

HENRY AND THE WOLF DOCTOR Part 3:
LIBERATIONS AND ACCOUNTABILITIES

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CHAPTER 1

No less than five officials in black suits sat behind the desk, playing and being God to the man in front of them. Reams of paper lay between them and the mortal whose fate lay in their blister-free hands. The prisoner led into the room by overly armed guards was clad in white from neck to toe. His eyeline fell a foot below his examiners after his hurting ass hit the chair, nothing in front of him except his naked and burnt right arm.

“Good morning, and may God bestow His blessings on you, Sirs,” the still somehow handsome and perfectly proportioned prisoner said with a humble bow. Upon looking up the Keana Reeves at fabulous forty look alike, despite the bruises on his face and swollen eye, appended his greeting with, “And you, Ma’am,” addressing the short haired androgenous woman leading the proceedings.

“Those burns on your right arm,” the senior and sole female member of the parole committee inquired of the prisoner. “They look to be...four or five days old.”

“A week” the prisoner replied, pulling back his parched lips.

“And self inflicted, when you were doing kitchen duty, which you related to the doctor after the ‘accident’. Following your announcement to the second in command of the White Brotherhood that ‘you were abdicating your throne’,” the older woman in charge of the younger men related while glancing pensively at the most recent contents in the inmate’s overloaded file, scratching her double chin that had more hair on it than those of her male associates. “After which you went to the stove, then grabbed a knife. Conveniently removing...hmmm....”

“Tattoos saying I belonged to Satan and his minions, yes,” the prisoner replied looking down at the reddened and putrid smelling appendage which was his arm. “Who I renounced when the Holy Spirit visited me in my cell.” A mild chuckle ushered into his blown out stubble covered cheeks. “I didn’t have the courage or tools to scrap off all of my skin and arm. But, as we all know, or should, as it says in Mathew 5:29. ‘If thine right eye offends thee, pluck it out. And if thine right arm doth lead you to sin, cut it off.’”

“With you being a lefty?” the five foot two elderly woman said. She raised her sunbaked face, taking a look over the rim of her bifocals at the six foot two prisoner. who had elevated himself in status over the last 8 years from a slick white collar wall street mogul to become a king who ruled over those who valued brawn as well as brains.

The prisoner raised up his left hand, showing twice as much inflamed soon to be scar tissue. "My eyes are in the service of the Lord now," he said, pointing to his, if you looked at him in the right light, baby blue ocular portholes. "After they were led to read about....someone special to me now." A warm, sincere smile came over his face. That face had been, according to the conversation between the members of the parole board, beaten while defending the life of a guard who was about to be molested and then killed, by his fellow Correction Officers and inmates in his charge. A guard who was the head committee member's nephew.

"Your Honor?" the prisoner said to the ex-female SEAL known by the guards as well as the inmates as 'hard-assed Granny'. Who had become warden of a man's prison by being harsher than any penile bearing competitor for that job. Her eyes softened, then released a small trickle of tears.

"Sirs?" the prisoner said to the men around 'hard assed granny' who were moved by whatever Spirit had come into her. Maybe because, as the J man said, 'whenever two or more of you are gathered in My name I am there also.'

The men conferred with each other, then looked at their Iron Lady for approval of their unsaid suggestion. "Yes, I think we can move along with that proposal, gentlemen," she said while wiping the tears from her face. She turned to the prisoner, her tone firm, assertive, her smile somehow....hopeful. "Even religiously atheists like me believe that sometimes a miracle happens suddenly, and by accident. There are historical incidences of this. En mass, the Vikings after unleashing horrific raids in Europe eventually settled down to spawn a few centuries later pacifist Scandinavians who shared what they have and compete only with themselves. The Mongols conquered everyone from China to the gates of Vienna, then, eventually, went home to become peace loving Buddhists. The Germans...after they experimented with excesses in 'might is right' politics in 1933 became crusaders for goodness between people and kindness to animals. And as for the latter..."

Hard Ass Granny looked to the right side of the long oak table, her eyes fixing on a labrador retriever who had seen, heard and absorbed far more than its human 'masters' in the room thought he could. "This is...hmmm... Rusty," she said to the prisoner regarding the light brown Husky-Lab cross whose capacity of thought, feeling and sarcastic wit was, yet again, underestimated. Otherwise, why would he be named according to the color of his fur rather than the qualities of soul between his floppy often yeast and bacteria infected ears? "A stray who is your new cell mate, friend and protector," Hard-Assed Granny said while she petted the canine, bringing him towards the prisoner. "A new program to get both of you off the streets, and on the road to a better future outside of these walls, very soon," she said regarding her most recent experiment with teaming naïve, unintelligent souls blessed with contagious love with those who are cynical, clever and mean. Theoretically, the former would conver, without understanding anything about cruelty, the latter to a life of unbridled goodness AND applied intelligence.

To the hound, the born again prisoner seemed sincere. Likeable, and even trustable. More so than his previous owners. One family of self-absorbed upright walking idiots had ignored his presence most of the time, made him do tricks to make THEM look smart, and never bothered to look into his eyes. Unless it was to say 'NO!' when he had to evacuate his bladder after being trapped in the house for 14 hours. Then there was a newly married couple who, had the mixed breed hound not escaped from, was going to take him to a shelter for euthanasia because his fur color didn't match their new furniture. And still another 'rescuer' thought the dog would be a money maker when put into a pit for a pugilistic fight to the death with another canine, even if it was his.

'Rusty' followed the prisoner to his cell, a solitary dwelling with a cot for each of them. "Thank you," he said to the head guard who bid him a cautious 'good night, gentlemen'. His assistant petted the canine on the head, then snuck a beef bone still laden with fresh meat into his mouth.

Within five seconds of the cell door closing to the cell (which, according to the new plan for him, would be open for good within a few weeks) the prisoner snatched the bone from Rusty's mouth. "First a story, then, maybe a snack," he said. He plopped his ass on the most comfortable of the cots. "I have to feed your soul with some truth that the Holy Spirit delivered to me." the repentant prisoner said. He removed a Bible out of his pocket, opening it a folded up article printed on glossy paper.

"An article from Rolling Stone," the prisoner said to the dog, pulling Rusty into a tight hug around his torso that was as intense as the fist with which he held the article. "All about a new superstar who is 'a miraculous healer of busted and diseased animal flesh as well as a doctor for the broken, defeated and destructive human soul. A new innovative Master, nay Mistress of the science and art of medicine, music, and the most difficult to maintain emotion of all....humor.' Who now calls herself..Roberta Collineur, who I knew as...well....someone else, something else. Someone who....put me here!" His voice escalated into the loudest angry whisper possible, while eyeing a photo of Roberta Collineur, Ph.D., D.V.M., H.B.A.R.P., the latter described as human being, aspiring Renaissance person, with two of her 'taught me more than I ever taught them' apprentices. "Yeah, Roberta Collineur. Who called me Kurt the Suit. Who I gave all the jewelry, dope and booze she begged for! Who I loaned out to only my best and most high paying horny friends! Who ran away when she got pregnant with the kid she didn't deserve to have! Who...was a gift her white father gave to me to pay back some business debts, so I could do whatever I wanted for and to her! Who, because the disloyal bitch made a deal with the Feds, I will....!"

The dog barked, silencing the rant that hurt his ears as well as was painful to his soul. "No, 'Rusty!' Kurt growled back to the dog. "Bark when I don't say it is ok. Or I'll say that you bit

me and drew blood. Which is, as you know, grounds to put down any dog. Or any ungrateful, double doc Injun bitch!”

The primitive part of Rusty’s brain wanted to know if he would get the bone back. He recalled the times when he stood up for himself. Or tried to defend the most vulnerable and deserving humanoid in the room who was usually not the strongest. And the one who had the fewest number of tatoos.

“But, maybe I can train Kurt the suit here to be a more caring human,” Rusty considered regarding his new tatoo-less “master”. “I know more words in Human than he knows in Canine, which makes me the more intelligent ‘partner’ here. And being intelligent makes you more caring, so...I think this human has more potential for good than others. After all, he seems very smart. I just have to be more clever than he is. An easy trick to learn, right?”

“You say something?” Kurt growled at Rusty.

“Yes, which I’ll tell you when the time is right,” the too smart for his own good canine gently barked back. It was enough to keep going. But going where?

CHAPTER 2

After finally finishing the final two strokes on the painting, Jennifer Jones signed it differently than usual.

“Why are you signing this one JJ, and TK, Deathhound?” Terri Kewalski asked her best friend and most trusted fellow animal lover AND server as she gazed at her latest watercolor and charcoal visual rendition in two dimensions of what she felt in three behind her exhausted yet still wide open eyes. The sun filtered into window of the mobile home, adding another layer of light this latest and (so Deathhound hoped) greatest painting. The warm rays of springtime sunlight made the red hues laugh, the blue tones flow and the green portions of the multi-personed abstract portrait expressing assertiveness. The white strokes evoked the sound of deep winter woods Silence reflectiveness. The yellow strokes assured the eye that it is not only ok, but required, to let the constellation of colors find their natural place in the brain, mind and soul. . “It’s your best work. And didn’t that art dealer say that you need to be consistent with your brand?” five foot nothing first Nations Terri noted to her nearly 6 foot tall White roommate, and friend. :”That brand being---”

“To write from the heart, and make the colors serve the subject matter instead of the other way around,” the Amazonian now ex-Goth said as she treated herself to the first, and perhaps only, objective a view of her art. “I don’t know what it says yet, but maybe you all of you can tell me,” she continued from the mobile home built in 1978 whose mobility days were long gone, its walls still standing defiantly against the element .covering outdated but well constructed electrical wiring “OK guys?” Jennifer Hillary Deathhound Jones said to her roommates, flipping her, for the first time, all naturally colored blonde rather than artificially purple black hair to the right side of the neck. Those cohabitants included included Terri, five rescued dogs, six soon to be neutered and spayed young cats who had been dumped on the doorstep as kittens, and of course, the Jesus Spirit. A Spirit the still nose-ring wearing ex-Goth finally accepted into her life, but in a private way that was strongest because she did NOT declare it to fellow mortals, or try to draw a picture of It.

The abstract landscape-portrait she has just completed featuring Knife Bend with all of the faces of its still independent rugged individual’s faces buried within it was done in the service of Spirit big S. Deathhound’s Jesus was a more kind than powerful, more wise than clever and more gender fluid than male Deity who she now considered her best friend. She cared about Him almost as much as she cared about, and for, Terri.

Terri had, by example, taught Deathhound the power of kindness, while not knowing how powerful or influential she was. That medically as well as mechanically gifted NON-university, or trade school trained ‘assistant’ in Doc Henry and Roberta’s clinic without knowing it, infected everyone around her with optimism, even when confronted with animals with incurable diseases.

The normal percentage of human patients who get better because they believe that the sugar pill was powerful medicine was 37 percent. Terri was able to up that number for people, and their animals. The still cautious Doc Roberta calculated the placebo effect to an average of 69 percent.

Terri's most recent convert was Deathhound, who she had inadvertently 'ministered to' while the latter was putting in time as a volunteer at the vet clinic so that she could get her High School diploma faster. And so that she could be spared spending time with her annoyingly ignorant, dangerously naive about the plight of the downtrodden, and pathologically 'politically sensitive' rich parental units. Prior to living with Terri, Deathhound had claimed that 'negativity' was the only thing that got her through the day dealing with idiots and assholes. At night she would compose dark, cynical prose which would make Edgar Allan Poe's writings seem like Mary Poppins' tales about driving Chittychitty Bang Bang to the North Pole to have cake and cookies with Santa Clause.

But on this day, Deathhound, now 'Jen' Jones, felt the sunlight moving across her uncovered by pasty foundation face as it changed its location in the sky. She thanked the Jesus Spirit for letting the warm rays shine onto Terri's face. It was a twenty-five year old face that was both young and old. The shape of her nose, high cheekbones, warm brown eyes and jet black hair now grown long enough for her to sit on it revealed the most physically beautiful features of at least ten different first Nations tribes. Terri's angelic face had been bombarded by more clever 'come on, get real here you pathetically naïve patsy' quips to that were not understood, or thankfully processed, than Deathhound could count. But that was then, and this was now.

Since moving in with the most valued assistant at Henry's clinic, Deathhound, now Jen, expressed her respect for Terri by doing 80 percent of the cooking, to Terri's tastes. and 95 percent of the cleaning, to standards far cleaner than Jen had when she was clad in dirty, sweat soaked black Goth clothing. Jen admired Terri for instinctively knowing, and teaching, her how making a broken car engine purr with delight like the organs in a feline body by complimenting her roommate's skills. Deathhound tried to show that admiration by doing her best to try to learn them. As several interesting weeks led to meaningful months, Jen desired to share a bed with Terri. But every time a laugh from a gender fluid tv show was shared while sitting on the couch, Jen's attempts to move in kiss Terri on the cheek, or lips, were met with discreet pullback. Perhaps, the 'Deathhound' still lingering in Jen had speculated, such would bring back Terri's memory of kisses on the lips leading to punches into face, or worse.

Despite Jen's variety of methods to get Terri to talk about her past relations with boyfriends, girlfriends or family members, they were met with averted eyes, then deflections of the conversation to something in Deathhound's life. And, truth be told, the renegade from overly rich and comfortable White parents bought into the temptation to fall back her bad habit of talking about herself more than conversating anyone else..

“Maybe Terri’s doesn’t want something in that will hurt her,” Deathhound pondered, on this, yes, fine day, scratching her chin with her still paint covered fingers. Diving down deeper than usual, another possibility wacked Deathhound in the face. “Or, maybe Terri doesn’t want something in her which will hurt ME,” she considered.

“So, Ter,” Jen said to Terri, as she laid her most recent painting into a closet prior to framing it. After such, it of course would be put it on a wall somewhere. Maybe this time, somewhere other than the few empty spaces on the walls or the trailer, or the cluttered with art walls of Henry and Roberta’s vet clinic. The latter would, perhaps, be the most effective way to share it with the world outside of Knife Bend. But before determining where the painting would go, there was the matter of protecting it from four legged roommates that could add their own paw prints to it, or scratch a critique on the canvas. She picked up her jean jacket from the floor, which thankfully didn’t have any animal excretions from anal or oral cavities on it, this time. “I’m heading to the store to get supplies for the clinic. You want or need anything?”

“First, for you to not head into town or into the clinic with blood on your hands,” Terri said, pointing to the red patches of paint on Jen’s fingertips and palm.

“Ah, yeah,” Jen volleyed back, moving over the kitchen sink, turning on the faucet. When putting her fingers under the rusty tap, the theoretically safe for consumption water felt hotter than usual. Deathhound pulled her hands back, hoping no damage was done. “So, the hot water tank is working, too well this time.”

Terri rushed over to the sink, opening the unlabeled cold water tap. “That water heater is a temperamental beast. She sometimes tries too hard to please,” she said, yet again referring to things made of metal in the same manner as creatures made of flesh.

