan request he received was a garage owner, who decided to buy many car parts without receipts at a thirty percent discount with the money from the loan and thus hide part of his revenue from the IRS. Tony justified him. He remembered Mr. Mandelovitch, who offered his father a position he wasn't qualified for, with a salary at the taxpayers' expense.

He became angry and he suddenly had the urge to get even with the government. He looked for a suitable way and said to himself. 'Not only will I not pay them, they'll pay me.' He immediately went over to the nearest Social Security office and filed a request for a stipend, a benefit that he was entitled to according to the law as a released prisoner for rehabilitation purposes. He filled out the form and he wrote down his father's bank account in the blank specifying where the money should be deposited. He signed the form and gave it to the bespectacled clerk.

The loan business was taking off. In a short time Tony acquired three hundred customers, who collectively received \$3,000,000. Their payments flowed to him daily by means of messengers on mopeds that moved from customer to customer and collected the payments.

It became apparent to Tony that the business wasn't as simple as it looked. A third of the customers didn't intend to return the loan, but rather to disappear with the money. There were those that claimed that they weren't able to pay off the loan. 'In the worst case, he will sue me. Three to five years will pass until a judgment is made and bankruptcy proceedings are enacted,' they thought to themselves.

They didn't expect the steps that Tony took. Tony didn't believe in the law and its slow ways. After the first delay in a payment, a group of tough hoodlums armed with heavy baseball bats appeared at the home or business of the problematic customer. They made it eminently clear to the debtor the extent of the damage that would be caused when the bat met his skull.

In accordance with Tony's stature as an elite New York criminal, he had to display his power and wealth. He wore an original Breitling watch and an expensive one karat diamond pinky ring. He wore expensive Prada sunglasses and drove a well-appointed black BMW X5.

More than once he had made a "hit" worth a few hundred thousand dollars by various schemes. For example, the time he bought gambling machines that had been confiscated by the police. He approached the police and the governor through his attorney, using a fictitious name and offered to purchase the confiscated gambling machines. He promised to pack the machines and send them overseas. Thus, it would put money into the impoverished state treasury instead of paying storage fees for years and paying for disposal of the machines. The governor's office reacted enthusiastically, but on the condition that the police would be present when the shipment was sent from the New York port.

Tony agreed. He prepared three hundred exterior shells of the gambling machines. He removed the internal parts including the computer, cogwheels and coin acceptor. He sent a team of expert and proficient workers to the police warehouse. They drove a heavy truck with two empty containers. The team loaded the three hundred gambling machines, several of which were still loaded with tens and hundreds of dollars that had escaped the eyes of the police, who had emptied the coins after the police raid on the gambling hall. After loading the machines, they notified the internal security representative, who represented the NYPD, to wait for them at the port in order to check the contents of the container. The driver was requested to drive directly to the port, but he made a detour and entered a huge warehouse on the outskirts of the city. At the end of forty minutes of hard physical labor, all three hundred expensive machines were replaced by the cheap shells of the machines that looked identical. Tony instructed them to put real machines in the first row of every container, in case the policeman in charge wanted to make an inspection. The policeman was impatient due to the delay. His wife was angry that he had agreed to take this assignment on the day they were celebrating their oldest son's second birthday.

He urged the driver to help him open the heavy doors of the container. After one machine was removed, the policeman saw that all of the machines in the other rows were identical; he sealed the doors of the container with a lead stamp. He listed the number of the stamp and he signed the accompanying forms. The crane lifted the container from the truck and lowered it into the belly of the ship. The policeman got into his car, activated the siren and left the port.

The empty truck also left the port and slowly drove to a nearby gas station. There at a coffee shop, Tony was waiting at a table laden with food, with a few bodyguards standing behind him. He gave the driver an envelope with \$10,000 cash for perfect execution of the mission. They toasted to the driver and to the New York Police.

16. The Implant

Jessie and Tommy sat in their office. They were working as usual until David entered. “It is time to progress with our plan,” he said and invited them to join him for lunch again at the Pita Grill in Manhattan. While they ate hummus and salads, they made small talk and exchanged pleasantries, but the two were anxious to hear what David had to say. David read their expressions and pulled out four white envelopes. He handed each one an envelope and kept one for himself and said: “Each one of us gets an advance of \$10,000. The fourth envelope has the same amount for purchasing sensor systems, a computer and necessary components.”

Each one took an envelope and stuffed it into his jacket pocket. They looked at David with admiration and esteem for his quick acquisition of the financing. David urged them to take the project with the utmost seriousness: “The success of the project will lead to additional orders, which means cash. As you know, no one has yet complained that money is superfluous.”

The waiter brought skewers of lamb and steaks. Tommy pointed out the fact to David that they were eating too much meat and they weren't taking care of their health.

“Who's the strongest animal? Who is the king of all beasts? Is the lion vegetarian? Does the lion eat vegetables, Tommy? No way!!! If you want to be strong, eat meat and you'll be king!” David explained with a smile and he took a bite of the juicy meat.

At six in the evening, as they had planned, the three met in the laboratory of the company, “Bug Systems” on 44th Street. They detailed their requirements to the company's engineers and they paid up front. From there they went to the company, “Signal Systems” on nearby 42nd Street. The company specialized in development, production and marketing of security and control systems. They purchased a detection and warning system and eighty chips in the form of barcode stickers, marked with numbers from 1 to 80, meant to be placed on the items to be marked. The engineers of the company suggested that the system be installed at the client's facility, but this suggestion was rejected with the claim that the systems were intended for export to Russia. David requested detailed installation instructions so that they would be able to install it themselves. They were invited to return later to learn about all the details of the system and the mode of operation and to receive directions and guidance about installation in the facility. They paid in cash and went to a coffee shop nearby. They

discussed the technical details, particularly about making the machine's software compatible with the system they were acquiring.

David asked Tommy to program at least one thousand series of 11 different numbers into the computer's software, from which the machine would pull out the six winning balls that come up in the lottery.

"The owners of the machine are requesting to prepare in advance the correct Bingo cards for the Bingo game, thus, they control the player's winning percentage in their hands," he explained, but didn't mean a single word. He didn't want to expose his big secret to them, which was the possibility to know the winning series of numbers that would be selected in the next one thousand lottery drawings ahead of time. He continued calmly, "The owners of the machine want to know the "source" of the software in order to change the series of numbers that you wrote, to numbers that they will select and in that way they can prevent cheating or leaking numbers to the players," he said. Thus, David was assured that only he would have the paper with the one thousand number series from which the six winning balls would be drawn in each lottery.

They finished their coffee, the tasks were understood and secrecy was assured. Each one went on his own way to accomplish his mission. Tommy labored all night on writing the program and the integration of the various systems. All that remained was to wait for the machine and synchronize the program with the system.

In order to prevent eavesdropping on his call, David went to a public telephone and he dialed Jeff. He asked: "When can I come to get the machine that is "out of order" and make the necessary "repairs"."

"Tomorrow...in the morning," answered Jeff hesitantly, even though none of the Lottery Company employees had been suspicious when he entered the studio a few days ago and opened the lottery machine in order to disconnect the wire that activated the three blades and caused the technical failure.

An hour before each lottery drawing, which was broadcast live on television, a routine check was conducted in order to prevent hitches. David learned from this that he had to plan the numbers that would be selected every second series, since the first series would serve as a check before the drawing.

David appeared the next day at the Lottery Company's offices, accompanied by a security guard. The machine was covered with a tarp and loaded onto a moving van that David had hired for the move. He gave the driver directions to the location of the

laboratory that he had rented for three months and had covered the windows with dark paper. The movers placed the machine in the laboratory, received their payment in cash and left. David removed all of the identifying markings of the Lottery Company from the machine and then called his friends and asked them to come to the laboratory.

They checked how the machine worked. Tommy removed the original computer and installed the new computer they had purchased in its place. The new computer had the software installed that was supposed to meet David's criteria. At the same time Jessie installed the tiny sensors on both sides of the transparent chamber at the bottom of the container. Two minute gold wires were connected to the sensors with clear glue on the bottom of the acrylic chamber and were connected directly to the electronic system that was assembled inside a solid wooden box hidden from public view. The balls also received their due treatment, as chips were inserted into the balls and were well camouflaged.

At the end of three days of intensive work of continuous checking, the system worked flawlessly. They helped David clean and polish the machine and they offered to help pack and load it, but their offer was politely refused under the pretense that the mover could only come late at night. David took upon himself the job of packing and filling out the customs declarations and required security measures required for export at the airport. They parted in the understanding that the machine was intended for export to Japan.

After they left, David replaced the markings of the Lottery Company. He connected the keyboard and fed into the computer the one thousand number sequences of eleven different numbers listed on the paper he had prepared ahead of time. The task was exhausting, but he knew that he would be fully compensated for his work. After he completed these changes, David turned on the machine again and waited for the six numbers of the first sequence. As planned, sequence after sequence appeared. He rubbed his hands together in satisfaction. He smiled and stroked the machine: "Continue just like this and don't disappoint me on Saturday night," he whispered. He shut off the machine, turned off the light in the laboratory and left for home feeling satisfied, yet tense about what was to follow.

In the morning, David summoned the movers, who came and moved the "repaired" machine back to the studio at the Lottery Company. In order to remove every obstacle before the anticipated drawing of fifty million dollars, Jeff gave the regular technician

a bonus for his devoted service. Part of his job was to check every machine that was repaired by technicians outside of the company. Jeff sent him on a “special vacation”, a three week trip for two to Japan and Thailand, which also included an in-service at the Japanese Lottery Company.

Jeff thought about the financial difficulties he found himself in with Tony and the grey market because of his wife, Danielle’s entanglements. David and he activated the machine three times in a row to check its reliability after the jostling in the move. The machine met expectations. David wrote down the last number sequence and instructed Jeff to do only two additional drawings on the evening of the big drawing, at the time of the general rehearsal with the director and television cameras.

They shut down the machine and parted with a warm handshake and a wish for good luck. Their thoughts wandered towards the big Saturday, when from thereafter their future and fate would be changed.

17. An Olive Branch

“Daddy, Daddy, they’re cutting down the trees,” the little girl shouted and ran to her parents’ bedroom where they were sleeping. It was a clear night in the Sacramento Valley in Central California. The sound of an electric saw shattered the murmur of the rustling leaves, which were moving to the rhythm of the gentle breeze that was blowing.

Lou, nicknamed, “Tomahawk”, was a native Indian who had served as a scout in the elite Navy Seals unit. When he was released from the navy, he took his savings and purchased ten acres of land on the slopes overlooking the valley. He grew up on the Buena Vista Ranchera Indian Reservation near Sacramento and over the years he had acquired knowledge and experience in raising trees. He planted olive trees, built his home and constructed a small modern oil-press facility, which was a new burgeoning industry in the area.

Tomahawk awoke, startled by his daughter’s cries. He ran after her to the porch that overlooked the olive grove. In the moonlight, he could see two figures on the edge of the grove cutting down the trees with a chain saw. He could hear the sound of branches crashing to the ground. He told his wife Sue, who had awakened up from the commotion, to call the police. He grabbed a sharp knife from the kitchen and shot out of the house like an arrow. He arrived on the scene in a few seconds. He saw ten tree stumps and severed branches, which had been deliberately cut, strewn on the ground. The damage was irreversible. The sight enraged Tomahawk. The two men, who were busy destroying the olive grove, were wearing cone-shaped white hats with white masks that covered their faces and long white flowing robes. They were members of the Klu Klux Klan and they were committed to evicting the Indians from the land. They went out on nightly operations to seed fear and destruction, in the hopes that the residents would flee.

The sound of the saw masked the sound of approaching steps, even though Tomahawk trampled on the branches and leaves lying on the ground as he strode towards them. Tomahawk jumped on one man’s back, who was surprised by the attack. He took off the man’s hat, held him from behind and pressed the knife to his throat. The second man, who was holding the buzzing saw, approached Tomahawk and threatened to use it as a weapon. He could chop off Tomahawk’s arm in one clean swing. Tomahawk, who had trained in combat and in self-defense during his military

service, wasn't afraid. He was very self-confident and he said: "One more step and your friend's head will be on the ground with all the branches that you cut." The man with the saw froze in his tracks. He hadn't expected a reaction like this from an Indian farmer. From his broad experience, he had learned that the grove owners usually started to scream until the police arrived, but by that time, he had already relayed his message persuading the Indians to flee their land and he had inflicted sufficient damage. He always managed to escape on his dirt bike in time.

Tomahawk ordered the man to put the saw down and lie face down on the ground. The KKK man tried to move closer. A shout escaped from his friend's throat as he felt the sharp knife cut into his skin and warm liquid started to flow down his chest. He realized that his life depended on only a fraction of an inch, the distance to his main artery, which carried blood to his perverted brain. The man did as Tomahawk commanded. He laid face down on the ground. He threatened that he would get even and take revenge. Tomahawk didn't respond to his nonsense and he walked over with the second man to the dirt bike which stood nearby. He punctured the tires with his knife to prevent their escape. Suddenly, headlights blinded him. He was able to discern two policemen running towards him through his squinting eyes.

"Put your hands up, everyone, you too," the policemen commanded to Tomahawk, who was holding the knife.

The man dripping blood held his throat and yelled: "This Indian tried to kill me with a knife. You saw it with your own eyes."

The police shut him up and called an ambulance to check the severity of the wound. The three were handcuffed and taken to the police car that was parked by the dirt road next to Tomahawk's house. Sue protested her husband's arrest; he had been defending his property- his life's work-which was threatened with destruction by these two hooligans.

The police car left and stopped next to the ambulance that was waiting for them at the nearest intersection. The wounded KKK man was checked and his wound was dressed. The doctor decided to send him to the hospital. One of the policemen accompanied him in the ambulance and the other two were taken to the police station in order to investigate the occurrence. The police investigator heard their stories and wrote down their testimony. He decided to imprison them until they were brought before a judge who would decide their fate.

The next morning, they were brought before the judge on duty at the local courthouse. He ruled to detain them for seven days in order to complete the investigation and file an indictment.

Sue called David. She remembered the sentence he had said at the party held at the end of the Navy Seals course: “We are brothers in arms, each one of us is obliged to help and assist the other when he is in distress.”

“Hello, David, this is Sue, Tomahawk’s wife, your tracker.”

“Hi Sue, how is my friend Tomahawk?”

“Not good, David. He’s been arrested.” Sue said and she told him what happened.

“I will take care of it immediately, Sue. I’ll let you know if there are any developments,” he promised and hung up. He made a conference call with Bobby, who was his deputy in the unit and Phillip, who was the signal officer and who had just completed his law degree at Harvard. He told them: “We have to do something; our friend is in jail!”

“It’s Friday afternoon, the courts close soon. The possibilities are limited; what can we do?” asked Phillip.

“Who can influence a judge’s decision?” asked Bobby.

“Only the governor,” answered Phillip, half in jest.

“So let’s fly to the governor,” said David.

“Are you crazy? Who would talk to you?” asked Phillip.

“The governor is also made of flesh and blood. We’ll stand in front of his house until he’ll see us and we’ll tell him about the injustice being done,” answered David and added: “I am going to try to free our friend; if you want, you are invited to join me.”

“OK...Let’s meet at JFK, Terminal B in one hour,” they replied and hung up.

On Friday at 7:00 p.m., the workday had already ended, so they went directly to the governor’s residence.

“What is your business here?” the policeman who was guarding the entrance to the house asked David and his friends.

“We would like to speak with the governor; it’s urgent,” said David.

“You have to submit a request in writing to the governor’s office. You will get a reply by mail from his spokesperson or secretary.”

They told the policeman about the injustice being done to their friend who was sitting in jail for trying to defend his property. The policeman was sympathetic and he

suggested that they turn to the governor's son, who was a lawyer. Just then, the son pulled up to the gate in his Ford.

"Good evening, Mr. Franklin," David addressed him unabashedly and he told him about the chain of events.

"Please relay our request to the governor to let our friend be released under house arrest until the court proceedings. Tell him that he acted in defense of his property and not with the intent to murder, as the criminals are claiming."

"I promise to pass this along to my father, but I can't promise anything," the son replied. He entered the gate and disappeared into the courtyard of the governor's home.

After five minutes, the governor himself came out of the house accompanied by a bodyguard. In one hand he held a plate with freshly baked rolls and with his other hand he shook hands with David and his friends.

"Hello, young fellows. I am impressed by your efforts to help your imprisoned friend who seems to be wrongly accused. However, I am not above the law and I won't be able to help you until Monday morning. On Monday, I will ask the legal counsel in my office to contact the president of the courts in California and request an additional hearing regarding his case."

"Thank you, Mr. Franklin. We'll be there on Monday," said Phillip.

Here, please have some rolls...my wife baked them...for now return to your families and let me know if things don't turn out well," said the governor and he parted from them with a warm handshake.

They let Sue know about their efforts to get Tomahawk released and they promised not to rest until he was freed.

"The court is in session," proclaimed the clerk in the courtroom in Sacramento, which was convening to discuss the request to release Tomahawk on bail. All those present in the courtroom, including Tomahawk, the policeman guarding him and his three friends from the navy, rose when judge Conrad Hill entered. He was wearing a black robe and small reading glasses rested on the bridge of his nose. He motioned to the assembly to sit down and he sat in his high-backed chair. Pictures of the President and the state and national symbols were hanging behind him and the national and state flags stood next to the podium.

“Case B 2578/06, the State of California vs. Lou Sunshine, also known as Tomahawk. This is a second hearing regarding the incarceration of the aforementioned until an indictment is filed,” the judge opened the discussion.

“Your honor, we agree that the suspect be released on bail under house arrest until the investigation is completed,” said the prosecutor, who apparently was aware of the high level intervention in the case.

“I request the immediate release of the accused, who claims self-defense and defense of his property,” said Phillip, the young attorney, who appealed to the judge and gave details about the chain of events.

The judge addressed the court and said: “My decision is as follows: the court accepts the claim of self-defense. It is the right of every citizen to defend his property when it is endangered and it is his right and even obligation to act in self-defense. Since the investigation has not been completed, due to the injury of one of the suspects, I rule house arrest of the suspect until an indictment is filed, if it will be filed. This court is adjourned until next Tuesday.”

Tomahawk smiled and left the courtroom. His friends were waiting for him in the corridor. They shook hands and warmly hugged each other.

“Come visit me; broaden your knowledge about olive trees and olive oil. As a bonus, you will be able to taste the product.” Tomahawk entreated.

He wanted to repay their kindness for helping him.

“We’ll come this weekend for a tour,” they agreed and parted.

On Saturday, the three came with their girlfriends. The women were happy to fly out and enjoy a weekend in California. Tomahawk led his guests to his modern olive press facility he had built next to his house. On the way, he stopped next to one of the trees in the grove and he told them about the life cycle of an olive tree. He cut off a branch with a cluster of olives and he handed some to each guest. They examined the olives; they smelled them and tasted their strong, bitter taste. On their way to the olive press, he reviewed the history of the olive. “The birthplace of the olive was in the Mediterranean Basin. Here, already in ancient times, olive oil production was developed. There have been few improvements on making olive oil since then; the old ways continued almost up until today.

When they entered the structure, they walked into the oil production area. Tomahawk told them: “There are three main stages of making olive oil: The first stage is crushing, where the olive is crushed and turned into paste. The second stage is

squeezing or expressing oil, where pressure is applied to the olive paste and it is separated into solid and liquid. The liquid part contains oil and water. The third stage is separating the oil from the water and contaminants. The separation is done by centrifugal force, either vertical or horizontal.” They saw the process of making olive oil with their own eyes. From there they went to visit the laboratory and then to the gift shop, where they could taste the olive oil along with cheese and crackers. The women asked for advice about which oil to buy and how to store it.

Tomahawk answered professionally: “Olive oil is very sensitive to light; therefore, you should store it in a dark pantry in an opaque bottle or can and it should be sealed well in order to avoid oxidation. Also, it should be stored at between 64 to 68 degrees Fahrenheit. What determines the quality of the oil is the quality of the olive at the time of squeezing and production. Oil that is green is made from young olives and it isn’t as good as oil whose color is light yellow, which is made from mature olives, whose color is purple. You can cook and fry in olive oil, even deep frying, because its smoke or burning point is very high- 375 degrees Fahrenheit- and you can fry in the same oil several times.

The guests were impressed by Tomahawk’s extensive knowledge. The smell of the products assaulted their taste buds, which Tomahawk didn’t fail to notice.

“Dear friends, now we have arrived at the interesting part of the visit: the tasting stage. Come, please join me at the table,” he said as he pointed to the heavy rectangular table made of dark wood. Set on the table were plates of different kinds of olives, cheese, fresh French bread, savory pastries and a carafe of Cabernet Sauvignon, a product of the “Boutique Winery”, a winery that he established a year ago next to his olive grove.

He poured extra virgin olive oil onto a plate and added a special spice called summer savory. He tore off a piece of the French bread and dipped it into the mixture and by that he signaled the beginning of the festive meal. Compliments were heard all around. With perfect timing, Sue entered with a large round platter of traditional American Indian dishes.

“Please help yourself,” Sue said.

“Tell us about Indian customs and traditions,” said one of the guests to their gracious host.

Tomahawk told his guests an old Indian folktale: “Once there was an old Indian, who upon his death bequeathed seventeen horses to his three sons. To his eldest son, he

left half of the horses; to the second son, he gave a third of the horses and to the youngest son, he gave a ninth of the horses. The three sons made dizzying calculations and tried to decipher what their exact part should be. Of course, they could not find the solution, because 17 can not be divided by 2, 3, or 9. Their lives became hard and embittered. Animosity and anger gripped them. The brotherhood they had had evaporated and disappeared. Every day they were consumed with calculating from every possible angle, but for naught. They weren't able to reach a solution that would satisfy each of them. In their despair, they decided to seek experts to help them solve the dilemma. An old wise woman from the village heard about their problem. She asked them to let her meditate on the problem for awhile and try to find a solution. After prolonged thought, she told them: 'I don't know if I can help you solve the problem, but what I can do is to give you the one horse I have, then you will have eighteen horses.' The brothers were very happy. The eldest received half of the inheritance- nine horses. The second son received the third that was promised to him- six horses and the third son received a ninth of the inheritance- two horses. They sat and thought and found that $9+6+2$ is equal to exactly 17 horses. The brothers returned the extra horse to the old wise lady."

David was amazed by the story and tried to count again in case he had made a mistake counting. Tomahawk continued and said: "The story is very similar to many stories about problems and trouble in our lives, whether they are personal problems or international conflicts, such as conflicts between races and religions. Sometimes, all we have to do is to take a step back and free ourselves from our preconceived assumptions. To see the big picture...to look for the eighteenth horse...after it helps us solve the problem, we can send it on its way..."

David understood the moral of the story. He stood up and went over to Tomahawk. He shook his hand and gave him a hug of friendship, a brotherly hug.

18. Dividing the Loot

Six o'clock in the morning, the familiar rustling of paper was heard in front of the door to their apartment. It was the newspaper boy, who threw the paper from the lower floor in order to save himself the tiring climb of eighteen steps.

David got up carefully, so as not to awaken Sandy, but she felt his movement. She held his hand and pulled him back to her arms under the warm blanket. She wanted to feel his body, the security that he provided and the love that he gave her. He gently covered her nose and eyelids with little kisses in order to weaken her resistance to his leaving the bed. He whispered: "The paper."

"What's the rush? Why do you need the paper at six in the morning? The same thing will be written there at seven o'clock, so why the sudden urgency?"

"I'm curious to see the results of a few games that were played last night," he lied and jumped up from the bed and walked to the front door.

It was very cold in the hallway. He reached his hand out, grabbed the newspaper and ran back to the warm bed. He opened to the next to last page and scanned the headlines. A large headline read: "One winner in the big lottery!" The small print broke the news that he would have to give 25 million dollars in tax to the government if he took all of the prize money at once. He continued to read to himself that "from the data provided by the Lottery Company, a single winner won the prize. The winner has not appeared at the company's offices yet, nor has he contacted the company." The rest of the data listed in the article didn't interest him. He folded the paper, smiled broadly and volunteered to make coffee for both of them.

"What happened that you're so generous today?" asked Sandy, even though she was happy to be pampered by her boyfriend.

"I suggest that you shower first," he said and he took out a towel from the linen cabinet.

She relished a few more minutes in bed with the coffee he made for her and then she skipped off to the shower, so she would be on time for the test at the university. She got dressed quickly, kissed him goodbye and left with his wishes for good luck. David was excited, but he tried to remain calm. After a refreshing shower, he left for the Lottery Company building. He asked the security guard, who stood at the entrance, where to go to claim prize money.

"Up to \$600 at Retailers Statewide. How much did you win?" he asked politely.

“Fifty million,” David answered and couldn’t believe that he had just said this sentence.

“Really?” asked the man again.

“Yes, for real.”

“Bravo,” the man exclaimed and he directed David towards the elevator. “Third Floor, Drawings and Winnings Department,” he said.

The sign on his partner’s door read: “Jeff Klein- Manger- Department of Drawings and Winnings.” David was exited. He knocked lightly on the door.

“Yes, come in...” Jeff’s voice was heard from the office.

David entered the office. Jeff was sitting in his black executive chair behind his large desk. On the other side of the table, a clerk was reading statistics to him from a page she held in her hand.

“Hello, my name is David Johnson. I am the one who won the big drawing yesterday.”

“Congratulations, Mr. Johnson,” Jeff said. He rose from his chair and went to shake his hand. They shook hands and behaved as if they had never seen each other before.

“Please, young man,” Jeff said and his voice trembled slightly. He tried to overcome his excitement and continued: “Could you please show me your winning form?”

“Yes, of course,” he said and pulled the form out of his wallet.

Jeff looked at the form from all sides and said: “On the surface, everything looks in order. Please come with me to the office next door for a more thorough inspection.”

The clerk arranged her hair and smiled at David and followed him with her eyes with a look of admiration on his good fortune. Jeff gave the form to a clerk who sat in front of a computer that was linked to the central computer and the device that issued the lottery cards. He was used to seeing excited winners every three days, so he went about his business as usual. First he examined the form with a magnifying glass to check the paper and if there were any erasure marks or markings on the form.

“We’ve come across attempts to cheat,” he said without raising his head and he put the form into a terminal. He looked at the small display screen which displayed the number: \$50,063,484. Since you filled out a systematic form, you won an additional \$63,484” said the clerk dryly and waited for the page to be printed with all of the technical details, such as the place the form was purchased, its serial number, the date of purchase and the exact amount of prize money. “It is fine, you can continue the process,” he said to Jeff.

“Congratulations, Mr. Johnson! Now it is official,” said Jeff and he was just as happy as David was, but he maintained a serious and official expression.

David showed restraint and he did everything that was requested of him. Jeff led him to another room. “There are a few more technical things to take care of, that we must do according to the company code,” he said. They entered the photography studio, where a big check, three feet by six feet, had been prepared ahead of time. The check was filled out in big letters: Fifty million, sixty three thousand, four hundred and eighty-four dollars.” On the ‘Pay to the order of’ line was written: “The happy winner.” David put a mask on his face to hide his identity from the parasites and all the people who would want to ask him for money. He stood next to Jeff on the photography spot and Jeff shook his hand with one hand and handed him the check with the other. After a series of pictures, where David felt like a movie star, Jeff led him to the Accounting Department. He signed documents authorizing the transfer of \$25,031,742 dollars to the IRS. He said to the clerk: “I hope that the money I donated just now to the government will go towards buying equipment for a hospital or paving streets and not to some corrupt politician who will use it to travel abroad with his family.” He wrote down his bank account details where the remaining amount of the prize money would be deposited, \$25,031,742. The clerk made it clear to him that the money would be deposited to his account only in ten days. This policy was in case there was a mistake or another winner appeared which would appeal his win. David protested, but it appeared that those were the standard procedures and it was not possible to deviate. He entered Jeff’s office in order to thank him and leave. Jeff motioned him to enter and close the door behind him. “I hope that you won’t lose your head, David,” he whispered out of fear that someone was listening to their conversation. “I always warn the winners to be careful, to get advice and not to be frivolous, but to no avail. This time, it affects me personally, so take my warning seriously, David. Guard your money, because you don’t win the lottery every week!” he said, but he didn’t realize how much he was mistaken.

“Don’t worry, Jeff. I’m not a child. Even if I am frivolous, I’ll still have a few million left, enough to get by in life. At any rate, I will honor my obligations. Since the money will only be deposited in my account in ten days, ask Danielle to tell Tony to come to her office to get the money on Sunday in two weeks. You will get the remaining nine million of your share later. You have nothing to worry about.”

Jeff had anticipated hearing these words for a long time and prayed to see his share of the loot with his own eyes. He stood up, extended his hand and said: “You are a great guy, David. I see that I wasn’t mistaken in my estimation that I can do business with you.”

David shook his hand and left. He went straight to his Citibank branch on Canal Street in Chinatown in Manhattan. He sat down in the empty chair across from Roger, the bank clerk who took care of his account and he told him: “Roger, I have to talk with you now. Leave everything and listen to me...”

“David, I’m very sorry, but the bank doesn’t belong to me and I can’t extend your line of credit on your account,” he cut David off.

David started to laugh out loud, as if he had just heard a good joke. He motioned to Roger with his hand, who didn’t understand how a man in David’s bad financial shape could be sitting here laughing.

“Roger, first listen...from today you won’t have to call me every week asking me to deposit money into my account to avoid going over my credit limit.”

“Why? Did you win the lottery?” he jested and waited for a serious reply.

David looked around, leaned his head towards him and whispered: “Exactly, Roger. I won fifty million dollars!”

Roger couldn’t believe his ears and asked for proof. David pulled out the form that the Lottery Company gave him from his wallet. The amount of his prize money was printed on it. The bank clerk was excited, as if he were a partner in the winnings. He turned to Jack, the department manager who sat across from him and said: “Jack, could you come over for a moment, please?”

He also thought that David was asking for more credit and he apologized that he couldn’t do any more about the issue, but Roger urged him to come over to his desk. “Sit down, Jack, I can’t speak loudly...David is the sole winner in the fifty million dollar lottery,” Roger told him and handed him the form still in his hands. Jack looked at the numbers and at the signed form and he also was excited to be involved with the news that appeared in today’s newspapers.

“Let’s go up to McNamara, the branch manager. He will be happy to hear good news for a change. He usually hears bad news day in and day out, about one customer or another who is going bankrupt.”

When McNamara saw them in his doorway, he thought that they were coming to tell him about another irrecoverable loan. He studied their faces and asked: “What’s it this time?”

“This time we have good news,” Jack assured him and he put the form on his desk. They smiled at him.

“Is this you, David?” asked the manager as he looked up at him.

David nodded and smiled broadly.

“You are the sole winner in the lottery that I just read about in the newspaper?” he asked again, as if he couldn’t believe it.

Calley Smith, a senior bank clerk at the branch entered the office with bank checks for the manger to sign.

The manager dismissed her with a disdainful wave of his hand, like she was an annoying fly that he wanted to be rid of. On her way out, McNamara asked her to make coffee for his distinguished guest. This dramatic change in attitude towards him completely surprised David. He couldn’t believe that the bank manager was asking someone to make him a cup of coffee and in his office no less. He felt like he was the most important client at the bank. Suddenly everyone was being nice to him and wanted to be near him. McNamara was still holding the form in his hand and he addressed David: I suppose that you don’t have any objection to my calling the Lottery Company to verify your winning?”

“On the contrary,” answered David and added: “I would do the same if I were in your position.”

McNamara looked up the number in the phonebook and called himself. He introduced himself and asked to speak with the director of the Drawings and Winnings Department. Jeff came on the line.

“Hello, sir. I am the manager the Citibank branch in Chinatown in Manhattan. Mr. David Johnson is sitting across from me and he has shown me his winning form of the big lottery. I would like to confirm if this is true.”

“I am prohibited from giving the names of the winners, unless I receive permission from the winner himself,” answered Jeff.

McNamara handed the phone to David, who gave Jeff permission to disclose the details.

“Indeed, Mr. McNamara, David Johnson is the sole winner, but take into account that 25 million dollars in tax will be taken from the prize money. We received the

directive from Mr. Johnson to transfer the amount of a little over 25 million dollars to his account at your branch.”

“Thank you, Mr. Klein,” said McNamara and he placed the receiver down. He shook David’s hand and said: “I am pleased to inform you that you are one of our biggest clients at our branch. Therefore, you will be transferred to our VIP department and Ms. Smith will take care of your account.”

