

LOS CABOS

Where The Fun Never Sets



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CHAPTER ONE

Carlos Garza lived with his mother, father and six sisters in the tiny fishing village of San Lucas, located at the very southern tip of Baja California. Their house, like all of the houses in the village, was nothing more than four walls made from sticks from dead cardon cacti woven together. There was an ample supply of building materials around there because the hardy cardon sprouted from any crack or crevice where soil was trapped in the tumble of rocks which formed the naked hillsides. The roof was thatched with palm fronds, which not only kept out the sun and rain, but its nooks and crannies also provided a home for a colony of small lizards which scampered about catching flies and other insects. There was plenty food for the lizards because the cool shade offered them a place to escape the wrath of the sun which bore straight down during the long, hot summer. His mother kept the dirt floor of the house dust-free by a daily splashing with water. Fresh water was so scarce in the village that she used sea water for this purpose, resulting in a floor which was hard as a rock and flecked with deposits of salt where the water formed small puddles before evaporating.

From the open doorway of their casa, which faced toward the south to take advantage of the cool breezes that drifted in from the ocean in the summer and capture the warming rays of the sun during the winter, they could look out across the sheltered bay at an unusual rock formation known as "The Friars". The rocks were so named by the Jesuits who came to the tip of Baja shortly after the Spanish began exploring the new world. To them the rocks looked like Friars tending their gardens. Later arrivals who were less spiritual and more carnal in their ideals saw the rocks forming the outline of a nude woman lying half in and half out of the water. No matter what visions the rocks might provoke, they effectively sheltered the tiny bay from the vast Pacific Ocean which rolled and crashed against them from the west.

There were fewer than a hundred residents in the village of San Lucas. They had no school, no store and no church. Carlos had heard that there was a much larger town, San Jose del Cabo, some distance along the shore to the east, but he had never been there. In fact, he had never been further from his home than three or four kilometers along the beach to the east. Just west of the protective rocks lay Cabo Falso, but the Pacific ocean beat against it with such fury that few men dared venture there, much less young boys. There was a real church at San Jose del Cabo and a resident Padre who would ride to Cabo San Lucas on a mule once a month to say mass, perform marriages and do other things that only a Priest could do. Nine year old Carlos wished that some day he could go see the big city and the church, but knew in his heart that he would never be able to.

Being the only boy in the family, it fell his duty to catch fish to feed his family. Catching

fish was easy if one knew how, but if he should fail, all that would be on the table that night would be tortillas, nopalitos and beans. Only once in a great while would his father go up in the hills to snare a rabbit or trap some quail as a change of diet from fish. On very special occasions, someone would butcher a pig or young calf, which would be shared with everyone in the village. When this happened, Carlos wouldn't have to catch fish that day.

Early each morning, Carlos would go down to the beach to gather limpets, shrimp, clams and sand crabs that were trapped in small pools left by the receding tide. These would be the bait that he used to catch the fish. Some fish would take one kind of bait while others would not. He had to have just the right kind of bait for the fish which came to the rocks that day. If he did not have the proper bait, he would catch no fish.

Carlos had to gather his bait just after sunrise, or the sea gulls and pelicans would swoop down and eat it all, then there would be none left for him. He kept the bait in an old pot with some sand and water until it was time to use it in the afternoon. He could not catch the fish in the morning because it would spoil before it was time for his mother to cook it that night.

After siesta when the sun moved off toward the Pacific, Carlos would take the pot of bait and his hand line and walk out on the rock jetty to fish. The rocks had been put there for tuna boats to tie up when the cannery was in operation. There were usually several other boys about his age there, also catching fish for their families. Girls never went out on the rocks to fish because that was man's work and girls didn't know how to fish. All that girls were good for was to giggle, gather firewood and scold their little brothers.

Standing with his back to the sun, Carlos could look down into the water through his shadow and watch for just the right type and size of fish to come along. Many different kinds of fish would gather in the shade of the rocks, but he had to be careful to catch only the best ones. Some fish, such as the Sierra, had dark meat and had a strong taste. Sierra was good only when salted and smoked. Others, like the Trigger Fish, had such sharp teeth that they could bite right through his line and he would lose a valuable hook. Also, he didn't want to catch a fish so large that he couldn't pull it out of the water because he would not only lose the fish but also his precious hook and line. He did that one time and it was almost a week before his father could find another line and make a new hook.

The most desired fish to catch was a small Dorado, which got its name from its beautiful golden color. Carlos would bait his hook and unwind the proper length of line to allow the hook to descend to just the right depth where the Dorado swam, then he would stand silently, watching the water and waiting for a fish to come to the shade. When the desired fish swam by, he would drop the baited hook right in front of it and he would usually have a fish on his line within a few seconds. One big fish would feed his family, but it was usually easier to catch two or three smaller ones. He usually caught an extra fish or two which he would give to the old people of the village who didn't have any young boys to catch fish for them.

Life in San Lucas was very hard. At one time, all of the men in the village made good money working at the tuna cannery, but when it was destroyed by a Chubasco, as severe wind storms are called in Mexico, it was not rebuilt. Now all that the men had to do was sit around and talk about the times when things had been better.

Carlos had seen many ships pass by, a kilometer or two off shore, but few of them ever stopped to anchor in the natural harbor at Cabo San Lucas. During the Chubasco season, ships would occasionally enter the harbor to escape a storm, but the people on them seldom ever came ashore.

Carlos was eleven years old when a large, white ship pulled into the harbor, dropped its

anchor and put a small boat over the side. It was during siesta when the ship arrived and most of the people in the village were taking their afternoon nap. Carlos was searching the rubble which had been the tuna cannery for nails from which his father could make fish hooks, so he was the only one to see the men come ashore. He rushed to where the small boat was being beached and greeted the men. One of them, who seemed to be the leader, asked Carlos to take them to see the Jefe or Caudillo Delantero of the village. This man spoke Spanish when he talked with Carlos but spoke a strange language which Carlos didn't understand when he talked with the others from the ship. The village had no mayor, so Carlos took them to see the Delegado, who was the closest thing that they had to any sort of legal authority. He listened as the man explained that his name was Doctor Carter and he was a professor at a school in a city called San Diego, which was located in the Estados Unidos. He said that they were there to collect sea life from the waters off Baja California and would like to hire someone who knew the area to guide them.

"I am the greatest fisherman in all of San Lucas," boasted Carlos. "I catch fish for my family every day and can show you how."

"I'm not interested in catching fish, Carlos," Doctor Carter replied. "We are here to gather things like limpets, sea worms, urchins and sand crabs, but I'm sure that I can use your help."

"Why do you gather bait if you don't want to catch fish?" asked Carlos.

"We study them in the school where I teach," answered Doctor Carter.

"If you are a doctor, can you cure my Grandmother of her sickness?" asked Carlos. "She stumbles and falls down a lot."

"I'm sorry, but I'm not that kind of doctor," replied Doctor Carter. "Actually I am a professor in a college and many professors are also referred to as doctors due to their education."

"You are one loco Gringo," said Carlos. "You are a doctor who can't cure sick people and you gather bait but do not want to catch fish."

"I know that it sounds strange to you, Carlos, but that is the reason why I'm here," said the professor. "You seem to be a bright young man. Would you like to work for me for a couple weeks. I will pay you well"

"There is no tienda in San Lucas where I could spend money and my family will have nothing to eat except tortillas and beans if I am not here to catch fish for them," replied Carlos. "If you give them food in cans like the Norte Americanos eat, I will go with you."

"You are a very thoughtful young man, Carlos, and I can't think of a better deal than giving your family food in exchange for your work," said the professor. "I'll have supplies for them brought ashore and you can start working as our guide after we have had our breakfast tomorrow morning."

"If you want to catch bait, you must be at the beach when it is just light enough to see," said Carlos. "While you are eating, the sea gulls will be having your bait for their breakfast."

"Whatever you say," replied Dr. Carter. "We will meet you on the beach as soon as it is light enough to see."

Two weeks turned into a month and Doctor Carter and Carlos developed a close friendship. When the professor and his students had gathered all the specimens they wanted and were ready to return to San Diego, Doctor Carter told Carlos that he would like to talk with Luis Garza, his father.

"Mr. Garza, I have come to like Carlos very much and would like to do something for him," said Doctor Carter. "My wife and I have no children and I would like for Carlos to go to San Diego with me and live with us while he goes to school. He has never been to school a day in his life and I would like to see that he gets an education. Many changes will take place in Baja during the next few years and he will need an education."

"I already know more about things that live in the sea than you do, so what could you teach me?" demanded Carlos.

"I'm not talking about Marine Biology," said the professor, "I'm talking about your learning to read and write and to speak, not only proper Spanish, but also English."

"But it is so far away and he is my only son," replied Luis. "Many of our sons go norte and never return. I might never see him again."

"I assure you, Mr. Garza, that I will see to it that Carlos returns to you by the time that he is eighteen years old. Whether he chooses to remain after that or not, I cannot say. All that I want to do is to give him a better chance in life than what he has now."

Luis Garza sat with his head lowered in thought for several minutes before he stood and embraced his son. "Many young men in Baja have no fathers, but now you have two."

CHAPTER TWO

The year was 1936 and the great depression was bearing down with a vengeance on the people who were still hanging on to life around Sallisaw, Oklahoma. It was rather difficult to go any further east and still be in the state of Oklahoma because it was claimed that one could literally spit from Sallisaw into Arkansas. It is also said that the Bible Belt, which wraps so tightly across the south, has its buckle situated directly over Sallisaw and the people of that region are always trying to cinch it up another notch.

There are more Baptist churches than filling stations in Sallisaw. Baptists, for some unknown reason, tend to clone themselves into new churches far more often than any other single pietistic group. When the original Baptist preacher came to a town and gathered a flock, they established themselves as the First Baptist Church. Then as a rule, when the church reached a certain size, a fight would erupt among the members and about a third of the congregation would break away in a rage of religious indignity to form a new church. The split usually came about because the departing members felt that the remaining ones had become far too lenient in their belief and were not living up to the strictest letter of the Bible. When the new church was formed, they would rather die than to ever be known as the Second Third or Fourth Baptist Church, so they always took a name which was intended to show the town that they held God in a much higher esteem than did the backsliding members of the church which they left. Each succeeding clone added more words to their name to show an even greater holiness. Ruth Harrison and her daughter, Mary, were among those who left the Holy Bible Baptist Church to become founding members of the latest in the chain of Baptist churches in Sallisaw; God's Holy Word Baptist Tabernacle. It seems that calling it a tabernacle is much more saintly than it simply being known as a church.

Ruth wasn't a widow, nor was she divorced; she just didn't happen to know, nor particularly care where her husband was. The last time that she had seen him was the summer of 1934 when he came by to see if she had any money that she could give him and to tell her that he was on his way to California to look for work. She gave him the last five bucks that she had in order to speed him along his way.

Other than her daughter, Ruth had only two interests in life: her job with the Sallisaw High School as cook in the lunch room and her church. In fact, if it ever came down to a choice, Mary would probably have come at the bottom of that list. Some people, especially Ruth's husband, claimed that her excessive dedication of time and attention to the church was the main reason why he wasn't around. She and Mary were at the church any time that the doors were open. They arrived

at six in the morning to attend the early church services, followed by Sunday School and then late morning church which was supposed to turn out at noon. However, it was not unusual for the preacher to hold his congregation captive until as late as 1:30 while he urged members to come forward to accept salvation. They would return Sunday evening to attend both early and late church services.

Monday nights were devoted to visiting people who hadn't shown up for church on Sunday, Tuesday was fellowship night and Wednesday was Prayer Meeting Night. Thursday night was for collective Bible reading and Friday was devoted to what the preacher called "Inspirational Talks With God". Most of Saturday was devoted to visiting sick members and anyone whom they felt might be inclined to blackslide and not come to church the following day.

It was Mary Harrison's thirteenth birthday and her greatest wish was for a brassiere like the ones that she had seen in the Sears Roebuck catalog. But instead of buying her something to enclose her budding breasts, her mother gave her a Bible in a white leather case. It wasn't that her mother had failed to notice the development of her breasts because she decided that the occasion of her becoming a teen-ager called for a Mother-Daughter talk. Most mothers talk with their daughters about sex, babies and growing up; but Ruth based her talk entirely on sin.

"Sit down, Mary," she told her. "You are thirteen years old today and the time has come for me to tell you about men. All men are instruments of the Devil and each one carries the serpent of sin in his pants. You remember the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The serpent mentioned in the Bible isn't an ordinary snake like we see in the garden, but it is the serpent of sin which every man carries with him from birth. A man's serpent of sin is a vile, venom-spitting demon which will sentence you to an eternal life of hell and damnation if it ever touches you. For a woman look upon this serpent or even think about it is a mortal sin."

Mary was in a cold sweat by this time because one day while she was walking to school, she had seen a boy wetting on a tree. She began to cry, "Oh Mother, I've already seen one of those serpents of sin. Am I doomed to go to Hell?"

"How did you come to see the serpent?" the mother demanded.

"I was walking to school and saw this boy who was holding his serpent in his hand and using it to wet on a tree," she sobbed.

"It is not as great a sin if you saw it by accident, but the boy was sinning by having his serpent out in a place where it might be seen by an innocent girl," she replied. "But you must cleanse your soul of sin for having seen the serpent. You must say an extra prayer every night and go forward during the invitation this Sunday and ask God for redemption."

"Being instruments of the Devil, men are driven to seek out women for their serpents to attack by penetrating their bodies," she continued. The Devil gives these serpents a special ability to entice and tempt women and they are able to cast spells over a woman which makes her want to touch the serpent and taste the forbidden fruit. Once you come under the spell of the serpent of sin, there is no escape and you are doomed to live in Hell forever."

"God places a shield, called a Maiden's Head, over the place where the serpent of sin enters a woman's body. It is there as proof of her virginity and purity at birth. If this shield is ever broken by a serpent, it is lost forever and will never grow back. It is placed there by God so a woman can always prove her purity and virginity. Your only defense against the serpent of sin entering your body is a strong will and faith in God because his shield is not strong enough to resist a lustful serpent. When the serpents of sin become excited with lust for a woman, they will grow to a great size in an effort to escape and reach their prey. You must always be aware of this and do everything possible to protect yourself from coming under its spell."

From that day forward, Mary made a special effort to never look anywhere near a boy's crotch lest she accidentally see a serpent of sin and come under its spell.

The Sallisaw High School had only one gymnasium so the boys had to play at one end and the girls at the other. In the heat of a game, it was not unusual for a penis to sneak out the leg of a pair of shorts or for a breast to be exposed when a blouse became unbuttoned. Both the boys and the girls kept a special watch in order to catch these bits of excitement which were often more deliberate than accidental. In gym class, Mary always kept her back turned toward the boy's end of the gym to guard against accidentally seeing an exposed serpent of sin.

One day in English class, the boy seated across the aisle from Mary handed her a folded piece of paper. She opened the note which read, "You are very pretty and I like you. Can I carry your books home for you?" His name was Roger and he had always seemed very nice. Certainly there couldn't be anything sinful about allowing him to walk her home. She smiled at him as she slipped the note inside the cover on her book. Just then, the teacher called on Roger to stand and read a selection from the book which they were using.

As Roger stood to read, another boy, who was seated across the next aisle whispered loud enough for everyone in the room to hear, "Look, ol' Roger's got a boner on."

Roger instinctively turned his back to the boy who had made the remark and Mary turned her head to see what he was talking about. Not six inches from her face was a huge bulge in Roger's pants, pointing right at her. Mary leaped from her seat and dashed toward the door, screaming, "Roger's serpent of sin is lusting and wants me! It wants to attack me! Oh, Please God, save me from it!"

Needless to say, after that experience, neither Roger or any other boy ever offered to walk Mary home from school. In fact, after that outburst, none would have dared to even ask.

Mary graduated from high school, but not being financially able to go on to college, she began to search for a suitable job. As it happened, Miss Roby, the head librarian, had just retired and Miss Doyal moved up to her job. Miss Hawks took over Miss Doyal's position, leaving an opening at the lowest level. The expression "Old Maid Librarian" is a pleonasm because it seems that no librarian is ever married and both "Old Maid" and "Librarian" are taken to have the same meaning.

Mary knew that she never wanted to have anything to do with a man, much less to get married, but deep down inside her, there was the gnawing maternal urge. She knew that married women had babies and once in a while, some unmarried woman would create a scandal by coming up pregnant. Usually, the girl who became pregnant without benefit of marriage went off someplace to visit an aunt for several months. Beyond that, she simply didn't understand the process of having babies. Never once did she ever connect the serpent of sin with babies. After all, how could anything which was so horrible and sinful have anything to do with something as sweet and pure as a baby.

Mary applied for the job as assistant librarian and was hired, mostly because she was the only applicant. Her job consisted mainly of keeping the floors swept, replacing books on the shelves when they were returned and cataloging new books when they arrived. It also gave her a chance to see hundreds of books which she never knew existed. While many of the books contained so much sin that she dared not read them, others offered valuable and exciting information.

When Old Doctor Pritchard died, his son donated all of his books to the library. This was a valuable addition to the library because Dr. Pritchard had amassed an impressive collection of the great writings of mankind, some so rare that they dared not place them on the shelves but locked away in a separate room for safekeeping. While they had no idea who might want to read them, they decided to place his medical books on a shelf which was available to the public. Mary was told to

catalog the medical books and place them in a special section back near the rest room.

While Mary was separating the books into the various categories for placement on the shelves, she found some of the titles most interesting. One especially caught her attention. It was titled, "Human Reproduction." As she thumbed through the volume, she was shocked at some of the pictures and words which she found there. The book was illustrated in several places by the use of a stack of plastic overlays which, when all were in place, illustrated the male genitals. Raising the first sheet showed a cut-away of the penis and the testicles. Mary was so shocked that she dared not lift the second sheet of plastic and slammed the book closed, placing it on the shelf. As she moved books from the stacks on the floors to the shelves, she could not help but think about what she had seen. There didn't seem to be a serpent lurking inside the penis as she had always believed, just strange looking veins, arteries and cells.

Each time that she passed the shelf containing the collection of medical books, that one particular book seemed to reach out and beg her to explore its pages. The book offered so much knowledge about a subject which was truly fascinating to Mary, however there were also those awful sins associated with simply looking at the serpent of sin. The longer that she thought about the book, the more that she wanted to open its pages and explore its knowledge.

"Could this be the Devil's way of tempting me with sin?" she thought. "If I read this book, will I face total and lasting damnation?"

She dared not ask her mother about the book because she already knew what the answer would be. Neither could she ask the preacher, because he was a man. In desperation, she asked herself, "How sinful could it be to read such a book if medical students have to study it in order to become doctors?" She took the book from the shelf and locked herself in the bathroom.

Page after page and illustration after illustration on the male anatomy held her total attention. She read unknown words like, Semen, Sperm, Erection, and Ejaculation. Her thoughts were interrupted by a tapping on the door. "Mary, are you all right?" asked Miss Doyal. "You've been in there for two hours, are you ill?"

"No, I'm OK," Mary stammered, not realizing how long she had been reading the book. "I'll be right out."

She waited for the tap-tap of the little heels on Miss Doyal's shoes to indicate that she had returned to the front of the library, but they never came. How on earth could she open the door and let Miss Doyal know that she had been reading such a book; and for two whole hours. She finally shoved the book into the trash can, covered it with paper towels, flushed the toilet and came out. She could safely return the book to the shelves when she emptied the trash that night.

"Are you sure that you are all right?" asked Miss Doyal. "Your face is all flushed and you are perspiring."

"It does seem to be rather stuffy in here," Mary replied. "I think that I'll be OK if I can sit by an open window for a few minutes." She also realized that her breasts were hard as rocks and she had a terrible urge to rub her crotch.

Mary knew that it would be impossible for her to read and absorb the contents of the book while working, so she wrapped it in her coat and carried it home with her that night.

Each night, Mary would lie awake in the darkness, waiting until she heard her mother's steady breathing in the next room. This would be a signal that her mother was asleep and she could safely turn on the small lamp by her bed and read the book. At times, she would become so engrossed in the book that roosters were crowing before she abandoned it for sleep.

The next section of the book concerned the female reproductive system and was presented with the same type of plastic overlays as had been the male section. She carefully read every word,

learning amazing things about the functions of her own body, including how and why she had monthly periods, which her mother referred to as "A visit from a little friend".

When she had finished reading the section on the female reproductive parts, she decided to compare herself with the drawings in the book. She removed her panties and leaned against the headboard of the bed. Using a small mirror and spreading the lips of her vagina, she was amazed to see how accurately her body matched the drawings in the book. She could easily see that her hymen, or Maiden's Head as her mother called it, was still in place as shown by one of the drawings. She was relieved to see that it had never been broken as depicted in another.

All of this newly-gained knowledge reinforced her desires to have a baby while teaching her that there was no way in which she could become pregnant without the fertilization of her egg by sperm from a man. To allow a man to invade her body with his penis, even once in order to become pregnant, was totally unthinkable.

It just happened that the preacher had chosen that Sunday to present a sermon about a subject which accounted for part of the name of their church, Immaculate Conception. He talked about how God had made a child suddenly appear in the womb of the Virgin Mary. If such a thing could happen to her, perhaps she could have a baby without the mortal sin of allowing a man's serpent of sin to invade her body. After all, her name was Mary and she was a virgin. For the next several months, Mary prayed many times each day for God to make a baby appear her womb, but each month her "Little Friend" came to tell her that nothing had happened.

Torn between the teachings of the bible and what doctors were taught, Mary returned to the medical book and the section about how the sperm cells traveled from the vagina and into the womb in order to reach an egg and fertilize it. If God would not give her a baby; she must turn to medical science.

She had probably studied this book with far greater interest than had any medical student and kept going back to one particular statement, "It is possible for a woman to become pregnant without actual penetration by a penis if live sperm cells are deposited anywhere near the lips of the vagina. This can happen even through clothing." Mary knew what she had to do, but she still had the problem of finding the live sperm cells.

All of a sudden, a conversation which she had overheard a few months earlier came back to her. She had been in a booth at the drugstore and four girls were talking in the booth behind her. They were all discussing boys and how they acted. One of the girls mentioned about going out with soldiers who were stationed over at Fort Smith, but said that she wasn't about to let one of them get her pregnant and would never let them "Go all the way" without using a rubber. The book had referred to the use of a condom to prevent pregnancy and they were made from rubber--this was obviously what she was talking about, a rubber or condom was used to capture the sperm cells and prevent them from being released into the vagina.

Mary knew that there was a area out north of town where the soldiers went to park with their dates and if they did what the girls had been talking about, there were bound to be sperm-filled condoms left lying all over the place. They would be the source of the necessary sperm cells. She plotted the dates on which she had her periods and using the fertility charts from the book, estimated the next date on which she would be able to become pregnant.

On the appointed night when she could become pregnant, which fortunately was a Saturday and there would be lots of soldiers coming to town, she drove her mother's car out to the favored place and parked it out of sight behind some trees. One car drove up, parked and stayed for about half an hour before leaving. As soon as it was gone, Mary took a flashlight and searched the area where it had been parked. There was nothing there. Either they had not "Gone all the way" or else

they hadn't used a rubber and the girl would probably become pregnant whether she wanted to or not. As she walked back to her car, another car drove in and she was almost caught in the glare of its headlights. This scared her so badly that she almost left, but decided to stay and give it one more try.

When that car drove away, she rushed to the where they had been parked and there, laying on the ground, was a white, wrinkled tube of rubber. She gingerly picked it up and a good size blob of thick liquid collected in the tip. Rushing back to her car, she carefully wiped away a few grains of sand which were clinging to wet and sticky outside and prepared to make herself pregnant.

Sitting in the back seat of the car, she pulled off her panties and, using a pair of sewing scissors, snipped a tiny hole in the tip of the rubber. She felt in her vagina for the small opening at the bottom of her hymen and carefully slipped the tip of the rubber under it. She squeezed the rubber and felt its contents flow into her. When it was empty, she tossed the rubber out the window and began to massage her crotch with her hand to make sure that all of the semen was captured. The rubbing felt so good that she continued to stroke herself for a few more minutes. Suddenly her whole body began to tingle and she couldn't stop massaging herself. A few seconds later, her legs began to jerk and she felt a sensation which was totally strange but felt so good that she couldn't stop. When she was finally able to stop rubbing her crotch, she was exhausted and wet with perspiration. If that is how it felt to become pregnant, no wonder so many women had children.

Millions of sperm cells, freed from the rubber jail in which they had been left to die, found themselves in a warm and wet environment which caused them to swim around in great excitement. Some of the sperm cells swam the wrong direction and stained her underwear, some were lost in hidden folds but several million of them set out along the proper course, making their way up the vagina, turning the corner at the cervix and heading straight for the waiting egg.

Mary had expected to be able to feel the baby in her womb immediately if she was pregnant, but could feel nothing there. Two weeks passed and the time came for her period but nothing showed. She had missed having her period a time or two before, especially during stressful times at school, so she still wasn't sure whether she had been successful or not. Another month passed and her second period failed to appear. She was now sure that she was going to have a baby. The problem now was how to break the news that she was pregnant without being considered to be a slut, a whore or something worse. The story of the Immaculate Conception had worked for one virgin named Mary, so she would make it work for her. After all, she still had her hymen to prove that she hadn't been with a man.

When the preacher began the invitation after his sermon, Mary walked down the aisle and whispered to him, "Reverend, I must talk with you."

"What is it, my child?" he asked.

"I think that I am going to have a baby, but I have never been with a man," she replied.

"You and your mother meet me in my study as soon as everyone leaves," he whispered. "We must talk about this situation."

The preacher dismissed the congregation as quickly as possible and entered his study where Mary and her mother waited. Ruth's face was ashen when he entered, so he assumed that Mary had already told her of the situation.

"Tell me about it," said the preacher.

"About a month and a half ago," began Mary. "I was awakened by a strange sound in my room. When I opened my eyes, the room was filled with a pale, white light and a golden figure stood at the foot of my bed. I was frightened and wanted to scream for help, but couldn't seem able to open my mouth."

"Go on," requested the preacher. "What happened then?"

"The figure reached out and placed both hands on my stomach and told me that he had chosen me to bear his child. I felt a strange power flow from his hands and into my body. Then he was gone and the room became dark."

"Whore of Babylon!" shouted Ruth. "You've gone out and got yourself knocked up and now you expect us to believe this story?"

"Please, Mrs. Harrison," said the preacher. "This sounds like what happened to the Virgin Mary, so we should not doubt her story."

"I'll believe her story when a doctor tells me that she is pregnant but hasn't been with a man," scorned her mother. "Doctors can tell those things and that is where she is going first thing tomorrow morning."

The nurse told Mary to remove her clothes and put on the white gown which she handed to her. Then, she had Mary lie down on a table with strange stirrups at the end. When the doctor entered, he lifted her feet into the stirrups and began his examination. With the nurse standing by his side and Ruth holding Mary's hand, he told them, "Her hymen is still in place, so she obviously has not been with a man. I will not be able to verify if she is pregnant or not without breaking it."

"No!" shouted Mary. "Don't break it! That's my proof that I am a virgin and have not sinned."

"Then the only other way is to wait," replied the doctor. "If she has already missed two periods, she should begin to show in another month or two."

A month passed and Mary did not need a doctor to tell her that she was pregnant. She was sick every morning, her breasts had begun to grow and she could feel the fetus pressing downward against her bladder.

Ruth told the preacher, "What Mary told us is true. She is definitely with child and the doctor said that she had never been with a man. The only answer is that she is going to have a Child of God."

"Praise God," shouted the preacher. "Just to think that God has chosen a member of our small church to bear his next son. I'll make the announcement tonight."

"What if they don't believe you?" asked Ruth.

"I'll say that anyone who does not believe in this miracle does not really believe in God," he replied. "Anyone who does not believe that Mary is going to have a Child of God will be afraid to admit it."

The preacher was right as not a single soul ever openly questioned how Mary became pregnant. They either believed the story or else never admitted to their doubts in public.

When the news of the Immaculate Conception was out, people came from every direction, to see the pregnant virgin. Crippled people wanted Mary to touch and cure them. Reporters wanted to write stories about the miracle. The flow of people became such a problem that Mary finally locked herself inside the house, but the street in front was still filled with people who hoped that they could catch sight of her.

Mary's labor pains began on the morning of December 24th and she went to the hospital for delivery of the baby. The doctor examined her again and said, "The hymen is still in place and there is no way to deliver the baby normally without breaking it."

"If it is necessary to break it for the delivery, then do so," said Mary. "But be sure that you put on the birth certificate that it was there and that you had to break it."

"Who do you want to show on the birth certificate as being the father?" asked the doctor.

"God, obviously. Who else?" replied Mary.

At one minute past midnight on December 25th in the hospital at Sallisaw, Oklahoma, a

seven pound baby boy was born. The doctor filled out the birth certificate, showing that the mother was Mary Harrison, the father was God and, under the section where any special information concerning the birth is shown, he place the statement, "Mother's hymen was still in place and had to be broken for delivery. In my opinion, this may have been an Immaculate Conception."

"What name do you want on the birth certificate?" asked the Doctor.

"I suppose that it would be going too far to name him Jesus of Sallisaw, so I'll name after my two grandfathers. Show his name as John Henry Harrison," Mary answered.

CHAPTER THREE

A cold north wind drove the light snow in horizontal streaks, whipping it around Rebecca Crenshaw's legs as she stood with her two sons, Nelson and Jason. They watched in silence as the coffin containing the body of T. Clayton Crenshaw was lowered into the frozen earth. The two sons had flown to Chicago to attend their father's funeral. Nelson now lived in Los Angeles and Jason was attending Harvard Law School, where three generations of attorneys before him had graduated.

T. Clayton Crenshaw was only forty-two years of age when he dropped dead of a heart attack, suffered while trying to dig his stranded Mercedes out of a snow bank. When the coffin reached the bottom of the grave, Rebecca dropped a single rose on it. As she and her sons turned to leave the cemetery, they were joined by Abraham Goldblat and J. Henry Potter, the remaining two members of the prestigious Chicago law firm of Crenshaw, Goldblat and Potter. Potter spoke, "Rebecca, we have been law partners with your husband for fifteen years and loved him like a brother. I know that Clayton left you well provided for, but it will take a few weeks to get his will through probate. If you need any money or anything else in the meantime, be sure to give the office a call. Also, we had a special arrangement between the three of us concerning the partnership in the event that any one of us should die. When you feel like it, come by the office and we will explain it all to you."

"Thanks, Henry," replied Rebecca. "I appreciate that and will see you after things get settled down."

Two weeks later, Rebecca parked her Cadillac in her late husband's private parking spot and took the elevator to the 17th floor where his offices were located. She was ushered into the plush conference room and seated at the head of the table; the place which had always been occupied by her husband, as president of the firm, prior to his death. Goldblat was seated at one side of the long table and Potter on the other. Two secretaries and a Notary Public were also present.

Henry Potter spoke, "I'm glad that you could come in, Rebecca. I assume that you have no objections, so I will turn the video camera on to record this meeting." Without waiting for a reply, Henry pressed a small button and the red light on a video camera mounted in a book case at the end of the room blinked on.

