

Master  
Of The  
Welded  
Bead

By:

Kit Cain

# Master Of The Welded Bead

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# PREFACE

Originally written as a screenplay, I later realized that the nature of the screenplay doesn't include enough essential details to produce a proper feel for the story, introducing too many mechanical instructions essential for other professional film artists to have. The story is short because screenplays are quite short—110 to 120 pages—in order to accommodate the average 90-minute screen time.

The underlying theme of this story is my effort to illustrate what a man who is a master of his own personal universe looks like to me. The hero of the story, Warren “Jack” Diamond, is transparent at whatever level of society he chooses to move within at the moment. His dress and mannerisms may not be equal to those of the poor or very wealthy, but they are at least not intimidating and not purposely chosen to make any kind of statement. He feels unity with all of humanity and his actions express those inner feelings. His cheerful, outgoing, and humorous attitude place him on an equal footing with the self-important while at the same time his positive, encouraging friendliness and compassion for the poor in spirit and material well-being make him loved and respected at that level. In short, he moves through all levels of society with equanimity and without prejudice, but his trials and tests would sorely tax the mind, heart, and body of lesser souls ... or retire them to their gated community post haste!

The other major character of the story, Don Hendrix, is an old acquaintance of Jack's, but their paths through life have led them in quite divergent directions with resultant motivations and levels of awareness quite diametrically opposed to each other. The attempt to resolve this conflict is a recurrent theme throughout the story. Jack and Don, as young men just out of college, met during their tour of active duty in the U.S. Marine Corps while undergoing flight training. Though modest rivals, they were none-the-less great friends until going their separate ways after their armed forces duties were completed. Jack, being of a more adventurous nature, worked as a pilot in all kinds of aircraft and helicopters all over the globe, learning to be a qualified aircraft mechanic as well as having single-engine, multi-engine, helicopter, instrument, and airline pilot's ratings. He is a naturally mechanical person who loves working with his hands and also has specialty training in various trades, having gradually achieved the level of master welder over the years.

Don, on the other hand, moved into the business world right after his service obligations were completed and gradually worked his way up in corporate management until he had accumulated enough wealth and experience to buy his own company ... with more than

a little of his family's financial help it might also be added. In this story, the company he has purchased is a ship building company whose primary source of income lies in building small, high-speed gun ships for the military and government. Don's primary focus of attention is first of all on his own personal net worth (financially and socially), his company's success (but only as an extension of his personal pride), and his family (as objects of his personal pride and personal desires).

Other differences between the two men are equally as dramatic physically, emotionally, and mentally. Jack is physically in good shape for his age, controlling intuitively and intelligently his quantity, quality, and type of food and liquid intake, and he chooses trade professions that demand physical exertion as a form of exercise and muscular maintenance. Don, on the other hand, has "gone to pot" from over-indulgences in everything but exercise or any other kind of physical effort ... except perhaps sex.

Jack's relationship with his two daughters gives some idea of his capabilities—or limitations, depending upon point of view—as a Father in an age of broken families, greater freedoms of all kinds, and abundance beyond anything experienced before by the masses in our own short period of mankind's recorded history.

Other more colorful characters in the story—friends of Jack's from all social levels and walks of life—are caricatures of real people given more character, awareness, intelligence, and "joie de vivre" than they actually demonstrate in real life, but from whom Jack derives a certain measure of enjoyment and satisfaction through his own willingness to help and interact with them. Hendrix, on the other hand, would feel so far above most of these individuals that he would not bother to speak to them except with disdain—and most probably not at all.

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# CHAPTER 1.

Morgan River Shipyard sprawls along one side of the Morgan River right where it widens out into the North Atlantic Ocean. The city of Steeltown, once a well-known industrial city, straddles the river on both sides, the shipyard being in the industrial portion and next to the lesser social levels of the city. Several very large construction hangars landmark the yard from a distance along with a sprawling junkyard filled with rusted scrap steel, boat parts, junked steel fishing boats, and a coastal freighter waiting to be dismantled and sold for scrap. Granted that the shipyard is an eyesore to the community, it nevertheless employs over a hundred men and women in a somewhat sporadic fashion dependant largely on national and international government orders for small, fast gunboats and coastal patrol boats.

The shipyard is owned by a tough businessman named Don Hendrix who constantly resists demands by the town commissioners to clean up the mess, retorting that it doesn't bother him—and if it bothers anyone else, they can pay him to clean it up. Like so many things in life, however, where one finds a measure of darkness, one also finds an equally bright light—though in this case the light is masked in such a way as to appear unobvious to the eyes of the mundane, frustrating, and physically exhausting world of manual labor and heavy construction. Such a light is Warren “Jack” Diamond, a welder and a one-time companion of Hendrix in their younger years as U.S. Marine pilots.

Inside the largest hangar, the noise level increases dramatically. Steel being hammered, drilled, or dropped mingles with the grating sound of high-speed grinders and the scream of metal-cutting saws that require ear plugs to keep the workers from going deaf. Constant brilliant flashes of light from arc welders light up the inside of the hangar like lightning, and the smell of ozone and burned steel permeates everything. In the welding section, Jack Diamond puts the finishing weld on a hawse pipe, his body covered by a long leather apron, his face masked by a welder's helmet that enables him to stare into the brilliant white light of the welding arc without losing his eyesight. Jack is a Master Welder, self-taught, but known throughout the shipyard as a master of the welded bead. He would probably acknowledge the compliment with a shrug of the shoulders, but were there someone (which is there isn't) capable of seeing inside the more profound parts of his being who was to refer to him as a “Master Of The Welded Bead And Other Illusions Of The Universe” it would most assuredly bring a knowing smile to his face.

At his welding station inside the hangar, Jack straightens up, flips the used-up butt of a welding rod from the wand of his arc welder onto the concrete floor, and raises his

helmet to look at his work with a critical eye that misses nothing. Suddenly, from behind him, he hears his name being called.

“Jack? ... Jack!” yells Wanda, Don Hendrix’ personal secretary, above the din of the hangar.

Jack pulls off his helmet and slowly turns to look at Wanda.

“Hi, Wanda. What brings you down into the bowels of Hell?” Jack asks.

“Mr. Hendrix would like to see you as soon as possible,” she replies.

“*Mister* Hendrix?” Jack sneers with a slight smile on his face. “You mean, Don?”

“Suit yourself!” replies Wanda with a shrug of her shoulders.

Jack looks at his watch.

“Tell him I’ll be there at 1:30. I have to meet my daughter at the airport in fifteen minutes. In fact, I’m late now.”

“Okay ... I’ll tell him,” replies Wanda reluctantly, “but he isn’t going to like it!”

“Tell him to count his money ‘till I get there!” replies Jack sarcastically.

“Oh, sure! ... and who’s going to hire me tomorrow?” replies Wanda.

Jack hurriedly sheds his leather apron and heavy leather welder’s gauntlets, punches himself out with his time card, and heads for the parking lot. He climbs into an immaculately reconstructed Volkswagen “Thing”—the civilian version of the World War II German Jeep—and makes his way to the local airport. His daughter Jenny waits patiently for him at the curbside with her suitcase and the two of them proceed homeward.

“Sorry I’m late, Honey. I’m now old enough to start losing track of time,” says Jack.

“I wasn’t really worried, Dad,” says Jenny quietly.

They look at each other. Jack takes Jenny’s hand.

“I’m sure proud of you making your own way like you are. I think about you more than you’ll ever know,” says Jack.

Jack suddenly brakes hard enough to make the tires squeal slightly. Jenny is startled to see some ne’er-do-well pushing a shopping cart full of junk into the street directly in front of their car and making his way to Jack’s window. Before Jenny can ask what’s going on, Jack comes to a stop, rolls down his window, and speaks to the individual as though he knows him well.

“Ike ... for God’s sake! You’re blocking traffic!” says Jack, slightly exasperated.

Ike reaches into his shopping cart, pulls out a slightly worn mini metal grinder, and holds it up for Jack to see.

“Ten bucks!” says Ike, a man of very few words.

By now the traffic behind Jack is becoming impatient, horns are blowing, and there are more than a few impatient faces in Jack’s rearview mirror.

“Bring it over later,” says Jack, leaving Ike stranded in the middle of the traffic.

“Who was that, Dad?” asks Jenny

“That was Ike ... one of my ‘friends of a lesser-experienced soul’, if you know what I mean,” replies Jack, “and there’s another one over there on the street corner painting at the artist’s easel. That’s Trudy ... you’ll like Trudy.”

Trudy is a huge woman dressed in gaily colored attire and wearing a crazy floppy hat. Her constant speech and wild gesticulations indicate that she is one who obviously enjoys being the center of attention, and by the nature of the people from all walks of life and social class seated or standing around her, she is intimidated by no one. Just as Jack and Jenny are passing by, she bursts into the loudest and most infectious laugh imaginable ... the noise echoing throughout the park and for at least a city block in all directions. As they pass, Jack pushes the button on his electric tape recorder/noise machine and the loudspeaker just behind the front grille sends out a loud OOOOOGAH! Trudy turns quickly and waves.

“Hi, Jack!” she yells in a boisterous voice. Jack waves and drives on.

“Good Lord, Dad,” exclaims Jenny. “These are your friends?”

“I don’t really have a lot to do with them,” replies Jack, “but they don’t have many people they can turn to for help, so I help them out every now and then.”

“You’ve sure moved further into the lower side of life than you were when we were together,” said says Jenny.

“I guess it may look that way, but only because you’re older now and see a different side of me,” replies Jack. “I got tired of fences around subdivisions; fences around houses; and fences around everybody’s heart. Money and its acquisition seem to insulate people from one another ... and that’s not all bad ... but people who have money entertain themselves in quite a different manner than those who have to make their own entertainment, as you will see while you’re with me.”

“You’re not afraid of crime or violence in this part of town,” asks Jenny.

“I’m not exactly the victim type!” laughs Jack, “but there are other, deeper reasons why I have no fear.”

“Such as ...?” asks Jenny.

“For one thing, I’ve hunted down my fears like a dragon slayer,” says Jack. “The minute I found myself fearful of something, I purposefully and carefully experienced it or examined it until I understood it well enough to fear it no longer. Some people fear the unknown. I used to. Now, the unknown is my playground. I’ve grown to trust it as much as I trust the known.”

As Jack’s buggy approaches the far side of the town park, Jenny notices two more characters gesturing in their direction. One of them—obviously a Preacher of some ilk, as noted by his dress—is standing on a box, Bible in hand, sending some sort of a hand-waved blessing in their direction. His companion of considerably shorter stature,

unshaven, dressed in an odd assortment of Salvation Army clothes, and boasting a pair of black oversized gumboots, gives Jack a buddy-type wave. Jack again responds with his electronic noise generator. This time, the loudspeaker behind the front grille of the Jeep blurts out a very loud DING! ... DONG!

“Another friend?” asks Jenny.

“They’re fun! They’ve always got something besides ‘Hi, how’re you today?’ Ike always has good used things for sale for a pittance, and I’m probably his best customer. He gets stuff out of garbage bins and I don’t even want to know where the rest comes from. Preacher there, he should be on stage. Have you ever tried to be original with religion? He does it without even trying. The secret is to help them and not get too close.”

“This is going to be interesting!” remarks Jenny. “I can’t wait to see the home you been telling me about. A ship in a junkyard is a long way from a \$300,000 house in Denver!”

“Shorter distance than you think!” Jack replies, “...and this place is free!”

Jack makes his way on the town streets around the perimeter of the huge Shipyard grounds which are surrounded by a high steel fence. At the far end of the junkyard and close to the water he stops at a gate in the steel fence which is securely locked with a chain and padlock. Unlocking the padlock, he drives slowly into the junkyard on a very rugged dirt road marked with potholes. He stops beneath the bow of a 150-foot-long, rusting steel ship’s hull with the words LAND LADY crudely painted high up on the bow. The ship was once a small coastal freighter now hauled up high and dry for dismantling and recycling as scrap steel.

Mid way between the bow and the stern and not too far out from the keel, Jack has cut a large hole in the steel plate and welded in place a steel gangway ladder which extends from the ground upward into the dark bowels of the ship’s interior. Jack and Jenny climb up the steel steps of the gangway ladder past a massive diesel engine, pipes, valves, generators, pumps, and other paraphernalia of the ship’s engine room and finally onto the third level of platforms which lead to the ship’s living quarters. They walk toward the stern of the ship past several stateroom doors on each side until coming to a nicely-decorated door at the end of the hall which has a polished brass nameplate saying CAPTAIN’S CABIN.

As they walk into the captain’s cabin, Jenny can see a sleeping area on the left side, a small galley kitchen on the right side, and the entire stern being a living/sitting room with portholes placed at even intervals all the way around the ship’s stern and sides. The interior of the cabin is impeccably decorated with ship’s memorabilia, signal flags, brass lights and lanterns, beautiful pictures, a number of living plants, and an odd, but neat and clean assortment of wood and leather furniture.

“WOW! Dad!” remarks Jenny excitedly. “This is so neat! Did you do all this yourself?”

“Most of it.” replies Jack.

“How did all this come about?” asks Jenny.

“If I remember correctly, I told you about meeting my old Marine Corps Flight School buddy, Don Hendrix, in a store in Steeltown one day, and when he found out I was a welder, he asked me if I wanted a job as a welder in his shipyard. I took him up on his offer and came to find out the company had a problem with ne'er-do-wells breaking through the fence and building fires and little shacks back here in this part of the junkyard. I had already spent numerous hours out here wandering around, looking the junkyard over, and been up on this ship and in the captain's cabin ... though it certainly didn't look anything like it does today. I thought to myself this would make one hell-of-a nice living suite and so told Don that I could take care of his problem by living back here. He was really appalled at his old buddy wanting to live in the company junkyard, but he quickly agreed since it offered a cheap solution to his problem. He still won't come out here ... it's just a little too far beneath him.”

“It's so cozy,” remarks Jenny.

“Not much is new,” Jack adds. “The table came from Goodwill; the easy chair from the Salvation Army. The rest came from yard sales here and there, and various dumpsters in the wealthy part of town. Oh! I almost forgot! I have to meet with Hendrix. Go back down the hall a couple of doors until you find a stateroom with your name on it. There's a little surprise for you. See you later.”

Jack returns to work and his meeting with Don Hendrix.

Jenny makes her way out of the Captain's Cabin, down the hall, and stops at the door of a stateroom which has a small polished brass plate with her name on it that she had not noticed when passing by before. She slowly opens the door and peers in.

“Andy!” Jenny exclaims.

She runs over to the bunk bed, falls to her knees, and hugs the huge Panda Bear propped up at the head of the bunk.

“Andy, where did you come from? I haven't seen you for years. Oh ... Dad!” says Jenny as the tears fill her eyes from happy memories of the distant past.

## CHAPTER 2.

The Executive offices of the Morgan River Shipyard Co. lie in a separate building which adjoins the Main hangar building. As Jack walks into the Office of the President, he first encounters the secretarial office where Wanda looks up at him with a scowl on her face.

“Go on in,” she says. “He’s waiting for you ... and not very patiently, either.”

Jack walks into Hendrix’ office.

“Nice of you to come up, Jack!” growls Hendrix facetiously.

“Get back on your throne, you Turkey! You can choose your lunch hour—I can’t. What would you be wanting me for?” asks Jack.

“I can use a little of your help,” says Hendrix condescendingly.

“You’ve got something to weld, maybe?” says Jack facetiously.

“Right!” growls Hendrix in a disgusted voice.

“Management? ... again?” says Jack.

“I offered you a management position and you wouldn’t take it,” adds Hendrix.

“What good would it have done? You don’t listen to me,” says Jack. “My ideas are like from another planet. I don’t need that kind of frustration. What is it this time?”

“Help me hold off the strike for another two weeks until the Patrol Boat contracts are let.” Hendricks says quietly.

“I don’t control the Strike Committee. The Union does.” adds Jack.

“Yes, but they’ll listen to you.” Hendricks says.

“They listen to me because I’m human. They don’t listen to you because you’re a greed-bag and you lie to them.” says Jack with a very firm voice. “You don’t have to be an insider to know who gets the money around here.”

“Look, knock off the bullshit, Jack!” exclaims Hendrix with no small amount of anger.

“This is very important for the company as well as you. If we don’t get the Patrol Boat contract, there may not be any work for anybody.”

“I don’t like siding with management when I don’t agree with their philosophy,” says Jack with a matter-of-fact tone to his voice.

“You’re going to be retired in six months! What difference does company philosophy make to you?” demands Hendrix.

Jack looks out the window and thinks for a minute.

“Okay. I’ll try,” says Jack. “But if I succeed, I want five hours of flight time in the P-51.”

“What! It costs five hundred bucks an hour just to keep that thing in the air,” replies Hendrix in an exasperated tone of voice.

“Yeah,” replies Jack, “and it’s my money and the other guys’ money the keeps it there!”

“It is in a pig’s ass!” exclaims Hendrix. “It’s my personal money that pays for that airplane.”

“And where do you get that money?” says Jack intensely. “Are you worth ten, twenty times what I’m worth? You want to post your expense account on the cafeteria bulletin board so the workers can all see where their money goes? *Is the hand worth less than the brain?*”

There’s a long pause during which time Hendrix looks intensely at Jack with something considerably less than friendship.

“Answer me! Is the hand worth less than the brain?” demands Jack.

“Fuck!” exclaims Hendrix. “You always were a problem!”

“Right! ... like back in flight training I should’ve bailed out just after I gave you that practice fuel-failure emergency,” says Jack.

“Well, you could’ve at least waited ‘till 2,000 ft. instead of turning the fuel off at the end of the fucking runway,” says Hendrix, remembering all too well that very frightening incident.

Jack laughs boisterously.

“Even then you forgot what you were supposed to do,” says Jack with a smile on his face. “You were suckin’ up pine needles through your puckered ass before I finally turned the damn fuel pump on. It’s always your help that bails you out ... and you think you’re worth ten times what they’re worth! What’re you gonna do this time if there’s no Patrol Boat contract?”

“I’m working on it. I’ve got several other big deals in the fire. One of them will come through ... you watch ... they always do,” says Hendrix with assuring confidence.

“You’re gonna need some loaded dice, Don,” says Jack. “Things are too far out of balance here, and you’re the only one who can put the balance back. You get too much, and we get too little. It’s getting to be time for me to leave anyway, but I’m not doing anything unless you give me a lot more reward than you’ve given me in the past. Five hours in the P-51 is little enough to ask.”

“Three! ... You pay for the gas!” retorts Hendrix.

“Four hours! ... and YOU pay for the gas!” Jack demands.

“Only if you get me the extension,” adds Hendrix.

“I’ll see what I can do,” Jack replies and turns to go.

Several hours later, Jack is sitting in his living room in the Captain’s Cabin talking on the telephone to one of the Union executives. Jenny is preparing food in the galley.

“I’m in favor of this strike totally,” explains Jack, “but I’m finding out Hendrix is in more financial trouble than we think. If the government gets wind of any labor unrest, it may influence the letting of the Patrol Boat contracts. Also, it may just push this company over the brink into bankruptcy. I don’t know what else to tell you, except that’s the way it looks

from here ... and from my latest conversation with Hendrix a few hours ago.”

There’s a long silence while Jack listens to the reply.

“That’s fine,” Jack says. “Get back to me as soon as you make a decision. Talk to you later ...and thanks, Jim.”

Jack hangs up with a grim look on his face.

“Is the company in financial trouble?” asks Jenny.

“Yes,” replies Jack, “but this isn’t the first time. Hendricks has always pulled it off at the last moment before; nobody knows how. I have a feeling this time it may be different. He’s not quite as cocky as he usually is.”

“You aren’t worried?” asks Jenny.

“In six months I’m a free man,” replies Jack, “ ... retirement pay; social security; and I’m outa’ here. For all I care, this whole damned ship can sink; I’m finished with making it my personal problem.”

“How’s Casey doing?” asks Jenny, changing the subject to ask about her half-sister.

“She’s going to be here sometime next week,” says Jack.

“She is?” says Jenny, somewhat excited.

“Yes ... and it may not be too much fun,” replies Jack.

“Why not?” replies Jenny. “We have fun together.”

“Her mother’s put her foot down again. Instead of putting her foot down firmly each day, she waits until things become a huge time bomb. Then she slams her foot down—for a while—and then gives in. This time Cayce’s decided to come live with me for a while. Things may get wild around here. As you know, I don’t give in at all!” says Jack.

“I can handle it. After all, Dad, I am your daughter!” says Jenny.

“Yes, but Casey doesn’t have as many things going for her as you do,” replies Jack.

“As I’ve told you before, there’s no such thing as an accident of chance or fate in this Universe. You had help when you needed it because you deserved help. There’s nothing rebellious or lazy about you.”

Jenny is silent for a few moments.

“I think I should probably go by and visit Mom tonight,” she says. “Could you please drop me off there?”

“Sure. I’ll go by the club and visit Marty,” says Jack.

“Who’s Marty?”

“She’s a singer,” replies Jack, “a very nice girl; about ten years older than you.”

“Is she ... are you ... um,” asks Jenny, unsure quite what question to ask.

“She’s not exactly sure what I am,” Jack says, “ ... father image; lover image; security blanket; hard-times counselor; or just a good friend.”

“And how do you see it?”

“All of the above!” replies Jack with laughter. “Let’s go. We’ll get a bite to eat on the way.”

After leaving Jenny at her mother's, Jack makes his way to the local nightclub where he is well-known. The band is playing as he walks in and Marty is part way through one of her songs. She notices Jack the minute he comes through the door and smiles at him without missing a beat. Jack smiles in return and takes a table off to the side, ordering a beer when the waitress comes by. When Marty's song is finished, the band takes a break and Marty moves to Jack's table, pulling a chair over next to him.

"Where have you been, you old Devil?" asks Marty.

"I guess it's been three whole days, hasn't it?" replies Jack.

"Well?" continues Marty.

"Problems at work that take my mind off you," replies Jack.

"They must be very big problems!" says Marty kiddingly.

"Oh, they are! ... bond underwritings; new stock issues; political parties in D.C.; the president's secretary pregnant and she's not sure if it's her husband, her boyfriend, the President of the company, or the Chairman of the Board," says Jack facetiously, then adds, "You're still a little nervous when you sing, aren't you?"

"Nyaooh! ... not a bit!" responds Marty.

"The mike is shaking because it weighs a ton, right? ... or maybe there's a high wind up on the stage that I don't feel!" says Jack with a smile on his face.