“I would like Roger to continue to take care of my account. He has been as fair as possible with me. There’s no reason to change. I have only one request...to maintain strict secrecy.”

“No need to request that; it is our professional obligation. When the money is deposited in your account, we can plan your savings and investment portfolio together.”

David listened, smiled and was quiet. McNamara let David finish his coffee and said: “Look, David, my friend, since we don’t have a lien on your assets, which actually you don’t have yet, you have to restrain yourself as much as possible until the money is deposited into your account; after that the sky’s the limit,” said McNamara apologetically. He didn’t want to offend his important client; however, it was crucial not to deviate from strict procedures stipulated by the main office.

David nodded in agreement and left with a satisfied grin. As he left the bank, a billboard advertising unique apartments in the exclusive Millennium Towers caught his eye.

He went to the offices of the construction company that was selling the apartments. He entered the building with shaky knees, but with determination, even though at the moment, he couldn’t pay the required down payment.

“Where can I purchase a penthouse in the Millennium Towers?” David asked the attractive receptionist, who was wearing a dark business suit.

She gave him a steely, disdainful look when she saw his attire: jeans, a sweatshirt and sport shoes, not the appearance of a wealthy man. “Do you know what the price of a penthouse is? Pardon my curiosity, but for whom are you enquiring about the apartment?”

“For me, of course,” he answered her.

She raised an eyebrow in surprise and despite his distinctly poor appearance, she had fulfilled her duty. “Please, follow me to the general manager’s office. Only he is

authorized to conduct negotiations,” she said as she presented him to the general manager.

The manager was a man of about sixty, handsome and well-groomed. He was wearing a dark suit, a light colored shirt and a blue checkered tie. He invited David to sit in the armchair across from his large, highly polished desk.

“What would you like to drink, sir?” asked the receptionist and she looked into his eyes.

“A cold drink, if possible, thank you,” he answered and he glanced at the pictures of the building that decorated the walls of the manager’s office.

The manager showed him a large, beautiful photo album. Every photograph showed a different element of the interior space of the apartment. The master bedroom had a walk-in closet made of mahogany wood and a bathroom with double sinks, a jacuzzi for two and the most elegant and expensive fittings available. The bathroom was large and spacious, decorated in the best taste by talented interior designers. David thought he was looking at an advertisement in a journal meant for the top echelon of society. The following pictures showed guest bathrooms, an enormous kitchen with an island in the middle with matching drawers and cabinets, a stovetop range without burners that had a futuristic oven hood perched above it, built-in ovens and a microwave and other built-in appliances, a giant side-by-side refrigerator with a water and ice dispenser in the door. In the last series of pictures, David saw the elegant lobby with a doorman at the entrance, an exercise room with the newest equipment for the use of the residents, the spa, indoor swimming pool, squash court and game room. There were pictures of the amazing view of the Hudson River to the west and Ellis Island, Upper New York Bay and the Statue of Liberty to the south visible from the balcony off the living room in the penthouse on the 35th Floor. There were two underground parking spots, listed on the apartment owner’s name. David was impressed and decided on the spot that this would be his apartment, come what may.

He took a sip of the icy drink and he leafed through the album again. “Not bad, what’s the square footage?” he asked without showing too much enthusiasm, lest the price jump.

“3,100 square feet.”

“It looks smaller.”

“Don’t forget, that is the gross area, the net is 2,250 square feet. Even a large family wouldn’t be cramped in this apartment.”

“And now, the bottom line...what’s the price?”

“Five million dollars,” the manager said flatly, as if he was a clerk in a market and someone had asked him the price of a quart of milk.

“I saw your ad in some magazine two months ago, as far as I can recall, the price was \$200,000 dollars less,” he waited for an explanation.

“Don’t forget that this is the last penthouse in the building. The apartment is well-appointed and designed by top architects. The view from the apartment is priceless and in another two months the price will rise by an additional \$200,000” the manager answered confidently and he didn’t expect David to bargain over the price.

“OK, I’ll buy it,” David said and he reached out his hand to the manger.

The manager was surprised, as he hadn’t expected a serious offer from someone dressed so simply and certainly he hadn’t expected that he would buy such an expensive apartment in a half an hour. He stood up and shook David’s hand firmly and then sat down again.

“Where and how are you going to pay?” asked the manager.

“What do you mean, where? I’m going to pay here and now!” answered David.

“Most of the buildings tenants are foreign citizens who transfer money from abroad. I hope that the money you intend to pay with is legal, because I must report the details of the sale to the tax authorities.”

“Only this morning I transferred 25 million dollars to the tax coffers of the government, so there’s no problem,” he answered proudly as a law-abiding citizen.

Two copies of the purchase agreement were laid in front of him for signing, but he didn’t sign, claiming he had to consult his lawyer first. On the other hand, he took out his checkbook from his pocket and wrote the sum in clear lettering, five million dollars, paid to the order of “USA Construction Ltd.” dated for two weeks time.

“The payment will be executed in two weeks, by then, I will sign the sale agreement and I will organize the money transfer. In two weeks the required sum of money is supposed to be in my account. Upon payment, the title will be registered in my name.”

“That sound reasonable,” said the manager and he took David on a tour of the apartment to assure him that the pictures reflected reality. After the tour, the manager returned to his office and called David’s bank branch to check if this was a prank and if he was wasting his time. McNamara, the branch manager, told him that he was unable to supply protected information about his customers, but he didn’t negate the

possibility that a large sum of money would be deposited in David's account and in approximately ten days he would be able to clear the check. The manager relaxed and sent a cleaner to the apartment to wipe away the dust that had accumulated.

David glanced at his watch and quickly called Sandy, who had just finished her test at the university. She was sipping mineral water from a small bottle that she was carrying in her purse.

"How was the test?" David asked when she answered her cell phone.

"It went OK, I think I passed."

"Great! I have some news...something dramatic...maybe we can have breakfast at the restaurant on the bay?"

"Give me a hint and I'll agree," she said.

"a picture"

"Did you buy me the landscape oil painting we saw last week in a gallery?"

"It's not for the phone; I'll wait for you at Café Beethoven in the Millennium Towers."

"I'll be there in 40 minutes," she said and hung up.

While he waited at the Café, David called Jessie and said: "Hi, my friend, I don't feel well. I'm not able to make it into work today. By the way, my friend in Japan informed me that the machine just arrived and after it's checked and tested, he will wire the rest of the money. Probably in ten days." Jessie was happy to hear the news. He wished him a speedy recovery and hung up.

Sandy appeared, happy and smiling. She kissed him and tried to get another hint about David's dramatic secret.

"Two breakfast specials," David ordered, but then he remembered that he didn't have enough cash on him and he asked the waitress: "How much is the breakfast special?"

"15 dollars."

"Why so expensive? It's only breakfast," he said to the waitress and added with a smile: "Do you think that I won the lottery that you're asking such a high price?" The waitress waited to hear his final decision. He fished in his pocket and found a twenty dollar bill. "We'll take one breakfast to share."

David felt frustrated and said to his girlfriend: "I am in a strange position; on the one hand I'm a millionaire and on the other hand, I can't afford to order breakfast."

"Millionaire?" cried Sandy in astonishment and surprise from this declaration.

“On my way to work, I checked the lottery card that I bought and I discovered that I am the only winner of the jackpot of the fifty million dollar lottery.”

Sandy’s eyes and mouth opened wide. After the meaning sunk in, a big smile spread across her face. She pushed her chair back, jumped up and ran around the table. He stood up to hug her.

“Yes, yes, yes!” she called out happily. She jumped on him, wrapped her arms around his neck, hugged him tightly and covered his face with kisses.

The people in the restaurant didn’t understand the meaning of the scene they were witnessing. For them it was a pleasant, heart-warming scene, two young lovers demonstrating their affection, especially since they were both so good looking.

“Tell me more, share with me. I want to hear how it happened. Have you already checked the form at the Lottery Company?” she asked enthusiastically.

David told her about the process at the Lottery Company and the respectful way he was treated at the bank based on the 25 million dollars that would be deposited in his account.

Her face suddenly became serious and she stopped talking.

“Why the silence and the serious face all of a sudden?” asked David.

“Money brings trouble. It’s simple, I’ve heard this many times in my life and I am convinced that it is true,” she said and looked at David with worry in her eyes.

“Money may bring many worries, but it also brings comfort and relief,” he said and he held up a piece of the omelet to her mouth.

“I love you so much, David,” she said and she placed a piece of cheese in his mouth.

They enjoyed the mutual adoration. His hand didn’t release her hand and her eyes didn’t leave his face. They finished the vegetable salad and shared kisses for dessert.

David paid and even left a two dollar tip for the waitress.

“Come, I want to show you pictures of an amazing view,” he said to Sandy and he pressed the elevator button to the 35th Floor.

“I didn’t know that this building had an art gallery,” she said as they rose in the express elevator.

“The pictures that you will see now are so close to reality, that you will think they are real,” he said without further explanation. When they reached the 35th Floor, David rang the bell at the entrance to apartment number 248 and without waiting for an answer; he opened the door and entered directly into the spacious living room.

“We’re intruding on private property!” Sandy said. Suddenly, the cleaning woman appeared and she recognized David as the buyer from earlier that morning.

“Hello, sir. I will be finished cleaning in an hour,” the cleaning woman said apologetically.

“That’s OK, we’re just making a short tour and then we’re leaving,” he replied and led Sandy, who was in shock, to the large balcony. When they reached the railing, he stood behind her, hugged her and asked: “Do you like the picture?”

She was very impressed by the amazing view that was visible from this angle and she closed here eyes. “Now I understand the hint about the picture,” she said with a smile. The wind blew on her face and blew her hair to the side. Her lungs opened fully to absorb the fresh air.

“All of this is ours, the ‘picture’ that you see now. I bought this morning after I left the Lottery Company. Every morning from now on, this is the view that you will see when you get up.”

Sandy was overwhelmed and tears fell from her beautiful eyes. She hadn’t expected such a quick series of events in such a short time. After she calmed down a bit, he took her to the elegant master bath and he heard whistles and amazement from her, even though she had come from a wealthy family. From there he led her to the master bedroom. “I don’t even have money yet to buy appropriate linens...you get that assignment,” he said and kissed her on the lips.

She glanced at her watch. “David, I have to run. I promised my mother that I would go with her to the eye doctor. I’ll see you at home this evening. I love you!” she said and quickly left the elegant apartment.

David walked through the apartment again. He thought of different ideas to complete the special look of the apartment. When he exited the parking lot, he was asked to pay five dollars. He counted the money he had left, only three dollars. He was embarrassed. He searched his empty pockets again. He looked in the car and found another dollar in the glove compartment. He promised to pay back the missing dollar later. The guard complained and grumbled: “Everyone says the same thing and I am forced to pay for all of the schemers.”

“Don’t worry, my friend. I bought a penthouse today in this building. You’ll see me every day.”

“At least make a realistic lie when you’re driving this piece of junk,” he said pointing to David’s old car.

David shrugged his shoulders and drove to the GM showroom in Manhattan. A young, pretty saleswoman joined him in order to show him the different car models. He walked by different models of shiny, luxuriant SUVs displayed in the showroom. He was impressed by them all, until he reached the real thing- a shiny yellow large Hummer H2 SUV.

He felt as he had when he first met Sandy and he had known that she was the one for him. Now he knew that this vehicle was meant for him. Apparently, his good experience during his military service helped him reach his decision immediately. This model was an original creation. It uniquely combined luxury, pampering and power in a sport, off-road vehicle. He pointed at the shining Hummer and said to the saleswoman: "That's what I want!"

The saleswoman smiled, as if he were a child in a toy store with his mother and was asking for a new toy. "Do you want to hear some technical details about the performance of the motor?" she asked him politely.

"I know the vehicle and its performance well," he answered and he strode towards the "creation". He opened the door widely and he was surprised by what he saw. In contrast to the military version, he discovered a sleekly designed interior, metallic and expensive, made from quality material in order to assure control, comfort and maximum indulgence. The interior space was huge; it could seat six in luxurious leather seats that were electronically adjustable. The sound system was top of the line by Boss. The chrome finish was expensive and technologically advanced. An inexplicable excitement engulfed him. This was the most coveted brand in the automotive world. He made a decision and said: "We can close the deal!" and he returned to the desk to order the vehicle.

"As you wish," she turned around and walked after him to her desk.

David looked at the elegant brochure. The pictures of the yellow vehicle, shining in the sand, in snow, on rocks and on the street gave him the urge to get into the vehicle and drive forever. He selected the H2 SUV, the largest, most luxurious model. He also ordered additional features, such as a 10 inch television, a DVD system, a computer with internet connection through a cell phone and a 21 inch screen hidden in the ceiling of the interior that pulled down with a click of a button, also a bar, a refrigerator to keep food cool during trips and challenging off-road driving. He also requested a GPS system to be installed, for navigation by satellite. The saleswoman

explained that the stock of this model was on its way to the city and it would take eleven days to prepare it for delivery.

“OK” he mumbled and he left a check for \$80,000 with the date in eleven days. He took the brochure and left the showroom. His inflated ego caused him to puff up with pride. He sensed the power that money gives a person and how it boosts self-confidence.

When he reached his old Chevrolet, the air escaped from his lungs and he returned to reality. He stood next to his car and laughed as if he was going to enter a toilet stall for recruitments at an army base, who were suffering from stomach trouble and diarrhea.

When he saw the saleswoman looking at him from the showroom window, he smiled at her and introduced his old, beat-up car with a wave of his hand, as if to say: “That’s how it is...” at least for now and then he vanished.

19. Private Detective

“There must be a better way to start the day than getting up in the morning!” David answered his mother in her third attempt to get him out of his warm bed.

“Hard work never killed anyone,” she said.

“But I wouldn’t want to take a risk! And who was that on the telephone? Who would call so early in the morning?”

“Morrison from Intelligence One” is on the line, he finally has work for you. Get up lazy bones!”

In order to finance his studies at the university, David wanted a job that would give him satisfaction and pleasure in addition to the minimum wage. He had refused offers to work in security companies or guarding institutions for fifteen dollars per hour. On the other hand, he happily accepted his friend Morrison’s offer. Morrison was general manager of Intelligence One, which dealt in surveillance and observation of various targets. He was sent to a course called ‘Intelligence Gathering and Investigation’ and upon completion he received a certificate to work as a private investigator. He was authorized to perform tracking, observation and wiretapping that would be used as evidence in various commercial and financial court cases and in discussions at the Manhattan Family Court.

One day, David was called to Morrison’s office and he received another surveillance case, similar to many cases he had already performed on behalf of the company. He opened the manila folder and he looked at the subject’s personal details. When he looked at the photograph, it almost dropped out of his hands. He stared at it again and again and couldn’t believe it. It was none other than Roy Hill, his roommate during his officer’s course at West Point. David didn’t show his emotions and the tempest that raged inside him; he behaved as if this were a routine case.

Roy was a real friend. He had always helped David, especially in the meticulous morning inspections. David was the machine-gunner in the course and he had twelve extra rifle magazines to clean. Without Roy’s help, he wouldn’t have been able to get it done in the tight schedule and he would have been confined to base and penalized. He knew that he owed Roy a number of leaves, because without his help, he would have stayed on the base to do guard duty. They hadn’t been in touch since then, except for the class reunion two years ago.

Morrison told David to observe Roy and follow him closely, since his wife Naomi suspected him of cheating on her with another woman.

If it weren't for the surprising target, the task would have been simple and routine. He equipped himself with a camera and a state of the art digital video camera with a powerful telephoto lens in order to perform the surveillance and to provide the required proof. When he got into his car, he took out the picture again. He looked at it and muttered: 'So, Roy you son of a gun, you started to play around?' He started to drive towards Roy's house in Brooklyn. When he got to the intersection of Utica Avenue and Linden Boulevard, at the entrance to the quiet neighborhood of Park Slope, he parked his car at a point with a clear view of the white Buick that Roy drove every day.

David took out a new videocassette from the inside pocket of the carrying case and loaded it into the camera. He sat alertly in his car. His eyes followed the events in the place designated as the "point of surveillance" and he waited patiently for Roy to appear. Darkness began to fall on the city and lights were already emanating from the nearby windows. He listened to the soft music that was playing on the radio. Suddenly, he tensed and glanced at his watch, the time was 8:05. He saw Roy get into his car and after a quick ignition, he pulled out and drove slowly towards Prospect Park. At the red light, David took out his record sheet and documented the commencement of the surveillance: "At 8:05 p.m., Roy drove from his home towards the park."

When Roy arrived at the parking lot at the park, he drove up and down the rows of parked cars and stopped next to a white Mazda. He got out of his car, he opened the driver's door of the Mazda, entered the car quickly and closed the door after him. The couple fell into each other's arms and began passionately kissing each other. Of course, they didn't realize that they were being followed. David marked down the license plate number and make of the car in order to find out who the car belonged to in the company's database. The video camera also sprang into full action. After a few minutes, they got out of the car and Roy was carrying a sleeping bag stuffed into a cloth bag over his broad shoulders. After a brisk walk into the park, they settled down in a dark, isolated place at the edge of the grass, next to a grove of trees.

David followed them and was agitated, unlike previous times, due to his familiarity with the target and with the knowledge that he was liable to cause serious damage to his friend, which meant divorce from his wife Naomi. David positioned himself on

the grass behind one of the trees. He observed the couple from a distance of about 200 feet making love on the grass. The setting was perfect for a regular intimate rendezvous that took place every evening.

The clear sky provided a dark canopy through which small points of light twinkled. Despite the darkness, the full moon radiated a soft light by which the lovers' faces could be seen. Their conduct certainly exhibited their knowledge of carnal desire. They didn't notice the concealed observer, who was watching and documenting their tryst with the best video camera which enabled almost perfect visibility, even in the dim light.

Actually, for Catherine and Roy, their relationship was closing a circle. It began in high school, at Jefferson High, where they both studied as science majors. They fell in love then, but due to various reasons, they didn't consummate their love. As fate would have it, each one went jogging every day in Prospect Park and one day they passed each other.

"Roy?" Catherine exclaimed as she suddenly stopped, but continued jogging in place to prevent muscle cramps.

"Catherine", the tall and handsome Roy said. He moved closer to her to be sure that he wasn't hallucinating. They shook hands while he said: "I didn't believe that I would ever see you again." He scanned her face and her body in admiration and added: "You haven't changed at all; you are still curvaceous Catherine, queen of the senior class. In fact, you've become even sexier and more attractive. What's your secret?"

Catherine came closer to him, kissed him on the cheek and whispered: "Thank you for the compliments, Roy. A woman always loves to hear them, even if they aren't always true. Why didn't you say these things then, in high school? My life would have been different and more successful." She held his hand and added: "Come, join me for a walk. Tell me about what you've been up to."

They began to walk on the path surrounded by manicured green lawn. In the background, white swans floated peacefully on the blue lake. The chirping of the birds in the entanglement of branches and the sound of the crickets that could be heard created an atmosphere of nature and beauty, as if they were in the Kalahari Nature Reserve in Africa.

They hungrily devoured the information that each one supplied to the other. Catherine told about her studies at the university and her job as a clerk in the Dean's office, on

her marriage to the chairman of the university, Powell, who she later discovered was a violent and dangerous man. She was left with external scars and emotional scars, but they didn't flaw her figure, which was discernable from afar. After her divorce, she became a single-parent to her four year old son. All of her efforts to rehabilitate her life were in vain.

Roy told her about his military service in the Marines, as a company commander for recruits in Tennessee. He told her about his wife Naomi, who was beautiful and tall, and who gave birth to two sweet and talented daughters immediately after the wedding which took place in a reception hall in Brooklyn. He told her proudly about his successful factory that produced salads, which he established in the city and about his routine: work-home and back again.

"I miss the excitement I had once, but I'm not complaining."

They didn't pay attention how the time passed quickly. They turned towards the nearby parking lot and they lingered a bit more. They parted with a friendly kiss.

With a slight spark in her eyes, Catherine said: "Roy, I go jogging every evening, you are welcome to join me."

"OK," Roy said casually and he quickly got into his car.

In time, a passionate relationship developed between the two, to compensate for the unrequited love that was finally blossoming now in stolen sexual encounters.

While David was observing Roy's and Catherine's impressive sexual performance, he thought about Roy's daughters' future. As a result of the expected divorce and his separation from his home and family, he would no longer be able to hug them affectionately on a rainy and stormy night and he would be prevented from spending quality time with them as he loved to do as a devoted father. 'Who knows what kind of man will replace him. Maybe a pedophile who would rape them,' thought David to himself. He was angry at Roy and he decided to himself: 'I won't let this happen. I can salvage the situation before the damage is done. This can not be allowed to happen!'

Contrary to all of the rules of ethics that he had learned in the course, he stopped filming. He took out the cassette and shut off the camera. He collected his equipment and returned to his car. After an hour, he saw them return to their cars and each one went their separate ways. He called Roy's cell phone. He drove 100 feet ahead of him and he identified himself.

"Hello, Roy, this is David Johnson, from the officer's course; do you remember me?"

“Of course I remember,” answered Roy happily and he recalled the period of their service in Up-State New York. “How are you, David?” When are we going to get together?” he asked in a delighted tone of voice.

“As far as I’m concerned, we can meet now, or at any time you can find. I want to talk to you about an important, urgent matter.”

Roy paused for a moment and answered: “I’m at a party right now, what about tomorrow morning at my factory in Brooklyn?”

“OK, I’ll be there tomorrow at 10:00. See you then,” answered David and he hung up.

The next day, at 10:00 sharp, David stood in front of the CEO’s office. Roy’s office was located on the second floor of the salad factory, which was in full operation and very noisy. They hugged and slapped each other on the back, as was the custom of soldiers returning from a long leave. They exchanged polite small talk and drank a cup of coffee that the secretary served to her boss and his guest.

“What is the sudden urgent and important matter that you wanted to see me about?” asked Roy with a serious expression.

“I was told that you are getting a divorce in two weeks,” shot David straight at Roy’s face, which paled as if all the blood had been drained from it all at once.

“Who told you such nonsense, David? I myself don’t know about it; so how could you know before me?”

“Listen well, Roy my friend, not only will you be losing your wife, who will undoubtedly find another man, especially with all of the property you stand to lose to her; you will be forced to give up your beautiful home, your car and half of your factory! Not to mention the biggest loss of all- your two wonderful daughters. Start to mark you calendar, two hours a week of supervised visits with them, because that’s what the Family Court will allow you.”

Roy started to sweat and he squirmed uncomfortably in his executive chair. “You owe me an explanation! What’s happening here, damn it!” he shouted and waited impatiently for David’s reply.

“Fine...look Roy,” started David and said quietly: “your wife is suspicious that you’re having an affair. She hired a private detective agency to investigate and follow you. When the evidence is obtained, she will hire a well-known divorce lawyer and go to court. The court will undoubtedly rule in her favor and in favor of the children.”

Roy groaned and felt that he was going to get a heart attack in realization of the facts and bad scenario that was about to happen. He tried to urge David to tell him everything he knew.

“Here’s the evidence!” said David and laid an envelope on the table. Inside the envelope there were about thirty clear pictures of Roy and Catherine in positions that didn’t leave anything to the imagination.

Roy looked at the pictures and felt ashamed by the exposure.

“What should I do, David?” he asked and he waited anxiously for his utterance.

“Do you want to get a divorce?”

“No,” he said and continued: “Even though I don’t get butterflies in my stomach like I once had with Naomi, I’m sure that in the future, the same thing will happen with Catherine. So, to lose everything for butterflies?” No, I don’t think so,” he came to the conclusion himself. “Help me, David,” he begged. “Only you can do it!”

“Are you sure?” asked David.

In response to the question, Roy took out his cell phone and called Catherine. “Hello, Catherine,” he opened the conversation and then he said dramatically, without waiting for her greeting: “Look, Catherine, my wife Naomi knows about us and I have no intention of losing my daughters and my family, which is more precious to me than anything. I’m not sorry about what we had between us, but we must end the contact immediately. I’m sorry about the urgency, but I don’t have any option other than a clean break. I wish you luck...Good bye.” he declared and hung up.

David was convinced that Roy had learned his lesson and he intended to return to his family. David collected all of the pictures and put them into the small paper shredder that stood next to the desk. The pictures were shredded into tiny pieces that were of no use to anyone. David explained his plan to Roy and asked for his full cooperation. Roy agreed to every task required of him. They agreed to meet at 6:00 p.m. next to the synagogue, “Splendor of Zion” in the Borough Park neighborhood. David made arrangements ahead of time with Rabbi Moshe Greenberg, to begin a process of helping Roy to return to his religion.

Roy was at the synagogue exactly on time with a yarmulke on his head and a prayer book in hand along with twenty other Jewish men seeking their roots. Rabbi Greenberg was happy that David had brought a stray member of his congregation back to the fold. Of course, the time Roy spent studying and praying at the synagogue was documented and filmed by David for his surveillance report.

Roy, as planned, began to say things that were not usually heard in his home, such as “God willing”, or “Thank God” and more. He also asked Naomi to light Sabbath candles. A few days later, David was called to the detective agency and he submitted his report to Morrison. The file contained a detailed report of Roy’s movements, accompanied by photos and recordings showing Roy wearing a big, white yarmulke on his head, praying and studying the Bible. Slowly, he was strengthened by his worship.

When Naomi came to the detective agency and received the file, she was completely surprised by the findings and the pictures spread out before her. She asked Morrison, “Why did he hide this from me? I would have accepted this with understanding and not prevented him from pursuing religion, if this is what makes him happy.” she said and waited for an answer.

Morrison answered partly from knowledge and partly from logic: “I suppose he still wasn’t sure about the way he chose and until he decided on a new way of life, he wanted to hide the vacillations from you.”

“So...how much do I owe you?”

“\$4,000 plus tax.”

Naomi took her checkbook out of her purse and wrote the check. She left the agency feeling a little bit guilty that she had wrongly suspected her husband, but she was happy that her family wasn’t going to fall apart.

She threw the envelope with the report, pictures and videos into the nearest trash can with a big smile.

20. Payment of Debts

At work David was assembling an electronic board for a video game intended for export when he received a call from Roger on his cell phone. Roger, the bank clerk who took care of his account at his branch, told him: “The money has been deposited in your account, David.”

“Thanks, Roger. Please order ten checkbooks for me.”

“With pleasure, David,” Roger answered and hung up. He laid down the screwdriver he was holding and he went over to the computer to check his account at Citibank. He typed in his name, password and his ID code number and his up-dated account information appeared on the screen. His eyes jumped when he saw the astronomical sum...\$25,021,742... ‘Twenty five million, twenty one thousand, seven hundred and forty two dollars!’ he mumbled to himself. He looked around to be sure that no one was looking at the screen. He checked the name and account number again and again, just in case there had been a mistake. Maybe it was a dream or a hallucination. His body trembled. The tension inundated his soul and excitement gripped his being. His credit debit of \$10,000 was covered and the rest of the money poured into his account. He knew very well that a substantial portion of the money would go to the penthouse he bought, to the new vehicle that awaited him and to Jeff, his secret partner.

The next day, on Friday, David entered the GM dealer showroom in Manhattan and signed the papers that authorized transfer of ownership of the new vehicle. The keys jingled in his hand as he confidently walked behind the salesman who led him to his stylish yellow H2 Hummer. Its exclusive appearance and its meticulous finish were apparent from afar. He almost ran up to it to kiss it.

“I wouldn’t be able to restrain myself,” said the salesman, who looked at David with admiration and clicked the button on the remote control in his hand. The disarming beep of the alarm system was heard and the two side lights flashed. Immediately, with the second click, the vehicle’s engine started and the air conditioner turned on without the driver sitting in the car. David wanted to hug the salesman, but he sufficed with a light tap on his shoulder in thanks for the introductory lesson of his new toy.

The salesman enjoyed the show as much as David, so he pressed all the different buttons which operated different systems. David sat down on the comfortable, wide seat covered in black leather. He electronically adjusted the seat’s height, angle and distance and programmed the settings in the computer’s memory as “position one.”

He was able to master the control system with no difficulty and he drove off for a drive to get familiar with his new car.

He felt gratified when pedestrians and other drivers followed him with their eyes out of admiration and jealousy. When he returned the salesman to the car dealer's parking lot, David couldn't contain his excitement and he bellowed happily: "Yesssss!"

Thus, he vented his pent up tension. The car was sealed and didn't allow any sound to escape the vehicle. The song that he considered his "personal anthem" was playing on his advanced sound system. David joined in singing the song "Delusions" that he had adopted and sang along with the singer:

"To live in a mansion.

To think you're a millionaire.

To wake up in the afternoon.

Next to a girl or two

A fancy yellow car...

To sing and to love.

Refrain:

I'll never have to work

I'll never have to serve another

My head is in the sky.

I feel good, I feel high.

Delusions..."

In this "high" he drove around the streets of Manhattan and enjoyed the stares that accompanied him. But he planned his "victory lap" for Saturday morning. He called his friends and arranged a jeep trip. After that, he called Sandy and picked her up to show her the new car. Sandy was bothered by the fact that every stupid, big-breasted girl would desire her beloved boyfriend and would try to "hunt" him as prey.

On Saturday morning, David met his friends at the gas station near the Lincoln Tunnel that led into New Jersey. Needless to say, the "star" of the trip was the shiny, new Hummer. It was different than the rest of the jeeps which were also among the best in the market; it was coveted, daring, superior and aroused inexplicable

excitement. At least that's how his friends felt when they climbed into it. They whistled in amazement and with more than a little jealousy. David's ego was ready to burst. The girlfriends joined the trip, but they were interested in diets and fashion. On their way south on Route 95, about 30 miles from Washington D.C., they turned off the road near River Bull Run and they made their first stop. David gathered everyone together and gave a short overview of the Battle of 1st Bull Run. It was the first big battle in the Civil War and it took place on July 21, 1861 and resulted in victory for the Southern Confederate Army. The battle was also known as the Battle of 1st Manassas.

The army post and water tower weren't particularly fascinating, but David was happy to tell his friends about the interesting legacy of the battle that had taken place there.

"In this Civil War battle, the Confederate regiment was made up of soldiers from Virginia and was under the command of General Thomas Jackson. The regiment showed surprising determination and refused to retreat from its position. The other Confederate Army units received inspiration from the regiment's fight and they held to their mission and were able to end the battle and cause the Federal forces to withdraw. After this battle, General Jackson received the nickname, 'Stonewall Jackson'. The Federal troops, from the North, advanced and attacked until they came up against a Confederate company that was comprised of soldiers from Virginia, under the command of Thomas Armstrong, who advanced to the dominant hill in the area. The company blocked the path of the enemy, which was moving with heavy reinforcements. A heavy battle ensued there. The Confederate company had many casualties. The shouts for help increased. Reinforcements didn't arrive and the company commander decided to retreat. His deputy commander thought otherwise and said to his commander 'If we retreat, the Federal troops will get to Richmond and they will slaughter every person that they come across on the way. If it is your desire to retreat, you can go. I and all the other soldiers are staying to defend our position until our last drop of blood' The commander was shocked and said to his deputy, 'The command to retreat will help us regain strength; we will be able to resist attack and then we will be able to lead an attack. You know that you are refusing and order during battle, which according to military law is punishable by death.' The deputy commander replied, 'You can shoot me if you wish; I am not leaving this place until the end, for better or for worse.' Finally, the commander accepted his deputy's opinion and he remained in his position to lead the battle. After a few days of bloody

battles, they were successful in repelling the enemy and they caused heavy casualties. At the end of the battle, the deputy commander was field court-martialed for refusing orders during battle. He was demoted in rank to a private, but in an honorable and festive ceremony the next day, he was awarded a gallantry medal for courage and perseverance.”

David, who was a company commander in the reserves, looked at his friend and deputy commander, Bobby, who had a slight smile on his face. David wanted to know how Bobby would have behaved in such a situation.

They continued on their way over the Appalachian Mountains, the prettiest mountains in the east. They drove on a road with unspoiled open spaces and splendid, dizzying views until they reached the Delaware Water Gap National Area., a geological formation on the border of New Jersey and Pennsylvania where the Delaware River crosses the Appalachian Mountains. They stopped at a viewpoint and got out of the vehicles. They looked at the breathtaking view. Occasionally, David let his friends drive his Hummer to give them the thrilling driving experience and sensation that wasn't similar to anything they had experience up until then.