Jen noted that this time Terri dubbed the repaired for the fifth time water heater with a female persona. But more importantly, she felt something new rushing up her arm as Terri’s fingers cleaned the red and blue paint off her fingers. Something that had to be nurtured, to sprout on its own time. In its own way. Before that new sensation could be defined, Terri pulled away from Deathhound’s phalanges, and handed her a grocery list. Then the First Nations wonder child whose destiny, and Purpose, was to never grow up pulled some money from the pocket of her life rather than factory torn jeans..

“No, I got this one,” Jen said, motioning for Terri to put the money into her pocket. “Each gives according to their ability and gives according to their needs and...well, I got some extra spending money from my parental units with a promise for more if I go back home and date this guy who they say knows people who own art galleries in...”

Before Jen could construct another lie, built upon some things that were true, Terri put her fingers on her lips, silencing her latest attempt to be noble, for real. Then Terri put her own money into Deathhounds' pocket. "And, if you could pick up the mail also, please."

"Sure," Jen smiled back without a hint of Deathhound in her voice or gestures. Little did she know that it was a request she should have refused.

CHAPTER 3

It was just another day at the vet shop for Roberta Collineur. Seven dog neuters, five cat spays, three equine laceration repairs and removal of tumors from two dogs, confirmed as being lipomas on one and a 'good thing we got it early' mast cell tumor in the other one. All proved that 'the best care anywhere, on this planet anyway' was a promise that was delivered from the Knife Bend Animal Clinic, yet again. but not with the flair and pinasche of MASH. The day felt to be...uneventfully procedural. Then again, being the eye of the hurricane that busted up every one of Mother Nature's plans to end or severely compromise the quality of animal life disabled you from appreciating what you really did, and did before lunch.

But there was one step forward Inside that the once drug addicted, drunk, self destructive and abused animal doc self observed. It had been at least five thousand patients ago, or as measured by the calendar, 9 months since Doc Roberta called a newborn calf, pup or kitten 'Daniel'. It was name she had given to her first and only baby, whose father was either Roberta's 'dear old dad' or one of his buds. Her desire to turn that life born to incest or rape, or both, into a well adjusted boy and man who would never think about following in dear old dad's footsteps. Still, Kurt the Suit, the 'handler' dear old dad sold her to, made her give away the child. After all, it would get in the way of Roberta (aka 'Bobbi') assisting him in illegal distribution/sales of drugs, weapons and other 'Robertas'. When Kurt refused to let Roberta go to her Grandmother's funeral, since it would interfere with a special party he had arranged with populist politicians and Russian oligarchs who owned them, Roberta turned herself into the Cops, Fortunately it were the ones who were not on Kurt's payroll. The immunity from prosecution and new identity turned into becoming a savior of life rather than a destroyer of such. It had been a hard decade of climbing out of the gutter and into a life Roberta's Medicine Woman Grandmother would be proud rather than ashamed of her favorite grand-daughter pursuing.

When Roberta had finally found the foster family who had adopted Daniel, she was told that the lad refused to see her, wishing her nothing but ill will. As if giving birth to a child who rejected you was not punishment enough. But, that was then, and this was now---for today, anyway.

After wolfing down three 4 day old donuts and half a liter of Turkish coffee so thick you could cut scoop it up with a fork, Roberta took on the real challenge. A cruciate ligament repair in a 90 pound German Shepherd, named 'Little John' of course, whose leg was destined for the waste bucket in the last three clinics he had been taken to. It was a surgery that required the best steel sutures available and a pair of assistant's hands that were as strong as they were steady to hold onto the limb while Doc R delicately drilled holes into fragile bone which wanted to break into a billion pieces if you looked at it the wrong way. All while enduring the music coming out of the phone of the assistant's hands which was more annoying than the Hearty Party, and more anger-inducing than Onward Christian Soldiers ever was.

“When Doc Henry said you better shake a leg to get in here, two hours late, again, he didn’t mean to shake the leg of that patient, Taylor,” Roberta said to Norma’s 19 going on 9 granddaughter. Taylor was assigned to work at the clinic by Norma as well as the Cop who decided to not arrest her for shoplifting while Henry was, yet again, out on a farm call dealing with animal detritus rather than human bullshit. “We don’t want you to shake Little John’s leg until we WANT him to wake up from the happy drugs we used to send him to dreamland,” Roberta added.. “Where he can beat his fellow male canine companions to a private love fest with 70 virgin unspayed dogs, and become a papa who doesn’t have to pay child support if he scurries back home fast enough.”

Roberta expected a laugh, but didn’t even get a chuckle as she resumed drilling her way into the bone, trying to find the right spot to insert the wire. Her noble attempt to infuse the most needed element in human and animal medicine, humor, was rewarded by indifference.

Taylor seemed to at least ‘processed’ the witticism. Something she saw on her phone holding hand resulted in her bone holding hand to sway. Roberta pulled back the drill, just before it was pushed into the wrong portion of the, as she was discovering, prematurely arthritic bone. “I, and more importantly, Little John here, need you to hold this limb steady, please!” she requested, calmly, shutting off the drill.

“You’re, like, ya know, being abusive, and yer stressing me out!” Taylor shot back, letting go of the dog’s leg, thankfully, not before Roberta grasped it in her free hand. Roberta offered the limp to Taylor again. She grabbed hold of the limb again breathing heavily as Roberta continued the necessary surgery. Knife Bend’s newest expert in ‘quiet quitting’, who had worked her way into being dismissed with extra pay by working ‘for the man’ in no less than four other establishments in town, took in some more deep breaths, exaggerating the exhaustion that was so intense she couldn’t hide it anymore. After all, she had put in a full two hours of work. “I’m being overworked here,” Taylor said to Roberta. “And as you know, and everyone else who isn’t MAGA knows, overwork is self abuse.”

“And why is that, Taylor?” Roberta commented, in as non-confrontational manner as she could. She waited to see what else would come out of the entitled mouth of the new overpaid employee who still felt like she was due compensation for leaving the womb of Norma’s daughter on her mother’s time table.

“Overwork is self abuse, ‘Doctor’ because, as you know, or should know,” Taylor replied rolling her eyebrows in condescension. “Effortless success is the best kind. Self love is the only real love that matters.”

“And you’re not coming in on time, as you promised you would? There is such a thing as keeping your word,” Roberta reminded the assistant who made the physical aspect of the surgery harder, but with conversation that made things interesting during a less than-interesting day.

“Keeping your word is something you don’t have to do, because ‘keeping your word, and your word is your bond’, like VERY old Doc Henry said isn’t something we have to do, because things change and you have to be flexible.” Taylor replied.

“And what about deadlines?” Roberta inquired, still feeling more investigative than enraged.

“Huh?”, that battlecry of social justice warriors who would never even consider going to jail for any cause, flowed out of the lip rings on Taylor’s mouth.

“A shot in the dark here, from a gypsy scholar,” Roberta offered while continuing to treat Little John’s unfixable leg, according to the assessment of the corporate clinics specializing in overcharging each client for AI-generated medical advice. “Being an Indian giver who doesn’t honor your word, on time, will blow you into doldrums that will leave you stagnant,” she noted, allowing her gaze shift to shift between recalling her own life journeys on the high and sometimes toxic seas of life, and seeing maelstroms Taylor’s overbuilt ship was heading into. “Saying ‘no can do’ when you CAN and SHOULD do will put a hole in the hull you call a soul bigger than any iceberg. And if you don’t man up to do what’s uncomfortable and what sometimes hurts, your ship will never leave any port. You’ll wind up being sold down the river by even your own people, your own shipmates. It’s crazy but it’s as true. No pain, no gain. But if you steer your rudder around happiness, no matter what course you’re sailing or blown into by a Northeaster wind, you will feel...Bliss” Roberta envisioned her own journeys in life, professionally, personally and spiritually, allowing her to say as a chronically tired but always accomplished soul Having put the first hole into Little John’s bone, without cracking it, she allowed herself a vicarious pat on the back. She then turned to, Taylor, whose soul was....savable. “Yes, Bliss. Which is a far more fulfilling life experience than the, calling a spade a spade, -toxic cake walk that you’ve been pushed and pulled into.”

“Yeah,” Taylor conceded, looking into Roberta’s caring eyes as someone who seemed to have accepted her most heartfelt gift.

Yes, it was a good day for Doc Roberta. Using, and amplifying, her skills as an artist, scientist she indeed had cured matters of body, mind and spirit in a two legged patient. With her outer ear, she heard the cawing of an eagle on the roof of the clinic. And the howl of an injured wolf from the back room whose limb, and life. Both said ‘you go, girl’. But when Taylor looked

down at her phone again, Roberta heard with her inner ear, the voice of her Grandmother saying, 'maybe the stew isn't quite ready yet.'

"But aside from enforcing deadlines on others, or worse, yourself, you just blurted out six things that are..." Taylor said. She abruptly raised her head up from the mechanical advisor whose life suggestions she valued more than any flesh bearing human, or animal, shouting into Roberta's face. "...Very offensive!"

"Huh?" Roberta replied, her head nodding to the left.

"Okay, 'boomer' or whoever you think you are," 'Professor Taylor' shot back at her errand student reading what she had entered onto the phone screen with her free hand. "You said 'gypsy', which is a racial and ethnic slur against the Roma people. 'Indian giver' which White Colonialists called YOUR people, if indeed you still remember your cultural roots. 'No can do', pigeon English from the Caribbean, mocking slaves there who spoke it. 'Crazy', which of course, as you should know 'DOCTOR Collienuer' is a slur against the mentally handicapped and marginalized people on the spectrum. 'Calling a Spade a Spade', referring to another racist term referring to African Americans, and..."

"---That ultra WOK crap is, like, ya know, or should know, so lame!" Roberta blasted back.

"That makes seven," justice warrior princess Taylor took note of with a calm, condescending tone that Roberta had experienced all too often from pseudo-liberal assholes and idiots who, instead of robbing you of money like the rednecks did so well, stole your confidence and sense of worth. Making you feel that you were not and never would be worthy of being 'enlightened' as well as 'artistically sensitive and talented' as they were. 'Lame' being a word that takes away dignity of the disabled," Taylor continued.

"Which you are, between the ears anyway," Roberta thought, but did not give voice to. Perhaps because something else had overcome her consciousness.

Even though Roberta hadn't reached the fat, flatulent and forty landmark biologically yet for any of those parameters, she felt like...Doc Henry now. Down to her having used a nautical metaphor and having seen more than expected grey strands of hair in her now re-grown out topknot. She didn't know what to do with that realization. But she knew what she had to do to save Little John from having to be renamed 'Tripod' as Taylor's 'firm and steady' hold of the leg merged into a swaying action in rhythm to the Taylor Swift 'I'm me who is more important than any of you' empowerment song on her phone.

“Terri , here, now!” Roberta yelled out, laying down her drill, grabbing hold of the leg her assigned assistant was supposed to hold steady for \$25 an hour.. “Taylor, out,” she blasted out. “And this goes overboard, into the deep six, as silent as Davy Jones’ locker,” Doctor R continued, finding the Doc Henry nautical metaphors that had always annoyed her being exactly what the helmsman ordered. She grabbed Taylor’s phone, shut off the music. She abruptly tossed that appendage AI was using to take over Taylor’s soul as well as mind into the laundry bucket.

“This is so...ya know...I can’t even listen to my own music at work!” Tears streamed down Taylor’s face. “And I have to wear this....uniform!” She continued, ripping off the surgical green top she was requested to put on while assisting in the OR as if it was a prison shirt assigned to an inmate at Auschwitz. That garment which, truth be told, was requested to be worn so that blood emerging from a patient didn’t stain the Flower Power shirt that Norma had worn in 1968 which she passed down to her granddaughter, hoping that dedication to the Peace and Love Revolution Norma’s daughter had rejected would be taken on by Taylor. In any case, Taylor took yet another wanted and (truth be told, given how ill trained she was for real life outside of the computer screen) maybe needed ‘stress break’ in the back yard of the clinic.

Matters of passing down to younger generations the virtues but not toxic vices of the older ones, including Roberta’s wondering about what was going on with her estranged biological son Daniel, were given a second seat on the poop deck as the stern of the good ship Roberta were rudely interrupted by a wave coming in from the starboard side. Though Roberta, all the while, kept an eye on Little John’s breathing and respirations, the canine started to whimper. “Yeah, I know,” she said to the canine as she laid down the drill, then upped the level of isoflurane. She noted that the heart and respiration recording machines had signed off for the day. Perhaps it was because of something Taylor did by accident, or maybe, on purpose, because the beeps from those medical devices interfered with her music. Or, perhaps, like animal and human bodies, mechanical devices had their flaws.

“Where’s Terri?” Roberta asked Rachelle Thundercloud, a Lakota-Cree 20 year old who scurried into the operating room as quickly as possible, her head lowered, her demeanor submissive.

“Terri’s not here,” came out in a barely audible from the shaking lips of the volunteer who Roberta DID insist on working at the clinic. And to be paid MORE than Taylor. “Not here?” the hardest working member of the staff continued, as if that situation was her fault. Her pathologically and tragically ‘fat free’ long for her short high legs shook, the ribs in her malnourished chest clearly visible. “Terri’s...not here,” Raschelle said, apologetically.

“But YOU are, here that is,” Roberta said with a warm inviting smile, which reeked of praise, respect and pity. She extended her open hand to Rachelle’s previously slashed wrist, addressing

her by her Native name, Wapakwani. THIS time, Rachelle didn't pull her wrist away. She allowed her outer lips to be pushed up into something resembling a smile. "Something I can do for you Doctor Collineur?" She asked Roberta, daring to look into Roberta's eyes.

"Kick some common sense into Taylor, and open up that big heart and wanting to express itself brilliant mind of yours," Roberta wanted to say, but didn't. Not yet anyway. "Hold this leg, steady as she goes," Doc R said instead, leading Raschelle's, or rather Wapakwani's, hand to the appropriate position. "And keep an eye on his breathing with your eyes, and heart with that," Roberta said, pointing her desired assistant's attention to a stethoscope hanging on the wall.

Roberta treated herself to a look at and into Wapakwani's eyes when she put the stethoscope around her neck. A neck on which there was still a scar left behind by an electric collar that had been bolted in place, activated to full capacity whenever Wapakwani defiantly decided to not be the kind of 'Raschelle' that her Master or the client who paid for her wanted her to be.

"Now, we're gonna both get Little John running on all fours," Roberta proudly proclaimed. She felt a tear of accomplishment about to stream down HER face. The remnants of the thin black rim around Reshelle's face turned into an emanating golden white aura that lighted the room more than any surgical lamp could.

As the surgery continued, Roberta asked herself how many other Rachelles there were still out there. How many, by 'racial coincidence' again, missing young woman in a country where the proportion of missing Indigenous and Metis women 'gone missing' was still 8 times higher proportionally than for any other racial group. On a person note, Roberta thought about Cowboy Hank. The escaped country pop star used to think that saving the world by making them dance to happy music was his calling when he was 'on top' of the charts, and the social pyramid. Since arriving in Knife Bend, under an assumed name and with a different look, he wrote lyrics that would inspire others to do the right rather than the popular or comfortable thing. He now, with his various un-deputized unofficial posses, was DOING many right things, for animals and people. Such included liberating Reshelle from 'Uncle' Frank Reynolds, a sex slave under the 'protective care' of the most powerful human trafficking master West of Manitoba. He was a major shareholder in one of the three corporations which were well underway to owning ALL of the independent veterinary clinics in America and (thankfully still not the 51st state) Canada. Reynolds was out on bail, about to be acquitted by one of the highest judges in the Alberta provincial court, who had pleased himself with one too many underaged First Nations girls at Legal Conferences and Political Conventions.

