

In for a Penny ... in for a Pound

By Dean Caldwell

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Chapter 1 Hidden in the sand

"This isn't nostalgic! Look at this place!"

"Well what did you expect? Something out of a 1930's movie? Billowing black coal smoke, hissing steam, wooden cars; come on, that was 70 years ago." I shook my head. For the first time in the nearly two weeks I'd known Barb she sounded like a New York Jewish princess.

We'd met because of our mothers. I was working on my backlog of cases. After my fourth cold, wet winter in Amsterdam I was bored. Nothing in my queue seemed worth the effort. Below in the back courtyard of the cafe the lunch crowd had thinned so I'd opened the door to the small balcony. These renovated buildings lacked air conditioning. The minor canal that split the street out front eventually led to one of the ring canals connecting to Amsterdam's harbor. From what was once the front sitting room you could look down on the tourists that ventured a few blocks away from the Dom square to glimpse the 'real Amsterdam'.

I glanced at the caller ID on the ringing phone. It was a number my mother had made me memorize before I could go out an play. "Good morning mother. How's the Island this morning?"

"Just fine, of course." Her tone, as much as the fact that she'd called me at work at 8 AM New York time, set off alarms that usually foretold dire events. "I was at a meeting yesterday and saw Mrs. Kratz. You remember them. Their eldest son went to school with you. Her youngest daughter went to work for her father, the art importer, when she got out of City. Now they want her to get to know more about the business so they sent her to their shop in Amsterdam. When Mrs. Kratz talked to her yesterday, Barbara that's her daughter's name, said she was feeling a little lost and lonely. So I'd like to call Mrs. Kratz back and say that you'll look in on her. You'll be at the office for a little while?"

"Yes." I figured that I had maybe fifteen minutes to go down to the cafe and exchange my empty mid morning mug for a fresh afternoon refill. Hey, there are advantages to working above a cafe and renting from the owner who lives above your office.

Yvette, the owners wife, saw me walking in with my empty mug and had a freshly filled one waiting by the time I got to the counter. I'd been thinking on the way down the stairs how I was going to carry off this 'looking in on' to my mother's and Mrs. Kratz expectations. As a single 35 year old Jewish man, the shadow of his mother's hand is never far away.

"Yvette, can I get the far corner table for say 8 tonight?"

"Ja. A primo date?"

"No. Just a family friend my mother wants me to entertain. I don't even know the woman."

With coffee in hand I had just reached the office when my phone rang. I picked it up without looking at the caller ID. I didn't need to. On a busy day I might get two or three calls. Most of my work came from referrals or emails from my dad in the New York office. "Good afternoon, I Brown and Company, how can I help you?"

"Mr. Swartz, this is Mrs. Kratz, from Long Island, New York. Your mother said you'd be willing to look in on my daughter and help her get settled in Amsterdam. She works at . . ." The woman droned on and on. I took notes. Her daughter's whole history became outlined in blue ballpoint pen on the pages of a yellow pad. At least I'd have a few conversation starting points. With my left ear warm and probably red from over exposure, I finally got a chance to assure her that I'd give her daughter a call and arrange something.

The address of the art shop was on the way towards the Dom square. An area lined with tourist and antique/art shops. I closed up the office and walked there. The late spring flowering trees were in bloom and the heavy tourist crowds were a month away. Amsterdam can be lovely under the right conditions. I slowed down and enjoyed the stroll. I should have been thinking about how I was going to approach Mrs. Kratz's daughter.

I stopped at the window of the shop and collected my thoughts. A couple carrying blue and white KLM travel tour bags were at the register. I window shopped until they left and quickly hurried in.

Barbara must have seen me approach because she turned to put away a small box as I got to the counter. To her turning back I blurted "Miss Kratz, I'm Dominic Swartz. Our mother's . . ."

"I can tell and I'm glad to finally meet you." She quickly squatted down to the shelf below the counter giving me only a view of the top of her head and the long black hair that flowed to well below her shoulders. Fumbling for something she spoke in a hurried tempo. "They've each called twice today. It's a good thing my uncle owns this business. He'd have fired the local help for spending so much time on the phone. Not that either let me say much. I need get a few things cleaned up and we'll go. He'll be happy to get rid of me so he can call and them and report that we're off." As she headed toward a curtained doorway at the back of the shop I realized that all I'd seen of her was a glimpse of her face, the top of her head and the back of a lovely five foot something figure not even a cardigan sweater could hide. Her words had been said quickly and nervously. The sound of her voice soothed my apprehension. Anything else about her besides her voice for the next few hours would be a bonus.

I nosed around the shop while waiting on her. They didn't carry cheap tourist items. Even the small stuff was expensive. Glass paperweights started at €100. I recognized several of the mid and late 20th century painters who were just starting to make a name for themselves. These were not their best works, but in a few years even these could appreciate noticeably. Especially if a major collector were to take notice of them or they became identified with an emerging style. The sculptures and jewelry looked expensive. The price tags were small and discretely placed. A glass wall case held key lit necklaces, earrings and bracelets. Each could have been a unique creation. The display case in front had a selection of estate quality rings. To the discerning and affluent this shop offered a wide variety of expensive treasures.

From behind me: "I'm ready!" I turned bracing myself for my first real look at my blind date. She looked up at me as I looked down. Soft afternoon light from the front windows would have hid any flaws if she'd had any. I memorized her every feature in the instant before I reached for her hand so she wouldn't find some last second excuse to have to stay any longer or beg off. Images of silver screen stars raced through my mind looking for a match. None were close. She was in every detail what I'd composited as perfect. Realizing that we were both smitten and relieved at our good fortune to be so, she gave my hand a gentle squeeze and led me outside.

Out on the sidewalk reality set in. "Where to Mr. Swartz?"

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"A canal boat ride?"
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For the next eight hours I remember nothing except being with her on the boat tour, having a glass of wine at a sidewalk cafe, a walk back to our reserved quiet corner table and dinner.

[&]quot;Haven't done that yet."

[&]quot;Well then it is in for a penny . . .

[&]quot;... in for a pound." Barb and I finished in unison.

[&]quot;Where did you get that?"

[&]quot;Everyone knows that saying. My father used it all the time when we were kids and would start off on some new adventure, like riding our bikes along a new trail on the island. I didn't think about it. I just said it."

[&]quot;My father did the same. He said it was just what you said when you started out on something new. I figured it was his way of expressing commitment."

[&]quot;I'm committed, if you are?"

"I guess we should call our mothers."

"OK. Let's go up to my office." I pointed to my balcony. "If dad questions the calls, I'll tell him is was mother's doing."

"You really do work right up there?"

"Well, yes. How else do you think we got this table. You saw the line as we walked in and there hasn't been an empty place all night. Besides it helps that they are my landlord for the office and my flat."

"You eat dinner here regularly?"

"A few times a week. And lunch and coffee."

"And you live close by?"

"Just in the next block. Around the corner from you."

"You know where I live?"

"When we get up to the office I'll show you the pages of notes I took as your mother dictated your life story to me this afternoon."

"She didn't?"

"You'll see!"

"At least your mother faxed me your picture and CV, not that either did you justice. I was more than a little apprehensive about meeting you. My mother has set me up, using one pretext or another, with some classic losers. When you walked in backlit by the front windows and started to introduce yourself even before you got to the counter my heart sank. I had to find some excuse so I pretended to put things away below the counter When my eyes were able to adjust and focus on your reflection in the glass counter I couldn't believe my good fortune at having a date with you. Then I had to go into the back room to catch my breath and regain some semblance of composure. The rest has been . . ."

In my impatience to tell her my side, I cut off what she was saying. "You don't say! In four years here I've entertained god only knows how many of my mother's friends daughters who just happened to be here for the day. Up until this afternoon if I could have divorced my mother I would have. Now I never . . ."

"Me too."

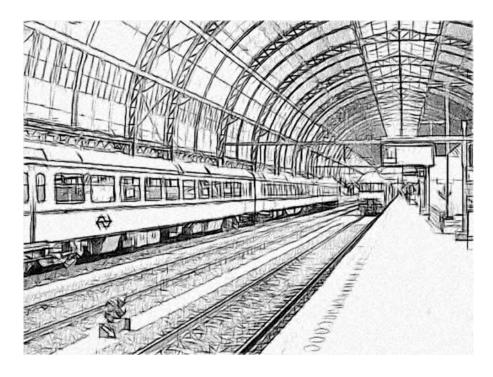
"I think they owe us!"

"No kidding!"

We settled into a private first class cabin. Not my usual arrangement by any means, but I needed some uninterrupted time with Barb to tell her a few things about what I Brown & Company really did. Then I had to make the case for her to join us. My father endorsed the idea. For the last two weeks during seemingly daily phone calls to both of us, our mothers had tried to hide the fact that they got what they wanted. All this thinking about how approach the subject took more time than I realized. The movement of the train brought my focus back to the present. Barb had a small art tablet in her left hand and was sketching something.

"May I see it?"

"In a moment, just a few more lines."



"Wow! That's really great! I didn't know you could draw!"

"Well, I was an Art major and we did have to take a drawing class. Didn't you?"

"No. I majored in Art History for a reason. No drawing classes!"

"I can believe that. I've tried to read your hand writing."

"So 'ILY DOM' is hard to read?"

"No, it is what follows, 'Barb' and precedes 'ILY DOM' that seems encrypted."

I spent an additional moment looking at her sketch and refocusing on what she had to be told before we got any further.

Over the last year I had been engaged in a loosing battle with my parents. Mother heckling me to get some office help. "Dominic, no one will respect the business if you answer the phone all the time. You need to hire someone." Dad noted my slow turn around on projects to the point of openly wondering if I could handle the job.

Since meeting Barb, I all but stopped doing any real productive work while she and I did all the touristy things. We took a one day bus trip to the Keukenhoff Rijks flower gardens. Spent a day in Delft touring the pottery and tile factory. The two days at the Reich's museum were hardly enough for the art majors that we are. We told my father and her uncle that two days of studying the masters in person was something every serious art historian had to do. Collectively we agreed that asking for two days in the Louvre would be stretching our credibility. Visited a casino one night after we each tried to put in a real day's work at our jobs. Left work early to repeat the canal boat tour. This time listening to the guide and looking at the scenery. I rented a car for the weekend so we could go to Muiden and Naarden. It was fun, but the time was never right to talk business the way Dad wanted me to do. He'd first suggested hiring her after I told him of our Delft trip. This train ride to Den Helder and the Friesian Islands had to be it. If she said no, we'd spend two more days as tourists and go back to our jobs on Monday morning, seeing each other as time and inclination permitted. If she agreed we'd start the field work on a project well past the promised date. And I'd slowly work on making our working relationship more personal.

"Hey this is nice!"

"Glad you like it." I smiled at her.

"It'd be better if you were over here and put your arm around me. This is private enough." I changed sides and draped my arm around her shoulder. She adjusted my hand over her sweater covered breast. "That's much better. I want to stay this way forever. Cared for and protected by you!" I leaned right and kissed her forehead. She would have none of that and tilted her head

back for a real kiss. This answered my second question. Not that I had any real doubts that eventually Barb would agree to my marriage proposal. Instantly I changed my mind.

"So you will marry me?"

"I wouldn't let you marry anyone else!"

"Even if you don't know what I Brown & Company does and why we have an office in Amsterdam?"

"OK. What do you do? Not that I'm likely to change my mind, but I might try to lead you down a straighter path."

"I Brown & Company are art and antique consultants as I've told you. We provide two related services for our clients who are usually institutions, insurance companies or wealthy individuals. We provide independent providence for pieces and we also help find missing pieces. And that is where you come in."

"Me!"

"Yes. Dad and his partners want to hire you to work with me. I'm not a very good judge of the authenticity of a piece. I tend to extensively verify the provided history and have a battery of mechanical tests run. Both are expensive and time consuming."

"You seem to know when a piece doesn't look quite right. Or the production code is suspicious. When I told dad the story of how in the Delft circle shop you picked up pieces of pottery or tiles and immediately knew the real from the fake, he was as blown away as I was. The same was true when you looked at jewelry. Although it was the 18th century Dutch landscape that you identified as that of a minor artist, and we took home for less than lunch money, that really convinced both of us. He already has a buyer for it."

"So what does this job pay?"

"Dad says you make what I do."

"Do I work for you?"

'No. We're partners, a team."

"You bet we are!" There followed a protracted hug and kiss interrupted by a knocking on the glass door by the conductor. I showed him our tickets, which he punched with a date stamp. I

asked about where to get tea. He pointed down the hall. Five minutes later I was back. Barb's mind had obviously been in overdrive.

"Since neither one of us is at all the least bit religious, how do we get married without teeing off our parents?"

"We can't. But I'm not sure how much I care, either. As I told you before, one of the main reasons dad set me up in my own office over here is to get me away from my mother. Her meddling drove us both crazy. So we tell them we're getting married at a location and date of our choice. Dad will completely understand."

"OK, but where?"

"I don't know. Some place our mothers have no influence, like city hall in Amsterdam."

"Can we do it here?"

"Why not? We both have work visas. Our US passports don't expire for years. On Monday we'll ask the lawyer I use. We can have lunch with him."

"How soon?"

"An eager little hussy you are. Afraid I might change my mind?"

"No! Don't you dare! But the longer we wait the more they'll pry and scheme. In the last two weeks we've heard a constant increase in their pointed questions. I just don't want to give my mother any time to react or she'll start running things. She actually ruined my older sister's wedding by over planning it. She hired a wedding manager. It was scripted to the minute, to the minute! A 10 hour event with more than 100 pages of instructions. My escort, one of the groomsmen, left before it was over. I wish I could have. She actually had my dance card and many of the other attendant's made out in advance for the whole evening. They were next to our table place cards."

"What about next Friday? We'll tell them on Tuesday evening. After the wedding we'll catch the ferry to London. It's where we have to go to verify some antique records if my research is correct."

"So instead of a honeymoon I get a working vacation?"

"You agreed to work for I Brown & Company. We've got a several year back log of cases to resolve at the rate I plod. Besides, that way dad and his client will pay for it."

From the train station in Den Helder we went to the left toward the harbor. I towed our sacked wheeled cases with my left hand and held Barb's hand in the other. While waiting for a light to cross the street she asked. "Does my hand feel OK to you?"

"Yea."

"It seems to be missing something."

I went along with her game. I'd see how obtuse she thought I was, and if I could make her come right out and ask for a ring. "Weren't you wearing a costume jewelry ring on our first date? And sometimes a silver braided one maybe?"

The changing light saved her answering and saved me a reply I should not have provoked. At the first jewelry store we saw she pulled me inside. Then all but accosted man behind the glass counter. "We need to look at wedding ring sets!" Barbara definitely knew how to play the game. I'd need to pick my jousts more judiciously, if I ever intended to win.

Back on the street we resumed our walk to the harbor looking for a place to have a simple lunch. "My hand feels better, thank you. And I don't care if mother thinks only diamonds are acceptable as engagement rings. I like these five small rubies in light yellow gold. The twisted dark red gold wedding bands will make a stunning trio."

I'd booked us into a small hotel in Den Burg. The hotel shuttle picked us up at the dock and saved us a fair walk. Texel is the southern most of the islands that are off the northwest coast of Holland. There is some agriculture on most of them, but fishing and tourism are their main activities. After getting our key Barb set off up the stairs to our room. I followed her in leaving the rollies in the open niche closet. Over her shoulder I could see two single beds separated by a night stand. Two chairs and a small circular bar table were in the corner near the draped full glass sliding door that opened onto a standing room only balcony.

"You follow orders well, Mr. Swartz, two beds and a private bath. I meant what I told you the first time you tried to kiss me at the end of our second date. I may have been totally smitten with you from the moment I set eyes on you, but I will remain a virgin until we're married. Now what . . ."

I could take it no longer and spun her around to face me and mashed the rest of what she was saying with a hungry kiss as I lifted her off the floor. Her stiffness turned to need. Barb locked us together with her arms around my neck. She slid her head to the side and caught her breath in a few ear warming lungfuls.

In a whisper only my left ear could have heard she asked. "Dom, how are we going to last another week?"

"Work, that's how." I whispered back. We stayed that way for another moment before I put her down on her feet. My hands on her waist, hers on my chest, resolve infusing us.

"So where do we start?"

"Take my notebook and email dad that you accept his offer to join I Brown & Company. Tell him we are in Texel checking out the most critical part of the story. Then find the projects folder and open the file "LP_05" and start reading the background material. Meanwhile I'll contact my, our, lawyer and get things rolling for our wedding. I'll also book our trip to England."

"Do I use the house phone to get on the . . . "

"No. You'll find a wireless card in the case. It plugs into the USB port. It puts you on my cell phone. Our log in is Yonkers and the password is 01671."

"Then what'll you use?"

"The house phone." I used a hotel scratch pad to list the three things I need to talk to Jan about. Then dialed his secure number from memory.

He would have passed my mother's test of credibility and outward importance. On the second ring I was shuffled of to voice mail where I left my name, the hotel and room numbers. Booking our England trip was much easier. My usual travel agent said she would have tickets and hotel reservation slips delivered on Tuesday.

Barb asked "Do you want to read this note before I send it?"

"No. Dad's reaction will be a phone call. He's not comfortable with email. However, I did get him to use a video conference not long ago. He might go that far again if its important enough."

She read the LP_05 file and I studied the map of Texel comparing it to my field work objectives: Had any WWII British fighter wreckage's been found on the island? Any list of resistance or Jewish people living on the island during the war? Where was the German base and their out posts? How could you get off the island and where would you go when the Germans' occupied it? My library and internet searching to date had turned up very little. If this part of the story couldn't be verified then either we had a story told too many times or were on the wrong island. Within the hour I had a plan for our Saturday.

"Can I call your dad? This man he says is a primary source of the story and the one of those heading the group paying for our search sounds a lot like a man my father knows. I don't remember his name, but it could be him."

"Really?"

"Yea! I know there must be quite a few Harry Waxmanns, but this all sounds slightly familiar. Not that I actually ever was told this story from start to finish, yet I've heard it before in bits and pieces."

"Go ahead. It is speed dial #8. Then put it on speaker so we can both hear him. You'll save him making the call."

"Good morning Mr. Swartz, this is Barbara Kratz in Holland."

"Nice to hear from you Barbara. And welcome aboard I Brown & Company. I see you're using Dominic's phone. The echo must mean you're on the speaker phone."

"Hi Dad."

"So you two are really getting along? This isn't just your mothers wishful thinking?"

"We share things. And will more real soon." I answered.

"Good." His perception apparent in his voice and response. "I'm going to give you both a piece of advice and make you an offer. Elope. And I'll add 25% to both your base salaries for three years."

"What?" We both said at once.

He laughed while saying, "There really is an echo on this line, isn't there? Actually it's a business deal. We need you to get that back log taken care of while clients are still willing to pay for them. Being distracted by the large wedding that Barbaras' mother and my wife will want to have won't help and it'll cost Abe and I more than the extra you'll earn."

"Mother will have a cow!" exclaimed Barb.

"You leave them to us. Now when can you two get married?"

"Dom and the lawyer are setting up for next Friday in Amsterdam."

"Good. Abe and I'll be there. Your mother's have some sort of charity event they are chairing so when we tell them we need to go to Amsterdam on business they won't even miss us. We'll be in Thursday morning."

"I didn't know you even knew my father."

"Abe is one of our foundation clients. We've done work for his company for more than 30 years. His list of referrals has kept us in business during many years. Here, you can talk to him. We were just about to go out to lunch."

"What?"

"Hello dear. Congratulations! I know you've made a wise choice. And don't worry I'll handle your mother by not telling her until after we get back. One wedding fiasco by her in a lifetime is all I can afford, and something no daughter of mine will ever have to be put through again."

"Dad. Is the Harry Waxmann we know the one who is paying for this lost plane search?"

"Actually it is a group, but he's part of it. I knew if anyone could sort out this story it would be Dom. But don't worry about it for now. You and Dom have a lot to do in just a few days. So enjoy your weekend and we'll see you Thursday morning."

Barb said good bye for us and killed the connection. "Dom, I need a drink. Damn the time!"

She led me to the stairs and to a table at a sidewalk cafe next to the hotel. I held her chair, whispered 'I love you.' in her ear and started inside to place our order. Barb turned her head back towards me. Her cheeks had colored. "Dom, don't leave me, not now!"

I sat next to her holding her hands in mine on her lap. The waiter appeared instantly. We were his first guests of the evening. "Two drafts, please."

The first words she spoke after finishing half of her beer in one continuous slow sip came out as slowly. "If I ever get a personalized license plate for my car it will be MAY0605. So far today I've become engaged to the man of my dreams, been hired to work as his partner, given a raise, told to elope by my father-in-law to be, congratulated by my father on my pending marriage, promised that he'd be at the wedding and guaranteed that there would be no repercussions from my mother for doing any of this. I'm exhausted! Please feed me then put me to bed. We'll sort this out tomorrow."

"You put me to bed in my clothes!" Barb chastised me.

"Well you were too sleepy and sated to undress yourself and I didn't want you wake up and wonder what I might have seen or done to you."

"OK. I buy that, but just barely. And now that I am awake we need a shower. Just because I insist on staying a virgin doesn't mean we can't . . . do other things. Now does it?"

"You're sure this is a good idea? You think you can control my 35 year old hormones once I get you wet and soapy?"

"See this?" Barb held up her left hand and twisted the ruby studded ring. "We won't forget, will we!"

"I won't, but can you resist 'the man of your dreams' when he's that close and available?"

"Dominic Anthony Swartz, we'll see what kind of resolve we have. This'll be a good test for us! A marriage needs self discipline."

We had enough, barely!

Over breakfast at the same cafe where we ate the night before, we did sort out what we didn't the night before. I told her what I thought we had to get done here in Texel and how having our fathers here would give us a chance to better map out a search plan. I also wanted to know more about why they wanted to know this. She took out an island map and plotted our route to the museum, cemetery, airport and tourist information center, the VVV. We'd need a cab to get to the airport. The rest would be an easy walk.

I felt this was a good time to amplify my earlier explanation about the work I Brown and Company did. "Barb, this is not one of our normal kind of cases. Usually we try to determine if a piece is really what the seller says it is or the buyer has been told it is. The art world is full of charlatans, impostors, master pieces that aren't and half truths. A significant number of really good pieces are not on public display and even more are not publicly cataloged. We help people understand what they are selling and what they are buying. As dad told me years ago; art is only worth what someone will pay for it or insure it for."

"Didn't I see that every day! People would walk into uncle's eshop and pay very high prices for junk. Poorly made sculptures. Limited editions with no proof of limitation. Sloppy and vague brush technique. Some of our really good stuff by up and coming artists was usually assessed by the tourists as over priced. We had a few savvy collectors who would visit us regularly to see

what was new. Two of our artists produced more than any gallery was able to show. They'd offer a piece to a prime gallery and if they didn't have room or like it we'd get a chance to display it. Old jewelry was often bought because it was old, not good or worth much. I often felt that what I learned in art class didn't seem to matter to buyers. Inconsistent perspective and lighting didn't bother them. My uncle would tell me that the less I said the easier it was to make a sale."

"Right. That's what I don't understand about this case. We are asked to find, or at least verify to some extent, that an RAF bomber escort plane went down over Texel or on one of the other islands. The story, as you read, says it was a fighter piloted by Joshua Hassma, a Dutch Jew from Makkum. His family went to England in the late 1920's when he was maybe 4 or 5. He joined the RAF and flew many escort missions before disappearing sometime in 1943."

"The story picks up with Hassma in northern Holland. On Texel, in Makkum, in Zwoolle and maybe in France, making his way to the Prague ghetto via Strasbourg. So if you connect the dots presumably he landed or control crashed a plane on the island of Texel and the under ground gets him to eastern Europe with his stash."

"Why do you think that?"

"The further inland he flies, the denser the population is and the more likely he is to be seen landing or crashing. His mission is to deliver gold and 'other things', what ever those are, to the resistance who bribed prison guards and officials to make life easier or facilitate someone's escape. So he needed to land safely and then hide his plane. A dune field is an easier place than either a mud flat or farm land to do that and it won't get a lot of attention if done right."

"This brings me to a piece of speculation that might be critical. What ever the stash is he needs lots of it to pay off everyone along the way and still have enough to make the trip worthwhile once he gets there. Gold is pretty heavy stuff. Bars don't take up much room, but are not easy to use as bribes. Coins, yes, but the guards, gate keepers underground can't spend gold coins without getting noticed. So my guess is he used gold jewelry. Bulky, but useful".

"As for the other stuff, I'm guessing drugs. Specifically, hashish. A little bulky, but easy to parcel out in payment or bribes. In those days almost everyone smoked. A strong shag cut could hide most any odor the hash would have."

"This brings me to another speculation. I think he was not alone. To move that much stuff he'd need help. It would also be nice to know there was someone you could absolutely depend on."

"Like Joshua, he had to be fluent in many languages. It is a given that they were both good in English. With a name of Hassma he probably knew both Dutch and German. I'd guess his forte was French and Czech. To be credible both knew Yiddish and possibly spoke it well."

"So Sherlock, what color was Joshua's hair?"

"My guess is both had darker skin tones and hair. Were athletic, stocky and of medium stature. They didn't attract attention when alone or in a crowd."

"During the narrative the whole tale gets muddled. Hassma seems to be in more than one place at a time. Maybe they split up. The chronology and his exploits don't fit what is known of troop deployments within Germany occupied areas. I think the story has grown. Pride, hero worship if you will, has crept into the story. Maybe, as I think about it, they want us to cleanse the story of Joshua Hassma. To do that we need to establish if he was ever on this side of the channel. I know from RAF records where he was stationed and with what unit. I don't know when he was last with the unit or who his friends were. I'm hoping for a dated group picture in early 1943."

"So that's why we're going to England on our honeymoon? I'll buy that. This is the kind of thing my dad would do. Even help pay for. His contribution to Jewish history. Do you suppose that if we can sort it all out that we'll be paid to write the story? Nah! They'll hire some known guy and we'll be lucky to get mentioned in the forward."

"Barb! That's a bit defeatist, isn't it?"

"Well, who's ever heard of us? The Island is full of writers who've been reviewed in the Times and New Yorker"

"OK. You're right. But we still are getting paid to do the research. So our first stop after another cup of coffee is the museum and then the cemetery to look at WWII era graves. Lastly I'd like to go out to the dunes and get a feel for what a landing would have been like."

"Shouldn't we go at night?"

"We could always go back after a romantic dinner and continue our research."

"You got my vote Sherlock!"

By the time we got organized to go it was raining. We walked to the museum huddling under an umbrella and paid our entrance fee. The lady at the information kiosk eventually understood our request and introduced us to the museum director. This intense young man, at least he seemed young to be a museum director, told us in no uncertain terms that they had no collection of WWII artifacts that were open to the public and suggested, without providing any details, several on line sources we could check. He also suggested we visit one of the polder museums in the Provinces of North Holland and Flevoland. We asked about cemeteries and he said there were

many. Barb pulled on the back of my jacket and led us back to the lady at the information desk. She gladly helped us by taking a map and circling the older grave yards.

Barb took a shot in the dark. "Where can we find out about the resistance during the Second World War?" She wrote the name 'Fred' in the map margin. Then told us while pointing to her right, "The rain seems to be letting up a bit. It'll be clear in half an hour. There is a cafe next door. Why don't you wait there."

We thanked her and again and hugged under the umbrella until we got to the cafe. Without a word a waiter seated us in the far back corner, the other patrons were along the front windows. We sat ignored by passing waiters.

Barb frowned at me. "Is it us? Do we smell? They must see Americans. They . . ." She trailed off having run out of ideas.

An older man in a black half apron approached carrying a tray with three glass cups steeping tea. "May I join you?" Open handedly I gestured to the remaining chair.

"Martha called from the museum. I checked with Mosha. Mr. Swartz, what is you father's middle name and why?"

"Isaac because both my grandfathers are named Isaac."

"Honored and glad to meet you, finally. I am Fred. Your father said you would come in your own time and you have, but none too soon." His heavy statement lingered oppressively as we sipped our tea and took bites of the ginger cookies.

He looked with hooded eyes at Barbara then back at me. "Your father did not mention any woman."

I reached for her left hand under the table and brought it up to the edge of my place mat. "This is Barbara Kratz. She is an employee of I Brown & Company. The daughter of one of my father's business associates who is also a co-funder of this project. And she will be, by this time next week, my wife."

"Pardon my reticence, caution I might better say. I was once a curator at the museum as was my grandfather before me. We collected antiques and artifacts and exhibited them as you'd expect. A few years ago, maybe ten or so we saw a gradual change in our visitors. It is early so you might not notice, but in a month every other car will be from Germany, by July even more. We depend heavily on admissions and donations. Our space is limited so we display what people want to see."

"Since the late 1940's my grandfather collected WWII items found on the island and we had a modest diorama showing the German fortifications and their use of the air field. Beside it we had a case with the story of Joshua Hassma, a British RAF uniform, a model of and escort fighter and a map of his journey to Prague."

"Now for a real science or history museum these may not have been accurate enough. We had no actual pictures of the German fortifications as they were, or the air field as they had it, or Joshua Hassma. It was all done from community memory. Two years ago they hired a new museum director with academic credentials and an eye on the as they say bottom line. He went through each exhibit and demanded documentation. He also watched what displays people spent the most time at and what they talked about in the cafe in the courtyard. He actually had waiters spy on people and take notes. He used the yearly budget meeting to cut staff based on academic level and speciality. He also 'reallocated' the museums resources to match our visitors interest. I was gone in less than a week. Starting in September of that year he closed more than half the displays and put in more documented historical and ecology displays."

Fred got up and brought back refills of our tea. I sat thinking of what question to ask first. So many seemed peripheral to what we were trying to resolve. Barb cut to the quick faster then I.

"Do you believe the Joshua Hassma story?"

In a near whisper came back an emphatic "Yes."

"Why?"

"I know where his plane is."

"What?" we said in a duet. We were getting good at this response in unison stuff.

"Not here. Meet me at the kerk at 2100 hours. Dark clothes. Shoes for walking. I'll be in a blue Fiat 850 and not alone." Fred abruptly left for the kitchen.

When Barb had finished her tea she gave my hand a squeeze. "So much for our romantic dune walk"

"Come on! After our shower this morning how much more temptation do you think we can handle?"

Holding up her left hand, she flashed her ruby ring. "This much."

We walked in a light rain again huddled under our umbrella to the cemetery we'd been told about. In truth we learned nothing except that no marker indicated that a Hassma was buried in

this place. By the time we got back to our hotel, we agreed that what we really needed was a nap to get us through what could be a long night. I set our alarm for 7PM, charged our camera batteries and assembled our other gear.

"Do you always do that before you goto bed? I mean lay things out?"

"With you as a distraction, if I didn't before I better start making it a habit."

She threw back the comforter flashing herself in only panties. "Could this distract you?"

We had dinner at a cafe on Burgwalstrat across the street from the park that surrounds the kerk. We held hands, but didn't say much. Tension had silenced us, a new aspect of our relationship that Barb quickly picked up on.

"We can't just sit here mired in our own thoughts when we get into situations like this. What's our plan? Where's our out?"

"I don't know. I'm not a spy or a PI. Well OK I'm, we're PI's, but we do art PI not criminal."

"But criminals are involved in art. So how do we defend ourselves if it gets sticky? Do you have a gun?"

"No! I've never have had one of my own. This isn't a movie."

"Yea, well! That's what scares me. They may use real bullets."

"Barb!"

"Well, let's try to be careful and not heros."

We walked around the front of the kerk and loitered under and between street lamps. We tried to look like we were waiting for a ride. An old weathered Fiat pulled up to the curb across the way. The driver waved us over. In the right seat was someone.

I clenched my fist and gave Barb's a gentle squeeze with the other. "In for a penny, . . ."

"... in for a pound." she finished as we crossed the street.

A big man got out of the passenger side and held the door so we could bend our way into the small back bench seat. It was tight, shoving us together my knees near my chin. We felt better. The small engine strained to get us away and around the first right. It seemed we were going in

circles and backtracking along alleys made for the small car. When Fred finally found a straight road to his liking he introduced his passenger. "This is Anton. It's at his farm."

A few minutes later the car stopped in a farm yard lit only by our car's old yellowing headlights. A tall brick wall was straight ahead. We were led to the right around the side past a small four pane window lit from within. Fred held a plank door open and told us to take a seat at an old well worn table in the small brick room seemingly adjacent to what smelled and sounded like a large barn filled with cows, sheep and horses. Fred and Anton sat across from us. The single large clear bare bulb revealed all the room's secrets in its harsh incandescent light. Open shelves lined the wall below the small single pane window and partially along the sides. To a city boy, all manner of farm animal tool and tack was neatly in place. A small blackened red brick hearth cut off one corner. The mouth of the chimney flared from the low ceiling to waist height.

Pounding the thick planks with his stubby finger Fred began to speak at the same pace a few beats later his mouth seemed to catch up with his thoughts. "It was here in this very room that our fathers brought us on that night. I remember, it was my tenth birthday. They told us no one was to know what we did tonight. We must be quiet. Do as we were told. Not ask questions. Ever!"

Anton took up the story. "Our fathers did not like the English. They fished our waters. Sold inferior wool and tariffed our cheese. They made our farming difficult. But they hated the occupying Germans more. They stole our fish for whatever they wanted to pay. Killed our sheep and cows for food. Took our vegetables. Soldiers came into our yard and dug up what ever they wanted. Protests or resistance got us cuffed. You can still see it in Anton's broken nose. Our fathers became part of the resistance because they hated the Germans more than the English."

"On one of their trips to church in the village on the Waddenzee they must have made their opinions known. From then on they went to more church meetings."

Fred had recovered is composure. "They handed us each a lamp." Blindly reaching behind himself he put a kerosene lamp on the table. "Not this one of course, but just like it. Then they led us out to the dunes through the west gate. Here we'll show you."

Anton handed us each a similar lamp, adjusted the wick and lit it with a stout wooden lucifer. "We didn't need lamps you understand. This is just for tonight."

Fred led the way across the bare wet sand of the yard and over a fence stair. The low clouds hindered any hope I had of seeing where we were going. The path was well trodden. The low spots were corduroyed with small logs.

He stopped. "It was here that we got our instructions. Anton and I were to stand with our backs to the dunes in front and behind us. When we heard the English bombers fly over head we were to be ready to light our lamps. But not until we saw our fathers do it. They went along this trough. We waited and waited. The Germans at the darkened lighthouses waited. The sound of the bombers started low from the west and continued and continued. I was growing tired. Wanted to pee. It was so dark I couldn't even see Anton. Finally, all the bombers seemed to have passed on their way over the Waddenzee."

"From my right to the south I heard the very loud high rev engine of a fighter coming at us. Then it turned slightly to the east and then north again as it started a strafing run on the airfield. The German guns all started firing. My father lit his lamp. Anton and I did the same. A second fighter followed the first, or maybe it was the same one again. I was too busy watching the listening to the shooting to notice the plane landing between Anton and I until it passed. It made no noise except scraping along the trough between the dunes."

"We doused our lamps and ran after the plane toward Anton's Father. To our right another strafing run started. Two men had gotten out of the plane and were piling things up.

"Hurry!" his father ordered. "Help with the tarp. Then get sand around the edges and those branches on top."

We worked for a long time getting the plane hidden and covering the tracks it left landing. Each of us was given a canvas bag to carry to the barn. The farm was dark, darker than normal. Not even a small kitchen light was on when Anton's mother opened the door to the yard. She sat us down and gave Anton and I hot chocolate before putting us to bed in Anton and his sister's room "

"The next morning I was awakened to do my chores by his mother. At my house next door my mother told me to be a big boy and do my father's chores."

I asked. "Did you ever really see or meet the two flyers?"

"No. It was too dark. No names were used. Father said it was too dangerous for us."

"So when did you learn who they were?" was Barb's question looking at both of them.

"Only after the war when Holland was freed." Anton answered. "Fred and I had been playing in the dunes and went searching for the old plane. We found it still under the tarp. More covered by sand and debris. That night at dinner I asked my mother and she told me the story. Mother seemed to sense my skepticism. She left the table and came back to show my sister and I a pair of gold earrings they had given to her."

"Does she still have them?"

"Mother died several years ago. Not long after my sister died."

"I'm sorry!"

"But I still have them. They are the only gold I think my mother ever had."

"Could I see them?"

"I'll show you at the house. Now we must get back. We want you to see the plane Fred and I have been restoring."

Fred opened a Judas gate in the large double barn doors. Anton led the way for Barb and I. Maybe twenty dairy cows, a few less sheep, six or so goats and a pair of draft horses were in various partitions of the dimly lit barn.

Barb seemed surprised. "Wow! A real Noah's Ark!"

Anton just looked at her as a farmer would a city girl. "We are a small family farm. We sell or trade milk, a few animals when we can. Raise all our own livestock, feed and basic food."

"Do you use the horses?" She asked.

Patiently he continued. "On a farm this small with small fields horses can be as good as tractors. Those two have been together for twelve years. Their parents before them plowed the same fields. Fred's family has the mares, we have the sires. The yearly foals bring a good price."

From behind us Fred spoke. "Go up that ladder. I'll get the lights."

Anton helped Barb reach the high first step. I followed her up the aged worn treads. I couldn't resist running my hand up the outside of her jeans leg. Looking down at me from under her right arm she smiled. "Hey farmer boy, expecting a roll in the hay?"

Just as she got to the top the lights went on. No single bare bulb, full studio lights. "God! I feel like I'm next to a ship in a bottle. I've never felt so small! This is awesome! You gotta see this."

"Well get your cute little . . . heinie . . . out of the way and I will."

We stood side by side on the top step, our heads nearly touching the wing of a museum quality restoration of a World War Two fighter. Tented above, attached to the roof was a sand colored knotted and flagged camouflage net. With a 46 foot wing span and a 34 foot length it had to be angled to fit in the hay loft. It rested on wide skid skis. The only insignia on the desert sand patterned plane was the RAF roundel.

"That's a real Blackburn Skua." I gasped!

"How'd you know that?"

"Some relative of my mother's was in the RAF in the 30's and took us to a museum somewhere in the Midlands. He flew one of these until it was replaced by Fairey Fulmer and the Hawker Sea Hurricane. He showed us pictures. I don't remember which one of the others he flew, but I remember those three names. Once I got so frustrated and mad during a debate I characterized my adversary as having a Skua like perception of the subject."

"What's a Skua?" Barb asked.

"A brown chicken sized gull that frequents these islands in the spring and fall. A little afraid of people, not like the gulls who'll come right into our yard."

Barb and I walked around the plane. We ran our hands over the smooth aluminum surface that had a slight roughness from the paint. Unlike the museum one I'd seen as a teenager, the cockpit perspex looked like it had actually been flown. In fact as I paid closer attention the whole plane looked used; serviceable, but used.

Standing beside the front of the plane in front of the prop Fred and Anton glowed in our appreciation of their work as we wiggled between the right wing tip and the sloping barn roof.