The meeting had taken on a much more formal atmosphere than what Rebecca had expected, but she said nothing. Goldblat spoke first, "Mrs. Crenshaw, this is a legal meeting of the board of directors for the Law Firm of Crenshaw, Goldblat and Potter; as incorporated under the laws of the State of Illinois. The meeting is being video tape recorded and Miss Roberts will take

minutes. Do you have any questions before we begin?"

"None that I can think of," replied Rebecca. "But I don't understand what this is about."

"I assure you that you will know in due time," replied Potter as he opened a large file folder which lay on the table in front of him. "Five years ago, we foresaw the possibility that something like your husband's death might happen to one of the partners and took steps to protect the remaining members of the firm. We established a value of three million dollars for the firm and bought a life insurance policy in the sum of two million dollars to cover each of us individually. One million would be paid to the deceased partner's heirs for his interest in the firm and the other million would go directly to the firm to offset the loss of his services."

"Do you mean to tell me that my husband had a two million dollar life insurance policy and didn't tell me anything about it?" asked Rebecca. "I thought the only one he had was for \$250,000 and I received the check for it today."

"I don't know why he chose not to tell you about it, but such a policy was in effect at the time of his death," replied Potter, picking up a cashier's check from the stack of papers. "I have your check here and all that you have to do is sign these papers in which you release all interests and rights which you might have in the firm." He pushed a legal document, containing several pages and bound in a blue cover, across the table to her. "Please read it and we will explain any parts which you do not understand. If you wish to seek the advice of outside counsel, you may do so before signing. You might also be interested to know that this was your husband's idea and he drew up the agreement."

When she had finished reading the agreement which, unlike most legal documents was simple and to the point, she picked up the gold fountain pen which lay on the table and signed it. Goldblat handed the folder to the Notary Public who dated, signed and applied his seal below her signature.

Potter handed the check for one million dollars to her and said with a smile, "Don't spend it all in one place."

Goldblat spoke up, "We plan to retain your husband's name as a part of the firm name, since that is the way in which it was incorporated. I hope that is agreeable with you."

"Yes, of course," replied Rebecca. "In fact, I would consider it to be an honor to him."

"The firm will handle the probate of the will for you pro bono and will provide you with free legal services should you ever need them," said Goldblat, "And my first free legal advice to you is to see my brother, Adam Goldblat, who is one of the best financial advisors in Chicago. His offices are in this same building and he also took care of your husband's financial affairs before he died."

Not since the days when she and her husband were first married and both attending college had she ever felt a need for money, but to actually hold a check for a million dollars in her hand was awesome. She pushed the elevator button for the 8th floor, where Adam Goldblat had his offices.

"Good morning, Mrs. Crenshaw," said the secretary, as she entered the office. "Mr. Goldblat is expecting you, please follow me."

Rebecca sat in front of his desk, clutching the million dollar check in her hands. It had all been so sudden. One minute she was handed a check for a million dollars and the next minute she would be handing it over to someone whom she had never met before. Her husband had always taken care of all financial dealings, leaving her free to plan pool parties, bridge games and European vacations.

Adam spoke, "Mrs. Crenshaw, that million dollars is an insurance settlement and therefore is not subject to income taxes; however, under the new tax laws, almost any money which it produces will be taxed as earned income. I took care of your late husband's financial affairs, so I

know that you aren't going to have any financial problems once his will is probated. I understand that you have also received the proceeds from a personal policy he had with you as the beneficiary"

"Your primary interest in this money will be safe, long term growth rather than producing the highest immediate cash returns. I suggest that some seventy-five percent of these funds be placed in tax-exempt government bonds and the remainder split equally between higher yielding growth funds and blue-chip stocks."

"I have drawn up this proposal for your investment program, based on your needs, but I do want you to read and understand it completely before making any decisions. You might also want to let your husband's partners see what they think of it. In the meantime, I would suggest that we put that million dollar check, which you are clutching so tightly in your hand, into a daily interest account in the bank downstairs where it will begin earning around two hundred dollars each day. I'm a firm believer that one should never waste a single day when their money could be working for them. This account will have it earning interest while giving you time to study my proposal before making up your mind."

"Since my husband trusted your judgment, I'm sure you know what's best for me, so I'll take your advice," replied Rebecca.

"Good, and if we can get the check deposited before the computers close, it will begin earning interest today."

Rebecca endorsed the check and handed it to him, because anyone who is as interested in a two hundred dollars as he is in a million must have something on the ball.

"One other thing, Mrs. Crenshaw," he continued. "If I were you, living alone in that big house out there in the country, I'd consider selling it and buying a nice apartment in one of those new high-rises along the lake.

"But that's my home," Rebecca protested. "All of my friends live in that area and I enjoy socializing with them."

"I'm afraid that you are in for a lot of heartaches if you continue to live there," said Adam. "The people who you consider to be your friends will have a much different attitude now that your husband is no longer living. You are now a very wealthy, young and attractive widow, and whether you intend it to be that way or not, you will be viewed as a threat to every married woman you know."

"It's difficult for me to believe that would ever happen."

"Let me ask you one question. Even though your husband has been dead for only two weeks, how many invitations have you had to social events?"

"Come to think of it, none," replied Rebecca. "But I had supposed that most of them felt that it was too soon to have me to dinner or a party."

"At least give some consideration to my suggestion. Living in an apartment has much to offer, such as security and elimination of the need to keep a gardener and pool man each summer; besides, you are still a young woman and need to be here in the city where the action is.

CHAPTER FOUR

"HELL NO, WE WON'T GO! HELL NO, WE WON'T GO!" Tom Davis led the shouting mass of students as they surged back and forth in front of the Administration Building at Berkeley University. This was only one of the almost-daily protest sessions which he led against President Lyndon B. Johnson, the Viet Nam War, the price of tuition, the food in the cafeteria and whatever else might be on his mind at the time. Even though there was no immediate danger of his being drafted due to his college deferment, which was good until he graduated, he was one of the first draft resisters to burn his draft card on the steps of the Selective Service Office. To his fellow students, he was the local hero because he had led so many anti-war demonstrations that the school finally decided to abandon its ROTC Program.

With his long, stringy hair, unruly beard and totally unkempt appearance, he looked as if he would be more at home in the hippie haunts of San Francisco than on a college campus.

Protesting the Viet Nam war wasn't the only cause that occupied Tom's energies. He had led rallies to legalize pot, to stamp out nuclear weapons, to stop construction on the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant, to save both the whale and the sea otter and against the CIA involvement in Chili. In any cause which flew against the accepted interests and aims of mainstream America, Tom Davis was first to lead a noisy demonstration either for or against it, depending on which direction would attract the most coverage by the local media. He loved the TV cameras because they allowed him to take his cause into every living room and the TV reporters loved him because he always provided "good press" for them. This exposure also earned him a prominent spot on just about every government list of subversives, reactionaries and other dangerous or undesirable characters.

Unlike most students who used the college campus only as a base from which they could safely pursue their causes, while gaining very little in the way of an education; Tom not only graduated with the honors, but also earned the highest grade point average in the history of Berkeley. The President of the university, realizing who would be delivering the valedictory address at the graduation ceremonies, sent word to Tom that he would be required to submit his speech for approval. Tom wrote a speech worthy of the best of politicians. He praised God, country, motherhood, short hair, apple pie, hot dogs, baseball and the good old American way; using every hackneyed cliché ever written. The President approved the speech with a personal note, "Most inspiring speech that I ever read."

Graduation day came and the hall was filled to overflowing. On the large stage sat the college's regents, directors and honored alumni. The officers of the college were there in their

doctoral robes and a color guard stood at attention to one side. Just below and in front of the stage, the band played softly.

The graduating class occupied the center section of the auditorium and thousands of proud parents jammed the rest of the hall. The band played "Trumpet Voluntaire" and the auditorium became quiet.

After a lengthy introduction of the people on the stage, the President of the College gave a glowing introduction of the Valedictorian. Tom walked to the podium, arranged he notes and began his speech in a most proper way, "Mr. President, Regents, Directors, Deans, Department Heads, Graduating Glass and distinguished ladies and gentlemen. Now that we have that formal horseshit out of the way, let's get down to the things which really concern us." With that, discarded his cap and gown, ripped his notes in half and launched into a tirade about how the Washington Politicians were using illegally obtained tax monies to send the nation down the road to ruin. While he continued his diatribe about crooked politicians and matters in general, the President rose and walked into the wings at one side of the stage. Suddenly, the microphone at the podium went dead and the band began to play so loudly that it completely drowned him out. While the stunned audience sat in silence, Tom dropped his pants and mooned the dignitaries on the stage, gave the audience the old middle-finger salute and strode off the stage.

As he reached the bottom of the steps, four husky men in dark blue suits stepped up to him. His arms were jerked behind his back and he felt handcuffs snap around his wrists. "We are United States Marshals and you are under arrest," said the leader.

"On what charge?" asked Tom.

"The charges," said the Marshal, emphasizing the plural form of charge, "Are sedition, inciting to riot and destruction of government property, among other things."

"What government property have I destroyed?" demanded Tom.

"Draft cards are government property and you burned yours, that will do for a starter," he replied.

During the next few hours, Tom was fingerprinted, photographed and processed into a holding cell in the Federal Building in San Francisco. The following morning, he was brought into a room where another man dressed in a blue suit was seated. "Mr. Davis, I am Cecil Stone with the Department of Justice. You have some very serious charges against you, but I am here to offer you an alternative to a long prison term after you are convicted."

"You seem pretty sure that I'll be convicted on these trumped up charges," replied Tom.

"Mr. Davis, I can assure you that we have enough evidence to convict you ten times over, so I suggest that you hear what I have to offer."

"No harm in listening," replied Tom.

"I am authorized by the Justice Department to make you this offer on a one-time basis. If you do not accept it today, we will proceed with prosecution on all charges. Here is our offer. You will appear before a Federal Judge tomorrow morning and enter a plea of "Guilty" to all charges. He will defer sentencing with the provision that you agree to immediate induction into the Army. Your Army service will be for only two years while a conviction will get you from ten to twenty years in a federal detention facility. I believe that you are smart enough to understand the wisdom of accepting our offer."

Seldom has an appearance before a judge taken less time. Tom was taken into the court room and seated at a table. Cecil Stone, whom Tom had met with the day before, was seated at one table and a man whom Tom not met was at the other. The other man put out his hand and said, "I am Ogden Hayden, your court appointed attorney."

"The case of the United States of America against Thomas Dwight Davis," said the Judge.

"Defense waves reading of the charges, your honor," said Hayden.

"How do you plead to the charges, Mr. Davis?" asked the Judge.

"Guilty to all charges, your honor," replied Tom.

"Your guilty plea is accepted by the court, however I will defer sentencing, pending completion of the agreement submitted by the prosecution," replied the Judge. "Next case."

Two hours later, Tom was standing stark naked in line with a hundred or more other men being processed into military service at the induction center. "Wouldn't it be a hoot if I failed their damn physical examination," he thought to himself. But, little did he realize that under the agreement, it was already decided that Thomas Dwight Davis was going to pass his draft physical, regardless of what the doctors might find.

Tom left his mop of long hair and the scraggly beard laying on the floor as he went past the barbers on his way through the induction process. His "Save the Whales" T-Shirt and ragged jeans were traded for Army fatigues and suddenly, he was no longer a hippie resisting the draft; he was just another nameless grunt in the army. All that it took after induction was six weeks in a Hell Hole called Fort Polk, Louisiana before he was loaded aboard an airplane bound for Viet Nam. Tom kept getting the feeling that he was being pushed toward his destination in Viet Nam with the same rapid efficiency that had moved him through his session in the kangaroo court.

Each canvas seat on the airplane was filled with a gaunt-faced youth, most of whom still weren't old enough to legally buy beer. The seats folded down to haul new cannon fodder to Viet Nam and folded up into litters to haul the wounded back. The airplane was on the ground in Hawaii for two hours to take on fuel, food and a new flight crew but Tom and the other soldiers were not allowed to step foot off the ship. The only exercise that they could get was walking down the aisle to the bathrooms.

The airplane raced with the sun across the International Dateline, seemingly driven to deliver its load of new bodies to the war as rapidly as possible. After more than twenty-four hours in the air, the ship touched down at Da Nang Airbase just as the sun was rising over the rice paddies.

The two hundred newly delivered troops were hustled off the airplane so that it could be refueled, the interior rearranged to haul wounded and made ready for the return flight. Names were called, people were shuffled into small groups, some going to one place and some to another. Tom was the last person to be loaded aboard a truck which rolled out the gate and headed for his assigned unit. The company to which he was assigned was located in an area which was supposed to be free from fighting at the time.

"Everybody out," shouted the Corporal as he dropped the tailgate of the truck. Tom stood up, stiff from the two hour ride over rough roads, and jumped to the ground. There was a roar, a blinding flash of light and searing heat as he felt himself being blown back into the truck.

Tom could hear voices, "Poor bastard, jumped right on top of a land mine."

"What gets me is how the hell the Cong could get into the middle of our area to plant the damn thing."

"Who knows. It could have been a houseboy, or one of the old women who scrounge through the garbage. You never know who's a Cong and who isn't. We ought to shoot every damn gook who comes into the area."

He felt people doing things with him, picking him up and moving him about. Someone rolled his sleeve up and there was a slight prick of a needle. Tom slipped into darkness.

"Think you can save his feet, doc?"

"They're blown all to hell; hand me a bone saw and I'll take them off."

"How about just patching him up and shipping back him stateside. We are already getting a lot of heat for amputating too many limbs that they claim could have been saved."

"Even if they do save them, they won't be anything more than stubs. I say that we amputate, especially the right one."

"Even stubs are better than plastic ones."

Tom could hear the voices and feel the awful, burning pain in his feet and legs. He had to see what was going on, so he opened his eyes. A bright light was aimed at his feet and several figures in surgical gowns huddled around him. Masks covered their faces. "No! Don't cut off my feet!" Tom screamed as he struggled to lift his shoulders high enough to see what they were doing.

"He's coming to, bomb him!" said one of the figures. Hands held him down while a black rubber mask was cupped over his face. He drifted back into darkness.

Tom could feel hands on his body. They felt wet as if someone was washing him. He could no longer feel any pain in his feet; were they still there? Had the doctor cut them off? He opened his eyes to see a nurse in a white uniform bending over him. She was busy washing his chest and arms.

"Welcome back," she said.

"My feet, are they still there?" he asked.

"Sure are. The doctor said that they will be just fine."

"But I heard him talking about amputating them," said Tom. "I came to for a few seconds and heard him."

"You were probably imagining things, that happens a lot when you are under. Don't worry about your feet. They are still there and just fine."

"Where am I?" Tom asked, looking around.

"You are in an M.A.S.H. unit. As soon as you are stable, you'll be going to an EVAC hospital for shipment back stateside to an orthopedic hospital."

Tom couldn't remember too much about what happened during the next few hours. It seemed that every time that he opened his eyes, they would give him another shot and he would be out again. He could remember only bits and pieces, like riding in a helicopter and then in an ambulance.

"Water, could I please have some water," he heard himself saying. His mouth was as dry as cotton.

"Sure thing, soldier. Drink some through this straw," came the voice as he felt something against his lips. He drew on the straw and water had never tasted so good in his life.

He opened his eyes and became aware of a low hum. He rolled his eyes around and realized that he was in an airplane. He looked up and recognized a broken place in the plastic ceiling. He was going home on the same airplane which had brought him to Viet Nam.

"Are you in any pain?" asked the voice.

"Not much, so don't give me another shot to knock me out again. I want to know what is going on," said Tom.

"Your tour in Viet Nam is over and you are on your way stateside to a hospital," said the voice, which Tom could now see belonged to a young soldier.

"You a doctor, nurse or what?" asked Tom.

"Medical technician," he replied. "A doctor will be along in a few minutes to check you over. Anything that I can do for you until he gets here?"

"Yes, one thing. Raise me up high enough so I can see my feet. They keep telling me that they are there, but I still can't feel them." The young man helped Tom raise his head until he could see his bandaged legs and feet.

"See, just like I told you. Your feet are still there, just wrapped in bandages," said the medic.

"Thanks a lot, I just wanted to be sure."

Although Tom's legs and feet were badly mangled, the doctors were able to save them. After three months in the hospital, his feet were repaired as well as possible and he was due for release.

Tom sat in a wheelchair while the doctor read from his report, "You have a ninety percent loss of motion in your right foot and ankle and a sixty percent in your left. You also have a fifty percent loss of motion in your right knee. You will be able to walk, but your days of playing football are over," he joked.

"Beats the hell out of rolling round in a wheelchair," replied Tom. "If it had been left up to that quack over in Nam, my feet would still be there."

Six months to the day after he was sworn in, Tom Davis received a Purple Heart and a disability discharge from the Army. "One thing that I can say for the Army is that it doesn't take long for them to make a cripple out of a person. This Purple Heart and fifty cents will buy a cup of coffee most anyplace. I'll learn how to walk on these feet, but it's going to be tough as hell learning to live on the three-twenty a month that they are going to give me for fucking up my life."

CHAPTER FIVE

"I choose Joe Bob Puckett," the owner of the football shouted as a sandlot football game was being organized. Ownership of the football automatically made one the captain and quarterback of the team. Joe Bob was always the first one chosen on a team because he stood a head taller and was half again heavier than any other kid his age. In addition to his generous size, he had the longest arms of any kid around and could tackle a horse.

As his Uncle Charlie, who was also his Little League Football coach, put it when he was in the fifth grade, "Joe Bob knocks down the whole offensive line, gathers up everyone in the backfield and then tosses them out one at a time until he finds the one with the ball, and then he smashes him good." It wasn't that Joe Bob was all that good as a football player, he was just so much bigger than the other kids.

Joe Bob and his mother lived with her brother, Charlie, who worked as a handyman to keep the boilers working down at the steam laundry. They hadn't seen Joe Bob's dad in several years. He just walked out the door one morning and never came back. The rumor was that he disappeared at about the same time as the Avon Lady and neither was ever seen again. The police asked Joe Bob's mother if she wanted to file a missing persons report but she told them not to bother because he wasn't really worth the effort.

Joe Bob bullied and intimidated his way through Junior High Football but when it came time for him to enter West Fort Worth High School, the district in which he lived, he was drafted to play for Paschal High. If you think that there is no such thing as a high school football draft, then you just don't understand Texas high school football.

West Fort Worth High had what was not only the worst football team in the metroplex area, but probably the worst in all of Texas. They had not only lost their last thirty-eight games in a row, they hadn't scored a single point during the past season. Paschal High, on the other hand, had been Texas State High School Champions for the past three years and had no intention of allowing any other school to break that string, no matter what it cost them to obtain and keep the biggest and best players. As a part of the draft agreement, Uncle Charlie, who was now acting as Joe Bob's manager, was put on the school's payroll as a janitor and given a school pickup truck to drive so that he could bring Joe Bob to school each morning and take him home each evening. Other than chauffeuring Joe Bob to football practice, he had no other duties at the school. In order to make it appear that Joe Bob was a bonified resident within the Paschal District, the school listed one of the teacher's home as Joe Bob's residence.

Even as a Freshman, Joe Bob stood over six feet tall and weighed better than two hundred

pounds. With a reach of nearly seven feet from one fingertip to the other, Joe Bob was a starter in every game. About all that he had to do as a defensive tackle was to stand his ground, spread his arms and very little could get by him. Their opponents learned very quickly that it was difficult to accomplish much with a running play in his direction.

About the only subject in school that Joe Bob took with any enthusiasm was football and seldom attended other classes more than once or twice a week, and then only to pick up girls. If his grades sagged a bit, all that he had to do was let his coach know about the problem and he would have a discussion with the teacher about how valuable Joe Bob was to the football team and school spirit, and how important it was for him to have passing grades in order to remain eligible to play. Failing grades magically became passing grades.

One of the most compelling reasons for Joe Bob to attend classes at all was the fact that, due to alphabetical arrangement, he was always seated right behind LuAnn Poovey who, even at thirteen years of age, had the best looking tits and the cutest little ass in school. LuAnn was the majorette for the band as well as head cheer leader. When the offense was on the field during a game, Joe Bob usually sat facing away from the field so that he had the best view of LuAnn's rear, made even more admirable by her tiny skirt.

LuAnn could care less that Joe Bob was a big defensive lineman because she had eyes for no one except Brad Hartley, the school jock and starting quarterback on the football team.

One day in English class, when LuAnn had been called on to stand and read something, Joe Bob was afforded one of his better views of her cute little ass. Evidently, the last time that LuAnn went to the bathroom, she accidentally caught the back hem of her skirt in the top of her underwear and as she stood, Joe Bob was face to face with nothing but thin, pink panties covering that beautiful ass. The temptation became too much for Joe Bob to endure so he reached up and patted her on the butt.

LuAnn spun around and screamed at him, "Touch my ass again you big, lecherous, horny bastard and I'll give you a knee in the nuts."

When college coaches go out to recruit high school students, they go armed not only with scholarships, but with various side offers which are usually furnished by members of the alumni. Most high school football stars select the college which they will allow to give them a free education, not based on how good the school is, but on how many side benefits they can negotiate and where their best chances for being drafted by the professional teams lie. Uncle Charlie took over the negotiations for Joe Bob's college career.

At least a dozen colleges approached Joe Bob about coming to their campus to play football. Those which offered nothing more than a year by year scholarship didn't stand a chance because Uncle Charlie had set a four year, no-cut deal as a very minimum. Once that point was established, they could negotiate on the side benefits.

Joe Bob's choices had been reduced to the three best possibilities; Texas A&M, Wyoming and the TCU Hornfrogs. Initially, the Wyoming Cowboys had the best offer with a full scholarship, the local Ford dealer would furnish Joe Bob a used car to drive while he was in school and he would get twenty tickets to each home game. Supposedly, the free tickets were so the player's family could attend the games without paying, but the more common practice was for the player to sell them to pick up some quick cash. The problem with Wyoming was that few of the professional teams ever considered drafting players from that school.

Using the Wyoming offer as a starting point, Uncle Charlie began some hard bargaining with A&M and TCU. TCU upped the deal with fifty tickets to each game and a Chrysler-Plymouth dealer would provide a new car to drive each year. A&M countered with the same deal but added a

scouting pass with an expense account for Uncle Charlie. This would allow him to attend all the college and bowl games that he cared to see and bill the travel costs to A&M.

The deal with A&M was almost made until Big Bob Bradshaw stepped in. Big Bob had been a defensive tackle at TCU and wanted Joe Bob to play his old position. He called Uncle Charlie on the phone and said, "Howdy, Big Bob Bradshaw is my name and the All Bidness is my game. How 'bout you and Joe Bob coming down to my huntin' ranch shootin' a few deer and turkey with me? I'm having a few of my friends over and we'll cook up a cow and drink some good bourbon whiskey while we are at it."

When one of the biggest independent oilmen in Texas issues such an invitation, it's a good idea to accept.

"Sure thing," replied Uncle Charlie. "How do we get to your spread?"

"It is down south of Abilene, jist outside of my town called Bradshaw, but all you have to do is drive out to Meacham Field and stop at the big white hangar where it says Bradshaw Oil. My pilot will run you down in the Learjet."

Big Bob wasn't the type of person who was willing to spend the time and effort that it would take to get a town named after him, so he just found an existing town which already had his name and claimed it. Bradshaw, Texas had a population of around fifty people, so there wasn't all that much opposition to him calling it his town. He did buy a small ranch, mostly covered by mesquite trees, next to the town and asked the city fathers to take it into the city limits. The best thing on the whole place was a rambling old Spanish style ranch house which Big Bob immediately turned into a place where he could come to party. With all the improvements on the land, Big Bob became not only the biggest, but one of the few people who actually paid taxes to the town.

Since Bradshaw was a bonified Texas town, they were eligible for all sorts of state money, especially from the Texas Aeronautics Commission's Airport Fund for improving their municipal airport. Bradshaw not only didn't have an airport, they didn't even have anyone there who could fly. This posed no problem to Big Bob, because he simply dozed the mesquite off a strip on his ranch and registered it as the Bradshaw Municipal Airport. With several million dollars now available for improvement, the runway was paved, landing lights put in and even an instrument landing system installed. Naturally, all the improvements on the airport were made by the Bradshaw Construction Company so by cooking the books, he got back about three times what he had spent on the deal.

It would have been about a four hour drive from Fort Worth to Bradshaw but in only twenty minutes flying time, the Learjet screeched its tires on the 7000 foot asphalt runway of the Bradshaw Municipal Airport. To the local resident's knowledge, the only airplanes ever to use the airport, other than Big Bob's Learjet, was a couple crazy crop dusters who stopped by each spring to spray weeds just before wheat harvest.

"Good thing that Big Bob's last name wasn't Dallas," remarked Uncle Charlie, "Or he couldn't have afforded his own town."

Bradshaw had that ranch mostly as a place to party and impress his guests. It wasn't all that big by Texas standards, something less than three thousand acres. However, with the aid of some wire cutters, Big Bob and his friends were able to roam just about anywhere that deer and turkey could be found in the rolling brush and mesquite covered hills. Big Bob's real home was situated in the middle of a whole city block in the most expensive part of Fort Worth. He also owned most of the land between Fort Worth and Jacksboro.

Big Bob, driving a fire-engine red Cadillac convertible with steer horns across the hood, chrome-plated pistols for door handles and a saddle mounted on each front fender; came roaring up and slid to a stop before the pilot had time to shut down the engines on the Learjet. "You can go on

back to Fort Worth," he shouted to the pilot. "I'll call you when I want you to come back."

"Hop in, good buddies," he shouted to Joe Bob and Uncle Charlie over the whine of the jet engines and motioned them toward the steer hide seats in the Caddy. "The bourbon is getting warm and the steaks are getting cold."

When they arrived at the ranch house, several men were standing around sipping at glasses of bourbon and branch water, while they watched a Mexican who was turning a hind quarter of a steer on a spit over glowing mesquite coals.

"Big Bob, you said something about hunting deer and turkey," said Uncle Charlie. "That season ain't open right now in Texas. Ain't we liable to get arrested or something?"

"You don't have to worry none about that, Charlie," said Big Bob. "I want you to meet some of the fellers who will be hunting with us. This here is Clint Osmer, Texas Ranger. This is Cletus Hall, sheriff of Runnels County, and standing beside him is Oscar Taylor, the District Attorney. This slicked up feller here is my cousin, Hurshul Clayburn, head of the Texas Aeronautics Commission. Finally, this here young man is my nephew, Homer Bradshaw and with him is Jim Thomas, our local game warden."

"You certainly know how to cover all the bases, Big Bob," said Uncle Charlie.

"You don't get as rich as I am by leaving no loose ends," replied Big Bob. "And speaking of loose ends, let's go inside and take care of a few of them while the steer is cooking."

They walked into the huge living room of the native stone ranch house. On the wall above the fireplace was the mounted head of a longhorn bull whose horns spread at least seven feet. "That there is old Sam Houston, most famous longhorn bull that ever lived. During his lifetime, he sired more than three thousand calves; 'course he had the help of artificial insemination for the ugly cows that he didn't care to screw. He died at thirty-eight years of age--died of a heart attack while screwing a heifer," said Big Bob, pointing to the head. "Thirty-eight years for a longhorn is equal to a hunnert and fourteen years of age for a man. That's how I want to go, heart attack while screwing some young thing on my hunnert and fourteenth birthday."

They sat down around a poker table and Big Bob continued, "I'll come right to the point. The coach down at TCU called me up and said that he was having a little difficulty in getting Joe Bob to sign a letter of intent to go there; asked me to see if I could talk some sense into you."

"Well," said Uncle Charlie, "I'll have to admit that TCU is a mighty fine college, but A&M seems to have a lot more to offer a young man like Joe Bob. He could get a mighty fine education there."

"Don't give me that good school horseshit," said Big Bob. "We all know that it's the side deals that get the best futbawl players. This here is a poker table that we are sitting around, so I'll just lay my cards on it. First off, Joe Bob, there is a brand new pickumup truck with your name on the title sitting out back. Second, here are the keys to an apartment that I keep for special purposes. You can take your pussies there to screw, rent it out and keep the money or do whatever you want with it, just as long as you keep wearing a TCU uniform. Finally, here's a map to my biggest gas field with the location of all of the drips marked."

"I don't understand the benefit of that map," said Uncle Charlie. "Those are your gas wells, and the gas is probably already contracted, so how could that help us?"

"Charlie, I thought you were a lot smarter than that," replied Big Bob. "Each one of those drips will produce about a barrel of untaxed drip gasoline every three of four days. That is not enough to afford to send out a truck to get, so the lease foreman usually just blows the drip and flames it off."

"Run out there at night in your pickup, draw off six or eight barrels and sell it to some

independent filling station at a discount. It gets mixed with his other gasoline and goes right out through the pumps without anyone ever knowing the difference. He makes a good profit, you have a hundred bucks for a couple hours work and no one is the wiser."

"Aren't taxes supposed to be paid to the state or something?" asked Joe Bob.

"Hell, the State of Texas already collects billions of dollars in taxes from us independents, so what's wrong with us holding a few dollars back here and there and using them where they will do the most good," replied Big Bob. "After all, what's good for TCU is good for Texas."

"I don't know," said Uncle Charlie. "I really liked the idea of that scouting job and the expense account that A&M offered so I could fly around anywhere I wanted to go see a game."

"Hell, Charlie, this boy will never get nowhere if he keeps thinking like you," said Big Bob. TCU will match anything them Aggies could come up with. "My old daddy once told me something that made me as rich as I am today. 'Course him leaving me a couple hunnert sections of land, a 19 story office building in downtown Fort Worth, along with three hunnert good gas and oil wells and a couple hunnert million when he died didn't hurt none neither. He said if you give a man money, he'll just go out and spend it on bourbon whiskey and pussy. But if you show him how to make money, he will become rich."

"I never thought about it that way," said Joe Bob.

"Course not, that's why you are already eighteen years old and still ain't made your first million yet," said Big Bob as he shoved the letter over to him. "The meat's done, so sign this damn letter and let's get back outside and eat."

The Mexican cook sliced off a pile of rare steaks that weighed at least a couple pounds each and put them on the plates. Then he set a huge iron pot of beans and a tub of cole slaw on the table. Big Bob stood up and yelled for everyone to be quiet so he could ask the blessing. He lowered his head and said, "Praise the Lord and bless this here food. We got lots more to be thankful for tonight 'cause Joe Bob Puckett has done seen the light and signed a letter of intent to play futbawl at TCU, the best damn college in all of Texas or the rest of the world. It gives me great pleasure to hand over the old Number 77 jersey that I wore when I played at TCU, to the best damn defensive tackle to come along since me. Now, let's eat. Amen."

CHAPTER SIX

It seems that all towns in rural Kansas are more or less identical, and the town of Noggley was no different. Out in the western part of Kansas, towns are about ten miles apart and situated at the intersection of a state highway which runs through it in one direction and forms the main street and a farm-to-market road the other. They are all about the same size, never growing larger than a couple thousand residents. There are always two white grain elevators standing between the highway and the railroad tracks, four service stations, three churches, two banks, one grocery store, a John Deere tractor dealer and absolutely nothing other than farm work to keep the kids occupied during the summer. There was no movie house in the town, no swimming pool except the irrigation tail-water pits where the boys went skinny-dipping, and few social activities for kids. One single, snowy channel which was the only thing that they could get on TV, and it never had anything worthwhile on it except for cartoons on Saturday morning.