Roberta's mastery as a surgeon as well as genius at knowing just what drugs AND herbs could be combined effectively out-shadowed her ability to be a councillor to Wapakwani, whose Native name she was still unable to pronounce correctly due to her being around more Palefaces than, as she was allowed to say because of her age, 'redskins'. Roberta asked Wapakwani questions

about her life now, and in the past, couching them in metaphors that were colorful, witty and, at the right time, humorous. She got answers that were brief, and elusive. But, it was a start. Clearly, the rest of the healing process would have to involve chanting First Nations prayers, shooing away the evil spirits with sweetgrass, the latest dopaminergic medications which were claimed to be cures for Post Traumatic Stress Disease, walks in the woods or spending time with animals. Or perhaps, the most effective ‘medicine’ for Rachelle would involve some yet to be formulated combination of the aforementioned.

Between the non-answered questions from Reshelle, and Wapakwani, Roberta’s mind wandered to other co-workers and friends. Or were they patients? People who she felt obligated to treat, cure and fix instead of just enjoy being around, the latter of course contraindicated for a masochistic workaholic.

Doc R self observed herself thinking about the masochistic workaholic who was responsible for her being here, and, partially anyway, who she had become. “Do you know when Doc Henry is coming back?” she asked Rachelle.

“Don’t know,” the soft volumed reply. “But I think Deathhound went with him”

“Yeah,” Roberta said, feeling something important to consider that was still... undefined upon hearing such.

CHAPTER 4

Larry Jackson was in not rush to get his herd of 5 colts gelded, in part because his pension checks and the money left to him by his recently departed brother had not arrived yet. And in part because he was thinking of converting the ranch he had recently inherited into a breeding operation where his presumably pure bred Arabs would grow up to be ideal fathers for quarterhorse mares. Such would create hybrids who would have the intelligence and endurance of their fathers and the steady minds of their mothers, allowing them to remain calm after even cannon fire. Or the unnatural sounds that occurred on even the best managed Duster movie set. But, Henry had insisted on doing them today, since there would be a full moon the next three nights.

Being an 'expert', as most horse people of course were, particularly if they moved in from places bigger and more important than Knife Bend where they read all the books and saw all the right films, Larry insisted that the cycle of the moon had nothing to do with when and where to do surgery. But, Doc Henry Steiner learned, from old time cowboys as well as Indians whose ancestors were the first to tame the wild mustangs that lived on the range, that converting colts into geldings when there was a full moon resulted in excess bleeding and death, no matter how advanced your emasculators or anesthetics were. He offered Larry a discounted price so that he wouldn't wait for his financial situation to kick into place, and so that the born, bred and conditioned into an urban perspective of rural biology Vancouver resident wouldn't access the veterinary competition. That competition now consisted of three vet clinics now owned and regulated by corporations based in New York, Toronto and Los Angeles. As well as bubba bellied Oliver 'Slim' Johnson, 'discount farrier' who used alcohol to not only sterilize incision sites for removing testicles from colts, but to put his own brain cells into a dysfunctional happy 'slumber'

With each horse Henry pulled down to the ground, using his more than century experienced brains aided by Deathhound's uninjured and very functional Amazonian yet still tastefully feminine 20 year old body, he informed the owners, and the patients that 'manhood is between the ears'. His saying so today in the Germanic tongue of his Bavarian ancestors was particularly calming to the beasts. It was a tongue that made him feel more empowered than English. It was far more direct than French, a tongue Henry was never quite able to grasp with his tongue or mind after arriving in Canada from the US of A. Perhaps because French was too musical, the fact that what you read is not what you say, or that pesky requirement to be sure you called an object, person or thing by its accurate gender. Or, as he used to think, the sound of French, even when accented as it was in Quebec, was not quite...masculine enough for his liking.

But with each assurance that 'manhood is between the ears' Doc Henry gave each horse, he found himself doubting the empowerment that went with that claim. Henry offered the raw prairie oysters that had been testicular tissue to Larry, noting how great they tasted when cooked just right, followed by relating the cowboy and Indian recipe for such. This newcomer to Knife

Bend, as expected, balked at the concept of eating any kind of meat not purchased in a grocery store. But, his dogs ate well that afternoon, not requiring any cooking of the delicacy.

Henry accepted whatever money Larry could pay him, refusing of course to take this client's last dollar, Looney or, so it was said that he had, Krugerrand. His knees, more of a source of pain than being a functional fulcrum for leg extension and flexion, registered a level of intensity that went beyond the one to ten scale nurses asked their human patients regarding the level of 'discomfort'. Henry requested Deathhound's help to pack up his gear. But this time, despite the vibration of the road making the Baker's cyst behind his right knee even more painful than normal, Henry insisted on driving. At least while Larry and his family waved him a good day.

Henry thanked Deathhound for offering to drive again, but insisted on being in the driver's seat. Such would enable him to more effectively drive the conversation she wanted to have in the direction he wanted and needed it to go into. But, Deathhound today had other ideas.

"I see that you're not growing out your trademark Sam Elliot mustache and Don Johnson Miami Vice beard," she commented.

"Yeah, suppose I'm not," Henry replied, stroking his cleanly shaven face.

"And it didn't bleed when you shaved it off to pose as a granny to get the goods on the SPCA staff that were stealing every animal lovers' creatures," she pointed out, delivering an arrow directly into the target Henry was hiding.

"Suppose it didn't," Henry grumbled out of his mouth, in as baritone voice as he could muster

"And everyone in town, everyone who matters anyway, is thankful for you so effectively being a granny who got their animals out of their cages before they were put into a mass grave behind the building," she noted. "We needed someone who the armed guards, who were known to beat up anyone who wasn't authorized to go into the building, didn't recognize. You took a great risk possibly sacrificing yourself. It was a great service you did for the animals and the people they own. "

"Suppose it was," Henry replied, answering more than what Deathhound posed in her question. "We do what we have to sometimes," he asserted, recalling how much lighter his body felt as an unrecognizable Granny, and how easily he learned how to walk in her elevated heels, and invented life.

“And we sometimes discover that the have tos merge into want tos?” Deathhound advanced, leaning in towards her boss, and now student. Or perhaps patient.

Henry took in a deep breath, feeling the delivery of that motto he always told ‘the yungins’ when they were assigned tasks that they didn’t want to do. But he held his usually easily stimulated into emotionally charged discourse tongue. For reasons he couldn’t and wouldn’t reveal, not to her anyway. And not to any client. And not to any other ‘comrade in caring’ including Doctor Roberta. And especially Norma, who had provided him with the wig, clothing and accessories he used to become ‘granny’. So he could sneak past the heavily armed security guards at Marie’s ‘all kill’ shelter, co-owned by the now thankfully discredited and closed Alpine vet clinic run by her cohort Tom Wilson, DVM, Ph.D, Esq, MBA. So he could rescue the animals stolen by them before they were turned into Chinese food.

“Ya know,” Deathhound said, edging her way towards Henry again. “Biologically, we’re all two spirited in some way. A super human, theoretically anyway, and a super healer, according to the Souix and Cree, is someone who can access the male and female abilities and talents inside of him, or her. Understanding and working with both perspectives. There’s always some estrogen circulating around in red blooded men. And women do make testosterone in the adrenal gland that they use to...”

“---Turn into annoying bastards as well as bitches during ‘that time of the month’ with big noses that DO have nose hairs in them that they stick into other people’s business!” Henry barked back.

“Still, a man like you who wasn’t afraid to work with the woman inside of him...,” Deathhound pressed, gently. “... in the service of male and female people, and animals should be---”

“---Left alone with his thoughts!” Henry blasted out, averting his eyes, his hold on the steering wheel becoming a tight fist after nearly swirling into the ditch.

“And feelings,” Deathhound replied, placing her hands up in the air. Or so Henry thought he heard. Deciding and knowing that he should be the boss of the conversation, he looked towards the envelopes in Deathhound’s jean jacket. “Good time to check your mail,” he suggested. “A real man AND woman pays his, or her, bills on time.”

“Sure,” she said, obeying Henry’s request which, yes, he did deliver as a command, and commandment.

Deathhound rifled through the envelopes. “Power, mortgage, cable...”

“Cable tv....Which you need so you can know what lies the world is buying as the truth, or on the way to believing is the truth,” Henry commented.

“Internet,” Deathhound said, glancing at the next bill.

“Where who is believed most is who has the friendliest friggin’ font and hypnotizing visuals,” Henry noted, recalling how his competitors and their gutter snipping clients nearly destroyed his reputation on line, and off line. “Which I hope, and pray, you aren’t using to ask AI chat to tell you what to do, how to do it, when to do it, and WHY you’re doing it. For treating animal diseases, human morality problems or anything else!” Henry halted his rant, sensing a wall of ‘computers can be useful to us and none of us, even you, won’t be able to handle going back to the stone age’ about to be put up. “And the others?” he said with regard to the remaining envelopes.

“The cancer society, asking for more money,” Deathhound noted.

“So they can overpay their administrators 90 cents on the dollar, throwing a nickel to indoctrinated, book smart but intuitive gut stupid glory seeking researchers more lab rats to unnecessarily kill. And a few test tubes. AND drinks on the way to medical conferences where they cheat on their wives and bad mouth the old school ‘Doc dinosaurs’ who gave them their jobs,” Henry grumbled.

“Which is better than having no test tubes or rats to test new treatments on?” the inquiry, delivered with respect.

“True enough,” Henry conceded, holding himself back from re-relating tales about him being displaced from his hard earned faculty position at Wyoming Veterinary College by young, hip, and cool academics whose skill at knowing how to do lunch with the deans exceeded their ability to be caring, effective and intelligent researchers, teachers or docs.

“Hmmm,” Deathhound said as her attention was held by the last envelope. “The address is right, but the addressee? With a bold font.”

“Doc Roberta’s favorite,” Henry read, glancing at it.

“Which is Terri,” the former cynical and self destructive Goth on her way to becoming...something else conceded.

“Not so,” Henry replied to the most rapidly learning member of his staff. “There are many ways to skin a cat, and a hundred times that ways to cure a sick one,” he continued, self observing that he was yet again not using a nautical metaphor. “Terri knows more about animals, and people, than 95 of the officially trained overly certified registered veterinary technicians in this toxically over-regulated province. That’s despite and BECAUSE she didn’t wasted two years of her life and five years of savings on being trained by idiot instructors who worship state of the art technology over common sense,” he said. He noticed that even he was sick of hearing his rants about his battles with the veterinary association in Alberta, a province which was supposed to be the last remnant of the independent Wild West of Canada. He took in a deep breath, letting out reason instead of volcanic rage against others or boasts about himself. “As I said, there are many ways to skin a cat, and a hundred more to treat it when it gets sick,” he continued, self observing that it was yet another non-red-blooded macho nautical metaphor. “Terri is coming up with ideas to diagnose and treat FUS, FIP, IBD, KD, COPD and four other diseases that now have new ‘upgraded’ initials for them that aren’t the same treatments as Roberta’s, or mine. Not saying they’re better or worse than hers, or mine, but, as we know, attach a feeling to a medical idea and, more arguments than discourses pop up.”

“Then who is Doc R’s favorite? I mean, a humanoid with four legs?” Deathhound inquired, bracing for the real answer regarding the 8 by 11 inch manilla parcel addressed to the person holding that title.

“She’s in there, Deathhound,” Henry said, pointing her to the rear view mirror.

““It’s Jen now, Doc,” her reply.

“Tell her that!” Henry insisted, pointing to the reflection in the rear view mirror, not letting Deathhound escape a visually assisted examination.

While Deathhound stared at Jen, and Jen stared at and into Deathhound, Henry treated himself to a look at her, and a smile of accomplishment. “What other people think of you, or call you, is none of your business,” he offered.

“But what Roberta thinks of me, still is my business, and matters,” Deathhound took note of, but didn’t say. She turned away from the mirror, facing the envelope back to envelope. She hesitated.

“Something wrong?” Henry inquired, trying to read the return address. His force of will couldn’t make his tired, and probably in need of surgery, eyes focus clearly enough to read the small print. “It isn’t from the re-opened somewhere else Alpine Clinic, or any money grubbing, high falutin Animal hospital, or...”

“---No,” Deathhound interjected. “A street address, somewhere in the US.”

“A so far independent country that, maybe, for its own good, should become the 11th province of Canada?” the American expatriate mused.

“The tweth province, Doc,” Deathhound said, yet again, respectfully, perhaps as part of her being Jen now. She smiled when seeing what was on the back of the envelope from the mystery sender. “ .

“A fish,” Henry noted. “With a cross under it. The sign of, as I recall....”

“Someone who also knows the Jesus Spirit,” Deathhound said, feeling at home with her own kind. She looked at that back seat of the truck. “The Jesus Spirit Who just popped in here, because as we know, when two or more of you are gathered in his name...”

“He’ll pop in for a visit and share a beer with you,” Henry said, feeling a warm smile overcome his lips, from non-machismo place that was now very new.

“A glass wine!” Deathhound asserted, gently.

“Right, and some bread, communion wafers, brown rice crackers, Tibetan incense, sweetgrass blessed Bannack or depending on..well...” Henry speculated. He recalled how differences in religious theolog destroyed his relationship with his own estranged family destroyed his ability to believe in anything spiritual. Then there were his arguments with God regarding why the most noble souls who walked on two legs or four care got the most painful and incurable diseases. But the Amazonian cynic who had before her being Born Again believed nothing she

saw or heard in the 'real' world now seemed to be sustained by something only she could see in the back seat of the truck.

"Yeah," Henry thought to himself. "Roberta sees the spirit of her medicine woman grandma floating around the OR when she's figuring out how to sneak her way under a tumor without making it squirt out a river of blood," he pondered and, for reasons he could feel but not understand, didn't give voice to. "And hears voices from her messenger animals in the woods when she's trying to figure out where her life SHOULD be going. Norma claims that her dead husband Bill came back from the dead to advise her as to how she should deal with her new real world love interest, Gustav, and me. And maybe is I click my heels and say there is no place like Om I'll also see...."

Henry completed those incantations in his head. They were accompanied by small movements of his feet and silent utterances from his mouth, closing his eyes while doing so. Upon opening up his ocular portholes, he saw nothing in the back seat by ropes, halters, half used bottles of antibiotics, surgical kits and towels covered with blood requiring washing with peroxide as soon as he got back to the vet shop. "Oh well, maybe next time," he said to himself, loud enough to be heard by Deathhound.

"You say something doc?" she inquired.

