

WEATHER OR NOT

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“Everyone complains about the Weather but doesn’t do anything about it....or maybe not.” Promethian Atlantian Gazette

CHAPTER 1

Tristan Vanderhoof had never set eyes upon Diana Johanson, though there was a plethora of texts, tweets, emails and skyping sessions he had with her. Through such, the 20 going on 200 year old Tristan, named after a Wagnarian opera as well as a Nordic Irish hero, understood what the 20 something going on ‘whatever’ cyber-pal named after a Motown Idol had gone through in the last few weeks before her last transmission.

“Depression, anxiety, OCD, PTSD, learned helplessness and bipolar syndrome,” he said when looking at the gravestone her ‘we never saw this coming’ Neocon Yuppoid family had erected to her. “You never did say where you were from,” he continued to the Diana, as he felt his long, wavy hair blow over his beardless face, trying to imagine her speaking from the other side of the veil. “If I knew you were only a one hour bus ride from where I ‘live’ here in Glenville Falls, or ten minute race in my father’s car to Winchester Flats, I would have gotten there before you did yourself in, and before you got that e mail, which was NOT from me, saying that you and the world should “part company for both of your sakes,” he continued, feeling the heat of yet another day in a fortnight of no rain in a region of British Columbia that was known for its muddy soil, wet green trees and blood sucking mosquitoes.

Meanwhile in Eastern Canada, floods and cold weather were taking hard-earned house trailers for of one way ride into the Great Lakes and the ocean. And South of the line, climactic extremes were hitting communities least able to afford dealing with them. While Tristan’s underemployed parental units, as he called them out of psychological necessity and function, yet remained somehow economically solvent, never losing a dollar on the investments in the American and Canadian Markets they put their hard earned money into. Locally, when Tristan’s father needed an extra \$60 all he did was to stop in at a gas station and buy his ‘lucky color’ of scratch and win tickets. As for his Mom, the only explanation for how she was able to buy whatever tailor torn hippie dippie tree planter namebrand fashions she wanted was ‘treat life right, it treats you right’.

“I wonder why that math never worked on your karmic calculator, Diana,” Tristan said while imagining his contemporary cyber pen pal’s (and self-appointed patient’s) face in his refection on the gravestone. “Or for me, in ways that matter to me anyway,” he continued, after which he addressed the main point at hand, paw and mind. “Doing yourself in, maybe like this planet and our species is doing, must have taken a lot of courage, maybe, Diana. Or maybe it would have been braver to continue on. Or maybe you were getting better, because I know really well that sometimes you feel so down, and out of it, that you have to work yourself UP to suicide.”

Tristan self observed himself chuckling at the gravesite as the wind blow his shoulder length hair into his eyes. He pretended to think that it was Diana saying ‘it’s okay on this side of the veil..like, really, ya know?’ like she had said in real life when she felt detached from the world and her body. Maybe she had been in an altered state when she reported such, or maybe it was just the illusions that happen when you mix pharmacy with grow-op derived medicinals. Or maybe she really had a conversation with God when she put a bag over her head, a sort of portable 21st century confessional box. There were so many questions Tristan had for Diana. Testing the not-impossible hypothesis that the angels had also upgraded to Windows 10 for communication rather than visions of white light, he looked once again for anything coming over his phone. Tristan texted to Diana ‘Does God really exist, and if so, what are his designs for the universe and how many times a week does HE have to see a shrink to stay functional?’ No response came back of course, allowing Tristan to imagine that the reply was being intercepted by CIA operatives who monitored the internet, as their job was to serve the citizens of North America by hiding them from the real truth, and Truths. Such led to Tristan to ask by voice of the north wind that blew hot rather than cool air, his second inquiry pulling at his heart, and haunting his mind. “Why is it that everyone I know who is between 18 and 30 plagued with mental disease, including me?”

“Because you don’t suck it up, buttercup,” came from a voice behind Tristan. “Get your ass out of your parent’s basement, your eyes off your fucking phones and your feet planted in the real world,” an ugly on the inside and outside stubble-faced groundskeeper grumbled as he planted beautiful flowers in the dirt around the grave. Flowers which were beautiful until you smelled and felt them to be them to be plastic. “Get a job, join the Army, have a family like I had to do when I was your age,” he barked at Tristan, bitterly. “And get a haircut! You look like a girl. And girlie men never amount to anything.”

Tristan had heard it all before. Normally, he would have informed the old coot that he DID try to get jobs but no one would hire him, no matter how slicked back his hair was and how many times he got sell out ‘respectable citizen’ duds from the Salvation Army. As for joining the Army, Tristan was eager and willing to fight and (if he was lucky) die for a noble Cause. But WWII was the last confrontation between good and evil Tristan could recall, having researched such on his own without any help from his history illiterate Social Studies teachers in High School and the year he experimented with getting an education at the hands of instructors thinking they were teachers at the local college. And as for starting a family of his, like any ‘respectable man’ does, Tristan knew even at this early age in his tour of earth duty that though loners were tortured souls who often felt isolated, they were far less fucked up than anyone who considered themselves part of or the originators that started a family.

The Old Man continued to complain about life to the Young One, the latter doing more listening than talking. While doing so, Tristan assisted the Old Coot in his assigned grave keeping duties at the final resting places of other souls. With each grave the Old Man visited, Tristan could see with his ever open, light sensitive blue eyes that the

Groundskeeper wished to join the more saintly ones and wished them well in the afterlife. He spit on the graves of the departed with whom he had past history while they were above ground, wishing them even more flames from the devil's pitchfork up their asses in as 'payment almost in full' for them having fucked him up the ass while they were still alive. To make his point clear, he pissed on each of their graves. "Bad karma," Tristan felt like saying to the old man, but didn't, and wouldn't, as he saved his last 'wishing you hot time in hell' for the final grave on his appointed rounds. "Hell and Next Lifetimes hath no fury like an entitled, bitchy, manipulative and oppressive ex-wife who you'll have to meet again in another 'coincidental relationship' that happens to you. Or worse, you get reincarnated as someone who's got what I got," Tristan continued, in his head, feeling more invisible the harder he thought.

Such was yet another one of Tristan's many 'isolating' habits that had hard wired into his fast thinking head. Like helplessly watching at his father's auto repair when his country-loving Dad's country duds or redneck manhood was inadvertently insulted by a rich, upidy city slicker primadonna tourista, followed by his father putting in a defective part that would screw up the engine even more, 'stranding the bitch' somewhere even more 'primitive' down the road. Like Tristan not being able to argue back with a girlfriend who gauged how much her potential mate loved her by how passionately he argued back. And now like letting himself do the Old Coot grounds keeper's labors, for the wage of getting progressively insulted for doing them wrong. And, of course, for both intentionally and inadvertantly asking almost anyone he met to dive deep into themselves so that they could liberate themselves from both the demons of their own creation and the limitations the world had inflicted on them.

Indeed, and as intended in his all too rare self-confident moments, Tristan was a buzz kill who forced people to Work with the underutilized muscle between their ears rather than having effortless and therefore meaningless (and all to temporary) fun. A misfit who saw all too clearly how the world should be, knowing more and more how the world really was, whose heartfelt advise was ignored and whose insightful suggestions were always dismissed. A loner who felt called to make a Difference, big D, in a world he felt more detached from with each new Perspective he gained in his ever-thinking brain, even when meeting non-thinking humanoids. Yet he still saw every 'hurting unit' and 'walking pathology', (as he described all humans, including himself) as a learning opportunity. A 'case' which could give him the clue as to what the central cause of the disease was, and by knowing such, provide the cure.

The latest challenge and opportunity to the self-appointed researcher-therapist, was clearly this Grounds Keeper. Floating ideas that could repair his aching heart and tortured head started to form in Tristan's mind as he ranted on, throwing his most colorful insults at Tristan. Tristan down at the earth, absorbing but not accepting the insults, waiting for those thoughts incubating in his head to gel into an central idea and just the right words. And just as they did, Tristan looked up, and saw the grumblng old man, his patient and perhaps teacher, entering his car, hearing him argueing with the engine, then smelling burnt rubber as he blasted away. The only thing left to talk to, or about, was the wind. And Diana, who Tristan made a sacred pledge to. "Yeah, I'll figure out how to

make at least us Millenials free of the spell that's poisoned our souls, and fucked up our heads.”

The wind answered Tristan, planting words in his head that he initially thought were a replay from several real bad acid trips he took in his teens that led him to a whole bunch of wrong decisions in the ‘real’ world. “You are responsible for all of this,” it said, blowing sun-baked leaves from dying trees that onto Diana’s grave, and several others. “You are responsible.”

Tristan wasn’t sure what he was responsible for. He inventoried all of those situations in his not yet 23 years on the planet in which he volunteered to fix machinery forged in the cyber-era for anyone in need, often without any request or expectation of reward. After restoring the wires, gears and circuits back to functionality and then some, he apologized for them having been broken. ‘Fix it Tristan’ also was the first and only one on line to make right matters that didn’t require a tinker’s brain or a self-made genius inventor’s head. From cleaning up the basement bar his father build from scratch after Tristan’s schoolmates trashed the place and emptied the bottles into their bellies, replacing the booze with coolaid that 7 year old Tristan thought would trick his old man into thinking the bottles of fine wines and brandy had never touched . To talking his girlfriend back in grade 5 out of putting glue into the hair of her once-best-gal-friend after said freind had tricked her into sitting on a seat on the schoolbus loaded with apple juice mixed with urine. To taking on the care of Diana when she shrinks at the Christian School and her born again parents at home asserted that all the suicidal almost-18-year-old needed was more Jesus in her life, and of course aversion therapy to shock her out of any gender identification and same-sex love issues. To Tristan involuntarily being the one ‘holding’ the dope while his stoned out friends, who would be big time jail terms if convicted, convincingly denied to the Cops being on anything.

Yes, Tristan was the most farmable dude in town, and when accused of doing ANYthing, he sensed that he was guilty of the crime. Even though according to ‘his best recollection’ in ‘the universe he was aware of’ (his most common defense to the men in blue), he didn’t do it. If the definition of a Catholic was someone who apologized for rain, the translation for ‘Tristan’ in the dictionary of perceived life experience was someone who felt himself to be a failure because he could not create local earthquakes to shake up the stagnations like Nicola Tesla did around his New York Apartment, nor figure out a way to shoot seeds into the clouds from the ground to make them rain where it was needed, nor even to build a tower from which electricity could be delivered to everyone without wires, cables or pollution. Of course, such would be considered criminal by BC Hydro and affiliated cable-using electrical companies. As was most anything Tristan did most days between waking up out of an uneasy slumber and surrendering to sleep at the end of yet another day of doing time, and hopefully his Calling, on planet earth.

When the Cops interrupted Tristan’s day this time, they came with flashers on, as they meant business. “You know the routine, Tristan,” Officer LaRue said as he pushed all of his 260 pounds out of the Blue and White, cuffs in hand. “I have to take you in.”

“For what?” Tristan asked the small town law enforcement officer who had ‘20 years of experience’, or more accurately, 20 years of the same experience. “Corrupting the dead with philosophical ideas about the life they left and the one they may be able to tell me about?” he barked back, finally having had it with being the most farmable Philosopher and Therapist in training in town. “What did I steal this time? Property, virginity, life?”

“Many lives, according to the history on YOUR computer,” LaRue replied, after which he quickly snapped the cuffs on Tristan and escorted him to the car. “You’re going to need a real lawyer this time,” the overfed Policeman said to the underfed youth. “One from THIS dimensions, son.”

It was the first time LaRue called Tristan ‘son’. Maybe it was meant as an indication of compassion, or maybe just another dig from an old fart from ‘the moral, hard working’ generation to a spoiled millennial.

Tristan wondered what he was being arrested for now as the door to the cruiser was opened for him. He’d beat the rap, as he always did, just as he always knew how to duck just enough to avoid ‘accidentally’ having his head hit the roof of the car during entry to it.

“She was a good kid, ya know.” LaRue commented, as a father, gazing at Diana’s gravesite. “A kind and intelligent soul.”

“Both prosecutable crimes in most law books in the world as it is,” Tristan felt like saying, but didn’t, as he was pushed into the back seat of the cruiser, this time his head hitting the roof hard, and clearly not by accident.

CHAPTER 2

“Namaste,” the dark skinned clerk at the book store store said with a slight bow to the customer in front of him who had just purchased five books on Eastern Philosophy and Culture as the heavy rain above him pounded onto the roof in yet another attempt to break through to the wet first floor and the waterlogged basement.

“Namaste” the real translation--- ‘fuck off and let me do what Life assigns me to do and be responsible for while you do and deal with what you’re responsible for’, Yannis Korikopilis thought, but didn’t say as he paid for the books. “They’re for my nephew. His birthday,” he explained apologetically to the clerk.. “My still stuck at Woodstock Buddhist sister, and her husband, a Catholic Jew during the week and a Jewish Catholic on the weekends, both say they want my nephew to have a well rounded education so he can figure out what’s really up there.”

“Or IN there?” the clerk offered with a warm and sincere smile, pointing to his heart, then the ‘third eye’ between his two wide open ocular portholes.

The 75 year old Professor of Ethics, Economics and Psychology of Arbitration at Opulis University considered that over-voiced, over-chanted and over-sung proposition that the real home of the Unseeable Essence is within everything and everyone that we think we see. Yannis compared it with the theory known as Eastern Christian Orthodoxy (which he had somehow absorbed as a kid) with the realities of a new world that ignored, ridiculed or had no idea of what Orthodoxy really was. Again, his logical and intuitive brain could come up with no answer to the clerk's well intentioned and probably sincerely lived conviction regarding the residence of the Almighty, All-knowing, All-present and perhaps All-giving.

But there was one thing Professor Yannis, as his most challenging and favorite students called him, was certain of. If he didn't get out of the bookstore quickly, he's miss the train to work. A place of teaching and learning on the less prestigious side of the Hudson River in New Jersey where the motto 'we're do top quality work because everyone including us thinks we're only grade B losers' was always operative in the masochistic workaholic's mind, and soul. A Mind and soul that was still very attached to body whose remaining topknot hair had turned white by the time he had turned 50, which now twenty years later was dependent on one good leg and another with a defective knee to get him around. But still, Yannis had full use of arms that still carried his notes on volumes of paper crammed into a twenty pound briefcase rather than a 3 ounce thumb drive attached to his keychain or around his neck. With long, bold steps made bigger because of the pain induced by making them, he strode out of the bookstore with a crouching gait, eyes forward in that 'professor thinking' mode and was stopped the instant his twenty times repaired, twenty year old 'Ozzie and Harriett' Oxfords hit the bricks by three tourists with cameras who snatched his picture.

"Now, can we have a picture with us and you both in the picture, Bernie?" the wife with the Made in China 'I love NY' cap asked.

"In front of a book store, Mister Sanders," the husband in what looked like his own weather beaten cowboy hat.

"So I show my stuck up girlfriend, Jeannette, who got to go to Europe this year that I met a celebrity in the Big Apple. And so I can prove to my Communications teacher in high school and the 'cool' kids in my class who he got laughing at me that I really CAN be a correspondent for something other than the Atlantian Starship Martian Dreamers Gazette," the daughter clad in the most expensive designer jeans a working class budget could afford added.

"Or maybe discoursed with?" the wife offered, after which her daughter started interviewing Yannis as if he was Bernie Sanders.

While trying to show off her fledgling journalistic skills into her parent's camera phones for a youtube video the flatly-accented teenager from the flatlands showed more courage than flair, more directness than finesse. Yannis projected that if she stuck with it, she could get into a classy college, or get invited to the prom by the high school quarterback

back home, wherever in the heartland (as it was so pathologically simply called) of America she came from.

Being the born teacher he always was, Yannis tried to steer the conversation into issues about politics rather than the topic at hand being her, or her view of political affairs. Yannis did his best to respond to the questions he planted into the naïve Crusader's head like Bernie Sanders would have done. Such was easy because like Bernie, Yannis was a die-hard, workaholic New Yorker who was obsessed with doing the right thing, especially if it was a hard thing to do. It was also difficult to do because most of Yannis' political points of view were diametrically opposite to those of the Brooklyn born left wing Presidential Candidate Senator who found a second home in neighboring Vermont. Still, the video was about young Alice from Wonderbread land, not old fart Bernie nor older fart (at least in his head) Yannis.

The interview was cut short when Yannis saw someone approaching. It was one of the students who graduated from his courses given in New Jersey two years ago, who now looked like he was a success in Manhattan. A success on his OWN terms by proud way in which he carried himself in commoner clothing. And the way the young woman on his arm seemed to both love and respect him. Excusing himself because he was late for an important meeting with some potentially 'powerful people who I will turn into compassionate ones', Yannis left the tourists with the illusion that they had connected to a man of greatness, after which he had to deal with his own illusions about his own life. Such as if what he had written in so many articles on university shelves would ever make it out of the library. And if this student approaching him now would lose his idealism in a year or two, and turn into one of the idiots and assholes who would 'accept his limitations'. Or worse, if this prize student as he was brought up the ladder because of his advanced intellect would pose as one of the people fighting complacency then sell it as 'happiness' to unsuspected buyers. Buyers who now overpopulated the city that Yannis thought was immune from the 'chillax' spell, and had a natural immunity to dull out disease. Disorders that were now even finding their way into his life-tired Mind, and Soul.

Suddenly, without warning, one of those 'old New York' moments came to Yannis, heralded by his eyes catching the movements of a woman with long, auburn hair, clad in a pencil jean skirt and scuffed cowboy boots accompanied visually by a violin strapped to her back like it was an AKA 47 loaded with ammunition to musically kill anything reeking of dullness, lifelessness, mediocrity and even cruelty. The sunglassed probably 30 year old Promethian boldly and joyfully hummed improvisations of Beethoven's third symphony to herself as she plastered every available surface with posters advertizing. 'An Offering', it said, displaying herself playing the violin in an outfit that showed the boldest, and most alluring, expression of Ancient Nordic culture, Old West rugged bravado and New Age expansiveness.

"September 24. This Thursday!" she declared to a well dressed, middle aged woman who carried herself off like an art critic passing by who seemed interested in both the poster and who it was promoting. "You look like you're an appreciator of Art with a

capital A, that's Alive with another capital A. Admission's what you feel is right, and what you can afford, whatever happens first. And as a prelude...my card, with links to my books. Low cost to downloads. And if you want to buy them, ultra cheap downloads available," the colorfully-clad Artist continued to the color-coordinated outfitted Observer while handing her a business card.