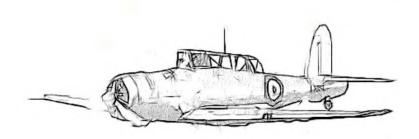
"Nice job guys! Does anyone besides you have one of these? Can I take a few pictures."

"Yes, but only for yourselves. No one that we know of has a similar restoration. That's part of why we've spent nearly twenty years doing it. It is an obscure plane. It played a part in saving people lives. Now because the curator doesn't want to offend the German tourists it sits here."

"Does he know it's here?" Asked Barb.

"No. Don't think so." thought Fred. "We've never mentioned it to anyone. You're the only people other than family that we've even shown it to."

While I took pictures with my pocket camera, Barb sketched as she continued her line of questioning. "Would he do something if he knew about it?"



"Her Krautmann, as we call him, seems to believe that he is the curator of everything on the island. He wants the whole island designated a 'historical zone' so no changes can be made without his approval. He says that we must retain the integrity of the island's culture and history or risk loosing tourists to other places that are easier to reach. A neighbor down the way wants to replace the roof on his house. It is an old reed roof. He wants a new metal roof. He can not get permission. He says he can not afford a new reed roof. They are many times more expensive than a metal roof." Fred absently rubbed his thumb and fingers together. "The island will not pay for his new reed roof. Her Krautmann publicly stated at the meeting that people should not live in houses that they can not afford. They are at an impasse. So he lives with an old leaky reed roof that may look good in tourist pictures, but serves him poorly."

"What about the new camper sites near the nature park? They can't be more than two years old."

"Those bring German tourists in their little camp trailers. Besides most of that was approved before he lived here."

"Again, do you think he'd do anything if he knew?"

"Maybe not him, but others might. We get bikers and 'skin heads'. We sometimes hear them at the cafe talking about this really being part of the Germany. It is the Rhine that built Holland with German soil they say."

I asked Anton "Would you give or sell it to some other museum if they were interested in your plane?"

"Maybe, maybe not. Why?"

"We at I Brown and Company deal with museums all the time. Who knows some deep pocked group might make you decent offer for your efforts."

"But . . . It would have . . . to be . . ."

"We are always discrete."

Fred finished Anton's thought. "What he's saying is that as soon as Her Krautmann found out about this he'd step in and stop it. He wouldn't display it, but no one else will either. There is a warehouse of old displays local people and other curators remember, but he will not lend. He says they are not ready."

This was getting us nowhere. Barb tried to change the subject and get us back on track. "Before it gets too late, I'd like to see those earrings you mentioned."

We left our shoes and coats in the traditional farm cottage foyer. Worn tile floor, pegs for outer ware on one side, shoes below, a bench ran along the other under a long narrow window and an old milk can for umbrellas. Marci, who we'd met at the museum, welcomed us into her living room. It was straight out of a Denmark catalogue. The walls were bright pale shades. The furniture was made of blonde wood, leather, chrome and glass. Indirect and recessed lighting made the room seem alive. Only as Barb and I took a seat on the small cream leather sofa did I realize that some vaguely familiar classical music was playing. Anton and Fred sat across from us in natural colored leather loungers that seemed to know their bodies very well. Marci brought us tea in a Makkum pot and matching cups. She sat in a bent wood rocker nearest the kitchen. We sampled the cookies she'd arranged on a pale green glass tray and placed on the low light blue curved glass table between us.

Anton reached into the leather saddle of the magazine table between Fred and himself. "I thought you'd want to see these. I suppose they are the only real proof that we have that the Joshua Hassma story is real. The Skua could have been anyone's." He handed Barb a small wooden box with and inlaid geometric pattern on the lid. "I made the box just for the earrings. I carved the date on the back, 11'43."

She opened it with a gentle twist. The waxed surfaces came apart soundlessly. "May I touch them?"

"Yes! How else can you tell they are real?"

In her palm they seemed too big to have fit inside the small box. To me they looked like thick gold bars sliced into 1 centimeter bands. Barb poked at them with her index finger, hefted them and then looked inside near where the clasp attached. "There seems to be a similar mark inside both of these. And do you mind if I photograph them?"

"Of course you may. What do you make of them?"

"Actually I don't know. Estate jewelry is not my speciality. However, I'd guess that they were not recent and not from Holland. In our shop we see lots of old Dutch jewelry and I've never seen anything like this. These are heavy. They are almost pure gold." Barb fumbled around in her purse and came out with a shiny black pen sized LED flash light and a loupe.

"Dom can you hold the light and the ear ring for me?"

After squinting and repositioning my hand several times she again went into her purse and took out a note pad and pen. In a few deft strokes she had reproduced the symbols from inside. Looking at the second earring look only a moment. She brought her head up and searched the room.

"Anton I'd like today's paper if you have one, if not then a recent one and a ruler, a scale."

She positioned the earrings below the date on the masthead and the scale below the ear rings in the foreground. I was instructed to hold the LED light at an angle to best show the inside symbols. Barb took several pictures with her small digital camera. Next she took the scale and balanced it on a round pencil to make a teeter totter. She stacked the earrings on one end and put a euro cent to the other, adjusting the fulcrum until it balanced. She took more pictures as we stared in quiet awe.

"My uncle has books and books of estate jewelry pictures. I suspect we'll find a match, or real near. The mark may tell us who, where and when they were made. The scale and the weight will give us an approximate idea of the purity of the gold."

"Pardon me if I've asked this question before. Did you ever learn the names of the two flyers?"

Anton thought for a moment. "This will seem a bit strange, but my mother wasn't sure she heard their names. They weren't introduced to her by name. The only thing she remembers is their boots that were left in foyer. One pair had an "H" and the other an "N" inked on the spines.

I retrieved our key from the front desk and we raced up the stairs to our room. She won. "Hand me the key, slow poke!" Would I ever get tired of following her petite figure up stairs? I hoped not.

"What the hell! We didn't leave it looking like this! I know I made the beds! The dresser drawers aren't shut! Dom, where is your laptop?"

"Taped to the back of the dresser."

"God! You scared me. But someone sat on the beds. You can see the butt prints. And I know the drawers were closed. I need a hug before you tell me this is just part of the job."

I held her until her tension subsided. "It's not part of the job, or hasn't been up until now."

"So who tossed our room? What did they want?"

"Probably just who we are. Maybe someone saw us being picked up in that blue Fiat 850. I'd bet everyone in town knows whose it is."

"So now what? We take turns standing guard?"

"No need. They'll know when we leave. Next we have to get your pictures on to the laptop and on to a back up memory stick. We would seem to have seen two things most people haven't."

"Wouldn't it be safer to email it to ourselves? The hotel has a Wifi network they say."

"Don't think so. It is too easy to monitor and intercept the traffic. A file as big as a picture could get unwanted attention. And I don't want them to know that they might have missed finding the laptop. We weren't carrying a briefcase with us tonight so who ever saw us get into the car could have noticed that."

Barb did her bathroom chores while I downloaded pictures and made copies. When I'd finished my bathroom stint I came out to hear Barb talking on her cell phone. I put out my morning clothes on top of the dresser and set the travel alarm while she finished.

"That was my uncle. He's expecting me Monday morning with pictures. And is sure he can tell us all about them. Evidently news about our engagement and my new job has traveled very quickly. He and his wife are having a dinner for us and our fathers on Thursday night. He said he'll take care of his sister. And asked rhetorically, why did I think he and my aunt moved away from the Island. It was the only way they could have a life of their own."

After we were in our separate beds and I'd turned of the wall lamp she asked, "Shouldn't you wedge a chair under the door handle or something?"

I did.

Chapter 2 Running in Place

We caught the earliest ferry back to Den Helder. On Sunday morning there were not many people aboard. The coffee tasted like it was left over from the previous night and the pastries

were definitely stale. None of the sidewalk cafes we'd seen on Friday were open as we walked to the train station. Once there I queued for tickets and Barb found us a seat in the cafe. They used the same vendor as the ferry boat. Barb bussed our unfinished coffee and rolls. At two minutes to ten our train arrived. Barb headed for the 2nd Class car. I steered her to 1st Class.

"I thought you didn't travel this way? Not that I mind you understand."

"Didn't before now. But we need time to make a plan for this next week and I didn't think we wanted to do it in public. We have tonight and three days."

"You go get us some food and I'll start thinking and making lists."

A waiter with a cart followed me into our cabin. Barb moved her lists from the fold down table so he could set down a try loaded with the train's version of a hot 'farmer's breakfast' of eggs, bacon, dark bread, cheese, fruit and a large insulated pitcher of aromatic coffee. I'd asked the conductor about getting a bite to eat and he said that Sunday morning brunch during tourist season was being test marketed to 1st class passengers on this run.

"You must think I'm too thin the way you keep feeding me. If I'm not careful I'll look just like my mother by the time I'm thirty."

"Running after kids will keep you in shape."

"What kids? We haven't talked about this? When are going to have kids? Will they be born here? On the Island? Forget the kids. We need to focus on next week. Here's my list. You can read it while you eat. It'll keep your mind on what's important!"

"It is, on your bod!"

"Dominic Anthony Swartz!"

I ate, read, ate, made notes in the margin, ate, drew a few arrows and handed her list back. She considered my revisions as I poured us each a second cup of the remarkably good coffee from the insulated stainless steel pot.

"OK. I agree up to a point. This part sounds reasonable, sort of. Monday morning I go to my uncle's shop to do research. You sort out our living arrangements. We meet our lawyer for lunch. In the afternoon I pack a suitcase and tell my landlord I'm returning to New York. You'll have crew there to pack everything else. I grab a cab to Schipol. You meet me at arrivals and we take the train to Appledorn, wherever that is. We hang out at your buddies house until Thursday morning when we take the train back to Schipol to meet our fathers. You don't have us

anywhere on Thursday night. Friday we get married and take a flight to London. Why so? I mean all this travel?"

"You're the one who noticed that our room had been entered. I didn't. You had me jam a chair against the door. Believing your intuition is safer than ignoring it. Peter and Yvette will watch my, our, flat and office while we're gone. By the time we get back from London they'll have you moved into my flat. If anyone is looking for us Peter and Yvette should see them at least once in two weeks."

"This sounds like you've gone to ground before."

"Not everyone likes their scam exposed. Not all galleries and museums like being told that the masterpiece they proudly display may not be real or have it's prior ownership questioned. I've had to go on the lam a time or two."

"And tonight?"

"Same answer. You pick a place."

"Delft? We saw a small hotel near the train station. Who'd think of working people going to Delft on a Sunday night?"

"Unless we're being followed right now?"

"So who's paranoid now?"

"You're right. We need to act normal. We'll stay at my office tonight and eat our meals at Peter And Yvette's downstairs. These guys just want information about who we are and why we were asking questions and why we visited Fred and Anton. We don't have anything they want that we know of. On Monday afternoon we meet with a lawyer and then disappear. That'll get them running in place."

From the central Amsterdam train station we walked to her uncle's shop. He was with a customer and several others were wandering about the shop. Barb immediately went to work helping them with their purchases. I walked into the back room where I'd never been before and acted like I did this all the time. I had my laptop set up and was looking for a wifi network when Barb came up behind me and reached over my shoulders to take control of the keyboard. In a few practiced strokes she had me on to the store's secure network. "Be good my love. I won't be too long. He needs help and his new girl won't be in until tomorrow." She kissed me on the ear as she started to leave. I spun the desk chair around and grabbed her by the waist and

pulled her back onto my lap. "Mr. Swartz! Please! I have customers waiting." She kissed me on the tip of my nose and broke free.

For the next three hours I updated my calendar, searched the web for anything on Dolf Wesselmann and Joshua Hassma. The only relevant Dolf Wesselmann was the one we'd met. He was born in Koln, Germany of Dutch-German parents according to his CV. There seemed to be several Wesselmanns' associated with various neo-Nazi leaning groups throughout western Germany. I found a concentration of Hassma's in Makkum. However, none turned up in a CV search. My search of the RAF records showed no Joshua Hassma during the period we'd need to focus on to find a class picture. My existing plan seemed to need revision. We'd have to follow the trail the story said Joshua and his companion took to Prague. I'd like to wedge in a few days of non-work after our wedding. I visited travel sites and played with my calendar trying to fit all the pieces together.

My first clue that the afternoon had passed while I worked was the flickering of the office lights. Barbara's uncle, Herman Rose, used the lights to gently get my attention.

"Congratulations Dominic." He smiled and held out his hand. Still in a bit of a fog I shook it while standing up and getting into the present. "Of course it'll cost you! Taking both my favorite niece and my best ever employee."

"Doesn't everything about her cost me. It has been the most expensive two weeks of my life."

"What the hell was that, Dominic Anthony Swartz! I heard every word . . ."

"Barb, I was a simple bachelor ..."

"Enough you two. Out!" He reached into his pocket and handed me a sheaf of Euros. "Go buy her a nice dinner with wine. Call me on Monday and tell me about the wedding plans. I'll attend and we'll be even."

"Thank you uncle Herman. See you Monday morning."

Yvette led us to the secluded corner table she seemed to reserve for me. I held Barb's chair but she wasn't about to be seated. Instead she held out her left hand. "See the engagement ring Dom gave me? He found it in Den Helder on our way to Texel. We're getting married on Friday morning. Our father's will be there. Then we're off to London to spend some of the cash he hoarded while a bachelor!" Yvette gave Barb a perfunctory hug.

"This is all so sudden."

"No. I'll tell you the story someday. We almost grew up together. Only we didn't know it."

"Where'll you be living?"

I needed to step in I thought. Barb beat me to it. "Dom says that the three bedroom flat below his is available. So could we have it? It's a little big for now, but who knows we may need it someday." Even in the dim light I could see them both blush and giggle a little. "Of course you can have it." This hug was the real thing.

I did step in this time talking to Barb's back. "I'll talk to Peter tomorrow morning about the arrangements." Yvette nodded to me, broke the hug and held Barb's hand.

"Speaking of arrangements, would you like to have your reception here? We can close the shop for lunch. How many will there be?"

Barb touched her fingers in quick order. "Maybe 8 to 10 if you count yourself and Peter."

"So few. No brothers and sisters?"

"No. Not even mothers!"

"What!"

"If you'd seen the mess she made of my sister's wedding you'd not want her anywhere close. Our fathers told us to elope. Really! They'd handle our mothers. Who, if we tell them, will pick the date so as not to interfere with some already scheduled event within the next year."

Yvette seemed stumped for a reply so asked what we wanted for dinner. "A bottle of wine to go with whatever you are serving." Bubbled Barb as she gave the owner another unexpected hug.

Barb finally allowed me to help her get seated and hand her a napkin from my side of the table. A soon as mine was in place I reached for her hand. "Barb you're amazing. I fretted as to how I was going to tell them about us and ask about the new flat, and you just did it. She didn't have a chance to say anything but yes. Good work."

"What's the problem?"

"Amsterdam flats in this neighborhood are like gold. They're hard to find and . . ."

Peter arrived at that moment so I shut up. He put four large bowled glasses down and filled them with a pale fruity aroma wine I didn't need to see the label to identify. Rhine wines were abundant in his cellar. Yvette's favorite was Zeller Schwarze Katz from Bernkastel-Kues on the

Mosel. As he put them in front of us his wife rejoined us. Barb and I stood when he raised his glass. "To the woman of the hour and Dom's life. We wish you all the best."

We drank to his toast. I asked if they could join us for dinner. Yvette looked around the half empty restaurant, nodded and went off to the kitchen. Peter and I borrowed two chairs from an empty table next to ours.

"Yvette tells me you will be moving into the lower flat after you're married and that we're hosting a small luncheon reception on Friday. We couldn't be happier for you. Besides that way we can close by 9AM and not open again until the dinner service. Friday lunches this time of year are a waste. The locals take the day off and the tourists haven't arrived. Will you be keeping your office?"

"Definitely! Dom's father hired me permanently. He said the job was more than he could do alone and if we eloped he'd give us each a pay raise. How could I refuse. I get the man of my dreams, the job I've trained years to do, a salary equal to his and then we each get a raise for eloping."

"I don't get it." questioned Peter.

"We both grew up on Long Island in traditional Jewish households run by overbearing mothers, even by local standards. We both rebelled as soon as we left home for college, and are still not comfortable with our mother's constant meddling. Our fathers know this. They also know from previous experience how disruptive to a our life and theirs a wedding run by our mothers would be. We have a long list of pending jobs that we can't wait to get started and finished."

"But Yvette says your fathers will be here for the wedding. How can this be eloping? Maybe my English . . ."

Barb continued to try to explain. "Well, maybe it is not eloping. Whatever. We're getting married without our mother's interference. Call it what you will."

Yvette and a waiter brought four spring garden salads and another bottle of wine. We talked about where we'd just been and our growing concerns. As for the entree we had Dover sole in a light lemon sauce with fresh asparagus and flaked curry rice. We told them of our plans for the next few days and that we'd be back Thursday night, but the flat needn't be ready for a week after that. We asked them to keep a watch for us.

We walked up a flight of stairs to my office where we'd spend the night. Barb looked at me questioningly as I flipped on the lights of the front room. "You'll get the bedroom and I'll take this couch."

"What bedroom? This is your office, not your flat, or have you forgotten? Maybe a little too much wine?"

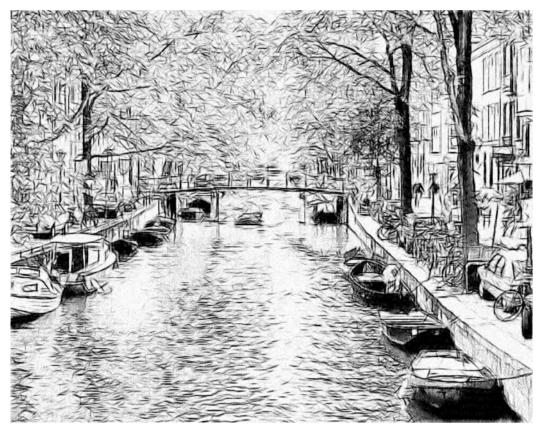
"Barb, this used to be a two bedroom flat. I had them make it into an an office for me. I lived here for more than a year before they had a vacancy in their apartment building. That's one of the reasons I was so amazed at how you got us into the new flat."

"Oh! So where's my office going to be? The bedroom? Or living room?"

"Take your pick."

"I think we should keep a bed in our office. Then later we won't need a nanny."

"And before then . . ."



Monday morning we had coffee and breakfast pastries down stairs. I walked Barb to her uncle's shop. We tried to spot anyone following us. A crowd had gathered outside the police tape cording off the front of the shop. An officer stopped us at the door. Without being asked Barb explained. "I'm Barbara Kratz. My uncle Herman Rose owns this shop. I work here. This is my husband. He walks me to work."

We ducked under the tape and were met in by another officer to whom Barb offered the same explanation and got the same result. Her uncle was giving a statement in Dutch to a middle aged man in a long blue coat. "I've never had any trouble. Petty theft, a false credit card, those kinds of things, but never this."

"Are you active in the Jewish community?"

"No."

"Do you go to services?"

"Sometimes. I work every day. I can't."

"Do people know you're Jewish?"

"Like how would they. My name is not on anything. I don't sound Jewish, except I was born here, in Rotterdam, and grew up on Long Island. My parents took us to the US in '36. So I speak Dutch with an accent. But most of my customers are tourists so to them my English sounds normal."

"What do you make of the number scratched into the glass door?"

"You don't know when Reichskristallnacht was? 11 09 38"

"Forgive me, please. Yes I do know. You think that's what this is about?"

"What else?"

"But yours is the only shop with a broken window or that number."

"I don't know, But what else?"

"Thank you Mr. Rose. We'll get people to help you cleanup and be on our way as soon as the investigators are through."

Barb and I stood to one side in the shadows looking for anything out of place. The only damage seemed to be the broken front window. She went into the back and started water for tea. I mentally retraced our walk from the central train station to the shop. There were too many people for me to notice anyone following us. Fear gripped me as I picked up the phone and called Peter and Yvette to warn them.

Barb put her arms around me from the back and noticed my tension. "Who were you talking to?"

"Peter."

"In Dutch? You really can speak Dutch? I've never heard you say but a few words."

"I took a PC based course when I got here and Peter and Yvette have helped me get better. So I don't feel too stupid speaking it with them."

"What were you talking about?"

"I warned them to be careful."

"So we should be worried?"

"Cautious. And we need to change our routine. I'll call Jan and put together a plan. For the time being we'll stay right here. You do your research into the earring and I'll think. With the police out front we're safer here than anywhere else."

Over the next half hour Jan and I put together a plan that we'd spring on Barb at lunch. I called Peter back and filled him in on the changes. He and Yvette agreed with our caution. They'd take care of things. I reviewed my notes and could find no obvious skips, flaws or problems in my logic. Our plan seemed our best chance to both find the truth behind the Joshua Hassma story and why we were being targeted. With nearly a hour before Jan arrived, on a whim I called Fred at the cafe on Texel.

"Dominic, I've been trying to call you. We've had two suspicious fires since last night. Someone tried to torch the barn last night and the cafe this morning. Neither was successful. Our dogs seem to have scared off the barn burner. We heard a lot of barking and when we went out back we heard a car start and go gunning down the road. There was a lit torch. One of those patio type 'tiki' torches I think they're called burning in the yard. Then this morning someone set the trash can in the back of the cafe on fire. No damage. The firemen were there in a hurry. They are just behind us. So these guys aren't too bright. . . ." Out of breath he stopped talking. I filled him in on the store vandalism and told him to be watchful. I'd call again in a few days. We were going into hiding.

Back on my laptop I pulled up the web site for the Texel museum and clipped a picture of the director for my file. I updated my agenda and waited.

Right on the bell chiming stroke of noon Jan and lunch arrived. I asked Mr. Rose to close the shop while Barb and I set out the Dim Sum baskets. With everyone seated and starting to divide up the lunch items I addressed Barb and her uncle.

"We've had a change in plans. Barb and I are getting married this afternoon, in a little over an hour. Jan has arranged everything. Peter and Yvette will be our witnesses. We leave for a cruise up the Rhine tonight. We catch a flight to New York from Frankfurt. We'll spend a few days in hiding on Long Island, then make peace with our mothers before returning and starting our search to points east."

"What is this? What happened to our plan?"

"Barb, not to put too fine a point on it, but trouble is following us. We need to break the trail of bread crumbs we've been leaving. So we move quickly and unpredictably. Also as Jan, each of our fathers and Peter all agree we've convinced someone that we know something that is damaging to them. We need to find out what is scaring them and who they are, because it is likely much more important than the simple story of a pair of soldiers taking ransom jewelry to Prague. We feel that until we know this, we and anyone we associated with us will be harassed."

"Why are we getting married this afternoon? Not that I mind, mind you. And why are we going to visit our mothers? And why are we doing this? Doesn't the government have spies or police to do this kind of work?"

"The simple answer is that this afternoon is the only time we have to get married. To answer your last question, two of I Brown and Company's best and oldest clients are the Dutch and American governments. That's why we have offices in New York and here. If these guys, who ever they are, can trace us to Long Island after a week of sailing and traveling under these names, then we begin to know the scope of their network. Also our fathers think we need to talk to some of the primary sources for this story. All we have to go on now is a pair of gold earrings and a restored airplane. I'd also like a list of names we can check out on our way east. Walking into the Josefov in Prague without some leads will get us nowhere fast. We'd have to talk too much. The word would get around. That could make us easy targets to find. The net result is we learn nothing."

"Well, I guess I buy that. Uncle?"

"They've obviously thought this out. Staying here doesn't seem safe. So go."

"What about our things?"

Jan stepped to my rescue as he has for years. From his clamshell briefcase he pulled two folders. "In here is all your paperwork, passports, and tickets. We'll sign the papers when we get to the

city hall. Just don't ask how it happened. Peter and Yvette will have your suitcases. A plain police car will take you to a boat. This is being treated as a hate crime by both The Netherlands and the US. You're investigation now has a new priority and you're working at a whole new case level. Look at your new passports."

We did. Mine was no surprise. I'd used the name before. Barb screeched the only word she seem to know. "What? I'm now Mrs. Gloria Thomas of Rye, New York?"

"Hey, at least you're married to George Thomas of Rye, New York." I dead panned.

"Do we get married under these names? Will it be legal?

The lawyer spoke his piece to restore the peace. "You'll be married under your real names. The records will be sealed by the court."

"Dom or Tom or whatever your name is, I don't believe the last three hours. It'll take more than a beer or two this time to get me unwound!"

"Soft music to accompany our dinner. Moon light on the Rhine as we enjoy the foredeck. The boat is all ours alone until Sunday noon."

"I thought we were going on a cruise?"

"We are. A private 10 meter house boat is ours for six nights."

"Just another job perk, I take it. Or is this mortgaging our children's college fund?"

"No. The boat belongs to a friend of Jan's who needs it in Basel in ten days or so. We're just delivering it half way."

"Enough! Let me sleep or I'll be a grouch and I want to enjoy tonight. And the day after and the day after and . . ."

I crushed her lips with a kiss to get her to shut up. A tactic I'd found worked rather well, at least for now. She didn't exactly sleep for the next hour as we were driven south on the A2, but she didn't say much either. Near Zaltbommel the car pulled into a marina. The plain clothed police officer who'd been our driver handed me a black ballistic nylon day pack. I signed his log book and a the chit. We got our rollies out of the back and walked down the gang plank to the small house boat.

The khaki clad deck hand in a blue wind breaker greeted us. He spent a quarter of an hour briefing us on the boat's operation. A 10 meter rental house boat is not that difficult to master or it wouldn't be a rental, now would it? He provided us with maps, a GPS, points of interest, and told us he had made the dinner reservations I'd requested at canal side restaurant in Heerewaarden where they had a slip reserved for us so we could spend the night.



No sooner was the cabin door closed than we were in each others arms. Barb was still in her white linen business suit and high heels, I in my dark charcoal wool suit with hairline dark gray stripes. The boat started to gently rock from the wake of a passing cargo barge. Barb pulled back to look at me.

"Dom, you do have a way of making the world move beneath my feet."

"Cheap parlor trick, if you must know. It only works once with most girls."

"So you've done this before?"

"Never! You're the first woman I've ever married."

"That's not what I meant. I'm thinking that today went too quickly and too smoothly. And what's in that pack the driver handed you?"

"Look for yourself. I've got no secrets from you."

Barb opened the top zipper and pulled out the Beretta Px4 Storm 9 mm in a soft black leather shoulder holster. "What is this? You said . . . You lied to me. You just said you had no secrets. So tell me!" Tension and anger colored her cheeks.

"That isn't my gun. They loan it to me when they think I might need it."

"So you're like a 007. How many people have you killed?"

"No. I don't have a license to kill. I've killed no one."

"Shot?"

"Shot at? A few. Hit, a couple."

"Why?"

"I needed to stay alive. Not everyone I deal with is nice."

"So do you have to carry this with you everywhere? Even to bed? Under our pillow? Is it loaded?"

"No. No. No. And No. I'll load it and carry it with me. When we get to Long Island I'll take you out to the range and you can familiarize yourself with it."

"You mean I have to learn to shoot one of these?

"It would be safer if you knew how to operate one since we'll have it in the house."

"OK! What else aren't you telling me about yourself and our work?"

"Nothing. I requested the piece because I'd rather be cautious. We do what I said we do. A few times it has gotten a little rough."

"So is this job we're on really about this Jewish flier who ransomed people in the Prague Ghetto?"

"As far as I know that's it. You read the same briefing I did. But I'm beginning to believe that there is more to the story. In the past I've been threatened with law suits, but never with fire. That's why we need to talk to some primary sources back home before we raise too much attention over here."

"So where does that leave us?"

"Hopefully with a romantic dinner and a six night honeymoon. Now we have to change our clothes and get underway, or we'll never make our evening berth, dinner and bed."

From the top helm I started the small diesel engine, got the electronics all working. The GPS map navigation initiated and our evening berth location set so our course would display. Casting off the fore and aft lines I went back to the wheel and guided us out to the entry of main channel. Waiting until a large cargo barge passed I slipped in behind him. He could do our work heading up river until we took a small side channel to a smaller distributary we'd follow to our evening berth. Having a large barge in front and the sun at our back made for an easy refresher course in boat handling.

"Cap'n, reporting for next orders. All's ship shape below. Every things unpacked, the bed is made, the galley is fully furnished and I'm ready."

I put my right arm around her waist and ran it up her side. Her now braless breast was a welcome surprise I could not ignore. I moved her around beside the wheel so that I could kiss her and still keep an eye on the wake in front of us and on our route. She pulled my shirt out from my pants and rubbed my bare stomach. Sensing that two could play this game I pushed my hand down the back of her skirt past the tail of her blouse encountering only nice warm skin. Using the pretext of navigation I pulled free of her and put both hands on the wheel, telling her she was going to be needed up front as we made the turn into the small St. Andries channel and lock.

While we waited our turn to go through the lock Barb came back and snuggled up to me. She put my arm around her, least I forget she was braless. "Where did you learn to pilot a boat? Not on Long Island Sound?"

"No. I've done this several times when I've needed to get away. It is as quiet and private as you want it to be."

"So am I the first 'guest' you've had on one of these getaways?"

"The first woman. Jan I took one after a particularly difficult job. It was a good way for me to decompress and for him to debrief me."

"Somehow Jan seems like more than just your lawyer. He's your 'control' to use the spy term?"

"Well sort of. Our jobs always come through I Brown and Company. When they involve government work Jan is our primary contact in Europe. Jan is also the company's legal representative here. And a very close friend."

"So where did you two go?"

"We meandered around the canals and lakes of Friesland for two weeks. I'd never been beaten up or shot at before that. To me the job was being an academic sleuth. A forgery ring in Hungary didn't see my job that way."

"So Jan debriefed you and changed your mind about quitting?"

"Sort of. I wasn't going to quit. Just not take those kind of jobs any more. Between Jan and our fathers they changed my mind. At lunch you sounded just like me. 'Doesn't the government have spies or police to do this kind of work?' is exactly what I asked. Their response was to the effect that spies and the police aren't experts in art and art history, so they hire people who are. Us."

"You said 'our fathers', what gives?"

"Your dad, your uncle and my father all run separate but very similar businesses. I've worked with your dad on several occasions. I just didn't remember that he had a young daughter named Barbara. I must have seen you around. I just don't remember. You were in what first grade?when I was a senior in high school?"

"OK! I understand. By the way that guy waving at us wants us to go forward and enter the lock. I take it."

Two kilometers later I had the fenders positioned as we pulled into a slip at the foot of Maasstraat in Heerewaarden. Barb held the helm while I cleated the lines and got us all secure in short order. The marina master came down the dock to check us in. I took care of the paper work and fee at his office and checked on our dinner and inn reservation.

Barb felt the boat rock as I stepped aboard and called loudly from below decks.

"Down here Dom. I've got everything ready for us."

I ducked down and entered the dimly lit living quarters. She'd closed all the curtains. The galley/lounge was empty. I made my way to the bow. She was sitting on the edge of the double bunk in a plain flower print cotton robe pulled tightly around her. Her long black hair combed into a seductress cascade over one shoulder. Two large diameter simple white candles burned on

the shelf along the mid ship bulkhead casting the berth in an amber warmth. Her hands were clenched on her lap between her legs.

clenched on her lap between her legs.

"Dom, if I wait any longer I'll burst."

"Jan this is Gloria Thomas . . ."

"and George on the other phone . . ."

"we're in Ghent, at a hotel."

"Good. I'll have tickets at the Brussels KLM counter on Sunday morning."

CLICK

"That was quick. Did we get him at a bad time, do you think?"

"No. Talking over a nonsecure house phone . . . You know makes him uneasy."

"I wanted to thank him for the wonderful week we've had. Never in my dreams, and all young girls have dreams of their honeymoon, did I expect this. Our own private place and no time tables. Just us being us. Too bad we have to go back to work on Monday."

"More likely tomorrow as soon as we get airborne. I'd bet besides the tickets there's a complete schedule our fathers have worked out and a return flight; and Jan has a full dossier for each of us to read. We've had our fun. Now we pay the piper."

"Boy did we! Speaking of children, do you want a boy or girl first; once I stop taking the pill?"

"I leave that to the venta."

"Yentas don't do that. They're gossips and busy bodies. Didn't you listen to your mother?"

"I had a choice? I listened. I didn't learn much."

"Well you've learned a lot about me. What I like. How to please me. What not to do."

"It's amazing what the positive reinforcement of your kisses will do."

"Speaking of which, no more kisses until you get us seated at a nice quiet table for dinner. I'm starved after walking all afternoon. This was the first time in a week we've walked further than from the boat around some village square and back."

"I liked the change in our exercise routine. You'd rather have walked more?"

"Dominic Anthony Swartz!"

"Yes, Gloria Thomas?"

Chapter 3 Mothers and other realities

As we expected the KLM clerk required ID's and signatures for check-in. We bought cases to use as carry-ons at the duty free shop before our flight to Schiphol. Gloria choose a black leather messenger bag that would double as a large purse. I picked a wheeled hard sided leather laptop case with room for a portfolio and about everything else. We checked our rollies. At security we were singled out for special consideration. In the small well lit room our bags were opened on the single white plastic table.

"Mr. and Mrs. Swartz," A large plain clothes officer with a badge hanging from the breast pocket of his dark suit started his introduction. The two others in the room stood against the side walls on either side of the only door. "I'm Mr. Arnold, we were notified to expect you. You've been cleared through to JFK. Your seats have been changed for the New York flight to the first row of business class. No one is across the aisle from you or in the row behind you. The crew has been instructed to give you as much privacy as possible, and not just because you're newly weds."

He took a large folio from the inspection table and handed it to me. "If you'll sign for this you can be on your way. Oh! One other thing." He reached into my rollie and handed me the Beretta in the shoulder holster. "Keep those documents secure. No copies. You will surrender them to our officer at JFK. Have a good flight. One last thing." His slight stoop, darting eyes and disjointed speech made him seem unsure about the situation he was told to handle. "There is a number inside to call when you make your return flight. We're here to help."

Out in the mall like forecourt to the boarding stations Barb hooked her arm through mine and hugged me close as we walked. "I do believe that he is the first stranger to address us as 'Mr. and Mrs. Swartz'. Now I feel more married."

"OK!"

"Well we've been Mr. and Mrs. Thomas, which isn't exactly the same."

"OK"

"Are you alright? You seem as up tight as Mr. Arnold."

"No shit! I've just spent the most wonderful week of my life and we do something as normal as go through a routine airport security check where we're slapped with reality and press ganged into working for EACD, whoever the European Arts and Culture Directorate is? They've cleared seats around us so we have some privacy while we read the stuff they've given us. And we can't make copies and we have to give it back as soon as we land. And I'm handed my gun back with the implied instructions to use it if we have to to keep a folio of documents secure. This column of numbers has a negative total by my addition."

"Lighten up. The business class cabin probably wasn't full any way. And the files are probably mostly speculation. If they had hard information the sworn officers would be doing this job, not us hirelings." Correctly observed Barb.

"Your optimism will carry us through. Don't misplace it."

Jan met us at the jet way Schiphol. "I've booked us a private room for the next several hours. I've made a quick change of plans. We'll read those documents together and I'll return them to my office. Your flight has been rebooked. You get into JFK in the morning."

We did as we were told. A cart of snacks and drinks were in the room. For several hours we each read, took notes and thought. Nearing 1800 hours Jan asked to compare notes and thoughts. "What have you got Barbara?"

"A lot of loose ends are tied together by speculation. Three different agencies, if I can call them that: EACD, a UN group I've never heard of and the Dutch police all have different slants on what was originally and still seems to be a simple question by a private group. Who was Joshua Hassma and what did he actually do in the spring of 1943? I don't understand why my earring

report, which the last time I saw it was still in longhand on a yellow legal pad, is included. If the agencies are correct I see no connection."

"Barb, your uncle showed me your report. I didn't know what to make of it so I included it. The EACD analysts thought it might be of use to someone. Now let me tell you a pet theory of mine and some other police investigators. Crime is a family business that gets passed along to the next generation. The same people who trafficked in gold before WWII did so during and after up to the present. As Dom knows only too well, jewelry and art are used to finance drugs and corruption as often as cash. This is where you two come into the picture. You're the art experts and the basis of this story is Jewish payoffs. You might be able to do better than an Irish cop assigned the same job."

"OK, I'll buy that. But I'll have to leave the criminal side to someone else. Criminal Justice courses were not where I looked for electives."

"Dom, your thoughts?"

"I agree with Barb's assessment. I'll add, cynically, from a government point of view, this all looks political. They all want to find some group to pin a hate crime on. It is good press." I continued. "In addition I still have a problem with is the whole Joshua Hassma story. The provenance if you will. It is brought to the surface by people on Long Island who want to memorialize a Jewish hero. Other than a museum display of dubious authenticity, and a restored British aircraft, all we have is a pair of uniquely fashioned gold earrings. Barb and her uncle think they may be eastern European. There is no record that I can find of any strafing or bombing of the airfield on Texel that matches the dates needed by the story. I can't actually document that the Allied night bombing missions of that short period went over Texel. That more than any other is the reason the job sat on my desk for several months." I paused catching my breath and thoughts. "Lastly, I don't understand why our asking questions about Joshua Hassma should make anyone upset. But it sure has. And I'd like to know why and who is upset."

"Fine. I see both your points and agree with them. Now let me add a few things I've learned over the years." Jan paused to take a deep breath. "Not everyone, not every Jew, thought the Nazis were going to loose. Not all Jews choose to be openly Jewish. Having a Jewish surname didn't make you Jewish if someone would vouch for you. Before the web, ancestry tracing was much more difficult and easier to doubt. People claimed to be related to royalty and few believed them."

"By post war standards there were some Jewish traitors. The Hassma story seems to have too many holes. He, there is no creditable mention of his passenger, makes it all the way to Prague with enough stuff to affect the release of some undocumented number of Jews there and along the way."

Looking from one to the other, I spoke a thought without thinking. "Consider, if you will, what if Hassma was working for the Germans? What if his real mission was to discover how Jews were secreted out? What if someone today doesn't want their past family history known? What if the same groups that were able to smuggle people out were still in business today? It is that line of questions I'd like us to look at using the original story as our cover."

Jan looked at me in slight amazement. "Now that is an idea with plausible merit. Go for it!"

Barb, both sharp and new to the company, asked the novice question. "How does I Brown and Company get paid for our work?"

"Barb, dear, leave that to Jan and our fathers."

Jan righted the ship. "I know this nice Indonesian place not far away. I'll feed you and get you back in time for your post midnight departure."

Once in our seats at shortly after 1 AM, Barb pushed the armrest between us up, pulled the blanket over herself and snuggled forcing the window against my right shoulder. "Hey this is sort of nice. Not as nice as our first night or as private as our houseboat cabin, but nice. Speaking of nice places to sleep, Where are we staying in New York?"

"Didn't you read your passport Mrs. Thomas?"