They continued their journey in the gorgeous mountainous region, between streams, cliffs and deep ravines, following the river in the direction of the two small towns of Bushkill and Dingmans Ferry.

On one of the stops, there was an especially strong echo. David gathered everyone together and told them about a young man who came to consult with nature about what to do about his girlfriend. He called out in a loud voice:

"Dear Eco, you probably know why I am here, I came to you for advice from abroad"

"Broad, broad, broad."

"You are right! I met a girl, so good looking!"

"King, king, king."

"What's her aspiration? With whom to continue? "

"You, you, you."

"What would she like me to bring?"

"Ring, ring, ring."

"If she will ask for a new car, to fight or to forgive?"

"Give, give, give."

"After we wed, what will she ask of me To live in harmony?"

"Money, money, money."

"Will she respect me after we tie the knot?"

"Not, not, not."

"And if the marriage doesn't go well?"

"hell, hell, hell"

"Should I say, 'I do'?"

"do, do, do"

Everybody laughed and clapped. David knew how to combine humor with the knowledge that he had in so many areas. That's why when he arranged a trip, no one refused. From there he led them to the Cliff Summit Lookout Point. The intoxicating view made them feel like they were sitting in a 3-D Omnimax film devoted to unspoiled nature. They finished the tiring, but enjoyable trip at a diner on Interstate 80. David treated everyone in honor of his lottery win. Before they parted, he proposed that they make more frequent trips.

David and Sandy drove to Long Island to her parents. They were impressed with his new car and they complimented him on his good taste. They were surprised to hear that Sandy also drove this heavy vehicle. After cake and coffee, they drove to their apartment in Manhattan.

While Sandy threw their clothes in the washing machine, David went into the shower. He showered quickly, so he would be able to make love with Sandy until sunrise.

While he was waiting for her in the warm bed, he watched a sport program on ESPN that listed the scores of football games. Suddenly, he fell into a deep sleep and the sex he had planned took place only in his sweet dreams.

When he woke up, Sandy was already on her way to the university. He called work and told them that he would be late. After a quick shower, he left for the bank. At the bank entrance he saw a Brinks truck. He guessed that at this very moment, they were unloading the "merchandise" that he had ordered.

There were bank forms on Roger's desk signed by the bank which were waiting for his signature.

Jack, the department manager tried to persuade David not to carry such a large sum in cash, but David rejected the advice. He withdrew one million and thirty thousand dollars in cash, arranged in one hundred and thirty packets of one hundred, one-hundred dollar bills. He put it all into a backpack. David requested that one million dollars in cash wait for him at the bank every morning for the next nine days. McNamara, the bank manager asked him the meaning of these irregular withdrawals, because he was worried about breaking money laundering laws, which had been passed recently. He told David that he had to report withdrawals of over \$10,000 to the authorities. David answered and even signed a document confirming that the cash withdrawals represented a percentage of his winnings and were designated for different charities.

“Why ten million? A million would have been generous enough.” McNamara said.

“When I filled out the lottery form, a beggar stood next to me at the counter and I promised him that if I won fifty million dollars, I would allocate twenty percent to charity and I always keep my promises.”

McNamara esteemed David for his great generosity and he couldn't prevent him from doing so, but he warned: “You need to be very cautious when you when you are carrying so much cash. There are people who wouldn't hesitate to kill you for much less.”

“As long as nobody knows that I have a million dollars on my back, nothing bad will happen to me. Therefore, we must all maintain secrecy.” David answered. He looked into the faces of those present, while he put on his backpack and connected it with a strap around his chest.

When he was in the safety of his car, he pushed the automatic lock button and drove towards 5th Avenue. He glanced in his rearview mirror occasionally to be sure that no one was following him. He stopped next to Danielle's fashion house. He grabbed his backpack and entered her office quickly. “I am happy to see you David. How is Sandy?” asked Danielle and she kissed him on the cheek.

“Fine,” he replied and his eyes scanned the office.

“What are you looking for?”

“Here's the money, a million dollars in cash. Give me a box and I'll pack it for you and then you can call Tony and tell him that you have the money. But don't give him one penny before you get back all the checks and promissory notes that you signed as a guarantee.”

“I’ll do that right away,” she said and she laid down a box meant for her fashion exports on the desk. After the carton was sealed with packing tape, she wrote “Tony” on it and put it under her desk. David went quickly to his car. There under the seat, he had left the remaining \$30,000 for Jessie and Tommy. On his way to his place of work, he stopped at a pay phone and announced to Jeff: “The first installment has been delivered and the threat is removed; the second will be delivered tomorrow,” and he hung up.

David parked his car on a side street in order to conceal his sudden wealth. At noon, he went with his friends to lunch and while they were waiting for the waiter, David took out packets of cash and distributed them. They didn’t hide their great surprise.

“Finally, the money arrived from abroad, for the machine we made. Actually there is more than the promised sum, because it is customary abroad to give a tip for good service,” he said.

They took the money and hid it deep in their pockets. They looked at David in deep appreciation and they praised his friend in Japan, who upheld his end of the bargain and sent the money as promised.

“I hope that we’ll get another job like this,” said Jessie smiling.

“I believe that we will. When I hear something, I’ll let you know.”

After lunch, the three returned to work. David’s mind wasn’t on work. His thoughts wandered to the machine at the Lottery Company. He was impatient and he kept looking at his watch, waiting for the workday to end. Actually, he didn’t need the measly sum that he earned there. Just the interest that he earned in one month on the remaining amount in his account was more than \$15,000. This amount was also small compared to three million dollars that he expected to win twice a week, in the lottery drawing. Every three days, he regularly filled out a systematic form in order to strike while the iron was hot, not only hot, but blazing! He took precautionary steps to buy the forms from different points of sale in the different cities, in order to prevent detection of his method and his repetitive winnings.

He kept the page of number series in a file called “statistical data”. He followed the results of the lottery and was sure to mark or erase the expired series. He didn’t forget to skip every other series which took into account the practice drawing before the television broadcast. He kept the winning forms in a sealed envelope labeled “David-personal documents” which he hid in a secret niche in his mother’s attic. His mother had been a widow for several years.

The next morning, David again arrived at the bank and again he placed the packets of cash in his backpack. McNamara asked, half in jest, half seriously, if he could be one of his charity cases at his cash distribution station. David smiled mischievously and politely refused. He said that it gave him great pleasure to give the money to families that had difficulty providing food to their children or a decent schoolbag, or sport shoes. Not to mention paying gas and electric bills in order to get reconnected after being cut off for inability to pay. He really meant what he was saying, but first he would pay off his debt to Jeff. And so, for eight consecutive days, David arrived at the bank in the morning and from there drove to Jeff's house. On the eighth day, Jeff shook his hand warmly and said: "David, thank you for everything, especially for rescuing us from this mess that we got into! Thanks to you, Danielle's life is saved. The quality of our lives and our daughters' lives has improved beyond recognition. For all of this, we owe you a lot!" He hugged David emotionally and they parted.

Jeff could barely shove in the ninth packet of a million dollars into the concealed safe that he had installed behind the wall of his walk-in closet in the master bedroom, behind a shoe storage cabinet.

He stood in front of the steel safe and he felt frustrated looking at the packets of money stuffed in it. He had difficulty shutting it and then he locked it. He said to himself: 'nine million dollars are at my disposal, but what good does it do me if I can't use it without revealing my secret?'

21. My Brother

A week after his big win, David began the next phase of his plan, to rake in prize after prize until he used up the winning 500 series of numbers. On Tuesday, during his lunch break, he drove to Long Island. He stopped at a convenience store that had a lottery point of sale. In the window, there was a large poster that grabbed everyone's attention. The large number "3" in blue particularly stood out on the poster: "3 Million Dollars First Prize".

He wore sunglasses and a baseball cap to hide his identity as the serial winner. He went up to the counter with the systematic form, which he had prepared ahead of time that included eleven different numbers. He paid \$693 in cash. He thanked the store clerk and left. On his way back to work, he stopped at a lunch stand nearby and bought a tuna sandwich with vegetables and ate heartily. He was filled with a sense of victory.

In the evening, Sandy and David had dinner with another couple. They went to a vegetarian restaurant in the commercial district in the building where they lived. They noticed that David was distracted. It seemed that his thoughts were a million miles away. They tried to bring him back to the present, back to the meal, but his mind was occupied with lottery numbers. He looked at his watch; the approaching time of the lottery drawing increased his desire to end the evening and say goodbye to his friends. He apologized to them for his lack of concentration and he went up with Sandy to their penthouse on the 35th Floor. Sandy went to take a shower and David quickly turned on the TV. He picked up the lottery form and waited. There were commercials on the television and throbbing in his chest.

"In one moment we'll go live to the Lottery studio," relayed the text that flashed on the screen. Another breath escaped from his lungs and his fingers tapped nervously on the table. He held a pen, which he shifted restlessly in his hand.

The attractive master of ceremonies walked over to the shiny machine and with a smile, she announced the beginning of the broadcast: "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome dear viewers to the lottery drawing. Today the prize is three million dollars. I repeat, three million dollars! I am sure that each one of you has already planned what you will do with the large amount of money that you will win," she said with a meaningful expression. As required, she praised the Lottery Company

for its contribution to education and she congratulated the members of the supervisory committee.

“Come on already,” David said to the woman impatiently. “Get to the point!”

“And now for the drawing...” she said as she pressed the red button.

The balls started to spin quickly. David’s eyes were glued to them. He whispered to himself: ‘Here’s my “dance of the balls”. Come on balls, it’s your turn!’

“David, come join me in the shower,” Sandy called.

“In five minutes, honey,” he answered under pressure and he watched the first ball that was chosen, because he knew if it was the number on his form, his win was assured.

The woman on the screen continued: “Another second...another second...and here comes the first ball...17! We have our first number. 17! Mark it down, ladies and gentlemen” the master of ceremonies cried in an excited voice.

A sigh of relief rose in David’s chest. He smiled broadly.

“3, ladies and gentlemen, 3 is the second number,” she continued.

David’s smile turned into a big laugh.

“Maybe you can share the joke with me, so I can laugh too?” Sandy called as she rubbed in body lotion on her fresh, smooth skin.

“I just heard a good joke,” David said and he turned to concentrate on the screen in front of him.

The master of ceremonies continued to announce the numbers that were selected. When David saw that all of the numbers on his form were selected, he didn’t wait to check the bonus number, because he didn’t need it. He put the form in his wallet and ran happily to the shower. He hugged and kissed Sandy, who was still naked. She pushed him away gently and asked: “What’s this sudden euphoria that’s possessed you? Anyway, take a shower first.”

“You are very mean. Apparently you were a witch in a previous life,” he said and tried to kiss her again.

“You talk too much and make too much noise; you must have been a generator in a previous life,” she replied and pushed him away again.

He smiled. His desire for her grew and kindled a yearning in his groin. He took off his clothes and threw them on the bathroom floor. He got into the hot shower and began to sing his “personal anthem”, the song “Delusions.”

“Maybe you can tell me the joke that you were cracking up about?” Sandy asked.

“Scientists have discovered that a woman’s “G” spot is located at the end of the word ‘shopping’,” David said and burst into laughter.

“Very funny,” she said, but nevertheless she laughed and added teasingly: “I saw a clever ad today, for a sexual disorders clinic, for men like you... ‘Call, if it isn’t hard for you’,” she said and she laughed loudly.

“We’ll soon check if it’s hard or not,” he said as he turned off the shower.

Sandy left the bathroom. David wrapped a towel around his hips, sprinkled aftershave on his face and neck, put on deodorant and joined her. She was waiting for him with open arms and their wet kisses lasted for minutes. They made love passionately and gave themselves to each other. Their love deepened their sexual relationship and made them a perfect couple.

The next morning, Sandy left as usual for the university. David allowed himself the luxury of staying in bed and sipping his coffee which Sandy had put on the nightstand next to him. He leafed through the pages of the newspaper and read that one single winner had won the lottery drawing last night.

‘Great! If I don’t make mistakes, I can expect to win 500 drawings of three million dollars.’ He made a quick calculation and he realized that he might earn one billion and five million dollars. He smiled and was proud of himself: ‘I am a billionaire! David, do you hear? You are a billionaire!’

The clock was not in his favor. ‘I’m late to work again. Actually...to hell with it! I’m a billionaire! What do I need the small change from my salary for? Anyway, they don’t appreciate my talents,’ he thought to himself, but he immediately began to think logically: ‘I have to continue my routine, but it won’t be a catastrophe if I miss work now and then. In the worst case scenario, they will fire me. Big deal,’ he convinced himself and he called work to tell them that he would be late.

He took his winning lottery form and drove to Julie’s house, his sister-in-law, the widow of his brother Robert, who had died suddenly from cardiac arrest. The death broke the entire family’s happiness. Robert was the older of the two brothers. As children, they had always played together in their neighborhood in Brooklyn. They played football, hide and seek, tag and other childhood games, before there were computers, but one game in particular was etched into his memory, the game “The Clinic”. Every day, one of the girls in the neighborhood begged them to play the roles of doctor and nurse, when they were about 11 or 12 years old. The “clinic was located in the bathroom at one of the girls’ houses when the parents were out. Robert was

always picked to be the gynecologist and David was the compassionate nurse who brought in the girls, one after the other, for a comprehensive gynecological exam. After a short instruction by one of the older girls, they gained much knowledge and experience about diagnosing female diseases and giving prescriptions. When the “patient” entered the “doctor’s office”, she took off her underpants, even before she was requested to do so. The doctor questioned her about where the pain was located exactly. Without a word, she lay down on the small carpet next to the bathtub and opened her legs widely and impatiently waited for the doctor. With the aid of two popsicle sticks, he began to explore and feel her vaginal area, which was smooth and without pubic hair.

Once in awhile, he opened the lips of the small vagina, to the delighted giggles of the girl. He always discovered serious diseases on these lips, for which he directed them to come to the clinic the next day for another examination. After they got dressed, they received a little water and they drank the required “medicine”. What the brothers remembered was that the girls enjoyed the game more than they did. What the girls had was the incurable disease of “love sickness”. The clinic operated everyday at 4:00 and it closed when the girls reached puberty.

The brothers’ paths also crossed during the period of their military service. They met by chance before a mission into enemy territory when their units were supposed to participate in a daring operation Robert was an outstanding officer and he rose quickly up the ranks, until he decided to leave the army for business in the civilian sector. He invested all of his money and even took loans to buy a small restaurant which was very successful. In light of this success, he established a chain of very successful restaurants. As fate would have it, all his plans were cut down in one stroke. One morning, at 5:00, he was found spread out on the floor, dead. The doctor who arrived in the ambulance could only proclaim his death, because he had died of cardiac arrest. That horrible morning left a scar on David that would never heal.

The persistent ringing of the telephone got David out of the bathroom in the middle of shaving. Julie, his sister-in-law, told him about the horrible tragedy and she asked him to tell his mother, who was still mourning his father’s death.

His mother was surprised to see him so early in the morning. She asked: “What happened, David?”

“Let’s sit down, Mom. I want to talk to you,” he said and sat across from her on the couch in the living room. Worry crept into her face; she didn’t know what to expect.

In her heart, she hoped that he wasn't in any serious trouble. She looked at him pleadingly and encouraged him to speak.

His eyes were tearing up; he tried to keep the tears from falling.

His mother burst out: "David, talk to me, please," she urged.

"Mom, it's Robert..."

"What happened to Robert? Is he in trouble? Tell me!"

"Robert...is dead!"

She looked at him in shock. She didn't understand, or she didn't want to understand what was being said. She put her hands over her ears, as if to prevent them from hearing the bad news. Suddenly, she let out a cry of despair that shattered the stillness in the house. She slapped her face and screamed: "No! No! No!"

David jumped to her side. He hugged her as if he was trying to merge their pain and he cried with her. She wallowed in her sorrow and wanted to know the details. How did it happen? Mostly, why couldn't they save him? He brought her a glass of water to calm her down and he told her what Julie had said. The neighbors, who had heard Sonia's piercing scream, came over to the house and tried to soothe her, but no one could console her.

The funeral took place that day. David gave the eulogy, which expressed the entire family's grief. He mentioned Robert's accomplishments and plans and he lamented the loss, the emptiness and the vacuum that he left behind.

As the older brother, Robert had always supported David; especially when David had been a student at the university. He didn't have anything and he needed funds to complete his engineering degree. David remembered this well and with his brother's sudden death, he hadn't been able to return the money yet. David felt terrible about this and he swore to himself to help his sister-in-law and his niece and nephew whenever he could because they were an important part of his life.

This morning, David realized that the time had arrived to compensate them befittingly. 'Before my fraud is discovered, or some unexpected glitch occurs with the machine, which will prevent me from realizing my plans, I will go to Julie's house,' he thought to himself.

Julie was surprised to see him early in the morning, but she was happy to see him. She was happy about the warm relationship she had with her deceased husband's loving family.

"I have a nice surprise for you, Julie," David said.

Julie poured a cup of coffee for both of them. She looked at him with curiosity and said: “Finally, something positive in the difficult year that I’ve had.”

“I won the lottery...ten days ago...fifty million dollars. I want to give you a gift that will help you compensate for the loss of income caused by Robert’s death,” he said and he laid down the new lottery form on the table.

Julie’s face brightened and she smiled. “Great, you really deserve it,” she said and suddenly she buried her face in her hands and started to sob because of David’s generous gesture. She went over to him; she hugged him and kissed him on the cheek with her tear stained face.

Emotion overcame him and he also started to cry. Their memories of Robert flooded them and he appeared before their eyes.

“You don’t have to do this, David. Robert loved you. He gave you everything from his heart and he didn’t expect you to repay him. You can feel good about it.”

“If you want me to feel good, please take what I want to give you. For me it is repayment of my moral indebtedness to you and especially to the children, Sharon and Ben. Robert didn’t buy things for them in order to help me with my future,” he said and stood firm in his opinion.

“If you insist, I will accept this and I will do as you say,” she said.

“But I have a small request...a problem that hopefully can be solved with your help. I had incredible luck again and the unbelievable happened. I also won first prize in the lottery drawing from last night. It is a very rare occurrence that has never happened anywhere in the world.”

“I don’t believe it,” she said and laughed loudly.

“No one will believe it, especially not the Lottery Company, when I come to cash in the winning form. Since I planned on giving you this amount of money anyway, I will give you the winning form. She should go to the Lottery office and the money will be deposited in a few days.”

“You want to give me three million dollars? Are you crazy? It’s too much! Even a million would help me enough. And who is ‘she’?”

“Don’t worry; they will take 50% for tax. In order for them not to make a connection between our family names, ask Sharon to go to claim the prize. Since she is married and she has a different family name, they won’t be suspicious. You can distribute the money as you see fit, but I suggest that you give half a million to each child and the

rest keep for yourself. In any case, one day everything will go to the children,” he said and he handed her the form.

Julie held the form in her trembling hands. Her body also started to shake. David hugged her emotionally and his eyes filled with tears again. She thanked him and kissed him on the cheek and her eyes also didn't stay dry.

He said goodbye and in the elevator, he felt a great relief that he had fulfilled his promise and his moral obligation to his brother Robert, who he would never see again, but undoubtedly would never forget.

22. The Pleasure of Giving

David and Sandy got settled in their new, spacious apartment on the 35th Floor of the Millennium Towers on the shores of New York Harbor. The view from the apartment was so stunning that it dazed the viewer. David hired Toby, a famous interior designer, to furnish the apartment with exclusive furniture. David chose accessories and the latest high-tech electronics in the world for his dream apartment. His home cinema system had an advanced ceiling projector with a 6 by 9 foot roll-down screen hidden in the ceiling that was operated by a remote control panel and had a quality surround sound system. The unique viewing experience encouraged David to spend more and more time in front of the screen. His expensive SUV, a powerful motorcycle with a 900 cc engine and a two-seat jet ski occupied him so much that it seemed that these possessions were his top priority.

Sandy felt that their relationship had reached a point that David was pulling away from her. She was apprehensive of all the young girls who deposited themselves at the best plastic surgeons and up-graded their bodies to become objects of desire to men. They reshaped their noses; they sucked out fat from one area and added silicone to another. They shamelessly exposed their impressive data, because they believed in the saying: "You can improve on nature." Also, David's pursuit of money began to worry Sandy.

She called David from the university and said: "David, we have to talk."

"About what, honey?"

"Don't you know? Or are you just pretending not to know?"

"Sandy, I don't have a clue what you are talking about..."

"If that's the case, the problem is more serious than I thought. We'll talk at home tonight!" she said dramatically and hung up.

His instinct told him to buy her something to soften her up. On his way home, David stopped at a jewelry store. He looked at a variety of rings. He was impressed by one in particular, a gold ring with a large, brilliant 1 carat diamond. It was totally clear; it had flawless clarity and it was perfectly polished.

"How much does this ring cost?"

"\$6,000. For a stone of this quality, it is an excellent price," answered the store owner.

"OK," David said and handed him his credit card. The man wrapped up the ring box and thanked him. David left the store in a good mood.

When he arrived home, Sandy was in the kitchen. She was making a green salad with halved cherry tomatoes, a vinaigrette dressing and walnut pieces on top.

“Hi, sweetheart,” he said and cuddled up to her from behind. He hugged her warmly and kissed her neck.

She turned around, put the salad bowl in his hands and said: “Put the salad and bread basket on the balcony table, please.”

He sensed her bad mood and he backed off a bit. Also, his growing hunger motivated him to do as he was bid. She served the platter of cheese and smoked salmon.

The weather was perfect. The water was calm and fishing boats were leaving the nearby harbor for the fishing area off Ellis Island. Peace and calm settled on the scene, which for a moment erased the day to day annoyances.

David took advantage of the atmosphere and poured wine into the wine glasses. He held up his glass and waited for Sandy to do likewise.

“Cheers,” he said in order to get her attention.

“Cheers...but I prefer to remain clear headed.”

He noticed her serious expression. He sipped a little of his wine. He took a slice of salmon, put it on a slice of bread spread with cream cheese and took a big bite. He looked into her beautiful eyes for awhile, as if to look for the cause of her distress.

“David, it seems to me that our relationship is deteriorating.”

He dropped the food from his hand. He looked at her in astonishment and asked: “What makes you think that?”

“A short time ago, you were occupied with only me. You nurtured our relationship, you invested energy in our love and I felt like I was your whole world. Today, I feel like I’m a small part of it. I’m trying to identify the cause of your obsessive passion for money. It’s as if...as if some demon has possessed you, or maybe your upbringing or some genetic flaw. You have surrendered to a materialistic society which goads you to chase after money, power and success. You are so self-absorbed with your many toys that you’ve surrounded yourself with. You are changing and the good traits you had are disappearing so quickly, that you haven’t even noticed. David, money destroys...I am very worried. Our future together is very important to me.”

David went over to her, knelt down on his right knee, kissed her on the lips and said: “You are mistaken, Sandy. I love you, not less since I won the money and perhaps even more.” He took out the little box from his pocket and placed it in her hand. She hadn’t expected such a swift response.

Sandy, who was surprised, opened the box. The beautiful diamond ring shone in front of her and it sparkled in the rays of the moonlight. David felt her excitement from the spontaneous surprise and he recalled the saying: ‘Diamonds are a girl’s best friend.’ Or perhaps, to his disappointment, Sandy was not in this category of women. ‘Not Sandy. Sandy is not blinded by sparkling stones.’

She closed the box without taking out the ring and she returned it to him. She said: “I want love and happiness from you, not cold stones and sophisticated gadgets. You should know, David that I love you very much and I am afraid of losing you.”

This hurt David to the depths of his soul. He hadn’t expected that she would refuse his gift. He removed the ring from the box, quickly walked over to the railing of the balcony and threw it towards the park next to the building. Small flashes of light flickered from the diamond on its descent towards the park’s shrubbery and darkness. She looked at him in shock and couldn’t move her hand. He returned to the table and continued to eat without saying a word. Several long minutes of silence passed until Sandy finally recovered and said: “Why did you do that? Are you trying to impress me? You should know by now, that money doesn’t impress me at all; I am richer than you...”

David, who had millions of dollars in his bank account, was surprised by her proclamation and he asked: “From where do you have so much money that I didn’t know of its existence up until now?”

“A wise person, even wiser than you David, once said: ‘Who is rich? One who is happy with his lot!’ and I am happy with my lot; I am happy with what I have, while you aren’t satisfied with what you have anymore and you are looking for more and more. David I miss the days when our old refrigerator leaked, when you had the old Chevrolet and when you paid attention to me.”

Without saying a word, David got up and went to bed. Many thoughts and questions started to reverberate in his head: ‘I took a big risk to reach the goal. Was it all for nothing? Should I give up all the pleasure and joys of life for love? Is this real love? Perhaps it is love whose future is uncertain...’

Sandy also got into bed. She was careful to keep a distance from his body. She picked up a book and tried to concentrate on reading, but to no avail. David looked at some papers he received in the mail; he went over the words and sentences, but he couldn’t concentrate. Finally, he turned off his reading lamp and Sandy also switched off her light. In the oppressive silence she said: “There are women who bring happiness when

they come and there are those who bring happiness when they leave! Decide which group of women you think I belong to.”

His feelings were still hurt and he didn't respond, but the sentence she said stayed with him throughout the night.

David woke up in the morning to the sound of the door slamming. Sandy left for her studies and he remembered the events of the previous night. He suddenly got out of bed and went over to the railing on the balcony, from where he had thrown the ring. He calculated and found that there was a possibility that it had landed across the street, between the building and the shrubbery in the park. He dressed quickly and went down into the deserted park. He looked up at the balcony and imagined the ring's trajectory. He calculated the direction and distance where it might have landed. First, he scanned the street and walking path. It wasn't there. He got down on all fours and searched through the soft grass with his hands. Occasionally, a jogger or early morning walker passed by on the well-maintained path. The first search didn't produce anything. He enlarged the area of the search a little bit and said to himself: 'This is worse than looking for a needle in a haystack.' The search became a challenge for him and he focused on a smaller area, but with a more thorough search. His cell phone rang and interrupted his search.

“David, I don't feel well. Please take me to the doctor.”

“Get ready, Mom. I'll be there in half an hour.”

He got up and brushed off the leaves and dirt that clung to his hands and knees. He walked quickly towards home and suddenly, he glimpsed an unusual glint of light from the grass that caught his attention. He carefully approached the tiny point of light that had reflected the sun's rays. 'I suppose it is a piece of broken glass, but it's worth checking,' he said to himself as he reached for the source of the tiny light. “Yes!” he said with a victorious smile. He picked up the ring and cleaned off the leaves. He blew on it several times to remove the dirt that was hiding in the prongs which held the perfect diamond.

He carefully inspected the diamond to see if it was broken or cracked. 'It appears that the dense shrubbery cushioned the force of the fall' he said to himself. He hid it in his pocket and went to pick up his mother.

The diagnosis of Dr. Stan Fiddler, his mother's devoted family physician who had cared for her for twenty five years, was precise and unequivocal, “Mrs. Johnson, you are prone to stress and anxiety...”

“You’re right, doctor. The loneliness and heartbreak from my husband’s and my son Robert’s death are driving me crazy,” she confirmed the doctor’s diagnosis.

He recommended rest and he had the courage to also recommend that she move into a good assisted living facility, where she would have company, security and a good quality of life. Sonya was apprehensive about leaving her home, the place where she had raised one of her sons and the place where she had known true love with her deceased husband. She was hesitant to leave all the memories imprinted in every corner of the house to strangers.

David sensed her fears and said, “Come on Mom...you know that I’ll never leave you and it isn’t important where you live. I’ll be with you and with all the memories, until you’re sick of me.” He hugged her warmly. He smiled and added: “I saw a commercial on TV for a new place for seniors that recently opened. It offers a high standard of living and it is like a 5 star hotel. Most importantly, it is in a quiet location, surrounded by green areas and in the center of the city. I suggest that we go there to check and get an impression. If you don’t like it, we’ll go home.”

Sonya listened to him and said: “I am willing to check out a satisfactory place where I can find interesting things to do and tranquility.”

He helped her into the car. On the way he explained to her how important it was that she not be alone. She agreed with him. Her openness amazed him, especially when she understood that she wasn’t a burden on him and she wasn’t abandoned by him.

They arrived at the tall and fancy building that had been recently built next to Mt. Sinai Hospital. He parked his car and they slowly walked around the building. It made a positive impression. They entered Ms. Smith’s office, the marketing manager of the company. She welcomed them politely and with a smile, she asked: “How can I help you?” Even before they could answer, she poured them a glass of lemonade.

“We are considering a move here, for my mother,” David said.

Ms. Smith gave them an introductory tour of the facility. She told them about the variety of social activities, the living conditions, which were of the highest standard and she gave them information about the close medical supervision. All this convinced Sonya to sign the papers, but only after she received David’s assurance that he would come to visit at least once a week. A check for a million dollars guaranteed her living conditions until the end of her days.

“You are lucky that you won the money and I am lucky that I won you,” Sonya said happily and she kissed her son. She added; “Take care of yourself, David; you’re all I have to live for.”

David was also happy that he was able to give his mother the best and compensate her for all that she had done for him.

After they parted, he went to work. He only showed his face for a few hours until the workday ended.

On his way home, David received a message that his friends were planning to spend the evening at a club in a bowling alley in the city. His excuse was that he and Sandy were invited to another event and he hoped that they could also make it to the bowling alley later. Actually, he feared that Sandy had left him and he prepared himself for the worst.

In the afternoon, Sandy left the university and decided to do something to improve her bad mood. She thought about new clothes and naturally she headed for her friend Danielle’s fashion house. Danielle hugged her and they went into her office. She gave her a soft drink and asked: “How are you? How is David? You two are so well suited for each other... a match made in heaven. When’s the wedding?”

“A perfectly matched pair can only be found in a shoe store.” Sandy replied with a weak smile, mixed with sadness. Then she added: “What are you talking about? I am thinking of splitting up with him today...”

“What happened? Tell me...”

Sandy told her about the previous night and she choked on tears.

Danielle stroked her head and said, “Sandy, you are mistaken. The guy loves you and the ring attests to that more than anything. You have to understand him; he wants to realize his dreams that he has been waiting for, but were beyond his reach up until now. You shouldn’t put him in the position of choosing between you or the money. It’s like...one twin would confront his father and say ‘you only love my twin brother, so decide- him or me.’ One father can love both of his children equally. So can David. My dear, you are overcome by emotions...you mustn’t judge or make any fateful decisions in this condition.”

Sandy listened and didn’t say a word.

“Where will you find such a perfect man? Handsome, healthy, educated, friendly, rich and even good in bed...it’s hard to find such merchandise on the market. Even if you look forever, you won’t find a man like David in the entire northern hemisphere.

Sandy, this time you made a big mistake and it's not a disgrace to apologize. On the contrary, he will appreciate it, believe me. Now, come with me and I'll show you a dress that will suit you," said Danielle. She took Sandy's hand and pulled her out of the office.

She put a stunning dress on Sandy and it fit her perfect figure. Danielle was happy with her deed.

"How much does it cost?" asked Sandy.

"Nothing! Don't forget, I owe you and David so much for the help you gave me! I am happy that I have an opportunity to pay you back with something. Go home fast and do what I said," Danielle urged and sent Sandy off with the new dress and a considerably improved mood.

David stood in front of his apartment and put his ear to the door. He tried to hear a sound, but the total silence made it clear to him that the apartment was empty. His mood hit rock-bottom. He opened the door and to his surprise, he saw her standing in front of him, beautiful and radiant in her new dress.

"I want to tell you something," she said and she came close to him.

David was worried that the end of their relationship was coming and even though he had prepared himself, he was overcome by emotion. His body almost betrayed him, but he remained standing and listened to her.

She took his hand and whispered: "David, I love you very much. I'm sorry for hurting your feelings, please forgive me..."

She looked at him; his eyes were closed and a smile of relief spread across his face.

He hugged her tightly and he covered her face with kisses.

"I'll return the money for the lost diamond," she said.

He remembered...he freed himself from her embrace, put his hand into his pants pocket and took out the sparkling ring. He held her hand, placed the ring on her finger and kissed the back of her hand.

Sandy was overwhelmed and she couldn't stop her tears. She hugged him as tears rolled down her cheeks. They embraced for a long time. He stroked her neck and back. She put her head on his chest and he whispered to her: "Love is pleasure and pain together. Without love, life is meaningless."