Jack takes Marty's hand in his.

"Oh ... your palms are sweaty!" Jack remarks. "That happens to me when I'm really nervous ... like in an airplane flying under extremely dangerous conditions."

"Well, if you can be nervous under some conditions, why can't I?" counters Marty.

"Marty, if I was nervous every time I got into airplane, I'd have no business being in an airplane!"

"I still wouldn't call myself fearful, Jack."

"Fearful ... nervous ... it's pretty much the same thing," Jack says. "The nervousness that you feel is transmitted sub-consciously to your audience. It's a small thing, but you have such a great voice that you would go a lot further if you cleared up that little detail."

"And how would you suggest that I do that?" asks Marty.

"The same way that anyone overcomes limitations," replies Jack, "By putting yourself in a position that produces anxiety or nervousness, studying it, asking yourself what makes you feel the way you do, and then talking yourself out of your response. There are occasions when anxiety, nervousness, and fear are well justified as warnings that one is over-extending one's self. You are very good at your trade. You are not over-extending yourself. No one in the audience is going to throw rotten eggs at you. You aren't going to die if you miss a note or two, so just relax and turn your nervousness into a new power of projection."

"Boy, that's a mouthful!" remarks Marty. "I don't even understand what you mean let alone how to do it."

“Would you like me to help you with it?” asks Jack.

“Sure,” says Marty, not knowing what she’s letting herself in for.

“You have to let me be your petty tyrant for a while because that’s part of the game, okay?”

“Okay,” replies Marty. “Whoops! Here comes the band; it’s time for me to get back to the mike . Meet me in my room after the next set.”

Jack nods and smiles at her as she gets up.

Twenty minutes later, Jack is sitting in Marty’s hotel room at the top of the club while Marty is in the bathroom removing makeup.

“I don’t understand why you can’t be a little more serious about our relationship,” says Marty from the bathroom.

“It’s fear!” says Jack from the sitting room.

Just then Marty walks out of the bathroom in her scanty bra, and scanty, frilly panties. She has an incredibly beautiful body which draws Jack’s attention like a powerful magnet.

“Fear?” exclaims Marty facetiously. “I thought I was talking to the fearless one.”

“No, Sweetheart,” Jack replies gently. “I said you should recognize fear for what it is, admit that you have it, decide whether there’s any real danger to your being, and then either keep it around as a warning or banish it from your world.”

“So, I’m a real danger to your being!” exclaims Marty.

“In a sense ... yes,” says Jack.

“What’s that sense?”

“Marty ... I’m not sure I want to talk about this. I don’t want to hurt your feelings.”

“Hurt my feelings?” exclaims Marty. “You tear me apart daily like it’s part of your milk run, and you don’t want to hurt my feelings? Come on, Jack, talk to me.”

Jack pauses to think for a minute in an effort to choose his words carefully.

“You don’t see the difference between us, do you, Marty?”

“No, I don’t,” Marty replies. “I get along better with you than I have with any man I’ve ever known. I know what happens when I get my body up next to yours. You can’t lie about that! How many women do you know like me?”

“None, Marty. That’s why I’m here. But our physical relationship is not where the problem lies.”

“So, just what is the problem?”

“It’s your perspective,” Jack replies, “You want this relationship to be so close that there’s no separation ... no freedom for either one of us. It’s what happens when you’re not complete in and of yourself ... when there’s still a big empty space in your being.”

“Well ... but ... what else are relationships for?” asks Marty plaintively.

“Partly for the purpose of filling that need,” replies Jack, “But it only works well when you have a partner with the same need ... and I don’t fall into that category.”

“You’re talking about the spiritual difference between us, then,” says Marty.

“That’s the major problem, Marty. The other one is an age difference.”

“You certainly don’t FEEL like there’s an age difference between us,” remarks Marty.

“I’ve already raised two families,” replies Jack. “The first one was unplanned and due to stupidity on my part; the second was by acceptance because that was part of the package placed before me. You’ve mentioned many times that you want to have a family of your own. I don’t want another twenty years of that kind of responsibility. There are plenty of men in the world willing to accommodate you,”

“But I want so badly for this to work out,” says Marty with tears in her eyes.

“Marty, I love you very much just the way you are,” says Jack getting up and putting his arms around her. “I’ve already experienced the things you have yet to experience. Were the circumstances different, I might be willing to experience them all over again just for you, but such is not the case. A major part of life’s instruction is to teach us to make the most we can of what is placed before us, and that’s just exactly what I’m trying to do right now.”

Jack looks at his watch.

“Uh-Oh!” he exclaims. “I told Jenny I’d pick her up at her mother’s ten minutes ago.”

“Dammit, Jack!” exclaims Marty.

Jack stands very still, looking at Marty intensely for several seconds.

“See what I mean?” asks Jack very quietly. “Release me!”

“Sometimes you make me so mad ...!” says Marty.

“You’re just making yourself mad, Sweetheart. Let’s get together Sunday afternoon. I’ll give you a call. See you later.”

## CHAPTER 3.

The next day Jack drives to the airport to pick up his step-daughter, Casey, who makes it quite clear all the way from the airport that she is not in a very good mood. As Jack pulls up underneath the bow of the Land Lady, Casey's face takes on a somewhat disgruntled look.

"Honestly, Dad," she says, "I don't know why you choose to live in a junkyard. Why don't you have a nice home like we did in Denver?"

"It's not that important to me, Casey," Jack replies. "This is actually much more fun ... and a lot less responsibility. It's also free."

"Doesn't look like fun to me," Casey mutters under her breath.

Jack stops her short as she is unloading her bags, looks her very intensely in the face and says equally as firmly:

"You don't have to be here, you know!"

Casey looks away with a slight sneer on her face. Jack picks up several of the bags and walks up the steel gangway into the ship, Casey following.

Casey's stateroom is full of animals and dolls, big and small, covering the bunk bed. There's a small makeup dresser and mirror in the corner, and pictures all over the walls of young men, fast cars, surfers, and movie posters. Casey surveys the room carefully as she walks in.

"Hey!" she says, "Something's missing. Where's Panda?"

"You mean Jenny's Panda?" asks Jack. "When I let you borrow him, I specifically told you that he went back to Jenny when she was here. Do you not recall my words?"

"Then I don't know why you gave him to me if he was going back to her," Casey replies indignantly.

"Well, if you can't figure that one out, I can't help you any further with it," replies Jack looking at his watch. "We'll be eating in about an hour. Come up when you're ready."

"What's for dinner?" asks Casey.

"Dinner!" replies Jack.

"If I don't like it, I may not eat," states Casey in a very matter-of-fact, controlling fashion.

"Stir-fried chicken and rice," says Jack calmly.

"I'll pass, thanks," says Casey busying herself with her suitcases.

"Suit yourself," replies Jack, leaving.

An hour or so later, Jack and Jenny are sitting at the table with no sign of Casey.

"Good dinner, Dad!" remarks Jenny.

Jack nods his head and they eat on in silence.

“What’s on your mind?” asks Jenny.

Jack thinks for a minute and then says:

“I guess I must still need a button-pusher because that’s exactly what Casey does to me very often when I’m around her.”

“What else is new?” remarks Jenny. “She’s never been any different, but she’s not always that way either.”

“She’s old enough now to start thinking about someone other than herself. What the hell’s wrong with what I cook and eat? It’s done with careful thought and consideration. Can’t she see that?”

“Feed her mashed potatoes and gravy,” comments Jenny. “She’ll always eat that.”

“For some reason, I just don’t feel like accommodating that kind of consciousness,” replies Jack.

“Wait ‘till the half-hour-shower starts!” comments Jenny.

“The half-hour-shower! Right!” says Jack.

Just then, as though prompted by the conversation, water starts running through the ship’s pipes and Jack glances at the clock.

“There it is! The half-hour-shower!” remarks Jack with a disgusted look on his face.

“Can I quote you?” asks Jenny with a smile on her face.

Jack nods his head.

“What am I doing in a space where this is real to me?” quotes Jenny from Jack’s teachings.

Jack replies with a mock British accent:

“Oi think Oi c’n ‘andle this, Mate,” he says, getting up. “Right now, let’s you and me get out of here and go to a show.”

“Sounds good to me,” says Jenny, as they grab their jackets and leave for the local theater.

Two hours later, they return from the movies to discover the entire ship vibrating with loud rock music which seems to emanate from somewhere near the aft end and the captain’s cabin. On entering the captain’s cabin, the noise becomes deafening, and there is Casey in a pair of tights, dancing herself into a sweat. Jack walks over and turns the volume down.

“Nice stereo, Dad!” remarks Casey. “I didn’t know you liked ROCK HOUNDS.”

“Actually, I don’t,” replies Jack. “That’s your disk that’s been there since the last time you were here.”

“Where have you guys been?” asks Casey.

“We went to the show,” replies Jack.

Casey puts her hands on her hips and responds indignantly:

“Thanks for waiting for me!”

“If we’d waited for you, we’d have missed the show,” says Jack. “You had just started your half-hour shower when we left. And while we’re on the subject, we don’t do half-hour showers here, as I’ve told you before. You get twelve minutes once a day.”

“But, Dad, I can’t wash my long hair and shave my legs and arms in twelve minutes,” Casey complains. “I just can’t do it!”

“You can take an hour if you like,” adds Jack in as calm a voice as possible, “just don’t run the water more than twelve minutes. This ship has no sewer! Do you hear me? ... no sewer! I have to pay to have a truck pump out the sewer tanks.”

Casey storms out of the room and slams the door behind her.

Early the next morning, Jack heads for the Executive Offices before donning his welder’s outfit. As he walks into Wanda’s office, he says:

“What kind of mood’s he in today?”

“Intense! ... No change!” replies Wanda.

“I have to talk to him for a minute,” says Jack.

“No way! You’re better off trying to talk to a hungry lion!” says Wanda.

“It’s good news,” says Jack. “The strike is off for now.”

“Oh ... good news he can handle,” says Wanda reaching for the button on her intercom.

“Strike’s off! Jack has to talk to you.”

“Send him in,” says the intercom. Wanda nods her head towards Hendrix’ door, smiling.

Jack walks in to Hendrix office.

“I knew you could do it, Buddy Boy!” says Hendrix boisterously and with much relief.

“It’s just temporary, Don,” adds Jack. “We haven’t really resolved anything.”

“I’ve got a line on two fat contracts,” states Hendrix enthusiastically. “We land one; then we negotiate. Either the employees work, or they leave!”

“That’s real negotiation!” replies Jack disgustedly.

“They’re overpaid now!” states Hendrix, knowing there’s some element of truth in what he says.

“That may be so ... when they’re actually working,” replies Jack, “But they don’t know what this company’s problems are. There’s no communication between the top and the bottom.”

“Why should there be?” demands Hendrix incredulously. “It’s real simple: the top leads; the bottom follows.”

“Oh, right! You’re fifty years behind the times, old friend,” replies Jack. “You’ve got working partners, not slaves! These people are like you and me. They have hopes and dreams too. They’re the ones who get you where you’re going ... and where does it get them? Do you give them rewards? A piece of the company? They’d all work harder, longer and

for less if they understood the company's problems and had a long-term goal."

"I'm telling you, they're overpaid now!" states Hendrix flatly. "You want me to cut their pay back and give them a lump-sum reward? ... Okay, I can do that. You want them to own a piece of the company? Just tell them to walk the two blocks down the street to Richardson, Blaine, and Evers and buy stock like everyone else does."

"You're not on my wavelength, Don," replies Jack. "What you say is half right, but what I'm saying is far more synergistic ... gets everybody working toward the same goal and enthusiastic about what they're doing. What's needed here is a change in attitude as well as a change in procedure. If the executives took less when times are rough; if everyone felt the bite at all levels ..."

"They do!" interrupts Hendrix. "No work ... no profits ... no bonuses!"

"They get two to ten times as much ... plus bonuses!" adds Jack in an exasperated tone of voice, "and we're back again to that old human issue: if it takes everyone to make the company run, who's worth more than who?"

"What it is ... is what it is!" replies Hendrix, terminating the conversation for good.

Jack stands up and holds out his hand.

"Keys, please." he says.

"To what?" replies Hendrix.

"The airplane!" says Jack. "What the hell do you think I want the keys to, your wife's chastity belt?"

"They disappeared a long time ago" mutters Hendrix.

"I don't wonder," says Jack.

Hendricks pulls the keys to the P-51's cockpit from his desk drawer and tosses them to Jack.

"Don't hurt it," he adds, " ... and there's not much gas left in the tanks."

"God dammit, Don! You always change your fucking agreements in mid-stream ... in YOUR favor! Gimme your credit card, you Greedbag ... come on!"

Hendricks has a devilish smile on his face when he reaches for his wallet and pulls out the credit card, holding it up in a teasing fashion to Jack. Jack grabs it, shakes his head, and leaves. Hendricks drops into his big leather desk chair, folds his hands up behind his head, and looks out the window with a satisfied smile on his face.

Jack dances past Wanda, waving the keys in the air and singing a little ditty.

"Kick the tire, light the fire, and it's off we go into the wild, blue yonder, climbing high, into the sun" ... and he dances out the door.

As promised, when Sunday morning rolls around, Jack calls Marty and invites her to go for a drive. He's not quite sure if she'll go for the plan he has in mind, so he decides to be very devious about it. As though the event occurs strictly by chance, they just happen to drive by the airport where the P-51 is located.

“Oh, you know what?” says Jack naively. “This is the airport where Hendrix keeps his World War II fighter airplane. Want to go have a look at it? It’s really an exciting piece of machinery.”

“Okay,” says Marty.

Jack drives around the airport to the private flight service hangar, pulls out onto the aircraft parking tarmac, stops not far from a shiny silver-colored P-51. They climb out of Jack’s little custom Jeep and walk over to the airplane.

“WOW!” says Marty. “Is this ever impressive! What’s it like to fly in one of these things?”

“It’s sort of like riding on a motorcycle ... only there isn’t any wind,” replies Jack.

“That sounds like fun,” says Marty. “Does it tip?”

“Does a motorcycle tip when it turns, Marty?” says Jack.

“What happens if the motor stops?” asks Marty.

“The plane still flies if the motor stops!” says Jack, somewhat exasperated. “You just put it down on the runway or on the highway. How many planes have you seen on the highway in your whole life?”

“None.”

“That should tell you how safe it is,” adds Jack. “Being in this thing is like being on a magic carpet. You look down, you see the farmland below ... the desert ... smooth as silk. Want to go for a ride?”

“In this one?” asks Marty.

“Yes,” says Jack. “This is the one I fly all the time.”

“Oh, yeah?” remarks Marty.

“Don’t tell me you have a FEAR of heights?” asks Jack facetiously.

“Nope.” replies Marty somewhat hesitantly.

Jack climbs up onto the wing and opens the canopy.

“C’mon up here and try it out,” suggests Jack.

“I don’t think so,” says Marty.

Jack, disgusted, drops the canopy.

“Shit! ... you want to know what the big difference between us is,” says Jack. “Your guts are all in your stomach! I’m not going up in this thing to commit suicide, you know!”

“Oh, well, okay,” replies Marty, realizing she has no way out of that one, “... but promise me you won’t do anything crazy.”

“Everything I do is calculated to be safe and get us back here in the same shape we left in,” replies Jack, carefully avoiding the promise.

Marty climbs up onto the wing and into the rear seat of the P-51. Jack shows her how to strap in.

“What are all these straps for?” asks Marty naively.

“They hold the airplane together, Dummy!” replies Jack. “Here, put this on your head so I can talk to you.”

Jack hands her a helmet which she puts over her head and ears, and Jack snaps the chin strap.

“When you want to talk to me, push this little button here,” says Jack.

Jack notices that her hands are shaking with apprehension.

“Marty, relax, sweetheart. Airplanes fly all over the skies twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. You are far safer in an airplane than you are in an automobile, and those are well-known statistics.”

Marty relaxes and smiles at Jack. Jack climbs into the front seat, fires up the big Rolls-Royce Merlin engine, and starts to taxi out onto the taxi strip toward the duty runway. He calls the control tower for clearance and the control tower replies.

“Fox-trot 51 Alpha, you’re cleared for takeoff when ready. No traffic in the local pattern.”

“Roger, 51 Alpha,” replies Jack.

“Who’s that you’re talking to?” Marty asks Jack over the intercom.

“The guy in that tower over there,” Jack replies. “He makes sure airplanes don’t run into each other. Plus, he’s had his eyes on you with his binoculars since you got out of the car. The Blue Angels could buzz this field and he’d never even notice. Wave to him ... or give him the finger ... anything you like. Here we go.”

The engine noise builds to a deafening roar and the power of the acceleration forces Marty and Jack into their seat-backs for a few seconds. The rumble of the wheels on the runway ceases after a few seconds as the P-51 climbs into the air, but the air is smooth as silk as Jack throttles back and reduces the propeller RPM.

“See? Nice and smooth,” says Jack over the intercom. “I’m going to make a little turn here so we can head out onto the desert.”

Jack banks into a slight left turn. Marty immediately reaches for the sides of the cockpit.

“Whoa! ...Oh, Shit!” says Marty, alarmed at the change in flight attitude.

“Just relax and go with it,” says Jack calmly on the intercom, “Just like you would going around a turn on a motorcycle or on a roller coaster.”

“I’d rather have my arms around you than be strapped into this beast,” remarks Marty.

“What are these little bags for?”

“They’re lunch bags,” remarks Jack.

“We didn’t bring any lunch,” adds Marty.

“Right! Just remember where they are,” Jack says. “Hey, look down there among the rocks. That looks like a little pueblo ... a lone Indian camp. I’ve been out here a number of times and never seen that before. Let’s go down and take a look.”

The P-51 does an abrupt wing-over; the engine power comes off; and the plane plummet's straight down towards the earth ... the wind whistling by at an ever-increasing pitch. Marty grabs for anything she can hold onto.

"What the fuck are you doing?" screams Marty at the top of her lungs.

"Not exactly a motorcycle maneuver," Jack replies over the intercom, "But then, this isn't a motorcycle."

"Stop it, will you, Jack," Marty yells.

Jack turns off the intercom so Marty's voice can only faintly be heard in the background. She pounds on the rear control panel; screams, but Jack pays no attention though he can still see her in the rearview mirror.

The P-51 pulls out of its dive just above the ground and zooms up and over the Indian pueblo in a tight ninety-degree banked turn. A lone Indian comes out, peers up, waves, and Jack waggles the P-51 wings. Marty has her hand over mouth, and is turning white.

"Put your lunch in the bag, sweetheart," says Jack kindly. "That's what the bags are for."

Marty's spends the rest of the flight throwing up, passing out, in tears, or cursing. Jack heads back for the airfield, drops the landing gear and the landing pattern, and squeaks the wheels onto the runway with barely a bounce. The plane taxis to its parking space, the huge propeller spins to a halt, and Jack climbs out.

## CHAPTER 4.

Marty is pretending to be passed out in the rear seat. Jack unstraps her safety harness and lifts her up out of the cockpit.

“C’mon there Fearless Wonder. Most women wouldn’t get near a plane like this.” says Jack affectionately.

“And I never will again, you Bastard! You Son-Of -A-Bitch! That wasn’t fair,” says Marty, starting to cry. “That was mean, Jack. I’m never going to trust you again.”

“Marty! ... stop this shit!” replies Jack adamantly. “Are you alive and in one piece?”

“I don’t know.” replies Marty.

“You’re supposed to be fearless!” says Jack, putting Marty down next to the car. “Get in the car and stop feeling sorry for yourself.”

Marty falls into the passenger seat and Jack reaches into the cooler on the back seat, pulling out several bottles and a cup with some ice in it.

“What’re you doing?” asks Marty, turning around suspiciously.

“Boy, are you ever skittish!” says Jack. “I’m mixing you the strongest Margarita you ever drank!”

“It can’t be strong enough!” exclaims Marty.

“According to pilot’s law you’re required to have four of these after your first flight,” says Jack, “and then we’re going to take you home and put you right to bed so you can forget all about an experience you’ll talk about for the rest of your life.”

“With you?” asks Marty.

“With me, what?” asks Jack.

“Am I going to bed with you?” asks Marty.

“Not if you’re sick and full of fear and hatefull bile and all that shit,” replies Jack.

Marty suddenly brightens up and acts like a child.

“Oh ... suddenly I’m feeling much better. It must be the Margarita. I might even go flying with you agai...WHOA! What am I Saying! Oh, forget it!” says Marty with an evil smile on her face.

“More!” demands Marty, holding out her glass.

By the time at Jack and Marty arrive at Marty’s apartment, Marty is not only slurring her words, but also having great difficulty staying upright. Once in her bedroom, she undresses with all the abandon that only alcohol can produce. Clothes go flying in every direction on the way into the bathroom and shower. Jack watches with amusement and as soon as Marty disappears into the shower stall, Jack undresses and climbs in the shower with her.

“What you doing in here!” giggles Marty.

“Just thought I’d make sure you stay upright,” replies Jack

“By the looks of it, I’m not the only thing that’s upright in this shower!” says Marty.

“I think there’s a snake in your shower,” says Jack.

“That’s one snake I’m not afraid of,” replies Marty.

“Next time you go flying, we’ll start with the Margaritas,” says Jack, “But if you see me having even one, you’d better stay on the ground.”

“Deal,” replies Marty.

Marty and Jack wrap themselves around each other between the sheets of the bed.

“I never get enough of you,” says Marty.

“Let’s keep it that that way,” Jack replies.

“At least you could let me get bored with you just once,” she adds.

“Not a chance,” Jack replies. “Then you’d have to go looking for someone more exciting.”

“Than you? Where would I go to find that?” asks Marty.

“Desire is the mother of invention,” adds Jack.

“Hmph! My desires don’t seem to be mothering the kind of invention I’m looking for,” states Marty.

“You aren’t the only one in that boat, Sweetheart!” replies Jack emphatically.

The next morning, Casey and Jenny are having breakfast alone when the door of the Captain’s Cabin opens and Jack walks in, hangs up his jacket, and pours himself a cup of coffee.

“Where have you been?” asks Casey with more than a little concern.

“I didn’t know I was on parole,” replies Jack.

“I’m probably going to be late for school,” snarls Casey.

“You break your legs?” Jack replies.

“I’m NOT walking to school!” remarks Casey emphatically. “MY friends get their parents’ car for the day. Melissa has a brand-new Pontiac whenever she wants it.”