"Well, yea, but . . . you mean there actually is such an address?"

"Of course. It's too obvious a detail to let slip."

"So what is it? A house, an apartment, a condo, a . . . loft?

"A three bedroom garden condo, it's one of several hundred. I doubt anyone even notices when I'm not there. My brother Tony uses it when he needs to be near New York."

"But it's yours? Ours?"

"Yea. My first paycheck had mortgage payment 1 of 360 taken out of it. Now try to get some sleep we've had a long day and they won't get any easier or shorter while we're stateside."

"You expect me to sleep while you do that to me?"

"Teach you not to wear a bra."

"Hey! Two can play this game."

We picked up our bags and I followed Barb through the express customs line. Her "What's this!" scream told me we'd been met by family, lots of them. In the melee that ensued, I gave my mother-in-law a hug, my mother a kiss on the cheek, shook hands with our fathers and other family members. At the curb were two very long black Lincoln limos. Barb was put along the back between the mothers. The three of us men weren't so choosy.

As soon as the door closed her mother had to know, "How long will you be staying? I just heard about this yesterday. We want to . . ."

My father put an end to that with a commanding statement. "They are here for a few days. I have them fully booked. That's why we're having a family brunch. They've got to get back and work on that back log. Unhappy clients mean no repeat business." Our mothers understood and changed the subject.

Mrs. Kratz, at that point I didn't actually remember her first name, asked. "Where did you find such an interesting wedding ring set?"

"Dom saw it in a store window in Den Helder. I really like the look of rubies in light gold and the separate braided red gold wedding bands on either side."

"Where is Den Helder? Why were you there?" Continued Mrs. Kratz.

"We took the train on Friday morning from Amsterdam north to . . ."

"What about your job? My brother lets you just go off?" Her mother asked.

Once again my father stepped in. "She'd accepted a position along side Dominic working for us. The first case we needed cleaned up involved a trip to the island of Texel. To get there they took the train."

For the next hour our fathers rewrote Barb's and my history enough to sooth their wives. The restaurant they choose was a stylish roadhouse near Rye. They'd booked a private room. After coffee and before the start of the meal service my dad excused himself. I did likewise, not knowing when we'd get a chance to talk again.

"Nicely done. It seems you've pulled off a large miracle."

"The miracle will be you and Barbara getting to the bottom of this Joshua Hassma story. I don't believe it, never have. People want to make him into some sort of hero. If they get going and the truth comes out differently, we all look like fools. Our enemies don't need us giving them ammo and bombs. The Iranians do enough of that as is. I'll email you a schedule later today and we'll meet Tuesday for lunch and an afternoon work session. Friday you're at the range. Saturday you fly out. We need this wrapped up by the end of the month. They vote on the memorial funding at the first meeting in June."

Barb was too sleepy and too wiped out to even notice as I helped her up the stairs to our bedroom. I pulled the bedspread over her and she was out instantly. I crashed next to her. By late afternoon she was napped out.

She punched and shook me until I woke up. "Hey, Dom! You did it again! We're married now so you don't have to put me to bed in my clothes!"

"What time is it?" I asked to get a moment to wake up.

"4 o'clock in the afternoon on Monday May 16th. I, we, need a shower then I want to see my new house."

"You think that after taking a shower together you'll see anything but this room?"

"Yes. Then I want to go to dinner some place real American, and a movie. We've never been to a movie together. An American date. I know you and your father talked, which can only mean he has our stay planned to the minute. So tonight is ours!"

"So right you are."

Tuesday morning still on Amsterdam time, we stopped at my favorite coffee shop for breakfast as soon as they opened and to the nearest grocery store after that. Barb put our purchases away while I checked email. Dad's had three attachments and told me to expect a package by 9AM. It had a few useful things like new credit cards, cell phones and a deposit to the checking account. Right as the doors opened we were at the bank and got Gloria's signature added to the checking account, credit card and issued her own ATM card.

Her observation on the walk back to the condo was enough to make me wonder if I'd done her right by marrying her. "You're trying your best to make me feel married aren't you? A house in

the 'burbs. A checking account. Grocery shopping for two. Even if it is to George Thomas. Why do we need the deception here?"

"If Jan and EACD are even half right like my dad thinks, then we seem to be on somebody's short list of annoyances. We're better off as Mr. And Mrs. Thomas. Also our fathers are setting up some people for us to talk to about the Hassma story. They don't want them to know who we really are. If one of them was to talk, the word or email could get back to whoever thinks we know more than we do."

"Then won't the act of talking to these people stir up the same hornets nest?"

"We are to pose as freelance feature writers who our fathers contracted. If the group votes to fund the memorial, then there'll be a feature length piece to plant with the local and other papers. It is a reasonable cover."

"What if we get asked about or CV's. What can we show them?"

"After the way they handled our mothers, I believe they can handle this. We just go along, ask questions and take notes."

"You said we leave on Saturday. Where to?"

"The tickets are for Frankfurt. We'll likely drive to Strasbourg before going on to Prague."

"So what do we do with the rest of the day? Play in our new house. We had fun last night."

"We're to meet my father at his office by noon. The rest of the day's agenda was still being worked when he emailed me the weekly schedule this morning."

"What about the rest of the week?"

"Wednesday and Thursday are basically the same. We work on the Hassma story from here. Friday we are at the gun range."

"So it's work late and sleep in. We're young. We can handle that."

Handle it we did. We even got in a baseball game on Wednesday afternoon. We purchased Barb a notebook PC like mine to make sharing notes and report writing more efficient. By Friday afternoon we'd wrapped up all our expected chores and treated ourselves to a night at home in our own house. I barbecued some steaks, Barb tossed a salad and steamed some fresh snap

beans. We had a split of Champaign with our strawberry cheese cake as we watched a movie on TCM.

In less than a week we'd redefined the relationships with our mothers. Convinced our fathers that we were a team they could rely on to get the job done. And fully bought into the belief that the Hassma story wasn't what it seemed. For all we knew the different perspectives of Jan, Mr. Arnold, our fathers and the citizens committee didn't fully contain the story. As one of my favorite and most cantankerous art history profs once put it. "Art history is a bitch. She's a whore to perspective."

Chapter 4

Translations beget misunderstanding

If I ever doubted that translations beget misunderstanding, the next few days would have made me a convert. It was like we were the last in a long line of the 'whisper in the next person's ear what you heard from the previous person. The story we were using as the basis for our investigation was excised from somewhere in the middle of the line. Our dinner meetings in New York had produced nine and maybe ten different versions. The lead characters names were not the least consistent.

Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday night we were on Long Island where we'd taped the discussion and the guests recollections of the story. These were then transcribed by a service my dad had hired. Barb and I would add our own notes and each session would go into a folder. A sub file had the full transcript. This was broken down by guest. Usually I'd spend time reconstructing and comparing versions looking for verifiable elements. These 'best information' pieces would become our leads.

Time was not on our side. Friday at the gun range was necessary practice and certification for both of us. But seriously ate into our time to analyze the three nights of interviews. Saturday morning we packed, had a command performance lunch our mothers organized before catching the evening flight to Frankfurt. We had the flight time to pin down a lead less general than 'Strasbourg, 1943'. One of my old profs had used an historic account winnowing technique he claimed worked, but lacked academic acceptance for good reason. He counted the occurrence of individual nouns. I'd used his spread sheet program a time or two and It did narrow the search field. In 2 hours I had a distribution table displayed on the laptop. First I checked the names against the list of RAF fliers I'd found who might have been lost over Holland. I'd been disappointed that none were named Hassma. Now I had two matches, Hassmann and Hess.

"Gloria, see what I found." She looked up from her book. I rotated the screen to give her a better viewing angle.

"What's this?"

So I explained the process and what I thought it meant. "As we'd expect the cities London, Prague and Strasbourg are mentioned the most. See these near the bottom?"

"Idar, where is that?

"My guess is that this is really Idar-Oberstein. An old gem cutting center west of Frankfurt I think."

"Enschede?"

"A Dutch town on the German border that was active in hiding Jews. The German's only infiltrated the main cell a few days before the Allies liberated the city."

"Now notice these names starting with 'K', 'P', 'D' and 'Z'. All, are according to the auto spell checker, misspelled. I did a search on the mini Atlas and none matched. I went to the map of the western Czech Republic. Quite a few names start with these letters. One of the main, and ancient, routes between Prague and Germany ran through the area of Pilsen. It is a farming area known for grain, hops and, of course, Pilsner beer. Jan's theory is that if you are going to move, use established routes because you'll be less noticed, might fit here."

"Dom, where . . . how does this help us develop leads?"

"In the middle of the word list is a group starting with 'H' that are similar. Hassma occurs the most, as expected. But there is also Hassman, Hassmann, Havel, Hessmann, Hessmann, Hessmann and several others"

"Names of two fliers who were lost on missions during this time period were named Hessmann and Hess. Were they fighter pilots or crew? I couldn't easily find out."

"Consider this, to build credibility quickly, having a familiar sounding name really helps. So in Holland you are Hassma, Friesian or almost, and you might more easily get a boat ride to Makkum in Friesland. In Enschede you have a German sounding name like Hassmann. You keep the name until you get to the Idar area. There you become Hess. A not unlikely Jewish name in the area. You can keep it until you get to Pilsen where you become Havel. This is both a German and Czech name. Vaclav Havel was a leader of the post WWII freedom movement among the Czech."

"This all sounds a little far fetched, I'll agree. But who's going to check his background? They are hoping for and expecting help from the Brits in the form of ransom money. He has a good story and maybe even a few documents. I still believe, even though I have no proof, that he did this job without the knowledge and backing of the Brits."

"So you think he was a German spy?"

"Well that maybe too formal a relationship. Maybe he was an informer who used what he learned to save the family business. The Germans could provide assistance as long as he was useful to them. Then either pack him off with the rest of the Jews or hide him somewhere, like today's witness protection programs do. This perspective fits the core facts as well as any other we've heard. And could explain why even today the descendants of Joshua H are still active and don't want anyone prying into their family history."

Catching my breath as I formed my next thought I continued. "Remember the childhood game of pass the secret along? It got pretty distorted by the time the last person had to tell the story. That could be what happened here. I'd like to have had the chance to talk to all those people separately and build a diagram of where they heard the story. For now we have enough to get us started. Time to shut off the thinking and spend some quality time with my wife."

"Here? What do you think we can do?"

"Hold hands. Snuggle. Act like the newly weds we are."

"Dominic, do I really have to call you George? I had a creepy blind date once who's name was George. Some sort of an oily Greek, both socially and ethnically. I faked menstrual cramps and got him to take me home early."

At the airport picked up a rental car, a small Ford. It was a bit of a change from the Dodge we'd had in New York. But then again the roads and price of fuel were different in Germany. Barb got out the map and traced the route to Strasbourg with her finger. She gave directions as I drove. We paralleled the Rhine for a bit. At the first sign for Bad Krueznach I exited. My navigator questioned my choice of a route.

"We should have stayed on the autobahn." She pointed to her right. "Strasbourg is that way."

"So it is, but we're going to Idar-Oberstien."

"What did I miss?"

"Actually nothing. It didn't occur to me until a few minutes age. We have no firm leads in either city. Idar is smaller so fewer people to chase, has been a gem and therefore a jewelry center for centuries and smuggling gems today is still done. If we can't develop any leads in Idar we go to Strasbourg."

"That idea beats my two pair. Take the next left and look for any sign pointed to the Nahe River while I plot our revised course, captain." Barb led us mostly west and we enjoyed a beautifully scenic drive through the wine area of the Nahe River. By mid day we were in Idar-Oberstein.

Newer construction and an autobahn grade highway took us from the vineyards into the narrows. The old town is hard up against the slaty stone wall of the valley. Halfway up the cliff in a niche is the white Felsenkirche. We learned this from the city sights brochure on the table of the out door cafe where we stopped for lunch. This cafe like the others along the street, was in a white building with brown half timbers and a slate roof. The daily specials were written on a chalk board hung from a a tree limb. We adjusted the white resin chairs and table to be under the shade of the red awning. Our waiter immediately noticed the misalignment and made a polite, but obvious show of moving the tables to either side of us to also be in the shade.

Barb took out her sketch book and hastily added the FelsenKirche.



We were finishing our bottle of light white wine that had gone well with our quiche when Barb brought us back to the present. "What's our cover, Sherlock?"

"Just who we are, or were on Long Island. Mr. & Mrs. Thomas, newly married, writers combining some research on WWII era jewelry while on our honeymoon. We'd heard about this place and decided to have a look."

"So where to?"

"In that brochure it says there is a schmuckmuseum."

"Wait a minute! I'm a Jewish girl. I know what schmuck means; a jerk, literally a penis head."

"No. In German not Yiddish. It means fine jewelry as you must know."

"I didn't know. My experience is limited, but in a Yiddish museum maybe I'd learn something I . . ."

"Go go powder your nose and get back in character. I'll settle up with the waiter."

The walk was less than half a kilometer along what could have passed as the backlot of Universal Studios. I suppose if we didn't live in Amsterdam we'd have been more impressed and walked a bit slower, looking at every building and in every store window. This time of year the street was more a pedestrian walk than a traffic way. Like so many older streets in Europe, it was paved in swirls of square stones.

"Dom, look at that! It would look great on the glass topped coffee table we'll get for our living room."

She was pointing to a dinner plate sized snail fossil. The highly polished ribbed dark brown swirl would complement the area rug and furniture she'd seen in an IKEA catalogue.

"Go in and ask about it while I look at the sweaters next door."

Five minutes later I found her modeling cardigans. "Which do you like best? The turquoise blue that complement my silver earnings or the camel that matches my skirt?"

"Do we have room in our bags for both?"

"That's a question only a new husband would ask, and then only once. Of course we do."

Back out on the street she remembered the errand she'd sent me on. "Well what'd you find out about the fossil?"

"Actually I had second thoughts . . ."

"What?"

"If we bought it we'd have to have it shipped. We're not lugging 10 kilos of rock with us. It would mean we'd have to give them our real name and address. In a town this small it might very well blow our cover. So after a quick look around the shop, I took their free post card and left. Here take a look."

She looked at the glossy picture of fossils and geodes in a Black Forrest motif display case. Their name in an imposing silver Gothic font, Navare's Natural Wonders, took up the bottom quarter of the card. Barb turned it over and read the short description of the store in German. "It says here that they also have locations in Rome, Paris, London, Amsterdam, Entreves, Bern, Prague, Munich and Berlin."

I took the card back and examined the front again. "The name Navare doesn't seem typically German to me."

"The French and Germans have fought many wars and exchanged territory after each, so maybe they were originally French."

"OK."

Entering the museum, Barb immediately assumed her Gloria persona as she walked up to the information desk. I took the moment to file our museum admission receipt and change away in my travel wallet as she began her spiel. "I'm Gloria Thomas. My husband and I are writers. Is there anyone here who we can talk to about jewelry styles and crafting during the Second World War?"

The woman, who looked like any of our aunts, paused and thought a moment. "Not here. Let me make a few calls."

Barb joined me off to the right. I'd been looking but not seeing the display of amethyst geodes right in front of me. We walked further away. "Where's our car from here. We may need a quick exit plan. I may have blown our cover."

"If we get no summons in five minutes we disappear."

"How are we going to do that?"

"We passed a world bazaar type shop that had an English tourist bus near it. We go back there and hide among the crowd."

"You think that'll work?"

"Until we hatch plan B."

"Do you have your gun? Is it loaded?"

"Why don't you find out?" I smiled down at her up turned face.

As she ran her hand under my left arm I grabbed her in a playful hug and kiss. A throat clearing sound got us to break apart. Frau Info was behind Barb with a piece of paper in her hand.

"My husband and his father will see you." Pointing to her hand drawn map she made sure we could get to the house. "We are here. Go right, left, right. They'll be waiting for you." She handed me the paper and what looked to be an admission ticket. "Here is as you call 'a rain check'. Come back when you can."

Barb thanked her in better German than she might have expected from American tourists.

We stepped out on to the street and Barb turned to me. "Isn't this how our Texel trip started? Query the info lady, she makes a call, tells us where to meet a resource." Barb's nervousness showed as she continued "Do you have your gun? Is it loaded?"

"Ah, you liked my smooth entrapment move? Would you like to try to feel me up again?"

"Be serious. This could be a trap. Just like Texel could have been. How lucky can we get? How many questions does she answer a year about Second World War jewelry? And by a couple as distinct as us?"

She had a point there. Barb is about 5'3", 115 pounds, dark eyes, straight dark black hair. I'm close to a foot taller, 205 pounds, curly brown hair. Facially we're both very Jewish looking.

The last turn put us in a narrow alley with uneven age old cobble stones. The houses fronted the curb. Balconies from the second and third levels left blocky indistinct shadows from the afternoon trace of smoke and haze. Slate roofs merged into the mottled gray sky. Barb held my left hand tighter as we made our way higher up the slightly curving way. A glance over my shoulder confirmed we were out of sight of the named street. The damp vulnerability of our situation brittled my soul. A man of my father's age came into view. He was standing feet apart and square shouldered to us. From the left corner of his mouth sagged a straight stemmed pipe. He waved us nearer.

"I'm Karl Hess." He spoke loudly, as if unafraid of who heard him. His accent was well tuned American English. Turning slightly to the left he extended his hand and helped an old man rise from a bench. "This is my father, also Karl Hess." The old man's clothes looked too big for him. He'd lost a lot of weight recently. His aging skin was reacting slowly. "My wife called and said to expect you. Her sister on Long Island, New York thought you'd be by."

Barb's reaction was a tightening of her grip and a slight loss of color. Mine was a rapid search of past faces. Who had mentioned this town?

"Please come in. I've made some Nescafe."

Once seated in the comfortable, albeit dark front room you could see a kitchen to the rear and a stair to the right. The sides of the house were shared with the neighbors.

Karl senior took an old chair near the front window. A place where he seemed to sit often, wrapping himself in a dour hued blanket. The indirect light through the lined old yellowing glass made him look frailer. Karl served him first and put our coffee cups on the small dark wood table in front of us.

"As I said we were half expecting you. You interviewed my wife's sister who was quite taken by you. But she had a few doubts. There are still people who remember the war and would want it otherwise. She said she left you two clues. The name Hess and the Idar-Oberstein. If you were really writers researching the story you'd ask and find us."

"Maybe I should start with a short family history, who we are and why my sister-in-law lives on Long Island. We are Hess. We have been engineers for generations. During the Second World war my father was an engineer in Stuttgart. He was too valuable to question his ethnicity. So his employer hid him. Yes, we are Jews by ancestry, not practice. When the Nazi's started hunting Jews my father was moved here. The company had a machine shop here. I grew up in this house. After going to school I went to work for the same company. They have a plant on Long Island where I worked along side my brother-in-law for a while. You can begin to see the connections."

"But that is not the story you are writing. I've heard it many times. You should hear it from my father who was part of the story. He does not speak English. Should I translate, or are you comfortable in German. You surprised my wife."

Barb answered for us. "Our German is not that good. If it won't be too taxing we've like you to translate for us. Do you mind if I tape this?"

"No. Of course not."

Karl spoke to his father for a few moments and refilled our coffee cups. Barb set the tape recorder on the table, took two pocket note books from her purse for us and we waited for Karl to begin. He started in what was the middle of the story as we knew it.

In the spring of 1943, maybe late April or early May, a poorly dressed man appeared in town claiming to be a Hess from near Stuttgart who had been in England and now was back to help free Jews. Because his name was Hess we were asked to take him in. Immediately I knew he was not who he said he was and not from where he said. He had no hand skills. We use our minds to work with our hands. He stayed with us only one night. I sent him away with a little food. Several days later I saw him again. He had found another place to live in the village and a job in a gem company. He was here for several weeks and then was not to be found. My superior learned that the Nazi's were looking in the smaller towns for Jews, so he moved us back to Stuttgart on a days notice. A few months later we moved back here. It was then that I heard about the closing of several gem shops and that their people were taken away. Suspicion immediately fell on the mysterious Mr. Hess.

After the war when we could travel, we visited friends in the area. One of those was a colleague at the company plant in Trier. Karl remembers that trip because the children played in the old Roman ruins. We told stories about the war. Our story about Mr. Hess and theirs about a Mr. Hessmann sounded quite alike, only theirs happened in late March and early April. That is all I personally know about Mr. Hess. Some here thought I was trying to make the Nazi's look worse than they were. I did not need to have arguments with my neighbors, so I stopped saying what I thought."

"Let me add two final chapters to his story." The son continued. "First, I remember telling the story to my sister when we lived on Long Island. She married a Jew and took up the faith. She was too young to remember much about the war and is still very interested in how ordinary people coped and survived during those days. She has an extensive library on the subject. You might ask her if you need a source you can not find. We know that many original accounts that were written right after the war are no longer available. Historians like to call them into question because the names can not be independently verified. Of course this is true. Many Germans changed the spelling of their names or where they lived during the war, so that afterwards they could hide or deny what they did."

"Secondly, maybe five years ago I took my wife with me to Prague on a business trip. There was a large equipment show there. One of my co-workers is a very devout Jew. He thought we might enjoy a night with his family in the Jewish neighborhood where he grew up, the Josefov. Of course we told stories. One of theirs was identical to our story of Mr. Hess, only the name was Havel."

I tried to frame my statement carefully. "This is taking us down a different path than we started on for sure. We started trying to piece together a story about a Jewish hero, and now it seems he

might well have been a German spy, a corroborator. Do you think it would be possible for us to talk with this family in Prague?"

Karl thought a moment. "Yes, I think so also. He, like me, has retired and moved back home to take care of his parents. I'll call him tonight and ask." He got up and refreshed our coffee. Upon his return he looked squarely at me, seemingly more comfortable speaking man-to-man. "You are an American. You may have heard about those who are not happy that Germany lost the war. We still live with them. To some this Mr. Hess is a hero, not spy or Jewish traitor. If you go further with this story they may find out."

I sat in silence not able to frame my next question.

Once again Barb came to our rescue. "This is a village known for gems and jewelry. That is why we came here, primarily. The people we talked to on Long Island told us the Hess story, but also about the unique jewelry of the period. The Hess story, until just now, was too vague and had too many loose ends to be of interest to most publishers. So we decided to concentrate on unique World War II jewelry. Jewelry and art are an areas where we have some training. And what a nice way to combine work with a honeymoon."

Karl spoke contritely. "I'm sorry. I misunderstood."

"Don't be." I said. "You have given us the seed to a much better story than we thought we had. We still do have a few jewelry questions to get answered. One of the intriguing aspects of the story as we first heard it and were asked to write about was the use of gems and jewelry to buy Jewish freedom. In Holland we were shown a piece of unusual jewelry. Hess gave it to the farmers who helped him evade the Germans and get started on his way east. Gloria has some pictures she took of the piece and some measurements. We'd like some professional opinion."

"You didn't ask anyone in Holland? They have large jewelry marts."

"No one we talked to had ever seen anything exactly like it."

"Let me see. Joseph might still be working. He is just down the street."

We sat in silence while Karl made a call. Barb looked over at me with a half smile.

Karl returned walking directly to his father. "Let me take care of him and we'll go. Also, my wife has asked that you stay for dinner."

"Thank you. We'd love to." Was Barb's response. "But we need to find a place to stay."

"I'll call my wife back and have her arrange something."

Karl led us down the hill and to the right past the tourist filled stores. We followed him into a shoulder wide bricked path between two buildings. He opened the simple wrought iron gate and motioned for us to take a seat on an old wooden bench at the side of the small interior court yard now fully shaded. He turned to the left of the two side by side unmarked doors, seemingly separated by only an ancient brick wall, and without knocking opened it, calling out. "Joseph."

A man as old as Karl's father, but obviously in better health, came out into the cool of the court. Karl pointed to us as we rose. In deliberate English he said. "These are the people I asked you to see."

We shook hands. Joseph turned back to the door. Karl waved us to go in front of him. The narrow stair way led down into the warmth of a stone vaulted and well lit jewelers work shop that got bigger the closer we got to the tiled floor. We were motioned to take take seats in the red leather arm chairs. Karl sat in one of the two matching beige leather chairs. A thick rich cream white carpet looking of middle eastern origin under a highly polished ebony table was between us. Joseph returned with four cups of coffee on a mirror bright silver tray.

Karl began by looking at Joseph and then us. "This is Mr. George Thomas and his wife Gloria. As I told you, they are writers. While on their honeymoon they are collecting information for an article in World War Two jewelry. I could think of no one better than you to tell them about how our families survived those years."

"As they did with my father, they would like to tape record your story. If you would feel more comfortable speaking German, I will translate for them. Although I suspect that their German is better than they let on." Karl winked at Barb.

For the next half hour we listened to a story not so much of the misery of war, as of a people being occupied by their own military. Joseph and others did what they were told. Made jewelry to order. Accepted what they were offered in payment. All to avoid being displaced to the war factories in the Rhine valley."

Joseph was noticeably tired after his story was told. Karl brought a silver pot and poured more coffee. The second cup seemed to revive Joseph. He started to speak catching Karl by surprise who hurriedly translated on the fly. "The best place to go is the Schmuckmuseum in Pforzheim. They have all the history and best displays."

"Thank you. We are headed next to Prague. Is Pforzheim on the way?" Asked Gloria as she rummaged in her purse for some folded paper.

"Not really out of your way. Worth a day trip."

She unfolded the paper and turned it toward Joseph. "Have you ever seen a piece like this?"

"But yes! It is Roma or Slav. I have such a piece. Let me show you." He got up and walked to a glass fronted display case. With the pride of a collector he returned with a thin wooden box. He removed the simple inset top. What was inside baffled me, but not Barb. Joseph saw her smile and read her body language. "So, you know what it is now?"

"Not really, but now I can guess."

"Let me show you." He removed a thin metal 'S' shaped hook and put it on his index finger. He suspended rod with a loop in the middle from it. He hung an earring, that looked exactly like one of the pair we saw in Texel, in a notch at one end of the rod and from the other side he hung a weight in a notch about half way from the end. The scale balanced.

"This is a simple way to test for the purity of gold. The eastern traders would cary such a scale as they bartered. What you have is a piece of pure gold. They would make small bars or strips. Usually these were about 10 cm long and 2 cm wide by 1 cm thick, about 20 cc."

"We were told it was an earring."

"Well it could be. It would be a bit heavy." His eyes went from her face to Barb's wedding ring set. "May I see your ring?"

Barb held out her left hand towards him. "It is an unusual design. And quite new."

"We were only married two and a half weeks ago."

"Your husband does not wear a ring? I thought rings were common among American men?"

"The store we found this in Holland did not have a man's version."

Joseph looked at me. "Would you like one? I have this same red gold. I could make you a matching man's style without the rubies by noon tomorrow and you still have time to get to Pforzheim for dinner."

As Barb gave my hand a bit more pressure she smiled while asking, "George, would you like one?"

"Yes. That would be nice."

After dinner we were served a light fresh wine. Barb unwrapped the towel from the bottle and beamed. "Mr. Hess, I thought I recognized this wine. This is the same one George ordered for us on our first date. He promised me that some day he'd take me to the Mozel. Well, maybe on the way back from Prague."

The question I'd found hard to frame for Joseph, now became clear to me. "Karl, during the war how did you know who to trust? Did you know those who would . . ."

"I didn't know, I was too young. My father and mother seemed to know. We were told not to discuss the war or politics or beliefs or our family. It was safer for everyone."

"Earlier you said some still wish the war had ended differently. Do you know who they are?"

"Since the end of the war the roles have been reversed. Only now as their children and grand children face the certainty of a truly united Europe, do some of these want to return to the glory of a very dominant Germany. Many of them, and I've heard a few locals say it openly, see the French and English as again trying to tell us how to run our own country. They see less skillful foreigners taking our jobs. Foreigners we can't keep out because of our union with other countries. They see anyone who disparages the German work ethic and social conventions, as disloyal to those who built this country. Mostly they believe that the Nazi's knew all this and were justified in keeping Germany German. They have used intimidating actions to silence moderates."

"If we wrote the story your father told us what would happen?" Asked Barb.

"Some years ago a man wrote a story a few Moslem zealots did not like. He had to go into hiding. I think you know who I mean."

"Yes, I think we do." responded Barb. "But should we write the story we heard tonight?"

"Maybe you should not use your real names." Karl said looking deep into her eyes.

A bit flustered Barb changed the subject by asking his wife where she had booked us a room. "It is a room near the market square. Karl can take you there."

We said our good nights and were led by Karl to the market square. From there I could remember where we'd parked our rental car. While Barb checked us in, Karl and I went in to retrieve the rollies. Karl noticed the car's list before I did.

"Unusual to have two flats on the same side while parked. They were OK when you arrived?"

"Most definitely!"

The engineer in him appraised the two curb side tires. "Here's the problem. Both are slashed at the top. An amateurish job with a big knife."

"A message being delivered to us you think?

"Easily. A rental from Frankfurt that hasn't moved since mid day, a message."

"What do you suggest?"

"We get your bags and go. I'll have the car towed and looked at, the tires fixed and you'll be ready to go by noon. Call me and I'll have the garage deliver the car to you. Best if it's secure and out of sight until you need it."

We parted on the street in front of the hotel. Barb was waiting for me in the small lobby.

"I have this awful feeling about . . ."

"So do I. Let's go to our room and talk about it."

"Can't we just go . . . somewhere else?"

"No. Lead the way."

In the small room she clung to me fiercely. "Dom, what's going on? What are we up against? The more Karl told us the more frightened I got. Tell me I'm being a silly school girl who has read too many novels."

"You're not silly and this is not a novel. We've got a problem, or rather someone has a problem with us. Our die is cast. We go to Prague. Just not to Pforzheim. Our return takes us to Friesland to see if we can find where Mr. Hassma spent a few weeks before going to Enschede and on up the Rhine."

"Won't they be expecting us in Prague?"

"I hope so. It'll make the job a lot easier once there, and a whole lot easier back in Holland."

"Why?"

"They know who we are. We do not know who they are. We need to find them. We do this by being both unpredictable and highly visible. Like we were here. The only difference is we can now tell the good guys we meet what to expect and they'll help us identify the bad guys."

"So what about tomorrow?" "First we have breakfast, be seen doing a little shopping, writing a few post cards and then we go pick up my ring. In the meantime our car has been safety checked, the tires repaired and is fueled for our departure." "Why does our car need a safety check and the tires . . . Oh No. They didn't?" "Yes they did, and Karl is taking care of everything." "So you trust him?" "Yes. And you?" "I guess so. What about Joseph?" "No." "Then why are we . . ." "Because I want a wedding ring. We need to be visible. We need our car fixed. And he has to think we're heading to Prague via Pforzheim. It could give us an unnoticed half a day or longer in Prague." "I hope you can use that pistol you carry. This sounds like it could get dangerous." "In for a penny . . ." "... in for a pound. Jam a chair under the door and meet me in the shower."

"Such a hussy you've become. I love it!"

Chapter 5 Baiting the trap

"Barb you are amazing."

"So tell me about it. I don't mind being flattered."

"You drape the Gloria persona about you and spout lines like a trained actress. I'd hoped for half a day lead in Prague. You probably gave us at least a full day, and no all night drive to get there. When you asked Joseph how far the Mozel river was and if he thought we'd like it, his eyes lit up as he paused and smiled; I'll just bet he remembered some long lost dalliance. The coup was insisting to me that we still go to the schmuckmuseum, even if it was further out of our way."

"Shouldn't we be turning pretty soon? You said we need to find road 269 to Morbach in about a half hour."

"Yes, and from there we go on to Mainz, to Nurnberg, to Pilzen and Prague."

"How far will we get tonight?"

"I don't know."

"Do we have a place in Prague?"

"No. Would you call my, our, travel agent and get them to book us a room in a small hotel not too close to the Jewish section. Then call Jan and get him up to date."

"Hey! I thought we were equals. I'm not your new found secretary."

I bit my tongue and waited to pull off into the next truck area. Barb looked at me from the right seat of our rental. "What are you doing?"

"OK. You drive. I'll look at the world class scenery and make the calls while you focus on this narrow snaky road. And at all those big trucks and busses that keep coming toward us, taking up part of our lane or those that we keep catching up to, and can't see around for kilometers at a time then have barely 200 meters to make a pass."

"Dominic, I'm sorry. I'll watch and talk. You're bound to be a better driver here than I am. I've never driven in Europe. I didn't even bring my New York license with me to Amsterdam."

In short order she had us a hotel in Prague and circled several exits along our route where the agent told her there were good hotels. Her call to Jan was short.

"Jan, this is . . . "

"I know. I'll call you." Barb accepted his reply not as a rebuff, but as the normal way he, for good reason, did business.

"Less than a minute later her phone rang again. "Hello." She said and answered his question. "Doing it right now." Barb pressed the speaker button and laid the phone in the change bin on the dash.

"How's it going? I see you are along the Mozel. We're on a secure scramble line. Note this number. Dial it any time and use your six digit wedding date as the password. Now tell me what you've been up to and where you're headed."

"I'll fill you in and Dom can chime in as he's able. This road is really a two handed and a full attention one. Dom changed our plans because he felt Idar was a better place to start than Strasbourg. He was so right. He'd begun to think that the most logical and complete scenario that fit all we know about Joshua H, is that he was a Jewish outcast who got involved in smuggling, probably in association with the Roma. He sold information about Jews to the Nazis in exchange for his own freedom. His trip across Europe in the spring of 1943 was one of retribution and securing what he hoped was a decent future acting as a western outlet for Roma goods. After the war, he and his descendants have continued this business to the present day. They are the ones who feel threatened by us and who we need to identify."

"The man we met in Idar arranged for us to meet an old colleague, a Jew, who lives in Prague. This man, we were told has specific first hand knowledge of Joshua H. He will be the third first hand witness we will have interviewed. While in Idar we met an old man who we strongly suspect is still part of the active smuggling business. We'll file a detailed report as soon as we can get a secure connection."

"Good report Barbara. I'll have it transcribed and put in the file. Dom, I've not heard from you. Any additional thoughts?"

"Nothing to add. Barb has done a great job of synthesizing our thinking. The travel agent has our Prague info and where we'll be tonight."

"Dominic & Barbara, don't ever do that over an open line again!"

"Message received and understood." I replied.

"I'll have support and cover for you in Prague. Use the day clues to identify your support. You're on your own tonight. I doubt that I can get any one near you on such short notice. So be watchful and careful. Call as needed." CLICK.

"Nice work dear. Jan doesn't give out a lot of Kudos. The open line reservation mistake was mine. I should have thought of it."

Somewhere west of Nurnberg we found an autobahn restaurant and hotel that matched one of the agents suggestions and more than met our nightly needs. The room was of cruise ship size and efficiency. Early the next afternoon we pulled up to a small hotel just west of the old center of Prague.

Our room was on the third level on the back side overlooking the small courtyard that served the basement cafe as additional seating for days like today when the weather permitted. Barb opened the windows and drew aside the sheers. A gauzy eastern light filled the room. The bath was private, marble tiled and very small. Barb took a shower while I made contact with the people Karl told us about. Tomorrow was set.

Emerging freshly shaved from the shower with a towel around my waist I noticed Barb sitting on the bed still wrapped in a terry robe, painting her finger nails the same color as she had her toe nails.

"Prague can be a lively city I'm told. Ready for some action?" I swiveled my hips a bit.

"No! Dominic."

That was a mood crusher. "Then why the new paint job?"

"I needed to do something. Just sitting here waiting for you was making my mind think of what could . . . could happen. Come sit next to me. I need a hug."

"No!" Two could play her game, albeit a different version. "Put the nail polish down. Stand up. Turn around with your back to me. Put your arms out away from your body. Spread your fingers."

"Now what?"

"You'll get a hug like this," slipping my hands inside her robe, "and I'll get to play."

"That's not fair."

"Oh! I think you'll like it just fine. Just get comfortable in my arms."

"What about you?"

"When your nails are dry we'll see what you're still able to do. I understand the cafe in the basement is where the locals hang out. Maybe they'll be able to find us secluded table we can use as an interlude."

"God, if I'd known you were such a fiend we'd have been married by the end of our first date. You were so . . . so polite . . . and reserved . . . and grown up. I was afraid you'd never call back."

"I didn't until the next morning, did I?"

We woke up from our play and nap to the wonderfully mixed aromas of a spit barbecue, simmering wine sauce baste and frying onions.

"Well, if I wasn't hungry before, I am now. Are you going to call for reservations?"

"No. If we have to wait, so much the better. We can sit in the patio and have some wine or one of their renowned Pilsners while we soak in the local color and culture."

"Won't we be obvious? I thought you wanted a day to hide in plain sight?"

"We will be obvious. But we're nowhere near either the Jewish or tourist parts of town. And we're covered."

"Wait, how did she know to book this place? All I asked for was a small hotel in Prague."

"This is where Jan stays. He sometimes works for the VOA."

"The who? And who really is Jan?"

"Voice of America, and Jan is a lawyer with many clients. Let's leave it at that."

"Oh! Should you have told me that? Now that I know will you have to kill me?"

"Not on your life! You're the first woman I've ever met who made me want a normal married life and family."

"You mean that, don't you?"

"When we get things sorted out, we'll settle down. Now get dressed. We'll take this further over drinks and dinner."

The cafe is in the basement of the hotel. From the street level lobby we went down a short flight of stairs into a candle and incandescent bulb lit vaulted brick catacomb. The visual warmth was enveloping. A man no taller than Barb and thrice as heavy greeted us. Over her shoulder I asked. "May we sit out side? The aroma of your cooking came in our window and drew us here."

"Of course, it is how people know what we will be serving."

He seated us at a cocktail size table against the hotel wall that the afternoon sun had warmed. The roasting spit had legs of lamb being hand turned and basted with a wine sauce. The aroma of simmering onions in a cast iron skillet at the edge of the coals tantalized like an appetizer.

"To drink?" he asked.

"Two pilsners, please."

On his return he carried a galvanized bucket with six bottles and two glasses nestled in a bed of ice. An opener hung from the handle by a string. After he filled the glasses and left I toasted my bride. "Thanks for changing my life with yours. We make a great team, just hopefully not always in this business."

Barb took a long pull of her beer as I did mine. Setting her glass on the table she took my hand in her cold wet one. "OK! I believe you haven't lied to me about what I Brown and company does, but what haven't you told me?"

"I've told you everything except the names of our clients. Often I don't know their names and an glad I don't. I've done enough of these jobs to figure out who they must ultimately be. As you've noticed, Jan has resources the average lawyer probably doesn't. I just hope that our fathers now treat us as family and find others to take these jobs so we can do what we're really trained to do, investigate art."

"You mean my father has done this for years?"

"So I understand."

"One last question while I finish the rest of my beer. What's tomorrow's plan?"

"We meet the contact Karl found for us. Hope to get spotted. Then lead the tail into a trap."

"One more question, how do you know this and how do we do this? OK. That was two questions, sorry."

"We play tourist. We walk old Prague and the castle. Jan's arranged cover, for us which means he wants to talk to who ever is interested in us."