23. Protection Money

The prestigious BMW SUV was cruising on East River Drive. Quiet music was playing on the excellent sound system. An advanced climate control system kept the interior of the black vehicle at a comfortable, uniform temperature. This made the ride pleasant for Tony and his bodyguards and was in stark contrast to the noise, stress and heat that prevailed outside. Tony was compelled to hire the best bodyguards in three shifts. The huge expense for the protection, purchasing new gambling machines to replace the ones confiscated by the police, the fees for his shrewd lawyer and his office staff made it necessary for him to create additional sources of income.

Tony felt that the police were breathing down his neck. He knew that sooner or later the police would succeed in cornering him; so he decided to make the most of the good life while he could.

He looked at life differently than most people. He believed that yesterday is history, tomorrow is unknown and today- today is the gift of life! It was no coincidence that the present time was called “present”. Therefore, once in awhile, he treated himself to sumptuous suites in the company of two or three of the most beautiful and expensive call girls in New York. The entertainment include a variety of first rate alcohol and clean crystal cocaine for the girls. After a wild night such as this, he parted from another couple of thousand dollars.

David, who by chance was driving on the same street in his expensive SUV, passed Tony’s vehicle. “Speed up and tail him!” Tony ordered his driver who shot forward and with no difficulty tailgated the yellow vehicle. Tony wrote down the vehicle’s license plate number and said to himself: ‘I don’t have any alternative but to get into the protection racket. What’s good for the IRS is also good for Tony. The tax authorities take legal protection money from wealthy people, who they identify by their exclusive cars, yachts and private planes and they demand their share as partners with equal rights. I will also demand my share, as a tax for personal security, so that the wealthy can continue to move as barons and kings. The State has their sources for information and I have mine.’

He dialed his private investigator, who supplied him with information services in return for cold cash.

“Hello, Mr. Christopher, How are you today?”

“Fine, thank you. How can I help you, Tony?” he asked.

“Write this number down... license plate number DGN4583. Send me all the information about the owner and his business.”

“In a few days you will get what you requested in writing in addition to pictures.”

“Thanks,” said Tony and hung up.

The investigator called his friend in the police force, but he was on vacation and he couldn't deliver the “goods” on time. He turned to Theresa, a clerk at the Department of Motor Vehicles. She regularly received \$1,000 from him to provide information from the DMV's computerized database. She used the money to pay for her son's college tuition for his studies in economics and business administration.

“Write this down,” she said as she read the information on the screen to him: “David Johnson, born in 1976, single. Address: 2 Little West St, Manhattan, in the Millennium Towers, 35th Floor. He owns a 2006 yellow Hummer SUV.

“You helped me a lot. Thanks very much. We'll meet on Saturday, on the first of the month at your house. See you then.”

He took out a new videocassette and wrote “David Johnson,” on the side. He loaded it into the video camera and rode over the Millennium Towers on his motorcycle. When he slipped into the building's parking garage, he immediately found the vehicle. He filmed it from every possible angle. He also filmed the stairwell, the elegant lobby, the elevators and the entrance to David's apartment. The shrewd investigator knocked on the door and presented himself as a real estate agent, sent by the management company of the building to film the apartment for marketing and advertising purposes. David didn't suspect anything. He opened the door and let him take as many pictures as he wanted.

“Thank you,” said the investigator, while at the same time, he filmed David's apartment with his tiny video camera.

“Very good and thorough work,” Tony said to the private investigator, when he viewed the videotape.

The source of the money of this young couple was unknown. The investigator's hunch was that Sandy's parents, who lived in Long Island, were supporting the couple. After he gave the investigator a sealed envelope with three thousand dollars, he left and took out his cell phone, from which calls could not be traced.

“Mr. David Johnson?”

“Speaking,” he said and immediately asked, “Who's this?”

“Bagio...I got your telephone number from one of your neighbors in your building. I would like to interest you in investing in a unique project. I would be happy if you would meet me tomorrow afternoon at the Mozart Café in the Pier 17 shopping center.”

David did not suspect anything. He thought that investment in real estate would yield a nice return and he agreed to the offer. The quiet and secluded café was located on the third floor of the bustling shopping center and it provided an ideal place for a quiet, intimate conversation. While David was sipping his espresso, he suddenly noticed five thugs walking towards him. They're body language expressed force and violence.

“Hello, David,” said Tony as he held out his hand to David.

David thought he looked familiar, but he rose to greet him.

“Hello, Bagio,” he answered and shook his hand.

“I'm Tony Bagio. You have probably seen my name in the crime section of the newspapers lately.”

“I don't read the newspapers regularly,” David lied as he tensely awaited the next move.

“Look, David,” Tony said quietly and he got straight to the point: “We have friends in Sing Sing Prison. They and their families are in dire financial straights and they need money to pay for better lawyers who demand high fees for their services.”

David began to sweat and didn't say a word.

“I noticed that you have accumulated nice toys around yourself...like your penthouse on the 35th Floor, your very expensive, fancy, yellow SUV, Sandy, with the face of an angel. It would be a shame to destroy all these beautiful things. We are sure that you can afford, without any difficulty, a one-time expenditure of \$100,000, which is a pittance for you and thus you will be able to continue to enjoy the pleasures of life.”

David listened carefully and was silent.

“As opposed to you, these people have nothing to lose, if you refuse, you can order a wheelchair in the best case scenario, or a fancy marble headstone in the worst case.”

David was surprised by the openness and nerve of the person sitting across from him. He quickly considered the options available to him and he understood that he was at a disadvantage at the moment against the considerable power opposed to him.

Tony perceived what was going through David's mind and he said: “Get rid of all the stupid ideas in your head. Even though you are a former Navy Seals officer and a

brave fighter, you are up against people with no conscience, people who first shoot and later aim. Even the devil himself is afraid of them.”

David shifted uncomfortably in his chair. He tried to buy time, until he could find a solution, so he said: “Give me a few days to organize the money.”

“If you are planning on going to the police, take into account that you’ll have additional outlays...for a plastic surgeon to replace the skin on Sandy’s face.” he said and stood up. He indicated the end of the meeting to his men.

David sat frozen in his chair and he sipped some lemonade, which calmed down the raging storm in his soul a bit.

He tried to organize his thoughts. He suddenly got up, put a twenty dollar bill on the table and ran to the outside glass elevator. He watched as the group of men who had descended on the escalator walked towards the parking lot. When they were swallowed up by the BMW, David wrote down the license plate number on his hand.

Many thoughts and questions bounced around his mind. ‘Does Tony know the source of the money?’ One thing was clear to him, if he gave into his demands, more demands would follow until he was impoverished. ‘I don’t have many choices. I must fight for my life. It’s me or him!’ he said to himself and decided to call his friend Bobby to meet in person.

Bobby, whose work as a police detective took up most of his time, was busy, but he offered to meet in the evening after his shift. David thanked him and until the meeting, he sat and planned his steps. ‘I need time in order to get organized and fight back without playing by the rules, just like Tony. He has already threatened to bring Sandy into the battle and she is my soft spot.’ He understood that his mother was also liable to be a target in order to give him a hard, painful blow. He tried to give himself encouragement: ‘David, get yourself together. Fight! You have looked death in the face more than once and you overcame...overcame armed terrorists in hostile territory. With the help of your army friends, you will certainly be able to defeat this lone criminal.’

He weighed his options and made a few decisions. The most important was to remove his mother and Sandy in order to neutralize this weak link in the chain. Secondly, to strike first! In the army he had learned that the best defense is offense. The third important decision was to find Tony’s weak spots. Every person, and it didn’t matter what he did for a living, has points where you can hurt him. He decided to answer Tony in kind and to involve Tony’s family in his assault.

At their meeting, David told Bobby the tumultuous chain of events that he had experienced that day and he asked his opinion.

“At this stage, there’s no point in filing a complaint with the police. Anyway, there hasn’t been any criminal action taken against you yet, except for the threat and extortion, which in any case Tony will deny and his men will back up his version. As a first step, let’s hide your car, in order to reduce your weak points that Tony has in his favor,” Bobby answered and recommended that they take action immediately.

Bobby followed David as he drove to his friend Paul’s house. There, he parked his car in a subterranean, secure and hidden garage. He thanked Paul and joined Bobby. They made their way to the exclusive building where Tony lived.

With the help of a set of lock picks, which Bobby always had on him, they entered the parking garage, which was heavily guarded. There was a gate with bars that was operated by a remote control and closed-circuit television monitored by a guard. They raised Tony’s car with a jack that they had brought with them. They took off all four tires and hid them in the corner of the garage. Using a burglary tool, they made a narrow opening between the windowpane and the side of the door. They slipped in a piece of paper with the printed message: “Next time, it will be fatal. Find a different victim!”

“Now for the next step,” Bobby declared and they drove to an army base near Albany. They parked next to the emergency warehouses of their unit. They entered one of them, opened the commander’s armored personnel carrier and took out a fragmentation hand grenade.

David drove all the way to the Bronx. During the drive, Bobby took care of the grenade. He wore gloves in order to prevent identification of fingerprints. He was careful to keep the safety-catch closed and to be on the safe side, he fastened the lever to the grenade with black electrical tape. He didn’t let David touch the grenade or explosives, so there wouldn’t be even molecular traces of gunpowder on his body, which could easily be identified with advanced sensors that the police had.

Bobby attached the grenade to the front door handle of the Bagio home. There was a note attached that read: “We don’t pay protection money.”

On their way back to the Queens, David thanked Bobby for his help and even wanted to compensate him with money. Bobby refused and said: “You are my brother in arms; I’m your deputy commander. We were together in missions no less dangerous! I’ll never forget how you rescued me from terrorist fire in Iraq, until we destroyed

them. I'm sure you would do the same for me and I am glad that I had the opportunity to repay you at least a little."

David shook his hand firmly and thanked him for his loyalty and his sincerity.

"David, forget it. I do this wholeheartedly!"

"I know and I appreciate it!"

"You know, it's a good thing we took precautionary steps for tomorrow. Despite Sandy's and your mother's worry and hesitation about going on an "enforced vacation" to a hotel in Up State New York, they understood it was for their own welfare, until the problem can be solved. Now that your apartment is being protected by a reputable security company, we have finished our job and the ball is in Tony's court," said Bobby and he parked his car next to his apartment.

It was four in the morning. David sat on the living room couch. Bobby went into his room to bring him sheets and blankets, but when he returned, David was already in a deep sleep. The fatigue and tremendous stress had their effect. Bobby covered him with a blanket and he joined his girlfriend Patricia, sleeping in the bedroom.

Bobby thought about the scenarios that were going to take place in the next few hours in the Bronx and in Manhattan. He knew that his detective friends would be urgently requested to investigate and to decipher the dramatic events. He fell asleep with a slight smile, knowing that starting tomorrow morning; Tony's sleep wouldn't be peaceful anymore.

"Fuck off! Who is bothering me so early in the morning?" hissed Tony between his teeth when he heard his cell phone incessantly ringing.

"Hello," he barked into the phone.

"Son of a Bitch!" his father, Luciano screamed.

"What a disgrace you are to your parents and your entire family. Piece of shit!"

Luciano continued to swear.

Tony tried to calm him down. "What happened, Dad?"

"You ask, what happened? Come see what happened. A hand grenade was taped to our front door handle with a note that says: 'We don't pay protection money!' The police bomb disposal squad is neutralizing it now and the whole neighborhood is watching the spectacle and is talking about the Bagio family's reputation! I only get disgrace from you! I'm sorry that you were ever born!" said his father in a choking voice and hung up.

Tony choked. His eyes became moist. 'They cut me to the quick! They humiliated me! They hurt the person I love most in the world. They'll pay dearly for this!' he said to himself and he got ready for a hasty departure. His bodyguard, who stood on his shift by the front door, joined him in the elevator and they walked quickly towards his car in the garage. About 30 feet from the car, they both stopped, as if they had been struck by lightning. The sight that appeared before their eyes surprised them. His opponent's guts and nerves stunned Tony. He understood that this time he was up against a professional. The vehicle was resting on its wheel rims. Tony approached the car and walked around it. He noticed the piece of paper on the passenger's seat. He understood that if they were able to put the paper there, they could also conceal a demolition charge under the seat, which would undoubtedly scatter his body in every direction. This was a breaking point for him, which caused him to delay the planned attack for a more convenient time. He said to himself: 'You just wait, David. This time you have the upper hand, but you won't live to enjoy the money or Sandy. You will beg to die in order to ease the pain and suffering that I'm going to cause you!' He ordered the bodyguard to put back the tires.

On their way to the Bronx, he watched the cars that were following him. He knew that as head of organized crime, he was a target for intelligence gathering. His every step was documented and filmed and every word was heard and recorded. In order not to supply incriminating evidence to the police, who had been trying to get its hand on him for a long time, he had stopped using his cell phone.

For the first time in years, he felt remorse about the path he had chosen for himself. When he arrived at his parents' home, there were still signs of police presence. Detectives from the criminal identification unit had taken fingerprints. The nylon strip barriers cordoning off the area were still there. Luciano sat in his armchair in the living room. He was agitated and overwrought. The shame kept him from sticking even one toe out of the door because of the neighbors' stares. He ignored Tony's presence, but Tony went over to him and said: "Don't worry, Dad. They'll pay for what they did to you!"

"Get out of here, you criminal! You are contaminating this house. You only cause us anguish. Get out!"

"Dad, Dad..."

"Call the police! Tell them to come and take him away!" Luciano shouted to his wife, who took her son away from him and pushed him out the door.

Tony went down the stairs, accompanied by his bodyguards. The neighbors crowded around the windows of their apartments to stare at the infamous man in the headlines as he walked back to his car. Police squad cars surrounded his vehicle. Two police officers approached him and asked him to accompany them to the police station for questioning regarding the hand grenade. Tony felt humiliated.

During the ride to the interrogation room at the station, many thoughts bombarded his mind. 'I obsessively and blindly chase after money which has led me to self-destruction. I endangered the life of my family...I trampled my father's dignity. I removed myself from him. What am I doing...?'

24. The Escape

The quick pace of events forced David to take steps to neutralize the situation. He decided that the best temporary solution was to leave the country until the storm died down. At JFK Airport, he went to the American Airlines office and purchased a ticket to Paris. After paying \$670 in cash, he received a ticket on the night flight.

He went through passport control and walked around the duty-free shops. At one o'clock in the morning, he heard the call over the loudspeakers in the terminal: "Passengers on Flight 327 to Paris are requested to go to Gate D4, thank you."

David put his small carry-on bag in the overhead bin. He sat down in the window seat, covered himself with a thin blanket, put his head on the white pillow and tried to fall asleep. After considerable tossing and turning and eating a light meal, he fell into a peaceful sleep.

At the end of the six hour flight, the plane landed safely at Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris. David looked for a continuing flight to a random destination in order to prevent someone from tracking him, in case he was being followed.

He saw a sign of a company that offered daily flights and vacation packages for a week to the exotic destination Mauritius. He entered the small office and received information from the girl at the reception desk. After he reviewed the options, he purchased a package at an exclusive resort for \$1,800, which he paid in cash in order to avoid exposing information required when paying by credit card.

He tried to kill the remaining time until the flight in the coffee shop. He ordered coffee and a fresh croissant, like only the French know to make, but also know how to charge for- 6 Euros.

At 3:20 p.m. his flight was called. He sat in the window seat and thought: 'Where did I make a mistake in planning and carrying out the perfect crime? It was my creative, original plan, no one knows about it, except for Jeff and most importantly, no one was harmed by it and no one lost anything; therefore, there were no complaints...so where did I go wrong?'

Dinner was served and interrupted his thoughts. I was a meal in the French tradition: a salad with baby shrimps, chicken breast in Hunter's sauce, pasta with olive oil and basil, steamed vegetables, a small baguette, butter and good camembert cheese, red wine which helped digestion and for dessert, chocolate mousse with dried fruit

sprinkled on top and black coffee. The gourmet meal and mainly the wine dulled his senses and swept him into a deep sleep.

The pleasant voice of the French stewardess awakened him with the announcement about their impending arrival in the paradise of Mauritius. He put his face to the window and saw a green forest. He rubbed his eyes to be sure that this amazing vision was true. 'This is the serenity that I need,' he said to himself. The good looking captain stepped out of the lavatory and a question arose in David's mind: 'What is the difference between a pilot and a doctor? Why do we inquire and request information, opinions and recommendations about a doctor who is going to perform surgery on us and yet, when we are going to fly, we don't ask for recommendations or opinions about the pilot and his experience?' David supplied the answer to himself: 'The pilot is flying with us; if he makes a mistake, his life and our lives will both be endangered. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that a tired or unfocused pilot wouldn't fly the plane. On the contrary, a doctor isn't with us on the operating table and his life isn't in danger.'

Mauritius, Ramgoolam International Airport. After passing through passport control, David stopped a local taxi which took him to the exclusive "Indian Resort", located on the southwest coast of the island. He passed green expanses, fields of sugarcane and exotic beaches with fishing boats returning from endless fishing areas.

Two attractive reception clerks, wearing traditional saris, welcomed him with a colorful cocktail. One of them told him about the dining room hours and about the varied activities the hotel offers its guests. The other took care of all the registration details. He signed where requested and he followed the bellboy, who carried his bag and led him to the second floor to his room. The bellboy put the bag on the bed and the tip in his pocket and left the room.

David opened the door to the balcony, which looked out towards the sea. It was a spectacular and relaxing view. It was 82 degrees, very comfortable weather. He stood there awhile. Green manicured lawns bordered the beach. In the center there was a row of palm trees and coconut trees and flowerbeds with many kinds of colorful flowers. The birds' chirping could be heard, mixed with the sound of the waves crashing on the white sandy beach. Wooden sunshades and straw umbrellas were placed along the beach, under which were chaise lounges. A few women were lying on them in tiny bikinis, exposing their bodies to the burning sun. Several of them who were uninhibited, took off their tops to merge with nature. 'A perfect paradise! I guess

that in my previous life I was a righteous archbishop. God fulfilled his promise that in the next world I would get to paradise and here he did it...and how!

David quickly put on his bathing suit; he picked up his MP3 and went to the big swimming pool in the middle of the lively resort. He selected one of the white chaise lounges near the clear water. He spread out a towel and he stretched out with a sigh of pleasure. He put the earphones in his ears, pressed the start button and praised this technological wonder and the inventor of this small gadget that transformed the cavity of his skull into a sound chamber and allowed him to enjoy the experience as if he were in a concert hall with perfect acoustic conditions.

He smiled when the first song played. It was his personal anthem, "Delusions" by the singer Sarusi. The second song that played was, "Marry Me, My Love", a quiet and melodic song by the singer Regev, whose words always brought tears to Sandy's eyes. His girlfriend and his love Sandy. The geographical distance between them caused yearning to spread throughout his body. His head moved from side to side to the rhythm of the music. He didn't notice that people were watching him with a smile, impressed by his total abandonment to the sun and the music. They were especially impressed when he sang the words out loud, which expressed love and devotion. David was cut off from the world. He was immersed in the song, as if he were in a transparent bubble, floating above the earth. Some of the people who sat near him didn't understand English, but they were unanimous in the opinion that this attractive man was submersed in a sweet dream and was enjoying every minute. The quiet love songs that he had selected and burned on his MP3 made it clear to him how much he missed Sandy, especially at times like these, when he was lonely. Every song reinforced his longing for Sandy more and more so that all he wanted to do was to tell her how much he loved her.

The old song, "Longing" began to play:

"With a glass of beer.

Think of me dear.

Oceans so deep.

Uphill so steep.

Forget loves from the past.

I promise, you're my last.

*Wait for me still there.
I will protect, take care.*

*So much I've missed.
Yours lips, sensual kissed.
Your voice in my ears.
Eyes brimmed with tears."*

David sang the words passionately and tears began to fall from the corner of his eyes. The women around him became emotional at the sight of a masculine, handsome man singing a romantic song and crying. They decided to surprise him. They called over a pool attendant, who returned a few minutes later with a drink in a glass which was dark red at the bottom and had shades of orange and yellow at the top. A piece of pineapple and a small paper parasol were placed on the rim of the glass as decoration for the tropical fruit cocktail.

The girl didn't want to interrupt his song, so she waited until the end of the song, whose words drew more and more tears from his eyes. He wiped off the tears that had wet his cheeks. Then the girl whispered: "Excuse me, sir, these ladies ordered a drink for you." David opened his eyes, as if he had just awoken up from a sweet dream. He wiped his face again and felt embarrassed when all of the people around the pool, especially the women, clapped their hands. The women appreciated a lonely man, rapt in his love and shedding a tear.

He took the glass and nodded his head slightly in thanks. He sipped the exotic drink in enjoyment. One of the women was curious and she asked in French: "Why are you so sad?"

David answered in English: "I was listening to quiet love songs and I was thinking about my girlfriend. I miss her so much that I became emotional. I apologize if I disturbed anyone..."

They cut off his apology and they told him how exciting it was to see that men like him still exist and especially an American man. Lately, they had seen American men on the television news broadcasts; tough soldiers wearing uniforms and holding weapons.

The news about David spread like wildfire among the women. They all agreed that David was the ultimate man. They asked their husbands/boyfriends if they too would

cry for them. Some of them answered yes and were confronted with total disbelief. Others explained that David probably had not served in the army and therefore, was broken easily. David smiled at them and sipped his drink. He put on his earphones again and returned to his world of longing and to Sandy, who was presently far away from him. He felt how the music carried him on its wings. When he closed his eyes, he saw her skipping towards him on a long ladder made of musical notes, to the sounds of the romantic songs.

25. Games in Paradise

In order to pass the time pleasantly during his enforced stay on the exotic island of Mauritius, until the danger passed and a plan could be crystallized in the fight for his life and his family's life, David decided to partake in the various water activities offered at the resort.

He stood on the wooden pier in front of the resort with a pair of colorful water skis. The local instructor explained how to hold the tow bar connected by a long cable to a new speedboat. He told him how to rise to the surface of the water, bend his knees and stabilize while skiing. He gave David a few more tips that would help his performance. After a few failed attempts, David caught on and started to enjoy every moment. The skipper increased the boat's speed and David tried to perform maneuvers that he had seen once on a sports program on television. He was able to skid over the water and dive again and again into the blue water. After he had made the most of water skiing, he gave his leg and arm muscles a rest and tried parasailing a few times.

During a short break, David sipped a fruit cocktail. Then he asked to ride on a jet ski. The courteous instructor explained how to operate the water vehicle. He helped David to put on the lifejacket, as the law required and he sent him on his way. At first, David went slowly and cautiously in order to become familiar with the jet ski and its capabilities. Later, he opened up the throttle to the maximum and the vehicle flew over the water like an arrow and a high level of adrenalin rushed through David's bloodstream.

In the afternoon, he went to the gym, a place he was familiar with from the big city. After forty minutes on the treadmill, at different levels of difficulty, he tried spinning for thirty minutes which provided strenuous leg exercise that combined a workout for the heart, lungs and general endurance. Between the activities, he drank mineral water straight from the dispenser. The results of lifting weights and muscle building exercise were apparent on his body.

At the end of the day, which had been full of physical activity, he hurried to the shower. The chambermaid had strewn colorful rose petals around the sink in the bathroom. He filled the tub and the bubble bath emitted a pleasant fragrance. He relaxed for half an hour.

The menu in the dining room was purely Italian. A pair of musicians, who were dressed like Venetian gondoliers, played pleasant background music. The pizzas, the colorful pastas, the delicious soup and grilled filet mignon increased his appetite. He couldn't pass up the grilled lamb chops.

At the end of the meal, David was invited, along with the rest of the hotel guests, to visit the casino in the adjacent hotel. He was pleased with this special entertainment offer and he entered the luxurious bus with the other guests, which transported them to the casino. There he presented his passport and his personal details were fed into the computer. Since the computer didn't issue a warning that he was a crook or a professional gambler, David received an entrance ticket. The elegant hall impressed him.

At the beginning, he observed the activities in order to absorb the atmosphere. He stood next to an elderly lady who was feeding tens and hundreds of coins into a slot machine, known as "the one-armed bandit." Indeed, the machine robbed the woman of all her money. She swore at it and insulted it and left the casino penniless.

One of the hotel guests approached him and asked: "David, where do you recommend that I gamble?"

"You don't make recommendations in a casino. If you lose, you'll blame me." he answered evasively.

"No," she said and she begged him to help her realize her dream of winning in a casino. "Please, David, only one tip, as an employee of a company that makes games."

He gave in and asked her where she preferred to play, "next to a table or at a machine?"

"At a machine," she answered without hesitation.

"If that's the case, follow me." He led her to the machine where the elderly woman had lost all her money. He told her only to play this machine. He wished her luck and went over to the Roulette table.

When he saw that the number zero with a green background appeared twice on the wheel, he said to the hotel guest in the room next to his: "I would leave this table, because your chances of winning are slim."

"On the contrary, I just started winning," the man said excitedly as he put a pile of chips on the red and waited for the wheel to stop. The ball went around and skipped between the numbers until it landed on "0". They players groaned and swore about

their bad luck, but they continued to put their chips on different numbers. And again, they swore and played another round and thus the wheel went round and round. When one wins and eight cry, only the casino wins its share.

The casino was happy to supply soft drinks, alcoholic drinks, cigarettes and coffee to the gamblers to help them pass their time pleasantly, as long as they continued to gamble and lose happily.

David left the Roulette table and he stood next to the Black Jack table. 'In this game, the casino has the advantage over the player by only one-half of a percent, but if the gambler has a good memory and he can keep track of the cards, the advantage shifts to the gambler.' David thought to himself and decided to join the game. He waited for the end of the round and he took a seat at the table opposite the dealer. He bet ten Euros every time. Once he won and once he lost, but in the meantime, he quietly kept track of the cards that were dealt. He did this without anyone noticing so that the security guard wouldn't remove him from the casino. After a few rounds, where an unusual number of low cards had been dealt, he decided that it was time to make a big bet. He put down 200 Euros on two places, 100 each and he waited for the cards to be dealt. On one place, he got an ace and on the other a queen. When he saw that the dealer got the card 6, he knew that this was his chance to strike. The dealer dealt a second round to the players and David received two queens. The dealer announced "Black Jack" for one of David's places with a queen and ace and he laid 150 Euros in chips next to this place. In David's second place there were two queens.

David requested to split the two queens into two separate places and he received 8 in one and 3 in the other. He announced that he didn't want any more cards and he waited for the dealer's results as he dealt himself cards. The dealer's first card was a 10 and the second a king, which in addition to the first card of 6 brought him to a total of 26. That is to say, he went over the limit of 21 and he lost even to the hand that had 13. David won 350 Euros at the end of this round. In the next round, he again bet only 10 Euros.

"Bet big; this is your lucky night," suggested one of the players at the table.

"It is better to win small than to lose big," David answered with a smile.

He continued to bet patiently, until he left the game with 1,745 Euros. He passed by the slot machines. The woman who played the machine that he had recommended jumped on him, hugged and kissed him and shouted excitedly: "Don't ask, David. I won 1,500 Euros! It is my lucky night!" She said and continued to pull the handle of

the machine. David suggested quietly that she stop playing and take the money before it was swallowed up again by the machine. She didn't listen to him; she wanted only another 500 Euros, but when she had only 500 Euros left, she reluctantly went to the cashier to cash in her chips. The man who gambled at the Roulette table also lost all of his money.

On the way back to the hotel, David explained to the man the principles on which Roulette had been based upon for hundreds of years: "When you win, you get back 36 times the amount you bet. But since the Roulette wheel has 36 numbers plus one zero, that means 37 numbers. If we assume that you bet one Euro on every number on the table, then you have invested 37 Euros. Of course in this situation, you'll win, no matter which number the ball falls on, but you'll only win 36 Euros. That means, that every turn you'll lose one Euro and the casino will win one Euro. If you calculate the percentages, then 37 divided by 36 gives a result of 2.7%. In this casino, there are two zeros, which double the winning percentage of the casino. If you calculate that every spin of the Roulette wheel takes a minute and 1000 Euros are bet on each spin, then the casino earns 54 Euros a minute or 3,240 Euros an hour or 38,880 Euros in a 12 hour shift and all this is on a single table. Do the math yourself and you will understand that a casino is an excellent business for the owners and occasionally also for the gamblers."

On the way back to the hotel, he tried to explain the principles of the slot machines, but he knew very well that gambling is a kind of addiction, exactly like drugs and alcohol, which needs to be treated to kick the habit and explanations are not enough.

When he returned to his room tired from the day's strenuous physical activities and the late hour, David got undressed and placed his gambling earnings in the room safe. He also wanted to put his passport in the safe, but he discovered that it had disappeared. He reconstructed the events of the evening. He was sure that the guard at the casino had returned his passport. Suddenly he remembered; he had been pushed hard, as if by accident, by a local couple that stood next to him at the Roulette table. He understood that he had fallen victim to crooks. However, they hadn't been completely successful in their "work", since David kept his money in his front pocket. He was alarmed and he called the operator in order to get the casino's telephone number before they closed.

"Hello, sir. How may I help you?" asked the operator.

“I think that my passport was stolen at the casino. Can you connect me with the casino reception, please?”

“You are the third case this week that this has happened to.”

“What happened to those people?”

“The first filed a complaint with the police and had to turn to his embassy on the island to get a temporary passport issued in order to get home. The second was wiser. He paid 1,500 Euros at the front desk to someone who was able to locate and return the passport the next morning.”

“Thank you, I’ll be down in five minutes to give the money to the reception desk. It’s my winnings from gambling, so I am able to pay,” he told her.

“I will notify the clerk,” she said and hung up.

“I understand the gang’s method of operation,” he said to himself. He opened the safe and took out the money that exchanged hands without leaving a trace...

26. Mauritius

Despite the peace and calm, David felt that his enjoyment in this exotic paradise was not complete. His longing for Sandy increased. He missed her captivating smile, her passionate kisses, her soft touch and her perfect body. In order to distract himself, he kept himself busy with sport and water activities. At dawn, on the fourth day of his stay on the island, he stood on the wooden pier with four other amateur fishermen. They sailed towards the deep sea in a new white motor boat. Ragi, an experienced sailor and fisherman, explained how to use the five fishing rods, which were attached to the back of the boat. At the end of the fishing line was a “kuna”, an object in the shape of a fish which served as fish bait. There was a length of 300 feet of line. There were also tails attached to the kuna and a sharp hook stuck out in-between them. They went out 18 miles from the shore, where the water reaches a depth of 5,000 feet. Ragi spotted a flock of birds that was picking off small fish from a school of fish in the area.

The small fish attracted the big fish; the swordfish, tuna and shark were efficient hunting machines. They were fast and strong and were seeking a decent fish meal. They often made attacks on schools of small fish, but there they fell into Ragi’s trap. He placed his five decoys into the middle of the school of small fish. Once in awhile, a bell, tied to one of the rods, rang which announced a strong pull by a big fish. This was where David and his colleagues joined the action. Their job was to reel the fish in. This stage lasted about fifteen minutes, during which the fish turned wildly and tried to escape its fate; in most of the cases, it failed. Both sides of the line, the fish on one side and the fisherman on the other, ended up exhausted from their struggle. When the fish was pulled up to the side of the boat, Ragi stabbed him with a big hook that was connected to a long pole and brought it up to the stern deck to the cheers of the tourists. That was how David spent a few hours on the boat. The struggle between man and this hunting machine from the ocean’s depths was an exceptional and unforgettable experience. He could feel how remnants of hunting genes from prehistoric times were released from the depths of his soul.

In the afternoon, he went to the tennis center. He asked the local tennis instructor, who was watching a game between two German guests, to join him for a three set match. David shouted happily and gave himself encouragement every time he was successful in hitting the ball back to George’s side. The game was interesting and fast

paced, with powerful strokes. Each player had to put all of his strength and energy into the game in order not to be defeated.

David lost, but he received many compliments about his strong game and his excellent tennis skills. "At least I got a good hour's workout for my muscles," David said with a smile. He thanked the instructor and left.

After a refreshing shower, David went down to the dining room. Two pretty hostesses, immaculately made-up, greeted him. They were wearing traditional Chinese dresses that had gold threads sewn on the collars. One of them led him to a table for two in the non-smoking section. She pointed to his seat and removed the extra place setting. She lit the candle and said: "This evening we are serving Chinese cuisine. You will certainly find your favorite dish on our rich menu. The selection of dishes is being served at the buffet."