“You were born poor for a good reason,” says Jack quietly.

“Why don’t you see things from my point of view once and awhile,” Casey whines. “After all, I’m just a kid.”

“Sixteen is the bitter end of kid-hood!” replies Jack. “Besides that, I do see things from your point of view. It’s just a higher perspective than you’re capable of seeing. Get your books and meet me in the car!”

Jack already has the car running when Casey gets in and plunks herself in the passenger seat. Jack spins the rear wheels on the way out through the gate.

“It’s bad enough that I have to arrive at school in this thing,” remarks Casey smugly pair.

“Life is hell!” Jack replies.

Jack accelerates the car to well past a safe speed and is still accelerating when Casey becomes alarmed, then terrified.

“What the hell are you doing?” demands Casey almost hysterically.

The car rockets through one 4-way stop street, and then another, slides around a corner, and flies through another 4-way stop sign without the tiniest break in speed. Casey has a horrified look on her face, her mouth open, eyes staring straight ahead, hands grabbing anything that provides a handhold.

“We certainly don’t want you to be late,” replies Jack calmly.

Jack passes other cars on the quiet suburban street, then roars out into the main traffic flow narrowly missing several other cars. By this time, Casey is hiding her head in her hands. On arriving at the High School, Jack drives up onto the sidewalk at the main entrance, comes to a stop, and at the same time punches a button on the dash panel. From out of the loudspeakers concealed behind the Jeep’s grille comes a noise loud enough to wake the dead as far away as the planet Pluto. The sound is that of a truck air horn blaring, tires screeching to a very high-speed, drawn-out emergency stop, the horrible grinding crunch of a metal to metal crash, the sound of broken glass flying everywhere, a few seconds of silence, and then the sound of a car hood crashing into the ground after being catapulted to great height. The High School windows fill with people. People run out-of-doors to see what happened. By-standers stare, wondering what the hell has actually happened.

“Out you go, Kid!” exclaims Jack. “You’re on center stage now. Smile! Stick out those nice little titties of yours.”

Astonished, humiliated, and angry as a mad hornet, Casey gets out, slams the door and struts into school. Jack roars off.

“I hate when I have to do that.” he says to himself. “There must be a lesson in this somewhere for me, but I sure don’t get it yet.”

Later that morning, in the main hangar of the shipyard, the 10 o’clock break buzzer sounds. The grinding, sawing, hammering, and other sounds of busy work gradually come to a halt as workers file into the lunchroom for their fifteen minute coffee break and rest. As Jack walks into the lunch room, he notices that everyone is very quiet and many have dejected, unhappy faces.

“What is this ... somebody die?” asks Jack as he sits down at the welder’s table with his coffee.

“You don’t want to hear it!” says the shop foreman.

Jack opens his lunch box. The silence extends for so long he stops and looks from face to face.

“Do I have to do a little dance? ... on the table? ... take off my clothes?” says Jack finally.

“Save us the em-bare-ass-ment!” says one of the welders, caustically.

“We lost the Patrol Boat contract!” says the shop foreman

“ ... and this is my last week of work,” adds the welder.

Jack drinks his coffee in a somewhat disinterested silence.

“What I don’t understand,” continues the shop foreman, “Is why they’re letting Pete go (indicating the welder who had just spoken), and keeping you on. You get paid more than he does ... and they could have offered you an early retirement package last year. Why didn’t they do that?”

“I don’t know,” replies Jack. “Maybe Hendrix likes me. Maybe they need someone with my abilities on staff,” and then Jack adds facetiously, “But it’s more likely that they just like my looks.”

“If Wanda made those decisions, you’d be welding her desk every day!” says the shop foreman, “but I don’t even think Hendrix likes you more than he likes his pocketbook ... or his airplane. You should’ve been out of here long ago, unless there’s something going on that we don’t know about.”

“If there’s something going on,” replies Jack, looking somewhat alarmed, “I sure don’t know anything about it.”

The coffee break continues in silence for a minute or two. The shop foreman breaks the silence.

“Jack,” he says, “didn’t you used to work for Delaware Steel and Shipbuilding for a while?”

“Yes,” Jack replies. “Why do you ask?”

“Do you think they’d be interested in buying this company,” says the foreman.

“I have no idea,” replies Jack.

“Is there anyone you know over there well enough to find out?” asks the foreman.

“Yes,” says Jack.

“What do we have to lose by asking?”

“I can tell you right now, Hendrix won’t even consider it,” Jack replies emphatically.

“Would you try it?” the foreman asks, “ ... for us?”

The lunch room becomes very silent ... all eyes on Jack.

“Sure, I’ll try,” replies Jack. “Thanks for the vote of confidence, but there are some things that even the Gods can’t manifest.”

As the afternoon buzzer announces closing time, Jack cleans up his work area, removes his leather apron, washes his hands, and makes his way to the Executive offices. Wanda has already left for the day so Jack walks to the open door to Hendrix’ office and leans against the door frame.

“Mind if I come in?” he asks.

“Come on in,” replies Hendrix, stopping what he was doing and leaning back in his chair.

Jack drops the keys to the P-51 on Hendrix' desk along with the credit card.

"How many hours?" asks Hendrix.

"One point nine," Jack replies as he takes a seat. "I bet you don't love that thing any more than I do. It's like riding a wild stallion."

"Better! A wild stallion's unpredictable. 1500 horses in both your hands is totally predictable," Hendrix replies. "Mind you, your life is at stake with either one, but I'll put my odds on the airplane."

"Me too, actually," says Jack, pausing for a few seconds. "Would you ... uh ... sell this company?"

Hendricks looks up sharply from his work.

"Sure ... I'd sell anything for the right price," he says.

"Suppose Delaware Steel offered you a good price," says Jack. "Would you sell to them?"

"They couldn't offer me enough!" replies Hendrix adamantly. "Those bastards would run this company into the ground and close it down."

"So what?" says Jack, "...it's not like right now the company's flying along at 40,000 feet and headed home with a tail wind, Don. What's wrong with their money?"

"They can keep it, that's all!"

"I just thought I'd tell you they're interested," Jack replies calmly.

"I'm not!" exclaims Hendrix, "And that's the end of it."

The next day Jack is driving through town with Marty. He stops at a stop sign and then pulls out into the main flow of traffic all the while talking to Marty.

"I told him Delaware Steel was interested in buying the company and he flatly refused to even consider an offer because he doesn't like the way they do business," explains Jack to Marty. "Here's a guy about to go under and he doesn't want ..."

"Jack! ... Jack!" interrupts Marty in a very urgent tone of voice. "There's been a horrible accident behind us. Didn't you hear the crash?"

Jack looks into the rearview mirror without even slowing down.

"Some idiot went through the stop sign," Jack says. "We didn't see it happen, did we?"

"No, no, Jack!" exclaims Marty, shocked at Jack's indifference. "We've got to go back. They may need help."

Jack pulls quickly onto the shoulder and into a driveway to turn around.

"Oookay!" Jack says reluctantly. "I guess you must need this experience."

As they approach the scene of the accident, Jack can see that a car full of teenagers has gone through the stop sign at high speed and hit a Mercedes with a well-dressed, middle-aged couple in it. The driver of the Mercedes is lying in the street, the driver's door hanging open by a single hinge. His stomach is laid open, his intestines hanging

out in the street. His arm is bleeding. His wife is in shock and can't move. Jack pulls past the scene and onto a nearby lawn well away from danger.

"Oh, my God!" exclaims Marty. "What a horrible sight! What are you parking up here on the lawn for?"

"Staying out of the way," replies Jack. "Accident's cause more accidents. Stay here for a minute."

Jack gets out of a car and walks toward the accident scene. Just as he does, another carload of teenagers comes squealing through the stop sign, brakes locked, swerves sideways, and heads straight for Jack. Calmly, but with lightning speed, Jack jumps behind a nearby electric light pole as the swerving vehicle smashes into it. Jack gives a slight nod in the direction of the now-unconscious driver.

"Brilliant maneuver, you jerk!" exclaims Jack after the din of the crash has subsided. "Your father should buy you a gun, too!"

Jack walks over to the Mercedes, looks at the guy dying in the street, and then at the lady staring at him from the car.

"Get out of a car, Lady!" says Jack loud enough to be heard. It brings no response from the lady who is still gaping at Jack.

"Get out of a car, Lady," Jack repeats louder. "He needs help!"

There's still no response from the lady in the passenger seat.

"Get the fuck out of the car, Lady!" Jack yells.

She slides across the seat and sits there looking down at her husband, hands to her face, horrified and speechless.

"Your money and your fancy clothes ain't gonna help you now, Lady." says Jack. "You want him to live, you gotta stop the bleeding right now."

"I ... I ... can't." the Lady replies.

"One thing's for sure," says Jack, looking at her disgustedly. "Money doesn't produce any heroes!"

Just then Marty walks up. Jack turns to her:

"Marty, tear up this guy's shirt and ..."

"No, no, that's a very expensive shirt!" interrupts the Lady.

"Okay ... let him die ... his life's not worth the shirt," replies Jack matter-of factly. "He bet the insurance company a lot of money he'd have an accident, didn't he? Did he win? ... or did he lose?"

"Marty, take off his tie and put a tourniquet around the arm above the wound. Wind it up tight so it stops the bleeding. Then pick up his guts and put them back where they belong so they don't dry out."

Just as quickly as he has spoken, Jack walks over to the first teenager's car. Marty struggles with her own feelings, but does as she's told. Jack finds the driver of the first

vehicle laid back in his seat, steam rising from his open mouth.

“Driver’s dead,” Jack mutters to himself. “Can’t do anything to help him.”

“That one’s crying,” mutters Jack, looking at the kid in the passenger seat, “He’s okay ... and the one in the back seat is hysterical, he’s okay”

The fourth member of the teen car is reeling and stumbling outside the car in a drunken stupor. The sound of an ambulance and police sirens draws nearer. Jack walks around behind the wrecked teen car and notices the license plate. It’s a custom plate with the name “Ripper” stamped on it. He walks over to get Marty.

“Let’s go, Marty. We’ve done what we can.”

As Jack’s car drives away, a policeman is talking to the wife of the injured man.

“Did anyone witness the accident, Lady?” asks the policeman.

“Yes, there was a man,” she grimaces. “Oh, he was so horrible ... so mean; he just kept yelling at me.”

“Which one is he?” asks the policeman.

The Lady looks up on the lawn; Jack’s car is no longer there.

“He’s gone,” she says. “He was in a little white car.”

“Oh ... I see,” states the policeman incredulously, “A little white car, eh? I’m sure we’ll be able to find that one right away!”

The policeman shakes his head and walks away to look at the rest of the wreckage.

As Jack and Marty leave the scene of the accident, Jack has some kind and encouraging words for Marty.

“Good work, Marty,” Jack says. “You kept your fear under control like a master. I’m impressed!”

“At least this time it was MY choice,” replies Marty sarcastically.

“It was your choice in the airplane as well,” Jack explains. “I think the difference is simply that in the airplane you were in a totally unfamiliar environment and having a totally new experience. With this last experience, you were at least on solid footing and amongst familiar surroundings.”

Marty is silently thoughtful for a few moments.

“Do you have any idea how close we came to being in the middle of that accident back there?” she asks.

“Ten feet away or ten miles away; it’s all the same. The fact is: we weren’t ... and won’t ever be!”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Jack,” replies Marty. “Accidents can happen to anybody.”

“Wrong, Marty!” states Jack firmly. “That’s just a famous old “Saw” you bought into without thinking.”

“What do you mean?” she asks.

“If you’re going to NOT do accidents, you have to be totally attentive and functioning within your limitations 90% of the time. It isn’t possible to be that way 100 percent of the time. The last 10% you control by your faith ... your belief in the fact that there is “outside help” when you need it, and your belief that you simply DO NOT DO accidents!”

“That’s crazy, Jack,” exclaims Marty. “Where do you think insurance companies get their Actuarial Statistics ... out of some dream world?”

“Actuarial Statistics come from the 99% of humanity that subscribes to the belief that we’re all victims,” he adds. “They’re the ones who haven’t examined fear and put themselves in a position where they bet their life they can control what happens in their world.”

“Honestly, Jack, your rationale totally escapes me sometimes. How do you eliminate accidents?”

“Lots of practice,” he replies. “Cancel your car insurance for a while as an exercise. Watch how attentive and careful you become. Watch how hard you have to work on KNOWING it’s okay, and making it okay, rather than worrying that it’s not. This kind of practice eventually forms a habit that raises you to a new level of consciousness.”

“I’d like to believe you,” says Marty, “But it just seems too improbable to be true.”

“That’s an example of one of the unbridgeable gaps between us, dear heart. This mind of mine is not filled with idle thoughts ... it’s working all the time.”

Later, after Jack has dropped Marty off at her apartment, Jack is back in the Captain’s Cabin where he and Casey are washing up the dishes from dinner.

“Does one of your buddies drive a red car that has a license plate with the name “Ripper” impressed on it?” asks Jack casually.

“Yeah ... cool car!” replies Casey. “It’s a Pontiac Grand Am. I ride with him sometimes.”

“It’s a good thing you weren’t riding with him this afternoon,” Jack says.

“Why is that?” asks Casey, her mouth open in alarm.

“He’s dead!” remarks Jack with apparent disinterest.

“Ripper? Dead?” exclaims Casey, dramatically shocked. “How ... what ...?”

“Went through a stop sign at about 60 with a carload of his buddies and ran smack into the side of a Mercedes. His buddies lived; he didn’t. He probably wasn’t drunk enough.”

Casey goes over to the couch and sits down, head in her hands.

“Oh, my God, my God!” Casey mutters with disbelief.

“Was he that close to you?” asks Jack.

“It’s not that,” replies Casey, beginning to cry.

Jack walks over, sits down in front of her, and gives her his total attention. Casey continues:

“I told him about how you went through five stop signs to get me to school on time. He must have tried to do it himself. Oh ... it’s all my fault! Why can’t I keep my big mouth shut?”

“Did you dare him to try it? ... or something else like that?” asks Jack.

“No, of course not,” Casey replies.

“Casey, you can’t take on guilt for a stupid maneuver like that!”

“Why did you do that with me? You could have gotten me killed,” exclaims Casey, suddenly angry.

“Are you foolish enough to see me at the same level as Ripper?” asks Jack sharply.

“It’s the same thing,” pleads Casey.

“Do you know how many times I’ve driven the route we took and studied every possible way the events could turn to worms?”

“No,” replies Casey.

“About twenty times ... at varying speeds ... at different times of the day just to learn the traffic flow patterns. I didn’t do that for you, I did it just for fun because my imagination plays with things like that.”

“But there could have been cars coming through those other intersections,” argues Casey.

“Had you looked carefully you would have seen that all those intersections were four-way stop streets ... carefully chosen from hundreds of options ... with lots of view at each corner ... white stop lines on every street. You’re dumb buddy went roaring through a single stop sign into a busy intersection with no thinking in advance at all. That’s Russian roulette with five loaded chambers! I don’t take chances, Casey. None! It may have looked like it to you, but illusions are different things to different people. Ask any magician.”

“But why do you do these things to me?” asks Casey plaintively.

“Because I’m interested in having you confront your death,” replies Jack.

“But why,” continues Casey.

“When you realize how delicate life is ... that it hangs by a thread for all of us ... it starts you thinking about your death. And when you contemplate your death, it forces you to think about life and its meaning. This is the first step in figuring out who you are, where you come from, and why you’re here.”

“I still don’t see why I need to know THAT!” snarls Casey, tiring of listening to her father’s philosophical conversation.

“Because everything you can ever learn is nothing alongside that,” whispers Jack, looking intently at Casey. “Until you understand who you are, where you come from, and why you’re here, you are lost in the illusion of life. You’re relegated to being the victim of your own ego or someone else’s. Just remember what I’ve said. You don’t have to do anything about it until the time comes when you have to find out. Sooner or later, everyone one comes to that point.”

## CHAPTER 5.

Inside the big shipbuilding hangar, Jack is putting the final touches on a piece of ship's hardware. The shop foreman walks up, shielding his eyes from the brilliant light of the arc welder.

"Jack?" asks the foreman.

Jack breaks the arc, straightens up, swings the bulky welder's helmet to its overhead position, and turns to the foreman.

"What is it?" he asks.

"I have your paycheck here. Ours are all short a few dollars. Would you mind looking to see if yours is too?"

"You can go ahead and open it up," says Jack.

The foreman opens the envelope.

"How much?" Jack asks.

"\$527.60," the foreman replies.

"Should be \$577.60," says Jack, swallowing hard.

"We were all shorted the same amount—fifty bucks," the foreman says. "What the hell's going on?"

"I don't know, but it's not like we didn't know it was coming," Jack replies.

"And listen," adds the foreman, "I've got worse news. You better come with me."

Jack follows the shop foreman into his little corner office closing the door behind him and shutting out the loud clangor of metal being worked.

"I don't know how to tell you this," says the foreman confidentially. "I guess there isn't an easy way. There's a rumor ... well, more than just a rumor ... that Hendrix has been borrowing money from the Pension Fund to keep the business going. There's not much left in the fund."

Jack swallows hard.

"How the hell can he do that?" he retorts angrily. "That's not only against the law, it's next to impossible. Not just anyone can remove funds from a government-approved trust."

"Evidently there's a way ... and he's found it," replies the foreman.

Jack immediately heads for Hendrix' office.

Jack comes into Wanda's office like a bull charging a red flag. He heads for the closed door of Hendrix office. Wanda quickly intervenes.

"Whoa! Hold on! Don't go in there now" says Wanda quietly, at the same time moving quickly to block Jack's access to Hendrix office.

"Why the hell not?" demands Jack angrily.

“Very important—very heated—meeting,” replies Wanda. “You’ll get thrown out or stonewalled. Don’t waste your time. Come back at 5:30. By your looks you ought to cool off a bit anyhow. What’s the problem ... as if I didn’t know!”

“My pension! ... or the lack of it ... and that’s a major”

“Mine, too, but I can’t say a thing,” replies Wanda. “Come back at 5:30. I should be safely on the other side of the city by then.”

“Thanks, Wanda,” Jack replies and heads back to the foreman’s office for some further verification.

As Jack walks into the foreman’s office, the foreman turns from his paper work and motions Jack to a chair.

“How the hell did you hear about this?” asks Jack quietly.

“It came across and down to me,” the foreman replies.

“What do you mean?”

“What I mean is that I can’t really talk about it. Too many heads would roll in both companies. I can tell you this, though, it came from one who knows.”

Jack sits still for a few moments, nods his head in thanks to the foreman and then makes his way to his welding station. For the next hour or so, Jack kills time aimlessly cleaning up his work area, putting away tools, and going to the lunch room for coffee and a snack. Finally, after what seems like forever, and the hangar is devoid of both noise and people, the hands of the clock creep around to indicate 5:25PM. Jack reluctantly and slowly makes his way to Hendrix’ office, not only not wanting to have this conversation, but not wanting to hear what he’s afraid he’ll hear.

He walks through Wanda’s empty office and pauses in the open doorway of Hendrix’ office, leaning against the door jamb and knocking lightly with his knuckles. Hendricks looks up from his paper work and Jack can tell instantly from the look on Hendrix’ face that he’s already been through hell. Jack is glad his anger has melted into a certain amount of compassion for a job he would never take and a level of responsibility he could not handle due to his sensitive and over-considerate nature.

“Come on in, Jack,” says Hendrix in a quiet, resigned voice.

Jack sits down nervously. Hendrix continues:

“I’m sorry about the paychecks,” he says. “It was either give everybody less or lay off a few more.”

“The paycheck I can handle for now, Don,” says Jack quietly. “I’m having a lot more difficulty handling the fact that there may not be enough money in the Pension Fund for me or anyone else.”

Hendricks is obviously caught unawares. He quickly turns his chair to look out the rear window, his back facing Jack.

“What makes you think there’s no money in the Pension Fund,” asks Hendrix.

“You know how rumors are. You never know who starts them; you never know if they’re true; but usually there’s some truth to them somewhere ... right?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” replies Hendrix, turning to look Jack straight in the eye. “Pension Funds can’t just be tapped at will. The company just pays into them; they’re managed by someone else.”

“I know you too well, Don,” replies Jack with an equally powerful gaze into Hendrix eye. “If anybody could tap into one, I’m sure you’d set it up so you could.”

Hendrix loses it. He stands up behind his desk, leaning forward, both hands on the desk, and fires his next words at Jack like machine gun bullets.

“I resent that, you son-of-a-bitch! I don’t have to listen to that shit! Get the hell out of here!”

Jack just sits there, unperturbed, a slight smile on his face.

“Your words and actions admit your guilt, Don. We’ve known each other for too long. I’m not going anywhere until I have some answers.”

Hendrix continues to rant in an effort to defray his own frustration.

“Why don’t you try running this goddamn company, Diamond! Why don’t you try to keep it alive when there’s no work? You have a handful of details to take care of ... I have a thousand. Are there 200 people out of work and ten million in assets on the auction block if one of your decisions is wrong? You can turn off your welding machine and sleep at night. You know how long you’d have a job if I worked that way?”

Jack nods his head and gives Hendrix time to cool down, then adds quietly:

“If I’m the Quartermaster of a ship, and I tell the Captain we should make a ten degree change in course to avoid running aground, does that mean I want the Captain’s job? I am not the Captain because I have purposely chosen to not be a Captain. I don’t have the mind or the Constitution for it. But Captains are not infallible beings. I am a master mariner; a master aircraft pilot; and a master welder among other things. My main interest is in seeing this company carry on. Can’t you see that?”

Hendrix is disarmed by Jack’s tone of voice and his rationale. He sits back down in his chair and turns once again to look out the rear window, unable to confront his pride face-to-face with an old competitor and friend.

“Jack ... I don’t know how to be the things you are. You used to be like me; now you’re an enigma. I’m still made up of pride ... and ego ... and self-importance. It’s the game I play, the money I make, and the things I do with it that make all the pressure and responsibility worthwhile.”

Hendricks turns in his chair and looks intently at Jack over the top of the desk.

“It’s the role of the dice ... the long shot ... the win! That’s what I am, and that’s what I love to do. Tell me you don’t know about that, Jack-O-Diamonds! How many card games

have you played to earn your nickname? How many years were you lost? How long did you wander all over the ocean like a ship without a rudder until I gave you a job and you came back to the real world a changed man?

“Don ...,” replies Jack patiently, “...The Pension Funds!”