The presumably Upper East Side patron, by the looks of her, looked at then inspected the card. The Artist seemed to be awaiting her words with baited breath. Finally, the Upper Caste woman spoke. "Low cost download, free to all who don't want to or can't pay?"

"Each gives according to their ability and takes according to their needs," the Artist said with a confident and bold smile. "And to quote John Steinbeck, all of us ultimately want to do something meaningful with our lives."

"And if you don't value your own services, economically, no one else will value your services," the potential patron said with rolling eyebrows. "Or 'offerings'" she smirked, looking at the poster, using the Artist's own words against her as the spearhead of her dig. "Some friendly advice from someone who knows," she continued in the manner of a condescending gatekeeper whose position on top was no doubt more inherited than earned. "And as for this," she said of the Artist's business card. "If the directness of this font reflects what's in your music or books, I suggest that you do not quit your day job. Friendly advice from someone who knows." She flicked the business card into the trash bin and strutted on in her loud stiletto heels like a queen. "And believe me, I AM someone who knows what is worth knowing," she declared en route

"Someone who knows SHIT!" the artist screamed at the elitist bitch. "Someone who knows NOTHING about herself, life as it is or life..."

"...as it should be?" Yannis found himself saying to the Artist after pulling her card out of the trash bin. He wiped it off, and looked at it. "Where can I buy these books and music?" he asked, feeling himself being a 25 year old seeker of Fire, Wisdom and Warmth again. A time when his horizons were unlimited and he could sail to and beyond each of them with whatever company he chose.

"On September 24, 8 pm," she smiled back.

"Which is my wedding anniversary, very unfortunately, to a wife that, well I have to pretend I am still happily married to for business reasons at my end and, God help me, hers," Yannis replied, lamenting the words he had said to the Priest at the altar half a century ago, and being born with the kind of soul that always kept his word, due to honor, stupidity, cowardice or all of the above. "It...happens to you," he said to the young Artist, somehow knowing that she understood.

"Yeah, I know," the young Artist replied with the voice of an old soul, confirming her appreciation of Yannis' life situation. "Being officially married to a woman who was

about more ‘no’s’ than yes’s. A respectable woman who turned eighty on her 30th birthday.”

“Someone approved by the family who echoed the battle cry of American Greeks, ‘what would people think?’ to every expression outside of the box by a culture that required it’s members to be conservative in dress, demeanor and politics unless given special permission otherwise,” Yannis explained, each word feeling like a painful confession of trumped up charges which were more true than false. “Ruled by a God who rewarded being unexpressive and restrained with goodies such as wealth, health and a long life of safe samo samo that ended with anyone other than this young Artist.”

Yannis wanted to ask the name of his patient and understanding young listener, but instead he asked one of his standard questions of her. One that was very much on his mind and from his heart since the moment fate forced him to set eyes upon her. “You look familiar.”

“In what way?” she inquired, eager for an answer, seeming to be accepting of whatever Yannis wanted to say.

Just as the feelings became thoughts, and the thoughts were about to materialized as words, Yannis’ phone rang. Looking at the display, he couldn’t let it go, much as he wanted and needed to.

CHAPTER 3

‘Officer Offie’ (from Alice’s Restaurant) was what he was called by the geriatric hippies in Glenville Falls whose hair had turned white and whose occupational development over the last 40 years had not evolved beyond pumping gas during the day and selling weed at night. ‘Sir’ from his terrified subordinates at the Precinct who knew that one right word could get them out of doing traffic duty and one wrong word could get them tossed out onto the streets as unprotectable civilians. ‘George’ from the Seargent who made it possible for him to become a Captain. ‘Asshole’ from his two ex-wives who couldn’t take him to the cleaners, even after they manufactured some convincing dirt about him. ‘Idiot’ from himself as he looked into the mirror so many mornings through eyes that had not had a good night’s sleep since the time he had a consensual, yet brief, affair with a student who enrolled into his Community Action class at the local college. ‘Moron’ for letting himself become an administrator of the law rather than the one who made it. ‘Failure’ for running out of options for what to do about the prisoner who was now in his custody, in a small town where he himself felt himself more of a prisoner than anyone behind bars.

“I had to arrest him this time,” George Corman said apologetically to the attorney at the other end of the phone who finally answered his call. “I had no choice. Circumstances demanded it.”

“Circumstances like changing your name from Korikopolis to Corman!” Yannis blasted over the phone. “Your mother and I raised you to celebrate the family name and our Greek Heritage, not to dishonor it.”

“I was trying to hide what certain Greeks did to dishonor our heritage,” George explained, yet again, to the man who he never called Dad, Father or Pop after hitting puberty.

The small town Western Canadian Cop who could have been a big shot judge or senator in the Eastern US waited for his big shot lawyer father to come back with a retort, but Yannis remained silent. It was a silence that reeked of both regret and shame, but still was based in the credo that all New World Greeks held to, no matter what their chosen or assigned professions. “What would people think?” George proposed to his father. “I assume that’s still the main motivation for doing or not doing something back East in the Big Crab Apple.”

“So then why did you call me?” Yannis retorted. “You want to come back home to make something of yourself here, while your mother is still alive to see it? Settle down with a nice Greek Christian girl instead of the ‘artistic’ hippie pagans out there, who----”

“---have nothing to do with the offer I have for you, which will make people think more highly of you than ever, Dad,” George interjected, that form of address getting stuck in his throat. “The offer of a lifetime,” George continued, so as to keep the topic at hand about criminal justice rather than familial guilt. “That will make everyone I know on the Supreme Court, the Law Review and the Dean’s Committee decide the new investigation about you is bullshit. And that you should be promoted to Professor Emertus at Jersey City Law School instead of demoted into a jump suit at Rikers. My contacts say that you’re in deep legal shit. And that the only way you can get right with the law, the press, and the publicity that’s about to turn a 180 on you is to do something hard, challenging and heroic.”

George heard, and felt, silence coming from the other end of the phone. His recollection of ‘good old days’ with his family in the East, when he played poker with his Dad. If he won, George would be allowed to go surfing with his long hair buddies for the weekend. If he lost, it was a trip to the barber on Friday afternoon, followed by working as a bus boy at the family restaurant where the tables were under occupied by diners yet the till was always filled with money. George’s futile attempts to learn how to bluff as well as his father wined him up with more than one crew cut. But now, due to either being smart, or smart enough to stop being honest, George had figured out how to bluff his father into thinking that he knew more about what was going on behind the scenes in the Big Crab Apple than dear old Dad did. Such was felt in the Silence from the other end of the phone, and confirmed by Yannis’ next question.

“What hard, heroic, and challenging thing did you have in mind?” the old Lawyer asked.

“A kid, who’s the hope of his and our, generation,” the middle aged Cop replied. “Who needs defending.”

“Defending for doing what, George?” Yannis asked his son, as a father.

“Doing the Right thing in a wrong world,” the reply, the words feeling both real, and terrifying.

CHAPTER 4

Sophia Garcia had worked her way up from being a dirt-covered teen picking grapes in Kelowna for an underpaying Church-going WASP employer, to selling the vino produced from them at the Provincial Wine shows, to being picked up by the television station to promote the region to tourists, to being the being the first weathergirl to be allowed to call herself a meteorologist at the Weather Broadcasting Network, and to relate the information to the Canadian public with an accent that was still proudly Mexican. True, Sophia had the looks required to work her way up from ragamuffin farm hand to supermodel. She was blessed by her creator and Mexican genetics with long, thick black hair that framed one of those faces that could pass for a carefree 16 year old maiden or a caring 36 years experienced Mom, with a shapely body underneath that was naturally slender without being underweight, all centered around warm, brown eyes that looked into your soul but never down upon you. When soaked with sweat and mud, there was something elegant about her. When made up to be a heavenly goddess in front of the tv cameras, she projected as ‘down to earth’, bringing dignity and class to the most poorly written dialog, and truth to any lie the sponsors were trying to sell to the public.

There were a thousand other girls from foreign, exotic cultures who were on line for the scheduled ‘breakthrough’ of ethnic women into very Anglo Canadian broadcasting realm. Those before Sophia rose to the top and plummeted down just as quickly, sometimes by their own hand, and other times by the hand of those they had stepped on en route. But whatever steps Sophia took up the ladder were built on solid ground. Contrary to the stereotype the Gringos South of the 49th parallel had of Mexicans, Sophia was a hard working, intelligent and humble. Most importantly, she was always willing to let other people with fragile egos, small minds and fearful souls to take credit for her work. The Anglo, First Nations, Black, Asian and East Indian women she had to work with, and under, claimed that Sophia was a master manipulator of course. “I wish I were a master manipulator,” Sophia muttered to herself, in Spanish, as she read the script about to be loaded onto the teleprompter regarding the latest weather broadcast which featured her as the star, on yet again hot, dry and very flammable day in Interior British Columbia which the script described as ideal climate for tourists. “Or better yet, I wish I could manipulate the weather so that those forest fires we’re supposed to downplay on some days, and play up on other days, get drenched by some badly needed cold rain.”

“Or we manipulate the Great Spirit into not testing us so hard,” she heard from a Sound Man behind her while adjusting his equipment. It was voiced in Spanish tinted with a heavy First Nations accent. “Time for some big cities populated by White folks to be baked by the sun, blown by the wind and burnt into ash instead a small towns and Reservations. Or some of the big rains in Ontario to be blown over this way. Or get one of my people, who got burnt out, do to a raindance, once he’s out of the hospital. Or get one of your people to seed some clouds with whatever is needed to make them piss down water instead of dry thunder on us. What do you say about that, Professor-Doctor Garcia?” he asked of the part time grad student whose degree was many fixed hoops ahead of her with a courtly and genuinely respectful bow.

How Jack Grunderson has kept his job without bowing to anyone else at the station was a mystery to Sophia. As was why the weather she reported on at the station during the day, and studied at night, was disobeying all of the laws of physics and the predictions regarding Mother Nature that had been predicted by all of the established experts. Even the Farmer’s Almanac, which Red Power Activist Grunderson claimed was written by a First Nations Elder Shamen who had to masquerade as a White, German farmer, was now wrong 94 percent of the time. As was perhaps the prediction Sophia was now required to read, and make the public believe on one of those broadcast nights where she came into the studio drenched in rain yet was told to report that the weather was sunny, with blue skies. She wondered who would benefit by spreading inaccurate weather reports, and what climate change was really about. She asked herself what, or who, was responsible for the property and life destroying climatic mess which was plaguing most every part of North America, except for a few ‘naturally protected’ places such as Manhattan, Washington and (after a new Albertan Prime Minister who considered himself more American than Canadian was elected in an off year contest), Ottawa and Calgary.

Sophia considered what lies she could say with her mouth, and what truths she could convey with her eyes to the camera. Just as a solution gelled in her head and emerged like a welcomed torrent of thunderless rain in her soul, a mic was rammed into her face.

“Say something,” Grunderson commanded her, pointing to an outlet which we actively recording.

There was so much Sophia wanted and needed to say. Grunderson was certain to get it put onto his underground podcast show for fellow conspiracy buffs. And for those who still had steady jobs and families who had not disowned them. The words formed in Sophia’s gut, worked their way up her spine, and when they reached her throat, she heard---

“Picture’s up!” the First AD proclaimed in a loud voice, after which he moved aside, bowing slightly with his massively large body, revealing a small framed middle aged woman seated very authoritatively in a director’s chair behind her.

Rhonda Schwartz-Stein, otherwise known as ‘SS Commander Rhonda’ by her enemies, and ‘The Ageless Goddess’ by her envious Plus Size colleagues in the industry, threw a grin of pride into Sophia’s startled face. “We’re live, in five.”

Yes, Sophia could have said anything to the cameras, as Grunderson had sabotaged the delay feed for the fourth time that in as many weeks. But as the eyes of the First AD and the Security grunts were all on him, Sophia knew that harm would come to him if this latest plan of his were to materialize. “Yes, time for me to tell the people the truth about something,” Sophia said to herself as she prepared herself to end her commercial broadcast career, and begin her Calling as a REAL journalist, and scientist. She felt Grunderson’s essence behind her, took in a deep breath, then noticed that he was gone, replaced by a man with dead eyes and a sterile soul. Surrounded by death masquerading as admiration, Sophia put on as fake a smile as she could muster and read, “Well, it’s beach weather in the Interior again,” to the camera lens. She then read the copy on the teleprompter that advertized great vacation weather for locations where the sponsors of the broadcast station had resorts. The next order of printed business was to scare the enthusiasm and vitality out of everyone in ‘unimportant’ places with overblown predictions of even more smoke and fire with data that was 24 hours old, and inaccurate even then.

The how’s and why’s of it didn’t make sense to Sophia. But the need to stay within the circle of those in power did. As did the need to will Satan the worse punishment possible for thrusting the worse weather in centuries upon humanity, and animals. As did the need to pray that the Almighty would have mercy on his two and four legged creations, or cancel the Apocalypse He, and perhaps his Underground demonic co-conspirator, had brewed up.

CHAPTER 5

Mariah Vanderhoof sniffed the strudel that had been baked according to the recipe that had been handed down to her by her adopted Grandmother, who had gotten it from the Grandmother before her. Such skills after all skipped a generation. As did the ability to open up people’s hearts and minds through what they stuffed into their mouths. Her husband, Ralph, whose perspective on life was as blue collar ‘regular Joe’ as his name, stomped his way into the kitchen smelling of sweat and motor oil. With his grease-stained hands and black fingernails, he grabbed hold of a corner of the strudel and snatched a man-sized biteful, inserting it against his lips. Just as it reached Ralph’s tongue, his bear-sized claws were severely slapped by Mariah’s short and slender fingers.

“That strudel’s for someone else,” she informed Ralph.

“Well, you can bake them another one,” he grumbled.

“Give it back!” she demanded. “Now!”

“Only if you come get it,” he muttered, opening up his mouth.

Mariah reached into Ralph’s pie hole with her fingers, then felt her lean, thin vegan torso being pulled into his bubba belly. She encountered another sensation she never expected from her husband this late in a long, hot summer and a long, hard life. His chapped lips felt like they did when they had met 25 years and three religious conversions ago. She could taste them with her nose, and hear them with her eyes, somehow. Those oculars, as well as the the third eye in the middle of her forehead, now envisioned her balding, overweight husband as the bushy-haired, slender, mounted ‘never even think about token’ a joint’ Cowboy security guard she met at the country-rock music festival her hippie band was hired to play at. And herself as a wrinkle-less maiden in search of spiritual knowledge, wisdom and (by necessity for the well being of fellow mortals) power. “It feels like he really wants me for what I have, or had, between the ears, instead of between the legs,” Mariah allowed herself to believe. With that, she kissed him, extending her tongue into his mouth.

Ralph seemed to enjoy the French kiss, till Mariah used her tongue to extract out the strudel from his mouth, took it into her own oral cavity, then spit it out onto the floor.

“What was that all about!?” Ralph spat back at her.

“Necessity,” she replied, after which she wrapped what was left of the strudel into aluminum foil, wrapped it a box, and put it into the freezer. “This one’s apple. The cherry strudel I baked for you is on the counter, the third one from the right.” She pointed Ralph to a row of recently baked delicacies, all of which were labelled in writing that only she could read in a calligraphy which, thankfully, he admired but still could not read.

CHAPTER 6

“So, it’s apple, again,” Tristan said as he opened the aluminum wrapped pastry delivered to him in his very private windowless hotel room, in which there was a comfortable cot with a real pillow, padded walls and cameras that left no corner unfilmable.

“Your Mom said it was your favorite. With hmmm...” Officer Offie commented, edging his way to the delivery package. He took a whiff from it from his large, hair nostrils. “Cinnamen.”

“And two healthy slices taken out of it,” Tristan noted with an angry stare. “I thought all of you flatfoots ate donuts. After you make us eat shit.”

“Talk like that, and I’ll rescind your bail,” George Corman barked back, holding up a piece of paper. “And put you into the kind of cell you and your cyber-toys that you’ve still been allowed to keep on you would never be able to figure your way out of,” he warned the expansive tinkerer who could fix anything in town, except the wiring between

his own ears which he was never willing or able to making money at doing. “I had a hard enough time dealing with idiots who turned into violent and dangerous assholes tonight! On both sides of the badge!”

“After they helped themselves to half of this strudel?” Tristan countered, his stomach growling from hunger, his mouth still tasting the cardboard the expired jail food mac and cheese had been scraped out of.

“Do you want to get out of here, or not?” Corman challenged, seeming to have been ‘got’ by the choice of words and their subtext. After an angry exhale of hot breath though his sweaty face, he removed the key from his belt and opened the the door to the luxury cell reserved for ‘special guests’. “I called in some favors and got you released on your own recognisance, and secured for you the best council possible,” he proclaimed. “So you could get out of here, for your mother’s sake.”

“Out of this cell made of walls, out of this town that’s taking you and me nowhere, ‘Officer George?’” Tristan blasted into the eyes of the Cop who had arrested him more than any other flatfoot in town. “Or out of this cell that’s my body with what you all say is a defective mind attached to it? Maybe if you give me back my belt, a sharp knife to cut this strudel with, and turn off those cameras, I’ll save the court a whole lot of time and me a whole lot of agony.” He raised his hand up in the air, placing his fingers in the Boy Scout salute he had once considered sacred. “I promise to not make a mess on my way out,” he pledged. “On my honor as a...” Tristan couldn’t figure out what to say, as he was too tired to define it, or commit to it. He found himself breaking into mad laughter. The kind that said ‘I don’t give a fuck anymore, so what can you or life do to me’. After filling the room with the echo of his defiant laughing, he laid his down on the pillow, then let exhaustion take him over. “I think I’m...tired. And need to go to sleep. Get a little bit of sleep anyway. Any problem with that, Officer George?”

“Probably not, Professor Tristan,” Officer George replied, after which he faked a power-swagger out of the cell whose door he closed but kept unlocked, leaving Tristan with an empty belly and a feeling of something ominous afoot lingering in his aching head. He could see through the fog of confusion something far beyond his control that he had to get control of not only to secure his own freedom, but that of the earthlings he, as a ‘Martian’, still had to share the planet with. If only he could locate where the blindfold was.