"Very impressive, Thank you," he answered her.

"Have a pleasant evening and Bon appetit," she said. She poured him red wine and mineral water and then returned to her station.

For a first course, David chose Dim sum, egg rolls and salads, from among an enormous selection, generously laid out. He enjoyed the exquisite taste of the food and the accompaniment of music from the Far East made the meal very pleasant. His wine glass didn't remain empty. The waiter, who maintained eye contact, came over frequently to refill his glass. He slowly ate the encrusted corn soup and he enjoyed the beautiful view from his table which looked out at the large winding pool. Underwater lights illuminated the clear water with a glowing radiance. The trunks of the palm trees were wound with clear rubber tubes through which ran thousands of colored lights that looked like colorful snakes twisting up the tree and were reflected on the clear water. This view, mixed with the sounds of birds twittering, gave him the feeling of being in the VIP section of Paradise.

David walked over to the main course section of the buffet. The chef served him stir-fried vegetables from a wok. She enquired: "How are you enjoying yourself on the island? Are you having a good time?"

"I would also like to see how the local people live, not only tourist attractions," he answered.

"If that's the case...I'm, off tomorrow. You can come to the fishing village where I live and get a first-hand impression," she said.

"How do I get there?"

“Tomorrow at ten in the morning, a blue taxi will wait for you at the hotel gate. The driver is my son, San Jai. He will bring you to the village.”

David thanked her and promised to be ready on time. He sat down at his table with the vegetables and grilled fillet of fish. He had pineapple slices, coconut cubes, strips of mango, lychee balls, melon slices and juicy watermelon for dessert, all tropical fruit which grew plentifully on the island. Even though he loved pastries, he was content with just a few bites.

In the lobby, he sat next to a small table near the stage illuminated by colored lights. A local band was playing songs and melodies in a variety of styles. A waiter, dressed in white, served him a long espresso with a piece of bittersweet chocolate and a glass of soda water with a lemon wedge. David sipped his coffee and enjoyed a dance show. At first, six pretty, shapely girls wearing traditional kimonos went up on the stage. They held red fans and they danced a graceful and beautiful dance to the sounds of Japanese music. They received an enthusiastic round of applause. Following them, six young men, wearing only leopard skin loincloths and holding spears went up on the stage. Their faces were smeared with war paint, like warriors from an African tribe. They danced and jumped to African drums. They also received enthusiastic applause.

After the show, the dance floor filled up as guests danced to the music of the local band. One of the ladies, who was of large proportions, assertive and very energetic, dragged her scrawny husband to the dance floor and started to move him and swing him around, like he was a chicken being led to the slaughter. The embarrassed man smiled a feebly every time he caught someone looking at him and his wife.

At this point, David retired to his room. His tiredness overcame him and he fell asleep with no difficulty, but not before he thought about his distant lover.

In the morning, David pampered himself by staying in bed until 8:30. He showered, shaved and went down to the dining room. At ten, he went out to the entrance gate. The blue taxi was waiting for him. He introduced himself to the driver and they headed off for the small fishing village which was located five miles south of the resort. On the way, San Jai told him about the small island in the Indian Ocean, next to Madagascar to the west. He told David about the people’s source of income from fishing and tourism. When they arrived at the entrance of the village, he parked the taxi next to a dilapidated shack that was made of rusty, tin siding. His mother, the chef at the resort, received him warmly and introduced him to the rest of her family:

her husband George, who held out his suntanned arm that had been wrinkled by the burning sun, welcomed him, the young daughter, Lakasmi and the eldest daughter, Sunita. He could not pull his eyes away from Sunita's beauty. She was twenty five years old, single and beautiful with large, almond shaped, light colored eyes, which stood out in contrast to her brown skin. Her face shone when she saw this handsome man who appeared in their home. She wanted to do everything she could to make his visit pleasant. At the end of the introductions, David drank coconut milk from a fresh coconut that had just been picked from a tree in the yard and opened especially for him. He also tasted the small cookies, which had recently been baked.

"Why don't you build a sturdier house?" David asked the father.

A look of disappointment fell on the family members' faces.

"Last year, a strong typhoon hit the southern portion of the island and it destroyed everything in its path. At the last moment, we were able to take refuge in a public shelter, but after two days, when we returned...there was no place to come back to. The storm destroyed everything we had. Since we don't have the possibility of obtaining the required money to buy land and build a solid house made of cement, we make due with what we have and we pray to our good Lord," the father explained and led David out to the yard. There he showed David and explained to him how they dry and preserve the fish which they aren't able to sell, as security for difficult times.

The family's sad story touched David. He asked to see the surrounding area in order to get an impression of the place and its residents. The mother, who had noticed the spark in Sunita's eyes asked her to accompany the guest and to return in time for lunch which she was hard at work preparing.

They went out to the deserted street, the only street in the village. At the edge of the village they came to a shabby bar. There was a big fan hanging from the faded ceiling which barely moved around. It wasn't even able to chase away the many flies that buzzed around the dark room. Two old fishermen who had sun-spotted, burned dark faces sat in the corner playing backgammon. They greeted her kindly and spoke to her in the local language of Creole. She answered them and she told David that they complimented him. He smiled at them in a sign of thanks. The owner poured them a glass of "rum" made locally. They sipped the drink and nibbled on dried, salted fish in order to relieve the burning in their throats. From there, Sunita led him to the beach.

She knew the place well from her childhood. She turned towards a small ravine and passed through it to a beautiful cove that looked like it had been taken from a

commercial for an exotic, enchanting vacation. It was hidden on both sides by palm trees. A strip of white sand, soft and clean, ran a length of fifty feet next to aquamarine, clear water. It had the classic look of paradise.

She sat down on the soft sand and she challenged David to a swimming competition of 600 feet. When she sensed his hesitation, she promised to give him anything he asked for if he won, or the opposite if she won. David was up for the challenge, but he refused on the grounds that he didn't have a bathing suit. In reaction to this, she stood up, took off her dress and ran to the water with only thong underwear on. He was shocked and excited by the enticing vision he had just seen, her gorgeous body, her long shapely legs. He looked at her small buttocks, round and firm. She had an athletic back and he could see the bulge of her perfect breasts protruding at her sides. She jumped into the pleasant water and her head appeared after a few seconds. Her smile was captivating as she invited him to join her in the water. David was embarrassed, but as a proud male, he didn't want to create the impression that American men were wimps. So, he took off his shirt, his shoes and his pants. Wearing only his scant underwear that covered his genitals, he ran quickly and jumped into the water like a dolphin. When he reached her, he could see her perfect figure through the clear water. He was worried that he would get an erection with such an erotic view and so he immediately suggested that they begin the competition.

"I will count until three and then we'll begin. We'll swim up to that black rock, touch it and return to the beach and our clothes," he said.

"OK, I'm ready," she replied.

"One, two and ...three!" David called.

They shot out like two arrows swimming fast towards the black rock that protruded above the water. To his surprise, Sunita was a faster swimmer than he was. She touched the rock with her hand and immediately turned and swam back with the skilled strokes of a professional swimmer. All of David's efforts to overtake her were in vain. When he reached the point that he realized that he couldn't catch up to her, he stopped swimming quickly and progressed with a moderate breast stroke in order to catch his breath. He didn't take his eyes off her fantastic tanned and firm body that revealed itself part by part as she got out of the water.

She dropped down on the white sand and spread out her arms to the side. She closed her eyes and called to him to join her. She behaved very naturally, which reassured

him. He lay next to her and didn't pass up the opportunity to look at her perfect body. He said: "I didn't know that you were so talented, but I accept my defeat gracefully."

"Don't forget, David, the sea is my home territory."

"I will take that into account next time. What's the price I have to pay for losing?"

"You're the price...I want you, David." She rolled over towards him. She moved her face close to his and added: "Despite the short time we have been together, I feel that I am in love with you. This has never happened to me before, but all that I wish for right now is you. I know that I may never see you again. Maybe my request sounds outrageous, but I am a direct and sincere person and if I seem impudent, I apologize."

David was surprised by her request, but was flattered. She began to stroke his face gently. Even though they were almost naked and intercourse would have completed the scene, he was determined to remain faithful to Sandy. He stroked her face gently and rejected her tempting offer. He said: "Sunita, you are an amazing and beautiful woman. Any man on earth would desire you, but I am in love with my girlfriend Sandy. I don't want to hurt her or break the trust between us. It also took me a long time to find what I wanted and I am convinced that you will find someone better than me."

The spark in her eyes went out. Sunita lowered her eyes and returned to her previous position. An oppressive silence settled on the beautiful scene. She got dressed and he quickly did likewise. She turned her gaze towards the sea. Tears fell from her beautiful eyes and her crying broke the silence. David understood what was happening. He hugged her from behind with both arms and whispered in her ear: "I will remember this picture my whole life, Sunita and I will make sure that you will as well." She didn't answer. They returned to her house without exchanging a word the whole way. When they arrived, her mother asked in Creole: "What happened, my child? Why do you look so sad?"

"I am in love with a man who loves another...that's a good enough reason to be disappointed," she said and she went into the kitchen to bring the pot with the spicy fish soup that her mother had made with much love. The family sat around the table and heartily ate the delicious pieces of fish that had been caught just last night. David asked the father about the price of private land and how to purchase it.

"Very expensive, about 30,000 Euros for a lot the size of 3,000 square feet on the beach," answered the father.

“In other places, like the States or in Europe, the price is seventy time more for a less attractive location,” answered David and he asked Sunita to accompany him to the bank in the capital city of Port Louis.

She declined citing “previous commitments”. He didn’t believe her, but he understood her feelings. Her brother, San Jai volunteered to help him. He parted from the family with thanks for the warm hospitality. He promised to return one day and he left with San Jai.

They drove on the left side of the street, a remnant from British Colonial times. The British had ruled the island up until 1968 when independence was declared. The traffic flowed up until the outskirts of the city. In the afternoon, traffic was heavy, especially in the center of the city. They passed street vendors, where many tourists gathered during this time of year.

When they entered the manager’s office at the bank, David requested to transfer 60,000 Euros from his bank account in New York. He asked that 30,000 Euros be paid to the government of Mauritius for purchase of land, 25,000 Euros to a construction company that the bank manager recommended which had an account at the bank. He asked for the remaining 5,000 Euros in cash. The manager explained that he would have to pay a high commission fee due to the fact that he didn’t have an account at the bank.

David agreed and he picked up the telephone receiver. He dialed to Roger at his bank branch. He asked him to immediately transfer the required sum. Roger was surprised and asked: “What happened, David. Were you kidnapped? Do you need ransom money for your release?”

David laughed and explained: “I am buying property on the beach on the island, to build a house and furnish it. Sixty thousand Euros is a bargain!” he said.

Roger executed the transfer from the computer on his desk and sent David the Swift number in London, through which the transfer would be made. At the same time, he sent the transfer form by fax. The bank manager called London and requested confirmation of the transaction and they also faxed confirmation of the bank transfer. The manager of the construction company was urgently summoned to the bank. The contract for building the house was signed in the bank manager’s presence. The house was to be two floors, 300 square feet on each floor, with a wall on the perimeter of the lot. The money would be deposited up-front in the company’s account.

From there, he and San Jai went to the Bureau of Land Registry nearby and filled out the necessary forms in order to receive the permits. The clerk verified the transfer of the money with the bank manager. He told them that an official would come tomorrow to mark the boundaries of the lot he had purchased. David requested that the property be listed on Sunita's name.

Armed with the purchase documents and mainly the building plans and registration papers from the government office, they returned to the rusty tin shack.

San Jai enthusiastically called Sunita loudly. The family emerged from the house and said that she wasn't there. They understood from their son's excitement that something big had happened, but they didn't suspect for a moment what it was about.

San Jai told the family what David had done. He showed them the papers as proof. They hugged and kissed David, but what he really wanted was a hug from Sunita. She had gone to the beautiful cove to be alone. He thanked them again for hosting him warmly and his face radiated from happiness about the good deed he had done for them.

David approached the mother and handed her an envelope with fifty 100 Euro bills and said: "This is for buying furniture and other items that you might need during construction." The family almost burst with happiness from the miracle that was happening to them. They thanked him again and again, until he had to break away forcefully and get into the taxi. San Jai returned him to the resort and took his leave with a hug and a warm handshake.

In the evening, David packed his bag in preparation for his trip home tomorrow morning. He lay down on the wide bed, put the earphones on and turned on the MP3. He closed his eyes fell asleep to the song, "The Green Grass of Home" by Tom Jones. In the morning, he had time to grab a light breakfast before he checked out at reception. The ride to the airport took forty-five minutes. David sat next to the window and looked at the green sugarcane fields next to the blue sea and the green coconut trees on the white sand.

When he reached the airport, he took his bag from the luggage compartment and headed for the departure terminal. Suddenly, he saw beautiful Sunita standing on the sidewalk. She was standing alone with a small bouquet of flowers in one hand and a colorful conch shell in the other. He was so surprised, but happy to see her. He walked over to her. She smiled and cried at the same time. Tears streamed from her

eyes uninhibitedly. David was emotional. He wiped her tears with both of his hands and he kissed her wet cheeks.

Sunita handed him the flowers and said: “These are in thanks for everything you did for me,” she said and wiped away another tear. “I took this shell from the cove...our cove...as a memento, so you won’t forget me.” she said and put it in his hand, which trembled with emotion.

David couldn’t find words to answer her as he was swirling in a storm of emotions she had caused him. He dug in his mind and heart and finally said: “Save a room for me. Maybe I’ll return one day...”

“I’ll keep room for you in my heart, David. I will wait for you until the day I die...”

Her tears broke off her words. They stood hugging and crying until the announcement for his flight could be heard over the loudspeaker. They released each other. David quickly walked over to the immigration counter for a quick passport check and from there he walked to the boarding gate.

Sunita followed him with her eyes the whole way until he was swallowed up by the big airplane and it slowly left the gate towards the runway. The moment that the wheels left the runway, a big tear left Sunita’s beautiful eyelashes. She watched the airplane recede until it was a small dot that merged with the horizon, there, at the end of the world.

27. Counter Attack

The heavy airplane circled around the airport and headed west. On the way, it flew over the small, quaint fishing village. From a bird's-eye-view, the cove where he had swum with beautiful Sunita, looked like the set from the movie, "The Blue Lagoon," with fantastic, breathtaking vistas. With a smile on his face, David asked himself: 'Did I just leave the gates of paradise? Would I want to live here for the rest of my life? It's a beautiful place, but no matter how beautiful, it can't bring happiness; it could only be a backdrop for the real thing.' Real happiness, the only time that he had experienced it on the island was when he gave renewed hope to kind and penniless people. That was the most touching moment during his visit in paradise. He was sorry that Sandy wasn't able to be with him to share the feelings, the flavors, the sights and sounds that he experienced and he promised to himself that from now on, he would take her wherever he went in the world. He felt her absence and with these longings in his heart and with her image rising before his eyes, he fell asleep in his seat.

When he landed at the airport in Paris, he called his friend Bobby and asked how things were developing there.

"Everything is fine. We have prepared a comprehensive plan of action. I'll tell you when you get here."

"I'm tired of running away. I'm returning this evening at 7:15 on American Airlines, flight 733 from Paris."

"OK, I'll wait for you at the airport," he said and hung up.

The flight to New York was exhausting. After a full day of airports and connecting flights, all that he wanted to do was to land and find a solution to the problem that was threatening his life and his loved ones. Bobby was waiting for him in the terminal. Since he was a police officer, he was allowed to enter the arrival terminal. He greeted David with a strong handshake. They gave each other a hug and slap on the back, as was the custom of Navy Seal graduates.

David picked up his bags and they sped off in an unmarked police car with civilian plates. They were on their way to meet five close friends who had served with David in his reserve unit. He was surprised to see them. They demonstrated true friendship, especially in a time of need.

Bobby analyzed the events and drew the conclusion that Tony was a clever man and that his father, Luciano, was his Achilles' heel. He theorized that if Tony understood that he was liable to lose his money or his life, he would back down from his plans.

"We will create a situation where he will realize that he is up against an opponent who is stronger than him and he will reconsider his intentions."

David nodded in agreement and asked: "Does Tony assume that the police are weak adversaries?"

"The police have a few weak spots. One of them is that the police have to operate within the law and therefore, he isn't afraid of them. That's also the reason why I recommend that you not involve the police. Rather, you should operate independently and play by the criminal's rules. Tony respects those rules."

They all agreed with Bobby. He continued to lay out his plan before them.

"We will all arrive at the emergency warehouse at the base in Up State New York in two days in the morning. We'll tell them that we are going out on an exploratory patrol to get ready for our reserve duty next month. We will sign out assault rifles for two days. When the sergeant sees that we are all together with our company commander, he won't have any doubts and he will give his permission. In the worst case, we can call the regiment commander, who will undoubtedly praise our serious attitude towards our reserve duty. After we are armed, David, Felix and Michael will go to Luciano's house in the Bronx. David will stay outside to be a look-out. Michael and Felix will enter the apartment and inform Luciano that he is a hostage until his son, Tony, will cancel his plans to harm and rob others. Only act after you receive a signal on your cell phones. After the father speaks with his son, you will get confirmation to fold up. Most importantly, don't forget to charge your cell phones! Those of us who aren't going to the Bronx will wait for Tony in his parking garage. First, we will surprise his bodyguards, because the moment they observe that a sniper has them in his sights and will put a hole in their heads, like a pin puncturing a balloon and that they will meet their Maker before they can manage to reach the safety-catch, they won't open fire. When Tony goes out of his apartment towards the barrel of a gun aimed at him, he'll know how to make the right decision. We'll pull the "trump card", Luciano, when it's necessary."

The plan seemed perfect. The amount of weapons and ammunition was meant more as a deterrent than for actual use. They performed "events and responses" exercises in order to prepare solutions for any future, unexpected developments; likewise, modus

operandi and rescue operations. They were determined to help David, their charismatic commander, because they knew he would do exactly the same for them. Each one left to go about his business.

On the set morning, they all reported to their unit's emergency warehouse. The staff member, who was responsible for the weapons and had served with them and knew them well, didn't suspect that the company commander, his deputy and the rest of the soldiers would take weapons for any other purpose. They checked their weapons and prepared them for the operation. They synchronized their watches in the parking lot; they confirmed that their cell phones were open and charged and then the group set off for the mission.

Based on their surveillance over the past few days, they knew Tony's and his father's schedule. One hour remained until Tony's two additional bodyguards would arrive to join the guard who always stood outside Tony's front door. Tony hadn't learned his lesson. He hadn't placed a guard next to his car; he only complained to the building management how easy it was to penetrate the garage and get to the residents' expensive vehicles.

James put a sealed carton in front of the building. He went over to the elderly security guard, who stood in the lobby, and asked him to come and check the suspicious carton. The guard went out and left the front door open. During this time, David's friends entered the building without being noticed. The rifles were hidden in a white tennis bag with a tennis racket and towel protruding. Shawn opened the emergency exit door for James. Bobby was wearing tennis clothes and had a white towel hanging around his neck. He went up the elevator to the 7th Floor, where Tony's apartment was located. He pretended to be a visitor who got off at the wrong floor. He got back in the elevator and went up to the next floor. There he stood and waited for his friends' signal. James' telephone vibrated. He received the message that Tony's two bodyguards were entering the building. When they entered the lobby, they asked the security guard if everything was in order, which he answered affirmatively. They went up to the 7th Floor. The bodyguard in front of Tony's apartment drew his gun when he heard the elevator stopping. They identified themselves even before the elevator doors opened. This was one of the safety measures they took. After he identified them, they exited the elevator and the bodyguard knocked on the door in a pre-arranged manner.

"Who's there?" Tony asked and waited for the agreed upon response.

“Napoleon,” answered the senior bodyguard and the sound of the locks opening reverberated in the corridor.

Tony opened the door and rebuked the bodyguards for being late. He locked the front door behind him and signaled the guard to call the elevator. The elevator doors opened. Bobby was leaning on the back wall with his foot on his tennis bag. The bodyguard signaled him to continue on his way, but Tony was impatient and he ordered everyone to get into the elevator and join the harmless athlete, who certainly wasn't armed.

They stopped at the garage level. First, the two bodyguards stepped out of the elevator. They came face to face with two men whose heads were covered by dark stockings; only two pairs of threatening eyes were visible. The masked men aimed their short assault rifles at them. Bobby bent over and took a heavy pistol from his bag and put it against Tony's head. Tony was in shock. Before the third bodyguard could move, two additional snipers jumped up and took aim from a distance of 30 feet directly at Tony's skull.

The bodyguards understood that they had fallen into a trap. They were ordered to throw down their weapons, which they did very carefully. They were careful not to make any sudden movements which might be interpreted as an attempt to attack, in order to avoid heavy fire in their direction. Tony came to his senses first. He understood that it was not their intention to kill him; otherwise they would have already easily done so. He asked Bobby: “Who are you? What do you want?”

“Walk towards your car! You'll open your mouth when I tell you!” Bobby barked at him and pushed the barrel of the pistol deep between his ribs. The bodyguards' hands were handcuffed behind their backs with plastic handcuffs and they were also taken towards Tony's car, which stood in an isolated section of the parking garage. The bodyguards were forced to lie face down on the cold cement floor and their legs were also cuffed.

David and his friends received the report on completion of phase one of their plan. Phase two began.

Shawn, Bobby and James put Tony into the luxurious car and ordered him to open his mouth. He complied without resistance. They tipped his head back and put the barrel of the cold pistol into his mouth. “Pay close attention,” said Bobby quietly, but with the determination of a real professional. “You made a mistake when you chose your target to rob. David is our company commander in the commandos. He won the

lottery; he paid fifty percent to the IRS, as required by law, and he has no intention of giving up the remaining money. If one hair on his head is harmed, you will be buried in the depths of the sea with a full military ceremony by the entire company! Tony, I know you well and I'll give you wise advice for free. Give up all of the business you deal with and enjoy the money you have accumulated without doing jail time. Everyday that passes brings you closer to sitting many years in prison and regretting that you didn't follow my advice!"

"I'm not afraid of dying," Tony said and took the sting out of the threat on his life.

"In that case, your father, Luciano will pay the price," Bobby hissed between his teeth.

A shiver passed through Tony's body when he heard his father's name mentioned.

"My father has nothing to do with this!"

"He has been kidnapped and is being held hostage at a secret location."

"I don't believe you!"

"Here, talk to him..." said Bobby and he dialed Michael, who had told Luciano about his son's attempt to blackmail their friend because of his wealth. He had won Luciano's sympathy. He cursed his son and requested to speak with him.

"Tony, what are you doing to me? They could kill me if they wanted to. You're nothing but a dirty criminal. You have no honor and I don't want to hear from you again!" he said and returned the phone to David and burst out crying.

Tony felt as if an infected abscess had burst on his face. He froze in his place after he heard his father crying. This was the turning point. He gave in and decided to retreat at this stage.

Within a minute, the friends were in the unmarked police car. On the way, they removed the stocking masks and hid the weapons in the tennis bag. They drove to the meeting point next to the entrance gate at the base. David and his two friends also arrived. They hugged and shook hands according to the tradition at the end of every military mission. One of them went into the base and disposed of the weapons.

David invited his friends to celebrate the mission's success at an expensive seafood restaurant in the city. He preferred to spend money on them rather than to pay a filthy criminal. He parted from them with a strong hug and each one of his fighters went on his way.

David called his mother, who was still with Sandy at a Bed and Breakfast in Up State New York.

“Your enforced vacation has come to an end,” he announced and he told them about the successful operation. Despite the generous hospitality and the royal treatment, they were both happy to get back to their regular routine.

David paid for their stay with his credit card and they made their way back to New York.

David went to his apartment and released the security guard from his post. He unpacked his bag from the trip and went into the bathroom. After a refreshing shower and a clean shave, he sprayed on men’s cologne that had an intoxicating smell on his face and neck. He lay down on the sofa in the living room and waited for Sandy, his love, who would come straight into his arms at any moment.

28. Generous Hospitality

Rain didn't stop falling all night. It increased particularly in the early hours of the morning, or more precisely, late at night. A strong wind blew forcefully and scattered yellow leaves and branches on the street. A homeless man lay on a bench at a bus stop, wrapped up in cardboard, which he used as a blanket to ward off the biting cold. He opened one eye when he heard someone calling him and tapping on his shoulder.

"Get up, sir. Come with me...I have a warm bed to offer you..."

"Go away, you drunk. Let me sleep in peace," he said. Suddenly he opened both eyes, lifted his head from his pillow of newspapers that he had arranged to cushion his head and he looked again at the handsome stranger and his fancy car.

"What do you want? Where do you want to take me?"

"To a hotel."

"I don't have money for a hotel; don't you get that?"

"You don't have to pay a penny. You will get your own room and there are also free hot drinks."

"Are you kidding? Let me sleep. It's not nice to abuse old people," he said and put his head down again on the pile of newspapers.

"Sir, I'm not kidding. Come, get in the car. We'll be at the hotel in five minutes..."

The homeless man sat up on the bench, removed the cardboard and looked into David's eyes, which seemed kind and well-meaning.

"OK, what do I have to lose?" he said and took his bag of rags. When he entered the car, he looked around as if he were hallucinating or dreaming. He rubbed his eyes. The many colored lights and climate control system in the car that blew warm air led him to believe that he had been picked up by aliens in some kind of spaceship.

David poured him some hot tea. His body started to thaw and his heart started to beat hard from emotion. He looked again at the angel who had been sent to him and asked:

"Why are you doing this?"

"I promised...and you have to keep your promises."

"Who did you promise?"

"To myself."

The homeless man was impressed by the young, successful man and he looked at him in appreciation.

David stopped in front of a renovated and well-maintained building. There were five rooms on each of the two stories. There was a lighted sign in front: “Sander House”, named in honor of his father who had died three years ago from a terrible disease.

David decided to perpetuate his father’s memory by deeds that would benefit society in general and the weak in particular. He met with the attorney, Morris Shepard and he gave him the new winning lottery form and said: “An anonymous person requested that I give you this form in order to fulfill his wish. He wants to donate the prize money to the poor. You can redeem the form in the name of the foundation that will have the name, Sander. You are supposed to manage the foundation, for a salary of course. You should purchase the building on 67 Lincoln Street in Brooklyn, renovate it and entrust its management, as a salaried position, to one or two of the former homeless residents who are capable of running it. The building is supposed to provide a warm home for homeless people, who are living in the streets.”

The attorney took upon himself the task of carrying out this humanitarian project. A few weeks later, the important memorial to his father was realized and ten people gained shelter and a supportive, friendly environment.

Once in awhile, David popped in to be sure that everything was being managed to his satisfaction and each time he felt gratification.

The homeless man followed David into the small reception area. An elderly man greeted them. He had fallen asleep in front of the TV and he woke up when he heard them enter.

He got up from his chair and said to David: “Hello, my young friend. I see that you have brought a new resident...?”

“Yes, I hope that there is a free room.”

“Come, sir, my name is Dan...” he shook his hand warmly and added, “Here, take sheets and a towel. Go to room number four, ahead on the left.”

The homeless man took his bag of rags and muttered on the way to his room: “I thought that stories like these only happen in fairy tales.”

David accompanied him to his room and checked if there was hot water. He put three one-hundred dollar bills on the bed and said: “Buy some new shoes and clothes.”

The fact that a little of the money that was “stolen” from the people by the Lottery Company, was being returned to the weak and needy, filled David with great satisfaction.

He also felt longing for Sandy, his love. Sometimes, this craving drove him crazy and caused him to drive recklessly in order to reach the arms of his beloved quickly.

One evening, at the end of another boring day at work, David was driving down a wide boulevard. He wove in and out of traffic at a high speed. He suddenly heard a siren and a loud voice command over a loudspeaker: “Yellow Hummer, pull over!”

There was a police car behind him, flashing red lights skipped across the car’s roof and its headlights were blinking to indicate to David that he was signaling to him.

David was surprised and he slowed down considerably. He looked at the digital speedometer. ‘This time I really over-did it!’ He was angry with himself and an expletive escaped his lips. He stopped in the bus zone, turned off the car and waited anxiously for the cop to come.

He could see in his large side-mirror, an elderly man in a police uniform walking towards him with determined strides. He was astonished when he recognized the policeman as the homeless man that he had picked up only a few days ago from a bus stop bench and had taken to Sander House. In contrast to the image engraved in his memory, he now saw in front of him a well-groomed person who had a haircut, was shaven and was wearing a uniform, which gave him an air of authority. David didn’t care about the huge fine that he would probably get, rather the demerit points that accumulated against him. Instead of enjoying being in the embrace of his love, the beautiful Sandy, he would be forced to take a preventative driving course, which meant, from his perspective, a waste of precious time in the evening. He would have the “pleasure” of sitting long and boring hours in a classroom in the company of other traffic violators like him. David felt relieved that this was the homeless man. He opened the window and tried his luck: “Hello, my friend. Do you remember me? A week ago...Sander House...?”

“Hello, David,” the policeman answered and added dryly: “Give me your driver’s license and the car registration papers, please.”

David understood that his attempt to get out of the ticket failed and he decided to switch to a strategy of feigning innocence.

“What did I do? Why did you stop me?”

“You were driving 50 mph in a 30 mph zone. That means that you were going 20mph over the speed limit.”

“Yes...I am in a hurry to get home, to see my girlfriend Sandy, who is waiting for me.”

“Wait in your car and let me do my job,” the policeman said and returned to his patrol car.

David closed the window and looked in the mirror. The policeman looked at the data in his computer. The prolonged time that he took filling out the ticket worried David. ‘I can’t believe that he is going to give me a ticket. How will he be able to look me in the eyes when I come to visit at Sander House?’ he thought to himself.

A light tap on the window interrupted his thoughts. The policeman was holding the papers and with a serious expression signaled him to open the window. David pressed the button on the side of the door and the window slowly slid down. The policeman’s grave expression wasn’t a good sign. He put the papers in David’s hands, including a folded piece of paper. Without saying a word, he walked back to his vehicle.

The cold air which entered the car, in combination with the coldness of the homeless man, who apparently was ungrateful, kept David frozen in his seat. David continued to watch the coldhearted steps of the man and when he got into his car, David closed the window and opened the folded piece of paper. He read the words written there:

“David, my young friend,

A year has passed since the tragic event, which as a result of I lost all of my possessions, as well as the will to live. Since then, I have gathered new strength and I volunteer as a traffic policeman, a kind of activity for the benefit of the public, like you do.

Today, exactly one year ago, a young driver was in a hurry to see his girlfriend. His thoughts about her distracted him from the safety rules, caution and from the law. His foot was heavy on the gas pedal and he wasn’t able to brake in time before he ran over my daughter and killed her. His punishment was a small fine and three months imprisonment. Now he is free to hug his girlfriend. I only had one daughter and I have to wait until I get to heaven to hug her again. I have tried to forgive that driver a hundred times and a hundred times I have tried to forgive other drivers like him and even now, you. So, forgive me, David, drive slowly. I have only one son left and I am very fearful for him.”

A shiver ran down David’s spine. He moved his eyes from the page and he felt embarrassed as he looked out of the window. He wanted to make a gesture that he got the point and that he understood that the policeman wanted to help him, but he just managed to get a glimpse of the police car driving off down the street. He watched it until it disappeared.

He stayed frozen on the spot for awhile and he couldn't stop thinking about what had happened. When he recovered, he started the car and drove slowly and carefully towards home, even though he saw Sandy in his mind, smiling and happy to see him. Sandy didn't understand why David was so agitated and emotional when he took her in his arms. She felt dampness on her shoulder from the tears that flooded his eyes.

29. Operation “End of the Road”

“Dom Perignon is my favorite champagne. Please send a bottle up to my suite and add something to snack on,” Tony requested from Room Service. He was on the 25th Floor of the Sheraton Hotel in Manhattan. Tony was entertaining himself in the elegant suite with two sexy, nineteen year olds, who were smuggled out of Brazil to work in his escort service.

The three arrived at the hotel in the late morning and they amused themselves in the jacuzzi, in bed and on the soft carpet. He felt like a Saudi prince who was seeking to empty his pockets that were bursting with cash. He mainly wanted to compensate himself for his difficult childhood in an impoverished neighborhood where he had grown up. He sat in the jacuzzi, sipping expensive champagne from the Champagne region in France. The girls pampered him with a selection of delicacies and fresh pastries, the product of a professional pastry chef. He returned the pampering and poured a little champagne on the jacuzzi bubble, which caused the naked girls to giggle with delight.