Hendricks hesitates for a moment, still looking intently at Jack.

“They’ve been borrowed,” he replies. “That’s why you have a paycheck. You want to retire? You’re going to have to find a better way than I have to keep this company going. It’s just about all over for all of us.”

There is a long pause. Jack looks out the window. Hendrix settles back in his chair.

“I should be mad as hell at you right now, but you know what I’m asking myself?” comments Jack.

“I can’t imagine,” Hendrix replies.

“I’m asking myself what I’m doing in a place where this is a real situation? What am I doing working for this company? Do I deserve this kind of treatment? It sure catapult’s me right out into the unknown,” says Jack. The two looks silently at each other. Jack continues:

“I never dreamed you and I might go down together. We’re too fucking smart for that, aren’t we?”

“Well, we ain’t dead yet! I’m sorry it had to come to this, Jack.”

Jack nods his head, gets up and walks toward the door. At the door he turns.

“Are you ... are you willing to let me work on this thing?” he asks.

“What can you do, Jack? What do you know about corporate finance, government contracts, legal issues, and on and on?”

“A little while ago you said you don’t understand what I’ve become. I don’t completely understand it myself. Even what I do understand, I can’t put into words anyone else understands or even wants to hear. What I am is something much more than just the old Jack Diamond you knew. That part of me can work on this situation, but only if you ask it to. Even then, you have to be flexible enough to take whatever forms itself.”

“That’s exactly what I’m doing now,” Hendrix replies, “trying to take care of what’s formed itself.”

“But what you’re getting is what Don Hendrix alone has produced. What you’re doing is limited by all of Don Hendrix’ limitations.”

“So, what else is there?”

“A much closer look!” replies Jack adamantly.

“Explain ‘closer look’,” Hendrix asks.

“Just because a ship stays afloat doesn’t mean it’s going anywhere. If it keeps running up on sandbars, then something’s wrong with the pilot, the chart, the NAV equipment, the captain, the rudder. You keep saying that what you do has worked so far ...”

“Well, it has, Dammit!” says Hendrix, interrupting. “How do you think we’ve come this

far? Take a look around. This is quite an establishment.”

“No doubt about it!” Jack replies. “But times change. The ship is still afloat, but it can’t go anywhere because the internal workings hold it back. The ship and the captain have the same problem. The outer mechanism and the inner mechanism don’t work together anymore the way they used to.”

“I’d like to understand what you’re saying, Jack, but I just can’t get a handle on it.”

“We aren’t changing fast enough for the times we live in, Don. It’s taken me years to just begin ...”

“What do I accomplish by telling you to work on it?” says Hendrix, interrupting.

“You have to be willing to ask for help before you get any ... either from me or from that unknown part of myself that I’ve come to depend on so heavily. Even then you have to be open to what comes along and see it as instructive within the situation.”

“Jesus! That’s a big order, Jack! You’re really into some pretty weird stuff,” and both have a good laugh over the irony of it all.

“The mere fact that my energy is openly and willingly associated with a problem changes not only the *possible* solutions, but significantly affects the *probable* solutions. I don’t have pride and selfish interest blocking my view. It may appear that I’m not actually doing anything. When something does happen, an outsider would look at it and call it ‘Luck’, or ‘Fate’, or ‘Chance’, when, in fact, there’s no such thing as any of those words. Those words are fill-ins for ignorance of how things really work.”

“That’s a tough one to take!” says Hendrix. “You’re already a part of this company and look where we are!”

“I’m part of the inner workings you’re not listening to. The Captain needs to listen to the navigator. There needs to be a change in direction at the top.”

“Mmmm ...” muses Hendrix, “... and what happens if I can’t change fast enough?”

“From where I see it,” Jack continues, “You either have to be open to solutions you’ve never considered before, or be unwillingly forced out completely. You might, for example, hire someone else who’s strong in the areas in which you’re weak, and still remain in a sort of shared control. Would you be willing to do that? Even if you were, you’d still have to know yourself better than you do to be able to appreciate and work with the person who complements you.”

Hendrix let’s out a deep sigh and looks off into the distance.

“Too many unknowns there,” he remarks. “My job is to gather everything that’s known about any situation or problem and make a decision based on what I know.”

“That’s too bad,” replies Jack. “Real creativity comes from the unknown ... and you have to make lots of room for it. Anyway, that’s your choice. Let me know if you change your mind.”

## CHAPTER 6.

Jack is cruising along by himself on a paved desert highway in the late morning looking intently off at the mountains for some sign of the pueblo he spotted from the P-51.

“Should be just about here,” he says to himself. “Those are the hills right there.”

He drives past a dirt road that heads towards the rocky hills, slows to a stop, backs up, turns around, and turns onto the narrow dirt track. With a cloud of dust trailing behind him, he follows the winding road into the rocky hills until it comes to a dead-end at a large level landing made from mine tailings. On the inside of the landing, a dilapidated corrugated-steel building butts up against a sheer rock wall, obviously hiding the entrance to a mine shaft. Jack stops his little jeep next to the steel building, gets out and starts to scan the hills and the area above him around the mine. There’s no sign of the pueblo ... in fact, no sign of life at all. As he turns to look in the opposite direction, he is suddenly startled by the loud BONK! of a stone dropped onto the corrugated steel roof behind him. He looks up and there, standing on the rock rim above the mine buildings, stands an Indian where seconds before there had been no-one.

“Hi,” says the Indian.

“Howdy!” replies Jack.

“Looking for something?” the Indian asks.

“Did you see some crazy bastard fly over here last week in a blue airplane?” Jack asks.

“Yeah ... was that you?” asks the Indian, becoming quite interested.

“That was me and my girlfriend,” replies Jack, “...sorry about the noise.”

“Oh, man, engine noise I like. BIG engine noise I LOVE! What kinda motor you got in that thing?” the Indian asks.

“Turbocharged Rolls Royce Merlin V-16 ... 1500 horsepower.”

“Wow! Would I like to see that,” remarks the Indian.

“Consider it a future fact,” replies Jack. “Is that your pueblo I saw from the air somewhere around here?”

“Yeah ... built it myself. Come on up and I’ll show it to you. Path starts over there behind that huge boulder,” says the Indian, pointing toward a boulder at the mouth of a narrow canyon leading into the hill. “Just follow it ’till it ends.”

Jack makes his way by himself up the well-worn dusty trail until he comes to a small valley with the Pueblo sitting at one edge. As Jack approaches, he notices the Indian sitting on a log in front of an open-pit fire. The Indian stands up, sticks out his hand, and introduces himself.

“I’m T-Bird,” says the Indian.

“I’m Jack,” says Jack, shaking hands. “What a nice secluded spot. Do you live here?”

“This is my weekend hideout. During the week I work at the tribe’s casino in Soda Mine.”

“What do you do for the casino,” asks Jack.

“Oh, a little of this ... a little of that ... drive the garbage truck; drive the vans; deal blackjack; run errands for the Chief. No big deal. What about you?”

“I’m a welder ... down at Morgan River Shipyard.”

“You build ships?” T-Bird asks.

“Well, I’m just one of a whole damned herd of welders.”

“Are you a good welder?”

“One of the best!”

“You got a welding machine?” T-Bird asks eagerly.

“I can get one easily enough,” Jack replies.

“I don’t believe this!” exclaims T Bird, shaking his head.

Suddenly he leans forward and smiles.

“Rides-The-Wind didn’t send you, did he?” he asks.

Jack appears stumped for a minute.

“I ... uh ... don’t think I know Rides-The-Wind,” he adds.

“Oh, sorry! He’s my ... my ... something ... teacher, I guess,” T-Bird adds. “And he’s always doing these weird things, so I had to check.”

“Is it perhaps a spiritual thing?” asks Jack.

T-Bird hesitates somewhat uncomfortably.

“Sort of ... I guess you would call it that.”

“I understand spiritual stuff,” adds Jack. “I’m interested in hearing more if you don’t mind talking about it.”

“Rides-The-Wind is the tribe’s Shaman—Medicine Man—and he’s sort of training me for the job,” says T-Bird, still somewhat uncomfortable talking about it. “He’s teaching me to call for outside help ... I mean, to call inside for outside help. Know what I mean?”

T-Bird looks at Jack with a puzzled expression as though the concept might be foreign to him.

“I know exactly what you’re talking about,” replies Jack, looking T-Bird straight in the eye.

“You do?” exclaims T-Bird, his face brightening up at the prospect of finally finding someone he can talk to about his experiences. “You want me to tell you my story?”

“I’d love to hear your story,” Jack replies.

“It’s only short,” T-Bird says. “The rest of the story doesn’t have words yet.”

“If it’s like my story,” replies Jack, “you may have a hard time finding words for it!”

T Bird nods, eyes enlarged, and they both burst into laughter.

## T-Bird's Story:

“A year ago I was a mess. I was burned out from drugs and alcohol and I didn't want to live anymore. Chief White Eagle was very disappointed with me. He sends me to see Rides-The-Wind. Rides-The-Wind says to me, ‘You take lots of water ... no food. Go out onto the desert to a very lonely spot and ask the Great Spirit to tell you what he made you for ... and you stay there until you find out! Even if you die there, you stay there until you KNOW!’

“That was on a Sunday. Monday comes around and I find this place. By Monday night my stomach is complaining very loud. For years it has anything it wants ... and right away! My dick is throbbing for one of my five girlfriends; my ears are dying for loud music. My mind is screaming at me: “STOP THIS NONSENSE! You're gonna die, you idiot!” I'm getting ready to go back and find Rides-The-Wind when suddenly I get sick. I start to vomit; I have diarrhea ... and it smells like something died inside me. My head is splitting open; my back is killing me; my balls hurt; and my nose is running like a faucet. I'm convinced this is the end. But then I remember Rides-The-Wind told me if this happens, drink lots of water, keep drinking water.”

“Friday comes. I'm so weak I can't move. I hear this roaring noise ... almost as loud as your airplane. It goes on for hours, and finally my curiosity overcomes my weakness and pain. The sound of revving engines sucks me to it like a coyote to a road-kill. I drag myself to the top of the hill and look down. Dune buggies! Hundreds of them! Bright yellow, red, purple ... all racing over the dunes, jumping off ledges, chasing each other, and doing wheelies all over the place. There's this one ... I can't forget it. Its coal black, and it's got the engine in the back and this single exhaust pipe sticking straight up three feet in the air—like it's got a hard-on—and there's flame coming out of the damned thing! Right away I think, ‘Yessss ... That's Me! I've got to have that one!’ “

About this time, Jack is doubled up with laughter. T Bird continues with his story.

“That was the beginning of my return to life. So I go back to my shelter behind the rock and talk to the Great Spirit for two days, telling Him how much I want a dune buggy like the black one. That night, Rides-The-Wind shows up. How does he find me? ... I can't imagine. How many square miles of desert are there? He tells me he hears my spirit calling. He tells me the Great Spirit is not likely to give me a dune buggy. How in hell does he know I want a dune buggy? I'm kind of in shock, but now I'm hearing every word he says, so he goes on:

'First, you ask for something—maybe it's just for help. Next, something forms in your imagination. If it stays there, pretty soon a way to get its starts to open up. It may not be what you expected. It may be very hard, but you have to move toward it, explore it. You keep your desire in your imagination; play with it; ask for it. Slowly, slowly it becomes real ... or if it's not the right thing at the right time it never comes at all. You keep looking for things that work for you. Now it's time for me to go. Just one last thing: sometimes—not very often—but sometimes, what you want just appears like out of nowhere. Mostly you have to work long and hard. No power comes from quick success. You stay here in the desert until you will always remember the miracle in this event because it's not over yet.'"

"And so Rides-The-Wind leaves me there on the desert by myself to think. The next day I'm feeling incredibly strong. Remember, I haven't had anything but water for eight days! I walk down to where the dune buggies and travel trailers were. There's nothing left—not even trash—except suddenly I can't believe what I see. It's a dune buggy! ... or rather what's left of one. It's in hard shape: frame broken; piston out through the block. I wasn't about to leave it there so I wired it together and towed it back to the mine shed with my jeep. So now, let's have a cup of tea and then we'll go down to the mine shed and look at it."

Half an hour later T-Bird and Jack arrive outside the mine shaft building's entrance door. T Bird hauls out a key and unlocks the padlock, sliding the huge shed door back to allow light into the dark interior. Jack walks over and scrutinizes the beaten-up dune buggy carefully.

"Hey," exclaims Jack. "I can weld this up in half an hour ... and the engine ... it's the same as the one I have in my little jeep. I've got two spares hidden away at the Shipyard. It won't take us a whole day to get this thing on the road."

"Remember I told you I couldn't believe it ... that you were a welder?" says T-Bird.

Jack nods his head.

"Here's why. After I find the dune buggy, I ask the Great Spirit for help to build my pueblo," T Bird continues. "Suddenly, I get a job at the Casino that brings me money. Then, two weeks later, I meet the best pueblo builder in the southwest at the Casino one evening. He shows me how to do it myself. I take my money I earn from the Casino and I build what you see. Now it's time to fix up the dune buggy. I could take it to people I know who build these things. I could take it to my friend who has a welding shop. Instead I look inside myself and I say to the Great Spirit, "How do we fix this thing up? Don't you think we should have a little fun doing it?" ... and the next day you drive up the road. What you think of that!"

"T-Bird, my whole life is like that ... only with a lot more time between events so they don't seem quite so miraculous."

“You think you can help me with this thing?”

“I’ll have all the stuff we need out here next weekend,” says Jack.

“And what can I do for you?” asks T-Bird.

“Don’t even think about it,” Jack replies. “No doubt it’s already planned. I have no idea what it might be, but we can be sure of one thing: we’re sure gonna find out!”

And both laugh uproariously at the hidden implications.

## CHAPTER 7.

At dinnertime that same evening, Casey and Jenny are eating dinner in the captain's cabin. Jack comes in, greets them, washes his hands and begins serving himself some dinner from the stove.

Casey continues her conversation with Jenny.

"I just don't know why I can't find one guy—one—who is attractive and who doesn't play around with every girl who wiggles her tail at him."

"Sixteen is a very difficult age, Casey," says Jenny. "I know it was for me. Nothing appears stable or predictable. It's like everything is up for grabs just for the experience."

"I'm very faithful," adds Casey. "When I'm with a guy I don't even look at anyone else ... and I definitely don't lie or cheat."

Jack sits down at the table and eats in silence.

"I certainly don't get back what I put out," continues Casey.

"I wouldn't say that, Casey," says Jenny trying to be as tactful as possible.

"What do you mean," asks Casey.

"You have a very beautiful body ... which you never fail to advertise with tight T-shirts and tight jeans," says Jenny. "When you advertise sex, what you get is guys who are interested first in sex. That's one thing. The next most important thing is: who are you focusing your attention on? ... the good-looking guys that everybody thinks they want? ... or the not-so-good-looking guys who are more quiet, more stable, and not so self important? Choose your men more carefully."

"I guess that's another problem," replies Casey dejectedly. "The stable ones aren't attractive to me. What do I do about that?"

"Ask yourself why that's so. It's probably because you need the affirmation that comes from getting the most desirable guys. You have to feel good about yourself without needing that sort of ego gratification," adds Jenny, "and I don't know how to tell you how to do that."

Casey looks over at Jack. Jack munches away at his dinner and smiles.

"What're you smirking at?" asks Casey.

"My teen years were hell!" replies Jack.

"So what do you do about it?"

"You don't learn anything in heaven," replies Jack.

"That doesn't help much!"

"Men have an equal problem," continues Jack, "it just has a little different shape, that's all."

"What's that?" Casey asks.

“It’s like a tight fist in your crotch that’s on you twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week,” replies Jack. “You wake up in the morning and there’s a tent-pole in your bed. You go to the bathroom and you actually have a few minutes of sweet relief. Then it’s on you again, controls your mind ... your eyes. Anything female that comes along wearing a tight sweater or t-shirt, your heart starts to pound like a hammer. Sometimes you even break out into a sweat. Maybe then you look up at the face. Some guy’s never look up. They don’t care what’s in the package. They don’t care how it thinks, how it feels, or will it be hurt?”

“Oh, God, that sounds awful,” exclaims Casey, her mouth agape. “Is it true?”

“To varying degrees.” replies Jack. “To some it’s only there four or eight hours a day, but it’s always there for all men ... unless they’ve been castrated.”

“Why does it have to be that way?” asks Casey.

“If having sex was a painful experience—or if there was no pleasure in it at all—the human race would probably have died off centuries ago. You’ve been tossed into the Hero’s Obstacle Course, Honey. Learn how to run it or get trampled underfoot.”

“That’s depressing!” says Casey. “Let’s talk about something else. I need to have a car to get to school.”

“That’s even more depressing!” adds Jack.

“Dad! You don’t know what it’s like trying to get somebody to pick you up or take you home every school day. It’s a real frig.”

“Manipulating a bike is very easy,” Jack replies, “Manipulating your legs is easier still. Both are downright good for you and they don’t need more and more money to keep them operating.”

“Dad ... you don’t understand,” whines Casey.

“I understand completely,” Jack replies. “You put everything to the ‘Casey test: does it make me look good? ... does it feel good? ... does it taste good? ... does everyone else want it? ... is it easy? ... Does it make me feel important?”

“Yes,” replies Casey adamantly, “ ... so?”

“It’s the questions that aren’t on your test that make the girl into a woman into a hero,” adds Jack.

“Like?” demands Casey.

“Like, does it make me stronger? Does it make me healthier? Does it suck me into imprisonment? What do I have to learn to get what I want? How do I have to change myself to get what I want? ... and I don’t mean changing your clothes!”

Casey crosses her arms and pauses for a moment.

“I don’t think I want to be a hero,” she says. “All I want to do is have fun.”

Jack suddenly gets up energetically.

“Okay, let’s go look at cars,” he says.

“Are you serious?” asks Casey, suddenly elated.

“Yep!”

Casey runs out the door to get her jacket and put on her makeup. Jack walks over and puts his hand on Jenny's shoulder.

"You'd better stay here, Sweetheart. This isn't going to be a fun trip!"

A short while later Jack and Casey are wandering around a brightly lit used-car lot in the early evening. Casey is eyeballing a flashy white Pontiac Z-28. She gets in it. The salesman comes over.

"Want to take it for a drive," he asks.

"Sure!" replies Casey.

"Hold on a minute!" interjects Jack. "How much is it?"

"\$429 a month ... no cash down," replies the salesman.

"How much does a new one cost?" asks Jack

"They aren't cheap ... around \$32,000 new."

"And this is how old?" asks Jack.

"Four years old," the salesman says.

"How much you want for that one over there?" asks Jack, pointing to into a dilapidated, low-end car sitting on the back lot.

"That one's not for sale. Hasn't been fixed up yet."

"No, no ... Cash! ... right now! How much?" demands Jack.

"Five hundred bucks," says the salesman, disgusted.

"Go over and take a look at that one, Casey," Jack says to Casey, pointing to the car. Casey walks part-way over and turns around, disgusted.

"I wouldn't be caught dead in that thing," she comments bitterly.

"Okay," Jack says cheerfully. "Let's keep looking."

Jack and Casey drive off, ostensibly looking for another used-car lot. Instead, Jack pulls into a burger-joint parking lot.

"What are we doing here?" asks Casey.

"We're going have a little talk because you just passed up the chance to own your first car."

"But Dad, I'd be embarrassed to drive that thing to school. And besides, I don't know how to fix it up or keep it running."

Jack nods his head in understanding. They pick out a table and sit down.

"Casey, about the only thing you can do with your hands is put nail-polish on them. It's not like I don't know that. If you had a little less pride, and more enthusiastic energy and imagination, you would've asked me if I'd help you fix it up. You didn't because you don't have those things going for you ... not now anyway. You do have other things going for you. You're strong-willed, intelligent, quick-witted, well-coordinated, attractive, and strong-bodied ... but also very, very lazy."

The waitress comes over and they order; Jack continues:

“Life is all about controlling energy ... about generating your own energy from nothing of all. You have to constantly put yourself in a position that requires more of something than you have. Life is a Power builder, but it’s only the exercise equipment -- not the effort of Will to use them. The saying, ‘No pain, No gain’ is actually a simple statement about life. If you don’t have what it takes for the big dreams, then you settle for a lesser dream until you can gather your power inside you. It’s not easy, and it doesn’t happen quickly. It’s good that you want fancy, nice things, but they’re the reward for well-directed effort. You may have to settle for less at first, but don’t ever settle for less forever.”

The waitress brings drinks, place-settings and silverware, and then leaves.

“Play a little game with me,” says Jack. “What do you need a car for?”

“Transportation,” replies Casey.

“If that’s all you want a car for, the car I showed you would be fine, wouldn’t it?” asks Jack

“I guess,” answers Casey half-heartedly, not really wanting to play the game.

“So then, why was it the first car you climbed into was a Z-28?”

“Because I would look good in a Z-28,” replies Casey with a knowing smile.

“Now tell me the real reason you want a car.” says Jack, smiling.

“But isn’t it normal for a teenager to want to be noticed?” whines Casey.

“Yes, it is normal for some kids to want to be noticed,” replies Jack. “But the reason I’m taking the time and making the effort that this exercise has been, is to help you understand what you’re really made of. The more you understand about yourself, the more you rise above the normal. If your pride won’t let you be seen driving around a piece of junk, then some day you’re going to ask yourself if the price of your pride is worth walking everywhere or begging for rides. You might be forced into the realization that walking and riding a bike are good forms of exercise for your body. The actions of making yourself walk or ride a bike where you want to go for the purpose of producing health in your body raises you above the normal. The desire to own a Z-28 can still be a constructive motivator like the proverbial carrot hanging before the donkey’s nose. It might be years before you have the money to own one outright or lease one. Once you reach that point, you will find that satisfaction very short-lived. You will find the choices you have to make, the efforts you have to expend, the disappointments you have to endure and compensate for in order to arrive at that point, build more character for your soul than can easily be put into words. My duty as a Father is to see that you make that journey without it destroying you. It is not the easy or fun pathway through life. It is not an easy path to implement or watch ... particularly where a Father loves his children deeply. There is a balance point between having nothing, and no journey, and having everything given to you the minute you want it -- and still no journey! That balance point is called wisdom, and that’s what your Father is all about. If you don’t remember a thing

I say tonight, remember how interested I am in your becoming more than you are, and that my intent is that you have adequate guidance in becoming the best that you can become.”