Another year of school had ended for Virginia Wilson who had just turned thirteen and was faced with prospect of one more hot summer with nothing much to keep her occupied. Her dad was always at the John Deere dealership that he took over when his father was killed in an accident and her mother was usually busy cooking, sewing or cleaning the house. She had no brothers or sisters and there were few other children her age in the neighborhood.

Virginia's dad seemed to spend all of his waking hours at the shop. It had been started by her grandfather just after World War II ended and her dad had worked there since he was old enough to sweep floors. He would eat breakfast at seven in the morning, leave for the store and not be seen again until after dark when he would come home for dinner. As soon as he finished eating, he would go to his desk in the corner of the parlor where he would work on the books until long after Virginia had gone to sleep.

The tractor place held something of a fascination for Virginia, with the smells of motor oil, paint and strange chemicals. The men who worked there seemed to always be either beating on something or swearing. She already knew that the repair shop was too dangerous and certainly no place for a girl but it would still be nice just to spend the day with her dad. Even if she couldn't go into the shop, she longed to explore all those strange back rooms with their piles of dusty parts and books, but she wasn't even allowed there because her mother was afraid that she might get hurt. Perhaps the real reason why her mother refused to let her go to the shop was because it seemed that everywhere you looked there were calendars with pictures of nearly naked women on them.

The only thing that held any hope in the way of a release from the boredom for Virginia that summer was the fact that her cousin, Gary, was coming to stay with them while his mother went to

summer school to finish her teaching degree.

Gary was the same age as Virginia, or Ginger as everyone called her, but she had seen him only a couple times before when the family had gotten together at her Grandmother's home in Wichita for Christmas. She wasn't sure if she was going to like Gary or not because she didn't really like any boys. All that boys ever seemed to want to do was fight and roll in the dirt.

The Wilsons lived in a large, older two-story house at the end of town. There was nothing past their house except a wheat field. Downstairs was the kitchen, the dining room, a small parlor or library which was now used as an at-home office by her father, a huge living room with a fireplace and the master bedroom with its own bathroom. There was another small bathroom situated under the main stairway which ran from the living room to the hall upstairs where four more bedrooms were located. One of the bedrooms was Ginger's and the other three were referred to as guest rooms, even though they seldom ever had any. There was only a single bathroom upstairs at one end of the hall and from the other end, an outside stairway led to the ground in the back yard. There were lots of huge trees around the house and a garden along one side of the property where Ginger's mother raised more vegetables than they could eat.

A large building which had originally been a barn but now served as a garage for their cars stood in the back yard. It still had a hayloft or attic where all sorts of interesting trunks, boxes and furniture was stored, but the stairway that had once led up to it had long since been removed when it was converted for use as a garage. The only way to reach the loft now was by climbing a small ladder which led up through a hole in the floor. The loft had become a favorite place for Ginger to play because it was quiet and the second story windows allowed a view over the roofs of most of the rest of the houses in town.

Ginger went with her mother to pick Gary up at the Trailways bus station. There wasn't actually a bus station, just the Texaco service station where a small sign indicated that it was the bus stop. The signal for the bus to stop to pick up people or freight was a small red flag they would hang from the sign. The bus stopped only when it had passengers or freight on board to deliver or when there was something to pick up, otherwise, it roared right on through town in a cloud of dust.

Standing at the bus stop sign, one would ordinarily be able to see at least ten miles in either direction due to the pool table flatness of Kansas. Even though it was only nine in the morning, the shimmering rays of the summer heat and rising dust had already reduced the visibility to less than a mile. You could usually hear something coming long before you were able to see it.

Norbert Fripp, who pumped gas at the station was slumped in a battered old chair in the shade when they arrived but the prospect of the bus stopping was enough to bring him to life. He unfolded his long legs like a grasshopper getting ready to jump but rather than leaping, he slouched his way over to where they were standing beside the bus stop sign. He cocked his ear toward the distant sound of an approaching diesel engine and said, "Yup, it's the bus coming, alright. I kin tell the sound of a bus engine from a truck, and it's gonna stop. I jist heered the driver let off the gas a little bit when he got to the city limits."

The dark shape of the bus materialized through the haze as the driver began gearing down to stop. The sign above the windshield of the bus indicated that Denver was its destination. It pulled off the pavement and came bouncing to a stop right in front of the sign, releasing a loud hiss of compressed air and raising a cloud of dust. The door swung open and the driver said, "This is Noggley, son. Time to get off."

A smallish boy, no taller than Ginger, appeared at the door. He had unruly blond hair, blue eyes and a frightened look as he came down the steps of the bus, carrying a short fishing rod in one hand and a brown paper bag in the other. A note which was pinned to his shirt, "My name is Gary

Andrews and I am to get off at Noggley, Kansas."

"Hello, Gary," said Ginger's mother. "I'm your Aunt Helen, remember me?"

"I guess so," he said, still looking frightened and confused by the strange new place.

"And this is your cousin, Virginia," said Helen.

"Hi, Gary. What's the fishing pole for? There ain't a fish in a jillion miles of here," said Ginger. "What's in the sack?"

"I don't know why I brought it, I got it for my birthday so I just brought it along," he replied. "It was still dark when I left this morning and Mom thought that I might get hungry before I got here, so she fixed me a lunch. I still got a peanut butter-jelly sandwich, a boiled egg and an apple, but I ate the candy bar."

The bus driver raised a door on the side of the bus and removed Gary's luggage from the compartment. It consisted of a battered old suitcase and a cardboard box. Both were sealed shut by strips of silver duct tape.

"Here you go, son," said the driver. "Have a good vacation this summer." Air hissed, the door swung shut and the bus roared away in a cloud of heat, dust and diesel fumes.

Gary quickly settled into the Wilson family and he and Ginger became best friends. They played games and they climbed trees, but most fun of all, they explored the loft of the barn. Many of the boxes and trunks had been stored there by the people who had lived in the house before the Wilsons and they contained many treasures in the way of old clothing, old photos and even a few toys. There was also an ancient Victrola which still worked. It was great fun to wind up the Victrola and play those scratchy old records.

One day they were in the loft at around noon and Ginger looked out of a window and exclaimed, "Gary, come look at what the Barkleys next door are doing." John Barkley, who worked as a teller at the bank, had recently gotten married and they had rented the house next door. From their vantage point in the loft, they could look down through the upper part of a bedroom window which was not covered by a curtain and clearly see everything that was going on in the room.

"Hey, look, they are really doing it." Exclaimed Gary. "They are going it just like the big boys at school say they do."

"I know, I've seen them do that nearly every day since they moved in when he comes home for lunch." replied Ginger. "First, they kiss and pull their clothes off, then he gets on top of her like that. I think that they are making a baby."

"Look, they stopped and are putting their clothes back on," said Gary.

They didn't think much more about what they had seen until the next day when John felt the need to rush home from the bank to get another "Nooner", not realizing that they had a young audience.

Ginger was at the window and called Gary. "Come look. The Barkleys are kissing and pulling off their clothes again. Let's watch to see what they do. Without her clothes on, she looks just like my Barbie doll without her clothes," remarked Ginger. "Only, my Barbie doesn't have any hair between her legs."

"Do you have hair between your legs?"

"No," she whispered. "Do you?"

"I think that only old people have hair between their legs, said Gary. Look, he's putting it right in her!"

"Do you have a one like that?" asked Ginger.

"Yes, but it's not that big."

"Let me see yours," said Ginger. "Does it stick out like that?"

"It gets hard and sticks out when I take a bath," replied Gary. "It does some times even without a bath."

"Let me see it," said Ginger.

"No, Mama says that nice boys didn't play with it and to never let anyone look at it."

"It's OK, we're cousins," Ginger assured him. "I'll show you mine if you let me see yours."

Gary pulled his shorts and underwear down just enough to let his prepubescent penis spring up.

"It sure looks funny," said Ginger. "Look, it's sticking out just like his! How do you make it do that?"

"I don't know. Some times it gets big and hard when I don't want it to. When it is big like this, it feels real good if I rub it, but Mama said that I should never play with it because it would make me go blind."

"It sure looks funny," said Ginger as she reached over and touched him. It felt surprisingly warm and hard, nothing like what she expected.

"You said you'd show me yours," said Gary as he pulled his shorts back up but the bulge was still visible under them.

Ginger lifted her skirt and lowered her panties. "There isn't much to see," said Gary in a disappointed voice.

"Well, I have more," said Ginger as she raised her blouse. "My boobies are growing and that's something boys don't have. Want to feel them?" Gary touched one of her budding breasts and jerked his hand back. "It's OK, go ahead and feel of them, they tingle when I rub them."

"The Barkleys looked like they were having fun," said Ginger. "Want to do it?"

They both pulled off their underwear and went over to an old couch which was stored in the loft. Ginger pulled up her skirt, lay on the couch and spread her legs. Gary got on top of her and asked, "What do we do now?"

"You put it in and move up and down like he was doing," replied Ginger.

"It doesn't seem to be working right," said Gary. "It's not going in."

"Oh, it hurts. You aren't doing it right. You're pushing too hard."

"Why doesn't it go in?" asked Gary.

"Because you are doing it all wrong," said Ginger. "It hurts, let's stop."

As they put their clothes back on, Gary said, "Let's watch real close the next time that they do it and maybe we can do it right."

The following day they were back in the loft when John came home for lunch. "OK, now watch real close so we can get it right," whispered Ginger. "See, they kiss first and he rubs his hands all over her and she holds him."

"I hate kissing girls," said Gary. "That's icky and sissy."

"Don't be silly. It's not icky and sissy. Big people kiss all the time in the movies and on TV. Mom and Dad kiss and feel around on each other a lot when they think I'm not watching."

"Do they go to bed and do that after they kiss?" asked Gary.

"I think so," replied Ginger. "I was scared by a storm one night and when I ran downstairs and into their bedroom and Dad was laying on top of Mom. Dad got off real quick and said that he was just keeping Mom from being scared by the thunder. I guess that all big people do it. Now, watch what they are doing so you can get it right."

"Do your parents do it at noon?"

"Dad never comes home at noon, so I guess that they only do it at night. Dad put a lock on their bedroom door after I saw them that time."

Ginger and Gary watched and copied what they did. They kissed and removed their clothing as he rubbed his hands over her body, especially her breasts and between her legs. Ginger pushed his shorts and underwear down and began to play with his erect penis. "I think we are doing it right this time because I'm getting a real funny feeling," said Ginger as they went to the couch.

Just as Gary got on top of her, Ginger's mother called from the back door, "Lunch is ready kids."

In a panic, they jerked their clothes back on and ran to the house. They both had a cold feeling of guilt associated with nearly getting caught. They wondered if she knew what they had really been doing up in that loft. They ate rapidly in silence, anxious to get back to their hiding place above the garage.

After they had finished eating, the mother said, "I'm going grocery shopping. Do you two want to come along or stay here and play?"

"I think that we'll stay and play," answered Ginger, who wanted nothing more than to get back to the loft and resume what they had been doing before being interrupted. The anticipation was having strange and wonderful effects of Ginger. As soon as the car pulled from the driveway, they rushed back to the loft.

"Do we have to kiss again?" asked Gary.

"I don't think so, just pull off all your clothes," replied Ginger, who was already removing hers.

"Tell me if it hurts and I'll stop," said Gary who was surprised to find that things were much different than they had been before they went to lunch. Now she seemed to be all wet and warm.

"Just move around like he did and push real easy," she said. "I'll tell you if you are pushing too hard."

He moved up and down slowly, pushing a little harder each time. There were little shots of pain each time he pushed but the feeling was so good that she didn't care. Suddenly, there was a single, sharp stab of pain and Ginger gasped as she felt him entering her.

"Am I hurting you?" asked Gary as he stopped and tried to pull away.

It felt so big and strange in her that it was frightening but it also felt so good that she never wanted him to stop. She held him tightly and gasped, "No, don't stop, keep going." Suddenly a strange feeling rolled over them as they struggled and jerked in their embrace. Finally it ended with them drenched in sweat and breathing like they had been running. Then a feeling of calm swept over them. They had just discovered why the Barkleys were so eager to see each other at noon.

Do you think we made a baby?: asked Gary.

"No, only married people can make babies," replied Ginger. At least it sounded logical to her.

Ginger was a bit sore for the next couple days but it was much easier after that. She and Gary no longer needed to watch the Barkleys during their noon meetings because they always seemed to be ready for one another, making use of the couch in the loft two or three times a day. It was so much fun that they would lie awake each night until Ginger's parents were asleep and then one would slip quietly to the other's bedroom and spend the night together.

One morning Ginger's mother woke up early and went up stairs to gather dirty clothing to wash. She opened the door to Gary's room to see if there was anything in there that needed to be washed. When she glanced inside, she was shocked to see Ginger and Gary cuddled together, sound asleep and both totally nude. Her first thought was to wake them up and confront them but then she decided that there was a better way to handle the situation. After all, it hadn't been all that long since she was a teen age girl discovering her womanhood. She had been fifteen at the time and it

happened when she was in the 10th grade, and he was in 11th, in the back seat of a car. They got married two years later when they found she was pregnant a week before she graduated from high school. She had planned to go to college but the baby changed all that.

The last week of the summer flew by and Gary had to return home. After he was gone, Ginger's mother told her that they needed to talk. "I came up stairs early one morning last week and found you in Gary's bed. I had no idea that you two would become sexually active at such a young age but I suppose that kids are developing faster these days."

She didn't scold or accuse Ginger of anything, just a frank mother/daughter discussion about becoming a woman, feelings, desires, love, boys, and things like that. She also told her about pregnancy and birth control. She ended her talk by telling Ginger that it was time for her to visit a doctor for grown up women and that if she was going to continue having sex, which she probably would, she would need protection against getting pregnant. She didn't mention her own experience but certainly didn't want Ginger to make the same mistakes through lack of knowledge.

Ginger had no idea that her mother was so aware of what had been going on in the loft. She couldn't realize that her mother had been her age with the same desires and not all that many years before.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Carlos Garza didn't return to live in Cabo San Lucas until well past his eighteenth birthday, but he did return several times before then for short visits. Professor Carter knew a number of pilots who occasionally flew to the tip of Baja for the fantastic deep sea fishing and would arrange for Carlos to go along whenever they had the room. Each time that he returned to his home, he would bring presents and tell his family of all the wonderful things that he had seen and learned. He could now read and write in both English and Spanish and he had gone to school to learn how to repair diesel engines. He had also worked each summer and had saved most of the money that he earned, planning to buy his own boat when he returned to Baja. "Gringos will come here and pay me lots of money to take them out to fish for Marlin," he told them. "I want to have a nice boat to take them fishing in."

Many things happened during the seven years that Carlos was living with the Carters in San Diego. Three of his sisters married and moved away. His oldest sister, Lupita, had married Roberto Morales and they had two children before he was killed. Lomita's father and Roberto had set out in a small sailing boat to go to San Jose del Cabo but a sudden storm came up and they were never seen again. Lupita walked the shoreline eastward from Cabo San Lucas until she found the mast and sail from their boat washed up on the beach. She recognized the sail immediately because she had sewn it by hand. She knew the worst had happened.

The old Jesuit trail which followed the Pacific coast to Todos Santos had been widened and improved until cars and trucks were now able to drive all the way from the capital city of La Paz to Cabo San Lucas. No longer did the people of San Lucas have to depend on boats or mules to bring them supplies. As a result, the village was growing rapidly and they now had a church and a school.

While Carlos wasn't interested in attending the new school, he did find something there most interesting. It was the pretty, young teacher, Rosita, who caught his eye. She had been sent to the school to serve her one-year internship which was required in order to become a regular teacher. Since she had no relatives in the area to live with and was paid no money while serving as an intern, Mama Garza had invited her to come live with her and the two remaining single daughters.

When Carlos returned to live in Cabo San Lucas; he walked into the house, kissed his mother, prayed for his dead father and fell in love with Rosita at first glance. With no Aduana around to act as a chaperon and give their romance time to fester and grow, they were standing before the Padre to get married within a month after their first meeting. Carlos spent most of the money which he had been saving to buy a boat for a small house on a point of land which looked

out over the ocean.

Since Carlos was fluent in English as well as Spanish, he was able to get a job as a labor foreman with an American contractor who was building a big hotel high on the rocks which formed the protected harbor. A year after his wedding, Rosita presented Carlos with a beautiful baby boy which they named Luis, after his father.

When the hotel was completed, the owners brought in a fleet of large diesel-powered boats to serve the people who came to the hotel to fish for Marlin. When the hotel opened, Carlos stayed on as both a mechanic and an manager of the boats. In this position, he was now making far better wages than most other people who lived in the town. During the off season, when few tourists came to fish for Marlin, Carlos had the time to improve his house and land. Before long, his house was one of the more impressive ones in the town. It was the typical Spanish style house, built low to give it protection against storms and open to allow the cooling sea breezes to blow through in the summer. It was built around a courtyard which was enclosed by whitewashed walls and the red tile roof could be seen for miles. He drilled a well and erected a storage tank to provide running water inside the house.

Luis entered the local school as soon as he was old enough and once that he had finished the seven years provided there, he was sent to live with an aunt in La Paz and continue his education.

Carlos saved his money and when the hotel decided to replace their fleet with larger boats, he had enough to buy the best one of the fleet. The boat was called the Bluefin and had always been his favorite. The Bluefin was forty feet long with a flying bridge above the cabin and a spacious rear deck above the engine compartment. The rear deck would accommodate up to eight fishermen at one time. The main cabin was adequate for both crew and passengers; equipped with a small galley, a bathroom and seating for twelve people. There was also a wheel and engine controls in the cabin, but they were only used for handling the boat during bad weather. The boat was normally operated from the flying bridge where the captain had a much better view of fish when they came in to strike, but also of everything else around the boat. Beneath the foredeck in front of the cabin was a bedroom with bunk beds on either side.

Having worked on the boat for many years, Carlos knew it from stem to stern. The hull was solid and its fittings were in good shape. The only possible point of weakness on the boat was the engine which had many hours of running time on it. Carlos knew that he could repair the engine, but parts would have to be shipped all the way from the United States and would be very expensive. He had to take the chance that the engine would keep running because the boat cost him every cent that he had saved. By owning his own boat, he could make much more money than by working for the hotel. If luck was with him and he had a good fishing season the first year that he owned the boat, he would have enough money saved to overhaul the engine and make it like new when the winter fishing season was over.

But Lady Luck, who had smiled on Carlos so many times before, took this occasion to look the other way. Rosita became very ill and had to be taken to the nearest hospital, which was located in the capitol city of La Paz. Carlos went with her to the hospital and stayed by her side day and night while his boat sat idle throughout the Marlin season. The doctors were unable to help Rosita and Carlos watched helplessly as she became weaker and weaker. Her life and his savings expired at the same time.

Luis finished school at the university shortly after his mother died, and following his graduation, he returned to Cabo San Lucas to work with his father. Together, they would try to pick up the pieces of their shattered lives.

The Marlin had left Cabo San Lucas and headed for deeper water by the time that they

returned and about the only charter work that could be found was an occasional sightseeing ride around the harbor or possibly to Shipwreck Cove. Occasionally, they would get an extra long charter all the way to San Jose del Cabo. One day, when he was returning from such a trip, the aging diesel engine began to make strange and costly noises. Carlos reduced the power but the noises grew louder and louder until he knew that he must shut the engine down or else completely destroy it. Fortunately, they were well within the protected waters of the harbor at Cabo San Lucas and were not in any danger.

The boat floated dead in the water, rocking in tune with the small waves which moved toward shore. Carlos had intended to allow the boat to drift to shore on the tide, but his guests were complaining so loudly about the delay that when a friend came by in his outboard Panga, Carlos threw him a line and asked to be towed to the dock.

He tied the boat in his usual spot and removed the hatch above the engine compartment. He didn't need to look at the engine to know what was wrong; he already knew what was needed. He had worked on diesels long enough to know that this engine would never run again without a complete overhaul, and that would cost money that he didn't have.

"Hola, Carlos. Que tal amigo?" asked a voice from the dock. It was the crippled gringo hippie who lived in an old camper parked on the beach near Shipwreck Cove. Carlos knew the hippie well because he was a friend of his sister, Lupita.

"The engine is dead, Tomasino," replied Carlos.

"Water in the diesel fuel again?" asked the hippie.

"Much worse than that, amigo, much worse. It must have a complete overhaul to ever run again. The Marlin season will begin again soon and my engine is dead and I have no money to fix it with," he replied.

"Could you use the engine out of my pickup to run your boat?" asked the hippie, as he leaned on his walking stick and peered down into the greasy engine compartment.

"I could probably make it work, but what would you do without your pickup?" he asked. "You can hardly walk and you need it to go places."

"No problem," replied the hippie. "The tires are shot and I can't afford new ones. Even if I had tires, there is no place for me to go. You might as well use the engine until you can overhaul yours."

"Thank you my friend, you are like a brother, Mi Hermano."

CHAPTER EIGHT

To say that Travis Thornton Taylor the Third was born with a silver spoon in his mouth would be the understatement of the year. Judged by the usual monetary standards, one could say that he was born with enough silverware in his mouth for formal place settings for at least sixty-four people, plus a silver tea service and a couple candle holders. On the day of his birth, he was a certifiable millionaire.

Travis T. Taylor III was the first, and only, child of T. T. Taylor, Jr. who, in turn was the only child of T. Thornton Taylor, Sr., the richest and most vicious lawyer that San Francisco had ever seen. Whenever he went into the courtroom to represent either side in an argument, he usually came out in possession of everything that both parties owned.

He seemed to have the uncanny ability of being on the spot at any disaster, ready to defend the legal and financial interests of everyone involved. Within an hour after an airplane crash, train wreck, explosion, fire or other man-made made disaster, he would be at the court house, filing multi-million dollar law suits for everyone who was killed or injured. For the survivors who sustained no injuries, he would file damage suits for the mental anguish and fear that they suffered while thinking that they might have been injured. He even filed lawsuits for people who heard the news about a disaster and felt sorrow for those who were killed. He was able to work things around to where, even when he lost a case, he would still receive huge legal fees.

By investing his money in San Francisco real estate, mostly downtown business building, his wealth grew at an even faster rate until he became one of the nation's first billionaires. He not only sat on the boards and held first mortgages on most of the assets of a number of banks, airlines, shiplines, railroads, steel mills, oil companies and other large corporation; usually he was also their chief legal council on huge retainer fees. Few dollars flowed in any direction in San Francisco without a few cents from each one dropping into one of his bank accounts.

His son, T.T. Taylor, Jr., was his real estate manager, receiving a fee of twenty percent of the income from the properties that he managed, so he could hardly be considered as a member of the poverty class. All of the Taylor holdings, which were vast in nature, were grouped under the corporate name of Taylor Enterprises, Inc. with its offices occupying several floors of the massive downtown building which also bore the Taylor name.

When the senior Taylor heard the news that his daughter-in-law was bound for the hospital to deliver his first grandchild, he called his accountant. "Set up a trust fund with an initial deposit of one million dollars for my grandson who will be born within the next few hours. Have my financial

department handle investing it for the highest possible growth. Return all earnings back into the fund to be reinvested. Charge any losses which might occur to some of my other accounts so I can take them off my taxes. There will be only three provisions governing the fund. First; my grandson must graduate from Golden Gate College with a degree in either law or economics. Second; he will not be able to touch a penny of the earnings from the fund until he is twenty-five years of age. Third; he cannot touch the original investment or more than ten percent of the earnings from it until he forty years of age."

"Should I wait until they name the child to put a name on the fund?" asked the accountant.

"I've already decided that it will be a boy and what his name will be," he answered. "Make the trust out in the name of Travis Thornton Taylor III."

Travis T. Taylor III grew up as any normal multi-millionaire boy would. He had his own valet, was driven anywhere he needed to go in a Rolls Royce limo with black windows, attended a very private boy's school where no child was allowed unless his parents were worth at least a million dollars and received his own gold credit card for his tenth birthday.

For his high school education, Travis was sent to an exclusive boy's school on the east coast, where they were taught not only the basic subjects, but also those special skills which he would need in later life; such as polo, formal dancing and how to be a snob. For some unaccounted reason, he was totally unaffected by the lessons in snobbery and grew up to be a nice, normal young man.

Travis had led such a sheltered life that he knew almost nothing about girls except that those who were brought in from an equally exclusive girl's school for the weekly dances were soft and smelled good. Some of the other boys, especially those who came from families with only a few million dollars, claimed to have had all sorts of sexual experiences. Since the raging teenage boy hormones were running amok in his body, Travis found those stories not only exciting but also frustrating because he knew so little about the subject.

One of his fellow students came in one day with exciting news. He had heard about a girl in town who liked sex so much that she hung out around the park on Saturday, just waiting for boys to pick her up. The more boys that she could take on at one time, the better that she liked it. Not only was she a nymphomaniac, but she had her own car and would gladly drive boys out to the country to give them a little. They said that she had been with so many boys that everyone called her the "Punchboard".

Plans were made for the great conquest. Whispered conversations were exchanged about how they were going to recognize her and how to go about asking her. Finally, the student who had brought the original news said that he knew a boy in town who could point her out for them and that since she was always so horny, they stood a better chance if all of them asked her at once.

Five of them checked out with the headmaster to go to town for a late afternoon movie to be followed by Pizza. "Check-in time is nine, sharp," he told them, never realizing that their plans included far greater things than films and food.

It was getting dusk when they left the movie and walked to the park where they were scheduled to meet their benefactor who would point out "Punchboard" to them. When they arrived, he told them that she hadn't shown up yet and he had to go home. He did furnish them with a description; she had red hair and would be driving a brown Dodge sedan. Armed with such precise information, there was no way that they could miss her when she showed up. As the boy walked away, Travis called to him, "Hey, we don't even know her name. We can't just walk up to some girl and ask if she is the one who everyone calls "Punchboard".

"Oh, yeah. her name is Doris," he replied, "But she's kind of like an old dog; she'll answer to most anything."

As they stood on the corner under a street light, discussing how they would make their first move when she showed up, a brown Dodge drove slowly along the street. As it passed, they could see that a girl with red hair was driving it. "That's her," one whispered, "But she isn't stopping." They watched as the car turned the corner to circle around the block. As it came back up the street where they were standing, she slowed and pulled to the curb. "Oh shit, she stopped," he whispered. "What do we do now?"

"Let's just walk over by her car and see if she gets out or says anything," another suggested.

They moved toward the car in a tight little huddle, drawing courage from one another as they went.

"Hi guys," she said as they approached. "You from that snooty school up on the hill where all the rich boys go?"

"Yeah, we go to Wadsworth Academy," Travis replied, thankful that she had freed him from having to make the first move.

"Your name Doris?" asked their leader.

"Sure is. What's yours?" she asked.

"Percivil Farnsworth," he replied.

"Jeez, how come all you rich kids have such wimpy names? Why didn't your parents give you real Macho names like Brad or Lance?" said Doris.

"I was named after my father," he replied.

"She doesn't give a shit what your old man's name is," whispered Travis.

"You want to have a coke or Pizza or something?" asked the leader.

"I'm interested in something alright, but it ain't cokes or Pizza. You got any beer or booze on you?" she asked, striking a kitchen match on a spoke in the steering wheel and lighting the cigarette which hung from her brightly painted lips.

She appeared to be three or four years older than any of them and, while she did have red hair, she was far from being pretty. In fact, as she pulled a big drag on the cigarette and blew the smoke out the window at them, she looked a lot older and even less attractive.

"You boys like to go for a ride?" she asked.

"Sure, I suppose so," replied the leader.

"OK, but my car is nearly empty, any of you got a ten-spot on you for a tank of gas?"

All five boys reached for their wallets at the same time and as bills appeared, she plucked them in quick succession. "Hop in," she said as they scrambled to get into the car.

She swung the car around in the middle of the block and drove straight toward the outskirts of the town. Being a rather small town, it was only a short drive before they left the houses and were driving along a wooded lane. She turned into a small driveway leading to an old building which was falling down and pulled to a stop in a secluded area under some trees. From the way that she located the parking space so easily, it was obvious that this was far from her first trip to it.

She opened her door and got out, followed by the five boys. Then she lifted her dress, exposing the fact that she wasn't wearing panties and climbed into the back seat. She spread her legs and said, "OK, who's going to be first?"

Travis and the other boys looked at one another for a few seconds and then played a quick game of "Oddzies" to determine the order in which they would be relieved of their virginity. As luck would have it, Travis came out last in line.

Number one dropped his trousers and shorts to around his knees and climbed into the back seat with Doris. A couple minutes of frantic humping and it was over and time for number two.

Travis had never given much thought to the circumstances under which he would have his

first experience with a girl, but being number five to gang-screw an ugly girl in the back seat of a brown Dodge certainly wasn't what he had in mind. The whole thing had become a bit too base and sordid for his tastes.

Number four emerged from the Dodge, pulled up his pants and said, "OK, Taylor, your turn."

"I think that I'll pass," Travis replied.

"You're turning down some mighty good pussy here young fellow," came Doris's voice from the back seat. Your buddies have it all wet and loose for you. It's all warmed up and I'm just going good."

"Thanks anyway," said Travis as he turned his back on the scene and began walking back toward town.

Anyone for seconds?" she asked and the remaining four immediately lined up for another round.

For the next week or so, Travis was known as "Wimp" or "Chicken" in whispered conversations around the school but as it turned out, he was the lucky one as the other four all came down with a bad case of the clapp and had to make daily trips to the school nurse for shots.

Travis graduated from Wadsworth Academy with honors and returned to San Francisco to attend Golden Gate College, an exclusive private college where his grandfather, T. Thornton Taylor, Sr., was the head regent. It was no wonder that his grandfather held such a powerful position with the college. He had originally helped establish the college with a ten million dollar endowment and was a constant supporter with his checkbook. Not only did he provide a great amount of support to the college, but from his position as regent, he also kept a tight rein on how it was operated.

T. Thornton had always said that he was willing to spend whatever it took to ensure that there was at least one college in America which was free from the influences of those "Slopeheaded Eastern Liberal Communist Assholes" and taught nothing but the good old American Capitalism and free enterprise.

Travis received his degree in economics from Golden Gate, untainted by such liberal ideals as the "Ivory Tower" and "Kensian Theories" or the idea that the greater good produced by a nation should go to the greater number. Just like old time religion, it was old time economics which taught that those with the most ability or opportunity to make money should be the ones to have and control it and that taxes should be spent for nothing except defense of the nation.

Even though Travis had yet to reach his twenty-fifth birthday, he had never felt any need to dip his fingers into the trust fund which was well over twenty million by this time. He had his gold card with which he could buy anything from lunch at the Fairmont to a new Ferrari simply by signing his name. The bills were always paid by someone in the top-floor offices of the Taylor Building on Market Street. In fact, his greatest concern each day was what he could do to keep himself occupied, now that he no longer needed to study. Little did he realize that this was all going to change very shortly.