CHAPTER 7

“So, this is why you decided to come West?” Yannis Korikopilis commented to his guide as he was led further and further into a patch of woods illuminated by a full moon which was beet red after having passed the third “No Unauthorised Entry” sign posted by the Provincial WildFire Service. “Flies that bite you in the ass even when you have it covered. Charcoal covered trees that still smell like that incense your grandmother used

to stink up the house with when she was praying for Jesus to give her broker inside info on the stock market. All this Big Sky dry heat that bakes your brains into—“

“---Someone who’s trying to make a big difference in the world!” George Corman blasted back at his father as he checked his GPS.

“Sure,” Yannis replied as the soles of his feet felt the kind of blisters he never encountered pounding the pavement back home in the Big Crab Apple. “Making a big difference in the world by working with little people in small places is really a way to make a big global impact. With your talents, abilities and work ethic, you could have been----”

“---A New Yorker who ‘made it to the top’ only to find out that he was always on the bottom, in ways that matter?” George replied as the trail up to the designated sight grew steeper and rockier. “Proof that cheating your way up the ladder is the most effective way to get there. And the easiest way to fall down once that ladder is seen for what it is.”

Yannis kept silent, replying neither to the very accurate dig delivered straight into his agonized and life tired soul, nor to the escalating heat that seemed to get hotter the shadier the trail became. A heat that seemed to come out of the ground.

“So, this ‘client’ of mine that I’m supposed to save, and who you say will save me, and the world, lives on top of a volcano?” Yannis commented, trying to preserve his breath.

“A power source, or maybe an underground workshop built into the tunnels that the now broke mining companies used to Working with....” George halted his feet and mouth a text came in from his phone, “Hmmm...Someone else,” he continued, clearly holding back more than he was saying. “Someone...like him. But the opposite of him, in ways that I still haven’t been able to prove yet. Who was seen around every crime in this small town, and suspected crime. A witch, and bitch, who he seems to be covering up for, and preventing us from finding for the last two years. Someone---”

“---Who you put a trace on after you let him go, which is illegal without a warrant,” Yannis challenged, fed up with half answers to direct questions.

“I know the judge. She understands,” the reply from George after which turned off his phone. “Or will,” he continued, pointing to and taking the first steps onto an even steeper trail leading to a patch of pine covered ‘nothing’.

“Someone who, maybe, started a fire here so that no one would find him, or follow him up here?” Yannis continued as a swarm of flies as big as a subway token swarmed around him. “And who set out magnetic rays from his portable workshop to make these flies horny enough to multiply and vicious enough to think that any human coming into their domain is a free lunch!” Yannis swatted at five of the slowest sic legged flying marauders, discovering more blood under his hand than squashed insect parts.

“Tristan wouldn’t have started the fire here,” George said. “It must have been...hmmm.”

“Someone else?” Yannis replied. “Because Tristan is of course just an innocent genius, who’s too intelligent to be deceptive. And too scholarly to know how to lie. Too wise to not know that the ‘what comes around goes around rule’ works on, and for, everyone. So honorable that he’s still a virgin.”

“Yes!” George asserted, delivering that conviction eye to eye.

“And you really believe that?” Yannis challenged. “Because it’s true, or because you want it to be, or because, ah yeah, you Cops work on ‘hunches’ while we lawyers, who operate within the law----“

“--- make that law work for anyone who you’re paid to defend!” the son blasted back at the father.

“And my payment for defending, or doing whatever you need me to do, with this ‘innocent victim of a soul-dead decade is what, George?” the father scolded the son.

“Me working behind the scenes to get the Stock Exchange Regulatory Commission and the other Commissions off of your back,” the young man reminded the old one.

“And, if you are doing YOUR job after I’m rid of you and the world, seeing that the history books that you’ll write and your kids will read will glorify all of my accomplishments, and gloss over all of my mistakes. For the sake of our family and Hellenic honor.” the old man demanded of the young one. “Which---“

“---I will deliver on!” George barked back, with more conviction than the posterity-obsessed Yannis had ever seen in his son. “IF you deliver on helping me find the truth about what Tristan is, and what he’s doing.”

“And if that truth finds you and him guilty?” Yannis replied.

“You can put both of us in jail, and throw away the key.”

“Which, hmmm...” Yannis pondered, scratching the white stubble on his now triple and once chiseled chin. “Maybe I’ll consider putting under the mat, in front of your cell,” he continued, after which he edged his way into his son’s left ear, checking to see if any two or four legged creatures were listening, or if there were any biological observation cameras still left on the trees here. “You keep my secrets safe, I keep yours safe.”

“I don’t have any secrets!” George asserted.

“Then you are either a liar, or a fool. In which case I’m an idiot to have come out here. But there is one factor that, no Capitalistic pun intended, Trumps all of it.”

“Which is?”

“I’m still your father, and you are still my son,” Yannis reminded Georgy boy in English. “God bless and help us,” he said in Greek, appending those heartfelt word with an embrace that was mostly one way, but with enough two way traffic to make it worth staying on the road.

With that, Yannis motioned for his son to lead the way up the mountain that seemed to get hotter with increasing altitude, which led to thicker woods surrounding a narrowing trail, then a dead end of solid rock. On it was an inscription.

“Heil...Tesla?” Yannis read.

“The genius inventor who did everything he could to stop Hitler, but was not allowed to,” George replied.

“Not allowed to stop Hitler by who?” Yannis inquired, awaiting yet another ‘British Columbia’ answer alluding to ETs being in cohorts with the Nazis.

“People like us,” George replied, in a very down to earth voice which Yannis took very seriously, and accepted without retort.

CHAPTER 8

Sophia Garcia knew that television networks changed their mandates with as much frequency and reason as a Kardashian changes ‘life long’ soul mates. The Learning Channel got cheap deals on Soprano’s episodes and ‘reality’ fashion makeover shows that kept that network on the air. Youth TV was now airing episodes of Blazing Saddles and other moldy oldies that would be considered R to X rated in its time. Historical TV was now cluttered with programs featuring bargain hunting at contemporary pawn shops by hipsters who considered the start of recorded and recordable history to be the founding of Microsoft.

It came as no surprise that the presumably scientifically-trusted Weather Channel was now experimenting with themes metaphysical. Sophia was granted the opportunity to interview, by skype, the most recent guest in this new format. Being cast as the Molder to the guest being Scully, Sophia asked the first question, which was both what the network wanted to ask, and which she herself was ominously curious about. That messenger from the beyond who would perhaps pull the Weather Network’s ratings out of the abyss, was clad in slick black from her pricked feet to her discheveled mop of hair, adorned with colorful beads around her neck. In the background were the mountains, in an unnamed location whose real identity she claimed would never be picked up by any satellite.

“So, Esmarelda,” Sophia began to the maybe part Indian, probably part escaped mental patient, gypsy Elmira vampress ‘special guest’ on the screen in the studio in Vancouver. “You say that when you and your circle prayed, you brought badly needed rain to portions of British Columbia, and a break in the downpours in the already flooded East,” Sophia inquired, truly curious about the answer. “It’s been said that you were able to pray away the drought and the floods that, according to most scientists, were supposed to continue.”

“We prayed and sacrificed, Sophia,” Esmarlda said with a sharing and caring voice.

The cameras and Sophia’s eyes clearly saw that under her flaired long black sleeves, her hands were covered with blood and hair.

“And, no, we didn’t sacrifice any cats, if that’s what you all were thinking,” the Wizardess replied, alleviating the fears of the network bosses as well as the horror that had gone through Sophia. “We sacrificed this,” she continued, pulling up a fistful of hair that matched her chopped up mop in color and texture. “And we did some scalping as well,” she continued, after which she pulled up her dress, revealing patches of denuded skin devoid of hair amidst areas that still bore follicles. “The wounds will heal and as for what’s here...” She continued, opening up her mouth widely, revealing more bright red sanguous fluid in it. “The blood between our teeth is all our own,” she proclaimed proudly.

“Interesting,” was all Sophia could or felt like it was appropriate to say. “And ‘us’ is who?”

“Those who sacrifice things we like, and value, including food, and comfort, and the affections of loved ones, so that Mother Nature will be appeased,” she said. “Make offerings to the Goddess and she will be kind to us.”

“In a world where the weather was going to get better anyway,” Sophia was about to say, but didn’t. Such would make Esmarlda get pissed off, ending the interview, with an incantation that would curse Sophia. A curse that would undoubtedly cost the up and coming scientist and science journalist her job at the network. Or, perhaps, given that a true scientist has to keep all things open as possibilities, Esmarelda would bring floods, droughts or earthquakes to Vancouver, to take out everyone in the studio and surrounding environments. Being a humanist rather than a hard core reductionist, Sophia decided to say, “With the climate changes on this planet which endanger everyone on it, walking on two legs or four, we can use all the help we can get, Esaralda.”

“And sacrifice,” the wizardess interjected, this time sounding more like a Mother Superior in a 14th century Benedictine Nunnery than a wacko New Age Wicka out in the woods. “We must be pure of thought, mind and activity. Devotion to duty rather than frivolous laughter. Obedience to the laws and mandates of the Divine rather than individual creative expression. Our heads bowed in prayer instead of day dreaming about how we can change the world into something we want. Our knees bent to the Supreme

authorities who can, do and must rule us, for our own good. Taking care of others in need instead of pursuing the vanities of our own passions. To be good rather than trying to be great.”

“Hmmm...to be good,” Sophia said, noting dull out virus emanating out of the Priestess who seemed to value, and become, lifeless, boring, procedural and psychologically simplistic. “I think that’s something we all can agree on, Esmeralda.”

“You seem like a good friend, Sophia,” the Wizardess turned Mother Superior said as she turned into Jewish Grandmother matchmaker. “I’d like to welcome you to our family. I have a son who would like you. You would be very good for each other. A perfect match!”

“Thanks,” Sophia said, feeling the mesmerizing pull of the same magnet her Hispanic grandmother tried to use on her to marry a Latino so she could become a baby machine who enjoyed singing nursery rhythms rather than a struggling crusader in constant search of finding her own voice within symphonies that were composed by others. “I’ll take it under consideration,” she continued, knowing that insistent matchmakers never take no for an answer. “And I thank you, Esmeralda,” she continued, thankful that the allotted time for the interview was done with.

“And you, Sophia, can call me Mariah,” Esmerelda insisted with a warm, welcoming smile. “Because you’re family now.”

With that, Mariah, or whatever her real name was, shut off her skype feed, leaving Sophia alone in front of camera. “Another perspective,” she told her audience by way of explanation for it all. “A scary one I can’t ignore,” she told herself.

CHAPTER 9

The rising sun filtered through a pile of bushes behind his parent’s house which had still held onto their leaves, then penetrated through the window of the equipment-cluttered trailer that Tristan called home, awakening him from an uneasy sleep. His chest was drenched with sweat, his hair sticking up in all directions except the ones that matched each other. His throat was parched so dry that he struggled to grasp the first breath of ‘real world’ air. His feet felt like they had run a marathon, his arms like they had not only lifted up the world appended by a boxing match with himself in which both sides finally gave up. He struggled to push his eyelids open against the sticky gunk that wanted to keep them shut, then felt goo between his legs. “Another fucking wet dream?” he said to himself as he confirmed with his fingers, then his nose that indeed his groin was soaked with semen.

This time it went down to both of his knees, on legs that had been shaved yet again. This time, the razor didn’t go below the skin, though. Still, Tristan wondered what or who made him ‘express his reproductive manhood’, as his externally macho and internally

pissy-whipped father put it, as he had never been able, or willing, to 'get it up' for a woman in the waking world.

"I made you breakfast," Tristan heard from a voice that his semi-conscious mind somehow recognised. "Your favorite," his mother Mariah related though a loving smile as she laid a plate of free range eggs, soy bacon and tofu sausages next to him.

There were many questions Tristan had, the first of which he gave voice to. "What did you do to your hair?" he inquired of his mother, whose waist-long mane looked like it had been through a weed wacker.

"The important thing is what I did WITH it," she smiled back, running her fingers through a chopped mop that seemed to have pattern to it, if you looked at it in the right light. "And who I did it for," she asserted. "But please, don't ask me any questions about what I did last night, and what you did. With whom. As whom and for whom."

"Huh?" Tristan muttered, trying to figure out which guru, priest or cult leader his mother, who had a different name each month, had discovered, or been discovered by, this week.

The proclaimed atheist, who secretly was a Truth seeking agnostic, was overcome by a terrifying confusion when the well meaning wacko who he once called Mom pulled away a sheet from a table. Under it was a blood stained jean dress, bra with padding and size 10 heels. "So, your girlfriend is your size?" Mariah said, as she smelled the garments. "It's nothing to be ashamed of. I'd just like to meet her some day. We all would. She's nothing to be ashamed of, Tristan. I know she has many outfits she likes to wear when she's working for, around or on you," she continued, uncovering other sheets that covered machinery which the self-educated Tristan, whose juvenile criminal record still disallowed him entry into college, had constructed, or resurrected, from surplus assets sales at the local university, auctions, or on line with credit cards his parents said were his to use 'to fund his own scientific education'.

Tristan didn't know what to make of 'his girlfriends' wardrobe. All he knew was that he felt either caught, or accused. And that, after looking in the mirror, his lips were red. He wiped it off, discovering that it was not blood.

"You kissed her on the lips this time, I see," Mariah noted in a proud baritone voice, as if she was Tristan's father. "That means you're a man! A real man who can...hmmm...do technical miracles," she said as she went from invention to invention. Like the photosynthesis machine that grew food for the family table and underfunded music concerts which, according to the accusations anyway, had been adjusted to spout weed out of twigs and thin air. The Tesla coil that could collect energy from the sun even on the cloudiest days, then send electromagnetic beams to anywhere AC current was needed. Tristan's experimenting with it had been blamed as the cause for more than one accidental forest fire or burning down of a store where the owner had just taken out a new fire insurance policy. His vibration-making machine designed to disrupt stones in cat bladders so they could be peed out easily without surgery had without his knowledge

been adopted to literally make the room rock to every beat of 'Paster Peters' musician's organ solo at Mariah's church, scaring his congregation into thinking there really was an apacopyse that could be called upon to come down on them if they didn't put Jacksons instead of Washington's into the collection plate. The moog synthesizer on which Tristan had composed music that, according to his gut AND mathematical study of Beethoven's works, was designed to make people feel more Alive and become more intelligent, and therefore more compassion, had been reprogrammed into composing and putting on line perverted into 'happy' hip tunes (with enough power to dull out the brain and deflate the spirit of anyone, perhaps even Tesla or Beethoven) had got nearly a million hits on the net in the last two weeks.

Tristan genuinely had no idea how each good idea he had for an invention turned out bad, who was doing it, and why. He also had no idea as to why he woke up every morning with a clean-shaven face and no stubble on neither his legs nor his arms.

"You look tired," Tristan's mother Mariah said to him while reconsidering all of this, tenderly stroking his face. "You should eat, then get some more sleep. Then get up at Artist Inventor's time and do all those good things you do. Because you're so good. Like you are to protecting your secret girlfriend, who does deserve your affections and connections." Mama Mariah picked up the jean dress, scraped the blood off it, then took in a deep whiff of it, the essence of its wearer emanating into her nostrils. "Yes...Both of you are very special, and endangered, Tristan. You and...Teresa."

Mariah's voice was held hostage by a lump in her throat. It seemed to take a lot for her to voice the name of Tristan's long lost sister, who he never knew. The too-brilliant-for-her-time sister who was institutionalized at the age of four for 'socialization' problems, then who escaped to the streets at fourteen so she could regain her sanity. According to Mariah, and the fuzzy pictures 'Officer George' Corman was able to get that somehow got lost whenever it came time for trial, Teresa had been secretly coming home to reconnect with her family, most importantly, the brother who the elusive felony and misdemeanor making 'demoness' loved (as well as hated) more than herself. But Tristan's memory of playing with his twin sister during his preschool years was as vague as his recollection of sharing the same bedroom with her in the womb, and, for that matter, any dreams or nightmares he was having in the last four years.

In the last few years, Tristan kept waking up more tired than ever, and often in a different place than he went to sleep in. Such is what he was told by his mother anyway, and was warned by his father to not tell anyone outside the family about. Indeed, there were many things in the Vanderhoof family which Tristan was told were best kept within the family. From how his shabbily clad father earned a healthy living while his buds at the bar were struggling to pay minimums on their overcharged credit cards, to Tristan's special gifts as a scientist and musician who learned more from himself and the writings of dead innovators than living instructors, or teachers. To what now materialized, from Mariah's lips as she pressed them against Tristan's. Appended by a hug around his waist that pulled him into her belly before he had a chance to escape her loving embrace. Followed by the mother pulling her son's shirt open from the top button down to his navel in one

swift, musical motion. Choreographed with a roll onto Tristan's cot then onto the floor, with Tristan's jeans still zipped up, this time.

Mariah flicked on her phone to the overture to Tristan and Isolde, the Wagnerian music which Nazi hating conductor Georg Solti claimed was the most beautiful thing every written. As Isolde, Mariah pledged her love to Tristan eternally and always, claiming that the 'Lord' she married turned out to be the devil incarnate.

Tristan allowed Mariah to lead during the entire 'dance' atop his cot, his mind observing his body going through the motions. Motions which seemed to give his mother what she wanted, needed, and, given her recent diagnosis of inoperable cancer, deserved. "It's her fantasy not mine," he told himself, recalling what hookers said about dancing naked on stage for well dressed clients who had everything they ever wanted at home they needed except love, or respect. "This dance will end when the song does," Tristan continued in dialog between his ears which was always louder than anything audible in the 'real' world. And after 9 minutes, it did, when the London Decca recording of Solti's version of the overture finally ended, leaving Mariah asleep like a princess nuzzled against Tristan's sweat-soaked chest. With Tristan exhausted beyond measure, and even more terrified to surrender to slumber. He glanced over at the food left by Mariah, then smelled it. The nose said 'me like.' His belly said 'gotta have'. His brain said 'if we don't eat, we die'.

Tristan picked up the knife next to the fork and flipped the coin between his ears as he gazed into the reflection of his tired soul in the blade. "Heads again. I suppose that means I cut into the tofu sausage and soy bacon instead of me," the burnt out long before his time cynic muttered to himself, after which he allowed himself to be seduced by the lower shakra of gustatory enjoyment.