"Open that envelope," Henry said by way of instruction to yet another 20 year old young women who he imagined or hoped would be the incarnation of his estranged Pagan Buddhist hippie dippie daughter. Who, according to what his even more estranged ex-wife informed him anyway, had 'gone to heaven or somewhere just as good, or maybe better.' "It's a sin to pass up opportunities that life and the Good Lord puts your way," Henry declared to Deathhound regarding the mystery sender, and other memories which refused to leave his mind, and soul.

Deathhound opened the parcel, leaning into it with fascination as well as fear.

"Well, is he a Preacher wanting money, a refugee wanting you to send him money so he can rescue his family from a detention camp in Nigeria or a...." he said, his continuation of another 'Henry attack on the world' interrupted by noted that the name of the sender. It was Jack Patrick, two names which, to his knowledge, were still used to refer to the owner of a penis rather than vagina. Daring to try on his old life prior to the infiltration and dismantling of the corrupt SPCA to see if it would fit, Henry continued the lesson. This time he considered his over-caring paternal instincts an asset rather than a destructive liability. In a world where 'modern' fathers and mothers were the servants not the bosses of their danger seeking children. "I hope he isn't light in the loafers. Or wants us to implant a uterus into him to get pregnant

with YOUR baby....” He advanced, slipping back into his old homophobic ways which seemed to not fit as well as they used to.

Deathhound remained silent, a constellation of emotions Henry could not define thundering through her head and heart.

“So what or who is he?” Henry asked, open to whatever Deathhound saw, or wanted to say about what she saw..

“A lover of Christ, and atheists, and more importantly a lover of....” Deathhound removed a picture from the envelope, showing it to Henry.

“Dogs, cats and horses,” Henry said with a satisfied smile regarding the photo of a healthy looking man with a neatly trimmed beard. He was surrounded by no less than twenty fur bearing in front of a barn, all looking at the camera. “And cows!” Henry noted regarding a member of HIS favorite species peaking out of the window of the barn. “But he looks a little...older than you,” he said to Deathhound, noting the wrinkles in his face and a touch of grey on his chin and sideburns, a large cross around his neck. “But,” he said, looking at the prospect’s hand with the aid of a magnifying glass, a tool which of late he was now using to discern the fine print on labels of ‘newfangled’ drugs at the clinic rather than asking Terri or Roberta to read them for him. “No ring on his wedding ring finger.”

“And no white band where it was removed,” Jen said, still connected to Deathhound’s ability to see and warn others about the dirt in someone who appeared too clean. “He wants to meet me. And, didn’t you say that I was an old soul? And that all adults are the same age> And, as Roberta said, you had good relationships with more than one ‘younger woman’, Doc.”

“Who were, in some ways, older than I was,” Henry recalled, and conceded. “But,” he said, after which he turned to Deathhound, cocking his head to the left. “He found out about you from....” .

“An article about me,” Deathhound replied. “About my ability ‘to paint pictures of healthy animals and people who could be healthy if they really wanted to be’,” she read. “Written by maybe one of those art critics from Vancouver who came up to Knife Bend who saw the paintings Jesus did through me? Who came into the clinic where, I know, you think that you have to put up my paintings. Or maybe that art critic saw them at---.”

“---The Art festival where the town put up your paintings because it WANTED to?” Henry offered.

“Maybe,” Deathhound said, falling into the excessive humility that plagued her now as Jen. “But....Partrick is moving up here....to....hmmm....”

“Is there somewhere you can meet him?” Henry suggested. “With someone responsible for supervision?”

“Jesus will be there,” Deathhound related. “To protect me from him, and, given my history for breaking hearts that should have not been broken, him from me.”

Deathhound’s smile reeked of optimism, and wisdom. Besides, Henry did say that not taking advantage of opportunities that life, or the Lord, sent your way IS a mortal sin. Punishable by a life of regret. But, with one eye on the road and a steady hand on the wheel, he was curious about one thing. “That dog next to Jack Patrick Smith,” he said of the photograph. “He seems to have a special affinity for that Husky-Lab cross that’s more tan than brown or white, who, to me anyway, looks familiar. Reminds me of the dog I fell in love with, well, a while back. Did he by any chance mention that magnificent mutt’s name.”

“He did!” Deathhound exclaimed. She sped read her way to that portion of the letter in which ‘JP’ (according to his signature) described his life aspirations. “The dog in the middle of that group photo with Jack Patrick is named... Rusty.”

“It fits him, somehow, But Rusty is an interesting name with a lot of soon to be discovered secrets behind it,” Henry said of the brown and white canine who seemed to be smiling less than the other animals in the photograph. He thought of having another talk about superficial things that would lead to deeper ones, but.... He was ‘talked out’ and ‘philosophied’ into exhaustion.

CHAPTER 5

The dog pens at the new Wilson and Son Animal Hospital outside of Calgary were full. It was overfilled with strays originating from three counties. Their owners surrendered their animals due to inability to pay veterinary fees, refusal to get them vaccinated, incarceration or economic offers to purchase the canines that the working caste clients couldn't refuse. Every piece of equipment in the labs, exam rooms and three ORs was state beyond the art. Such was made possible because of Tom Wilson SENIOR'S professional connections with the departments of pharmacology, physiology and criminology at the Banff University and as many top flight pharmaceutical companies. The American born Eastern blueblood who owned more towns and cities in Canada than his Scottish-English Gilded Age Grandpa owned in Ireland was still too big, and competitive, to be bought out by Central Veterinary Corporation in New York. But there were rumors that now 60 something Tom Wilson the First was on the verge of becoming big enough to become a corporation that would take over even more independent shops than the CVC did.

A new candidate for member in the 'progressive practicing and research' team arrived, on time. He was greeted by the receptionist at the front desk. Indeed, this new upstart was who the aging blue blood hoped would have more grit and smarts than his son Tom Wilson Junior, who had been discredited by Roberta Collineur, the half-breed veterinary doc he could not turn into his personal squaw. He was also pulled down off his high golden horse by Doc Dinosaur Henry Steiner, who assisted Roberta in tossed him out of the veterinary profession, 'promoting' him to doing volunteer work for (according to the messages he left at the office) 'hard working 'nobody' people and, if possible, animals who needed help.' at locations he never revealed.

"So, Doctor Smith, you're here to see the director?" the tastefully perky but not slutty receptionist whose face and everything below the neck said 'fabulous even at forty' asked Kurt Smith as he entered the well lit lobby, featuring portraits of the most prestigious veterinarians and biomedical researchers in the Province. "And I see that you brought in another patient."

"Who's not an n value, or a dog who will be used for experiments on new drugs, even those that are being done to make better drugs and healthier diets for dogs," Kurt proclaimed, petting Rusty. "Not yet anyway. But Rusty gets sick or old before his time, Miss Loretta," he whispered to the receptionist with a flirtatious tone, having noticed her name tag. :

"It's MRS Loretta," he receptionist pointed out, holding up her left hand, revealing a 5 carat diamond ring on it. "Happily married."

"Your husband must be a lucky man," Kurt said.

“Wife,” Loretta replied with a satisfied glow in her face.

“Excuse me for assuming, well.....I’ve been out of circulation for a while,” Kurt said by way of explanation. “I’m sorry.”

“I’m not,” Loretta replied with a smile saying ‘satisfied in the ways that matter and the rest of them as well

“And the rest of the staff?” Kurt inquired, noting lab coat on the multitude of empty chairs both in front of the reception desk and behind it.. She pushed a button under her desk, opening a locked door behind her.

“The ones who are here for the paycheck, out to lunch. The ones willing to work for a higher paycheck, out back.” From behind the partially opened door, Kurt heard then smelled a herd of dogs barking. Then the aroma of dog hair and canine excrement entered his hairless nostrils. The sound of a whistle then penetrated the air, after which deadly silence permeated the hallway leading to the back room. It was followed by angry growling from two canines, ending in only one dog voice after twenty seconds, then----applause. The smell of blood was blown towards Kurt, causing him to smile with delight and he proceeded to the back room, keeping Rusty on a short leash.. Rusty whimpered, then pulled back on the leash, causing his ‘protector’ to fall to the ground, tearing his shirt. “Coward,” Kurt grumbled at the terrified canine.

“I’ll take him,” Loretta said. She grabbed the leash with a tight fist, using all of her strength to not let the hound bolt out the partially opened front door

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After emitting a ‘this is not acceptable’ growl at Rusty, Kurt proceeded onward to consult with the white coated ‘professionals’ taking notes, and the denim jacket wearing civilians passing money around. Hunchbacked kennel staff members in torn tee-shirts did their best to tear a very much alive ten pound terrier away from ravenously tearing the guts out of a dying 60 pound Rottweiler.

An elderly gentleman with thinning white hair and a neatly trimmed mustache wearing a pressly pressed white lab coat greeted Kurt with an extended handshake. "Our recent experiment. Turning a ten pound weaking into a hundred pound prize fighter," boasted.

"And turning the Rotty into a patsy by giving him a dose of Xylazine?" Kurt pressed, noting a bottle of that drug on the ledge of the walled 6 by six foot 'arena'.

"Not this time, Mister Smith," Doctor Tom Wilson Senior replied..

"It's DOCTOR Smith," Kurt asserted, still holding onto his briefcase. "I do have a Ph.D. in pharmacology and another doctorate in Neuroscience," he said. "Which got me hired by armies from three capitalist, American loving, God fearing countries to develop drugs that will turn fearful recruits into fierce fighting soldiers. And schools to turn bullied kids into those who will stand up for themselves against larger aggressive assholes instead of running back home to slit their own wrists or take an overdose of zombifying drugs from their WOKE pacifist mothers, and fathers."

"Indeed," 'Doctor Tom' said with a proud smile. He led Kurt away from the next pugilistic 'festival' to take place and into a office containing all the trimmings of a man addicted to acquiring more money than he would ever live long enough to spend. "What you are doing, Doctor Smith, to turn pussy cat millennial socialist victims into confident capitalistic lions is service to the world, and a stab into the belly of the communist WOKE cancer," Wilson said en route to a gold plated chair behind a vintage oak desk, plopping his ass into it. He then picked up a pile of papers left there by his secretary. "And, according to these research reports you sent to me about the work you've been doing, you're ready to go to clinical trials."

"Clinical CURES," Kurt asserted with a raised index finger and chin, helping himself to a seat in front of the medical mogal monarch. He was thankful that the forged papers he hired a Russian mob enforcer and his prime hacker who he formed tight connections with when a resident in the 'grey bar motel' were convincing enough to fool a man of Thomas Wilson's stature. "Which I'm ready to release on a most interesting patient with a unique pathology." Kurt reached into his briefcase and whipped out a picture of Deathhound as a reformed ex-Goth while working in Doc Henry and Roberta's clinic. He offered it to (according to the press releases believed by most of the population outside of Knife Bend and towns like it) the 'good doctor' behind the desk.

"Ah yes," Wilson noted leaning back on his chair, his overfed bubba belly bulging out. "Who looks...familiar.. And if it is who I think it is...."

“...Someone we both know who is dangerous to our...survival,” Kurt said. “And the natural order of things. This patient here, who CALLED herself Deathhound, when working in Steiner and Collineur’s clinic, is suffering from an overdose of ” ignorantiae secundum bonitatem et simplicem cogitationem.”

“Overdose of ignorance based goodness and deluded naivety,” Wilson said with as pity evolking smile for its victims. “But the cure for this disease in humans?”

“Can and should be based on not only my data with preliminary patients,” ‘Doctor Kurt’ said, pointing to the most convincing fabrication and falsification of medical data since the plethora of research papers on COVID, or the fudged data of famed geneticist Gregor Mendel. “But with some addition data from YOUR studies, the published ones and those about to be published. To go to press in its appropriate time of course, Professor Doctor Wilson,” he continued with bowed head.

“It’s just Doctor, which is sufficient qualification for what needs to be done.” Wilson conceded. He pulled out a key strapped to his money belt, and opened the left drawer of the desk. He handed a fist full of manuscripts and lab notes, handing them to Kurt. “Maybe these will help you derive the right proportion of cocaine, methamphetamine, LSD, and Ecstasy for human and animal subjects, I mean, patients. Kept in balance, of course, with xylazine.”

“And if we add some Flakka to the mix?” Kurt offered.

“Some what?” Wilson inquired, cocking his head to the left in total confusion.

“Pyrroolidopentadione,” Kurt said with a profession grin, displaying his hatred and envy of high level mobsters like Wilson whose activities were supported by legal laws rather than threatened by them. “Otherwise known as PVPs.” He took in a deep breath, ready to blast the medical mob boss who was born into power. A man who knew nothing about what it was like to have to claw your way from the gutter to become a source of power and influence. “And for IBDGN patients who have an overdose of Jesus-evoked endorphins that limit their potential, and destiny....” Kurt reached into his breifcase, pulling out the next round of mind altering cannon fire. “A gospel written by Jesus, translated by a Jewish publicist too honest to be considered part of his crew of twelve,” he said regarding the leather bound, self composed and self published manuscript he had shared with fellow Born Again Christian Deathhound. “Which says that might IS right. And that to be effective for fellow humans on earth, we have to become our OWN gods instead of bowing the knee and sacrificing our common sense and dignity to the ‘heavenly father’ above.”

“Interesting,” Wilson said several times as he sped reading the ‘recently discovered’ gospel that Kurt had penned himself while in the Big House, inspired by his own ‘inspirational sources’, including Machevelli, Lao Tse, Nitche and, of course, Uncle Adolf.

“And some musical accompaniment for the lesson which has unique healing effects for IDGBN and Dull Out Disease due to its chord progressions, evoking the spirit of the only TRUE angel of the Lord, whose message is that it is not only cool to be cruel, but effective to be so,” Kurt added, showing him several CDs from some bands that are popular, and some that were not.

“Satanic music, from the angel that God sent to hell,” Wilson noted, pulling back his support for Kurt’s experiment. Plauged by the voice of Sunday school teachers that still lingered in his head.

“Hey!” Kurt interjected as quickly as he could, self observing him believing his own bullshit. “For giving humanity the gift of fire, reading and free thinking, Zeus sentenced Promethius to be tied down to a rock to have his liver eaten by crows each night, having that organ grow back the next day, then eaten up again the night after.”

“Yes,” Wilson admitted. “I recall that I was held back from my biological mother who told me professors who told me to ‘accept my limitations’”.

“And what happened to her?” Kurt asked

“She died early, accepting her limitations,” Wilson replied. “To be replaced by someone more appropriate for the Wilson family’s needs, and destiny. After all, top shelf families do, amongst other duties, have to take on the burdon of serving the inferior masses. And be appropriately served by them in return. And pleased by them for that service,” he said with a chuckle.

Kurt treated himself to join in the smug laughter. After all he deserved to be on top of every totem pole he fancied as a member of the privildged class after having duked it out as a street pimp, dealer and enforcer on his way up the ladder.

“But!” emerged out Wilson’s mouth just as Kurt was feeling comfortable in his new position at the top.

“You came to me, here, and now, because....”

Kurt knew that if he didn't choose his words and manner of relating them carefully, he would wind up back in the slammer. Perhaps after being torn to bits by one of Wilson's experimentally created ten pound superdogs. He took in a deep breath, knowing that for his plan to work, born again Jen would not only have to be turned back into Deathhound, but something far more sadistic and crafty. And someone who couldn't die from an overdose of mind 'activating' medications. So she could live long enough to commit the foulest of acts, then suicide. Which Roberta Collineur would feel responsible for, prior to doing herself in.

