



**John Victor Ramses**

***Not On  
My Life***

**The true story of an American father's  
battle for his daughter that becomes a  
fight for his life against the Machiavellian  
Western Australian legal system**

**(READ FIRST FOUR CHAPTERS OF “NOT ON MY LIFE”)**

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Cover by John Victor Ramses


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Artwork printed within this work are reproductions of original paintings by John Victor Ramses and include: "Beautiful Day", "Reflecting", "Private Despondence", "Looking For Hope", "Choose Your Might" and "Weekend that Wasn't" Other artwork includes Aboriginal painting by Terrance (Bull) Dann.

The author asserts the moral right to be the author of this work.

Certain segments used in this work were excerpted from '11:11 - The Love Story', 'Salem's Ghost', and / or 'My Daughter's Country' by John Victor Ramses.

**For My Daughter, Amanraya –  
Wherever you are...**

**I never left you.      I was taken.**

**Machiavellian** / mak-ee-uh-vel-ee-un / *adj.*  
~ Elaborately cunning; scheming, unscrupulous

--- Oxford's Australian Dictionary

**Author's preface:**

Thousands of people once knew me as John Victor Ramses – author, artist, producer, creator of *Ghost Radio Network*, *Underworld Show* and *Haunted Australia*, father and husband. They knew who I was married to and of our incredible love story that had been founded on an occurrence of strange phenomena and compelling dreams of a future daughter who would be born in the year 2000. You might have read of us in magazines or the newspaper or seen us on TV promoting our projects or had listened to one of our radio interviews. You might have been one of the many clients of my web marketing business *I-Prodigy Communications*. You might even have once called me friend as I had so many of you.

Then suddenly on 1 July 2010 I simply vanished from the world amidst a flurry of rumors and allegations spread across the Internet. For all intent I had overnight simply ceased to exist from the world as effectively as if I had died.

But I am still here. I have always been here.

This is my story....



September 2011  
Hakea Maximum Remand Prison  
Canningvale, Western Australia  
Official visit

“You knew there was evidence that proved I was innocent, that they had lied through their teeth to steal my daughter. I told you where to get the evidence. You went there, you saw it, but you ignored it and put me to trial anyway – without a lawyer! Why did you keep that evidence from me then sit there on your ass and let me be convicted knowing I was innocent?”

“Because, Mr. Ramses, I’m assigned to the complainant and helping you would be a conflict of interest.”

“*Conflict of interest?* You’re a fucking police officer! I had a right to that evidence - and to those witnesses! That evidence proved there was never any need for a damn trial.”

“Like I’ve said before, Mr. Ramses, if you wanted rights you should have stayed in America.”

“My life is not expendable. And I want my daughter back!”

“Good luck with that. You were convicted by jury in *our* court. You likely won’t see your daughter again until she’s 18, a legal adult, *if* she wants to see you again”

“Go fuck yourself! You’re not a cop. You’re just an advocate for whomever or *whatever* complains first. This isn’t justice, it’s corruption. This meeting is over. *Boss!* Take me back to my cell!”



# ***Not On My Life***





“Weekend That Wasn't” - Painting by the author, 26 June 2016 for his daughter's 16<sup>th</sup> Birthday. He wasn't there.

# Prologue

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## **Timeless Last Impressions**

Kingsley, Western Australia

30 June 2010

The McDonald's franchise near the corner of Wanneroo Road and Hepburn Ave was unusually packed for a Wednesday night. Through the exuberant ambience of crumpling wrappers and drone of conversations the higher pitched sound of children's voices and laughter could be easily discerned from beyond the enclosed play area. My daughter's voice, which had become familiar and distinct through the past decade since her birth, remained singular to my alert parental ears as she played amidst the hyperactive menagerie. She had always made friends easily and could join in with any group of kids whether at school, the beach, park or McDonalds. Shy she was not, but instead outgoing with a radiant personality that seemed to draw other children to her, as if little moths to a light on a warm summer night.

I had made it a priority over everything else but work to spend every moment with her as I could arrange since separating from her mother two months earlier. The separation had shattered her predictable, safe world as such events tend to do to children, but the way she had been told was nothing short of selfish, callous and cruel in my view. Because of the way she had been told caused me to keep her closer than I otherwise might have in order to assure her that, in spite of the separation, I was always here for her, always contactable and most importantly, that I would never leave her. I had bought her a basic mobile phone so she could contact me any time day or night as she felt the need or reassurance that I was not too far away. She had adjusted comfortably in that assurance and I had demonstrated my promise to her nearly every day by picking her up after work or on weekends and taking her to Sorrento Quay or Fremantle for dinner. Tonight she wanted McDonald's.

I now had only *her* to concern myself with and had spoilt her with whatever she wanted to help soften the blow of the separation. Truth be known, it was more to mask the guilt I harbored that *her* parents had ever separated at all, considering how her mother and I had met - the persistent dreams and surreal phenomena surrounding it and the immeasurable love we had shared for each other. It had been in the midst of that love that this child had been conceived and born and it seems to have permeated her entire being with it, as if to remain a solitary testament that such a love between two people had ever happened at all.

Above the boisterous activity a number was called out matching the number on my receipt. On my way to collect our meals I opened the glass door to the play area and motioned to my daughter that it was time to eat. I noted warmly, as I had on numerous similar occasions, how her new-found friends reluctantly waved goodbye and asked if she would be coming back. She had that effect. She was unique, beautiful and perfect. I felt that way about all my children – her older

siblings in America from a previous marriage – as parents always tend to feel about their own.

All of my children had been born as a result of uncanny similar circumstances surrounding the meeting of their respective mothers, though twenty years apart, not least this child who now munched placidly on her cheeseburger between sips of her *McFlurry*. The circumstances involved with how her mother and I had met had been nothing less than profound. It was a story well known in the day and had been recounted in magazines and radio interviews. A photo of my daughter hugging a tree at age five had been printed with one such article in *Take 5 Magazine* in June 2006<sup>1</sup> and had been captioned: ‘*The little girl in John’s dreams*’. Indeed, she was. I treasured the photo and had scanned it from the magazine, which I’d kept in my wallet since.

Apart from challenges facing any married couple or family, the marriage had seemed to be enchanted and unusual. Ours was meant to be the love to end all yearning for love. For eleven years it mostly had been. But *forever* it had not been meant to be, apparently. Rather, it seemed to have been a rare and privileged gift, but one which had also come with an expiry date. As in the movies, there’s always a catch.

“How’s your hamburger,” I asked my daughter, already knowing the answer. “Is it good?”

“Mmmmm,” she responded, emphasizing her approval with an exaggerated nod.

Looking at her now, no longer a part of her every waking moment, I resented all the times I had told her ‘*Daddy’s too busy right now*’ when she had come seeking attention or a cuddle in my lap or just wanting to play. It’s a regret shared by many parents who through divorce or an untimely death had lost a precious child from their life. The moment reminded me that I’d been here before a long, long time ago, a rainy day in April 1985 following a separation from a former wife in America, and of a song I had written while driving home after dropping my then young son and daughter back to their mother after an outing together. The chorus had said it all:

*Weekend daddy  
Sometimes more a good friend  
From Friday to Sunday I’d hoped maybe one day  
We could be a family again  
But your new daddy loves you  
And tries to discipline kindly  
So be good for them both. I love you.  
And I’ll see you next Friday<sup>2</sup>*

That wife had remarried to an old high school flame almost before our bed had grown cold from her absence. It hurt like hell at the time but I came to respect her new husband and later, to call him friend. There had been no animosity between us, only an ignorance of youth. Although young when we had become engaged (I was 19, she 17), yet having an awareness that our youth may one day undermine our marriage, we had made a vow that if that terrible day should ever arrive we would remain friends, remember we had loved each other, and not act as our respective parents had acted when they divorced. That day did ultimately come to pass, but amidst the heartache and feelings of betrayal we remembered that vow and bit our tongues at appropriate times, she more often than I.

By contrast, my Australian wife had felt no such sentiments. I had not been in Australia but a few days when, after speaking with my former wife in order to pass a message to my children that I had arrived safely, she warned: *'Don't ever think that we will remain friends if we divorce. I'm not like that'*. I'd been taken aback by the abrupt comment as if it had been uttered from a different person than the one that love had caused me to travel 10,000 miles to marry. I also harbored an urban superstition that once the 'D' word had been spoken in a marriage it was destined to happen. I had assured her then, as men do in those awkward situations, that I loved her forever and that *we* would never divorce. I sincerely meant it at the time and was still shocked when we actually did divorce eleven years later.

The McDonald's patrons gradually thinned out as my daughter and I took our time eating our meals, and with them went the pandemonium. In between bites she filled me in on what she was doing in school and that she was participating in a special program and expected me to be there. I knew that wouldn't sit well with her mother, who had likely informed the teachers, parents and anyone who would listen that we had separated and, as far as she was concerned the reason why, but I wouldn't disappoint my daughter no matter how awkward the situation or condemning the eyes. Like her father and her older siblings in America, she was naturally talented, musically and artistically inclined. I loved watching her discover and explore those talents.

"So what are you doing in the program?"

"Singing and dancing, of course, daddy," she said with intended sarcasm, rolling her eyes for effect

"Ah, of course. Silly me." Then leaning across the table for emphasis I assured her, "I wouldn't miss it for all the gold in the world!"

"I know," she said confidently, knowing I had never missed one of her programs or assemblies.

Music had been a constant in our home. If not from the radio or some thousands of tracks in our station's playlist then I had been playing guitar. Typically, my wife and kids would be dancing around the house; such had been the atmosphere, and for my daughter it just came naturally, something she almost

couldn't help. She had not been walking on her own but a couple weeks when, from the doorway of our makeshift home office, I spied her negotiating her way down the hall in her pink jumpsuit, a tiny hand on the wall for support. About that time, I had put on some music while I worked. The first track was Meredith Brook's *Bitch*.

Only a few words into the powerful chorus I glanced down the hallway to check her progress. She had come to a stop and was staring dumbfoundedly at her right leg, which was spasming up and down to the beat of the music as if completely of its own accord. The strange action seemed to baffle her for a moment, and then she looked up the hallway to where she knew I was sitting and smiled a broad toothless smile and giggled. Whatever her leg was doing down there it agreed with her. Quickly, I had called to her mother who appeared at the other end of the hallway and together we watched proudly as our daughter's tiny form continued on her journey, moving in rhythm with the beat.

Music was in her blood and she'd been dancing and singing since. In October, just some months before the separation, she and I had sung together at a family reunion on a farm in Grass Valley near Northam<sup>3</sup>. It was the first time we'd sang together in public and apart from me messing up the words it was incredibly special. The song we had selected was *Second Chance* by the group Shine Down, which had been popular at the time. We had recorded the event and put on YouTube for my family in America. I had exhausted a lot of hours re-watching those videos since the separation.

"I can't wait to go fishing on Saturday," said my daughter in a perky voice after slurping down the last of her McFlurry. "Daddy's *American Fourth of July!*"

"I can't wait, either," I said. "It will be fun."

"I told all my friends that *my* daddy is the bestest fish catcher in the whole world!"

"Gee, thanks for that, baby girl! I don't quite know what to say."

"It's true because you're *my* daddy!"

"I am indeed," I chuckled warmly.

I had spent forty years fishing in the Rocky Mountains of my home country with reasonable success, but I had no intention of telling my proud little girl that, frankly, I hadn't the slightest clue about fishing for *anything* in Australia, much less in the ocean. I could barely swim in it. I'd been brought up using a fly rod which, even with my skill on a mountain lake or stream, I was fairly certain would not work the same in the surf or off a jetty. But if I could get the bait on the hook and cast it into the water at all, anything we caught – including seaweed – would be chocked up to luck. If we didn't catch anything, blame it on the moon, but there

was no way I was going to tell my daughter that her hero daddy wasn't the 'bestest' at anything!

"And, I have a surprise for you, too," I quickly added before she could expose any more of my exaggerations in public. "It's part of your birthday presents, as if you hadn't already been spoiled beyond ever being humble again," I concluded with a wink.

"Yay! What is it", she queried excitedly, bouncing in her seat.

"If I told you it wouldn't be a surprise!"

"Awww," she pouted, feigning a frown.

"But I'll bet you'll catch more fish than me with it. And, like you, it's pretty, too!" She giggled unabashed and set to finish the last of her meal without further query, knowing I wouldn't reveal her surprise no matter how much she pestered me.

"Daddy, how come Australia doesn't have a Fourth of July?"

The answer to that innocent question was complex, even for adults. "I'm working on it, baby girl."

The Western Australia winter sun had long since set below the horizon of the Indian Ocean. Although only approaching 7.30 PM I could sense that my daughter's half-sister at home would be on the phone to her mother, who was still at work, informing her that I had not yet returned from our outing. My now ex-wife harbored an unwarranted fear that I might abscond with our daughter back to America even though, if I'd had such intention, it would still require both a passport and legal permission signed by her. What my wife truly feared was the deep bond my daughter and I shared and that she might *choose* to follow me wherever I may go, whether home to America or into a new relationship. My wife failed in my view to recognize that our daughter loved her as much. She was just a child who knew no favoritism.

But the fact that *this* daughter had been my little 'dream' daughter, who over some five years had appeared in my dreams almost monthly as I slept until finally meeting her would-be mother on the unusual morning of April 27, 1998 did not help my wife's confidence in the matter. Indeed, our strange meeting and our marriage had been underscored by my dreams of a future daughter who would be born in the year 2000. On 26 June at 10:10 AM of that year it had come to pass with magnificent accuracy. Whether one might call it a fluke or otherwise there was no doubt the bond between us and therein lay the root of my wife's concerns should we ever divorce, which had now occurred.

But this night I didn't care what my wife or anyone else thought. I relished every moment with my daughter, savoring the time slowly. Each week since the separation had found my wife tightening the distance from the house that I was

‘allowed’ to take our daughter on outings. With my wife’s family and friends always in her ear, I had to argue just to take my daughter fishing off the jetty at Hillary’s Resort only a few miles away. Taking my daughter to America on holiday as I’d planned for over a year was not negotiable. The last argument had occurred just some days ago over the fishing trip. She had come to resent and discourage anything *American*, which included me, or even celebrating it by taking my daughter fishing on that American holiday. Singing the American National Anthem or placing a hand over the heart for the beginning of a football game on TV, as I’d taught my daughter, was ridiculed and mocked by her mother. But it had not always been that way. There had been a time that my wife had been as proud of her American husband as I was my Aussie wife.

Nonetheless, the access restrictions had become ridiculous and I’d had enough. I had informed my wife that in the week following our daughter’s birthday I was left with no choice but to initiate Family Court proceedings. I also intended to seek the right to take her on holiday to America by invoking *The Hague Convention on International Parent’s Rights*. Without possibly knowing the outcome of any such proceeding I had assured my wife I would win, to which she bitterly spat ‘*We’ll see about that!*’ before storming into the house. Our daughter’s 10<sup>th</sup> birthday had now just past and my wife and I hadn’t spoken since. True to her word *friends* we would not remain in the event that *we* should ever divorce. On the Monday next I intended to follow through with the proceedings, as unnecessary as I felt it should ever have to be.

Concluding our meals, I asked my daughter if she was ready to go. Glancing briefly at the play area and noting that most of the kids had also left she replied, “I guess so”. Sliding from our seats, as I prepared to gather the tray of empty cups and wrappers, she suddenly beamed with a broad smile. Taking my hands into her delicate hands she looked up into my eyes and said, “Daddy, I love you so very, very, *very* much. I hope you know how much!”

“I certainly do,” I assured her. “And I love you the very same. *Always* remember that....”

Her sincere, gentle gaze suddenly connected with my soul and as I stood looking down into her azure-steel eyes set amidst her tender smiling face framed by plumes of long, wavy blonde hair I suddenly recognized that she had become the embodiment in perfect detail of the beautiful, radiant future daughter who had so long ago appeared in my dreams as I had slept. A soft tingle moved through my spine as I felt I was experiencing a powerful moment of *déjà vu*. *Wow*, I breathed with a contented sigh. Could all those dreams of her, each exactly the same, have been but a projection of a single moment in a future time – *this* moment in which I now stood? If so, for what possible reason? I was momentarily transfixed, filled suddenly with the same overwhelming emotion of love and calm that had always accompanied those dreams of her before waking short of breath and sweating. How could *her* mother and father have separated? How could *her* mother and father now



be preparing for war? Surely, there must be another way, I thought, as I now felt moved to forego the Family Court action.

Then, as if sensing something disconsolate deep within my own eyes she hugged me tightly and said, "Everything will be okay, daddy, because I love you and you love me." She was referring, I was sure, to her acceptance of the separation and a confidence that I would never leave her. Or, was she telling me something on a soul level, words I would come to cling to through the uncertain years ahead?

As I negotiated our way through the congested parking lot, holding her hand for safety, I was still under the spell of that emotion. During the ten-minute drive down Hepburn Ave toward the house the song *Second Chance* came on the radio and we sang along. I thought it coincidental and wondered if it might be a sign that her mother and I could resolve our issues, finally communicate, and have *second chance* at a marriage that had been almost fairy tale.

"You're so talented, baby girl," I said proudly. "You were the star of the family reunion!"

"You messed up," she pointed out with a light laugh.

"That's because I was so distracted listening to your beautiful voice I forgot that I was part of the show!" Then I added, "I love singing with you."

"I love singing with my daddy! I can't wait for the next family reunion to sing with my daddy!"

"Yeah."

I left it at that. There would be no more family reunions for me in Australia, but she didn't need to know that tonight.

As we pulled up to the verge in front of the house the image of my daughter at the restaurant flashed in my mind causing me to wonder: What could have been so significant about a simple meal at McDonald's that it would cause an impression of a solitary moment to have been projected into my dreams some 17 years before, complete with the emotion of such love and peace that had come over me as I stood looking down at my daughter? Then, I put aside my thoughts of it as she slid out of the car, slammed the door behind her, and trotted up to the house, me following not far behind.

My daughter's bedtime on a school night was 8PM. We'd made it back in the nick of time. As I passed through the living room of what had been my home just months before I said hello to my former stepdaughter who sat on the sofa watching TV with her mobile phone in her hand. She had not spoken a word to me since the separation despite the close relationship we and her older brother had shared through the years I'd been married to their mother. As expected, my greeting was ignored, but hurt all the same.

As my daughter readied herself for bed I waited awkwardly in the hall feeling unwelcome and displaced. Familiar scents, sights and sounds intruded with

memories: cheese on toast not long out of the oven and the perfume my wife always wore to work. The sound of the TV filled the air and the computers and makeshift studio equipment from where my wife and I had spent countless enjoyable hours producing our *Ghost Radio Network*, *Underworld Show*, *Haunted Australia* and had conducted more than 150 radio interviews still sat where it had for the past several years. A framed promotional poster of my book, *Quest for Peralta Gold: A Hidden History of Red Mountain* still hung on the wall in the dining room and now I was preparing to tuck my little daughter in bed with a hug and kiss goodnight. It was still *home*. The only thing missing was the marriage, the love we had shared, and of course, my place in it.

Swinging open her bedroom door my pajama-clad daughter giggled and pounced into bed. Burying herself beneath the blankets she then reached her arms typically into the air waiting for her hug and kiss. Sitting on the edge of her bed I scooped her up blankets and all and held her close for a long moment before blowing a ‘raspberry’ on her neck. She laughed and squirmed away, falling back into bed. As much as her mother had chastised me over the years for getting our daughter all geared up before sleep, I couldn’t resist tickling her as I’d always done and she waited for it with rigid anticipation and a suppressed grin. Like her daddy, the ribs were most ticklish and with a quick move and exaggerated growl I went straight for them. She burst into hysterical laughter amidst breathless pleas to stop, which I ignored. A few moments later, she was indeed geared up, but she would soon fall asleep regardless, as she always had.

Kissing her goodnight on the forehead I told her to dream of going fishing on the weekend and try to guess the surprise I had for her. I had bought us new fishing poles for her birthday, which were still wrapped in the trunk of my car. I had bought her tons of birthday presents but had kept the fishing poles secret, to open just between us on the weekend. Hers was pinkish with a silver-blue reel.

Turning out her light and closing her door half way, I made my way back through the hall and living room of the small house. As I passed through my stepdaughter handed me a letter in an envelope and told me to read it only when I was ‘far away’. It was the first time she had said a word to me since the separation, since learning I had grown close to a woman in Finland during the months her mother had been pushing me and the marriage away. My stepdaughter blamed me for the separation having only her mother’s influence and version of ‘facts’.

By now I really didn’t care. What’s done is done, despite that mature and responsible communication between her mother and I would have resolved an outcome contrary to divorce. But neither of us had acted maturely and our respective words to each other during that rare heated debate had cut us both deeply. In the midst of it came the threat that I could no longer take my daughter to America on holiday as I’d planned, followed by counter-threats of Family Court action as if we were already divorced. Our incredible love story ended on that bitter night of 2 September 2009, ironically on the anniversary of the day I had first arrived in Australia to marry her in 1999. It would just take me several more

months to realize and accept it, in spite of what should have been obvious indications.

As I left into the cool night air I looked back only briefly at the house that had been our home and which still sheltered countless fond memories as well as my sleeping daughter, who was by now likely dreaming of fishing with her daddy on my Fourth of July weekend. Then suddenly, an inexplicable foreboding filled my heart as I drove down Fontley Road past the oval and toward Hepburn Ave. A tear rolled down my cheek unexpectedly. Tomorrow knew something I didn't, something I couldn't have but barely imagined.

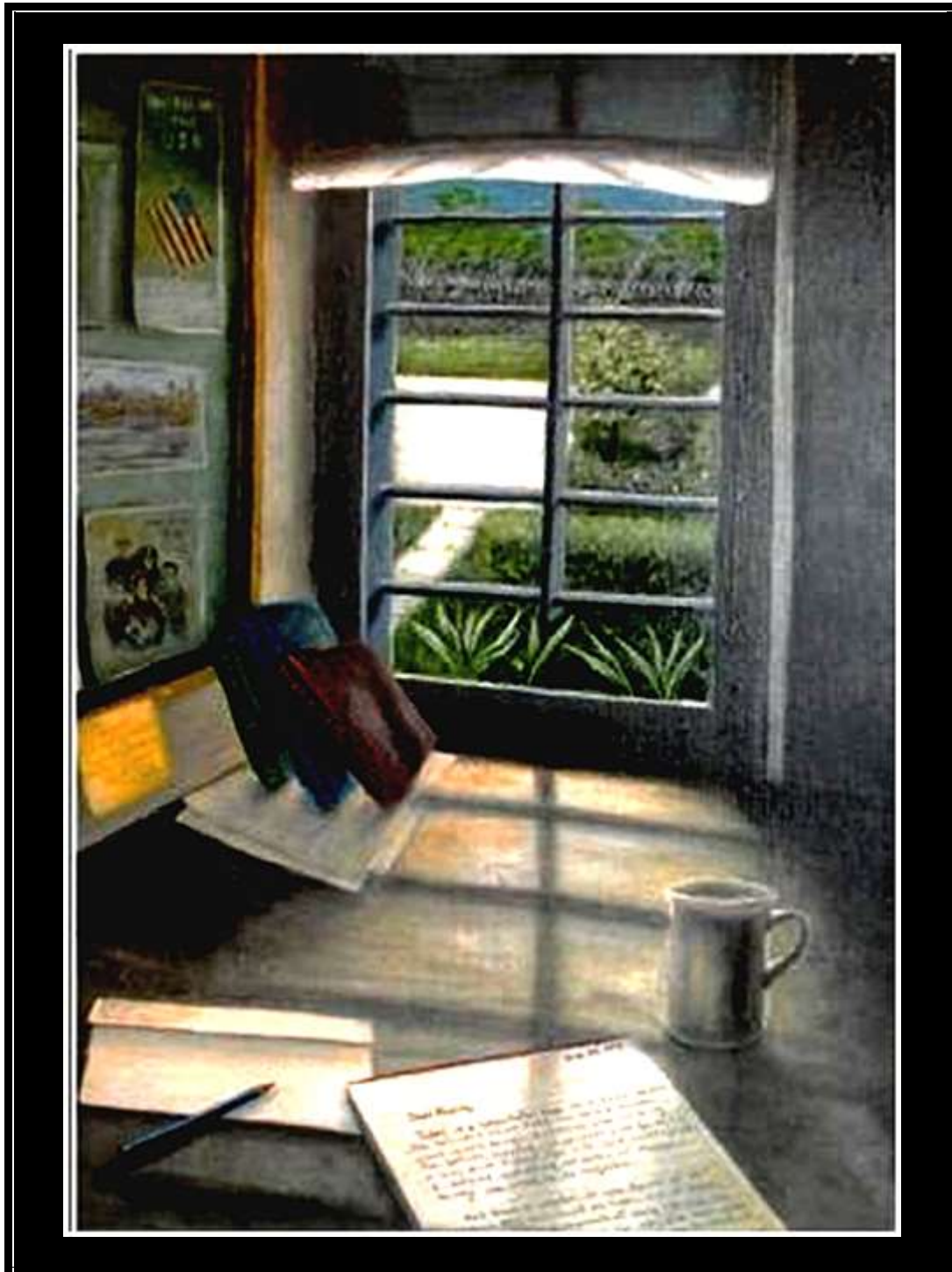
\* \* \* \*

My daughter never got to see the new fishing poles I'd bought us for her birthday. We never got the chance to go fishing. She never saw her daddy after that night we had gone to McDonald's. I never saw my little 'dream' daughter again. If I should survive the coming years, the next time I might see my daughter she would be as a grown young woman. I will have aged beyond my years, neither of us likely recognizing the other.

# Part One

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## Shattering Delusions



"Beautiful Day" - Painting by the author of his cell # 9, Unit 3, J-block , Acacia Prison, 2013.

## CHAPTER ONE

### *The Nuclear Option*

July 1, 2010

I wasn't sure how far I'd walked on the beach since parking my car near the Rendezvous Hotel in Scarborough for a cup of coffee and bite to eat before work but the gigantic orange cranes of the Fremantle shipping docks, some twenty miles south of town, seemed only a stone's throw away.

As I had reached into my glove box to grab my wallet I noticed the letter my stepdaughter had handed me the night before laying on the floor where it had fallen after tossing it onto the seat in the dark. Setting it on the dashboard I'd nicked into the shop to buy a sausage roll and coffee to go. Returning to the car I decided to read it while I ate. I believed it to be an explanation for why she refused to talk to me, likely telling me not to try to talk to her any more or something along those lines. I'd mentioned the issue to her on a few occasions when picking up my daughter, explaining that such attitude was senseless considering the fun and closeness we had shared as a family. But more importantly, I didn't think it was healthy for my daughter, nor for her older autistic brother, whom I still included in our outings as his mother would permit.

But the content of the letter was nothing of the sort. Shocking and disturbing beyond anything I could have imagined. Instead, it was filled with accusations of assaulting her sexually, of reincarnation and magical amulets created to guard her for my own desires, of ruining her first chance to have a boyfriend, of never working and ruining her mother financially among other ill accusations. There were things typed that only her mother and I had known about such as the reasons for selling the first Kingsley house in 2000 and the costs of operating our web marketing business, Ghost Radio Network and Underworld Show – things never discussed with the children or even other family members. The tone and wording of the letter was not that of the teenage stepdaughter I had known. Her mother had written the letter, I was certain, or co-wrote it in collusion. But for what sinister purpose?

There was only one purpose that such a device had been manufactured. It was meant as a threat – to return to America, forget about my little daughter, forget Family Court, forget Australia and never come back or else. Or else

accusations of sexual assault against my stepdaughter would be reported. How cliché, I thought bitterly. I now understood the cryptic statement from my stepdaughter the night before to go ‘far away’ before reading it. Indeed, I would have confronted them about it, no doubt.

The letter had sickened me and simultaneously angered me to no end. That it was within my wife’s capacity to do such a thing had been evidenced long before by what she, in collusion with her family, had done to her first husband after they had divorced in 1997. They had pulled strings through their connection with the WA police via her wealthy uncle, set him up and made his life a living hell. Through my eleven years in the family they had bragged openly of their dirty deed, defaming the poor guy and laughing at how easy it was to make accusations. It took three or four years before I realized he was not a bad guy, nothing like what they had made him out to be. They did it to him simply because they could and get away with it.

The question was not how they could do such terrible things. They had done it before. The question in my mind was how could they do this to *me*, to my little girl? Would they actually follow through, after all? Or was it, as I believed, a scare tactic? Either way I was not leaving my daughter and simply returning home to America as if she’d never been born, as if I had never had a life in Australia simply because we had divorced. Presuming the weekend of fishing with my daughter was out for now I was more determined than ever to start Family Court proceedings on Monday, the sentimental feelings I’d experienced the night before now gone for good.

The outline of the coastal town of Scarborough was vaguely visible through the winter haze in spite of a steady breeze, confirming that I had walked some several kilometers in fury since reading the letter around 7 AM. It was now after noon. I had called my supervisor at work to inform him that something had come up regarding my daughter that I needed to sort out. Though backlogged, but having had his share of ex-wife and custody problems, he understood. For some subconscious reason I had carried the filthy letter clenched in my fist. I threw it onto the sand as if toxic, the pages blowing away into the surf, and began the hike back to my car. It was a long hike. The waves of the Indian Ocean breaking on the beach thundered rhythmically while the mist of sea spray dampened my clothes and skin. My pace – fueled by anger and the thought of them taking my daughter through such a dirty tactic – caused me to make it back to my car before sundown. The coffee and sausage roll were where I had left them, uneaten and now cold. Swirling the cup to stir its contents I took a fair gulp anyway, convincing my taste buds that it was now merely ice coffee. I was hungry but had no appetite.

I had left my mobile phone in the console between the seats. It rang. Picking it up I noticed there were several missed calls, all from a number I didn’t recognize. There were no calls from my daughter as there would typically be. Answering it I was surprised to hear the voice of my wife’s brother whom I’d

seldom had contact with over the years. His lifestyle of drugs and alcohol and usually unemployed had left nothing in common between us on which to base any kind of a relationship.

“What do you want,” I answered curtly.

“The police wanna bit of a chin-wag with ya, mate,” he said in a tone as if we were best friends.

“Is that so,” I said coolly. “And what would *they* possibly want to talk to *me* about?”

“Apparently, you’ve been touchin’ up me niece. Not good, mate.”

My blood ran cold as a winter sea. So the letter was no threat after all. My wife had in fact reported me to the police. But what then had been the purpose of that ill-written letter? Why give it to me at all? It made no sense, but I presumed my ex-wife was listening in on the conversation.

“It’s a bit odd, don’t you think, that *you* of all people in the family should be the one to call me? Where’s your mom and stepdad? Maybe you could put them on the phone. I’d like to hear it from them.”

There was a pause and then muffled voices as if he’d covered the phone speaker against his clothes while speaking to someone with him. I had been especially close to my wife’s parents through the years. Her stepdad had secured my first job in Australia after being approved for a work visa. He had acted as my Best Man at our wedding and we’d always had a deep respect for each other. My mother-in-law and I had early on developed a close confidence between us as she gradually opened up about her own sexual abuse, and that of her two sisters, at the hands of their father, a decorated war hero. Their hatred of sex abuse had been made abundantly clear at every opportunity. From my perspective, if anyone should be calling me to ask about allegations of sexual abuse against one of their own, in light of their history and our close relationship, it should be them. My guess was that either they didn’t know the scheme in play or if they did know they had been silenced or simply wanted no part of it. I trusted my wife’s mother and stepdad, neither of whom could lie to me or anyone else as I had come to know them.

“They’re probably at home, mate,” the brother at last answered. “But you need to get to a cop shop and turn yourself in before doin’ anything else.”

*A bit eager, aren’t we*, I thought. I suspected that my wanting to talk to my former in-laws spooked them. “I’ll be going to the police, *matie*. You can count on it. And tell your sister that her little scheme to get me kicked out of the country and keep my daughter from me won’t work. Now piss off!” I turned off the power to my phone.

In the United States Family Law attorneys came to call false sexual allegations made in the midst of a custody battle as the *nuclear option* because of



its devastating affects to the accused, who often stood little chance of recovery after such an allegation had been dropped on them. The initial threats between my wife and I had been shots across each other's bow. The letter had been a shot *into* my bow designed to cause me to change my heading for America, or so I'd thought until minutes ago. But *that* shot had been precisely aimed to sink me and I was taking on water ahead of a proverbial storm. The war had begun between two people who once loved each other so deeply as to make news, to create our beautiful daughter. My wife had deployed the 'nuclear' arsenal. It was cheap and cowardly. How this would affect my daughter was my primary concern, but as the situation stood she was not going to come out of it unscathed of her heart, and that only aggravated my anger.

If I'd started my car in that moment I would have driven straight to Kingsley, through the living room and up their collective asses and had it out with them in person. I've never been violent, never even raising my voice to my children nor my wife during arguments, but I had rarely in fifty years of life been so enraged. I threw my car keys, which hit the passenger door and fell down between the door and the seat, then sat there fuming.

I needed to vent to someone. I didn't want to upset my parents with the situation. Getting on in age they didn't need it. I had just returned in April after a three month visit with them, being the first time I'd been home since hugging them goodbye at the airport to fly to Australia in September 1999. It had been good to see my family then, and the towering Rocky Mountains I'd so missed, but I hadn't returned home by choice, *per se*. In October 2009, not long after the heated argument in September and just before my daughter and I sang at the family reunion, my wife suddenly insisted I return home to America while we 'sort out' the marriage issues. Having too much on with work and running the radio station, marketing firm and writing three separate scripts for TV series consigned to LaVella Entertainment Group in Toronto, Canada, I only reluctantly agreed. She had insisted that I stay until July 2010, but I couldn't afford to be away that long. Having just been made redundant from her job at Stellar Corporation in Joondalup, neither could she afford it, I believed. So I returned in mid-April relatively unannounced to anyone but my daughter via Skype. The reception from my wife had been cool, but warm from the kids, including my stepdaughter. At home my wife insisted I sleep in another room of the house, which I did. Shortly afterward she officially asked me for a divorce, citing my relations with the woman in Finland, which misconstrued 'affair' had never been maturely discussed. Now I had grown to love the woman. Hearts were involved. My mother had sensed something amiss and worried about my return to Australia. She had seen in the situation what I had refused to permit myself to believe: the marriage was over. My wife had sent me back to America for that purpose, neither wanting nor expecting me to return, keeping my daughter to herself. Both my mother and father had their hands full looking after grandkids and great grandkids with a certain joy that kept them young at heart

and were always there to help in any crisis. But *this* news, this problem, they didn't need.

Retrieving my keys I started up the car to generate some heat to ward of an increasing shiver. Sliding my laptop from under my seat I booted it up, plugged in the power adapter in the lighter socket and connected the USB WiFi device. The signal revealed a strong four bars. The time difference between Helsinki and Perth was not many hours. I knew my woman friend, who resided in a rural area north of Helsinki, would still be awake with her computer on. I vented first in an email. Five minutes later came a brief reply followed by an invitation to chat on Messenger. We chatted back and forth for nearly an hour. She felt grave concern for me but her words were soothing and reassuring at the same time. Warm now, with the heater full blast and my window cracked open for fresh air, my anger had dissipated by a long measure from what it had been during the day. We chatted about my daughter and of our plans to go fishing on the weekend and about the strange occurrence at McDonald's just the night before. I told her about the letter and the feeling of foreboding as I had driven away after tucking my daughter into bed.

"I'm going to confront the police on this matter tomorrow." I text to her. "It'll be okay. On Monday I'm starting Family Court proceedings. After this little act I really don't feel confident with my daughter staying in Australia under this dark influence, but I'll see how she feels about that. She's in the middle of it all now, as much as I've tried to keep her out of it."

"John.... Be careful. If your X would do this to keep your daughter from you what else is she or her family capable of? Remember, you're alone in Australia now :-(" "

"Alone.... I hadn't thought of that, really. I'll be okay ;-/ "

"Be safe. I love you <3 Bye for now."

"Ditto <3 "

I had needed that chat in lieu of a hug and felt better for venting. Putting my laptop away under the seat I turned on the radio and tuned in 96FM. Driving out of the parking lot and into the Coast Highway traffic to look for a fast food joint, *Second Chance* came on the radio. Emotion swelled in me but this time I held no delusions of getting back together with my ex-wife and living happily ever after. That had been permanently killed in me this day. The 'enchanted' era of our love story seemed a distant memory, another lifetime, as if the world had suddenly changed channels during the night. Rather, I thought only of seeing my little girl again, singing with her, and spending the weekend fishing.

\* \* \* \*

## CHAPTER TWO

### *When Tomorrow Never Comes*

July 2, 2010

The following morning brought a few clouds and a sprinkle of rain but quickly cleared. I hadn't slept much through the night as an onslaught of emotions battled with memories and disbelief. I had called my supervisor at 6 AM, filled him in on what had occurred and told him I needed this day off as well to deal with police. Again he understood. Again the backlog of work orders increased, but with the fishing trip with my daughter off the calendar for now I assured him I would come in on Saturday to catch up before Monday's scheduled pick up. I needed to keep my mind busy, as well.