"Oh! So, now I know he's some sort of spy master. I need another beer."

I'd all but finished my second beer while she'd hardly touched hers'. "What is it Barb?"

"You said you wanted a normal married life after we got things sorted out. What needs sorting? We move to some suburb of Utrecht or Arnhem. We can do our job as well from there. We start a family. We tell our fathers, who know who their clients are, we don't do those kind of jobs anymore. They won't endanger their grand children. And if they try, we tell our mothers. Guilt trips can be a two way street."

"Sounds good to me! When do we start?"

"When we clear our back log."

"Ouch! That may take a while."

"How many are of this type?"

"Maybe three of the ten."

"Well, we'll work out some angle. Fathers have been manipulated by daughters and daughter-inlaws for generations. I know from personal experience I can get to my father when I need to, and I'll bet I can get to yours."

I raised my glass. "Here's to you. And a normal future."

By ten we were sated. The roast lamb, potatoes, greens, white wine and custard type desert was delicious. Back in our room we were too tired for anything but a call to the front desk to arrange a wake-up call.

We left our hotel and walked the six blocks to the subway. At the first traffic light the man next to us knelt down to retie his left shoe. A block further he retied his right shoe while waiting. I

slowed us down so he'd get a ways ahead. To Barb I whispered. "Remember him. He's part of our cover."

"What!"

"A blue suit, black wing tips, one black sock, one blue sock, watch inside right wrist and solid blue tie on blue shirt. Today's code. So when you see him again ignore him."

"Holy shit! How'd you know that?"

"It is like signals in baseball. Tuesday is blue, black/black, black/blue, inside right, solid blue on blue."

We put coins into the machine and got all day passes. The escalator took us down some three levels to a brightly lit platform reminiscent of the Moscow system I'd once used. The schematic made our choice obvious. At the fifth stop we got off and surfaced on Platnerska at Stare Mesto. I took me a few moments to get my bearings. Barb held my hand tightly as I maneuvered us across the Old Town square toward Teynkirche. Without asking we sat at a street cafe table.

"What now Sherlock?"

"We wait until Sol, or so he says that's his name, finds us. In the center of the square is the Jan Hus monument. Sort of behind us is Josefov, the Jewish quarter. Off to the left are tourist stalls."

"Can we take a horse drawn carriage tour? I always wanted to in Central Park, but mother said it was too expensive."

"In the Park it is. Here we'll afford it. Good idea. See that young guy on the bench dressed in blue jeans and a jean jacket? He's part of the cover. He waited until I looked at him and pulled up his pant legs and checked his watch. We're not alone."

"Wait, what happened to the suit code? So you think this could get . . ." Barb stopped in mid breath

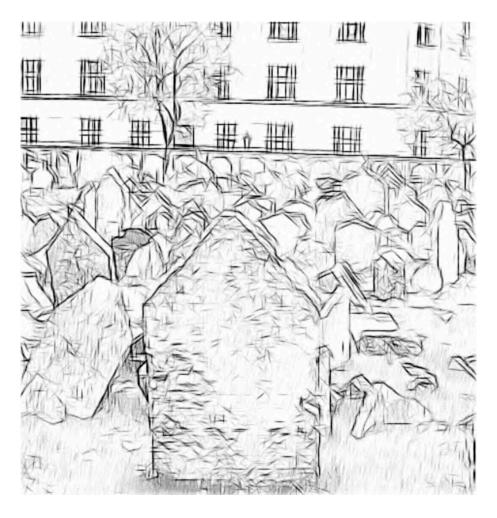
I stood up as a bearded man in traditional Jewish dress approached our table. His age was not easy to guess. His hands and neck suggested that he was past seventy. He extended his hand. I did likewise.

"I'm Sol. Would you come with me?" His voice was not robust. If a horse carriage had been passing his words would not have traveled the three feet from his mouth to my ears.

As we walked, he gave us a running commentary on the buildings we passed; St. Nicholas church, the birth place of Kafka and the Maisel Synagogue. We turned left then right into the old Jewish cemetery. His walk and voice took on a slower more deliberate pace.

"I was chosen to meet with you because I know the story of Havel. I was a young boy of thirteen when he came. I was tending these graves when he first appeared. He knew my name. We talked and he asked to see my father. I took him."

"Over there in a newer section is my family." Barb and I trailed him and gave him some room and quiet as he visited with them. She took out her sketch book to quickly scratch a few lines.



Turning back to us, he led us on a serpentine crisscrossing route through the hollowed grounds. "Two weeks later my father, mother and brother disappeared. I was visiting my aunt when they were taken. Only after the war did he return, not the others, a very sick and broken man. He did not tell me where he was taken or what he had done. My aunt would not speak of it. As an adult I have spent years piecing together what happened to my father and several others. Karl tells me you know of this man, Havel, and have traced him."

"We, my wife and I, think we know who he was. What we don't know is why someone doesn't like our knowing about him. Every time we talk to someone about him an intimidating action takes place. Fires are set. Tires are slashed."

"I think I know why. Let us go to have coffee in a private place."

Sol took us to a restaurant near the old synagogue. Coffee and pastries were set before us. I continued our story. "We believe Havel, as he told you his name was, is the same man known as Hassma in Holland and Hess in Germany. We think he was a German sympathizer or spy. His job, we believe, was to infiltrate Jewish groups and report about them to the Nazis. The reason we think so, is that after he left a place selected members of the Jewish community we arrested and disappeared."

Sol looked into his half full coffee cup seeming to weigh his response. "I also think that. Most don't. They see him as sort of a hero. He is said to have helped some escape. They say he knew the way and brought gems and jewelry to buy our way out. I don't think so. If it was that easy our people would have used their own wealth to do it. The way out was known to some. Knowing who to trust was not."

He continued. "I think he only helped people to get out so he could find out how they did it. Once he knew, he identified the resistance leaders and transporters to the Nazi's and a they were taken away."

More coffee and pastries magically appeared. He thanked the young woman.

"My granddaughter."

"Our understanding is that the underground escape system worked to some extent all during the war. Is that true?"

"Yes."

"How could that be if the Nazi's kept shutting it down?"

"I believe the underground here was run by Roma." Sol said softly. "To them we were no different than any other commodity you paid to smuggle out. I have never been able to find anyone who was smuggled out. Once they left, they disappeared. Only a very few arrested by the Nazis ever came back, like my father did."

Barb got us to the next level quickly. "So they smuggle people out, what do they smuggle in?"

"In? I don't know."

"Could it have been drugs? Hashish? Could that have been the reason the Roma were allowed to continue smuggling? They were providing Jews and a product the Nazi solders wanted?"

Sol sat in silence as he considered our theory.

I tried to move us along. "Do you have or remember any piece of physical evidence that Havel existed?"

"I don't. I've never seen anything anyone ever said he gave them. It makes the whole story seem a little unreal. Almost like it is a way to explain how the Nazi's knew."

"From our side one of the facets that makes this story hard to pin down and explain is that we have no physical evidence." Barb declared. "We have no picture. We have no family history that can be verified. He seems mythical, except that he purportedly gave the Dutch farmers who helped him a pair of gold earrings. A jeweler in Idar-Oberstein said they were Slav or Roma bullion, not earrings."

I voiced one of my primary concerns. "This is piece of the story that doesn't fit, at least by my understanding of the Jewish-Roma relations of the time. I've been led to believe that the German's pitted one group against the other."

Sol again thought for a moment. The pace and tone of his words were those of the cemetery earlier. "The Jews and Roma have not always and maybe never have gotten along. We stayed in cities. They seemed comfortable being nomadic."

"If we showed you a picture of the earrings do you know a jeweler who might give us an opinion?"

"I could do so. My shop is only next door."

Barb put the folded picture in front of Sol. Within a moment of flattening the page open he spoke. "This is a piece of Roma gold bullion. You say Mr. Havel gave them to the Dutch farmers who helped him? So he brought it from England?"

"That's the way we heard the story both on Long Island and in Holland."

"If he had shown this gold bar here he would have been immediately suspect. This is definitely Roma, from that period or before."

Emboldened by what we had heard I confidently thought out loud. "What if this man was a disgruntled Jew who could pass as Roma or Jew. Both have very strong family ties and organization. The Nazi's didn't like what they couldn't control and when they took over a

country they immediately put pressure on people and groups. Roma smuggling didn't start up with the Nazi invasion. It had been in place for centuries."

"Try this idea." I continued. "He is selected by Roma elders to help preserve the family business of smuggling. He gets to England and becomes a RAF pilot. We don't know his name. None of the ones he used later match a pilot on a RAF list. So we guess he used a different name. A liaison cuts a deal with the Nazis that if they can deliver both Jews and drugs they will be left alone. The Nazis supply bribery items, Jewish communities that they need to infiltrate and transportation within Europe. For the most part this deal works, except in some localized situations where an individual military commander wants his own part of the action."

"This ties what we know into a plausible scenario. We can't find him, but the plane he used is listed as missing. The dates of the actions against Jews in Holland, Idar-Oberstein and here match a probable time line. After Prague he disappears. One reason to try to intimidate us is because we could expose a generations old family business that still operates today. If Gloria is correct about drug smuggling, a major supplier has long thought to be in southeastern Europe and a major market is Holland. Trade routes from antiquity have used this corridor. Wars didn't stop the trade before WWII and the fall of the iron curtain probably made the trade flourish."

Looking at both of them I asked. "Your thoughts?"

"I'd agree, but without a person how do you prove it?" Sol asked.

"George, if someone is following us today and we can catch them is that a big enough fish to lead us to the family?" Posited Barb.

"No. But I'll bet Dolf Wesselmann is."

"Who did you just say?"

"Dolf Wesselmann, the director of the museum on the Dutch island of Texel. He seems to be the first person we upset by asking about this story."

"I'm not a detective like you, but that name I know. A Wesselmann family of three left Prague in the fall of 1938. That I know, because they left a flat my uncle rented to them. I have no further record of them. They were not too welcome in the community. Some say he wanted an easy way to live well, that he would make any deal with anyone. I remember asking my older brother about them. He said they were speculators and cowards."

"What do you know about this family?"

"The father was Joshua, the son was Isaac his wife was Sarah, maybe. I could check."

"About how old was the son?"

"I'd guess maybe seventeen to twenty. But no one knows or remembers anything about him. There are no records mentioning him. No school records, nothing. I don't ever remember seeing him, which seems odd to me. I can remember all the other children, just not him."

"What about the other children you remember?" Asked Barb. "You seem to have been a rather tight community. Who was his best friend?"

"That I remember. The boy's name was . . . The family was Navrátil. I can still picture him, a short, scrappy bully. His mother was Jewish maybe, his father maybe not. We picked on him and he fought back. The didn't live in the Josefov. Many of the newer families didn't live here."

"Sol, is there a phone or an internet connection I can use? I'd like to run the son's name through the RAF database."

"You can do that, a World War Two list of names?"

"Shouldn't take long."

Barb went to use the restroom while Sol took me down the hall to the restaurant office.

Once on the web and a secure server the search was all keying. By the time Barb returned I'd found what we'd missed before in the RAF archives. A name and picture of one Isaac Wessel, a head shot and a squad picture from 1941. He was listed as a Skua pilot who went missing on an escort flight in February of 1943. Nothing definitive came up on either Joshua or Miriam Wessel or Wesselmann in England post 1938.

"How can you be sure your man is related?" asked Sol.

I brought up the web site for the Texel museum and the RAF squad picture side by side on my PC screen. I asked both of them to find the flyer who most closely resembled the curator's picture. In short order they both picked the same flyer, Lt. I. Wessel.

"Circumstantial, but I rest my case for the time being." I stated.

"Good work young man, remembering faces so well."

"Sir, in the days before facial recognition software, we trained doing this. It was part of my art history training."

"May I see that group picture again? One face . . .looks familiar, maybe."

I filled the notebook screen with the RAF picture. Sol took a moment and pointed to the flyer at the end of the first row. "See him? The face is close. The pose is him! He always stood like that, with his leg bent and right toe behind his left heel. I can find a school picture just like that." He ran his arthritic finger to the last name on bottom row of the caption, J. Navare. "He changed his name, maybe?"

I took Barb's hand, looked up at her and motioned with my eyes for her and Sol to leave.

"Sol, will you show me around?"

"But, of course."

As soon as I was alone I emailed Jan. He sent back two local phone numbers and our flight confirmation out of Prague that evening.

From the Josefov we walked to the Charles bridge along the very open sidewalks of the Moldavia river. Barb asked the obvious question. "How are we going to catch the guy who is supposedly following us?"

"I don't know. Somewhere along the way we'll get told what to do."

"What if there's more than one?"

"That's the hope. We, they, detain one and the other reports it. That leads to the boss."

"Sherlock, I don't doubt that you know what you're doing; but do you really believe what you told Sol?"

"I think so. It was an ad lib out loud thinking that mostly fits what we told him and he believes. Hopefully it sounded a little presumptuous and arrogant. We don't know who Sol is or his background. He might be one of the bad guys. If he underestimates us all the better. The only one I'm sure of is Dolf Wesselmann. And I still don't know what or who he is protecting. Except that it is important enough to him to want us to drop the subject."

"Let me try this idea out on you." Barb postulated. "What if you grew hashish in among some of your hops. Those tall trellises could hide the plants very well. To some extent both require the same kind of processing. You export the hops and packages of hash to Holland and Germany and split off the hash before it gets the breweries."

"Barb, I'm a dummy and we're fortunate that I am. If I'd thought of this before I might have blown the whole thing. Do you remember anything in Dolf Wesselmanns' resume about where he worked before he got the Texel position?"

"No."

"Neither do I. Let's find an internet cafe and power up the laptop to have a look." Twenty five minutes later we had our answer. There was no mention of his previous experience on the web pages I'd saved. Time to text Jan for some real help.

"CV and crim on Dolf Wesselmann or D. or A. Wessel. Story has gaps. C U Schipol 2nite."

"Hey you're pretty good at that. When do I get a text phone?"

"Next week as we settle into our new home. I told dad we'll have earned and want a week off. Now we need to be on our way. Lunch on the other side of the Charles bridge is waiting for us."

The Charles Bridge is as iconic as any landmark in the world. Simply it is now a pedestrian bridge anchored at both ends by tourist shops and crowded with day vendor stalls. The statues that stand on the railings have been eroded by flash photography as much as weather. Even in May, a month before the heavy tourist season starts the bridge is packed. A youthful Swedish couple were having their portrait done in oil crayons. Small dresser top jewelry boxes inlaid with old town scenes caught Barb's eye.

"Can I get one of these? It is small enough to fit in my purse."

"Of course!" I said idly paying more attention to the people around us than to Barb as she tried to choose one. I noticed one of our minders pretending interest in the postcards to our right in the adjacent booth.

"Here is one of the castle. Look it is the same view as from here. I think I'll take it."

One statue further on a fifty-ish man was displaying earrings. Barb and I stopped staring stone still. On the top shelf of the glass display case were several gold earrings like the ones we saw on Texel. Barb caught her thoughts before I did. Pointing at the case to get his attention she asked.

"May I see the third one?"

He put them in the palm of his hand and held them out for her. Barb picked one up. "George do you think these would look good with my black dress?"

Getting on the same page as her I replied. "Yes, very! And you might consider the necklace of the same design there on the bottom shelf." The necklace ingots were of graduated length forming a soft curve below the flat chain.

"Do you think so? Not too much?"

"Definitely not. If you get the earrings, you should get the necklace that matches."

Barb went into her thoughtful acting mode and turned the earring over, hefted it and looked inside at the jeweler's signature mark. She put the earring back in the vendors hand. "What does that mark on the inside mean?"

He took a loupe from his pocket and handed it to her along with one of the earrings. "It is our initial. A "W" with a small "I" in the middle. The "2" means it is 22 carrot gold, not filled. We have a shop in Josefov where make them and you can see more like these. The style is one of many our family has made forever."

He boxed and wrapped up Barb's gold, I paid for it with plastic. I don't carry that much cash. He handed the purchase to Barb and thanked her wishing us a pleasant stay in Prague. As an afterthought I took one of his printed cards stacked between the display cases. The name Wesselmann branded my retina causing a slight stumble step. I handed the card to Barb.

Looking up at me with a smile. "OK Sherlock, now what?"

"Lunch under the umbrella at the cafe on our right."

The waiter looked surprised, but seated us out in the open near the corner. People walking off the Charles Bridge and those on the side street approaching the bridge were only an elbow away. Barb took the white resin chair facing it, I with my back to the bridge. She had caught on to the routine very quickly. She hid her people watching by sketching the tower across the river.



I tried to notice anyone who seemed to notice us. This percolated a thought I should have had earlier. "Do you want me to put the box in my thigh cargo pocket? In crowds like this there are always people watching those who buy expensive things."

"That might be better, but not here where anyone can see you do it. Now that I have the gold do I get the simple black dress and shoes to go with it?"

"You're kidding? You're saying you don't have one. I can't believe your mother would let you be without"

"Well, she wouldn't and didn't, but it was worth a try."

"On the street past the tourist information office are many shops, we'll look. In for a penny . . ."

"... in for a pound."

Our waiter returned with Barb's and my beer, took our order and left us looking at a tourist guide. She read it while I checked my messages.

She interrupted my reading of Jan's TM. "Dom, behind you is the same man we saw in Josefov. He's been window shopping the same side of the street since we sat down. It's not one of our minders."

"Ditto behind you. It's comforting to know we've been found. One of our minders just took the last table over there on the end. 'The game is a foot', to coin a phrase."

"OK Sherlock, what do you make of this morning's revelations?"

"Dolf Wesselmann runs more than a museum. Joseph tried to lead us astray and is one of the bad guys. He offered to make my ring to keep us there and buy time. Sol is protecting someone. The bridge vendor is out of the loop. Unless he tells someone about us he'll stay there."

"By the way, Mrs. Swartz, I love my wedding ring. Thank you."

"You're welcome. Now put your phone away. Lunch is here."

I didn't. I went back and reread Jan's TM while I ate. "DW + CV Rott Rap now. Armory trap NTF SA CU 2 nite."

"Dom, there is a Mocha museum here!"

"I know. Been there. Nice people. Helped me once."

"You're being awfully short!"

I let her read Jan's TM. "What now? What's 'Armory trap' and 'SA' mean? I think I get the rest of it."

"We've still got a trap to set in the armory in the castle and a flight to Schipol to catch. NTF SA means 'news travels fast stay alive' I think. Could get interesting."

"Back to Mocha, what was this you said?"

"A few years ago a gallery was offered some Mocha prints. They needed them authenticated. I was here helping out a colleague with some obscure 16th century pastorals. They mailed me a tube of Mocha posters and I went to the museum to get them authenticated. They were fakes. But it is a nice, small museum. In the cathedral at the castle is one of his stained glass pieces. Truly amazing work."

"Can we see it?"

"We'll come back when we're not working and spend a week."

"At least a week, and before we have children. Pushing a stroller over these cobblestones through a crowd would be insane!"

We headed west along Mostecka, the shopping street that fronts St. Nicholas Church and connects to the Charles Bridge. In the window of an upscale boutique Barb saw a simple black dress. "That'll do nicely. Have they followed us?"

"The trailer hasn't been able to stay hidden. He's not very good at this. The lead I haven't seen since we got up from the table."

Barb settled on the third dress she tried on with the necklace; simple lines, slight sheen to the linen, lovely deep scoop neckline to show off her curves and the jewelry. Matching high heeled shoes brought the top of her head to my chin.

"Will this do?"

"Only if I can take you home with me."

Barb hung herself around my neck as we shared a normally reserved for private type of kiss. Judging by the reaction of the sales lady she'd seen this before. As I was putting a small countries debt on plastic, Barb slipped the gold into my right thigh cargo pocket.

Two doors down I was caught by surprise when she entered a touristy card and gem shop. Without a moments hesitation she picked out a glass bead necklace and had the clerk box it for her. 10 Euros and two minutes later we were again on the inclined street among the throng headed to the castle.

"This is quite some hike. When you said to wear my most comfortable walking shoes I'm not sure I believed you. Now I do. How much further?"

"We pass the church then zig-zag up the hill. We'll get a drink at the top and wait until we are sure everyone has caught up to us. Let me carry the dress bag. You keep your purse strap across your shoulders and the shoe box in your right hand. Hold my hand. We don't want to be separated. We don't need you to become a hostage."

We approached the front of the castle and skirted the crowd who were watching the changing of the guard. So much for plan A. I pulled Barb to the left away from the main gate. Immediately ahead was a "U" shaped forecourt entrance to a large building.

"Start taking pictures. I'll be on the other side out of sight, but covering you."

Wiggling her hips Barb retorted, "I hope he likes the bait?"

The lead tracker glanced both ways and came up behind Barb twisting her left arm behind her.

"Ouch!"

"Stop talking or it gets worse. Now hand me the box!"

In two silent steps I was behind him, my needle point knife drawn and pricking the base of his skull. Several drops of blood flowed through his buzz cut to his shirt collar. He froze. Barb sensing the change twisted loose, turned and brought her knee up hard between his legs. As he stiffened from the second shock in three heart beats he turned his head to the right away from the pain. The knife point cut a scalpel line from his neck through right ear. His right hand grabbed his bleeding head before his knees buckled. From the court entrance to my left came a command.

"We'll take over now. Get lost!"

Our minders had spoken. We swiftly back tracked down the hill loosing ourselves within those going to the Mala Strana subway station.

Barb packed while I checked us out, called the rental company to pick up the car and arranged a taxi to the airport. Snugly in the back of the older tan Skoda I was glad I'd taken the desk's advice and didn't drive to our flight. There was no way we'd have made it in time through the late afternoon traffic.

We checked in at the Swiss Air counter. The clerk took our passports and asked us the usual questions, gave us our ticket envelopes and introduced us to another uniformed service person. She led us to a private room in a lounge adjacent to ticketing.

"May I get you anything?"

Barb asked for some cold water for both of us. When she returned with our water she was accompanied by two men in off the rack eastern European suits. Badges hung from their left breast pockets.

"You made good time. I just got out of a briefing about your activities this afternoon and was asked to brief you on what we think comes next."

"Let me start by saying our field men were impressed with how you handled yourselves. I understand this is not your usual profession. And they want to see the shiv you used on that guy."

"Right. We are with I Brown and Company. Mostly we do art consulting, but upon occasion we get loaned out to others." I took the knife that is really a modified expensive name brand ball point pen from my pocket and handed it to him. "It is what it looks like, but move the clip to the side, press the button and out the end comes a ceramic needle blade knife."

He tried it. "Wow! Where do you get one of these?"

"A shop in Amsterdam."

"Do you always carry this?"

"Yes."

"Airport security doesn't take it?"

"Not yet."

"Speaking of armed, are you?"

"Yes."

"You should be. Just before your plane boards we'll walk you around the line to your gate. No need to bring attention to you." He reached inside his coat and took out a card handing it to me with a complement and a rebuke. "Send me the info on the pens and call me before you arrive next time."

"As for what you're getting into next, we think we know. The guy you downed so expertly is muscle for a local group that does it all. Their real money seems to be in smuggling. That's our focus. Dolf Wesselmann has been ID'ed as Joshua Hassma who has been involved in barge based smuggling in Rotterdam. Now he runs a museum and has gone legit. No way, as you say."

"We've tried to infiltrate the operation here for years and gotten no where. You two have salted some old wound. You're going to agitate them until they make a mistake and once again we'll be there"

He rose and while shaking our hand reiterated the guarantee, "Good luck. We'll cover you like we did today. Come pack to Prague. It is a nice city when you don't have to work it every day."

We sat holding hands and finishing our ice water. A hostess offered us a selection of finger food from a silver tray. When she was out of ear shot Barb asked. "Do we really know much more than before?

"We know who the black sheep of the family is and that the trade route is still large and very active."

"What are they smuggling?"

"As of now my guess is Russian diamonds and other gems. The expansion of the EU and better detection has made land travel easier and drugs harder to hide. My guess is that gems take fewer people than a drug operation, which is why it is harder to infiltrate."

"OK, I'll buy that. What if their model hasn't changed in years or a century? You bring in raw gem stones, sell them at a discount to people who moonlight processing them and slip them into existing stock. The profit is high. The risk to all is minimal. Maybe DW didn't go completely legit, only sort of legit."

I added the finish to her thoughts. "Because EACD can't infiltrate they don't know how big it is. So they can't get funding for a major operation and hire it out. If we succeed they get a headline bust. If not, it is lost in 'consultant fees' or some other black hole."

Chapter 6 Transatlantic Hide and Seek

As promised Jan met us outside of customs at Schiphol. His car and driver were waiting at the curb. We were just under way when he launched into a monologue recounting our time in Prague demonstrating what he'd TM and that NTF.

"Good work. Now here's what we do next . . . "

"NO!" Interrupted Barb. "Next we go home and sleep in our own bed and get our clocks back to normal. We'll go back to work on Monday. These people have been doing this for years through wars and god knows what else. They aren't going to stop just because we're nosing around."

That so throughly shut Jan up that we spent the rest of the ride to Amsterdam in silence until Jan told the driver to drop us off at our flat. His final words were, "Call me when you're ready to go back to work."

Once inside our second floor flat I took Barb in my arms. "You're going to add years to my life the way you managed Jan."

"That's the idea. Let's unwind with a shower and not set the alarm."

My cell phone rang at a moment after 7AM. We ignored it. Someone banged on our door at 7:05Am, so much for Barb's good idea. I put on a robe and went to the door. Through the peep hole I could see nothing. I turned to go back to bed and was slammed sideways and under the door being smashed from its jamb. Two guys in shorts and rugby shirts pinned my legs by kneeling on the door. One grabbed my hair pulling my head back, torquing my back. His basic guttural voice was intimidating. "You mess with us, we do you. Got it?"

Two shots exploded from our bedroom doorway behind me to the left. My head was released during their screams. Both crawled off the door in opposite directions to face the shooter. Blood trailed after them from leg wounds.

"Freeze you maggots! Move and you're dead!" Yelled Barb. A rerun of Charlie's Angles flashed through my mind.

The weight of the two guys on the door pinning me to the floor had numbed the back of my thighs to uselessness. I heard the one to my left move. In response Barb fired again. A translation of his immediate expletives was unnecessary. From the edge of my face down vision I could see the blood from his shredded right biceps dripping to the floor. The rivulet moved toward me.

A short silence set in broken by the sound of boots on the stairs and the echoing of an approaching siren. I twisted my head to the right as two police officers came into the room with guns drawn. Their assessment of the scene was instantaneous. One ordered the intruders to lay on their stomachs with hands behind their head. The other pulled the door off me setting it against our dining table. As I arm crawled towards Barb my cell phone rang. I picked it up off the end table.

Jan's voice was harsh and mad. "Don't say a word. I'll be there immediately." He hung up.

To Barb I said. "It was Jan. He'll be here soon. He said to keep quiet." She'd put the pistol on an end table when she sat on the couch.

A policeman had zip tied the thugs hands and started to assess their wounds while the other continued to cover them with his drawn pistol. This tableau remained center stage for several minutes. A medic arrived and took over the first aid. In a bit the intruders were secured to stretchers carried down the stairs. We'd sat wordlessly holding hands through the entire time warp.

The shorter of the two policemen approached us. Looking at Barb he asked. "Is that your gun? Do you have a permit?"

Jan rushed through the broken door frame. His badge and ID plainly visible in his open wallet. "I'm Jan Groenwaal, EACD. These two work for me. We'll file a report and have it to you later today."

The policeman slowly and carefully examined Jan's credentials. His demeanor stiffened into all but a parade ground stance as he handed Jan back his wallet. "Yes Chief Inspector. We'll post a man to deflect the curious."

After the room had cleared Jan pulled a dining area chair up. Straddling it with his arms over the top of the back he faced us. "Now young lady, the next time I start to brief you, don't shut me up. These at not little boy games they are playing. You were too distraught last night to listen,

so I let it go. We figured they'd find you sooner or later. I thought we had a day or two. My mistake."

"For now, you can do everything we need you to do from your condo in New York. We'll figure out what field work is next later. This is deeper than we thought, much deeper. Your job from now on is to keep finding and removing the layers that protect someone. I'll have docs and references sent to you."

He let this set in. In a complete change of tone he complemented her. "Barb, that was pretty good shooting. We need to get you a gun permit."

Her spunkiness surprised both of us. "And how could I miss two big butts from ten feet? Come on!"

"But thigh shots? Good thinking."

"I didn't dare be high and risk hitting Dom."

"The third was very selective and effective."

"Not really. I aimed for his chest and he moved to his left so it got him in the arm."

"Then it is back to the range for you young lady. I'll have everything there for you next week. You can take the full urban course and Dom can join you. His refresher is probably overdue."

"Dom, I hear you impressed our man in Prague with how you set the trap when the primary wasn't available and used your needle blade knife to take the man down. He wants me to send him some. Good work. Now get yourselves cleaned up and packed. I'll have a car here for you in two hours. We'll lunch, sketch out a report and have you on your way by late afternoon."

"Again, nice work you two. Dom, you were a good solo before, as a team I may need to hire you full time."

With concern in her voice Barb stated my sentiments exactly, only better than I could have. "You'll have to talk to our fathers."

"I have."

"And?"

"We cover all your costs and they get you for free when you're available. They liked the sound of it. A few details remain, but we'll get there."

"Don't we get a say in this?" I asked. "Or is this like a sports trade? We go where we're told."

"Some of each. We'll work out something we all like. See you in a few hours."

Jan got up and let himself out. Barb and I retreated to our bedroom and closed the door. She pushed me onto the bed and sat on my lap all curled up. Her head pressed into my shoulder.

"Dom, I'm sorry. I..."

"Jan knows you are still a bride. And he knows what it is like to be newly married. He has a nice wife and two adult children. You'll meet them."

"Did you know he is a Chief Inspector for EACD?"

"Not really, but with his stroke he had to be pretty high up. I knew he was a lawyer for them who ran contract people like us."

"So, what are we going to do about his and our father's deal?"

"Take it probably. The work is what we do well. We can live here. The pay is great."

"What about the thugs and the shooting?"

"Barb, you shot two more people today than I have in four years of working for Jan."

"What about situations like Prague?"

"A couple of times, usually my size, my back up and their common sense prevailed."

"So, this isn't really a dangerous business?"

"Not before this it wasn't. We deal in the world of art, not drugs. We do research and verification then write reports. Now it's time for a shower and packing."

"What about the front room?

"We'll tell Peter and Yvette as we leave."

"The cost?"

"We'll give the bills to Jan."

We were in the same car as the night before going back to Schiphol. On the way Barb apologized to Jan in so many ways and reassured him we'd continue working for both him and I Brown and Company that we were nearly at the airport before Jan had a chance to start his briefing. He had his driver pull into the short term parking garage near the top to finish his spiel.

"After tailing him since your run in with him on Texel several things still bother us about DW. He goes to Rotterdam regularly, six times in three weeks, and disappears after a visit to NAFC. We loose him. He doesn't frequent any of the known places of his past that we have under watch. We next spot him back in Texel at his row house."

"Unlike most Dutch, if that is what he is and there is some doubt you can try to untangle, he does all the family household shopping. His wife seems to spend her time home schooling their three sons. She is rarely seen outside the house except with the boys. They seem to only have friends with German or Frisian surnames"

"He lives well within his means, and except for the winter vacations they take you'd think he was planning on an early retirement. We've run passport checks and he doesn't seem to travel outside of the EU."

"As you American's say 'That's the job in a nut shell.' We'll rebuild his past on this end and you do it on your end. We'll keep watching him, you keep him thinking about you to dilute his attention."

"Mr. & Mrs. Thomas your KLM flight leaves in just over 2 hours. Dom, security is expecting you, stay armed. Now on your way."

"Dom, this place isn't so bad. If we do a little redecorating and trash this furniture that came with it when it was a rental. We could do it in a day of shopping. You game?"

"Why not? Jan's docs wont be here until tomorrow. By the way Mrs. Swartz, did you ever dream of being newly married and having two houses, one on either side of the Atlantic?"

"No, but then I figured you'd show up on my door step; if I'd only wait and be smart enough to know you when I met you."

"I did. Let's go shopping. Do you need a list?"

"Naw! Everything goes. All the furniture, bedding, kitchen, dining room. Everything. I'll call our mothers and invite them to dinner Sunday night, that way they can see what they put in my hope chest."

"You think we can get away with this?"

"Of course! You'll call our fathers and tell them the conditions of their deal with Jan is to furnish our two houses."

"Do we call before or after our shopping spree?"

"We'll cut them some slack and call before. Besides then you can fill them in our progress."

Barb sat in the living room to make her calls and I made mine from the patio. Dad had just finished agreeing to our new terms of employment and given us a tentative date of Sunday afternoon to talk to the Hassma Memorial committee, when Barb came out to see how I was doing.

"Dom, I need some real coffee. Two cups of nuked instant is my limit."

"Get your purse, we're out of here."

At a near by bakery cafe we had coffee and apple bagels to sustain us through our trading of parental news. Barb led off.

"Our mothers have agreed to visit us on Sunday evening, providing we don't keep them too late. And your mother, who I gather has never been to our condo, agreed that the first thing I needed to do was get some decent furniture and dishes. My mother forgave me in advance for not being able to have a kosher kitchen set up on such sort notice, as long as the food was kosher. I let that one pass."

My turn. "We meet with the Hassma Memorial committee at 2PM on Sunday. We do urban pistol training on Monday on the island."

"Dad then got your father tied into the phone circuit somehow and we talked about our future employment. I gave them a brief listing of our recent activities leaving out most of the details and all of the speculation, including why we were back in the states. They didn't ask any questions, as if they knew the rules which I suspect they do, so I left it a bare bones story."

"I learned a few things. Jan and other similar agencies have been major clients of both of our fathers for years. As of Wednesday next we'll be listed with all their clients under both names. Jan will be our European contact, our old men are our US contacts and Juan Blanco our Central and South American contact. He works out of Mexico City and Rio. Juan is a partner in I Brown and Company."

"They agree to furnishing our homes. I asked if we do work in South America do we get a condo in Rio? Their reply was that depends on how much work we do with that office. They reminded me that for the moment we were still well behind on cases."

"Lastly I asked why I wasn't told this all before. Their reply won't surprise you, it didn't me. In short it is all about a need to know basis. Feeling put in my place by an answer to a question I shouldn't have asked, I tried to salvage a little face and asked if there was anything else we needed to know about the current case that we didn't. I got figuratively slapped on the wrist again. 'It's Jan's case, we know less than you do. You should keep it that way.' That's my side of our morning."

The Hassma Memorial committee met at a member's house. I chose to combine my talk with some graphics. The large flat screen TV in the living room worked as well as those I've used at any business presentation.

"Thank you for having us here this afternoon. We've written a preliminary version of the story as we've been able to assemble it from your recollections, other people's stories in Europe and some field work. You'll all get a copy later. As with other stories compiled from multiple sources, the story is not simple. With that in mind we've chosen to tell the story to you and have you ask questions as we go along."

I started by showing a 1938 map of Europe. "The story makes a loop from Prague to London to Holland to Germany and back to Prague." I went through five slides, each building on the previous. I'd laid out this plan to our fathers the day before during a very long meeting in the NYC office. We'd agreed to tell them what we knew and tell them what we suspected as separate stories. My other motive was to develop future leads based on who commented on our speculation.

"The Wesselmann family moved from Prague to London in 1937 or 1938. Their son Isaac, who had evidently trained as a civilian pilot, enlisted in the RAF. He was assigned to Skua squadron." I showed them a picture of the squadron, but admitted that I could not positively identify which if any was Isaac Wesselmann, because the number of names in the caption did not match the number of people in the picture. I showed them a picture of some unidentified RAF people standing near a Skua and gave a short run down of it's capabilities. "By 1942 he was flying bomber escort missions. In the spring of 1943 he disappears on a mission over Holland. He'd ditched his plane in a planned maneuver by the resistance on the island of Texel." I showed them a detailed map. "Two farmers and their son's hid him and his plane. Joshua Hassma, as he then called himself, gave one of the farmer's wives a pair of gold ear rings as a thank you for their hospitality." I showed them Barb's pictures of the jewelry. "After spending the night on the farm he asked to be taken to a small fishing village where he'd get a ride to Makkum. Next we have confirmation of his being in Idar-Oberstein, where he spent a few weeks. In the late spring he is back in Prague."

"Any questions before I get to talking about our speculation? Please understand that based on your collective remembrances and what we've discovered we have written a convincing story that newspapers or local speciality magazines might want to publish."

"Mr. Thomas," A grey haired woman of nearly ninety, I guessed, spoke up. "You don't sound completely convinced that the story is true."

"On the contrary. We fully believe what I've just told you. It is substantiated by known facts."

She followed up, "Then what else is there?"

"My wife and I are investigative writers. We try to find the facts behind stories. In most cases there are generally accepted aspects of a story that can not be verified. It doesn't mean that they

are not true, just not proven. So it is with this one. We have so far found no one who can identify someone he helped escape. Maybe we are too late. Sixty plus years is a long time."

"What we seemingly can coincidentally prove is just the opposite. Again the names and time line I'm about to lay out match, but there could be other explanations. Our concern is that since we've uncovered these coincidences, others might. Your efforts might be brought into question, but that is something you have to decide after hearing the circumstantial evidence we've uncovered."

"In London in February of 1938, a man named Wessel and his family were detained by the British for attempting to immigrate from Prague using false documents. No further mention is made of them. In 1942, possibly the same man, is questioned about association with a known Nazi sympathizer."

"During the spring of 1943 the SS made a string of raids and took into custody Jewish families. Some of these raids followed the known and probable course taken by Joshua Hassma to Prague. Note: In Idar-Oberstein he called himself Hess. In Prague he used the name Havel. It seems that he might have had multiple identity documents."

"Two people we talked to, both old enough to have had the personal contact they claim to have had with him, contend that the SS had left them alone until after this stranger who just showed up on their door step had gone. These two people also said that the raid only took selected people, not entire families or communities. This was not the normal Gestapo routine as we understand it. None of the people taken in these raids was ever heard from or about again."

"From this circumstantial evidence one might infer that the Wesselmanns were German sympathizers, or in some way cut a deal with the Germans. I doubt that we'll ever know where the Wesselmann's loyalties laid."

I waited in their silence. Our hostess got up and returned with a full serving tray asking if we'd like more coffee

A man identifying himself as Mr. Feingold asked the obvious question. "How hard would it be for others to dig out what you have?"

"Most of what we've found is on line. It is knowing where to look and what to ask."

His wife asked. "Do you believe the circumstantial evidence is creditable and proves that he is not the hero we believe him to be?"

"I believe the circumstantial evidence. It's relevance to the story is questionable. What bothers me most is that we can not find anyone who he specifically helped to escape. As I said, age could well be a factor. Sixty years is a long time. Parents may not have told their children, who'd still be alive today, exactly how they escaped. Mr. Hassma or Hess or Havel may have had no direct contact with those chosen by the community to try to escape."