CHAPTER 10

The next week, then two, in much of Interior British Columbia, particularly in Glenville Falls, could not have been better, or nicer, climatically anyway. The clouds laid down badly needed rain at night, then moved aside for a morning sun which shone upon a day that was warm enough for grass to grow on the parched pastures, but still cool enough for riders of horses who grazed on them to be given a good workout by their riders without breaking into a drenched sweat. Indeed, the new song for the weather report on most of the television stations was 'Camelot', where 'perfect weather' was required, by both law and royal decree. The regional economy of Interior BC blossomed, most particularly the small towns such as Glenville Falls, which were one store closing away from shutting down the entire town for good. The German and Japanese tourists found their way back to their annual vacation grounds, leaving behind not only badly needed dollars but a plethora of uni-lingual Canadian parents who insisted that their kids pick up some words in a foreign tongue so they could either get a job abroad, as well as sound impressive to other families at home. Some actually did. After the aforementioned was said and shown with selected video clips, newscaster on the wide screen tv in the tavern said in

conclusion, “And wishing all of you another perfect British Columbia day tomorrow as well!” with a wide smile to the camera.

“There’s just one problem,” George, still half-dressed for Cop duty even though he was officially off, commented to his father while watching Melanie Marvelis give her customary ‘good times, good life’ wave to her loyal fans as he watched her from his usual table and his usual pub at his usual time, his usual beer and burger being brought to him by his usual server, Wendy.

“That Melanie’s taking those size perfect tits, long legs and mane of blonde hair so thick and long that you could get lost finding her lips when the lights go out to someone other than you tonight, my fine, virgined, small puckered friend?” Yannis smirked back at his son, in Greek. He smiled at Wendy, doubling the tip that George had put on her tray,

“No..the problem is,” George muttered...All of this good weather, good cheer in the townfolks, good cash flow coming into the tills everywhere, and good people getting pulled over for speeding tickets as the only criminal activities here,” George muttered.

“I know,” Yannis replied. “You can’t trust any city where you can’t smell or see the garbage,” he continued, in Greek. “Which means, we both like your dress. Particularly my unmarried and very available son here,” he said to Wendy, appended by a warm smile.

“Wendy’s married to her freedom,” George interjected. “As am I!”

Yannis looked at the free-spirited looking woman who, to him anyway, to represent everything the wife he was stuck with at home, out of honor and pity, wasn’t. From her long, wavy hair that she let become grey naturally, to her tight fitting blouse which revealed a body that had been kept fit by healthy outside work in God’s Hills rather than lazy indoor socializing at the Priest’s Hellenic Ladies club, to the boots on her feet which she used to ride horses instead of stomp on the dreams of any man who wanted to be greater than his societal-dictated station. “If my son is too imprisoned by his own freedom, you and me could share our freedom together,” he said.

Wendy seemed to consider the offer, emanating ‘maybe’ with her wide open, coral green eyes, about to say ‘yes’ with her lips.

“Which could work, except for the difference in your body types, skill in riding a horse vs a desk, and age, and marital status,” George interjected.

“Your mother and me and are separated, legally now,” Yannis announced to his son.

“But one you, in the here and now, is old, and the other isn’t,” the protective son replied, believing his father, forced to play along with him in any case.

“So, if she dies, she dies,” the Old Greek offered regarding Wendy, fully knowing that he had stolen that joke from Jewish comics, violating both legal and moral statutes.

“Wendy’s heard that one, Pop,” George said. “And she should know that---“

“---She still enjoys the joke,” she replied, after which she put down her tray and pointed Yannis to the dance floor. Interrupting George before he could inform the 40 something cowgirl-hippie-gypsy that Yannis was married. She flicked on her ipad, releasing something from it which Yannis had not heard in years in his sort of native NY, and certainly did not expect to enter his ears out here where presumably the only kind of music were country and Western. She snapped her fingers on her boldly outstretched hands, inviting Yannis to join him on the floor for a Zorba dance. “Oppa?” she exclaimed, and asked.

“UPa” Yannis added, grabbing Wendy by her slender waist, lifting her up on a table, flinging her in the air, then joining her in a dance as her feet landed on the ground, her chest into his open arms. The music gave both vitality and flexibility to Yannis’ old, arthritic feet, moving as one entity with Wendy’s gams in a dance that embraced their souls into one with improvised steps they both seemed to know by both Ancient knowledge and Passion, with no one leading and no one following.

Yannis wondered why this attraction to this woman was so strong, and primal, and why he seemed to know her by another name, place and time. A look at her long, wavy blonde hair with bangs that framed her big blue eyes and undersized yet still very expressive lips reminded him, once again. “So, let’s dance, like we used to. Like I wanted to anyway, Lori,” he said to her in a whisper she could not hear, addressing the 17 year old Jewish beauty ballet student at Julliard back in 1964 he fell in love with as a clumsy, homely, Greek-American, Christian delivery schlep. “Yeah, it was self survival on your part when you dumped me, Lori,” he silently said to the image dancing around the room with him that turned into ghosts from his past. They turned into Visions of the future as he declared, “After fucking up or making life ‘interesting’ for at least 10 girlfriends like you, I think I finally got ‘me’ right. I’m not the dull, boring, lifeless, procedural geek who thought he had a musical relationship with you, or had any music in him at all. It took me fifty years to get that music into me, and now, I can share it with you instead of trying to drain it from you.” That libretto kept the dancing going, Yannis’ feet telling him where his body should go rather than his head doing that job. Feet that were not only his, but those belonging to his new partner Wendy, who was well beyond Lori’s one to 8, and probably the real Lori, wherever she was now.

The patrons of the Wildwater Café clapped along from their seats as the music got faster, louder, and channelled the intensity of the Theodorakis, the blacklisted Communist who composed the music, and of course the intellect of Nikos Katzanakis, who penned the novel while the German and Italian Fascists occupied the streets outside of his study.

George, as always, sat back and watched the crowd celebrate, as his job was to calm things down when they got too hot, and bring spirits up when they were in the dumps, his

ability to do so requiring that he never share in either the pain nor the passion of experienced by the people he protected, and hopefully served.

It was a Godsent having Wendy around to keep Yannis occupied, entertained and perhaps staying on in Glenwood Falls until Tristan could be located. George had run out of excuses to tell his father regarding why Tristan was so unfindable, though he and his sister had been spotted numerous times by others in town. There were only so many tall tales George could tell his father regarding bosses who didn't want Tristan found. Some of them were true, as George was being pressured from 'nameless parties above' to concentrate on what he was being paid for. Maintaining the quota of speeding ticket given to rich out-of-towners in the speedtrap set up on the highway that ran through town. Arresting kids for B and Es in town before they learned how to pull off bank heists in the city. Finding grow-ops in the bush that were on the list to be shut down, and pretending to be unable to find the meth-labs that were never supposed to be found. Maintaining the colorful myth, and in off years the reality, that the three major industries in Interior BC were cutting down trees, growing weed and pretending to put a halt to the drug trade.

As Yannis got everyone in the tavern, even the Japanese tourists, clapping, dancing or joining him in breaking glasses, George looked around the room and noted a familiar figure in the dark who was oblivious to the music and the dancing. "Yeah, that's him," he said noting Tristan's trademark long, wavy hair with one braid on the right side that was a combination of red, black and brown, no matter what kind of light shone upon it. "Or her," he considered, as the very real Tristan and the always illusive Teresa, were not that much alike, on the outside anyway. This time he, or she, was working on a computer, hunched over to it, back turned to any and all observers in the 'lovers' table in the back, which afforded a view of the entire room yet with its dim lighting and lack of mirrors, looked like a black hole to all those who didn't know of its existence.

George faked a cough, then an upset stomach, and worked his way to 'the barf room', aka, the can, hiding both his face and purpose. "It's too perfect," he heard from the operator of the computer, in a voice that he didn't recognize. "Nothing can be this perfect."

"Except finding you so easily, faking a voice that may fool the shrinks and half pissed, half stoned people in this town, but not me," George declared, very much as himself. "It's time for us to start helping each other, Tristan," he said. "Or rather, Teresa," he continued, spelling perfume rather than sweat, and noting that the two hairless legs under the table were wrapped by a pressed skirt rather than naturally-torn jeans.

"It is too perfect. Too good to be true, or real," the young woman in front of the lap top said in a Hispanic accent.

"The weather? The influx of money to this town that ISN'T connected to the Hell's Angels, or the Jim Pattison Investment Group?" George said.

“All of it,” she said, pointing to the first point of reference on the screen. “My being given a scholarship to the Ph.D. program in Atmospheric Sciences at MIT when I haven’t even gotten through my third year at Cariboo College. My bosses at the broadcast station giving me a promotion to associate producer, my own regular slot as a primary anchor, and a cushy vacation assignment here for two weeks, all expensive paid...”

“...as long as you keep that makeover you did with your hair?” George advanced. “And maybe was assigned to use the music of this guy as backdrop for your piece?” He slapped a picture of Tristan in front of her on his phone. “Or her?” he continued, offering her a view of the sketch of Teresa he had crumbled in his pocket which was, to the best of his collected data regarding the illusive mischief maker who was seen but never spoken to.

“They do look alike, sort of,” she noted. “Except for what they’re thinking and feeling behind the eyes of course. Twins?”

“According to our best theory,” George said, sitting down next to the woman who seemed to be neither surprised by what he had said, nor startled into the usual fear of authority his Police shirt and badge evoked in patrons of the Wildcat Café who had secrets to keep. “And your name is?”

“Sophia. Sophia Gonzales, Officer Corman,” she said, offering her hand in provisional friendship.

George accepted the offer to shake her outstretched nail painted paw, thinking at first that she had either a mystical way to see through him, or that she was sent by one of his legally or illegally-funded bosses to keep him looking at into what he was supposed to, and not what he was not supposed to know about. How else would she know his name? Then, it flashed on George how this stranger knew this, when he noted that he still had name tag pinned to his chest. “You look like a man on a mission,” Sophia offered. “A real mission,” she continued.

“As do you, Professor Garcia,” George said with a reverend bow.

“George. Just George,” he replied.

“Sophia,” offered with a warm yet already life tired smile from a wrinkleless face that reminded George of every girl he let go, every woman he wanted, and every opportunity for happiness, which he knew he would never be able to have until he did right by Tristan. And till he did right by and with his father, who by the looks of it was collecting info from Wendy and the other townsfolk at the pool table who he had befriended. Info that George knew he wasn’t able to obtain due to his ‘always on the job’ social station as a Cop, as well as his inability to be playfully social.

She knew something was up. That someone was after her. That she would soon get caught and the gig would be up. But that didn't stop Teresa from being who she was. A girl with a brain who had the obligation to use it to teach earthling humans a lesson which was far beyond what they called 'morality'. And of course to be loyal to her silent patrons, who she considered superior to her only with regard to being rich in pocket rather than intellect. For the moment anyway.

Under the cover and sustenance of night, Teresa left the underground cabin in the woods that her brother Tristan had build for her and inspected the machinery that had been built into the caves that had been left by the mining company after they discovered 'empty' at the end of the tunnels they had built. "Yeah, they'll work," she said of the rain making machine which, according to her brother Tristan anyway, could spit time released capsules into the atmosphere to be distributed to appropriate places in the world by the winds, which still operated very mathematically, if one used the right formula of course.

Flipping back the hair on a needed and surprisingly liked layered short blonde wig she had acquired earlier that day from the shelves of Hair Be Us when the owner was on a lunch break, Teresa moved on to the 'deatomizer', a devise which would keep water from being pissed out of clouds and convert cold air into hot, powered by both sunlight as well as energy coming from 'power spots' in the earth, which were marked in previous aged from above by medicine wheels. Of course, she removed the circle of stones that the dead Indian Shamans had placed on the mountain to mark that spot as another way to hide her tracks. And she did whatever she could on the internet to discredit the geophysicists who hypothesized and that this mountain was energy geo-center of the continent, and the New Age promoters who tried to bring tourists to Glenville Falls because it was 'the center of the universe'. No, this place was sacred to her, and the family who was protecting her. The family who kept her real whereabouts secret after she escaped the loony tune factory. And who kept even Officer George from finding out any info about her, or her brother Tristan, who if he was examined by any by-the-numbers shrink, would wind up in a nut house far more horrific than the one she had escaped.

Teresa moved on to the next devise to be brought to be activated. "Yeah, you're my favorite," she said as she petted 'Rumblestillski', an earthquake generating machine that was modelled after the one invented by Nicola Tesla. She recalled the story about how he caused the ground to rumble around a one block radius from his low rent, dingy, grocery-lacking apartment in New York in the 1930s, and was requested by the Cops to not create any localized earthquakes during the hours when people were sleeping. "You know what you should have done with this, Nichola?" Teresa said as she gazed at the picture of Nichola Tesla as a young, optimistic man which was posted on the wall next to the machine that he made possible, and the US government made Top Secret after confiscating his notes, for the second time. "You should have directed this baby at Wall Street instead of Bleeker Street. Make those All American Captains of Industry who discredited you, ridiculed you, then stole from you beg you to stop making the ground shake until they instituted a world that YOU wanted. A world without wires, cables,

pollution, war, poverty, hunger, ignorance, cruelty, slavery, spiritual lifelessness, dull out disease, country music, elevator Muzak, retro-pop 60's golden moldies..."

Teresa's listing the cultural toxins Tristan had satirized in his complex music and naïve screenplays that needed far more money to produce than Tristan would be able to get on his own was halted by a call on her cell. It was her patron, ordering the next hit with the weather making and altering machines. She was given the coordinates, and the timing. She agreed to all of it, except that which was technically not feasible. "I'm going to need a better meteorologist than last time to make this work," she said by way of explanation. "I hope this one you got up here is both accurate, and cooperative."

The muffled voice at the other end of the phone assured Teresa that both criteria would be met through a new technical meteorological advisor who would be 'serving the program then perhaps be with it'. As for her continued existence in whatever plot her bosses were scheming this week, Teresa dared not ask why her funders were still keeping her fed, clothed and kept away from the shrinks and the electroconvulsive machines waiting to fry her brains into 'sanity'. All she knew was that they, just as Tristan, were a means to an end. HER end, which she was keeping as secret as the reason why she was doing all of this as a self-appointed disruptor whose job was necessary. "Burn down the forests so that we can grow better trees," she said by way of explanation of the next set of orders from the bosses to friend and mentor Nicola. It seemed that he understood this time.

CHAPTER 14

Yannis' trip back to New York, with Wendy as his date for the weekend, week or perhaps lifetime, was halted due to an act of God. "Or maybe it's the ancient Greek gods again," he muttered to himself as he put down his suitcases at George's apartment for the third time after trying to get the flight back home from Kamloops, noting the footage on the Weather Channel coming over the small flat screen tv with commentary by a 'concerned' yet perky Barbie Brat who seemed to want the viewers to look at her 'all growed up' low cut dress rather than the screen behind her. "Forest Fires out here because Apollo is farting hot air down at you, floods in Ontario again because Athena was out drinking too much again and can't find her way to the piss pot because she's too hammered, Zeus' love child he had with the Oracle at Delphi deciding that surfers in New York could best get Banzai Pipeline waves if there was a category 3 hurricane that lingered off Florida, punishing Cuba with a category 4 so that the Commie Socialists there would have to take out unpayable back loans from Washington." Yannis grumbled to himself. "Or maybe one of your local Injun gods decided to stick it to Whitey, torturing me with you, and you with me for another week, and another wild goose fucking chase," he continued to his host.

"Or an opportunity to follow a theory of mine," George replied, stroking his chin while glancing out the window at the blue sky that turned dry, hot and windy again, tempting

the trees below them to give in to the temptation to let another bolt of dry lightening stare a bon fire. “Or theory of yours, as you’ll get the credit for this one.”

“Or the blame,” Yannis bolted back, elevating George’s satisfied smile into a shit eating grin. “Or a space in the looney tune factory for thinking that the weather is being controlled by Tristan Vanderhoof, a self made genius who dropped out of High School and still hasn’t gotten his GED. Helped by his wacko sister who even me, with the contacts I’ve been able to make in YOUR town, isn’t able to verify as being real.”

“The gods of Olympus aren’t real, yet if you get someone with special photographic skills who’s an expert in camouflage climbing Mount Olympus at the right time, you could prove their existence. And according to your latest project overseas, they did,” George pointed out as he went to the triple locked drawer in the kitchen and pulled the evidence he had been collecting, dumping it on the table as if he was serving a meal for a hungry guest.

Though fed up with his son’s theories about conspirators working behind conspirators which made even the check to check living local clergy here members of the Illuminati, Yannis was hungry for a case that would vindicate him back East for schemes a lot more deceptive than hiring an investigative journalist to find evidence of the gods’ continued inhabitation of Mount Olympus, which did turn into short term profits for his properties in the surrounding towns during tourist season.

“So, what do we have TODAY?” Yannis slurred out of his mouth, trying to make himself sound both invigorated and optimistic. He pulled his exhausted blister loaded feet towards the table and plopped his ass down on the three-and-a-half-legged chair George normally took for himself.

“Coffee to keep us awake, as it’s going to be another long night,” George said, pouring himself a cup of super strength java straight up black, and another with triple sugar and double cream for his Dad. “I think we spotted Teresa.”

“And ‘we’ is who?” Yannis inquired, still tasting the cardboard box the expired, half-off discount coffee had been stored in.

“Sophia Garcia, almost Ph.D,” he said as he rifled through the photos of Teresa’s silhouettes, and remnants of machinery that no man born of normal woman, at least in Glenville Falls, was capable of building, showing them to his father. Yannis was pleased to see that they were copies made from cameras that were not internet connectable, and that the money he had sent his son five years ago for his birthday had been spent on that dark room he wanted, presumably to do wildlife photography as a hobby. “She’s a weather expert who met up with Teresa on Dragon’s Den mountain on a midnight ride. She and the horse took to Teresa very well. Which is unusual because Sigfried is a man’s horse, not a woman’s. If it weren’t for Sophia’s skill as a rider, Sigfried would have set his pasterns over any fence she didn’t want to go through, tossed her off his back by the back door, then cow-kicked her till she hobbled back home.”