The words my woman friend in Finland had texted before signing off haunted me: *Remember, You're alone in Australia now.* From the day I'd first arrived in Australia my new family had welcomed me into their fold with open arms. Except for going to our respective jobs my wife and I had rarely been apart, working close on projects, incorporating me and eventually our new daughter into the lives and school schedule of her two existing children and dealing with the constant issues surrounding her son's autism. With assistance from her and her family I learned to blend with the Australian culture, drive on the wrong side of the road, deal with immigration and understand the Aussie slang. And I'd been there to help in times of family crisis, move homes, talk a family member out of suicide or just being a shoulder to cry on and an open ear. We'd always been there for each other and I never once felt alone though so far away from home. But today it felt as if they'd been beamed off the planet leaving me with a nightmare to contend with, and had taken my precious little daughter with them. Home and *my* family seemed 10,000 miles away. Indeed, they were, literally. I was truly alone now, save for a familiar voice from my family over the phone or text across the screen of my computer.

The realization of being now utterly alone caused a drop in my confidence level. In spite of my fair popularity and friends I'd made including scores on MySpace and Facebook through our *Ghost Radio Network* and numerous interviews, I was in enemy territory – my ex-wife's home country, home town and home people. It felt for me like waking from an amazing dream only to find myself in the middle of a foreign battle field with no ally in sight. Despite my status as a permanent resident in Australia, without my Aussie family – the reason I'd come to Australia at all – it no longer felt like home. I no longer belonged. But I had

come to know well the city, the beaches, the streets, culture and pulse. Feeling alone was one thing. Being helpless I was not.

“Screw this shit,” I grumbled, pulling my confidence out of my back pocket where I’d allowed it to slide. *Allegations of sex abuse, slander, defamation and lies amidst a divorce and custody battle? We Americans had sadly invented this game*, I reminded myself as I started my car and steered toward the heavy morning traffic to search for a police station. Having never had need of police, the only station I could recall seeing was near the Warwick Shopping Center. Heading away from the city against the rush hour traffic, it was still close to an hour before I arrived. I checked my wallet for my driver’s license and passport for identification then walked in and reported to the front desk. I informed a female officer why I was there, that apparently the police wanted to talk with me. I provided a brief background.

“There’s nothing in our system, Mr. Ramses, that indicates you’re a person of interest,” she said politely. “Let me check with other agencies.”

I perused the posters and notices on the wall while the officer made inquiries. Had the call from my wife’s idiot brother been just a sick joke? Had the letter been a part of the sick joke? Were they screwing with me thinking I’d spook and go home on the next plane? No, my wife knew me better as her American husband who never backed down, and now as her adversary. She would know I would never leave my daughter like that. Either way I was determined they wouldn’t get away with this and I began to regret having thrown the disturbing letter onto the beach. I should have kept it for Family Court.

Several minutes later the officer returned. “Apparently, Mr. Ramses, an officer with the Child Protection Services is interested in talking to you,” she said. “They’re in Perth. I’ll give you his name and number.”

So, it was no joke, I thought as the officer wrote down a name and number on the back of a precinct business card and handed it to me with a pleasant smile. I thanked her for her efforts and returned to my car. As much as I loved the city of Perth, which I had come to call the *Emerald City of Oz*, I loathed the thought of driving into it during morning rush hour traffic and finding a place to park. I was weary from the long hike on the windy beach the day before, the exhausting anger and turbulent sleepless night. And where was my daughter?

I started the car and sat there with the heater running. I felt compelled to contact my daughter on her phone, just to hear her voice again, but thought better of it. Had she been told anything? If so, what? My mind reeled and I felt the anger welling up again. By now she would be at school, I presumed. I didn’t want to tell her anything that would upset her. I didn’t want her to mention anything about her surprise or our fishing trip, which engagement I now could not keep. Instead, I sent her a text message: *Daddy loves you, baby girl. Have a nice day :-)*

Her mother had allowed her to take her phone to school providing it would not be a distraction. She was only permitted to call me at lunch time. Then the thought occurred to me that they might have taken her phone away to prevent me from contacting her at all. She hadn't called at all the day before. If she did not call at lunch time today, I could assume she no longer had the phone I'd bought her.

Sighing, I pressed in the number written on the back of the card provided to me by the Warwick officer. A male voice answered, identifying himself as Gary Thwaites.

"Gary Thwaites," I spoke. "This is John Victor Ramses. I've been told you wanted to talk to me?"

"Yes, John. Thank you for calling. We have some questions for you concerning allegations reported to us by your wife and stepdaughter...."

"I believe I'm aware of those allegations," I broke in. "She had written a rather disturbing letter to me last night and her uncle had since informed me that you were looking for me."

"We're not quite ready yet," he informed me. "We're just wrapping up a few details and going over a statement. Can I reach you at this number when we're ready to talk to you?"

"Yes. I'll keep my phone on me."

"Then, I'll be in touch later today."

Ending the call, I was relieved that I didn't have to drive into the city in the thick slow-and-go traffic, but I felt I needed to walk around. In spite of the clear, sunny sky the air was cold. I drove a short distance into the parking lot of the Warwick Shopping Center and went inside, browsing the shops to keep my mind occupied. Seemingly everything I looked at reminded me of my daughter, wanting to buy her this or that, knowing that I had the money. At the time of the separation her mother had insisted I pay no child support against my desire to do so. I had intended to also pay an amount for my stepson as well, whom I loved as my own, but she wouldn't accept any of it. Rather, she told me she had it 'all figured out' and didn't want any money from me save that I could pay for my daughter's school needs if I wanted. I thought it highly suspicious, presuming she intended to use my lack of child support payments to her advantage in Family Court, so I insisted there be a record of her decision, which was given to Centrelink in a recorded phone call on the 25th April, with both of us confirming the arrangement.

But now I was beginning to realize something more sinister. My wife had never intended for me to have any part in my daughter's life and welfare whatsoever. How long had she been planning this to have had it 'all figured out', I pondered as I roamed mindlessly from shop to shop. At least since the argument on 2 September the previous year, I suspected, before insisting I go back home to

America while we ‘sort out’ our marital issues. She had not expected me to return, I now knew. I had been as naïve as she had been sly and cunning, having colluded with her family once before to shaft an ex-husband. He’d never seen it coming. Still in love and blinded by it, never believing that she and I would ever actually divorce, I had never seen *this* coming, either. I’d failed to see the blatant indications. Neither had I given the least thought that an unprecedented, disturbing incident by stepdaughter just six days after the bitter 2 September argument might be related to my wife’s scheme. It was now beginning to make sense and the thought sickened me more than the contents of the letter.

Lost in a sea of thoughts I must have browsed all the shops a dozen times. Suspicion began to form in the eyes above the patient, rehearsed smiles of the shop clerks. As I left the shopping center I glanced at my watch. It was approaching 1:30 PM. I checked my phone. No messages from my daughter. They had taken the phone I’d bought her, I was certain. But what reason had they given her? Had they told her that her daddy’s never coming back? Was she actually at school? Or sobbing in her bedroom from heartache and confusion? My blood boiled at the image of her sobbing, in spite of the cool air. Having not heard from the officer I started my car, turned on the radio to clear my thoughts praying *Second Chance* didn’t play, then drove down the coast to Fremantle to pass the time.

The seaside town of Fremantle, which the locals affectionately call ‘Freo’, is steeped in history with numerous ancient limestone block buildings built by convicts in a bygone era, who had also built the prison that had housed them, now a museum with tours. It is the primary port through which most imports and exports in Western Australia pass, and the gigantic cranes of the shipping dock towered above lines of international freighters waiting to be unloaded and reloaded before plotting a course to other ports around the world. The culture of Fremantle is diverse, with markets, shops, restaurants, music and art centers and is a favorite destination for tourists visiting Western Australia. Fremantle was also the home town of the late Bon Scott where a monument in his honor had been erected near the wharf. My wife had brought me to ‘Freo’ in the first week after arriving in Australia, introducing me to *Cicerello’s* restaurant and real Aussie fish and chips and famous seafood chowder, which I could never get enough of. Her father had been taking her there since childhood and *Cicerello’s*, like the town of Fremantle, quickly became one of my favorite places, also. Fremantle is as Aussie as it gets in Western Australia and I was very sentimental to the bustling, quaint little sea port, which held an abundance of wonderful memories from better days.

I parked on the waterfront overlooking the Indian Ocean just south of town. The surf boomed, influenced by high tide and an approaching storm engulfing the horizon. I felt an affinity with it: tumultuous waves of emotion breaking on my heart and mind ahead of an imminent storm on my own near horizon. At some point during my discordant meditations I had fallen asleep in my seat. A familiar sound tugged at my subconscious gradually drawing my attention back to a waking

state. The lighting was dim, the sun low behind a heavy, dark gathering of clouds to the northwest. Glancing at my radio clock I noted it was nearly 6 PM. The warmth of the heater, gentle vibration of the idling engine and rhythm of waves breaking on the shore had apparently lulled me into a much needed sleep. Focusing, I realized my phone was ringing, its melodic tone having penetrated into my slumber.

“Mr. Ramses,” a male voice said in my ear after finally answering the call.

“Yes, this is Ramses.”

“Mr. Ramses, this is detective Gary Thwaites. I believe we’re now at a point where we can talk to you about the allegations. Are you able to come in to the office?”

“Yes,” I replied. “But I’m currently in Fremantle. It will take me an hour or so to drive to Perth. Will you still be on duty or would you prefer first thing in the morning?”

“No, we’re always on duty. We can come to Fremantle if that would be easier for you. This shouldn’t take long.”

I considered the officer’s offer but I still had to head back in that direction for work tomorrow anyway. “No, that won’t be necessary,” I said. “I’ll leave now. Where are you located?”

Thwaites gave me the address and basic instructions on how to find them in East Perth. Ending the call I drove back down the road through Fremantle, up High Street and north onto the Kwinanna Freeway. The illuminated city center of Perth’s CBD dominated the skyline before me.

Contrasting with the well-lit CBD, the street and building matching the address on the more run-down East Side I’d been given by the officer was dark and seemingly empty of life save for a dim glow through a few scattered office windows or the headlights of an occasional passing car. The sparsely positioned street lamps illuminated the street and walkway directly below them, but little more. There was no wanting for a parking place. The officer had told me this shouldn’t take long so I parked in front of the building in a short-term zone. Now after 7 PM, business hours long since concluded, I didn’t think it would be of any consequence.

Locking my car, I walked up to the glass doors of the archaic looking building. It appeared that only security lights were on. I had expected a police station to be active with officers and nightshift staff but the building appeared deserted. Had I miswritten the address, I wondered. Using my mobile phone, I called the officer to confirm the address. I was at the correct place, he assured, and would be down shortly to let me in. Minutes later two men in plain clothes emerged from an elevator, unlocked the door and invited me in. The taller of the two

introduced himself as Gary Thwaites and instructed me to follow them to their office on an upper floor of the building.

Exiting the elevator Thwaites offered me a drink of my choice. "I'll have a Coke, if you have one," I replied. While Thwaites directed me to a seat the shorter officer left the room, returning moments later with a cold can of Coke which I thanked him for then opened and took a sip before setting it on the desktop next to me.

"Mr. Ramses," Thwaites began, opening a folder filled with official-looking documents. "We've had a complaint made against you by your stepdaughter regarding some very serious allegations."

"Yes, I presumed as much," I said. "I believe I mentioned to you a very disturbing letter she had supposedly written and gave to me, accusing me of a number of heinous acts."

"Supposedly," Thwaites questioned, raising an eyebrow. "You're saying that you don't think she wrote it?"

"Not entirely, no. I think her mother wrote it in collusion."

"Why would you say that?"

"There were certain things written that only her mother and I knew about and...."

"Maybe your stepdaughter was more tuned in with the situation in the home than you give her credit for."

"Not unless she is psychic or her mother had imparted our adult matters to her; stuff like finances that were none of her business much less to be accusing me of."

"So you think there's a conspiracy between your wife and teenage stepdaughter to write that letter?"

"Yes, to make false allegations."

"For what purpose would they do that?"

"To keep me from my daughter or from taking her to America. It's been my wife's fear since we...."

"Maybe the only fear they have is that you will touch your daughter sexually, too, you think?"

The question crossed a line and I became furious but maintained a controlled disposition. "No," I asserted. "My wife obviously wants to prevent me from starting Family Court action next week. We've argued about my access rights since we separated on 27 April a few months ago. She feared that if I took my daughter to America I wouldn't let her return to Australia, but instead start a new life with a woman I'd met in Finland, the very reason we divorced."



It had suddenly hit me what my wife meant when she told me *We'll see about that!* when I had assured her I would win in Family Court. She knew all along she intended to make allegations, to use the so-called 'nuclear option'. I felt stupid and bitter at the same time, just as her first husband must have felt. Had I not returned from America in April relatively unannounced, I now had no remaining doubt that she would have threatened me with making allegations to scare me off from returning. July 1 was also the date on which the lease was up on our rental unit. It was clear to me now why she had insisted I stay in America until July: She had intended to move to a new location and keeping her whereabouts – and my daughter – a secret. Has she moved? Did she make the allegations in order to detain me while she relocated? Certainly she had to know I would have won certain rights in Family Court, rights she was not willing to allow.

"We've spent time talking to your ex-wife and stepdaughter," Thwaites continued. "They were pretty convincing and we're trained to detect if someone is lying to us."

"Apparently not," I said. Thwaites' eyes narrowed. "They did this to take my daughter. I want my daughter back!"

"Right now, Mr. Ramses, we're charging you with indecent dealings with a minor and sexual penetration of a de facto lineal child under the age of 16. You're currently under arrest."

"You've gotta be fucking joking," I snapped, leaning forward in my seat.

"No joke. These are very serious charges against you," Thwaites said, laying a charge sheet before me.

I saw only the word *penetration*. "Sick, twisted bastards," I fumed, shoving the document back at the officer. "It's horseshit. They fucking lied. We're in the middle of a divorce and custody battle and that doesn't seem suspicious to you?"

"Before we go any further, Mr. Ramses, my partner will turn on the video camera and you can make a statement."

All my years being raised and living in the United States of America the one thing impressed upon us from birth is never say a word to police without a lawyer when you find yourself in trouble with the law. The word 'lawyer' is third in our vocabulary to be learned immediately following 'ma-ma' and 'da-da'. "I refuse to make a statement without a lawyer."

"This will go much easier on you if you show some cooperation."

"I have a right to speak to a lawyer," I insisted.

"You watch too much American TV," Thwaites laughed. "You don't have any rights in Australia. Certainly no right to a lawyer."

It then occurred to me that Thwaites had not read me my rights when he placed me under arrest. "So that's why you never read me my rights?"

“Like I said, you watch too much American TV.”

How could Australia, a democracy, friend and ally of the United States, not recognize any rights for people, I wondered. “What about International treaties,” I questioned. “The right to a lawyer and fair treatment is covered in those somewhere.” Or was it? I couldn’t recall.

“Treaties mean nothing unless our Parliament says it does and the right to a lawyer has not been made a right by legislation. I’m not going to argue law and rights with you, Mr. Ramses. Are you going to provide a statement or be deemed uncooperative?”

“I want to speak with a lawyer,” I demanded calmly. “As a U.S. citizen in your country charged with a serious crime I’m not saying a word on record without talking first to a lawyer. I don’t know anything about your laws in these matters.”

Thwaites stood for a moment then turned and conversed with his partner just out of earshot. Then, with an impatient sigh he said, “Alright, Mr. Ramses. My partner is getting a phone book, but good luck getting a lawyer at this time of night on a Friday.”

His partner set a worn copy of the Perth directory down on the table in front of me. Thumbing through to ‘Lawyer’ I saw that all the pages of that category had been ripped out except for one. “There’s only one page for lawyers,” I said.

“There’s only one lawyer in Perth who takes after hour calls to my knowledge,” Thwaites smirked.

“Who might that be?”

“I can’t provide you a name as it could appear to be showing favoritism.”

Scanning down the small list of remaining ads I saw one that stated ‘After Hours Calls Accepted’. “And removing all the listings but this one lawyer isn’t showing favoritism,” I said aloud, rhetorically. “This one. Andrew Maughn and Associates,” I said turning the book to face Thwaites and jabbing my index finger at the ad.

Thwaites removed a mobile phone from his pocket and dialed the number, which something told me he had memorized anyway. Then he spoke to the person on the other end. “Mr. Maughn. Good evening, sir. This is detective Gary Thwaites. I have a man in custody – an American gentleman – who says he requires to speak to a lawyer. Can I pass him on to you?”

Thwaites handed me the phone. “Hello, this John Ramses. Andrew Maughn, is it?”

“Yes, John,” replied a middle-aged sounding voice. “I understand you’re in custody and require a lawyer?”

“Yes sir. I’ve been arrested and they want me to make a statement, but I don’t feel comfortable with that. Are you in a position to represent me?”

“Yes, I am”, said Maughn. “Firstly, say nothing. Do not make any statement at this time. It could prove to be more difficult to defend you if you do.”

“No, I’ve already told them I’ll make no such statement,” I said, feeling slightly more assured by Maughn’s advice.

“Good call. Now, I can’t do anything for you tonight. Unfortunately, you’re going to have to spend the night in lockup. In the morning I’ll have my assistant tend to your instructions. I presume you’ll want to apply for bail?”

*Bail? Jesus Christ! I have to get bail?* The severity of the situation was sinking in. “Yes, of course I do.”

Very well then, John. Try not to stress and we’ll take this one step at a time in the morning. We’ll review your charges and your situation and make an application for bail.”

“Okay, thank you,” is all I could find to say. Maughn ended the call and I passed the phone back to Thwaites.

“Mr. Ramses”, said Thwaites, putting his phone back in his pocket. “We’ll need to hold your passport for the time being. Do you have it on you?” I removed my passport and handed to him. “Any other personal items you have on your person, wallet, watch, etcetera, will be recorded and kept at the Perth Watch House.”

Anxieties flooded over me. “What about my car,” I asked. “It’s parked in front of your building in a short term zone. I can’t leave it there with my property in it. It will be towed.”

Thwaites thought for a moment then looked at his partner. Sighing he asked, “Is there anyone who can collect it for you?”

“No, I’m alone in Australia.” That was the first time I’d admitted it out loud and hearing from my own voice, it sounded forlorn, invoking feelings of helplessness.

Thwaites conversed again with his partner then asked, “Is there somewhere we can drive it and leave it?”

It was my turn to think. My head was cloudy. Anxieties flushed my body with sensations of heat and I felt perspiration forming on my forehead. “The closest place would be my employer in Malaga. I can park it there and leave a note on it for my boss.”

“Alright, my partner will drive your car to your employer’s place. You’ll ride with me and we’ll lead him there. Afterward, Mr. Ramses, we’ll be taking you to the Watch House to process you in. I take it your lawyer will meet with you in the morning?”

“That’s what he said, or his assistant, anyway.”

“Abigail Rogers,” he said. “That’s Maughn’s assistant. Tall, slender and blonde. Can’t miss her.” *A bit familiar aren’t we, I mused.* “Can I trust you if I leave the handcuffs off?”

“I’m not going to run, if that’s what you mean.”

“We’ll go down to our car first then drive around to yours. Do you have the keys?”

I produced the keys from my pocket and handed them to Thwaites who passed them to his partner.

“If you’ll follow me, then, Mr. Ramses.”

Thwaites led the way to the elevator and to the staff parking level, his partner following behind me. Unlocking and opening the rear door of an unmarked sedan he motioned for me to get in, which I did. Climbing into the driver’s seat, his partner in the front passenger seat, Thwaites started the engine and drove slowly through an open gate and onto the street, coming to a stop behind my car. His partner got out, opened the door of my car and started it up. It aggravated me seeing a stranger take charge of my vehicle, especially under the circumstances. With his partner following behind in my car, we drove together down the dimly lit street.

“My partner will follow us, Mr. Ramses,” Thwaites said. “You just tell me where to go.”

*Wouldn’t I love to.* “Take the Mitchell Freeway to Reid Highway, then south,” I directed.

It would be about a twenty-minute drive. We drove most of the way in silence. Then Thwaites spoke. “Now, Mr. Ramses, if you get bail tomorrow don’t slip out of Australia back to America. I don’t want to have to come and get you there.”

*I dare you.* “Running is as good as admitting guilt. Besides, I promised my daughter I’d never leave her and that promise is more binding than any threat to find and extradite me from the United States.”

The atmosphere turned cool. The previous niceties, practiced smile and offer of a drink were no longer in play.

“You have a girlfriend in Finland, you said?”

“What about her?”

“How old is she?”

“34. Why?”

“You’re fifty. Your wife is eleven years younger than you, she told me. So you like young girls?”

*Fuck you.* “Did she also tell that my previous wife was eleven years older than me?”

“No. But she did say that you and your stepdaughter were quite close.”

“We were all close. Is it now a crime in Australia to be close to you family and children?”

“Only if you’re having sex with them.” The cop was trying to stir me and I knew it. “They have some pretty convincing evidence against you.”

“Is that so? Nothing in the least ever happened and they know it.”

“Well, they say it did.”

“So a guy divorces an Australian woman who then conveniently accuses him of sexual abuse in the middle of a custody battle and he’s immediately arrested off the street and treated guilty with no investigation of facts? How easy for them....and you.”

I realized now why Thwaites had assured me over the phone that ‘*this won’t take long*’. He had had no intention of questioning me about the accusations or investigating facts. He planned to charge and arrest me on the spot without further ado, whether in Fremantle or his office. The lure had worked as designed, coaxing a wanted person into their trap by creating a false sense of trust and a friendly, non-threatening casual atmosphere.

“The accusation is all we need,” Thwaites asserted. “That *is* the evidence.”

“So, if I accuse my wife and stepdaughter of making false statements to police shouldn’t you also charge and arrest them? That, too, is a serious crime, I presume, even in this backwater state.”

“Only accusations of sex offences are considered to be evidence in itself,” Thwaites said, studying my reaction through the rearview mirror. “We don’t need much else. The situation is: They’ve said *this* about you. You’ll say *that* in response. We’ll say something else again. It’s a case of he said-she said, and cases of accusations of sexual assault against a woman or child are seldom won in WA, with or without a lawyer. The jury usually plays the better-safe-than-sorry card.”

“Jury,” I queried. “You mean I have to stand trial now? All because of an accusation, someone’s say-so?”

“As long as you maintain your innocence you’ll have to prove it in trial. That could be a year or more away. That’s a long time to sit in jail waiting. Just plead guilty and be out of jail and back to your own country in a couple years. If you lose in trial, wasting our time and money, you’re looking at several years. Your lawyer will explain that to you.”

“So investigating the facts, procedural fairness, right of due process? That’s not practiced here?”

“We don’t *have* to investigate in these cases. We take the report, make the arrest then turn the complaint over to the prosecution. You’ll have to prove your case in trial. That’s just the way it is. If you wanted rights you should have stayed in America, Mr. Ramses.”

*Go to hell.* “Your opinion of my country’s Constitution and Bill of Rights are duly noted.”

I thought I heard him snicker. My anger and anxieties were increasing. I believed Thwaites wanted just that and I wondered which of us actually watched too much TV. It seemed to be a practiced tactic of a man who loved his *job* too much. He held all the power and he knew it. I held none whatsoever.

I directed Thwaites to my employer, the only other words I spoke during the ride. The company yard was dark but I knew my way around it well. “Tell your partner to park my car there,” I said, pointing at an empty stall next to the security fence. Thwaites directed his partner to park my car then opened my door and allowed me out of the sedan. “I’ll just leave a note on it for my boss. Do you have a pen and paper?”

Thwaites’ partner produced a pen and a small note pad, the size commonly carried by detective sidekicks. I scribbled a quick note and slid it under the wiper blade, locked my car and took my keys with me. Then together we drove back to East Perth. Twice during the drive back Thwaites attempted to antagonize me with insinuations and insulting questions, his partner occasionally grinning at his mentor, but I had nothing further to say to him and rode the rest of way in silent anger.

I had lost respect for the police due to the attitude and comments of this cop, and being charged and arrested without any investigation whatsoever. It was shocking to me. But this was not America, but what had now become for me a very foreign country with very different laws and policies and mindset. I had harbored a certain expectancy of due process, whether impressed by TV or not. This wasn’t civilized, but more what I would expect from some Third World government under a dictatorship, and not from Australia whose politicians routinely tout in the media how they share the same values as Americans as well as respect for International law. *You don’t have any rights in Australia*, Thwaites’ words echoed in my mind. How could that be? The proof is that I was now being taken to jail on someone’s word alone and as the realization of being in a foreign country began to cement in my mind, fear began to rise.

At the Perth Watch House, I was handcuffed after exiting the sedan and escorted into the building, which was alive with officers, staff and apparent offenders in custody. The processing room smelled of alcohol and vomit and was congested. It was Friday night, not too late, and already the drunks were being rounded up off the streets of Perth and brought in. From my perspective the scene was like something from a B-grade detective film, one which I was now cast to play a role.

Thwaites took me aside and removed the handcuffs. "I'm required to ask you whether you want to be put in the protection sector."

"What's that?"

"You'll be put in a special section of the jail under protection status for your own safety. I'd advise it. Most sex offenders go there for their own good."

*I'm not a fucking sex offender, jack ass!* "Yeah, I supposed I do, then," I answered verbally.

I was directed to a window with an officer behind the counter where I was instructed to provide my details and surrender all personal items, including jewelry, which was logged and put in a container. I was then sent to a bay to be strip searched.

"Alright," said an officer to me as I stood naked in the cubical. "Open your mouth and lift your tongue. Good. Raise your arms. Show behind your ears. Now lift up your ball sack. Okay, turn around. Show me under your right foot. Now your left. Squat for me. Right, you're done. Next..."

What do these people tell their children they do for a living, I curiously wondered? I should have felt embarrassed by the ordeal. Rather, I felt embarrassed for them, and certain sympathy for having to look at all sorts of naked men, their scrotums and anuses day in and day out. Surely it had to have some adverse effects on their psyche that carried over into their personal lives.

Two officers then escorted me through the building to my cell and left me. It was now late evening. A few minutes later an officer returned and asked me if I wanted to make a coffee or some toast before locking me in. Telling him 'no thanks' he proceeded to close the heavy steel door to my cell, which was followed by a solid 'clacking' sound that I took to be the turning of a fortified lock. In relative darkness, save for a soft glow emanating through a narrow rectangular observation window mounted in the door, I sat down on the edge of a small bed. I was numb. A thick silence gathered in my ears. *This is not happening*, I told myself. *This is not fucking happening!*

I laid down on the bed staring up into the near-black shadows of the ceiling, which slowly transformed into a canvas displaying a myriad of scenes from my years in Australia. I saw my wife - my god, how I'd loved her, and our marriage on the beach at Mullaloo on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November at 11:11 PM to commemorate the strange phenomena that had united our love and lives. Then came my daughter's birth in my presence the following year, born at 10:10 AM, fulfilling my vision-dreams of her to the letter. Then passed before me Christmases, birthdays and anniversaries year by year; our hopes, dreams and goals, laughter, promises and tears. Faces of family and friends I'd come to know. Places, objects and moments held dear. School assemblies and holidays and photos too many to count. My daughter learning to crawl, learning to walk, to dance, sing, run and

ride a bike. My eleven years in Australia passed before my eyes. A lifetime, it seemed, now in the throes of dying at the end of its days much too soon.

I desperately wanted to hate her, the woman I'd loved so much, my wife, the mother of my child. I had every right to hate her for this, but I couldn't after all. How could I hate a mother of my child, I questioned myself. To do so is to hate one-half of everything my child is and I love my children completely, fully, without condition or exception. I could only hate what her mother had done; reckless, selfish and cruel beyond words. And that hatred was ever deepening.

Where is my daughter? I hear her sweet signature voice in the recesses of my mind: *Daddy, I love you so very, very, very much!* And I love you the same, precious little girl. *Everything will be OK because I love you and you love me.* Everything will be OK. Daddy's here, baby girl. I'm right here, not too far away. Not far at all. We'll go fishing, I promise you. I promise....

My meditations were disturbed by another 'clacking' at my door. This was followed by a rise of low voices and smell of toast emanating, I was sure, from the small common area of the cell block. Morning had come from out of my darkness and though I was certain I hadn't slept, I only now became aware of the time...and wetness on my face and pillow. I'd been crying.

\* \* \* \*

July 3, 2010

I heard an officer call out, "Does anyone have appointments to see the judge or their lawyer?"

"I do," I heard a voice reply.

I left my cell in haste and walked quickly to the common area. "I do, too," I said.

"Okay, just the two of you? Follow me then."

The guard led me and a young aborigine man to a window where another officer sat with a pen in his hand and a list of names on a document. I was motioned first to the window.



“Your name,” he queried in a British accent without looking up.

“Ramses. John Victor Ramses.”

“Spell your surname...”

“R-A-M-S-E-S,” I answered. “Like the pharaoh.”

“And your lawyer is.....Abigail Rogers?”

I was relieved that Maughn had followed through after our brief conversation the night before. “Yes, that’s right.”

“Alright, wait over there,” he indicated with a sharp nod in the direction of the opposite wall. “You’ll be taken to the judge’s chambers when your name is called up.”

Ten minutes passed, and then two officers led me down an archaic flight of stairs and into a cubical with clear Plexiglas. There was only enough room to stand. Beyond the Plexiglas the small court room appeared dingy and ancient, like a leftover relic from a bygone time. A young woman matching the description that Thwaites had provided came up to the bar table and identified herself for the court.

“Abigail Rogers, your Honor, for Mr. Ramses.”

“John Victor Ramses, is that your name,” the judge asked looking toward me.

“Yes.”

“You may precede, Ms. Rogers,” the judge said in an apathetic tone.

The charges against me were identified for the judge but not read aloud. Then Rogers began putting up an argument in favor of my bail.

“I see here that Mr. Ramses is a citizen of the United States,” the judge noted. “What assurances have been implemented to prevent him from being a flight risk?”

“Mr. Ramses has surrendered his passport to the police, Your Honor. He is, as far as I can see here, a permanent resident of Australia. He also has a biological daughter from a former marriage living here in WA. Mr. Ramses has lived in Australia since 1999. Based on those factors, especially that he has surrendered his passport, I feel the risk of flight is a non-issue. I might also add, Your Honor, that Mr. Ramses has no previous records in Australia nor, apparently, in the USA.”

“Thank you, Ms. Rogers. Then based on that information I will grant bail on a five-thousand-dollar surety”.

“If you please, Your Honor, I will speak to my client on this matter.”

Andrew Maughn’s assistant walked toward the cubical where I stood on display behind the Plexiglas. Taller than an average woman, I guessed her to be around five foot eleven inches. Her straight white-blonde hair cascaded down to

about her mid-back and reflected the dull overhead lighting with a soft sheen. Abigail Rogers impressed as stately, professional and well maintained and of having had a life of pampering by wealthy parents who had provided the best of everything, including education.

“Do you have five-thousand dollars or someone to provide surety for you, Mr. Ramses,” she asked in a precise feminine voice through a circular pattern of holes drilled through the Plexiglas.

*Jesus Christ! I don't have that kind of money!* “No, ma'am, I don't,” I replied. Then I quickly added, “But I might be able to get it.” I had no idea how I would get five thousand dollars but felt my only option was to ask my employer for an advance.

“In that case,” she continued, “you'll have to remain in custody until you come up with the bond. That's the best I can do right now. I'll give you my card.” She slipped a business card through a small slot. “Call me as soon as you have the bond.”

“I will,” I said. But how could I get the money being locked up in jail, I worried. What happens now? I have no family here, or support of any kind, for that matter.

Darkness settled over my soul commensurate with the dingy atmosphere of the makeshift court room. In that darkness was the unknown and I was suddenly gripped by icy fear. In just twenty-four hours I had ceased to exist from the world, from my daughter, and from my life as surely as if I had died. Not one moment to the next could I anticipate. This was a completely alien world to me now. The Australia had come to love and had known well was nowhere to be seen, and as my Finnish woman friend had pointed out, I was utterly alone.

Escorted back up the stairs by the officers I was dazed, crushed and frightened. I was returned to my block where I went back to my cell and laid on the bed thinking of what to do about bond money. An hour had not passed when I was informed by an officer that I would be transferred to another prison – a maximum security prison called Hakea somewhere south of Perth.

*Maximum prison*, my mind echoed. I've done nothing wrong during all my years in Australia. Now I'm being committed to a maximum security prison? Where in the hell is procedural fairness? Weren't the police *supposed* to investigate both sides of a story before arresting someone and throwing them in jail? How could I now be heading for a maximum prison on the mere accusation of a disgruntled ex-wife and stepdaughter as if I'd already been found guilty on irrefutable evidence? What about my life outside, or my car? My job? My personal belongings? What of the TV scripts I'd worked so long and hard to promote through LaVella Entertainment? What of my family in America? What of my little daughter in Australia? And where was she? What sinister things had she been told about her daddy? Was she as shattered as her father, sobbing her heart out?

The onslaught of thoughts and questions collided in my brain and my heart palpitated with anxiety as I was loaded into a small, claustrophobic compartment of a fortified prisoner transport van with a small port window, heavily tinted. I heard what I thought were other prisoners also being loaded into separate compartments, the heavy doors shut and latched behind them. Moments later we were in motion as the van maneuvered out of the underground dock, along a short, narrow tunnel and into the morning light of day.

Through the small tinted window, I saw passing cars and walkways occupied by ordinary people carrying on with their lives, oblivious to the van. Two days ago I had been just one among them. I saw the shops and buildings of Perth that eons ago I had visited or admired while holding the hand of my wife, eager to show off her city. As the transport van steered around onto the freeway Kings Park, high on a hill above the Swan River and Old Swan Brewery came into view. A myriad of memories crowded my heart, visions of happier times spent there. The first time my wife had taken me to Kings Park, so proud to share her Australia with me, I was stunned by its beauty; gardens of flowers and rows of towering gum trees each dedicated with a plaque to a fallen soldier of war. From the War monument on the southern edge of the hill overlooking the Swan River and the city of Perth below, I was in awe. The city skyline, with its crisp, clean cluster of modern buildings rising like crystals from the shoreline, had been inspirational and I had thereafter referred to Perth as the *Emerald City of Oz*. My parents had twice visited Australia and equally loved the magnificent park on the hill, as had my son on another occasion.

Through the window of the prisoner transport van it seemed as if I were watching a video, discolored and spotted with age, of another life I had lived long, long ago. Surely this must be a dream, a nightmare, I prayed. Not real at all. I suddenly found myself repeating under my breath *There's no place like home. There's no place like home.* But 'home' was somewhere back over the rainbow far, far away.

As the van arched toward the south the receding city of Perth filled the full view through the small tinted window. It no longer inspired to be the *Emerald City*, but rather the *Witch's Castle* in disguise. Had it always been, I wondered solemnly. Had I been deceived by its beauty as I had been deceived by my love and trust of my daughter's mother? Was that misplaced trust now the reason I was heading for a maximum security prison without due process? Certainly, I tried to assure myself, fairer minds will prevail. I simply need to be heard and this nightmare will be over.

\* \* \* \*



## CHAPTER THREE

### *The Bad Place*

All my life I'd been taught that prison is a very bad place for very bad people, the last stop before hell. My maternal grandmother had retired as Chief Deputy Clerk of the local court in Murray, Utah – the town where I had been born. As her grandchildren growing up the 1960's and 70's she would take advantage of every opportunity to impress upon us the virtues of abiding by the law and what happens to those who don't. Our Sunday drives often took us over the 'Point of the Mountain' between Salt Lake City and Provo and past the dreadful Utah State Penitentiary, a dark gray concrete structure whose design, to my young mind, had surely been inspired from a Mary Shelley novel. With fortified watch towers above high stone walls and rows of rusty barbed wire it had appeared cold, gloomy and archaic even on the brightest summer day. "You never want to go to that place, Johnny," preached grandma on every trip. "Terrible is *that* place!"

Grandma's speeches had the effect on us kids as might an old fashioned Catholic exorcism – the kind that only Hollywood can produce – designed to scare the potential devil out of us. And it had worked. Apart from an occasional traffic violation none of her grandchildren ever broke the law and thus stayed far away from the *Bad Place and the Point of the Mountain!*

But grandma had passed away in '83 and this was neither Utah nor America. In spite of having lived in Australia for eleven years, it was now to me a foreign and lonely world far from familiar faces and family and the support family offered. The attitude of the detective toward rights and due process, as well as the arrest and immediate incarceration on someone's word alone, only amplified my feelings of shock, fear, alienation and loneliness. Without any investigation whatsoever I had been presumed and treated as if guilty by fact. Now, as the transport vehicle was motioned through a number of gates and heavy rolling security doors and into the reception bay of Hakea Maximum Remand Prison, *America* - like my little daughter- could not have seemed farther way.

Prisoner Transport Vehicles, called PTV's (or meat wagons), are compartmentalized into sections commonly seating two prisoners per compartment. They are deliberately confining, and not a pleasant experience for the claustrophobic, a malady I was fortunate not to suffer from. Still, I felt that prolonged confinement would ultimately break me. The leg room was less than what might be found in the economy section of a typical domestic commercial airline, but enclosed by solid metal walls, floor and ceiling, save for a small window mounted in the door. Fate had provided me a window seat, which I

viewed as both a blessing and a curse. While the window, however darkly tinted, provided a connection to the outside world, the memories associated with the passing scenery and landmarks had tortured my heart. And yet, I had not been able to look away, as if seeing it all for the last time.