A nervous small balding man who'd seemed more focused on us than what was said stood up. "I'm Harry Waxmann, you look familiar."

I cut him off. "I grew up on the east side and married my childhood sweet heart. We've been writers since college. You've got our CV's. Check them out. Gloria, will you hand out our story? Read what we've written. Check it out. Rewrite it. It's paid for."

This and Barb's passing out of the papers distracted the committee. I called for a taxi. In five minutes we were on our way to the train station and the long ride back to Rye.

On a Sunday afternoon the ride to GCS was not crowded. We selected a pair of seats with no one in front or behind us. Barb leaned away from the window to snuggle into my shoulder. "You are one smooth operator. When you raise our deflector shields nothing gets through."

"You were studying body language and taking notes, what did you learn?"

"No one liked your, our, approach to the project. They wanted a slick piece requiring no judgements or work on their part, just confirmation. I think they were hoping we'd turned up evidence of his heroic death or that he'd been captured and died in a camp. A nice neat package no one could refute. And, if at a later date the story was questioned, they could blame us."

"Those who asked questions felt someone had to ask them. Mr. Feingold's in particular was about how much down side risk there is. His wife asked the serious question. Your answer had her satisfied until you mentioned that we couldn't find anyone who he'd actually helped escape. That deflated her and several others. Until you mentioned this maybe no one had thought it necessary to produce an escapee. Your last statement that none of the escapees may actually have met him brought a little more life to their eyes."

"Harry Waxmann is potentially bothersome. He knows our family. Neither he nor his wife was there at our original meeting. Because he wasn't expecting to see me he didn't think to recognize me until late. We'll have to tell our parents."

"I saw you writing, did you get everyone's name and a general description?"

"Actually I did that and a bit better. During your intro when you had their initial attention, I stepped away and came back around the side where the group was framed in the living room mirror over the mantle. I took a picture with my cell phone as I pretended to check for messages."

"Good! Speaking of cell phones I better check to see if Jan called back. I'd asked him how much we could, or should, share with our fathers." In three keys I was listening to Jan's voice. "All. I'll bring them in. We need ideas and leads. DW spent a day in Leuwarden and Franneker with two minders in tow. No attempt at stealth. Call when you can."

I keyed 9 for replay and handed the phone to Barb. She hit 7 to delete it after she'd finished. "OK. It'll be good for our fathers to know what they've sold us down the river to do."

"Barb, I've been so tied up with this I haven't even asked about tonight's dinner. Is everything set?"

"Of course! It is home delivered kosher carry out. We're not going to take the blame. Can you imagine the verbal food fight if I'd cooked? No way was I going to give them that opportunity."

Other young couples had said that the first dinner at your place with the parents was memorable. Ours was pleasantly memorable. After dinner I took our fathers out for walk so that they could have cigars. About the first thing her father said was. "God that was slick, kosher carry out. Talk about how to put a sock in her mother's mouth. Maria's been on the subject of this dinner for days. Barb wouldn't tell her what the menu was going to be so she didn't know what to cook every night. She fretted about what dessert to bring. Tonight was great! Damn that girl is good. If her sister and brother were any where near as spunky and resourceful, our business could go on for generations."

"Speaking of business, did Jan talk to you?" I asked.

My dad replied with a smile in his voice he couldn't hide. I needed to know no more about how he felt the evening had gone. "Yes. You can brief us on Tuesday. We'll get his files tomorrow. I understand you are going to the pistol range then."

Abe couldn't contain his thoughts. "When he told us the story of how my little girl shot those two guys in the butt while they were trying to mug you in your front room I nearly bust a gut myself. I'll say it again, damn that girl is good!"

"So you're OK with this? I mean our working for Jan?"

"Dominic my new son," He put his arm around me. "I, and I'm sure I speak for your father although he might never say so, couldn't be prouder of both of you if I tried. How many life long friends have their children marry each other? How many men have their children take up the same line of work as their fathers while the rest of the family remains clueless?"

In his more usual somber tones my father's low measured voice stirred from down deep. "Dom, Abe and I were recruited out of college through our fathers, much like you two were. We went into the family businesses as you know. Today's standards are different. The work is different. None of our other children would even be considered for this. Barb's and your careers will probably parallel ours. To the world we're I Brown and Company art consultants and Kratz Imports. Over the last sixty or so years the assignments have changed as government needs have changed, but the cover has remained the same. Two viable companies."

We finished the outer loop of the complex and headed back indoors. The smell of fresh coffee welcomed us. I was closing the front door behind us when I heard my mother-in-law saying to Barb. "Now that you have this place looking so nice I take it we can expect to see more of you?"

Abe quashed her hopes. "Actually we were just talking about that as we walked off a bit of that wonderful dinner. Yosef and I have decided to expand our business in Europe by combining into a single company with two parts. My brother wants to retire someday so he's looking for a local person to manage that gold mine of a business we've built over the last twenty years. Barb knows the business but is much to valuable to I Brown and Company, and to us, to have her manage a store, even if it is a gold mine. When a new manager is found, Barb will look over his shoulder."

My father, not to be out done, finished the quashing. "Juan Blanco says there are similar real opportunities for us in Central and South America. He believes that the same model we will use in Europe will work in Mexico City and in Rio where we have consulting offices and Abe has retail stores. After Barb and Dominic get the Amsterdam company set up, maybe a year or less I'd guess, we'll probably have them do the same down south."

"So dear," Abe admonished his wife, "this is just for when they are back here."

"Oh! I was hoping . . ."

"Don't worry. They're young. We didn't start a family until late ourselves. Our oldest niece is what, twenty years older than Barb?"

"Oh. Yes you're right." Came her mother's deflated reply.

"Now ladies we gotta go. Yosef and I both have to work tomorrow."

We waved as we watched them drive off in my father's Lincoln Town Car. Once inside Barb came into my arms and before I could thank her for such a lovely dinner and evening she asked. "Did they mean what they said about Amsterdam and Rio? You talked about it, right?"

"Boy did they. The short version is that they have been employees for various government agencies since they left college. Their legitimate business are their cover. We have been hired as their replacements in every sense and function. We'll meet with them all day Tuesday for all the details."

"Dom, I'm a little scared. Are we good enough to do both, run businesses and be agents?"

"Our fathers and their fathers before them did it. It is our family business."

"Do our mothers know this?"

"I was assured this has been a closely guarded secret from their spouses for two generations going on three."

"When do we have to be at the range?"

"From 10 to 3."

"Good let's take a walk, a shower and set the alarm for 7."

"Like the way you think, love."

Monday and Tuesday went as planned. Barb and I went through the urban fire arms course, she got a higher score on the target drill than I did. I won the obstacle course race, her size was a factor. We met with our fathers and discussed the family business. Wednesday was altogether a shock. As I was closing our front door on the way out to an early jog, I noticed it had a yellow Star of David spray painted on it with the caption

STICK TO THE FACTS. YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON IT printed in wide black marker pen.

"Barb was this here last night when we got home?"

"I don't think so. We'd have seen it. What more proof do we need?"

"You got that right! I'll get a few pictures to send to Jan then paint over it before it draws attention. Would you call our fathers and tell them?"

Two large bayberry shrubs provide a bit of a screen to our front door. I hoped no one had noticed anything yet. In fifteen minutes I'd gotten the door repainted. Barb was still on the phone after I'd put the paint away in the garage. She saw me and promptly ended her conversation. "Mom, I gotta go. Dom and I have to file a report."

"Dom, they put a Star of David on your parents lawn with acid or something. And two front windows at my parents house were smashed early this morning. The numbers 11 09 38 were written in bold black marker pen on both their front doors. Mother is very upset and wild with speculation. The press has already been there and they're talking like it is a hate crime. What do we do?"

"I'll call Jan on the secure line." It was busy. I put it back in my shirt pocket and took Barb into my arms for a hug.

The cell phone vibrated in my pocket. "Another cheap parlor trick you use to impress the ladies?" she asked. We read the TM together. FROM BAIT TO HOOK, JFK KLM 1P

"I'll pack, you get us a taxi, reply, call our parents and secure the house."

"Barb, you're amazing. Not even a flinch."

"In for a penny . . ."

"... in for a pound." I finished.

Chapter 7 From Bait to Hook

In the lounge, awaiting the boarding of our flight, Barb and I were organizing the personal history files of the Memorial Committee members we'd gotten from my dad. He didn't say where he got them or how. Most went back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries and they originated in western Europe. Only Mr. Harry Waxman's was post 1950. I called dad and asked him. "Thanks for the bios, we'll look at them on the flight. Do you have any idea why the Waxmann bio is so short?"

"He's a sometimes member of the congregation. They also have a place in Groton where he does something with the seafood trade. He's pretty quiet about his work."

"Anything further on this morning?"

"No. Your mother is very upset, as you'd imagine. The police are clueless as where to look. Abe and I will let it pass, because to us it confirms that Joshua Hassma isn't a Jewish hero and suggests the reach of their organization."

My modem got me on to our secure site and from there I ran a bio check on Harry Waxmann of Groton. The details filled several pages. I showed them to Barb, emailed them to Jan and dad. Harry was listed as the Groton operations manager for North Atlantic Fishing Co-operative. The NAFC main office was in Rotterdam. They had fresh fish processing plants in Lauwersoog and Boston.

Barb had been on the web chasing down a thread I'd forgotten. She found some anomalies in the jewelry trade. "You said once that smuggling was just like any other family business, it was passed down to succeeding generations. And I think you said it was a service business. We may have found a source of their clients. I've down loaded pages of trade stats, gem processing figures and sales data. We can analyze them during the flight. My guess is that we'll find variations that are more than we can account for by just rounding errors and currency fluctuations"

"Wouldn't smuggled gems never see the light of the retail trade?"

"Unless there was such a surplus that the black market couldn't absorb it all. And in post Communist Asia it is every man for himself."

Our flight was called and we took our business class seats, impatiently letting the flight crew do their preflight fussing and we kept our laptops off until told we could resume our work.

While waiting to go back to work, I asked Barb. "I thought you majored in art history, not accounting?"

"I did, but I had to take a stats class and an international trade class to satisfy my committee that I knew enough about economics to treat art as a commodity. The simple question was: If a piece of art is commoditized does the value of the original change relative to similar pieces? It was an exercise in research that proved nothing as far as I could tell. Too little data and too many other non-quantifiable factors to consider within the time I had to finish the project. Fortunately, it wasn't a thesis; just a Master's project. What was yours?"

"I looked into some obscure Dutch painters and tried to determine if they ever likely went to the places that they painted. It took me all over the low countries for two years. I think I established that most of the obscure painters copied settings from known painters and made multiple copies with local variations to satisfy the buyer. To my knowledge no one has ever quoted my work. So maybe my thesis is either not accepted or is so patently obvious that citation is unnecessary. I did find several original misattributed master pieces as I visited castles and museums. Dad took this as a good sign that my education was not wasted and hired me."

Once allowed to, we worked well into the approaching night, took a short nap and awoke to work more before we landed. It was during our decent that Barb showed me a strange a looking line graph she'd built. "The X axis is years, 1950 to 2000. The Y axis is relative amount of each category. All are UN stats. Solid red is USSR gem production. Dashed red is people involved. Blue is world gem production. Dashed blue is people involved. Green is the USSR production per person. Green dashed is the world figure."

"Look at the change after the break up of the USSR. The people stay about the same and production drops. Did they become less productive or did the Russian Mafia, as the press calls them, find other distribution channels? I'll bet the latter. And who better than established smuggling networks that just happened to work east to west."

"Now when and where do we have our fist notice of DW's activities? Rotterdam in 1997 fits this hypothesis pretty well."

"Sounds good to me. Mean time, I'd like you to try out this non quantitative idea. If as we suspect, smuggling has been a Wesselmann family business for generations, what if it isn't their primary business? Something they do because they're good at it, but only episodically? When a client calls, they can provide the transport service, smuggling. The Wesselmann's we've seen and heard of don't live large. They hire low end messengers and enforcers as if they recruit them

from a local day labor pool. We can ask Jan, but I'll bet none of those who have harassed us can be traced back to a Wesselmann."

"So you're saying that they are sort of like I Brown and Company and Kratz Imports. Sort of like us?" Barb got my drift.

"Exactly! DW doesn't live large. Joshua his grandfather, I assume because of the age difference, who moved to England. Harry Waxman, who I think looks enough like DW to be his older brother, may have two houses, but doesn't seem to flaunt his wealth."

She asked "Can you put a picture of DW and HW side by side on your screen?"

"Easier done than said." I moved my curser over a folder and selected two pictures. One Barb had taken with her cell phone and one from the museum's web site. The size and resolutions were comparable.

"It may be wishful thinking on my part and a belief that if you say so it must be true, but I do see a strong family resemblance that looks say fifteen years apart. It would sure help tie everything together, now wouldn't it?"

"We'll run these two ideas past Jan and our New York office when we land."

Jan met us at the gate and took us through customs and immigration to a small room within the security office. He had coffee, in mugs, and pastries set out on a side table. We got our notebooks fired up and ready to show him what we'd been doing.

In response to Jan's question about what we could add to the understanding of DW's activities, Barb and I laid out what we'd surmised while on the flight. The graphs and the pictures helped make our case.

However, in Jan's mind, and subsequently in ours, the clincher was from my dad. "Dom, your father called this afternoon. He has been asking around to see where the idea of memorial to Joshua Hassma originated. As near as he can tell Harry Waxmann was at a dinner where he heard others talking about forgotten Jewish heros of WWII. He said he'd heard of one as a child and to the best of his recollection, he claimed, he told the story. It was by far the most complete and compelling story told. He'd gotten the cart rolling and people just jumped on with ideas as how to preserve and publicize these stories. Days later when the emotion of the moment died down, several people recall that Harry Waxmann was the on who proposed a memorial and who wrote the first check to start the funding. At the initial committee meeting, the following month, he backed off being the chair because he traveled so much."

"With that information from your father, I put together a plan and rushed through the halls getting proper approvals. I was no sooner back in my office than our man on Texel called saying

that Wesselmann had just told his secretary that he was going to Rotterdam for a museum meeting. Here's what we're going to do."

"Dolf Wesselmann is ticketed on the train from Den Helder to Rotterdam. We've got all his usual places under surveillance. Assuming he makes the connections, he'll arrive about 10:30 tonight. I want him to see you on the platform when he gets off. We're going to set the hook by having him see you everywhere he goes. Openly follow him; not a tail, a follow. We think he'll head to some flats where he's gone in the past. If you loose him, no big deal as you say. We already have people in place."

"Tomorrow morning we expect him to go to the museum association office that just happens to be along the same corridor as the NAFC office. Once he is inside you'll go take a table at the lobby cafe. We want him to see you as he leaves. We'll get security tapes from both the flats and the office building."

"It is where he goes next that has been a problem. Our man lost him twice in Rotterdam as he dodges into crowded stores. Tomorrow we'll have upwards of ten agents around the building to notice him as he leaves. The plan is to have him see you again when he finishes wherever he stops after that. We believe that he'll wind his way back to Texel in one or two days because of your following him. In the past, three days has been his usual trip as we've noticed twice and been told from other interviews."

"After he leaves each place he stops we'll isolate that group during an interrogation and hold them at least until he finishes this trip."

"Again, we want you to set the hook, let him run and then we'll land him when he gets back home. We believe that the pressure will cause him to make a mistake and that we'll learn something through our questioning that'll be grounds for holding him."

"Any questions?"

Barb answered for us more convincingly than I could have, my head full of the practical details such as where we going to stay each night and those kinds of things. I suspect she was still in spy novel mode where these details are never mentioned. "No. We know you've thought of everything."

"Two things, Barb," He reached into a brown box on the chair beside him. "here is your Beretta Px4 Storm 9 mm pistol and an extra clip. Keep it in your purse. I want you armed at all times. We'll always have someone near you, but maybe not that near. Use the secure office number to contact me. We'll take your bags and check you in to the hotel across the street from the station."

From Schiphol we rode in dark silence until we got to the curb in front of the Rotterdam train station. Jan's driver got the door for us. Jan said to our backs. "He's arriving at spoor 8A in 12

minutes. We'll stay in touch and stay flexible. See you tomorrow morning for coffee and a danish in the office lobby."

We hurried through the main lobby and along the rail underpasses to the stair marked 8A. The flight of concrete stairs were broken by a mid point bench where an older man was momentarily stopped. He'd pushed his bicycle halfway up the side ramp and seemed to need a breather before the last flight of stairs.

On the platform we moved away from the jam of people going and coming. Now out in the open under the gull wing steel raftered canopy there was little doubt that this was an industrial seaport. The cool damp nearly foggy air carried the smell of diesel and inner harbor trash. Once this station may have been covered. Now it was an exposed two sided comb with platforms for teeth that needed a good scrubbing.

"Over there!" pointed Barb to an analog arrival sign that had just changed from blank to Amsterdam. We took up a place along the 8A spoor with our backs against the railing of the descending stairs.

"What's the plan?" she asked.

"I'll just go up to him and recognize him by telling him so."

"Then I stay here and try to notice anyone who seems to take a particular interest in either of you. Is that it?"

"That sounds like it came right out of the spy manual neither of us has read. But that's probably the best idea. We don't want him to somehow trap both of us at once."

The steel on steel sound of wheels made to turn slower than train's speed, foretold the arrival before we could see it ourselves. People, most with bags or business cases in hand, queued to predetermined spots along the white tile safety line. Our view of those getting off was being severely hampered. The turbidity of the passenger exchange was a study in the self direction of particles seemingly more likely found in a university physics lab than at this scale.

Barb tugged my arm pulling us to the right. "There he goes. He's heading for the stairs behind us." We joined the exodus to the central lobby. My height being an advantage in keeping his back in sight. At a news stand he abruptly stopped forcing us to do the same. The mob eddied around us while Barb fumbled inside my jacket for who knows what.

When he'd selected a paper I broke free of Barb, grabbed the nearest paper and elbowed my way up next to him. His frown at my lack of commuter courtesy got the desired attention I needed. "Say, aren't you the director of that small museum on Texel? We visited there a while back and I rarely forget a face. Bit far from home aren't you? Busman's holiday maybe?"

"Ja. And you?" His snarled response confirmed his recognition of me.

"Just on our way back to Amsterdam after some business here." I said to him as he left a Euro on the counter and pushed his way toward the central concourse. I put my paper back and headed upstream toward Barb. We stood arm in arm creating a continuing ripple in the flow until I could no longer see DW.

"I know how we hate station coffee, but maybe we can get a soda while we let our hooked fish run. We really don't know where he's going, so best not be seen again quite yet."

"So you think you hooked him?"

"Most definitely!"

We opted for a seat near the rear of the snack bar. When I returned with our sodas Barb was just folding up her phone. "That was Jan. DW was met and is on his way to the usual flats. I told him how we approached DW and that he seemed to be alone. We are to meet Jan at 8:30AM in the hotel lobby. He'll take us to the NAFC office building where we'll openly wait for DW to exit."

"Sounds good to me. Now my bride can I interest you in some real food, a little light conversation and a large bed?"

"Only the later. I'm too tired for anything else. I've flown more since we've been married than I did in the previous six years. I don't know how people do it, especially traveling tourist class."

Our coffee with the requisite foil wrapped ginger cookie was served to us by a bored, bosomy blonde waitress in french maid's uniform that looked to be on it's third day of use, loosing it's intended appeal. Barb made the sexist comment I only thought, "If she is meant to attract morning customers, an attitude that matches the state of her uniform doesn't do it."

Jan laughed. "The candor of you young Americans is amazing. Her boss probably can't do anything about it. So until she quits and he has to find another, he is stuck with her. Such is the EU today."

"You think it is any better in the States?" asked Barb. "Even I remember when to be a flight attendant there seemed to be an unwritten, but in force rule, of being under thirty, pretty and single. Some show no more enthusiasm at the beginning of a flight then our waitress has now. Oh, they're competent, but like her, it is just a job. The élan of being special has gone."

"Tell me about it. When I started as an inspector, just being selected to train as an inspector was special. We used to say that for the first year your shoes shined themselves. Learning the business happened without effort from either teacher or student. New people were so proud to

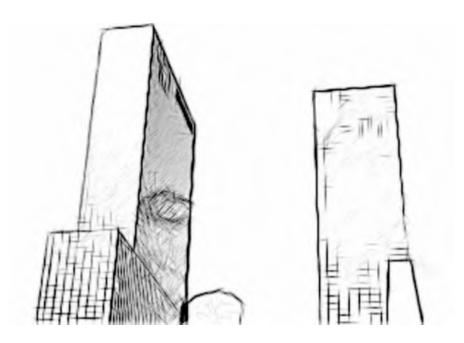
be chosen they couldn't learn fast enough. Now we have to search for that special quality that makes an inspector."

"It is one of the reasons we hire I Brown and Company and others like them for these kind of assignments. They can be more selective than we can. No civil service exam ranking to make your choice for you. If one of their people doesn't work out we ask for another. If one is a great fit we ask for them again, like we've done with Dominic for several years. This method has been used for many years. In fact an inspector Dominic met early on, Hendric Oost an antiquities specialist, worked for a museum when we first used him. He'd spent years as a field archeologist and began to broaden his academic scope. The museum hired him because of his breath of knowledge. We liked his combination of knowledge and field operations sense. He spent much of his time away from his desk digging into fraud allegations. He was medically retired last fall. The Director would like to replace him. So I keep looking at our staff and so far no one who could, or would even want to be, trained for a job that requires the extra effort that a field inspector must exert has emerged. Fortunately, there are companies like yours that can fill in as we need them. What we'll do in the future I don't know. Prosperity seems to beget scams. The EU is on a rising prosperity curve so our case load will only become greater. I just know it. My staffing briefing for the Director next Tuesday will not be well received."

Jan, the bureaucrat, had aired his lament. It was the longest I'd ever heard him address the subject. Getting ready for a Director's briefing and wanting to wrap up this case so he'd have something positive to lead off with, was wearing on him.

The early rush was over and the mid morning break regulars wouldn't be here for an hour or so. We were at one of eight small colored glass topped tables along the edge of the atrium garden. With a small bit of rearranging of the table matching brushed chrome chairs each of us had a sector of the bank of elevators to monitor. DW had been followed to the NAFC office at 9AM by the GPS device EACD had placed on his car the night before. We had sat down a quarter of an hour later and now were on our second coffees.

Barb took out her art paper, walked away, looked down the street for a few moments while sketching. I reached for her proffered pad. "What you can do with a few lines is amazing!" I passed it on to Jan.



He got up and walked to where she had stood, studied the drawing and returned.

"Barbara, only an artist knows when color is not necessary. This is superb!"

Fortunately, we wanted to be seen. The atrium was deserted. The polished tile flooring reflected the ceiling not the movement of office workers and vendors. DW was the only one that got off the near elevator facing us. I quickly stood and walked to intercept him. Sticking out my hand as I approached. "Dolf Wesselmann, that's the name I couldn't think of last night when I saw you. Would you like to join us for coffee? My wife and I decided to stay the night rather than returning again this morning."

He tried to brush past me.

"NO! Get out of my way!" He growled bumping my left shoulder in his bee line rush to the revolving doors. His driver had the car parked in the intersection between the crosswalks as if he'd just been called to station.

I let him pass, waving to his back. Jan was folding up his phone when the flashing lights of a police motor cycle changed DW's destination. We watched as he turned right to veer away from the violation.

"Nice work! That'll disrupt his day and blur his focus." I commented to Jan as I sat down to finish my coffee.

"That's the idea. Over load him with minor inconveniences. He'll be less likely to spot our men. If he doesn't go back to the flat, we'll move in and secure it and the old man who lives there."

Barb asked, "What do you know about the old man he visits?"

"Based on your reports and what we've pieced together we think we know who he is. The lease says he is Joshua Hessmann. No listed previous address, although he has been there since 1990. He is not a Dutch citizen as far as we know. It'll be one of our questions for him. He registered for government services when he moved here. The visiting nurse says he is 85. He is reclusive. His phone records over the past several years have infrequent calls to DW's house in Texel, a Hess in Idar-Oberstein, and several numbers in western Slovakia. All his bills are paid by an account at a local bank. A deposit is made every month from the same bank that NAFC uses. We think he is Joshua Wesselmann of Prague. A few gentle questions down at headquarters, while we check his fingerprints against those the RAF gave us, will likely clear up his identity."

"Then what?" I asked.

"We can hold him for a while on various immigration and fraud related charges. We'd like to know his involvement with DW's enterprise. Maybe DW is just taking care of his grandfather. We don't know."

"What do we do next?" asked Barb.

Jan's phone rang. He held up his free hand as he replied to her "Please excuse me a moment." as he answered it. He listened for quite some time and gave his approval to whatever was proposed.

"DW seems not to have been put off by our harassment. He looks to be on his way north. If he makes the same stops as in the past he'll go directly to Lauwersoog. He may spend the night in Franeker before going back home. I've reserved you hotel rooms for both nights. A car will be here in a few minutes for you to take north. You can monitor his location on the GPS screen. Don't get too close unless he stops. When he does we'll have some local uniformed officer do the close in visual monitoring."

"I'll stay here doing the questioning and join you when I can. At the latest it'll be on Texel."

"What if he calls some body?"

"Not to worry Barbara. We have a monitor on his cell phone. It was part of the general order we got for the GPS. We'll call you if we find out anything. Now good luck. Let him see you in Lauwersoog and Francker and Texel."

We followed him east and north staying a safe 5 to 7 kilometers behind him. I was surprised at the legal speed his driver maintained. If unencumbered by traffic, the Dutch are prone to speeding. Past where the A28 and A32 split in Meppel, DW's car pulled off the highway for fuel and restaurant stop. We cruised past and did the same at the next service station. Meppel is as flat as Holland gets. The fields are planar and angular and each seems a different shade and

texture of green. At Heerenveen they took the A7 toward Drachten. East of there about 5 kilometers they left the highway to go north. The two lane country road, bordered with farms along the straight stretches and sweeping turns, changed his driving style. DW's driver was a man of the country, not the new highways. He drove impatiently fast. Approaching most of the villages there are speed bumps to slow the traffic. Every one seemed familiar to him. Before the warning sign he'd slow down with hard breaking. By the time we got to the same one several minutes later, we had been well warned.

By this time we were confident in DW's destination. At Nieuwezijlen we were stopped to let a barge go through the locks. Off to our right a full half circle rainbow touched down. Barb got out of the car and took some pictures of the pastoral scene. The best of the bunch is now her desk top PC's background.

No sooner were we on our way than we noticed on the GPS screen that DW's car parked next to a large building along the Lauwersoog inner harbor. My cell phone rang. Barb answered it. "Hello." Her remaining replies were "OK" several times.

"We are to go to the harbor. There is a fast food type place. Jan says they have the best fish and chips in all of Holland. DW usually gets a 'to go' order before he leaves on their next leg. We are to show ourselves again. Let him go. Then follow him. Jan's, our, people will secure the fishery processing factory after we leave. And one other thing. He said he'd fill us in tonight on what they found out when they questioned Joshua Wesselmann. It was better than they'd hoped."

A quarter of an hour later we were sitting at a window table. Barb noticed that the ferry from Schiermonnikoog had arrived and was discharging vacationeers. "We timed this just right. This place will be crowed in a hurry."

"Right! Better go get our order in. You up for fish and chips and . . ."

"and a lemonade, unsweetened if they have it."

While standing in line with my tray and napkin wrapped utensils I looked to my right out the glass front double doors and the obvious froze me. We hadn't even looked for DW's car so we hadn't selected a table that looked in the direction of the fish processing buildings. I quickly gave up my place in line and went back to Barb to explain.

"You're right. I was so taken by the view of the approaching ferry that I didn't think about that. Holland is still so new to me I automatically go into tourist mode at each new place we stop. I'll move. You get back in line."

I went to the end of the line some eight people further back. The man who'd been behind me turned his head to answer a question from someone at a near by table. He saw me and waved me forward as he explained in Dutch to those in front of me that I had been in line, but my wife had called me back to change her order. They smiled and allowed me to reclaim my place. Walking back to Barb with a fully loaded red fiberglass tray I shook my head thinking this sure wasn't a tourist eatery in New York.

"You expect me to eat all of this? God! We could have split an order and not gone hungry. Dom, we're going to need some serious exercise once this caper ends. Where do you go for exercise at home?"

"You mean in Amsterdam?"

"Yea!"

"I use the gym at Encoex. They have all the usual stuff; personal trainers, dressing rooms, showers, a lap pool, treadmills, rowing machines, weights, handball, squash, tennis, an indoor track and a sauna. You'll love it. And it is only a block away."

"I've never heard of them. What do they do?"

"Business consulting type stuff. A client got me in shortly after I got here. He saw me jogging along the street and told me there was a much safer place to get my workout."

"What does it cost?"

"I had the bill sent to I. Brown & Company and since I started I've never seen bill or heard a word from anyone. If our fathers want healthy children able to chase all over the place like we have been doing, they can pay for it."

"Look!" Barb pointed. "Isn't that DW's driver getting into their car?"

"Sure looks like it. And over to the left the guy walking down the gang plank from that blue hulled trawler would seem to be our quarry."

"So now we sit tight and if he doesn't get some carry out we give him a few minutes and he's no wiser?"

"Sounds about right."

"If he comes in, how you going to do it?"

"I think we'll slip out the far door as soon as we're sure he's headed here. You keep an eye on the driver and I'll 'bump into him' as he leaves with his bag of fish and chips. That way you can cover me if he gets too physical and call about the driver if he tries to escape without DW."

She got up to leave sending me an air kiss as she passed. "I'll bus the tray and leave the same way first. It'll give me a moment to find some cover. In for a penny . . ."

"... in for a pound. Be safe Barb."

I lost sight of DW among the mass of returning tourists and used the screen they created to exit stage right. I saw Barb sitting on a bench at the bus stop shelter half way between the eatery and

the fishing dock. The only exit to the parking lot passed right in front of her. Sometimes it is easy to hide in plain sight. We'd obviously arrived by car so for her to waiting at a bus stop would go unnoticed, she hoped, as did I. My cover took me back to our car. I opened it, fumbled around a bit and meandered toward the restaurant entrance DW would likely exit. I didn't want to arouse the suspicions of some guard monitoring the parking lot for car thieves.

Dolf's reaction as I walked up beside him was affected coolness. A movie line I could not recall. "You seem to be following me."

I hoped my line sounded as good. "Like you, we have our informants."

"Don't play cute with me Swartz. I know who you work for . . ."

"I Brown and Company, art consultants; would you like one of my cards?"

"I said don't play cute with me. Nothing in my museum is stolen or fake. You can take that back to your client. But without a court order I don't ever want to see you again. Set foot in my museum and I'll get you arrested. Got it?"

"No! My investigation will run its course, with or without your help."

We'd reached the side of his car where the driver held the door open for him. I did a bit of a 'U' turn and headed back to our car. Fortunately, I could place a concrete based light pole between myself and his wheel spinning start. DW's glare as his driver swerved to miss the obstacle and still get into the exit lane, was worthy of a star's reaction to paparazzi.

At the bus stop I asked through the open right window. "Would M'lady care for a lift?"

"Well thank you gracious sir."

We followed GW at a respectful distance that kept us out of sight. The screen on our dashboard showed both our and his location and the surrounding countryside. Barb called Jan and told him what had happened and what we were doing.

"Good work. At this moment we are securing the fish processing plant and the trawler he visited. We cut off all their phones before we went in and jammed their cell phones. We should have a preliminary report by morning. The customs and immigration people are very thorough. We did find that they are part of NAFC. We've put a notice out to the US Customs and Immigration people to watch NAFC and be ready to act if a reason is found."

He told us what to expect in Franaker and where he'd made us reservations for the evening. The late afternoon brought some multilevel clouds and the promise of the kind of Friesan sunset the Dutch landscape masters captured so well.

The moment GW passed the last Franaker exit, Barb was on the phone again. "Jan, what's your best thought now?"

"Maybe he's going home. If so he'll take the Afsluitdijk to Den Helder and the ferry. I'll check on the schedule. We don't want both of you on the same ferry. The next confrontation with him could be more violent. His fuse is getting short. There are lots of people on a boat. I'll get an agent on the island soonest. We don't want to use the local police, especially after the threat he made to Dominic. Too many people would find out what was going on. This really puts the ball in your court. You're the only ones we have who really know what he looks like. My guess is that if he is pulled in he'll use one of his alternate identities. So, you'll have to be there when we arrest him. Stay close to him and we'll find a good location. We've got enough now, but we could always use some more."

We closed the gap on him to about a kilometer and always used several cars as a buffer. If our GPS track was right, he made a last moment choice to take the Makkum exit. Barb noticed him leave the highway heading south by west. She was on the phone immediately while pointing to the screen. I slowed down and let two cars pass me before taking the same exit.

"Jan, Barb here, what do you make of his change?"

"Our guess is the commercial fishing dock at Makkum. A NAFC boat home ports there. I'm trying to get an ID on it. If he goes out on the dock it will be obvious. Go into town and follow him toward the dock staying just far enough back so he can't see you. Take the last road before the dike. Park at the end and using the dike for cover, you should be able to see what he's up to. I'll call when we have more info."

Barb relayed the message to me and directed us to our observation point while I kept us back out of sight. DW's car had just driven onto the dock as I stopped at the end of the street. Barb got out taking a pair of small binoculars with her, and walked up the side of the dike keeping the last house between her and the view of the harbor. I turned the car around and parked as close as I could to the leeward side of the road. If we needed to leave quickly we would be ready.

I stood slightly below her looking west. We hoped that only the tops of our heads would be visible to anyone on the trawler. Speaking without taking her eyes off the boats she briefed me. "The car stopped next to the big blue hulled one on the far side. DW got out, walked around the front to the ramp and went aboard. No one met him that I could see. I think the car engine is still running."

We waited and watched while nothing else happened. Barb's phone rang. Her first words were a location check. "Wait. Lots of black smoke just came out of the trawler's stack. DW's car is making a U turn, and heading off the dock." She was quiet for 10 seconds.

Still with the phone to her ear and glasses at her eyes she continued her play by play. "I'm sure DW didn't return to the car. There is only one ramp. Dom, did you see him leave the boat?"

"No one left. They're taking up the ramp and untying the hawsers. She'll be ready to go soon."

Barb listened for another half minute and started back to our car. We were underway in less than 2 minutes. DW's car headed south. I asked for directions. "Jan said to ignore the driver and head for Den Helder. He thinks the trawler will go through the Afsluitdijk at the Lorentzsluizen locks which is about 4 kilometers on to the dike. He wants us in place to watch the transit and be prepared to get into a helicopter to follow the boat until it's direction is determined. The chopper will need at least a half an hour or so to get to us. Jan says we'll never make the ferry, so if the trawler seems to be heading for Oudeschild harbor on Texel we'll land at the island airport and take a car to the harbor. He promises more details as the plan develops."

I got onto the A7 at the same place we'd exited and continued west. At the locks I found a parking place hidden from view by a transiting ship. We headed south to the walkway spanning the A7 and used the trees for shelter from the northwest wind and direct observation. The several minutes waiting gave us a chance to cuddle and unwind a bit.

"Have I ever told you" Barb started saying "that I'm glad you don't smoke. I'd met a man I fell very hard for my senior year. I hated kissing him after he'd been smoking. He tried breath mints and all sorts of things, none worked to my liking. I finally told him it was me or tobacco. He made a mild protest, tried to bargain with me saying compromise was the basis of any relationship; I would not give in on smoking, sex or religion. He never called back after I took my stand."

"Mrs. Swartz, I'm very glad you stuck to you principles."

"Mr. Swartz, so am I. I was a terrified virgin sitting in my cotton nightgown on the bunk of our house boat. Even though you'd made other plans for our wedding night, you were so understanding, gentle, slow and gentlemanly. No virgin could have asked for any better. However, you did give me a surprise none of my girl friends will ever believe; dinner at a Dutch panekoeken house! That place is such a romanic 18th century farm inn. In truth, after the hard short bunk of the boat to be able to spend our first night in a real feather bed with quilts and stacks of pillows and fresh flowers and a copper bathtub and everything was just so great. We must go back there again and this time I'll take pictures to prove to myself and everyone else that it wasn't just a school girl dream."

Our first night reminiscing was harshly interrupted by what is universally recognized as the squawk of a fog horn. "Mrs. Swartz, that sounds like a boat signal. I suspect we must get back to work." From the trees we could see the blue trawler very slowly approaching the locks. Barb went out on the lawn behind the trees and called Jan.

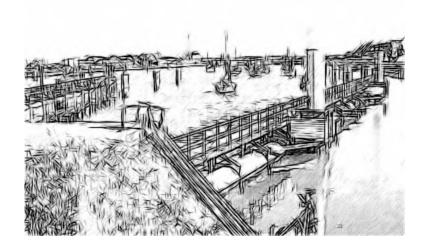
"Jan said it'll be almost another half hour until the helicopter arrives. It'll land on the south parking lot. He has a car waiting for us at the Texel airport if we need it. If not we'll be flown back here."

"Sounds good to me."

"Dom, I've never been for a ride in a helicopter. Have you?"

"Upon occasion. When we board you get it the front. The view will be better and more fun. I'll take the back and look over your shoulder. We're just passengers."

The boat made the transit through the locks. We stood at the high point of the skyway over the A7 and watched it all but disappear heading north by west. Barb captured part of the scene in her sketch book.



What sounded initially like a gnat became a smallish yellow helo making a noisy landing in the lot behind us. We rushed to meet it. When the rotors stopped, the pilot opened his door and waved us to get in the other side. His preflight instructions were succinct and thorough. With our seat belts tightened and our ear phones in place, he spun up the rotor and gently lifted off in a long arc ending in a northwesterly direction. The blue trawler was steering further west, but obviously taking the dark channel through the shoals of the shallow Wadden Sea toward Oudeschild harbor.

He keyed his mic. "EPJ15 this is EPH2. Confirmed route as expected. TD Texel in 15 minutes."

"EPH2 copy."

He made a wide sweep well to the south of the ship and vectored due north to the landing area. We flew over the Den Helder ferry as it was docking. Texel island scrolled below us like a screen from Google Earth. Our landing was more a feather than a rock touch down. I got out and helped Barb down. Standing on the tarmac without the headphones and the vibrations seemed almost too quiet. The pilot said he'd wait for us here to take us back to our car. We walked to the gate in the low chain link fence and looked around the parking lot. No one waved or seemed to notice that we'd arrived.

[&]quot;Now what Sherlock?"

"We wait?"

"Don't have time, I'd guess. I'll call Jan." She turned her left side to the wind, speed dialed 6 and covered her left ear. Without saying a word to Jan she pocketed the phone 20 seconds later. "Keys are in the silver gray Fiat Panda. We go to the dock and hide. Let DW leave and follow him. Call back with DW's car info, stay on the phone and be ready to block his retreat when they set up a road block."