Yannis listened to his son continue to boast and moan about the horse he loved more than any woman, and almost as much as his job. The horse lingo made as much sense as the rantings of Olga, the obsessively clean, honorable and attentive Ukrainian schoolmarm who made the rest of her living teaching naughty clients to bark, beg and bargain fairly with her in the Apartment Yannis had acquired for her back in New York, in exchange to get inside dope on what was really going on in the back of Russian owned pizza parlors and tea rooms in 'Brighton Bitch'. For every tip she gave Yannis regarding the best investment on the stock market that week, or the best bargain in acquiring passport-deprived 'neices' who came from Moscow, Olga would rant out five times the amount of Ukrainian cursing Russians for killing a third of the Ukraine with the famine of 1931, Putin's annexation of the Crimea back to its 'Russian roots' and their bastardizations of Ukrainian cuisine they sold as their own. But there was one thing that George said, and his horse intuited, that sparked a light in the dark cervices of Yannis' mind, and soul.

"You said that Sigfried ordinarily likes men and not women, so if he took a liking to Teresa, then maybe..." Yannis interjected into George's country horse talk. "Then according to the rules of logic, if they still apply to a world gone mad and crazy, Teresa is---?"

"---Not an ordinary woman," George assured Yannis, terrified about the real meaning of that complex conclusion.

As to what was ordinary, nothing about Teresa or her family was normal. Then again, nothing about anyone out here was normal, these 'simple mountain folk' defying every stereotype Yannis brought out with him from the Big Crab Apple. Soon he would find out just how normal, or abnormal, Teresa was, as Sophia had arranged to meet her at her hotel room. "The 'connecting time' between these girls, we watch," George asserted.

"The first red blooded male thing you've said since I've arrived out here," Yannis thought to himself, but didn't say. It would cause yet another argument, another setback for the case, and 'bad karma' for the world at large. Such was the claim that Wendy made regarding the rivalry between local Cop who she considered a friend, and the visiting New York attorney who she found herself falling in love with.

CHAPTER 15

Sophia Garcia could feel the third brain between herself and Teresa Vanderhoff growing, glowing and in need of a rest to process a badly- needed rich meal of mind/soul food in the most isolated and curtain covered room in the 'Imperial Riverview' motel, which had neither a view of the river nor any kind of furnishings any royalty would sleep or lounge on. Within a magical five hours that went by in which every moment felt like the Eternal Now, Sophia had not only been able to get a clear vision of the pilot episode and subsequent series for 'Weather or Not' as dictated by her well-educated but under intellectually-developed broadcaster bosses, but had shared her new theories about

weather predictions with Teresa, based on a mixture of mathematics, geophysics and a healthy dose of ‘feel what the earth and the data is telling you’ intuition. In exchange, from Teresa came all of that information about what inventor Nichola Tesla wanted to share with the world but didn’t, couldn’t, or wasn’t allowed to during his lifetime way back in the first half of an ignorance (and therefore cruelty) saturated 20th century. Indeed, Teresa’s instinct as an inventor, as she was developing new ideas on the fly, seemed to be coming from not only the incarnation of Nichola, but with a bit of consensual possession by Leonardo DaVinci as well. Shades of European accents came to her voice in rhythms that kept changing according to the beat of an unseen yet always present conductor, that third brain which had evolved between the two women. Two women whose brown, blue and yellow tinged black hair, due to the request made by Sophia’s bosses at the network, was identically eccentric in style and length, with a signature braid on the left. An ‘Atlantian Tribe ID tag’ which was Tristan’s trademark in the land of the living during the daytime hours as well that earthlings would never understand, and are not supposed to yet, according to Teresa’s ramblings.

‘A style that would never catch on with earthlings’, as Teresa had mused twenty one ‘discoveries on the fly’ and 3 hours ago. ‘And when that style does become popular and palatable for the masses, it would have to be altered in us,’ Sophia had appended without missing a beat. The third brain seemed to laugh at the joke and approve of its profound subtext, voicing within the loud Silence the permeated the room the Groucho Marx line ‘I wouldn’t want to be part of any club that would have me as a member.’

It was the first time in a long time that Sophia had graduated into the kind of company that kept her brain challenged and her mind stimulated, her Soul Enlivened. Sophia felt the final Vision of the multilayered, intellectually-stimulating and (by necessity and good fortune) entertaining ‘Weather or Not’ show emerging into something a lot bigger than a money maker for the network and an elevation in exposure for herself. Without warning, a messenger emerged from a the weatherbeaten cookoo clock in the mismatched furnished room. The small wooden sparrow with slanted eyes cawed out midnight as it did its dance on the extended platform. Sophia burst into laughter, as did Teresa.

“Yes, I know. Confucious,” Teresa said to the bird after recovering from the belly laugh, seeming to read Sophia’s mind. “One should invest one’s time, energy and life with people who are equal to or better than oneself. Who you meet through people, well, maybe who, well, ya know, are, ya know are...”

“Not as developed as us, in the ways we value? Or who know who we are, and what we’re all about?” Sophia offered, sensing that Teresa was talking about whoever arranged for their meeting at her end. Sophia realized now that Constable George Corman and his ‘seen and sometimes done everything the criminal mind can imagine’ father was all wrong about who was and what Teresa was all about. Teresa envisioned a world run scientifically instead of irrationally, and ‘whatever illegal or what some rigidly religious people call ‘moral’ transgressions’ had to be done along the way were necessary.

“And one of those necessities I was talking about,” Teresa said as both she and Sophia heard hunger pains they were both experiencing at the same time. “If the body doesn’t eat, the mind doesn’t think clearly, effectively or expansively.”

“Until you devise an implant you can put behind the eye that can convert light into food that the brain can distribute through to the rest of the organ systems, after it’s fed itself,” Sophia proposed. “Which...hmmm.” She contemplated just how it could work based on whatever biology she knew, in ‘light’ what Teresa described as the photosynthesis machine she had devised. Which she let her brother Tristan take credit for, as he had to live in the world of humans as a citizen during the day, and she lived amongst shadows very happily as a ‘ghost’ at night.

“We’ll work on that, and more, together, after I get us some food,” Teresa said, after which she looked at her watch, noting the lateness of the hour. “And take care of some other things. Earth shit I have to do instead of... Martian expansions.” She leaned over the table of cluttered with papers which had been blank pages five hours previously and kissed Sophia on the lips. “Like Einstein said, maybe Albert or maybe his under-quoted and unacknowledged first wife Mileva, ‘Every scientist has to know how to be, or occasionally be, a shoemaker’.”

“I can come with you?” Sophia offered, as the warmth of ‘Teslian energy’ danced up and down her spine, stopping en route to the heart to make its presence felt very ‘loudly’, manifesting as a pain in her left chest that she never wanted to anesthetize.

“No,” Teresa insisted, with an assertive voice and gentle smile. “You stay here. Take care of your belly.” She pointed to a large picnic basket hidden in the corner of the room next to the bag containing miniature prototypes of her favorite inventions she had built, and would like to. “Local cuisine. Some honest compliments to the chef get the locals here to like you. Some fabricated ones will make them love you. And then take care of whatever other ‘have tos’ that have been shit on your plate on the earthly plane. And, check in with the world,” she continued, putting the all news program on the TV. “We have to find and expand our own truth within the lies that people believe are true. And write our Martian paintings with Earthling paints. Back in an hour.” With that Teresa left the room, not noticing, or perhaps not talking about, the video and audio recording devices Wendy, George’s best friend and Yannis’ new soulmate, had sewn into Sophia’s jacket and purse. They were still operating, recording everything that happened, or didn’t happen, as evidence.

“They’re probably out of memory,” Sophia said as she turned the monitoring devices off, then put the memory cards into her pocket. As for the devices themselves, Sophia wondered at how far inventors had come since the days of cameras that you had to carry on your back and recording devices that had bigger microphones than the tiny cockroach sized units that could pick up sound without distortion or static. “Grandpa, you would be proud of whoever invented these things,” she said to herself regarding the only Mexican who was ever allowed to operate a camera for DW Griffin, until the day that All American Director whose blockbuster and artistic hit ‘Birth of a Nation’ resurrected the

KKK found out that Fred Gunn was really Fredricko Gonzales. “And if I’m going to climb my way up the Anglo ladder in Canada, I’m not going to make the same mistakes you did. As you advised me to do, many times, I’ll make my own mistakes, miscalculations and lucky guesses.”

Teresa, the criminal suspect, demoness and escaped lunatic (according to some anyway) seemed to fit all three of those categories. She had more intensity in her than a thousand earthlings and a hundred Martians, combined. Some would call the always clad in something blood red, jet black and seductively-bold purple misdemeaner and felony-producing ghost ‘evil’. But Sophia felt her to be something far more than that. Recalling the origin of her brother Tristan’s Wagnerian-based name, Sophia’s auditory memory took her back to her favorite piece by that composer. Specifically, the overture from *Tanheuser*, an opera about a Knight seeking salvation and empowerment in the Cause of good, came to mind. One of his Spirit Guides was Elizabeth, a blonde, blue eyed very goodly Christian woman who was about piety, restraint and gentility. Then there was Venus, goddess of the underworld who was loud, unbridled, erotic and, above all, Alive in ways that the angels in Elizabeth’s service could never be. The first part of the Overture featured a holy and profound rendition of Elizabeth’s theme. The middle portion opened up into Venus’ music which reeked of Beethovenian liberation and Promethian Fire. When both were combined at the end, morality and expansion merged, as did the agenda of ‘above all do no harm’ and ‘make as big a difference on this planet while you are here as you can.’ Sophia felt herself to be both Elizabeth and *Tanheuser*, in need of Teresa’s Fire and unbridled expression of ‘essence’ so that the symphony inside of her mind could find its way to making a bold impact in the world rather than lingering in the moralistic maze that was the library of calculations, permutations and caution inside her head and life. Another Einstein quote came to mind, and soul. “Without science, religion is blind. And without religion, science is lame.”

Heeding the advice, and request, of her provisional Priestess and friend Teresa, Sophia helped herself to the cherry and something else pie, sandwiches and dried pieces of fruit that tasted more like jerky in the picnic basket which had been left by the locals for her. After a few bitefuls, Sophia’s challenged tongue decided to send signals to her brain to say ‘we really DO like this’. The news on the television from the US was not so pleasant. Featured were reports of more forest fires in an even drier and windier Southern California fruit belt. An unexpected cold spell in the Northeast halted the grape growing season in Upstate New York. In the gulf states of Texas and Louisiana, rising tides and torrential rains from a lingering storm that decided to promote itself into a category 4 hurricane instead of going out to sea as a worn out blowhard were causing record flooding. On the bottom of the screen flashing in print were stock market reports, noting the ups and downs of software stocks, entertainment multinationals and pharmaceutical companies.

“Ya know what they’re missing?” Sophia commented to a roach that was bold, or stupid, enough to crawl out of the woodwork without the cover of darkness. “The real stock market changes that this will cause. Or are causing right now. Like the price of shares in companies that distribute and package California fruit my lazy and slow-thinking cousins

still have to pick and I remember tasting when I was with them which is, I have to admit, not as good or erotic tasting as whatever this jerky and pie were made from,” she commented, tossing her six legged visitor a piece of the locally made cuisine from a the Café which perhaps was welcoming her to town, or who was seeking a good review and product placement on the premier episode of ‘Weather or Not’. “Less wine from Upstate New York this year means more French, German and even Mexican imports to restaurants in the Big Apple. And as for Texas and the Big Easy, oil stocks will go down big time after this one, especially if there’s another oil spill, translating into big time gains in companies developing solar, wind and ‘fart’ power. The latter which can, according to Gringos in America, can be produced by eating too much Mexican chili. No shit.”

The roach seemed to enjoy the joke, as he (or she) seemed to smile. Sophia allowed the beasts of intuition and then imagination take over the wheel that had been handled by her academic scientific mind. “But...the real money in disasters is working the insurance companies,” Broker Gonzales advised her new six legged investment client. “With all of these disasters, everywhere, or most everywhere anyway, big pay outs to people for fire, frost and flood insurance. Insurance company stocks go low, so you buy, knowing they will be high again very soon because for next season, everyone everywhere is gonna buy insurance and the companies will up their premiums, milking the terrified public of their hard earned and easily stolen money. Meanwhile, over on the other side of what most of my relatives still think is the Iron Curtain, despite the fact that Trotsky decided to make Mexico his home in the 30s, and Pancho Villa was the first Socialist Revolutionary who made America shake in its capitalist boots, Russia will be economically richer in oil. China, which makes better wine than any New York vineyard, will be on top of the capitalist pyramid again. Comprende?”

“Si, Herr Professor Comrade Doctor,” the roach seemed to reply.

“You mean High Priestess,” Sophia answered, after which her glance was held hostage by a mirror. “Very High...someone, who I think I like more than ever before. On the inside and the outside,” she said to the pulsing reflection in it that changed color and shape with every breath.

Sophia knew what it was like to be stoned, drunk and sent on an acid trip up down Rainbow Creek without a rudder, as all three had been inflicted on her by well meaning friends during her high school years in LA and her college time in Vancouver. This was not it. This was something else...As was Teresa when she came into the hotel room, 35 minutes early, was someone else.

Teresa’s unshakable confidence was replaced by fear. Her self-generated energy replaced by an overwhelming desire to close her eyes and go to sleep. Her communicable confidence overtaken by self doubt. Her detached sense of time with a sense of urgency. Every portion of her anatomy from her forehead down to her three inch strapped stilettos seemed to be more alluringly-goddess like than attractive-mortal. And for the first time, ever, Sophia could see rather than merely sense an aura. A

wondrously golden one pulsed out of Teresa's head in all directions. In Teresa's left was something sharp and shiny, which when it was wielded, revealed itself to be a pair of scissors with reflective edges and a sharp tip. In her right, a blonde wig styled in the manner of a shag and shoulder length bob and bottle of hair dye.

"Make me look like this, and I won't use this to cut off your hair an inch below the scalp," Teresa desperately asked, and assertively pledged. "Please, NOW!" The left side of her face that of a powerful dominatrix, the right side that of a needy and life-tired submissive.

"I don't know," Sophia replied as Teresa, whatever she was now, rammed the scissors in her hand, then turned around, demanding that she expand her skills to that of a hair dresser. "The last time I cut my brother's hair it was when he was going into the Army, and he was gonna get it chopped off anyway, so it didn't matter."

"Well, it matters now," Teresa asserted. "And I need your help."

Sophia self-observed herself wanting and needing Teresa more than any promotion in the broadcasting world, scientific position in a university, or even her own soap box on a network that was becoming more popular with each storm that was still being considered an environmental 'glitch' by the climate change deniers in DC and Wall Street. Yes, the 'I can't be tied down to anyone because it isn't fair to me or them' Sophia had a friend, who wanted to be far more than that. To prove that point, the alluring goddess Teresa tore off her dress, her bra, then her panties. What was under those panties was something Sophia had never seen, and hardly expected.

"Didn't do too bad of a job chopping my brother's balls off with a laser," Teresa boasted. "But then I went for Tristan's doink at his request, and mine, there were some...problems," she continued regarding the penis that was sliced in the middle, glued somehow together with a mixture of strange smelling glue and scars left by sutures. "Maybe you can give me a hand job or gently suck it off me with your mouth?" Teresa requested, in a voice two octaves lower. "For all three of us? And the world? But first, the haircut. So neither of us will be recognized when we..."

As for the rest of what Tristan, or Teresa, or both had in mind, such never reached Sophia's ears, at least while the brain between them was awake. She slipped into a deep sleep, hearing one phrase as she fell onto the bed. "I have to do everything myself, again! Shit!"

CHAPTER 16

Captain George Corman arrived at the Royal Riverview Motel at the crack of dawn with three police cars worth of uniforms and half a dozen plain clothes Feds. "So, interesting haircut," he said to a half-slumbering Sophia when he spotted her on the bed in the room

without Teresa, without her notes, without her servailance-containing clothes and purse, and without most of her long dark hair, the remaining portion of it being blonde.

George removed his coat and wrapped the slowly-awakening, slobbering and still muttering 'genius' into it, guiding her towards the bathroom. En route, Sophia got a view of herself in the mirror, pulling back in shock.

"You look less Mexican, Sophia," Wendy commented as she entered the room.

"And more Anglo," Yannis added. "In a good way that is," he said to her, in another one of his half truths that he was so good at using for his own means or (when he was feeling generous) for the benefit of others. "Can you tell us what happened here?"

"I don't remember," Sophia replied. "But I think I want to. And maybe should."

As George saw it, and everyone else noted, Sophia seemed more like a stoned and laid hooker than a morally-sound, intellectually brilliant co-investigator. She sang-talked to Wagnerian melodies incoherent technobabble that made her sound like she was recovering from an ET abduction, and trying to get kidnapped again somehow.

"So, you brought us all up here, for this, Corporal Corman," said the head suit, the shortest of the plain clothes Feds with condescending chuckle.

"My son's a Captain!" Yannis asserted.

"As is my best friend," Wendy added, putting her arms around George's shaking shoulders. "He's a bolder thinker than any of you 'think inside the box' clones, and clowns," she barked back, missing no opportunity to stare into the eyes, and souls, of each of the suits from out of town, as well as the local uniforms who were doing that 'yes we do have a boss who's out of his tree' eyeroll to each other. "Captain George Corman will go down in history as the man who not only saved this province from self-destruction, but the world."

"A legend in his own mind," the head suit spat back with a condescending eyeroll. "Who maybe needs a vacation?"

"Where I'm free to prove what I was convinced of all along!" George asserted regarding the gut-derived, but still unproven, theory that Tristan and Teresa were two sides of the same coin who were serving good and evil, respectively, with the most advanced technology available. "I can use two weeks away from all of you anyway."

"As we can use two years, or more, away from you," the head suit said, after which he flicked his fingers. Two deep and anxious breaths later, George found himself cuffed by his own men, then escorted to a vehicle outside the hotel room that had pulled up.

"An ambulance?" George gasped. "I'm not sick."

“We’ll let the doctors determine that,” the head suit said in an assuring voice as George was handed over to two paramedics clad in white, while a third injected something into his arm.

“I’m not crazy!” George pleaded to a Yannis and Wendy, who were held back from approaching him. “You gotta continue what we started! Find out who and what’s behind all of these weather changes. The world depends on it,” George continued, in Greek.