As Jack speaks, the tears begin to flow down his face. Casey notices them and immediately looks away as the tears start on her own face. She reaches out and puts her hand on top of her Father’s hand.

“Thank you, Dad. I know where you’re coming from. Thanks for making the effort. I just don’t think I can ever be what you want me to be.”

“Casey, feel my heart. You and Jenny are already more than I could ever hope to have for children. Thank you for being with me on this journey through life.”

The waitress walks up with her arms loaded with food platters, notices the emotional nature of the moment, and stops short.

“Oh, I’m sorry” she says. “Am I interrupting something?”

“Not at all,” replies Jack quickly. “We go through this every evening before dinner! I think it’s the hunger pains!”

The waitress shakes her head and smiles as she puts down their plates.

## CHAPTER 8.

The following weekend, Jack borrows a Morgan River Shipyard flatbed truck and loads a portable welding unit on the bed. Backing up next to the Land Lady's steel hull not far from where the gangway climbs up inside the ship, he stops the truck just short of a small cargo container he uses for storage. Removing the padlock, he swings open the double doors. Just inside the left-hand door Jack has welded together a hoisting boom out of steel pipe. A pulley dangles off of the boom's end holding a piece of cable that runs down to a hand-operated winch. Jack releases the catch on the winch and pulls out the cable until it can attach to a chain harness on one of his spare VW air-cooled engines. He then hoists it up and swings it out onto the flat bed of the truck. He does the same with the second engine just in case he needs it, then jumps in the truck and heads out alone toward the desert to help T-Bird repair his dune buggy.

Less than an hour later Jack is welding on the dune buggy frame while T-Bird is tearing apart one of the engines at his work bench to check its condition. Nothing they could do would make either one of them any happier than what they're doing at the moment.

"You like working at the shipyard?" asks T-Bird.

"I have up until just recently," replies Jack. "The guy who runs the company is an old friend of mine from Flight School and times seem to be changing too fast for him to adapt. The company's headed for bankruptcy, which wouldn't bother me except that this guy has learned how to tap into the pension funds to keep the company afloat and what would normally have been a very comfortable pension for me has now vanished like the morning fog. I was going to retire in a few months, but now I don't know what I'm going to do. Social Security is hardly enough to live on, and if the company folds, I lose my free living quarters."

"Does that worry you?" asks T-Bird.

"It's not like I haven't been there a few dozen times before," replies Jack. "It always works out, but I must admit it's a little unsettling."

"Ask for help, man!" says T-Bird. "It's only a few words away."

"Not even that far away, T-Bird. I KNOW things are okay ... I have no idea just how okay they are, though!"

"I've been there before," remarks T-Bird, having a good laugh at the situation.

Both men work away quietly for a few moments, then T-Bird stops to make a comment. "You know, you should talk to our Casino Business Manager. He used to work with big business ... like he was a comptroller, or an accountant, or something like that. He's got college degrees out the kazoo. He might be able to tell you some things to look for."

Jack pauses for a moment to think about the implications.

“That feels kind of interesting,” he says. “I think I’d like to do that. Write down his name and address for me. Maybe I’ll stop by and have a talk with him.”

Later in the afternoon, as the sun drops down behind the hills, T-Bird rolls the rejuvenated dune buggy out of the shed where they can look at it in broad daylight.

“This calls for a celebration,” announces Jack who walks over to the back of his jeep, opens an ice-filled cooler, and takes out two beers. Both sit with their backs up against the cool steel of the mine building and admire their handiwork.

“I can’t believe this,” says T-Bird, “but you know what I like best?”

“I could never guess,” replies Jack, laughing facetiously.

“There’s no doubt about the fact this thing’s a male animal!” says T-Bird. “It looks as horny as a male coyote on a full moon night.”

“I wonder if we can get some flame out of that Pecker Pipe,” Jack comments. “Want to see if it runs?”

“I’ve been kind of afraid it would disappear if I touched it!” remarks T-Bird.

“Well, we’d better find out if it’s going to before we put any more work into it,” replies Jack

“That’s for damn sure!” says T-Bird climbing into the driver’s seat and turning the ignition key.

The engine turns over ten or fifteen times while the fuel pump picks up gas from the tank, and then suddenly roars into life firing a cloud of black smoke and several feet of flames from its phallic proboscis. T-Bird throws up his arms in elation.

“Get in, Jack!” T-Bird yells above the din. “This thing can’t be any worse than that fire-breathing dragon you fly.”

Jack climbs on board and they both strap themselves in with a seat and shoulder harness. T-Bird pops the clutch and they take off like a scared hyena for a ride through the desert that leaves Jack hanging on for dear life and wondering whether or not he’s going to live through the experience.

The following week, T-Bird’s suggestion about meeting with the Casino Business Manager keeps popping up in Jack’s mind. Not being one to ignore intuitive suggestions, especially those that seem persistent, Jack digs out T-Bird’s slip of paper on which he inscribed the business manager’s name, David Goldstein, and his telephone number. Jack makes an appointment with Mr. Goldstein’s secretary to meet with him the following day, not really knowing why he is doing so or what the purpose of the meeting will be, but certain that by the time he arrives he’ll have enough intelligent questions to make the meeting worthwhile.

At the appointed time, Jack is ushered into David Goldstein's office. David rises from his desk chair and walks around the desk to greet Jack.

"Hi, Jack," David says cheerfully. "I'm David Goldstein. Please have a seat. T-Bird gave me a little insight into what's happening in your life after he found out that you were coming down for a visit and I took the liberty of calling a few friends of mine who know something about Morgan River Shipyard so that I could at least talk intelligently with you. Why don't you run your version of the present Morgan River scenario by me first so that we both have the same frames of reference."

With that, Jack describes his background as an old acquaintance of Don Hendrix and his experiences of trying to be a mediator between the labor forces and the management forces at Morgan River Shipyard.

"The latest and last straw has been that he simply refuses to hire and train any minority people at the shipyard," adds Jack. "The government is very much aware of his stand and, quite understandably, refuses to continue to do business with him. His stand is that he should be able to run the business any damned way he pleases—which he can, of course—but he doesn't seem to realize that the government of this Nation has to take *all* of its citizens into account. What he's done is automatically eliminate his major source of income. I just don't understand that kind of stupidity, and I think the only way the company can survive is for someone to either buy him out of the picture or force him out of the picture. I made some preliminary phone calls to a key executive at Delaware Steel and Shipbuilding where I used to work several years ago. They said they might be interested in buying the company, but they'd have to see some numbers first. I assume that means income and expenses."

"Not necessarily," replies David. "They know what it takes to run that kind of business. What they mainly need to know right now is asset value: the value of the land, buildings, equipment, inventory, and so on. A record of expenses would tell them if the company was efficiently run, of course, and a copy of a few years of invoices would tell them what kind of contracts Hendrix managed to land."

"That's not exactly down my alley," replies Jack.

"It's not such a big deal," David says casually. "Do you have any friends in the accounting department?"

"They aren't the friendly types," Jack adds.

"Do you know where the accounting office is located?" David asks.

"That I know," Jack replies.

"Could you get in there at night?" asks David as demurely as the chicken might ask the Fox.

"A bit more of a challenge, but ... yes," Jack replies.

"Do you know anything about computers?"

"Not much."

“Then you’ve got have some help,” says David succinctly. “I have an old friend who used to be an IRS agent, and he’s also a computer nut. He’ll help you ... because we’ll pay him to help you!”

“That’s really nice of you,” Jack says, surprised, “but how is it that you’re being so helpful? I mean, isn’t there a certain amount of risk involved in your participation?”

“You forget something!” David says, smiling. “The Casino business lives with risk. It thrives on it! We have problems you can’t even imagine with some of the cleverest people in the country and with governments at all levels. We’re accustomed to handling things in a variety of ways, not all of them pleasant. The reason we’re willing to help you is because T-Bird is sort of the Chief’s adopted son. When either of them wants something done, it gets done in a big hurry. You must’ve done T- Bird a huge dune-buggy favor to hear him talk about you.”

David writes down a name and address on a piece of paper and hands it to Jack.

“Here,” he continues. “By the time you call Jimmy, I will have talked to him and filled him in on what we need.”

There’s a light knock at the door and T-Bird sticks his head through the doorway.

“Hi, Jack.” he says. “I thought that was your car in the parking lot. I’ll wait for you out here.”

“We’re done for now, T-Bird,” interjects David.

“Great! Come on Jack, I’ll show you around the Casino.”

Jack thanks David and leaves with T-Bird.

Jimmy Bartoloni’s office is not what someone would expect for a private detective—being a very plush office in a high-rise office building located in the heart of the downtown financial district. Nor is his personal office space a typical corporate executive’s layout. The business end of the office is more like a space station control center, having a wall-mounted desk on two contiguous walls covered with multiple computer monitors, printers, a CB radio base station, plus VHF and UHF radio scanners that cover the marine, aircraft, police, and fire frequencies. In one corner stands a tall set of rack-mounted computers and several pieces of sound recording equipment. The rest of the office is more like a living room at home complete with fresh flowers, comfortable brown leather chairs and sofa, colorful art work on the walls, and a large projection screen which rolls down from the top of the picture window, making the room completely dark for viewing. Obviously, Jimmy Bartoloni’s services are very valuable to more than a few people! Jimmy sits in one of the leather easy chairs; Jack on the leather couch.

“Can an IRS agent just walk into a place like Morgan River Shipyards and go over their books?” asks Jack.

“Yes,” replies Jimmy, “but usually we make an appointment ahead of time. In this situation, we have to plan very carefully. Are there times when this guy—what’s his

name? Hendrix?—when he’s gone for a few days?”

“Yes,” Jack says. “He goes on business trips quite often.”

“Can you find out ahead of time when he’s going to be gone?” Jimmy asks.

“That shouldn’t be too hard.”

“We have to get into that accounting office while Hendrix is away and I can go in sort of on a preliminary visit to announce the beginning of the real investigation, which, of course, will never happen because we’ll have our information by then.”

“Take them by surprise while the big decision maker is away, you mean?”

“Exactly!” replies Jimmy, “and you’re talking to a master of surprise and intimidation. Nobody—but nobody—recovered as much money for the IRS as I did when I worked for them. They just couldn’t justify paying much for my valuable services.”

“You’re going to get everything you need on this one visit?” asks Jack.

“No, no. All I get on the first visit is how to find the information. Then, later, you and I go in between two and three in the morning and collect what we need. What we’re looking for is something that will incriminate this guy Hendrix so that he can be convincingly manipulated. I have yet to find a corporation with this kind of individual in charge that’s squeaky clean. The numbers are what give evidence and substance to the local gossip, and that’s what we’re hoping to find. I already have enough information from my own contacts and David’s to know what to look for.”

“How the hell are we going to get into that accounting office during the early hours of morning?” asks Jack. “It’s locked up tighter than a drumhead and there’s a guard at the front door.”

“That’s your job!” Jimmy replies. “It would take me weeks to find out what you already know about the building and office layout and the possibilities. If we can’t get in there without being caught, there’s no sense going any further in this direction. Do you think you can handle it?”

“Holy shit!” exclaims Jack. “That puts a stretch on my imagination. I’ll let you know before the end of next week what the possibilities are.”

The following evening after dinner, Jack walks into the front lobby of the Administration Building. The night watchman has his feet up on the desk, watching a hockey game on TV.

“Hi, Jack,” he says. “Everything quiet in the yard?”

“Hi, Bob,” Jack replies. “Everything’s quiet, but I left my good leather jacket in the main hangar. Can I get a key to get in there?”

“Sure,” replies the watchmen, starting to get up.

“Don’t bother getting up, Bob. Give me the key to the key cabinet and I’ll take care of it.”

The watchmen hands Jack his key-ring without taking his eyes off of the game.

“Yeah, thanks. This game is some tense, man. I wonder what it takes to be a player like Gretzky.”

“You have to be born with skates on,” Jack replies.

Jack walks into the Security Office, opens the main key cabinet, and removes the keys to the Accounting Office and Hendrix’ office, knowing they are always locked when unoccupied. He returns the watchman’s key-ring to him.

“Thanks, Bob,” he says. “I’ll be back with the key in a few minutes.”

The watchmen nods ... and Jack immediately heads for the local hardware store to have the keys duplicated.

## CHAPTER 9.

Shortly after returning the keys to the night watchman, Jack drives around the outside of the high perimeter fence surrounding the shipyard until he comes to the double steel-mesh gates leading to his living quarters in the LAND LADY. He unlocks the padlock on the chain holding the two halves of the gate closed, re-locks them behind himself, and drives the short distance to his parking area beneath the bow of the old coastal freighter. As he climbs out of his jeep, he hears the familiar sound of loud, raucous female laughter emanating from back toward the stern of the LAND LADY. He immediately recognizes Trudy's laugh and realizes that his "Friends of a Lesser Soul" must have come through some secretly-cut opening in the shipyard fence for a meeting in what Sharkey, their leader, has ignominiously labeled as their "Think Tank". What he is referring to is the top half of a scrapped gigantic bunker oil storage tank about 15 feet high and 20 feet in diameter, and having an opening in the center of the top that was formerly an inspection port. Access to the interior is through an opening about 5 feet high cut at ground level by Jack's welding torch and hidden from the site of the outside world by the vast expanse of LAND LADY'S hull. Jack can smell wood smoke in the dark night air and sees a slight hint of smoke drifting up out of the open inspection port on the top of the abandoned tank. As he makes his way toward the tank, the flicker of firelight plays against LAND LADY'S hull from the tank's open entrance.

Jack keeps well back under cover of the darkness beneath LAND LADY'S hull until he can see what's going on inside the tank. Sitting around the open fire on old lobster crates, wire rope reels, or broken chairs, are six individuals: there's SHARKEY, a black male wearing a baseball cap, a Salvation Army acquired dress shirt that's never tucked in, and baggy pants stuffed into the top of oversized rubber boots. Next is PREACHER, a tall, skinny, white male with black beard, long black hair tied in a ponytail in back; and black, too-short pants over run-down black Army boots. Beside him is his tattered, ratty, also-black, executive briefcase.

There is IKE, a rotund but solidly-built white male with close-cropped hair who perpetually wears a variety of tight-fitting t-shirts with obscene caricaturizations on both front and back sides, jogging shoes ... and everything about his person always neat and clean. Beside him is his ever-present shopping cart full of junk collected for resale from garbage bins, street trash, and late-night property raids of those who fail to lock up their possessions. There is BUMBLE-BEE, a very short, almost stunted, white male in his 60's who is also a deaf-mute. He always appears wearing an ill-fitting business suit—no doubt of Good Will

or Salvation Army origin—and a bowler hat. He always carries on his left arm a brown paper shopping bag with handles, from which he pulls kitchen scissors and sheets of colored paper which he quickly and deftly folds into sixteenths. Once the paper is folded, the scissors fairly fly through the folded paper to make various cookie-cutter shapes. All the while he mumbles a continuous guttural sound that rises and falls with a musical rhythm and sound much like that of a swarm of bees until the piece is finished. He then unfolds a string of paper dolls, or a Christmas design, to the delight of any child, holds up one finger to suggest a fee of one dollar, smiles gratuitously, and points to his open bag with money in it.

There is TRUDY who's overbearing weight is constantly supported by a tortured walking stick and emphasized by an arthritic hobble, and whose eternally joyous and humorous personality is frequently punctuated by a raucous, earthshaking, earsplitting laugh audible easily for two city blocks ... farther on a windy day. Trudy insists that she has not yet graduated to the status of "Bag Lady", though she is often mistaken for such. Lastly, there is BEAULAH, a newcomer to the group; a very large, shy, quiet black lady in a simple cotton dress who seems to have no bone to pick with the world at large, no need to be noticed, and whose only addiction seems to be to laughter silently expressed as a shy smile and a body that shakes like a minor earthquake at the least humorous provocation.

Jack takes the top off of a large metal garbage can, holds it in front of him like a shield, grabs a stick and leaps through the opening into the tank screaming at the top of his lungs: POLICE! POLICE! PUT YOUR HANDS IN THE AIR! ... all the while keeping his face hidden by the garbage can lid. Everyone is startled. Sharkey knocks over his wine bottle and goes scrambling after it on all fours. Jack drops the shield so they can all see his smiling face. Sharkey is the first to recover, though still shaking with fright and holding his wine bottle next to his heart with both hands.

"Goddammit, Jack! ... my liquid gold! Don't do that, man!" he exclaims.

Everyone laughs according to their own particular style, and then things become quiet. Jack quickly spots their nervousness.

"This is a pleasant surprise," he states. "What's the occasion?"

"Oh, we was sittin' here in the thinkin' tank thinkin' and waitin' for youse to come home, Jack. We was goin' to ... ahhh ..." Sharkey's voice trails off as though he just cannot bring himself to state the real reason of their visit. After a moment, Jack responds.

"If it's all that serious, perhaps we ought to have an opening invocation. Preacher! ... give us something the covers all the possibilities. You got anything the covers a birth and a death at the same time?"

Preacher thinks for a few seconds.

“Why, sure,” he says. “That’s just a conversion!”

Jack chuckles at the quick response while Preacher pulls out a book from his executive briefcase and fumbles with the pages. Meanwhile, Bumble-Bee has stood up, pulled out scissors and paper from his shopping bag, and is walking slowly from person to person giving everyone except Beulah and Trudy a nicely-folded piece of blank paper. Preacher suddenly stands up, raises his right hand, palm outspread, and begins to read from a well-worn, brown-leather-covered book.

“The Earth rolls upon her wings, and the Sun giveth his light by day, and the Moon giveth her light by night, and the stars also give their light, as they roll upon their wings in their glory in the midst of the power of God. Unto what shall I liken these kingdoms that ye may understand? Behold, all these are kingdoms, and any man who hath seen any or the least of these hath seen God moving in His majesty and power. I say unto you, he hath seen HIM; nevertheless, he who came unto his own was not known.”

While Preacher is preaching, Jack leans over and whispers to Sharkey.

“Sharkey ... what’s Bumble-Bee doing?”

“He’s passin’ out tickets to de wine party,” whispers Sharkey.

Suddenly, Trudy interrupts Preacher’s speech in such a loud voice it stops Preacher short.

“HEY! ... how come I didn’t get one of those pieces of paper like everybody else did?” she demands. “Is this male chauvinist week, or what?”

“Oh, shut up, Trudy!” says Sharkey. “That’s a invitation to a wine party we’s havin’ for de men, ... and ‘sides, you don’t drink nohow.”

“Well, Beulah,” Trudy growls loudly, “ I guess we’ll have to have our own damn party!” Preacher starts reading again, this time louder, purposefully emphasizing each reference to God as “He”.

“HE that ascended up on high, as also HE descended below all things, in that HE comprehended all things, that HE might be in all and through all things the Light of Truth.”

“WHAT!” bellows Trudy. “What is that STUFF you’re reading?”

Preacher hauls his book close to his body in mock protection and scowls at Trudy. Trudy continues:

“That sounds like another one of those damned male-written documents. Where the hell would God come from if it wasn’t from a woman? Answer me that, Preacher! ... and I’ll tell you this: The reason there’s a great woman BEHIND every great man is because she can’t push, kick, and shove from the front! HAHAAHAHAHAHAHA HAHAAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!” Beulah puts her hand over her face, but her whole body shakes with laughter. Preacher

can't take it anymore. He loses it completely. He gives Trudy the "Evil Arm" with fist clenched and shouts:

"Climb on this, you old Skunk Muncher!"

"HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA," roars Trudy. "Divinity sounds about as good on you as it looks, HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA!"

Preacher turns his back on her and begins to read softly to himself.

"Ahhhhh, he's tough alright," she roars. "He's male! ... same stuff God's made of, HAHAHAHAHAHAHA, HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA."

As Trudy's laugh dies out, things become very quiet as though everyone instinctively knows what now has to be said.

"Jack," says Sharkey nervously, "we-all brought Beulah down here to see if you would help her for a while."

"You 'all' brought her?" asks Jack, looking at each member of the group individually. Each nods affirmatively. Sharkey continues:

"Beulah ... well ... she come in from de country 'cause her house burn down and she ain't got no relatives or nothin'. But she ain't no Bag Lady, Jack! She too good for that! We was thinkin' you might could help her 'cause ain't nobody we know knows the things and people you knows, and ain't nobody else willin' to help poor souls like us like the way you does."

Everyone in the group nods and murmurs assent.

"Sharkey," Jack says with mock disdain. "You should be ashamed of yourself!"

"Whysat?" Sharkey asks with complete surprise.

"You're the only man I know can get blood from a stone," Jack says, laughing.

"HAHAHAHAHA," roars Trudy. "He sure knows how to get WINE outa' one! HAHAHAHAHAHAHA, HAHAHAHAHAHAHA!"

"Yes," Jack adds after the laughter dies down. "I'll be glad to help Beulah in any way I can."

Beulah's obvious apprehension melts into the flow of tears which she tries to hide with her hand.

"Guess that's it for Church tonight, folks," says Sharkey. He turns toward Jack and hands him a slip of Bumble-Bee's paper.

"Here's your ticket to the wine party, Jack. We'll see you there."

All file out of the tank slowly except Beulah.

"Come with me, Beulah," says Jack. "There's lots of room in the LAND LADY and you can make yourself comfortable there until we figure out what's best for you."

One evening, several days after Beulah has had a chance to become familiar with her new surroundings and new home, Jack is sitting quietly in the captain's cabin reading a book when he hears Beulah's voice singing an old Negro spiritual song. She sings

without any musical accompaniment, yet her knowledge of musical intonation is perfect; not a note is a single cent off key. Jack closes his book, closes his eyes, and listens as the music rises and falls, increases and decreases in intensity in a play of emotional expression that only music can produce. Nothing Beulah could do would express her gratitude more to Jack for his generosity than for her to make the walls of the old ship vibrate with her new joy. Jack's emotions are at the point of tears when suddenly the door to the Captain's Cabin bursts open and Casey storms in, mad as a hornet.

"Dad!" she exclaims. "What are you doing dragging all this trash home!"

It takes Jack but a short moment to bring his emotions under control and respond rather than react.

"What are you talking about, Casey?" he asks quietly.

"That ... that ... black woman! She'll steal us blind ... or her friends will. What if she has lice ... or cockroaches? And what is that *stuff* she's singing? Do I have to listen to *that* all night?"

"Reserve your judgments until you know what you're talking about, Casey. Otherwise you look like a fool. Her name is Beulah, and she's one of the kindest, most humble people you'll ever meet."