The secretary to T. Thornton Taylor Sr. knocked softly on the door, opened it and entered his office. "Mr. Albert Patton's secretary called to see if we could schedule a luncheon meeting between the two of you."

"Is that Admiral Patton, the shipbuilder?" asked T. Thornton.

"Yes, that is who it is," she replied. "She suggested this Friday at the San Francisco Club. You have that date open, shall I set it up?"

"If it concerns business, I'd rather meet here in my office where I have the advantage," he replied.

"She said that it concerned a personal matter and that is why a luncheon meeting was suggested."

"OK. Go ahead and set it up. But, in the meantime, have our research department do a full financial and background research on Patton, his family and his business so I'll know exactly where I stand. I never like to walk into any situation without knowing who my opponent is and all his weaknesses. Tell them to have it on my desk tomorrow morning."

The following morning, a red folder, the color which T. Thornton always used for personal files, lay on his desk. It was fully an inch thick and weighed over two pounds. Mostly double space typed pages but some XEROX copies and photos.

With a practiced legal eye, he read the cover report, then began to thumb through the file, making notes on a small pad as he went. The report began with Patton's wartime record. He served in the Navy during Korea, enlisting as a Seaman and coming out as a Junior Petty Officer. The Rank of Admiral was an honorary one bestowed on him by the Coast Guard in recognition of his years of doing business with them. Net worth at time of entry into the Navy, less than one month's pay. Net worth at the end of his enlistment, slightly over two million dollars. No mention of how he managed that. T. Thornton scribbled a note to the research department to find out how he came by all that money in such a short time.

Business: Patton Shipyards, Inc. Family owned, no debts or stockholders. Builds some small ships, but is mostly involved in repair and overhaul contract work for the Navy and Coast Guard. Government contracts run in excess of twenty million per year. Hires good people and pays them well. No union problems. Average profit on investment after taxes, 20%. He is certainly not in financial difficulty. Net worth of Patton Shipyards, \$50 million. Personal worth in the form of home, cars, insurance policies, bank accounts; another two million.

Personal: 56 Years old, good health. Married 36 years. Wife Geraldine, 61 years old, daughter of the late Senator and Mrs. Robert Fitzgerald of Brockton, Mass. No mistress, but from the looks of the photo of Geraldine, he ought to have one. What a horse face on that woman, she looked more like she should be eating hay and pulling a plow.

One daughter, Daphnie, age 26, single. No wonder she is still single, looks just like her mother, possibly even worse. Graduated from Brown, likes skiing, swimming and tennis. Tried out for the Olympic Swimming Team but failed to make it. Seldom ever seen with a man, but almost always with her swimming instructor, Judy Clark. Drives a Porsche, California ego tag, DEE DEE.

He was still reading the file on Admiral Patton, trying to find a clue as why this man would want to see him on a personal matter, when his secretary buzzed him, "Research reports that Mrs. Patton had a trust fund worth several million at the time that they married." Perhaps it was his training as a lawyer, or possibly pure chance, but it jumped right off the page at him and he drew a red circle around Daphnie's name.

He picked up the phone and dialed the number of his chief accountant, "Howe, this is Thornton. Run a computer printout on the present worth of Travis T's trust fund as well as all other assets that he might have, and bring it to me immediately."

Ten minutes later, his secretary buzzed, "Mr. Howe is here, Sir."

"Good, send him right in," he replied.

Edward Howe was the typical corporate bean counter. He stood barely five feet tall, had almost no hair and wore a pair of round, pinch glasses perched on his nose. He handed a computer run to Thornton, saying, "Here is everything, Sir. I hope that is what you wanted."

"Have a seat, Howe. I'm sure that I will have something else for you to do," said Thornton as he opened the folds of computer paper and scanned the figures. "I see that Travis T's personal worth

is slightly over twenty million. Does that including everything?"

"Yes, Sir. Even his Ferrari, guns, cameras, stereo and the condo that you gave him to live in while he went to college," replied Howe.

"Transfer thirty-two million dollars worth of those junk bonds that I bought for three cents on the dollar to use as leverage when I took over that last airline. Put them into Travis T's name at face value. Make the transfer today, but back-date it a couple years in our computer. As soon as that has been posted, run a new financial statement for him and bring it to me. I'll need it before noon."

T. Thornton had a fat envelope nestled in the inside pocket of his coat when he walked into the plush San Francisco Club. "I'm meeting Admiral Patton," he told the host.

"Yes Sir. He is expecting you. This way please."

T. Thornton had met the Admiral a time or two before on a social basis but they could hardly be called close acquaintances. However, he had seen his wife, Geraldine, several times before. She always seemed to be in the middle of every social event, fund raising function or Republican political gathering that happened around San Francisco. She was the typical social butterfly, flitting from one function to another. They shook hands and he sat down.

"Black Label Scotch, neat," he told the waiter.

They ordered their food and made small talk while waiting for it to arrive. T. Thornton watched the Admiral in the same manner that he would watch a hostile witness. He really enjoyed toying with people's minds when he knew they were trying to formulate just the right way of saying something.

"Mr. Taylor," began the Admiral. "I asked for this meeting in order to discuss a matter which I feel will be of great value to both of us."

T. Thornton didn't answer, knowing that one can win far more cases by allowing the opponent to keep talking and defeat himself, than he ever can by flamboyant oratory.

The Admiral continued, "You might say that I have a merger of sorts in mind. Between our two families, we represent a sizable amount of the total wealth in San Francisco and it would be foolish to allow any of it to be siphoned off by a unwise or foolish marriage by one of our heirs."

T. Thornton had always said that there came an instant during every trial when he knew without a doubt that he had won and absolutely no amount of twisting or thrashing about by the other party would make the slightest difference in the ultimate outcome. He knew that he had won this encounter without saying a single word.

He sat there and watched the Admiral squirm as he continued, "I have a lovely daughter who will inherit my wealth when I die and you have a grandson who will come by yours some day. What I propose is a merger of sorts in which we will ensure the continued solidity of our accumulated wealth. What I have in mind is that we arrange a marriage between our two basic heirs and in that way, we will keep our fortunes within the family, so to speak."

"My grandson is fairly well off right now, Admiral," said T. Thornton. "If we are able to effect this merger, as you choose call it, what will your daughter bring into the partnership initially?"

"Well, I hadn't given too much consideration to that part of the arrangement, but I can assure you that she will be able to bring her fair share to the union," replied the Admiral.

"I hoped that would be the way you'd feel about it, because I feel that any marriage should start off on an equal footing," said Thornton, "Each party bringing equal amounts to it."

"That's certainly true," agreed the Admiral. "Do you have any particular figure in mind to start the young couple off with? Perhaps half a million each or so, something like that."

"I'm glad that you asked that, because I was going over Travis T's current financial

statement and just happen to have it right here in my pocket." He pulled the envelope from inside his coat and passed it to the Admiral, saying, "Naturally, the figures on this statement are to be held in the strictest confidence and I assure you that I will do the same with your daughter's financial statement when you have it delivered to me by messenger on Monday. I hate to eat and run, Admiral, but I do have an appointment in ten minutes."

T. Thornton glanced back at the table just before leaving the club to see the Admiral, his face ashen white, reading the totals on the last page of the printout. He thought to himself, "We'll see how badly he wants to marry off that ugly daughter of his."

One week later, there was a formal dinner being held at the T. Thornton's estate, situated high on a hill overlooking San Francisco. Seated around the long table were T. Thornton and his wife; T. T. Taylor, Jr. and his wife; the Admiral and Geraldine and sitting next to each other were Travis T. and Daphnie.

The stated purpose of the party was to celebrate Daphnie being named President and Chairman of the Board of Patton Shipyards, Inc. However, with the exception of Daphnie and Travis T, everyone at the table knew the real reason for the dinner. At that point, Daphnie and Travis T. thought that it was simply a way that their parents had for making them uncomfortable for the evening.

After the dinner guests had gone, T. Thornton put his arm around his grandson's shoulders and said, "What do you think of Daphnie?"

"God, grandfather, she's a moose!"

"Yeah, but she's a very rich moose. Laying on top of enough money, most any woman looks good."

CHAPTER NINE

Every inch of seating room was jammed full in God's Holy Word Baptist Tabernacle in Sallisaw, Oklahoma. The folding chairs which had been set up in the aisles and across the back of the church were filled. The entry hall was jammed with people and several hundred more who could not crowd inside, braved the cold January winds and stood on tiptoe outside the church, peering through the windows in the hope that they could catch a glimpse of the Child of God who was to be baptized that morning.

Mary, the child's mother, brought the blanketed bundle forward and presented it to the preacher, who was dressed in a white robe and standing waist-deep in the baptismal. He carefully unwrapped the child, removed his diaper and held him high in the air for everyone to see. Gasps and whispers of "Praise God" ran through the congregation.

The preacher folded a white cloth, placed it over the baby's face and immersed him in the water which hadn't completely lost its nightly chill, saying, "John Henry Harrison, Child of God, I baptize you in the name of the Father, The Son and The Holy Ghost."

Some of the congregation fell to their knees in prayer and others fainted. The chant of "Praise God" filled the church while a very unhappy John Henry Harrison screamed in protest to the shock of being dunked in the cold water.

By displaying the baby at every opportunity and distributing copies of his birth certificate, the preacher increased the congregation of his church ten-fold within a few weeks. Contributions poured into the coffers of the church and work was begun on a new building which would seat even more people than could be accommodated in the original First Baptist Church. In order to take advantage of the good fortune which had fallen into their laps, the deacons increased the length of the church's name to include the birth. It became God's Holy Word Tabernacle of the Immaculate Conception. By the time that the new building was completed in late summer, it had become inadequate to hold all the people and plans were being drawn for an even larger one.

People would drive a hundred miles or more to attend services and gaze upon the baby which came into the world through Immaculate Conception. It was bound to be true, because he had a birth certificate with a doctor's signature to prove it.

It didn't take the preacher long to realize what a rich vein of gold that the Harrison infant represented. Not being one to let a good thing slip through his fingers, the preacher quietly formed a non-profit religious corporation called the Immaculate Conception Ministry, with himself as president, treasurer and chairman. He kept everything in the family by naming his wife as the vice

president and auditor. Under the umbrella of this corporation, he could direct most of the money which had been going to the church into several bank accounts, all of which were totally under his control.

John Harrison grew up in total belief that his father was God and began delivering sermons by the time that he was four years of age. While he did receive a thorough education in the teachings of the Bible, and could quote it; Book, Chapter and Verse, he never attended a day of formal schooling. By the time that he was ten years of age, the Preacher had taken total control of his life. The Preacher also arranged for him to be awarded a Doctor of Divinity Degree by Oral Roberts University and to be ordained as a Baptist minister.

Even with the preacher pulling the majority of the money from the collection plates, by the time that John was fourteen, his home church had grown to be the largest Baptist church, not only in the state of Oklahoma, but anywhere in the whole Bible Belt. Since there was a limit to the amount of money which could be separated from the people within driving distance of Sallisaw, the preacher decided to take the show on the road.

The Immaculate Conception Ministry traveled back and forth across the nation, sometimes in a huge bus, and other times on an airplane. Reverend Harrison was always in demand and always on the move. The Ministry received at least ten requests for the Reverend to appear for each Sunday, allowing them to accept only the ones which promised the greatest return. Any church lucky enough to be placed on the busy schedule could depend on the Reverend John Harrison to fill not only their empty seats, but also their treasury. The fee for an appearance by the Child of God was seventy-five percent of everything which was taken in during the many collections which were requested during each meeting. In an hour's time, the collection plates would be passed for love offerings, church offerings, ministry offerings, mission offerings, tithes and just plain old collections. There was hardly a minute during a sermon when the large brass collection plates weren't circulating. When they were filled with fives, tens and twenties, they were immediately taken to a back room where the Preacher did the counting. Only after he had taken three out of every four dollars for himself, did the preacher pass on the remaining one to the host church.

It was never known how many millions of dollars passed through the Immaculate Conception Ministry and into the pockets of the Preacher because, as a religious organization, he was not subject to taxes, audits and other irreverent actions of that sort. The Reverend Harrison didn't really care that he was being exploited, because it allowed him the opportunity to spread his ministry to the greatest number of people. John was nearly forty years of age before he finally decided that the Preacher had used him long enough and broke away to go on his own.

Deprived of his gold mine, the Preacher set out to do as much damage to the Reverend Harrison as possible. As soon as he left the Immaculate Conception Ministry, the Preacher issued a news release saying that he had discovered that Harrison was a fraud and accused him of taking all the money which had been donated to the ministry. After that, the Preacher moved the millions of dollars that he had accumulated into numbered Swiss bank accounts and retired to Brazil.

While with the Ministry, he had to follow the sermons exactly as they were laid out by the Preacher, and those dealt far more with the need to raise money than with salvation. On his own and free of those controls, he would be able to attack the one thing which he most despised and wanted to stamp out in the world: sin. Since sin and Satan were more or less one in the same in the mind of the Reverend, stamping out sin would be equal to stamping out Satan.

The Reverend could find sin in just about everything that people did. He went much further than the ordinary sins like war and those which are spelled out and prohibited by the commandments. He found sin in drinking, smoking, dancing, gambling, lust, lipstick, off-color

jokes, homosexuals, movies, television, communism and The KKK. He denounced bowling, watching football games, auto racing or basketball on TV. Playing golf and any other activity which might be more fun for people to do instead of going to church on Sunday was a special target. That last group of sins could include anything from fishing to sleeping late. He finally decided that all sins could be directly equated with fun and anything which was fun must also be sinful. The more fun that anything was, the more sinful it was bound to be. While he had totally abstained from sex himself, he did condone it, but only between married people and then only when absolutely necessary.

Although he had been extremely popular and always in demand while with the Immaculate Conception Ministry, now with the cloud of suspicion cast by the Preacher, he found that it was difficult to get into anything except the smallest of churches with indifferent congregations. In fact, many times he would come to a town and be unable to find a single church which would provide him with a pulpit from which to denounce sin. Worst of all, the flow of money which he had seen passing to the Preacher on collection plates, diminished to a dribble. People just weren't all that interested in fighting sin.

For three years before he left the Immaculate Conception Ministry, The Reverend had been secretly saving most of the money which people slipped to him when they shook his hand after the services, rather than turning it over to the Preacher in the back room. With most of that money, he bought a camper van and set out across the country in search of sin.

The Sin Mobile, as it jokingly became known, had a raised top which allowed a person to stand erect inside and was equipped with the same facilities as a motorhome, except on a reduced scale. It had a bed across the back, partitioned off from the rest of the van by a curtain, as well as a smaller bunk which dropped down above the front seats. The van was fully self-contained with its own water supply, roof air conditioning, propane heater, stove, refrigerator, folding table and a tiny bath room. Just inside the two back doors was a folding platform which could be lowered to serve as a stage. When it was lowered, a black curtain was drawn across the opening as a backdrop and to block any view into the van.

He bought a coal black suit and hat and dressed himself much in the same manner as had the circuit-riding preachers of a century ago. His destination would be San Francisco, the town which he considered to be the sin capitol of the world. With its reputation as a haven for homosexuals, hippies, drug users, free sex and various other sinners, he figured that he would look for sin where there was the most sin to be found. He decided that he would travel across the country like preachers did during the pioneer and gold-rush days, he would travel from one small town to the next, stamping out sin wherever he found it as he journeyed toward his goal in San Francisco.

Leaving Sallisaw, Oklahoma, where his mother was now the head librarian, he angled northwestward across the state, Once past Tulsa, he had an endless number of small towns at his disposal. In some, he stood behind the pulpit in small churches, in some he preached from the back of his van, while in others, he couldn't raise a single soul to listen to him. It seemed that his worst problem, even when he did raise an audience, was not being able to deliver his sermon and pass a collection plate at the same time. Any time that he stopped preaching to produce the plate, his audience would melt away without their hands ever leaving their pockets.

When he crossed the state line into Kansas, the situation didn't prove to be any more productive, either as a place for stamped out sin or for putting money in the collection plates. In fact, when he passed through a strip of the state where the Mennonites and Mormons were well entrenched, he began to feel particularly unwelcome. They were not only indifferent to his preaching, they were outright hostile to his even being there.

The next small town along the route taken by the Reverend Harrison was a place called Noggley, Kansas. According to the road map, it had about two thousand residents and five churches, Methodist, Catholic and three Baptist. He stopped by the First Baptist Church to visit with the resident minister, who wasn't interested in sharing his pulpit with another preacher, especially if he also had to share the collection with him. The Bible Baptist Church had recently hired a new pastor who was afraid that his job might be in jeopardy if the congregation compared him with a big gun preacher like the Reverend. The newest Baptist church, known as the Total Immersion Baptist Church, was temporarily closed. It seemed to have lived up to its name on the Sunday that they dedicated the church when a seam split in the vinyl liner of the baptismal and about 10,000 gallons of water flooded the place. Under the assumption that they had divine protection, the deacons of the church hadn't bothered to buy any insurance to cover such things like that and when the founders found that out, most of them went back to the church that they had left. The Methodist minister refused to allow anyone of the Baptist faith to preach in his church and he couldn't even get past the nun at the door to see the Priest at the Catholic Church.

Undaunted by the refusals, the Reverend parked his van near the picnic tables in the city park and folded down his platform. He hung out a sign which read, "Hear The Reverend John Harrison, a True child of God, speak tonight at 7:00PM". On each table, he placed several copies of his birth certificate, holding them in place with pebbles to keep them from being scattered by the Kansas wind.

When the time came for beginning his sermon, there were perhaps a dozen people seated at the picnic tables, although at least half of them were simply there to take advantage of the cool air which was a result of the grass having been watered that day. He launched into his sermon on the various sins of the world and as he preached, a few more people wandered in until there was perhaps twenty people in his audience. This was the largest crowd that he had been able to draw in weeks and he felt that his ministry was beginning to take off.

When it came time to pass the collection plate, he was faced with the same old problem which had plagued him from the first. He saw the people begin to stir restlessly and look for a way to escape. Just then, a vision of virginal youth and beauty stepped forward. She was about twenty years old, had short-cropped sandy hair, an enchanting smile and the body of Goddess. One glimpse of those seductive breasts, long legs and beautifully rounded hips even stirred primal urges in the chaste body of the Reverend. She said to him as she reached for the collection plate, "May I pass this through the crowd for you, Reverend?"

Freed from the necessary awkwardness of passing the plate, the Reverend was able cleanse his mind of any sinful thoughts that the beautiful girl might have provoked and he launched into the most spellbinding part of his sermon. While he spoke, she silently handed the collection plate from one table to the next and the Reverend could see folding money appearing in it.

He ended his last prayer, stepped from his stage and walked to the edge of the crowd to shake hands with all of the people whom he could reach. Being out in the open, he was not afforded the captivity of their having to pass by him as they left and most of them escaped without having to shake his hand. As the young lady who had befriended him in his moment of need approached, he said softly to her, "Would you please remain a few minutes. I'd like to thank you properly for helping with the collection."

When everyone except the girl had departed, he extended his hand to her, saying, "I'm the Reverend John Harrison and I want to thank you for helping me with the services tonight."

"Glad to do it, Reverend," she replied. "My name is Ginger Wilson and you looked as if you could use a little help."

"Yes, Miss Wilson," he said "I certainly do need some help with my ministry. I didn't see any rings on your fingers was why I called you Miss. Are you married?"

"No," she replied, "And not engaged either."

"You seem to be so much at ease with people, where do you work?"

"Up to about an hour ago, I worked for my father as a bookkeeper. His business goes on the auction block tomorrow morning, so I suppose you could say that as of right now, I'm unemployed."

"I take it that since you stopped to hear me speak, that you believe in God," he asked.

"I'm not a Bible-thumper like some people, but, yes, I do believe in God."

"Do you believe in Immaculate Conception?" he asked.

"Not if it's done right," replied Ginger, laughing at her own joke.

The Reverend thought about her last statement for a few seconds but failing to grasp the humor, he continued, "I plan to take my ministry to San Francisco, where I feel that it will do the most good. Do you suppose that you would be interested in coming along and helping me with my ministry?" he asked. Then he stopped suddenly and said, "Please forgive me for asking such a forward question. Let me assure you that, as a Child of God, I have only the purest of intentions. I am a child of an Immaculate Conception with my virgin mother and have never and would never touch a woman in a carnal way."

"I didn't have you pegged as a dirty old man, Reverend, and after hearing you speak, I'm sure of it," said Ginger. "But even though I'm old enough to do whatever I like, I think that you and I should talk with my father about my going."

"I wouldn't have it any other way. When can I meet him?"

CHAPTER TEN

TCU fielded 137 starting football players and since there are only 99 playing numbers which could be assigned, most of the freshmen members, who didn't stand a ghost of a chance of being allowed to play, had to wear plain jerseys. Joe Bob Puckett was the exception because Big Bob Bradshaw had seen to it that his old number of 77 was taken away from the third string junior who had been wearing it so it could be given to the man who he had personally brought to the squad.

During his first year at TCU, Joe Bob received grades arranged by his coaches, ran wind sprints, acted as a tackling dummy during scrimmages, cheered the team on during games but never played a single official down. It didn't matter all that much to Joe Bob because he was the only freshman who had a number on his jersey and, as a member of the football team, was automatically a Big Man on Campus. The other advantage of never having his number called during a game was that he never got banged around.

During his sophomore year at TCU, Joe Bob got his first chance to play in a real game. It was down to the last three minutes of the fourth quarter, TCU was leading by thirty points and the coach figured that sending in a few young players to get experience couldn't be all that dangerous.

During the millions of years since man got up off all fours to walk erect, his knees have never been required to bend in anything but one direction. He could walk or run, he could bend or sit, he could kick or squat, but the knees needed to bend in only one direction. As a result of those millions of years of having their own way, knees tended to resist movement in any direction not of their choosing. If, due to some reason, knees were forced to bend in any other direction; such as having a boulder or tree fall on them, or else by being blind-sided by a dinosaur or a football player, considerable damage could be done to the ligaments which held the knee in its accustomed position.

It will never be known what Joe Bob was looking at or thinking about when it happened, but one thing for certain, he didn't see the two hundred fifty pounds of frustration and rage in the opponent's jersey as it smashed against his left knee, buckling it in a most unaccustomed and uncomfortable direction.

The crowd cheered for Joe Bob as he was wheeled off the field in the direction of the dressing room where the trainer decided that he needed far more than a Number 4 Codeine and three layers of tape to repair the damage. Play one down and bash one knee, about average for a lot of college football players.

In the Fort Worth General Hospital, the Orthopedic Surgeon looked at the X-Rays, prodded

the swollen knee with his fingers and said, "Hmmm."

Joe Bob asked, "Think that I'll be able to play next week, Doc?"

"Monopoly perhaps, possibly a piano, but certainly not football," replied the doctor. "Prepare him for surgery tomorrow morning."

The only thing to come out of his stay in the hospital, other than an overhauled knee, was a pretty young nurse named Betty Ann Bishop who worked the graveyard shift. Their courtship began in Joe Bob's hospital bed where, due to the full cast on his left leg, he could do little to help it along except to furnish a certain erect and willing part of the lovemaking process. They were married two weeks after he got out of the hospital and they moved into the Big Bob's apartment.

During Joe Bob's junior year, Betty Ann worked at night and slept during the day. He drank beer with his buddies, went to class when he felt like it and suited out with the football team. He also played four downs that year without a single injury which, considering his prior record, was an achievement of sorts. He was lucky enough to be credited with a tackle when a running back slipped while making a cut and Joe Bob fell on top of him.

One of his high school buddies, Bubba Ray Sanders, owned Bubba's U-Pump-It Station, Auto Salvage Yard and Wrecker Service out on the Jacksboro Highway and agreed to buy occasional loads of drip gasoline for half of what the jobber charged him. Whenever Joe Bob needed a few dollars, he would drive out to Big Bob's lease, hose off a few barrels of drip and deliver it to Bubba Ray. What more could a man of his caliber need or want. He had a pretty wife with a good job, a ready source of money when he needed it and he didn't have to go to class unless he had nothing better to do. Joe Bob was living the good life of a TCU football player.

Even as a Senior, playing time for Joe Bob didn't improve to any great amount. He would go in and play a down or two if the man he replaced was injured, tired or needed to take a leak; but only if his team was leading by a considerable amount. Number 77 was seen on the field so seldom that the broadcast spotters usually didn't even bother to put it on their crib sheets.

It was the big Thanksgiving Day game with Arkansas and the last game of the season. It was also likely to be the last organized football game in which Joe Bob Puckett would ever have a chance to play. Arkansas was leading by four points as the scoreboard clock counted off the few remaining seconds of the game. Arkansas had the ball, second and ten, on their own sixteen and were simply trying to run the clock out. They would have to make at least one more first down because TCU had just used only their first timeout and had two remaining. To win the game, TCU would not only have to get the ball, they would also have to score a touchdown, both of which looked highly unlikely with only twenty seconds remaining on the clock.

Two opposing linemen, TCU's Moose Bronski and Mohammed Lavender from Arkansas, had waged their own private war during the long day and now that the game was nearly over, decided to settle things in a dignified way. As they lined up facemask to facemask, Moose made some remark which included not only ethnic, religious and social slurs, but also certain questions about Mohammed Lavender's parenthood. Instead of blocking when the ball was snapped, Mohammed swung at Moose, catching him square on the jaw, just below his face mask and laying him out cold. A yellow flag hit the ground at his feet, calling back the long pass play which had been caught and carried all the way to TCU's twenty. The Arkansas quarterback was so furious about the penalty that he grabbed up the flag and threw it back at the official, hitting him in the face with it. The air was filled with flying yellow flags.

The Arkansas lineman and the quarterback were both ejected from the game and the officials began pacing off the double penalties from where the ball had been on the sixteen. The penalty for hitting the official put the ball down on the one yard line and the personal foul by

Mohammed Lavender moved it to half that distance to the TCU goal line. It was still second down but now about a mile to go for Arkansas. Twelve seconds remained on the game clock.

The backup quarterback for Arkansas was warming up on the sidelines as they carried the inert hulk of Moose Bronski off the field. "TCU still has two timeouts," the Arkansas coach told the second string quarterback as he sent him in. "We will probably have to kick it, so run a possession play to get the ball off the goal line and give the kicker some room to work. TCU certainly won't be expecting a draw and it might even work for a bunch of yards."

"Puckett, get in there for Bronski and try to keep them from moving the ball off the goal line," shouted the TCU coach as he slapped Joe Bob on the back.

Joe Bob raced onto the field, but had to return to the bench to get his helmet which was laying on the ground. "Shit! He's stupid," remarked the coach. "At least this is the last year that I'll have to put up with him to pay off Big Bob Bradshaw."

Joe Bob ran in and lined up on the wrong side of the line. The Defensive Captain moved him over to where he was supposed to be and told him, "With the people that Arkansas has on the field, it looks like a pass, but they might just call a draw play. Listen for me to yell if I read draw."

"Hut, Hut," chanted the Arkansas quarterback and the ball slipped between the center's legs to him. He stepped straight back a quick four steps, raising the ball as if to pass while his linemen dropped each way into a pass protection pocket. This split TCU's line, drawing it with them. Instead of following his man as he was supposed to do, Joe Bob lunged straight ahead, but meeting no resistance, began to fall forward as he stumbled into the end zone.

When Joe Bob failed to go with his assigned man, Arkansas was able to double-team TCU's right end, who was about to slip his block, break through and sack the quarterback in the end zone. The Arkansas quarterback suddenly lowered the ball and began to turn toward his halfback who was sprinting forward.

"DRAW! DRAW!" screamed TCU's captain and the linebackers surged forward to cover the hole which had been left in the center of the line.

The Arkansas quarterback reached out to put the ball into the halfback's stomach, but held it a bit too high and it struck him in the chest. They both grabbed for the loose ball, but it was too late. The ball bounded off to their left, hit the ground in a forest of struggling legs and rolled right under the falling Joe Bob.

At least a ton of football players descended into a pile on top of the prone Joe Bob. There was a tangle of arms and legs, digging and clawing for the ball. By the time that the officials could see what was going on in the pile, the final seconds ticked by and the game-ending gun fired.

"There are no signals from the officials yet," said the on-the-air TV announcer, but the pileup seems to be inside the end zone. If an Arkansas player has the ball, it will be a safety but they will still win by two points. If a TCU player has the ball, it's a touchdown and they will win."

Half a dozen striped shirts surged into the fray, pulling bodies from the pile, trying to see who had the ball. Finally they were down to a single player on the ground, Number 77, who was still and limp, but no ball was to be found. One of the officials rolled Joe Bob over and there on the ground, flat as a pancake, was the football; blown out like a cheap tire by the impact of so many bodies piling on top of Joe Bob. Arms shot into the air.

"Touchdown, TCU," screamed the announcer into his microphone. "Can you see which TCU player recovered the fumble?" he asked his color man.

"Number 77. He hasn't been on the field before this play and I don't have his name."

"77 is Joe Bob Puckett," shouted one of the TCU spotters from the other end of the press

table.

"The TCU player who recovered the fumble in the end zone and scored the winning touchdown is Number 77, Bucket, Joe Bucket," reported the announcer.

"Puckett, not Bucket, you asshole. Joe Bob Puckett!" shouted the spotter.

But Joe Bob's single moment of glory was lost forever as the wrong name had already gone out over the airwaves. The correction of the mistake was never to be heard by the audience because the station cut away for a commercial at just that instant.

They had not only knocked the breath out of Joe Bob, but had also given his bell a good ringing, so it was several minutes before he could gather his wits enough to realize what all the shouting and cheering was about. He took the flattened, game ball home with him that night.

The professional teams draft of college players was rapidly approaching and the sports writers and broadcasters across the nation were tossing around the names of whom each thought would have the honor of being first to be drafted. Naturally, Joe Bob didn't expect to hear his name on that list, but he was certain that he would get a few calls and be picked up by some pro team. After all, good defensive linemen are always in demand. He sat by his phone and waited and waited, but no professional scout called to talk with him. Draft time was coming closer so he thought that he'd better have a talk with his old benefactor, Big Bob Bradshaw.

Big Bob told him, "I'll see what I can do for you, Joe Bob, but don't start packing your bags yet. I own a box in Texas Stadium and know the assistant defensive line coach with the Cowboys pretty well. I'll give him a call. Incidentally, you need to be out of that apartment by the end of the month because a young fellow who is coming to TCU from Kermet, Texas will be moving in."

The phone in the Cowboy's coaching office rang for the assistant defensive line coach, "Howdy, Big Bob Bradshaw is my name and the All Bidness is my game. I'm having a few fellows out to my ranch this weekend for some barbecue and bourbon. Would you like to join us and do a little deer and turkey hunting?"

Since they hadn't been having to pay rent while living in Big Bob's apartment, Betty Ann had been saving a fair amount of her salary each month for the down payment on a house, but still lacked enough to buy a nice place like she wanted. When they moved out of the apartment, she and Joe Bob rented an small, two bedroom house in River Oaks, a suburb of Fort Worth, nestled in between Carswell Air Force Base and the Jacksboro Highway. The house was clean and the neighborhood was nice. The worst problem with the location was the continuous stream of B-52s roaring in and out of Carswell every day while she was trying to sleep.