“And what did he say, Mister Korikopolis?” George heard the head suit say to Yannis as his eyes saw everything around him transform into a big blur.

“That I should go back to New York and father the wondrous woman’s children,” Yannis translated, putting his arms around Wendy.

“A smart idea,” the head suit said, his voice meaning business. “A very smart idea.”

CHAPTER 17

The hotel room Yannis stayed at for three nights before finally being able to get a plane out of Kamloops was the best in town, paid for by ‘the townsfolk who thank you for coming out and trying to talk some sense into your son George’, according to the Head Fed from Toronto who decided that he needed a vacation in what was left of the Wild Western Canadian wilderness. The local cab company gave Yannis and his new daughter-wife rides wherever they wanted to go, gratis. There was no eatery in town where he could pay for a meal, even at the tavern where Wendy had just given her notice. “We’re just glad that Wendy’s with a respectable man who will look after her, and keep the fire in her soul from burning out or dulling out,” her old boss, Jack Davidson said to Yannis several times over complimentary bottles of homemade spirits that the old Greek insisted on sharing with him. Forty proof spirits that Yannis could handle, but pretended that he couldn’t, while they loosened Jack’s tongue and those of all the drinking buddies who came to join them.

Finally, the time came to get the limo to go to Kamloops, and the plane East for a new life with his new bride to be. Of course there was the small matter of Yannis dumping, or liberating, his present wife, but such would be easily done. Irena would let Yannis go if she was paid enough money, and Yannis knew how to get that. She could also be wooed into falling in love with a handsome other man, or a woman who was skilled in the art of magic potions and other means of making one self-absorbed human being become absorbed into loving another one.

“I also know how to get that,” Yannis said to Wendy as the sun-glassed driver whose cap and black suit made him seem invisible to everyone, even himself, turned the corner on the highway, leaving Glenville Falls behind. “I have contacts in the pharmaceutical industry that makes money legally, and the one that makes it without paying taxes. Who

make and steal a living with manufactured molecules that can turn anyone into anyone else. And herbalists who have more botanical tricks up their flaired, hippie fashioned sleeves than even Mariah Vanderhoof's Strawberry Fields Emporium."

"Maybe yes," Wendy smiled at her new lover, and now friend.

"Or maybe no," the driver barked from her seat, pulling off her cap and sunglasses. "I know there was something in that basket of food that I ate that turned me into something else," Sophia shot back to her passengers as she stared at them through the rear view mirror. "And it makes logical sense that Mariah Vanderhoof, who provided a Strawberry Field supper for me in the hotel room with her daughter Teresa, wanted me to not only look like her, but to fall in love with her. Or maybe that wacko wicka who I never wanted to interview on screen in the first place wanted me to fall in love with her son, Tristan. Who NO one, even you, told me was the same person as Mariah's daughter."

"It was a theory," Yannis related. "George's theory."

"That he wanted you to prove, or disprove, without bias," Wendy explained. "That's what you scientists do, right? Investigate without bias?"

"And without any real data," Sophia barked back, angrily moving the front portion of her hair, not long enough to put in a pony tail, away from angry eyes. "And facts! Unless we lab rats are supposed to be data, and not know any real facts. Like what you're going to do when I drop you off around the corner at Wendy's unregistered pick-up truck instead of delivering you to Kamloops for the plane East, like the driver who is supposed to be in this seat was supposed to do."

"He'll get over it," Yannis said regarding the Junior G-man whose ice tea was spiked with high test local weed by Wendy at the Café, then dragged into the woods without a map. "When he wakes up and discovers himself in a windowless railroad car, alone, without his suit, which fits you better than him somehow. By the time he gets to Manitoba, he'll thank us for getting fired by his bosses for going AWOL."

"And what about MY bosses?" Sophia sneered back. "Who expect me to make a killer pilot with a family that probably kills ecosystems, local economies and people with bolts of manufactured weather. And WHEN I tell people in the REAL world about it---."

"---They'll think you're crazy, and lock you up in a cell next to George," Wendy reminded Sophia. "Whoever and whatever we're dealing with, we have to pretend to believe what we're supposed to."

"While we're doing what?" Sophia demanded.

"I thought you wanted out of this," Yannis said. "And that you wanted me, and Wendy, to deal with bad guys who NO humanity-serving scientist, or idealistic humanist can understand, or ever will, Doctor Garcia."

“Only after WE figure out what this is,” Sophia countered as she swerved to the side of the highway then proceeded up a logging trail. “Starting with what we DO know about Tristan. Besides the fact that he’s just as unfindable as Teresa now. And as unfindable as the high tech facility in the restricted entry fire zone that developed legs and walked away.”

“Or flew away, if there’s as much money behind this as I think there is and---” Yannis offered after which Sophia purposely drove the car over the bumpiest part of the road, then swirved the wheel in both directions to insure that he would not only hurt his back, but barf out his lunch. “So, you have some better ideas as to what we should do?”

“Tristan’s shrinks,” Sophia proposed. “Someone like him, and Teresa, go through a lot of them. I tried to get info on that from the free clinic here and got told that the docs who treated him moved away and were unreachable.”

“Probably true,” Wendy offered. “All of the shrinks from ‘normal’ places who came to this wacked out town were assigned to somewhere else just before they all went crazy themselves. I drove a few of them mad myself, though I like to think that I tried to dance them out of their lifeless, analytical, tunnel vision ‘put everything into a box’ coffins. Sean Whiteman comes to mind, and soul, in particular,” she with a fond smile, keeping the details of such behind downturned eyes. “But the records from shrinks are confidential,” Wendy then declared, having joined the world of the present, and still living.

“Not for those who well...maybe were not allowed to continue being head shrinkers after they found out what was really in Tristan and Teresa cranial vault?” Sophia offered. “Which bring me, or rather you to, your destination. Physically anyway.”

Sophia stopped at the designated area, being sure to make it an abrupt halt of course. “You don’t have to thank me, Yannis. That mechanical chiropractic adjustment is on the house,” she said regarding the shooting pain going up and down Yannis’ spine. She turned to Wendy, saying “I’m sure you can kiss it and make it better.”

“While you do what!” Yannis pushed out of a throat that wanted to scream in pain while Wendy pulled him out of the car and helped him into the seat of her camouflaged unregistered pick up truck, which Yannis had won in a bet with a local locoweed planter. “Wendy will kiss my ass into not killing me, while you do fucking what, you ungrateful, vindictive Wetback bitch?!”

“Look for Sean Whiteman, while you dig up the REAL financial records and transactions of the Vanderhoofs,” Sophia asserted calmly.

“Said as a commander and not a soldier,” Yannis stated, with pride.

“Thank you,” Sophia replied with an arched back and confident bow.

“In a war where the commanders will be killed first,” he warned her. “Or are turned against other commanders without their even knowing it,” he continued, to himself. Shutting out even Wendy from reading his troubled and weary mind. “But I can set you up with a new life, because the way you’re going, the one you got is about to be 86’d in a New York minute,” he proclaimed, and feared.

CHAPTER 18

Sophia’s picture with her new Anglo blonde bob made her look nothing like the likeness on her driver’s licence. But the outlet for Rent a Bomb in Lillowet allowed her to trade the converted hearst that doubled as a limo for weddings for a pick up truck that was more rust than metal. Such allowed her to find her way undetected to Mikael Petrovitch, a Russian almost master of most criminal trades who tried to pass himself off as Mike Peterson to avoid getting snuffed by his Comrades back in the Motherland. Petrovitch’s forgery skills allowed him to survive Stalin, Kruschev and Brechnev. His skills at cyber security allowed him to link his masterfully crafted documents to data sites already on line. His base of operations was no longer a converted bunker in Moscow connected to the electrical network of the entire city grid, but a cabin in the Canadian wilderness fed by a Tesla coil and solar panels for electrical power and flying saucers to send and receive info from the world he loved, and for that reason, was hiding from.

While the master forger was finishing the final details on Sophia Gonzales’ new ID as Inspector Sally Ann Jackson, whose appearance was as White Bread as her half Texan and half Calgary roots, Sophia looked at the wall of ID’s he had made for other clients.

“Kids who are under-aged want to get into bars, adults who got busted for weed when they were kids want to visit their parents want to visit their parents in Florida. Then there are the truck drivers supporting two wives, five kids, five dogs, and three horses who got busted by quota-hungry Cops for having half a beer before they got on the road, or a hit of speed so they wouldn’t fall asleep on the road,” he said by way of explanation. “It’s a ‘sort of’ living” Petrovitch continued, in a voice that mimicked in tone and rhythm someone she thought she knew very well.

“Yannis said that you earn more of a ‘sort of’ living,” Sophia noted as she perused the rest of the cabin. It housed six figures worth of crammed in state of the art computer equipment, a wine collection that was worth twice that much, and paintings which had officially been ‘acquired for safe keeping’ by the Nazi Army when they sacked Eastern Europe. But there was something else that Sophia noted, perhaps testing out her new Inspector personal, that was even more ominous. “I noticed that none of the trees around your place were scorched by the fires that burnt out one in five structures I saw when coming up here.”

“I have a good underground irrigation system, and get paid in chickens, chocolate cake and chick pea casseroles, ‘Sally’ Ann,” Petrovitch said by way of explanation, motioning

with his head for Sophia to help herself to the meal he had set out for her. “I know you’re hungry, so, please, enjoy.”

“No, thanks, Mikeal Petovitch,” Sophia voiced in her best Russian, recalling that when you wanted to talk with a Russian rather than at him, you addressed him by his full name. “I don’t think I can handle another haircut.”

“I don’t understand,” Mikael’s reply, in English, then Spanish.

“Better,” she answered, in Russian.

Mikael Petrovitch corrected her pronunciation, the manner in which she was wearing her ‘inspector suit’ and the way she carried the body underneath it. “You have to look arrogant, sexy and friendly, all at the same time,” he told her, with a Texas twang in his voice that had neither Ruskie nor North Yankee in any part of it. “And when you walk up to someone who knows where Sean Whiteman is, who is being paid to keep his whereabouts secret, you do it like this,” he continued, demonstrating the point with a sashee power march that would make any dominatrix submit to his every whim.

“And when I find Sean Whiteman?” Sophia inquired with all seriousness, while still enjoying the show Comrade Petrovitch was providing for her. “How do I get that shrink, or ex-shrink, to tell me what I need to know about Teresa and/or Tristan Vanderhoof, who---“

Sophia’s words were halted by Petrovitch’s raised right hand, but just for a moment.

“—Who has the ability to turn deserts into flood plains, jungles into deserts, tropical Edens into frozen hells, rain forests into blazing infernos,” she blasted into the kindly old Russian’s wrinkled, life-battered face. “Armed with the latest Teslian and neo-Teslian technology available on both sides of the iron curtain.”

“And your theories on weather patterns, that I am sure you were glad to boast about when you were with Teresa,” Petrovitch countered. “Theories that well...off the charts.”

With a courtly bow, Petovitch invited his blonde, Texas cheerleader-turned-inspector to sit on the most comfortable chair in his cabin to view the computer screen. On it flashed correspondences of reviewers to the editors of the top meteorological journals in the business regarding the papers Sophia had submitted, along with the rejection slips sent to her.

“Public knowledge. The suits don’t like innovation,” Sophia acknowledged.

“Because they want to steal it,” the old Russian Professor offered his new grad student in her very independent study non-elective in Life University. He provided Sophia with a clear view of research papers submitted to other top publications, which were slated to go into press. “Your work, their name on it. Which, I hope is inaccurate work.”

“And if it isn’t? And the mathematical formula that came out of my head and fingers predicts the weather everywhere, for everyone on the planet?” Sophia said, hoping for the first time in her life that her most insightful intuitions were wrong, as Teresa and her bosses now knew more about her unifying weather theory than anyone else . “What the hell did I do?”

“The important thing is what you are GOING to do, Inspector Sally Ann Jackson,” Petrovitch said Sophia as he laid his strong, supportive bear like claws on her shaking shoulders. “When you have your first session with Shaman Sean,” he continued, after which he punched a few keys on the board, signalling the printer to pound out an appointment card. “As an Inspector for Revenue Canada and the IRS, you have had guilt and spirituality issues that made you seek his help, at 4 pm, this Thursday. And if he doesn’t want to spill the beans regarding what he knows about the still missing Tristan and Teresa, you can threaten to audit him. I’m sure he has a lot to hide, according to some other information I can find,” Petrovitch said, after which he turned to the computer to draw it up.

“Or fabricate?” Sophia dared to ask, and found herself suggesting.

“Yes, indeed,” Petrovitch smiled, enjoying his Craft of sometimes moral and sometimes immoral criminality as intensely as Beethoven was on the keyboard when playing to unsuspecting clients in Vienna who were about to be blasted into a more Enlightened Universe by the music.

While Petrovitch became engrossed in taking Sophia’s suggestion to heart, mind, then application, Sophia wondered what other lies would be required to get to the truth of all of this. And who would be able to handle that truth.

CHAPTER 19

Tristan and Teresa looked at each other against the light of a new moon on the third node in the mountain range they called home, agreeing that it was a good idea to move the weather machines to a safer haven. They agreed on nothing else. They talked, discoursed, then argued about everything from the necessity to go blonde and short with regard to their topknot, to what to do with the people who were charged to catch them. But most particularly, they haggled over where and when to send up the boluses of electromagnetic energy and chemical capsules beyond the fog they had created to hide their location.

Their energy was so intense that the artificial intelligence programmed into the machines decided to take action itself, as that program had incorporated the personalities and pathologies of Tristan and Teresa’s boss. That boss hid his and/or her identity, just as God did. The Man Behind the Curtain who had the benefit of those in front of it always in Mind, Tristan referred to him as, while Teresa insisted that the boss was a Goddess,

who considered culling of the human population as something needed to produce something more valuable than 'good'. Something 'Great', big G, which was beyond duality. A duality that kept Tristan and Teresa yelling at each other, then pushing each other around, then finally indulging in an all out fist fight which catapulted them into the central computer, setting off firing of every missile and ray gun.

Within ten minutes, the entire planet around the installation was being drenched with torrential rains, freeze frozen, or set ablaze under a scorching sun that allowed the flow of nothing except fire. Locally, all that was spared was the small patch of woods around the installation, which after three days of 'global cleansing', was referred to as Eden. The only hope for humanity was now a meeting of Minds and Souls between the opposites in gender, temperament and perspective which were Teresa and Tristan.

"There are worse beginnings for a new humanity," George said to the Harrold Weinburg, the all but comatose patient next to him in the loony tune factory as he woke up from an uneasy slumber. "But, if you dream it, that doesn't mean that it's going to happen in this universe, right, Harry?"

All that would come out of Harrold's mouth was a hush. One of those hushes that, according to what George had observed, meant 'yes'. A 'yes' from a Universe which seemed a lot more ancient and real than the one George and his fellow earthlings were living in, or conscious of.

As George needed something to keep his mind occupied with while he was playing head games with the docs to make them think he had settled down into being a passionless, expression lacking, super G rated citizen, aka, 'normal'. Using tricks he learned as a kid when being given bitter medicine and worst tasting food by his mother, George reactivated the art and science of how to fake a swallow. Still, it was a matter of time till the docs would find him and the residual drugs lingering in his mouth that he spit out when he cleverly distracted them. With that 'better' part of himself (that which the drugs had not reached), George pulled himself out of his bed, let his legs hit the floor, then did the 'Belview Nut House' shuffle towards Harrold's bed, complete with slobbering down the left side of his mouth. He could feel the cameras on the walls watching him, but denied them eye contact, as such would only show that he was paranoid.

But George was paranoid. He was beyond paranoid, particularly after the dream he had, as it was one of those dreams which felt too real to be false. As real as dreaming at the age of five that his brother died in a car accident on Christmas eve, to have it materialize three days after New Years. As real as seeing in his nightmares two days before the event occurred, two large buildings in downtown Manhattan colliding with airplanes on the day his disbelieving fiancée took her two kids to work on Wall Street to show her what 'respectable' women did for a living, relative to wacked out fathers who decided to head West to start a new life. As real as the worst of his imaginings if Sophia, Yannis and Wendy didn't stop Teresa from taking over Tristan, or worse, turning him into her. As real as him finding out about it while still locked up in a mental ward.

“Hey, I got an idea, given who I think you might really be,” George whispered into Harrold’s always open ear, as he was a good listener who never argued back. “Maybe you tell the suits who planted you here to listen to what I’m thinking, what I know, and what I’m plotting, and tell them that you and me know secrets about them that if revealed, will destroy any kind of relationship they have with their spouses, kids, dying parents, or very alive mistresses or boy toys? Everyone’s got a secret, and if you can make people believe you know it, you own them. And, hey, you have honest eyes. Eyes that haven’t owned anyone. But sometimes to take back your own life, you have to own someone else...just temporarily. What do ya say to that, yes or no?”

Harrold answered neither with a ‘yes’ sigh, or a ‘no’ one. Instead, he rolled his eyes, in the manner of a condescending schoolteacher scolding a petulant child, commanding him to take his place, stop being stupid, and cease being defiant. Or so it seemed to George, who heard from behind him what he hated and feared most.

“George, time for you medication,” came from a voice that sounded familiar. George turned around and confirmed that she looked familiar as well. His eyes perceived a middle aged Nurse who bore a striking resemblance to his mother, holding a syringe. Behind the illusion that perhaps represented the materialization of an Oedipal complex which was either inside of George’ past, or created by his present ‘healers’, were two very big, hefty men in White Coats, with military issue combat boots on their feet and freshly shorn military issue hair.

“All I want to do is make one phone call!” George said. “What do I have to do to make just one phone call? Or have a talk with the Doc in charge here.”

“Medication first, talking later,” the Nurse offered with a smile. “For your own good.”

George saw from the corner of his eye a door to the outside open. With whatever energy he had, he kicked the orderlies aside, pushed the nurse onto Harrold (which the old man seemed to enjoy) and made a made rush for the outside. En route, George grabbed hold of a cane which he used as a sabre, and was able to fight his way to an ambulance parked out front. The keys were in the car, the driver having a smoke ten feet away. George floored the accelerator than made a beeline for the exit. He bashed his way through the first gate, and could see open ground in front of him as he blasted his way down the highway faster than the cars pursuing him. His ability to drive on mountain roads paid off as he was able to hold onto the road with each swerve. The two, then three, then four vehicles behind him could not. But, as even George know, what goes up, or to the side, must come down, which it did. The last thing he remembered was creating a road of his own with no speed limit leading down the mountain and into a patch of trees, followed by an escape from the vehicle before it blew up, being taken to freedom by a gently flowing river. Whether such was a dream or reality didn’t seem to matter, to George anyway.