The PTV had come to a stop inside the bay but remained idling, no doubt awaiting further instructions as per protocol when transporting prisoners. There were, in fact, other prisoners in the PTV, confined to their respective compartments. Occasionally, I had heard them talking or laughing or yelling slurs at prisoners in other sections or shouting foul comments at a female pedestrian who luckily couldn't hear them through the reinforced walls. Some prisoners seemed to know each other, perhaps having committed a crime together or had served jail together in the past. At least two of them were enemies and could be heard making threats back and forth during the ride. From the tone of their voices and nature of their language I estimated them to be in their late teens or early twenties. I'd seen enough Hollywood films about prisons to know I wasn't in the least way mentally prepared to be dumped into a prison block with such characters, but neither could I appear to be weak. Whatever was in store for me I'd deal with it as it came. In the mean time I'd shut up and observe. That was my nature when confronted with an unfamiliar situation.

During the 45 minute or so ride from the Perth Watch House my mind had played out several what-if scenarios. None of them really ended well, based on the movies I'd seen, but I was my daughter's father whom she had grown to know as her 'strong American daddy', as she would proudly proclaim. Now that title was being tested as I never could have imagined. I thought of her endlessly – where she was, what she'd been told and how she would feel if she knew what her daddy was going through merely because I had wanted to take her on holiday to America. I fought back tears welling up in my eyes as her precious smiling face at McDonald's two nights ago flashed through my mind. Now was not the time to cry, and where I was about to be locked up with hardened criminals, that time may yet be far ahead into a future I could neither imagine nor even guess at. Every moment was new and unpredictable.

Outside my window I saw activity. Male and female prison officers moved back and forth past my narrow field of view. Their beige-colored uniforms, with patches depicting an inverted pentagram with the Crown of England above it, intimidated me. I was now on the wrong side of the law in a foreign country. They were the enemy. Again, I'd seen all the movies, and I began to feel the already tight, narrow metal walls closing in around me. My body was beginning to cramp, also, from sitting in one position with no room to stretch. The seats were made of some kind of slick, hard, polished plastic and my tailbone had felt every bump in the road while each corner turned or intersection braked at had caused me to slide in my seat. If not for the seatbelt, which an officer had instructed me to fasten around my waist before leaving the Watch House, I would have slid off onto the floor on several occasions.

During one particularly hot summer in 2007 an aborigine man named Fred Ward had died in such a compartment after being literally cooked to death. There had been no airflow into his compartment and no one had thought to give him a bottle of water. Unaware to the driver and his partner riding in the air conditioned cab, the relentless northern Australian summer sun had transformed the small cubical into an oven with temperatures reaching over 90° Celsius. When they had at last arrived at their destination and opened the door, Fred Ward was lying dead on the floor with 3<sup>rd</sup> degree burns on his body where his skin had come in contact with the scalding metal flooring. I recalled the news reports of the incident, as well as the outcry from the indigenous communities. As a result, all PTV's had been refitted or since manufactured with air conditioning that provided a constant flow of cool air into each compartment whenever the vehicle was operating.

But July in Western Australia was mid-winter, having mild temperatures similar to winter time in San Diego or Phoenix of the Southwest USA. Still, the cold air blowing onto my face from the overhead vent only exacerbated the shiver of fear and anxiety I'd been experiencing since being arrested the night before. I wasn't looking forward to what awaited me when they finally opened the door and ushered me out with other prisoners, but neither was I hoping to spend one more minute in the cold coffin-like box, either.

Apart from other prisoners locked in their respective sections, I had not had my compartment to myself. Sitting quietly beside me, his shoulder nearly pressed into mine due to the narrow space, sat a man I had judged from occasional discreet glances to be roughly around my age. His messy graying hair suggested that, like me, he'd probably spent a sleepless night in worry at the Watch House. His head hung down, staring at nervous hands that twisted and tangled finger into finger. He was obviously stressed, and to my knowledge he had not looked up once during the ride. Neither had we spoken a word to each other, but my anxieties needed a distraction, or I felt certain I would pass out.

"What's your name, mate," I asked.

As if startled from deep thought his eyes darted briefly to mine before relaxing back to his hands. "Tom," he answered. "You?"

"I'm John Victor Ramses," I said, as if he should know my name. "What happens from here?"

"Don't know. I've never been arrested before."

"You and me both, then." The few words Tom had spoke were enough for me to know he wasn't an Aussie. "Where you from?"

"New Zealand," he answered. "I came here for work about four years ago. Are you Canadian?"

If I'd had a dollar over the past decade for every time someone in Australia asked me if I was Canadian, I could have bought the whole continent and had change left over to throw a *'shrimp' on the barbie*. It had mildly annoyed me, while at the same time impressing on me that the world is a much bigger place than just the *US of A*. It had taken me some years living outside the States to truly grasp that. "No, I'm an American," I said. "I came here back in '99 to marry a gal I'd met on the Internet."

"True?" He looked up.

"Yep, back when the Internet and online dating was still in its infancy. Those were the days." The reason I had come to Australia had not been so trivial by a long shot. In fact, it would be almost unbelievable to anyone who didn't know me personally back in that time. I felt compelled to tell Tom all about it, but I refrained.

"I never got into the Internet much, myself," Tom said. "How'd *that* go?"

"Good, until just recently."

Tom was about to say something when there came a clacking at our door as latches were turned and locks opened. A rush of slightly warmer air and bright light flooded the compartment as the door was swung open by a stalker officer wearing thick prescription glasses. Outside the PTV stood three more officers in formation, likely according to their training. The brief conversation I'd had with Tom had done nothing to calm my anxiety. "That's us", I said, my voice slightly cracking from a fear of the unknown.

"Seems so", he returned as we unfastened our seatbelts.

"Alright, first prisoner out," compelled the stalker officer. "Watch your step."

Stepping cautiously from the PTV, onto a metal plate and then onto the concrete floor of the receiving bay of Hakea Prison, my back ached as I stood up straight. The officer motioned Tom to remain seated, then gave me a direction.

"Stand over there on the line and follow the officer's instructions." I obeyed.

"Your name," asked another officer holding a pen and clipboard.

"John Victor Ramses."

"Date of birth?"

I had never gotten used to giving the date backwards and had to think about it for a moment, which no doubt made me look stupid. "Fifteen February Nineteen Sixty."

"Do you have any injuries?"

"No." *Not yet, anyway.*



“Turn around and put your hands on the wall, legs apart.”

*I'm not a goddamn criminal*, I wanted to scream. I did as I was asked. Another officer gave me quick pat-search.

The rest of the process was a blur but involved having my photo taken, a DNA sample, a series of questions asked and then given an induction kit that consisted of extra prison clothes, toiletries, sheets and a towel. I was then taken into another section and ordered to take a shower. Afterward, I was escorted out of that building and into another building where I was then directed into a small cell with two bunks. A prisoner already occupied the lower bunk, so I could presume mine was up top. Briefly, our eyes met, each of us having suspicion of the other. “My name’s John”, I offered, deciding to dispense with the ‘Victor Ramses’ part.

“Steve”, he said. “Looks like you get the top bunk”.

“Fine with me”, I replied, concluding the obvious.

An officer stepped into the cell and spoke to Steve. “Will you show the new prisoner around, where the showers and common areas are and where we do dish-up?”

“No worries, boss”.

“We’ll be doing muster shortly”, the officer then said to me. “Fully dressed in your greens, socks, shoes, your ID pinned on your shirt over your left tit and stand outside your cell by the door”.

“Yep”, I acknowledged with a nod.

The officer left, leaving the door open. I had no idea what a ‘muster’ was about, but I’d try to follow Steve’s lead when it came up.

“There’s not a lot a room up there so watch your head if you sit up in a hurry”, Steve continued saying. “I was up there until yesterday when my previous celly was moved to A-wing.”

“Thanks for the tip,” I replied, discretely studying his appearance. I tossed my kit onto the bare, thin mattress of the top bunk, then climbed up the makeshift ladder and began sorting the contents of my kit.

Aussies pronounce an ‘e’ as a long ‘a’ while ignoring completely any ‘r’ that might occur in the middle or end of a word. Steve was an Aussie, and due to my years living in Western Australia, working, raising a family, blending into the culture, I was certain he was a WA native, probably second generation, at least. I tried to play cool, pretending this was just another walk in the park, but I was scared shitless. Steve was a big man, around 6’3”, heavy gut and broad shoulders with arms like those of a career sheep-shearer leading to thick, meaty hands. Short hair like brown bristles all but covered his table-flat head while a brooding brow shadowed unnerving ice-blue eyes of a cold blooded killer. This

was prison, where bad people are locked away from society. In that environment Steve looked to me like a classic psychopathic axe murderer who had likely butchered his entire family and then the pet dog for good measure.

A chill ran through me as I had a sudden flash of being strangled in my sleep by Steve while the guards played cards or surfed porn sites completely oblivious to my gurgled screams. I had lived fairly independent since leaving the nest at age 19, and apart from a few rough financial moments, brought about by a divorce or two, I had never felt a need to run crying home to mom and dad until now. It was all beginning to sink in as if with the weight of a stone block around my neck after being tossed alive into a dark, deep sea. This was real. It was happening. I was in prison – the *bad place* my grandmother had warned me of, filled with very bad people who had done terrible things to other people. They were criminals - the worst of humanity – and now, as far as they or the world was concerned, I was just one among them. I was scared. I was trapped. I shouldn't even be there. Not me.

For a time, there were no more words spoken between me and Steve as I unpacked my kit, separated the clothes and toiletries from the bed sheets and began making up my bunk. In the silence, my emotional state - which was already shattered - became compounded by an increasing bitterness against my ex-wife that had been suppressed through the shock of arrest and processing. Now it was resurfacing. I didn't need it right then. But I was in prison because of her, because of a lie of an unspeakable nature. What kind of mind could accuse someone of such things? Was my life so cheap to her after all we'd been and shared over the past eleven years? My heart began to pound with rage. Not once had I given her or her family cause to do such a cruel thing to me. Rather, I'd loved and adored them all, had put up with the family's dysfunction, alcoholism, drug addictions and suicide attempts. I'd loved her children as my own, all too often putting them before my own daughter to quell any feelings of jealousy, and this is my reward? *Damn you straight to hell, the lot of you*, I cursed under my breath. *I want my daughter back!* And where was my daughter? My mind was reeling between love and hate; cherished memories colliding with the bitter present. My nerves were shot and I felt my forced cool demeanor was being held in place only by a hair-pin trigger.

There had been very few times through the marriage that my wife and I had argued. During those time when words could have caused a turn for the worst, I had always stopped and looked back to the first day I had seen her smiling, anxious face waiting among the crowd as I had come out of customs at the Perth International Airport on the afternoon of September 2, 1999. At last together, we had embraced for an eternity. God, how we had loved each other then. Conjuring that memory during such an argument had always calmed a potentially bad outcome. *I love you as I did the first day I saw you at the airport*, I would tell her. The situation would become compromised with neither of us able to continue arguing as we'd remember together that amazing day, the love

we had for each other, and what we'd been through to be together. Whatever we'd been arguing about became moot and shortly forgotten.

Why had I not reminded us of that day during the devastating argument on September 2, 2009 last year, I regretted to myself. Would it have mattered? I had not even thought of that day until now, as if something had locked the file from memory. Now the memory returned in full, too little, too late, but just as vivid as it had ever been, as if to deliberately further torment my heart. The feelings of that love we'd shared were still strong within me, in spite of the divorce, even as I was now in prison because of her. It hurt like hell to feel that love. I didn't want those feelings anymore. I wanted to hate her but couldn't.

There had never been a love so pure and magical as what we had shared, except in legends, I was sure. Even so, she had still harbored a private fear that I would not want to be with her due to her son's autism – a fear that would be forced to the surface just two days after our long awaited embrace at the airport. She had arranged with her mother that my first night and day in Australia be spent together without her children. On the third day she introduced them to me, and me to them. Her daughter, then age 6, had been quiet and reserved. With silky blond hair and green eyes, she had smiled shyly as she clung to her mother's leg. Her son, aged 8, had been disenchanted with the meeting but darling in my eyes all the same as he had run to and fro through the small Kingsley house. His senses had become overwhelmed by the sudden change with something new and unfamiliar in his world, typical of autistic children. To make the transition easier, we had walked a short distance to a nearby park, which the Aussies refer to as an 'oval'. The walk had been challenging as her son routinely ran ahead ignoring his mother's instructions to stay together. When the oval had at last come into view, he had sprinted toward the playground some forty meters away, again ignoring his mother's calls to stop and wait.

"He'll be O.K.," I had assured her as her young daughter walked obediently beside us. "We can see him."

It had been only then that I noticed my wife-to-be walking rigidly, her arms folded tight across her breasts, her lip slightly quivering.

"I know he'll be O.K. on the playground," she had said with a tremble in her voice. "That's not it." Her eyes welled with tears before flowing over, forming twin streams down her reddened cheeks. "I'm afraid he'll be too much for you, that you won't want to be his father or stay with us and I can't bear the thought, John. Not now."

I wanted to laugh at the absurdity but refrained when she turned into me and broke down sobbing. I had held her close that day, closer than when we had embraced at the airport. My experience with autism was nil, but I told her the truth as I saw it. "I don't see an autistic child. I see a beautiful, carefree little boy completely detached from our adult world. I envy him."

“It’s been so hard,” she spoke through broken breaths. “I’ve worked so hard with him now all alone. You’ve no idea how hard. I knew he was different, that something was wrong, but the doctors never believed me. They just ignored me. He’s a good boy, John. I wanted to tell you more about his autism, about what to expect, but I was so afraid you’d change your mind for something easier. I just wanted you to know him the way I do. It’s been my only secret from you, my deepest fear. But now...I’m sorry.”

She had cried into my chest as I held her. Her young daughter, who had remained obediently beside us, wore an expression as if she were witnessing the end of the world, her mother crying in the arms of a strange man. It had broken my heart that this woman I loved so deep had felt that way, the burden it must have been on her heart. She hadn’t given the slightest indication through our countless emails, chats and phone conversations while I had still been in America.

I spoke into her ear as I held her against me. “You trusted me with my most tender secret, love, one that nearly caused me to stay in America and spend the rest of my life without love rather than risk being hurt. When I found the courage to tell you, you loved me no less.”

“That’s different.”

“No different. I believed that if you knew the truth, especially being a hairdresser, you wouldn’t want to be with me. It was *my* greatest and only fear. I love you beyond imagination. I love our children. We’re a family now and whatever you’ve been through ‘til now, you’ll never be alone in it again.”

“I’ve been so afraid. I mean, even his own father didn’t want much to do with him. That’s why we divorced.”

“And that’s why we’re now together.” I kissed her lightly on her head. “Can you honestly say that all those strange events that led us together were for nothing? Ours is the love to end all yearning for love. I truly believe that.”

“I want to believe that, too,” she had sniffled.

“It has already been tested back on July 1st, a few months ago, remember? Nothing can break us apart, especially not a precious child whose only fault is that he doesn’t give a piss about the world around him. We already have that in common, he and I,” I snickered.

“It won’t be easy, John.”

“Nothing worthwhile ever is. I have a lot to learn about autism and you’ll both teach me. It’s our job to keep him safe while gradually bringing him into our world. That’s what you once told me. But right now he’s hogging all the fun and I say we should join him in his world!”

“God, I love you so much,” she had laughed lightly, squeezing herself into me and wiping her eyes on my shirt. “I never thought I would have a partner in

my life again, that no one would want me with my son. I had settled for that. Then came those numbers everywhere. Then you.”

“Proof we are meant to be, right?”

“I can’t wait for the eleventh of November. I want us to marry so bad.”

“We were married the moment your first email arrived to me on that strange morning of April 27, seventeen months ago.”

“You know what I mean. I want to say to the world with all my heart, ‘*This is my husband!*’”

“I already call you my wife,” I had said as she picked up her troubled daughter.

“Mummy’s O.K., Munchkin,” she said, kissing her daughter firmly on the cheek before setting her back onto the grass. “I’m just very, very happy! Now, go play with your brother. We’ll be right here.”

Cautiously assured that her mother was O.K., the little blond child scampered off to join her brother on the playground, while her mother and I followed behind, walking hand in hand. The day had been sunny and warm. The smell of gum trees, wattle, wildflowers and sea salt had permeated a soft breeze blowing in from the Indian Ocean. In just two days Australia had come to feel to me like that mythical, magical land somewhere over the rainbow, complete with a Munchkin and a Lollypop kid. And I was so in love.

As we came up to the playground, we had sat down on the grass. I wrapped my arms around her as she laid back into my chest. For a while we sat in silence, looking on as the blond child patiently followed her energetic brother about the slide, swings and monkey bars, while he did his best to pretend she didn’t exist.

“What does it mean, John, really. Eleven Eleven,” she had then asked, almost rhetorically. “It had been so compelling and insistent, stirring something deep, deep within me every time I saw it. I’d never felt such feelings.”

“You’ve read my web site,” I replied. “You know as much as I do, or at least as much as I can find words to explain. But I think it’s somehow linked to our deepest desires, those we’re afraid to share with the world, but pray quietly to ourselves.”

“Make a wish and it’ll come true, you told me in response to my email. I’d been so afraid to share with anyone how much I yearned for a man to love me and my children, my son. I had always put on a brave face, pretending I didn’t care, when someone asked if I ever intended to re-marry.”

“Well, there you go! Whatever it means it led us to find each other and here we are. That’s all I care to know. Soon, we’ll have another precious child in

our family. For nearly seven years she's appeared to me, and you are her mother."

"How can you be so sure I'll have a girl?"

"After all the strange things that have occurred to us, you need to ask?"

"It's all so surreal, isn't it? I feel like we're in some bubble of magic that the rest of the world is unaware of. I mean, even my divorce was finalized on the eleventh of November shortly after meeting you. That's something you can't just make happen."

"And in just two months we're going to be married on the eleventh of November on the beach at 11:11 PM, just as you wished." I kissed her softly on the head.

"I fear the bubble will pop and I'll wake up right where I was and you and all this will have only been a dream."

"I don't know what it's all been about – eleven eleven, the raven, the white feather, the synchronicities and all. It's been as amazing as strange, but we're together and happy now. That's all that matters. And she *will* be a girl, trust me! She'll be born in the middle of next year. A Millennium Child. How cool is that!"

"Well, we'd best get busy making her then," she said snuggling into me.

"I thought that's what we had done last night?"

"Best make absolutely certain tonight, tomorrow night and the next night."

"I love you so much. Words can't explain. And I love our beautiful family. We'll be just fine; I promise..." I had assured her on that warm September day in 1999.

But that was *then*, this is *now*, I thought, as the memory faded to reveal the stark reality of the small, confining prison cell I was now in because of her. The bubble had burst, the magic gone, and she had taken my daughter; her smiling face at McDonald's – the last real impression of her in my mind – still haunting me. We were supposed to go fishing this weekend. Not this. I thought about the fishing poles in my car, which was parked in my employer's lot, still wrapped for her birthday. Again I fought back tears.

Subconsciously, I had made up my bunk and had set my clothes and toiletries in a corner where the bunk met the wall. I laid down on my back, the ceiling too low to sit comfortably upright, and locked my fingers behind my head. Where had it all gone so wrong, I wondered, staring beyond the concrete ceiling back on our marriage. Eleven Eleven had brought us together, sure enough. Eleven years later it returned to completely destroy what it had once

created. Why? What had it all truly been for? Was this situation I was now in just a part of it all? Were we truly over and done? Or was this just the beginning of something else, a new chapter? I couldn't even guess.

"C-wing, muster up. By your doors, ID's on your shirt," came a shout from outside the cell, interrupting my troubled meditation as if a bright light had been suddenly switched on during a sad film in a dark theater.

"Muster, mate," Steve said. "Oh, tuck your shirt in, too. They insist. It's kind of a military regime here. You'll get used to it."

*Get used to it?* How can you get used to being in prison? I won't be here long enough to get used to anything in here, I said to myself.

"Hurry up, C-wing," I heard the same voice shout out as I climbed carefully down the rungs, hastily tucked in my shirt and pinned my ID to it. Steve was already standing outside the door when I emerged. I took a position on the opposite side where he had discreetly pointed. Three officers stood in the short hallway, then one walked briskly along ticking names off on a clipboard. Reaching the end of the hall he turned around, walked back to join his colleagues and said, "Alright, stand down C-wing", before walking through an open barred gate and into the next wing of the block. "D-wing, muster up," he then shouted.

Along the hallway of my wing stood other men of various ages, some in their twenties or thirties and one who appeared to be in his seventies. All wore green shirts and track pants like me. Prisoners. I couldn't help but wonder what they had each done to get here. The elderly man looked to me like a typical grandfather who wouldn't have hurt a fly, while two of the younger men looked like criminals fresh from an episode of Cops, with shaved heads and tattooed neck and arms depicting images and words I couldn't make out. The rest were anyone's guess. Nothing about them really spoke 'criminal' as I'd been conditioned by media to think of a criminal. I felt suddenly very small, not so much due to Steve's physical mass, but rather because my confidence had flat-lined. This was much worse than merely being alone in Australia. I was now in an Australian prison. My senses were overloading, but unlike my young autistic stepson a decade ago, I had nowhere to run and no one to make the transition easier. A walk in the park this was not.

"A-wing, on the dish-up," I heard someone yell out in another section of the block.

"Grab your plate," Steve directed. "They'll be callin' us up to get our meal." Climbing up to my bunk I slid a blue plastic plate and cup from the stack of kit items I'd stashed in the corner, then climbed back down. "The food's mostly shit," Steve assured me, "but sometimes they surprise us."

*Prison food?* I'd heard about that, too. Slop, as I recalled from films. But it was the extra non-culinary human by-products that sometimes deliberately found their way into prison food that concerned me: snot, spit, blood, feces. My stomach knotted even though I was starving, having not eaten since McDonald's with my daughter two nights ago. I'd been too stressed to eat, then the arrest and processing, and now here. It had been a blur. I felt like I should be able to simply drive down to the shops or order something from Domino's as I had always been free to do, but the restricting walls, barred gates and ever present prison officers stifled such thoughts of freedom. I'd never been prone to panic attacks, but I felt like I would snap at any moment. I breathed deeply, steadily, and tried to ignore the confining environment.

"C-wing, on the dish-up," the same voiced yelled out, closer this time.

"Com'on, I'll show ya' where to get a feed," said Steve as he walked out of the cell. I followed him down the hall, through the gate and around a corner, then stopped as we came to the end of a single line of men, all wearing green and holding blue plates. Two officers stood by observing the men in the line. "Meals are always dished out here," Steve informed me. "Just hold your plate out when you get up there and they'll fill it up. Then I'll show ya' where we sit in the common area."

I moved forward in the line stepping, stopping, stepping again until I came to a small table where two prisoners dressed in white aprons and hairnets stood serving food. I held my plate out, as I'd been directed, feeling like Oliver, but from the looks of the 'slop' I had no intention of asking '*Please, sir. Can I have more?*' It reeked of curry, which I had never acquired a taste for, but looked to be mostly carrots with other things I couldn't readily identify. Steve had waited for me, then together we walked back to our wing and into a small common area about half the size of an average living room. In the room was a small white plastic patio table occupied by four guys. Fitted somehow into the small space was also fridge and a wide sink sunken into a long counter. On the counter I spied a can of coffee and container of sugar. *Coffee!* I felt my saliva glands suddenly awaken and had to swallow several times in a short minute to keep from drowning in it. "I see coffee over on the counter," I pointed out to Steve. "Is that for us?"

"Yeah, help yourself. There's some sugar if you take it, and you'll find milk in the fridge in little square bags. You'll see them. Anyway, the table in here is taken. There's another one outside in the court yard." I followed Steve outside, holding my plate of curry-something slop, barely able to take my eyes off the can of coffee beckoning to me from the counter.

The court yard was rectangular, a bit larger than an average living room, but enclosed by high cement block walls. It felt just as confining but at least it was outdoors. The open sky, what little of it I could see due to being framed by the imposing barrier, appeared a deep blue with pinkish hues among a few



passing clouds. It was late afternoon, I surmised. Seeing the sky and pastel clouds tinted by a waning sun was the first time that I had any perspective of time since being arrested. Like the can of coffee waiting patiently for me on the counter as I'd walked out into the court yard, I could almost not take my eyes off the sky above me, however narrow the view.

"This is John," Steve said to a couple of guys as he set his plate down on a worn wood-style picnic table. "He's my new celly."

"Hope he's better than your last celly. That bloke's a wanker. My name's Ian," a bearded middle-aged man said, extending his hand to me. "Welcome to Hakea."

"Thanks, I think," I returned, shaking his hand as I took a seat beside Steve. My tailbone still felt tender from the ride in the PTV.

"I'm Roger," the other, slightly younger man said. "This your first time here, mate?"

"Yeah. I've never been in jail before. Not a pleasant experience."

"You sound like a Yank," Ian observed. "You from America?"

Buy the man a drink, I laughed to myself. "Yeah, western States area."

"In that case, welcome to Australia," said Roger, grinning.

"Good call," I nodded to Ian. "Many Aussies presume my accent is Canadian for some reason, despite being bombarded by US film and TV down here."

"My brother's married to a Yank," Ian said. "Good sheila, that one. They live in Pennsylvania. I spent a few months there about six years ago. I liked it. What brought you to our little island paradise?"

"Married an Aussie gal some years ago. Been here since."

"Still married," Roger asked.

"No. We split up back in April."

"Have any kids," Ian then asked.

"Two in the States from a previous marriage and a ten-year-old daughter in Australia from this marriage. It was a good marriage while it lasted."

"All good things must come to an end," said Ian philosophically.

"Especially in *this* state," Roger added. "WA's where all good things come to die."

"Seems like that now, but it wasn't always that way," Steve said defensively.

"I'd have to agree," I said, recalling some magical times.

“It mostly went to shit in the last decade,” Steve continued. “Nearly all of our industries have closed up except mining, but even that’s uncertain.”

“And everything’s being privatized, too, by foreign investors, which isn’t good for us,” Ian added. “It’s harder to live day to day while those bastards get rich.”

“True”, Steve said. “There used to be a lot to do here for nothing or cheap. Hell, we local lot can’t even take the family to Rotto for a day like we used to. That’s all been developed to cater to foreign tourists. They even told the Indigenous mob to fuck off it, and it’s *their* island.”

“I’m not a fan of privatization,” I put into the conversation. “Especially by foreign investors. They drive the prices up to make profits while decreasing the quality of service to bare minimum. It’s hard to hold anyone to account when their based in another country. You can’t complain to the politicians because their hands are dirty from bribes and back-room deals.”

“You’re not wrong,” Steve agreed.

It was nothing I didn’t already know, having watched it all happen through the years since first arriving in Australia, and having been personally affected by it. But Steve was right: It had not always been that way. I had arrived in Australia just before the turning point. The goals my new wife and I had planned for when we married – realistic and achievable at the time – would never have the chance to be realized. No one could have foreseen the events of 9-11, nor the ensuing collapse of the global economy, nor the privatization of everything not nailed down by Constitution. The cost of living skyrocketed in a very brief period, putting our goals beyond reach. We had persevered like everyone else, but my wife’s hopes of one-day visiting America, of buying a small farm near Lancelin and raising alpacas, of travelling across Australia with the kids in a bus, slowly but surely died away in her. Then, eventually, she stopped talking about it, stopped dreaming. I had watched that too. It had hurt. To a certain degree it had contributed to the end of our love story. Work hard as we did, we could never quite catch the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Few could. Her country was changing and she was changing too. A darkness was settling over the land of ‘Oz’ and despite my talents, I was no wizard. The growing feminist movement replaced her ideal of a perfect marriage and family with snide remarks about someday living single, alone and free. That hurt, too. Then came the woman from Finland, almost on cue as if to trigger the inevitable. In hindsight, it had been too timely to be merely a fluke, occurring in a moment when hope had died and ‘I love you’ were just words spoken from long habit.

In all our years together we’d only ever visited Rottneest Island – which the locals affectionately call ‘Rotto’ – three times, once for our anniversary. The quaint little island she had regularly visited with her family through her life, with its odd furry Quokkas, pristine turquoise reefs, unique shops, beachside cabins and historic lighthouse, became too expensive for the average Aussie family after

being sold off to private investors. A handful of people at the top became rich while every other West Aussie became poorer. When the Barnett Government at last kicked the aborigine tour group off their island, I stopped promoting Rottneest through Ghost Radio, a sort of personal boycott. I had even declined a marketing contract that had come my way through my IT firm *I-Prodigy Communications*. It had just not sat well with me what was going on. I never went back to Rotto, sadly. But on a clear day at the beach I can sometimes make out the lighthouse just on the horizon. My favorite memory is of watching my excited then four-year-old daughter feeding a Quokka out of her hand, back in an affordable but by-gone era.

Then, as if reading my thoughts, Ian glanced sharply in my direction. "Australia really went to hell after your 9-11," he said in an accusing tone. "Draggin' us yet into another fucking war we don't belong in."

His tone caught me off guard.

"Well, there's *that*, too," Steve agreed, taking a bite. There was an uncomfortable silence as if they were waiting for me to say something about it. The atmosphere suddenly felt tense. Swallowing his bite of food, Steve continued. "We Aussies felt for you Yanks, make no mistake about that. But we didn't want to get sucked into another war. Like 'Nam, we weren't given a choice in the matter."

*Where in hell did this come from?* "It wasn't good for anyone," I responded, choosing my words carefully. "Aussies *or* Americans. Or the world, for that matter."

Ian's tone became more agitated. "When your President Bush said 'You're either with us or you're a fucking terrorist', well, our pollies stood to attention, saluted the Yanky flag and said 'yes sir, Mr President, sir! We've got your back! No worries from us down under!', and that was us fucked again."

*Doesn't say much about your politicians or having the guts to stand up for yourselves*, I wanted to say, but didn't. It was a sensitive issue with Aussies, and I've lived in Australia long enough to know that the public is never given a voice in such matters. The tone in Ian's voice affirmed it. I suddenly felt like a Collingwood supporter who had inadvertently sat down at a table of Eagles fans.

"You've probably heard our little sayin'," Steve then said between a bite of his food. "If America sneezes, Australia catches the cold."

"Yeah, I heard that quite a lot over the years, actually," I said while mindlessly exploring my plate of slop with my fork.

Ian's turn again. "No offence, Yank. But we Aussies have grown weary of marching to the US drumbeat. We try to be polite about it but it's getting annoying. Seems all you Yanks want to do is start a war with people who don't agree with you or have something you want, and we're expected to fall in line. It

drains our budget, fucks our economy and pisses off our trading partners out here. Like Steve said, we felt for you Yanks on 9-11, and we're grateful for the help against the Japanese back in the day, but we don't have the population or resources to go pickin' fights every fuckin' day like you Yanks seem to have."

I was becoming defensive. *Ever thought about becoming an Independent Republic, standing on your own feet and making decisions for yourselves like big boys and girls do*, I again wanted to say, but again didn't. "I'd only been in Australia for a short time when 9-11 happened," I said as if making an excuse.

For the moment they ate in silence. It felt personal, the way they were putting their opinions to me, as if holding me accountable for all of Australia's woes due merely to my heritage. I almost expected a fist to soon find its way into my face, but even though their sentiments were legitimate, it wasn't personal. I knew that. And, it wasn't the first time I'd been a sounding board for Aussie venting over US policies and pressure since 9-11. They had a right to vent, and for the most part, their concerns were justified. Americans back home had no clue how much Australia is controlled by Washington, especially since 9-11. But 9-11 had affected me, too, as it had all Americans. I still remembered clearly that terrible morning – or late evening as it had been in Perth – when the World Trade Towers were attacked. Tensely, I had watched it all unfold on the TV from half a world away, the billowing smoke and panic, while I had cradled my one-year-old daughter close in my arms. "That's your daddy's country," I had said to her as if she could understand. "Your other home, where your brother and sister live." Then a tear had fallen from my eye and splashed on her tender cheek. The memory of that day was still vivid, as well as the political upheaval that followed. I had felt so utterly helpless, feeling like I should be home, helping, doing something. But I was home now, in Australia with my new family. That choice had been made on July 1, 1999. I had never experienced such a tearing of my soul as one-half desperately reached for America, while the other half remained firmly grounded in Australia. Every American living abroad had felt that way on that day.

Then President Bush made his unholy mandate as he called the world to war: 'You're either with us or you support terrorism.' Australia found itself between a rock and a hard place. John Howard, the Australian Prime Minister at the time, had responded according to Ian's description, minus saluting the American Flag. Being an American I became bombarded with Aussie opinion after that, as if I had a direct line to the White House and could make it all go away. The undercurrent of dissent against American policies affecting Australians had surfaced publicly, and it was growing louder. Then the Bali Bombing happened, suspiciously timed in my view, wiping out more than a hundred Aussies and other foreign nationals in a single flash at the Sari Club. With it went any further overt dissent against the call to war; Terrorists had hit Australians. But the dissent is still there, underground, boiling, occasionally

rising to the surface as it was now while sitting at a table of Aussies – even in prison.

I've always been a proud American and fierce patriot. Always will be. But through my years living in Australia I came to understand how US policies and dollar value effects everything in Australia from the budget, fragile economy, politics, international relations to personal lives. It was a saying not without substance: If America sneezes, Australia catches the cold. On 9-11 America had been shot in the gut, but Australia shared the wound, perhaps more so than any other nation. Australia is my daughter's country and my second home. With her birth I naturally became a defender of two countries I deeply loved, on opposite sides of the planet, and who are as uniquely different from each other as the Southern Cross is to the North Star. From the day my daughter was born I was destined to be caught between two friends who don't always see the universe from each other's perspective, but I would defend both. I had sworn that in my application for permanent residency in Australia way back in 1999, when love was new and all that mattered, and dreams could still come true.

I broke the silence. "For what it's worth I'm a strong proponent for an Independent Republic of Australia. And *neutral*. The wholesale privatization of the country's public infrastructure has to stop, as well. Everybody owns a piece of Australia except the Australians these days."

"It's surprising, to me anyway, to hear a Yank concerned about us Aussies," Roger said.

"American's love Australia and adore the Aussies. They just don't know much more about Australia beyond *Crocodile Dundee*. Your politics and opinion of US policy never make it into the media. In fact, it's kept from it. Besides, I have a vested interest in Australia's welfare. My daughter's an Australian."

"Point taken," Ian conceded, seemingly calmer. "Her mother Aussie?"

"True blue. Are you all WA natives?" I was hoping to change the subject.

"Fuck no," Roger snapped as if offended by the suggestion. "I'm from Queensland. Brisbane, actually."

"I'm from Adelaide," Ian dropped in. "That's in South Australia. I've been here about nine years. It's not all bad. You probably know that by now. Steve here's a local boy, though."

"Born and bred," Steve confirmed, taking a bite of his meal.

I had guessed correctly. "Second or third generation, I'll bet?"

"Depends," he said, pausing to chew then swallow his food. "My father's Irish. He came here with my Nan and Pop when he was just a youngster. Mum's part German, part Aborigine. I don't know much about my Mum's dad. He was killed in a rollover when she was quite young. But Mum's mum, my Nanna Sue,

she's Indigenous from up Pilbara way. Her mob's been here for over forty thousand years or so."

"I guess that qualifies you as a WA native."

"What part of America you from," Ian then asked.

"I was born in Utah. Mountain country, but I've lived in Arizona, California, Washington State, Oregon – pretty much a western boy."

"Utah? Are you Mormon," Roger asked, looking up from his empty plate.

If I'd had a dollar for every time I'd been asked *that*, I mused without finishing the thought. "I was raised Lutheran on my dad's side and Mormon on my mom's side. I pretty much walked away from religion when I was in my teens, but my grandmother might have said I *lost* my way. She and my grandfather had hopes of me becoming a pastor at their local parish but I just wanted to be Rock Star." I laughed. No one else did. "Fact is, I asked too many questions requiring uncomfortable answers. Later on I changed my name so as not to embarrass or offend them with some of the stuff I'd write and publish."

"Let me guess," Roger said. "You started writing for porn mags?"

"No, much more blasphemous to my grandparents than that, I think. My passions are mysteries and phenomena and that sometimes questions the concept of God, which was not a topic open for discussion with my grandparents, believe me!"

"Like what kind of mysteries," Roger queried.

"Everything, really, from ancient historical enigmas, lost treasure, UFO's, ghosts – your min-min lights even. If there's a mystery, I have to solve it. It's kind of an obsession, I think." I was relieved for the lighter atmosphere and change of topic.

"Bermuda Triangle, too," Roger asked.

"Yep, even that."

"That story's fascinated me since I was a kid."

"I think it's all bullock, myself," Ian said cynically.

"Yes, there's that possibility, too," I agreed. "My position is that of an investigator, not believer, although I've seen some crazy shit in my day. Speaking of Bermuda," I said hoping to keep the topic away from US policy. "You know your Rottnest Island out there is antipodal of Bermuda."

"Anti-what?"

"Antipode. It means that the Rottnest Island is on the exact opposite side of the planet from Bermuda. If you punch a hole through the earth from the Island of Bermuda, you'll come out just shy of Rottnest Island."

“Fair dinkum?”

“True. I had incorporated that fact into the advertising and branding of our online radio station: *Broadcasting from the other side of the Bermuda Triangle and the most isolated metropolis in the world – Ghost Radio!*” I spoke the line with emphasis, mimicking the sound-bite.