"And the reason why you came to me with all of this, Doctor Smith?" Wilson pressed, perhaps doubting the validity of that title.

Kurt boldly stood up in front of this most recent judge, and perhaps executioner. "The enemy of my enemy is my friend," he declared. "And perhaps my partner in future enterprises of mutual benefit," he stated rather than asked. He extended his hand to the medical mogul who not only lost his veterinary license and potential medical empire in the Knife Bend valley to old school old fart dogooder Doctor Henry. Far worse, Thomas Wilson Senior failed to turn his son into someone who would follow in his father's footsteps, who failed to break down and colonize Roberta. Roberta Collineur. Ph.D., DVM. and, as she claimed to be and certainly had become within and outside of her veterinary pursuits, H.B.A.R.P. (human being aspiring Renaissance person).

Kurt felt the hand of destiny connect to his own with the handshake from Wilson. After which he heard Rusty bark in the lobby. "And that dog you brought in is?" Wilson asked his new partner in slime.

"Another expendable and useful lab rat, n value and guinea pig," the revitalized rags to riches mobster replied.

CHAPTER 6

Doc Henry Steiner had gone through a lot of unexpected changes since Roberta arrived on his doorsteps several years and twenty-thousand patients ago with an injured wolf cub, a broken down truck and mirror which forced the 'I know enough about myself to not need any shrink' old school healer to re-examine the way he treated patients, other people and himself. He had survived as a victor in the war against the Wilson Corporation and their favorite cohort, Marie with and 'ie'. She broke his heart but somehow was an instrument in redefining and strengthening it.

Henry still held out against seeing a shrink since 'why would anyone rebuild the hull of a boat because there's a few barnacles on it?'. As for group therapy to, as Terri suggested, 'convert you from being a good practitioner of the body, mind and soul to being a great one,' he grumbled 'your best teacher is on the other side of the mirror.' But he did append his rebuttals with a 'thank you for caring' of late. As for what he wanted and needed in life, Norma Pounstone came into the clinic an hour before official opening time while he was 'wasting valuable practicing time' doing paperwork behind the reception desk. In Norma's outstretched hands was just what the (intending to be, anyway) good doctor ordered.

"Ah!" Henry proclaimed lifting up his head. He took into his triple sized and still hairy nostrils an aroma which to the two term Navy war veteran was almost as invigorating to his body, mind and spirit as seawater. "Oatmeal cookies with raisins!" he shouted with glee, jumping up to his feet.

"Currants," Norma said as Henry scurried to her side of the reception desk as quickly as he could with one arthritic knee and an aching back. "Better than raisins, Henry."

"We'll see about that!" Henry pushed out of his mouth. He filled it with a generous bite of the currency with which he insisted that the animal rescuer who NOT an animal horder pay her escalating veterinary bills.

Henry chewed, nodding his head with a series of 'hmmms'. Then shifted his gaze to avoid Norma looking him straight in the face.

"Well?" Norma finally asked, her impatience about to convert into rage.

“Not too bad, but,” Henry declared with a happy ‘all is beyond well’ smile. He reached for another cookie on her overloaded tray. “But I think I have to take this skip out for another trip around the bay to see if she’s seaworthy and “

Norma’s slap on the wrist forced Henry’s hand into being pulled into dry dock, leaving the hull of his oral cavity empty.

“An honest opinion, Henry,” Norma insisted. “I tried a new recipe on these cookies which are for you AND the staff. AND the clients who deserve them, and, hmmm...” She looked at one of the cookies.maybe these currents.---”

“---Are better than raisons,” Henry said, sneaking another cookie into his mouth, in one large gulp.

“Or maybe these currents came from the anal cavity of my rabbits instead of off a seasoned grape vine?” she suggested, leaning against the wall, placing the plate on the reception desk. “Reserved for your non-deserving clients, or uninvited visitors?”

As politely as he could, Henry removed whatever cookie was left in his mouth and placed it on the plate of uneaten delights.

“Maybe these cookies are intended for Tom Wilson Senior and his corporate goons who still want to take over this shop, and town?” Norma suggested, after which she looked behind and beyond Henry to the Northern most ‘special corner’ of the main multi-purpose room. “And, so I heard, and got confirmation of,” Norma said, focusing on a worn out Aussie saddle mounted on a stand in that location. . “Maybe these rabbit raison currents should be reserved for that group of, so they claim on the notes they leave behind, Eco Justice Warriors who are freeing horses, cattle, dogs and cats from ‘unlawful confinement’ and taking them.... somewhere “

“Somewhere that the rider on that saddle knows about. Operated by an organization he can infiltrate?” Henry said as he hopped on his feet, limping over to the invisible, to him anyway, horseman. “Bill, we do appreciate your hanging around here,” he addressed the ‘ghost’. “To scare away infectious bacteria, inspectors from the veterinary association who are paid by the number of animal SAVING clinics they shut down, developers who wanna shut down every Mom and Pop store in town and make it into a resort and shopping mall selling authentic Canadian goods made in China. But---

“It’s not fair or nice of you, Henry, to mock me for seeing the ghost of my departed husband Bill!” Norma blasted out.

“And it’s damn frustrating not being able to find missing or possibly murdered animals, Norma!”

“Or people!” Norma pointed out as five foot nothing Rashelle came into the lobby from the back, carting a box of antibiotics and dewormer nearly as big and probably weighting as much as herself. “People who you should be helping,” she yelled out to her granddaughter Taylor who was buzy shouffling along as slow as she could as a quiet quitter, carrying a bag of gauze with one hand, weighing not that much than the phone she had and was looking at in the other. “Like, ya know, now, please, Taylor?” Norma blasted out, to no avail as her grand-daughter continued to let Rashelle do all of the heavy lifting.. “If you want these iphone app coupons,” Norma continued, still getting no response. “Or...these?” Norma said after taking in a deep breath, lifting up the plate of cookies.

“Yeah, cool! Cookies!” Taylor exclaimed. She quickly troted to the plate, gobbling them up as quickly as she could grab them.

Norma winked to Henry, who winked back at her. “You boomers are so, like, cute. And lame,” Taylor said through a mouth full of cookies, emptying the plate. “Doc, these rabbit terds really are currants.”

Henry looked disapprovingly at Norma. “And tricking me into thinking they were terds was....Bill’s idea, Norma?”

“Henry,” Norma said, laying her open palm on his strong arm, avoiding, yet again, touching his chest or connecting too deeply to the heart within it. “I wouldn’t make you eat any more shit than the idiots and assholes out there are shoving into your mouth, and life.” .

“But I would!” Taylor spouted out. “Payback to you and Roberta and everyone else here for making me clean rabbit cages, dog pens, and...”

Terri interupted the inter generation battle of wits and wills about to happen, carting under her arm a painting covered with brown paper as she pushed open the front door. “A new painting from Deathhound, eh, I mean, Jen.”

“Who is still out on a paid vacation, Henry?” Norma blasted at and into Henry with a cocked head and upturned eyes.

“Field trip,” his response. “That I approved of,” Henry asserted, proudly. He pointed to the walls of the clinic, lined with paintings bearing Deathhound’s old and new signature. “Just like I approved hanging these paintings here on the walls. To make the place look....more artistic. Works from an artist who I know will be famous one day. And for the right reasons.”

“She wanted me to open this newest painting when everyone else was here,” Terri proclaimed, eager to see Deathhound and/or Jen’s new creation. “Speaking of which, where is Roberta?”

“Out with Cowboy Hank,” Reshelle related. “Looking for strays and rounding up rustlers.”

“Stray cattle and horses, or people,” Norma assured the formerly missing but thankfully not murdered Indigenous young woman.

“Yeah,” Reshelle replied with a grateful smile. “I wanted to go help them but, they both said it was...too soon.”

A wave of empathy overtook the room regarding someone finally doing something about finding missing indigenous, and other, young women, and bringing their new ‘masters’ to task. Henry could sense that even Bill’s ghost was about to get off the saddle that owned him when he was alive and fly over to supply metaphysical air support for Roberta and Cowboy Hank’s endeavor to take over law enforcement. To stop kidnapping, rapes and murders which the, by ‘coincidence’, White skinned mounties neglected to stop. Or perhaps had facilitated. The posse assisting Cowboy Hank and Doc R included the help of outlaw bikers whose identity would have to remain secret, so as to protect them from other outlaws. And, on occasion, as ‘civilized’ citizens who, truth be told, could not handle knowing the truth about how REAL justice is administered.

“So, Norma,” Terri said, motioning for Henry’s Platonic Soul Mate to do a drum roll. Such was done with a pair of hemostats on a plastic model of a dog’s skull. “And...!”

Upon opening up of the brown paper wrapping, every jaw in the room dropped, including that of the plastic dog skeletal, except for Taylor’s. Every and everyone, including the clinic mouser cat, pulled back as far as they could from the painting.

“Cool!,” Taylor exclaimed as she approached the painting. She took it out of Terri’s shaking hands before the sacred rendition of hell, hosted by the devil himself, dropped to the ground. Its blood red, deep black and alarmly loud yellow hues projected pure evil through the images. Such included the face of a human within a horned goat with fluorescent eyes, sharp teeth, and wings of the fallen angel cast out from heaven. In the upper portions of the most frightening likeness of the Prince of Darkness and his minions were the standard variety found in anyone nightmares regarding Satanic worship. They included a cross being choked by a serpent, five sided stars, upside down crucifixes and, as Norma noted with shivering lower jaw, the Sigil of Lucifer, featuring an inverted triangle with a V on the bottom. The lower third of the painting featured likeness of victims, both human and animal, every inch of their mutilated bodies screaming out in pain that was, on the pain scale of 1 to 10 that the nurses at the ER asked every patient, 66, or more accurately. 666. They bore distorted likenesses of the two and four legged souls in the clinic, including Roberta’s now middle aged wolf Promethius still mobile as ever three legged dog Mahegan. Notably absent from being ‘immortalized in portrait’ were Deathhound, Taylor.... and Roberta.

The visual view of the underworld realm that good people feared and bad people scoffed at was accentuated by a small black box that said ‘press on me,’ now. It emitted Satanic music, elevating Taylor’s ‘this is really fucking cool’ smile into a sadistic laugh.

Henry pushed her aside, whipped out his pocket knife, and used all the might and machinery between his ears to dismantle it. He succeeded only in cutting his surgically needed fingers.

“That ‘painting’ is pure....” Norma noted, searching for the appropriate word for evil..

“---Art. It’s pure awesome Art!” Taylor interjected. “Cool art. Because as ‘we all know, or should know’” she continued imitating Henry and Norma. “It’s cool to be cruel. Popular. And. profitable.”

Raschelle shook like a young willow blown into a rock by a hurricane force Nor'easter, her stare held hostage by the painting. She hyperventilated loud enough to be heard two counties away. Her brown face turned pale white. Her eyes popping out of her head, seeing no doubt the most horrible memories behind them. Terri grabbed hold of her, attempting to speak the former sex slave’s language with reassurances. Terri attempted closing her eyes and ears, but to no avail, succeeding only in having her arm pushed away with more force than Rashelle had ever exerted. Finally, Rachell screamed out, ‘No No No’ in English, then her own tongue.

By the way Taylor looked at the painting, and bopped her head to the demonic music, Henry and Norma both shared the same thought. Deathhound was on her way to take on a different name with no doubt a rich as well as destructive patron. Maybe she would return to Knife Bend to get her severance pay, or maybe not. Henry hoped, and prayed, for the latter. One question

lingered in Henry's still thinking and not completely feeling mind. Whose face was at the core of the painting as the incarnated form or the Devil?

Other agendas kicked into gear when Roberta came through the door with Cowboy Hank, earlier than expected, their boots caked with mud, their foreheads covered with dust. "We found five live head of cattle roaming around in the Provincial Park and two horses. All back to their owners," she proudly said with a wide smile.

"Rounded up and herded in with Roberta on horseback this time," Hank proclaimed. "She sung all of 'em all the way home, with her doin' lead and ME doin' harmony!" He hung a large bucketful of, this time anyway, not blood soaked halters on the rack.

"And the human 'strays'?" Henry asked, after letting Terri take Rashelle to the back of the clinic so she would not hear the good, or bad, news about the on going, non-legally sanctioned search for missing Indigenous and other young women. And less than 'manly' young men.

"We got some intel and found some clues as to where the 'pleasure palaces' are located, but they keep movin' their 'cargo'" Hank related, taking off his hat, then wiping the sweat off his brow with his spare bandana. "Maybe there's a mole somewhere in town, I reckon."

"Who can follow us with the brain implants that their ET buds implanted into our heads when we were dosing off," Roberta suggested, in the hope that an infusion of dark humor into the mix would shed light on the search for the elusive newcomers to Knife Bend. "And, yes, dosing off, together, BUT fully clothed, and without, well, what 'real' lovers do while still awake," she thought, but didn't say. She looked lovingly at her partner in music, veterinary care and now volunteer law enforcement, who she still called 'Cowboy Hank'. "There's someone who doesn't want us to find those missing and probably soon to be murdered kids," Hank informed Henry.

"Maybe one of your new biker buds?" Norma offered, gazing out the East window at the motorcycles outside the clinic that 100 pound Terri was better at fixing than their 250 pound bubba bellied owners.

"Or maybe your two actor friends from Los Angeles who say they're helping out so they could get 'on the job' experience they can use for their new parts in a movie?" Henry challenged. "Land lubbers who sign on to a whaling cruise ship to get the authentic Moby Dick experience so they can pass themselves off as real yomen for the camera?" he continued, bringing his frame of reference back to solid grounding again. "Then there's Doctor Admiral Tom Wilson Senior, who's always looking for new 'business ventures'," Henry speculated. He recalled the indignant

face of his first Canadian veterinary competitor who became his mortal enemy with regard to most everything else over next two decades. "There's big non-taxable money in selling and degrading people, and when the 'product' stops bringing pleasure to to your high paying clients here or overseas..." Henry stopped himself, thinking of using another sea faring descriptor of the sex slave trade. He took in a deep breath, recalling how human cargo was moved over land and sea, often not making it to port alive, in THIS century. "All of it, pure evil!" he concluded.

"Speakin' of which," Hank said, his stare roaming to and being held hostage by Deathhound's most recent exploration in the visual arts. "Signed by... Deathhound?" he said leaning in to see the signature He then pulled back to take in the entire view, then focused on the face in the middle of the painting. "The scariest portrait of hell, featurin' as its band leader who..." His attention was drawn to Roberta, her jaw dropped, her hands and feet shaking. Her pupils dilated, pure terror taking hold of the mind and soul behind them. "You know?" he asked, edging his way toward her, slowly, to protect his (for reasons he still could not define) beloved with the most sincere of embraces. "Someone you know?" he asked again regarding the most centrally featured human face in the Inferno 'masterpeice'.

"Knew," Roberta said, pulling back from Hank. "Knew when I was...."

"Was what?" Henry gently offered.