"But do I have to listen to that ... that music?" demands Casey.

"She's in a different part of the ship and doesn't realize there are others besides herself and me," Jack replies. "Not once have I come down and told you to turn your music down when you have the volume at full blast and are dancing to it. And what you call music is certainly not music to me. It doesn't hurt you to exercise more than a little patience since you need quite a bit more than you have. If Beulah's music happens too often, I'll speak to her about it, and I will also speak to you about the volume of your music when it can disturb Beulah. Do you agree to that?"

"Hmph!" growls Casey with a smirk. Turning on her heel, she exits the Captain's Cabin, closing the door loud loudly as she leaves.

Beulah's singing stops. Jack shakes his head in disappointment, sighs, and returns to his book.

## CHAPTER 10.

Jimmy Bartoloni is dressed impeccably in a dark business suit and carries a black leather attaché case as he walks through the front door of the Administration Building of Morgan River Shipyard. The guard looks up from behind his counter and greets him.

“Good afternoon, sir. Can I help you?” queries the guard.

“My name’s Maloney and I’m here on official U.S. Government business,” says Jimmy flashing his official-looking ID. “Could you please direct me to Mr. Hendrix’ office?”

“Certainly, sir. I’ll call and tell them you’re here,” replies the guard.

“Don’t bother. I was just talking to Wanda on my cell phone in the parking lot and she said to come on up,”

“Oh, very well, sir. At the top of those stairs, turn left. Mr. Hendrix’ office is at the end of the hall.” says the guard settling back into his chair.

Jimmy climbs the stairs, walks down the hall and blithely into Wanda’s office.

“Good afternoon ... Mr. Hendrix in?” he asks, knowing full well from Jack’s morning phone call that Don Hendrix has gone to D.C. for a long weekend.

“He’s away for the weekend,” Wanda replies, taken aback by the interruption.

“My name is Maloney,” Jimmy says. “I’m an auditor for the U.S. Internal Revenue Service and I need to make preliminary arrangements for an audit.”

“I’m sorry, but Mr. Hendrix won’t be back until Monday or Tuesday. Would you like me to make an appointment?”

“That won’t be necessary,” says Jimmy. “I don’t need to see him today, but I do need to have a short visit with the company Comptroller.”

“Please be seated. I’ll have to see if he’s in,” replies Wanda, stalling for time.

“He’s in!” says Jimmy with a very intimidating voice. “Just take me to his office.”

Wanda walks to the Accounting Office; Jimmy follows.

“Herman, this is Mr. ...umm ...”

“Maloney,” Jimmy replies. “I’m with the Internal Revenue Service.”

Jimmy flashes his ID badge again.

“I dropped by to spend a few minutes with you in advance of the investigation which you were notified about which begins next week,” continues Jimmy.

“No,” replies the Comptroller, obviously confused, “We haven’t been notified of this at all! ... have we Wanda?”

Wanda shakes her head in bewilderment.

“Damn!” exclaims Jimmy. “This is the third time they’ve embarrassed me this way! Sorry about that. I was told you’d been notified.”

“Shouldn’t I call Mr. Hendrix?” Wanda asks Herman, somewhat alarmed.

“There’s no cause for alarm,” Jimmy replies calmly. “I’m not here to investigate or look at anything.”

“In fact,” he says, looking at his watch, “My wife and family are expecting me in forty-five minutes to go camping for the weekend. What I came for is to go over the mechanics of the procedure with you, Mr. ... I didn’t quite catch your name ...”

“Jefferies ... Herman Jefferies.”

“I’m Robert Maloney, Mr. Jefferies,” says Jimmy reaching out to shake hands. “The purpose of my visit is to go over the mechanics of the audit procedure with you. I may need an assistant ... or two ... or I may need none. I need to know your methods of record-keeping, data storage and so on.”

Jimmy stops talking and stands there ... waiting. After a rather long and uncertain silence, Herman picks up the ball and runs with it.

“I think it’s alright, Wanda. I’ll go over it with you later.”

“Where would you like to start, Mr. Maloney?” continues Herman as Wanda returns to her office.

“How do you maintain your Ledgers and Journals?” Jimmy asks.

“Ledgers, journals, and payroll are all on computer. They’ve recently been upgraded and meticulously organized,” replies Herman.

“Is this PC on a Local Area Network?” asks Jimmy.

“Yes, we have a separate server for the accounting department,” Herman replies.

“And how do you do your daily backups?” asks Jimmy.

“We have a rather antiquated tape backup system,” replies Herman.

“Would you mind showing me your tape storage?” Jimmy asks.

“Certainly, just come with me.”

As Herman shows Jimmy the tape storage area, Jimmy takes careful note of the office, looking for ledgers that would require manual entries. He notices several on the sideboard immediately behind Herman’s desk chair. As they return to Herman’s desk, Jimmy has one last request.

“One final request, Mr. Jefferies. Would you mind bringing up your computer programs for me?”

“I’ve shut things down for the weekend,” replies Herman, “But it won’t take a second to start it up.”

So saying, Herman goes into the back of the office and restarts the server. Jimmy notes his every move and stands up so he can observe more clearly. As Herman sits down at his desk and waits for the Windows program to open, Jimmy sidles around the desk so he can watch Herman’s activity with the keyboard.

“This is our main accounting program,” says Herman, punching in his password to open the program. In an instant, Jimmy has the password memorized.

“That’s fine,” says Jimmy. “I’m familiar with that program. You needn’t go any further. Thank you very much.”

Jimmy looks at his watch.

“Damn! The kids are going to be mad at me again. I’ll schedule a new time for that investigation and make sure you get a letter this time. Nice to meet you, Mr. Jefferies.”

Jimmy picks up his briefcase and departs quickly.

Two hours later, Jack has finished eating his dinner and is sitting alone in the Captain’s Cabin when the telephone rings. It’s Jimmy Bartoloni. Jimmy gives Jack a run-down on his encounter at the shipyard office.

“After you called and told me Hendrix had gone to D.C. for a long weekend, I decided to take a chance on going in today. Like I said, Friday’s my day for surprise parties ... especially just before 5 o’clock when everyone’s already half out the door. I called after lunch to make sure Hendrix had left. He had. I called again at 4 o’clock just outside the gate to make sure Jefferies was in. He was. So far so good. You should’ve seen the look on Wanda’s face when I walked in unannounced. It was even better when I flashed my badge. Good thing they didn’t look at it too closely. I bought it on Ebay for twenty bucks! ... but it is the real McCoy; the IRS agent’s name was Maloney. The Comptroller—Jefferies—was very helpful ... even punched in his password for opening the accounting programs while I was looking over his shoulder. Guess what it is ... Mustang! ... sound familiar? Isn’t that slang for a P-51? I thought so. Now guess who must have originated the password? None other than your buddy Don Hendrix, right? Who else would want that kind of control and access to the company’s books?”

Jack is smiling and chuckling as he listens to Jimmy tell the story. Jimmy continues:

“They were some damned glad to see me leave. I hope you’re ready with your end of the deal. We’re due back in that office in exactly four hours, Mister. If we miss this chance, we may never have another once Hendrix gets back and tries to figure out what’s going on.”

Jack replies:

“I’ve got the keys to Hendrix office and the Accounting Office. The way we get through the front door you’re going to have to see to believe!”

Four hours after Jack hangs up the telephone from his conversation with Jimmy, it is 11:00PM. A white delivery van with the name ACE JANITORIAL SERVICES painted on the side pulls up and parks in front of the Morgan River Shipyard Administrative Office door. Out steps its driver—Sharkey—dressed in a set of white coveralls with the cleaning company name embroidered on the back. The side door slides open and out step Preacher, Beulah, Trudy, Bumble-Bee, and Ike all dressed in the same white coveralls as Sharkey. Ike’s shopping cart comes out last and gets loaded with all manner of cleaning

liquid, mops, brooms, rags, buckets, and dusters. Preacher wears his Top Hat, Beulah wears a red bandanna around her head, Trudy wears a floppy artist's hat with a peacock feather, Bumble-Bee wears his Bowler Hat, and Ike sports a head-mounted flashlight. They form up in single file behind Sharkey as he walks over to the main door and raps sharply on the glass. The watchman leaves his station, unlocks the door, and opens it slightly.

"What do you want?" demands the watchman abruptly.

"Whadda Ya mean 'What we want?' " retorts Sharkey. "We's here to CLEAN, Man. Dat's what youse ask for!"

"That's what WHO asked for?" demands the watchmen.

"Look, man, I got dis order here. It say clean halls, batrooms, zecativ offices. How'm I pos' a do dat wit you in de way?"

"I don't know about no goddamn cleaning order," states the night watchman.

"I can't help you don't get de word, Man," says Sharkey equally irritably. "Dis order come straight from Mr. Henders ... or Hendiks ... or somep'm like 'at. He call in yestiday, say he's leavin', CLEAN HIS ZEKATIV HALLS AND BATROMS REAL CLEAN!"

The night watchman throws up his hands in despair and hauls the door open.

"Well, CLEAN them then!"

The watchman looks on in disbelief at the crew that files past him.

Obviously well briefed, Sharkey leads them to the stairs and up to the upstairs hall. The watchman returns to watching his TV programs, occasionally glancing at the closed-circuit TV monitors that monitor the cleaning crew's progress. As the cleaning crew comes into view in the next monitor, Beulah is leading the way holding a step ladder which she plants in front of the camera. Climbing up directly in front of the camera to block its view, she dusts the camera and its mount with her feather duster. As soon as the camera's view is completely blocked, Sharkey ducks back to open an exterior side door. Jimmy and Jack come in carrying computer gear and file past Beulah. As soon as they're past the camera's view range, Beulah repeats the procedure with the camera in front of the accounting office. Jack opens the accounting office and he and Jimmy go in. There are no cameras in the accounting office, only in the hallways. Jimmy starts the accounting office server, types in the password, and starts to download data to his portable drive. While the computer is disgorging its contents, Jimmy walks around behind Jefferies' desk.

"Hey! There's something missing here," he says. "There was a ledger book here at 4:30 this afternoon. Look around for a red and black ledger book. It may be important."

"I'll look in Hendrix' office," says Jack. "I've got the key."

Several minutes later Jack returns to the accounting office carrying a ledger.

"Is this it?" Jack asks.

“Looks like it. Let me see it,” says Jimmy taking the ledger and thumbing through the pages. “There’s a lot of big numbers here ... and what looks like code for what it’s for ... over a million and a half bucks, in fact.”

Jimmy opens the ledger to the first page.

“Here it is!” he says excitedly. “Just a number, but I’ve seen too many of them not to know what it is. It’s a number for a Swiss bank account ... and it’ll also tell us which bank.”

Jimmy hands the book back to Jack.

“Start up the copier. Copy all the pages with numbers, and then put it back exactly where you got it. Better wipe it off before you put it back.”

Jack has no sooner come back to the accounting office after returning the ledger than Beulah sticks her head through the office door.

“Bumble-Bee says the watchman’s coming,” she says excitedly, ducking back into the hall with her mop.

“Quick, shut off the lights and lock the office door,” says Jack in a whisper. Jimmy locks the door and cuts the light switch.

“What’s he doing coming up here?” whispers Jimmy.

“He has rounds to make in both buildings,” answers Jack. “He punches a zone alarm on each round to show what time him he was there.”

“Is there a zone alarm in here?” asks Jimmy.

“I don’t know,” replies Jack. “I think they’re just at the ends of the halls.”

Jack and Jimmy move to the computer data storage room and close the door. They can still hear the night watchman’s keys rattling on his chain as he moves down the hall checking that all door doors are locked as he moves along. The noise comes closer ... the accounting office door handle rattles with movement. Nothing happens. The next office door handle further down the hall rattles. Suddenly Trudy’s voice rips through the silence.

**“GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE! DON’T YOU KNOW A LADIES’ ROOM FROM A MENS’ ROOM!”**

A door slams loudly, echoing down the hall. The night watchman makes his way back up the hall the way he came, his keys jangling as he moves—his voice muttering obscenities and references to craproom cleaners in general. When he’s long gone, Jimmy starts packing up his gear.

“We’ve got as much information as we’re going to get,” Jimmy remarks. “How long have we been in here?”

“A little over two hours,” remarks Jack looking at the office clock.

“That’s enough for a good cleaning job,” remarks Jimmy. “Let’s go back through the same procedure we used getting in here.”

Jack opens the office door slightly and calls quietly for Beulah. As she moves the huge dry-mop down the hall past the accounting office door, Jack whispers to her.

“Block the cameras, Beulah. Pretend you’re washing the ceiling. Call when you’re ready.”

The aluminum ladder rattles as it’s being set up in front of the TV camera, then Beulah sings a little ditty with the word “Okay” used prolifically. Jack and Jimmy make their way out into the night air through the same side door by which they entered. The rest of the cleaning crew gather up their gear and march single file out the building’s front door toward the van. Bumble-Bee is the last one in line and when no one is looking he scurries over to the night watchman’s desk, hands him what looks like a slip of red paper, waves like a little child, and scurries out the door. With a puzzled look on his face, the night watchman opens the slip of red paper to reveal a string of paper dolls. He shakes his head in disbelief as the truck roars off into the night.

Several days later, Jimmy Bartoloni and Jack meet in the casino manager’s office with David Goldstein. There’s a large stack of papers on David’s desk which he and Jimmy are examining carefully. Jack sits quietly by.

“This company’s made a helluva lot of money in the past,” says Jimmy, “But it appears that Hendrix is a better generator than a manager. Some tighter controls ... salary changes at some levels, and a few new contracts and this company could be around for a long time.”

“The company only has one or two minority group workers,” adds Jack, “and that’s at the janitorial level. There won’t be another government contract until that situation is remedied. That’s been made very clear for the last few years.”

“We’ve got some hard-working Indian construction workers in the tribe,” says David. “That’s a perfect place for them to be full-time employed. That also makes it a good place to put some casino money. What would we have to do to buy out Hendrix?”

“Jack says he won’t sell,” replies Jimmy, “But from what I’ve seen so far we could put him in jail for a very convincing period of time.”

“Oh?” remarks David, raising his eyebrows.

“He’s been siphoning money out of the company through a foreign consulting agency that’s supposedly finding him shipbuilding contracts,” replies Jimmy. “The money goes into a Swiss bank account ... about one point six million so far.”

“How do you know this?” asks David.

“Hendrix has an unmarked ledger book in his office,” continues Jimmy. “It covers about two years up to last month. Each deposit in the ledger corresponds in amount and time with bills paid to International Shipping Management Company, a Cayman Islands company judging by the address.”

“How much is owed to the pension fund?” David asks.

“It looks like about three and a half million,” Jimmy replies.

“He knows the company’s been finished for a long time,” muses David, “No doubt trying to sock some money away so he can declare bankruptcy and still have something left. He probably won’t sell because he doesn’t want anyone to know about the pension funds. There must be some serious tax losses over the past five years.”

“That’s just what I was thinking,” adds Jimmy. “Enough to cover years of casino income.”

“Proper management would make that a very good investment for the tribe ... a good place to reinvest casino funds,” remarks David. “Okay, leave the records here with me so I can digest them over the next few days.”

## CHAPTER 11.

The stereo in the captain's cabin is loud enough to rattle the glasses in the kitchen cabinets at each crescendo as it plays one of Jack's favorite tunes. He is enjoying dancing by himself to the music when the cabin door opens and Casey appears in the doorway. She leans against the door frame and watches him, smiling. Jack walks over and turns the volume of the stereo down.

"What do you want, Honey?" Jack asks quietly.

"How you know I want something?" says Casey.

"You only have two positions to the switch on your power panel. One position is 'want'; the other is 'don't want'. When you seek me out with that coy little smile on your face, all I have to ask myself is: how much is it this time."

Jack sits in his easy chair and Casey comes in and sits down across from him.

"But, Dad! I don't ask for much from you. I've spent all the money I earned last summer, and I need just a teensy-weensy little more."

"You saved four hundred dollars over the summer. What did you spend that on?"

"Lunches, and food and stuff."

"Every time you don't want to eat what your mother or I serve, you go out to eat. That's a luxury you can't afford. You're too proud to carry a bag lunch to school, too lazy to make it, and too particular to make it out of what we have available. So now we have to pay twice for your upkeep. That is not fair in my opinion. What is it you want?"

"I need a prom dress."

"How much is it going to cost," Jack asks.

"Two hundred dollars!" replies Casey cringing slightly.

"I suppose an annual prom is a 'surprise' event—certainly not one you could plan for, is it?" says Jack facetiously. No comment from Casey.

"Okay ... I'll pay for it!" continues Jack. "But you also have to pay for it."

"How?" asks Casey meekly.

Jack gets up and walks to a closet. He rummages around and comes back with two burlap potato sacks. He walks over to Casey and holds one up against her as though sizing up a skirt.

"You wear these two sacks to school for a week," says Jack, "These and your underwear and sandals. No jackets, no coats, no hose, no makeup, and no hairdo. Start Monday morning; finish Friday at 5:00PM. Do it with courage and I hand you two hundred bucks cash Friday night."

Jack sits down. Casey is horrified at first, and then very angry.

"You Bastard! How can you be so cruel? Does it give you some kind of sadistic satisfaction to see me suffer? Why do you want to want to humiliate me this way?"

Casey breaks down in tears and sits down. Jack takes it all in calmly. When Casey quiets down, he speaks:

“Casey ... it is no accident of fate that you find yourself in the company of a man who has very carefully, with long and diligent practice, made and remade himself into what he considers to be a hero among men. I have paid whatever price I had to pay; willingly suffered whatever humility I had to suffer; started from the bottom and worked my way upward time and time again until now there is no bottom ... and no top; to me they are one and the same. I have died a thousand deaths and, like the Phoenix, risen each time from the ashes on wings of greater power. As my step-daughter you have chosen to use my last name instead of your genetic father’s name. This is a test! If you refuse to do as I have requested, your name is henceforth no longer Diamond. You will use the name you were born with so that you will be constantly aware that what your father is—and isn’t—is also what you are and what you are not. You are tough! You’re hard—too hard. You ride roughshod over people regularly, and you see yourself as far superior to them when in fact you are not. On Monday, we will all see what you’re really made of.”

Casey gets up, curses, and throws the sacks angrily into the waste can beside the door as she leaves. After she’s gone, Jack leans his head back in the chair, wondering if he hasn’t gone too far. He cringes as Casey’s stateroom door slams below.

Several hours later, Jack is still sitting quietly by himself in his chair. There is a light knock on the door and Jenny walks in.

“Are you still up, Dad?” she asks. “I saw your light under the door.”

“Come in, Honey.”

“Casey told me what you asked her to do,” says Jenny.

“Well, what do you think?” asks Jack.

“That’s awfully tough, Dad. Was your father that way with you?”

“At times ... and in different ways. I had different parts of my personality that needed adjusting. I hated him for it at the time, but I love him for it now.”

“Do you think your proposal will prove anything?” Jenny asks. “A major part of Casey’s problem is that she doesn’t feel good about herself deep down inside. How would what you have asked her to do improve on that situation?”

“Any challenge that we’re asked to rise to has the net effect of increasing our personal power and confidence whether we succeed or fail. It’s the effort that counts. Casey already has the power to do what I asked and turn it into a positive event, but she has to rise above her pride and self-importance. She has to learn how to give what at first seem like negative events a positive result.”

“Well ... I don’t think I could do it,” replies Jenny.

“You certainly could!” retorts Jack. “All you’d have to do is see it as a costume for a part in a play!”

“Oh!” replies Jenny, realizing that her father knows her better than she thought. “That changes the whole perspective ... but it still wouldn’t be easy.”

“And there’s nothing learned and no power gained if I just hand her two hundred dollars.”

“Do I need lessons like this?” asks Jenny.

“Certainly not!” replies Jack. “You’ve had your difficult lessons in other lifetimes. You don’t have this miserable negative streak inside you that Casey does. You now create your own challenges and rise to them as best you’re able. That’s how well-experienced souls handle Planet Earth.”

“I think I need to talk to Casey,” says Jenny after a pause.

“A very good idea ... and thank you, Sweetheart. That’s what good sisters are for.”

## CHAPTER 12.

The night is a very long one for Jack. He pours himself a strong drink and sits back in his chair with a book in an effort to take his mind off the present situation. He soon falls asleep in his chair and only awakens as the first rays of sunlight poke through the portholes of the Captain's Cabin. He goes into his bathroom to shave and take a shower, and when he emerges into the living area again, Jenny is fixing breakfast.

"Want some eggs, Dad?" she asks.

"No thanks," Jack replies, walking to the nearest porthole to stare morosely out at the new day.

"Don't worry about it, Dad," says Jenny. "We talked for a long time last night. I don't think Casey slept much either, but I think she's gotten over her anger."

"I certainly hope so," replies Jack. "I haven't heard the shower running this morning. Is Casey here?"

"Oh yes. She was when I got up anyway."

Just then, Casey appears in the cabin door in her bathrobe. She stands there looking very troubled for a moment, then walks over and picks up the burlap sacks. She holds one up in front of her as though examining it.

"Can I cut holes in these things ... or what?" she asks aloud, not directing her speech to anyone in particular.

Jack turns with a rather surprised look on his face.

"You can do anything you like with them," he says quietly. Things become very quiet in the cabin.

"What can I tell people?" asks Casey a moment later, still eyeing the burlap sack.

"Tell them you're starring in Robinson Crusoe. Tell them what a jerk your father is. Tell them any kind of a story that works for you," replies Jack quietly.

"Five days?" Casey asks, glancing over at Jack.

"Five days," Jack replies, nodding his head affirmatively.

Casey throws both sacks over her arm and walks out of the Captain's Cabin. Jack takes a deep breath and releases it very slowly. Tears start to trickle down his cheeks. Jenny walks over and gives her father a big hug.

"I sure hope she has the power to carry it off," Jenny says.

"Promise me you'll keep working with her?" asks Jack.

"Promise!" replies Jenny with a smile.

A short time later, as Jack is cleaning up the breakfast dishes, he hears a car drive up outside the fence. A horn beeps twice. Footsteps run down the steel gangway ladder as Jack moves to the porthole to look out. Casey is on her way to school, her hair in a single braid, one sack tied around her waist as a long skirt, the other a long blouse with a hole for the neck and a hole for each arm. She wears sandals only and carries her books and a backpack. She has wisely called for one of her girlfriends to pick her up that morning, but Jack can already hear the razzing she'll get when she gets to school. He feels her uneasiness and self-consciousness deeply within, but knows himself well enough not to change his resolve. He shakes his head and returns to cleaning up.