“You meet all kinds in here,” Ian grumbled.

“I respect cynicism. It keeps me grounded in reality – most of the time, anyway.”

“Wait a minute,” Steve said turning toward me. “I know Ghost Radio. My wife and her mother are big fans. That you?”

“*Were* big fans, I’m afraid. I stopped streaming after my wife hosted her last show on the ninth of December 2009, about the time our marriage went south. She lost interest, then I lost heart. I’d built Ghost Radio and Haunted Australia to satisfy my wife’s passion for the occult. Ghost Radio was literally the radio station that love inspired. When the love died so did Ghost Radio. I’ve kept the web site up online, frozen on the last day we streamed. I haven’t had the heart to take it down. It had been a lot of work but also a lot of fun. Shortly afterward we divorced, which started a custody dispute over our ten-year-old daughter. Now I’m here.”

“What’s your full name,” Steve asked.

“John Victor Ramses.”

“Fuck me! My missus is going to piss herself when she learns who my celly is! She never missed a show. She even bought one of those coffee mugs with *Underworld Show* on it.”

“Well, thank her for that from me,” I said. “The *Underworld Show* was my wife’s program. I created and produced it but she was the host. She did a great job considering she’d never had formal experience. We were becoming fairly well known with articles about us in magazines and the Sunday Times and a couple of TV spots. In fact, the very reason she and I had even met was because of a set of very unusual and weird events that still boggles my mind.”

“Sounds like you two were *meant* for each other,” Ian stated. I wasn’t sure how to take the remark. “What broke you up, if you don’t mind me askin’?”

“Not sure where it all went wrong, really. I never saw it coming. That last year together she changed dramatically. Nothing seemed to make her happy anymore. But ultimately another woman entered the picture and triggered the end of the marriage. In hindsight, it seems more an excuse for something that had been brewing in my wife for some time.”

“Now the ‘other woman’ I can believe,” Ian said laughing. “No great mystery to solve there, mate!” I had abridged the ‘other woman’ part, but it had

not been as simple as that, and my meeting her had been directly related to that same phenomena of eleven-eleven that had once brought my wife and I together.

“Probably no mystery about how you ended up in here, either,” said Roger. There was a brief pause in the conversation and then he continued in a hushed voice. “Look, mate, in here you never talk about your charges, why you’re here. It’s nobody’s business. But I’m gonna make a wild guess based on what I’ve heard so far. You don’t have to acknowledge if I’m right or wrong if you don’t want to. You said you and your missus split up a bit ago and you’ve got a young daughter between you and going through a custody battle. You’re in the *protection* block of the jail. All those elements combined, I’m guessing your wife put you here, made up some allegations to keep you from your kid and *whah-lah* – your sitting in here with us now. Am I warm?”

“You missed your calling. You should have been a detective,” I said.

“Nah. Just typical. You’d be shocked to learn how many blokes are in here because of that same thing. Divorce Australia style. Sheila’s make a phone call and you disappear. Any Family Court case is defaulted in her favor.”

“I never had the chance to start proceedings. I intended to do that on this Monday. I told her so, hoping she would be reasonable and want to avoid it all.” *And remember how much we’d loved each other once and that our daughter needs us both*, I continued saying in my mind.

“Not too bright for a Yank, are ya,” Ian ridiculed. “If you’re goin’ to punch someone in the face you just do it. You don’t give ’em a heads up, for Christ’s sake. Now look where ya are!”

*I thought you disapproved of US policy*, I almost said.

“Nothing leaves this table, John,” Steve said in a low voice, leaning toward me. “But we three – or *four* now – we’re all in for very similar shit. An accusation. Nothing more. So are other blokes in here.”

“But don’t take that wrong, mate. There’s a lot of real sick sons-a-bitches in here, too. Dangerous pricks,” Ian quickly added.

“How in hell do police get away with arresting people on a mere accusation?”

“WA is a police state. They do want they want and the laws allow it. You’ll learn that if you haven’t already.”

“Surely police are supposed to investigate an alleged crime before they throw someone in prison for it.”

“Not here,” Ian said. “If you get accused, you’re fucked. Like catchin’ leprosy. Back east they’re a *bit* more civilized. But in WA they can arrest and charge you and jail you on just an accusation. No evidence.”

“The cop pretty much told me the same things yesterday,” I said.



“They can confiscate everything you own on that accusation, too. Trust me,” Roger said. “The bastards froze my bank accounts so I can’t even get access to my own money to pay for a lawyer. They stitch you up well and good.”

“That cop also told me there are no rights for people in WA. That true?”

Steve answered. “If you mean a Bill of Rights, like what you Yanks have, the answer’s no. We’ve been fighting to have a Bill of Rights for years but the pollies keep knockin’ it back. They make all the rules and we have no say about it. They like it like that. Rights empower the average lot and that doesn’t sit well with that mob. Australia’s not a democracy as they’d have the world think.”

“The cop laughed when I told him I had a right to a lawyer.”

“I bet he did. He’s probably still laughin’.” Steve paused to take a bite of his food, then continued. “There’s a couple of blokes over in A Wing you might want to get to know. Pretty sharp on this stuff. They might be able to give you some good leads or info to help yourself. But honestly, mate, if you’re gonna beat this you need to get bail and get out and get a good lawyer.”

“Preferably and eastern states lawyer, not the lawyers out here,” said Roger.

“True enough,” Steve agreed. “They’re all too closely connected here, and thick with the DPP. Hell, they probably even name their kids after each other.”

“If not *have* them with each other,” Roger laughed.

“It’s really that bad,” I asked.

“They’re only interested in money,” Steve continued, “like being some third world country. If you have lots of it you can buy your freedom. I don’t mean by bribing them. I mean if you have money your lawyer *might* actually work for you, put up evidence and an argument. If you don’t have money he’ll sit on his hands and let you burn, no matter how much evidence you have in your favor. You can only sit in silence on display and watch. Some guys in here have already been convicted and just waiting to be transferred to Casa or Acacia. They’ve got a lot to say about it. If you come to know them they might open up and let you know what’s ahead of you.”

“Doesn’t sound very promising,” I said solemnly.

“Have you applied for bail,” Ian asked, pushing his empty plate to the center of the table.

“Yeah. I tried this morning. Well, the bail lawyer did, anyway. But I don’t have the amount.”

“If it’s not too personal, can I ask how much,” Ian queried.

“Five thousand.”

“Fuckin’ pocket change, mate,” Steve said surprised. “You don’t have that?”

“No. Not with the divorce and all.”

Ian spoke. “Got anything worth that much? A car or something?”

“My car’s just a cheap beater. Nothing else, really. My job pays fair but I didn’t think to save up in the event I’d be arrested off the street out of the blue.”

“How long have you lived in WA again,” Steve asked sarcastically, raising his eyebrow.

“Apparently one day too long.” I forced a laugh.

“Saving for bail is something *we’re* taught out here before we can even walk,” Steve snickered. “Especially if you’re Indigenous. You live in WA long enough and you’ll eventually end up in jail at least once, unless your family’s connected.”

“But never save your money in a bank or any place *those* thievin’ bastards can get their hands on it,” Roger said bitterly. “I’d be out on bail if I had access to my own money.”

“They got another little saying out here,” said Steve. “You’re not a true blue Aussie until you’ve been in jail. Comes with the heritage.”

“You’re not wrong,” agreed Roger.

“You’re definitely native,” I said toward Steve. “My wife used to tell me something along those lines at times.”

Ian laughed. “You should have seen *this* coming then. Damn sheilas out here put most the blokes in jail. The accuser’s pampered like they just fell from heaven. No questions asked. The bloke is dog food, at best. Out here you’re guilty until proven innocent. And they’ll hide the proof if they can. It’s just the mindset. Better realize that now.”

My predicament seemed to be getting worse with each passing minute. “And that’s just accepted? I’d have thought better of Australia in that regard.”

“The government holds all the cards out here,” Ian said. “Challenge them and bad things happen. Goes back to the colonial days, I guess. You can only smile and like it and keep your head down.”

“This is a side of Australia I’ve only heard locals complain about down here, but never experienced it personally, until now.”

“Not outside of pubs or your own living room, you won’t hear of it,” Roger said in turn. “Aussie’s learnt to keep quiet, unlike Yanks. Australia’s a convict island. You probably know the history. Convicts pretty much built the country – and their own prisons – but the Pommie-loyal government still treats everyone beneath like they were just dragged out of the cargo hold of the First

Fleet. Australia's the only country in the world that celebrates the day its convicts arrived, 26 January, Australia Day."

"And we're the only country that eats its national emblem," Steve laughed. "Ever tried Kangaroo or Emu?"

"No. Never had the opportunity."

"You'll get lots of *roo* now," Roger smirked.

"Road kill," Ian groaned.

"You guy's seem to know a lot about this stuff. How long have you been in here?"

"Six months," answered Ian first. "I'm waiting for trial next year."

"Only six weeks for me," added Roger. "But long enough."

Then Steve spoke. "About three weeks, this time. I was arrested some months back and eventually got bail, but I breached it last week when I drove past my kid's school hopin' to catch a glimpse of my son. Haven't seen him since a bit after his mum and I divorced. Granted, I work up north a lot, mining, but when I'm home I always try to see him."

I suspected they all had kids somewhere as I did. Maybe grandkids. "Can't blame you for trying, mate," I finally said. "I miss my daughter very much already. I last saw her just two nights ago when I took her to McDonald's. Her mother called the police that night – planned, no doubt. My kid and I were supposed go fishing for the American 4<sup>th</sup> of July this weekend. It was part of her birthday." *Fucking bitch*, I cursed my wife under my breath as the thought jabbed at my heart.

"So, do you have anyone to go surety for ya," Ian asked.

"I'm not familiar with the term."

"Yep, a first-timer," Roger chuckled.

"Any friends or family who would put up the bond for you?"

"I hadn't thought of that. Maybe. I'd have to make some calls. What's involved?"

Steve answered. "They just put up the money on the promise that you'll appear in court and stick to your bail conditions and *Bob's yer uncle!* Easy peasy."

I felt a faint glimmer of hope as I thought about asking my parents for help. Then it suddenly dawned on me that I hadn't told them where I am. I loathed the thought of telling them what had happened, asking for money, but I had no other options. They needed to know. "I should call home. Do we get access to a phone in here," I asked to anyone.

“There’s a phone on the wall of each wing,” Ian answered. “First, though, you need to put in a form with the numbers you wanna call. And put credit on your account. If you find me tomorrow I’ll show you where the forms are, or Steve can show you.”

“Thanks. It just occurred to me that nobody knows where I am.”

“Be careful what ya say on the phone, mate,” Roger advised. “They record everything and the coppers and DPP listen to you.”

“Don’t make any threats against anyone, either, even if your just blowin’ wind,” Ian added. “And never talk about your case. They’ll use everything against you.”

“Christ. Thanks for the advice.”

“Inside, fellas,” yelled an officer from the doorway. “We’re lockin’ up the yard.”

“Yep,” I heard Steve acknowledge as he, Ian and Roger grabbed their plates, stood up and headed obediently back inside to the common area. I followed their lead. “Wash your dish up in the sink,” he said to me. Then, noticing my plate was still full asked, “You’re not going to eat?”

“I’m not really hungry. Nerves, probably.” There were other reasons I hadn’t touched the food but kept those to myself, having seen how they had each wolfed down their portions with unreserved enjoyment. “I’m more interested in a cup of coffee. And a cigarette!”

“You smoke,” Roger asked.

“Only the Lutheran part of me.”

“You should have said something. I would have given ya one while we were out in the yard.”

“I didn’t think you could smoke in here.”

“I’ll role ya one for after lock down,” Steve offered. “They say ‘no smoking’ in the cells, but we all do. They don’t really care because it keeps us calm.”

I could relate to that. “Thanks. I appreciate that.”

“Havin’ smokes keeps us from killin’ each other or rioting, he means,” Roger corrected.

“Pretty much,” Steve laughed. “This is a *remand prison*. Everyone in here is either waitin’ for trial or waitin’ to be sent up river to the Big House. Emotions and tension can run high, and that can mean trouble for both us and the Screws.”

“Didn’t you get smokes when you were brought in,” Ian queried.

“No. Do they do that?”

“Usually right before they bring ya to your cell.”

“I must have missed it. I wasn’t really in my right mind then.”

“Ask a Screw tomorrow. It’s the weekend, but you might get lucky. If not, definitely Monday.”

Screw? I was about to ask what that meant when it came my turn to wash up. I dumped the pile of slop into a bin as I’d seen other guys do ahead of me then washed and dried my plate. Then, seeing the can of coffee, I’d forgotten to ask. “I’m gonna make a coffee now,” I said, heading for the can on the counter.

“They’ll be lockin’ us down soon, but you can bring it into the cell,” Steve said, as he washed his plate.

“They don’t mind?”

“Nah, most guys eat lunch or supper in their cell, especially if they’re in a single.”

“Single?” The words I knew. How they were used in context of prison I didn’t know.

“A cell all to yourself. We’re in a ‘two-out’, but when you move to A wing you’ll likely go into a single. Gives you more privacy and time alone to de-stress when you need it.”

“And time to wank,” Roger tossed in.

“Nothin’ to wank about in here,” Ian insisted.

“That sheila Screw ain’t bad.”

“Seriously? I think you’ve been in too long already mate,” Ian chided.

Steve broke in while drying his plate. “Don’t let her hear ya talkin’ about that. She’ll send you down back with balls in your gob.”

There was that word again. “What’s a ‘Screw’,” I asked curiously.

“Hell, you really are fresh off the boat, mate. And I don’t mean the prisoner barge,” Steve laughed. “‘Screw’ is what we Aussie prisoner’s call the prison officers. Can’t tell ya’ why, but never call them that to their face. Address the officers as either Boss or Miss or Mr or Miss so-and-so, and never by their first name.”

“Fair enough. So I’ll be moving to A wing?”

“Not before me,” Steve asserted. “But yeah, eventually everyone is moved out of C wing, normally to A wing. Maybe D wing, if you’re a problem prisoner. C wing is a transit wing to see how you go, whether you’re going to be trouble or suicidal. Trouble makers more likely go to D wing. Just respect the officers, do what they ask and you’ll get to A, then maybe N or B wing. N and B are earned

cells with better stuff, but A's not bad. It might take a few weeks, but you'll eventually be moved."

"You should get a job, too," Ian advised, taking his turn at the sink. "Otherwise you'll be locked in your cell for most of the day. It also gives ya' a bit of money to spend, about thirty-five dollars each week."

"What is there to buy in *prison*," I asked surprised.

"Lot's, really," Steve answered. "I'll show you a Spends Sheet back in the cell and how to fill it out. Spends Day is every Wednesday morning before work."

"So what kind of work is there," I asked as images of busting rocks or stamping license plates flickered through my mind.

"Laundry, mostly. That's where I work. Ian and Roger, too. Time goes fast and it keeps ya' busy so you don't have too much time to think. But there's also jobs cleaning the admin or visits area. If you wanna work laundry, just tell a Screw and follow us over on Monday."

"I might do that."

I have a job on the outside, I thought to myself. I have a life. Working in prison for \$35 per week is the last thing I wanna do right now. I want to get out of here. I want to get back to my own job. I want to take my daughter fishing. I want to start making calls. I *need* time to do it and time to think.

"See ya' tomorrow, fellas," said Roger as he prepared to leave the common area, presumably to his cell. He then spoke to me. "Good to meet ya, mate. Don't do it so hard. She'll be right!"

*She'll be right*, is Aussie slang for *it will be O.K.* I struggled to see how it would be at that moment, but I had to turn this situation around somehow. Getting ahold of my parents was the place to start, but I had to wait until Monday, put forms in, get credit, then make the dreaded call. What would I tell them is the reason I was in jail? The reason was sickening. It would sicken *them* at the thought. How would their health be affected by such news? And my wife had their little granddaughter. That was another issue altogether.

I took my clean plate and hot cup of coffee and followed Steve back to the cell. The earlier conversation had started rough but talking about the Ghost Radio days had been a welcome reprieve and for just a moment it had felt no different than chatting with mates at a barbecue on any other Saturday afternoon. Then the topic had turned back to the matter at hand, which overloaded me with information. But now, with no more distractions to occupy my mind, the full weight of my situation came flooding in, filling the vacuum of space where the distraction had previously been. Having to tell my parents, to have to hurt or stress them with such terrible news, only embittered me further. They didn't need it, certainly didn't deserve it. They, like me, had adored their Aussie in-

laws. But I knew a side of them that my family had been kept ignorant of; a darker side, one in which I was now a target. Perhaps having too much time to think would prove detrimental. Maybe working in the meantime might be best. I'd think about that, too. Maybe.

"Here's a fag, mate," Steve offered, handing me a freshly rolled smoke. "But don't light up until after they lock us in – about 15 minutes. Then we can relax."

Taking the cigarette, I realized my hand was trembling. Withdrawals maybe, but it was more likely due to the events of the past twenty-four hours, which had shocked my system. "You don't know how I'm looking forward to it. Thanks."

"No worries. I'll help ya out 'til ya get yourself sorted."

I fondled the cigarette, desperate to light it. "It's my only vice, smoking. I don't drink alcohol or take drugs."

"I'll bet you had a tough time fittin' in down *here* then," Steve laughed. "Grog's an Aussie staple."

"My in-laws didn't quite know what to bring to our barbies, but I wasn't the only vice-misfit in the family. My wife never drank or took drugs, nor had ever even smoked that I know of. She would have done well as a Mormon if she weren't a practicing witch. So there was never any real pressure to blend in with her family."

"Well, good on her."

"She's also a vegetarian, our *only* culinary conflict. But as a result all her children were born healthy. Her son is autistic, but even *he* was fine and normal until he was given that so called three-in-one jab back when he was a toddler in the nineties. Mercury-based shit. The Big Pharma's swore it wasn't the cause but wise parents believed differently. After the jab his eyes lost their luster and he was never same. He seems alright now, but it took a lot of love, work and patience. A fierce and dedicated mother, she is. I'll give her that."

"Tough go," Steve said. "My ex's girlfriend has an autistic kid, a girl. It was bad, so I know a bit about what you must have gone through."

"Females seem to get hit harder with autism for some reason. We too had a friend with a young autistic daughter – darling little blond. It made raising our boy seem like gravy. It was heartbreaking to see the kid so lost and out of control, as well as the hardship on her parents. You rarely get out as a couple and never as a family."

"How old's your boy?"

"Eighteen now, just."

"You see him since the divorce?"

“Yeah, up until now, I did. We were pretty close. He’s a great kid, smart as hell, and had adopted my interests in computer graphics, art and filmmaking and stuff. I think of him as my own son, having raised him since he was eight. I miss him, but my daughter’s the one I’m really concerned about. She and I were thick as thieves. She’s the only reason her mother and I came together at all.”

“Steve raised his eyebrow. “How’s that?”

“Long, long story there, mate. Perhaps another time when my heads clearer. There are interviews about us on Ghost Radio’s web site and an article in Take 5 magazine and in Golden Dawn and Witchcraft Mags. There’s even a three-page spread in the Sunday Times, if I recall. My daughter’s absence is carving a hole through my heart. I suppose it’s the same with you where your son’s concerned. How old is he?”

“Nine. His mum and I married in ‘98 and he was born in 2001. We split up in 2008. She became a real bitch when I moved in with an old girlfriend from back in the day, making it difficult to get access to him, always claiming to be busy or some shit. Like you and your kid, me and my boy are mates. Loves playin’ footy.”

“My turn to guess,” I said, tasting the cigarette through my fingers. “You went to start Family Court action, she reported to you police and *whah-lah*, now you’re here?”

“Close,” Steve chuckled. “There was never any Family Court. Too expensive and it takes years to resolve anyway. But it was startin’ to turn nasty between me and my ex. My boy kept askin’ when I was coming to see him when I’d ring. All I could say was ask your mum. Then me and her would have it out on the phone. She conspired with her sister and niece to make allegations. Her niece made a claim that I had touched her up and a week later, when I came back from the mines, I was arrested. My current missus went off at the police, almost getting herself arrested. She knows what’s going on, don’t you worry!”

Except for a few minor variables, Steve could have been recounting the past two months of my own life. “So they did *this* just to keep you from your son?”

“I believe so. My ex remarried to a bloke and she didn’t want me in the picture where my boy is concerned. I’m only guessing, based on what I’ve heard anyway.”

“And this new guy just went along with it? What a prick.” Even as I said it I realized I’d probably missed judged the guy. It had been some years before I came to realize what my wife and her family had done to her first husband. Then to defend him in any form meant threat of instant divorce. I kept quiet to keep peace.



“I don’t know him. Likely he was never let in the loop. Sheila’s keep their cards close between them, ya know. Nasty lot when they wanna be, them. Worse than blokes.”

“Some *can* be. And, like I said, I don’t fault you for trying to see your son. It already seems like months since I’ve seen my daughter.”

“Being out there on bail, knowing he was out there too, but not being able to see him was worse than sitting in here. I’d look for him in every shop or passing car or on the beach or fast-food joints. I actually became afraid that I might run into him. Not sure what I’d have done. Probably taken him and made a runner. At least in here I don’t see all the places we used to go like the oval to play footy.”

Steve didn’t need to say it. It was apparent on his face and in his tone. He loved his kid and being kept from him was painful. Excruciatingly so. I could relate. Now that pain had been compounded by being thrown in jail on allegations of sexual abuse. If Steve were to be believed, we – Ian and Roger included – were all in the same sinking boat without life preservers in an uncharted sea of sharks. It was wrong, terribly wrong. Nearly unbelievable, except here I am.

“It’s hard for me to get my head around all this, that guys can be arrested on someone’s word. No questions or investigation while the cops just laugh at you or insult you. What the fuck?”

“Yep. Welcome to WA.”

“To be honest, mate, if it hadn’t happened to me I’d have called you a liar. But it did. I’m still in shock.”

“Same. If it were the other way around I’d probably have called you a liar – before *this*, anyway. All I can advise, mate, is hang on tight. You’re in for a long, rough ride and the coppers are *their* best friend, not yours. Ian and Roger you already met. Good blokes, in for similar shit. You’ll get to know others in here, too, if you’re here long enough. Learn as much as you can from them. But you need to get bail and prepare to help yourself. You can’t do it in here.”

“Muster up, C wing,” came a familiar shout.

“Here we go. Stand outside by the door like you did earlier,” Steve directed as he stood up from his bunk. “After the Screws pass, we close our door and stand inside where they can see us. Then they lock us in. After that, light up.” He grinned.

I followed Steve’s lead for a third time in so many hours. When the officer passed he paused briefly as Steve and I walked obediently back into our cell, Steve closing the heavy steel door behind us. Shortly after came that equally familiar clacking sound, confirming that we had been locked inside. The cell suddenly felt smaller, stifling. Steve handed me his lighter, which I immediately

clicked and held to the end of the thin hand-rolled cigarette he had given me earlier. I inhaled deeply, holding it in for a long moment before slowly exhaling.

“When did you last have a fag, mate,” Steve laughed.

“In my car, just before reporting to the cops.” My head began to buzz. “That was almost twenty-four hours ago.”

“I’ll roll you a few more to get ya by. Ask the Screw tomorrow for tobacco. They’re fairly understanding to smokers since most of *them* smoke. By the way, I like to watch a bit of TV at night to keep me from thinking too much. I seem to sleep better, too. Do you mind?”

Until then I hadn’t noticed the small flat-screen TV sitting on a narrow desk attached to the wall. “No, I don’t mind. I could use the distraction as well.”

“Anything particular you like to watch?”

“Nah, I seldom watch TV anyway, so I’m good with whatever you wanna watch.”

“I like a fishing show that comes on about now.”

Except *that*, I yelled in my mind. I didn’t need a reminder that I wasn’t taking my little girl fishing this weekend. “That’s fine, mate. Whatever suits ya.”

I savored the coffee and cigarette while leaning against the cold wall as Steve fiddled about with the TV remote until he found his program, *Fishing WA*. Then he lay back on his bunk, lit his cigarette and seemed to become lost in the show. I presumed it was a kind of escape for him, a means through which to forget about the walls and barred window, double-locked reinforced steel door, and his son’s absence, so out of respect I said no more.

Finishing my cigarette, I tossed the butt into the low stainless steel toilet, took a piss and flushed. Then I rinsed my cup and ashes down the small porcelain sink, which I had used as an ashtray. Calmer now, I climbed back up to my bunk and lay back, but facing the wall so I couldn’t see the TV, wishing I had ear plugs. My mind was trying to process and sort through a thousand thoughts at once. A quantum computer my brain was not, and I could feel a headache slowly taking hold. The anxieties I had been experiencing since the abrupt arrest had somewhat dissipated, likely due to the simultaneous ingestion of caffeine and nicotine. After having talked with Steve, Ian and Roger my fear of being in prison had also mellowed a bit for the moment. Perhaps I wouldn’t be strangled in my sleep after all, but I still wanted out. I wanted my life back, my daughter. I wanted to get her and just go home, back to America, familiar territory, family, then maybe go fly fishing on a quiet mountain stream in the Wasatch National Forest some tens of light-years from here.

I was still thinking, facing the wall, when Steve turned off the TV. “If you’re ready for sleep I’ll kill the light. It’s just after ten.”

That late? “Sounds good.”

“Right, see ya in the morning, mate.”

The small space suddenly went dark save for a soft glow coming through the semi-covered window, which I presumed to be the outside security lights. I had stared at the wall thinking for nearly four hours, tracing characters in my mind on the rough-finished white painted concrete. It had felt like only thirty minutes. Now in the dark my eyes had nothing to entertain them, so it was inevitable that images of my daughter, marriage and years in Australia would once again manifest. My heart was sick, breaking. Love and hate once again collided, like scalding water tossed upon a sheet of thin ice. ‘Shattered’ would be a gross understatement. My biological father, who had survived some rough times in his own life, once told me: “When you close your eyes to sleep at night you don’t know whether you’re in the Hilton or in an alley on B-Street. You can be anywhere you want to be”. I wanted to be home, back in Utah with family and the smell of pine and rivers. Closing my eyes, I tried to imagine being there, but it was no use. I knew where I was, and for now at least, there was no escaping *this* reality.

\* \* \* \*

Fourth of July, 2010  
Sunday

I don’t remember sleeping. Maybe I had at some point. Rather, I had tossed and turned on the hard, thin mattress as I had processed through a mosaic of fragmented thoughts, becoming angry then sad then numb then angry again. While I had cycled through it the darkness had gradually surrendered to light, revealing the stark confine of the small cell, tinted in the hues of another Australian morning – one on which I should’ve been preparing to collect my daughter to go fishing. It felt to be around 5AM, but I couldn’t tell, exactly.

During the night the winter cold, however mild, had saturated the cement walls that enclosed me, reaching out into the room, caressing my skin like invisible icy hands. The thin wool prison-issue blanket, barely long enough to

cover me, had done little to ward off the chill. At times I had found myself shivering, but it could have been nerves. I was craving a cigarette, and many times during the night I had felt tempted to light up, just a puff or two to take the edge off, but out of respect for Steve, whose snoring in the bunk below would rival the angry growl of a trucker's compression brake, I refrained. Smokers, sound asleep or not, could detect a lit cigarette from a thousand meters with the accuracy of a shark honing in on a single drop of blood in the sea. I knew the smoke would wake him, and if what he had said about his own circumstances were true, missing his son, how he came to be here, sleep was a reprieve to be relished. I envied him.

But then there was also that matter: How we'd come to be here. In just a few hours I'd met three men who all had alluded to being innocent. *Everyone in prison claims to be innocent*, the ancient adage asserted. To me it was unbelievable that two men in the same cell, much less four at the same table, were all truly innocent. It just wasn't plausible. The legal system rarely gets it wrong, so they tout regularly in the media and crime shows. I had been conditioned to believe that. Were these men lying, afraid to confront their own demons? Perhaps afraid of what happened to sex offenders in prison? Maybe. Maybe not. I had been arrested and thrown in prison on nothing more than someone's word. *Nothing* more. So it does happen. But I knew *I* was innocent. My situation was different, just a misunderstanding that would shortly be cleared up. I'd be free, back at work, back with my daughter. Then I'd start Family Court Proceedings – *especially* after this.

Then paranoia began to creep in. The thought that those three men, including the one sleeping below me, might be lying about their innocence made them all the more dangerous in my mind. '*There's a lot of real sick sons-a-bitches in here. Dangerous pricks*', Ian had said. Was he referring to himself, perhaps a personality of him that had actually committed a crime? He'd seemed quite angry at the world, negative and short tempered. I suddenly became frightened once again, as I'd been when they had first brought me in and thrown me into this cell. I was in unfamiliar territory: the psychology of a psychopath. I'd only heard of these kinds of people. Now I was living with them, imprisoned with them. Perhaps I'd talked too much yesterday, letting my guard down. They knew a lot about me, now. I knew nothing about them. Were they thinking the same thing about me? Regardless, I decided to keep my cards very close to my own chest for the duration of my stay, which I hoped would not be very long at all.

I heard a commotion from somewhere beyond the door of my cell: clanging metal, locks being turned, muffled voices, then a tapping sound. "Movement," I heard a voice holler. Then it was all repeated in the same order, coming closer each time, until the wooden shade covering the observation window of my cell slid up, revealing an officer's face peering in. *Tap, tap, tap, tap*, came the sound against the glass. "Movement!"

“I’m good,” I heard Steve groan from below. The officer closed the shade then moved to the next cell in the hall. I heard Steve stir, yawn, groan again, then he stood up and staggered to the toilet.

“What was that about,” I queried.

“Dead check,” he answered through a yawn. “They do that every morning before unlocking. If you don’t move, they presume you bought the farm during the night. Then we all stay locked down ‘til they deal with the body and determine cause of death. Not fun.”

“Dying in here? Does that happen?”

“Oh yeah,” Steve said, returning his goods to his track pants and flushing. “Sometimes an old bloke bite’s it – probably from stress and all. Sometimes a bloke does himself in. That happened in D wing a while back.” Steve yawned again. “By the way, they do cell inspections in the morning, mate. They’re pretty tough on it. Make up your bed, sheets and blanket tucked in, everything else stacked neat. I’ll wipe down the sink. The newest celly cleans the toilet.” He grinned. “No water spots or streaks.”

That would be right, I mused. Cleaning toilets in prison. “Do I use a toothbrush,” I said sarcastically.

“If you *want* to,” he laughed. “I prefer using the wipes and spray cleaner over there in the bucket, myself. You’ll find plastic gloves, too. They’re bonkers about hygiene, which is good.”

I was still tired. I stretched, yawned and sat up. Then in unison we began making up our bunks. I made mine the in the old military style as my ex-Air Force father had tried to teach me in my youth before eventually giving up. But I had remembered, and when I was done you could bounce a coin on it. Afterward, I stacked my gear neatly back in the corner, climbed down and began rummaging through the bucket for the spray bottle and wipes. I, too, was nuts for hygiene, especially here in prison where I was certain any number of contagious diseases flourished. Fitting on the plastic gloves I set to cleaning the stainless steel bowl and black plastic seat and lid.

“The Miss is the toughest of the lot,” Steve said as he wiped the sink. “She expects it all to look like it was just put on display in the bathroom isle of Bunnings. But she’s good about giving warnings where some officers just write you up if it doesn’t glow.”

“We do this every morning?”

“Good habit. They normally don’t do inspections on the weekend, but sometimes they surprise us. That’s usually because a prisoner pissed off a Screw. Then the whole block suffers for it. They check the cells when they make their rounds during the day, anyway. You earn more kudos if your neat and respectful.

That pays off when you need something from them like getting a phone number added to your account in a hurry or having something special in your cell.”

“Sounds fair enough.”

“They’ll also be opening the gates and the yard in about an hour or so. I’ll take you around and show you the layout, introduce you to a few blokes. When they open the gates we can go into the other wings, except B wing, that’s self-care, an *earned* wing. But you can check out A wing, get a feel for it since you’ll likely be moving there in a few weeks.”

A few weeks? I want out of here today! “Ian said something about forms for the phone?” Calling home was my main, if not only concern right then.

“Yeah, they’re on the wall near where we had stood to get our meals last night. I’ll get ya sorted.”

“Thanks,” I said, finishing up the toilet. Steve glanced over then gave a nod of approval.

“When they unlock the cell door, wait until they give the signal before opening it and going out. Legally, they have to be back on the other side of the gate and lock it before we leave the cell. If you open it before then, they get really up tight and could punish you by locking you back in again – for the day.”

“I’ll remember that. Thanks.”

There was no cell inspection. Apparently no one had pissed off an officer. As soon as the cell was unlocked and the officer gave the signal, I located my cup, which was about the same size as might be used to teach a toddler to drink from, then headed straight for the coffee in the common area. There were already several other guys there, including Ian. A few more guys paced in the court yard. I nodded to Ian as I made my coffee. Steve had rolled me an additional four cigarettes while we had chatted the night before. I fetched one from my pocket, now crumpled and bent from tossing and turning on it, but still smoke-able. Then I made my way out into the court yard. Roger was already sitting at the wooden table.

“Mornin’”, I said, sitting down across from him in the spot I’d previously occupied.

“Sleep well,” he asked, grinning.

I detected the intended sarcasm. “Like a babe in a mother’s arms.”

“You can make cereal or toast. It’s in the cabinet above the counter.”

I still had no appetite two days running. “I might do that.” I lit my cigarette, took a drag then chased it with a sip of coffee.

“I’d love to chat more about that strange shit you’re into, Bermuda Triangle and such. I love that stuff.”

“Weird shit just follows me around.” The fact was I really didn’t want to talk about it. Ghost Radio was gone, and so were those days. It was still a fresh wound. Talking about it on the evening before, however refreshing from the political topic, had been somewhat painful, as if something precious and close to my heart had died. I had loved Ghost Radio. So had my wife, I thought. It had been a labor of love. Like the passing of a loved one I was still coming to terms with the loss. But right now I had a very real, pressing problem to devote my attention to, a problem far more frightening to me than being sucked into another dimension through a vortex of lightning at sea. *That* I could probably handle. Dealing with a foreign legal system was another matter altogether. And I was in prison.

“When you get out you should visit my website, then,” I said, hoping he would take the hint. “Lots of stuff up there. Plus, all the ghost radio interviews with some pretty fascinating guests – around a 150 or so.” There was no sense in giving Roger the URL addresses without a pen to right them down. “Or, just do a Google search for John Victor Ramses. It’ll all come up, but remember the spelling: R-A-M-S-E-S, like the pharaoh. Google will probably correct you anyway.”

“Ramses. Is that what you changed your name to?”

“Yeah. I’m a fan of ancient Egyptian history, particularly the era of Ramses II. I’ve always been impressed with what he accomplished during his life and reign. Helluva guy.”

“Ain’t that the pharaoh who enslaved all the Jews and made them build his temples and shit?”

“Nah, wasn’t him. If it happened at all, it was some other pharaoh, and likely on a much smaller scale than what they’d have you believe today.”

“You don’t buy it?”

“Just one of the many topics my grandparents were loath to even ponder. But to draw an analogy, when you look at western society today, we’re no different than they say those Jews were, only we’re slaves to the big banks – the new modern pharaohs.”

“Mate, you’re not wrong there!”

“Have you ever noticed that on top of high corporate buildings or banks of western metropolises there is a perfect pyramid, like the ones in Giza? Go figure. There’s also a pyramid on the flip side of our Great Seal, which is shown on the back of the US one-dollar note. President Roosevelt had authorized it. He was considered by some to be the last of America’s founding fathers. Personally, I believe the so-called unfinished pyramid was designed to a calendar or timeline

for the future United States, depicting eras of 13 years each. But at any rate, somebody's always trying to dominate somebody else. It's been the same for thousands of years."

"*Everybody wants to rule the world,*" Roger sang poorly.

"Tears for Fears. You must be from *my* era in history. How old are you?"

"Forty-six, two months ago."

"Fifty, myself. Half a century on this planet."

Ian sat down in his spot beside Roger, then Steve beside me. Both had a bowl of mushy-looking cereal in a small blue bowl.

"So how was your first night in Hard Rock," Ian asked.

"Sleepless in paradise. It's hard to shut off after something like this."

"Eventually you'll relax. Enough to sleep anyway," Steve offered. "That's why workin's good. It occupies you, gives some sense of normalcy, and you're tired by lockdown."

"You're probably right."

"There's a yard area just out of N wing," Ian said, stirring the contents in his bowl. "You can go out there and walk around. Most of us do. It's good for the head."

"That I can use right now."

Ian continued. "It's your big day over in America, ain't it? The Fourth of July?"

*Thanks for reminding me that I'm not fishing with my daughter right now.* "Yep. In another few hours, anyway. After noontime, here. Perth is twelve hours ahead of New York."

"So the Fourth of July is when they signed your constitution or something after kickin' the Pommie's butt," Roger asked.

"Declaration of Independence," I corrected. "The bloody battle continued for years after that, though. Some say it never truly ended, that we're still fighting. But even most Americans believe the Declaration of was signed on the Fourth, but that's not true."

"Fair dinkum?"