At two o’clock, they heard a knock at the door. One of the girls got out of the jacuzzi, wrapped herself in a towel and asked: “Who’s there?”

“Room Service, the manager is sending chocolate and a basket of fruit to the VIP guest..” answered the voice on the other side of the door.

She opened the door and suddenly six policemen burst into the room, some dressed in civilian clothes. They had their weapons drawn.

“Help!” the girl screamed and she was immediately silenced by a slap in the face from “The Hunter”. She started to shake and cry, stunned by the intrusion.

The policemen ran into the bathroom. Tony sat naked in the hot water, with the second girl next to him. She was petrified and shook like a leaf. Tony froze in the presence of the pistol aimed between his eyes.

“Get up, Tony. Get dressed. The party’s over. You’ve reached the end of the road!” said Bill Carter, the head of the Detective Division in the NYPD. He had planned this moment for a long time. He couldn’t have captured the criminal in a better manner, without resistance and without violence, which might have ended in property damage or personal injury.

“Envy is driving you insane! Anyway, my lawyer will get me released today. You don’t have any evidence against me; so the judge will rule to free me immediately!”

said Tony, who got out of the water and dried off in front of the policemen's watchful eyes.

They carefully searched Tony's clothes and the empty drawers and closets. On the bed stand, there were three doses of pure crystal cocaine of high quality.

One of the policemen photographed the drugs and with rubber gloves, he put it into a plastic bag labeled with the date and place where the incriminating material was found. The girls were also told to get dressed, although the policemen enjoyed looking at their perfect bodies. They feared that they would conceal the incriminating evidence in concealed places in their bodies.

Tony began to understand the graveness of the situation and he warned the girls: "Don't say a word, understand?"

"You just committed another felony, Tony- an attempt to disrupt legal proceedings, which carries a sentence of one year in prison," said Chief Carter.

"I didn't mean it that way," said Tony in an attempt to backtrack.

"Too late, Tony, you're only digging your grave deeper. Every word and every movement is being filmed and documented," he said and he ordered to shackle Tony's hands and feet.

Two strong policemen escorted him to the elevator. Two curious maids and the hotel head of security that were in the corridor watched them. Tony looked back and scanned the corridor.

"Don't bother looking, Tony. Your bodyguards are already in the interrogation room at the station. According to what I've heard, they are singing like canaries, without any need to pressure them. They just want to avoid a prolonged imprisonment. They won't sit in a stinking jail for you, not even one day. You aren't worth it!"

Outside the hotel, dozens of crime reporters and photographers swooped down on Tony. Among them was Richard Bell, the renowned crime reporter from the New York Times. He and his colleagues peppered Tony with questions, but he chose not to answer. Camera flashes documented his most humiliating moment of his life. He knew very well that even his expensive lawyer couldn't prevent publicity about his arrest, which would likely be broadcast on all of the television channels.

Additionally, the embarrassing photos would be splashed across all of the pages of the newspapers tomorrow. He wouldn't be able to stop it. He thought: 'I really have reached the end of the road.'

The camera flashes didn't cease, even when he was put in the backseat of the police car. He was guarded by two policemen, just in case he tried to do something stupid.

The photographers pursued the police car and were able to photograph him during the ride as well. The journalists and newspaper editors received messages on their pagers about the press conference at 6:00 p.m. at Police Headquarters. The subject was the arrest of the head of organized crime in the city and the police force's fight against organized crime.

Most of the FBI's investigation teams and investigators in the money laundering prevention units had been mobilized in the operation called: "End of the Road." The operation began six months ago on a few fronts simultaneously. They collected information, data and incriminating evidence which reached its peak with the big arrest. Chief Bill Carter oversaw all the stages of the operation, which was carried out in large part by "The Hunter". Chief Carter of course carried out the arrest and at the same time, investigators from the money laundering prevention units entered Tony's house and offices. They checked his big safe at the bank and the safe at his money changing and wire transfer office. His car was confiscated; his warehouses, illegal casinos, brothels and escort services were shut down as well. Until the completion of the proceedings, all equipment, possessions, computers, documents and a great deal of cash, which could be used as evidence in the future trial, was confiscated. All of his property was impounded and a legal request was filed to transfer everything to the state.

A million and a half dollars in cash was seized at the money exchange office. Only \$300,000 in cash was seized at the casino and brothel. However, the icing on the cake was the safety deposit box at the bank. What the investigators found there surprised even them: packet upon packet of cash in different currencies, mainly dollars and euros. They seized \$3,200,000 and €600,000. The entire amount was designated to be handed over to the state after Tony's guilt had been proven in court.

When Tony entered the investigation room, he looked up at the corners of the ceiling in an attempt to discover hidden cameras and microphones. A senior investigator and the Head of the Investigation Division of the FBI took their places at the large table and began a direct dialogue, without any unnecessary pleasantries."

"This time, Tony, we worked in a thorough and organized manner, in conjunction with the regional prosecutor. We have been following you for six months. Your every

step has been photographed and documented; your every word has been recorded. We have solid evidence, Tony. You are going to sit twenty years inside.”

Tony was silent and he didn't let a word escape his lips.

“We can go easy on you and save ourselves precious time, if you sign this statement and then we will proceed.

“I exercise my right to remain silent,” and he didn't add a word.

“We will remove some indictments, such as possession of drugs that we found at the hotel and an attempt to disrupt legal proceedings, if you cooperate,” the “good cop” tried to convince him.

“I'm not a child, so don't try to deceive me. If you have evidence against me, file an indictment and we'll meet in court.”

The “bad cop” tried his luck and said: “We will withhold visitation rights and we will hurt you, Tony, just like you hurt your victims.”

Tony indicated with his hand that he wasn't interested in continuing this conversation and he put his head on the table.

“Fine,” said the young investigator, “we have enough solid evidence without a statement. Let's go, we don't have anyone to talk to here.” He pressed the buzzer.

Two policemen entered and held him by his shackled arms. They took him to the Bronx House of Detention for Men, which served as a transit holding prison for detainees before their trial began. The facility was infamous for its poor conditions and deplorable treatment of prisoners, as well as for the mental distress of the prisoners incarcerated there. More than once, prisoners couldn't bear the suffering, the shame and the degradation and tried to commit suicide.

The news of his capture spread like wildfire. The criminals who read about his deeds in the newspapers and who watched the news were in awe of him. He was honored and revered by young criminals. They viewed him as a role model, who they admired for the shortcut he took to rake in millions without paying a price. Before he opened his mouth or did anything, he was crowned the undisputed king of the detention center. Everyone sought out his company. After a few days, the prison staff began to fear him, when their family members received messages: “Give respect” to their leader, or harm would come to them.

The next day, Tony was brought to the court in Manhattan. The police requested that the judge rule to keep him incarcerated until the end of the legal proceedings. They presented overwhelming evidence that linked Tony to crimes in which he was a

suspect, in addition to statements and testimonies of employees in his money exchange offices and casino. His bodyguards, who were afraid of losing their license to carry weapons, which was their source of income, also gave testimonies.

The prostitutes' statements were also added to the evidence. They reached an agreement with the prosecutor, that after they made their statements, they would be released to pursue their profession, until the time they had to testify in court. The experienced investigators didn't need to use complicated methods of interrogation in order to get statements and testimony regarding their employer Tony, who at the time of their employment, carried out crimes. Sometimes they showed a fabricated statement of one of the employees to the person being interrogated and as a result, he gave his testimony. Tony's lawyer agreed to his internment, but he requested that it be changed to house arrest. The judge didn't grant his petition, from fear of disrupting the investigation by threats and witness intimidation. Moreover, the judge was apprehensive of a public outcry which would be raised in the media about the lack of cooperation from the legal system against increasing violence and crime which was rampant on the streets. The judge ruled to keep Tony imprisoned until the end of the trial. Despite his discontent, Tony was returned to BxHMD. His request to be transferred to a different prison with better conditions was also denied.

Joe, who was one of Tony's biggest fans at the detention center, knew him from their time together at Sing Sing Prison. He was going to be released from prison soon. He was accused of killing a criminal who had crossed the line and had become a state witness. The police had made an effort to hide him and keep him safe in the witness protection program, until he could testify in court.

Joe was a particularly evil character. In contrast to criminals who harmed others, intentionally or unintentionally, but would regret it, he would get great pleasure by causing pain to others. He was the embodiment of pure evil. When he wanted to watch the Super Bowl in the comfort of his own home, he simply went to the children's cancer ward at Mount Sinai Hospital, picked up the 42 inch plasma screen from the wall and left a note, "television being repaired" and went home.

When Tony was put in Joe's cell, his senses sharpened and warning light went off in his head.

"Welcome, Tony," Joe greeted him with a handshake.

Tony shook his hand and looked around the walls and ceiling of the cell to check if there were cameras or microphones planted there.

“Even though you didn’t find what you were looking for, I’m convinced that every word spoken here is documented and might be used against you. Take that into account.”

Tony nodded and asked: “When are you going to be released?”

“The sons of bitches have held me for two weeks already. There’s no body and no witnesses. In fact, they don’t have anything on me. Tomorrow is the end of the extension that the police got from the judge in order to complete the investigation. I believe that tomorrow morning I’ll be free. The problem is that I don’t have anything to do.”

Tony moved closer to him and said: “I learned from an ex-FBI agent, who is a private investigator, that you can separate voices from music by technological device. If you are recorded in your car while the radio is playing loudly, they can easily delete the sounds of the radio and hear your voice. On the other hand, if you scream loudly and I whisper something in your ear...”

“Ayyyyyyyyy!” Joe screamed while Tony covered his mouth to prevent a camera from reading his lips and he whispered in his ear: “I have a task for you. It won’t be hard for you. I want you to ‘eliminate’ someone who injured me.”

“Continue.”

“David Johnson, an electronic engineer, 30 years old; he lives in the Millennium Towers on the promenade in South Manhattan, on the 35th Floor.

“What about money?” asked Joe.

“Go see Charlie. He has \$20,000. Tell him that I sent you to take the envelope with the code word, halleluiah”.

“OK,” Joe agreed.

‘That’s my consolation,’ Tony whispered to himself.

The next morning, after the daily prisoner count, Joe was ordered to get dressed and get ready to go to court in Manhattan for the hearing regarding his release.

“Since no evidence has been submitted to the court that links the suspect to the murder and he is being held on suspicion only, I can not grant the petition. Therefore, I rule to free the prisoner immediately!” the judge decided.

The prosecutor looked at the intelligence officer, who didn’t want to expose the source of his information. He raised his hands and said: “There’s nothing we can do.”

Joe hugged his lawyer and walked free. He was free to do the task, to function as the murder weapon, as Tony’s emissary. It was as if Tony himself were set free from

behind bars to sow destruction and death, as if he were God himself, deciding who should live and who should die.

30. Salon Talk

David's pursuit in saving the world, according to his perception, required his frequent absence from the house. That, plus his obsessive involvement with himself and with his toys, again crept into Sandy's thoughts. She felt that he was her whole world, but that she was only a part of his.

He was submerged in a plush armchair that was controlled electrically. It provided heat and massaging over the entire body. He lay in this position and watched DVDs that were projected from a state-of-the-art projector from the ceiling onto a giant screen that scrolled down by means of a remote control and was part of his home movie system. He also spent many hours in front of his computer that looked like a spacecraft before liftoff. With the help of the electric controls, he adjusted the soft leather chair so, that he was lying with his face towards the ceiling looking at his 46 inch, thin LCD screen.

The chair was originally intended to be a dentist's chair, but David changed it for his convenience and comfort. He replaced the tool tray with a cordless keyboard, so that the keys faced down; an optical cordless mouse was placed on a diagonal next to the keyboard, which connected him to the computer that was concealed in an etched glass cabinet. The interior designer who designed this workspace was very talented and consequently, his bank account swelled accordingly.

Sandy sat and thought about how she could bring him to include her into his activities. She consulted with her friend Lisa, who shared with her about how his friends feel: "We all feel that he isn't here with us. His mind wanders to other places and it's not a pleasant feeling."

"Lisa, I think we have to start from here, a social evening, which will counteract the lack of intellectual stimulation and the horrible boredom that has fallen upon us since he won the lottery. Please help me organize evenings like these, even with a guest lecturer, so that he will be forced to be part of the group," Sandy requested.

"Sandy, I would do anything for you! This Friday evening, the first meeting?" asked Lisa encouragingly.

So they thought about all of the details: food, drinks, music and invitations to organize the first evening.

David expressed delight about the gathering, especially since it included his friends from his military unit. The guests arrived and unintentionally, most naturally, two groups formed, one of women and the other of men.

The men's discussion, not surprisingly, centered on politics and the president's foreign policy. The endless argument between the Republicans and Democrats started out quietly and then continued to rise in volume with great passion, as each one presented his point of view and tried to convince his friend.

Fashion and diets were the main topics of the women's discussion. Sharon started to lecture about women's bottoms: "A woman's ass is the most problematic part of her body. All of the calories are concentrated in my ass," she complained and displayed her ample behind. "Tell me, girls, when you mix flour and water you get glue. If you add an egg and margarine, you get a cake, so where did the glue disappear to? It is a real mystery, isn't it? And so, the glue is what glues the cake to my ass!" she said with a broad smile and her friends applauded her.

"What are you talking about?" interrupted Julie, who was very thin. "I wish I had your ass. My problem is bigger than yours. I don't have an ass at all, nothing. I'm a board. My husband laughs at me and dreams about your ass. There's something to grab, you can warm up next to it, but with me, nothing!"

"Maybe you can compensate each other," laughed Sandy.

Rochelle suggested following the Jewish religious laws: "Eat like a king in the morning, like a prince in the afternoon and like a pauper in the evening."

Terry spoke bluntly: "Lately, I have completely lost restraint. I have been eating everything in sight and I have blown up like a balloon since our economic situation has improved. We've been going to stay at hotels frequently. They serve such a variety of gourmet food; I simply can't resist the temptation. Not long ago, we were staying at a Bed & Breakfast in the country. I opened the window and said to my husband, who was in the bathtub, 'James, I see a deer at the window.' Do you know what he answered me? 'You are mistaken, darling, that isn't a deer, it's a cow and that's not a window, it's a mirror!' So...what do you think of that?"

The women broke out laughing and told the joke to the men, who were in the heat of a political argument. One of the men, who was particularly chauvinistic, wanted to get attention, so he told a riddle about blondes: "What is the difference between a blonde and a light bulb?" he smiled at everyone, as if he had invented cleverness and then solved the riddle: "A light bulb is smarter, but it's easier to turn on the blonde."

Patricia, who had blonde hair, was very insulted. She stood up and silenced everyone: “I would like tell you about a quiz for blondes from the show “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire.”

“Question Number 1: How long did the One Hundred Years War last?

- a. 116
- b. 99
- c. 100
- d. 15

The blonde skipped the question.

“Question Number 2: In which country was the Panama Hat invented?

- a. Brazil
- b. Chile
- c. Panama
- d. Ecuador

The blonde requested half-half.

“Question Number 3: In which month was the October Revolution?

- a. January
- b. September
- c. October
- d. November

The blonde called her boyfriend on the telephone for help.

“Question Number 4: What was the name of King George III?

- a. Albert
- b. George
- c. Charles
- d. Henry

The blonde consulted the audience.

“Question Number 5: What animal are the Canary Islands named after?

- a. canary
- b. kangaroo
- c. dog
- d. mouse

The blonde quit the game.

“And you, my clever friends, did you know that:

1. The One Hundred Years War (1337-1453) lasted 116 years!
2. The Panama Hat was invented in Ecuador!
3. The October Revolution took place in November!
4. The name of King George was Albert (He was named after Queen Victoria's husband) and he changed his name in 1936!
5. The Canary Islands are named for dogs. The name of the islands in Latin is 'Canaria', which means 'Island of the dog'. The reason is that there were many wild dogs that inhabited the islands.

"So stop laughing at blondes, because you aren't smarter than they are and not as pretty either!"

The women clapped and the men wanted to tell jokes to counter Patricia's joke.

David couldn't control the argument; the only solution was to play music. The pleasant sounds filled the house to the enjoyment of the guests. Some started to dance and the rest enjoyed the first rate drinks.

At the end of the evening, David spoke with his close friends. Sandy said good-bye to her girlfriends and Lisa whispered to her: "It seems like we're in the right direction."

"I don't think so... he already made plans with his friends to meet in the morning on the beach, for a day of sport: water skiing, Jet Ski and speed boats, in spite of my open resentment, of course. I'll talk with you tomorrow," Sandy said with a sad face.

"Leave everything and come to bed," David called to her enthusiastically, while she was cleaning up.

"You only think about yourself. Now games in bed, sweet dreams, tomorrow water games and so on. Who will clean up here?"

"We can hire a cleaning girl," he grumbled and tried to salvage the evening.

"I don't want other women around me, in addition to the sophisticated toys that take you away from me."

He gently pulled her to the bedroom laid her on the bed and looking deep into her eyes he said: "Most people pass their life in quiet despair and they continue to hope up until the end. They waste precious time and die with the feeling that they didn't fulfill their dreams."

Sandy was surprised by his answer. She understood that he wasn't willing to give up the power and money that he had amassed in such a short time. She answered him with a determined look and before she turned her back to him, she said straight to his face: "Your obsessive pursuit of money and wealth, success and glory, sex and power

will destroy you. If you realize this truth in time and abandon your obsession, you will be able to redeem yourself.”

He didn't dare reach his hand towards her body and he fell asleep. She tossed and turned uncomfortable, until weariness also overtook her. At sunrise, David slipped out of bed quietly, so as not to awaken Sandy. He got dressed and drove to the beach to meet his friends. When Sandy woke up and didn't see David in bed, she was sure that he had thought about what she had said and that he decided to devote the morning only to her. 'He's probably making me something in the kitchen,' she thought. But as the minutes passed and she didn't hear a sound in the apartment, she understood that nevertheless, he had gone out with his friends. She was furious and her tears flowed in her misery.

In the afternoon, satisfied with a day of water sport, David went home and decided to invite Sandy to a nice lunch. He put his car keys on the chest of drawers and suddenly he noticed a piece of paper on the dining room table. His heart began to pound and his hands were shaking. He opened the letter: "David, I packed and left. Don't try to contact me until you're ready. Sandy."

He read it again and again. He sank into the armchair and tried to find a logical explanation for what she had done, or the cause which brought her to do this. His thoughts were confused. He put his head between his hands and his lips mumbled her name.

31. Serious Illness

“Luciano Bagio to Room 17,” the call was heard over the loudspeaker. He and his wife, Claudia, were waiting in the reception area of the Cardiology Department at New York University Hospital. When they heard the call, they entered the room.

“Hello, Mr. and Mrs. Bagio. Please be seated. My name is Dr. Stan Norman. I called you in today to talk about the results of the imaging test you took last week. I understand that you are anxious, so I will get straight to the point. Yesterday, I received the results which confirm that you are ill with pulmonary hypertension. This means that your heart and lungs are not functioning properly.”

A chill went down Bagio’s spine. His heart skipped a beat and his mouth became dry. He tried to get encouraging news from the doctor: “Medicine has developed over the past few years. Many operations are performed today,” he said and waited for the doctor’s reaction.

Dr. Norman, who was an expert in heart and chest surgery, discerned Luciano’s fear, but didn’t want to give him false hope. “You are right, Mr. Bagio, but your case is more complicated. The functioning of your lungs and heart are poor and there is rapid deterioration, which requires an immediate solution, but it is very dangerous. I’ll tell you the truth, Mr. Bagio, your condition is critical. Your life expectancy isn’t more than sixty days. However, if we act quickly, there is hope, but the cost won’t be cheap.”

“Money is no problem. My son, Tony, will finance the required outlay,” said Luciano in a choked voice, while his wife, Claudia, wept quietly.

Dr. Norman gave her a tissue and said: “The only solution for you is a combined heart and lung transplant. There are only a few places in the world where such an operation is performed. I recommend that you go to Mount Sinai Hospital in New York. They have had a high rate of success, but as I said, the cost of this complex operation is high, a half a million dollars.”

“I will go to my son, Tony in Manhattan tomorrow and I will get the required amount.”

“In that case, I will write a referral to Professor Henry McArthur, head of the Heart Transplant Department at Mount Sinai Hospital. I will include your medical history and results of the test.”

Dr. Norman entered Luciano's social security number and data began to flow from the printer. He put the material in an envelope and handed it to Luciano. He helped his wife, who couldn't stop crying about the catastrophe that had struck them out of the blue.

They said good-bye to the doctor, who tried to give them encouragement. He asked them to keep him informed about the surgery date and he promised to help them however he could.

In the elevator, Claudia hugged her husband and they both broke out in tears. On the way home in the bus, Luciano looked at his watch and said: "The countdown has begun...if I don't hurry, I might be too late."

"Fine, when we get home we'll call Tony. He'll bring the money today or tomorrow and he'll also arrange a hotel room for us nearby the hospital. I'm sure that he'll come with us, because you are the most important and dear person to him in the whole world. He would move heaven and earth to help you," she said and she sank deep into her thoughts.

He put the envelope with the medical documents on the table and immediately called Tony.

"The customer is not available. Please try your call again later."

"Where is he at this hour? Why doesn't he answer?"

"Try again, maybe you dialed wrong," Claudia offered.

"He doesn't answer. Maybe he's at a movie or a play and his cell phone is turned off."

"You see that I was right when I said that we should have taken the money he pleaded with us to take?"

"It is filthy money. I don't want stolen money, without a conscience, taken from innocent people by criminals."

"And now the money isn't filthy?"

"Now I don't have a choice. It's a matter of life and death."

"Fine, let's eat. Try again later."

They also couldn't reach him in the evening. They were helpless and fear began to creep into their hearts. Luciano turned on the television. The evening news was about to begin. At the start of the broadcast there was a report about the arrest of someone who was considered to be the head of organized crime, Tony Bagio. The news commentator said that he is suspected of operating illegal casinos, escort services and brothels. Also that he is accused of tax evasion, money laundering, drug possession

and disrupting legal proceedings. They froze in their places. The report was accompanied by close-up photographs of Tony's face the filled up the entire screen and also shots of him with handcuffs on his hands and feet, being led by two enormous policemen. What they saw was intolerable. Tony, their eldest son, on whom they had placed all of their hopes, looked miserable and exhausted. The shame was great and the phone started ringing incessantly. They preferred not to answer. They didn't want to face the shame he had brought upon them.

"This is a black day for the family. I can't absorb two blows in one day," said Luciano and he turned off the T.V.

"We'll go to the detention center tomorrow. They'll have to take my condition into consideration and allow me to meet with my son," he said, half to himself and half to his wife, whose tears flowed down her cheeks uncontrollably.

They slept poorly. Bad thoughts swept them between their split worlds; on the one side, was their cruel reality and on the other side, the next world, which Luciano might soon join.

The next morning, they went to Tony's attorney's office. Luciano put the medical papers on Mr. Fisher's desk and begged him to pressure the judge to allow him to see his son before he died. It was a weighty humanitarian request, given the hourglass that was quickly emptying.

In court, the police representative voiced determined opposition to the meeting, claiming that it might disrupt the legal proceedings if Tony passed information to his parents, who would act on his behalf outside of the prison.

The police detective, Bobby was requested to verify the authenticity of Dr. Norman's documents. Before Bobby arrived at the court to relay the results of his check to his commander, he called David in order to make a meeting to reassess the new situation.

The judge on duty was compelled again to face a dilemma. On the one hand, not to sabotage the police effort to investigate and bring someone who was considered to be head of organized crime to trial and on the other hand, stood an innocent man whose days were numbered and whose only request was to say good-bye to his son before he died. Luciano's and his wife's tears combined with Dr. Norman's report about Luciano's fatal disease tipped the scale in favor of the request and he ruled that Luciano could visit his son on that same day, but with certain restrictions. He could visit his son in the presence of the prison guards and the prosecutor for only thirty

minutes. Luciano's tears of pain changed to tears of happiness. A small crack of hope opened, perhaps a way could be found to solve his predicament.

32. Immoral Dance

The music of the tango filtered out from the cellar and reverberated in David's ears as he entered the club. There was only one couple dancing on the dance floor. They were a special couple. He was lean and erect and he was wearing a white shirt and dark, tight pants. He had a determined and penetrating look. His partner was wearing a crimson dress, the color of wine. Her bottom and bosom protruded and swayed with every movement, as if hidden waterfalls and rivers flowed under her dress. She was aware of the power of her softness. The coordination of their movements was so flawless that they flowed as one body.

David sipped his wine and the taste rejuvenated him and awakened a desire in him to try new things. He felt that he could remove all barriers. As his eyes lingered on the couple, without realizing it, he began to move his head to the simple beat of the music, which was so basic. One step back, two steps forward. 'That's exactly the pace I should adopt, in contrast to the events that have been happening around me lately...one step forward and two backwards,' he said to himself. That's how they danced- one step back, two forward, a turn and a quick whirl. She bent her body back. Her hair touched the floor and he leaned above her. His lips were so close, touching hers. He breathed her then he rotated on his left shoe and elegantly caused her to straighten up together with him. The music throbbed and throbbed. 'I wish I had that rhythm,' David said again to himself as he looked around. The couple moved forward cheek to cheek. His one hand encircled her waist and her one hand encircled his neck and their free hands extended forward. They looked painfully taut, but they surely didn't feel any pain. They didn't dance to the music; rather they composed the rhythm themselves for every movement. One back, two forward. David was hypnotized by the sensual scene. Envy inundated him as he watched the man swing his partner in the air. Her bottom was resting in his raised hand and his other hand was bent gracefully behind his back, like a matador subduing a bull. And her, her hands were around his neck, her eyes were closed, her legs were spread and she turned on the axis of his arm, like a perfect gyroscope. He stamped his feet, as if to signal a different dance to a different tempo, he immediately lowered her and hugged her for a lingering moment. Her eyes closed with pleasure, her nostrils breathed in his breath and again they were together, joined in the rhythm of the tango. "ta-tata-tata." What perfection. What a performance.

“How easy it is to move together. But that can only be obtained with a permanent partner,” he heard a feminine voice behind him.

“Nice to meet you I'm Alice,” she said and reached out her hand.

“Nice to meet you I'm David,” he answered and he saw a distinctive woman in front of him, about forty years old. She wasn't beautiful, but she embodied something like a modern reincarnation of Cleopatra. She was simple...regal. She gleamed like a gem. Her very short dress clung to her shapely figure and emphasized every detail. Her almond eyes stood out on her brown skin. Her soft voice contained an element of strength. Her proud carriage added glamour to her figure.

“The perfection and harmony of the couple in front of us couldn't be reached if they didn't live together. If they didn't know every muscle, fold, vein and capillary in each others bodies, they couldn't dance with such coordination,” said Alice. She reached out her hand to him and asked: “Do you want to try?”

“I don't know how to dance. I came to get an impression.”

“You were born to dance,” she said and pulled him towards the dance floor.

David followed her hesitantly. He felt like a lamb being led to the slaughter. In order to give him confidence, she said: “In tango, one person always leads. This time I will lead.”

David felt slightly encouraged when he saw other couples on the dance floor. They moved like sleepwalkers, clinging to each other, captivated by the overwhelming, erotic ambience of the tango. It was eroticism that was beyond the senses, a knot full of longing and movement, touch and beauty that could never be obtained.

Near him, a man led his partner, who let her body fall back, exactly when his strong arm supported her waist. She uttered a soft sound which could only be heard by someone with sensitive hearing through the velvety music. He felt how much yearning was expressed in that single special sound. The man reached out his hand to her head and her dark, flowing hair cascaded through his fingers. He led her to the center of the floor where they danced in a trance of passion and desire. Slowly, David let go of the fear that was gripping him and he began to enjoy dancing. He merged between the other couples on the dance floor thanks to Alice's talent, skill and experience. Alice emitted a vortex of scents, perfume mixed with sweat, that intensely invaded his nostrils. By this time, David was totally excited. He sensed how the intoxication of the moment accelerated the flow of blood through his veins.

“Let’s switch to a slow dance, something calming and soothing,” Alice said determining the next stage and she let him press against her body. His heart beat strongly from this closeness and the bulge in his pants announced his erection that he couldn’t deny. Her eyes stopped roaming around the room and focused on his eyes. She smiled a small, provocative smile, a smile of the victor. At the end of the dance, he bowed formally and said: “Thank you, that was great.”

“The pleasure was all mine.”

David returned to his seat and ordered cold lemonade. He wanted to cool down his sweaty body after his physical exertion. He watched the dance floor.

“May I join you?” asked Alice and without waiting for an answer, she sat on the chair next to him. She sipped a cool drink and looked at him in appreciation.

“I’m hooked and that’s fine with me,” said David. He was still looking at the dance floor. The music flowed from the sound system and sent sparks into the room and towards the excited dancers who were like waterfalls of passion. Legs swung, heads turned and lustful glances wandered from body to body.

In a few seconds, he saw another couple that was moving to a different rhythm and his fingers tapped to the beat on the table.

“The tango is the most sensual dance. It gives you passion, energy and pure emotion. That is why I am sure that it is meant for you, David...or more precisely, it is meant for us. I have been looking for an appropriate partner for a long time for the annual competition that will be held in two months at Carnegie Hall.”

“I don’t know how to dance. Didn’t you notice that? Or maybe you’re aiming for last place...”

“Your looks and body along with my experience will defeat any contestant who will compete against us. If you invest your all every evening, we’ll get to the top, David. A stranger would have to part with \$10,000, which is what I charge for lessons, but you are exempt. What do you think?”

“We can start immediately,” he said and he stood up as he took her hand and led her to the dance floor.

Alice let him lead in the first dance in order to determine his ability. I seemed that he was being swallowed up in the circle of desire and not only from the music. She felt that he wasn’t listening to the music in the same way as she was, at the deep layers. She was a little disappointed from his lack of experience; so she picked up the lead and was happy that at least he was able to keep the beat and he had endless energy.

The music strengthened and swept Alice away in its magical sounds. Her perseverance and determination increased with the quickening tempo of the music- as if to warn the other dancers about the tempest raging inside her and was hidden from their eyes. Only the DJ understood the meaning of the veteran dance instructor's flirtations and jealousy began to accumulate in his heart, as she again hunted a living sexual doll. She didn't stop trying to draw attention to herself on the dance floor. She exposed a shoulder or a shapely leg and also a pink tongue. She opened another button on her dress. She kept smiling at David, as if only the two of them were on the dance floor. David danced and his mind was in a different place. Two steps forward, one back, turn, bend. The music led them towards the climax, gently and carefully. They danced a dance that was totally sensual and pure energy and could without a doubt be called an "immoral dance."

Towards the end of the meeting, she nodded her head to the DJ to play a slow dance in order to regulate breathing.

"David, you surprised me with your abilities...relatively good for a first time dancer." she said and put her head on his shoulder. "We belong together, but in order to reach perfection, we must get to know each other better- to become familiar with the body, the rhythm, the passion." She began to stroke his neck and hair and she added in a whisper, "Let's go to my apartment. We can shower and we'll start to get to know each other..."

"I have an amazing girlfriend, her name is Sandy. I love her and I can't come with you."

"When you're ready, get back to me!" she hissed between her teeth. With a sense of rejection, she pushed him aside abruptly and strode off to her office without turning around. David was in shock. He didn't hide his disappointment and surprise at her vulgar behavior and the image of a "modern reincarnation of Cleopatra" faded before his eyes.

33. Light at the End of the Tunnel

“Get up, Tony,” the prison guard said and opened the cell door.

“Go screw yourself, you and all your friends and tell the investigators to stop messing with me and not to bother my rest.”

“It’s your lawyer; he wants to tell you something,” answered a second guard who also came to accompany him to the meeting room.

Tony jumped up from his bed as if a snake had bitten him. They took him to the room. His lawyer approached him and shook his hand. Tony saw his father out of the corner of his eye. His father had stubbornly refused to see him over the past few years and refused to forgive him for his crimes. He ran towards his father. Luciano held out his arms to him and they hugged and kissed.

“I am happy Dad, that you accept me as your son again. I know that I sinned and I’m going to be severely punished for it. I caused you and Mom great suffering, disgrace and anguish. But Dad, I will compensate you for it when I’m released.”

They let go of each other and sat face-to-face. The lawyer and the police representative watched them in silence.