Still later that morning, Jack receives a call all from David, the Casino manager, inviting him to come by after work that afternoon for a short visit. He will not discuss the matter with Jack over the telephone, but Jack senses a certain amount of eager anticipation in David's voice. When the 5 o'clock buzzer goes off in the Shipyard hangar building, Jack quickly cleans up his work area, throws on a leather flight jacket and heads for the Casino. Once at the Casino, David ushers Jack into his office and opens a door leading to a private suite just off of his office. There they can sit in comfort in a living room with a panoramic view of the desert. David opens up the conversation.

"Jack, the reason I called you over is to tell you that we're definitely interested in taking over Morgan River Shipyards—debts and all. But the chief has asked me to get your opinion on certain matters. Assuming that we can back Hendrix into a negotiating corner with what we know, what would you do with him? He has certain talents and abilities that it would be a shame to pass up."

"I'm not sure what I would do with him," Jack replies after a moment's thought. "In any case, I don't think he'd stay in a lesser position. He and I already went over that possibility."

"So, give me your gut reaction. He's spent your retirement money, and feathered his own nest with it."

"I don't know how Hendrix justifies his actions in his own mind," says Jack. "The only thing I can deal with is what's happened to me in my world and what I have to do about it. When a ship is sinking, the clever and the powerful don't have to go to the bottom with it ... especially when there's plenty of warning. I have to ask myself: 'What am I doing on a sinking ship?' At some level, I've either chosen or accepted the experience. And since I don't do bad things to myself, I have to wait to see what the final answer is."

"So what would you do with Hendrix?" asks David.

"He's held his hand and he's played his cards," replies Jack. "He could've folded ... could've dropped out of the game. I guess he now has to be forced out. Since he's sort of an old 'rival', I'd prefer not to be the one holding the sword to his throat."

"I understand that, Jack. You don't have to be. What is it that you want more than anything else at this point in time?"

“I’ve really been looking forward to my freedom,” replies Jack emphatically.

“That can be arranged,” says David. “As long as people enjoy the gaming dream, we can cover a lot of other people’s mistakes and shortcomings. We’re a tribal people—the human tribe. We curse ourselves on the one hand ... and redeem ourselves with the other.”

“I don’t really have to leave the company to have my freedom, either,” Jack adds. “When I love the people I live with, I don’t want to be anyplace else—except maybe for a few trips here and there to break the monotony.”

“I think the Chief wanted to hear you say that,” says David.

“I’m not a corporate executive either, or a chief,” Jack adds. “In fact, I’m not really sure what the hell I am in spite of spending years trying to figure it out.”

“The chief says you’re like T-Bird. He says we have to keep guys like you around. I don’t know exactly what he means, but judging from what happens to everything he touches, he knows exactly what he’s about. That’s all I have to say; you have any questions?”

“No,” Jack replies. “But I will say that things are becoming more and more interesting every day.”

That evening, as Jack, Casey, and Jenny are sitting at the table eating dinner, things are very quiet. Jack doesn’t dare ask Casey how her first day at school went. Suddenly, Casey begins to cry.

“What is it, Honey?” Jack asks, slightly alarmed.

“This is too hard, Dad,” cries Casey. “Everybody’s making fun of me at school and I just don’t think I can go on.”

“Casey, this is not easy for me either, but I’ll cry a lot more than you if you stop. What, exactly, is the problem?”

“My friends ignore me. They make fun of me behind my back. I can just feel them laughing at me,” she says.

Jack nods his head with understanding and thinks for a minute.

“Then they certainly are not your friends! Real friends don’t do that,” Jack comments.

“They’re just your schoolmates. They don’t know how to be a friend yet.”

“Sarah is the only one trying to help me and encourage me,” continues Casey.

“The very overweight girl?” Jack asks.

“Yes,” reply replies Casey.

“Feel this experience, Casey. The reason Sarah has compassion for you is because she lives with this kind of rejection on a daily basis. She’s had to learn to deal with it and it isn’t easy. One of the biggest challenges in life is to turn a negative situation into a positive one. It may be difficult, but it can always be done. Don’t allow yourself to be the victim in this situation. Look at me Honey.”

Jack holds up his left hand.

“Victim,” he says, looking at his raised left hand.

He holds up his right hand.

“Master and hero,” he says looking intently at Casey. “Take charge of it, Honey.”

Casey continues to cry and goes to her room. Jenny follows shortly thereafter. Jack walks to the porthole window, unable to finish his dinner.

Suddenly, Jack is abruptly brought out of his funk by the annoying ring of the telephone. He walks over and picks it up.

“Hello?” he says.

“Hi, Jack, this is Jimmy. I know this is sort of short notice, but can you come down to the office in the next hour or so?”

“Sure,” he replies. “I can be there in fifteen minutes, if you like.”

“8 o’clock is fine. We’re having a little strategy meeting here and need your input.”

“I’ll be there at eight,” Jack replies.

Jack is very grateful for the short notice intrusion, and thus energized, he throws on his leather jacket and heads to the Pub for a beer before the meeting.

Promptly at 8:00PM, Jack walks into Jimmy’s office, says Hi to David, and takes a seat in one of the comfortable easy chairs.

“Jack, have you talked to Hendrix anymore about his present situation?” asks Jimmy.

“I’ve tried,” replies Jack, “But he doesn’t want to talk about it. My feeling is that he would rather see the company sink than let go of it.”

“Doesn’t the man know by now that he doesn’t have far to go?” asks Jimmy.

“He’s more of a gambler than I ever was,” says Jack. “He doesn’t know when to stop. Believing in something works fine if you’ve stacked the cards in your favor, or if your continuous actions have kept you on the credit side of the ledger, but he doesn’t have either situation going for him.”

“Well, I have to say that we have far from an airtight case ourselves,” says David. “He might just deny all of our findings ... and if he’s a good poker player he’ll do just that.”

“There’s another aspect to this that you haven’t factored in,” remarks Jack.

“What’s that?” asks Jimmy with curiosity.

“Don’s intent has always been to serve himself first,” replies Jack. “It appears that your intent is to serve the needs of the tribe as well as the company. Am I not correct in that assumption?”

“Hell, yes,” replies David quickly. “The main reason we’re interested in the company is because it provides a work source for some very talented men and women of the tribe. They’re much more constructively and creatively employed there than in the casino or any other source of employment presently available to them. The company doesn’t even have to make money to be a good investment; the Casino does that.”

“Then your intent for both the tribe and the company gives you a much stronger hand than you might realize,” remarks Jack. “The possibility for that future synergy of energy has a greater effect on the present moment than you might think.”

“You’re thinking goes beyond mine, Jack,” replies Jimmy. “Let’s hope it’s so. But, at any rate, we haven’t come this far to let the opportunity go. When the chips are down he may prove to be a wise man and a lousy poker player. Let’s hope so! We won’t know ‘till we drop the bomb on him.”

“Do you have a strategy planned?” David asks Jimmy.

“Ready and loaded,” Jimmy replies. “What are you going to do if my plan works? My ultimatum gets Hendrix out of there in a matter of hours.”

“I have a guy who can move into Hendrix position in thirty days. He knows the business as well as Hendrix,” says David. “Until then, the three of us will have to make company decisions and try to keep the creditors at bay.”

“Okay,” says Jimmy. “I’ll make the big call Friday afternoon just before 5:00PM ... my favorite time for judgment calls! Come by the office if you want to hear the ultimatum in person.”

In the meantime, back at the LAND LADY, Jenny is hearing strange noises coming from Casey’s stateroom ... like, perhaps, the sound of a sewing machine. This being a sound of an entirely different nature than the sounds that were earlier emanating from Casey’s stateroom, Jenny decides to pay Casey a visit to see what’s going on. She knocks gently on Casey’s door.

“Come in,” says Jenny with a cheerful voice. Casey peers in through the open door.

“Watcha doin’?” she asks.

“Trying to make a pumpkin look like a glass slipper,” remarks Casey over the hum of the sewing machine.

“Casey, if anyone can pull this off, you can!” says Jenny. “Make the skirt short ... and the blouse tight! The guys won’t even notice the burlap!”

“Oh, I am ... don’t worry!” replies Casey, pausing in her work. “You know ... I would never do this if Dad didn’t work as hard on himself as he does on us.”

The sound of footsteps on the steel stairs leading to the Captain’s Cabin interrupts their conversation.

“Sounds like Dad’s just come back,” says Jenny. “He had a very important meeting about the company tonight. I think I’ll go find out what’s going on.”

“I’ll have this done in a few minutes,” remarks Casey. “I’ll wear it up there and you can tell me what you think.”

Twenty minutes later, Jack and Jenny are sitting in the Captain’s Cabin when Jenny walks through the door dressed in her newly-converted burlap outfit. What used to be

an ankle-length burlap skirt it is now a mini-skirt just short of the knees, hemmed at the bottom and zipped on the upper portion of the back to make a perfect fit around her small waist. The blouse/jacket is now only waist length, but has a two-inch-wide burlap hem around the waist made by rolling the burlap up and sewing it flat so that it looks like a belt. The V-neck and collar are nicely styled of sewn-down burlap, and where once there were just holes for the arms, are now elbow-length burlap sleeves also hemmed at the elbow. The two halves of the blouse/jacket are held together in front by a long brown shoelace crisscrossed from the waist upward and tied suggestively between her two very well-formed breasts. As she parades around the room like the model she could well be if she liked, she asks:

“Well ... what do you think?”

“The skirt could be little shorter,” remarks Jenny.

“Naa, my legs are too white,” replies Casey. “Dad? I have a shoelace in my blouse. Okay?”

“Permissible ... and very well done, Casey!” Jack remarks. “You get an A for effort and an A for design ... and the A stands for my admiration. Not many people could—or would—do what I’ve asked you to do.”

“I kind of like it myself,” says Casey. “In fact, I may just wear it more often than for the next three days.”

## CHAPTER 13.

Promptly at 4:30 Friday afternoon, David and Jack arrived at Jimmy's office for the showdown phone call. The air is filled with nervous energy and apprehension as they sit around Jimmy's conference table looking at each other.

"Well," says Jimmy with a nervous smile. "Time to roll the dice!"

Jimmy picks up the phone and dials the Morgan River Shipyard telephone number.

"Mr. Hendrix office, please," he says to the switchboard operator.

After several rings, Wanda answers the telephone.

"May I speak with Mr. Hendrix please?" Jimmy asks in a voice quite different from his normal voice so that Wanda won't recognize who's calling.

"May I tell him who's calling?" Wanda asks.

"James Anderson, Anderson and White, lawyers for several of the company's creditors," Jimmy replies.

"One moment, please," says Wanda.

Jimmy takes a long, deep, nervous breath while he sits there on hold. Shortly, Hendrix comes on the phone.

"Hello!" Hendrix answers in a half-angry voice.

"My name is Anderson, James Anderson," Jimmy replies with an equally intimidating voice. "I represent several of your larger creditors. They've asked me to take action against your company failing certain levels of performance on your part."

"Who are they?" demands Hendrix.

"I'm not at liberty to disclose that," replies Jimmy.

"Well, then, tell them to fuck off!" says Hendrix emphatically and hangs up.

"The bastard hung up on me!" Jimmy says, reaching to re-dial.

Again the phone rings in Wanda's office and she picks it up.

"Yes, this is James Anderson again," says Jimmy. "Hendrix hung up on me before I could get to the really serious part of my message. Would you please tell him that if he doesn't get on the phone and stay on the phone until I'm finished, the Internal Revenue Service will seize his Swiss bank account and that will be just the beginning of his many problems."

There's a long pause while Wanda relays the message to Hendrix. Jack, Jimmy and David look at each other nervously. Someone picks up the phone and at the other end, but no sound or greeting comes through.

"Hendrix? ... you there?" demands Jimmy and a gruff tone of voice.

"Yeah," replies Hendrix in a muffled, nervous voice ... obviously on the defensive.

Having carefully contrived his presentation, Jimmy does not leave it to memory, but

reads it from a sheet of paper in front of him so as to not miss a single point.

“You have under your control a Swiss bank account with Credit Suisse, number 427-19520, current balance 1.62 million U.S. dollars. That money has been carefully siphoned from Morgan River Shipyard operating capital and illegally-removed pension funds, and transferred through a Cayman Islands company, also under your control, named International Ship Management Corporation. In exactly one hour from now, that money will either continue to belong to you, or it will be seized by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. Do I have your full attention?”

There is a long and nervous pause.

“Yeah,” Hendrix finally replies in a somewhat resigned voice. Jimmy continues:

“In the best interests of Morgan River Shipyard, its employees and its creditors, you are hereby instructed to transfer all right, title, and interest in management and ownership of the Morgan River Shipyard to the Kingston Trust, a group of businessmen who do not know you and whom you have never met. They will take proper action to see that the company either continues or is liquidated to cover its debts including the Pension Fund indebtedness. You will sign the necessary papers in your office at 8:00PM tonight and will not return to the Shipyard grounds again. If you refuse to cooperate in any way, charges will immediately be laid against you personally for income tax evasion, fraud, and theft of pension fund monies. Simultaneously, your creditors, which I represent, will file for relief under the Chapter 11 Bankruptcy Act thus effectively closing the doors on Morgan River Shipyard. Your Swiss bank account will be seized on Monday morning and you will have nothing but a possible jail sentence to show for your misjudgments. If you comply as directed, no mention will ever be made of your Swiss bank account or the money borrowed from the Pension Fund and you can continue on your way a free man. I will call you at this number at exactly 6:00PM, one hour from now, for your answer. If you aren't there with your answer, I will consider that you have refused and the process that I have mentioned will therefore become irrevocable. Goodbye, Mr. Hendrix.”

The three men sit in the office looking at each other.

“Anyone want to take odds on this crap game?” Jimmy asks.

“How did Hendrix sound?” asks David.

“Trapped!” replies Jimmy.

“I can tell you this,” says David. “I would not want to be on the receiving end of that ultimatum the way you presented it.”

“I think maybe I'll go down to Don's office to see how he's handling it,” says Jack, standing up slowly. “I often drop in on him about this time so it won't seem unusual.”

A short while later Jack walks through Wanda's empty office and into Don Hendrix' office as though nothing has happened.

“Don ... I was wondering if you'd mind if I ... Is something wrong?” Jack asks.

Hendricks looks up at Jack with a very lost look on his face, then turns his back to Jack to look out the window.

“It's all over, Jack,” says a totally defeated Hendrix. “It's finally all over!”

“What are you talking about, Don? What's all over?”

“I'm being forced out of the company,” replies Hendrix. “My creditors have closed me down.”

“You can't pull it out this time?” asks Jack.

“Nope! ... and what's more I don't want to,” says Hendrix. “I'm tired of all this crap and pressure.”

“Well, no-one's making you do it, but you,” says Jack.

“I know that, but I'm too old to start all over again and too young to retire,”

“I can't tell you what your next move might be,” says Jack, “But I can tell you this: I've been where you are more times than I can count. The nights seem long, but they're only half as long as the days and one always follows the other. And what's more, the light of each new day gets brighter when you learn to go willingly and hopefully into the unknown. I'll talk to you more about it later. Right now I gotta run.”

“What was it you wanted, Jack?”

“Nothing you want to be bothered with right now,” says Jack getting up to leave. “I'll see you later.”

Jack rejoins David and Jimmy in Jimmy's office and the three of them sit there watching the wall clock as it slowly ticks its way to 6:00PM. Precisely at six, Jimmy picks up the phone and dials Hendrix number. The phone rings and rings. Hendrix finally picks it up.

“Hello?”

“Hello, Mr. Hendrix?” Jimmy asks.

“Yes,” replies Hendrix.

“Do you have an answer for us?” asks Jimmy.

“What do you want me to do?” asks Hendrix.

“Let us into your office at 8:00PM sharp ... that's in exact exactly two hours. There will be three of us with the necessary papers for you to sign. Do you have the corporate seal there in your office?”

“Yes,” Hendrix replies.

“Do you also have the company stock certificates there?” Jimmy asks.

“Yes,” Hendrix replies. “They're all in the safe.”

“Fine. We'll see you at 8:00PM,” says Jimmy, hanging up.

“Guess I'll go have a few stiff drinks,” says Jack. “I know how Hendrix feels all too well.”

“I'll drink when the party's over,” says Jimmy. “Lemme call the real lawyer now. He'd better have the damned papers ready.”

“You want to call me when you’re through with Hendrix?” asks Jack. “Since I’m not gonna be there, I’d like to know how it turns out.”

“Done,” says Jimmy, “But it might be late.”

“Doesn’t matter,” Jack replies. “I won’t be able to sleep until I know how it went. See you guys later.”

When Jack walks into the Captain’s Cabin, Jenny and Casey are cleaning up the dinner dishes. Casey is still dressed in her burlap outfit and she’s wearing a green Robin Hood hat complete with feather.

“Hi, Dad,” says Jenny. “We saved you some dinner. It’s in the microwave.”

“Oh, thanks,” says Jack, taking off his leather jacket.

“Like my hat, Dad?” asks Casey.

“It looks appropriate,” remarks Jack. “How did that come to be a part of your outfit?”

“My friends ... and some I didn’t even know I had ... chipped in and bought it for me. They said if they had to do what I did, they would’ve stayed home. The first two days were the worst before I put a little style into the effort, but the rest of the week was ... well ... interesting, to say the least.”

“How so,” Jack asks.

“I got lots of attention from the guys, and probably made a few jealous enemies with the girls, but it should all smooth over this next week.”

“Did you learn anything from the experience?” Jack asks.

“I know what it’s like to be laughed at,” Casey replies, “And I know something more about my friends than I want to know, but I will never forget your lesson about turning a negative into a positive. Can I have my 200 bucks now?”

“Well ...” says Jack, stalling for time. “I wasn’t really serious when I said you could have 200 bucks, you know.”

“DAD! ... STOP THAT!” Casey demands.

Jack bursts out laughing and reaches into his pocket. He hands Casey a wad of money.

“I may just keep the 200 bucks and wear this outfit to the prom,” says Casey, carefully counting out the money. “Hey ... there’s 300 bucks here!”

“That’s a bonus for a job well done,” says Jack, “And you know what else? I think my name looks as good on you as that outfit.”

Casey goes over and gives Jack a big hug, then picks up her book bag and goes to her stateroom. As soon as she’s gone, Jack turns to Jenny and says:

“I have a surprise for you too, Sweetheart; one that you’ve already earned.”

“You do?” Jenny says with a surprised smile on her face.

“It’s on your bed under your pillow,” Jack says, and Jenny rushes to her stateroom to find out what it is. No sooner does she leave than the telephone rings. Jack looks at the clock; it says 10:30PM.

“Oh, Hi, Jimmy,” Jack answers, “You did? So there were no problems? Good! Okay, I’ll see you first thing Monday morning in Hendrix office. Goodbye.”

Jenny bursts through the door of the Captain’s Cabin holding a digital camera in her hand.

“How did you know I wanted a digital camera, Dad?”

“I overheard you talking to Casey about it last week. I didn’t want you to feel left out and, after all, you played a major part in helping Casey overcome that difficult negative streak she has to deal with all the time.”

“Thank you,” says Jenny, giving her father a big hug. “What was that phone call you just received?”

“Hendrix is out and Morgan River Shipyard is about to begin a new era. Poor Don! I imagine he’s probably going through hell right now ... not that he hasn’t earned it!”

“Is the company going to survive?” Jenny asks.

“There’s a better chance for it now than yesterday,” Jack replies.

“What will Mr. Hendrix do?” Jenny asks.

“What would you do with a million and a half bucks in the bank and a million dollars worth of personal paid-for assets?”

“Oh,” says Jenny. “I should have his problem!”

## CHAPTER 14.

Late Saturday afternoon, Jack goes to the liquor store and loads up a carton with five large bottles of Sherry. The cashier, who knows him well, comments:

“My God, Jack! You gonna drink all this yourself?”

“It’s not for me, Walter,” replies Jack. “I have a debt to pay.”

“Maybe you’d better get six bottles of aspirin too!” adds the cashier.

“What they do with it is their business,” says Jack.

Jack loads the box of Sherry bottles into his little jeep and heads for the edge of town. The local farms begin but a short distance from the edge of town and Jack turns off the main road onto a dirt road into a hayfield full of waist-high hay. He stops just short of the field, blows his oooga, oooga horn, and waits. There is nothing to be seen but high grass moving softly in the light breeze. Suddenly, about 50 feet away, a head peeps up above the grass. It’s Sharkey. As soon as he recognizes Jack’s car he turns and motions the others to come with him. Out of the grass emerge Sharkey, Ike, Preacher, and Bumble-Bee moving single file behind Sharkey until they reach Jack’s car. Jack gets out and leans against the car while they form a semicircle around him.

“Where the hell a’ you been?” scolds Sharkey to Jack. “We musta beed here a whole hour!”

“Twenty minutes!” interrupts Preacher.

“Well ...” says Jack after a long pause. “Where’s your stuff? We can’t have a party without something to drink ... and I brought mine.”

“Hey, Man!” exclaims Sharkey angrily. “You invite US to de party. Dat mean YOU bring de hooch!”

Preacher stares angrily at Jack; Ike looks up at the sky, his foot tapping the ground impatiently; Bumble-Bee glances quickly from one to another, not knowing what’s going on. Finally, Jack can keep a straight face no longer. Sharkey picks up on it right away.

“HA! I shoulda’ knowed you up to you old tricks! So ... so ... whadja bring, huh?”

Jack reaches into the carton behind the driver’s seat of the jeep and pulls out a big bottle of Sherry so they can all see it. Their eyes bug out. Sharkey reaches out to grab it. Jack quickly pulls it back and hugs it against his chest.

“Jack! Will you stop this!” shouts Sharkey. “You makin’ my knees shake, Man!”

Jack reaches back into the box and pulls out a bottle for each of them. They can’t believe it! Bumble-Bee puts his in his shopping bag, takes out scissors and starts to snip away at the air as he does a little dance. Ike lies flat on his back, clutching his bottle to his chest

and laughing a feeble, broken laugh. Preacher is holding his bottle aloft giving thanks to the sky. Sharkey is sitting cross-legged hugging his bottle like a baby. Suddenly, Preacher takes charge.