Norma, who Henry knew could see into other people's souls far better than he could, slowly worked her way to Roberta. The shocked Doc was as skilled at hiding her fear as she was at treating animals who were terrified of more pain or death. She allowed Norma to gently lay her fingers on her forearm. "Whatever you were, Doctor R, you're not that now. And whoever that demon reminds you of..."

"Can't harm you now," Henry interjected, from a safe and emotionally detached yet heartfelt distance, as was his 'way. "He can't hurt you now, Doc," her repeated..

"But will," Roberta said, regaining her composure. "After he harms all the rest of you. And a whole lot of others like he did to...." Roberta pointed to Deathhound's signature.

"Maybe if we ...talk about....ya know," Hank offered Roberta, daring to approach her again. "I can fix this! " the man who loved Roberta enough to not ask why she didn't want expressions of love from him beyond a hug, or an occasional kiss on the lips, insisted. "So you and me can..."

"I can't, and won't," Roberta said, after which she pushed Norma and Cowboy Hank away. She ran out the door, running as fast as she could for the woods.

Hank rushed towards the door, only to be tripped by Henry. “What the fuck did ya do that fer?”

“She’s gotta do what she’s gotta do, alone. Without us telling her what to do,” Henry explained to Hank, standing in front of the door. The Old Man pushed the younger one back to the ground each time the latter tried to get up.

“I have to save her. MY way!” Hank blasted back.

“Like Henry tried to save his daughter,” Norma reminded Hank, and Henry.
“And how you, Henry tried to save your son, who.....”

“I pushed away, by trying to protect them MY way, Hank!!” Henry informed the still, to him, young lad. “She’s gotta confer with her messenger animals out there, and as I sense she’s still around, the spirit of her Medicine woman Granny” he informed Hank. “Right, Bill?” the Old ‘still living in the real world’ Doc directed at the ghost in Norma’s husband saddle. This time with respect. And, truth be told, considering that perhaps what couldn’t be seen is more powerful than what is more widely seeable.

“Yeah, ok,” Cowboy Hank slurred to Henry, pushing his way up to his feet, holding onto his hurting knee. “But if we’re gonna DO somethin’ about fixin’ what’s goin’ on with my, IF we figure out why we love each other, future wife and your surrogate daughter, I’m gonna need a knee brace and maybe a shot of numbing juice into this limb. We agreed on at least that, Doc?”

Henry conceded the matter, tending to Hank’s hurting but hopefully not busted hindlimb. While Norma stole some binoculars from behind the lobby counter, looking into the woods. Meanwhile, the first, second and third car, then three trucks pulled into the parking lot. An emergency C- section on a 10 year old beagle, a seizing labrador retriever, a cat in need of urethral obstruction unblocking and a stallion with half of its skin on the rear right stripped off after trying to jump over a fence to service a mare in heat. And of course, just as many routine vaccinations and elective spays. Just another normal day in Paradise.

CHAPTER 7

It had been several weeks, or more accurately, several months since Roberta Collineur, Ph.D., D.V.M., H.B.A.R.P. (human being aspiring Renaissance person) had taken a break from fixing the bodies of ill and injured animals and openly asked them to heal the ailments in her soul. Such was even the case with her now fully grown wolf cub, Prometheus, and Heinz 57 canine mutt, Mahegan. She kept them at home and work as grown up siblings 24/7, asking nothing from them except to be happy, evacuate their bowels on the grass instead of the floor, and not kill each other who got the most food or was the first to be petted. Doc R knew, or wrote about anyway, that Spirit messengers in the form of seeable animals were real. And that they serviced members of the presumably 'most advanced' 46 chromosome owning species on the planet, to which she belonged, biologically anyway. Spirit Messengers of course dwelled in and got their wisdom from a Timeless dimension. But time, as measured by the human-made ticking time clock, had become Roberta's master in her various medical, biomedical science, the arts and vigilante law enforcement endeavors.

The time clock was ticking down to when she would encounter Kurt 'the suit' Smith, the slimiest, cleverest and most sadistic man she knew. He had bought her from her slimey, clever and sadistic Caucasian dad for a bargain price to be his arm candy, his most rentable whore as well as involuntarily drug and alcohol addicted 'assistant' in his criminal endeavors. If she disobeyed, or didn't follow his orders to the letter, and on time, withholding of recreational pharmaceuticals or soul quenching firewater was only the start of the punishment inflicted on her.

How Kurt got out of jail on a 25 year to life sentence, and how he found his way to find Roberta, and Deathhound, was a secondary issue on the 'problem' list. What to do about it topped all other priorities now. Such included dealing with the issue of one day, perhaps, reconnecting with Daniel. He was the only life that came into and out of her womb. Kurt insisted that she give 'it' away ASAP, which was implemented before any tests were done determining who was Daniel's sperm donor. That latter issue was immaterial now, or maybe it wasn't? Only the Messenger Spirits in the woods knew that, and more. Or perhaps Roberta's Grandmother's spirit did.

"Grams, can you hear me!" Roberta voiced in English, Cree and three other Native tongues to the sky to the North, South, East and West from a rock she had converted into a chair next to a creek that was deciding whether it was going to be a small river or a big stream. But she could not hear Medicine Woman Granny's spirit in the wind, flowing waters or even in the Silence that permeated her ears. And she couldn't feel that spirit either. "OK," she said, to any four legged creature who was listening. "Maybe Granny is still in the clinic, advising Henry about how to improve his time tested 'vetinry' surgical skills while he tried to pull out another miracle in the OR. Or she's telling Terri all of my medical and scientific secrets so she can become as good a non-licensed undiplomated veterinarian as she is an ace mechanic. That would make her a far better doc than Henry or I ever were, or maybe could be. Or maybe Granny's ghost has

something going on with the spirit of Bill, Norma's ex. Who Norma claims is still hanging around Knife Bend, making a comfortable home in the clinic. That would explain why after we lock the doors at night, we find messes on the oversized cots, damp towels on the floor and cigarette butts in the ash trays that I know I didn't leave." Such would perhaps make an interesting story for Roberta's next 'to be published when people start reading real books again' novel, screenplay that could maybe get into production with Cowboy Hank's Los Angeles buds, or lyrics for her next solo audio 'folk rock' opera.

She looked to her four legged audience to see if anyone was laughing at the jokes, or intrigued by her speculations, but all she heard and saw were squirrels, sparrows and rabbits talking to each other. They were chattering about affairs that perhaps concerned only the species they belonged to. Or maybe their various asculatations were ridiculing comments about the dumbshit human who barged into their ecosystem who were too smart and or self absorbed to understand squirrelese, sparrowese or rabbitease.

"I usually talk to the eagle up there, but....maybe he, or maybe she, is on a lunch break that will last another hour, day, year or century," Roberta said to a bear creeping up behind her. It was a cub who seemed to be no more than five months out of the womb. The owner of that warm, cozy place was perhaps shot by one of Tom Wilson Sr's super rich and, perhaps as a result of such, super insensitive American hunting buddy pals, leaving the cub as lost and alone as Roberta felt now. "But in the meantime, take this," she said to the bear, as she put her tingling fingers into her deep pockets.. She throw the cub handfuls of freeze dried apples, beef jerky, dried salmon, dehydrated bananas, peanuts, and carrots which she always kept around to bribe animals into accepting her medical help. On more than one occassion, went hypoglycemic during a 28 hour work shift, she munching on them herself. "I know, a performer who has to pay off the crowd," she said to the cub who still lingered. "But...You're a better and more ethical audience than a Priest. Who Cowboy Hank and Henry said I should talk to about my past. Preists who, in my past, of course kept what I said to them in the confessional confidential about what I did, and wanted to do, or needed to do. Sharing what I had to say, share and figure out only with God. And of course the Nuns who beat me to a pulp. And to my White father, in return for contributions to the 'poor box' which wound up in the Good Father's pockets. And of course the Cops, who, well...."

The bear growled something that sounded like 'yes, I'm listening', appended by pointing to the pocket from which Roberta had more goodies. She rationed out another portion to the cub, as she knew there was a lot to say and, perhaps, this was her new Messenger Spirit Animal. One who she would NOT name Daniel this time. "So, what's going on now?" she continued, hearing her stomach growl with hunger. Yet somehow feeding it to the bear made her own empty stomach feel full. "Me and Kurt 'the suit' Smith, as he called himself then anyway, was never seen in public, or in private parties, without his suit on. An expensive suit, according to White and Casino rich Injun standards. He used me as a drug mule, a pleasure mare to satisfy the needs and wants of his most valued clients, and business partners. And 'muscle', or rather, front line murderous to kill off his business partners who became his competition, or clients who were becoming 'problems'. Yeah, I didn't ask, particularly when I was stoned or drunk, what was in those packets I was asked to put in their drinks. Or pills I was supposed to push into their

mouths when I French kissed his special 'partners'. And there was the issue of, yeah, my father. Kurt helped me kill my father, after he beat and raped my mother, and left her in a coma she's, maybe, still in somewhere. And when Granny died, and I wanted to go to her funeral, Kurt said we had a 'party' to go to instead. I went to the Cops who...." Roberta hesitated, her consciousness held hostage by having spoken about the events that visited her in nightmares which woke her up drenched in sweat and, on occasion, bleeding palms when she neglected to trim her fingernails down to nothing. She recalled times when she experimented and formulated new medical and herbal treatments for PTSD which did work on abused dogs, horses and cats, and some MMIW's like Rashelle, but not yet on her. "Well," Roberta said to the bear, upon which she looked at its genitalia. He was a 'she'. Something Roberta had in common with the 'beast' who hopefully would not be shot by the ignorant city slickers who were incriminating on Knife Bend again. Despite the signs Cowboy Hank et al put up on every entrance to the valley bearing Knife Bend's name saying 'Entering No Capacino Zone', 'Proudly Under-Developed', 'A town where it's NOT cool to be cruel, or arrogantly nasty' and 'Where it's what you know, not Who you know.' But the conversation, even though it was one way, had to be continued. "The issue of the Cops...and the deal I made with them. My freedom for him losing his. For immunity from crimes that I did, but---"

"---Not those that didn't tell them about," Roberta heard from an all too familiar voice behind her. The bear fled as the intruder cast a shadow in front of Roberta that was bigger than any beast in the woods, or felt larger than any in her imagination. "And crimes that, 'saved by Jesus and the Good Lord giving him a love for animals, and his trusty dog Rusty' Kurt Smith said you did, that you were not given immunity from?" Tom Wilson, Junior said as he sat down on the bear's spot. His usually clean shaven face had sprouted a raggedy beard. His hair was a mop more filled with knots than long, neatly combed waves of 'handsome'. His designer jeans was ridden with holes, his blue business shirt stained in all manner of hues from stains. Over it all was a surplus Army jacket on which there were no less than 8 major holes probably made by bullets, which were sewn together by many different varieties of expired suture. He smelled of sweat, muck and....a strange brand of sincerity. Rather than take the food left by the bear, he gave it back to Roberta, despite his torso being underfed, his stomach growling with hunger. Through a breath reeking of acetone, the result of being either diabetic or underfed, he continued, "Kurt can still go to the Cops, who will believe him this time.. He could tell them stories about crimes you committed when with him, that he didn't command you to do. Drug running, sale of illegal weapons including germ warfare agents, grand larceny, murder, kidnapping and...as he'll no doubt bring up...assisting him in kidnapping young, particularly non-White girls, for the sex slave trade. Which, if your new friends here in Knife Bend are told about about, will require them to rat on you. Or be charged with being accessory after the fact, which is still punishable by...well, ya know..." Tom's clear speech was interrupted by a bigger growl from his belly, forcing him to grab hold of his stomach.

With no shortage of caution, Roberta offered him food.

“No thanks,” he said, outstretching his open blistered palm. “I don’t deserve it for what I put you through, and so many other people. And...the animals who I...” The memories in Tom’s head, and heart, haunted him, causing his once arrogant eyes to release a stream of tears.

Roberta didn’t have the heart, or brains, to remind Tom, about the things he did when he was Doctor Wilson. Of particular concern were the many animals he intentionally poisoned and faked records on so that they would die in Henry’s clinic. Such resulted in the Old School Dinasauro Doc blaming himself for their suffering, and demise, resulting in Henry Steiner nearly killing himself. Such would have denied him a well deserved place in heaven in the afterlife, as well as denying countless animals health care they needed from Henry. Who would be cured with his, truth be told, miraculous gift of healing.. There there were the other ‘medical misdemeanors’ Tom Wilson Jr, DVM, MBA, Esq did while operating the ‘state beyond the art’ Alpine Veterinary Clinic, funded by his ultra rich, power hungry father. A blue blood sperm doner whose approval Tom Jr needed but never got, but craved with pathological excess. Such resulted in Tom Jr. delivering sub-standard medical care to animals for high prices. Converting the Veterinary Association into his own private legal entity to destroy his veterinary competitors. And of course, he did his best to lure Roberta away from Doc Henry so that she could become his personal, always subservient, and abused in many ways sqwaw.

“So,” Roberta asked the seemingly voluntarily homeless man who she and Henry had discredited, finally. “Why are YOU out here?”

“Trying to redeem myself from things I did,” he said. “Which are worse than what you ever did, or wanted to do,” he related. He wiped off his tears, leaving behind a red face that different than that of the smug mug of the minion of evil that nearly destroyed Knife Bend. And not only because it was now gaunt, perhaps from voluntary malnutrition, or disease. “And to give you this,” Tom said, handing Roberta a blood stained envelope, folded up. “For you to open after I, eh, fuck off.”

“Can we talk first?” Roberta inquired, lowering her defenses, feeling herself invaded not by demons but very humanistic angels.

“After you and the people I almost destroyed take care of that,” he said, afterwhich he rose to his apparently aching feet. “I gotta go now,” Tom finally declared. “I left some roadkill on the sterno.”

“Where?” Roberta asked.

“Somewhere I dare not invite you, for your protection, and maybe mine.” With that, the ex Corporate Veterinary mogul disappeared into the woods, slithering he way under the bushes. Perhaps to not be seen by any Messeanger Eagle, surveailence chopper, the bear cub, or Roberta.

The eagle, or something like seemed like it, flew over top of Roberta, cawing something. “Ok, I’ll open it,” she said of the blood stained envelope. Upon opening it, her eyes popped out of the sockets. Such required her to pop back into action with those who, not yet anyway, didn’t know and couldn’t know about her past. And why she had to erase every element of it if there was a shot at her, or them, having any future.

CHAPTER 8

“Infernally Fantastic Festival, featuring freshly killed barbeque with the best female entertainment this side of Hades” Norma read on the red and black notice in Aryan gold calligraphy to celebrate the ‘rising of the full blood moon’. .

“A Satanic ceremony complete with animal sacrifice,” Henry translated to the congregation gathered in the clinic lobby, reception area and dispensary for medications at 50 percent mark up for well off clients, 10 percent for clients who had jobs, and cookies for those having trouble filling their cupboards at home with human edibles.

“The female entertainers being provided by the most involuntary ‘dancers’ so called ‘Doctor Kurt’ et al could kidnap, or trick into an all expense paid training month to become actresses in Toronto and models in Vancouver,” Roberta added regarding likeness of the the master of ceremonies on the personalized invitation.