The day for the pro draft came and all 28 of the teams that make up the NFL were joined by a nationwide TV hookup. The Tampa Bay Buccaneers, with the worst record during the past season, had the first draft choice while Dallas, with its 14 and 2 season would get the very last choice of the last round.

The Cowboy coach, along with all of his assistant coaches, were huddled around computer terminals which were connected to a huge mainframe in the basement. Stored in its memory were the records of ever college football player in the nation. They were separated into categories according to the position that each played. The coach could instantly call up a particular position with the players from every college arranged according to a number of different criteria such as weight, race, school, age or number of points on his rating system. He could also call up data on any individual player by typing in the player's name or his school and playing number.

Using game films, scouting reports and game records, each player had been scored on a plus, zero or minus basis for each play that they had been in. If they did something better than average during the play, such as stopping a play or making a tackle, they got a plus. An extra plus

was given for forcing or recovering a fumble and two extra pluses if they sacked the opposing quarterback or scored a touchdown. If they did only what they were supposed to do, they were scored with a zero but if they dropped the ball, missed an assignment or screwed up in any way during the play, they were given a minus. Since the computer didn't show how many plays each person had been in and minus and plus scores balanced out one another, it was possible, under this system, for a someone to play for four years and do an acceptable job, but end up with a score only a few points one way or the other from zero. On the other hand, it was also possible for someone to play only a few downs without screwing up and come out with more or less the same score.

This was the coach's personal scoring system which he felt would bring out the really superior players while grouping all of the average players into a area with a score somewhere around zero. He wasn't really interested in drafting average or zero point players.

The draft went along about as expected with the college hero of the year going to Tampa Bay on the first draft. Many equally good players were taken during the first several rounds, with Dallas picking up a good running back and a couple wide receivers. Along toward the last rounds of the draft, the enthusiasm began to wane and some players were selected only because the coach thought that they would make good trading material.

As the time for the final draft choice for Dallas was approaching, the coach asked his coaches, "We don't really need to fill any more particular spots, with the possible exception of adding a little depth in the defensive line. Some of our defensive players like White and Jones are getting kind of long in the tooth and we should have a few new men coming along in our system for these positions. Any suggestions?"

"How about Puckett?" suggested the assistant defensive line coach who had been out to Big Bob's place and was paying his debt.

"Puckett, Puckett Who? Never heard of him." said the coach.

"Joe Bob Puckett from TCU. You know him, defensive tackle who scored the winning touchdown on a fumble recovery in the last seconds against Arkansas last Thanksgiving. Number 77."

"A defensive lineman won the game?" asked the coach as he typed "TCU 77" into the computer.

"Puckett, Joe Bob. TCU. Defensive tackle. 245 pounds. Plus 5." appeared instantly on the computer screen.

"Plus 5, not bad for a defensive tackle, but I'd like to see a bit more weight on a man in that position. If he moves good and is fast enough, I suppose that a few pounds on the light side doesn't matter that much. Who knows what he will weigh when it comes time for him to play." Anyone know him?"

"Big Bob Bradshaw likes him," replied the assistant defensive line coach. "But I never personally saw him play." He was no fool and wanted to be able to deny responsibility if Joe Bob was a dud.

The coach typed another command into the computer and every Right Defensive Tackle in the nation appeared on the screen, arranged in order of their points under his system. "Only two other people playing his position with more than Plus 5," he said, "And they have both been drafted."

The light on the console came on, indicating that it was time for Dallas to make their final draft choice. The coach pressed the button on the microphone and said, "Puckett, TCU."

The assistant defensive line coach for the Dallas Cowboys had just paid a debt, known only

to himself and Big Bob Bradshaw.

"I've been drafted by Dallas!" shouted Joe Bob over the phone to Betty Ann, whom he had roused from a deep sleep.

"That's nice," she replied. "At least we won't have to move again."

The next step for a drafted player is to negotiate a contract with the team that drafted him. Uncle Charley decided that since he had done such a good job negotiating with Big Bob Bradshaw and TCU, he would deal with the Cowboys for Joe Bob. He didn't stand a ghost of a chance with the sharks in the Cowboy front office.

The standard offer by the Cowboys for all new people, other than the super stars, was a contract which gave them a first year salary of \$50,000 with an option allowing the Cowboys to keep them for a second year with a 20% increase. This was based on the supposition that they were actually signed to play. Many of the drafted players were dropped during or shortly after spring training camp. Uncle Charley was so dead set on getting Joe Bob a three year, no cut contract that he agreed to an annual salary of \$30,000 with no raises during the term of the contract..

Joe Bob was one of the first to arrive at the Cowboy's summer training camp and was surprised by the number of fresh, new faces that were also there. Many of those new faces would be competing for his position. He went through a complete physical during which special attention was given to the knee which had been injured. The team doctor wanted some X-Rays before he made a final decision. Evidently, the doctor passed the knee because he found himself being measured and fitted with pads and a uniform. He was given a playbook to study and a thick book of rules governing his membership with the Cowboys.

"Can I have Number 77? That's what I wore at TCU," he asked one of the coaches.

"Man Mountain McGursky wears that number has been with us for ten years. Why don't you just run right over and ask him if he'll give it up for you," he replied with a smile.

"I thought McGursky was in the pen down at Huntsville," said Joe Bob. "I heard that he was given two to five years for killing some farmer's mule with his bare hands."

"He was," replied the coach. "But they let him out on a work-release program so he can play football. Besides, the warden wanted to get rid of him because he kept scaring the prisoners in death row."

Joe Bob may not have been too smart, but by the same token, he certainly wasn't that stupid he took the number that they gave him.

Summer camp began with the usual workouts, wind sprints and timed runs over a given distance. Being a lineman, a fast 40 was not nearly as important as it was to a running back or wide receiver. That was a good thing for Joe Bob because one of the coaches remarked, "I don't need a stopwatch to time Puckett, I need an almanac."

Next came walk-through drills on various defensive sets, then some light-contact practice and finally came the day for full-contact drills. The coach, who had shown up by that time, stood on the sidelines watching the men run through practice. He told one of his assistants, "Have Lamar Washington run a few toward Puckett so I can see how he does."

On the first play, Lamar, who was built like a fireplug and reputed to be the best running back in the NFL, headed straight for Joe Bob. Joe Bob spread his arms to their maximum reach to gather in the runner but at the last instant, Lamar gave him a head fake in one direction and was gone like a greased pig in the other. Joe Bob came up with his arms full of air.

The next play was almost a carbon copy of the first with Lamar heading straight for Joe Bob who wasn't about to fall for that old head fake again. Lamar came at full speed directly at him, stopped suddenly and did a little stutter step, during which Joe Bob made his grab. As he hit the

ground empty handed, Lamar skipped over Joe Bob's prone body and was gone again.

"Tell Lamar to at least give the guy a chance to tackle him this next play," said Landry.

Here came Lamar, low to the ground with his shoulders set square. Joe Bob knew that he had his number this time and went for the little runner with a vengeance. Lamar hit Joe Bob so hard that it rattled his teeth, knocked the wind out of him and sent his helmet flying. Then he bounced off and was gone again.

Landry turned to one of his coaches and said, "Can you get me the TCU game film where Puckett won that game against Arkansas? I got to see that to believe it."

The coach sat in the darkened room with the special projector which allowed him to run a film forward, backward or freeze one frame at a time. The film had been shot at 24 frames per second, allowing him to see at least 96 individual photos of what went on during those four seconds which spelled doom for Arkansas. He ran the film back and forth a number of times and then he called the assistant defensive line coach to watch the film with him.

Frame by frame by frame it told the story of how Joe Bob had missed his assignment, only to stumble and fall on top of the rolling ball without ever knowing that it was there.

"Just plain, blind shithouse luck," was all that the assistant defensive line coach could say. "He couldn't do a credible job of playing with himself, much less playing football in this league.

"If he tried to play with himself, he'd probably fumble and drop it," said the coach.

"We can't simply send him packing. With that no-cut contract that he has, we'll have to keep him around and pay him for three years," mentioned the assistant coach.

"Drafting him was your idea, so it's up to you to get rid of him without costing us a bundle," replied the coach.

"I'll call the front office and tell them to see if they can trade his ass off before any other team gets wise. Even though he's getting only thirty grand a year, he would be an awfully expensive person to keep around just to sweep floors or drive the team bus for three years."

"We couldn't even let him drive the bus," replied the coach. "If he did, we would be in deep shit with the Teamsters Union."

Three days later, Joe Bob Puckett had his bags packed and was on his way to the New York Jets. The coach's comment was, "Other than whipping those Dog Ass Jets, trading Puckett to them brings me the greatest pleasure."

Joe Bob spent that season on the Jet's payroll, playing a few downs during the exhibition season before being put on reserve status. Betty Ann remained in Fort Worth and continued to work at the hospital. Just before the season ended, Joe Bob, along with a running back and a rookie linebacker, was traded to the Rams for two future unspecified draft choices. Being traded for an unspecified draft choice is about the lowest value that can be placed on a player. Joe Bob never realized that he was just part of a package and the Rams had to take him in order to get the other two players they really wanted.

Joe Bob caught the first plane out of New York and reported in at the Ram's office, where he was told that the their vice president in charge of player contracts wanted to see him the next morning. Joe Bob got a haircut and bought himself a new suit to wear to the meeting. After all, this guy was a vice president and he certainly wanted to make a good impression on him.

"Have a seat Mister Puckett," said the VP as he stood to shake Joe Bob's hand.

"Hot damn, I'm in the big time now," thought Joe Bob. "First day here and I'm already being called Mister Puckett by a Vice President."

The VP shuffled through a stack of papers on his desk, pulling one out one bunch held together with a paper clip. He read what was written on a little yellow, stick-on notes and said, "I

see that you have a three year, no-cut contract for thirty grand a year, Mister Pucket. How do you feel about playing for the Rams?"

"Well, if I had my choice, I'd rather be playing for Dallas or Houston because they are both Texas teams, but I suppose that LA will be good enough for the next two years until my contract runs out and I can become a free agent," replied Joe Bob.

"I don't know if we will be able to keep you on our roster because we already have two good men for your position, so we might have to trade you to Tampa Bay. How would you feel about that?"

"Tampa Bay! That would be awful. They are nothing but a bunch of losers and has-bens. I want to play on a winning team and don't think that I could stand still for a trade like that," replied Joe Bob.

Well, with your contract, it looks like you have us between a rock and a hard spot," said the VP, looking at the papers and shaking his head. "I suppose that we have no choice other than to allow you become a free agent?"

"Then I could go to any team that I wanted to and negotiate a new salary?" asked Joe Bob.

"That's right son. Free agents are open to take any contract that they wish and when teams start bidding against one another for a player, it can run into millions of dollars."

"What kind of figure did you have in mind should I agree to let you buy out my contract?" asked Joe Bob.

"Well, son. I know that the front office is going to scream bloody murder for my offering you this much money, but I like you and it's my hide that they will strip. I can have a check for ten thousand bucks, a plane ticket back to Fort Worth and a release for you to sign in the next ten minutes."

"Hot damn, let me have it," shouted Joe Bob. "Free Agent, here I come!"

The VP stepped into the treasurer's office and said, "I'd have paid him the sixty grand that he has coming, just to get us out from under his contract, but that jerk jumped at ten grand when I offered it to him. Get a check cut quick, before he has a chance to think it over and back out."

Joe Bob sat in the coach section of the American Airlines 727 as he winged his way back to Texas, looking at the ten thousand dollar check in his hand. That was more money than he had ever seen at one time in his whole life. "I'm going to buy me a new pickup soon as I get home, then drink Lone Star Beer and watch mud wrestling on TV until the right offer comes along," he thought to himself.

Joe Bob Puckett bought the new pickup and drank the Lone Star. He watched mud wrestling on TV, but the only people who ever called were telephone solicitors wanting to sell him aluminum siding, carpet cleaning or water softeners.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

With the aid of a pair of genuine Army-issued crutches, Tom Davis hobbled out of the military hospital with a disability discharge in his pocket. Along with the discharge came a promise that he would receive a check for \$320 from the Army each month for the rest of his life as payment for turning his feet into stumps. That fall, he enrolled as a graduate student in the Psychology Department at Berkeley, where his troubles had all begun a year before.

Tom no longer took part in the daily protest marches but he did allow his hair, beard and general appearance return to its original condition. He applied himself to his studies and two years later, received his Doctoral Degree in Psychology. He considered going into private practice, but since he had been associated with colleges for so long, he decided that he would rather teach.

Davis sent his resume, photo and application to a number of colleges across the nation but the only positive reply which he received was from a small, private college in San Francisco, known as the Golden Gate College. The college lacked the prestige of larger and better known colleges, however they paid better than average and catered to the more wealthy students. He accepted the offer and made his first appearance at a general meeting of the regents, officers of the school and faculty.

On a raised dais at the back of the stage sat the seven regents who controlled the purse strings, politics and policies of Golden Gate College. They were all wealthy businessmen from the San Francisco area, and all hand picked by T. Thornton Taylor, Sr. for their dedication to the preservation of wealth and the American way of life.

Seated in two rows of folding chairs, just below and in front of the regents sat the various officers of the college, each of whom answered to the President of the school and he, directly to the regents. Seated in the auditorium was the faculty, general administrative people and all other employees. Every person who drew a check from the college was there, even down to the janitors.

The President stood to welcome the people of the Golden Gate College to another academic year, after which he introduced the seven regents, followed by an introduction of the officers who were seated on the stage. When he returned to his seat, several of the officers took their turns to make speeches concerning their particular areas of interest.

While the Dean of Men was speaking, T. Thornton Taylor, Sr. leaned forward and tapped the President on the shoulder, "Who or what is that thing, next to the aisle about five rows back?"

The President looked at the seat indicated by T. Thornton and saw what appeared to be something which had escaped from a hippie drug raid in the Haight-Asbury section. From their

vantage point, they could see that he was wearing army combat boots, blue jeans with holes in the knees and a faded T-Shirt which proclaimed, "Save The Whales". A pair of crutches lay on the floor beside his seat. There was no way to recognize the face under all of that hair.

"I don't know, perhaps a janitor," whispered the President, "But I'll certainly find out."

"Do that and get his ass off this campus before the sun goes down," replied T. Thornton. "I won't have something like that hanging around Golden Gate. He might become a bad influence on some of the students."

Half an hour after the meeting ended, Tom Davis leaned on his arm crutches in front of the President. "So you are the new Assistant Professor in the Psychology Department," he said more as a statement than a question, as he scanned the personnel file in front of him. "You certainly look nothing like the photo which you sent in with your application."

"Probably because that was taken just after I got out of the Army," replied Tom.

"Well, Doctor Davis, this is a very exclusive college. We accept only the highest caliber of young people as students and expect our faculty to maintain their personal attire and grooming habits in keeping with the standards of such an institution. Let me say that you certainly do not fit the image which we try to project."

"It isn't what a person looks like, but what he is that makes the difference," replied Tom.

"What one looks like certainly has a bearing on whether he will be allowed to teach at Golden Gate," said the President.

"Are you telling me that I have to put on a Sears Roebuck suit and look like an encyclopedia salesman if I want to teach here?" asked Tom.

"You were hired on a probational basis for the first year and you will be expected to conform to our standards, not only in appearance, but in lifestyle as well, if you plan to remain at Golden Gate," he replied.

"I don't know if you realize it or not," replied Tom, "But that demand is an invasion of my legal, constitutional and personal rights."

"Mister T. Thornton Taylor, the head regent here at Golden Gate told me to have you off this campus by the end of this day, but I decided that since you were new here and possibly didn't understand our strict standards, I would give you an opportunity to adjust. Since you do not seem inclined to do so, you leave me no alternative other than to inform you that your association with Golden Gate is terminated as of this moment and you will be considered to be trespassing if you remain on the campus or return to it. Good-bye, Mister Davis, this meeting is ended."

A few days later, the President of Golden Gate called T. Thornton on the phone, "We received a letter from a lawyer who is representing Tom Davis, that hippie-looking character who you told me to fire. He says that they are going to sue the school for ten million dollars."

"What's that lawyer's name and how long is his letter?" asked T. Thornton.

"His name is L. Bertrand Noland and his letter is five pages long. "Why do you ask about the length of his letter?" replied the President.

"Simple, the longer the letter that a lawyer writes, the less sure that he is of his case," replied T. Thornton. "I'll handle this matter for you."

The thin folder in a red cover arrived from the research department within half an hour. T. Thornton read its contents. "L. Bertrand Noland, Attorney. Graduate of International Correspondence School of Law. Failed bar examination eleven times before passing. Small office upstairs over a meat market on 3rd Street. Rent \$300 per month, two months behind on rent. Represents mostly personal injury and slip-and-fall cases in department stores. Been in court twice, lost both times."

T. Thornton buzzed his secretary, "Get a lawyer by the name of L. Bertrand Noland on the phone, but keep him on hold for about five minutes before you buzz me."

The phone buzzed and he picked it up, "Noland, this is T. Thornton Taylor. I understand that you are representing a fellow by the name of Tom Davis in an action against Golden Gate College."

"Yes I am. Mister Davis is a crippled Viet Nam War hero with an impressive military record. The college violated his rights when they unjustly fired him, and I am going to see that he gets what he deserves," replied lawyer Noland.

"I see," said T. Thornton. "That's why I am calling you, to see if we can settle this case out of court and avoid a long and costly trial. Do you have any figure in mind?"

"I'll have to talk with my client, but I think that I can probably get him to agree to a quick, out of court settlement for somewhere around three million dollars."

"Tell you what, Noland. You tell your client that the college will pay him five thousand dollars for his trouble, plus another five hundred for your fee. I'll not have you clipping him for a third of his money for writing one insulting letter. If that isn't agreeable, then file your suit and I'll see you in court, which will be at least five years from now if it ever gets there. If the case should ever go before a judge, I'll be there to whip your ass nine ways to Sunday." He smiled as he hung up the phone, saying to himself, "Ten minutes is the longest that I will give him to call back."

Exactly seven minutes later, the phone rang, "How soon can we have our money?" asked lawyer L. Bertrand Noland.

T. Thornton buzzed his secretary, "Call the President of Golden Gate and tell him that I settled his ten million dollar lawsuit out of court for fifty-five hundred dollars. He is to write one check to Davis for five thousand dollars and another to his lawyer for five hundred. Then have our accounting department bill Golden Gate College for ten thousand dollars for my legal services," he said.

"What the hell," said Tom Davis. "Five thousand dollars is better than a poke in the eye with a sharp stick." He spent most of the money to buy a used pickup truck with an overhead camper mounted on it. He pointed the pickup southward on Interstate 5, saying, "I'm going to keep driving till I come to a place where the weather is warm, pot grows good, the Tequila is cheap and I can live on \$320 a month."

CHAPTER TWELVE

Betty Ann suggested that Joe Bob deposit at least five thousand dollars from the check he received from the LA Rams into their joint savings account with Fort Worth Savings and Loan. She had already been able to save nearly that same amount from her checks and this would put them a long way toward buying their own house. This was agreeable with Joe Bob because he was certain that he would be hearing from some team in the near future, with an offer which would make a mere five thousand dollars look like peanuts.

He drove down the local Chevrolet dealer in the pickup that Big Bob had bribed him with to go to TCU and drove home in one of their highest dollar, top of the line, everything on it, sport pickups. It was a fire engine red with a step-side sport bed, fuel injected 350 engine, four wheel drive, electric windows, Quad-speaker stereo, leather seats and just about everything else that the dealer could find in his parts department to hang on it. After the six thousand dollars that the dealer allowed him in trade on his old pickup, there was still almost twenty thousand dollars to be financed through GMAC. On the credit application, he gave his occupation as professional football player and the LA Rams as his employer even though he was no longer with them.

He had decided not to put any of his five grand into it, but to keep that as sort of walking-around pocket money until he signed with one of the NFL teams. Payments would run well over four hundred dollars a month, but what's a mere four hundred bucks to a big time, free agent professional football player.

As he drove toward home along Camp Bowie Boulevard in his new pickup, he had the strangest feeling that an off-the-floor pickup just didn't make the right kind of statement for a man in his position. On his right, he saw the answer, Billy Fred's 4X4 Shop. Chrome, chrome, and acres of chrome sparkled in the sun. Almost as if the pickup had a mind of its own, he pulled in.

"Howdy, Joe Bob Puckett is my name and football is my game. What can you do to dress up my new pickup a little?" he asked Billy Fred.

"Depends on how much cash you want to spend on it," replied Guru of 4X4 trucks. "I work on a cash basis only."

"I only got about five grand in folding money on me at this minute," replied Joe Bob. "Might as well start with that."

"Good," said Billy Fred as he picked up a stack of work orders with a glint of money in his eye. "For a man of your status, we got just about everything. First, we'll give it a jack-job and raise the body up off the frame about a foot, then we we'll slap on a set of super-wide mags with

raised-letter Goodrich Ground Grabber tires. Then you'll get double shocks all 'round plus steering dampers. While the accessory boys are up in the bed, installing a sliding rear window, sun roof and a double chrome roll bar with six flame thrower off-road lights, the mechanics will be down under it, bolting on headers, glass-packs and chrome side pipes. Headers and pipes will give you another thirty horses and make it beller like a bull when you get after it. 'Course you'll need a side step package with grab handles so those pretty little sweet things, who will be after you like flies when they see your rig, can climb all the way from the ground up into the cab. When they climb into the cab of one of my jack-jobs, they give everyone within a block a free shot of their panties, that is if they are wearing any."

Billy Fred was keeping a running total which was eating away at the five thousand dollars very rapidly. "Gotta have an electric winch and chrome brush guard in front of the chrome tube grill that we're gonna install and then there'll be steel skid plates under the engine, transmission and transfer case in case you want to get with it in the rocks. Might as well figure another couple wheels and tires as spares, along with brackets for mounting them under the roll bars," he continued. "I won't stand for no half-way jobs on this fine truck of yours, Joe Bob."

He hit the adding machine a few more times and said, "That will make you one great looking truck and it all comes to just five thousand, eight dollars and nineteen cents. What the hell, I'll round it off to an even five grand even and throw in a free chrome cowbell to hang under the front end."

"How about a rack across the back window for my guns?" asked Joe Bob, pulling out a large roll of hundred dollar bills.

"Chrome gun-racks usually go for twenty bucks, but for you, Sport, it's a freebie. That exactly burns your five grand. Here are the keys to my pickup which you can drive till yours is finished. It ought to be ready about noon tomorrow."

When he went down to register the new pickup, he wanted to get an ego tag for it. "JOE BOB" had already been issued to some lawyer up in Amarillo, so he settled for "OLD 77".

There is one other thing that every good old boy just has to have on his pickup: the right kind of bumper stickers on the tailgate. To a True-blue Texan with a pickup truck, bumper stickers are absolutely necessary to make the proper statement for him. In the same manner as a hippie would rather be caught dead than wearing a T-Shirt without something obnoxious or insulting printed on it, no genuine Good Old Boy Texan would venture forth in his pickup unless it gave everyone behind him a statement of his feelings and beliefs. The first bumper sticker that Joe Bob placed on the tailgate was one which proclaimed, "ANYONE CAN BE AN AMERICAN, BUT YOU HAVE TO BE BORN A TEXAN". Then there was a warning anyone who might consider ripping off some of the chrome, "THIS VEHICLE INSURED BY SMITH AND WESSON". With the two basics taken care of, Joe Bob could turn his talents to the finer things of life like, "GOD BLESS JOHN WAYNE" and "HONK IF YOU ARE HORNY". Finally, just to be poetic, he filled the remaining space with, "REAL COWGIRLS LIFT THEIR LEG WHEN THEY FART".

For the next three or four months, Joe Bob drove his pickup around Fort Worth, hopping and bouncing from one bump in the road to the next. Whenever he needed a few dollars in the way of spending money, he would run the drips out on Big Bob's lease and dump it off at Bubba Ray's U-Pump-It. All the time, he kept telling himself that the only reason why some team hadn't called with a big offer was because it wasn't football season yet.

One day, when he went by Bubba Ray's to pick up the money for the drip that he had dumped off the night before, Bubba told him, "There was a couple laws from the Texas Railroad Commission out here yesterday asking all sorts of questions, and a lot of them were about you.

They said that they were investigating illegal sales of untaxed gas and took samples from all my pumps. I can't take any more drip from you because they would hang my ass right along with yours if we got caught."

Joe Bob didn't think much about what Bubba Ray had said and started checking with several of the other independents out on the Jackboro Highway to see if they wanted to make a few easy bucks by mixing some drip with their regular gas. None of them were especially interested and a couple even told him to get his ass out of their station or they would call the law.

One day when Joe Bob came home, Betty Ann told him, "My kid sister, Jodie, is coming to live with us for a while. She is fourteen and just at that age when girls and their mothers fight all the time about everything. I told her that she could live with us for a few weeks till things cooled off at home."

Joe Bob hadn't seen Jodie since she was ten years old when he and Betty Ann got married. At that time, she was a skinny little thing with buck teeth and bony knees, but My-Oh-My, what those four years had done for her. She now wore a 36-D bra, when she did wear one, and had the kind of figure that stopped traffic, started fights and broke up happy homes.

One night, about a week after Jodie moved into their spare bedroom and Betty Ann had just left for her shift at the hospital, Jodie walked into the living room. She had just gotten out of the shower and was wearing nothing but two towels, one around her hair and the other around her body which she held more or less in place with one hand. Joe Bob was watching the Carson show on TV. The towel was far too small to cover her when she had been a skinny ten year old, much less do any sort of job hiding what she had now become.

Joe Bob did his best to ignore her by concentrating on the first guest on the show, but it was like trying to ignore a stampede when she walked between him and the TV set and said, "How do you like my towel?"

"I think there ought to be a little more of it," replied Joe Bob.

"Like the way that I fill it out?" she asked, pulling it tighter around her waist and turning around to give him a shot at where it failed to meet in the back.

"Jodie, I think that you'd better go to your room and put on a robe," he said.

"Chicken," she laughed as she let the towel drop and trail behind her as she swung her hips out of the room.

She returned in a few minutes, wearing a robe which clung to her body like glue and sat down beside him. She snuggled close and said, "I thought that you were a big macho football jock. Don't girls turn you on? What's the matter, are you queer or something?"

"No, I'm not queer and girls do turn me on," replied Joe Bob.

"Then what's wrong with me?" she pouted.

"It's not you, Jodie, it's the situation; I'm married to your sister and you are only fourteen years old."

"Fourteen year old girls get just as horny as women as old as Betty Ann, possibly even more so," she replied. "Besides, you could say that we would be just keeping it all in the family."

"Jodie, I'm not going to listen to any more of this. I'm going to bed."

"That sounds like the best idea that you've come up with yet, your bed or mine?" she asked.

"You in your bed and me in mine," replied Joe Bob who was having a most difficult time refusing such a tempting offer.

Joe Bob had barely snapped off the light in his bedroom when he heard the door open. A soft, warm naked figure slipped between the sheets and cuddled close to him. Her erect nipples pressed against his back as she nibbled at his ear. Then she lifted her leg over his body and began to

stroke him with the inside of her thigh.

"Oh Shit," he moaned. "As the old saying goes, a stiff cock has no conscience."

Three hours later, it occurred to him to set the alarm for six in the morning to be sure that he was awake and had Jodie back in her own bed long before Betty Ann got off work.

Jodie visited his bed almost every night during the next couple months with sexual demands which he never knew existed in a woman. Even though Jodie kept him physically whipped, he always made sure that he kept his regular three times a week lovemaking schedule with Betty Ann, lest she notice his loss of enthusiasm and suspect something. With Jodie in the house, the Wednesday mornings after Betty Ann got off work had to be moved to the weekends and her nights off.

One night, Betty Ann was mopping the kitchen floor before she left for work and Jodie came into the living room, dressed in cutoff blue jeans which were so short that it was obvious that she wore no panties under them. She was wearing a T-Shirt which was fully two sizes too small, and no bra on under it.

"Where do you think you're going?" asked Betty Ann, coldly.

"Down to the Ace Drive In," replied Jodie.

"In the first place, you aren't going anywhere near the Ace. That is where that bunch of drunken bikers called the Hairy Bastards hang out, and second, you aren't setting foot out of this house dressed like that," replied Betty Ann.

"Motorcycle riders are fun," said Jodie.

"Bikers are a bunch of thugs and junkies," replied Betty Ann. "I see them come into the hospital all the time, so stoned out of their heads that they don't even know that they've been shot or knifed."

Joe Bob tried to ignore the argument between the two sisters and concentrate on his favorite TV show, "The Fall Guy".

"Some of them are real nice guys, and what's wrong with the way that I'm dressed?" shouted Jodie. "Joe Bob, is there anything wrong with me going out like this?"

"Leave me out of this," he replied. "The way that you dress is between you and your sister, and she is the boss while you are living here."

"I thought that you liked the way that I dressed," she said.

Joe Bob knew better than to get involved any further in this discussion so continued to watch the TV.

"I can dress like this if I want to," shouted Jodie. "Boys like it because it's sexy and I like it too."

"No woman who thinks anything of herself or her reputation would be seen in public dressed like that, much less a fourteen year old child," said Betty Ann. "Now go to your room and change into something decent if you intend to set foot out of this house tonight."

"I may be fourteen, but I'm a hell of a lot more woman than you will ever be," shouted Jodie. "I've gotten Joe Bob up as many as four times in one night and I'll bet that you never did that."

"Oh Shit, here it comes," thought Joe Bob as he tried to sink deeper into the couch and disappear.

"What do you mean that you have gotten Joe Bob up four times in one night?" shouted Betty Ann.

"What the hell do you think that we do every night while you are emptying bedpans; play monopoly?"

Joe Bob had always heard that the worst possible woman in the world to have an affair with

was your sister-in-law. She and your wife are bound to get into a fight some day and the first thing she will do is tell your wife all about it. He ducked and headed for the door as the wet mop hit him over the head. A lamp crashed against the door as it slammed shut behind him.

Joe Bob stopped at a bar out on the Jacksboro Highway where the main entertainment, other than occasional fights with broken bottles, was mud wrestling and Wet T-Shirt contests. He had a few beers while he tried to think of some logical explanation that he could tell Betty Ann. He had so much on his mind that he couldn't even enjoy what was going on in the quagmire. When the place closed at two in the morning and he had to leave, he just mostly drove around Fort Worth and thought about the situation.

"Well, first," he decided, "I'll fix Betty Ann a good, big breakfast of Jimmy Dean Sausage, eggs and whomp biscuits and have it ready when she gets off work. That woman does love her Jimmy Dean. Every time that we have had a fight, good old Jimmy Dean has come to the rescue. Then, I'll tell her that I am only human and that a man can resist just so much, then I'll beg her to forgive me and that I'll never touch another woman as long as I live," he thought as he drove. "She'll probably send Jodie packing and cut me off for a week or so, but things should get better after a while."

It was getting gray in the east when he stopped by a Circle-K, picked up a pound of Jimmy Dean, a dozen eggs and a can of Pillsbury whomp biscuits.