"Many historians agree it was August 2<sup>nd</sup>. One version holds that on July 1<sup>st</sup> our John Adams gave his inspiring speech arguing for Independence, written mostly by Benjamin Franklin. That speech won over even the most ardent British supporters, which became evident the next day. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> fifty-six men signed the Declaration, giving birth to a new nation – the same you all know and love today! On the 3<sup>rd</sup> they paused to reflect on their actions, what meant, writing



in their journals and letters to family. Then, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, the new Declaration of Independence was read out to a fairly small number of the public, but as a result, Independence Day has been celebrated on the Fourth ever since.”

“You learn something new every day,” Ian said blandly.

“That all took place in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the same state your brother resides.”

“Australia would do well to break from the damn Pommies,” Steve grunted. “Aussies don’t know whether we’re American or British or Chinese half the time.”

“Won’t happen ‘til the Queen’s gone,” Ian said. “Bet your last dollar. Those wanks in Canberra are loyal and probably indebted to her and her kids. We tried to secede back in the nineties, but they rigged the referendum.”

“Even a child one day grows up and leaves its mother and makes its own way in the world,” I said, implying a potentially dangerous insinuation in the present company. “I’d like to see Australia become Independent for my own reasons, but after the way I was treated by that cop and simply thrown into jail on an accusation made under suspicious circumstances, well, historically, it bears a haunting resemblance to some of the very reasons America’s founders broke away from Britain: tyranny, injustice, persecution, no rights. That’s exactly what gave rise to our Constitution and Bill of Rights. For example, Article six basically states that in all criminal proceedings, every person shall have the right to a speedy trial, impartial jury, right to evidence and witnesses in their defence and the right to a lawyer.”

“Nope. Nothin’ like that here,” Steve said. “In that respect, nothin’s changed here in two hundred years.”

“But don’t get me wrong. America’s legal system is less than peachy, with its own hierarchy of corruption.”

“And after 9-11, our fuckin’ coppers were granted unlimited powers with no accountability, under the guise of fighting your war on terrorism,” Ian snapped.

Here we go, I thought. It was bound to come back to that. But his words bore certain truth. “A bit like giving children assault weapons and telling them to have fun, isn’t it,” I said as a matter of fact, deciding to jump right into the flame.

Steve changed the subject. “If you think what they did to you is criminal, what they did to my Nan’s kin would turn your blood cold, if you have any heart or decency. Do you know much about Australia’s Indigenous history?”

“Not enough to have an informed opinion, I’m sorry.”

“Well, if you get the chance, read up on it. It ain’t *Crodile Dundee*, mate. I’ll tell ya. Most of them are locked up in these prisons. Goddamn Pommies.”

“I’ll do that,” I said out of respect. But I was genuinely interested. It was clearly a sore spot with Steve and I wondered what had happened to him personally to cause such anger. I could ask the same of Ian, too, although I doubted his anger was related to Indigenous treatment.

“Those Yanks who signed that Declaration, they were all Masons, weren’t they,” Roger asked, as if the subject hadn’t changed.

“Jesus fucking Christ, Rog! Give it a fucking break,” Ian suddenly snapped, causing milk and bits of cereal to dribble down his chin as he spoke. “Not everything’s a fuckin’ conspiracy.”

I made a mental note: *Ian has a problem with his temper, hated most Americans, probably Roger, could blow up at any time and should be treated with caution.*

“Well I’d like to know this stuff from a true blue Yank,” Roger argued.

“You’ve been fucked in the head ever since you found that book in the library by James Jupiter or some fucking idiot. It’s all you’ve talked about for two fuckin’ weeks.”

“Jim Marrs,” Roger corrected. Then he directed his words to me. “You probably know of him. He wrote a book called *Rule By Secrecy* about the shit the Masons and Illuminati are doing to us. Fuck, man, everyone needs to know this stuff, what’s really going on.”

“Another conspiracy freak. That’s all he is. They make money scarin’ the fuck out of gullible people with lies.”

I cautiously stepped in. “Actually, Jim Marrs is a highly accredited journalist. Works only with fact. But to answer your question, Roger, yes, some of America’s founders were Masons, but not all.”

“See! I told ya so,” he directed to Ian, then put the questions back to me. “They were the Skull and Bones type, right?”

“That’s fucking it,” Ian snorted. “I don’t wanna listen to this garbage on my Sunday fucking morning. I’m going to take a shit.”

“Thanks for sharing,” Steve said indifferently.

Ian stood up, then taking his bowl of mush he hustled away into the building.

“Kinda like talking to my grandparents about aliens,” I said.

Roger looked like a schoolboy who’d just had his fingers smacked with a ruler by the teacher in front of the whole class. “I like getting into this stuff,” he whimpered. “My mum’s seen UFOs and ghosts and she also believes there’s a

conspiracy to make a one world order, making us all slaves like that pharaoh did to the Jews we were talking about. It's been going on for centuries, maybe longer, and there's...."

Steve and I sat staring at Roger in expressionless silence as he babbled. Then he caught on.

"What? There's *gotta* be something to it all."

I couldn't remember if we'd interviewed Jim Marrs on Ghost Radio or not, but I knew well his work, having listened to him on US radio programs as well as having had read a few of his books. Anyone interested in conspiracy theories knew of Marrs, but his work was based on sound journalism. The subject matter was compelling and informative, if not disturbing. But if you're new to his work (like the works of Zacharia Sitchen concerning the origins of humans), as I felt Roger was, it can be overwhelming, brain-frying. I had no doubt that Ian had in fact had to listen to Roger rant and babble on and on about *Rule By Secrecy*, and thus I could understand why he might be a bit perturbed by the subject - a little, anyway. There was more going on with Ian, I was sure.

"They allow Jim Marrs books in prison," I questioned Roger.

"Yeah. I found it a few weeks ago in the library. I've read it 3 times now."

"That could be dangerous content to the brain of the un-initiated." Roger seemed to have missed the insinuation.

"They'll be opening the gates up soon," Steve said, taking his bowl and standing up from the table. I'll show you 'round the place and get you those forms so you can get ahold of your kin back in the States."

"We can chat later about this stuff," I said to Roger, standing up myself. "Today's not really a good day. Lots in my own head to deal with."

"No worries. I forgot you just got here. Sorry, mate."

"No apology necessary. I still haven't grasped that I *am* actually here right now."

When the gates were unlocked, I followed Steve around the wings of the block like a faithful but nervous pound-puppy who'd been kicked and beaten by the ones he'd loved and trusted most, shy of the slightest irregular movement. Block Six, as it was called, was much smaller than I had expected for a prison. C and D wings were across from each other, as were A and B. N wing ran at a right angle from the junction of A and B with a door at the end of it that lead into the yard area. Dividing the all of the wings was a small 'movement' area where the block's Control Room was also situated, with thick glass windows all around it providing an unobstructed view of the immediate area. Inside sat two officers casually eyeing security monitors that displayed live feeds of each wing and the

yard from strategically positioned cameras. Across the hall from the Control Room was the Senior Officer's office. To the left of that was where the food had been dished up the night before. To the right of the office was a wall-mounted rack containing forms for various purposes.

Steve flipped through the forms until he finding the one I required. "Here ya' go. Just put down the numbers you want to call, who it is, the relationship and then I'll show you where to hand it in."

I filled in the form adding three numbers initially: my parents in the States, my supervisor and the bail lawyer's number from the card I had kept on me when I had exchanged my civies for prison garb. Then I signed the form.

"Just slip it under that slot in the window to the Screw," Steve said pointing. "Oh, and ask him if you can score some smokes, too. They usually give you a small lighter with it."

Following Steve's instructions, I slipped the form through the slot to the officer behind the glass. He glanced over it, then nodded and set it beside him on his desk. "It'll take a day or two at most to get the numbers on your account," he spoke through the grill. "We'll notify you as soon as it's done. When they call to put credit on the phone accounts this arvo, make sure you come up and tell them how much you want on. You won't be able to call until you've got credit."

"Thanks.....*Boss*," I remembered. "Just one more thing, if I can. I was told to ask about getting cigarettes and a lighter. I must have missed the call yesterday when I was brought in."

The officer wrote something down on a note pad. "I'll try to get that for you this arvo. If not, then definitely by morning."

"Thanks, again...*Boss*, for that."

I walked over to where Steve stood waiting for me at the junction of A, B and N wings. "All good," he asked.

"That went too easy," I said. "I might have some cigs by this afternoon. If not, then by morning. But I feel a bit odd calling someone 'Boss' who's younger than my kids in America, though."

Steve chuckled as we walked "It takes some getting used to, yeah. Just remember, you're addressing the uniform, not the person in it. You'll find most of the Screws here are fairly approachable, really try to help you out if you've got an issue. But there's others who were simply born nasty. You'll come across them. They can be insulting, treat you like shit, but just keep your cool. They try to provoke you, in my opinion. Always be respectful, regardless. You'll do it a lot easier in here if you don't make enemies out of the Screws."

"Films don't paint prison guards in a very good light. I expected the same treatment from *these* officers."

“A bit exaggerated. It’s not like that, really. Not here, anyway. But I wouldn’t want to be in one of your Yankie prisons, for sure.”

“There’s a few female officers in here, in a men’s prison,” I noted as we began to walk towards the door at the end of N wing. “I can’t get my head around that one. I wouldn’t have imagined any woman wanting to work in such a place, especially considering the type of crime some in here are supposed to have committed.”

“I don’t get it myself, but the sheilas are best of the lot in here, really. They seem to care more about the job and prisoners. Maybe it’s because they have to try harder. But don’t piss’em off. You’ve already learned about the darker side of a sheila’s nature! And always keep about a meter distance between you and the Screw when you’re talking to them. Any closer and it could be deemed as threatening. Having said that, there’s a sheila on the other shift that seems to have an inbred hatred of men. She’ll purposely get right in your face, yelling instead of talking to you. I don’t know why she’s been allowed to continue working here with all the complaints, but if you encounter her, well again, just keep your cool. *She* has the problem, not you.”

“Maybe she’d been raped or something.”

“Or her partner had an affair with some sheila in Finland,” Steve smirked.

“Like Family Court, I never had the chance for that, either.”

“Let me guess, you told your missus about your girlfriend, too?”

“Not in so many words....”

“I’m beginning to think you just arrived on this *planet*, mate,” Steve laughed, shaking his head as we walked through the N wing door into the yard.

The morning sky was bright and I had to shade my eyes while they adjusted. The air was fresh, cool against my face with just a taste of sea salt. I had no idea where the prison was located geographically, but the breeze could carry the ocean inland for many miles. When my eyes had somewhat adjusted I glanced casually around the yard to get my bearings, making mental notes. It was mostly grass but with patches of sand where nothing grew but short, hardy weeds. Block Six’s yard was only around 20 x 30 meters, enclosed by a high mesh-wire fence that connected to the block at either end. Nonetheless, having spent the past two days confined indoors, it felt to me the size of any given NFL stadium back home. A wide gate, secured shut by a thick chain and padlock, was all that interrupted the otherwise continuous barrier.

Beyond the fence, straight ahead, was an even larger yard belonging to another sector of the prison. The entire prison compound, including other blocks, buildings, yards and narrow service roads, was jealousy protected by a monolithic wall where unseen eyes behind the dark glass of sentry towers and

remote cameras peered down watching the moves of every green-clad prisoner below. While not nearly inspired by a Mary Shelly novel, there was no escaping Hakea Maximum Prison except by grant of release.

Along the inside edge of the high mesh fence walked prisoners in groups of two, three and four. A dozen or so more played with a football in the middle of the yard where mostly grass grew. A round wooden pergola had been built some meters out and a bit to the right of the door to N wing where another cluster of men stood talking and smoking. Steve headed for the pergola. Still shading my eyes, I continued to follow him.

Then, glancing sharp to my right as if an unseen hand had suddenly clutched and turned my head, my eyes fell upon a nearly unbelievable sight that for a moment caused a tingle to flush through my entire body. Fastened to the mesh fence were two large square white-painted plates spaced somewhat apart. On each was stenciled the number '11' in bold black paint. Together they formed '11 – 11'. Momentarily I froze in my tracks. *You've gotta be joking*, I nearly said out loud. *Eleven eleven?* Why not 12-12, 3-3, 89-89 or any other number from an infinite source of possible combinations? No, it *had* to be *eleven eleven*.

It was a number, or perhaps symbol, that had for nearly 34 years to the day haunted me, taunted me, compelled and confused me, and had even guided me with its uncanny synchronicity since July 2, 1976, when I was just sixteen years old. It had appeared that morning following a thankfully failed attempt to take my own young life the day before, on July 1 while alone in the Rocky Mountains, due to a broken heart and a naïve lost hope for any tomorrows. Since then 11:11 had been a constant companion, although not always welcome and sometimes resented. Then there had been other times when I'd found myself alone in the world, like now, when its uncanny manifestation had been like a welcomed friend stopping by to say hello, perhaps reminding me that I wasn't truly ever alone. Today was not one of *those* days.

But if not for 11:11 I would never had met my first wife on April 24, 1979, nor known my two beautiful children from her, born into my hands, bathed, kissed then laid gently in their mother's arms. Equally, I would never have met my latest wife or known the overwhelming feeling of love that would not only compel me to leave my home country and all I knew for an isolated metropolis on the opposite side of the world, but which would also bless us with my 'dream' daughter, born in my presence at 10:10 AM in the first year of the new millennium. One decade later it would then orchestrate my meeting of a woman from Finland, who had seemingly been singled out as if by design from literally thousands of people who had written to my wife and myself about 11:11 over the years - arriving as it had – at a critical, fragile juncture in the marriage.

Then on July 1, 2010 allegations were reported to the police. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> I was arrested. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> I was numb and in shock. Now, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July – Independence Day for Americans – I'm standing in the yard of a foreign

maximum security prison *because* of that number, as much as my wife's actions, however indirectly it might seem, instead of fishing off the jetty at Hillary's Resort with my daughter.

1976 had been America's *Bicentennial* celebrating 200 years of Independence from British rule. In many ways it had been a year for my own Independence and coming of age. But 11:11 would continue to be a private enigma. Then, in 1993, after 17 years of feeling as though I was the only one who experienced the 11:11 phenomena, sometimes questioning my own sanity, I learned that I was not alone after all. Millions of people around the world also experienced it with no apparent discrimination toward race, gender, religion, class, age or geography – from the average to the famous. 1993 had also been the year that the dreams of my future daughter had begun, while I was still in the midst of a second marriage.

In 1995, after discovering the still infant Internet, I began to write online of my own experiences, all I knew of the phenomena. Hundreds of people from the world over would eventually respond, sharing their stories and theories. By that time, I had divorced from my second wife and had begun a very personal, very private journey to find the unknown mother of this future daughter. Then, on the strange morning of April 27, 1998, while in Portland, Oregon, as I had been preparing to drive to Arizona to complete research for my book *Quest For Peralta Gold*, an email came into my Hotmail account, just one of typically many on the subject of 11:11. But for some reason, this particular email stood out from the rest, though I don't know why. It had been the only email that I'd had time to click and read. It was from a frantic single mother in Australia who had suddenly begun to see 11:11 everywhere for a week prior, so seemingly urgent that it had compelled her to look for answers on the Internet where she was directed to my web site. At the time I had no idea where on the planet this woman lived, nor what she looked like. It didn't matter. I knew deep in my soul and in every fiber of my being that this woman, whoever she was, wherever she resided, was the mother my future daughter. And I loved her beyond what any collection of words could describe. Our souls had met, even if we hadn't yet.

Our two souls had connected from beyond space and time; its resonance harmonious and perfect. Deep in her own soul she had also felt this inexplicable love beyond words. Shortly after that day we became engaged. 15 months later, on September 2, 1999, I landed in Perth, Western Australia. On November 11, at 11:11 PM (to commemorate the number that had brought us together) we were married on Mullaloo Beach amongst close friends and family, she being beautiful in her white sequenced dress and flower wreath around her head. Within her sacred womb our daughter, my 'dream' daughter, snuggled and grew safely from the world – 11% developed, according to the doctor earlier that day. I had played our wedding song, *So In Love*, which I had written during the flight while at 30 thousand feet in the heavens. Indeed, we had once been *so in love*.

The universe had smiled warmly on that cool but starry night while a crescent moon had observed indolently from over the Indian Ocean. But that night had not been merely *destined* to happen. It almost didn't. Rather, a bargain had been struck with God – some god, anyway – just a bit over four months earlier, on July 1, 1999, while I had laid possibly dying in the Intensive Care Unit of Carson-Tahoe Hospital in Nevada. On that night *Love* had been tested, and had won. Now, eleven years later to the day, that bargain had been concluded just four days ago– the night I was taken from my daughter – July 1<sup>st</sup>, the night I vanished from the world as if I had died after all.

Seeing that number now in this place, bold and apparent from anywhere in the yard when my eyes should be open, was proof once again that this was not a mere coincidence: not like the coincidental glance at a watch at a precise moment, or a number on a passing bus or train or license plate or address on a building. It was something much, much more, but which I was still trying to understand after 34 years of diligent investigation, just as millions of other people were. Countless people had tried to explain it, and like them I only had theories. For me 11:11 seemed to appear at junctures in life, large or small. When it does appear, it resonates with something so deep in the soul that human words could not begin to describe. It speaks in the language of *emotion*, the original language between all things, as I'd come to believe, before there was Voice, before Sound. It was the language of God – whoever, whatever God in fact might be. And right then it was speaking to my soul.

I thought briefly about returning inside and not venturing into the yard at all to avoid its constant reminder that my wife and I were no more, that my daughter had been kidnapped through the use of false allegations, that I was alone in a foreign prison in a foreign country, but it would have made little difference. I knew from a lifetime of experience that this number, as a symbol, would find a way to manifest to me, if even as a shadow on the wall through the bars of a window caused by a coincidental light source and seen during a coincidental glance at a coincidental moment while coincidentally pondering some deep, personal thought regarding my life, situation, well-being of a loved one or the uncertain future ahead.

I'd been afraid just before: afraid of being in prison, afraid of being injured or worse by other prisoners, afraid of the food, afraid of diseases. They now paled by comparison to a new fear surfacing in me: that this entire experience, beginning with the night of July 1, 1999, when my wife had made a deal with God eleven years ago to take ten years from her life and give them to me so I could see my 'dream' daughter born and raise her, might be part of something much more significant than just how it has affected me and completely beyond my control. Where it would lead I didn't dare even surmise. The future I could not predict. Not now. But 11:11 had, among other things, always been a harbinger of change, and deep with my soul that odd *something* was resonating, speaking, filling me with the feeling that whatever was truly



occurring, it was not just about me. This time, I felt it was the world that was about to change, for the worse. A choice had been made four nights ago, a terrible choice. Now the world would follow suit.

Subconsciously I had caught up to Steve at the Pergola. “John, this is Richard,” he said, pointing briefly to a man sitting on one of the benches. “I think you two might wanna chat. John here’s in a similar situation. He pissed off his wife by having an affair then told her he was going to sue her for custody of their kid and, well, I think you can fill in the rest from there. Oh, he’s a Yank. None too smart, though.”

Steve laughed and wandered off. I wasn’t offended. I had come to know well the Aussie humor, but it had taken some years to get used to. “It wasn’t quite like that,” I said, shaking Richard’s hand.

Richard was in his mid-thirties, I guessed, with short dark hair, defined facial features and black stubble shadowing olive skin of Mediterranean descent. He smiled broadly, revealing a polished set of ivory teeth. “But I’m guessing Steve’s not too far off base.”

“If I had to stuff it in a nutshell, I suppose.” His accent was Aussie, but with a remnant hint of foreign inflection on some words. “Where ya from, mate?”

“Melbourne, Victoria. That goes back some years though. I’ve lived in WA for almost 20 years after my parents moved out here to start a business. My brothers and I work for them now, a family operation in corporate branding and marketing. We’re moving into web marketing at the moment.”

“Well, we do have a bit in common then. Web marketing is my forte. I own *I-Prodigy Communications*. My wife and I operated it. Not easy out here, though. West Aussies resist anything new. I spent the first two years in business trying to convince potential clients that the Internet was the future and not just porn sites. It was a tough sell.”

Richard laughed. “Yep, we’re on the same page. Not an enterprising lot. We still have clients out here who believe the Internet is just a passing fad. Fortunately, many of our client’s are national and international.” Then, cutting through the pleasantries he said, “So, your wife put you here?”

“I still find it hard to believe, but yeah.”

“My situation’s probably a bit different. My ex and I have been divorced for some years with equal access to the kids, but yeah, she, along with her husband, put me here. Personally, I know about nine or ten blokes in the same boat. There’s more here, but they don’t talk much about it. Probably a good idea, considering the charges.”

“I’ll get right to the point,” I said, taking a seat beside him. “What exactly am I up against with this shit?”

“The *system* here, frankly. It’s dirty, corrupt and hell-bent on winning convictions, like it’s some kind of competition. Sex offence charges are easy money for them. Nothing else is needed beyond someone to make an accusation.” Richard leaned toward me, speaking low. “Look, I fought tooth and nail. My parents and brothers are behind me and so are a number of my close mates outside. They know the facts. We hired a QC, top dollar, and had gathered significant evidence to prove it was a setup. I was still convicted by the jury. They always bet the better-safe-than-sorry card in these cases.”

“Yeah, I’ve heard that somewhere before.”

“But my lawyer had as much to do with it. He never put up the evidence we gave him or put the hard questions to my ex. He let me burn, in spite of holding my evidence in his hands. We paid him over a hundred grand. Now the prick wants more money to appeal the conviction. It’s just business to them. A very lucrative business, especially with accusations increasing exponentially due to all the hysteria created by the media.”

“And they say crime doesn’t pay.”

“It just pays the wrong people for the wrong reasons. I was sentenced last week. I got two years, one of which I’ve already done sitting in here waiting for trial.”

“You didn’t get bail?”

“I rejected it. They made the conditions all but impossible. I couldn’t live at my own home alone, so I’d arranged to live with my parents. But CJS had threatened them with ruining their business by going to the media if I didn’t shut up and stay put.”

“So you kept quiet and stayed in jail to protect your folks?”

“In a nutshell, as you put it. They’ll be shipping me off to Acacia in a few weeks to finish my time.”

“I can’t believe they threatened your parents. Jesus, you have a right to bail if the judge granted it and you can meet the bond and conditions. That’s not fair – or justice.”

“Justice is spoken tongue-in-cheek out here. The system makes money for every head they put in jail – all paid for by the taxpayers, of course. And, they don’t like you out where you can gather evidence and prepare your case. They’re sore losers and don’t play fair. Like I said, sex offence charges are an easy kill. Never trust your lawyer if you have one. They’re not going to jeopardize their career by crossing swords with the prosecution. The DPP controls the legal industry, to be sure. Even judges are afraid of them. And the local media’s in their pocket, especially *The West Australian*, part of the *Seven West Corporation*. Pro-liberal, pro-establishment. If I’d had pushed for bail, I have no doubt that CPS bitch would have called one of her flunky reporters. There would have been

a trumped up spread in *The West*, right next to one of our business ads just for fun. That's how they work. Quite demented, really. In the end, you might beat the charges, but they leave you nothing to return home to out of spite for challenging them. Not the life you had, anyway."

"And to think these people live in our community, shop in our shops, probably send their kids to school with ours."

"Well, it's you're call, mate, but honestly, as a foreigner you need to consider whether you should just plead guilty in spite of being innocent. If you go to trial and lose, which I'm sorry to say might be the case, they'll throw a bunch of years on you to cover the costs of trial and to teach you a lesson for challenging them. Pleading guilty, or *Fast Tracking*, as they like to call it here, might get you less time. Then you can get home where you can worry about proving your innocence from outside Australia."

It was like *déjà vu*. "The cop pretty much told me the same thing. I'm trying to arrange bail myself right now, then see about getting a good lawyer."

"No such thing as a good lawyer out here. Do you have any family in Australia who can help you while you're in here?"

"Besides my ten-year-old daughter, no. I'm here alone."

"Well, you can't prepare your case or get evidence while in jail, that's for certain. It's too limited on resources. They deliberately keep you helpless in here, so you'll definitely need to be out there if you're going to stand a chance of beating it. But if you're going to push for bail, expect them to try and pull a dirty on you. Watch for it."

*Christ, this isn't really happening.* "I'd like to talk more about this later on. I appreciate the advice. But right now I think I need to walk around, breath some air and digest it all."

"No worries, mate. I'm in A wing. Look me up whenever you want. Also, a word of warning: Most guys in here are in for sex offence charges, but not all. Be careful who you talk to. If anyone asks what you're in for – and they will – tell them its drug related... and to piss off."

"Understood, Richard. Thanks again," I said shaking his hand once more.

Richard seemed to be highly educated and well raised. He maintained the disposition of a professional businessman in spite of being in for however long it had been. His demeanor was in striking contrast to most of the prisoners and I felt we had a connection with more than just our circumstances. He'd seemed calm about being convicted and now preparing to be sent *up river* to the 'Big House' they call Acacia. Maybe it was an acceptance of his fate, maybe a disciplined inner strength. Whichever it might be for him, I was not about to just plead guilty to something I didn't do, then accept whatever they throw at me

from their bag of dirty tricks. I wanted to go home more than anything, as soon as possible, but not as a guilty man and never without my daughter. I had promised her after the divorce that I would *never* leave her. It was a promise I intended to keep come hell or high water. Now it is personal.

I wandered over to the mesh fence and, not by conscious act, stood between the two 'eleven' plates with my hands in my pockets and then began assessing the men in the yard more discerningly. I was a prisoner, no different from them, but I felt no affinity or kinship with them. No brotherhood. Some looked rough as guts with tattoos and calloused faces. Others seemed meek and frightened like I felt. Still others paced in a zombie-like state lost in world of their own, no doubt contemplating serious personal problems. Few took notice of me; just another face attached to a body wearing green. I wondered momentarily if any of them had been among those I'd shared the PTV with, who had made me feel threatened and insecure. The New Zealand guy – Tom, I think was his name – was not among them. Perhaps he'd been put in another block. Perhaps he had died from stress.

A group of three prisoners walk by me on the path, talking low among themselves. I waited until they had gone several meters, putting ample space between us, then I joined the walk behind them. The path, which followed the edge of the mesh fence, was well worn by prisoners who had paced in endless circles while waiting on Judgment Day. The path was also slightly sunken, creating a shallow trough, as if the ground had been unable to withstand the weight of burdens men had carried with them over the years since Hakea Prison had been built. I walked along, following the path along the fence, then along the building, past the door to N wing and back to where I'd begun between 11-11. How many circles I'd completed the when they called us back inside, I'd lost track, not like I'd been counting anyway.

"Lunch, mate," Steve said as he came up behind me. "We'll be locked down for a bit then let back out to the yard later this arvo. Was Richard any help to ya?"

"If depressing me is helpful in some way, yes," I chuckled. "He's pretty informative, but a hard realist, too."

"It's best to be that way in here, mate. Delusions about justice or rights or fairness will only do you more harm. But look, guys beat these cases. I've known a few and heard of more. Just remember, it's a *he-said she-said* game. Her accusation is the evidence. What you need to do is discredit her story, prove she's lying, put doubt in the jury's mind. If she's lied she's made mistakes. Expose them."

"Christ. Jury? Trial? I've heard that that can be more than a year away. If I find a lawyer, can't they just show the evidence to the police or judge and end this?"

“Maybe in America. Maybe back east. But here they drag it to trial and make you show your evidence there, in front of a jury. By that point it’s tough to convince the jury. The fucking DPP know it, too. They depend on the juries to win a conviction, which is why they want a trail. And your lawyer’s no help. It’s not about justice, it’s about them winning. Sexual accusations are their fucking meal ticket, and they’re not about to go hungry, believe me.”

“That cop told me I watch too much American TV,” I said laughing.

“He’s probably right. It’s a lot different here. Forget everything you ever believed about the legal system. You’re in WA now. Speaking of hungry, they’ll be callin’ us for a lunch feed soon. Still have no appetite?”

“I’m starving, but I think I’ll vomit if I put anything other than caffeine in my stomach. To be honest, I’ve heard about prison food – the things they can put in it.”

“It happens. I’ve heard some sick stories about other prisons, for sure. But it doesn’t happen here. It’s too tightly controlled. The prisoners make the meals and they have to eat it, too. Worse, they have to live with *us*, which wouldn’t be for very long if they fucked with our feed. It’s not the best food, but it’s clean. *That* much I can promise.”

I ignored lunch, not ready to eat yet in spite of Steve’s assurances about the cleanliness of the food. Instead, I made another coffee then sat in the walled court yard off C wing thinking, then thinking more. Around 2:30 the gates were again opened and I returned to the yard where I continued my circular pacing along the fence, contributing the weight of my own burdens to the already downtrodden path. At 3 PM I heard the call for prisoners to put credit on their phone accounts. When my turn arrived I requested \$5 to start with.

“If you didn’t have money on you when you were arrested, we can only provide credit if you have a job in prison,” said the officer through the glass. “Do you want to work laundry?” I answered in the affirmative. “O.K., follow the prisoners over in the morning, then. You’ll be given an interview then likely put to work.”

“Fair enough,” I answered. Anything just to make the phone call and get out of here.

I made my way back out into the yard where I saw Steve, Ian and Roger at the pergola. Not feeling like talking I simply nodded to them as I passed then continued my pacing where I’d left off. Thirty minutes later they locked up the yard, then the gates between the wings. Returning to my cell I climbed up to my bunk and again stared beyond the ceiling, oblivious to the TV that Steve had settled in to watch. Then came muster and evening meal. This time it was over-cooked vegetables and some kind of meat, maybe road kill, as Ian had put it. I

ate the vegetables, not recognizing the meat as anything familiar. In the small court yard, I sat with the same group at the same table in the same position, but this time there was no discussion about the Bermuda Triangle, 9-11, US policy or legal matters, which I was glad for. The routine thereafter was the same as the night before: wash up, make coffee, return to the cell where Steve rolled me a cigarette, then, becoming lost in his TV programs, I climbed into my bunk and became lost in my own thoughts and memories. Somehow during the night I'd fallen asleep.

\* \* \* \*

July...something, 2010

Monday, I think.

Morning returned. Steve and I cleaned the cell for inspection, which passed with the Miss's approval. Then, after making and drinking a coffee, I followed a large crowd of prisoners out of N wing, across the yard, through the now unlocked gate and finally into another building on the compound where I found myself in a moderate factory-like room with tables piled with green clothing, blankets and white towels. Nearby was a row of industrial dryers, a heavy roller-type iron and steel crates filled with more laundry waiting to be washed.

An officer approached me. "If you're here to work you need to see the Miss in the office before you can start. Follow me over."

The officer was of African descent, short and wore thick black-rimmed prescription glasses. I immediately identified his accent. "You're American," I asked as we walked.

"New Yorker."

*Thank god. A kinsman from my homeland!* "I'm from Utah...and before you ask, no I'm *not*."

He laughed, understanding what I meant. "I was just about to ask that question next."

"How long have you been in Australia?"

"Twenty years now. I joined the navy when I was young, saw the world, retired from it and then took a job here."

"Well, it's nice to hear a voice from home. I wish I were there right now."

"It's in pretty bad shape there at the moment. Not much work."

"Family's there, though. I miss them."

"I never had much family to give a shit about," he said, opening the door to an office. "Go in and wait for the Miss to call you to her desk. Laundry is *her* domain. Be polite. She doesn't like *anybody*." Then he left. Less than a minute later I was sitting before at her desk.

"You want to work, then?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Rules are simple. Do the job, no horseplay, no sitting or standing around, no smoking in the toilet. Do that and you won't be fired. I see everything and everyone. It's very simple. Can you do it?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I'm starting you at the folding tables. Watch the others to learn how to do it. You might be asked by an officer to help out in some other area. Do as you're asked. Now, get out to the tables and start working. That's all."

"Thank you, ma'am."

I left promptly, leaving the door wide open, and made my way to one of the tables with a large pile of laundry on it. Steve, Ian and Roger worked at one table and seeing a narrow space between Steve and another prisoner, I slid in between them.

"So now you're folding laundry in prison," Steve yelled over the sound of the dryers and machinery.

"Living the dream, mate. Living the dream," Roger added.

Steve gave me a rundown on what to do and within a short time I was folding prison towels, shirts, pants, socks, jocks and blankets like I'd been born to do the job. It sucked, but at least the laundry was warm against my hands.

"We don't work weekends or holidays, but get paid for it, which is good," Steve yelled. "You get paid daily, too. So that helps."

There was no more said as we focused on reducing the mountain of linen, folding and sorting, which seemed to keep growing as other workers dumped

more onto the table. At 11:00 we were herded back to our block for lunch. On the way, Steve and Ian had waited for me at the gate.

“Not so bad as work goes, is it,” Steve asked as we cross the yard toward N wing.

“I’ve had worse jobs. Not many though. But the time does go by quickly, I’ll give you that.”

“We go back at 2PM, work until 3:20 or so, then that’s the day.”

“I’ve got to check about the phone account when we get inside. Utah’s 14 hours behind us and my folks will be going to bed there soon. I’ll also check about the cigarettes. I didn’t have time this morning. By the way, I didn’t see Richard in the Laundry?”

“He works in admin. He gets paid more, too.”

“He’s *special*,” Ian laughed sarcastically.

“There’s an American officer back there, from New York.”

“He’s a good bloke for a Yank,” Steve smirked. “He’s a funny bugger, too, when you get to know him. But he’s by-the-book type, probably from his years in the Navy. I suppose you met the Miss too?”

“Yeah, I felt she already had it in for me, but the American told me she hates everybody equally.”

“Don’t get on her bad side; her powers likely stretch into hell itself. She’ll treat you right by ignoring that you even exist if you just do your job. Trust me, *that’s* the way you want it with her.”

Passing by the Control Room I stopped at the window. “I’ll just check the phone account while I’m here. See ya back in the wing.”

“Yep,” Steve said as he and Ian continued walking.

“What do ya need,” asked an officer through the window.

“I’m just inquiring on whether my phone account is active. I need to call home to America and let them know where I’m at.”

The officer looked at something on the computer screen before him then said, “Looks like you’re all set. Three numbers have been approved and added.”

I was relieved. “Thanks for that.” I started to walk off.

“Hold on.....Ramses is it?”

“Yeah?”

Reaching into a box the officer retrieved what appeared to be a pouch of tobacco, a lighter, some rolling papers and a white sheet of paper. “Sign for that



stuff on the form there. You'll be charged for it, but they'll only take a bit out each week 'til it's paid for."

I signed the form and pushed it back through the window to the officer. "Thanks again, Boss." I looked down at the pouch and rolling papers. The lighter I knew how to work, but I had never rolled a cigarette in all my years of smoking and had no idea how. I'd either have to humiliate myself and ask Steve or Ian or Roger to show me, or quit smoking. After three seconds had passed I decided to ask for help.

Returning to my cell I tossed the tobacco onto my bunk and told Steve to take from it what I owed him.

"No need, mate. I have plenty."

"Thanks for helping me out. It's there if you run short. I've gotta get ahold of my folks before lunch or they'll be in bed."

"So the numbers are on already? That was quick."

"Not quick enough for me."

I hastened out of the cell toward the phone on the wall of C wing. Fortunately, no one was using it. Following the short instructions on the wall beside it I called home at last.

"Hello?"

The sound of my mother's voice forced emotions to the surface. So close was she that I could hear her, yet so very far away. Home. My eyes suddenly welled with tears causing a deluge of biblical proportions to run down my cheeks, onto my shirt and floor. Four days of pent-up horror released at once. My voice broke when I spoke. "Mom?"

"Well hi, honey," she said with concern in her tone. "The recording said you're in some prison. What's going on? Are you all right?"

"No, Mom. Is Dad there? He should also hear this."

"I'm here, son. I was downstairs. Your mom and I picked up the phone at the same time."

I took a deep breath. "Well I *am* in jail. I was arrested a few nights ago, back on the 2<sup>nd</sup>, after my former beloved called the police and reported false allegations that I'd sexually assaulted her eldest daughter. Then I was effectively arrested off the street."

"Oh, no, John! She didn't do that did she?"

"Afraid so, mom... to keep me from starting to Family Court today."

"My god, how can they just throw you in jail like that? Don't they have to have some proof or hear your side of the story or something?"

“Well, you would think so. But apparently *not* in Western Australia. The cop was quite ignorant and insulting. I called a lawyer after battling the cop to let me do so. They set bail at five thousand dollars....just on an accusation alone. I can't do anything to help myself locked away in here and you know I hate asking, but is there any chance of putting up the bond? Of course, you won't lose it. I just have to appear in court for hearings. But once outside I can get back to work, get a lawyer and if you require, I'll send you back the money within a couple months.”

After a period of silence Dad spoke. “We don't have that much money in the bank and our cards are maxed right now. We'll have to see about getting a loan against the house. It will take some time – three to five working days. But we'll get onto it.”

My mother was crying, which further weakened me. “John, this is so terrible. Are you O.K.? Are they treating you decent there? Are you in danger?”

“I'm O.K. at the moment, Mom. Scared shitless, but I'm in a cell with a guy who seems alright. He's been quite helpful.”

“Dammit! I suppose your ex-wife has your little daughter, too. I thought you'd be fishing together for the Fourth today like you'd planned. Does she know where you are?”

“I don't know what they've told her, but they would have had to say something when I didn't call or show up to take her out. God only knows what they've said to her, but I can imagine it broke her little heart, and that angers me more than what they did to me. Trust me on that!”