“Girls to service CEOs flush with cash, politicians who deserve a break from their hard work doin’ insider tradin’ on the stock market before they pass any bill,” Cowboy Hank added, as he read and smelled what the announcement said. “Or boys the master of ceremonies kidnap to satisfy ‘enlightened’ over priviledged shitheads and assholes who are LGBT tolerant. And Cops who.---”

“----You told about what you were doing!” Henry angrily nterjected. “Just before those failed raids to stop these land pirates who shanghai innocent people then feed them to the sharks, traffickers”

“I’ain’t that dumb between my ears,” Cowboy Hank shot back. “Not anymore, anyway,” he continued, averting his stare, then directing it to Roberta. “Who gave you this festival announcement?”

“Tom Wilson Junior, who was tossed out of his father’s billion dollar teepee, and stayed away, voluntarily doing a walkabout,” Roberta informed Hank, attempting to use her own Aboriginal metaphors as they pertained to the American and Austrailian continent. “We....ran into each other. A Spiritually designed accident.”

“Or a non-Spirituality designed set up, to trap and enslave US, Doc,” Hank shot back, addressing Roberta by her title rather than her name, for the first time in months. “When you were bein’

trained to give animals anethethia, did you accidentally fall asleep, letting someone yanked out the part of yer brain box where the common sense nerve cells are.”

“They’re called neurons!” Roberta shot back. “But they didn’t succeed in lobomomizing all of my thinking and caring neuronal curcuitry,” she continued recalling the mostly White, male brain and soul dead instructors at vet school who called themselves brilliant and caring professors. She turned to Henry. “I say we stop this operation, ASAP. Which means, tonight!”

“Our good intentions, Spirit Messenger animals, prayers and war lances against their guns?” Norma reminded Roberta. “And if we throw canisters of sweetgrass into their outdoor luxury midnight camp...”

“They might be effective if we could suppliment it with some gases from this century,” Henry offered. “Tear gas, mustard gas, chloride, hydrogen sulfide or some other mind numbing or eye blinding aromas that can be manufactured real quick here that the CIA, KGB and other agencies who have acryms for. The recipes for which filtered their way into my ears when I was driving drunk big wigs from base to ship, and ship to base,” he speculated, recalling his Old Navy days when he got more training in how to kill others than to save them.

“With using bandanas or surgical masks soaked with urine so we or the ‘service’ girls we’re trying to rescue from bein’ raped, again, don’t breath in the sleepin’ or breath endin’ gas?” Hank pointed out. “And, correct me if I’m wrong, but the nearest ‘Preppers are Us’ outlets are three hours away, and are closin’ in two hours. And last time I checked, Amazon quick delivery takes at least---“

“----Got a point, there,” Henry noted, scratching his chin. “But....I do recall that we got some thunder sticks and make shift gun power of our own buried in the storage unit.”

“That you didn’t tell the Cops about, Henry?” Norma asked.

“Yep,” he boasted regarding the rifles and pistols he had snuck past the 49th parellel on his re-lacation trips to Canada to protect his property and self from man eating bears, and his cattle from becoming lunch for hungry wolves and cougars. Then there were semi-automatic weapons he used on more than one occassion to scare off twenty-first century cultist Pagans who cut open cows to honor their deities. But, another suggestion found its way into his consciousness. “We’ve dart guns that are approved for veterinary use.”

“Depending on what’s in them,” Norma interjected, not aware of and probably not wanting to know about Henry’s military activities while in the service of Canada’s closest and most feared neighbor. “If you get caught by the Feds, or the Veterinary Associations, using anything illegal,”

“Like curare, which makes you feel pain but not be able to move your mouth, arms or legs,” Roberta noted, imagining what such would do to Kurt the suit and his buds. “Which we don’t have.”

.

“But there are some thing you have here,, legally, Henry?” Norma flashed onto.

“Like propfol!” Roberta snapped onto as the most rapidly acting anesthetic aboard the Good Ship Henry’s arensel.

“...And any other concoction we both can come up with to do what needs to be done,” Henry declared. “Like the saying goes, better selective maiming or killing though chemistry. Assuming we have a majority vote here.”

Henry shifted his visionay gaze to Roberta, who raised her hand and said “aye, Captain.” Then he turned to Terri, who so far was quiet. “Whatever Doc R says,” her reply, in English, then German, the language of Henry Steiner’s Bavarian ancestors. “And you, Norma?” Henry inquired.

“I’ll defer my vote to Bill,” she said, looking behind her to the empty saddle in the somehow spooky in the right way North corner of the clinic, where animals miraculously healed better if their cages were moved there. “Who says, yes,” she continued.

“Which makes a majority, I suppose,” Cowboy Hank added. “Yep, we live in democracy. Rule of the majority, which Socrates hated, as I recall, ‘cause the majority is more often more wrong than that right.”

Cowboy Hank’s stare was diverted to Rashelle emerging from the back room, her head bowed, her arms loaded with more boxes that she dumped on the lobby counter. “I finished all my work in the back room, docs,” she said. “Anything else I can do?”

“Look after the fort here,” Cowboy Hank said to Rashelle. “While they,” he continued pointing to Henry, Norma and Roberta. “I mean WE, go look for some more strays, and bring ‘em ALL home.”

“Looking where?” Rashelle inquired, demanding an answer..

The non-verbal drawing of straws resulted in Roberta getting the short one. “Somewhere you’ve been, and don’t have to be anymore, Wapakwani,” she assured Rashelle, laying her hand on the formerly rescued ex-sex slave whose whereabouts were being kept very secret by her protectors, and healers. “If that’s ok with you,” Roberta asked.

“It is,” Norma answered before Rashelle, or Wapakwani, could reply on her own.

With that, Henry pointed Terri to a marker on the counter to be delivered to his hand. He directed Norma to hand the firm, white plaque that hung on the front door to him. ‘Closed for all appointments and emergencies’ he wrote on it, requesting Roberta to hang it on the door. He then turned to the woman who loved and knew him as friend so deeply that she held back all of her desires to be his wife, or lover. “To be put on the answering machine, Norma,” Henry requested pointing to the closed sign. He then turned to Hank, “And you,...”

“Already sent out texts to the most trusted members of my posse,” Cowboy Hank replied. “On this newfangled phone that doesn’t connect to the wall, Along with the location where the midnight festivities are supposed ta happen. And how to get there, unnoticed and unheard.”

“And not spotted with their phones or GPS’s by any silocone valley shitheads or cybersmart Cops in attendance?” Roberta put forth.

‘Right, right, I plum fergot,” Hank said, after which he texted that message to his posse of bikers and actor turned activist LA buds.

Henry looked at and into Roberta, not sure of what to say to her terrified and angry face. “We’ll get them all this time,” he assured her in the same way that he assured each client that their beloved pet would survive going under the knife. Which they did, so far anyway.

It was the first time that Henry had shut down his now shared practice in....what seemed like forever. To be reopened when...the impossible and necessary were completed.

CHAPTER 9

No one for certain knew why or by whom the quarter section between Turner, Taylor, Timothy and Terra mountains had been cleared. Or who the occupants of the 100 year old barn, farmhouse and trading post built had been. The walls of those once firmly built structures were now warped, one big wind gust away from being blown away and deposited on the ground as kindling. No one was sure who put the 'Tresspassers will be shot' sign on the still treeless property still connected to functional logging roads which was surrounded by human and animal skeletons. No one who would tell Henry, Roberta or any of their clients, anyway. The persistent rumor believed as fact about 'Site 666' was that it was haunted. Or it was named such because the present chronically 'out of country' owner, most probably Tom Wilson Sr, had big plans for its future value as a potential new luxury resort. Once he got could evict the ghosts from the property. Or invite other spirits to become rentors, or caretakers, of it.

As for this night, Mama Nature seemed to be in service of those owners. The moon provided ample light for the Infernally Fantastic Festival, accompanied by a warm windless sky that felt more like late summer than early winter. Still, there was a big bonfire in the middle of the now outdoor event, further illuminating the mostly red and black hued celebration of anti-life. Red for the barefoot First Nations dancing girls clad in scant 'cavewoman' outfits. Black was worn by the Mastress who held the remote device in her hand that zapped the electric dog collars on the dancers if they didn't do the Satanic dance step properly, failed to sing their assigned demonic song loudly enough, or didn't give their all in smiles to the White Collar buyers who were bidding on them. One of the barefoot and branded dancers tried to make a run for it. Her courage was reward by the Mastress of ceromonies zapping her collar, forcing her to the ground into painful consciously felt seizures. She begged to be finished off, in three different languages. The Mastress upped the electric juice with each pleading from her captive prey. Kurt Smith, clad in an old style Mark Twain variety in virgin white suit, strolled over to sadistically smiling Deathhound, who while holding the devise. A sadistic smile came onto her face with each jolt she administered to the disobedient 'outlier n- value' and soon to be sold love slave.

"Good job, Deathhourd, I mean Deathdemonist!" Kurt said with pride in his newest convert, giving her a congratulatory pat on the shoulder. "If you want the pain to end, you're going to have to kill yourself, after the sale!" Deathound's new master, or perhaps associate, whispered into the ears of the shaking peice of still sellable merchandize. "Come on!" Kurt boldly exclaimed to a twenty confortably seated men in a variety of thousand dollar suits watching the festivities. Four of the VIP specators proudly wore RCMP police uniforms, one of them being the highest ranking officer for a hundred miles. On no less than 14 stations around the campground were human behemiths in featureless black leather jackets armed with semi-automatic assault weapons which, under normal circumstances, would be confiscated by aforementioned RCMP officers. "Do I hear a thousand for this Injun mustang who we can train into being an interesting 'First Nations' sqwaw?" Kurt shouted out to the potential buyers .

Having started the bidding amongst the esteemed gentlemen, Kurt instructed Deathhound to turn down the electric juice, which she reluctantly did. He then instructed her to proceed to Tom Wilson Senior next to the only upright wall of the barn. He was clad in his veterinary scientist CEO lab coat, displaying 'Death demonist's latest supply of paintings to an impressed buyer, a voluptuous woman. The only female buyer amongst the VIPS was covered with black leather from neck to spiked heeled toes, her face hidden by a cat mask. The woman stuffed money into Deathhound's cleavage, her fingers lingering there. She messaged the location where the loot was placed until Deathhound closed her eyes, allowing the buyer to become her Mistress.

Meanwhile, Tom Wilson Senior took hold of the electronic zapping device. The dance was slower, the singing diminishing in volume. Having heard, then seeing that, Deathhound, decided that it was better to be a hammer than a nail. She politely pulled away from her new art patron, snatched the electrical zapper from Wilson and pressed on the appropriate button. It sent the girls into a more brisk dance, with louder now raspier disharmonic Satanic singing.

"I gotta stop this, NOW!" Terri said with an angry voice infiltrated but not fueled by fear from the thick bush overlooking the compound. For the first time in her life, she grabbed a real gun loaded with real bullets, specifically Henry's vintage 1897 Winchester. She aimed it down at the procession from the bush overlooking the 'festivities', the business end of the weapon somehow not shaking as much as its bearer was.

"No!" Roberta whispered, putting her hand over the barrel. "We've got to wait for the others to get here first. And we will bring Deathdemonst back to being Deathhound, or even Jen, somehow. But we need her ALIVE! Nature, and even sadistic humans, never give you a problem without a solution."

"Yeah, I know," Terri conceded. "You can concoct some drug, or herb or maybe some surgery that will turn cruel back into kind?" she asked, demanding an affirmative answer.

"Biologically changing helpless into confident is becoming doable, turning stupid into smart can maybe be done with some electrical implants, but turning cruel back into kind, is more science fiction than fact," Roberta knew, but didn't give voice to. "Yeah, I'm confident that we can save her," she assured Terri. It was in the manner of a thinking Doc assuring a client that her unsavable dog, horse or cat that she loves more than herself will be saved. Being careful about the verbiage used so you can't be sued afterward. Yes it was another lie, like the previous one Doc R had given Terri, and herself, upon being the first arrivals to the 'festival'. Roberta hoped that the posse will find their way up to the ambush point, soon, and undetected. And that they would arrive with a solid plan and appropriate tools to stop the festivities, disable its sadistic

participants and save its innocent victims. The latter included the animals in cages labelled by sacrifice number and late night dinner course. They represented the most loveable and already injured feline, canine and young bovine 'entrees'. Next to the cages was the dining area of the camp. It featured blood red coverings over the tables arranged in a circle. An altar occupied the middle of the outdoor bistro, adorned with every Satanic symbol known to Roberta from her 'Kurt' days, and some she was not familiar with.

One of those four legged sacrifices who would no doubt be killed by the most painful means possible was the bear cub Roberta had confessed to and confided in. Lacerations covered his chest. Rope burns dug into the bones on his arms. The chains around his neck which had scraped off all of the fur and skin around his all too visible bloody windpipe. The cub was labelled as 'appetizer'. A pistol bearing two legged minion clad in black and red robes from face covered head to jackboot wearing toe, sharpened his knife in front of the cage. He looked at his watch, grabbed hold of a dart gun, and aimed it at the cub.

Roberta grabbed hold of her own weapon of choice, a fiberglass bow and an arrow. She dipped its tip into a small jar she had carefully opened with a plastic glove. "A mixed concoction of insecticides and industrial solvents that's a nicotonic acetylcholine blocker, with just a touch of muscarinic antagonism, which...." she explained to Terri as she inserted the arrow into the string, then pulled back the bow.

"....Is just as powerful as curare?" Terri asked Roberta, referring to the plant-based toxin used by hunters in the Amazon rain forest that paralyses fingers, legs, mouth mouth, leaving the prey with enhanced ability to feel everything but able to do nothing about it.

"Let's hope so," Roberta said, after which she let the arrow go. It landed it into the galloping chef's back. His immobilized body fell on the cage of the bear about to be relocated to the altar. The cub growled while helping himself to a human late night snack through the holes made in the cage by the chef's fall onto it.

"And when that goon's buds discover why he fell asleep on the job?" Terri asked. "Right now, it's..." she counted the number of armed guards as well as the four Cops. "Twenty five to," Doc R turned to Terri. "Two."

"Three," Terri and Roberta heard from a familiar voice behind them from Cowboy Hank. He pulled up a heavy sac with him. He reeked of horse sweat, his breathing so loud that Roberta was compelled to shh him with her index finger up in the air, then gently placed on his open, dry lips. "Four," came from Axe, aka Norman Winkerfeld, a six foot five biker, bearing his HA colors with as much pride as Roberta still flaunted her Ph.D., D.V.M. and self earned H.B.A.R.P. credentials to veterinary clients. "Five, six, seven, eight" came from Axe's subordinates. Each

carted with them a duffle bag, the shortest and least muscular of them, a new prospect in the club, carting two 'Santa to the rescue' sac full of deadly goodies. "And that makes nine," finally came from a hunchbacked and limping Doc Henry. "No thanks to the stubborn, bucking proud cut wildy that all of you made me ride."