When he turned the corner onto his street, he saw a car parked in front of his house. It was a dull green four door Plymouth Fury, no chrome, blackwall tires, small hubcaps and three radio antennas sticking out of the trunk lid. Even though it had regular Texas tags on it, the car was so obvious that they might as well have painted "COP" on either side in big letters. Skidding to a stop, he dropped the pickup into reverse and backed around the corner. Once out of sight of the house, he drove a block away and hid his truck behind some trees in a vacant lot.

Sneaking down the alley behind fences and bushes, he got close enough to the house to see that the police car was gone. Tapping softly on the back door, he whispered, "Jodie, you in there?"

She was dressed in a robe but wide awake when she came to the door. "That was a cop car out front, what did they want?" he asked.

"They were here after you," she said. "They were some sort of special state cops and had a warrant for your arrest. When I told them that you weren't here, they shoved me aside and came on in and searched the house anyway. They said something about you were wanted for selling gasoline or something like that."

"How about Betty Ann? How mad was she over what you told her?"

"She yelled at me for a while after you left and then she went to work. She called just before the cops came and told me to tell you that if you were here when she got home from work, she was going to have you arrested for statutory rape, that is if she didn't decide to cut your nuts out instead. She said something else that I didn't understand. She said that Jimmy Dean will never make enough sausage to get your ass out of this jam."

"Why in hell did you have to tell her about us for?" asked Joe Bob.

"Well, she wouldn't get off my case and made me mad and it just sort of slipped out," replied Jodie.

"Boy, am I deep shit," said Joe Bob.

"Yea, and besides all that, a guy from the finance company came by just after you left last night and said that you had till closing time today to get the three delinquent payments caught up on your pickup or they were going to repossess it."

It took Joe Bob only a few minutes to gather his clothes, camping gear, guns and guitar and

get them loaded into the pickup.

"Where are you going?" asked Jodie.

"Mexico, probably," replied Joe Bob. "I gotta get out of sight till things cool off."

"Take me with you," said Jodie.

"Not on your life," replied Joe Bob. "I'm already in enough trouble without hauling a minor across state lines."

"How about a little going-away piece before you leave?" asked Jodie. "We got time."

"Hell No! You and your hot pants have me in enough trouble already," replied Joe Bob.

"Please take me with you, Joe Bob. Betty Ann will probably make me go back home and I hate living with my bitchy mother."

Joe Bob just shook his head and walked to his pickup. He was gone a good half an hour before Betty Ann was due home from the hospital.

Realizing that every cop in the state would probably be looking for his ego tag, he drove by Bubba Ray's place where he knew several wrecked pickups were stored on the back lot. He pulled some current tags off one of them and put them on his pickup, tossing "OLD 77" under the seat. Then he waited around, staying out of sight, until the savings and loan place opened so he could get his money.

Joe Bob signed the withdrawal slip and stood there looking at the balance in the passbook; it was just over ten thousand dollars. Finally, he shrugged his shoulders, wrote in five thousand dollars and took it to the window. After the teller had counted out the money and entered the withdrawal in the passbook, he handed the book to the her and said, "Would you please mail this back to Mrs. Puckett."

Joe Bob Puckett pointed the custom grill of his pickup to the west, flipped on his Fuzzbuster, switched the CB to Channel 19, dropped a Willie Nelson tape into the stereo and leaned back to let the concrete of Interstate 20 roll by under his wheels. "Mexico, here I come."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"I'll bid two, no trump," said Rebecca.

"Two Clubs," said Pam, who sat to her left. Pam was divorced from her doctor-husband who had dumped her to marry his twenty year old receptionist. The cost of going through the change of wife for the horny doctor came to half of everything that he owned plus alimony to the tune of four thousand a month until one or the other died.

It was the regular Tuesday morning bridge game that took place in Rebecca Crenshaw's plush, North Chicago, 24th floor glass and chrome apartment. Rebecca had a corner apartment which provided a panoramic view which swept from Lake Michigan to the stark Sears Tower in downtown Chicago. Outside the protection of the floor to ceiling windows, a cold north wind drove whitecaps across the path of a freighter making its way northeastward to escape through the Straits of Mackinac.

"Pass," said Janet. She, like Rebecca, was a widow in her early forties because her husband had devoted far more time to his work as a stock broker than he did to the upkeep of his body and had died of a stroke.

"Three clubs," bid Sybil, who had married well three times and divorced even better the same number. All four of these women lived in the same apartment high-rise just off North Shore Drive. Some people referred to the place as "Little Fort Knox" because of its security and second, because it housed so many people of considerable wealth.

To enter the garage of the building required an electric garage door opener thing, however this would only open the first of two doors. As you entered the first, a laser scanner checked a small bar-code sticker in the lower left corner of the windshield. Any vehicle which did not have such a sticker was blocked by the second door until a security guard verified whether you belonged there or not. Even after a person got into the garage area, entry to the apartment area required a key and personal recognition by another security guard.

"Four hearts," bid Rebecca as she gazed out across the lake. "I heard that they had an early snow in Aspen and the skiing is good. I think that I'll fly out there for a week or so, might help my outlook on life."

"A week cuddled up with some big Swede Ski Instructor in front of a roaring fire would do wonders for my outlook on life and most everything else," said Pam.

"All that the men here in Chicago think about is work, work, work," said Sybil. "I'd like to meet a good looking Wyoming cowboy who had nothing to all day except poke cows and me."

"My idea of a really romantic setting is a warm beach with a handsome Latin man," replied Rebecca. "Someone like the star on the TV show, Fantasy Island."

"You mean Tattoo, the midget," laughed Janet.

"No, Ricardo Montalban," replied Rebecca.

"I'll agree with you about Montalban," said Sybil. "That man really blows my skirt up. What do you have to say about Latin lovers, Maria?" asked Sybil. "Are they all as good in bed as most people think?"

"I wouldn't know about that, Senora," blushed twenty-year-old Maria Ortiz, Rebecca's live-in maid, as she poured coffee for them. She had been with Rebecca since the day she moved into the apartment. They had been introduced by her brother, Emilio, who was one of the movers who had moved her furniture from the country house to the apartment.

"Come on, now," teased Sybil. "You're from Mexico aren't you. A pretty girl like you has bound to have been chased around the bed by a lot of young men."

"Actually, I'm from a small town in Baja, and I left there when I was sixteen. My Aduana never let me out of her sight when I talked to boys."

"Incidentally, Becky," said Janet. "It's been over a year since your husband died. Have you begun to go out yet?"

"Oh yes, I've been out a number of times," replied Rebecca. "The Potters have me over for dinner every month or so and I went shopping with Judith Goldblat last week."

"That's not the kind of going out that I mean and you know it," said Janet. "I mean going out with a man, and if things go right, coming back home with him."

"Oh, you mean dating," replied Rebecca. "No, I haven't had any offers and I don't know if I'm ready to accept one if it came along."

"It's about time that you did," said Sybil. "I never let being married interfere with my dating. In fact, it made it even better in some ways. If a guy began to get too serious, I could just tell him that I thought that my husband was getting suspicious and that usually cooled him off."

"Did any of your husbands ever suspect that you weren't always faithful?" asked Janet.

"I doubt it. They were usually content to have a couple drinks each night and go to sleep on the couch. They were just happy that I wasn't after them all the time."

Interest in the bridge game took a second place to the discussion of romance, sex and men; although not necessarily in that order. When the game broke up, and Maria was clearing away the cups, she said to Rebecca. "Senora Crenshaw, if you would like to meet a handsome Mexican man, I could introduce you to my uncle Fernando. He's not married and he is always as horny as a Macho Cabrio. How do you say it in English--a billygoat. Here is a picture of him with my family."

Maria handed her a black and white photo showing a family group on the steps of a church. There were two men, one woman holding a baby and two other children. "That is Uncle Fernando," said Maria, pointing to one of the men in the photo. He looked to be about forty years of age and Rebecca had to admit that he was very handsome.

"I'm flattered by your offer, but such a meeting is impossible. Your home is in Mexico and so far away," replied Rebecca.

"It's not too far from Tucson, and you have a sister living there, don't you?" said Maria.

"Yes, my sister, Eleanor, does live in Tucson. How far is it from there to where you live and what kind of a place is it?"

"I live in the town of Mulege on Baja and it is not very far. You can easily drive from Tucson to Guaymas in one day and then it takes one day for the ferry to cross the Sea of Cortez," replied Maria. "I found this picture of Los Cabos in a magazine. It is much further south in Baja, but

it will show you what Baja looks like."

The Los Cabos merchant's association, made up mostly of hotel owners, had contracted with an advertising agency to promote their area of Baja. The advertising agency came up with a full-page ad which featured the famed rock formation at Cabo San Lucas, over which an artist had airbrushed a nude woman lying half in and half out of the water.

Rebecca looked at the full-page color advertisement in the magazine. "Los Cabos, Where The Fun Never Sets," it proclaimed.

The more that Rebecca thought about Maria's Uncle Fernando, the better a trip to Baja sounded. A few days later, Rebecca casually asked, "Maria, how would you like to spend Christmas with your family in Baja?"

"Oh Senora Crenshaw, it would be so great to spend Feliz Navidad in Baja. I haven't seen Mama and Papa in four years."

"Good, let's start making plans for the trip right now. We will need to call the auto club for the road maps and Mexican insurance. First we will drive to Tucson to see Eleanor. After we visit with her for a few days, we can drive on to where you live and let you see your family."

"Senora Crenshaw, there is something that I must do before I can go and it will cost money which I do not have," said Maria. "I must have some papers so I can get back into the United States with you. My brother, Emilio, knows where to get them, but they cost fifty dollars."

"Fifty dollars is no problem, but what do you do with the money that I pay you? I've never seen you spend any of it."

"I send it to my family in Baja so they can send my younger brother to the university. Emilio also sends some, but it costs so much money; much more than Papa can make driving his taxi."

"Call Emilio and tell him to get you the papers that you will need and I'll pay for them," replied Rebecca.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Travis T. Taylor the Third could not come up with a single reason why someone as important and busy as his grandfather would want to have lunch with him, but when grandfather calls, you obey. They sat at a table in the restaurant at the Top of the Mark and made small talk for a few minutes. Travis had long since learned from his grandfather that it is always best to wait for the other person to deal the first card.

As casually as asking if Travis liked his broiled salmon, the elderly Taylor asked, "What did you think of the Patton girl who you met at dinner the other night?"

"OK, I suppose," he replied, taking care not to say anything uncomplimentary about his grandfather's guests, who were probably important clients of some sort.

"She's a well educated young lady and very wealthy. She owns Patton Shipyards, worth about fifty million dollars."

His grandfather was always one to rate people by how much money they were worth. "Too bad that she can't buy some good looks with all that money," replied Travis, throwing caution to the wind.

"I'll admit that she is no Betty Grable or Liz Taylor, but I suppose that those women were well before your time. But, as I have always said, looks aren't everything," replied the grandfather.

"I'll have to agree with you that those were both beautiful women, fully equal to some of today's beauties like Madonna or Vanna White," said Travis.

"Well, Travis, I'll get right down to the point. I'd consider it to be a personal favor to me if you would ask Daphnie Patton to go out with you a few times, just so the two of you get to know one another better. After all, a young man like yourself could do a lot worse financially than marry a girl like her. If you two did happen to get married, you'd probably become the President of Patton Shipyards in no time at all, and it's about time that you began to think about what you are going to do with your life."

During the next few months, Travis T. Taylor III and Daphnie Patton were seen together on a regular basis. They were seen at parties, which were usually planned by Geraldine Patton. Their photos were constantly in the social columns. Travis would get one of his friends, Ralph Evans, to team up with him to play Daphnie and Judy doubles in tennis. The girls would usually whip them soundly.

Travis and Ralph would take the girls swimming, where the girls would swim circles around them. "What a pair of damn jocks those two women are!" remarked Ralph one day. "I'll bet that

they wear leather bras."

Travis and Daphnie had never really discussed marriage, but just sort of went along with the flow when Geraldine Patton, who was usually referred to as General Patton, accidentally leaked news of their engagement to all the social editors in the city.

"You are really getting married?" asked Ralph.

"I suppose so, the social columns are full of it," answered Travis.

"I'll agree with you on one thing, the social columns are really full of it," replied Ralph. "But why are you getting married?"

Not wanting to go into the details, Travis replied, "I suppose for the same reasons why everyone else gets married. How about you and Judy, how are things coming along with you two?"

"We get along fine as friends, but she isn't my type and I'm certainly not hers." Travis didn't fully understand that last remark and simply shrugged it off.

No matter what Travis and Daphnie did, they seemed to never be able to be alone together. It was always Geraldine planning this or that or else Daphnie invited Judy and Ralph to come along with them any place that they went.

Travis finally decided that they simply had to get away from everyone and get to know one another, so he told her, "The Taylor Corporation has a condo up at Lake Tahoe. How about just you and me going there so we can be together and away from everyone else for a few days?" He didn't know about Daphnie, but he still had never had his first sexual encounter. This might be a good place for them to break the ice, so to speak, before they got married.

"Can Judy and Ralph come along?" asked Daphnie.

"Hell, no! They are one of the reasons why I want us to go to Tahoe. They are always around, especially Judy."

"Judy's my friend and if she can't come, then I won't go either," replied Daphnie.

Travis drove a Ferrari, Daphnie had a Porsche and Judy drove a Volvo, none of which had more than two seats, so they rented a sedan to drive to Lake Tahoe.

When they arrived at the condo, Travis carried his and Daphnie's bags into one bedroom and Judy's to the other. This was his subtle way of telling Daphnie that he expected her to spend the night with him.

"Why is my bag in your room?" she asked.

"After all, we are engaged and this seems like a good time and place for us to get better acquainted," he replied. Daphnie never said another word about the sleeping arrangements and they went out to dinner.

When they returned from the restaurant, Travis went into the bathroom first. When he returned to the bedroom, he was dressed in pajamas and a robe. "Your turn," he told her.

Daphnie was in the bathroom for no more than about thirty seconds before she returned, stark naked. She flopped down on the bed, spread her legs and said, "Go ahead and do what you brought me up here for and get it over with."

Travis stood beside the bed and stared at her for a few seconds. This was even worse than Doris in the back seat of the brown Dodge, except that Doris at least looked like a woman. Daphnie reminded him more of a skinny boy with no penis.

"What the hell, go sleep with Judy," he said. I couldn't make love to you now, even if I wanted to. The following morning, Travis caught a cab back to San Francisco, leaving Daphnie and Judy to drive home in the rented car.

Travis called his grandfather, "I think that we had better call the wedding off. Daphnie and I went to Lake Tahoe over the weekend and it was a total disaster. I don't love her and don't think that

I could ever bring myself to making love to her."

"You are both just timid and inexperienced," replied T. Thornton. "It is seldom ever magic the first time. You just have to give those things time to develop. Incidentally, my accountants tell me that you two kids should get married prior to the end of the year for tax reasons."

The date for the wedding was set for December 28th and Geraldine Patton launched her plan of action. She made lists and checklists. She set time schedules and arranged for the scores of people who would do the various things at the wedding. She even planned and made the reservations for their honeymoon trip to Acapulco. This was to be the masterpiece of all of her social events. Travis and Daphnie sort of rode along on the crest of the wave created by the General's forced march to the altar.

December 28th arrived and everything was right on schedule. General Patton moved her army of waiters, musicians, maids, aids and helpers back and forth, shifting them to the most strategic positions to prevent any possible breach of her plans.

The parking lot at the St. Thomas Episcopal Church was filled to overflowing, A long line of stretch limos with black windows and Cellular Phone antennas stood bumper to bumper, drivers casually wiping away any speck of dust as soon as it landed on their polished exteriors. Door handle to door handle in the parking lot sat row upon row of Rolls Royce and Mercedes sedans. Behind those were the Cadillacs and Lincoln Town Cars of the lesser wealthy of San Francisco. A TV station's remote van was parked on a side street, its generators humming softly.

The time was approaching, the organist was playing soft music. Travis Thornton Taylor III, dressed in the latest in formal wear, accompanied by his best man, Ralph Evans, emerged from an anteroom and walked to their places in front of the minister. They turned and stood looking toward the front of the church. The organist played the first few notes of the wedding march. When the door did not open, she waited a few more seconds and began to play again. Still no one appeared through the doors.

Suddenly the doors swung open and the organist launched into the wedding march for the third time; however, she stopped quickly when she realized Admiral Patton, wearing his full military dress uniform, was walking down the aisle alone. He strode to the altar and handed a folded piece of paper to Travis.

Travis opened the note which read, "Go fuck yourself, asshole. I don't love you and never will because I love Judy Clark."

"Your daughter certainly has a way with words," Travis whispered to the Admiral.

"You should have seen the first note that she wrote. I refused to deliver it until she cleaned it up," he replied.

"What's the matter," asked Ralph.

"Looks like there isn't going to be any wedding," Travis replied as they walked toward the back of the church.

The Admiral turned to the people gathered in the church and said, "I'm sorry but there will be no wedding. I want to apologize to and thank each of you for coming. I'll see that all gifts are returned by messenger."

"Daphnie's a damn Dyke, a Lesbian. She is as queer as a three dollar bill," Travis whispered. "What a hell of a time for her to decide to come out of the closet."

"Better now than after the wedding," was Ralph's only comment.

Geraldine Patton wailed like an Banshee and sprinted toward the front of the church, trying to save her masterpiece from destruction. It was too late. All that she saw was Judy's red Corvette, laying down twin stripes of smoking rubber, as it roared out of the parking lot. The bride's flowers

flew into the air as they disappeared around the corner.

"I had always thought that she and Judy were awfully close for some reason. It must be one hell of a life to be gay," said Travis.

"Oh, I don't know about that. I find that being gay has its advantages," replied Ralph as he squeezed Travis` arm and smiled.

"You too! Is the whole damn world queer?" said Travis, jerking away and heading toward the back exit of the church.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The auction wasn't scheduled to begin until 1:00PM, thus excluding the need for the sellers to furnish a noon meal for the bidders who had come to pick and strip the remains of the John Deere agency. No matter how bad the farming business gets, whenever there is a going out of business auction, there are always people looking for bargains among the ruins.

Ginger had completed two years at the university in Manhattan but with the failure of her father's business, the future didn't look all that good for her being able to return in the fall. When she arrived from school, Gary Matlock, her boyfriend through most of high school was waiting for her. He had gone to work for his father on their farm instead of going to college and had a whole different idea of what their future should be. He asked her to marry him the first night she was home, even had a ring and a date selected. Ginger had turned him down because while she wasn't sure of what she wanted to do, she knew that she certainly didn't want to become a farm wife trying to scratch out a living on 320 acres of dry farmland.

The Reverend John Harrison arrived at the Wilson house just after breakfast. He had come to explain his mission and to ask their permission for Ginger to accompany him as his assistant. "He's going to San Francisco and I have wanted to go there all my life," said Ginger. "This is a perfect opportunity for me to go."

The Wilsons concluded that, since he was a well-known minister and seemed to be sincere, they saw no reason why Ginger shouldn't go with him if she wanted to. After all, she was over the age of consent, knew what she wanted to do and there was certainly nothing to keep her in Noggley, Kansas.

The Reverend and Ginger drove out of town just as the auctioneer began his chant. Ginger fought the conflicting emotions of sadness and elation. She was excited at the thought of going to San Francisco yet tears welled in her eyes as she thought about leaving her parents and home. The Reverend was elated at having such a beautiful assistant to help him in his war against sin as he drove westward toward San Francisco, the city which he knew to be the sin capitol of the world. He felt that there was no place on earth which was more in need of his services. They hopped from one small Kansas town to the next, stamping out sin as they went.

With Ginger's assistance in handing out copies of his birth certificate to prove that he was born of an Immaculate Conception and passing the collection plate while he kept the audience captive, financially speaking, things began to look much better for the ministry. The main difference was that he could keep it all.

The Reverend decided that since he was dressed as a circuit riding preacher, Ginger needed an attire more in keeping with their war against sin and in line with her virginal beauty. When they stopped in the town of Ordway, Colorado to save souls and stamp out sin, he suggested that Ginger find a seamstress who could make a proper robe for her to wear during the services. Ginger found a lady who just happened to have some thin, white satin material left over after ordering too much for a wedding dress and agreed to design a robe for her.

It was also pure chance that the seamstress also fancied herself to be a designer equal to any who stitched gowns for the stars and set at the task with enthusiasm. She would drape the material over Ginger's shoulders, pull it tight at the waist and stick in a few pins. Finally satisfied with her design, she began to sew. When she was finished, the gown was biblical in design but styled in such a way that it clung to Ginger's perfect body like a coat of paint. It looked even better when worn without a bra or underwear.

The Reverend was interested only in the biblical aspects of the gown and completely failed to notice that Ginger now looked like a nightclub singer from the era when Moses was carving his admonishments in stone. Even though the Reverend didn't fully appreciate Ginger's new looks, the men in every town where they stopped did and the number of young men appearing at each sermon was astonishing. Collections soared and soon they not only had ample money for their basic needs, they were able to sock some away for a rainy day, should it ever come. The Reverend figured that the whole change had come about as a result of his rousing oratory.

One of the main problems which faced the ministry on its westward wanderings toward the sin capital of San Francisco was the approach of winter. Their outdoor appearances were beginning to suffer a considerable loss of enthusiasm which not even the sight of Ginger in the gown could improve. While the gown did great things for the people who came to gaze at Ginger, it was a total failure when it came to giving her any protection against the chilly breezes which held the silken dress so nicely against her nubile body.

After one particularly frigid outdoor service in the town of Cortez, Colorado, Ginger made a small suggestion to the Reverend, "I'm about to freeze my ass off running around in this damn gown," she told him. "I'm going to start wearing red long johns under it if we don't head for some place that's a lot warmer. I'm sure that there is just as much sin in warm places there is here in this damn icebox, probably even more."

While Ginger's language did shake him up a bit, what she said seemed like a reasonable suggestion to the Reverend, especially after he gave some thought as to what effect her wearing red long johns under the gown would have on the collection plate. Not only that, but it would certainly lessen Ginger's biblical image. Also, she was probably right about their finding as much sin to stamp out in warm places like Arizona as they would in cold Colorado. With quick turn to the left, San Francisco was forgotten and their sights were set on the alternate sin center of the world, Arizona. He had heard someone mention Sun City, Arizona and had thought that they said Sin City.

With a few quick stops to save some lost souls and stamp out a little sin in Farmington and Gallup, New Mexico, they crossed the Arizona border on Interstate 40. After a pause in Holbrook for one night of preaching in the park, and they made their way southward once more. When the Reverend and Ginger reached the town of Show Low, Arizona, they stopped by a small Baptist church to see if they could stage a revival to help the sagging attendance. The resident preacher thought that it was a good idea and the deacons approved it. Posters were printed and placed all over town, telling one and all that a true Child of God, the Reverend John Harrison, born by Immaculate Conception, would lead all the Baptists and other sinners of Show Low along the road to salvation at a revival meeting.

Even though the usual fee charged for an appearance by the Reverend while he was with the Immaculate Conception Ministry, was a flat 75% of the take, the Reverend decided to be generous and split the money which came in the collections plates, on a fifty-fifty basis with the church.

The church was packed each night for the whole week and twice on Sunday. The collection plate was heaped with green folding money each time that it returned to the hands of the preacher who took it to the back room where he and the lady who directed the choir counted it with a certain looks of pleasure and glee in their eyes.

"Are you keeping up with the collections as they come in?" asked Ginger when she noticed how much interest both the preacher and the choir director were showing in the money.

"The preacher is taking care of that," replied the Reverend.

"Shouldn't you be looking over his shoulder while he is counting it?" asked Ginger. "After all, half of it belongs to you."

"Are you suggesting that a Baptist minister, a fellow man of the cloth, needs to be watched?" asked the Reverend. "I find that suggestion to be almost a sacrilege."

On the following Monday morning, when the Reverend and Ginger stopped by the church to bid farewell and pick up their share of the contributions, they found that the preacher had taken all the money, deserted his wife and ran off to parts unknown with the choir director.

The deacons of the church, which included the sheriff and one of his deputies, claimed that the Reverend and Ginger had probably been in on the deal with the preacher all the time and told them to get out of town as fast as their van would take them if they didn't want to visit the county jail. Besides, they figured that there had to be some awful sinning going on in that van each night and they didn't want people like the Reverend and Ginger hanging around their town.

While filling the tank of the van with gasoline, the Reverend chanced to pick up a magazine which fell open to a travel advertisement for a place called Los Cabos. He glanced at it, "Los Cabos, Where The Fun Never Sets". Then he noticed the nude figure of a woman outlined within the rocks and came to an instant decision. If the fun never sets in this place called Los Cabos, then the sin probably never sets there either. That place was their new destiny. They had to take their ministry to Los Cabos, wherever that was.

Ginger couldn't have cared less whether they were going to Los Cabos, Las Vegas or Los Angeles, because she found the whole trip to be one big adventure and lots of fun. At any rate, she was just going along for the ride and the diversion that it offered from the boredom of life in Noglegley. She had never been more than a hundred miles from home before and this trip with the Reverend was a hoot. So what if she had to dress up in that sexy white robe and pass the collection plate around, it was easy work and she liked the way that the men looked at her. The only thing that she really missed was the fun that only a man could provide and the Reverend had never appeared to be even slightly interested in that sort of thing, not that she would have considered giving him a tumble in bed.

With maps in hand, they drove right through Tucson, where it was too hot and dry for very much sin anyway, and on to Nogales. Down Mexico Highway 15 they traveled until they were approaching the town of Guaymas. Just north of town is a village known as San Carlos, which was populated mostly by Americans who had bought land and built retirement and summer homes there.

The Reverend decided that Americans living in a pagan and decadent place like Mexico probably needed some spiritual guidance so he stopped to administer a good dose of religion and to stamp out whatever sin might be hanging around. They drew only a very small audience, mostly Mexican boys who didn't understand or care what the Reverend was talking about but just stopped to get a look at the wonders of Ginger in the white robe. Not a single American living in San Carlos

came to any of his meetings. It appeared that the only two things which they showed any interested in was fishing and drinking Cerveza Tecate.

While waiting for the time for them to board the ferry which would take them across the Sea of Cortez to Baja, the Reverend stopped by the local Catholic church and asked if he could hold a genuine, old-time, shouting and singing, Bible Belt Baptist revival in his church. The Priest told him that his congregation had no need for anything that the Baptist church had to offer and that he had better watch his step. While he might not come down with the dreaded Montezuma's Revenge, he would certainly suffer Father Juan Carlos Ferdinand's revenge if he tried to proselyte any of his members.

The Reverend and Ginger arrived at the ferry terminal early to be sure of getting aboard. The van was measured, they bought tickets and were told to park in a certain spot. When the time finally came for the van to be driven aboard for the trip to Santa Rosalia, they found that they were parked right behind a Cadillac Sedan bearing Illinois license plates and a Chicago dealer's logo.

Seeing the Cadillac with license plates from a city which the Reverend felt was only slightly less sinful than San Francisco, he approached the lady who was driving it and said, "Excuse me Madam. I see you are from Chicago and I would like to talk with you about sin."

She took one look at him and replied, "Get the hell away from me, you goofy old weirdo, or I'll call the Captain."

Ginger met Maria, who was traveling with the lady from Illinois, and they struck up an immediate friendship. They went to the lounge, but the Reverend refused to go with them because they served demon rum in there. In the lounge, they met two American students from the University of Texas who were on their way to a research project in Marine Biology at a place called Bahia de los Angeles. The two students invited them to their cabin, where they enjoyed a much more exciting and eventful trip across the Sea of Cortez than did either the Reverend or Rebecca Crenshaw, who were seated next to one another in the Tourist Section.

It was late in the afternoon when the ferry docked at Santa Rosalia to discharge its passengers and vehicles. Rebecca and Maria drove directly to Mulege, followed close behind by the Reverend and Ginger. Rebecca was bound for Maria's house while the Reverend was looking for a place to park the van for the night.

Rebecca, following Maria's directions, made her way along the narrow streets of Mulege until they came to a pleasant little house which faced out toward the river. There was a woman sweeping the street in front of the house when they arrived.

"Mama!" shouted Maria as she jumped from the car and ran to the house.

Maria's home!" shouted Mama as she ran to meet her. There was much hugging, kissing and crying, joined in by two younger girls who had come running from the house.

A boy about eighteen walked from the house and saw the shiny Cadillac parked in the street. Rubbing his hand over the sparkling chrome trim he said, "Man, Oh Man, what a low rider this would make. If I had a car like this, I could pick up all the Chucka Chucka in town."

"Manuel!" shouted Mama, as she swung at him with the broom. "How you talk in front of your sisters and the lady from Chicago."

Just then, an old Mexican man came stumbling around the corner of the house. His shirt was unbuttoned, his fly open and wearing only one shoe. His hair was long and shaggy, and he looked and smelled as if he hadn't bathed or shaved in a month. He was probably as horny as a goat, because he certainly smelled like one. Stumbling and falling into the street, he shouted, "Is this la Gringa from Estados Unidos who wants a good escrewing?"

"Pay no attention to Uncle Fernando," said Manuel. "He is mucho borracho. He's been

drunk ever since we got the letter from Maria saying that you were coming to meet him."

"Maria, when was that photo that you showed me taken?" whispered Rebecca.

"Almost twenty years ago, Senora, at my Christening," she replied.

"Have a nice Christmas with your family, Maria," said Rebecca. "Tell me how to get to the best hotel in town. I'll pick you up next Monday and we will celebrate the New Year in Los Cabos."

"Go back through town the way that we came in, turn left across the river and go about a mile. The Serenidad Hotel is on your left," replied Maria.

When she pulled into the parking lot of the hotel, she noticed the Reverend's van backed into one of the RV spaces. "At least I'll know someone who is staying here," she thought to herself. "That nice girl, Ginger, is here. I wonder how she ever came to be traveling with that strange old coot in the black suit and funny hat."

"You will be in the San Javier Room," said the man at the desk as he handed her a key. "And, I'll reserve a ticket for you to attend the pig roast this Saturday night?"

"What number is that room?" she asked.

"Our rooms do not have numbers, just names, Senora," he replied.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Joe Bob was nearing the town of Abilene when he overheard a conversation between two truckers on the CB.

"Breaker-Breaker One-Nine for the eastbound shit hauler in the red Peterbilt. You got the Big Stud shouting at ya. Got your ears on?"

"Shore nuff there, Big Stud. You got the Midnight Cowboy here. I ride 'um hard and put 'um away wet. I'm headed down Cowtown way with a double-decker load of steaks on the hoof, come on back."

"Yeah, I got you there Cowboy. I was jawin` with a Beaver Trucker back up at milepost three-ten and she said that there was a big road block down in Abilene town. What'cha know 'bout it, come on back."

"That's a big ten-four there Big Stud, you shore nuff got the true facts 'bout that. Whole passel o' bears and county-mounties all bunched up down there, but they ain't looking fur nothing with 18 wheels under it. They're a-laying low fur a red pickum up truck, come on back."

"A jacked-up red pickum up truck with big rollers under it passed me west bound a couple miles back, wonder if he's got his ears on. You in there good buddy?"