CHAPTER 20

Sophia's search for Sean Whiteman, Ph.D., M.D., led to a health food store in Salmon Arm whose supply of legal herbs to keep one living a long and productive life was as scant as the sparsely populated café adjoining it. "But I do have some miscellaneous herbs from what's left of from the burnt out store in Kelowna that are due in later today, Sally Anne. Particularly toxic lung syndrome, from breathing in all the smoke from the fires, that's nothing to sneeze or cough at," the long haired, overweight, and well over fifty year old Hippie Mama clad in a wardrobe fit for 15 year olds said to Sophie, whose cough was only partially faked, and who chose to use her new civilian ID to get through this gatekeeper. "If it goes untreated, the kidneys get calcified, the liver loses all of its antioxidant reserves, the pancreas secretes lipolytic enzymes, cardiac fibrosis sets in, and if you're pregnant, you start to grow cancer in your belly instead of healthy babies," the alternative healer mama continued with a superior mainstream professional doctor's tone.

Sophie's lack of medical training prevented her from knowing if 'Rainbow Renshaw' was trying to make another fast buck off of unsuspecting customers, or doing her utmost to use legal and illegal means to help fellow humanoids who had suffered because of the wildfires. At this point in the search for the well-hidden whereabouts of Sean Whiteman, Sophie was also exhausted from badgering or manipulating an armada of gatekeepers to get info needed to find Tristan Vanderhoof's shrink. Sophia coughed again, then looked at the poster portraying the effects of toxic lung syndrome with colorful detail amidst an eye-catching Peter Maxx psychedelic motif. Maybe the disease was real, or maybe it was an elaborate fabrication to trap innocent people into spending money on useless drugs. A trap like, perhaps, the one set by the string of people who seemed to 'off the record' too easily give up info about the next location of Sean Whiteman that led her here. Here being, perhaps, a secret hideout for a branch of the Illuminati, who were in league with ETs who, according to local papers and legends, liked to hang out in this area to cut open the odd sick cow for biological investigation and make crop circles with Atlantian writing on them in the meadows as an expression of their artistic aspirations.

"So, do you want these medications, or not, Sally Anne?" Rainbow inquired of Sophie. "But before you say 'no', Sally Anne, and think you can get your body healthy with industrial drugs and cleanse the toxin chi out of your shakras with happy thoughts, think again, Sally Anne."

"I was thinking of, in addition to these...maybe prayer," Sophia pushed out of her mouth. She forked out the money and paid for every item Priestess Rainbow had put on the counter. "I heard that there was a Shaman in the area. He used to call himself Sean, in the old days anyway, when we were, together. I have a picture of him in the good old days. I have a picture of him, here." Sophia showed Rainbow the photo of Sean Whiteman, a printed version, in which he was smiling, and happy. "Yeah, that's him. In a happy picture."

“A picture of him, without you,” Rainbow noted, seeming more like a guard at an NRA convention than a hippie mama dedicated to converting the world’s rifles and cannons into weed smoking bongos.

“Yeah,” Sophia said, feeling another talent inside of her blossoming. “I tore up the pictures with me and him, when we broke up, but someone else came into the picture a few months later,” she continued with a tear running down her face, patting her belly. “I promised you, little Seana, that you won’t grow up without a father. Your REAL father.”

“A father who...used to do soul healing work here, in that sweat lodge in the back, Sally” Rainbow said, while consoling Mama-to-be Sophie. “Who was taken away in the dead of night to somewhere else, little Seana,” she continued, talking so much sincerity to the life inside of Sophia’s womb that she actually felt herself believe that she was pregnant. “Somewhere that my biker buds found The do more to protect senior citizens from B and E crackheads, everyone from looters during the fire evacuations and battered wives from shithead husbands than the Cops ever did, found out about.” Rainbow said addressing mother through the child, writing the address and sneaking it into Sophie’s pocket. “Somewhere you both better get to quick,” she whispered just as a Burb land woman dressed in \$300 dollar custom torn jeans came in, followed by a uniformed Cop who alternatively eyed the ass of the shopping Mom and the clipboard in his hand. “And finally, blessings to this medication and you,” Rainbow said repeatedly as she did a Buddhist bow to the overpriced vitamins and perhaps innovatively compounded herbs, as well as to mother Sally and daughter Seana. She appended it with a “Namaste”, with a subtext that translated into ‘better fuck off fast if you know what’s fucking good for you, me and the fucking world.’”

CHAPTER 21

To keep herself awake en route to Celistra General Hospital, Sophia put the radio on. Her choices were limited to droning lesbian love songs between mates who were better off by themselves or with men, country music that had nothing to do with real country or well crafted music, and talk radio about the most sacred and expensive to grow up doing Canadian cow, hockey. The sedating misery of listening to such was broken up by several news reports. Highlighted were snowfalls in Florida, tropical rains with triple digit temps in the Yukon, continued drought and fires in British Columbia, prairie provinces East of the Rockies such as Alberta getting drenched with floods, with Saskatchewan and Manitoba starved for water so badly that celebs and their drinking buddies were hiring themselves out to get drunk, fly up on their private aircraft and piss down urine on the withering crops. Finally, Sophia reached the hospital, pulled into the visitor’s parking lot and walked to the entrance with that cool, collected, non-rushed gait that she had used so often when trying to sneak past the nurse’s station after visiting hours to see her sick, mostly illegally immigrated, relatives back in Los Angeles. She pushed the door open to the row of room where according to Rainbow’s biker buds said their favorite shrink, shaman and ambassador to the real world, aka Sean Whiteman, was in.

The hallway reeked of ammonia, rubbing alcohol and putrid blood, with a tinge of 'eud de morte' and roasting flesh to add to its authenticity. Upon turning the corner, then entering the only room in the ward where the door partially closed, Sophia's stare was held by a man being given last rights by a Chaplin in a black coat and high pitched voice.

According to every necklace, wristband and tattoo on his black, blue, blood red and pale white body, and Viking hairknot, patient Sean Whiteman was every inch a Pagan, yet he accepted the female Chaplin's Latin send off. She crossed herself three times with her right hand and with her left, moved his lifeless arm to do the same for himself. She put a small wafer into Sean's mouth, helping him swallow it, then with a syringe, inserted a few cc's of sacrificial wine from a plastic joggers's bottle into the least injured side of his mouth. With that, she said, "in the name of the father, son and holy ghost, Amen."

"Amen," Sean repeated, raising his shaking hand up to lay onto hers. "And, thank you."

"No, thank you, my dearest..." The Chaplin pushed out of a throat held hostage by an onrush of grief. She laid her head on his hand, her neatly combed greying hair rapidly becoming a mop soaked with tears. "Lord, this servant of yours saved my ass from killing myself, and others from doing a lot worse to themselves or others. We still need him here, but if you need him more, please take care of him. Or, I'll have my biker friends take care of you when they climb their way up there."

"It's okay. I'm ready," Sean slurred out of the left side of his mouth, clearly enough to be understood, sincerely enough to be felt, and believed. "I have a visitor that I have to talk over some things with," he said, finally looking Sophia in the eye. "Please," he said to her as he tried his best to push himself up. "Come into my office," he continued with his best shrink voice. And with eyes that revealed something Sophia was all too painfully aware of. "You're late for your appointment, Sophia, but I still have..." He looked at his chart. "...The rest of the hour free." He then looked to the Chaplin. "Right, Mother Ranata?"

"Mama Ranata, when my boss the ArchBishop figures out that Priests would be more acceptable if they were called Brother, Pop or Dad instead of Father. And remember that that Mary Magdeline never turned her back on Jesus while all of his male disciples denied knowing him during the Crucifixion, and fucked off to save their own asses when the Romans came around asking questions," she replied with a kind and defiant smile. "You have a talk about that with Saint Peter, will you, Sean?"

"After I let him tell me about his mother, vagina envy, and any other neurosis he does not want to turn into a psychosis, ya?" Sean replied with his best Sigmond Frued accent as he finally was able to push himself up into an upright position. "Und everything between me und my clients is confidential, ya, Mama Ranata?" His eyed then turned downward, and then to Sophia. "With some notable and necessary exceptions of course," he said very much as himself.

“He’s ready, I pray to God that you are,” Mama Ranata said to Sophia as she felt a wave of global responsibility overcome her. More than she ever wanted or bargained for.

With that, Mama Ranata left the room to no doubt comfort others with a satchel full of legends about the afterlife that patients in the rest of the hospital needed to believe to make their passing doable and meaningful. She closed the door behind her. Just after hearing the echoing thud of the door, no doubt with a ‘do not disturb’ sign on it from the outside, she turned to Sean and asked him the first question.

“How did you know who I was?” she inquired, feeling that she was being seen through.

“I don’t, not exactly,” he said. “But...neither of us have a lot of time and it’s time for me to break the confessional seal. Before you ask me what Illuminati hit man, underground KGB-CIA ‘poisons are us’ delivery dude or Hildebrand death squad did this to me, or wanted to do this to me, and I’d find myself lying about it, again...an even more frightening story.”

With that, Doctor Sean recalled everything he could about Tristan when he first came to him as a socially dysfunctional 10 year old who was smarter and wiser than any of his teachers in any academic subject, but who couldn’t figure out how to get the boys in gym class to not pick him in the locker room, or how to get the girls to stop laughing at him for having big eyes, a big head, big ears and, according to what the boys told them, a little penis. He related how Tristan had hidden in books about famous people, and conversed with them at length when he tried to duplicate their work or surpass it. Tristan thought of Nicola Tesla his brother, Ludwig von Beethoven as his uncle, DaVinci as his crazy Italian grandpa, and Einstein as his bus riding buddy, speaking to all of them on the solitary seat on the back of the bus in languages that he either taught himself, or made up so that no one would figure out what he was saying. “He had the bravest mind I ever knew, or tried to known anyway,” Doctor Sean noted. “If actors are athletes of the heart, he was a warrior of the spirit. He risked insanity, banishment and ridicule with each new insight he came up with be it in music, film, engineering and even biology, something that he was not nearly as good at as his only constant friend, and companion. Who also knew how manipulate people instead of mathematical formulas, molecules and electromagnetic fields.”

“His sister Teresa,” Sophia asked. “Who came to him, how and why?”

“At the last session we had, a few hours before I woke up here, he didn’t say,” Sean said. “And didn’t know!” he quickly affirmed. “He claims that he sees her in his dreams sometimes. And when he dosed off--“

“—He became her?” Sophia put forward.

“Something I theorized, but couldn’t prove, until, well..” Doctor Sean coughed up some more blood, this time bringing up pieces of his lung, then vomited up another bolus of bile, which with particles of food he recognized. He smelled it. “Hmmm...hemlock.

What did in Socrates after he drank a glass or two of ooze containing it so that the Athenian Citizenry would be spared his...challenges.”

“Hemlock mixed in with cherry pie, and what looks like beef jerky spices with Saskatoon berries,” Sophia noted from the material that came up Sean’s mouth. “With some residual crap in your crap,” she continued, looking into his blood-stained bedpan.

“Tristan said his mother sent him off with a picnic basket of road food that he had to eat to keep up his strength, and the Mission.”

“Or her mission, according to whatever religion High Priestess Mariah is into this week?” Sophia found herself thinking, and proposing, “And that Mission was?”

“Something I thought I’d find out after I broke crumpets and fruit flavored jerky with him. Anyone in the land of the living and still solvent knows that the surest deal breaker in a therapy session, date with a hot prospect, or a negotiation about property acquisition is to not share what the other party is eating,” Sean related stroking his chin like an academic and humanitarian with a hand that he held in place with the bedpost so it wouldn’t shake uncontrollably and take out his eyes. “A Jungian archetype that’s in our genetics.”

“Which got me this haircut,” Sophia said, angrily pointing to her Anglo died chopped bob, getting personally distracted from the matter at hand. “I know it’s a dumb question, but, I have to ask. What kind of hair did Tristan have when he came in? So we can identify him better, of course.”

“Yes, that doo which all three of you seemed to fall or evolve into,” Sean said as he looked at Sophia’s hair, then her eyes. “You have hair issues, which Tristan did as well. And Teresa does. A past lifetime residual, archetypal memory or unresolved adolescent event which---”

“---both of them inherited from their mother?” flashed into Sophia’s head. “The first interview I had with her was one where she cut off a goodly portion of her long, great looking hair as a sacrifice.”

“He didn’t tell me that,” Sean said. “But Teresa did, after Tristan dosed off. She talked around a lot of things, but she did talk about you. Who she is grateful to, beyond measure.”

“Because of what I did to or for her heart, or the Mission?”

“A little bit of both, until she started rambling on about how I was the enemy. How the source of my evil nature was based in being too good. How my uselessness to humanity was directly related to my caring for it, and her. After which she---”

“---slashed you in the belly with that ceremonial buffalo knife you had strapped to your waist,” Sophie said, noting the bandages around his belly becoming restrained with fresh blood.

“Which she was going to use to give me a haircut worse than yours, three inches below the scalp till...well. I started to defend myself against her with my open hand, then Teresa attack then got wacked and stabbed into, well...somewhere else. Maybe it was Nirvana, Valhalla or, God forbid, Heaven as defined by my Sunday School teacher in New Jersey. Then someone rescued me. It was, well...none other than Tristan. Who brought me here, dumped me off, then made a deal to make everything both right and profitable with Rainbow’s Biker Buds if they supplied him with a two weeks’ worth of uppers. So he wouldn’t go to sleep. Like...well,” Sean’s face went pale, after which his breath turned into a death rattle. “Like I have to...go to sleep now.” He looked up to the ceiling. “If that’s okay with you?”

The ghost of Carl Jung, an electromagnetic field shot into the room by Tristan/Teresa, or the Creator Him/Her/Itself seemed to give permission to Sean to depart the misery and duty that was his life on earth. A smile that said ‘it, whatever it is, is now accomplished’ came onto his face as his eye remained wide open. As the ECG turned into a flatlined buzz, Sophia pressed the buzzer to bring the Nurses in. The line was as dead as Sean Whiteman. “Help!” Sophia screamed out in desperation as she pushed open the door, then tried to administer CPR to Sean. After five screechings for help, that went unanswered, Sophia found herself pulled away from the smiling corpse. A large hand covered her mouth, a woman’s hand by the look and feel of it.

“Shhh” she heard Yannis say from behind her as Wendy throw a sheet over Sophia and threw her onto a gourney. They were both clad in white, looking very ‘hospitably’, the balding Yannis sporting a bushy greying Afro, the long haired Wendy in a Don Donald Trump ‘presidential’ comb over that was maybe real, or maybe not. From her vantage point on the covered shopping card heading towards the morgue, Sophia saw five pairs of boots connected to feet that bore RCMP stripes and combat fatigues coming into the hallway, followed by the small framed ‘G-man’ clone in the black suit and dark sunglasses. “Find the bitch, and bring her to me, alive,” he commanded his men. “The Mission depends on it.”

“And that Mission is?” Sophia asked Yannis as loudly as she dared.

“She who asked too many questions gets too many answers, Comrade,” Wendy informed Sophie in an Eastern European accent that sounded very convincing.

“Where are we going?” Sophia asked, having figured out that she was now a dead ringer for the ‘entity’ she was looking for.

“The money trail, the money trail, always follow the money trail,” she heard, in Spanish from Wendy, who claimed to be pathetically unilingual at first, second and third meeting.

It beat a one way trip to the morgue, or perhaps was a scenic route that eventually would lead to it.

CHAPTER 22

“How am I supposed to know what my son is doing in his spare time, and where he is?” Mariah Vanderhoof said to the visitors to her tent as she plastered her face with white foundation to compliment the thousand dollar a layer peasant red and blue flowing robes covering her newly tattooed body for the first annual ‘Pagans For Jesus’ festival, the congregation of seekers of all ages and impressionable temperaments outside waiting for the blessings, music and food. “Tristan’s a grown man, you know.”

“And woman?” Sophia commented, inviting a sympathetic respond, sister to sister. “A troubled woman who---“

“---was very real! Until the...accident so long ago.” Minister-Mistress Mariah barked back, turning to the balding, respectable-looking man next to him. Tears ran down Mariah’s face as she pointed to her heart with a hand bearing at least four thousand dollars worth of jewelry.

Yannis knew that her story was as real as a promise made by a Billionaire-turned President, but well aware that behind it lay some truths. “Where is Tristan?” he gently asked.

“Right here,” Mariah replied, pointing to her heart. “He’s always right here.”

“You mean there!” Sophia growled back, pointing to Mariah’s vulva. “According to the notes I got from his shrink. And the words he didn’t use but meant when talking about how much you loved and lusted after him.”

“And cooked special dinners for him, which prove that the way to a man’s heart, and the woman inside of that man, is through his stomach?” Wendy asserted regarding the herbal concoctions used by Mariah that turned Tristan into Teresa, either because she knew her son’s biology, or the kind of herbal biology that was as dangerous as the weather making machines. Before Mariah could spout out another lie, or half truth, Wendy turned to the jerky, bread bits and sacrificial wine on the white tablecloth, helping herself to a whiff. “Interesting combinations,” she said, after which she described exactly what was in them, by both Latin and common name. “I guess you are what you eat, or what the Priestess who you believe is a representative of the Almighty tells you to. And all along I thought that Catholic boys liked Catholic priests after communion because of the WAY they put the wafers under their tongue, while the Nuns--- ”

Wendy’s speculative discourse about how mind altering herbs were used to interconvert saints and sinners was interrupted by Mariah belting Wendy in the mouth, laying her flat on the ground, stepping on her chest to be sure she would not get up then ramming a

talking stick onto her trachea to be sure she, and the other two uninvited followers to her tent who snuck in clad in Jesus Pagan robes listened rather than spoke.