“I'm sorry that it will take a few days before we can help,” said Dad, retaining a fatherly strength. “Can you take care of yourself and call us back again on Friday or so? It's a holiday tomorrow, our Monday, so we can't even get to the bank until Tuesday.”

“Yes, Dad, I'll be fine. I'll call back then at around this same time. Thank you. I'll beat this damn thing, and then I'm getting your granddaughter and coming home after what they've pulled now.”

“Oh god, the precious little thing,” Mom spoke. “Children always lose in these situations no matter what. Please be safe in there, honey. Dad and I will do what we can as soon as the bank is open.”

“I'll be fine, Mom. Thanks, Dad. I suppose they'll be starting the fireworks show there soon?”

“Seems to me that the fireworks started three days early! We love you, son. Call back Friday and we'll have some news for you.”

“I love you both and miss you. Bye.”

I didn't dare return to the cell with wet eyes – or entire face, rather. Instead, I pretended to remain talking on the phone while I discreetly dried my eyes with my hand. My soaked shirt was another matter. As soon as I had returned to the cell I pretended to wash my face, pretending also that some water had splashed on my shirt, before Steve could notice I'd been crying while talking to my parents at age fifty. It hadn't fooled him.

“They say prisoners never cry in prison. That's a lie. We almost all do, mate.”

“Hearing my mother's voice had triggered it. I don't know where *that* came from,” I said, still pretending to be tough.

“Yeah, I wonder. Lunch is in about ten minutes. Getting back to work will do you some good. Believe me.”

“I've gotta quickly try to get ahold of the that lawyer before lunch and tell her what's being arranged.”

“You're not gonna cry on the phone to her *too*, are you?”

Over the past two days I'd grown accustomed to Steve's cheeky grin and attempt at humor. “I'll try not to.”

I hustled back to the phone and made the call. A receptionist answered first then patched me through to the lawyer. I explained the situation.

“They handle International bonds differently,” she said in my ear. “I'll have to approach the judge on this and he'll have to approve it. I'll fax you his decision tomorrow.”

“Thanks for that.”

Lunch came and went, then we returned to work in Laundry. When we had returned back to the block I again added \$5 to my phone account, certain I had used up the previous credit. I had to get ahold of my supervisor at my company and let him know what was happening. The note I'd left on the window of my car had been brief: *I'm leaving my car here for a while. I'll be in touch.* Hopefully by tomorrow afternoon I'd be able to call him.

Back in the cell I added insult to injury when I at last found the courage to ask Steve to show me how to roll a cigarette from scratch, this after he'd caught me crying like a baby.

After a long glazed stare of disbelief, he said, “Well, get your stuff and I'll walk you through it.”

Fetching the tobacco and papers from my bunk I handed them to him then said, “I trust we'll keep this between ourselves, right?”

“Oh, by all means! Cross my heart!”

Somehow I knew he had crossed a finger or a toe, as well.

“This is White Ox tobacco,” he began. “Nasty stuff if you’re used to tailor-made cigs. I swear they feed the leaves to the livestock first then wait for them to shit it back out, dry it, package it, then sell it to us. It’s why I roll smokes so thin.” In exaggerated slow motion Steve went through the process of showing me how to roll a cigarette. “Got it?”

“Got it,” I lied.

“*This* smoke I’m keepin’. Now *you* roll one.”

“Perhaps later, when I’m ready for a smoke,” I smiled.

Steve laughed. “You’re first roll I’ve *gotta* see! Might even save it and put it in a museum one day.”

“Thanks for the support,” I grinned.

“Save your bumpers, too. They come in handy if you run short during the week.”

“What’s a bumper,” I almost didn’t ask.

Steve rolled his eyes then removed a remnant cigarette from a cup he’d had stashed behind the TV. “The part of the roll you *don’t* smoke because you’d burn your fingers if tried.”

“Ah, a *roach*, as they used to be called back in the day by hooch smokers.”

“Mormon,” he said rolling his eyes again. “Just think of all the wonderful things you’re learning in jail that you can share with your grandkids one day.”

“Wonderful,” I said, shaking my head. “I’m going to bed. Remember...about this...” I said, pointing at the newly rolled cigarette in his hand. “Not a word!”

“Oh, absolutely,” he laughed, crossing his heart with his finger.

On the afternoon of the next day, after my routine of coffee, cig, work, lunch, coffee, cig, work, I was called up to the control room and handed a fax from the lawyer. My heart sank. The amount for bail had doubled to \$10,000. Fuming, I stormed back to my cell. After calming down I called the lawyer who half-heartedly explained that bonds coming from outside Australia often doubled. No reason was given. I knew that five thousand would be a struggle for my parents. Ten would be all but impossible, I was sure. I felt as if I was being taken advantage of because I was alone here with only family in America.

“They probably smell money, being a Yank and all,” Steve suggested after I’d vented to him.

“American’s don’t have money as the world may think. We have *credit* and not much of *that* anymore. I know my parents can’t do that much. Five is bad enough. Christ, I wouldn’t even be in this situation if my wife had acted like a responsible, decent human being in this, instead of a witch.”

“You mean *bitch*?”

“That too, but she believes she’s a real honest-to-god witch from some coven in Ireland called Frost. He whole damn family practices this shit. She bought her eldest daughter a copy of the *Satanic Bible* when she turned 13, telling her it embraced the coven’s beliefs. It really fucked the kid up. What she’s doing to me is a page right out of Anton LeVey’s principles.”

“And I thought *you* were weird. My missus gets into crystals and believes in ghosts, but that’s about it.”

“I’m fucking stuck here. I’m not going to get bail or see my daughter for a year until after trial. It’s completely wrong, sick and cruel!”

Steve’s tone changed. “Look mate, for what it’s worth, I’m genuinely sorry. It’s criminal, to be sure. But wait ‘til you talk to your parents before giving up. We’re *all* in the same boat here.”

“Sorry, I shouldn’t be dumping on you. You’ve got your own issues to contend with. I just don’t get it. Money is money, regardless of where it comes from. They get their five grand and I get out. Simple as that, or it should be. You’re right, though. They probably jacked up the price because I’m an American, believing my family will pay *anything* to get me home again.”

“Smells like it.”

I had another sleepless night, fuming. Then, in the afternoon I finally got ahold of my supervisor, who had suspected I’d been jailed.

“The cops let me bring my car out to the shop, but it was the only decent gesture they made, I assure you. They probably had some liability to see it was secure in the event I proved my innocence. If it had been damaged or vandalized, I’d sue the State.”

“It would have likely been vandalized by your ex-wife, if anyone,” he said. “She called the shop this morning demanding that we give her access to your car.”

“Are you kidding me? What in hell would she want my car for? It’s not in her name and there’s nothing in it worth anything except the fishing poles I’d bought for me and my daughter.”

“Honestly? I think she would have planted evidence to stick you. She was seriously violent over the phone. Our receptionist took the call initially. Your ex almost brought her to tears. Then she put it over the speaker phone so we could

hear it. Your ex was quite nasty and threatening. We almost filed a report with the police but we let it go after she called the receptionist a whore and hung up.”

“Jesus, mate. I’m sorry you all had to go through that. I’ve never known my wife to have a foul mouth. Not like *that* anyway. Do you think she really wanted to plant evidence or something?”

“What else? Like you said, the cars in *your* name and there’s nothing in it. She can’t take the car because you must have kept the keys with you. If she was just going to vandalize it she wouldn’t call and ask permission to get to it. Which reminds me - we felt it best to store your car in a safer place so we used the forklift to carry it into the warehouse. It’s well hidden in the back. No damage done.”

“Thanks for that, mate. Yeah, I kept the keys not feeling safe about leaving them on the wheel or anyplace. But how did she even know where my car was at? The only people who knew where I’d parked it was the police.”

“I think you have your answer, then. They probably told her where it was at. If so, sue them. They probably even told her to sneak something into it to stitch you up, which they would conveniently find afterward.”

“Sounds like she’s gone off the deep end and now I’m very worried about my daughter. *God Dammit!*”

“Well, on another note, we miss ya here at work. We’re behind and, except for me, you’re the only one who knows how to cut and install the windows in the door panels.”

“I’d rather be at work, too. I’m trying to arrange bail through my folks right now but it could take a while.”

“Let me know how that goes. In the meantime, keep your chin up and don’t worry about your kid. I’m sure she’s alright. And we’ve got your car well hidden away. Even *I’ve* forgotten where we put it!”

“You’re a good friend, mate. And again, thanks. If my ex tries anything again, let me know if you can – and call the police so there’s a record of it on file.”

“Shall do.”

If what my wife had done to her first husband could be likened to a mid-west Tornado, what she was doing to me now would rival Hurricane Katrina. Planting evidence to ensure that I stayed in jail so I would never have access to my daughter is the only logical reason I could think of for why she had been so determined to get to my car. It was going to extremes, even for her. But my supervisor had been right: The only way she could have known where my car was located is from that cop, *Thwaites*. He had deliberately told her, I was

certain. My car could have been left anywhere. But if true, that meant the cop was helping her to ensure that a terrible lie would lead to a conviction. It was becoming ever more clear: my daughter's mother was determined to end my very existence and the police were now helping her. But I knew, too, that it was not my wife alone orchestrating it. Her family was behind it, particularly her wealthy, well-connected uncle, who had used his influence before to pull favors with police – much to the detriment of her *first* husband.

It was also becoming more serious, personal and dangerous. The words my Finnish woman-friend had text to me last week came to mind: *John.... Be careful. If your X would do this to keep your daughter from you what else is she or her family capable of? Remember, you're alone in Australia now.* Indeed, what was my wife capable of? This was not the woman I'd married and loved. But she was right then the mother of my daughter who was holding her prisoner as much as me, and that made me feel extremely uneasy.

I briefly shared with Steve what my supervisor had told me, but not wanting to burden him with my problems, I kept it short.

“The cop no doubt told your ex where to find your car. He probably told her plant something. That's how they work out here. But apparently your car's safe, and hopefully you'll have some good news from your mum and dad on Friday. That's just two days.

“Is it Wednesday?”

“Time flies when you're havin' fun, mate!”

The routines of Thursday went by in a blur. Friday came – one week now since being arrested. At lunch I called my parents. Before they could tell me the outcome of their efforts I told them the bad news.

“John, we honestly can't come up with that much right now. It was a struggle to get *five*. I'm so angry over this.”

“Me too, Mom. But you've done all you can and I appreciate it.”

I then told them about the car and what their former daughter-in-law had attempted to do. Dad was on the spare phone. “I hate to say it, son, but it sounds like you're safer where you are for now. You're a long way from home.”

“My gal in Finland had been concerned about my safety, too. That reminds me. Can you email her and let her know briefly what's going on, where I am. I simply vanished and she's probably worried sick.”

“I'll do that as soon as we hang up,” said Mom. “Is it still the same email address?”

“Yes, the one at Hotmail.”

“I just can’t believe this, John. It’s so terrible. I’ve been crying and can’t sleep. Dad’s going to take me to St George for a few days. The ride will do us good. I’ll have my cell phone on me if you need to call before we get back. Do you still remember the number?”

“Yeah, I remember it. I’ll have it added to my account here. Tell my kids I love them when you text them next, will you?”

“Yes, of course. They already know what’s happened. They’re both furious. We’re all behind you.”

“Knowing that helps a great deal. I’ll call when I know more.”

“We love you, son,” said Dad. “Hang in there. You’ll get through this.”

“I love you both, too.” I felt my eyes watering up again. “Bye.”

The 4<sup>th</sup> of July seemed like a distant memory, and so too the *weekend that wasn’t* with my daughter. Both were moving farther away as if I were caught in a riptide with no life preserver while being carried helplessly over the horizon, out of sight and out of mind. When I’d next make landfall I couldn’t begin to guess, but that was dependent on whether I’d even survive. My daughter and I had loved the animation *Finding Nemo*, and at that moment, while being swept deeper into dark waters, I could almost swear I heard Dory encouraging me to *Just keep swimming. Just keep swimming. Just keep swimming, swimming, swimming....*

The second weekend was spent mostly by adding my weight of troubled thoughts to the furrowed path in the yard with occasional stops at the pergola to have a smoke and chat with the Steve, Ian, Roger and Richard who laughed outwardly at the crudely rolled cigarette half hidden in my hand while Steve pretended to be innocent of spilling the beans. We casually chatted about the recent developments in my saga; they offering advice and anecdotes from personal experience, but nothing really helpful or promising. What had happened to me – *was* happening – had to varying degrees happened to them and to who knew how many others. To them the nature of the police, as well as the legal system overall, with its overt presumption of guilt and indifference to justice and procedural fairness, was simply the way things are in Western Australia. It was a mindset accepted by the public without resistance or question and it flew in the face of everything I’d been raised to believe and stood for as an American. This was a side of Australia I’d only heard whispered about. Now I was facing it personally. But the actions of my wife were becoming more of a concern than even dealing with her legal system. My daughter’s welfare, mentally *and* otherwise, was the gravest of my concern as a result. By now she would have been told *something*. The slander and defamation had likely begun, as my wife had done to her other children regarding *their* father.



Week two arrived without fanfare. For some level of nourishment, I'd learned to accept and eat some of the prison food offered during meal time, but my appetite was still all but comatose. Rather, coffee remained my primary staple and where it was 'free' I helped myself generously. Worry over my daughter compounded issues that had piled up on me through the previous week. As it turned out, working became a welcomed distraction, as Steve had said it would, and during lunch breaks and evenings when I had nothing to do but fret, I actually missed it. It was another Thursday already. Today I woke up alive. It all went downhill from there.

Just before lunch break, while folding laundry at the usual table, I heard my name called out above the rumble of dryers and machinery. Quickly, I looked around then saw a female officer standing nearby. I had not seen this particular officer before.

"Prisoner Ramses," she again shouted, louder.

I dropped the T-shirt I'd been folding and approached her, maintaining the one-meter distance that Steve had advised me to do when speaking to 'sheila' officers. Perhaps good news had come through, I thought hopefully. Maybe my bond's been paid and I'm getting out. Maybe my wife dropped the charges. Maybe my daughter was even waiting outside to greet me.

"I'm Ramses," I said.

The officer placed her hands on her hips imperiously. Then, saying nothing for a long moment she seemed to be studying me, paying special attention to my head. From my vantage I saw the other prisoners looking on curiously as they went about their work. Then loudly and precisely she spoke.

"We've just been informed that you're wearing a wig. Is that true?"

In that moment hell froze over, its glaciation so quickly entombing my heart that my soul disembodied itself to a safe distance incase my blood should cease to flow. It had been my greatest if only insecurity and most guarded secret for nearly 20 years, one which, in the early days, had nearly caused me accept never getting involved in another relationship for fear of being hurt and humiliated. Indeed, I had even stressed for some months before telling the woman I'd come to love more than life, in case *she* should laugh and decide she didn't want to be with me after all, especially where she had been a hairdresser and had looked forward to running her fingers through *my* hair. But at last my love had won out over my fragile distrust and one night on ICQ, notwithstanding anxiety, I told her I wore a hairpiece. She had loved me anyway, though saddened that I'd been afraid to tell her - just as *she* had been afraid to tell me the extent of her son's autism. It had long become my public image as well as in business and promotions. Not even my young daughter knew that her father's head of dark brown hair was not real; its high quality design was literally undetectable through wind and activities, wet or dry, or even when routinely

pulled by curious infant hands. They who had once known a younger but balding man had long since forgotten about him. No one knew now except my wife and a very close, trusted client – until fifteen seconds ago. Now fifty prison inmates knew. And I had to live and work with them.

My face heated with embarrassment. I couldn't speak. All eyes in the vicinity were on me. Desperately attempting to save face – and my public image – I finally answered the officer with a question, alluding that her information was incorrect. “Who said *that*?” My attempt backfired.

Advancing a full step closer she yelled into my face. “Your wife called and told us you are wearing a wig and might be hiding drugs under it. ARE-YOU-WEARING-A-WIG?”

My wife? *Her*? Love and hate had been at war within me since being arrested on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, each countering the other by pitting the present with memories of the past, while I had made excuses to myself for her actions. But those battles had been but mere skirmishes along the border of my heart and mind. This *now* was different. This was pure evil, inspired and deliberate with intent on ruining and humiliating me for laughs. There is a place where that love and hate collide, where even gods fear to tread, a place so vile that none had dared give it a name lest it might be spoken aloud and cause the universe itself to tremble. In that moment I had found that forbidden, impalpable place with no name.

I started to shake, struggling again to speak. “I’m wearing.....yes. I’m wearing a.....” I couldn't say the word I'd so jealously guarded for two decades, since another lifetime. Then somehow I did. “I’m wearing a hairpiece, yes.”

“Right. Well, you’re going to have to take it off,” she insisted, shaking a finger at my scalp. “Either *you* can do or *we* will, but it’s coming off. If you want to keep it you’ll have to arrange for somebody on the outside to collect it for you. We can’t keep it for health reasons.”

My biological father had stuttered from an early age until eventually overcoming it as his self-confidence matured. I didn't inherit that impediment. I suddenly acquired it. “I...c—can’t just t—take it off. It’s a p---permanent type. Ex--pensive. They d---don’t just come off like that. It has to be done at a salon.”

“You should have thought about that *before* you committed a crime.”

“I’ve committed *NO* crime,” I then said clearly, defensively.

“Yes. Everyone’s innocent in here. I hear it every day. If it’s that difficult to remove you have until morning to do it, but it has to come off.”

The officer turned and left the factory. Insensible, I returned to the table of laundry surrounded by staring eyes which mine could not meet for shame. No one said a word. Not then, anyway.

Seemingly months later, while walking back to the block for lunch, a couple of guys, young and immature, made snide remarks from the rear of the group, showing off to each other. I didn't respond, pretending I hadn't heard. But I had. Steve, Ian and Roger walked along beside me without talking. I broke the silence.

"I'm going to kill that fuck back there." I felt I needed to appear tough after what had just occurred.

Steve responded. "No you're not because *I'm* going to kill the wank and if *you* kill him you'll be robbin' *me* of that enjoyment. Then I'll have to kill *you* for *that* and it'll just get messy."

"At least I'll be in hell for something I actually *did* do and you'll be in jail for something *you* actually did."

"Just keep walkin', mate. He's not worth it."

During lunch the usual four of us sat in awkward silence at the wooden table in the courtyard – me with my coffee and cigarette, still trembling, while they munched on their prison-issue food. Half way through lunch Steve spoke first.

"That's the sheila I was tellin' you about the other day, mate. The man-hater."

The awkward silence ended.

"Someone's gonna put her away one day," Ian said without looking up from his plate. "Mark my words."

"If she treated some Lifer with nothing to lose like she treats guys in here, you're probably not wrong," Steve agreed.

Roger spoke. "Word is that she came up from South Australia after being run out of a prison down there."

"Trouble with being employed by the State is that the bad ones never get the boot like they should. They just move 'em around – fuckin' unions and all."

Then to me Ian spoke while picking at his meal. "What she did to you in front of all us prisoners was fucking wrong, mate. They should have called you into the S.O.'s office and discussed it privately. Now the whole block knows, putting you in a bad predicament."

"I would have thought there would be policies in place to do just that," I finally spoke. "But I would have thought a lot of things before *this* that I've since learned are nothing but horseshit and lies."

"Well, I'd say again *Welcome to WA*, but..."

"You handled it well, mate, considering," Roger said. "I was hoping you'd break her jaw there for a minute, though."

“Numb and shocked, really.”

“For what it’s worth, except for a few dickheads, most of the blokes in here hate her and likely feel for ya like we lot,” Ian said. “You won’t catch any shit from them.”

“Thanks for the support, guys. I’m just shocked that my wife would actually do *that*,” I said, reflecting back to the night I’d finally braved to tell her.

“Christ, mate,” Roger began. “It may not be my place to say but your ex missus is a nasty bitch! You actually married that? I would have grabbed the kid when she was born and caught the first plane to the States.”

“My wife is still my daughter’s mother. But that officer is one twisted, sick woman! I think she actually enjoyed it.”

“Your ex may be your kid’s mum, mate,” Roger said. “But she’s seriously got it in for you to do something like that. What the fuck?”

My wife had sent me a message via *Banshee-Gram*, delivered loud and clear in the presence of fifty-plus prison inmates. I now felt I had to explain her actions, make excuses as I’d been doing to myself privately for two weeks to the day – and why I *still* couldn’t hate her. What *else* was she planning to do? She was out of control, reckless and irresponsible and was no doubt having a laugh with her friends and family at the very moment. But *I* knew who had called the prison, indeed, who had wanted to get to my car and who had reported false allegations to police to have me arrested and jailed in the first place, and that person was *not* my wife, *ex* or otherwise.

“This is a side of her I’d only seen a few times in all the years we’d been married,” I began. “She has this other personality that she herself named *Lilith* many years before I’d met her. According to a 13<sup>th</sup> century document, *Lilith* - not Eve – was the first wife or companion God had made for Adam, but *that* went south in a hurry. She bolted off somewhere and later became a demon.

“Sounds like she fled to Perth,” Roger said.

“*Lilith* is the progenitor of all man-hating bitches. Ever since my wife discovered my emails to the gal in Finland last year I never saw my *wife* again. This *Lilith* character seemed to have come out and taken charge. She had even used the name ‘Lilith’ as her email name back when we’d met.... when the *Lilith Fairs* were being promoted between ’97 and ’99. Ironically, they are having a Lilith Fair revival as we speak.<sup>4</sup>”

“Your ex has Multiple Personality Disorder,” Roger questioned with a gleam in his eye.

“I wouldn’t call it a disorder. Like I said, this other side of her rarely showed itself while we had been married. But I do believe it’s a defense mechanism deeply rooted in her psyche from childhood.”

“How’s that,” Steve asked curiously.

“Imagine being sexually assaulted by your drunken grandfather at night while you sleep alone in your room at age six or seven. Then when you try to tell your mom, aunts and grandmother about it they tell you it’s just the ghost of a man who had once died in the rickety old house and to just ignore him ‘til he goes away’.”

“That’s seriously fucked up, mate,” said Ian. “That true?”

“*Fair dinkum*, as you Aussies say. My wife grew up believing the ‘ghost story’, but I believe her subconscious always knew it had been her grandfather – a *man* – who’d assaulted her as he had done to her mom and aunts when they were young. So my theory became that whenever my wife felt betrayed or threatened by a male of our species this other personality, that she’d aptly named *Lilith*, came out to defend her where she’d been unable to defend herself as a child. I mean, she’d even get irate when I’d talk to my first wife in the States about our kids. She’d been raised under the belief that if you divorce or break up you’re supposed to hate each other with a passion, not remain friends as my first wife and I had.”

“Well, that sort of explains why you seem to still have compassion and sympathy for your ex in spite that she fucked up your entire life,” said Steve.

“I’m afraid I’d probably kill the bitch if my ex did to me what yours did to you,” Roger added.

“Well, when I love someone I love them forever, a part of them anyway. And she’s still my daughter’s mother. I remember a different woman, the one I’d married. It doesn’t make it any less wrong or less dangerous, but I know *why* she did this and *who* is doing it. I’ve seen this *Lilith* character before and the two are like night and day. I eventually heard the whole story from her mother back in 2006 after my wife published an article in *Take 5 Magazine*. Certain things in that didn’t add up – like a ‘ghost’ sexually assaulting her. Already knowing the history of sex abuse in the family, I demanded to know the truth from her mom in order to understand just what I was dealing with in those times when my wife seemed to snap at little things, change personalities. When my wife discovered my emails to the Finnish woman they were misconstrued as me having an affair with plans to take my daughter and start a new life. *Lilith* shoots first but never gets around to asking questions.”

“Then it’s probably a good thing Howard took our guns away then,” Ian laughed.

“They just invented a new weapon, one for *women only* to use against men: Accusations,” Roger said.

“I may be way off the mark, but I think this *Lilith* persona effectively locked my wife in a dungeon telling her it’s for her own good, then took charge. Kinda like those horror shows about possession or whatnot.”

“You think your ex is *possessed*,” Roger asked eagerly.

“No, of course not. I don’t buy into that stuff. My wife does though, as well as séances, witchcraft, Ouija Boards, spell-casting, etc. She’d been brought up on it from a young age by her family. But like I said before, it’s just a defense mechanism, however reckless – and dangerous. According to her mom, who swore me to never tell my wife the truth, the ‘pervert-ghost’ story was just a cover. They never wanted her to grow up with terrible memories of being sexually abused as they’d had to live with. As a result, my wife has never had to confront or deal with *that* demon, but it’s there nonetheless, buried deep. Her mom and aunties eventually conspired to kill their abusive father to prevent another generation from being ruined by his abuse – that generation being my wife and her female cousins. There was no one to complain to in those days and their old man was also a decorated war hero. Hard to make allegations stick back then.”

“Not anymore,” Steve said. “All a sheila needs to do is say some bloke touched her and he’s dead in the water.”

“That’s not right, either. Apparently it’s gone from one extreme to the other. At least *here*, anyway. One can probably understand why, though.”

“And didn’t you tell me that your wife and her lot were practicing witches, too?”

“They claim to be, from some coven in Ireland by the name of Frost. It’s all in the radio interviews stored online, but privately I investigated it and never found anything to support it. But I’ll tell you this: I came to learn that men are not among the most popular species in her family. Just a means to an end.”

“And your ex’s mom killed her own pop,” Roger asked surprised.

“So the story goes. My mother-in-law, who I was close to through the years and genuinely adored, more or less confirmed the rumor to me during the same heart-to-heart discussion back in ’06. Allegedly they – or one of the three sisters anyway – mixed a ‘*potion*’ of some type. If it’s true it was probably cyanide or something like that. The bastard dropped dead in the toilet where his body was found, probably puking before he croaked. But even if they *had* nicked him I had never faulted them for it, considering what he had done to them.”

“Fuckin’ hell,” Roger exclaimed. “You sure don’t have a boring life, mate.”

“Never a dull moment, for sure. Like I told you the other morning: Weird shit just seems to follow me around! Even being here now might be just a continuation of it all.”

“What does your sheila in Finland think about the allegations,” Steve then asked.

“Frankly, I don’t think she knows what to think right now. These types of allegations aren’t to be taken lightly and she has a young daughter, also. I need to clear my name before we can ever think about any kind of future together, if it were to be. But for the time being, my daughter is my priority. I won’t even consider getting involved in a relationship now until she’s grown. Everything’s changed because of *this*. By that time, I’ll probably be too old and decrepit for anyone to want.” I laughed.

“Like *I* said earlier: You meet all kinds in here,” Ian grunted. “I’ve never known anyone who was put in jail by a fucking demon before!” He chuckled cynically.

By contrast Roger had been engaged wide-eyed, only occasionally picking at his meal, as if riveted to an old time radio spook show. “Fuck mate, if you’ve got a real mother-fuckin’ ass-kicken’ demon pissed at you I’m transferring to another fuckin’ jail!”

“How do you think I feel? I have to *live* with the bloke,” Steve said with a wink and cheeky grin.

“That stuff’s not real except in Hollywood,” I assured Roger. Or was it, I wondered as I suddenly remembered the night *Ghost Radio* had been permitted to spend an entire night alone in the old Fremantle Prison<sup>5</sup> where my wife, a psychic and a few others from the group had attempted to conjure the spirit of the late notorious killer David Bernie using a Ouija Board. A tingle ran down my spine as I recalled the night and what happened afterward.

“So, what are you going to do about your hair, mate,” Steve asked, steering the subject back to the reality at hand.

“It doesn’t look like I’ll be getting bail so I’m stuck here under their rules. If I don’t remove it *they* will – rather painfully, I’m sure. It’s woven with my natural hair and uses an adhesive that sticks to the skin for months. I had just re-applied it a few weeks ago. I’ll deal with it tonight, I guess. But fuck me, I’ve only been *accused* not convicted for Christ’s sakes. Even if I do get out on bail now or clear my name, my public image is ruined. All my promo photos will become a laughing stock.” ...*they leave you nothing to return home to... Not the life you had, anyway...* Richards words then echoed in my mind.

“If you do get out on bail don’t go doin’ anything stupid like nickin’ your ex,” Ian said as he got up from the table. “Not like any of us here would blame ya, but - .”

“Unlike her mother, I’ll never do anything to break my daughter’s heart.” *But I’ll kill that bitch, Lilith, if it takes the rest of my life,* I swore bitterly to myself.

Thursday finished at last and we were now locked down in our cells for the night. While back at work during the afternoon the same two guys had attempted to make fun of me in front of the prisoners but gave up when no one played into it. I couldn't be sure but I thought I had seen a tough-looking character covered in tattoos walk over and whisper something in the ear of one of the guys then walk off. After that they focused on their work, never even looking my way again through the shift. Now, as Steve watched TV in the bunk below I set out to remove my hairpiece with only the glow from the TV for light. I didn't need light. I needed to wake up from a horrible nightmare, one where ghosts, demons and the conjured spirit of a long dead murderer just might be real after all. One thing was for certain: unadulterated cruelty *is* real. That much I now knew to be absolute fact.

The process of removing my hairpiece was long, tedious and painful even with my experience. It hadn't been designed to just come off. At a professional salon, certain techniques and solvents would be used which, even under those professional conditions can take an hour or more to remove then reapply. And I'd come to trust only one salon in Australia – *Innovative*. They had also been clients of my web marketing firm, but more importantly to me we had become friends.

I'd met the husband and wife team by chance back in 2001. My wife had been preparing to give a perm to one of her clients when she realized she had run out of a particular solution. I don't recall how it had come about but she knew of a supplier who operated part of their business from their home. As chance would again have it, they resided just two streets away and I had offered to make the run for her. Upon meeting the suppliers their demeanor was open, friendly and inviting - not the practiced act of typical sales people, but rather innocently genuine. Within a short time we seemed to have had formed a connection.

Adjacent to the lounge room where we had conducted business and chatted, was another room filled with odd equipment that had reminded me of leftover props that might well have been prototypes for the helmet used by Darth Vader in the *Star Wars* saga. A label on one of them read *Crown Laser*<sup>6</sup>. Curiously I had enquired what they were. Of all the clients I would come to do work for none had expressed such sincere enthusiasm for their product as these two young entrepreneurs had that day. Their eyes beaming, they explained the purpose and process - how red light, when combined with additional treatment techniques, would regrow hair, but only hair lost naturally over the past seven-ish years. Suddenly they were speaking directly to my own self esteem. In confidence I had shared my secret.

At the time they were looking to take advantage of the Internet to market their product. I had a very un-American policy to never promote anything I didn't personally believe in, but their enthusiasm and scientific knowledge,



combined with a seemingly inherent honesty not found in the hair replacement industry, took ahold of my heart. Web marketing just happened to be *my* business. Young, hip and eager to embrace the latest marketing avenues offered by the Internet, they needed no convincing. But just starting out they – like my wife and I – had been strapped for funds. Nonetheless, inspired by them I offered to put together an online marketing package for a greatly reduced cost. Moreover, I needed positive clients to build my own young portfolio to assist with growing my business. That marked the beginning of a long business relationship and friendship. I still recall designing the logo in Photoshop with its unique curl in the ‘O’ which came to symbolize ‘*Innovative*’.

On my own I investigated red light laser and found medical proof of its benefits. Even the military had used red light help heal wounded soldiers. This was not snake oil but science fact. But as far as growing my own hair back I had long since passed the seven-year mark where any success might occur. Instead, they had another solution, one which had been their forte before *Crown Laser*. From then on I’d always ordered my hairpieces from *Innovative*. Though not cheap, they were of the highest quality. It was so undetectable and natural that my own self confidence excelled, never again having to wear a hat out doors in the event a gust of wind might reveal the truth about John Victor Ramses. No natural element like wind or activity such as swimming, nor even curious toddler hands had ever betrayed me. That betrayal could only have occurred by the one I’d loved and trusted most. Now it had.

The hairpiece was finally removed. My head was sore where the adhesive and weave had pulled out some of my remaining natural hair. I then took a cheap plastic shaving razor I’d acquired from an officer earlier and began shaving the rest of my head. Afterward, I collected the hair and hairpiece and climbed down from the bunk where I saw Steve had fallen asleep while watching TV. There was no one outside the prison to collect the hairpiece, so with a sad sigh I simply and unceremoniously threw it in the bin and along with it went my hard earned public image and the only father my daughter had ever known. Then, I turned off the TV, felt my way back up to my bunk and lay in the dark quietly crying.

Routines of morning were typical but done in silence. In spite of his intimidating appearance I’d come to know Steve to have a heart, although he would never admit to it under torture.

“You missed a couple of spots in the back, mate. Where’s your razor and I’ll fix it up for ya.” Steve finished shaving my head then said, “The best way to deal with that in here is to just get out there like nothin’ ever happened. Half the guys in here have shaved heads so you’ll fit right in, lookin’ like a *real* crim now!”

I forced a laugh. “Thanks, mate.”

Steve was right though. This was *my* demon and the only way to deal with it was to call the demon by name –*vanity* – and confront it head on. I had never looked at myself in the mirror when *Innovative* had removed the hairpiece for maintenance. I had no idea what I looked like and I had no intention of looking into the scratched dull mirror in the cell for as long as possible. I made a coffee after unlock and, without catching the eyes of the prisoners around me, I went immediately to the table in the court yard, Steve following behind. The air was cold against my bare scalp, having never been without cover before, and it aggravated the sting where my natural hair had been pulled out by the roots.

Ian stared at me for a long time then said, “Jesus, mate. You’re one ugly sucker without hair. I can see now why you’d wanna’ cover that up!”

If I hadn’t come to know Ian’s dry and insensitive sense of humor over the past two weeks, I would have hit him. But in his own disturbing way he was just trying to make light of a bad situation and I knew it.

“Remind me to remove Ian from my Christmas list, will ya, Steve?”

“Done.”

“Honestly, John,” Ian continued. “If you beat this and clear your name I hope you sue the fuck out these ignorant pricks. I’m still pissed about what that sheila did and it didn’t even happen to me.”

I noted that that was the first time Ian had used my name rather than *Yank*, *Wank* or *Arse*. “Thanks. It’s definitely something to consider. But it won’t make the damage go away.”

“Well, just be grateful you’re in radio and not TV.”

“Jesus, Ian,” Steve chided. “Give the bloke a break. It’s still early.”

“On a serious note,” Ian said. “That’s a nasty scar you have on the top of your head. How’d that happen?”

I hadn’t thought about that scar in twenty years – out of sight, out of mind. But in the bad old days I’d been very self-conscious of it as it stood out like a sore thumb. “I was only three years old when I got that. My dad had accidentally closed the trunk of his red 57 Chev on my head while he was holding me, blankets and a cooler for a day out at *Lagoon*, a local theme park near Salt Lake City. I still actually remember it, or rather my mother’s panic and me screaming while she and my dad had run me to a nearby first aid shack. My poor dad would spend the next three decades apologizing to me for that. In my early thirties I was told by a doctor to never let the sun get to it in case it should form cancer. The hairpiece solved that problem along with a dwindling self-confidence for related reasons.

“Get a Screw to give you a hat, mate, for when you’re out in the yard,” Ian advised. “Then I won’t have to wear my sunglasses during meal time to block the glare off your head.”

“He’s quickly moving onto my shit list,” I said to Steve.

Roger joined the table and immediately lost his name from the Christmas list, too. “Fuck, mate. I didn’t even recognize you. From behind you’ve got a head shaped like one of those alien Grays.”

Ian had been joking. Roger just spoke without thinking.

“I think I’ll work at the other table today with the two ignorant pricks who insulted me yesterday. I’m starting to like them more.”

July 2010..... still.

I focused on the job while at work then fretted when I was not at work. I was sure another week had passed, maybe longer, and I was still no closer to getting bail or my daughter than I’d been when arrested. Steve, Roger and even Ian had visits from family on Visits Day. Roger had told his mom all about me who then told Roger that I might have a curse on me and should be careful. Likewise, Steve had told his wife about everything going on with me. When she had returned home she spent two days lost in my web site reading articles and listening to interviews from the Ghost Radio archive. Over the phone later she validated for Steve everything I’d said, which he then spread to Ian, Roger, Richard and who knew who else. Now, Steve and I were walking together around the circle in the yard.

“My missus said you’re a pretty decent singer, play guitar and all. She found some of your stuff on YouTube including one of you and your daughter singing together at some family event....” *God, don’t say the name of the song or anything else about it*, I pleaded in my head. “... You should go over to the music room on Fridays. They have guitars and stuff there. It might do you good.”

“Maybe,” I said. “I really don’t have the heart to play right now.”

“How long have you been playing guitar?”

“Since I was eleven, back in ’71. I heard John Denver’s *Rocky Mountain High* one day and decided I wanted to be like him. My folks bought me a guitar and I never looked back.”

“I used to play years ago. I always think about picking it up again but never seem to have the time.”

Glancing at Steve's thick, calloused hands I wondered how he could make a chord on the narrow fret board. "You've got all the time in the world right now. What kind of music do you play?"

"Country. But I don't sing. Maybe when this is all done one way or the other I'll pick it up again. But yeah, my missus was impressed though. She said she saw your wife in a video too, you singing a song for her."

"*My Sweet Lady* – back in happier times. That was her song. I don't think I'll ever play that again but I might think about going over to the music room on Friday – if nothing else bad happens between now and then."