Joe Bob picked up the microphone and pressed the button, "I hear you talkin' there Big Stud. Any way I can get 'round Abilene town? Come on."

"Breaker-Breaker One-Nine. This here is the Midnight Cowboy back at ya. Sho nuff there is way 'round Abilene town. I know all the back roads and ways to miss the scales 'round these parts. Whip yourself off at the Clyde exit, take six-oh-four south to Oplin and then work your way over to Bradshaw. Keep a hooking back and forth on the farm to market and you'll finally come back to the double lanes at Roscoe. Got all that, good buddy? Come on."

"That's a big ten-four there Cowboy. Thanks for the come back. Sorry I can't toss out my handle on the air. Big ears are always listening, you know."

"Damn," said Joe Bob to himself as he dropped the microphone back on its hook. He had just passed the Clyde exit, so he cut across the median, sending up a storm of dust and tumble weeds, and headed back east to get off the Interstate. "The cops must want me real bad to have road blocks this far from Fort Worth. You'd think that I had committed murder or something instead of just selling a little drip gasoline." Little did he realize that there had been a holdup at a liquor store in Abilene and the police were looking for the gunman who escaped in a ratty old red Ford pickup.

"Bradshaw! I can hole up at Big Bob's place for a few days till the heat is off," thought Joe

Bob as roared south on the narrow Farm to Market road. "I'll just tell him that I wanted to visit with him for old times sake."

Big Bob wasn't at the ranch but the hired help let Joe Bob in and treated him like long lost kin folk. He stayed at the ranch for close to a week before he decided that it might be safe to venture out. Even though he had been out of sight for a week, he felt that it would be a good idea to stay off Interstate 20 by sticking to the least traveled side roads that he could find as he traveled westward.

Joe Bob had intended to enter Mexico at El Paso, but changed his mind when he realized that he would have to show his drivers license and vehicle registration in order to get his pickup across the border. If he was wanted badly enough for the State Patrol to set up road blocks for him, the Border Patrol would certainly be looking for him too. It wouldn't be any better trying to get into Mexico at Douglas, Nogales or Yuma, Arizona either.

While Joe Bob was laying around the ranch, he picked up a magazine with an advertisement about a place called Los Cabos, located at the south tip of Baja. He asked the Mexican cook about the place and was told that Baja was still considered to be a territory of Mexico and one could go in and out of there without having to get anything more than a tourist card at the border. This was the ideal place for Joe Bob to hide out from the law.

When Joe Bob left Big Bob's place, he decided that he should still keep out of sight as much as possible. He could imagine that every motel clerk had a picture of him and would call the cops the instant that he checked in. He camped out the first night in a National Forest near the town of Cloudcroft, New Mexico and the second night in the desert near Gila Bend, Arizona. Because he was traveling only on side roads, the trip was taking much longer than it would have had he followed the Interstate, but he was a wanted man and on the run, or so he thought.

On the third night after leaving Big Bob's place, he felt that it would be safe for him to find an obscure little motel where he could get a bath and a good night's sleep. He remembered all the old movies in which a person on the run would go into some sleazy little motel, register under the name of John Smith and pass a twenty to the clerk to forget that he had ever seen them.

In his continuing effort to stay off the Interstate, he was now driving along California Highway 94 which ran parallel to the border. His destination was the crossing at the town of Tecate, where he planned to enter Baja. He had heard that it was a small crossing with very little traffic, so he would probably be able to cross there and never be noticed. Darkness overtook him before he reached Tecate, so he began to search for a place to spend the night.

"EATS" the neon sign flashed and below it was a faded sign which read, "Herb's Motel, Rooms \$9.00". It had obviously been built back during the days when motels were called Tourist Courts because each small room was separated from the next by a narrow garage. This was just the sort of place where a man on the run could safely hide out for a night without being noticed. In the true form of a fugitive, he registered under the name of John Smith.

Herb's wife, who registered him, looked at the card and said, "You will be in room six, Mr. Smith. Don't suppose that you are any kin to the other three John Smiths that we have registered?"

Since the garages weren't tall enough to allow him to get his jacked-up pickup inside, he pulled it out of sight behind the building. After a quick meal in the restaurant, he headed for his \$9.00 room. The tiny black and white TV received only one snowy channel and no amount of messing with the vertical hold would stop the picture from rolling, so he took a shower and went to bed.

Joe Bob got up the next morning, dressed and walked to the restaurant for breakfast. Parked side by side in front of the building sat a row of eight big Harley choppers. They had low-slung seats, long forks, skinny front tires and Ape Hanger handlebars. A puddle of oil was forming on the

ground beneath the front chain guard of each one of them. Joe Bob walked into the restaurant and sat down at the counter.

Without being asked, the waitress placed a menu, glass of water and a steaming cup of coffee on the counter in front of him and went to take orders from the eight bikers who were occupying two tables at the front of the restaurant.

Joe Bob had seen some really scroungy bikers in his day, but this bunch was a cut below the worst. Lettering stitched on the backs of their leather jackets informed everyone that they were members of the Mother Rapers Motorcycle Club of San Diego.

"Gimme a sixteen ounce rare T-Bone, three eggs over easy, hashbrowns and toast," said one who had "Mother" tattooed across his bare chest.

"Same thing for me," said one with the name "GOON" stitched into his leather jacket.

"That goes for me too," said Spike, as he slipping a dirty hand between the her legs and slid it toward her crotch. She deftly stepped away from him without missing a word on her pad.

She took the rest of the orders, all of which were for steaks and eggs with the only difference being how they wanted them cooked and how they wanted their eggs.

The waitress stepped to the window which opened into the kitchen and shouted, "Ordering, eight steak and eggs. 16 ounce T- Bones with three eggs and side of hashbrowns. Make four rare, three medium and one well done. Over easy on all the eggs except the well done and wreck those."

She turned to Joe Bob and asked, "What'll you have there, Sport?"

"Sausage and over easy with biscuits and gravy," replied Joe Bob.

"It'll be a few minutes, Herb has the grill full of steaks right now," she told him as she wrote down the order.

"Nice tits," Joe Bob thought to himself. There was something strangely familiar about the waitress and he kept trying to remember where he might have seen her before. Nothing came to him immediately and his train of thought was derailed by the arrival of the biker's orders.

"Pick 'em up," shouted Herb from the kitchen as he handed eight platters through the window. Then he looked at Joe Bob and said, "Your order will be right out, sorry for the delay."

"No problem," replied Joe Bob.

The waitress poured another round of coffee for the bikers, fended off Spike who made a grab for her tits and refilled Joe Bob's cup. While Joe Bob sipped his coffee, she began to refill the big urn. She had to stand on tiptoe in order to reach the top of the urn and as she did so, her starched white uniform rode up so high that Joe Bob could see the lace around the legs of her pink panties. "Nice ass too," he observed silently.

"Pick it up LuAnn," shouted Herb at he set Joe Bob's sausage and eggs in the window.

The pinball machine of Joe Bob's memory began to blink. The ball, which had been bouncing back and forth between nice tits and nice ass, was sent flying back to the top by the flipper called LuAnn. Then the ball bounced against the Fort Worth bumper, sideswiped the Paschal peg and dropped into the hole of recognition. The lights in his brain lit up, bells rang and he shouted, "LuAnn! You're LuAnn Poovey!"

She whirled around and stared at Joe Bob, saying, "I haven't used that name since high school. Where in hell do you know me from?"

"I'm Joe Bob Puckett. I sat right behind you at Paschal High in Fort Worth," he said. "You were the head cheer leader and I played Right Defensive Tackle."

"Now I remember you," she replied. "You're the jerk who patted me on the ass in English class and I threatened to kick you in the balls."

"I suppose that I had a good kick coming for that," replied Joe Bob. "But I just couldn't resist

the temptation."

LuAnn and Joe Bob talked about old times at Paschal High while the bikers cursed, slurped, belched, farted and gulped down their breakfasts. When they finished eating and LuAnn took their checks to them, they took one look at the total and the one named Goon stood up and said, "I didn't like the food and I ain't paying for none of it."

"Me neither," said Spike. "My steak was runny and the eggs were too tough."

"We ain't none of us paying for nothing," added the scrawny little creep who was wearing a German helmet, as they headed for the door.

"Come back here and pay your checks, you cheap bastards," shouted LuAnn.

The bikers straddled their Harleys and kicked life into the engines. Belching smoke and noise, they sent a shower of gravel pounding against the windows as they dug out toward the pavement. As they roared away, they gave the old middle-finger salute.

"That eighty bucks is coming out of your pay," shouted Herb who had just come running out of the kitchen with a long butcher's knife in his hand. "You know my rules, Luann. The waitress pays any check that she lets get away."

"Look Herb," said Joe Bob. "It wasn't LuAnn's fault and it's not really fair to make her pay for them. Those guys didn't intend to pay the check when they came in."

"Who pulled your chain, fellow? This is between me and her and you stay the hell out of it," replied Herb, waving the knife.

"You have just enough money coming to cover that check." Herb told LuAnn. "I've been planning to fire you anyway, so get your stuff out of that room you been staying in and hit the road."

"Come on, Joe Bob," said LuAnn. "I've been planning to blow this joint anyway. He's a real asshole to work for."

"How did you wind up in a place like this?" asked Joe Bob as they walked toward their rooms.

"I just recently learned that when my grandmother died, she left me a trust fund which is worth nearly twenty thousand dollars. I get it when I'm twenty-five years old, which isn't too far from now."

"I still don't see what that has to do with your being here," said Joe Bob.

"Well, I married Brad Hartley as soon as we got out of high school. I wanted to go to college too but I had to stay home and work while he went off to SMU to play football and screw around. He promised me that I could go to college as soon as he was drafted by the pros but that never happened. When he got passed over in the draft, he just came back home and turned into a bum. He would come and go whenever he felt like it but I just never bothered to get a divorce, thinking that he might straighten up some day. When he heard that I would be getting all that money, he came running back, saying that since we were still married, half of it would belong to him. I decided that it was time for me to shuck him, so I headed out to San Diego to stay with my sister and get a Mexican divorce before the money came through. My old Pinto blew its engine right in front of this place so I went to work for Herb for two bucks an hour plus tips. I already have my bags packed and planned to leave as soon as I got my money today, but those bikers took care of that."

"Well, just toss your things into my pickup and I'll take you to San Diego," replied Joe Bob. "That's the least that I could do for someone that I went to high school with. Come to think of it, I'm headed for Baja to get a divorce too, so why don't you just come along with me and maybe we can get a discount if we take two at one time."

"Might as well," said LuAnn. "I wasn't really looking forward to staying with my sister and her four screaming brats. Only problem is that forty bucks in tip money is all that I have to my

name."

"No problem," said Joe Bob. "I got enough to take care of both of us for several months.

Joe Bob and LuAnn pulled out on Highway 94 and headed west. They had driven only a few miles when Joe Bob said, "Well, will you look up ahead at what I see. That bunch of bikers has stopped to take a leak." He pulled his 12 Gauge pump shotgun down from the gun rack across the rear window and asked, "Can you use a rifle?"

"My daddy used to take me deer hunting with him all the time when I was a kid. I can shoot a rifle with the best of them," replied LuAnn.

"Good, you take the 30-30 Winchester and pile out of the right side as soon as I stop. With eight of those bikers, I'll need all the help that I can get."

The red pickup slid to a stop in a cloud of dust. Joe Bob, leaped from the driver's seat with the shotgun pointed at the bikers while LuAnn slid to the ground on the other side, armed with the Lever Action Winchester.

The bikers, who were all standing in the ditch and taking leaks, looked around, face to face with two guns. Joe Bob yelled, "You boys just keep hanging on to your dicks and turn around real slow. If I see one cock without a hand wrapped around it, I'll blow the damn thing off."

"What the hell do you want?" asked Goon.

"You fellers not only ran out on your checks and this pretty little lady here had to pay them for you, but you also forgot to leave her a tip. I'm just going to help you set things right."

"What do you think you're going to do, hold us here till the cops come along?" asked the one wearing the German helmet. "It'll just be our word against you and that bitch there, and since there are eight of us, the cops will believe us and let us go."

"You know what," said Joe Bob. "You ain't too awfully smart calling a lady who is pointing a 30-30 at your balls a bitch. She might just get so mad that she would shoot them off just for the fun of it."

"Better do what the bastard says," said Spike.

"Goon, you look like a mechanic. Just keep hanging on to that puny little cock of yours with one hand and use the other one to unscrew the valve cores and let the air out of the front tires on all your bikes."

"You ain't going to get away with this," said the one with the tattoos. "We got some mean friends in San Diego and when we tell them about what you did to us, they are going to come looking for you and the whole state of Texas won't be big enough for you to hide in."

By this time, each of the front tires on the choppers was spewing air and going flat. Joe Bob told them, "OK, one at a time, come up to the first hog and lay a couple twenty dollar bills on the seat, then back off. That ought to cover your check plus a nice tip for this little lady."

One by one they did as they were told with Goon being the last. He pulled a huge roll of bills from his pocket and while he was trying to hold the money in his free hand and get the rubber band off with his teeth, Joe Bob told him. "You look like a big tipper to me, Goon. So you just lay that whole roll down on the seat and back off."

"There's nearly four grand in there, you Texas bastard," he shouted. "That's our drug money and we'll get your ass for this."

"OK honey, watch them real close and go over and pick up your tips," said Joe Bob.

When LuAnn had collected the money and returned to the pickup, Joe Bob said, "OK, you worthless bastards keep hanging onto your cocks and start running out across the desert. If you run fast enough, you might be out of range and not get an ass full of buckshot when I empty this shotgun in your direction."

The bikers took off at a dead run while Joe Bob and LuAnn jumped into the pickup and roared away.

"There is the road to Tecate," said LuAnn.

"And none to soon," replied Joe Bob. "I got a feeling that when those bikers get their flats fixed, they are going to be looking for us with blood in their eyes."

"Think that they will follow us into Baja?" asked LuAnn.

"They will probably think that we are headed for San Diego and look for us there," replied Joe Bob.

"Bienvenidos Amigos," shouted the guard as he waved them through.

Twenty miles past Tecate, they came to the immigration check point where they stopped to get their tourist cards. "Do we need passports or anything like that?" asked LuAnn as they filled out the small, hello forms. "All I have is my driver's license as identification."

"I got about the only identification we will need and it has old Andy Jackson's picture on it." said Joe Bob as he took the two forms to the desk with the end of a twenty showing between them. Without the slightest hesitation, the man at the desk slid the twenty into a drawer as he reached for a rubber stamp to authenticate the tourist cards. Then he shoved them back across the desk, flashing a big smile that framed a gold tooth.

"I think that I'll get us a little insurance just in case those bikers do come this way looking for us," said Joe Bob. He turned to the man who had approved their tourist cards and told him, "We were in a bar just across the border from Tecate and heard about eight bikers talking about coming into Tecate to rob a bank and then escape back across the border." Joe Bob gave a full description of the bikers, as the man took careful notes.

"Gracias Amigo," replied the man. "I will call the Federalies and they will be waiting for these men if they come into Mexico."

Joe Bob and LuAnn made good time as they drove over the mountains to Ensenada and then southward, reaching the town of Mulege late the following day.

"Where is a good hotel?" Joe Bob asked the attendant at the Pemex who was filling their tank with gasoline.

"The Serenidad is very good, Senior," replied the attendant. "About three kilometers past the bridge and on the left."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The man who roasts the pig for the Saturday night barbecue at the Serenidad Hotel struck a match to the little pile of twigs under the mesquite logs stacked neatly in the cooker. It was only about noon but it takes several hours for the wood to burn down to the nice bed of glowing coals which gives the meat its special flavor and tenderness. In the meantime, he secured a whole pig to the spit which he would place over the coals at two in the afternoon. When the cooking began, he would tend the fire and turn the pig without stopping for the next six hours. He gladly accepted Joe Bob's offer of a cold beer, because even though it was December, the weather is always warm in Mulege and cooking the pig was hot work.

People would wander past, stopping to sniff the aroma of the burning mesquite and roasting pig. Waiters were busy arranging the tables under the palapa to accommodate the sold-out crowd for the feast. Each table was numbered and tickets were limited to exactly the number of chairs available. The blender in the bar was spinning in overdrive as it whipped out one Margarita after another for the thirsty crowd. They have three sizes of Margarita at the Serenidad; Chica, Grande and Mucho Macho. Few people can walk after more than a couple Mucho Machos.

A constant flow of airplanes appeared from the north, circled and landed on the hotel's private strip. They were able to taxi up and park right in front of their rooms. Most of the pilots had flown four hundred air miles from Southern California mainly to attend the Saturday night pig roast.

It was still half an hour before serving was to begin at eight but people were already moving into position to be at the head of the line. Most everyone had a drink in their hands and happy conversation flowed up and down the line. The first plate was filled at the stroke of eight and the line moved quickly past the long table loaded with all sorts of traditional Mexican foods. The servers at the Serenidad were most efficient and within ten minutes, all one hundred thirty people had filled their plates and found their seats at the proper tables.

"Howdy, Joe Bob Puckett's the name and football is my game," said Joe Bob as he began the introductions around the table. "You may have heard of me, I played for Dallas, the Jets and the Rams. Right now, I'm a free agent and just waiting to see which team comes up with the best offer. Me and this little lady come from Fort Worth, Texas. She was the prettiest cheerleader that Paschal High ever had."

"My name is LuAnn Poovey," said the pretty blonde seated beside him.

"I'm Rebecca Crenshaw and I come from Chicago," said the rather attractive lady who looked to be around forty years of age.

"My name is Ginger Wilson and I come from a town in Kansas so small that you probably never heard of it."

"You're the young lady traveling with that strange man dressed in black, aren't you? Where is he tonight?" Rebecca asked Ginger.

"You mean the Reverend?" said Ginger. "Yes, I'm traveling with him but he refuses to set foot in any place where they serve liquor. He's having a can of sardines or something to eat out in the van."

"You mean that he's a preacher?" asked Rebecca. "I thought he was some kind of coot."

"You're pretty close," replied Ginger. "He does have some rather strange ideas, especially when it comes to what all he considers to be sin."

"He sure is missing some good eating here," said Joe Bob as he attacked the ribs stacked like cordwood on his plate.

"Just what do you do with the Reverend?" asked Rebecca. "Are you his daughter or something?"

"No, I just travel with him and help him when he preaches. He claims that he is a Child of God and was born from an Immaculate Conception."

"Do you believe that he was?" asked Rebecca.

"Well, he has a birth certificate that says that he was, but you never know about those things."

"He came up to me on the ferry and said that he wanted to talk to me about sin. I thought that he was either crazy or some sort of dirty old man so I told him to go to Hell."

Maria Ortiz is with you, isn't she? We met on the ferry and I like her. Where is she tonight," asked Ginger.

"Her family lives here in Mulege and she's spending Christmas with them," replied Rebecca.

"I'm going back for seconds," said Joe Bob, who had polished off his first plate. "This is mighty good eating."

While they were eating, a small group of musicians began to wander among the tables, stopping for a moment to play for each group of people. Their instruments consisted of a violin, two horns, a mandolin and a huge, doghouse guitar. There was also an electric lap guitar but since he was plugged into an amplifier, he had to stay seated. The violinist looked like a caricature of Don Quixote while the one with the guitar looked like his sidekick, Sancho Panza.

Rebecca especially noticed the mandolin player. He was around her age, had jet black hair, a pencil-thin moustache and the deepest brown eyes she had ever seen. He was dressed in a skin-tight suit that reminded her of the suits of lights she had seen bull fighters wearing when she and her late husband had visited Spain, except that it didn't have all the decoration.

When the musicians approached the table where Joe Bob and the three women were sitting, the mandolin player said something in Spanish to the other musicians and they began to play a beautiful Mexican love song. He gazed deep into Rebecca's eyes and began to sing. While she didn't understand a word that he was saying, it was obvious to her and everyone else that it was a love song and he was singing it just for her. The musicians didn't leave their table until he had finished the song.

"Well peaches, peaches, shake my tree. Looks like you found yourself a real Latin lover there, Miz Becky." whispered Joe Bob after they moved to another table.

"Is he ever good looking," said Ginger. "I'd have absolutely melted if he had been singing to me like that."

"He could park his boots under my bed any old time that he wants to," said LuAnn. "If I

ever heard a let's-go-jump-in-bed song before, that was it."

"Slip him your room number," said Ginger. "Something with a cute butt like that doesn't come along every night."

"Will all of you stop talking like that," said Rebecca. "You're making me blush."

"Use it or lose it. That's my philosophy," said Joe Bob as he licked the barbeque sauce from his fingers.

In all her life, Rebecca had never given any thought to whether men had cute butts or not but for some reason, she had trouble keeping her thoughts and eyes from wandering to the way he filled out those tight pants.

After the meal was finished, everyone went into the lounge where the musicians began playing on a dais behind a small dance floor. After the band had played and sang a few numbers, the mandolin player laid down his instrument and came to their table. The band began to play slow, romantic music. He bowed to Rebecca and asked in halting English, "Beautiful Senora, please to dance with me, por favor?"

"Here's your chance," said LuAnn.

"Go for it!" urged Ginger.

He was an excellent dancer and held Rebecca close as he guided her across the floor. When the music stopped and he escorted her back to the table, her face was flushed and she was breathing hard.

"I'm all out of breath," she said.

"I got out of breath just watching," said LuAnn.

"Did you give him your room number?" asked Ginger.

"Of course I didn't," replied Rebecca. "What kind of woman do you think that I am?"

"Well, for one thing. I think that you are one hell of a good looking woman who has a chance to get lucky and have a lot of fun tonight if you will just let it happen," said Joe Bob.

"I've never done anything like that in my life and wouldn't know how to go about it," said Rebecca.

"Getting him to your room or what to do after he is there?" teased LuAnn.

"I couldn't just go up to a strange man and ask him if he would like to come to my room. Suppose he said no, I'd be mortified."

"After the way that he held you and looked into your eyes while you were dancing, wild horses couldn't keep him away if you give him half a chance," said LuAnn. "I half expected him to drag you right off the dance floor."

"All you have to do is write the name of your room on a cocktail napkin and hand it to him with a nice smile when you leave. I'm sure he'll know what to do after that," said Joe Bob.

Rebecca really liked the way that his muscular chest filled the fancy jacket that he was wearing, then she noticed his silver belt buckle. It was a work of art, hand carved and fitted with large turquoise stones. When she let her eyes drop a bit more, she became very much aware of the nice way that he filled out the front of his tight pants. She remembered how firm that bulge had felt when it pressed against her while they were dancing. Her breasts tingled and she felt a warm wet sensation between her legs, something that hadn't happened to her in years. Suddenly she became aware that she was actually staring at a man's crotch and having erotic fantasies about what it would take to fill pants out like that. She darted her eyes away and felt her face flush.

The musicians stopped playing at midnight and began to put their instruments away in their cases.

"Now's the time," urged Ginger as she took a pen from her purse, laid it on top of a cocktail

napkin and slid it across the table.

Rebecca sat there looking at the napkin for a considerable length of time before she finally picked up the pen and wrote "San Javier" on it.

"Good, now fold it once, walk over to him, look him straight in the eyes, smile and say that you really liked his music. Put the note in his hand without looking at it and go directly to your room," said Joe Bob.

"You seem to know a lot about staging a seduction," said LuAnn. "Have you had lots of practice?"

"Just enough to know what a man likes," replied Joe Bob.

Rebecca walked up to the mandolin player, smiled sweetly and slipped the folded note into his hand, saying, "I loved your music." As she walked toward the door, the man with the electric guitar picked out "La Cucaracha" one note at a time while the one with the doghouse guitar kept cadence with her every step by thumping on it. In a moment of wild abandon, she swung her hips seductively, looked over her shoulder at the mandolin player and smiled.

Rebecca walked quickly to her room, changed into the slinkiest nightgown that she had with her and slipped into a robe. Just as she finished changing, a soft tapping came at her door.

"What am I doing?" she asked herself. "Why did I ever let those kids talk me into this?"

She had invited the man to her room, so it would be rude not to let him in. She could always change her mind and ask him to leave. Rebecca opened the door and there stood the musician, holding two glasses and a cold bottle of champagne. "Come in," she said with a smile.

He set the glasses on the table, popped the cork on the champagne, poured the two glasses full and handed one to her. He raised his glass to hers and said, "Salute" then drank half of it in one swallow.

His tight jacket must have had fifty small buttons down the front because it seemed to Rebecca that it took him forever to unbutton all of them. He slipped out of his jacket, folded it neatly and laid it across the back of a chair. This seemed to be the proper time for Rebecca to take off her robe, so she let it slip slowly from her shoulders and drop seductively to the floor. She turned the sheet back and sat on the edge of the bed.

He turned his back to her, dropped his trousers and underwear to his knees and sat down beside her. Then he laid her back on the bed, gave her a quick kiss, lifted her nightgown and spread her legs. A few quick thrusts and it was over. His heavy breathing in her face smelled of beer and cigarettes.

While Rebecca's anticipation had created a considerable amount of enthusiasm, she had expected at least some foreplay before they had sex. Between her trepidation and the speed with which it was over, she not only didn't have an orgasm; she failed to find any pleasure at all in the encounter.

He pulled up his pants, picked up his jacket and started for the door.

"Where are you going in such a hurry?" she asked, hoping that there would be more to the night than what had just happened.

He picked up his glass, gulped the remainder of champagne and replied, "La esposa espera."

Rebecca didn't understand what he had said and was in a quandary as to why the man had departed so rapidly. "Didn't I satisfy him or what?" she asked herself. She had to remember what he had said so she could ask Maria what it meant. But then, it might be something so personal that Maria would be shocked. Rebecca gave a considerable amount of thought to what had happened and decided that she must ask Maria, no matter how embarrassing it might be.

She took a shower to get his smell off her then lay in the darkness thinking about her first

attempt at a romantic encounter with a sexy Latin lover and decided that she had grossly overestimated what it would be like. In fact, the whole episode had been rather degrading, he hadn't even taken his boots off. "I suppose the only thing that could have made it more demeaning would be if he had left a twenty on the dresser," she mused as she drifted off to sleep.

It was barely sunrise when Rebecca was awakened by the sound of an airplane engine starting outside her window. She listened to it taxi away, then roar past a few minutes later as it took off. She could hear the voices of people outside her window and decided that there was no way she would be able to get any more sleep so she dressed and went to the restaurant. A man sweeping the floor said it wouldn't open until eight. She walked to the end of the runway then back along the river past a row of small adobe houses until she came to a man and two women trying to push a boat across the sandy beach and into the water. She didn't know why she did it but it just seemed like the right thing to do. She kicked off her sandals and helped them shove the boat into the water.

The man hopped aboard as the boat began to float and pulled on the starting rope. The engine coughed and came to life, belching a cloud of blue smoke and showering them with muddy water. "Muchas Gracias," he shouted as he pulled away from the shore.

When Rebecca paid her bill on Monday morning she noticed that the bottle of champagne had been added to it. Then she drove to Maria's house to pick her up. As they drove away, Rebecca asked, "Did you have a nice Christmas?"

"Oh, Si Senora Crenshaw. It was the very best Christmas in all my life. I thank you so much for bringing me," replied Maria. "And Mama says Muchas Gracias for the gifts that you brought to her."

As they drove along the highway leading southward from Mulege, Rebecca finally asked Maria, "Could you tell me in English what La esposa espera, means."

Maria looked at her and replied, "The wife is waiting. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, it was just something that heard someone say last night and was wondering what it meant."

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The winch on the truck began to grind slowly as it lifted the heavy diesel engine upward from the hold of the boat. When it swung high in the air, the truck pulled forward and deposited its load onto the ground. Carlos Garza stared into the vacant space which had held the diesel engine. The next task was to fit the much smaller engine from the pickup truck onto the mounts which had supported the diesel. Installing the pickup engine would take several days of precious time as the Marlin were already running and rich gringos were flocking to Los Cabos. Carlos needed to earn some of the money which they were willing to spend in search of a trophy fish to hang on the wall of their den. Carlos needed that money to buy repair parts for the diesel.

Carlos and Luis worked from dawn to dark as they formed the hardwood mounts, installed them in the boat and bolted the pickup engine in place. After that, came the hours of connecting the many lines, wires, cables and levers necessary to adapt the strange engine to the fittings which had operated the diesel. Instead of going home each night, even though it was not very far, they slept and ate on the boat. Finally, the installation was completed and Carlos pressed the starter button. The pickup engine came to life and purred sweetly.

After checking everything carefully to be sure that the engine was operating properly, Luis cast off the lines and Carlos shifted the transmission into reverse. The boat backed slowly from the dock and swung around in response to a spin of the wheel. He moved the shift lever to the forward position and the boat began to pick up momentum.

At half power, there came a strange vibration which hadn't been present with the diesel engine, but it didn't seem to pose any particular danger. They moved out across the protected harbor and upon reaching the open water, Carlos advanced the throttle to full power.

Since the pickup engine had far less power than the diesel, the boat would only plow through the waves instead of climbing up and running on top of them. "While I'm using the pickup engine in the boat, I'll only be able to bring fishermen out in fairly calm waters," Carlos thought to himself. "If the winds blow hard and the waves run high, I won't be able to make headway against them."

On the way back to the dock, Luis suddenly shouted from the engine compartment, "Papa! We are talking on water very rapidly."

"Where is it coming from?" shouted Carlos.

"The shaking of the engine has broken the cooling intake pipe and sea water is pouring in. The pumps can't keep up with it."

"Can you fix it?" shouted Carlos.

"It is beneath the engine and I cannot get to it with the engine running. We will have to stop the engine," replied Luis. "And if we stop the engine, the pumps will stop working and we will soon sink."

Water gushed in through the three inch hole with such force that it was more than a foot deep in the belly of the boat by the time they reached the docks where a large pump could be used to keep the boat from sinking. Luis dove over the side with a large wad of rags to plug the water intake. Once that the big pump had been hooked up and was working it lowered the water level enough to allow them to get to the fitting. Once that they were able to get beneath the engine, it was a simple matter to make the repair.

"I felt a strange vibration with the new engine," said Carlos. "That must have caused the fitting to come loose. Perhaps we failed to tighten it properly when we installed the engine."

When strong winds blew in from the Pacific Ocean and the waves ran high, Carlos had to stay in port and watch while other boats took the rich Americans out to fish for Marlin. The only thing that he could do to make money at times such as these was take tourists on sightseeing cruises along the coast to see the famous wrecked Japanese fishing trawler which had run aground about six miles to the east in a place which was now called Shipwreck Cove.

The west winds were blowing hard when they arrived at the docks and whitecaps could be seen on the waves outside the harbor. Carlos looked at them for a few minutes and told Luis, "Put out the sign for sightseeing trips. It's much too rough for us to go to the open water."

Luis went to the parking lot at the docks and put up the sign which announced, "SEE THE WRECKED SHIP. Sightseeing Boat Ride \$10.00. Come to the Bluefin." As he finished setting it up, a shiny Cadillac drove up and two women got out. The older lady looked to be about his father's age and the other, who appeared to be Mexican, was his age.

"Buenos dais, Senioritas. Como se usted?" Luis said in greeting.

"Muy bueno, gracias," replied the younger one with a smile.