Roberta and Cowboy Hank didn't have the heart, time or lack of brains to inform Henry, the best equine surgeon within three hundred miles, that the 'proud cut wildy' he was assigned to ride to the location was the most bomb proof and obedient steed in Knife Bend.

"Who's looking after the horses, the getaway wagons and evac trucks?" Cowboy Hank asked Henry.

"Norma," he related and confessed. "And...."

"...Me," Raschelle announced, proudly, scuttling up the wooded hill to the overlook. She worked her way to Roberta, snatched the field glasses from her hand, and the campground below. "It's like, ya know, a new surgery. You see one, you do one, then you teach one, right, Doctor Bobbi?" the most successful rescue and recovery case Roberta and Hank had carried out to date asked. Addressing Doc R as Bobbi, a name which no one in Knife Bend ever used, or attempted to use, at least when Roberta was awake and conscious. An abbreviation of Roberta which was only voiced by her sleezy father during 'fun times' with her, and Kurt most of the time. But more pressing matters were at paw now, particularly Rashelle's accepting Henry's boast about 'ya see one, do one, then teach one'..

"Which is as much of a lie as the tale about Indigenous Santa in the North Pole dropping presents down the smoke hole of teepees while First Nations kids are sound asleep," Roberta thought, but dared not say to her most prized and difficult rescue case. Instead, she placed her palm on Rashelle's shaking shoulder. "You've gotta be healed yourself before you can effectively heal someone else, Wapakwani."

"Which of course you do all the time," Wapakwani shot back, sarcastically. Such was a new emotion from the rescued, once missing, enslaved but thankfully not murdered young woman. A step upward in her recovery, theoretically anyway. "I had to come to....eh..."

"See what all of these toys can do to those bastards down there?" Terri offered, showing Rashelle the collection of firearms with silencers, gas canisters, dart guns and real gas masks on the ground once all of the duffle bags were emptied.

“Where did you get all of this?” Roberta asked Henry.

Henry pointed to Axe. Who then pointed to Cowboy Hank. Who then pointed to the sky. “Okay, Roberta said to the Great Spirit, the Eagle or perhaps the Christian God who finally was going to be one of her allies rather than adversaries, or ‘do nothing’ observers . “Okey dokey then,” Roberta said in her best Jim Carrey imitation. “You guys take care of the buyers, guards and their Veterinary host. But the black prince in the white suit is mine,” she said, pulling out her jar of home made curare from her pocket, pointing to Kurt.

“At the right time, and right place,” Terri said to Roberta, in Cree.

Roberta corrected the Blackfoot-Okanagan raised First Nations ace mechanic and master unofficial vet’s pronuciation, then turned to Cowboy Hank. She asked him if his Hollywood actors slated to play anti-terrorists in a big budget upcoming film were coming, to which Hank shrugged his shoulders. Doc R then turned to Axe, daring to ask where the rest of his motorcycle ‘club’ was. “Some outlaws are less honest than we are,” he confessed and related. She then turned to Henry

“

“On the count of twenty, Doc?” Doc R asked Doc H.

“Ten,” came from none other than Rashelle, or rather Wapakwani.

With that, each member of the assault team grabbed hold of the weapons and masks best suited for their biology and abilities, the group thinking with one brain. “Maybe the brain of Jesus,” Roberta thought to herself. “Who, when gathered in his SERVICE is there also,” she told herself with her inner voice. “Who maybe will give us some extra help if we...” Roberta crossed herself, attracting the attention of the entire congregation.

Puzzled, worried and troubled looks were shot at Roberta from all directions.

“Extra insurance,” she explained to the faces lit up by the moon, which seemed to be brighter than a few moments ago. A blessing with regard to aiming the various weapons and paralytic-inducing devises at the right marks. A curse if she and the rescue team would be made more easy seen targets en route to the clearing, or once there.

The original plan in the 'huddle' of this winner take all football game to take place in the final two minutes of play involved shooting the tires on every vehicle the suits, cops and Satanic assistants drove in with. Cowboy Hank galloped as close to the camp as he could on his fastest horse, dropping tear gas cannisters in every corner of the camp populated by people, after of course chasing them out of the areas holding to be sacrificed animals. He then tossed grenades containing real explosions emitting black dust far more dramatic than any Satanic offering into the middle of the camp.

As Doc Henry's feet were far slower than his fast thinking brain, he took on sniper duty. His sharp eye and firm grip on the firearms proved that the marksmanship medals he earned in the Navy were real rather than made in China, as was the rumor about them.

Henry assigned Terri the job of shooting the first tranquilizer dart into the Deathhound's ass. Within three seconds of its delivery, she dropped her electricution devise then proceeded to a deep, and perhaps sound, nightmare free, sleep. Terri then shot darts into fat torsos of the slave buyers. Henry reserved the right to shoot one into Tom Wilson Sr for himself.

Axe's prospect, a war veteran who served with distinction in the Middle East with the American then Canadian forces, took out some of the armed guards from behind. Axe and his three most trusted fellow HAs rushed into camp, firing their highly illegally obtained automatic weapons into the arms, legs and when necessary, heads of the hired guards. Then into three of the Cops who they had personal history with, who no one in the force who mattered would miss.

Rashelle, with Roberta's help, removed the collars from the liberated girls. She sent them out of the camp, to a path leading to the getaway truck and and bullet proof horse trailer on the other side of the woods. Hopefully they were still under the control of Cowboy Hank. Ten girls followed Reahell's instructions. Two didn't, remaining in the camp, putting their collars back on. With all the force in what was left of their bodies they ran towards their sleeping masters, trying to revive them. They refused to let Roberta pull them away, kicking her in the groin, chest and mouth. "As expected," Rashelle shouted out to Doc R.

"I know," Roberta replied, recalling the last three lost souls she tried to rescue from owners who had 'found' them. But other matters came to Roberta's consciousness as the source of most of her troubles, and once overcome, accomplishments in life came into her eyeline.

"We'll get him later," Rashelle said regarding Kurt. He was somehow was able to escape a dart of sleepy juice, the allure of gases to send him into slumber or a bullet. He ran towards a dirt bike hidden in the brush.. With an affirmative pedal to the medal, he turned the engine on, firing a submachine gun at Roberta as he made his getaway.

“You okay, Doc R?” Rashelle asked, pulling her savior, mentor and perhaps soon friend as well as ally in numerous Causes off the ground.

“Not if he is!” Roberta sneared back. She looked around her, at a loss as to what to do next. “Fuck...damn it....My kingdom for a....”

“Horse?” Axe shouted, pulling his Harley in front of her. “Richard the third, act five,” the presumably semi-literate President of the Knife Bend HA chapter said.

“Roberta the first, act final, name of opus to be named later,” she declared, after which she pushed Axe off his hog, taking his modified AK47 semi-automatic into her firm hand just before he rolled on the dirt. Axe called for his buds to come by with a new two wheeled horse, but Rashelle said ‘no’. “Yes,” Axe insisted, getting behind his his mounted second and third in command. “Those girls down there need your help more than Doc R does,” Rashelle said, pointing down to the bottom of the hill. Axe processed that observation with intensity and alacrity, after which he motioned for the cavalry mounted on two wheeled horses to comply with thatt request.

Roberta was now seeing new challenges. First, how would she claim self defense after she killed Kurt once the REAL Cops came into town? Second, how sure was she that she really did know how to fire bullets as well as threats from the business end of the AK 47? And, most importantly, how could she, on a Harley built for high speed on the highway, keep up with and overcome a dirt bike built for mobility on trails barely wide enough for goats?

Following the sound of Kurt’s emergency dirt bike, the only coincidently hidden vehicle in the campground, kept Roberta on Kurt’s tail. The Great Spirit apparently wanted her to find and inactivate him. But a doe popping out of the woods had other ideas. Roberta did her best to avoid hitting the deer, so that she could continue the pursuit and, as well, so that Axe’s hog wouldn’t wind up being smashed into so many peices that even Terri couldn’t put together. But, life had other ideas. The bike slid on a slab of mud, scraping Roberta’s thigh and shoulder. Worse than any damage to her aching chest was what happened to the AK47, caked with mud, the silencer connected to it gone. It didn’t look happy, but maybe it was functional. It had to be. Or maybe, it DIDN’T have to be. “So, maybe like our ancestors did, yelling bullets out of our empty thundersticks at the Blue Coats might scare them into surrendering,” she said to Granny. Spirit delivered another weapon to Roberta. Next to her aching hand was long metal shaft with a sharp end to it. If thrust well, it could double as a spear. And there was always the autopsy and rope cutting bufallo knife strapped to Roberta’s waist which, thankfully, she hadn’t used on herself. And, something else ahead of her...Silence. The doe, uninjured, popped her head between the thick brush, her flouscent eyes staring at Roberta.

“I owe you one for having your girlfriends, kids or mate stopping him!” she said to the deer. “Free vaccinations and dewormer for you. On the house neutering of any stag who had his way with you when you wanted to stay single!” The doe nodded ‘yes’ to the offer, then hopping off into the brush, her brown torso disappearing into a forest of dark green.

Roberta followed the tire tracks ahead of her. They stopped when she nearly tripped on no less than twenty pieces of machinery which had been a functional dirt bike. Ahead of it was a trail of three hundred dollar hiking boots, then traces of blood. It led to a clearing, where another helper was waiting for her. But with some problems no one expected or planned for.

“You think about doing anything with that gun that might be able to fire, that knife which I know you can throw, that make shift spear or a curse with that foul mouth of yours, ‘Bobby’, and she dies!” Kurt said, holding Terri’s 100 pound body hostage with his overmuscle arms, a knife at her throat.

“Don’t listen to him!” Terri shouted out. “He’s...”

“...Not bluffing,” Kurt said. He laid the first layer of a deep cut across Terri’s throat. “The next one goes deeper, Bobbi! Now put down that Bolshevik water pistol.”

“What do you want?” Roberta said, lowering the submachine gun.

“You of course,” Kurt said, sounding...vulnerable. “Like it was in the old days. When you and me...ya know...both did...”

“...What I’m not doing now! And never did again!” Roberta blasted back.

“You wanna know what she did, right?” Kurt asked Terri, who shook her head in a very affirmative ‘no’, her incision bleeding, but not dangerously, so far. ‘Right?’

A helicopter came into hearing then visual range, lingering above. “Kurt motioned it to come down, which it did, landing in the clearing. Its pilot remained inside the blackened cockpit. “My ride, and yours, ‘Bobbi,’ Kurt said. “Who with your medical training could be...hmm...DOCTOR Bobbi,” he mused. “Doctor Bobbi SMITH, who above all WILL do

harm! To anyone I and my friends say you will! Because after what you did to me, and so many others...”

An arrow landed into Kurt’s thigh, silencing his relating the secrets about what he and Roberta did when she was Bobbi. He pulled it out of his leg, with no difficulty and apparently with no medical complications to worry about. The shooter emerged from the woods. “Ah, Raschelle!” he said to the archer. “Who I renamed Destiny. Who, well, was the best....”

“...Mole that drugs, money or guarantees that your sisters and brother wouldn’t be killed, or worse could buy?” Roberta interjected, putting together why Rashelle slipped and called her ‘Bobbi’. And why ever since Rashelle was rescued, any other attempts to locate and liberate anyone else resulted in a wild goose chase with nothing but ‘they were here but they aren’t here anymore’ replies from trusted informants. And it explained why Kurt was able to find the only mobile escape transportation after the raid. “Bobbi, Destiny until tonight anyway, was my best servant, partner and associate,” he declared.

“And your last one,” Rashelle growled, after which she shot an arrow near, and perhaps into, his testicular tissue. Terri made a quick getaway, rushing into the arms of Roberta. Kurt’s scream of agony into the moonlit night evoked a roar from the woods. It was followed by the bear cub and his mother emerging from the thick bush. They pull Kurt into the woods, helping themselves to a late night snack of humanoid meat. The evidence of such was arms, hands and ineditable testicals thrown out into the clearing. The chopper pilot put his engine back on, then flew up into the great black wander, disappearing behind the clouds.

Rashelle looked to Roberta, “Wapahki, niwapamitin, piyakwan, wahkotowin,” the 20 something ex-sex slave said with the kind of maturity that only comes from a self liberated Elder. After which she walked into the woods, disappearing into them.

“Which means?” Terri asked Roberta.

““See you later, maybe, perhaps’, Doctor Terri,” Roberta translated.

“And what do we do now, Doctor ROBERTA. Roberta COLLINEUER, Ph.D., D.V.M., H.B.A.R.P?” Doctor R’s second most improved student and friend asked.

“Coax those demon eating bears into coming to the clinic, or us making a house call to treat them for dietary indiscretions,” she mused regarding the toxicity in every miligram of Kurt’s body.

Thoughts of Light infiltrated into the Darkness that occupied Roberta's mind, and soul. Along with thinking, and planning to allow Cowboy Hank to express his love to her without any physical restraints, and to honor him in the same way.

EPILOG

“Life rewards those who trust others, somehow,” Roberta considered a week later when it was her turn to ‘take the wheel, rudder and mainsail’ of the Good Ship Henry. But the clinic was empty without Wapakwani, or Rashelle. It did still have Taylor on the pay-roll, who was learning that she was paid for hours she put in rather than time spent at home ‘thinking and stressing’ about coming to work. Turning Norma’s still ‘chronically Millennial’ grand-daughter into something that was an asset rather than a liability was still a bigger challenge than resurrecting four legged patients who went into cardiovascular collapse. Or convincing city slicker clients who watched too many episodes of Lonesome Dove from their urban lofts in West Vancouver that the color of the horse they wanted to buy was the last thing to consider as the most important item on their ‘must have’ list. Or trying to convince a new generation of veterinarians, and a lingering population of lazy middle aged ones, that basing your diagnosis and treatment for ANY disease on what AI Chat says is the first step to being its servant, and slave, as well as a veterinary mortician’s delight.

But as the title of the multi-genred opera she and Cowboy Hank were about to offer to the world as a cure for the renewed popularity of ‘The Hearty Party’ said, ‘Heartfelt Intensity: Always Rewared and in Fashion’ .That stubbornly held onto hypothesis was rewarded in ways she never expected.

A 14 year old lad portraying himself as proudly a quarter Cree and three quarters ‘other’ came into the clinic when Henry was out fishing, and doing nothing other than fishing, with Norma. In his arms, an injured wolf cub in his arms. “I found Beowolf and think I can save him, but I need some help, Doctor Collineur,” he said. After laying the patient on the exam table, he described the anatomical portions of his injured left hind leg with more accuracy than any fourth year vet student or, truth be told, veteran veterinary surgeon could.

“And your name is?” Roberta asked the boy she seemed to have an instant connection with.

“Danielle,” he replied with a wide smile, “Doctor Mom”

The hug between finally re-united son and mother was celebrated by everyone. Including the ghost of Norma’s ex husband Bill, and the still lingering spirit of Roberta’s Granny. “I think we can leave everyone here to their own devises,” Bill said to Granny. “I agree,” she replied in Cree. And with that, the guiding spirits that kept the Knife Bend clinic Alive and well, departed, in search of a mother who in the fifth month of gestation were carrying the bodies of soulless twins in her uterus in search of being occupied.