“How were you able to get in here, Dad?” Tony asked in surprise, because he was aware of the rigid restrictions that forbade visitations except for attorneys.

“Special circumstances, Tony, I requested that the court give its permission for this visit and here, your father is here...” explained his lawyer.

“Look son, here are the results of the medical tests I underwent at the hospital. I am very sick. They discovered that I suffer from pulmonary hypertension, That means that my heart and lungs aren’t functioning properly. I only have two months to live. There is one solution to my problem...a combined heart-lung transplant. If I have this operation, I will live.”

Tony listened in shock and tears fell from his eyes.

“The problem is that the operation can only be performed at Mount Sinai Hospital and it is very expensive- half a million dollars!” he said and looked at his son.

Luciano had expected to hear a firm promise that would save his life, but Tony, who up until yesterday was invincible, didn’t have good news for his father. He lowered his eyes and a heavy silence fell upon them. The father stood up and indicated to the lawyer that the meeting had ended. Tony also stood up and said: “Sit down, Dad...please, sit. I want to explain to you. You know that you are the most important

person to me in the whole world. I would be willing to donate my heart, lungs or any body part to save your life. Something happened yesterday, a reversal of fortune. Dozens of policemen and investigators entered my home and businesses and confiscated all of my property. I had enough money in the safe to save your life, more than three million dollars! I begged you many times to accept money from me, but you refused. If you had come yesterday, I would have given you all of my wealth. What can I do, Dad?"

"The judgment has been decreed; nothing can be done," he answered in a shaky and cracking voice and he added: "Our next meeting will be in the next world!"

Tony broke down; he fell on his father's neck and cried like a little boy. Luciano stroked him and tried to comfort him, but in vain.

Two guards entered the room and had to forcefully separate Tony and his father in order to return Tony to his cell. His lawyer was choked up from the scene he had just witnessed and he accompanied Luciano out of the detention center. Luciano's wife was waiting there, worried.

"Let's go home; I want to say goodbye to everyone and then jump from the Empire State Building. I don't want to suffer the pain and agony and I don't want you to suffer because of me." Claudia sobbed. She held his hand and pulled him away.

Tony returned to his empty cell. He sank into thoughts about his father and his conscience bothered him. He didn't have any friends and those he knew didn't have the required amount to save his father. He couldn't ask for a loan from anyone, because in the next few years, he wouldn't have any income. 'How...how is it that yesterday I was in the jacuzzi with two girls in a royal suite and my wealth was estimated at seven million dollars and now, twenty four hours later, I'm not worth ten cents? I was up, but I didn't think that I would ever be down...' he said to himself.

David and Bobby met to reassess the situation, as they had arranged. When David had learned of Luciano's fatal disease, he reached a decision to change strategy in his battle against Tony. Bobby agreed with him- to "hit" him in his weakest spot- his conscience that he couldn't save his father's life.

"Who's there?" asked Claudia in a weak voice when she heard a knock at the door.

"David Johnson."

The door opened. In front of him, David saw a broken woman, simply dressed with red eyes. There were traces of tears and her pain from heartbreak was evident.

"Yes, sir. What do you want?"

“To speak with your husband.”

“He can’t come and he doesn’t want to talk with anyone.”

“I am Tony’s friend. I came to help.”

“Come in,” she said and invited him to sit in the faded armchair in the living room.

“Would you like something to drink?” she asked politely.

“No, thank you.”

Luciano entered the room wearing brown striped pajamas. He put his cup of tea on the table and shook David’s hand.

“I don’t remember ever seeing you with my son Tony.”

“We’ve only known each other for a short time. I heard from him that you are sick and need an urgent transplant. I want to repay him for a favor that he did for me recently.”

“Thank you very much, but I don’t think...I’m not sure that you have the amount required for the operation.”

“How much does it cost?”

“Half a million dollars.”

David took a lottery form out of his pocket and gave it to Luciano and said: “Look, Mr. Bagio, you have a lottery form in your hand that I bought last Tuesday. The form won the jackpot and the prize is three million dollars. Go to the Lottery Company in Schenectady. You will receive a check for a million and a half dollars, after tax. The money will be enough for the operation and for a stay at a convalescent facility with your wife, who will undoubtedly help you recover. The money will also help you with other outlays that you’ll certainly have in the future.”

Luciano and Claudia were shocked. They couldn’t comprehend that only a few hours ago, Luciano was doomed to die and suddenly a stranger appears out of nowhere and gives him a present of life.

“Tell me the truth, Mr. Johnson...”

“David. You can call me David,” clarified David, who wanted to gain Luciano’s trust.

“OK, David, so tell me the truth. Why are you doing this? You look like a person who pursues truth, while my son has pursued honor his whole life. Unfortunately, Tony doesn’t have friends like you. Like the bumper sticker on his car says: ‘It is better to have a dog as a friend than a friend as a dog.’ He has no friends.

David smiled: “Ask him to tell you about me.”

“You’re made of different material, David. You are different from each other and couldn’t exist together. Exactly like a bird and fish. If they live in a tree, the fish will die and if they live in water the bird will die. At any rate, I appreciate what you’re doing for me very much, even though you don’t know me at all. You are giving me life; what my eldest son can’t do for me. You’ve opened up a window to life for me, David. You have turned on a light at the end of the tunnel.”

David shook his hand warmly and said goodbye with wishes for good health and good luck with the operation. He entered his car with a powerful feeling that he saved a soul in the world and said to Bobby: “More than I want to fight Tony, I want to save his father’s life.”

“Why am I not surprised, David? This is you! You are a unique soul!”

“Go, go...leave the compliments for now,” said David with a smile.

The travel, the crying and the emotion had drained Luciano and his wife. They got into bed and Luciano couldn’t stop thinking about David’s noble act. He turned to his wife and asked: “Claudia, would you give such a large amount to someone you didn’t know?”

“I was just thinking about his young man...do you think the form is real?” she asked.

“We’ll only get an answer tomorrow. Good night,” Luciano answered and they both fell asleep immediately.

At dawn, the couple got organized for the trip to Schenectady. Luciano took out the form that he had hidden beneath the mattress and put it in Claudia’s purse. They wore their best clothes and left on their way. At the Lottery Company, they were happy to hear about the touching story. More than anything, they were happy to know that the winning money would save a life. They were photographed again and again. Due to the urgency of the matter, the money was transferred to their account immediately. They were happy that Luciano had his life returned to him and then they went home. The story of the winners spread throughout the media and reached the “Hunter’s” desk. He cross-referenced the information that he received from his undercover investigation and from taped conversations from the public phone in the detention center. One of the prisoners was asked by Tony to call his parent’s house and ask how they were, in particular about his father, whose days were numbered.

“Your father sends his thanks and appreciation for the money that you sent through your friend, David Johnson.”

Tony was confused and negated this possibility. 'It's not possible that my enemy could give this amount of money to my father, who he doesn't even know.' He asked his lawyer to check the matter out with his family and report back to him about the strange events that were happening without his control.

The next day, the lawyer arrived at the detention center and surprised Tony: "David Johnson, a young man, tall and handsome, went to your parent's house in the Bronx two days ago..."

"David Johnson? Are you sure?" Tony cut him off.

"Yes," and he told him about the chain of events.

"They also take tax from a sick man?" asked Tony.

"The law's the law," answered the attorney and continued: "Your parents immediately ordered an ambulance and a doctor and already today, half a million dollars is being transferred from their account to the hospital. They are supposed to go to the hospital tomorrow. The operation will take place in a few days, after a series of tests that are required before any operation are performed. Your father is happy; color has returned to your mother's face. They thank you and are happy that in spite of your limiting conditions, you managed to save your father. Really...well done, Tony. Despite all of the shame and disgrace that you caused your father, when the moment of truth arrived, you did the honorable thing. For that, I hold you in esteem," he said and patted him on the shoulder.

Tony was surprised, but he didn't say anything. After his attorney left, many questions arose in his mind. 'Why did he do this for me? Why instead of hurting me, did he help me?' "More is unknown than known," he quoted the saying and suddenly he remembered that there was a \$20,000 reward on David's head. He remembered Joe, the cold and ruthless hired killer, who was pursuing David. 'I must stop this murder!' he stood up and began yelling between the bars: "Guard! Guard! Guaaaaaard!"

Two guards came running to Tony's cell.

"What happened?" they asked in alarm.

"Stop my lawyer. He just left. It's important...a matter of life and death!"

"What's his cell phone number?"

He gave him the number. They were able to reach him and upon his return, Tony grabbed his suit lapel and begged: "You have to stop this murder!"

"What are you talking about, Tony?"

“Hit men are on their way to “take down” David Johnson. Call Charlie and tell him to tell Joe that the job is cancelled!”

“I’ll do everything I can. I’ll go straight to Charlie and I’ll give him your message.”

‘If he kills David, it’s like he killed me... I won’t be able to look my father in the eyes again, with the knowledge that I put out a contract to kill a man who saved his life and saved my honor in my father’s eyes.’

34. The Rope Tightens

The sharp senses of Richard Bell, a crime reporter for the New York Times, warned him incessantly about a concealed event that was percolating beneath the surface. Despite his efforts, he couldn't identify a hint that would lead him to the hidden source. All of his attempts to extract details from monitoring the wireless communication networks by means of a portable digital frequency scanner that he had purchased on Canal Street, only revealed the usual information about burglaries, fraud and violence. Occasionally, there was information about a robbery of an elderly woman and other routine events that didn't exactly interest his loyal readers.

His entreaties to senior police officers to give him a scrap of information were answered negatively, due to lack of knowledge. When he met the "Hunter", as he was rushing out of police headquarters, he accompanied him to his car and asked: "What happened, Hunter? What's going on that suddenly everyone is so busy and no one is talking?"

"Don't you read the papers? Didn't you hear about the crime wave that is increasing daily?"

"You're treating me like a monk at the Vatican, who only sees good deeds. I am certain that you are working on something big...the kind of crime that happens only once every few years...something that also surprised the police. I promise not to leak information until you give me the go-ahead."

"You have a fertile imagination. Prozac will calm you down a bit!" he answered and got into his car.

"Look, Hunter," Richard blocked the car door with his body and added: "I will dig and scratch until I find out! And then I'll publicize the story on the front page, without getting your permission, so you won't be able to get a gag order and you won't be able to ask me to delay publication until you finish your investigation. Not to mention the photos and articles where you won't be presented as a hero on the printed page."

He slammed the door angrily and moved away from the car.

Hunter didn't react to Richard's tirade and he drove off quickly. 'Maybe there really is something big I don't know about,' he thought to himself. It isn't possible that the big fish have given up crime or have repented their sins. They won't pass up the opportunity to make a hit. They're clever and brave. They take the initiative and they have a well-developed imagination and ingenuity.' he thought and he analyzed the

current situation: 'The police's mode of operation is afflicted with inflexible thinking. Frequently, the law is an obstacle for the investigators and this makes our job more difficult. The result is that in the majority of cases, the police are reacting to crime, but aren't capable of preventing crime. The criminals take advantage of the fact that they are always "given" time to develop an original idea that no one has thought of before, to plan the "hit" and to surprise even us. In this time, they are able to accumulate great wealth, even if it costs the lives of their adversaries. We must initiate an attack on organized crime, to disrupt their plans ahead of time. As long as we don't operate like that, we will always be a step or two behind the criminal element. A good policeman solves crime, but a great policeman prevents it. I must initiate a broad inspection of my district.'

He made the decision to go on a personal "hunting expedition", hidden from everyone, including his colleagues at the police. 'Perhaps they will plant a collaborator or a "Trojan Horse" in our midst to prevent the exposure of the crime.' He called a police informant who worked as a manager of an "internet café", which was a front for an illegal casino.

You could obtain information there about gamblers who had "made a hit" and came to release their tension in front of the gambling machines. Big money also exchanged hands there, without arousing the suspicion of the police.

"Hello, Charlie. Something big is cooking and you're not telling me."

"I haven't heard of anything new. What subject? Who are you talking about?"

"You have to give me information, not the opposite. If I don't get material within two days, I'm closing your business, which means that you'll be forced to use your rectum in order to earn a living."

"I'll get back to you tomorrow," said Charlie and hung up.

Among all of the gambling games, the popular Pyramid game stood out the most. It drew in many "heavy" gamblers, due to the huge amount of money that circulated in the place. Charlie, who was valued and was considered to be very reliable by all of the café's customers, started to "sniff out" the gamblers. He handed out bonuses to them, which manifested itself in money and game points. Within a few minutes, he got the information from an unexpected source.

Tom, Tony's driver, who came in daily to rake in the profits, told Charlie that soon he would be driving a big, yellow Hummer which would soon be Tony's property. He

refused to volunteer additional information with the claim that even the information he gave went too far and if Tony found out, his end would be bitter.

“Hello, Hunter...”

“What did you find out, Charlie?”

“Check who owns a yellow Hummer H2. This is your lead. Take it from there. It will lead you to the big thing that you’re looking for.”

35. Pick-up Bar

Mixed feelings of longing and anger about Sandy who had abandoned him drove David to seek company in order to ease his loneliness. He headed for a place where you go in single and come out a couple. His friend, who couldn't join him, had recommended the place.

“Do you believe in love at first sight, or should I make another round and come back later?” David shouted in a beautiful woman's ear who was sitting next to him at the “Penguin Bar”. Loud music deafened his ears and forced him to yell every sentence twice at the pick-up bar that had opened in the heart of the entertainment center, “Pier 17”, next to the Brooklyn Bridge.

The Penguin had been on his list of favorite places for some time. He knew that lovers of romance and those who seek it frequented the bar and this evening he arrived there desperate and thirsting for a little romance. An impressive bar spread out before him. The interior space immediately transported the guest to a different dimension. The bar was elliptical and long; red chairs were placed opposite an amazing assortment of bottles. Dim lighting created the atmosphere of a pick-up bar and the seating arrangement provided constant eye contact between those seated at the bar. The intense red color of the wall radiated its hue on the entire club. The patrons watched a series of clips that were projected on a huge plasma screen. Since he was seeking romance, if only for one night, David sat with his back to the screen. He wanted to give a chance for a conversation to flow, instead of being addicted to and immersed in the clips that flickered on the screen. He was a perfect suitor. In addition to his good looks: tall, lean and tanned, he was polite and amusing, courteous and seductive and he made sure that the beautiful woman's glass was always full. He touched his glass and smiled. His warm hand made accidental contact with her hand and later, with her beautiful face and legs as well. It was easy for her to understand where he was leading and she went along in the same vein. They enjoyed the flirtation and the touching. They laughed at every bit of nonsense spoken, even if it sounded like a jumble of nonsense. The abundance of alcohol that was poured into their glasses had its effect. There was no doubt, that if Monica had wanted to be a model, she could easily have been a supermodel. God had blessed her with a beautiful face and a shapely body, long legs, a flat stomach and full breasts that called to every man from her plunging

neckline. Based on her participation, he understood that tonight he would be “inside” and so, he ordered an expensive dinner, in order to soften the growing passion.

They opened with stuffed steamed pastry, filled with pâté and medallions of roasted eggplant in grilled Portobello mushrooms with melted cheese. They occasionally sipped a cool drink. The romantic atmosphere emitted a scent of strong desire.

The next few moments passed in silence. From time to time, a groan of pleasure could be heard, not necessarily in preparation for more advanced stage later that night, rather in reaction to the ambience. The medallions of eggplant dripping with cheese that beckoned to him from the plate, disappeared at a frightening pace. Stolen tastes from each other’s plates definitely confirmed the quality of the first course. His date enjoyed and ate as if she had just finished fasting. They drank a cocktail, but the main course still awaited them. They debated about what to order for the main course. They called over the friendly waiter for assistance. He demonstrated impressive mastery over the details of the menu. His explanations flowed like the cold beer that they were served. His recommendations surely added a few calories to their daily allowance, but to make up for it, they were rewarded with one of the best and most satisfying seafood meals they had ever had.

“Seafood has been one of my real passions for many years and I’m not exaggerating,” David said as he looked in amazement at the seafood special that they were served. It was a huge portion made up of the highest quality selection of seafood: skewers of giant scallops, refreshing calamari “butterflies”, known to be juicier than the usual rings. Shrimp, which was surely the king of seafood and its taste definitely wasn’t disappointing, and delicate salmon. Everything was grilled and seasoned with different kinds of sauces: mint, red pepper, garlic in oil, soy sauce and ginger. Someone who said that he has been to paradise hasn’t eaten food like this.

For the next course, they ordered fillet of Grouper in a butter, garlic and white wine sauce with herbs. At the end of the meal they freshened up with moist towelettes. Their enjoyment was perfect. After a short rest, they ordered an “Apple Jack” cocktail, which was a mixture of schnapps, apple juice, Jack Daniels and triple martini, which they chose from a long cocktail and drinks menu. For dessert, they ordered three layers of strawberries in whipped cream and chocolate, which provided a sweet ending to the meal. The cocktail and her perfect breasts, which tempted him again and again, caused David to undress her in his imagination. Her caresses caused his sexual organ to show signs of life. He decided that this was the time to get up and

go and to receive compensation for his emotional, spiritual and financial investment. He whispered to her with a horny smile: “Come to my apartment; we’ll listen to music. If you don’t like it, get dressed and go!”

Monica got the message and even though she was satiated with alcohol, she held his hand and showed a strong desire to go with him to his little lair.

During the drive, he looked at her from the side and felt the sexuality that she radiated which could blind someone. She had a voracious sexual appetite and she exuded lust.

In the apartment, even before they got to the bedroom she started to take off her clothes. Her impressive breasts were exposed to his eyes. They were round and smooth and her nipples were magnificently erect. He took them in his hand. Like a magnet, he brought his mouth near and gathered each one according to its turn with his rolling tongue which carried her into a vortex of passion. His lips, biting and sucking, caused thousands of butterflies that were burning inside of him to burst out into her, into her warm body. When David tried to take off her pants, she stopped him and put her finger on his lips as if to silence his puzzlement. She went to a drawer near her and took out a black scarf and blindfolded him. She moved her lips close to his ear and whispered with a tremor: “From here, you’re all mine...let me give you pleasure like you’ve never had before,” she said and nibbled lightly in his ear.

He really wanted to see her thighs and her shapely body, but he cooperated with her. The thought of what awaited him brought him to the brink of sexual excitement and with a slight hesitation, he let her hold his hand and lead him to the wide bed. He lay on his back, fully clothed and anticipated the pleasure. Her hands found their way under his shirt; she pulled it out of his pants and pulled it up towards his head. Her fingers explored his body. Her lips tasted his faintly salty sweat and she kissed him passionately on every muscle. He wanted to return the pleasurable caresses, but every time he tried, he felt a light slap on the back of his hand expressing her demand that he be still and passive.

Slowly, David found himself with only underpants on his body. Her fingertips held the wide elastic band and uncovered his organ that had not yet reached its maximum proportions. Her sensuous lips kissed the cupola of his penis. Her tongue worked simultaneously and the first signs of sexual frenzy ran through his body. He raised his pelvis slightly in order to help her remove the last bit of cover he had on his body. He felt the cool linens touch his buttocks. This cool touch increased the flames of his

burning passion. Her hand held his member; a thick and beautiful male organ. Splendidly long and thrust in all its glory.

“Oh, Monica...it’s great Monica,” he mumbled in euphoria that comes when a man doesn’t know where a woman plans to lead him. With his eyes blindfolded, he sank into the murky alleyways of delusions, into the flames of fantasy that lodged in his mind. He hoped that she would continue forever, beyond Sodom and Gomorrah, indefatigable delight.

His groaning, provoked by unrestrained sexual excitation, caused her to increase the pressure and the speed. In one hand, she held his impressive organ and with the other hand that was wet with saliva from her tongue, she wet his penis and kneaded it very patiently, like it was dough in the hands of a skilled baker. She did as she pleased and he didn’t intend on interrupting her professional work. She fondled his testicles and pulled them down. He groaned from pleasure and she whispered her desire: “Wait for me, David; we’re only at the beginning.”

Her hot, wet lips washed over the length of his penis. He reacted with gentle pulsing, which Monica felt on her tongue, she started a journey of prolonged licking and delight. She went to his crotch and with slow, deliberate motions; she enhanced his horniness with attention to his laden testicles. She took them in her mouth, sucked them with uninhibited longing. Her skilled tongue kept on driving him wild. She worked on the base of his penis and with his ever increasing groans that came from his throat, she inched up to the tip and licked him longingly and with complete pleasure. David allowed her to take control of his horny body that was performing some kind of erotic, slow and crazy dance.

Monica knew exactly how to read his movements and knew that now was the moment that she would allow him to penetrate deep into her mouth. She sucked him skillfully and her tongue worked on the vein that ran the length of his penis. A feeling of soaring overtook David’s soul. He writhed beneath her hot body. His groans grew louder. Her fingers skid under his buttocks and explored the narrow opening of his ass.

She was a natural at giving blow-jobs; she possessed a great talent that when nurtured over time, was raised to a level of art. She had great powers of concentration and diligence and she also enjoyed every minute. Due to the creativeness that she exhibited, when and how to pass from point to point, the fantastic diversity and her

ability to breathe with a pipe stuck in her throat, David gave her the title: “The Picasso of blow-jobs”.

Her ability to understand the language of his organ and to flow with it, to listen to its inclination and to go with it, bestowed upon her the status of a love goddess. Without a doubt, David would award her the Nobel Prize for her contribution to mankind in general and for love to men in particular. She increased the pace. His quick groans dropped his senses into a fog and in an orchestrated whirl, he plunged his full member deep into her mouth and throat. “Ahhhhooo,” a roar escaped his lips. His testicles emptied at once.

The prolonged flow spilled deep within her throat. He poured his honey yield into her and she lustfully drank every drop of his desire. The pleasure he felt took him to places where the light was blinding. He wanted to give her pleasure in return sevenfold so he came down from his high.

His one hand stroked her breasts and the other hand went to explore her wellspring. Suddenly, horror gripped him. He froze in his place. He thought he had become paralyzed when he touched a male organ, strong and erect.

“Nooooo!” he screamed. He removed his hand from Monica, who was a transvestite before a sex change operation.

Nausea overcame him. He covered his mouth with his hand and ran to the bathroom sink. There he threw up his guts. He felt disgust rising in him and he immediately went into the shower and let the hot water beat down on his body in a strong jet, in an attempt to purify his body and his soul from the sin that stuck to him. He scrubbed every part of his body with a rough bath sponge immersed in soap and shampoo, but it didn’t help. The debasement and self-alienation that he felt without any warning or mental preparation, left a scar on his conscience that would probably never heal and would leave a deep trauma in his memory forever.

When he got out of the shower, he knew he had an account to settle with Monica, but because he was humane, he first thought he should apologize for his reaction. He considered his words carefully and he knew exactly what he was going to say to her. She wasn’t in the bedroom, also not in the living room. Her blouse wasn’t lying on the floor between the front door and the bedroom. His expression became so angry that he didn’t recognize himself. It wasn’t enough that he had the feeling that his masculinity had been robbed from him the moment he held “her” penis; she also didn’t give him the satisfaction of taking out his anger on her.

With these feelings, David sank into nightmares that destroyed all the moments of pleasure he had experienced that night and sabotaged his sleep. His mind couldn't stop wandering back to the worst moment of his life.

36. Love Conquers All

Since Tony's incarceration, David had stopped worrying. He decided to pursue his plans to win the lottery every three days. 'One billion, four hundred and fifty million dollars are still waiting for me at the Lottery Company,' he said to himself and he pulled out the list of number sequences from his pocket which were programmed into the Lottery Company's computer and which hadn't let him down up until now.

He walked confidently over to a lottery point of sale in Boro Park in Brooklyn. Two orthodox Jews stood in front of him. They didn't look like wealthy residents of the area. They bought a lottery ticket worth forty dollars each.

"Maybe God Almighty will pass through Brooklyn this week and will grant us a blessing and take away the financial burden hanging on our shoulders," said one of them while he wrote 'with God's help' on the right side of the ticket. The cashier gave him back the ticket after he ran it through the computer. The religious man made a blessing: "Please, Lord, rescue us. Please God, help us succeed..." he kissed the ticket and put it in his pocket.

"Amen to that! Would it be so!" answered his friend.

David waited patiently in line. He looked at the two religious men and he felt torn. On the one hand, he was happy that people filled out lottery tickets, so that the lottery prize would grow and he could happily empty it into his private account. On the other hand, he felt deep sorrow for these two poor men, who contributed the little amount of money they had denied their families in the hopes that God would benefit them. He wanted to tell them that indeed God would pass through Brooklyn, but that he would come to benefit him, David the "just", who apparently had been the head of a yeshiva in his previous life and was receiving his reward in this life. The religious men left and David filled out the systematic lottery form with eleven numbers that he took from the data sheet.

"A systematic ticket with eleven numbers, please," he said to the cashier and paid him six hundred and ninety three dollars. He tried not to look him in the eyes and not to bring attention to himself in any way, even though he was wearing a baseball cap and sunglasses.

Acting on a tip he got from Charlie, Hunter was trailing David. This information led him to a strange chain of events, whose nature he still hadn't uncovered. 'There is

something big going on here. Sophisticated people who are camouflaging their actions well,” he said and he promised to himself to solve the mystery.

He gave his target the nickname, “the serial winner”. It hadn’t been difficult to obtain information, at least about three of the winnings for certain. He received information about the fifty million dollar lottery from the Lottery Company. Luciano Bagio’s win was a human interest story that was widely covered by the media and he received the information about that win from a wiretap on a public phone at the detention center. Hunter found out about the Sander House, which was established with lottery prize money, after scrutinizing David’s phone records, which he received without difficulty in his capacity as a police investigator.

At this stage of analysis of the information, his conclusion was that Tony, David and a source at the Lottery Company were the main perpetrators of the “money triangle”. ‘They apparently divide the prize money among themselves every three days,’ he thought to himself and was amazed by the gambling scheme, to distribute the public’s money among the three. As soon as David left the lottery counter, Hunter presented his police badge to the store owner and requested a copy of the lottery form that David bought. The man complied and pulled out a copy. He asked: “What happened?”

“We are checking if retailers and regional distributors are paying the real amount of taxes, Hunter lied so as not to expose his suspicions and he left the store.

A motorcycle rider screeched to a stop in front of the store. He quickly walked over to the store owner and asked: “What did that guy who was just here and got a lottery form from you want?”

“Who are you?” the store owner asked.

“Richard Bell. I’m a reporter for the New York Times and I’m writing an investigatory article about the lottery.”

“I can’t talk.”

“A thousand dollars will help you and me equally.”

“Where’s the money?”

Richard took out one thousand dollars in cash from his pocket and gave it to the man who looked up to the sky and said: “There is a God! He finally awarded me the ability to buy a full bible with commentary for my son. I’ll also be able to buy a new beautiful mezuzah.”

“I’m happy I could do a good deed. Now, who was that?”

“That was a policeman who is investigating tax evasion by retailers and regional distributors.”

“Thank you,” said Richard and ran to his motorcycle.

Hunter had noticed that Richard was following him, so he waited for him next to his motorcycle.

“Richard, if you continue to trail me, I will be forced to stop you on the grounds of disrupting legal proceedings,” Hunter warned him with a scornful smile.

“Freedom of speech is guaranteed by the Constitution. Its importance supercedes the bullshit you are trying to pull on me,” answered Richard confidently and he added: “I don’t understand why you are dealing with tax evasion of regional distributors.”

Based on the reporter’s comment, Hunter understood that he hadn’t figured out the real aim of the investigation. He relaxed and answered: “The distributors found a method how to evade paying taxes to the State Treasury. The sums are rather substantial.”

“What’s the method?”

“We are still in the middle of the investigation. I have no intention of releasing information that will be published in your newspaper tomorrow. We have cause to fear that evidence will disappear and that will make it hard for us to prepare the indictments.”

“I give you my word that I won’t publish anything until I have your clearance.”

“Acquiring forms that won large amounts, that’s the main idea of the method. There is still more to be uncovered and I’m working hard on it.”

“I don’t really believe you, but I’ll leave you alone in the meantime...and remember your promise.”

Hunter was quiet for a moment and in a conciliatory tone he said: “I’m looking for information you have and you are looking for information I have. Listen to a story: On a remote Indian reservation, the residents asked their chief if the winter that was approaching would be cold or mild. Since he lived in modern society and never was trained in the secret traditions of the ancients, he said to them that it would be a cold winter and he suggested that they gather wood for heat. At the same time, he called the meteorological weather service and asked the same question. He got the same answer as he gave. Therefore, he told them to collect more wood. A week later, the chief called again and they told him that it might be a very cold winter. So he told the residents to collect every scrap of wood they could find. Another week passed and he

called again and asked the meteorologist if he was sure it was going to be a cold winter. The meteorologist affirmed his answer and said that it was going to be one of the coldest winters ever. The chief was interested how the meteorologist could be so sure about his forecast and he answered him because the Indians were collecting wood like crazy...”

Hunter concluded his story and walked to his car. He turned and said to Richard with a smile: “Have a nice day!”

Hunter drove quickly to the company Star Games, where David worked. He easily identified the conspicuous vehicle and he dialed David’s number: “Are you the owner of a Hummer?”

“Yes, who are you?”

“Someone hit your car. You should come quickly.”

David ran out of the office to the car and looked it over. He didn’t see any damage and he thought to himself: ‘Somebody is trying to play a trick on me.’

“Hello, David. I’m Chief Superintendent Allen Peterson of the New York Police. My friends call me Hunter. Nice to meet you,” he said and he presented his badge.

David froze and asked: “What happened?”

“I want to speak to you in private. Get in the car.”

David’s thoughts began to race through his mind. Hunter didn’t hide his admiration for the vehicle.

“Now, down to business...you have advanced at a meteoric pace, David. Statistically, a person has a higher chance of being killed on the way to filling out a lottery ticket than winning the lottery. But you, in contradiction to all of the statistics, have won the first prize at least three times and tonight, I will probably have proof of your fourth win,” he said and showed him a copy of his lottery ticket.

“If I’m not mistaken, there’s no law against winning more than once.”

“Correct, as long as you have a satisfactory explanation how you do it.”

David took the piece of paper with his number series out of the glove compartment. On the top was written: ‘Statistical Data’.

He said: “This is the explanation. I developed a secret statistical formula to anticipate ahead of time eleven numbers from which six numbers will be chosen and up until now, I haven’t been wrong.”

Hunter took the page, looked at the rows of numbers and compared it to the lottery form in his hand.

“According to this page, you know the results for the next 493 drawings. How much money would that be?...more than two billion dollars...a respectable sum, without a doubt...but you’re not so smart, you’re only a sophisticated crook, but that’s also something you don’t see every day.”

It was silent in the car. They each knew that the other was planning his next steps and they tried to read each other’s thoughts. Hunter understood that David had a logical explanation for his winning the lottery, until it could be proven otherwise. He knew that the burden of proof was on him and he tried to understand the system.

“So, according to this list and the ticket you bought today, the six winning numbers will be among the eleven following numbers: 7,9,11,15,19,20,23,24,27,31,34.”

“Right”

“I’ll surprise you, David. I will prove to you this evening that your statistics aren’t correct,” he said and he suddenly got out of the car. He got in his car and drove to the Lottery Company on One Broadway Center, Schenectady

“The general manager, please,” he said to the secretary.

“Who should I say is here?”

“NYPD Chief Superintendent, Allen Peterson,” he said and showed her his ID.

“Come with me, please,” she said and she escorted him to the general manager’s office, who was at that same moment sitting with Jeff, who he introduced as the drawings and winnings manager.

“Hello, sir, you can call me Hunter.” He then faced Jeff, who turned beet red.

“Could you let us talk in private, please?”

“Of course,” said Jeff and immediately left to go to his office.

“Did you know, sir, that all of the lottery prize money lately is going to only one person?”

“What are you talking about?” answered the general manager in surprise as beads of sweat collected on his brow.

“I know the results of the drawing that will take place this evening!” he said and he showed him the series of numbers written on the page.

“Inspector, you are mistaken. There is no possible way to know ahead of time which numbers will be picked this evening.”

“I can prove it to you right now. Let’s go to the studio.”

The general manager opened Jeff’s office door and told him: “Bring me the keys to the studio and come with me.”

Jeff cut off his urgent phone conversation with David and joined them. His body language, the flush on Jeff's face and the way he broke off his conversation, didn't escape Hunter's eyes. Jeff turned on the lights in the auditorium and Hunter examined the machine that he recognized only from TV.