The Panda was at the end of the row. The keys were under the floor mat as if the agent had been a parking lot attendant in his previous job. The non existent traffic made for an easy trip, but also made us vulnerable to anyone who had seen us land and who was watching. I'd guess bright yellow helos didn't land every day on Texel. Leaving the airport to go to the harbor offered a single choice of routes. Once in the village of Oudeschild we had a few more choices of roads. We parked near some large tanks on Laagwaalderweg where we were mostly hidden from the sea and could walk to a good view of the harbor entrance. The trawler was turning to the right, now that it was in the harbor.

"If they're headed for the dock along side those other trawlers we need to move." I said taking her hand and leading us back to the car. Barb directed us to the parking lot for the private boats that was just beyond the commercial wharfs. Passing the docking blue trawler I saw a man leaning against the fender of a dark sedan as he watched DW's ship come in. His bald head obvious in the lowering western light.

"That's our man's ride, you can be sure. Make a U turn behind that big flat bed truck with a container on it and we'll wait."

"Did you get the make and license plate of the car?" I kidded her.

Barb didn't even rise to the bait because she was already calling in the info. "DW is likely to be in a black Peugeot sedan, plate LP-DF- something. I'll call with more in a few minutes."

I got out and stood looking at the fishing boat from between the truck's cab and the container. DW was on and off the gang way almost before it was lowered. He was away just as fast. Staying with him seemed more important than being a classic tail. Barb kept a running commentary going. I followed him right on Laagwaalderweg into the surrounding farm lands.

"Jan says that they'll block the road just before the village of De Waal. There is a 20 meter long narrow bridge. As soon as he's on it, we block our end of the bridge with the car and get out. He may try to ram them or us. We're not to take chances and get injured."

"Got it. In for a penny . . ."

"... in for a pound."

Sooner than I expected, DW's driver tried to make a panic stop. He must have been completely surprised to see a car crossways in front of him. The speed of his stopping caused the car to fishtail into the right steel beam railing at mid span and jam the right front bumper hard into the other side railing. Barb braced herself for our semi controlled crash. The Panda slid to a sideways stop neatly between the rails at the near end of the bridge; not a scratch, much to my surprise.

I got out, drew my gun and knelt on my right knee facing the left side of the Peugeot, just as taught on Long Island during training. His driver was trying to free the car, spinning the wheels into clouds of acrid smelling white tire smoke. No such luck. DW opened the left rear door. Took two steps toward me and froze in recognition. "On your face! Now! Legs and arms spread. DO IT!" I yelled.

His first movement was to reach inside his jacket. From my left over the Panda's hood Barb fired. DW dropped holding his right arm at the elbow. The driver's door opened. A very scared looking young man in a studded black leather jacket with a shaved head got out and immediately fell to the pavement face down spreading his arms and legs. DW knelt holding his right arm.

Four men in suits with guns drawn, made their way over to DW's car. "We'll take it from here.

Chapter 8 Back log revisited

The following Tuesday morning Barb and I were starting to review and assess our back log of cases. We'd spent Saturday shopping for home furnishings at the Ikea south of Amsterdam. They'd been delivered on Monday. Two hours of reading files was as much as I could take after the excitement of the previous month.

"Barb, you ready for some coffee. I need a break."

"You too? Not one of these jobs sounds interesting. No wonder you put them off."

"They're not only boring, we're collecting a fee for documenting the obvious. But it is work and they'll pay our rent."

We went down stairs and were handed two 10 ounce mugs of freshly brewed coffee. We sat at a small table out in the court yard. "Dom, is this what our life is really going to be like? No more excitement? It was fun, you have to admit."

"Yea! It was that." I replied as Barb's phone rang. She hung up having said exactly one word. "Yes."

"Jan will be here in ten minutes. He sounded relieved that DW wasn't involved in drugs. Why would he sound relieved do you think?"

"He once told me that in crime the big four are drugs, child porn, tax evasion and murder. They generate the best press and the best continuing funding. Jan is with the art, artifacts and jewelry group. They like a low profile, which is why, among other reasons as you know, they hire I Brown and Company. The lower the profile the more effective they are he once told me. We don't look or act like typical policemen which is one of the reasons we were successful."

"That and the fact that we are such a good team." Barb beamed a smile across the table at me. "Oh, the last thing he said was that he wants to talk to us about some new job."

"End of boring office work! In for a penny . . . "

"... in for a pound."

Jan made his way to our table trailed by Yvette carrying his coffee on a tray. As we were saying hello she put the typical Dutch restaurant 3 ounce white cup with a small foil wrapped ginger cookie down at his place. Even before he sat Jan noticed the difference in the size of our coffees.

"How do I get a mug that size? I thought only the HEMA served coffee in those."

Without a further word I got up and returned with a heavy white porcelain kitchen mug that matched ours.

"Now that's better. If this were the States I'd expect free refills."

Barb smiled at our little perk. "Well we do and I'm sure Yvette will see you're included. You just have to go to the kitchen and get your own."

"Small price, worth every step I'd say. Enough of this small talk, I came to see you to get some details cleaned up and move forward. I was talking with Dominic's father yesterday and discovered that neither of you has ever signed an employment contract and therefore, never executed a confidentiality agreement." He brought out two packets of paper, with our names on yellow sticky notes, from the brown leather folder beside his chair, and put them down in front of us. "The top is the non-disclosure/confidentiality agreement. The second is a statement that you agree to follow lawful orders. Call it an employment contract. The last is a weapons permit; a gun permit, if you will. Dominic, yours is a renewal. I'd like you to sign them right now so I can put them in your personnel files."

With a tinge of alarm Barb asked, "Shouldn't we read them first?"

"Barb, he's our lawyer. To coin a phrase, just do it!" We did.

"Good, now with a little back dating my ass will be covered when the IG looks over the files this afternoon." He reached into his right inside suit coat pocket and took out what looked like two small black leather folders the size of business cards. He opened one slightly and checked something. Extending the proper one to each of us he explained: "The the staff field operations officer recommended you for these. He and I, believe you've earned them."

Barb opened hers' first. "This is real, I take it?"

"Yes, Mrs. Barbara Swartz, that is a real EACD officer's badge. You and Dominic are as of now, real EACD officers. I told you the director was impressed with your work. I'll leave you a copy of my report with the director's handwritten comments in the margins. Everyone believes you both have top drawer analytical and field skills. We'll fit some formal field training into your schedule later. The two of you had this case figured out faster and better than our office types did. Something that galled them a bit. They are used to field officers getting credit for their work, but not being beaten to the punch by field people. The ability you displayed to adapt to fluid situations can be hard and take a long time to learn. Mostly the director was in awe of your decision making and shooting ability. You rendered three armed and dangerous men harmless with less than lethal shots and you caused no collateral damage to people or property."

"Hey! I was just protecting the man I spent years waiting to marry and some thug or criminal wasn't going to spoil things. If the director had to protect his wife, he'd have done the same."

"I'll tell her that. She and the IG are at the office now doing an official review, which is why I'm here filling in the gaps in your files. However, she is having dinner with my wife and I tonight. So, if you're free, I'm sure my wife won't mind two extra guests." He looked at his watch. "Dom if I can have a refill, I'll be able to finish up these last two items and get back for the command performance lunch."

I got back to the table part way into the next topic of conversation. "... one of these days I'd like to meet your mothers. I, we, owe them a very big thank you for pairing the two of you up. You and Dom are an excellent team."

"Well we think so." Barb squeezed my hand as she continued. "And our mothers will be here on the 15th for three days. They tacked the time onto a previously scheduled French tour. So you pick the time and place."

I asked a question we'd talked about earlier that morning. "Did they ever ID the two thugs who broke into our flat?"

Caught a bit off guard because it wasn't on his agenda, Jan filled us in using as few words as possible. "They work for a local distributor of building materials, Navare something or other."

"It's a good thing you have some time. You'll need two weeks to get up to speed on your next job as I doubt either of you have any familiarity with ossuaries. But before I get into that, let me tie up a few loose ends on the Joshua Hassma case for you."

"Just as you suspected and noted in your report, the man Dolf Wesselmann, actually Adolph Wessel, visited in Rotterdam, is Joshua Wessel. We searched his flat and found some six expired passports and other memorabilia dating from the 1930's. Finger prints and dental records confirmed his confession. He was born in Prague of Jewish parents and joined up with the Roma at an early age after being scorned by his peers for wanting a non traditional Jewish life. He was evidentially following in his father's foot steps. He joined the youth army and took flying lessons getting some sort of license. The older he got, the more he hated the Jews and thought the Nazi's could win any war. His father emigrated to England to escape exclusion by the Prague community that had made earning any living difficult. In England Joshua joined the RAF and he says hoped to impress the Nazi's that he could be a spy. He made contact with at least one active spy and he said he laid out a plan to identify Jewish resistance leaders. With a minimal downside to the Nazi's, they agreed to the plan. Joshua made his way across German controlled Europe with Nazi help. The gold ear ring was the safe sign. If it was refused by his hosts they were probably part of the Nazi counter insurgency network. Those who accepted the gift were identified and arrested. He was, by his own admission and we can confirm, successful in Texel, Makkum and Groningen. Was not successful in Enschede. Frankfurt, Idar-Oberstein, Pfassal, Nurenburg and Prague were successes. The Nazi's moved him to Pilsen for the remainder of the war. He and his family have continued smuggling for the Russians to this day."

I asked. "Do we have any idea of the magnitude of their operation?"

"From the records that we've recovered so far, we know that gems from Asia were their usual trade. DW had over 5 kilos of rough cut gems in his car when you stopped him. We think he assesses what he picks up in Rotterdam and puts them out for bid using the fishing fleet and processors as the delivery mechanism."

"He lived low for someone in that line of work." observed Barb.

"Yes, but we aren't through combing his or Joshua's personal records. He needed a major amount of cash or a large line of credit to run this business. The NAFC could have offered him both and a way to launder the money. Our auditors will get it all figured out in due time."

"Dolf and Harry Waxmann are his grandsons. They could think of no better a final honor for their grandfather than to be honored as a Jewish hero. Joshua told us that early on in his questioning. He seemed to believe that nothing could stop a committee of Jews from inventing another World War Two hero. He also believed that once the honor was conferred that he would be safe from any prosecution, because public opinion would protect him. You beat them to the punch. And by the way, your fathers think that once Waxmann is formally indicted in both the EU and the US, that no one will take ownership of the memorial project. You can read the whole thing in the final report I'll have sent to you along with the full briefing for your next job."

"As for the next job, it involves duplicate artifacts. This morning after the Directors opening remarks to us and our briefing she pulled me aside to asked about the Brunelli investigation. I told her it was pending the availability of a field operative. The office staff had finished the background investigation and their work needs it to be field checked and have the leads traced. She immediately asked. "What about those two who just finished the Wessel case? You obviously have none better. They should be available unless you have a more pressing assignment for them that I didn't see listed at your briefing this morning. I meet with Minister Brunelli in Rome on Thursday and he is sure to ask about it."

"Barb and Dom, when you're hot you're hot. This set in motion a hour of frantic work resulting in your becoming fully fledged field agents. Not that it wouldn't have happened in due time, but it did require a lot of back filling that could have been done in a more orderly fashion with more appropriate consultation. However, When you are a Director you can get what you want."

"In a nut shell this is what we know and what we suspect. Over the last two months or so four dealers have been offered Jewish ossuaries purportedly dating from between 3 centuries BCE and 3 centuries after BCE. The dealers asked us what we knew of the suppliers, since they evidently could not confirm the CV details given them. Legit art and artifacts dealers don't want even the tint of fraud to taint their reputations, so many contact us to see if we have any information on unknown sources. Of note, the four dealers from three different countries seem to be unaware that others were offered similar ossuaries and that the source was identified as the same person. Our staff can not find any trace of the supplier. He gives his name as Asid Navare. He claims to be from Damascus."

"Then the case got a boost when one of the dealers, a Joseph Argoni, spoke to Minister Brunelli. It seems he thinks the piece he's being offered might be the ossuary of Jesus Christ based on his understanding of the engravings on the box. If the artifact proved genuine, this presents a real problem. The Minister decided that his friend, our Director Jeanette Whitte, was the most secure way to get to the bottom of this. The Director forwarded it to me and I sent it on to the man who'd been looking into the other three questions we'd received. In less than an hour Henk, our analyst, brings me pictures of the four ossuaries. They look the same down to the engravings. Henk put together a packet I sent on Friday, via currier, to the director. By yesterday morning she was on the phone not so much to thank me as to press for a plan to find out where the duplicate ossuaries had originated."

"Now you know why you got your badges this morning. I'd give you a deadline, but not even you two can resolve this by tomorrow morning. I don't think. Could you?"

Barb looked at me in pleading shock. I did an ad lib. "We'll have a plan for you by dinner. Don't keep us too late. We'll be on a flight to Tel Aviv tomorrow. Retired Professor Hiram Isaacmann is an old friend of mine. He's spent years digging in the middle east. His personal collection of memories, artifacts and photos will make a good start. You can help us by arranging a meeting with Minister Brunelli on Thursday morning. Whenever that is." My ad lib was getting out of control.

Barb pulled out her Blackberry and said. "That'll be June 9th."

"Good. I'll have a car pick you up at eight. It is formal." Jan rose, shook our hands and left. His mind was somewhere in the near future.

"Hey, I get to wear my new black dress, gold earrings and necklace for the first time."

Chapter 9

The past as we know it today

"Dom, we need to wrap this up. The car will be here in just over an hour. And we still have to go home, take a shower and dress. You do have a pressed tux, I hope? What have you got put together on your end so far?"

From my desk that faced Barb's in the back office of our business suite, I looked up. "My tux is in the plastic sleeve just as I got it from the cleaners. As for the rest, this is my best guess at a schedule. We fly to Tel Aviv tomorrow morning. In the afternoon and Thursday, if necessary, we meet with Professor Isaacmann. He's an expert on artifacts from that time. He helped me find the right expert once. Friday we fly to Rome to meet with the Minister. Saturday, armed with what we know we're off to Damascus to find out more about the elusive Mr. Asid Navare. I've down loaded lists and back grounds on known artifact dealers in Jerusalem, Rome and Damascus from our I Brown and Company classical old world art DB. None of the four dealers Jan has queries from is on that list. They all are on the modern art and artifact list. This leads me to the preliminary conclusion that Mr. Navare has chosen his marks carefully. Lastly I've made a note to ask Jan for access to all of Hendric Oost's old files. There might be something in them we can use."

"Mine has been more mental." Was Barb's assessment of her work for the past six hours. "I've boned up, pardon the pun, on Jewish ossuaries of the period. Your friend Professor Isaacmann is often cited for his work. He'll make a good tutor. It seems that over the period in question that customs changed and, if you will 'splintered', my term, among Jewish sects. You can read as much as you'd like while we fly. I've down loaded several relevant docs."

We were in such a self imposed rush that neither one of us thought to question the other about what we'd assembled.

"Good work. I'll lock up the office while you tell our land lord that we're off again."

At five minutes to eight Barb came out of our bedroom looking like a model in search of a runway lit with camera flashes. The combination of black high heels, simple black dress, straight black hair sweeping below shoulder, gold necklace and gold ear rings stopped my breathing. The Dominic Swartz I'd grown up as didn't deserve to be seen with a woman of such obvious stature and allure, let alone married to one.

"Well do you like it?" she asked as she did a slow turn to show me all sides.

"Dominic! Reality time. Close your mouth! Think, and answer my question or I'll take that agape mouthed stare as a 'yes' from your inner seventeen year old self, and leave you home."

"Barb, you don't play fair. No man could lay eyes on you and not be guilty of at least one sin. Where is your . . ."

"In my bag of course. A shoulder . . ."

"That's not what I was going to ask. Where is your wrap?"

"I don't have one that matches. We'll put it on our Rome shopping list. In the mean time, if I get cold you'll just have to be a gentleman and loan me your coat." She did a fake shiver to make her point and teased me with a hip wiggle.

The door bell rang and twenty minutes later we were let off at the front of a very up scale condo tower complex. The door man treated Barb as some starlet he thought he should know. He called the elevator and pressed the button for her. I tagged along.

Jan's condo took up the north side of the 15th floor as I well remembered. He met us at the elevator taking Barb's arm in his for the 3 meter walk through his open front door. I tagged along.

I was closing that door when Jan started introductions without me. His wife Elaine appeared from a side hall way and took my arm. "If my husband can introduce your wife to our guests, I get to do the same for you. We'll show him." She bounced my thigh with her hip and winked. "I'll switch the place cards around so we three sit side by side and he and Barbara don't. Jan's inviting you was a pleasant last minute addition. I was expecting a boring dinner for eight, the four spouses with little in common. I've met them before, but only at office functions where we didn't say much if anything to each other after the introductions."

I smiled down are her. Arm in arm we followed her husband into the living room.

"Mr. and Mrs. Whitte, I'd like to introduce you to Mr. Dominic Swartz." We shook hands and Mrs. Groenwaal steered me to the next two pairs. A Mr. and Mrs. Simpson and Mr. and Mrs. Baaker both of EADC with similar positions to Mrs. Whitte. A waiter was beside us as soon as the last introduction was completed offering my hostess a glass of white wine and me a neat single malt scotch. She led me away into the formal dining area. As she was rearranging the

place cards she commented. "Dominic, your wife is quite stunning. I hear you didn't remember her at all from when you both lived on Long Island as children."

"We are twelve years apart. Barb is the youngest and I'm the oldest child in our families. Our fathers have done business with each other for years and our mothers have been friends even longer. Our mothers arranged for us to meet here in Amsterdam. Once the shock wore off, it was love at first sight. Only it took us two weeks to admit it to ourselves and each other."

"I hear you eloped."

"Sort of. Our fathers offered us a bonus if we would and Jan facilitated it."

"He's good at that, I'm told. But a bonus to get married?"

"Our mothers would have made such a big deal of the wedding that it would have seriously interfered with our work schedule. It was an economic and humanitarian gesture we gladly accepted."

"Are they really that controlling?"

"Just ask Barb someday about her older sister's wedding. It is a horror story no dramatist could have invented and still be held creditable."

"One last thing I just have to ask, does she know why a Jewish baby boy from Long Island was named Dominic Anthony? I remember being a bit taken aback when you told me."

"Actually, it was on our first date. Barb told me her mother had explained it to her and was it true? I told her what my father told me. My mother didn't want her first son to be confused with anyone else in the family. A girlfriend in Amsterdam had a father named Dominic Anthony who my mother, as a young girl, thought was the handsomest man she'd ever seen."

"And your father didn't mind?"

"He says not. Adding 'How many men named Yosef Swartz does one family need?' so he agreed to my mother's idea."

"We better get back to the other guests before someone misses us."

"You think that's possible with the way Jan is parading Barb?"

"You should have seen him the first time he showed off our daughter-in-law to be to our friends. It was like he'd landed the biggest fish in the sea."

Back in our flat I was helping Barb undress when I could wait no longer to ask her impressions of the evening. "Jan is quite a tail chaser, as we used to say at the sorority. He loved showing me off. None of the Directors revealed much you couldn't get from their public bios. I tried to use that as a guide, changing the subject rather than getting trapped into revealing details."

"Did the subject of your jewelry come up?" Knowing Jan I'd bet it had. He liked making points with Directors.

"Of course it did. In fact it started with the introductions where he introduced me as a Field Agent, Director Whitte's approval of his request this morning that made our appointments a reality, was a surprise to the others that gained her a bit more respect from them. And the way Jan cited her approval without saying so, directly, gained him a few points from all three Directors. Jan quickly told the whole story, not waiting for your return from, as he put it, 'helping his wife with a few last minute details the caterers hadn't been able finish". To him one of the keys was our recognizing the same style necklace as the ear rings. It tied together events sixty years apart. He made quite a show of it."

"Do you think you handled it well? Being a prop for his story, that is."

"I knew the moment he invited us to dinner that we were part of the entertainment. It was too good an opportunity for him to pass up. Jan likes his job, but he is a bureaucrat as he's shown us. And so to be successful and demonstrate enthusiasm for the position he holds, his aspirations have to be transparent and are always one level higher. He's demonstrated his CJ credentials often enough to be believed by those both below and above him. Now after five years as a Chief Inspector, he needs to show his political credentials to both when an opportunity presents itself. Those at the dinner are the ones who have to feel comfortable enough with him to want him sharing their playing field. Note, the IG wasn't there, presumably not invited. This was a political showing."

"Mrs. Groenwaal said it was originally a dinner for eight. So you are right, no IG."

"In fact those more astute than us might instantly share the belief that the hurrying through of our appointments as Field Agents was a test of Jan's perception of a superior's wishes, the acceptance of his position among his colleagues that allows them to skirt the normal rules and timelines for such appointments and his brute ability to get it done on such short notice. He said this morning that he did it in about an hour. Not a slow run through the obstacle course of any bureaucracy to have paper work prepared and badges issued in that time frame, I'd say!"

"Again, you're right of course. I just hadn't thought of it in those terms. Well having a rising mentor can't hurt. You can tell me at another time how you learned all this."

"I'll do it now in one sentence. Since I planned on a job in some large museum, I took a two semester graduate level course in bureaucracy. I did have time to notice that you were fairly well occupied by our hostess."

"She's done that before when Jan is too preoccupied with some other guest to pay her much attention."

"So you've been to these dinners before?"

"Yes. Jan has invited me to them for no other apparent reason than to be Mrs. Groenwaal's companion while he's playing host. As you personally experienced tonight, he talks politics and business at these. She's an interior decorating consultant for a large store here. Also she avers to knowing less than nothing about what he does or what he cases he works. A situation we'll not have to face. Once she confided to me that I was the only junior colleague he'd ever invited to dinner."

"Well I guess that says a lot about how much he trusts you. By the way, when does our flight leave today?"

"In about 14 hours, 14:15 on KLM."

"Good. I need a quick shower and some play time with my man. Being ogled all night is tiring work. Although, I did find a moment to thank our hostess for the break our seating arrangement provided. She said she knew I would need a break from her husband's attention. You set the alarm for 9 and I'll warm the water for us."

Chapter 10

Rocks don't lie

We checked in with airport security near the Starbucks bar before going to the KLM counter. A tall blonde, middle aged, no nonsense looking woman with no visible rank led us into the watch officer's sanctum. We shook hands and went through the formalities of introductions, verification and itinerary.

"Very good officers Swartz. We'll see that security here, Tel Aviv, Rome and Damascus are alerted and appraised of the sensitivity of your work. Have a pleasant trip."

In the business class line at KLM Barb asked. "Did we have tell him as much as we did?"

"Gosh! I don't know. Like you I've never been through field agent school." I dead panned.

"Maybe that's something we should ask Jan. Speaking of that we should probably call him and see if there is any other protocol we need to be aware of. The agent in Prague seemed to be saying that he'd forgive us this once, but we should have known to check in."

"Good. I'll make the call while we wait. Knowing Jan, the call will last only a few seconds."

Upon deplaning at Dov Hoz airport, we were singled out by security and taken to a plain white windowless room. It seemed to be Prague revisited. A tired looking fifty-ish officer took a while looking at our passports and badges. He put them into a scanner and waited, looking sideways at the black phone several times. During the first ring he picked it up and no sooner did he have it to his left ear, than he returned it to the cradle.

"What is your purpose and itinerary officers Swartz?"

"We are her to investigate some purported duplicate ossuaries that have been offered for sale in Europe. Professor Isaacmann has agreed to help us."

"Have a good stay. Tell us when you leave."

The professor himself met us at the baggage claim. My first impression upon meeting him several years ago was that he was a double for the late Sam Jaffe when the actor was in his late 60's. At that time he said it used to be disquieting to have people stare at him and a few actually comment to his face, "I thought you died." Even when he wore a hat and dark glasses he'd get the same reaction from people. I asked him how his students reacted. His answer was that they don't. "There must be thirty men who look like Sam Jaffe here on campus. It is only in the tourist areas along the beach that I draw stares."

Barb's reaction was no different than other visitors as I introduced her to him.

"Dr. Hiram Isaacmann I'd like you to meet my wife, Barbara." He extended his right hand and she hers, but hers stopped leaving a gap between them. Reality and her memories were in conflict. He took a half a step toward her and grasped her hand.

"Mrs. Swartz, it is a pleasure to meet you."

The additional moment allowed Barb to recover. "And I you. Dom has told me of how you helped him on a previous investigation. I just didn't believe him when he told me you looked exactly like Sam Jaffe from Ben Casey."

"I used to get that a lot. Not so much anymore. That show ran 40 years ago, I was about 30, no one noticed me then, but now they remember him when they see me."

Our flight wasn't even posted on the baggage claim listing, so I took the moment to tell Barb a story of a similar reaction to hers. "A few years back we we sitting on the veranda of a sea side hotel one night having a drink and enjoying the sunset. A woman of our mother's age was at the next table, and from the time she sat down Dr. Isaacmann's presence distracted her. Finally she

could stand it no more and walked over to our table. A bit ill at ease she leaned forward and loudly whispered. "Mr. Jaffe, I've been a fan of yours for years. It is so good to see you."

"Actually, I'm Professor Isaacmann, but if I see Mr. Jaffe I'll tell him you admire his work."

"The lady returned to her table."

Several buzzers sounded at once, we all looked around the crowded area. Being the tallest I noticed the flashing light corresponding to our carrousel and made my way toward it. Our plastic hard sided luggage eventually made its way onto the belt. We followed Dr. Isaacmann out to his car. The ride to the sea side hotel was mercifully short. We asked him to join us for a drink after we checked in.

"I'll go get us quiet table while you check-in and freshen up."

In fifteen minutes we walked into the terrace bar. I started to ask the host to show us to Dr. Isaacmann's table. Without letting me finish he turned on his heel leading us to a far table lit with one small candle. Not even the flood lights used to show off the hotel had much effect on this secluded spot. Two men stood as we approached. One was who we expected, the other a complete stranger.

"Mr. and Mrs. Swartz, I'd like you to meet my long time friend and colleague Ben Levy. His specialty is geology. With his help we've resolved many an archeological paradox."

We shook hands all around and were about to seat ourselves when the waiter walked up to take our order. As soon as he left, I took the opportunity to set the stage, frame the question and establish ground rules for our visit.

"We are here to investigate a seemingly strange coincidence. Four separate clients have come to I Brown and Company within the last month asking for an opinion on Jewish/Christian ossuaries. For us to get one such inquiry a year is unusual. When we compared what the buyers were told about the artifacts there seemed to be significant similarities. The items pictured look nearly identical and the seller is either new to this field or isn't who he says he is. Our research can't place him. It was then that we sought your help."

"Based on my limited knowledge of ossuaries, a few other things bother me about the pieces. The purported date of at least one is post the Second Temple period. They look too similar. The buyers aren't allowed to physically examine them until their bid and deposit is accepted. The deposit is to be 'the normal amount', what ever that is? And is only refundable if irrefutable proof of fraud is presented before acceptance by the purchaser. No escrow account for the deposit is mentioned. Four of other sale conditions are: 'An accepted bid will allow for the viewing of the item by the bidder and an expert acceptable to both parties.' Location of the item is not mentioned, but is probably not Israel as I'll get to later. The second condition is that 'No physical tests that in anyway change the appearance of the item can be made.' The third condition isn't quite as harsh as it may sound, but could be a deal breaker. 'The item must remain in the sole possession of the buyer for not less than sixty [60] years during which it can

not be publicly exhibited.' The last condition is that 'The seller of the item can not be identified.', not an unheard of stipulation in these situations."

"One thing I found interesting was the penalty for post possession violation of any of the conditions, 'Refutation of the authenticity and source'. No mention of who would refute the authenticity."

Hiram was busting with a question. "With all those conditions, what's the draw? I saw nothing in the fax pictures that make these seem special, if they are in fact real."

"The faxes do not do justice to the inscriptions, to me they look like scrawled scratching, the seller claims are evident. The inscribed names are purportedly James, John and son of Joseph. With possible other names not yet deciphered."

"In the solicitation before the conditions of sale are mentioned, the seller makes a few statements to disarm the wary buyer. The ossuary is not subject to Israeli law regarding antiquities. If memory serves me right the discovery is described as having been, 'uncovered during a construction excavation in an area occupied by early Christians. The item is being offered privately without publicity so as not to impede construction by unnecessary intervention.' I'll give you a copy of one of the solicitations. As I've said they are all very similar. It is these two statements that make the conditions later in the offer seem reasonable to a buyer."

"I'm glad to be of help if I can. Like your clients, I'm more than a little skeptical, but quite intrigued. However, with this short a notice, you only called me yesterday, we may only strengthen your clients fears, not assuage their doubts. Speaking of calling, I'm Hiram that's Ben."

Barb rescued us. "We've been working on another case for the last month and only returned to this one two days ago. The last two ossuary questions came while we were busy. Like Dom said this seems a bit odd, even suspicious. The reason for the short notice is that our time frame is a bit rushed, because one of the sellers has put a deadline on the offer."

Hiram accepted her explanation and moved on with his initial assessment of the case. "I'd like to know, if you can tell me, what the asking price of these items are. A professional curiosity and maybe it will help answer part of your question as to who is offering them."

I answered his questions. "The buyers are to submit sealed bids. The pieces are described as nearly priceless. The sellers use several different names and addresses. None of which are in any of our data bases related to antiquities. The same or very nearly the same names, but not the same addresses, are found elsewhere."

"They must be new to the field if your company can find no matching record of them. I took a look at the faxed pictures you sent, and agree they look suspicious. In fact that is why I invited

Ben to join us. I think your bringing him aboard will greatly help understand what is being offered."

"Here is what I propose: We spend tomorrow morning at my office and the afternoon with Ben. I'll give you a briefing on ossuaries, look at a few I have and he'll try to tell you where the stone might have originated. Keep in mind, ossuaries like those from this period are almost all from near Jerusalem."

"Sounds good to us. We might have to tighten the schedule a bit. Barb and I have an early evening flight to Rome. A client can only meet with us on Friday morning."

"We'll get it all in. Hiram likes to talk, now that he no longer has a captive audience of students, he stretches out these meetings."

Hiram needed to recover the higher ground and change the subject. "Dominic, the last time we met I don't recall that you were married."

"He wasn't." Beamed Barb. "We were married a month ago, May 9th."

Hiram signaled the waiter and before Barb could finish a sanitized version of our courtship a bottle of champaign in an ice filled bucket was brought to the table. We sat in silence until the waiter left. Hiram and Ben raised their glasses in a toast to us.

Barb and I breakfasted on the same terrace. The coolness of the Mediterranean came to us in a slight onshore breeze. 'Gringo' hotels, as a road warrior I see at our gym calls them, have exported American breakfast menus world wide. Orange juice to start, coffee with your choice of eggs, bread, meat and a few pieces of fruit to color the plate.



"Do we check out before the Professor picks us up, or do we come back here before our flight?" asked Barb.

"Let's check out. Then if we have to run a little late, we can."

"What about emails?"

"We'll do it from Hiram's office."

"I'll go to our room and get us ready to leave while you check us out. See you in a few." A quick kiss and she was gone. I'd give her a few minutes head start using the time to order my thoughts for the day. Besides, the view of the shoreline uncluttered with striped beach umbrellas and lounge chairs was calming. We were expected at the curb in a half hour so I had a few more minutes to steal

The doorman put our bags in the trunk and held the rear door of Hiram's car open for us. I went behind him and got the back door. "Barb, you sit in front. You've never seen Tel Aviv. I have." I palmed him the only bill I had in my pocket, a five Euro note.

The professor/tour guide in Hiram started even before we got out of the parking lot. "Tel Aviv is a new city. It was carved from a suburb of Jaffa in 1909. A literal translation would be 'Hill of Spring'. Some think of the name as signaling the rebirth of Israel. Recently, 2003, UNESCO designated the White City as a World Heritage Site for the concentration of modernist Bauhaus style buildings started in the 1930s. Since that time modern, some would say avant garde, architecture has become a signature of the city."

For the next half hour he didn't take the most direct route to his office at the university. Along the way he pointed out notable buildings and had a personal comment about each.

"Now my office is on the third floor of that plain concrete slab building to the left. Fortunately, being inside I don't have to see it, and at least I can look out and see pleasing architectural styles."

As befits his emeritus stature he had a covered parking place. The elevator looked and sounded to be of 1970s vintage, giving the timeless looking structure an approximate age. The fluorescent light fixtures in the hallways confirmed this. Offices lined the perimeter of the floor; elevators, stairs, utilities and store rooms the interior spaces. His was a northeast corner office.

He seated us on a small couch and handed us a red covered volume titled: A Catalogue of Jewish Ossuaries in the Collections of the State of Israel, by L.Y. Rahmani in 1994. "The plates will give you an idea of the collection and help when I take you to see our collection. While you're doing that I'll go get us some coffee."

Barb and I paged through the volume. Without the luxury of time to read the accompanying text, only a few captions, we didn't add much to what we already knew. Comparing the ones pictured to the color pictures that we had of the offerings seemed to produce one surprise. "Dom, have you noticed that our pictures don't look like any one of these? More like they are composite that has all the major elements. We've noticed that all our pictures look strikingly similar, as if all are of the same piece under slightly different lighting conditions."

"I agree. Maybe, just maybe, they are carved from slightly different blocks from the same quarry. That could be why Hiram invited his friend the geologist along."

Dr. Isaacson returned with ladened tray firmly held in two hands; a stainless steel carafe of coffee with matching sugar and creamer and a plate of small cookies. He set these down on the oval glass table.

"This is good coffee!" Exclaimed Barb after her first sip. "Nectar like this needs nothing else! After that generic blend they served at the hotel this morning. It had next to no taste and only enough caffeine to be inoffensive to light sleepers."

"Tel Aviv has become over the years a cafe society. They are our social gathering places. In our residential areas, coffee houses may out number any other business. Here at the university we have many near by. I like the one directly across the street. They delivered this."

It was then that I noticed a distinctive blue logo on each cup and a larger version on the tray. I had to ask. "Do they export this blend? The cafe we go to would probably welcome a distinctive blend that would set them apart."

"I don't know. We can ask. Our lunch reservation is there. But you came to learn about ossuaries, not coffee. So let me start with a short history, then take you to see our collection and finally we'll look more closely at your client's pictures."

"Jewish ossuaries like the ones you are interested in were in fashion for a relatively short period of time. Maybe less than a century from about 20 BCE to Titus' destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Most we believe were used in Jerusalem. The custom may have continued in Galilee for a while after the Roman's quashed the rebellion."

"Typically a body was prepared for burial and placed in a tomb. A year later, after the flesh had decomposed, the bones were placed in a niche within the tomb, sometimes within a stone ossuary. Any given ossuary would likely include the bones of several family members. In some cases the names of those whose bones were inside were carved on the boxes."

"Now before I forget to mention it. During this period relatively few names were commonly used. Some scholars list Simon, Joseph, Jesus and James (Jacob) as the most common. Surnames as we know them were all but non existent, even among the rich. And that brings up another point. A family tomb was expensive to carve out of the rock. Ossuaries were probably not cheap. So what we have is a burial custom of the rich."

"Let me add one additional point, that like those mentioned before, is not shared by all scholars. The people of this era were forced to use oral history as a record of life events. Only the rich, a church and governments could afford scribes and the materials to permanently record events. So that leaves us to conclude that ossuaries held the bones of important people who were esteemed by the affluent or influential institutions. This is no different than it had been in Egypt for millennia. What would we know of ancient Egypt if it wasn't for the burial chambers of the rich and powerful?"

"The book you've been looking through has the best example of ossuaries. What I will show you next are mostly fragments and reconstructions. They vary in quality. The location of the tomb where they originally resided is usually unknown. And in fact their very authenticity is often questionable. However, it is precisely these qualities that make the collection a valuable study tool."

Hiram paused to give us moment to think and digest his monologue, while he refilled our coffee cups. "Bring those along while we visit the collection."

He led us across the hall to a door simply labeled 'lab'. We entered the a long room made narrower by the rows of floor to ceiling gray industrial shelving stretching away from us behind a monolithic looking elbow high table sitting crosswise to the shelves. A young man in a lab coat stood as we entered.

"Micha, this is Mr. And Mrs. Swartz."

Barb extended her hand and made eye contact with him as she smiled.

Micha stammered, "Glad . . . to . . . meet you." I let him squirm a bit, then extended my hand. "And you too sir." He managed to get out.

Hiram handed the student a slip of paper, "Micha, please get these for us. We'll look at them here." Without taking his eyes off Barb he reached for the note and hesitantly disappeared into the grey shelves.

"I thought it was only my age that made you seem so distracting." Laughed the professor.

"I'll wear more appropriate attire next time. This business suit is not generating the desired respect I'd intended. If you have an extra lab coat, maybe it would speed the process along?"

When Micha returned all three of us were in lab coats. The rational was that some of the artifacts were a bit dirty and we did need to travel later that day. Micha pushed a cart full of items up to the table and left to 'catch up on his work', as he put it. Hiram busied himself for a few minutes laying out items in a specific order on the white canvas covered table.

"I've put these in rough chronological order. Each, we believe, is part of an ossuary. Not all come from Jerusalem, some are from Galilee. And one or two maybe from communities further north. I'd like you to notice a few things about them and them we'll discuss what you've seen.

First, the rock is all similar. Limestone is common in this part of the world and was relatively easy to carve with the tools of the day. Secondly, the apparent skill of the artisan who carved these varied and is manifested in both the finished texture and, where present, the quality of the inscription. Thirdly, the patina is quite different from piece to piece. Fourthly, there are marks - scratches, gouges, and the like - that don't seem to be made by the original artisan."

"I'll go do a bit of office work and rejoin you say half an hour."

The next 30 minutes lasted no longer than the echo of the door closing behind the professor. When he returned he brought fresh carafe of coffee. "You've paged through the definitive book on the subject and assessed the real thing. What more can I do for you?"

"You can start by emailing us your opinion of our clients opportunity." I said. "Beyond that we have a few observations and questions. Let me start with your first point. They maybe all made from limestone, but to me the rock doesn't all look the same."

"Good eye. Professor Levy will spend some time explaining that to you. I won't steal his thunder. They are made of different rock, yet all are in fact from a type of rock local to Jerusalem or Galilee."

"It is the second point that has me the most concerned, the artistic quality." I paused to think in plain terms, not art jargon. "Some seem chiseled by stone cutters and others by trained sculptors. On one piece the inscription quality varies and doesn't seem to match the artistic effort. It is as if an expensive ossuary was bought, a lesser skilled man carved one set of letters and an apprentice did the last we see. The inconsistency is alarming, and makes me wonder if it is the only piece like it."

"I actually think this is fairly common. Consider this all too human scenario. Father dies. The grieving family spends lavishly on his burial, maybe in some sense of atonement. They commission an ossuary. A year passes, the grief lessens and a fuller more detached perspective of the father emerges. The engraver employed is not of the same quality as the sculpture. Some years later additional bones are added and the family may not see any need to spend money on an artisan. So they just scratch the name into the box. The family oral history has kept alive the story, no more is really needed."