"Your hair's startin' grow back out. It's been almost two weeks."

"Just growing in the wrong place."

"Anyone give you anymore shit?"

"Nah, not that I've been aware of."

"See! You look like a badass crim now," Steve laughed. "The fucks are afraid of you. You just need to get a tat or two and they'll be begging you to join their gang."

"Great. More things I can tell my grandkids about when I have them. I don't believe in tattoos myself. Not on *me*, anyway. Some tats look good but I'll never get one."

"It's hard to find anyone down here who *doesn't* have a tat. I've got a couple on my shoulder you might have noticed but -"

"My wife had the Eye of Horus tattooed on her abdomen to protect our daughter in her womb, she'd claimed. My daughter's perfect so who am I to say it didn't work? But it *could* just be her father's superior genes though, too."

"Any closer to getting' bail?"

"I've run out of options. I won't stress my folks over it. This has been hard enough on them and they're getting on in years with grandkids and great grandkids and worries of their own like everybody else."

"Well, all you need is someone to go surety for ya. Five grand – that's peanuts, really. You don't know anyone here?"

"Not now."

"Yeah. That's the trouble with these kinds of allegations: everyone ducks for cover. Trust me, I know all about that! So do other blokes in here. Accuse someone of drugs or robbery or even murder and the public wants to see the proof. Accuse someone of a sex offence and they've already hung you out. Only my missus and kids have stuck by me. My mob up north don't know anything about this. Ian's only got his son left. He owned a small but successful transport

business but lost it all through this. A lot of hard earned years wiped out on an allegation with no evidence.”

“And even if he proves it was all a lie they’ve still left him nothing to go home to. Richard explained that. Now I’m seeing it for myself. No wonder Ian’s so grumpy.”

“Well, that and other things I’m not obliged to talk about. He’s had a real rough go in his life. He’ll tell you what he thinks straight to your face but he’s a good bloke. Do anything for ya if he could. I got to know him when I was here for a few months before getting bail.”

“I’ve grown used to his nature. I don’t take anything he says to me personally.”

“Tomorrow’s Friday, mate. Go over and pick up a guitar and get you’re mind off all the shit.”

“Yeah, I think I’ll do that.”

On Friday after lunch they called for anyone going to the music or art rooms to meet in the yard. I’d grown tired of 11-11 gloating at me from the fence as I’d walk in endless circles so I decided to break the monotony. Only a few guys went to the music room. The rest went to art. I picked up an acoustic guitar, checked the action and strings and then went back out to the enclosed courtyard. There I sat alone picking mindlessly at the strings while watching clouds pass against the sky above the high wall. Feeling the guitar in my hands, hearing the crisp tone of the bronze-wound strings, brought me instantly back to the day my daughter and I had played *Second Chance* together at the Family Reunion. My fingers fell upon the starting chord of the song and I’d almost strummed the opening riff, but thankfully caught myself before I did. I couldn’t handle that right now. Not even close. My daughter was out there, I knew, just over the wall, just beyond the barriers of razor wire, just over *there* somewhere.... *I’m here, baby girl. Daddy’s right here, not too far away....*

*Daddy’s gone away for a while, baby girl.*

*I know your heart is broke but try to smile, baby girl.*

*Dream of happy days when you and I can play  
piggy back and tickles too.*

*Have sushi by the beach, I’m never really beyond reach,  
don’t cry yourself to sleep, sweet Boo*

*Daddy’s gone away for a while, baby girl*

*Don’t listen to what they say, hear my heart, baby girl*

*Close your eyes and dream*

*of double-scoop ice cream and Cicerello’s by the sea*

*Close your eyes and dream  
I'm right beside you, dream  
Daddy's gone away for a while, baby girl  
I'll be home one day to see you smile, baby girl  
Wipe away the tears, hide away your fears  
And wish upon a falling star  
Daddy's gone away but I promise not to be too far  
Close your eyes and dream  
I'm right beside you, dream  
As you were once my dream, lil' Boo  
I'll return to you soon, sweet Boo  
But for now...  
Daddy's gone away for a while baby girl.....*

Unconsciously I picked a melody to the lyrics forming in my heart. With a pencil on a scrap of paper I'd brought with me I wrote down the lyrics, folded the paper and put it in my pocket. Then, wiping the tears that had fallen onto the guitar I returned it to the music room and lit a cigarette then waited for the group to be escorted back to the block. "Well, *that* went well", I said sarcastically to myself.

Early August 2010

I called my supervisor to update him on my status. "I've still got no one to put up my bail bond so it doesn't look like I'll be getting out, mate. I'm sorry about that. I know you're in a bind at work, but I may be stuck in here for a year from the sound of it."

"What's your bond?"

"Five grand."

"Shit, mate. That's all? I wish I'd known. I would have put it up for you a month ago but I thought you had other arrangements in the works."

"Did I hear correctly?? "Wait – you're sayin' you can put up the bond? Are you serious?"

"I'll be workin' your arse off at the shop for it, don't you worry, but I can arrange it tomorrow."

“A million tons of weight just fell from my chest. I had almost sworn the lives of myself and my children to his eternal servitude.

“My god, mate, I can’t thank you enough! I can’t do anything about my case stuck in here. Now I can get back to work, get a lawyer and clear up this mess. I owe you big time!”

“Yep! I don’t know the process but maybe you can be out tomorrow as soon as I pay it up.”

“That’s how it goes in the movies. I have to contact the bail lawyer. Can I give her your number and details?”

“No problem. I always have my mobile on me so I’m available either at work or home.”

“Christ, I’m so relieved, you don’t know. Thanks so much for this, mate.”

“Right. See ya soon.”

I don’t remember hanging up the receiver. Maybe I did, but seemingly within seconds I was out in the court yard where Steve, Ian and Roger sat in their usual place. “Great news, guys,” I said sitting down in my place. “My supervisor’s going to bail me tomorrow.”

“See, Rog – he’s *not* cursed,” Steve said. “That *is* good news, mate. I guess not everyone abandoned you.”

“Remember what I told ya,” Ian grumbled. “Don’t go nickin’ your ex for making an alien-head out of you. You’ll just be right back in here and we’ll have to listen to your Yankie whining all over again.”

“I guess I’ll be getting a new celly, then.” I detected reluctance in Steve’s voice. “Unless they finally see fit to give me a single. They should have moved me into A wing two weeks ago.”

“See, Steve, the Yank is cursed.” I could never tell if Roger was playing or serious, but I was beginning to think it was the latter. “That cell’s probably haunted now. But at least I won’t have to transfer to another jail.”

“Probably a *conspiracy* of haunted cells and curses, no doubt. I heard they were going around,” Ian snickered.

“I’ve gotta get ahold of the lawyer and give her the details,” I said preparing to return to the phone.

Steve spoke. “Look, don’t panic if you don’t get out *tomorrow*. It takes a couple of days to process and they hate lettin’ anyone out on bail. They drag their feet. But if your bond’s paid they’ll have to let you out. Don’t stress.”

“Typical Yank,” Ian groaned. “We give him all our tobacco, stick up for him, take him under our wing and he blows us off at the first opportunity for bail. So much for *brotherhood*.”

Ian was joking but I considered his words. Everything he’d said save for ‘blowing them off’ was true. Over a month ago I’d come to jail terrified and suspicious of everyone. These prisoners – Steve, Ian, Roger to some extent and Richard – had taken me under their wing, stuck up for me, listened to my whining and bitching and had shared their knowledge and tobacco when I had been without either. Innocent or not, it didn’t matter in jail. We were all wearing green. We all had issues, but we all only had each other to depend on. *No one* else. If some psychic had once told me that in a future time I’d be thrown into a foreign prison and even come to call prisoners *friend* I would have demanded my money back and laughed all the way out the door. But in the end the psychic would have had the last laugh, to be sure. I was beginning to understand the *brotherhood* among prisoners.

Back at the phone I called the lawyer and gave her my supervisor’s details. Whether it simply came with being a lawyer or just her personality she seemed indifferent.

“I’ll put this to the judge. There will be strict conditions of your bail and you’ll have to follow them to the letter or you’ll be re-arrested and your friend will forfeit his bond.”

“I understand.” I’d never do anything intentional to jeopardize either his bond money or our friendship. It just wasn’t in me, so I had no issues with following conditions of bail.

Two days passed with no word so I called my supervisor to ask whether there had been a problem. The lawyer had contacted him and made the arrangements. As far as he knew everything was good. Then on the afternoon of the third day in waiting I was summoned to a visit by an agent from Community Justice Services named Chadwick.

“Before you can be allowed into the community on bail you must provide the State with a legitimate residence and *we* must approve of it.”

After my wife had announced she wanted a divorce tensions in the home had naturally become too unbearable to share the same space. I’d left, but not wanting to jump into just any lease agreement I’d arranged to live onsite at my workplace where they had a shower and basic amenities. When I’d left the home I hadn’t taken anything with me but some clothes pending a permanent residence, so I had needed little. Believing at the time that I would be having my daughter for overnight access visits I wanted to find a suitable place and not too far from Kingsley. But I’d never had the chance to pursue such a residence. Still, I found no reason why I couldn’t continue with the original living arrangements,



especially where - without access to my daughter – I'd be spending nearly all of my time working. But that was not acceptable to Chadwick.

“You can't live near a school or children,” she continued with no facial expression. “There can't be any children at your residence, not even visiting.”

“You're treating me as if I've already been convicted. Where's the presumption of innocence?”

“Prove it.”

“That burden's not mine to bear, legally. It's just an accusation right now.”

“Allegations of sexual assault against children are very serious. You've been accused *and* you've been charged by the police. We now have a duty of care to the public to ensure that you don't assault anyone else.”

“I've never assaulted *anyone*,” I insisted, attempting to check my anger. “My wife lied to keep my daughter from me.”

“Your wife didn't lodge the complaint. Your stepdaughter did.”

“Under her mother's influence. My *wife* is the one who actually made the call to police.”

“As a mother should. Unless you can prove you have an authorized residency you won't be getting bail. If you can prove that then call me and I'll check it out. Here's my card. Good day, Mr. Ramses.”

I've never believed in curses before, but rather that *most* shit just happens. I was beginning to believe in them now. In just the past month I had experienced meager highs followed by lows to depths I'd never thought possible; each glimmer of hope consumed as if into a black hole. I had thought it cute when my wife-to-be had once told me while still dating online that she was a witch. It had been a fad of the nineties. Only through the ensuing years together did I come to learn just how serious she took it all, as well as why her former husband had been concerned enough for his children to actually accuse her before the Family Court judge of practicing witchcraft. Nonetheless, *she* believed in it – religiously.

What I had endured in just over 30 days had been unprecedented: the material loss and torment to my heart and soul as if *something* were determined to kill me slowly. At that very moment, falling further into an abyss of despair and hopelessness, I imagined my ex-wife, in the company of her mother, aunts and even my former stepdaughter, chanting over a voodoo doll made in my likeness, set amidst carefully positioned crystals and other odd trinkets. My precious young daughter would not have been among that chanting ensemble, however. Still just ten years old her mother would not begin to teach *her* the Way of the Witch until her 13<sup>th</sup> year – the age her elder sister had suddenly dyed her beautiful blonde hair black, pierced her tender face, embraced the principles

in the *Satanic Bible* and the music of *Marylyn Manson* and became the newest generation to join the illusive Frost Coven.

Despondently, I explained my latest setback to the guys when we next caught up. Roger gloated, but dared not push it in case he too might become cursed. I noted that he seemed to keep the one-meter-rule distance from me, also. I had no doubt that during their next visit his mother would be filled in with the latest gossip from the *Underworld*, which she would then misinterpret and feed back to him.

Later in the cell, Steve acknowledged, “I’ve never known anyone to have such a bad run of luck, mate, and I’ve known some very bad luck in my time. I’m starting to think you’ve pissed off God himself, and I don’t even believe in God.”

“People make bad things happen to other people, mate. And there are a lot of really nasty people out there living in the community pretending to be good when in public, but doing terrible things behind their backs. I have to admit, though, this run lately is unprecedented – for me, anyway.”

“Anyone out there you can live with? What about your supervisor or a workmate?”

“He has custody of his younger daughter at present. Most of the other guys either have family or aren’t worth a fuck, working week to week to buy the next lot of drugs or alcohol. Nah, I’m afraid I’m still stuck here, mate – not that I’m knockin’ the present company though.”

“Well, all I can offer is: keep you chin up.”

The very next day Steve and I were both moved to A-wing, each of us into a single cell, as some of the convicted prisoners had been transferred to the Big House. I couldn’t help but boast to Steve that I’d actually been moved *before* him, if only by several minutes. The atmosphere in A wing was brighter and more spacious. In the common area was a pool table with a bookshelf against one wall containing a haphazard collection of books and old magazines that had been donated to the prison. The court yard was much larger also, about twice the size of a living room, with its own wooden table which had already been claimed by seniority.

My cell was the same size as the one I’d shared in C wing but with only one bunk, making it feel larger. Being alone in the cell felt odd at first, but I quickly accustomed to the sense of privacy. Lockdown was lonely, however, but while not having any interest in watching TV programs I had discovered a music channel called *SBS Chill*, which I played constantly while I fretted or reflected on days gone by. Work continued as usual, although Roger had begun working at the other folding table. He and Ian had remained in C wing so we only saw each

other during work or while in the yard. The worn path in the yard was just the *same ol', same ol'*, but I had begun to wonder who might be watching my every move closer: the eyes behind the cameras and sentry tower glass? Or 11-11 affixed prominently to the mesh wire fence.

I picked at my meals in the privacy of my cell. Steve knew other men in A wing from his first stay prior to getting bail and divided his time between them, me and time lone. During one afternoon before lockdown I had been sitting by myself in the courtyard smoking a disaster of a hand-made rollie when a guy approached me.

“Oi! Name’s Jason. You’re the Yank, Right?”

Jason was about my height with a closely shaved blonde head. His body was smothered with cartoon tattoos as if he’d become trapped for hours in the printing press at Marvel Comics. A large hole in each ear lobe and scars on his eyebrows, nostrils and lip suggested he had worn a number of pierce-jewelry on the outside. His eyes were just a shade up from black and, believing I was about to become fodder, I quickly looked around the court yard for Steve then made a dismal attempt to sound tough. “Yeah, I’m the Yank. What can I do for ya?”

“Those idiots in laundry give you any more shit, mate?”

“Not lately.”

“I had a word with ’em. They know who I am and I’ll fuck ’em up bad.”

“Then I have you to thank, I suppose.”

“Nah, mate. I just hate guys like them. If you’ve got somethin’ to say to a brother say it his face or shut up. They’re fuckin’ cowards and I hate cowards.”

“Yeah, a bit childish,” I said, hoping he didn’t hate Yanks too.

“What ya in for, mate?”

*Here we go.* “Drug related.”

“Nah, mate,” he said shaking his head dramatically. “Everyone’s in for drugs and everyone knows you’re fuckin’ lyin’ when you say that. Ask *me* what I’m in for.” I hesitated. “Go on, *ask me!*”

“What you in for?”

Jason put his face within an inch of my own, staring into me with eyes like a shark. “I’m in for killin’ the *last* stupid wank who asked me that question.” *I’m so dead.* “Now you try, mate. What ya in for?”

I hesitated again.

“Com’on. What ya in for?”

Then I got it. “For killing the last wank who asked me that?” It came out as a question.

Jason put his face back in mine and stared from one eye into my eye other. “You look like you’re gonna cry. You need to get the *look*, mate. Work on it. Anyway, Steve’s a good mate mine. I heard a bit about ya from him. If he thinks you’re O.K. you’re good in my books. Let me know if you need anything, mate – smokes, drugs, whatever. *I’m* the bloke. I can even get you a tat if you want, maybe one to cover up that scar on your head. Your wife do that?”

“No, my dad did but – ”

Jason quickly pulled up his shirt to reveal his belly. “See that scar, mate? My old man gave that to me when I was 14. The fuck knifed me after I kicked him in the balls for bashin’ me mum.”

“Christ!” A four inch scar was plainly visible behind the montage of tattoos. “But what my dad did was an accident, though.”

“Yeah, keep tellin’ yourself that. My pop said the same thing in court but he’s dead now, so who gives a shit. My mum’s OK though. Him knifin’ me was the best thing that could have happened to her. He died in prison –*accidentally*, of course.”

“Of course.”

“See all these tat’s, bro?”

“...Nice...(?)”

“They’re all my heroes....*Thor, Ironman, Hulk...not Wonder Woman*, though. I just wank on her –”

“No Captain America?”

“He’s on my arse. My crack forms part of the star in his shield. I’ll show ya one day when we’re alone.”

“I’m good.”

“Like I said, let *me* know if you need anything. Those other pricks will rip ya off.”

“I appreciate the offer....mate.” Jason shook my hand and walked off, thankfully.

The next day at work Steve passed a message. “Catch up with Richard when you get back to the block.”

“Will do. By the way, I met your mate, Jason.”

“Quite a character, him.”

“Right out of a comic book.”

“Never piss him off. He’s not all there, if you know what I mean. Fried from Meth. Oh, and never borrow *anything* from him that you can’t pay back with interest!”

Richard worked in admin until late. Afterward, he commonly returned to his cell and watched TV, keeping to himself, so I hadn’t seen much of him. After work today we finally caught up.

“I heard you got knocked back for bail because you need a place to live.”

“Yeah, so close, but...”

“I’ve spoken to my parents who are taking care of my house in Midland for me. We’re all cool if you want to live there.”

“You’re offering me to live at your house while I’m on bail?”

“Yes. It’s vacant and I’ll be going to Acacia for almost a year. I’d feel better if it wasn’t vacant.”

“That’s a hell of an offer, mate.”

“My parents were a bit concerned at first when I approached them about it, but I just spoke with them again at lunch. They looked you up on the Internet, read your profiles and saw all you’ve done online. They don’t have a problem with you staying at the house and neither do I. They were actually kinda hoping you might offer your skill and advice on web marketing. They were impressed after visiting a few of your client’s web sites.”

I was afraid to get my hopes up yet again. Each time I had before I had been pushed deeper down, yet this could be one more stepping stone to freedom. My supervisor had already put up my bond and it still held good. Could this offer now hold good? Maybe. Over the past thirty days, however, I’d modified a philosophy to live by: *Expect the worse and it can only get better from there. If it doesn’t you weren’t very fuckin’ surprised anyway.* Governed by that philosophy I cautiously but gratefully accepted Richard’s offer – just one more which seemed almost too good to be true.

“Richard, I can’t begin to express my gratitude. I’ll take good care of the place, be sure of that.”

“I don’t have any doubts. Look, you’ll be on bail about a year if they don’t drop the charges. There’s a minor repairs and maintenance that need to be done like painting, etc. If you’re willing to do that while your there, I’ve authorized my parents to pay for all the required supplies.”

“That’s the least I can do. I’m still just a bit shocked that this offer has dropped out of the blue...from a prisoner, no less.”

“The lord works in mysterious ways, for sure. Not that I’m religious.”

Perhaps, but lately I had felt as though I'd been caught in an escalating war between angels and demons – one taking everything away including hope while the other balanced it by offering *only* hope. Now an angel had just given me *hope* once again, but I couldn't help but feel that the demons still had one more card left to play.

“I'll make this up to you one day, Richard. Count on it.”

“Don't worry yourself over it. Beat your case, get your daughter and get as far away from Western Australia as you can get. These bastards out here will never give up 'til you're in jail or dead. Trust me.”

I didn't ask, but there was more to Richard's own story than what very little I knew. Still maintaining a professional attitude, his tone and eyes seemed to have lessened of life since we had first met. The WA police had some part in that, I was sure. But they were *his* demons and he'd not felt obliged to share.

“I'll call the CJS lady and inform her then. She'll have to approve of the house, unfortunately. She treats me like she actually witnessed the so-called crime.”

“Who is it?”

“An agent named Chadwick.”

“I've dealt with her. Nasty piece of work, that one. She's already been to the house.”

“I remember you once saying that you couldn't live at your house, had to live with your folks. Won't that be the same for me?”

“Can't say what she'll do, but my reasons were different from yours. All I can say is give it a shot. Right now you've got nothing to lose.”

“Point taken.”

After adequately expressing my sincere gratitude to Richard for his more than kind offer, I passed the information to Chadwick. The next afternoon Richard took me aside in his cell.

“I spoke to my parents this arvo. CJS had contacted my mum but again made idle threats to go to the media for housing a 'paedophile'. My mum stood her ground, though. The house has been approved but there's another hang up. You won't be able to do work for us, not at our company, anyway. Chadwick again insinuated to my mum that if *The West* should learn of you it wouldn't go well for their business. So my mum backed down on that one, but the house is yours.”

“Christ, Richard. I’m sorry about that. For hell’s sake, I’ve only been accused! I shouldn’t be treated like this until due process has proven the charge one way or the other.”

“As I said yesterday, mate. Beat this thing, then get your kid and go home. Even I and my parents and brother are seriously thinking of returning to Victoria. Once these hyenas catch your scent they won’t stop ‘til they’ve brought you down. It’s their business, their profits.”

“And the WA public calls this justice.”

Apparently. One other thing – you’ll be the house all alone. Stay vigilant and keep your doors locked. You’re ex is one matter, but these cops out here encourage vigilantism to punish you for challenging them or see you back in jail for trying to defend yourself.”

The following day during lunch I called the bail lawyer and told her that I now had both the bond and an approved place to live for her to put to the judge. Then came the next card in the demon’s deck. Why wasn’t I surprised?

“Well, I doubt they’re going to let you out anyway,” she said apathetically. “Apparently there’s a phone recording of you conspiring with your parents to flee Australia as soon as you get out.”

That became the straw that broke the proverbial camel’s back. I’d had enough. “There’s no such fucking recording,” I shouted into the phone. “I’ve never had any such conversation!”

“Well, *they* say there is.”

“I demand to hear that recording. And I want the judge to hear it. I’ve grown fucking tired of being accused by you wanks in this backwater glorified mining camp.”

“They don’t have to give you access to the recording. You’re a prisoner. The fact is it’s highly doubtful that you’ll be released at this point so...”

“Fuck off!” I slammed the receiver hard into the cradle and slid to the floor with my back against the wall, too angry to walk. Demons, ghosts, long-dead killers, bad luck.... This was nothing more than the actions of every day normal but very evil, sick-minded people. ‘Corruption’ didn’t begin to define it. Now a darkness was growing within me, taking form, becoming conscious, aware of itself. As the laws allowed these people to act with such evil intent, uninhibited by morals or ethics, so too was I allowing that darkness to grow within me. My love for my daughter was all that kept it from becoming that *place with no name* – for the moment.

I had almost quit my job, preferring to be locked in my cell all day. But at the last possible second I joined the group of men in the yard waiting to be escorted to the factory. The darkness within me must have seeped out – just enough. Walking through the throng of green prisoners they seemed to part, giving me a wide berth. I said nothing and no one spoke to me. Then in laundry Ian and Steve came and worked to either side of me as I folded the laundry. Roger had moved farther away, now standing on the opposite side of his table, no doubt certain that my curse was contagious.

“So what’s on your mind, Yank,” Ian asked first, just loud enough to hear over the drone of dryers. Speaking into the linens as I folded them I repeated what the lawyer had told me about the alleged phone recording. “Have you said anything that could have been construed that way?”

“Nothing even close. I’d never consider running even if I could. I haven’t done anything wrong and I’m sure as hell not leaving my daughter behind with *them*.”

“Who’s the lawyer?”

“Someone named Abigail Rogers.”

“Maughn’s sidekick. Do yourself a big, big favor and fuck’er off, mate. Maughn’s responsible for burning half the bloke’s in this joint. Ask around. But she’s wrong though. You *do* have a right to hear that recording and to put it before the judge for interpretation. Lawyers don’t make such comments all on their own. She’s actin’ on behalf of somebody upstairs. Bet on it.”

“Hey, didn’t you imply to Roger that conspiracies are bullshit,” I said forcing a laugh.

“I said not *everything* is a fucking conspiracy – such aliens taking over the planet disguised as world leaders.”

“I agree with Ian, though,” Steve said. “Someone’s deliberately keeping you in, mate. Seriously, for the lawyer to bold-face lie like *that* - - Someone’s pullin’ strings from high places.”

The only person who had that kind of influence who had a vested personal interest in keeping me from my daughter was my wife’s wealthy uncle. “You might be right. But if someone’s pulling favors at *that* level I’m screwed. On the other hand, Richard had warned me that they’d try to pull something if I pushed for bail. Either way, I’m completely alone out here, an easy target for these freaks.”

Steve spoke. “Being in a foreign prison with no local family or contacts has gotta be tough. I feel for ya. I don’t know what that could be like.”

“It’s not a fucking holiday, mate. I can tell you that much.”



“I know a bloke who *does* know all about being in a foreign prison,” Ian then said. “He’s been in and out since he was a kid. He spent some years in a Tai prison way back. He might be of some help to ya.”

“I’ll take *any* help I can get right now.”

“Don’t turn and stare – but the guy I’m talkin’ about is working at the sorting table behind you, the one with the long red hair and beard to match.”

I pretended to drop a pair of socks onto the floor. Picking them up I discretely glanced at the small group working at the sorting table. The man Ian had spoke of stood out among them like a bonfire on a dark desert night. Then I returned to work. “Yeah, I’ve seen him around. He resides in N wing, I think.”

“I’ve talked a bit with him in the past,” Ian continued. “Friendly enough. He knows his shit about the legal system for sure. He ought to, I guess, considering. Have a go at Smoko in ten minutes.”

Smoke break came none too soon. While Ian and Steve followed the horde of prisoners into the small break room, I darted toward the tall, skinny redhead hoping to catch him before he disappeared among them. Streams of strawberry red hair danced along the full length of his back as he walked. From behind one could be forgiven for thinking he might be a woman.

“Mate,” I said, almost cutting in front of him. “I’ve heard you know a bit about being in a foreign prison. I was hoping you might give me some advice.”

He turned toward me then briefly assessed me through wire-rim glasses before continuing toward the break room. “You might say I know a little about that subject,” he said laughing lightly. His voice came from somewhere behind a thick, long beard that concealed any indication that his mouth might be moving as he spoke. “You’re the American.”

“Yeah, in A wing.”

“Let me get a cuppa, then we can talk.”

I waited just outside the break room. Two minutes later he returned.

“So you’re an American in Oz, eh? How’d that go?”

I could see no part of his face or mouth for the hair but his eyes suggested he was smiling sarcastically. “Yeah well... long, long story.” I then gave him a brief rundown of what had been occurring, ending with the call to the lawyer.

“They’re corrupt as hell out here. If you think your wife’s family is doin’ the dirty on you from behind the scene, you need to be in contact with your Ambassador or State Department. Have you notified your consulate of your arrest and situation?”

“No. Can they do anything?”

He paused long, studying me from beneath a furrowed brow. “So.....you’re consulate doesn’t even *know* you’re here?” He laughed, took a sip of his drink then shook his head in disbelief. “Mate – the very *first* thing you do in a foreign country when shit like this happens is contact your embassy or consulate. You do *that* before calling a lawyer or even your family!”

“Jesus, it completely slipped my mind. Do you think they can help with this?”

“The US consulate is the closest thing to God you’ll ever know if you’re a US citizen abroad. You need to get in touch with them this afternoon. They’re bound by laws of our sovereign nation, but if those wanks pulling this shit on you learn the US is involved and watching, they’ll back off the bullshit. They’ll have to prove legitimate cause for detaining you and my guess is they have none. The judge granted you bail. If you meet the bond and conditions they have to let you out on bail. I’ll bet you’ll be out in a day.”

“Seriously? Do you think that’s really possible?”

“They don’t want an incident with a US citizen. It’s bad for relations. But remember; treat the consulate as if they *are* God – with the highest respect. Tell them what you told me. Typically, they won’t say a word but rather just take lots of notes. Expect that. Diplomacy demands that they don’t get involved emotionally. But when they go away *miracles* just seem to happen.”

There’s a consulate in Perth where I had my passport renewed. I don’t know their phone number, though.”

“Don’t call them. Get an officer to get you their fax number. Hand write a brief letter explaining that you need to speak with them and that it’s an emergency. Make sure to include *all* your details so they can look up your status. They’ll be in touch much quicker that way.”

The angels had dealt an ace from *their* deck. “Thanks for the advice, mate. By the way, my name’s John Ramses.”

“Any time. You know where I work. I’m Bradley Pen Dragon. They just call me Dragon.”

Immediately after work I approached the Senior Officer and explained what I required. Save for the *Banshee*, whom I rarely saw in the block, the officers had mostly been helpful and professional and easy to get along with. Within ten minutes I was called back to Control where the officer handed me a printout with the contact details of the Perth Consulate. Back in my cell I quickly wrote a request to meet with them in person then returned it to the S.O. who assured me he would send the fax within an hour<sup>7</sup>. I could only wait now. Suitably paranoid, I waited also for the next demonic card to be dealt.

Through the night I couldn't sleep as my mind was assaulted from all directions. Since the age of eleven when I'd first began playing guitar I'd found certain comfort in writing lyrics expressing situations I had found myself in. Around 2AM my pen flowed:

*Left alone in a prison to die with my dreams  
 My only companion is a face in the mirror aging, lonely and lean  
 I left the good life behind me, family and friends  
 I put behind me what I learned on Sunday and I never looked back again  
 Now here I stand waiting on Judgment Day  
 I moved in shadows of streetlights, shunned the naked light of day  
 I learned feed my belly trading drugs for money where the back street heroes  
 play.  
 My only true religion was taking for my gain  
 The only time I spoke of God and Jesus was when I spoke them in vain  
 Now here I stand waiting on Judgment Day  
 Sweet Kingdom Come, now my life will be done  
 I willingly stand sacrificed on Judgment Day  
 Sweet Kingdom Come, now I stand before the Son  
 They say the darker the sin the brighter His light and it's burning my eyes away.  
 Now I move in rhythm with duty, rise and fall to the turn of key  
 I've learned to feed my belly folding Hakea laundry for just five dollars a day  
 Salute the Bosses and Misses, but never look them in the eye  
 Another child of God forgot and abandon in a world called 'civilized'  
 Now here I stand waiting on Judgment Day  
 Sweet Kingdom Come, now my life will be done  
 I willingly stand sacrificed on Judgment Day  
 Sweet Kingdom Come, now I stand before the Son  
 They say the darker the sin the brighter His light and it's burnin' my eyes away.*

I called the song *Judgment Day*<sup>8</sup>. It was a combination of both my personal circumstances and those of other prisoners I'd come to know in here. Some had suddenly found God or Jesus, however too little, too late in my opinion, but who believed their salvation now rested with those deities. I held as

gospel a number of delusions through my life as well, many of which were being shattered with every passing day, but belief in some form of a ‘savior’ had not been among them for decades. Still, some do believe. Whatever gets one through their day on this planet was fine by me so long as it didn’t infringe on me adversely.

On the afternoon of the following day I was called out of laundry and escorted to Official Visits. Only once there was I told the purpose. “You have a meeting with the US Consulate,” said an officer as he came from behind a large enclosed desk. “This way.”

Butterflies suddenly swarmed through my stomach. *They actually came*, I rejoiced to myself. *The closest thing to God a US citizen abroad will know*, Dragon’s words echoed. My body flushed with elation and suspense.

The room was tight with a narrow desk that seemed to barely fit in the available space. Behind the desk sat a man and woman smartly dressed. The officer closed the door behind me as the pair stood to introduce themselves.

“I’m David Cimarron and this is my associate, Mary Robinson. We’re from the US Consulate office in Perth.”

Cimarron was tall and trim with a stately air of a person who had mingled among influential politicians and delegates. Robinson was shorter, equally stately and donned a warm smile. She presented to me as a gentle grandmother as might be depicted in a Norman Rockwell painting. Most importantly, they were Americans from my home country.

For a moment I hesitated to shake their hands. *Are prisoners allowed to touch such people? Are my hands clean?* “I’m John Victor Ramses. Thank you so much for coming out on short notice. I can’t tell you how much I appreciate it.” My desperation could not have gone unnoticed.

Sitting down together I commenced to tell them everything that had occurred since July 2<sup>nd</sup> including the attitude and treatment by the cop and CJS. My brain clogged with the details of event after event, from the significant to the menial, each battling to be the first to be heard. Lastly I explained the most recent incident with the bail lawyer and the apparent deliberate attempt to keep me from bail through a blatant lie. True to their nature, as Dragon had forewarned, the two consuls said little but rather listened intently while jotting notes every other moment.

“John, we’ll check into this and see where it stands,” Cimarron said at last.

I hadn’t heard my name spoken aloud in some time, having grown accustomed to *Yank, Yankie, Wank, Mate, American* or *Prisoner Ramses*. Hearing my name then, from the US consul, restored a sense of dignity that had

unconsciously dwindled over the past month and a half. In her turn, Robinson set a collection of documents before me consisting of a general information packet and a form giving them permission to release my details and status to certain parties of my choice. Among the options were family, spouse, employer, media and general public. I selected them all then signed it. With that my brief visit with emissaries of the Almighty concluded. I was then escorted unceremoniously back to purgatory to finish the last half hour in laundry where I briefly updated Steve and Ian (Roger had faded from the group). On the way back to the block I caught up to Dragon in the yard.

“That was the US Consulate,” I said, still glowing from the encounter like Moses on the Mount. “Two of them. I can’t believe they responded so quickly.”

“They don’t mess around when one of their own might be in trouble. How’d it go?”

“I told them everything, and like you had said, they mostly just listened and took notes. They assured me they’d check into this. I couldn’t read them so I don’t know what they were thinking about it all.”

“The first thing a consul is taught is how to make a poker face. They’re harder to read than judges. But the bottom line is this: if the State of WA has legitimate cause to keep you in jail they’ll have to prove it. If so, there’s nothing further the consulate can do but pray for you and send you a Christmas card. On the other hand, if you’re released on bail *now*, you know beyond doubt that someone was taking advantage of your vulnerability. If that’s the case, now that they know the US is watching, I’ll bet you’ll have no more trouble from whoever it is. They might even drop the charges if they’re not solid.”

“I just want to thank you for your advice and direction. I would never have thought to contact the consulate, as ridiculous as that sounds now. Too many issues clouding my head.”

“What are you charged with?”

“Killin’ the last wank---- drug re---- Sex offence charges.”

“They’ll put strict conditions on your bail, then. Trust me, that’s an area I’m also quite familiar with. But if you’re bailed, whatever they stick on you, just follow the rules closely. Your freedom and independence from the system is a priority. You can’t do anything to help yourself while in jail. I’m sure you’ve realized that by now. Good luck to you.”

Another sleepless night came and went, but this time it was spent in anxious hope. I had wanted to contact my parents after returning to the block, but the time in Salt Lake City would have been around 2 AM. Moreover, I didn’t want to get their hopes up in case a demon still had an ace up its sleeve. I’d

become concerned by how this was all affecting their health and there were also issues brewing at home, so I refrained.

All through the next day I held my breath waiting for some news one way or the other. Night came again. Turmoil returned. Hope began to wane within me until it was once again succeeded by the darkness from that *place with no name* as images of my daughter's smiling face at McDonald's so long, long, long ago took center stage. At 3AM, in the dim glow emanating from the small flat screen TV while *SBS Chill* played softly in the background, I penned that darkness into troubled stanzas and prosaic rhymes:

*There's a storm inside raging like a northern squall  
 Another layer of ice on a wounded heart building up the wall  
 You won't get to me, see the many who've tried  
 I'm not a man to hold, feel your blood run cold when you look into my eyes  
 I'm what hell is like when it's frozen in ice and still burning  
 I'm what the ocean is like when it's been sucked dry and still churning  
 I'm what a planet is like torn apart from inside and still turning  
 I'm what a dreamer is like buried six feet deep and still yearning...*

August 25, 2010

The next morning, I didn't go to work. Instead, I was unexpectedly escorted to Video Link where I learned my case for bail was being heard. The presiding judge mildly chastised the lawyer for complicating the original orders he had set back on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July. Then without further ado, the judge ordered that I be released on bail – effective immediately.

*Miracles just seem to happen.*

\* \* \* \*

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *Starry Nights*

I had been accused, charged and arrested on the American 4<sup>th</sup> of July weekend. For fifty-six days I had been incarcerated – one day for each of the 56 men who had signed the Declaration of Independence. Our respective battle against corruption, tyranny and oppression of fundamental human rights was not dissimilar. In *Western* Australia nothing had changed since ‘convicts’ had built their first jail nearly two centuries earlier. Western Australia’s isolation from the rest of the modern world, which I’d once used to my advantage for marketing Ghost Radio, had become more apparent, as did my sense of loneliness on the planet.

Processing my release had taken an eternity, no doubt deliberately dragging their feet. Then in the evening, long after lockdown, they came for me. The sun had long since set. Walking between two officers as they escorted me from Block Six to Reception where my street clothes and belongings were stored, I chanced to look up. The night sky was blazoned with stars more brilliant and crisp than I could ever recall. For 56 nights I had not seen them, having been locked down before dusk and unlocked after dawn. The expanse of heaven was breathtaking and I was so mesmerized by it that I had not noticed the curb along the service road and tripped over it as we walked, falling to the ground. I could have laid there for hours looking up. Although the constellations were upside-down from an American’s perspective, they were nonetheless familiar, especially Osiris (Orion) with its three-star belt. No matter where I had wandered on the planet through life the stars had always pointed the way back home lest I should one day forget due to long absence. I swore to myself to never miss an opportunity to look up at the star-spangled heavens at least once as clear skies would permit. For just over one year from then I rarely failed to do so.