“Time for communion!” he says. “Everyone gather ‘round and sit in a circle here. Open up your bottles. Don’t nobody drink yet.”

Everyone does as they’re told as though this was an age-old ritual. Jack doesn’t move ... not wanting to be part of whatever it is that’s about to transpire. Preacher scowls at him.

“You some kinda atheist?” Preacher demands.

“Do your thing, Preacher,” says Jack. “I’m just another Sinner.”

“Salvation to the Wicked for providing the wine,” says Preacher who then places his briefcase on the hood of the jeep and pulls out a tube of potato chips. He opens it, takes out a single chip, and walks over to Sharkey, placing it in Sharkey’s open mouth. He raises his right hand, closes his eyes, and raises his head toward heaven as he speaks.

“Hi, Mary. This is the body of our lord who turned water into wine for his mother-in-law at his own wedding. Persevere thy Liver into everlasting peace and joy. AAAAAAmen!”

Sharkey has his eyes closed, chewing on a potato chip. Preacher grabs Sharkey’s bottle and quickly takes a long pull on it. Sharkey looks dumbfounded, then quickly jumps up and grabs his bottle.

“Hey!” he exclaims. “That MY wine!”

“Minister always drinks first,” says Preacher. “Has to test the wine.”

“You drink y’own wine. Besides, that not what real ministers say.”

“But it’s MY church,” Preacher says adamantly.

“Turns water into wine?” Sharkey asks.

“In the twinkling of an eye,” replies Preacher raising his right hand.

“My God, Man,” Sharkey adds quickly. “We gotta find that guy!”

Preacher moves towards Ike with a potato chip in his hand, but Ike has capped his bottle and is holding it defensively like a football quarterback. Preacher glances at Bumble-Bee whose bottle is now nowhere in sight and who looks around with the smile of an innocent child on his face.

“That’s it for you heathens!” roars Preacher. “You can all burn in Hell! ... except for you Sharkey.”

Preacher pompously starts walking down the cart track out into the field. Everyone follows, taking frequent snorts from their bottles. Jack follows last without opening his bottle.

The dirt road leads through the field of tall grass over the top of a low hill and down into a ravine full of trees through which a small, rapidly-flowing creek flows. Beside the creek sits an abandoned school bus whose wheels have been removed. A wood-stove smoke-

pipe sticks up through the roof in the rear. The entourage makes its way to the bus door. Preacher opens it and all walk in except Sharkey who raises the engine hood to hook up the battery.

About the time everyone starts to get roaring drunk, the music begins to rattle the old bus windows. Long before things get completely out of hand, and as soon as everyone is too tipsy to notice, Jack leaves his almost-full bottle in the chair he's sitting in and slips out the back door to make his way back to the jeep.

Early Sunday morning a lone figure ambles slowly through the vacant Shipyard grounds. It is Don Hendrix taking a last look at what used to be his empire. He stops and takes a long look into the shipyard's scrap yard as though noticing for the first time the rusting hulk of the LAND LADY, then walks slowly down the rutted road past heaps of rusting iron until he's standing next to Jack's jeep beneath the LAND LADY's high bow. He stands there for a moment with his hands in his pockets, looks around briefly, then shakes his head as though in disbelief. Noticing the steel gangway ladder leading up into hold of the ship, he decides it's time he took his first look at what his old friend has chosen for living accommodations. Making his way up the many steel stairways, he finally arrives at the door to the Captain's Cabin.

Jack, Jenny, and Casey are eating a quiet breakfast when the gentle tinkling of silverware is interrupted by a sharp knock on the cabin door. Jack looks up with a curious look on his face. His first thought is that Beulah might be needing something so he answers promptly:

"Come on in."

Don Hendrix slowly opens the Captain's Cabin door and peers through the doorway.

"I hope I'm not interrupting anything," he says quietly.

"Oh, Hi, Don," Jack says, surprised. "Not at all. Come on in."

"My curiosity has gotten the best of me," says Hendrix, looking around. "This is nice! Really nice! Good thing I didn't come out here sooner or I'd have started charging you rent."

"I figured as much," replies Jack. "C'mon over and meet my two daughters. This is Jenny ... and this is Casey. And this is the original Don Hendrix of Morgan River Shipyard Fame. Cup of coffee, Don?"

"Fine ... black, please."

Jack brings a fresh cup of coffee for Hendrix from the kitchen and refills his own cup. They sit together at the breakfast table while the girls clear the breakfast dishes and start cleaning up in the small galley.

"After our conversation in your office the other night, my curiosity's been bugging me," says Jack. "Can you give me a little better idea about what's happening?"

"It's very simple," Hendrix replies. "I'm out ... completely! I signed over my entire interest

in the company to a group of businessmen who offered me a deal I couldn't refuse."

"It must've been an awfully good deal," says Jack.

"To the contrary. It was terrible ... excruciatingly painful. They gave me no real choice."

"That's too bad, Don. Do you have any feel for what they're going to do with the Company?"

"I guess they're going to try to continue operations," replies Hendrix listlessly. "I don't really know. They wouldn't tell me who it was or anything else. I thought you might have heard, since the grapevine rumors all seem to pass through you at some point."

"The only rumor I've heard is that the Indian tribe that owns the Casino in Sodamine has something to do with it."

"Oh?" replies Hendrix, his countenance brightening. "That's interesting! They sure won't have any trouble landing government contracts if they load the company with Indian workers."

"That's true ... Hey ..." says Jack, attempting to turn the conversation in a new direction,

"When was the last time you and I climbed into an airplane together?"

"Two years ago when I checked you out in the '51."

"It's time you and I took a flight together in that thing before it disappears," states Jack emphatically.

"Hell of an idea!" replies Hendrix.

"How about after lunch," Jack continues. "I'll meet you at the plane at 1:30."

"I ... can't ... wait!" replies Hendrix with an evil smile. He stands up, says goodbye politely to the girls, and departs.

"What did he mean by that last comment, Dad? It didn't sound very friendly," observes Jenny.

"Nothing serious, Honey. He's been waiting for years to get back at me for shutting off the fuel valve just after he was taking off on one of our training flights."

"Is shutting the fuel off a normal thing to do?" Jenny asks.

"Sure," Jack replies. "Emergency procedures have to be second nature to a pilot, and shutting off the fuel gives whoever is flying the airplane an immediate, adrenaline-pumping emergency. Their response has to be immediate and almost second nature."

"Sounds scary!"

"It can be very scary. And I'll bet old Donnie is going to try the same thing on me."

"He seems like a nice enough person," remarks Jenny.

"Everybody's nice until their buttons get pushed," says Jack. "It's only when there's a crisis that the hidden dragons come roaring out of their cages."

"What if he shuts the fuel off on you?"

"What if he does? I should be able to handle it ... or else I should stop flying airplanes. Don't you worry, he's not going to commit suicide. He's got too much money in the bank."

Promptly at 1:30, Hendrix and Jack walk out to the P-51 together dressed in flight suits, each carrying a helmet, and each wearing a back-pack parachute.

“Let’s flip for the front seat,” says Jack taking out a coin and flipping it. “Heads I win, tails you lose. OOOPS! ... Tails! You lose!”

“Shit!” remarks Hendrix, disgusted. “You ought to work for a casino!”

“You can fly front seat any time,” says Jack. “Besides, you still owe me two point one hours of flight time.”

“Good luck getting it!” remarks Hendrix as they climb into the cockpit.

Jack taxis the P-51 to the downwind end of the duty runway, runs up the big Rolls-Royce engine, goes through his numerous checklist procedures, and calls the tower for takeoff.

“Five one Alpha is ready for takeoff,” Jack says into his helmet mike.

“Five one Alpha, you’re cleared for takeoff. No reported traffic in the airport control zone,” replies the tower operator.

After roaring off into the clear afternoon sky, they head for the desert where the noise from the big engine won’t disturb anyone and they can buzz coyotes without fear of being reported for low flying. Hendricks has been doing some acrobatic maneuvers over a desert valley when Jack realizes they aren’t very far from T-Bird’s stomping grounds. At the top of a loop, Jack looks back at the ground and there, far below him, is a lone dune buggy screaming out onto the lake bed and making all kinds of wild, skidding turns. He recognizes instantly that T-Bird must have heard of the P-51, jumped into his dune buggy, and come out to celebrate the day with Jack.

“Let me have the plane for a second, Don” Jack requests. “If I’m not mistaken, that’s a friend of mine down there playing with his dune buggy.”

“Roger, you have the airplane,” Hendrix replies. “Buzz him and find out.”

The P-51 rolls upside-down into a split-S and dives vertically toward the desert floor, doing a three-G pullout not 20 feet above the ground and headed directly for the dune buggy. T-Bird brings his dune buggy to an abrupt sliding stop and ducks as the plane roars overhead at well over 300 miles an hour. Jack pulls up into a vertical Victory Roll and is half way through his third roll when the engine sputters and dies. Alarmed, Jack talks to himself.

“Oh, shit! We got enough fuel in this baby? Yep, half a tank left. Let’s see now: prop up; mixture up; fuel pump on; switch tanks ...”

Jack puts his hand under the seat to turn the fuel valve to another tank and discovers Hendrix’ foot locked against the turned-off fuel valve.

“Oh, you bloody bastard!” remarks Jack into the intercom.

Hendrix roars with laughter: “Took you long enough, Mother Goose!”

“Well ...” remarks Jack after a few seconds. “Are you gonna take your foot off the fuel valve or do I put this thing on the lake bed down there?”

“Put it on the lake bed,” remarks Hendrix.

“You ever made a dead-stick landing with this thing?” asks Jack.

“Not yet,” says Hendrix, “But I can’t think of anyone I’d rather have show me how. Why don’t you try feathering the prop?”

“Oh ... shit! ... yes! That would help,” adds Jack more than a little nervously.

Hendrix suddenly becomes very business-like as the P-51 descends silently, the giant four-bladed propeller now feathered and motionless on its nose.

“Judging from the dust movement, it looks like we’ve got a slight breeze out of the North,” remarks Hendrix. “Better land to the north and touch down about where your friend is. The lake bed looks solid at that point. I’ll follow you through on the controls. Hold the air speed at eighty-five knots with half flaps at the ninety position.”

“Roger,” replies Jack. “Gear coming down ... gear down and two in the green. Flaps to 50%.”

The P-51 drifts silently down onto the lake bed floor. All three wheels touch the ground with a puff of dust at the same time, and the plane rolls slowly to a stop. As soon as the wheels stop moving, the cockpit plexiglass canopy opens and Hendrix and Jack climb out onto the wing. They both jump down onto the ground just as T-bird drives up in his dune buggy.

“Anything wrong, Jack?” asks T-Bird.

“Nope,” replies Jack. “My Buddy, here, turned the fuel off on me and we decided to see how it lands without an engine.”

“What a buddy!” remarks T-Bird, smiling at Hendrix. “Mind if I take a look at the engine?”

“Go ahead,” says Hendrix.

Jack unsnaps the engine cowling so T-Bird can see the engine. T-Bird’s eyes grow wide with excitement. They talk for a few minutes about the engine and then T-Bird suddenly spots something happening off in the distance.

“We’ve got visitors!” says T-Bird. “Looks like the Park Ranger’s truck ... and we’re not supposed to have motorized vehicles on this part of the lake bed floor.”

About two miles away, a Park Ranger truck with yellow lights flashing is speeding across the lake bed toward them.

“And we’re not allowed to land anywhere but at an airport unless it’s an emergency,” adds Jack. “You go one way, T-Bird, we’ll go the other.”

Hendrix and Jack climb into the P-51, drop the hatch, and buckle in.

“Fuel’s on,” yells Hendrix with a good laugh.

The engine roars into life quickly, but there’s no time for safety-first checklists! Jack points the P-51’s nose directly at the oncoming truck and shoves the throttle forward.

“If I head straight for him and fly straight away from him, he’ll never get the plane’s side numbers,” remarks Jack into the intercom.

“Don’t be crazy, Jack,” replies Hendrix. “How many silver P-51’s are there in this part of the world?”

“Hell, he won’t know a P-51 from a P-40 or a Spitfire,” says Jack. “Besides that, we just had engine trouble. The engine oil dipstick came loose and we were losing engine oil, right?”

The Park Ranger’s truck makes a wild swerve to avoid a head-on collision just as Jack hauls the P-51 off the lake bed.

“Jesus, Jack!” exclaims Hendrix nervously. “That was almost too close for comfort. If the front seat of that truck wasn’t brown, I bet it is now. Hope he doesn’t catch up with your friend.”

“T-Bird’s long gone over the hill,” says Jack. “He knows every Jack-rabbit hole in the desert.”

“Is he an Indian?” asks Hendrix.

“Either that or Mexican,” answers Jack, effectively avoiding the whole truth of the matter.

Once back at the airport, Hendrix and Jack walk away from the plane toward their parked cars. Each unbuckles his parachute, removes his helmet, and throws them in the back seat of their respective cars.

“Well, Don, we probably won’t be running into each other as often now.”

“I have enjoyed my ‘run-ins’ with you, Jack.”

“Thanks for everything you’ve done to help me out,” adds Jack.

“It worked out well for both of us,” says Hendrix, “And thanks for trying to stretch my thinking. Right now all I can think about is how bleak the future is.”

“Jesus, Don,” comments Jack. “How can the future be bleak with a million and half tax-free U.S. dollars in a Swiss bank account?”

Hendricks looks at Jack, stunned.

“How the hell do you know about that?” he asks suspiciously.

Jack climbs into his car, starts it up, rolls down the window and begins to back up.

“It might have helped had you listened to me a little louder, but who knows,” Jack says.

“Now we’re both confronted with an unknown future. Want to trade places? ... see you later.”

Jack drives off leaving his old rival with a new game to learn.

## CHAPTER 15.

As Jack drives through the gate into his parking spot beneath the LAND LADY'S bow, another car pulls up just outside the gate, stops, and blows its horn impatiently. Jack quickly notices that it's Casey's mother, Ramona. He walks over to unlock the gate so she can come in.

"Hi, Ramona," says Jack in greeting when she rolls down the window of her car. "What brings you down to my part of the world?"

"'Down' is an understatement!" Ramona sneers, gesturing to the boat and junkyard. "Casey called and said she wants to come back home. I can certainly see why!"

"Appearances don't amount to much," replies Jack in a resigned tone of voice.

"I'm certainly glad you were here when I arrived," she continues. "How would you expect me to find her if you weren't here?"

"You might try just beeping your horn a couple of times. Casey can hear that well enough and she has a key to the gate," adds Jack patiently. "Would you like to come inside and see how nice it is?"

"No thanks! I'll just sit here in the car until she comes out."

"Suit yourself," Jack replies, and heads for the girls' quarters inside LAND LADY'S hull. He knocks quietly on Casey's door.

"Come in," she says.

As Jack walks in he notices that she's already almost packed.

"Going back home with your mom?" he asks.

"Yes ... but how did you know that?"

"She's outside in the car waiting ... not very patiently either."

"That's normal," Casey replies. "I didn't know what time you might be back so I called her and asked her to pick me up."

"The decision's a little sudden, isn't it?" Jack asks. "I mean, you could have discussed the matter with me a little in advance so I could plan accordingly."

"Well, I didn't realize until this morning that Jenny had to go back to work tomorrow ... and I can't have my friends over here and all ... know what I mean," says Jenny softly.

"Yes, I do, Honey ... and whatever works best for you works for me as well. Here, I'll give you a hand with your bags."

Jack helps Casey load her bags into her mother's car, gives her a hug and kiss goodbye, and goes to open the gate so they can go out. Ramona has the driver's window closed and purposefully ignores Jack as they drive through the gate.

"It's funny how some people change and some don't," Jack thinks to himself as he closes and locks the gate. "She used to be fun and full of laughter when I first met her, but there

was always that bitter streak when she couldn't adapt to circumstances. It looks like that's the part that took over."

The next day Jack takes Jenny to the airport for her return trip home. They stand next to each other watching the planes land and take off through the terminal's huge plate glass windows. Jack has his arm around Jenny's shoulder; she has her head on Jack's shoulder.

"I hate these goodbyes, Dad," she says. "I feel so comfortable and secure when I'm around you that I never want to leave ... and goodbyes always remind me of the time you left home and didn't come back."

"You'll never know how difficult that was for me as well," replies Jack. "But a man who's on a spiritual journey is compelled beyond comprehension ... and without regard to the things most meaningful to him ... or the things which he loves the most. It was an awful price for both of us to have to pay, but I had to know that you would be alright without my further help. I couldn't—and didn't—leave until I had that firm assurance from some unknown part of my being. And you have been well taken care of, you know?"

"Yes ... I realize that," she affirms. "But don't you get lonely spending so much time alone?"

"I did for many years, but as long as I stayed on my journey that feeling diminished until finally it disappeared completely."

"You mean you became accustomed to it?" Jenny asks.

"There's a lot more to it than that. You can become accustomed to anything," Jack replies, "even pounding your head against a wall. But there has to be some synergy to your life in addition to becoming accustomed to it, otherwise you aren't really alive."

"So where does the synergy come from?" asks Jenny.

"Remember when you were a child and you came into a new situation you weren't familiar with, or had to cross a dangerous intersection, you'd reach up and take my hand and then everything was okay?"

"Um-Hm."

"Whenever I'd feel the tiniest bit of loneliness or negativity, I'd imagine myself reaching up and taking the BIG hand that's always there. Things always changed right away. Pretty soon you just don't take your hand back. And if you never learn another thing from me, reach for the BIG hand instead of mine."

The loudspeaker announces Jenny's flight.

"Thanks, Dad. I love you."

Jack gives her a big hug and kiss.

"Heart of my heart," he says

"Bye!"

"You're never far away, Love."

Jack returns to the shipyard with a heavy heart, but the diversions of his life don't leave him much time for sorrow. As he walks into the main hangar building, he notices that there is someone new working at his station. Instead of heading for the Executive offices as he intended, he walks over to the foreman's office.

"Hi, Wayne," Jack says. "What's new and different today?"

"I guess you can see you've been replaced," he says. "They've got something better for you ... asked me to have you check in at the main office."

"Any other changes?" Jack asks.

"We had a big staff meeting this morning. Not much has changed for now, but they're going to start hiring and training Indian and other minority workers. Smart move! That should bring some contracts."

"Who's welding at my old station?" asks Jack.

"She's the new welding instructor ... makes welded iron sculpture and artwork in her spare time. She's also been trained as a machinist. Is she ever attractive ... Whew! I think she's German or Scandinavian.

"Thanks, Wayne," says Jack, turning to leave. "I'll talk to you later."

Jack walks up behind the new female welder, shielded by her body from the light of the arc. He stands there quietly looking around while she uses up the welding rod she's working with. When she's finished with it, she flips it out of the clamp, straightens up and lifts the welding helmet to its raised position. Only then does she notice someone standing behind her. She turns and looks straight into Jack's eyes. Both of them are visibly startled. She is Jack's height, of strong and lithe build, and of an age neither young nor old. She swallows hard and smiles

"Hi," she remarks shyly.

"Hi," Jack replies with a polite nod. "Mind if I take a look?"

"Not at all," she replies with a slight European accent. "Be my guest."

As she steps aside, Jack walks over to look at the bead she's welded. He picks up a welder's chipping hammer and flakes off the flux to reveal a perfect bead. Jack turns to her with a smile.

"It can't get any better than that!" he says.

"Thank you," she replies.

"Do you always use this much heat?"

"Only on flatwork," she replies. "It flows better."

Jack looks right at her, smiles, and sticks out his hand ... palm up ... as would a knight reaching for a lady's hand.

"My name's Jack,"

"Oh ... Jack!" she says, putting her hand gently in his. "This was your station, no?"

Jack nods his head.

"They tell me to tell you to come to the office. They have a new job for you."

“Yes,” Jack replies. “So I hear.”

“I do hope so it’s a good one,” she says. “I have put your things over here. Is this alright?”

Jack nods his head again, quite at a loss for words.

“I am Kirsten,” she says, still looking him straight in the eye.

“Yes ... so I see,” says Jack, looking at the name on her coveralls. “I guess I’d better go find out what’s in store for me. See you later.”

“Good luck!” she says as Jack walks toward the Executive offices. He gives a little wave of thanks. Kirsten turns back to her work.

“Sword,” she says, picking up the wand with a new rod inserted.

“Shield,” she says, lowering the helmet over her face.

“Light,” she says, striking the arc.

“Sound,” she says, listening to the crackle of flux and melting steel.

*The End*

Quite a different story with the same characters and setting  
continues from here in another book entitled:

*An Arrow To The Heart*

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**Soul And Man**: is a major work attempting to define and describe the parameters of the word “Soul”—particularly as it applies to the human soul. The very nature of its perspective brings together the various schools of Religious, Scientific, Philosophical, Spiritual, and Mystical thought suggestive of a unified frame of reference and vocabulary for all. This book is not easy reading. It can be discomfoting and thought-provoking for those new to the Spiritual Journey. I wrote it primarily to further define and synergize my own thinking ... and for the benefit of those compelled—as am I—to journey into areas of the unknown, uncertain, and impossible to define.

**On Pegasus’ Wings**: is a collection of personal poems and song lyrics begun in 1962 solely as a means of inner expression and never intended for the eyes of the world. Only in later years have I realized that in their number and variety there might be at least a single poem among the many for each person. The knowledge of such would give me great satisfaction.

**The Tears Of Power:** is a fable for all ages from ten to eternity about a mouse named Victor who lives in Edgeville—which is at the edge of everything: the river, the fields, the forest, the mountains, and the sky. Edgeville quickly becomes too small for his adventurous soul so he ventures out into the world of the great unknown, learning to pilot tugboats, fly helicopters, and meet some unusual friends like Oddie the Otter, Mo the musical Mole, and Minkie, his flight instructor. It is Eagle, though, who finally tells him what the tears of power really are. 24 great illustrations by illustrator Scott Peck.

**Flying The Yukon's Bush:** is the recounting of my adventures as a helicopter bush pilot in the Yukon Territory in 1962. Part 1 is the story in writing, and Part 2 is a slightly different story in pictures. Both parts can be downloaded from my website for free.

**Perfect Health For Dogs And Cats:** First wife Ann loved animals and so we always lived on a farm surrounded by dogs, cats, chickens, goats, and horses. Her dedication leaned toward the health and healing of animals by natural means, while mine leaned in a similar direction with humans. Contained in this small booklet are the simplest principles of health and healing for dogs and cats supported by our own experience and that of a major research foundation.