"Is this the machine you are going to use for the drawing this evening?" Hunter asked and he placed a video camera on the table nearby in order to document the drawing process.

"Yes," answered Jeff.

"Do you immediately operate the machine, or do you check and operate it before the live broadcast?"

"We have a general rehearsal with the moderator, cameras and director before the real drawing."

"If that's the case, let's see the general rehearsal now." Hunter ordered Jeff to turn on the machine.

He flicked on the power switch and pressed the start button on the side of the machine. The balls started to spin in the container and they emerged one after the other, until all the numbers that appeared on David's sheet were selected.

"Here are the winning numbers," Hunter said to them and showed them the six numbers from among the eleven in the series.

"Now, list the series of numbers from which the next six winning numbers will be picked: 7,9,11,15,19,20,23,24,27,31,34.

The general manager wrote down the numbers and Jeff was requested to start the machine again.

The balls started to spin in the container. The first ball drawn out was number 27.

"Bingo!" Hunter shouted and raised his hands in victory. He looked at the shocked faces of the two managers.

The second number that was drawn was 11. The general manager grasped his head in both his hands stunned and disbelieving. Jeff looked hypnotically at the sight in front of him. The next four numbers were as expected: 20,31,7,24.

"Do you have an explanation, gentlemen?"

"I don't know what to say. What are we going to do? We have a drawing in a few hours, millions of citizens purchased tickets..."

"Do you have an alternative machine?" the inspector asked.

"Yes," answered Jeff.

“Bring it now!” commanded Hunter. At the same time, he opened the machine and took out the internal computer that operated the lottery machine in order to prevent further fraud.

The alternative machine was brought in and it looked identical to the machine that was being replaced.

“Run it, please.”

Jeff turned on the switch. The balls began to spin in the container and they were drawn out, one after the other. The balls that were selected were not on David’s list of number series. Hunter confirmed this again and again and then gave his permission to have the drawing that evening.

“I must leave immediately. I will return tomorrow to continue the investigation. I want to inform you that you are under investigation and you are absolutely forbidden to talk to anyone about this matter,” Hunter clarified and he took the computer and video camera with him.

David’s cell phone wasn’t available. Hunter entered the company’s office and requested to see him.

“He left a few minutes ago and he’ll be back tomorrow,” the secretary said.

Hunter ran to his car and raced over to David’s house. He spotted David near the Millennium Towers. He was carrying a big case and was getting into a taxi that was waiting for him. Hunter followed the taxi. The driver drove over the speed limit and didn’t obey all of the yield and stop signs. Hunter, who was a determined and ambitious officer, didn’t allow noncompliance with the traffic rules to divert him from the goal. He pursued the taxi and stuck to his goal until its attainment.

The drive to LaGuardia Airport was short. When they arrived in front of the departure terminal, Hunter blocked the taxi. He ordered David to get into his car. He told him that he was under arrest and he handcuffed him.

“Give me your driver’s license,” he said to the taxi driver and he showed him his police badge.

“What am I guilty of?” asked the taxi driver, who was in shock from the rapid events unfolding before him.

“You drove wildly and endangered the public! My name is Hunter; come tomorrow to my office at the police station in South Manhattan,” replied Hunter with a serious expression, but in reality he wanted to document evidence of David’s attempt to escape.

David sat stunned in the car and covered his face in order to escape the penetrating stares of curious travelers that crowded around the car.

“So, David, are you going on a vacation to Jamaica without saying good-bye?”

David didn't reply. He sat quietly.

“I'm taking you to the Detention Center in the Bronx, David. You are a suspect in stealing sixty million dollars from the Lottery Company and you'll sit in jail for twenty years, like a criminal who steals money from a bank. The good life is over.”

“We could split the money, Hunter,” David tried his luck. “You would make in one week what you would make from working your whole life.”

“Attempted bribery, that is what the serious crime that you just committed is called,” he answered him and he thought about passing up the once in a lifetime chance to be a millionaire. He cleared these thoughts out of his mind and continued: “Do you want to notify your parents or attorney, so they won't think that you suddenly disappeared from the face of the earth?”

“Yes”

“OK, to whom?”

“To my girlfriend, Sandy.”

“What's the number?” he asked and dialed the number David told him.

“Let me talk to her.”

“Hello, Sandy, David wants to talk to you.”

He put the phone to David's ear.

“Hello, Sandy, I'm on my way to the Detention Center in the Bronx. Please notify my lawyer...and know that I love you very much. I am ready to give up all the money if you'll come back to me.”

“I've waited for this sentence for a long time, my love. I will give up the modeling contract I got today. I was supposed to leave for Paris and Rome tomorrow. David, Love conquers all.”

37. Forgiveness

“Pull down your underwear and spread your legs,” the prison guard ordered David, who was in prison for the first time. He obeyed the guard’s orders, who checked if he was hiding drugs in his rectum.

“OK, get dressed,” the guard said and he shoved two wool blankets in his hands that smelled of urine, mixed with semen that clung to them as a result of the prisoners “handiwork.”

“Please change the blankets, they stink,” complained David.

“And don’t you want the maid to make your bed for you too? Say thank you that you have blankets at all. You’ll find out how essential they are,” chuckled the tough guard.

He looked at David’s body and added: “I think that extensive sexual activity awaits you.” David was shocked. He still hadn’t comprehended the nature of the place and the new reality which he had brought upon himself. He realized that he was in the lions’ den and that he would have to fight for his ass, literally.

He was put in a cell with drug addicts and drug dealers, black and white. Mental and physical suffocation overcame him and caused him to vomit on the blanket and the filthy mattress. He sat on the floor that had a strong smell of Lysol and he bent his head down between his hands.

Despair gripped him and suddenly, he remembered a story that he once heard from an old Indian: “The sole survivor of a shipwreck was washed up on the shore of a small, unpopulated island. He fervently prayed to God that he would be rescued. Every day he scanned the horizon from end to end, but no sign appeared. Exhausted, hungry and injured, he was able to build himself a small hut made of wood that had been washed up on the beach. He had refuge from the wild animals. He put his few belongings that had swept up on shore with him in the hut. These were all the possessions he had in the world. One day, when he left his hut and went to the forest to look for food, a fire broke out and destroyed the hut and his possessions. The flames spread and threatened to burn down the entire forest. Black smoke billowed up to the sky. He moaned in grief and anguish and he said angrily to God: ‘How, how could you do this to me? Why do you bring disaster after disaster upon me?’ He spent the night in a nearby cave. The next morning he awakened to the sound of motors from an approaching

ship. It was coming to save him. ‘How did you know I was here?’ he asked his rescuers. ‘We saw the smoke signals you sent us...’”

‘Maybe my arrest is a smoke signal that was sent to remove me from the place I was and take me to a new and better place...’ David consoled himself and returned to the reality of the prison cell.

His cellmates began to question him. They were suspicious that he was placed in their cell by the police as an informer. His name and description circulated among the prisoners to see if someone knew if he was a police informant.

‘David Johnson is in the detention center?’ Tony asked himself and couldn’t believe his ears. ‘I must speak with the prison warden.’

As the undisputed leader of the prisoners, the warden took Tony’s opinions and requests into consideration. For the sake of keeping the peace in the prison, the warden agreed to take it easy on certain prisoners that Tony requested. He knew that a prisoner riot or strike in the detention center would involve investigative committees, which he wanted to prevent.

“Yes, Tony. How can I help you?”

“Transfer the prisoner David Johnson to my cell.”

“I can’t mix a new prisoner, who is in jail for the first time, with prisoners who have been arrested repeatedly.”

“He is currently in such a cell.”

“That is the order of the Superintendent of Investigations, with a certain intention which I can’t elaborate on.”

“So listen good. There is a reward on David Johnson’s head. His life is in danger! Furthermore, this man saved my father from certain death. He gave him the gift of life! I must save him and protect him!”

“Let me read the intelligence report and I’ll get back to you. Maybe it’s you yourself who wants to eliminate him!”

“He might be murdered any moment! Remember that I warned you!” said Tony and he stood up. Before he left the office, he turned around towards the warden, looked him in the eye and with a threatening finger pointing at him said: “If one hair on David’s head is harmed, I will personally guarantee you that your daughter Cindy will be killed on her way to kindergarten on Lincoln Street in Queens.”

The warden broke out in a cold sweat. All the details were precise, like a Swiss watch. He entered the intelligence officer's office, Mark: "What do you know about David Johnson?"

"There are suspicions of fraud and theft. Hunter wants to put pressure on him, so that's the reason he was put in a cell with drug addicts."

"Listen well; there is information from a very reliable source that there is a reward on David's head. Move him now, and I mean now, to Tony's cell! He's the only one who can protect him and he has a good reason for doing so. David saved his father's life."

"Right away, sir," said Mark and he got up to carry out the order. He took another guard with him according to the regulations.

David was leaning against the wall and was trying to catch a short nap. The squeaking of the cell door caused him to jump up. The prisoners made fun of the spoiled, rich man who wasn't used to conditions like these.

"David Johnson, get up and come with us...take your personal belongings with you."

"Also the blankets?" asked David.

"No, that won't be necessary."

He leaped up and joined them. In the narrow passageway, with the probing eyes of the varied prisoners on him, he asked: "Did someone arrange for my release?"

"When you admit your guilt, you'll be released," Mark tried to persuade him to "sing".

"I'm innocent."

"Sure, just like all of the prisoners...stand here. You see that door? You're going through there, to your new home! When you have something to tell me, call me," Mark winked at him and laughed.

The steel door with bars opened and he was shoved inside. He heard the bolts locking and he felt that his world was coming to an end. Through the sun beams that penetrated the cell from the barred window, David noticed a distinctive improvement in his confinement conditions. The cell was more spacious. There were two bunk beds instead of two single beds. There was a toilet and shower in the cell and a television and radio. 'An improvement of conditions' he thought to himself. Suddenly, he saw a man dressed in jeans and a plaid shirt. He was lying on one of the beds and his face was concealed by a black cowboy hat. The mattress and blankets were clean and smelled good. The white sheets created a different feeling from the previous cell where he had just come from.

He unpacked his personal belongings and sat on the bed opposite his cellmate's bed. Thoughts flooded his mind.

Suddenly, the man sat up on the edge of his bed. He took off his hat and looked at David. Total surprise together with dread fell upon David, who hadn't expected to find himself sitting opposite his opponent and enemy, Tony, in a closed, isolated jail cell. Instinctively, he stood up and prepared to meet an attack. He said: "You're going to have to sweat a lot to kill me, Tony."

Tony got on his knees; he clasped his hands together in front of his chest and begged: "David, I ask your forgiveness for what I did to you. You did a noble act and saved Luciano, my father, the dearest person to me in the world. You have my loyalty forever. I owe you my life, David. Please forgive me."

David stood in shock and didn't know how to react. When he came back to his senses, he relaxed his fighting stance. He held out his hand and helped Tony stand up. Tony hugged him and kissed him on the cheek. They sat across from each other on the bed and looked into each other's eyes.

"What are you doing here? What did they arrest you for?" Tony asked curiously.

"I am suspected of fraud and theft. Hunter can't sleep at night when he discovers that someone makes more money than police officers."

"The first rule is: don't admit anything. The best way to keep this important rule is to shut up. As you know, the fish wouldn't be on the plate if it hadn't opened its mouth. Be sure to use your right to remain silent. The second rule is that your arrest is meant to break you and cause you to admit your guilt, even for things you didn't do. At that point, you only want to remove the suffering and physical and mental stress. By the way, the reason that you are here with me in this spacious cell isn't because of comfort, rather for the purpose of defense. I requested that you be moved to my cell in order to prevent your elimination. There is a price on your head."

"Who wants to kill me?"

"Me...I ordered your death and I paid \$20,000 in cash, but that was before you saved my father. Now I am trying to stop the assassination, but I don't have communication with the death squad. I don't even know who they are. It could be anyone, including a prisoner or a guard."

David lay on his bed, fully dressed. He crossed his legs and put his hands under his head. He closed his eyes and thought to himself: 'Where did I go wrong? How did I transform from a free and happy man, with a billion and a half dollars waiting for him

to a prisoner sharing a jail cell with the head of organized crime and a reward on my head?’

“David, don’t sink now into self-pity. Get up; you’re not a weak female. You proved that in the operation you and your friends made against me,” Tony smiled. He went over the rules of caution and security that David was to keep during his stay in prison. Tony forbade him to go outside to the exercise yard where he could do physical activities, see the sunshine and breathe fresh air. He also prevented him from going into the dining room, where every fork might be used as a murder weapon. Tony stayed with him during these hours and they tried to kill time in the cell. They planned how to get out of the entanglement they had created with their own hands.

In the afternoon, they heard steps next to the cell door. The sounds of bolts and locks announced a new development. The door opened and a package was thrown into the middle of the cell.

“Somebody is taking care of you, David. They sent you a package from the prison’s canteen,” the guard muttered and slammed the heavy steel door behind him.

David jumped up and picked up the package.

“Stop!” Tony shouted at him. “Don’t open it...it’s probably booby-trapped.”

David removed one of his hands from the package as if he had touched white-hot iron.

“Are you expecting a package from someone?”

“No, I don’t have a clue...”

“Go into the bathroom. If there’s an explosion, at least one of us will live,” Tony told him and went over to the package. He examined it like a skilled sapper. He slowly took off the tape and he found a cash register receipt which detailed the items that were purchased in the canteen, the prices and the name of the purchaser, Sandy Canter-Johnson. He relaxed and he felt between the packages of the peanuts, almonds, coffee, tea, cans of tuna, corn and pickles, cookies and cakes.

“It’s OK David, Sandy still loves you,” he said and handed the package to David.

‘She wrote Sandy Canter-Johnson...if that’s the case, it seems that she has serious intentions,’ David whispered to himself and a pleasant feeling of longing suddenly flooded him.

“Cut the cake, Tony. I’ll make coffee,” said David and he went over to the faucet. He poured water into the small kettle and put it on the electric hot-plate.

They ate from the same plate with great appetite. The cans of tuna, corn and pickles reminded David of his army service.

“I love her, but she gave me an ultimatum: her or the money. What would you do in my position?” David looked at him with a look of admiration mixed with pity.

“I’m going to take a shit in the bathroom. Don’t go anywhere,” Tony laughed.

Suddenly, there were sounds of the locks being opened again. The steel door opened and a man with an angry face was thrown in the cell.

“Are you David?” he asked after the door was shut.

“Yes, and who are you?”

“I’m your angel of death!” he hissed and jumped on David like a panther. He held a fork in his hand that had been transformed into a sharp knife. There was great commotion from the jump and the wrestling. David tried to stop the hand that held the fork that was very near his throat. He fought like a tiger for his life. Tony came out of the bathroom with his pants down, but it didn’t stop him from dashing over to Joe.

“Joe, no!! Stop, it’s cancelled, stop! Ayeee...” a shout escaped from his throat. A strong stream of blood burst from his hand. Joe was surprised by the presence of another prisoner in the cell, especially since it was Tony himself.

“Are you retarded?” Joe asked Tony and got up from David, whose face was splattered with Tony’s blood.

“Everything’s cancelled Joe, I made a mistake,” he said and he applied pressure with one hand on the deep cut on his other hand. He went over to the faucet and washed off the blood.

David was still in shock. He tried to organize his thoughts after the traumatic event in which he almost lost his life. He stood ready, without moving, as if he had turned into a pillar of stone. He only looked at Joe and didn’t speak.

The commotion brought the guards running. Three of them burst into the cell and removed Joe to the corner. One of them checked Tony’s hand.

“You need stitches.”

“I’m fine, I simply fell on a fork,” answered Tony to the sound of the guards’ chuckling. When they were convinced that he had no intention of getting treatment, they let him alone and removed Joe from the cell.

“When I was in the bathroom they bring him in,” Tony complained and moaned in pain.

“Thank you, my friend. You came just in time and saved my life! Good friends are like stars: You don’t always see them, but you always know that they are there, somewhere...”

38. The Big Deal

“ ‘Fraud of billions of dollars’... ‘The largest theft in the country’s history’... Those are the headlines that will appear in tomorrow’s papers and on the radio and television news broadcasts,” said Hunter to his wife, as he sipped his morning coffee and read the newspaper that had been delivered to his doorstep. His wife, Mary, who was putting on her make-up and getting ready to leave for another routine workday at the advertising agency where she worked, the Mirage Ad Agency in Manhattan, stopped what she was doing and stared at him in surprise.

“Why did you keep such a big story a secret from me?”

“It’s something new; I only found out about it a few days ago, but it surprised even me in its daring and perfect execution. It reached the level of artistry- this is the art of crime...the raw materials in every kind of art is clear. A composer has instruments and musical notes. A dancer sees her body as an instrument of self-expression. A sculptor chisels stone and a painter uses paints. In contrast to them, the raw material in the art of crime is originality, creativity and imagination- something that has never been thought of before; something that will be a breakthrough- to commit a clean crime, without casualties, where the risk is low relative to the huge compensation that you get.”

“What is it? I’m very curious.”

“Something to do with the Lottery Company. They even tried to bribe me with a billion dollars, but I refused.”

“A billion? You’re not mistaken?”

“A billion and even more.”

“For ten thousand dollars, it’s not worth getting your hands dirty, but for a billion dollars, I would go for it; I’d even be willing to pay the price. A billion...is it too late to change your mind? Maybe we could finally buy a new washing machine instead of fixing the old one again and again. Not to mention the furniture that has seen better days. A mattress, so I could get up in the morning without a backache and a car and clothes and diamonds and a vacation in the Caribbean...Oh, Hunter, what I could do with a billion dollars!” said Mary and she flew away on the wings of her imagination to distant places.

Hunter roused her from her daydreams and said: “If I had wanted to take a bribe, I could have long ago from pimps, whores, casino owners and the rest of the criminals.

As you know, once you start, it's never enough. Tony could have stopped a month ago when he had six million dollars in his pockets and he could have lived like a Saudi prince with his harem. Senior officials and politicians who want more and more are caught in the end. Lust for money destroys character; it overcomes logic and causes self-destruction."

"You're right," she said begrudgingly.

"See you later, honey. I've got to go," he said and left for his new day of investigations. On his way to the Lottery Company, he checked that the video cassette was ready in order to document the embezzlement of millions of dollars. Since he hadn't told anyone about the investigation, he had to supply irrefutable evidence to file an indictment. Without it, all his work would go down the drain.

He started the video camera and hid it in a small pouch hanging on his belt and then he entered Jeff's office.

"Good morning, Jeff. Please join me in the general manager's office."

"Good morning, Hunter," he answered in a shaky voice. He had expected his arrival and he knew that it didn't bode well for him. He had even brought his personal shaving kit from his house in case he was arrested for the duration of the investigation. At the same time, he had prepared well in coordination with the general manager

The general manager was in the middle of dictating a letter to his secretary, which was designated to the mayor of Troy, regarding the establishment of a library and a sports auditorium in a school to be funded by the Lottery Company. He shook hands with Hunter and invited him into his office. Hunter sat down in front of the large desk, next to Jeff. He put the pouch on the desk along with his keys and he addressed the general manager: "I expected to see you at the police station in order to file a complaint about the theft and fraud of billions of dollars from the organization that you head. I'm really surprised that you haven't done anything. Your lack of action could be construed as your connection to the deed."

"First of all, you warned us yesterday not to speak to anyone regarding the matter. Secondly, how did you arrive at this imaginary number?"

"I expected this answer and I'm glad that you didn't tell anyone about the investigation. As for the sum, every week six million, times 54 weeks in a year...324 million, times ten years, that's undoubtedly a nice sum. If I hadn't uncovered the fraud, you would have earned another three billion dollars in the coming years. No

doubt about it, you came up with an amazing idea. However, the money went to your heads and you started to make mistakes, like buying toys that turn heads, which caused criminals to covet them for themselves and that's what led me here."

The general manager was totally relaxed, relative to someone who had just been accused of stealing billions of dollars.

He shifted his position in his chair and said: "We just purchased these machines three months ago from an American company, which is under the inspection of the Federal Authority for Gambling. So at most, only ninety days have passed. Secondly, I checked the matter out with Jeff. He has confessed to the crime that he committed due to threats on his and his wife's lives. His wife had borrowed money on the grey market and she couldn't meet her payments. Jeff was also surprised to find out that David continued to steal the prize money for himself twice a week. This was in contrary to their agreement that it was to be a one-shot event for the big drawing. We would have discovered the fraud as soon as David would have arrived at our office twice a week in order to collect the first prize."

Hunter was happy about Jeff's admission regarding his involvement in the fraud and he said: "Jeff, your involvement in the fraud and theft testifies to the malignant decay in society, which requires radical change and painful extraction in order to prevent repetition of such acts in the future."

Jeff lowered his eyes. Hunter observed the man's distress. He turned to the general manager and said: "Sir, who would know as well as you, that a serial winner could sell his winning form to tax evaders and to criminal elements, who would be happy to add ten percent to the prize money and be able to launder money that was obtained criminally. Let's assume that this went on for only three months, so 100 million dollars is a petty sum in your eyes? As the general manager of the Lottery Company, you bear personal responsibility, administratively and legally, for everything that goes on in the company and don't try to minimize it."

"Look, Mister Chief Inspector, a crime was committed here that I wasn't involved in. I'm not denying my responsibility, but as the general manager, I look at the broad picture and I reached the conclusion that if I were to file a complaint, a terrible catastrophe would befall the state and would cause irreparable damage, that both you and I would be sorry for the rest of our lives."

Hunter stared at him in surprise. He hadn't expected such a reaction and he asked for clarification.

“If I file a complaint with the police, it will lead to our dismissal without severance pay- a matter which is insignificant to you. However, that’s not the issue. The significant damage that will be caused is the total loss of the public’s confidence in the Lottery Company, in other words, closure of the company and similar companies on the entire continent. The implication of such an act will be the firing of hundreds of employees in the company and significant loss of income which will lead to the collapse of 15,000 retailers statewide that operate lottery points of sale. Additionally, exposure of the crime will cause a loss of tens of billions of dollars to the State Treasury, which will hurt many educational projects that the lottery finances. But the most terrible thing of all will be when citizens file lawsuits to get their money back that was swindled from them and the sum will be in the hundreds of billions of dollars- an amount that doesn’t exist in the State’s impoverished coffers! This fact will cause the collapse of the stock market and a chain reaction that is likely to bring the American economy crashing down for at least two years.”

Hunter moved restlessly in his chair and debated... ‘The point is, he’s right, fuck,’ thought Hunter. ‘Does the whole American economy rest on my shoulders?’

“Hunter, there isn’t a person who hasn’t made mistakes, including you!” said Jeff, who was holding the trump card in his hand. The police investigator was surprised by the personal attack on him and he tensed...

“Due to your over ambitiousness, Hunter, you made a mistake in the past and you are liable to lose your promising future that you anticipated because of it. We invested a little money and we obtained information about you. As you know, we have unlimited resources. We discovered that you bought your BA degree in Criminology from the University of Latvia for five thousand dollars. We have solid evidence to back up our claim. It will lead to your dismissal in disgrace from the police force, loss of your retirement benefits, not to mention opening a criminal file against you which will prevent you from getting a license to be a private investigator in the future.”

Hunter’s head was spinning from the findings thrown in his face. Judging from their confidence, he understood that they had him, but as an experienced police detective, he didn’t volunteer to surrender and so he was quiet. Jeff knew from Hunter’s body language that his victory was assured, so he continued in a softer and friendlier tone.

“You have the power to cause our collective suicide, but that is less important than the destruction of New York State’s economy and I am sure you don’t want to do that. So, let’s forget it and open a new page.”

Hunter lowered his gaze towards the table, weighed his options and said: “OK, but on the following conditions: Jeff will transfer the money still in his possession to the organization “Sister Tirza” that supplies medical equipment to the needy and to the organization Variety that helps disabled children. David will transfer all of his money and winning lottery tickets in his possession to the American Cancer Society and to the Green Light Association that works to prevent traffic accidents. You both retire and leave your positions.”

“OK,” the general manager said gladly and he looked angrily at Jeff who had caused them this enforced retirement.

“I’ll quit, but I will need money to live off for the rest of my life,” implored Jeff.

“You have a pension fund from the army and the Lottery Company, so you will be able to live comfortably and even beyond that,” Hunter insisted.

“Alright, if I have don’t have a choice...don’t forget to release David today, in order to prevent continuation of the episode.”

“I’ll do that as soon as we leave. We’ll also go to your house and collect the money that you kept for yourself.”

“On the way out, stop by Personnel and fill out the resignation forms,” the general manager said to Jeff.

Hunter and Jeff left the building quickly and walked towards the parking lot. When they reached Hunter’s car, he suddenly saw an uninvited guest leaning on his car door. He blanched, but he said with his characteristic bravado: “Are you trailing me again, Richard?”

“Based on the frequency of your visits to the Lottery Company, it looks like you won the big prize,” grinned Richard.

“In addition to what we talked about, I discovered widespread illegal gambling that greatly disturbs the Lottery Company and that’s what brought me to the building. It’s not something that your editor would put on the front page,” he said and got into his car with Jeff.

“My sixth sense tells me otherwise, but I’ll take your word for now,” he said and stepped aside.

Hunter called the general manager and warned him about the determined and nosy reporter who was trying to inquire as to why the head of the Vice Squad was visiting the Lottery Company. The manager replaced the receiver and told the reporter the

same story that he had heard from Hunter. Richard had to be satisfied with what he heard, but his instincts told him that it wasn't the truth.

Hunter stopped at the gate of the detention center in the Bronx. He presented his ID to the guard, who opened the gate for him. He parked his car in a spot reserved for prisoners' attorneys and he told Jeff to wait for him in the car. He entered the intelligence officer's office and said: "Release David Johnson. I don't have evidence against him. His release will be the bait to obtain evidence by following him."

"Sign the forms...he'll be out in five minutes."

He signed the forms and returned to his car. Ten minutes later, David appeared at the exit gate. His appearance was slovenly. He was tired and unshaven. He covered his eyes from the bright sunlight. Hunter called him over. David walked over to the car and was surprised to see Jeff sitting in the passenger seat.

"Get in. Do you know the distinguished gentleman sitting next to me?" asked Hunter.

"No"

"David, our story has been exposed. I put everything on the table. There's nothing more to hide," said Jeff.

"I have nothing to say," David insisted and he didn't volunteer to talk.

"The general manager and I made a deal with Hunter. I agreed to take all of the money I have left from the swindle and to donate it to charity. The general manager and I are quitting our jobs. The American public will continue to satisfy its need for excitement by gambling, in the hopes of making their dreams come true and by that the Lottery Company will continue to finance libraries and sport auditoriums for the benefit of students."

The three men looked at each other. "Your alternative is to go back through the gate which you just exited," Hunter helped him make the right decision.

"Sandy will be happy that I got rid of all the money. She will admire me for my sudden generosity," said David smiling and he put his thumb up to show that he agreed to the deal.

Hunter started the car and drove in the direction of Jeff's home.

"This is the biggest deal, with the most money that has been made in New York in a long time," said Jeff and he told David about the details of the deal that was made at the Lottery Company's offices.

When they reached Jeff's apartment, he was asked to open the concealed safe in the wall. With obvious displeasure, he put the packets of money into an army kit-bag.

They counted the money again and again... 8 million, 900 thousand dollars. They put the heavy bag into Hunter's car and they drove away quickly, using evasion techniques in case they were being followed. They arrived at the offices of Sister Tirza charity in Brooklyn.

"Hello, ladies, we want to make a modest donation of four million dollars," said Hunter and the three started to take the packets of money out of the bag. They deposited the money into the trustworthy hands of the three volunteers, who were surprised by the large amount. They praised their unusual act of generosity.

After they received a receipt for the sum of the donation, written to a false identity, they headed for the offices of the American Cancer Society in Manhattan.

"4 million and 900 thousand dollars" was the sum written on the receipt and on the certificate of appreciation that the three received for their generous donation, "anonymous" was written on the line designated for the name of the donor.

It was a short ride to the Citibank branch on Canal Street, where David had his account. "Balance: \$8,741,742" was written on the statement issued to David. Roger asked David about his disheveled appearance and who the two men with him were.

"They are my friends. I have been on a short educational trip. I learned an important lesson about the meaning of life. As a result, I decided to donate all of my money to charity."

"All of the money?" asked Roger. "It's good to be generous, David and you'll get your reward in Heaven, but you have to take care of yourself in this world, don't you?"

"Money only brings trouble and this donation will bring me back to the 'Garden of Sandy,' which is just as beautiful as the Garden of Eden."

Roger shrugged his shoulders and asked helplessly: "To whom do you want to transfer the money?"

"Three million to the organization Variety, three million to the Green Light Association and \$2,741,742 to the War on Aides Foundation."

"Are you sure, David? Maybe you should think about it for a day or two; if you change your mind it will be too late," Roger tried to change David's mind.

When he got a negative reply, he performed the transfer to the three charities. The three men helped him locate the addresses, phone numbers and bank account numbers about where to deposit the generous donations.

When the process was completed, David received his new bank account statement. At the bottom of the page was written: "Account balance: \$0."

Each one received a copy of the donations in case they needed it as proof. They left the bank with a good feeling. They were pleased with the solution that they found and they felt gratified by their contribution to society.

The three shook hands warmly and parted. They were happy that they had brought the episode to a close to each of their satisfaction.

David didn't have enough money in his pocket even to catch a bus to get to his car parked near his work. So he called Sandy: "Where are you Sandy?"

"At the canteen at the entrance to the detention center in the Bronx."

"I was freed. I'm next to the bank on Canal Street. Can you come get me?"

"Wait for me there. I'm coming."

David sat down on the bench at the bus stop and waited for her. The bus driver of line 6, which went uptown, stopped for him to get on. David shrugged his shoulders and apologized: "Sorry, I don't have three dollars for the bus fare." The driver closed the door and drove on.

Suddenly, Sandy's car screeched to a halt. She leaped out of the car and ran towards him. She jumped on David with hugs and kisses. All of the tension and waiting was discharged on his face, which was covered with stubble, but she didn't care. All that she asked was not to be parted ever again.

"I love you, David, like I've never loved anyone before. I won't leave you, not even for one minute," she said and again covered him with kisses, as if they were alone in a private room.

The bank clerk, Roger came out of the bank for his lunch break. He stood with all of the other passersby and watched the scene, as if it were from some war movie where the soldier was returning from battle to the arms of his lover.

He said: "You see, David, God pays immediately in cash to those who do good deeds..."

David woke up from the dream he had been in for the past few minutes and smiled at Roger in agreement. Sandy and David got in the car and drove towards home. On the way, he told her about the unfounded suspicions of the police about his winning the lottery and how he had denied that he had done anything illegal and therefore he had been released from prison.

“I’m starving. I haven’t eaten anything over the past two days and there’s nothing at home since you left. Let’s stop at a restaurant and grab a bite,” he suggested.

Although she was disappointed about the delay and her plans to wash him, shave him, feel him and make love with him, she agreed to stop and let him eat, in compensation for the suffering he had endured lately.

“Steak, French fries and salad, please,” David ordered.

“And two glasses of lemonade, please,” added Sandy.

While they were waiting, he told her about the tumultuous events that happened to him in prison and he showed her the bank statement with the balance of zero.

Sandy told him how she had signed a contract with the modeling agency Elite and the offer she had received to be the in-house model for the company Gottex, which involved frequent travel abroad.

“As you can see, I gave up everything for you, like you gave up everything for me. Love conquers all, because lovers sacrifice their needs for the sake of the other.”

They stood and kissed each other until the waitress appeared with their order. David devoured it with great appetite.

After Sandy paid the bill, David took twenty dollars from the change she received from the waitress and he waited for an old beggar to approach them with heavy steps.

“Lottery, sir, buy a lottery ticket. Perhaps it’s your day to win a lot of money.” He handed David a lottery ticket worth twenty dollars. David took the ticket and paid with bill he held in his hand. The beggar wished him luck. Sandy stood in shock. She looked into David’s eyes and couldn’t believe it.

“Livelihood for a poor man,” he answered in apology and he tore up the ticket into little pieces and put them in an ashtray.

The beggar looked unbelievably at the man’s action: “Another eccentric person in this incomprehensible city.”

Sandy relaxed and laughed. She kissed David and pulled him towards their love nest to fulfill their burning passion.

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