My supervisor and his wife had been waiting for me in the dim parking lot of Hakea Prison. I had forgotten that my head was hairless and for a brief time they hadn’t recognized me as I had stood waiting for the ride. But at last they caught on. I spent the first night at their home. His young daughter had gone to stay with her mother for the occasion due to the restrictions on my bail. At 6AM sharp we drove into work. True to his word he worked my ‘arse’ off, but though I had been out of sorts for the first few hours it was good to be back on the job.

I'd learned that someone from CJS had also contacted the company's owner in an attempt to dissuade him from allowing me to remain employed, likely in order to have cause to keep me incarcerated, but the owner had apparently put them in their place with certain threats of his own. The owner was a sharp, no nonsense businessman who'd always tried to treat his employees fairly. He held a rare philosophy for a West Aussie that a person was innocent until *proven* guilty. Whether it had been what he'd told CJS or whether it had been the sudden involvement of the US consulate, I would not be bothered again by them.

In the afternoon we dug my car out from the back of the warehouse where it had been stashed and covered to look like a pile of unused materials. Before the business day had concluded I drove a short distance to Richard's family-owned company where I met his parents and brother. After pleasantries, a short chat about web marketing and a brief bitch about CJS, I then followed them to the house that would be my home and sanctuary for the next year while on bail. The feeling of motion with the mild wind swirling around me through my open window was refreshing to my senses. *Freedom* - the act of going forward towards a goal.

The house was small but cozy, a three-bedroom, one-bath starter home suitable for a small family but perfect for a single man who suddenly had next to nothing in his life. Richard's parents took me on a brief tour to familiarize me with the layout and quirks then pointed out what repairs and general maintenance were required. Two of the smaller bedrooms belonged to Richard's children for when they had stayed on extended access visits. Each room contained toys and décor according to their age, interests and gender, but in a state of stasis awaiting their return. I knew Richard deeply missed his children, as I missed my daughter, and their rooms would be sacred to him. After his parents had handed me the key to the house and left I closed his children's doors and would never again open them. That privilege was Richard's alone.

From my workplace I had gathered my few belongings and extra clothes I had stashed there pending a residence of my own before the arrest. I brought them inside, plugged my mobile phone and laptop into the power outlet to charge, then put my clothes in an empty drawer of a dresser in the master bedroom. Lastly, I removed from my car the still-wrapped fishing poles I'd bought for the weekend with my daughter and with certain sadness I set them almost ceremoniously in a corner of the wardrobe out of sight, out of mind. I then closed the door and, like the doors to Richard's children's rooms, I would not open it again until my daughter and I were back together. They were too painful to look at, a reminder that she was not in my life as well as the reason *why*. I knew from talking with prisoners at Hakea that I had a long, if unnecessary battle ahead of me to clear my name before I could win her back. Unlike the now hidden poles, however, my daughter was an ever constant



presence in my mind; her smiling face at McDonald's always clear when I closed my eyes as if that last impression had been burned into my retinas.

By the time I had settled into the house the sun had settled behind the horizon. For a while I laid in the dark on the bed thinking, processing all that had happened since July 1. My mind ran amok. As the moments passed deeper into nighttime I gradually became aware of a strange sound that seemed to be coming from everywhere. At first it had been faint and distant, easily ignored, but it had now become a roar so loud I could hardly hear my own thoughts: the sound of *silence*. It was the first time I had actually 'heard' *silence* and I hated its awful, lonesome, deafening mourn; empty and void of life.

Rolling from the bed I felt my way to the wall by the door and turned on the light. Then I walked through the hall, lounge room and into the kitchen turning on each switch, leaving a trail of light behind. On the kitchen countertop I had early noticed a small clock radio. Turning it on I found it worked. I scrolled through the local channels – 92, 94, 96, until I came to a station I'd only rarely listened to called *Sonshine FM*. It was a Christian based format. Although not religious myself, the music was uplifting and pleasant and immediately drowned out the silence. Most importantly, I was sure that *Sonshine FM* would never play *Second Chance*.

Then another sensation began to creep into me, one that I had not felt for nearly two months: I was hungry. No, *starving*. My appetite had suddenly sprung from the bonds of stress as I had been sprung from jail. Now there were no thick concrete walls, no barred windows or double-locked reinforced steel doors. There were no prison officers. I could walk out the door, get into my car and drive to – *anywhere*. Freedom. So I did, just because I could. Perhaps tomorrow I might do basic grocery shopping but right then I felt like fast food.

Driving out of the neighborhood I came to the intersection of the Great Eastern Highway, which ran through the small town of Midland. Across from me as I waited for the light to turn green, the Golden Arches of McDonald's blazed against the night sky. My heart briefly palpitated a warning. For the time being McDonald's, like *Second Chance*, were taboo. When the light turned green I turned left. A minute later I spied an illuminated sign for Domino's Pizza, parked my car, went in and ordered a large pizza with extra everything and a liter of coke – because I *could*. Returning home, while *Sonshine FM* played gently in the background, I ate one slice after another, chasing each bite with a slug of coke. *Freedom* – the privilege of choosing what to eat and *where* not to eat. For a moment I had forgotten that I was on bail, still accused of a heinous crime and far, far from truly free. But then I remembered. Retrieving a pen and notepad from laptop case I prepared a to-do list, which began with: Report to Immigration and Find a lawyer. Everything thereafter was menial.

I had not had the opportunity to call my parents due to work and time zone difference. As it was about 8PM in Perth it would still only be around 4AM in

Salt Lake City. But not so in Helsinki. Leaving the power adapter plugged in I set my laptop on the dining table beside the open pizza box. I sent an email first to my parents briefly explaining my current status and that I would call soon. Then I sent an email to Finland. In less than a minute came a request to chat accompanied by several rows of smiley face emoticons. With so much to catch up on and discuss we chatted until after midnight.

I related to her all that my wife had done or attempted to do. Then, she informed me of what had been occurring in the online world and that she had been quietly watching my wife's Facebook profile for chatter that might reveal the whereabouts of my daughter as well as information that would prove I'd been set up, but there had been very little activity. By contrast, my wife's best friend had been quite prolific, spreading slander, defamation and rumors on her own profile and mine, no doubt with my wife's cooperation and encouragement. Apart from telling the world I was actually bald she had also spread a rumor that I had committed crimes in the United States, bought a wig, changed my name, then suckered a vulnerable Australian mother into marrying me in order to hide out from police. It was to me shameful that my wife would stoop so low as to manufacture such a lie for her friend to promote. Our love story had been too broadly known, having been told and retold by my wife in print and radio interviews.

But the person doing this to me was *not* my wife. Instead, it was a *thing* she had named *Lilith*. My wife knew full well that I had not changed my name until *after* I'd arrived in Australia, indeed, not until after our wedding vows had been spoken. While I had long used the name *Ramses* as a pseudonym in the U.S., I had not legally changed my name. The costs to do so in the U.S. outweighed the need at the time. Nonetheless, many people had come to know me as *Ramses* due to having published and promoted the name. My wife and I had wanted to be known as *Mr. and Mrs. Ramses*. Moreover, we wanted our daughter to be born a *Ramses*. So, shortly before I arrived in Australia my wife legally changed *her* surname to *Ramses* around the same time that she also had the Eye of Horus tattooed on her abdomen. When we had married I merely assumed *her* new surname whereby acquiring my *own* name back, officially and legally, at a bargain-basement price. While the name change had played havoc with my visa, Immigration, setting up bank accounts and such, it had been just one more interesting anecdote we'd tell through our years together.

*Lilith*, however, had not been invited to our wedding and was therefore ignorant of these well-known facts. In the place of facts, it appeared that *Lilith* had simply contrived a fantastic and damaging story, however provably incorrect. Also overlooked was the fact that by law and policy, the Australian Department of Immigration had conducted a thorough background check for any hint of a criminal history in the United States and Australia before approving my application for permanent residency. Their investigation had been especially

thorough where my sudden name change had raised a red flag. The report had come back spotless, as I knew it would.

Compounding the damage to my name, my woman friend also brought to my attention that my once close friend and client, Canadian psychic Robbie Thomas, had taken advantage of my arrest to bolster his own waning image by giving a radio interview in the US, claiming to have ‘inside knowledge’ of the allegations against me. I believed my wife and I had been too well known for anyone to buy into the slander and rumors, yet many had. It was a return to the age of accusations. In my view these individuals were all gutless, spreading such garbage around while I had been helpless and silenced in jail. Now I was not so helpless. Now I could and *would* set the record straight, especially for my daughter’s sake, who was also a *Ramses*. It was one thing to destroy me. It was another altogether to harm my daughter in any way, shape or form. I worried now that with all the gossip and reckless posting to the internet that she might be bullied in school. She had been so happy through her young life, even in spite of the divorce, but now she had been crushed by insensitive, selfish cruelty with no concern for her.

At last saying goodnight to each other and logging off *Messenger*, I was compelled to surf through the slanderous comments and listen to the interview by ‘psychic’ Robbie Thomas but stopped just short of a mouse-click. I was already pissed off, it was late and I had to be at the jobsite by 6:30AM. Still, I intended not to let it go unchallenged. Silence in the wake of an accusation is almost always viewed by the public as an admission of guilt. My silence had been forced upon me, but no more.

*Lilith* was out of control. It had become dangerous now. Her continuing actions not only proved it but also justified action on my part toward my own self-preservation. My wife knew her American husband as skilled in self-defense and a capable protector of my family and property, even lethally, if absolutely necessary. Any ill-intentioned intruder who might enter *my* home would not be leaving save in cuffs or a body bag. *Lilith* would be in the dark as to this part of me, as well, which made her all the more dangerous. My wife would never send a family member or friend to their probable death. *Lilith* would recklessly encourage it. But my wife would never have done *any* of this. The covert sex abuse combined with the occult influences of her childhood had created *Lilith*. That creature was now unchained and unchecked and never thought about consequences. In the past it had always left my wife to suffer those. I hated *Lilith* with a passion – and feared her. She was an adversary to be reckoned with. But deeply buried inside was my wife, the mother of my child, the woman I’d so loved. Now, my wife was gone forever; the damage could not be reconciled. Only my daughter remained of our love story. And I wanted her back.

Before at last going to bed I checked all the locks on the doors and ensured the windows were shut and properly latched. The home had been fitted with outdoor security light with motion sensors, which I had noted to be

functioning after returning from Dominos. Nonetheless, I left the porch light on as well as the rear patio light. I also left *Sunshine FM* playing continuously, if ever so soft, to keep the howling silence at bay.

In a drawer of the kitchen I found a steak knife that fit well and deadly in my hand and slipped it under my pillow. Then, bringing a dining room chair into the bedroom I closed the door and propped the chair under the knob. I was in survival mode, not an unfamiliar mode by any means. But this time it was not just my physical survival but survival from slanderous accusations, apparent corruption in the WA legal process and from the cop, Thwaites, whom I was confident had informed *Lilith* of my address with a certain sparkle in his eye.

The next day at work I called my parents during lunch break. I assured them I was fine and now moving forward. A ton of stress had no doubt been lifted from them and I saw no reason to suggest I might be in any danger. I had previously arranged with my supervisor to cut off two hours early in order to address pressing matters with Immigration. When my wife had sent me back to the US in January my permanent residency status expired and I had returned on a tourist visa. Due to the litigation, which could take more than a year to resolve, I required my permanency reinstated. I needed to be free in the community and not locked in a detention center.

The clerk at Immigration was kind and helpful. Reinstating my residency was not a problem in spite of the current legal situation, which I'd explained to her in detail. Then the clerk informed me of a flagged note attached to my file. She read it, paraphrasing. Apparently, my wife had called Immigration demanding that they deport me immediately. The call had been taken during the second week of my custody, about the same time my wife had informed the prison of my hairpiece and had attempted to gain access to my car. Her call to Immigration, however, made no sense, any more than the despicable letter my Stepdaughter had given to me. I was in jail on serious charges pending a future trial and yet she believed that, on her demand, Immigration would simply collect me and fly me home where I'd be free from any further pursuit of the charges? No, my wife was afraid. She knew the allegations were false. She knew I'd prove it and then sue her and her friend for slander and defamation as well as for absolute sole custody of my daughter. Keeping me from Family Court and my daughter had been my wife's intention when she had sent me back to America in the first place. Now she seemed to think she could make a demanding phone call and the world would just jump to her command. The Department of Immigration is *not* the WA police.

The clerk advised me that due to my wife's course language and verbal threats she had been red-flagged. *Lilith!* My wife never swore but very rare. Thanking the clerk, who provided me with printed proof of my reinstated permanent residency, I drove back to Midland. On my return I stopped off at Coles market and purchased a basic assortment of groceries, toiletries and other items. At the time of my arrest I still had several hundred dollars in the bank

with three hundred set aside for the weekend with my daughter. Remembering Roger's warning, I considered closing my account and asking my company to pay me in cash for the time being, but decided against it.

Once home I began looking through the phone directory for a lawyer and compiled a short list. Too late in the day to call, I contacted each the following day during lunch. The list was quickly exhausted. Each firm required \$35-50,000 up front. I didn't have that. One of them had suggested I try to get assistance through Legal Aid and had given me the Midland office address. The next day I again left a bit early and drove to Legal Aid. The Rep informed me that I did not qualify for aid due to having a job *and* a vehicle. I would be required to sell my vehicle and give them the money, then quit my job so as to be indigent before they would consider providing any funding. It was typical WA ludicrousness and I tried to get it through her head that without a vehicle I have no job and thus no place to live nor means of providing myself sustenance. She responded by telling me that in such cases the accused person either resides with a family member or remains in jail. Was this the horseshit Richard had faced? I had no family to stay with and I was certainly *not* going back to jail.

Angry, but keeping it contained, I thanked her and left. I was becoming nervous again. There was no right to a lawyer in Australia and Legal Aid, which I'd no doubt paid taxes into over the years, expected me to be utterly broke and helpless before *they'd* help. I had already been lied to by Maughn's sidekick who had deliberately attempted to foil my efforts for bail. CJS had tried to dissuade Richard's parents from allowing me residence and had even attempted to dissuade my boss from continuing my employment. *What a fucked up state*, I cursed as I drove home. The value of my country's Constitution, no doubt written by they who had personally endured such treatment under the old British rule, was becoming ever more appreciated. It was shameful to me that in our modern time Australia had not changed since those barbaric days. "*You have the right to a lawyer. If you cannot afford a lawyer one will be provided for you,*" the cops had recited on every American crime show I'd watched since *Perry Mason* in my childhood. It was well established that a lay person accused of a serious crime cannot defend his or her self in a criminal court of law. I was smart, but I was no lawyer. And I was against a foreign legal system that apparently didn't respect due process or fundamental rights.

<To be continued....>

[[ I hope you've enjoyed reading the first four draft chapters of my true, factual story *Not On My Life*. Your comments and critique are welcome by emailing to: [editor@salemsghost.com](mailto:editor@salemsghost.com) .

If you know my daughter, tell her I love her. I never left her. I was taken.

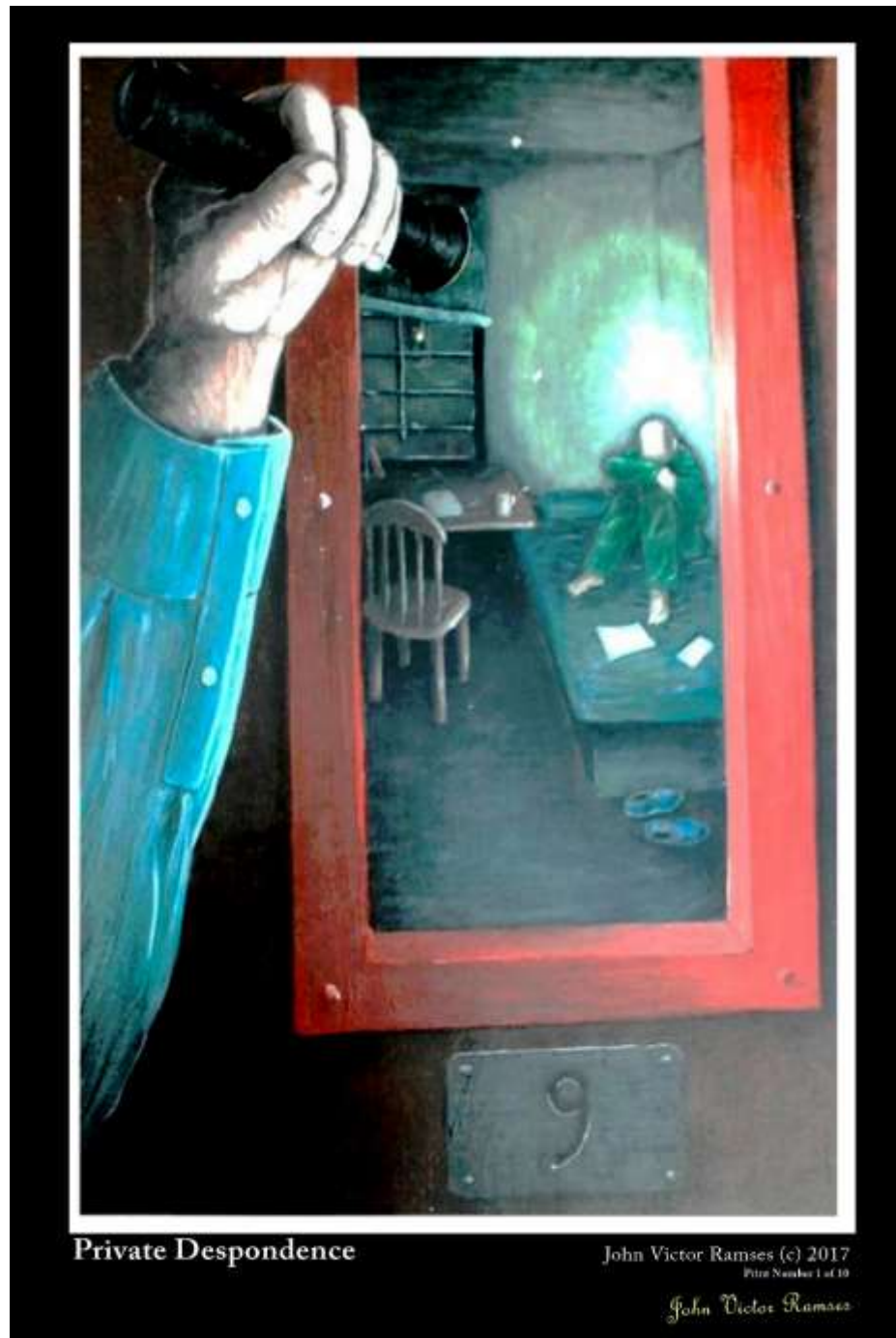
References:

1. See “*I’m and Online Ghost Buster*”, Take 5 Magazine, 23 June, 2006 (Australia), online at @ [www.johnvictorramses.com](http://www.johnvictorramses.com) .
2. “Second Chance” – YouTube, John singing with his daughter, October 2009.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8WUezl2-vdl&t=1s>  
 ( <http://www.youtube.com/johnvictorramses.com> )  
 Also: “My Sweet Lady” for my (then) wife : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bqFb0zUjj0s>  
 “Wildfire” for my Stepdaughter : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NCr35Z27uEs>  
<https://www.youtube.com/johnramses11>
3. See full lyrics, “*Weekend Daddy*”, online at @ [http://www.johnvictorramses.com/weekend\\_daddy.html](http://www.johnvictorramses.com/weekend_daddy.html) .
4. Lilith Fair Revival, 2010. Due to poor ticket sales, **13** shows (about one-third of the tour) were scratched (two announced on June 25, ten more on **July 1**, one additional on **July 2**) and one reassigned to a smaller venue.
5. See “*Something Evil Our Way Came*”, 2017, online at @ [www.johnvictorramses.com](http://www.johnvictorramses.com) .
6. See ‘Crown Laser’ at Innovative Hair Loss Solutions: <https://store.ihls.com.au/>
7. See Request Form for US Consulate, Perth, AU, online at @ [http://www.johnvictorramses.com/docs/cons\\_request\\_hakea.pdf](http://www.johnvictorramses.com/docs/cons_request_hakea.pdf) .
8. See YouTube for makeshift recording of ‘Judgment Day’.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ghWv4nyXihY>  
 ALSO: ( <http://www.youtube.com/johnramses11> )  
 All songs were recorded quickly on a laptop for my children in case of worst case scenario.

**Relevant Paintings By Author Use In This Book -**

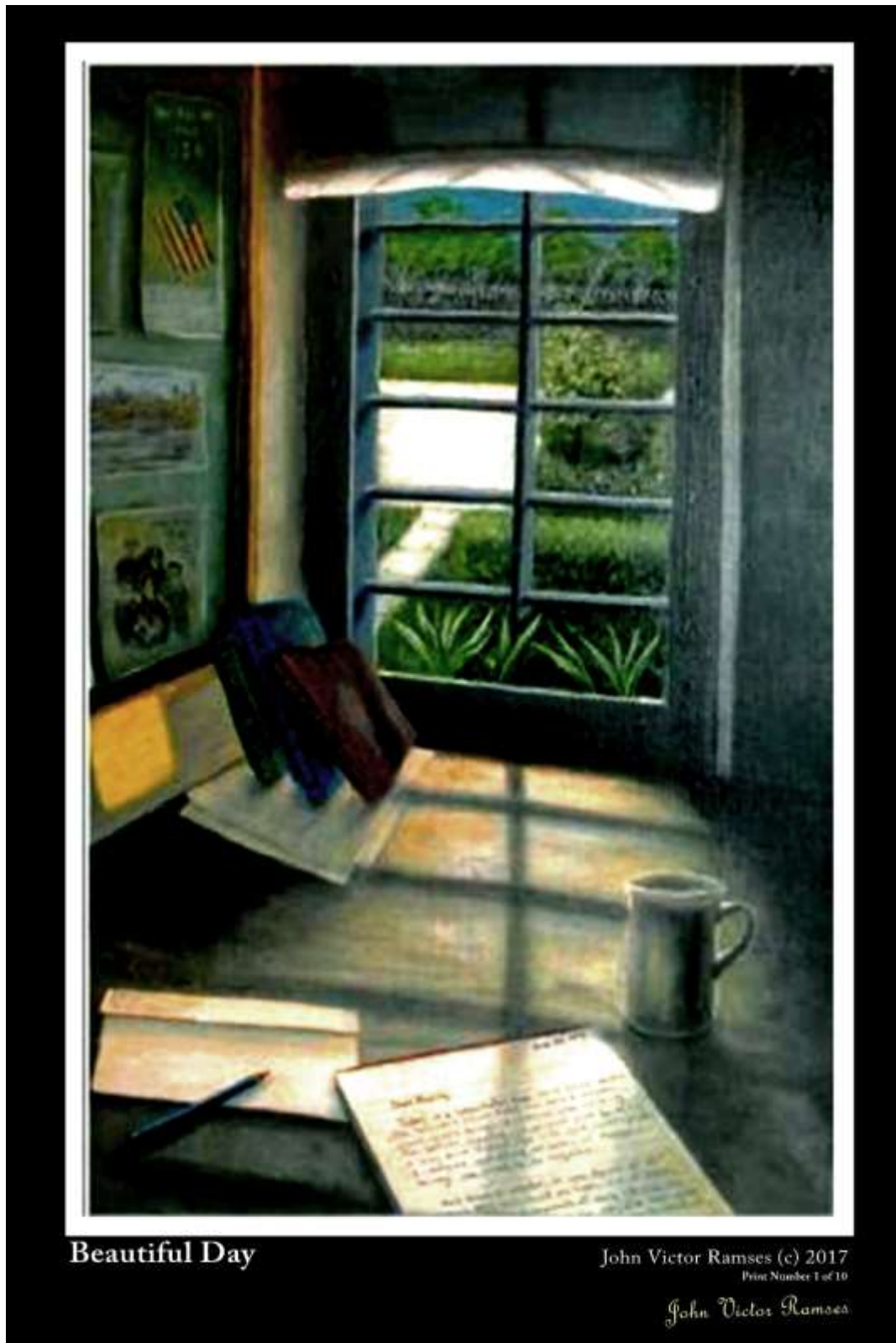
**(Original paintings are preserved for my daughter, Amanraya, should I ever find her.**

**Each painting is accompanied by a letter to her from me, explaining the painting.)**



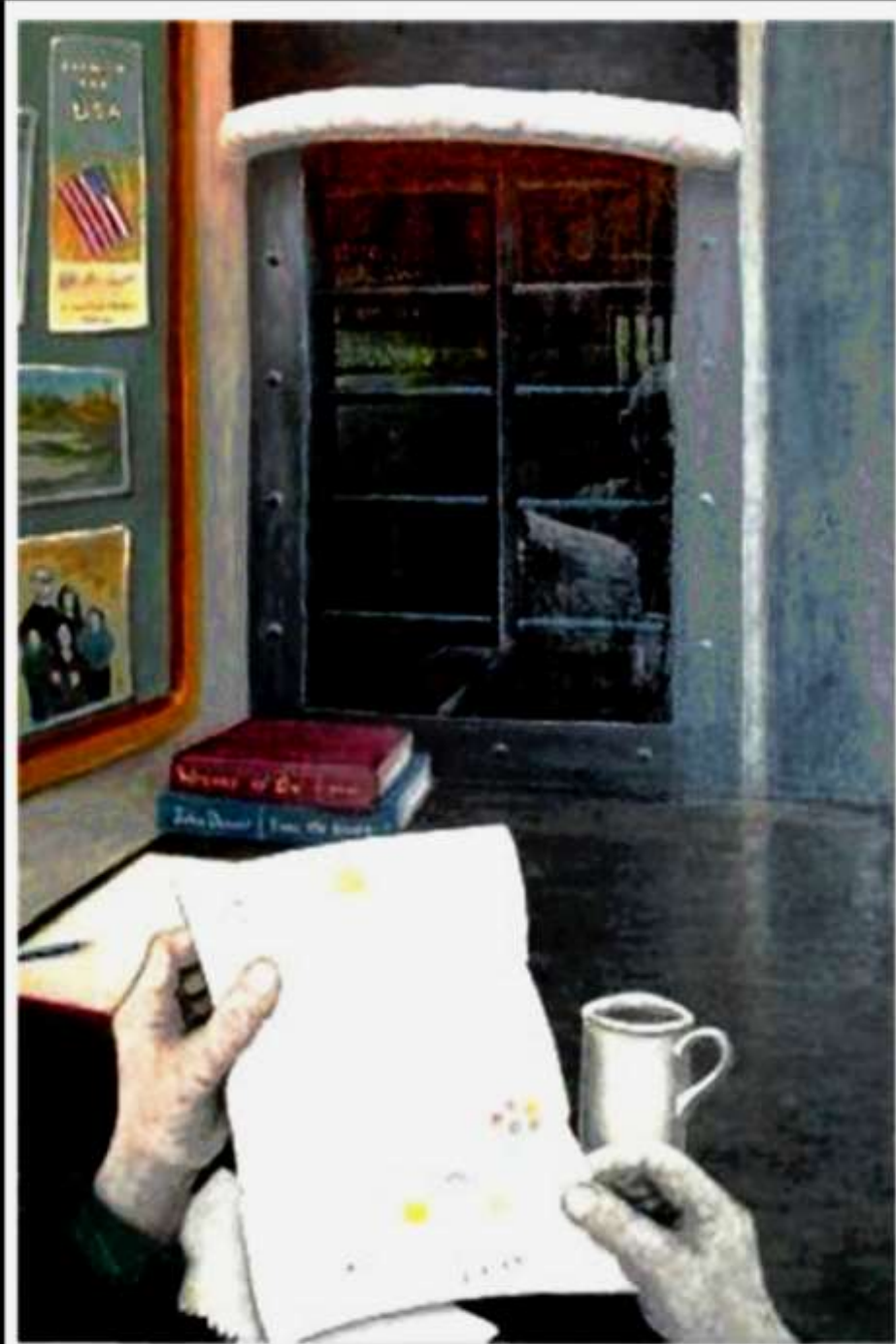
**"Private Despondence", Self, Cell 9 from outside door, nighttime, 2014.**





**“Beautiful Day” – Painting by author of his cell, #9, Unit 3, J-Block. Painting is exactly as it looked when painted in 2013. Also used in the cover of *Not On My Life*.**



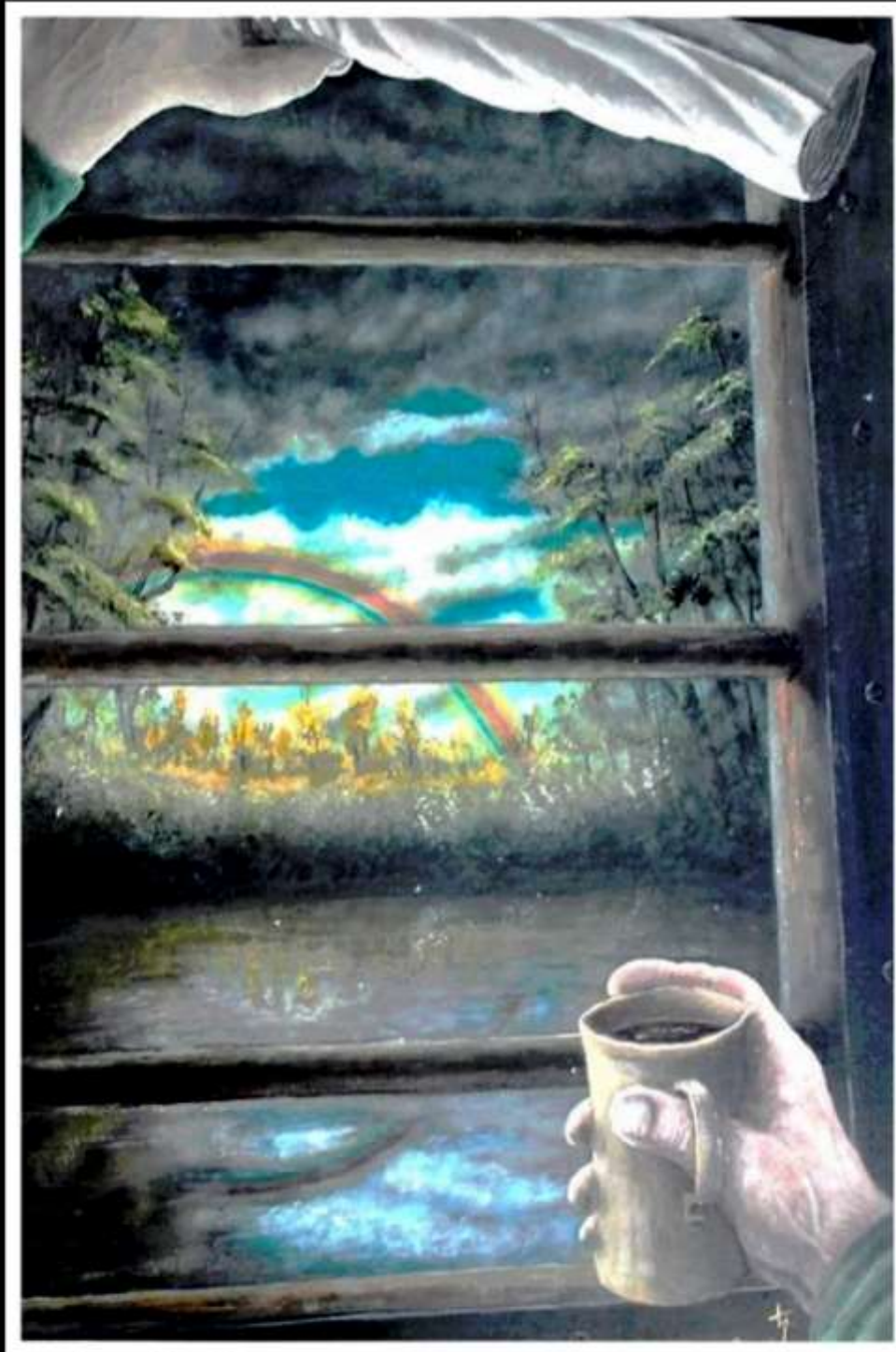


Reflecting

John Victor Ramses (c) 2017  
Print Number 1 of 10

*John Victor Ramses*

Cell 9 at Night, Letter, reflecting on better times, reflection in window.



Looking For Hope

John Victor Ramses (c) 2017  
Print Number 1 of 10

*John Victor Ramses*



**The Pen is mightier than the sword (but don't push me!)**





Visitors

John Victor Ramses (c) 2017  
Print Number 1 of 10

*John Victor Ramses*

**My Friend, Roy Dodd, Aboriginal - Acacia Prison  
Inspired from a real instance.**

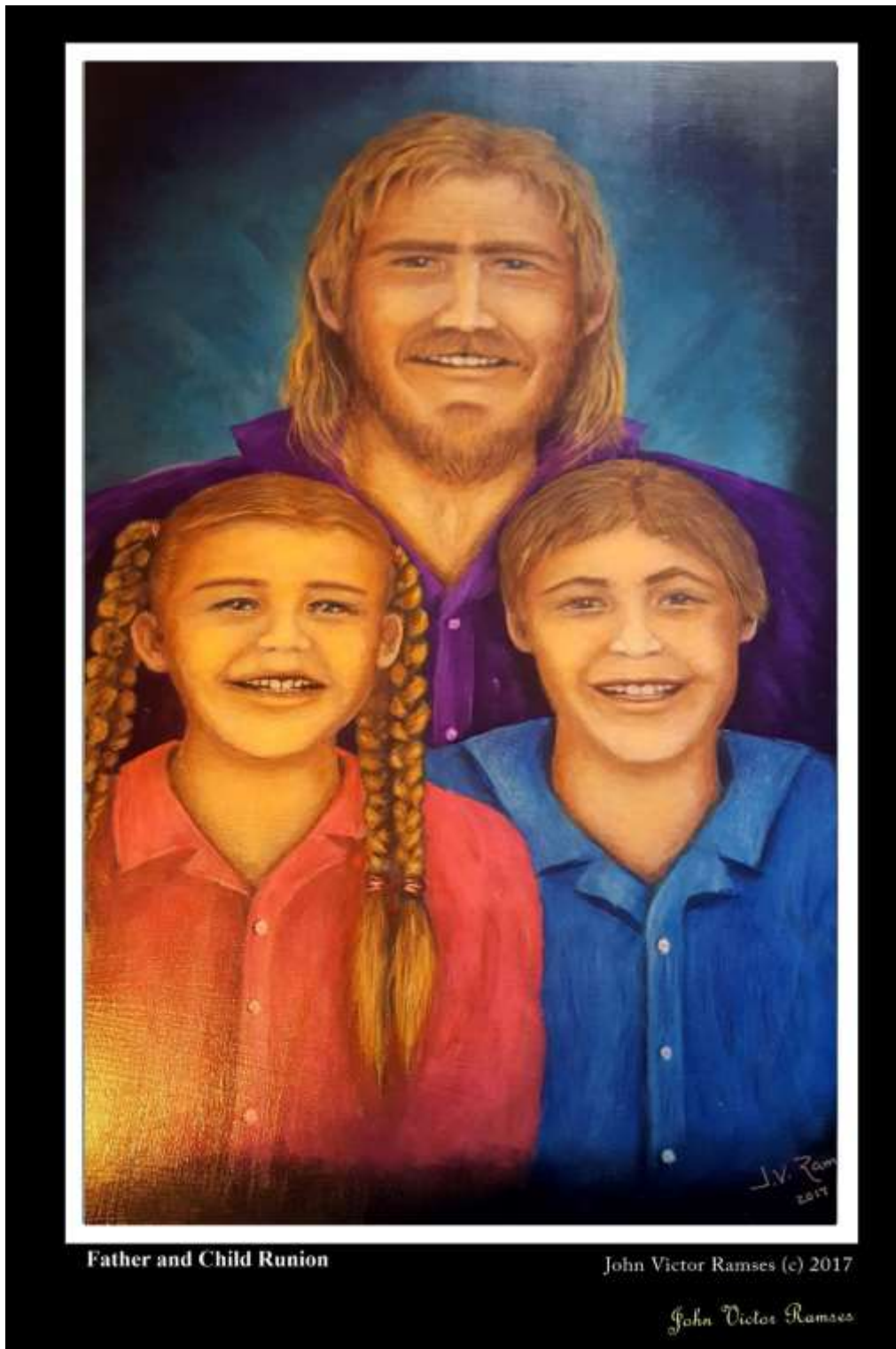


**Other Worlds (Horus / Falcom)**



See Prologue Image





**Portrait - Prisoner, friend (innocent) with his two children.  
Put in prison by his own auntie to have him removed from his  
grandmother's will (evidence with author).**



**Painted By Terrance 'Bull' Dann (Bunaba Tribe) for Author at Acacia Prison, 2016**

(See Screenplay, "*When the Outback Stood Still*"  
online at @ [http://www.johnvictorramses.com/docs/TDTOSS\\_Raw\\_Script\\_2b.pdf](http://www.johnvictorramses.com/docs/TDTOSS_Raw_Script_2b.pdf) .)