“What God wills has to happen,” Priestess Mariah informed her unconverted and uninvited guests. “And what will happen will happen,” she pledged. “Nature has been too kind to humanity. Humanity needs a lesson. A cleansing. A purging. A challenge for those who survive the days to come to become better, kinder and stronger.” She turned her gaze to the sky above the roof of the tent. “Is that not why you delivered me the flock of believers who will heed my words as I become an Instrument of your Will?” After whatever was up there seemed to say ‘yes’ to that question, Mariah spoke to that entity in tongues in a conversation charged with tears of grief, grunts of anger and outbursts of laughter.

All the while, Wendy remained under Mariah’s talking stick, while the very high on something Priestess took hold of Sophia with her other hand, threw a shawl on her, and showed her off to the big Boss, or Mistress, upstairs as her newest convert. Meanwhile, Yannis saw the opportunity to get a better look at the faces outside of the tent as the clouds over the full moon cleared away, illuminating the gathering. The crowd wore mostly whip-torn working man’s shirts on their bloody torsos, jeans stained with blood, and some brand of ‘sacrifice’ haircut, praying for weather to sustain rather than destroy their way of life elsewhere. Others chanted and bowed to the stage, clapping to the point of making their hands bleed to the music provided by a band on stage. Such was not surprising to Yannis, but one in ten of them offered another explanation. Their movements were minimal, their topknots styled rather than chopped, their wardrobe splattered with blood that seemed to be symmetrical to be due to self-flatulation, and glimpses of real jewellery were under them. They seemed to be looking at each other rather than the Goddess in the sky, or the leader of the band. And in the parking lot, one in ten vehicles were brand new, state beyond the art.

They reminded Yannis of the Moslem businessmen who entered Mecca for pilgrimage with designer poor man’s prayer robes, bought from shops that Yannis made a healthy profit from as a silent partner. They also reminded Yannis of the time he was assigned to fight with a Russian unit during WWII, where the job of one in ten of every soldier was to spy on their fellow Comrades rather than defeat the Nazi menace. Or the men in the back of the landing craft at Normandy whose job it was to shoot whoever didn’t rush the beach on D-Day.

The ethnicities of these no doubt financially-well off pilgrims in this gathering seemed to be very international. As did the name brands of the cars nestled in between the North American manufactured pick up trucks and clunkers in the parking lot. Yannis confirmed such when he looked at the envelopes in the open drawer and the overloaded incoming mail bin behind Mariah’s Alter.

How much money was in the envelopes addressed to Jesus’ Pagan Prayer Foundation, most of which were in care of Mariah, was not so much an issue as the return addresses for such. The countries in the G8 were very well represented. And the addresses were

from locations which had been spared the weather disasters which were now internationally distributed. Five of them were from firms that Yannis knew were companies that were the real holders of 98% of the world's wealth. Distributed by a mad woman living inside a kind man, who as long as he could stay away, would not slip into being re-possessed by the demoness he was protected, or perhaps at his core maybe really was.

Somehow, Wendy managed to push the stick out of Mariah's hands before it punctured a hole in her neck as the band, who Yannis recognised as The Better End (a top end Heavy Metal Anarchist group who apparently was scared or paid to become inspirational Pagan-Christian Rock) escalated their song into high energy riff whose breaths coincided with the wind, light of the moon and occasional bursts of rain that turned into wet snow, then back again. The high priestess fell to the floor, then lost consciousness, slipping into a talking dream. Sophie gasped a sigh of relief from her grip of salvation, then discovered a high tech minicomputer that had fallen out of Mariah's pocket. "How do I stop this?" she said, trying to manipulate the device, unable to affect anything on the display.

"We don't, and can't," Wendy said as she got up, her voice finally reconnecting to her windpipe. "But he, or she, can," she said, grabbing hold of a map that had fallen off the wall, with several hearts on it, all but one of them not containing a cross. "You, and Yannis, go here!" she commanded, after which she slipped on Mariah's robes and quickly whitened her face. "I can fake being her long enough for you to get out of here," she said as she grabbed hold of a knife, preparing to cut her hair into the chopped mess which was Mariah's sacrificial mane.

"Or you could put this over it," Yannis suggested, placing the hood over Wendy's head.

"Maybe, maybe not, but in the meantime---"

Wendy's plan to pose as the Priestess who could lead the world in prayer that would save the world from the wrath of Mama Nature remained inside her head, as the band stopped playing, yielding way to an announcer informing the crowd that Mariah would "be out to pray and sacrifice with y'all" in a matter of a few minutes.

One of the guards Yannis had inactivated with triple dosed weed-infused brownies started to wake up, muttering an Atlantian translation of 'Yellow Submarine' that his still knocked out buddy's feet tapped then swayed to.

"Both of you, go!" Wendy commanded Yannis and Sophia. "I know how to bullshit crowds into thinking they're having a good time better than anyone I know. No shit!"

"And I should believe that crap because why, Wendy?" Yannis demanded.

"I bullshitted you into loving me, didn't I?" she replied, after which she kissed Yannis on the lips. A kiss which Yannis felt was more sincere than any embrace, kiss or hug he ever got, or gave.

“Now, you and the weather girl here who knows how Nature works, and Mama Mayham, here, have to get out of here to find Tristan. Before he wakes up and becomes Teresa again,” Wendy said. “And fulfills...hmm...destiny.”

Displaying ‘destiny’ was a calendar lying on the floor that had been ripped off a tent post during the struggle. Every date had a motto on it suggesting how one should live a good and holy life, the mottos and the numbers crossed off and covered with blood, starting with...tomorrow, at sunrise.

CHAPTER 23

Tomorrow became today very quickly for Sophia and Yannis as they pulled up to the designated spot, a plateau just above the snow line nestled in a clump of woods that could only be accessed by making one’s own road. For better or worse, that road had been impressed and driven into the low lying bushes and wild grasses presumably by a backhoe, making the site for the next ‘send up’ of weather info into the atmosphere look more like a series of firewalls with only small patches of green in between then that could carry a blaze. The presumed creator of those dirt roads and platforms sat in his ground-crushing machine, taking a nap.

“Ralph!” the cargo Sophia and Yannis had been carting with them screamed at him from the back seat of the best car they could steal from the JP Festival. “Why did I ever marry you? You’re supposed to make roads between the trees, not over them, so the airplanes and choppers can’t see what we’re up to!” Mariah Vanderhoof slurred out of her mouth, having just woken up from a deep sleep, discovering a severe limitation to her physical mobility as well as the absence of her Priestess robes. “Now, get your ass over here and untie me. These people just stripped me naked, and probably raped me last night. Use the barrel of that shotgun I bought you for your birthday to shoot holes in their head instead of to lubricate your small, tiny, penile.---“

The rest of the description of how Ralph Vanderhoof derived any kind of sexual satisfaction in the one way street that was his marriage was halted by Yannis ramming a sock into Mariah’s mouth, then covering it with duct tape. The unwilling prisoner made even more noise, kicking the horn on, then scratching deep bloody tracks into Yannis’ arms that felt like they scraped up bone as well as flesh, causing him screech in pain, then tied up himself in the restraints that were binding his prisoner, putting them both against each other in deadly and very primal combat.

But neither the screams from the man who had boasted about a pain threshold higher than any Greek god, or earthly woman, nor Mariah’s horn honking woke the man up. Sophia noted that the driver of the only backhoe in sight showed no expression in his face. That face was covered with red jam and powder from a jelly donut, the remainder of it his lap stuck in the bandana around his neck. Daring to take a closer look, Sophia snuck around

the back of the state of the art bulldozer, noting that his eyes were fixed in position, his complexion pale white and the inside of his mouth clogged with freshly clotted blood.

“He’s dead!” Sophia yelled out to Yannis in Spanish, gently taking hold of a shotgun resting on the seat next to him.

“As we all will be, soon, thankfully,” Sophie heard from behind her. A millisecond after she recognised the voice, Teresa Vanderhoof, presenting to Sophia as Tristan visually from the neck down with hastily put on female make up layered on her face like war paint, grabbed hold of the shotgun. “Suicide is a courageous act. And a noble one. For me, humanity and now you.” Teresa aimed the gun at Sophia’s head with her right hand, and offering her a bite out of the mousey-bitter smelling, most likely hemlock infused, half eaten jelly donut with the other. “Daddy wasn’t supposed to eat breakfast till the sun came up. That is, till the sun came up OVER the mountains, not on the flat. So the donut from Gin Fortune’s I gave him was the one with---”

“---Where’s Tristan?” Sophia demanded. “I want to talk to him.”

“He’s...sleeping now,” Teresa replied, sadly. “Even he couldn’t invent artificial pill that can keep him from getting hungry or sleepy. Though, we both did try...”

Teresa lowered her head, the rapidly moving muscle between her ears seeming to be transmitting vital and conflicting information between one hemisphere and the other with escalating frequency and amplitude. Every one of the muscles of facial expression Teresa and Tristan’s attached to the skull underneath it contracted with full force, as no doubt the owner of that face was being forced to experience the most extreme of emotions, with a battle for supremacy of utmost urgency. But the fist holding onto the shotgun barrel remained firm, and the finger on the trigger seemed to have a mind of its own. Just as Sophia saw it ease into firing position, in the slowest motion she had ever experienced or imagined perceptible, a dull shot rang out from behind. As both personas fell to the ground. Behind it Wendy’s face came into Sophie’s view, along with the tazor gun in her hand, the gypsy cowgirl clad in a paramilitary security guard jumpsuit.

Finally the contractions on Tristan’s face stopped, as did the war between good and evil, rationality and insanity, constructive resiliency and blissful destruction inside his head. That primal conflict ended in a truce, leaving Sophia standing over a body that was breathing, restful and holding onto not a shotgun at her head, but a paper bearing instructions in a language that was a third mathematics, a third English and a third some kind of tongue in an alphabet Sophia couldn’t recognize.

“Your weather formula combined with Tristan’s genius,” Wendy said with a proud smile after the third speed read of the note. “And Teresa’s...hmmm.”

“Balls to think and act outside of the box of hmmm...duality-based morality, speaking metaphorically,” Sophia offered by way of possible explanation as she was trying to figure it out herself.

“God’s most powerful friend, ally and favorite drinking buddy is the devil,” Wendy replied with an even prouder grin on her face. “You’ve done well, girl. And will do even better!” she continued, taking the note and putting it into her pocket. A pocket that appeared to be filled with money as Sophia noted when it was opened.

“For your new hair extensions,” Wendy said, anticipating Sophia’s questions about the highest denominations for five world currencies that she saw in the pocket of the presumably minimum wage earning waitress, singer and part time horse trainer. Wendy then extended her hand onto Sophia’s coiffed blonde hair, stroking it with affection and admiration. “Or maybe when we wake our inventor, or inventors, up,” she continued regarding Tristan, whose locks had been similarly changed by his sister. “They can come up with something that will not only grow hair from follicle depleted heads, but make them sprout at an inch a day instead of on inch a month. Like grass on pastures and crops in farm fields that get the right amount of light, rain, warmth, along with super-chemical fertilizers and electromagnetic rays that unlock the supergene inside of them that makes them bigger, better and more competitive than their fellow plants.”

Sophia felt Wendy’s touch to be warm, inviting and above all supportive. Like that of the older brother who kept calling her stupid when she was growing up who broke parole to come to her graduation from High School, saying to Sophia that one look at her in the graduation gown is worth every month he’d have to serve on his extended sentence as the Cops took him away. And Sophia’s Uncle Fernando at her college graduation, who said that a woman’s place is in the home, not the office and especially in the laboratory, where she would grow up to be childless and eventually alone. And her mother, who, from her deathbed, assured her that where she is going is a better place because Sophia will make the world a better place for everyone.

But there was something that just didn’t fit regarding Wendy, as Sophia felt and now intuited it. First, she had escaped from an armed camp unscathed, not a hair of her head harmed, that hair smelling of being freshly washed, and looking freshly styled. Her arrival just in the nick of time this time and several other times was something that exists in the movies and fictionalized books, such ‘conveniences of writer’ being allowed in those entitled, and real life, only once. Third, her beloved Yannis was still caught up in mortal combat with a religiously-charged maniac who was bent on destroying the world, fueled by some kind of demoness inside or perhaps super-high octane herbal pharmaceutical that turned her into a supercharged unstoppable banshee.

“It’s good for him to struggle a bit,” Wendy said by way of explanation as Sophia looked towards the car in which the struggle was continuing. “No pain, no gain, and no appreciation for who and what you got,” she said in Greek, then translated into English.

After a few more agonizing blows delivered by Prisoner Mariah to Guard Yannis, the avowed macho closet atheist Yannis screamed “God, Jesus! God help me!” Wendy nodded her head, stating, “NOW is the right time, girlfriend.”

With that remark which had numerous applications, and subtexts, all of which were jumbled in Sophia's head, Wendy walked over to the car, set the tazer at the appropriate strength and fired it into Mariah's arm as she was about to slice open Yannis' exposed neck with a piece of broken glass.

Yannis thanked God, then Wendy for his deliverance from death. Meanwhile, Mariah muttered her willingness to embrace it between shocks, offering as her final salutation to the world of the living her soul to "whatever or whoever is really in charge".

"That would be us," Wendy replied. "We common folk that is," she explained to a confused but still very intensely thinking Sophia. "Right?" she asked Yannis as he checked in with his appendages, finding them all moveable, and attached. "Right!" she demanded of him.

"Wrong," Sophia heard from a voice behind Wendy. The hooded visitor in Jesus Pagan Foundation robes whistled, just as Wendy stared into his face. "It's over, Wendy," George said as cars loaded with heavily armed Jesus Pagans followers pulled onto the scene from the roads made by Ralph Vanderhoof's backhoe, the woods he that were supposed to hide the weather-making equipment he had brought in, and the sky which, for the moment anyway, was not pissing down torrential rain, flesh-burning sunlight or winds capable of turning everything under it upside down. "It's over Wendy, between you and me. And you and the world," he said. He motioned with his head for the men, and women, under him, who seemed to be common folk more used to using guns to hunt animals or threaten cans and targets, to take Wendy away to the paddy wagon which included as one of its involuntary passengers, the small framed FBI-G man 'suit' who had ordered George's transfer to the nut house. "And, Wendy, or whatever your real name is, it's over between you and my father."

"Who can speak for himself!" Yannis blasted out, pulling his still beloved close to him. "Explain yourself and all of these people!" he demanded of his son.

"After she explains herself?" Sophia suggested, referring to Wendy. "Or, if Mariah is still alive," Sophia offered, noting that breath had returned to the High Priestess' body.

"Which she isn't, and even if she is, she's nuts! Brain dead after not breathing for that long. A vegetable that's dangerous and toxic!" Wendy blasted at Sophia, then a disbelieving George. "Just like your crazy and now drug or demon possessed son, Yannis!"

"Who witnessed what happened after Mariah left the festival, and you took over the proceedings," George stated as he began a Sherlock Holmes walk from which he allowed his once best friend Wendy not a moment without his penetrating stare. "Telling the congregation that Mariah, whose superpowers of predicting the weather in disaster areas and whose prayers to stop them have worked, is in seclusion. Asking us commoners to sacrifice the money we need to feed our kids to the Priestess and the Creator she talks with on the way out the door, while others worked their way back to the Festival Grounds

to conference with you about business. The business of culling the human population down to a workable number, so the 'select' could populate the planet. The business of changing weather in one place so that others in other places get rich. Others who me, and a few other commoners decided to spy on during your business lunch for the enlightened class under the tent, then disarm, then...well."

"Who are you going to believe, Yannis?" Wendy asked her beloved. "This rabble. Or someone who loves you."

"Which is the only truth that's come out of your mouth all week," Sophia noted.

During a moment of human weakness, Wendy let her guard down as she looked at Yannis asking him for something he was not willing to give her anymore. During that moment, everyone, most painfully Yannis, saw that she was vulnerable, defeated and above all guilty.

"There's nothing I can say that, to you anyway, would make this right," Wendy said to the congregation. "But there is one thing I would like to do to make some of it right."

"Eat a cookie containing morality inverting herbs of OUR choosing?" George asked.

"To say goodbye to your Dad, if it is okay?" Wendy asked.

"That's up to him," Sophia interjected.

"Yes, it is!" Yannis asserted, after which he took Wendy's hands into his, moved closer to her and invited her to embrace him.

Wendy embraced Yannis with intensity, depth and sincerity, which brought a tear to everyone's eye. Except hers, as she pulled out Yannis' reserve gun from his pocket, then pushed him aside.

"No, don't do it!" rang out from a woman's voice who Sophia noted came from none other than Mariah. "Don't do it!"

"I have to. For both our sakes, and theirs," Wendy said, after which she put one slug into Mariah's head, and the second round into hers.

CHAPTER 24

George Corman was offered back his position as an RCMP Officer with a certificate of achievement and a completely new staff of people under him to look after the affairs of Glenville Falls after Yannis had gathered enough evidence to arrest and convict the Upper Ups in Wendy's band of 'enlightenists'. It was the first time that Yannis Korikopolis got a conviction without having to fudge some facts or fabricate evidence. It

made him want to experience another brand of law enforcement not yet applicable back in the Big Crab Apple.

Sophia Garcia obtained her Ph.D. in atmospheric sciences and climatic engineering and went on to teach from a university podium rather than pontificate from a television studio, so as to pass down what she knew about Mother Nature's secrets to those who would use them in her service, not their own.

Sophia married Tristan, which he jokingly said was because 'Mom and the Spirit she tried to find with every religious conversion always wanted me and you to get together'. Tristan learned to keep the most powerful inventions to himself. But there were some he could share safely, calculating that the good they would do would outweigh any harm. Yannis helped him with copyrights, George advising him on what companies he should sell or give away his many inventions to, as all Tristan wanted now was enough money to keep his self-made laboratory funded, and hidden from the world.

As for Teresa's wanting to make the marriage with Sophia and her brother a three way affair, Tristan did go to shrinks who were more interested in serving humanity rather than maintaining normality and was diagnosed with gender dysphoria. Teresa was allowed to materialize, but she was given a moral education that she eventually accepted, while reminding Tristan that 'good' only works when there is defiance and a healthy dose or rage behind it. Tristan made no attempt to correct the castration that Teresa inflicted, or perhaps gifted, him with. Tristan and Sophia adopted three children, with regard to gender identification, 'one of each'.

Mother Nature continued on as always, as either a manifestation of something higher, or as someone who ruled herself, sharing, to the extent that it was possible, the planet with the two legged species who at anytime could make earth a paradise, or...something else.