"This to me is one of the real problems with any attempt to assign specific persons to specific ossuaries. Besides the similarity of given names as we talked about this morning."

Barb continued. "The patina issue is always a problem. Faking it is just too easy. Without knowing the exact environmental conditions a piece was subjected to, it is at best a red herring."

"I couldn't agree with you more. My students often spend a long time trying to understand and explain the patina, because they see it as a primary indicator of age. I remain a skeptic of patina."

"Professor, your last point is one Barb and I encounter all too often in fakes. We were in Delft looking at pottery and a dealer showed us a piece he said came to him from an estate sale. He claimed it was old and had the wear and tear marks to prove it. We passed on the purchase for just that reason. Valuable pieces are treated with respect by owners. It is their wealth."

"That, Dominic, is why we have these pieces in this lab rather than in a museum. These are, we believe, common ossuaries. Those that were family treasures were likely better preserved."

"And that brings me to my conclusion about those being offered to your clients. The date range is suspect, based on commonly accepted research. They all look too much alike, too generic. That the seller says that they aren't subject to Israeli law is curious. The prohibition on expert evaluation is suspicious."

"Enough of this, Ben awaits us across the street. I'll email you a full report in a a day or two."

Where Hiram's approach was hands on and mentally challenging, Ben's was short and damning. His office was on another part of the campus. He led us to a department conference room. On the table was a large map of the mid east held in place by rock samples. No chairs were in sight. We three stood south of Egypt. Ben stood north of the Black Sea.

"The pieces you saw this morning came from near Jerusalem or Galilee. The two rocks at those cities are typical limestones from those locales. The rocks from which the ossuaries in your pictures were carved are from here." He pointed to a fist sized rock resting at a location in south central Turkey northwest of Antalya. "To the layman the same limestone, to a geologist the differences are strikingly apparent. Now unless Hiram and his bunch know of any ossuaries from that region, my guess is that these are suspicious. What is even more suspicious to me is that this area of Turkey has world class marble, limestone and travertine quarries. There was some activity in ancient times, but only since World War Two have the pits been really developed."

"I took a graduate class there one spring to show them how ornamental rock was quarried. Here limestone is used for concrete, gravel, and stone blocks. There they slab it for building facings, counter tops and the like. They have lathes and routers for shaping and wet tables for polishing. It is quite an operation."

"Well Hiram, the balls in your court. Any record of ossuaries from this area of Turkey?"

"Jewish settlement is known there along the coast. In some places there were sizable concentrations. I'd have to look up Antalya during this period, but I've read that the Christian apostle Paul visited and preached there. It was a Roman city and I presume that there was Jewish community, as in most larger Roman towns."

"Right. And the limestones and travertines are different there along the coast than they are inland or in Israel."

I had to ask the obvious, because our clients would ask us. "What is so distinctive about that limestone?"

"The fossils you see in it, plain and simple." He picked up the rock. "See these tiny shells and those tiny corrals, they say it all."

We each examined the rock. The rough and ragged sides and the flat polished side. The shells were small for sure, but there very size gave a depth, texture and color to rock making it seem unique. Barb's question blew me away. "You said that they make counters out of this. Where can I get one? It would look great in my new kitchen."

Ben smiled. "I'll get it right now. I have one of their brochures in my desk and I know they export a lot of it. When does your plane leave?"

In an automatic reaction I checked my watch. "About three and a half hours."

Ben sat at his desk and we heard him ruffle through some files in a bottom drawer. "Here it is. Keep it. I found two copies. If you'd had time I'd have liked to take you to my favorite afternoon cafe. You'd see why Tel Aviv is renowned as a cafe society."

At the airport we checked in with security and our Rome flight. The counter person directed us to the executive lounge to await our flight. Barb was reading the quarry's glossy promo. I was catching up on my notes and reading the background material on Antonio, the Art Minister, and recalling all I could about Joseph Argoni, the Rome based antiquities dealer, who'd hired I Brown and Company on several occasions.

"Dom, didn't we come across a Navare a few weeks ago and in our briefing for this case?"

"Right on both accounts. Remember that shop that sold fossils, the one in Idar-Oberstein?"

"Yes, of course. You decided not to buy that thing was saw in the window because we'd have to have it shipped and using our real names would blow our cover. You were so smart. Knowing what we do now, I'll bet it would have blown us right out of the water. We'd have never left there alive."

"The other time the name Navare has come up is as a shadowy figure that maybe associated with the offering of the ossuaries. His last known place of business was Damascus."

"Right, we're headed to Damascus after Rome. Did you get anything from Jan on him?"

"I forgot. I'll go back to security and use their phone to call him and have Navare's CV emailed to us. We can read it in Rome."

"Before you go, look at what I found. The name of the mining company Professor Levy took his student to visit in Turkey is Navare Ltd. They have wholesale distribution centers throughout Europe. Their main processing plant seems to be in Bari, Italy."

"And . . . "

"As PI, or whatever we are, I'm suspicious of coincidences. As rank amateur in economics I'd guess the Navare company finds it cheaper to import raw rock to Italy and process it there than to pay EU import tariffs on finished goods. With all the refugees, that part of Italy has absorbed from the Balkan wars of late, skilled labor is probably as cheap there as anywhere."

"Good work making those associations. I'll incorporate them into my request to Jan. And ask him to query Hendric Oost's old files."

"What are you thinking, Dom?"

"I'm not sure. Let's let it simmer while I get this query sent off from the security office. Maybe something will come to me while I busy myself."

Forty-five minutes later I was just getting back to the lounge as the announcement was being made for boarding our flight. The hostess was about to page me as walked through the frosted glass doors with the airline's logo etched into them.

She had Barb at her side. "Mr. And Mrs. Swartz you've been cleared through security. A cart will be here in a moment to take you directly to the gate."

Chapter 11 Pseudo reality

In less than an hour from when we landed, we were in our hotel room with a fine view of the air traffic of Leonardo de Vinci airport. I'd started to read Jan's emails while Barb unpacked for us. The first email set our appointment with the art Minister at 10AM in his office. The second was the Navare note. "This is all we could find. JG." Attached were pages and pages of unindexed, unsorted, un-prioritized, unevaluated material. The office had given us a file dump.

Barb saw me begin to slump and zone out. "That can wait. We need a shower, some play time, a quiet dinner in a restaurant that only a gringo hotel like this can provide and some serious rack time. We still have at least two more cities in three days before we're home."

My parents were right. In a month of marriage Barb had probably added more than a year to my life. The last six weeks had been a riot of unexpected travel, amazing accomplishments and the onset of an inner peace I'd never have imagined.

We awoke at 6AM, read the paper over breakfast and returned to our room within an hour. The first message on our phone told us to expect a car from the Art Ministry at 9:30AM. The second, from Jan, told us we had a meeting with Mr. Argoni, one of the prospective ossuary buyers at 2PM. We divided up the Navare file data dump and agreed to compare notes in an hour and a half. We both typed our notes into word docs as we read and digested the files.

"So what have you got?" asked Barb.

"In short simple terms, Asid Navare is the name of many related people. All are associated with Navare Ltd. in some way. My feeling is that we're dealing with at least one father-son pair and possibly a grandfather-father-son or two father-son pairs or some of all three and probably more. They all seem to come from the same five places: Antalya, Turkey, Durres, Albania and Bari and Bologna, Italy and as you already know Idar-Oberstein."

"One or more has been on the police blotters in all the cities. The charges are all relatively minor with dates redacted. Some extortion, drug use and petty theft. No mention of jail time. The redaction suggests crimes of the young."

"As for the company itself, it has been around since the 1930's. An Asid Navare bought the quarry in 1925. They have been an active supplier of stone and tile since the start. Today it is run by an Asid Navare who, based on his picture and CV, must be in his mid fifties. They've expanded within the last ten years as the EU economy has grown."

"I'll request that the office look at these files and sort all these people out for us. So, what did you find out?"

"If we combine your info with mine, we may have uncovered a bigger operation and a nifty cover. Antalya, Bari and Bologna are known as centers of drugs and artifacts. One report has a bust of an Albanian registered freighter. The bust wasn't for the usual stuff, it was for prescription knock offs. The artifacts are mid eastern and central Asian, including a shipment of 'Oriental rugs' evidently made in China but routed through Turkey."

"Shall we send our findings to Jan by return email and ask for a little help combing through this stuff with these perspectives in mind?" I asked.

"Let's do it. At least he'll see we've read all the material he sent to us."

We chatted with the doorman as we awaited our ride. Barb's phone sounded a new voice message was waiting her attention. She listened to it and put the phone away. When a generic looking black Mercedes with government plates pulled up, I opened the rear door for Barb. Gesturing with a sweep of left my left hand I said, "In for a penny . . ."

"... In for a pound." While our bags and cases were being tucked in the boot by the doorman and driver, I slid in next to Barb. She snuggled close and whispered. "That was Jan. They got our email and will work on it post haste. We are to check in from the local office when we finish. We are not to let the Minister bully us. He is a political appointee."

The driver delivered us to the rectory of a white stucco church across the street from a metro station. Waiting for us at the top of the red tiled stairs was a tenor sized man.

"Sr. and Sn. Swartz, I'm Antonio Brunelli. A man I wanted you to meet had a last minute change of plans, so we are here where he must say a Mass at noon." His voice matched his image projecting through the urban background noise rendering the static mute. The dark brown stained wooden door opened on cue. A tall thin cleric in a black tunic with a wide purple silk belt stood awaiting us. "May I introduce Monsignor Francis Brunelli of the Vatican? He is with the art history section of their archives. He is also my cousin."

We shook hands all around and the priest led us into a glass roofed atrium. A tiled tiered fountain was at either end. Four tables were placed in no particular pattern among the trees rooted in large glazed pots. A white coated waiter pushed a wrought iron cart on silent wide rubber wheels over the well worn terra cotta pavers. He served us from a silver samovar looking piece that wasn't really a samovar I'm sure.

"Mr. And Mrs. Swartz I'm glad you could find the time to fit my request into your schedule. When my friend and art dealer, Joseph Argoni, first brought this to my attention, I was shocked. I thought that such hoaxes had played themselves out several years ago. We in the art world do not need more sensational hoaxes for the press to feed on and by inference call into doubt the work of serious historians and collectors. The world's museums showcase Italian artists. Any talk of forgery or fraud taints these men who mean so much to Italy. The very livelihood of our trend setting fashion industry is rooted in the history of Italian art."

"The day Joseph showed me the solicitation I arranged to have dinner with my cousin Francis. I couldn't contain myself. I told him of the offer Joseph had received. His reaction was more profound and seriously based than mine. I am but the Art Minister. Francis is a man of God." Differentially nodding toward his cousin at his right, he continued. "You can tell your concerns better than I."

"I understand from what Antonio has told me that you are both EADC officers. We appreciate their cooperation in this matter. I further surmise that you are Jewish, possibly an asset in any investigation of this nature."

In just our few weeks together, our partnership had become honed to respond to questions asked of both of us at the same time. Barb takes the lead and I do the follow up. "We were both raised

in typical Jewish families on Long Island in New York. During our collegiate period we became less and less involved in the daily Jewish rituals. As of now we are non practicing Jews."

The Monsignor continued. "I didn't mean to pry. However, I recognize that Jews and Christians can have substantially different views on a ossuary which some might think was used by the family of Jesus Christ. My inquiry was with that in mind."

This was as good a time as any to allay the Monsignors fears. "We have just returned from Israel where we met with two acknowledged experts on Jewish ossuaries from the first century of the Common Era. They assure us, based on numerous criteria, that the ossuaries being offered are likely fakes. We'll send you a copy of their report."

"For the moment, suffice it to say that the rock from which they are carved probably didn't originate anywhere near Jerusalem. All four ossuaries are very similar in all their details including the inscriptions. One expert described them as almost generic looking, rather than custom made. The solicitation of each purports a different current owner and providence. Some of the details of the providence are not within the scope of currently accepted attributes of the ossuaries of this period."

"The agency would like to identify the person or persons making these solicitations. Art fraud is often tied to other criminal activities. To that end, we have arranged to meet with Mr. Argoni at 2PM."

"I did not know this." Blustered the Minister, sounding a bit taken aback.

Barb stepped in to sooth his rising temper. "We've been on another case for the last month. During that time Mr. Argoni contacted the local office who sent it on to our department. As the deadline for his response approached, and he'd not heard from us, he tried other government channels. This approach got the results he desired, action by us."

The Minister saw no further need to continue our meeting. "You are obviously well on your way to resolving this matter and I'm sure that will be taken care of in the most discrete fashion. Please keep Monsignor Francis and I informed. I'll leave my driver at your disposal for the rest of the day. Now Francis and I must prepare for the noon requiem Mass honoring our great aunt."

I had the driver take us to our local office. En route I asked him how long it would take to get from our office to Mr. Argoni's shop. He thought about it and said he'd pick us up at 1:30PM.

Inside the bland off white concrete building, we approached an equally bland white stucco semi circular chest high counter, topped with black faux marble. We presented our badges and asked if we could use an office for a few hours. The receptionist made a call and we were shown to a

vacant staff office on the second floor by a young man. He mentioned that if we needed anything we could ask the secretary. I set up our notebooks while Barb introduced herself to the secretary. I heard them chatting while I started to journal the meeting with the Minister and the Monsignor.

The click of two pairs of high heels got my attention. Barb entered the room trailed by a middle aged woman. "Dom, this is Antonella, the office manager of the steno pool and temp services." I rose, shook her hand and thanked her for accommodating us on instant notice.

"Mr. Swartz, I was told by my boss to expect you today. The director had told him that you'd be in Rome and might need an office and support."

"Thank you very much for being so prepared." I replied.

"She'll help us get connected to the web and bring us a phone and has made lunch reservations for us when we're ready."

"I do hope you invited her to join us."

"Taken care of the first thing."

In less than five minutes we were online to our central DB and had a secure phone link open to Jan in the Hague. Antonella had arranged for a tape and she'd transcribe the call on the fly. It would save us taking notes and make the meeting shorter. Jan's voice from the speaker phone was a little tinny sounding. During the 'how-are-yous' Antonella adjusted the speaker to a more normal range.

"How'd your meeting with the Minister go this morning?" Jan asked.

Barb started our response. "He changed the location to a church where his cousin Monsignor Francis Brunelli of the Vatican, who is with the art history section of their archives, is to say a Mass today. The Minister is, as my dad would say, 'self inflating'. He was not too happy that we'd already arranged a meeting later today with Mr. Argoni."

Jan stepped in. "Don't worry about that. You only met with him because the director had no choice but to intervene on his behalf. Your impressions Dominic?"

"Quite the same as Barb's. Actually I'm more looking forward to our afternoon meeting with Mr. Argoni than back at this morning's. He has been a client of I Brown and Company in the past."

"Good, that'll make this request easier. Here's what we'd like you to do. Ask to be his expert when he goes to meet the seller tomorrow. Following up on your work we think you've got the Navare family pegged. One of our analysts says he expects to have a family tree mapped by late this afternoon. Another believes he'll have the police records time lined shortly. The possible association with prescription drugs has us scrambling, but you maybe onto something."

"Call me after your meeting. Even if you can't be Mr. Argoni's expert, we'll want to have surveillance in place to cover the meeting. We may be able to match a face to someone in our DB. Talk with you later." The speaker went silent.

We sat for a moment each in our own thoughts. I was the first to speak. "Jan brings up a good point about meeting surveillance. Antonella, if you can arrange a car and driver for us and some surveillance, we'll dismiss the Minister's driver."

"So you don't trust the Minister?" Asked Barb.

"Maybe we shouldn't. But mostly I want to see who else might be watching Mr. Argoni."

"Mr. Swartz, if you'll give me the address and time for the meeting, I'll get it all arranged."

"We'll go to lunch when you're finished. Just the thought of non hotel food makes me hungry." Sighed Barb.

"Antonella, while you're doing that maybe we should thank your boss for his hospitality?"

"I'll call him. Take the elevator to the top floor. Virginia will meet you and take you to him."

The Minister's car arrived at 1:25PM. I thanked him for being on time, but told him we'd not need him for the rest of the afternoon. As soon as he was out of sight a white Alfa Romeo sedan pulled up to the curb. I got in the back seat next to Barb. The head of security, Joe Pupio, was in the front. We'd met after lunch and he said he'd use the ride to Mr. Argoni's store to explain how he'd set up the surveillance.

"I've had a man in place since noon. A quick local police check on Mr. Argoni turned up no hits. We'll let you off before the Spanish Steps. It'll be two and a half blocks down on the first right. Don't be surprised by the neighborhood or looks of the store. His place belongs among all those high end boutiques. There is a sidewalk cafe across the street. It is the one with the big green and white umbrellas and it has a balcony with the same colored bunting draped from the railing. We'll be on the balcony and also inside at a window table. When your meeting is over, walk back to Via del Babuino and we'll pick you up."

The driver stopped in the intersection. I got out and held the door for Barb. I'd like to say we turned a few heads, but we didn't. Barb looked at me questioningly as she adjusted her suit while standing alarmingly exposed to the traffic now going around us. I shrugged. "When in Rome..."

"... do as the Romans do." she finished the proverb, took my arm and we stepped into the narrow side street. After walking two blocks among the tourists filling the narrow street I still

couldn't see umbrellas of the cafe Joe had mentioned, but finding the balcony railing draped in green and white striped bunting was easy.

"I like this street. I'll bet I could find that simple black wrap I need for my dress in any of these places. Do we have time to look in this one?"

A quick check of my watch gave us a quarter of an hour. "Maybe, we still have to go half a block. Mr. Argoni's shop I recall is just ahead on the right. Can you decide that quickly?"

"I'll look now, shop later. Speaking of which, look at that one." She pointed to a summer weight wrap in a simple subtle design.

"Ferma! Ladro di gioielli. Ferma! Ladro di gioielli! Ferma! Ladro di gioielli!

I turned away from the window as a man broke free of a knot of people heading for the alley beside us. Pushing off from the store front with my left foot I launched myself at him. He must have noticed me because he slowed up a fraction. My tackle missed, becoming more of a cross block that sent us both to the pavement and into the building wall opposite. I got to my knees first.

"Stop! Hands behind your head! Feet spread!"

I started to do as commanded, then realized it was Barb barking the orders. Rising, I keeping my eyes on the suspected thief I drew my pistol from under my coat and stepped back a pace. My gun barrel's front sight only a meter from his head. He slightly shook his head to clear his vision and thoughts. The voice he'd heard didn't match what was in his line of sight. Me holding a gun.

"Do it! Now!" Barb barked. He complied, twisting his head to see her.

I looked at Barb when he did. She was on one knee. Her pistol beaded on the man. Three meters separated them.

The crowd had formed a circle around us three. Instant street theater. Police whistles curtained Act 1, drawing their collective attention. With my left hand I took out my badge folder with ID from my inside coat pocket, ready for whoever showed up. Three uniformed officers elbowed their way into the circle.

"Cuff him!" Yelled Barb. One did just that. Got the man to his feet and shoved him against the wall in a single quick, obviously painful, action. One approached me, scanned my credentials and nodded toward Barb who was returning the pistol to her purse. The third was talking to an excited smallish man in a very expensive suit. I recognized him from several previous meetings we'd had over the years. An infrequent, but good client of I Brown and Company.

The officer who checked me out, turned to the crowd and dispersed them. When calm had been restored he helped lead the suspect away, but only after telling me to stay until dismissed.

"Mr. Swartz, I owe you my deepest and most sincere thanks. That man stole a necklace reliably dated to the time of Caesar. Not the most expensive one I have on display, but one that brings people into the shop and establishes me as an antiquarian dealer." He let his words sink in, as if he had to.

"You were on your way to visit me." continuing to state the obvious. "My shop is over there, across from the cafe with the green and white umbrellas, as you must remember."

It was only as we started out to walk that the adrenaline wore off and my knee began to hurt, causing a limp. Barb noticed it with my first step. "Dom, you hurt your knee. That pant leg is torn and bloody."

"Here let me help you." offered Mr. Argoni. Two 5'3" tall people helping a foot taller person hobble is well intentioned, but not weight relieving. I shuffle footed the several meters into his shop. "Please sit." Barb helped me to sit lengthwise on a carved dark oak monastery bench, before taking a seat on a similar styled plain backed chair. Mr. Argoni found a pillow to put under my foot. To a distressed looking younger woman, I knew to be his daughter, he spoke. "Miriam, close the shop. Get come cappuccinos from the cafe. I'll call a doctor and my tailor."

They left us to run their errands. "Nice work, Barb. You really studied the 'Charlie's Angels' routines. Short decisive orders, given in a command voice, from a confrontational stance. If Jan ever sees you in action, you'll spend your free time as an instructor at an academy."

"If you didn't get yourself in situations that required my immediate assistance, I wouldn't need to."

"I'm sorry I missed the tackle. Intramural basketball was as athletic as I ever got."

"How's the knee feeling now?"

"It burns. Road rash is why I sold my cycle to get a car."

Miriam returned carrying a tray laden with cappuccinos and biscotti. The cups were, not surprisingly, green and white stripped. We sipped the delicious brew easing the moment.

"You are here to visit my father? He said we'd close the shop when you arrived."

"He was expecting us about now."

"What happened? He ran out chasing a man who stole a necklace from our window display."

"We saw the man running through the crowd and heard your father yelling to stop the thief. Dominic tackled him. We held him until the police arrived."

"No wonder he is grateful, that necklace should be in a locked case, but he likes to personally show it to special customers. Let them touch it. Try it on. Even have their picture taken wearing it. He says that nothing else in the shop convinces people that he can get for them what only museums usually get a chance to purchase."

From the back of the shop Mr. Argoni stepped through the black velvet curtain. A man, obviously a tailor by his attire, followed him. A knock at the front door was answered by Miriam. Four people now stood facing Barb and I.

The shop owner made the introductions. "Mr. Swartz this is Mr. Joseph Bartholomew, my personal doctor. Mr. Frank Burni is my tailor. My daughter Miriam you've already know." A daze settled on his brow as he looked at Barb. "Please, forgive me signora. My rudeness appalls me. In the rush of the moment I have not even asked your name."

"Mr. Argoni, I'd like you to meet my wife Barbara. She is also an employee of I Brown and Company and we are both on loan to EADC as art investigators."

We shook hands all around.

Recovering himself during the pause he reassumed his aplomb. "Mr. and Mrs. Swartz are EADC officers." He stressed the last word. "They were on their way to see me when I was robbed. Fortunately, they were able to stop the thief. Mr. Swartz seems to have hurt his knee and ruined his suit. We will leave you two to attend to him. My back room is available if you prefer. Miriam and I will take Mrs. Swartz to the cafe."

Dr. Bartholomew knelt to look at my knee through the tear in the pant leg. The tailor took a pair of scissors from his vest pocket and deftly cut the fabric above the wound and down the inside seam. They exchanged a few words I didn't catch, not that my Italian is that good.

Mr. Burni spoke. "I told him you're getting a new suit because not even I could mend this one."

I looked at him a bit surprised. "You'll have it in maybe an hour. Your size is easy. Minimal tailoring. My shoe man will be here to fit you. He matches the shoes to the suit to the man."

For the first time I looked at my shoes. Both were severely scraped and scuffed.

The conversation had diverted my attention from the doctors' work. I didn't even remember him applying the red colored antiseptic or the bandage cover he was now securing. "Just keep it dry and covered for a week or so. I'll leave some antiseptic swabs and a bandages. Change it daily."

I began to thank him as he extended an arm to lift me up. "We'll get you out of these so Frank can take them to his shop for measurements. I'm sure George won't mind you borrowing one of his work smocks."

I was sitting on the monastery bench with my leg up when the owner, his daughter and Barb returned. Miriam gathered three chairs from about the shop for them. Even before Mr. Argoni was seated he began to talk. "You must see this! I just now saw Barbara out in the street making this drawing. If she would go around Roma doing this, I could sell a hundred a day!"



Hardly pausing to catch his breath he sat and continued. "Frank said he'd be back in less than an hour. He has a near match in color and fabric. The pants only need hemming. The coat needs a small change for your holster and a slightly larger pocket for your ID and badge. He wouldn't want either to show. His shoe man will be here in a minute. He is glueing the orthotics he took from your shoes into the new ones."

"Again thank you for stopping that thief. I will now do as Miriam has suggested all along and have a special locked case made for it. The display will be better than it is now, and it will be secure. Is there anything else I can do for you beyond replacing the clothes you sacrificed in my behalf?"

Barb spoke as I was still gathering my thoughts. "We'd like Dominic to be your invited expert when you view the ossuary."

"Of course! That is why I wanted to meet with you today. To have an I Brown and Company expert at no cost because he is a EADC officer, of course I agree."

I asked, "When and where is your meeting scheduled?"

"Tomorrow at noon in Bari." Turning to his daughter. "Miriam, please book them on our morning flight and return. And add their room to our hotel reservation." She went behind the black velvet curtain.

"Where in Bari are we meeting him?" I asked.

"He said in his fax that he'd send a car to pick us up at the airport."

"OK. We'll deal with that by notifying the local office."

"Mr. Swartz, ..."

I interrupted him. "Sir, we work for you like your tailor, doctor and daughter who you address by their first names. My wife is Barbara, I'm Dominic."

"You Americans, so informal. But you are right, we are a team in this. As I was saying you seem concerned about the meeting."

"Anytime we have to go to a place we do not know, to meet with a person we've never met, who is promoting what we reasonably believe to be a con, we should be concerned."

"You are probably right. I have been too trusting." Miriam nodded and put her hand on his forearm. "Now I'm even more grateful that you are coming with us as both our expert and guards."

"This works both ways." Barb schmoozed. "Without you we have no invite and no chance to do our job."

As was his preference, Mr. Argoni took to leading the conversation. "Barbara told us about your meetings in Israel and with the Minister this morning. Besides actually seeing the ossuary, what do you hope to accomplish by meeting the seller?"

"Based on the similarity of the items and our meetings, we don't believe the ossuaries to be authentic. We can find no construction project near Bari which likely matches his claim. We believe, based on the pictures, that there are four separate ossuaries. It seems to be a high end, one off scam to quickly raise cash. As if, as Barb noted to our boss, they were presented a short window of investment opportunity. May I ask what you had to bid to get this far?"

"Of course. I finally agreed to a bid of €250,000. He asked for 10% of the sale price in addition. I said that anything else depended on an inspection, verification of authenticity and an independent valuation. If I, now we, agree that it is as purported, I will hand him a bearers check for the asking price."

"That is essentially the same deal he has gotten each of you to accept. Simple math, he gets a million plus expenses. And no one talks." Mused Barb. "Not a bad scam."

"What about the others?" George asked.

Barb continued. "Each has agreed to a similar meeting in Bari next week. We sort of figured that yours would be the last, probably on Thursday."

"You were going anyway?" He asked.

"No, that was not our original plan." I said. "We were going to do some more background work here. And ask to accompany you to the meeting. By that time he would have been turned down three times. We'd see how desperate he was for cash."

"You can't go with any of the others? Not that I mind having you as my expert."

"None of the others have ever been I Brown and Company clients."

"What kind of a revised plan do you have in mind?"

Barb proposed a simple idea. "We'll run our plan in reverse. You, like the others, turn him down if you have any doubts. This gives us time to supply them with even more documentation to question the authenticity. By the end of the week, we are where we would have been any way." I tried not to smile at her ad lib and half story. EADC still wants to ID this seller and if possible file the appropriate charges.

Mr. Argoni couched a previous question a bit differently. "While we were waiting for you to be attended to, Barbara outlined your reasons for doubting these ossuaries. We seem to have some time to wait on your new clothes. Would you go into more details about your reservations concerning these pieces?"

For the next half an hour Barb and I tag teamed the presentation of our arguments. We were interrupted once by Miriam returning to tell us that the reservations had been confirmed. He father immediately sent her for more cappuccinos. As we were winding down and summarizing our findings, the tailor knocked. Miriam let him, the shoe man and a tailor's assistant followed. Refusing help, I stood and was properly dressed. A few steps, a short walk back and forth for the audience and I felt renewed.

The tailor gave me his card. George promptly took it from me and signed the back. He gave it to Barb. "As my wedding present to you. Take this card to his shop. His sister Dona Argenelli will fit you with the dress of your choice and he'll fit Dominic with suit to match."

"Mr. Argoni, thank you for the generous offer, but we can't accept those gifts. We were doing our job as public servants. We'll keep Mr. Argenelli's card for ordering Dominic a new suit. I've never seen him look better, almost as good as Carry Grant."

"Then join my daughter and I for dinner tonight. A casual neighborhood place. We'll pick you up at your hotel about 8PM, and not keep you too late. Our flight leaves at ..."

Miriam filled in the details. "10AM so we must check in by 9."

"We'll be ready. Now we must be on our way. We still have work to do, not the least will be to file our own report and answer a few questions from the local constabulary." They seemed to understand. Barb and I walked back to the Spanish Steps to await our ride.

To save time, Barb worked on her notebook, grinding out our report as we were driven back to our hotel. I called Jan and briefed him. Arranged for surveillance in Bari and called Professor Levy, putting him on alert for a possible field trip to Antalya, Turkey.

Jan called back as we walked across the lobby to the elevators. "Go to the hotel manager's office. I've sent a fax to his personal machine." Click. I diverted Barb to the lady behind the brown marble topped counter and we identified ourselves.

"We are Mr. And Mrs. Swartz. The duty manager is expecting us." I laid my ID and badge wallet on the counter.

"Actually, he left this for you. He was called away a moment ago." She handed me a plain brown envelope. The flap sealed with white tape. A signature across the flap. "If you'll sign my log book, he'll know you've received it." I did.

In the elevator Barb asked. "Do we have to read that before we shower?"

"Probably."

"And Jan is expecting a reply?"

"Probably."

"Then a shower and quiet time? We have until 8."

"I'd have it no other way."

The fax contained four files. One each on the Minister, his cousin, Mr. Navare and his family. Barb took the first two, I the later. In twenty minutes I'd read my files and sorted out how they likely fit our project. I got up and walked to the balcony glass doors and stepped outside. One lungful of jet fuel tainted air convinced me that vanilla scented canned hotel air was preferable.

Barb looked up from her reading. "Dom, this only gets messier the more questions we ask. Before he was appointed Art Minister, he ran the family art sales business. Their speciality is Greek art both authentic and copies. They have an office in Bari as well as places in Greece and Turkey. Our sleuths are running down those leads. Their company and the Minister personally are prime donors to the major political parties, as well as to the renovation of various churches in Bari, Durres, Albania and Antalya, Turkey. In addition, it seems the Art Minister has a brother who is in the wholesale drug business in Bari."

"All I got out of my files was more depth on the Navare family. That is until you told me what you'd read. I think we may have competing families. The Brunellis have been at this a while. The Navares want in on the game. What simpler way to squash your competition than to get the government, which you so handsomely support, to do it for you?"

Barb asked. "We can't just let them fight it out themselves and then take down the winner?"

"Probably not."

"Dom, tell me it won't always be like this?"

"It better not be or we quit and offer your uncle the early retirement he so much seems to want."

"Let's discuss that option more thoroughly in a long shower."

"After I call Jan and brief him on our thoughts, our travel and our need for back up in Bari."

"If you must!" She said, starting a slow strip tease as I speed dialed Jan's secure number on my cell phone.

As we'd planned, upon deplaning we went our separate ways. Miriam and Barb got our luggage. They'd go to the hotel and wait for us. George and I looked for our ride. He was late. A well dressed man waiting at the bus stop on the arrival road island knelt to tie his shoe. His black wing tips, one blue and one black sock and a gold watch on the inside of his right wrist made me feel more comfortable. Jan had minders in place.

We were surprised to see a man in coveralls approach the taxi queue holding a piece of brown corrugated cardboard with the word 'Mr. Argoni' in red construction crayon. George stuck out his hand as he asked a question then introduced me. Other than my name I didn't understand a whole lot of the rest of their conversation. It was spoken fast and not the classroom Italian I'd been introduced to. We followed him to a parking lot and got in the back of a small Fiat van. Leaving the airport we headed south into a dense industrial area. He stopped in front of a generic looking old white building on a raised concrete foundation.

Without a word he led us up the three deteriorating steps, past a black block lettered business sign 'NAVARE' and through the open door. Inside was, as expected, a contractor's office. A few desks, drafting tables stacked with rolled plans, project boards and site maps pinned to the

walls, a working man's world for all appearances. To the right at the end was a wide enclosed office with a window looking out on the work room. The place was empty.

Our driver knocked on the office door and held it open for us. A man in a dirty shirt and khakis was reading a sheaf of stapled together pages. A strong smelling cigarette burned between the fingers of his left hand. We stood and waited. In a moment he looked up and motioned us to sit on an unpainted bench under the only window.

Once again all I understood was that I was being introduced. I shook his hand. Firm, but not the calloused work hand I expected. No broken nails, no scars, nothing but nicotine stains on the ends of his fingers. He and Mr. Argoni talked for several minutes. I observed. Looking around the room it looked too normal. A stage set with pieces placed for effect of visitors, not work. A dirty canvas tarp covered a box sized object on an old used wooden pallet. My eyes went back to get a better look at Mr. Navare. He matched the faxed picture we had of him. Dense dark black hair combed straight back, a full mustache, longish sideburns and in need of a second shave.

He pointed to the pallet. George got up and I followed him. Lifting it by the brass grommet in the corner, I pulled the tarp free of the ossuary. The lid was laid against the far side. We spent some time examining the piece. I looked closely at the inscriptions. Checked for machine and saw teeth marks, polished surfaces, stains, cracks, nicks, scrapes, and any other signs of wear. Lastly I looked at the top noting the same. I made sketches in my note book.

"Mr. Argoni, please ask if we can walk outside and have a few moments to talk and compare notes." He did. Mr. Navare's response was to pick up the papers he was reading. Once outside we walked around the end of the building to the back side.

"Dominic, tell me what you think."

"The office is a prop. Mr. Navare has rented it as is. The only place the company's name appears is the newly painted sign on the building. None of the rolls of plans on the tables or maps on the walls have any name visible. They could be of any where. The work room hasn't been used in a while. When we go back in look at the layer of dust everywhere. The ash trays are all old, but clean, as if they came from second hand store. The waste paper baskets . . . Everything looks like a stage prop."

"Mr. Navare is not in construction. His hands don't look the part. His skin is not that of a man who has spent years out doors."

"As for the ossuary, it might be an ossuary. It didn't originate in Israel. The rock looks nothing like any of those we were shown. The nicks, scrapes, dings and signs of use are all one deep. Not one mark overlays another. The surface has the look of being sand blasted not hand sanded. My guess is that the 'aging marks' on the top don't match the box. The inscription is beyond my understanding. The bas relief has aged too well, too uniformly. It doesn't look quite right."

"Dominic, you've got my vote. Even without your opinion, which I completely agree with, I wouldn't buy anything from him. I noticed as you did the state of the outer office. His

unwillingness to assist us during our inspection speaks for itself. If he knew what he had he'd have told us more. Shown us pictures of the site where it was found. How he knew it was a Jewish ossuary. Speculated as to how it got to the east coast of Italy. He was quiet because he was afraid of making a mistake that would give himself away."

"That's the way I'd take his silence." I said. "Besides, look around; does this look like a construction company yard? No fence with razor concertina wire on top. No store of materials, scaffolding, nothing! Not another piece of equipment in sight. The only vehicle is the one we arrived in. Have you ever seen a construction boss who didn't have his own truck?"

George continued, "Let's go tell him 'no thank you' and see his reaction."

Mr. Navare's reaction, if you can call it that, was to return to his reading of the same sheaf of papers he was when we first entered.

I called Barb from the house phone in the lobby to see what room we were in. "Dom, stay there. I just got off the phone with Jan. I'll be right down. A car will be here in less than five minutes."

To George I said. "Seems our day has taken a sharp twist. The boss called Barb. We're off to who knows what."

"Will we see you for dinner? I know a nice quiet Greek restaurant not far from here."

"Book us for eight. We still have some unfinished business to discuss. Including a response to the possible counter offer, I'd expect him to make."

"I was thinking the same, but didn't dare mention it while we were being taxied by his man. I'll work on a response to keep his fire lit."

"Great! We need to keep him interested as long as possible." From the corner of my eye I saw Barb and Miriam exit the elevator.

They greeted us with hugs. Radiance enveloped the two newly bound soul mates. "Dom when we're finished with this errand they want us to have dinner with them. Miriam has asked if we would join them next week at their villa on the island of Lipari. They are planning a get away before the summer crowds of tourist hit."

George noting his daughter's obvious concurrence extended the welcome even further. "We can fly directly to Sicily, get the afternoon ferry and have dinner on the terrace. We'll arrange everything by the time you get back."

A uniformed officer had approached stopping to await a break in our conversation. I squeezed Barb's hand and nodded toward the young man. "OK. We gotta go! See you soon." Barb finished by kissing Miriam on the cheek.

Within a step of leaving the Argonis Barb was back in business mode, serious and thinking. "Jan said our name came up when the Bari police filed a report about a serious accident involving a truck making a delivery to the Navare Stone and Tile Company in Bologna. He wants us to see if there is any connection to what we're doing."

The officer held open the rear door of the plain looking sedan. Once on our way he began to brief us. "A flat bed truck with a shipment of stone and tiles got off the Durres ferry and was turning onto the north bound E843 when the accident happened. All of the pallets of stone and tile shifted causing the truck to over turn. A crew was called to right the rig and reload it. The officer on the scene noticed that one of the pallets which had been broken apart had sacks of what looked like pills, medicines, in side. He called this in and secured the area. The documents said he was delivering the freight to the Navare Stone and Tile Company in Bologna."

"What about the driver?" I asked.

"He's being held pending an investigation. He claims he was hit from behind causing the rig to flip."

Barb's phone rang. "Yes sir." Her reply made the identity of the caller certain. She listened for less than a minute. "We're on it. We'll call with updates."

"Jan says that it was drugs, prescription drugs. Because we have no other 'assets', as he calls us, in the area and we are looking into the Navare family anyway; the case is ours."

"OK. Not exactly our bailiwick, but . . ."

"No week on Lipari is what it sounds like."

"You're probably right. Evidently EADC, like I Brown and Company, has more work than people to do the work. You sure know how to pick your employers."

Barb took my hand in hers, "In for a penny . . ."

"... in for a pound." I replied.

The officer turned on his sirens and lights to get us past the traffic back up the accident had caused. He parked next to a squad car, got the door for us and introduced us to those in charge. They already knew we were in charge of a larger investigation. We listened, toured the scene and returned to the primary site officer.

"Here's what I like you to do." I said. "Get the truck reloaded. Keep the driver out of circulation until we tie up the loose ends. Have the trucking company send you another driver to

make the delivery. Get me one piece of stone and tile from each of those three different bundles." I went over and pointed out which ones I wanted. "Find out what the driver's log says and send me a full report by morning".

"Yes sir. Anything else?"

"Can you get us a ride back to the hotel. It'll be easier to work there than standing here along the side of the road." The officer laughed and waved to the young man who'd picked us up.

Once in the car Barb immediately called Jan to brief him. She explained the scene and the officer's opinions in detail. At one point she answered his question with the response. "The officers believe the driver was hit in the right rear of the trailer. Witnesses said a delivery truck was following very close behind. They found white paint chips on the flatbed's newly broken rear light. They said the driver's record was nearly spotless. He's been driving this kind of rig for twenty years. They'll get the intersection video and try to ID the truck." She listened for a few more moments and handed me her phone.

His first words were, "I like the way you handled it. You're the field agent in charge of this. What's your plan?"

"I'll ask Professor Levy, the geologist, to meet us in Antalya tomorrow. The drugs were inside a cubic plastic drum in a hollow space within the pallet of stone pavers that seemed to match the ossuary stone. I have one of those pavers to take with us. If it is a match then we look to find the drug source."

"I'd have liked to detain the entire truck load, but I'm afraid of tipping our hand to Navare. So the best we can do is work both ends. Get the Bologna place under surveillance and find out where they ship to from there."

"You're beginning to think and sound like a cop. I like it. Keep it up and keep me informed." He clicked off.

I handed the phone back to Barb. She snuggled up even closer and whispered in my left ear. "Who ever said assertive raw power wasn't an aphrodisiac never asked me."

"Barb, we have a few details yet to take care of. You get our travel arrangements and I'll get Professor Levy on board."

After a shower, some cuddly play time and a short nap we met George and Miriam in the lobby. They had a taxi waiting to take us to a very nice seaside Greek restaurant. Being a Saturday night the evening was just getting started as we arrived. For the next three hours we drank, danced, ate, danced, ate, drank and did more of each.

On the way over, Miriam told us about the trip routing to Lipari. Barb was gracious in her explanation of duty first. They hugged. From the front seat George looked over at me and shrugged. "We all have to make a living first. You can join us some other time. The fall is especially nice. We take a week or so after the end of the tourist season."

Miriam still half facing Barb and still holding her hands finished the invitation. "We'll set a date and you can tell your boss far enough in advance so he can't spoil it. Now we aren't going to let this little thing stop us from having a great night."

Chapter 12 From dust to marble

The flight took us to Antalya via Athens and lasted into mid afternoon. The professor was waiting for us on the other side of the baggage claim fence. We waved at him and queued for an agent. At an airport this size, baggage can be on the custom agent's counter by the time you get there. A quick check of our IDs, luggage tags and our bags were ours again. Professor Levy led us to a rented Land Rover parked across the street in a lot.

"We'll stop by the hotel first and you can change. I brought the field clothes you asked for from our supply room. Most of our students can't afford a separate set of clothes for just the one required field session. Besides, this way they're all dressed and protected adequately. Judging by the sun and clear skies, we still have time today to make a short trip up to the quarry area before dark if you want to get a bit of a start on tomorrow."

"Professor," I paused and stumbled to get this said right. "we'd like to check out the Navare shipping facility today, the quarry tomorrow morning and take you with us on our trip to Durres to do the same again at another Navare operation. What we need to do in the next few days is confirm your opinion about the ossuary rock source with samples and confirm how they could have gotten to Bari, Italy where we met Mr. Navare trying to sell one of the ossuaries."

"So you actually saw and inspected one of them?"

"Yes. One of the dealers Mr. Navare contacted has been a client of I Brown and Company for many years. I was asked to be his expert during his inspection of the piece."

"Well, tell me more! Was it truly a fake?" He asked as he turned into the parking garage of a large water front area hotel.

"In short it was too perfect. Even without the education we received from you and Professor Isaacmann, there would have been doubts. It looked too new, unworn, unused, unburied. The art dealer and I could not believe that it had been unearthed at a construction site. I'll finish the story tonight. We need to get changed and find this place of theirs."

Our rooms were next to each other on the eight floor with a nice southwesterly view of the harbor snugged under the mountains. In the hall way I opened the outer pocket of my largest case and handed Professor Levy the burlap wrapped rock samples from the overturned truck. "These came from the truck making a delivery to Navare. There looked to be three different types of rocks cut into 30cm by 30cm by 3cm paving stones. One looks the same to me as the material of the ossuary we inspected. The other two types seem different. We need to know where they came from."

"We should be able to do that, I would think."

In twenty minutes we met in the lobby. Our clothes looked like we'd done field work before and felt relaxingly comfortable. Even our scuffed filed boots that laced up above the ankle walked well worn, albeit with nearly new soles and heels.

"Tell me again, professor," asked Barb. "how you can keep such an inventory of clothes?"

"It is really simply a practical matter. If students are uncomfortable, they focus on themselves and not on what we take them to the field to learn. We walk a lot. So for example, take your boots. . ."

"I wish I could, these are great!" interrupted Barb. "The bottoms look and feel new, the insoles seem molded to my feet, the tops are well broken in, but obviously very protective."

"You can't. Those boots are probably ten years old and on their fourth set of soles and heels. We put new gel insoles in for each user. Student's walk longer and complain less when their feet don't hurt."

"I'd still like to make you a deal . . ."

"Barb!"

"Easy Mr. Swartz. I get this every trip from the students. My answer is always no. So where do we go next?"

I showed him the address on a street map I'd printed from my computer. We walked outside and he turned on his GPS. Within a few minutes he had the location way pointed. He followed the onscreen directions to the Navare factory and warehouse. The last bit of the half hour trip was a turn off Akdeniz Boulevard toward the sea. This late in the afternoon we were alone driving into the industrial area.

The Professor asked the obvious question I'd not addressed. "What's the plan now that we're here? If we drive around much longer someone will get suspicious and call us in."

"Drive past their building and stop along the side of the road. We get out and check the area. If you're asked, you show them one of these I Brown and Company cards and tell them you're looking for a building site. Barb and I will do the field work."

A few chain saw trimmed dust covered trees lined the road side past the Navare Company warehouse. Dr. Levy parked in their shade. Barb handed him her cell phone. "Number 2 speed dials Dom. If you get asked to leave, do it without comment. Tell us and we'll make our way to the beach road and call you."

We walked away from the Land Rover and around the back side of the white painted metal building of the Navare Company. This looked like a working warehouse. Two flat beds loaded with square cut stones were backed up to the abused concrete loading dock.

"Barb, let's get in closer, I'd like a rock sample for comparison. Any little piece will do."

"Better make it quick. That is the second time a patrol pick up truck has gone past."

"Think we should call Dr. Levy and have him create a diversion?"

Barb reached into my shirt pocket for my cell phone. "I'm on it."

Speed dial 8 got her phone to ring. "Dr. Levy. This is Barbara. A security truck is heading your way. We need a five minute diversion, then head for the beach road and call us when you're there." Click.

"You've learned Jan's style quickly."

"Hey, it works doesn't it?"

We moved closer along the side of the raised concrete loading dock. On each trailer were three large pallets of cut stone pavers, like the ones we saw in Bari, except none of these pavers seemed to have one finished side. Among the trash and paper on the gravel parking area we found fist sized broken corners of unfinished pavers.

"OK Sherlock, we got what we came for now how do we get out of here?"

"We walk hand-in-hand around the front of the building and to where we left Dr. Levy. If he's there and alone we get in and go back to the hotel. If he's occupied, or not there, we continue walking to the beach and await his call."

Rounding the front of the building I looked right to find the Land rover under the trees. It wasn't there. I pointed that direction. "Barb we're in for a bit of a walk it seems."

"Darn! Maybe we can stretch it into half hour stroll on this lovely Mediterranean afternoon. We never did get our evening walk under the stars on Texel the day we became engaged. That is if your wounded knee can make it that far."

"You temptress!"

A moment later from behind and in front of us beams of rotating flashing yellow lights atop pick up trucks colored the white metal wall to our right and dominated our vision. The trucks stopped nose to nose thirty feet apart. We between them.

"OK Sherlock, now what?"

"Take out our EADC ID folders and hold them open in front of us."

"Gosh, Sherlock, that worked just like in the movies. They spoke Turkish, we spoke English, they looked at our IDs and left. Now what?"

"We call the good professor and while he is returning we look around some more, since we seem to have a carte blanche."

"I'll make the call while you try the doors."

Up on the raised concrete walkway along the front of the building I peered through a dirty window in a locked door. Just an office, three by three meters, two fluorescent shop lights over two desks and a rear door. A screeching scrape vanked my head to the right.

Barb was pushing a sliding door open. She'd stepped inside by the time I'd gotten there. "Well I'll be damned!" She said. "The ossuary business must be better than we thought."

I walked up beside her and saw four more identical to the one I'd seen in Bari. While I was parsing this information and putting it in the context of the work room where we were standing, Barb started taking pictures with her pocket digital camera. Either the umpteenth flash or the car horn finally broke my concentration.

From behind me the professor was shouting. "Dominic, you in there?"

"Come on in and have a look for your self." I gestured to him with a sweeping wave of my arm.

"Holy shit! Not even the Roman's could have nailed a rebel as well as this will."

"Stay there you two. I want pictures of both of you with the evidence." Four flashes later Barb had her shots. "Now we'll get a few outside shots and be on our way. A quick down load and off they go to Jan. Sound like a plan?"

On the way back to the hotel we were telling Dr. Levy of our encounter with the security guards when he took a sharp right into a space in an apartment tower's back parking lot. "Tell me again how this happened?"

I took him through it literally step by step. "We left you sitting under the trees and walked around the back of building. We picked up a few broken pieces that looked like the same material that was on the over turned truck in Bari. We saw security trucks in the distance go by twice, but with the flat beds between us and them they'd have to have looked directly at us to see us at all. From there we walked around the front of the building and almost instantly we were between two white security patrol pick up trucks. One man got out of each truck. We held our badge wallets out at arm's length. The man in front looked at mine. Said something and handed it back to me. I thanked him. He and the other security officer then got in their trucks and left."

"Here is what I did." Dr. Levy said. "As soon as you'd left I drove out along the main road. The lack of any visible security had seemed funny. I was going to cruise the beach area until you called. From the way your described them, I think they were waiting for you. You did the only thing you could have done, you ID'd yourselves."

"So now what?" asked Barb.

"We each go our separate ways. I'll catch the evening flight back to Amman and you to wherever is next on your list. Between here and our hotel watch for anyone that seems to be following us. We'll have no more than fifteen minutes to get packed and out the door. By now they're calling every tourist hotel trying to find you."

"Dom, you watch. I'll call Jan and get us secure transport to the airport. And thanks professor for being so observant. We just though it was . . ."

"Barbara, I live in a country where security is never taken lightly. When it isn't there I notice. We have to, to survive. In another generation or two our children will not have to be taught security. It will be genetically encoded in their DNA."

Chapter 13

1 + 1 = 2

We caught an evening flight to Athens. Upon landing, airport security let us call Jan and send him copies of our digital pictures. The last pix hadn't hardly left when Barb's phone rang. She nodded while answering 'Yes.' three times. And shook her head speaking 'No.' just before she closed her cell phone.

"We are to wait here for 'AA' the section head. He'll have made arrangements for us."

A security officer led us to a VIP lounge where we were offered coffee and a tray of finger food was put on a low oval table. We sat on a small settee. Barb put her head against my shoulder. "Dom, . . ." her voice faded with fatigue.

"In for a penny, . . ."

She quickly finished ". . . in for a pound."

"Now get to eating. We can only guess what Jan has planned for us next. And I'll bet he doesn't factor in sleep or eating."

"Now I know what's wrong with secret agent novels. People don't sleep or eat and they have boundless energy. I'm bushed. We've been on the go for days with no end in sight. And when we get back to Amsterdam we have our mothers to entertain. Dom . . ."

"Eat a few bites and have a second cup of coffee. I'll get us some water to wash down the Tylenol. We'll be better soon." The shell of me that remained fetched us some water and two slices of chocolate torte from a side board. The latter brought life back to Barb's eyes.

"Mr. and Mrs. Swartz," a uniformed hostess addressed us as we were finishing our second cup of coffee. "A Mr. Alexander would like you to join him in the conference room. Please follow me."

The private room was just off the main lounge divided by a frosted floor to ceiling glass wall with a sliding door. As we entered behind the hostess a tall and singularly thin man turned toward us. "Mr. and Mrs. Swartz this is Mr. Alexander. He has requested a meeting with you. Is there anything else you require Mr. Alexander?"

"No. Thank you. When you get the reservations I've requested please return with the confirmation." Noting that he was already extending his hand to us in welcome, she nodded and departed.

"Nice to meet you Mr. and Mrs. Swartz. I'm August Alexander. Jan and I were just talking and finalizing a plan based on your work and analysis. He and the staff in both Rome and Amsterdam think you've got these people mostly figured out. Now you have to nail them with the goods. There is one thing you said that makes a lot of sense, but we don't understand, and that is a possible relationship between the Navare's and the Brunelli's. The Rome office thinks that they've been business partners in the past and maybe even today. However, they've not been seen in public together in some time."

"To do that you'll be on the morning flight to Durres, Albania. There you'll monitor the loading of the Navare trucks at their factory warehouse and the loading of their shipment onto a ferry to

Bari. Our informant tells us that they have reserved space for three trucks carrying a total of nine pallets of stone tiles on the night ferry. You'll be on that ferry. The driver of the overturned truck in Bari said he'd picked up his load in Durres and was headed for Bologna. He said he makes the trip twice a week, as does another driver."

"Mr. Alexander, do we know if these four trips are the only ones they make?" I asked. "Twelve pallets a week doesn't seem like enough for the size of their operation. Is Bari their only port of entry? Wait . . . We didn't see anything at the Navare Bari warehouse that even suggests that it is a distribution center. And another thought, do we know where the second driver makes his deliveries? What if it's not Bologna? Can we follow him?"

"Wait . . ." interrupted Barb. "You said the informant told you they had reservations for three trucks, but the driver we detained only mentioned two drivers, correct?"

"I'll talk to Jan and get the staffs working on those questions." He opened his thin briefcase and found an envelope which he handed to me. "In this is your hotel reservation for tonight, Albanian paperwork and contacts, tickets for the 7AM flight, night ferry tickets and hotels in Bari and Bologna. Leave your bags with security and they'll catch up with you in Bari. The hostess has a carry on rollie with the clothes you'll need in Durres and the ferry."

"Night ferry?" I asked.

"Yes. The driver said he usually takes that ferry. It is less busy so they can almost always get the truck on it. On the day of the accident he couldn't get on the night ferry and had to wait until the next morning."

"Thank you." Offered Barb. "But how do we get from Bari to Bologna?"

Mr. Alexander smiled at her. "DOTS, as my American colleague would say; depends on the situation. I'll see that there is someone meet you at the dock in Bari."

"Thank you again for all your work." I said.

"Oh! One last thing. Stay out of trouble in Durres. Obviously, we've not had enough time to find a local for this scouting job or you wouldn't be doing it. And just as obviously, we've had no time to get any back up in place for you. The Albanian Foreign Office has been sent a notice of your arrival, but not what you're doing. We have sent them verification that you are special agents from the art fraud section. Good luck."

We all stood and shook hands. Mr. Alexander left as quietly as he had arrived. The hostess was waiting for him on the other side of the glass door. Barb and I sat back down. She took the envelope and opened it. "Let's see what gringo hotel he has us in. I need a hot soaking bath and some downtime."

The gringo hotel was just that. A lobby with a polished brown granite reception desk, conference rooms to the right, a multi purpose cafe/restaurant to the left and the icons for the elevator and pool straight ahead. Our fourth floor room overlooked the 'U' shaped inner courtyard facing away from the end of the main runway. In the distance a range of low hills and a golf course a bit closer. I noticed all this because as had become our routine when Barb needed a bath and some down time she went on auto pilot. It was best to just leave her alone.

I came back in from our small balcony through the shear drapes to find her in a state of semi undress seemingly preoccupied as she fussed about rather than getting ready for her soak bath.

"Dom, did Mr. Alexander say that they had three truck reservations on the ferry?"

"I think he did."

"And usually there are two trucks making the delivery the driver said."

"Yes."

"Good. My mind hasn't slipped. While I'm taking a bath . . ."

"I'll get Mr. Alexander to find us three GPS trackers like we used in Holland. We'll put them on the trucks while we transit the Adriatic . . ."

"We follow the truck north and people in Bari get the other two."

"Now off to your bath. There must be a decent seafood restaurant at the marina we passed on the way here."

The taxi ride from Tirana International Airport Nene Tereza to Durres was uneventful except for the slow heavy traffic. The customs officer who met us as we deplaned led us quickly through the bureaucracy and had a mini limo waiting at the curb for us. The back of the old Mercedes sat six on two facing sofa like benches and had two fold down seats. The refrigerator was probably not working as the mineral water, juice and colas were in a plastic tub of ice bungee corded to one of the jump seats. As a last act the agent asked the name of our hotel, relayed it to the driver and waved as we left.

"So what do you make of the special treatment?" Whispered Barb as she snuggled in under my left arm.

"We were definitely expected and will be watched."

"Ditto. Now may I get you a drink, such as they are?"

"A cola, if you please."

At the hotel desk I ask to change our room to a more modest one on the fifth floor facing away from the Adriatic and paid for two nights in advance. I told him our bags had not made our connecting flight, but would be sent over later tonight. I also ordered a cheap rental car to be ready in an hour.

Once in our room Barb reviewed the time window we had remaining to work within and still make the ferry. I looked at the map we had showing our hotel, the Navare tile factory and the ferry terminal.

"Dom, this will test our marriage. If we catch even a quick meal downstairs, there's no time for my soak bath. No time for play. No time for anything but work. Maybe we can squeeze a shower in on the ferry, if our berth even has a shower."

"Now Barb, I was just thinking how smart it was to have our bags sent ahead to the Bari office so we could travel light. So how much time do we have?"

"The ferry leaves at midnight. We have our tickets so we need to be there by probably 11:15. That gives us six hours."

"So we opt for food and a sponge bath?"

"My mind and stomach agree. We need food more than anything else. I'm not expecting the cafeteria on the ferry to be open."

A Niva was brought to us when we asked the bellman.

I'm not a car buff who knows every variation of every model, but with the looks of a Fiat Panda and the name of a Russian River my first guess was that this mini sized SUV was a Fiat made in Russia. Once seated behind the wheel the Cyrillic labels would seem to confirm my first impression. A kilometer into our journey the well abused donkey had told me all I need to know about how she needed to be driven; slow. Above 50 KM the combined rattles, shakes and exhaust fumes leaking up through the floor pan were intolerable. I settled our speed at a level well below the other cars heading in the same direction.

"Left at the next big street then right just before the tracks. The warehouse should be dead ahead in 500m meters on the left beside the tracks." Shouted Barb.

The right took us to the splay of a rail yard where every track ended beside a warehouse. Flat bed trailers and cargo containers seemed left at random to the side of the chuck holed, gravel, not recently oiled road we were on. Approaching the building we believed to be Navare's, we saw three trucks being loaded with stone laden pallets.

Barb yelled in my ear. "Drive past, make a loop and I'll get some pix on the way out. No way we can stop without being seen."

Avoiding the holes and ruts was getting more difficult the further we'd gotten into the yard. My concentration had narrowed to the next ten meters, three meters at a glance. This was big truck terrane, the Niva's roof wasn't much taller than their tires.

"Turn around here. I'm ready. At the big street, get us back to the beach road."

I had to wait for a spotting tractor pulling two trailers of lumber that was holding up a line of cars. A driver waved me into the slow moving line as if I was one of them.

"Good! They'll never notice us. We look just like all the rest of the workers going home."

For me the way out was easier than the way in, follow the leader. These guys drove this road every day and obviously knew every pot hole and rut. I didn't even concern myself with Barb's picture taking until I hung a right onto the four lane arterial that led to the beach.

"Did you get what we need?"

"Every bit of it and then some. Back to the hotel, we'll shower while these down load, send them off to Jan and AA and with this much time to kill we'll get a bite to eat."

The concierge promised us a 10PM taxi and a list of recommended late night spots. Once in our room Barb down loaded her pix, made a back up on a memory stick, copied them on to my laptop and emailed an encrypted set to Jan and AA. I ordered room service to be delivered in an hour.

As we were getting out of our dusty field clothes Barb mused. "I'm continually amazed by Jan and this whole organization. We trade suitcases in Athens and have perfectly fitting field clothes, shoes and undies. If it wasn't for the tags they left on you'd have thought we packed them ourselves."

Over dinner Barb and I looked at her pix, all 61 of them. "I couldn't tell when to start so made sure to start early."

"These are great! The Navare building plainly identified, three trucks being loaded and each Italian license plate clearly readable. You can even make out some faces well enough to ID them."

Number 58 stopped me in mid bite, beside a door was formal green and white sign Албания with a caduceus above the words медицинского назначения. "My Russian isn't real good, but being beneath a that symbol I'd bet it roughly translates as 'Albania medical supplies'. Is that on the same building as the Navare warehouse?"

Barb arrowed back to number 57. "That guy standing on the left sure is the same as in the one on the right of the next picture. And that pallet of pavers on the fork lift doesn't look like normal medical supplies."

My phone chimed the distinctive ring of a text message. We read it together. "GOT M COLD CU B DO NO MOR"

Chapter 14 Not Again!

"Mr. & Mrs. Swartz, I'm inspector Gambi, section head in Barri. I was instructed to meet you and give you your tickets to Amsterdam. But I'd rather you didn't use them."

Belatedly he offered his hand shake and ID. We followed him to his white Fiat sedan. The ride to the ferry parking lot was mercifully short and much too tense. I wouldn't describe our 20 hour ferry ride as Mediterranean cruise, but we thought the case was wrapped up except for the reports. We'd already begun to relax and plan what we do with the extra days before our mother's arrived

From the front seat Barb asked. "Inspector Gambi, what can we do for you?"

"Barri is a small office, and I don't have anyone to follow the third truck. Someone forgot that there are only three of us in this office. Could you, would you please do it?"

I speed dialed Jan. "Sir, Inspector Gambi has asked us to follow one . . ." Jan interrupted me loudly enough for the others to hear. "Do it!" CLICK.

Once our bags were in the boot of a Fiat identical to Inspector Gambi's, he pointed inside to a small screen. "Officers Swartz, here is the tracker. The set up is the same as you used in Holland. Each truck was inspected as it landed. Customs attached one of our GPS tags to each. Your truck is BT3 on the screen. You are BA3. Follow it until we can get you a replacement and are told to break contact. Good luck."

"Any idea as to where BT3 is headed?" I asked.

"None, All three are currently in a customs holding lot until I tell them to be released. Like I said, good luck."

"This is great weather for a ride along the east coast of Italy, so since this guy looks like he's going to Bologna we'll just stay on this route most of the way."

"Barb, we don't know which of the three trucks we saw in Durres we're following, do we?"

"No. What difference does it make?"

"What if this guy pulls into the warehouse yard in Bologna and there are other trucks there. We think that it is their biggest factory and distribution center. How do we know . . ."

"God! You're right. If Jan has the local people stake the place out he'll need to know which arriving truck to watch, because these GPS units are local to the district office."
"How far are we behind him?"

"Less than a kilometer. What are you thinking?"

"I'll insert us into a packet of fast cars and as we pass him you get a few pictures. We call Jan with the license number and then try to send him the pix over our mobiles."

"You think that'll work? I mean sending while we are moving?"

"It is worth a try. Foggia is a good size city so there must be good coverage."

For the next twenty minutes I maintained our pace and distance with BT3. With 500 kilometers and hours of daylight remaining I could be selective. "Dom, one of the things I really admire about you is your patience. But Foggia is only maybe 15 minutes away. And I could use a stop for necessities like a bathroom and food."

"What's after Foggia?"

"Termoli . . . In maybe 75 kilometers . . . too far for me. If we stop in Foggia after we pass BT3 at least we won't have to worry about catching up with him."

"Alright, lets see what this government issued beast will do. Get you camera ready!"

This stretch of the Autostrada Adriatica had a new surface. The catch up happened quickly. Our quary was the third from the end of a long line of big rigs. Barb shot the back, side, cab and front of BT3 through her open window.

"Did the driver see you?"

"I don't know. We'll find out when we see the snaps. Now I need that stop I mentioned."

Less than 2 kilometers further on was an Agip station with a restaurant. Barb left her camera downloading the pictures when she went inside to use the facilities and grab us some snacks. I fueled, washed the windows and called Inspector Gambi to report our location and activities.

"Good work officer Swartz. I still don't have a replacement for you. Some sort of equipment incompatibility between districts, channel settings or something like that. So other than visual you are the only tail we have. The same is true for the other two trucks, one looks headed for Roma and the other Napoli."

"Sir, I got to go before he gets too far ahead of us."

"Good luck. Drive safely. Most accidents happen at night on that road. People just drive too fast."

Once on our way Barb started sending the pictures and adjusted the scale of the tracking screen until she found the BT3 symbol nearly 25 kilometers ahead of us. With enough fuel to get to Bologna I wasn't shy about catching up to him. I figured we'd need close to an hour to get him in sight. Driving at 135/kph wasn't difficult. The packs in the left lane seemed to like that speed. We fit right in, our Fiat took the high revs with few complaints.

Near the airport at Falconara we caught up with BT3 and I pulled into the right hand lane a half a kilometer back. Now able to relax a bit I began to formulate an idea that had fermented in the back of my mind during, what was to me, a high speed chase.

"Barb, what did you make of Inspector Gambi?"

"Tense, not too sure of himself and he seemed a bit out of character. Jan said that drugs were one of the big four crimes. So why didn't he participate in the pursuit? Why ask us?"

"My thinking exactly! Why give us the honor? Jan didn't seem to know about his need for us. It almost sounded like the Inspector was ad libbing."

"You're right." Barb paused. "District level inspectors are always in control or they have no hope of being promoted to Chief Inspector."

"His last comment also seemed odd. He told me to 'Drive safely. Most accidents happen at night on that road.' as if he was issuing a warning."

"You don't suppose he is tied to the Navare group? And didn't want to answer for being there when the take down occurred?"

"Remember, the first truck accident in Bari we were called in because they didn't have anyone else available. Presumably the Bari office was called and the inspector begged off as being too busy. He'd let the local's handle it. He had no idea we were in the area."

"The way I put it together," I explained, "later Mr. Navare and the inspector have a meeting and my name comes up as having been at the ossuary sale and the truck accident. It doesn't take long for the inspector to get a profile on us."

Barb looked scared as she put the pieces in place. "That could explain a lot of what happened afterward. By getting us to be the tail he's free, but if he can get us put out of the way in an accident he scores points with the Navare group."

"I've been driving too hard to pay attention to the cars around us. We better start looking both fore and aft."

"Yea. I'll take my gun out of my purse and keep it on my lap."

"Another odd thought: no one knows what rocks weigh. So how would customs know if a bailed pallet of paving stones was solid rock or had a container of drugs hidden inside?"

"Sherlock, that's brilliant. I'll ask Jan to check the truck weights."

After her call we went into tourist mode enjoying the pastoral landscape. Near Rimini, just past the road to San Marino, Barb's phone rang.

"Sir, do you mind of I put it on speaker mode so Dom can hear this?"

"No, not at all. I think you have broken the case wide open. We checked with Bari customs and got loads and weights on all their trucks for the past year. The loads are all the same, three pallets of unfinished pavers. About once a week a truck is 50 kilos or so less than the others. We don't know where the trucks actually delivered their loads, but the one you're following, we IDed from the license plate you sent us, is one of the light ones."

"One other item, three months ago a truck had four pallets. It's weight was less than a normal three pallet truck. Our guess is that it had the ossuaries. It is all tying together rather well."

Barb picked up the phone from the dashboard, took it of speaker and talked directly to Jan. "We have another idea, really a suspicion we'd like checked out. Inspector Gambi acted . . ." Barb stopped talking in mid sentence, pushed the speaker button and held the phone between us.

"... observation. Anytime an inspector says that they are 'too busy' to check out a high profile incident it gets noticed. We've been watching him ever since. If he's on their payroll we'll know soon enough. His pawning this particular truck off to you doesn't help his case."

"Barbara, this was just handed to me. Your back up is from the Bologna office. They're in a black VW Euro van with French plates. They'll join up with you as you pass the toll booth. To be safe take Inspector Gambi's comment as a threat, Good luck." CLICK.

Barb put the phone away and leaned across the center console to give me a hug and kiss on the cheek. Without taking my eyes off the thickening traffic I gave her a wink and a "Thanks!"

"By the way do we know where the Navare Factory is in Bologna?"

"I don't."

"So we just follow BT3. I'll close the gap to just a few cars."

"I'll keep tabs on him and look for the black van. Do we follow him all the way into the yard?"

"My guess, unless we get orders to the contrary, is that once he is in the yard we block the entrance."

"Didn't we do this on Texel not long ago?"

Traffic slowed considerably as we continued on the Autostrada Adriatica around Bologna. I stayed as close as I could often only one car separated us. The landscape changed from urban to agriculture and the route designation changed to A1 from A14. The sign read 'Modena 25Km'.

Barb called Jan. "He's not stopping in Bologna. We are on the A1 headed toward Modena."

"Jan said to stay with him and keep him informed."

"My geography of this part of Italy is lousy. What's ahead of us?"

Barb rummaged in the glove box and found a very small scale map of Italy. "This road leads to Milan and then on to the Alps. Maybe 300 kilometers. It is hard to tell on this small map."

"If we're going that far we'll need fuel and another snack stop. Hopefully he will too."

Crossing the Po river valley I'd lengthened our tailing distance to nearly a kilometer. Our companion black VW van and I played leap frog for the next hour. Barb was the first to realize that we didn't have a way to contact our companions. She wrote our phone number on a large yellow pad and held it against the window as as I held our position next to them. She put the mobile on speaker and set it on the dash.

"Good afternoon, Dominic and Barbara here." she answered.

"We're Bo and Al, to friends."

"Nice to meet you." she waved to them. "Guy's we need fuel. So at the next petrol station we'll stop and you follow them. We'll catch up."

"Not a good idea. You have the tracker, we don't."

"OK, we'll make it a quick stop."

In less than five minutes BT3 slowed and pulled off the autostrada into a gas station. "What now sherlock? If we follow he sees us. If we go on we run out of fuel."

"Please call Bo and tell him we follow, but we pick a pump as far away from them as we can. They should use the pump behind us. If BT3 is looking for a solo white Fiat sedan, seeing it with a black van might not be what he expects."

At this stop the trucks are directed right into long bays, cars stay to the left queuing at four pairs of pumps. A restaurant separates the two fueling areas.

"I need to use the facilities and I'll get us some more snacks."

"Barb, here take my wallet, use a credit card and tell him we'll be fueling at pump #3. I'll talk with Bo and Al when they get here."

The black van pulled in behind us as Barb was on her way. Once the pump display read zeros I selected the Euro grade and began fueling. A guy as tall as I, but heavier was doing the same for the van. I went to meet him with my hand outstretched.

"I'm Dominic Swartz, Barbara went in to get us some eats."

"I'm Al Marciano, Bo followed her in to provide 'back-up' if she needs it. Hell! He follows anything in a skirt. No excuses needed. Speaking of 'back-up', what's the plan?"

"We have none. We were told to follow the truck and keep the office posted. As I understand it, we are to secure the delivery area."

"Any idea where they are making the delivering?"

"None. We thought it was going to be their warehouse in Bologna."

"Do you know what they are delivering?"

"No. It looks like three pallets of stone to me."

"How'd you get involved?"

"We were on an assignment in Bari that just finished. So we were available."

"We'll follow you." Reaching into his shirt pocket he took out a folder and handed me his card. "When it gets dark I'll close the gap to stay right behind you."

Back in the car I checked on BT3's location. They seemed to be starting a roll out leaving the fueling station. I closed my eyes and tried to remember Bo's key features. His shoes were unpolished and had heavy lug soles, the scars and callouses on his hands indicated a lot of

manual labor, his face looked to have spent years in the sun. He need a haircut. Barb interrupted my thoughts by opening the door.

"Dom, lets go the truck just pulled out. And I think we've got a problem. Those guys aren't one of us."

I let her observation sink in while getting back up to speed 300 meters behind our quarry. "Couldn't agree more. Tell me why you think they are the bad guys."

"I saw him follow me around the mini mart. I figured if he was back-up he'd have today's code. He didn't. Not one item matched. Then as I was standing in line I got a real good look at him on one of the surveillance monitors as he stood near a door. He was the driver of the car the Art Minister sent for us. To be sure I exited through the door where he was. With a creepy smile he pushed the door open for me. His left pinky ring was the absolute confirmation, a square gold face with an inlaid pink corral cabochon. What did you see?"

"Bo didn't meet the expected dress code, a bit too much like a laborer. And the card he handed me doesn't look like ours."

"Speaking of cards, I found the post card you picked up in Idar-Oberstein. I lists a Navare store in Entreves, Italy. Any idea where that is?"

'No."

"So my guess is that the ossuaries are how the Navare family is raising cash to buy into the Brunelli operation."

"Barb, that sure fits what we know."

"I'll call Jan and get his advice."

"Because it is getting dark I won't be able to help much as I try to keep track of both BT3 and the black van."

"Hello Jan, This is Barbara. We're . . ." She was instantly silent for several minutes. "That's why were were calling. Our back-up seems to be more like a tail. One of the two men was the Art Minister's driver in Rome. We think Brunelli and Navare are connected and that the ossuaries are to raise cash to buy in to the Brunelli operation. That being the case, the truck might be going to the Navare shop in Entreves, wherever that is."

Barb listened for the next ten minutes as I covered the fifteen kilometers approaching lake Viverone. "I understand." CLICK

"Jan had already figured out what we had. The pinky ring helps confirm the link between the Brunelli & Navare families. They'll take care of the truck as it pulls up to the Navare shop. We lead our tail away toward the Mount Blanc tunnel and the locals will close in for the arrest."

"Sounds simple, except that it is dark and I've never driven this road before and how do we know that they'll follow is."

"Jan says that that is the tails job. He thinks that if we interfere with the delivery that the tail will interfere with us. So we lead them astray and let others do the dirty work."

We rode in silence. "What are you thinking, Dom?"

"Just before the tunnel there has to be a parking lot or a vista point turn out or something. We'll stop as far away from other cars as possible to give us some room to play out the arrest."

"I'll get our guns out and ready. They may not go willingly."

As we approached Entreves I slowed down to let TB3 get well out of sight. The van had been close and pulled right up behind us.

"Barb, the truck exited. We'll stay on this highway and hope we are followed."

"Good. Jan said if they follow the truck we're to call and place ourselves in a back-up position. If they follow us, we bait the trap for the locals."

"Can you watch the van using the vanity mirror on your sun shade?"

"Will do!"

"The exit is in 500 meters. The truck is on a parallel street to ours still heading towards Entreves."

"Dom, they've turned their right signal on."

"We go straight ahead. . . . The exit is now."

"Dom, they didn't turn. Their signal is still on but they've pulled in behind us. I'll call Jan."

She speed dialed and set the mode to speaker. "Jan, this is Barb. The truck exited. The van is following us. We're thinking of the parking lot in front of the tunnel."

"Good. We'll take care of the truck. I'll tell the locals you're on your way." CLICK.

The A5 we'd been on devolves into a barrier divided four lane road. Our speed slowed to half so I took a look at the tracking map. TB3 was in the same place I'd last seen it two minutes before,

stopped at the edge of the village of Entreves. The oversized road sign indicated a further reduced speed for the left hair pin turn just ahead. I slowed and let three cars pass us on the inside of the curve. Only one set of lights was left behind us.

"Still with us, keeping pace."

A little more throttle kept our speed on the grade and around a gentle left bend before the road flattened into the flood lit toll plaza.

Instantly blue and red lights from atop not less than six cars abreast were blocking all the toll lanes.

The van pulled out into the left lane beside us. Barb yelled. "U-TURN. They're going to make a U-TURN in the parking . . ."

"Guns ready, hold on!" I Mashed the throttle and turned hard left towards the concrete barrier as the Fiat's nose cleared the front of the van. The surprise tactic pushed our tail to the right with our left side T boned. Once we'd stopped our screeching sparky slide, Barb was out, leaning over the boot with her gun drawn. I watched her in the mirror from the driver's seat. My door was jammed against the van's grill.

"Get out! Hands up!" Bo deliberately did as she commanded. "Face on the ground, spread your legs and arms." I snuck a peak over my left shoulder at a very compliant Bo.

I heard an engine rev and the Fiat lurched sideways scraping the nose further along the concrete wall. I grabbed the Beretta Barb had put in my lap, used the butt to break the window and fired three shots low into the left windshield of the van. The conjoined cars slowed and stopped moving. With ringing ears and senses etched with gun powder, I crawled over the center console and out the right side door looking for Barb to be pinned under the back wheels.

"Don't move! Or you're next!" Came her reassuring bark.

I walked up beside her with my gun at the ready to provide extra incentive to Bo. "Nice work Angel."

"Well, did you kill him?"

"I've no idea"

Chapter 15 No place like home

An hour later the locals graciously provided a car and driver to take us to a gringo hotel at the Turin airport. Barb leaned against me in the back seat.

"Shouldn't you be wearing a seat belt?"

"I don't give a damn about a seat belt! I just want to cuddle and fall asleep. The last week has worn me out. When we get home, I want a vacation in my own bed. Leisurely walks along Amsterdam's canals, time to sketch and no telephones, no Jan, no airports, no mothers . . . nothing!"

"OK, but stay awake until after we finish briefing Jan."

"How did the truck stop go?" I asked him.

"The Turin officers are real pros. Not a shot. Not even a whimper. I doubt the neighbors even knew that a raid had been staged. The place is secure. The lab boys will go over it tomorrow. I'm waiting on the report from Rome. They arrested the Art Minister and secured all the Brunelli and Navare properties. I expect to hear about the raids in France and Germany within the hour."

"Barb, how was your stop?"

"Dom, crashed their van into the barrier to stop them from making a U turn and escaping, then shot the driver when he tried to run us over. It took three minutes, start to finish. We'll tell you more over dinner tomorrow night. It has been a very long day. I need some sleep."

"Aren't you mother's due in tomorrow afternoon?"

"Oh shit!" We said in unison.

"Now come on, I want to meet them. My car will pick you up, we'll have dinner at my house at 8." CLICK.

"Dom, do we have . . ."

"Barb! In for a penny . . ."

"I know . . . In for a pound."

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Dean is a technical and science writer, only recently venturing into fiction. His fiction reflects a deep and life long interest in the details and nuances of history.

If It Looks Like a Duck is the follow-on to In For A Penney, In For A Pound. Gordian Knot completes Dominic and Barbara's first year as European Art and Culture Directive investigators and ties the stories together. These European art crime novels are set in the new millennium. They are also available as ebooks.

<u>Fog</u> is the first book in the Padre Sera trilogy. The following two novels, <u>Oil</u> and <u>Paper</u>, are also available as ebooks. This slice of California heritage was the prelude to the world changing attitudes and events that emitted from a singularly unique culture.

For a synopsis and preview of these books visit QuailwoodAssociates.com.

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