Rebecca made the introduction, "I'm Rebecca Crenshaw and this is Maria Ortiz."

Soon, two other couples, who were also interested in a sightseeing ride, came to the boat. One of the men said, "I'm Brother Robert and this is my wife, Sister Nancy. Our last name is Ewell and our church sent us to Cabo San Lucas on our mission. We are members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, commonly known as the Mormons."

The other man said, "This is amazing, My wife, Gloria, and I are also missionaries. We are Jehovah's Witnesses who have been sent to Los Cabos. My name is Harland Hart."

"It is ten dollars for each person to go to Shipwreck Cove, or for twenty dollars each, we will take you all the way to San Jose del Cabo where you can have a nice lunch, do some shopping and then we will return this afternoon. It is a much longer trip and you will probably be able to see several whales," Carlos told them.

They all agreed to take the longer trip to San Jose del Cabo. As they pulled away from the dock, Carlos began to give them a running account of what they were seeing as they passed along the shore.

"This is Shipwreck Cove and you can see the wrecked ship up on the rocks. It was a Japanese trawler which would come in very close to shore each night to set lobster traps illegally. At daybreak, they would go back out past the twelve mile limit and into international waters."

"Some local fishermen found that the way that the Japanese were able to come so close to shore and find their lobster traps in the darkness was by using underwater sound buoys to position themselves. Divers found the buoys and moved them very close to shore. That night, when the big

ship came steaming in, it ran onto the rocks and was trapped."

"It seems to be broken in half. Did it do that when it went ashore?" asked Harland Hart.

"No. They tried to pull it back into the water with a tug boat, but it was so hard aground on the rocks that it could not be moved. Over the years, Chubascos have beaten the ship to pieces. You'll also notice that several hundred people who come to Los Cabos for the winter have parked their motorhomes and trailers on the hills overlooking the cove."

He continued his running description of the shore, "You see the Hotel Cabo San Lucas high on that point of land. It's the nicest and most expensive hotel in all of Baja. There is also a landing strip for small airplanes just across the highway behind it." After they passed the high rocks with the hotel, he pointed to a small cove where palm trees grew, "My very good friend, Tomas Davis, an American who has been living here for several years, lives in that cove. When the engine in my boat failed, he loaned me the engine from his pickup to use. Had he not been so generous, we would not be making this trip now."

The six tourist left the Bluefin in San Jose del Cabo, had lunch, went shopping and returned for the scheduled departure at three in the afternoon. The winds had picked up from the west and the waves near the shore were running higher than they had been during the trip earlier that day.

Luis and Maria were sitting in the cabin, holding hands and talking softly to one another. The two missionary couples were in seats on the rear deck, watching for whales while Carlos operated the boat from the flying bridge.

Rebecca climbed the ladder to the flying bridge and sat down in the swivel chair beside Carlos. He was not what would be considered to be an especially handsome man in the classic sense, but he had a certain rugged, masculine attractiveness. The wrinkles in his face mirrored many years of exposure to the wind and salt spray. He wasn't quite as tall as Rebecca, but he had broad shoulders and strong arms. He stood easily at the wheel with his knees slightly bent, allowing the boat to pitch and roll under him as it followed the waves.

"Is Luis your son?" she asked.

"Yes, Senora, my only child," replied Carlos. "He just graduated from the university in La Paz."

"You and your wife must be very proud of him," said Rebecca.

"Yes," said Carlos. He crossed himself and continued, "But poor Rosita died before he graduated."

"I'm sorry to hear that," replied Rebecca.

Although Carlos was pushing the pickup engine at full power, they seemed to be making even less headway than normal. He called out in Spanish to his son in the cabin, "Luis, go below and see if anything is wrong."

"We are taking on water, Papa! The intake fitting has come loose again," shouted Luis from the engine compartment. "We already have more than a foot of water in the bilge."

"Can you fix it?" Carlos shouted back.

"Not unless we stop the engine," replied Luis.

"What is the matter?" asked Rebecca.

"We are taking on a little water," replied Carlos.

"Are we going to sink?" asked Rebecca.

"No, I'm sure that everything will be OK. Luis has started the pumps," said Carlos.

"We are taking on water so fast that we can never reach Cabo San Lucas," said Luis as he climbed to the flying bridge.

"Can't you go faster and get to Cabo San Lucas before it takes on too much water?" asked

Rebecca.

"It will go no faster, Senora. My big diesel engine is broken and I am having to use the small engine that my friend loaned to me."

"What are we going do to?" asked Rebecca, who was now becoming rather alarmed at the turn of events.

"We are near the hippie's cove," said Carlos. "There is a good place where we can beach the boat. The tide will be going out and the hull will soon be above water, then we can make repairs."

"I'll go below and help with the hand pump," said Luis as he disappeared into the engine compartment.

"May I have your attention," Carlos shouted in English to his passengers. "We are taking on a little water and will have to beach the boat. There is no danger, but please put on the life jackets which you will find under the seats."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Travis T. Taylor III stepped from the back door of the church and shaded his eyes against the bright sunlight. He didn't know what a person was supposed to do after being left standing at the altar, but one thing for sure, he wanted to be away from there before his parents, friends and especially the TV reporters with their stupid questions could get to him.

Just around the corner of the church, the stretch limo stood waiting to take he and Daphnie to the reception at the country club. He opened the back door, stepped in and told the driver, "Let's get out of here!"

"Shouldn't we wait for Mrs. Taylor?" asked the driver.

"It would be one hell of a long wait," replied Travis. "Just get moving."

The driver pulled across the rear parking lot of the church and onto a side street. He pressed the button on the intercom and asked, "Any place in particular, Sir?"

Travis thought a moment and replied, "Take me to San Francisco International Airport. Go to the Taylor Hangar on the executive side of the field."

His grandfather had insisted that, instead of leaving on their honeymoon on a commercial airliner, they take the company's Saberliner for their trip to Acapulco. Their bags were already aboard and it was fueled and ready for the flight.

Travis slumped into the leather seat and brooded about what had just happened. The Limo drifted past Candlestick Park where the 49ers had ended another losing season and onto the Bayshore Freeway. The runways of San Francisco International were laid out on land which had been created by dumping mud dredged up from the bottom of the bay. When the limo stopped at the door of the flight operations office, Travis was out before the driver had a chance to open the door for him. "Shall I wait for you, Sir?" asked the driver.

"You're done for the day as far as I'm concerned," said Travis. "If anyone should ask, don't tell anyone where you dropped me off."

When Travis walked into the flight office, Ray Norman, Taylor's chief pilot, was busy putting his JepCharts into their proper slots in his flight bag. He looked up in surprise and said, "I didn't think that you were supposed to be here for another four hours."

"Plans change," replied Travis. "How soon can you get us off the ground?"

"Let me see if I can advance our flight plan," said Ray as he picked up the phone and dialed a number. After a quick conversation with the FAA Flight Service, he told Travis, "We can be wheels up in twenty minutes. Will Mrs. Taylor be here by then."

"Unless you are talking about my Mother, then there is no Mrs. Taylor. I'll be your only passenger on this flight."

They walked into the hangar where Chuck Sipes, the co-pilot, was making last minute checks of the plane. As he motioned for the big hangar doors to be slid open, Ray asked, "Should I ask about Daphnie or is it better that I don't?"

"Might as well tell you now, Ray. No use in making you wait for the news to come down through the company grapevine," replied Travis. "It turns out that Daphnie is as queer as a three dollar bill and at the last minute, she decided to run off with that Judy Clark instead of getting married. That's probably the only smart thing that woman ever did. Unload her bags and move mine inside the cabin where I can get at them. I'm ready to go when you are."

The Saberliner pounded down the runway. Chuck called off the numbers, even though Ray was far ahead of him, but that is what co-pilots are for, "VR, and all green," he reported.

Ray eased back on the control column, the nose of the Saberliner lifted and the sound of wheels slapping against expansion joints the runway ceased. "Gear up, flaps for cruise-climb," said Ray.

Chuck flipped the gear switch and moved the flap lever to the position which would allow them to fly at the most efficient speed while climbing. With a soft whirring of electric motors, the wheels folded and clunked into the wells and the airplane pointed its nose toward their assigned altitude. Ray had missed his estimated time off by less than thirty seconds.

Travis slumped into a seat and watched the landscape fall away. The cabin speaker came on and Ray said, "Flight Level 240 is all that I could get on such short notice, but we will be able to go on up to a better altitude as soon as we get handed off to LAX."

When they reached their assigned altitude and were in level flight, Travis opened one of his bags and took out a pair of trousers, a sport shirt and comfortable shoes. Then he removed the tuxedo, wadded it into a bundle and tossed it onto a back seat. When he was dressed, he pulled the bottle of champagne, which was waiting in a bucket of ice for the happy couple, popped the cork and poured himself a glass. He held it up and said, "Well. here's to Daphnie the lesbian. May she and Judy live happily ever after."

Before long, Travis felt the nose of the Saberliner rise again as it began its climb to a higher altitude. When they were level at the new altitude, he could look off to the right and see the Pacific Ocean, while to the east lay what is known as the High Desert area of California.

Travis opened the door to the flight deck of the Saberliner. Ray sat in the left seat and Chuck was in the right. The center of the instrument panel was filled with a half dozen matched pairs of engine gauges, each one with a needle resting within a green arc. In front of Ray were the latest, state of the art, flight and navigation instruments, duplicated to a lesser degree in front of Chuck. The ship was equipped with state of the art global navigation equipment which would allow it to be flown around the world as easily as from San Francisco to Los Angeles.

Ray had come to Taylor Enterprises as their chief pilot after leaving the Navy, where he had become an ace in both Korea and Viet Nam. He didn't just fly an airplane, he played it the way a musician plays a violin. The violin has no frets to show the musician where to place his fingers. He must be able to depress the strings in the precise location by instinct and knowing the exact note which will be produced. Ray flew an airplane in the same manner, by feel and knowing what is going to happen, long before it does.

"Where are we?" Travis asked, looking through windshield at the rugged landscape which stretched ahead as far as he could see.

"Coming up on the Baja border, the Mexicali VOR is Twenty DME right over the nose,"

replied Ray.

"So that is Baja. That's where they have the Baja 1000 races, isn't it?" asked Travis.

"Sure is," replied Ray with a smile. "I drove in the first Baja 1000 in 1969, rolled the car into a canyon just south of El Rosario, came out without a scratch. I've driven in four more races since then and did a lot better in each of those."

"Did you win?" asked Travis.

"Sixty-third for my class was best that I ever did," replied Ray. "Out of more than four hundred in my class, I suppose that isn't bad. I considered it to be quite an accomplishment just to finish the thing."

"What's down there?" asked Travis.

"Not much," replied Ray. "Just some small towns and lots of rocks and sand for a thousand miles between Ensenada and La Paz, but the most beautiful place I've ever seen."

"That's all? I have heard that lots of people go there during the winter."

"Since the paved highway opened in 1973, allowing people to drive all the way to the tip, millions of people have gone there," replied Ray.

"Why do they go if it is such a desolate place?"

"The winters are very mild and Baja has some great fishing, especially on the Sea of Cortez side. Down around the southern tip, what they now call Los Cabos, they have the world's best Marlin fishing."

"Los Cabos, is that the name of the town there?" asked Travis.

"There are several towns around the tip with Cabo in their names, but none actually called Los Cabos. The big airport there just recently changed its name to Los Cabos International."

"How are the hotels there?" asked Travis.

"Some are equal to the best that we have in the states, but when I'm there, I like to stay in the smaller ones." Ray opened his flight bag and pulled out a magazine. He thumbed through it for a few seconds and handed it to Travis. "Here's what the bay at Cabo San Lucas looks like."

Travis looked at the ad for a few seconds and asked, "Can you land this thing there? It sounds like just the place for me to hide out for a few weeks to escape the reporters who are bound to start sniffing around after that fiasco at the wedding."

"No problem," replied Ray. "Soon as we hit the Santa Rosalia VOR and they hand me off to Mazatlan FIR, I'll change the flight plan from Acapulco to Los Cabos International."

The DME counted the miles down to Santa Rosalia. As the TO-FROM flag flipped on the navigation instrument, the right wing dipped and the nose swung to a new heading. The cockpit speaker came on in halting English, "Saberliner One Tango Tango, contact Mazatlan, One Thirty-Two point Eight Five."

"Gracias, One Tango Tango going to Thirty-Two point Eight Five," replied Ray in perfect Spanish.

"Buenos Tardes," answered the Tijuana high altitude controller.

"Mazatlan, Saberliner One Tango Tango with you at Three Niner Zero, request change of destination," Ray reported to the new controller.

Travis stood in the door to the cockpit while Ray swung out over the ocean and began his approach to runway 34 at Los Cabos International. The place didn't have the appearance one would expect for an international airport, just one long runway and a few buildings off to one side. He took his seat and fastened his seatbelt only seconds before the Saberliner's tires kissed the pavement.

"Chuck will unload your luggage and help get you through customs while I close our flight plan with the tower. Do you want me to stick around or file for a return?" asked Ray.

"I don't know how long I'll be staying here, so you can go on back. Don't tell anyone except my folks where you dropped me," replied Travis. "I'll call when I'm ready for you to come back after me."

"The Aduana and Immigration offices are right over here, Mister Taylor," said Chuck. "It won't take but a minute or two."

"How far is it to town?" asked Travis.

"Only about five miles to San Jose del Cabo and another twenty to Cabo San Lucas," replied Chuck.

"While I'm going through customs, get me a room at the best hotel down here and rent a car for me to drive. I'd like to drive around and see some of the country before I check in at the hotel."

As Travis walked from the customs and immigration offices, Chuck approached and said, "You are registered at the Hotel Cabo San Lucas and your baggage is already loaded into their van. The best car that I could rent for you is a Volkswagen built in Mexico. It looks like a Rabbit but in Mexico, it is called the Atlantic."

Travis drove into the town of San Jose del Cabo, which was just coming back to life after siesta. He realized that he was very hungry so he stopped in for a late lunch in a small restaurant just off the plaza. "Just think," he said to himself, "I was supposed to have eaten lunch at the San Francisco Country Club with good old queer Daphnie sitting by my side. She runs off with Judy and I dine alone in a place that I never heard of. Talk about how things can change."

Travis was just leaving the town of San Jose del Cabo when he was almost clipped by a jacked up red pickup as it turned into the Pemex station. "Texas tags," he said to himself. "It would be just my luck to be in driving along in a foreign country and get run over by some Texan in his pickup truck."

Not far out of town he passed two large RV Parks and a propane station. A sign informed him, "Cabo San Lucas, 31 Kilometers".

Travis hadn't traveled more than a few miles toward Cabo San Lucas before the engine of the car began to make strange noises and it slowed to a crawl. Finally, it refused to move any more and the engine would only gasp and belch black smoke.

He couldn't see any buildings around, but there was a narrow, rocky road which led off toward the beach. "That probably goes to a house where someone has a phone or can give me a ride," he thought to himself as he locked the car and began walking toward the beach.

Travis had walked about a quarter mile when the road turned toward a small grove of palm trees. As he came closer, he could see an old pickup truck parked beside an overhead camper which was now sitting on the ground. It was propped up with stones under one side to make it more or less level. There was a palm thatched cover attached to the end of the camper and extending out several feet. As he walked toward the camper, a big black dog jumped up from where it had been sleeping in the shade and came running toward him. It was holding his ears erect, growling and showing his teeth. Travis stopped instantly and the dog did likewise. They stood there in silence with about ten feet of space separating them.

In the shade of the cover, Travis could see a bearded figure sitting in a dilapidated old green recliner chair. The stuffing was poking out of various holes in the plastic covering and the seat sagged from long use. The man looked just like the hippies who had made the Haight-Asbury section of San Francisco their home during the 1960s, except that he was considerably older than most of them had been.

"Hello," called Travis. "May I come in?"

"Just stand still right where you are and Blackie will let you know if you can or not," replied

the man. "He is a much better judge of people than I am, so I let him make those decisions."

Blackie suddenly lowered his ears, turned his tail toward Travis and trotted back to where he had been sleeping in the shade. "Blackie says that you can come in now," said the hippie.

Travis walked up to the hippie and held out his hand. "I'm glad to see you," he said. "My name is Travis T. Taylor and my car broke down up on the road. Could I use your phone to call the auto rental place or would it be possible for you to take me to the Hotel Cabo San Lucas in your pickup truck?"

"You from San Francisco?" asked the hippie.

"Well, as a matter of fact, yes, I am from San Francisco, but how did you know?"

"And you got an old man who is a big shot lawyer by the name of T. Thornton Taylor?" continued the hippie.

"Actually, he's my grandfather, but how do you know so much about me?" asked Travis.

"At one time I thought your grandfather was the worst son of a bitch that ever lived, even considered killing him. Then after sitting here watching the ocean for a while, I figured out that he did me the greatest favor of my life," said the hippie. "He fired my ass before I even had a chance to go to work. If he hadn't canned me, I'd probably still be wasting my life at Golden Gate College, fighting the rat race, growing old and grading insipid papers written by dumb, rich snots like you."

"You were a professor at Golden Gate?" asked Travis in surprise.

"Never really taught there. I was hired and supposed to have started teaching in the Psychology Department the same year that you were coming in as a Freshman, but old man Taylor had me fired."

"This is certainly a small world, isn't it," said Travis.

"Yes it is; and getting too damn small by the way that I look at it. I come all the way down here to get away from people like you and your grandfather, but you still come along and hunt me up."

"I apologize for bothering you, but back to my original problem," said Travis. "Could I use your phone?"

"That's the trouble with rich people like you; pushing, shoving and striving all the time, always chasing after that elusive dollar. You think that you have to have a phone with half a dozen buttons on it in order to live. I haven't heard a phone ring in six years and have enjoyed every minute of it. Why don't you just pull up a box, sit down and take a load off those expensive shoes of yours. You'll live a hell of a lot longer if you just relax and let the world flow by at its own pace."

Travis moved a wooden box that was laying by the camper, into the shade and sat down. "What do you do here?" he asked.

"You might say that I'm doing it right now," replied the hippie.

"I mean what do you do for a living?" asked Travis.

"I grow a few vegetables and have a couple lime trees in my garden. I also grow a little pot back up the arroyo and drink whatever I can afford. My disability check from the army isn't due for a few more days, so right now, I'm down to drinking Cien Fuegos and lime juice."

"What is the world is that?" asked Travis.

"Cien Fuegos means a hundred fires. It's almost pure alcohol, but it costs less than a buck for a liter," replied the hippie. "Care for a shooter?"

"Thanks, but I think that I'll pass. But, could you give me a ride to the hotel in your pickup truck?"

"There you go again," said the hippie. "You may be sitting down but you ain't letting yourself unwind a bit. Lighten up and relax. Watch the waves roll across the ocean and listen to the

surf. That will do a better job of curing whatever ails the mind than all the doctors in the world."

"I'd really like to get on to the hotel and I'll gladly pay you whatever you feel is proper if you would take me there in your truck," replied Travis.

"The pickup doesn't run, or at least this part of it doesn't. I loaned the motor out of it to a friend to use in his boat. Sure you won't have a shooter. It's not too bad when you mix it with some lime juice and water. I don't have any ice."

"How do you get to town to buy groceries and things that you need," asked Travis.

"I have friends who come by occasionally and take me into town or pick up things that I need. The only time that I really have to go is when my Army check comes in at the post office. I usually buy all the booze and groceries that I will need for a month when I pick up my check. Then, there is Lupita Morales, a widow who lives with a married daughter just around that point of land. She brings me a stack of tortillas every time that she gets horny, which is usually once or twice a week. She keeps me happy and I keep her happy; works out just fine for both of us.

"You appear to be a well-educated man, so why are you wasting your life in a place like this?" asked Travis.

"It all depends on what you consider to be a waste of time," replied Tom. "You and your kind get ulcers, fighting and clawing at one another in the business world for fifty weeks a year just to get enough money to afford to spend two weeks doing what I do all year. Now, you tell me which one of us is wasting their time."

Travis thought that at least that he could be sociable, so he agreed to have a drink with the hippie. The hippie picked up a glass, dumped out a few ants which were crawling around inside it and poured in a shot of clear liquid from a bottle he pulled from a hole in the arm of his dilapidated chair. He handed the glass and a lime to Travis and said, "Lime squeezer is laying there on the table. Add how ever much water as you like from that jug."

Travis squeezed half of the lime into the glass with the Cien Fuegos and poured in about an equal amount of water. He raised the glass to the hippie and said, "Cheers". He took a good size slug from the glass and almost lost his breath.

"See why it is called Cien Fuegos, it really lights your fire," said the hippie. "It isn't too bad once you've managed to get the first two or three swallows down."

CHAPTER TWENTY

"That was a white man driving that car that nearly hit us," Joe Bob told LuAnn as he skidded his pickup in a tire smoking turn into the Pemex pumps. "He drives like a damn Meskin."

He dropped to the ground and said to the attendant, "Fill 'er up, buddy. Where's the can?"

"Can of what, Senior?" asked the attendant.

"The Can, The John, El Crapperoo; or whatever you call toilets down here," replied Joe Bob. "I gotta take a leak something awful."

"I'm sorry, Senior, it is not usable. Gringos have stopped up the excusado with toilet paper," replied the man who was pumping gas into the pickup.

"Is this here place Los Cabos?" asked Joe Bob.

"No, Senior, this city is called San Jose del Cabo, but everywhere around here is called Los Cabos."

"That's stupid," said Joe Bob. "I'm looking for the place that is called Los Cabos. Does anyone here speak 'Merican?"

A well dressed Mexican man, who was standing beside a black diesel Mercedes sedan which was being filled from the red pump said, "Sir, I speak all the languages of The Americas; French, Spanish, English, Portuguese and even Texan, like yourself."

"Well, shoot damn, put 'er there pardner," said Joe Bob as he stuck out his hand, without ever understanding the inference of the statement. Joe Bob handed the man the magazine and pointed to the advertisement. "How do I get to this here place called Los Cabos place?"

"The whole southern tip of Baja is known as Los Cabos, which means the capes. The two main cities are this place, San Jose del Cabo, and Cabo San Lucas which is about twenty miles west of here. This photo was taken of the famous rock formations at Cabo San Lucas. Turn left at the intersection and follow that road and it will take you to Cabo San Lucas, which is the place I'm sure that you are looking for. It is much more tourist oriented than this city and I'm sure that you will be more comfortable there," replied the man.

Joe Bob paid for the gas and as he pulled from the station, the man said in Spanish to the attendant, "Another Ugly American tourist, but Baja must have them to survive."

The road to Cabo San Lucas follows the rolling hills along the coast, past several modern RV parks, a dozen or more large hotels and hundreds of small camps where people can pitch a tent or park their RV. As they made the left turn at the intersection, LuAnn shouted, "Look! That's Ginger in that van. You know, that cute girl who we met at the pig roast."

"They sure get around a lot, wonder what they are doing all the way down here," said Joe Bob as he passed an old bus which was chugging along in a cloud of oil smoke. It was stuffed with so many people that some were hanging out the door. The roof was stacked high with various boxes, bales and even a couple goats with their feet tied together. "Boy, that is what I would call going native," he said.

Within a couple miles they came to a large RV Park. It had lots of palm trees, a swimming pool and was located next to a nice beach. "This looks like a nice place for us to stop. Wonder if they have tent spaces," he said as he turned into the driveway.

"Yes, Sir," the manager told him. "In addition to more than a hundred RV spaces, we have 20 tent sites, but we are completely full right now. There are several more RV parks between here and Cabo San Lucas or you can always find a spot to camp at a place called Shipwreck Cove. It is located at Kilometer 9. However, finding a place to pitch a tent is no problem because you can camp anywhere you like on the beaches. All beaches in Baja are public except for the few places right in front of big hotels."

They came over a small hill and ahead was a stalled car with some people who appeared to be working on it. As they got closer, they could see that all four wheels were missing and the men appeared to be removing the engine. "Looks like a new VW Rabbit, but this is sure an odd place to be pulling out the engine," said Joe Bob. "Oh well, you never know what a Meskin is liable to do."

"Look," said LuAnn. "There is a road turning off toward that beach down there. It looks like a nice place to camp. The man at the RV Park said that all the beaches were public, so let's drive down and look it over."

Just before they reached the beach, the road turned toward a small grove of palm trees with a pickup truck and a camper parked under them. Joe Bob wheeled to a stop and slid down from the cab. Just as his feet hit the ground, a big, black dog jumped up from where he had been snoozing in the shade and came running toward him. The dog was showing his teeth and growling. Joe Bob quickly climbed back into the pickup.

"How about calling off your dog," he shouted to the two men who were sitting in the shade of the thatched cover attached to the camper.

"Just stay where you are for a minute," shouted the one who looked like a hippie. "Let Blackie look you over. He will either decide that you are OK and come back down here or else stay there and take your leg off if you get out again."

"Talk about your odd couple," Joe Bob said to LuAnn. "Just have a look at that pair. One of them looks like Joe College and the other looks like something that the dog drug up."

A few seconds later, Blackie turned and trotted back to his spot in the shade. The hippie said, "Blackie says that it is OK, so you can come down now if you like."

Joe Bob and LuAnn climbed from the pickup and walked to where the two men were sitting under the palapa. "Howdy, Joe Bob Puckett is my name and football is my game. How much do you charge to let us camp on your beach tonight?"

"It's a public beach. Camp anywhere you like just as long as you do it out of my sight and hearing," replied the hippie.

"You sure ain't a very friendly sort for a fellow 'Merican," said Joe Bob. "You think that you could find it in you to be a bit more sociable if I offered you some cold beer or a shot of Jose Cuervo? I got plenty of both in the pickup."

"I'm Travis Taylor," said the man dressed in the expensive cloths as he rose and extended his hand. He looked totally out of place in the company of the hippie. "He seems to be a pretty nice fellow but I haven't gotten his name yet. He's sort of like his dog, doesn't care much for people who

come on too strong. But it that offer of a drink still stands, I'm sure that he'd take you up on it, especially if you have ice to put in it."

"Please excuse me if I don't get up," said the hippie as he extended his hand. "My feet aren't the best in the world. My name is Tom Davis, sorry that I failed to introduce myself earlier."

"LuAnn, honey. Would you be a nice little lady and drag old Jose away from his friends behind the seat while I bring that ice chest full of beer down here. These here are OK people and I feel a party coming on!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

After leaving the Pemex station, The Reverend and Ginger drove out west of town a couple miles and pulled into a nice RV Park called the Brisa del Mar, where they asked if there was space. The manager told them that the park was full but that they would probably be able to find camping space at Shipwreck Cove, located at Kilometer 9, just past the Hotel Cabo San Lucas.

"How about in the next town?" asked Ginger.

"There are several very nice RV parks there," said the manager. "Do you happen to be members of the Vagabundos del Mar?"

"What is that?" asked the Reverend.

"It's a travel club which has its own park. It's located on the left side of the highway, about a mile before you get into Cabo San Lucas. It's called Casa Rodantes VDM. If they aren't full of their own members, they will accept others."

"That is a strange name," said Ginger. "What does it mean in English?"

"Casa Rodantes means house which travels along the road," replied the manager.

"Seems odd to me that all of the parks are full at this time of the year," said Ginger. "I thought that people went on vacation in the summer."

"It is difficult to find RV spaces anywhere in Baja during the winter months," replied the manager. "Most of them are rented for three or four months at a time by people who come here to escape the cold weather where they live."

As they drove along the highway, they topped a hill and saw a burning automobile by the side of the road.

"Do you think that someone has had a wreck and needs help?" asked Ginger as they approached.

"I don't think so," replied the Reverend. "It looks as if the car was stripped before being set on fire."

Just as they came to the burning hulk, Ginger looked toward the ocean and shouted, "Look! Whales! And two of them, looks like a mother and a baby whale. Quick, turn down that road to the beach and let's go watch them."

They followed the road for a short distance, watching the whales as they would surface, send spouts of water into the air and dive back below the waves with a flip of their huge tails. These whales were stragglers which were working their way around the tip of Baja before setting out on the long voyage to their summer feeding grounds off the coast of Alaska.

"There's Joe Bob and LuAnn, the people that I told you about meeting at the pig roast when we were at the Serenidad," said Ginger. "Let's stop and see what they are doing."

Just as Ginger and the Reverend stepped out of the van, a big black dog came running toward them. A man who looked like a hippie shouted, "Blackie, get your ass back here and don't bite that man. He looks like a preacher and the last time you bit one of those things, you had the runs for a week."

"Howdy, Ginger," said Joe Bob. "We got ourselves a party going here. You folks care for a cold beer or a shot of Jose Cuervo?"

"Sir, We are Children of God and would never think of allowing such sinful liquid as that to cross our lips," said the Reverend.

"Come on now, Reverend, lighten up a little," said Ginger. "These are nice people and you don't have to drink anything stronger than a Pepsi if you don't want to. As for myself, I'd appreciate a good cold beer."

Travis got to his feet and introduced himself. "I'm Travis Taylor and this is Tom Davis. This is his home and we are his uninvited guests."

"I'm Ginger Wilson and this is the Reverend John Harrison," she said, holding out her hand to Travis. They shook hands, holding on and looking at one another for several seconds.

"Have a seat, Ginger," said Travis, offering her the box on which he had been sitting, then taking a seat on the ground.

"What will it be little darlin'," said Joe Bob to Ginger. "I got Carta Blanca, Superior and Tecate, all colder than a mother-in-law's kiss."

"A Tecate will be fine," replied Ginger.

"Sot!" scolded the Reverend as he retreated to the sanctity of the van.

"Those hellfire and brimstone preachers are all alike. How do you manage to put up with him," remarked Joe Bob.

"Oh, I just ignore about half of what he says," she replied as she sipped the cold beer.

"I suppose that I really should do something about the car that I left up on the road," said Travis.

"You don't have to worry about it," said the hippie. "It's probably already been stripped and torched by now."

"We saw a car burning up on the road when we drove in," said Ginger. "Was that yours?"

"It was a rental car," replied Travis. "Looks like it belongs to the insurance company now."

"Look," said the hippie. "That's the Bluefin coming around the point, but it looks as if it is riding awfully low in the water."

They watched as the boat plowed its way into the cove, turned and headed straight for the beach. They heard the engine stop just before the prow of the boat slid onto the sand.

"He's beached it," shouted the hippie as he jumped to his feet, grabbed a stick which was leaning against his chair and began to hobble toward the beach. "Everyone run down and help him with the lines so the tide doesn't carry it back out to sea."

Carlos stepped around the windshield and slid from the flying bridge to the front deck, where he tossed ropes to the people as they arrived. "See if you can hold us in this position for a few minutes," he shouted. "The tide's going out rather fast and the bottom will soon be resting firmly on the sand."

By this time, the hippie had arrived and shouted to Carlos, "Que Paso, Amigo?"

"We were taking on water. When the tide is all the way out, we will be able to repair it. She will float again at high tide just after midnight."

As soon as the boat was firmly aground on the sand, Carlos put a boarding ladder over the side and everyone climbed to the ground.

"Well, damn if it ain't Rebecca Crenshaw," said Joe Bob as he motioned her to a seat on the beer cooler. "How did things work out for you at the Serenidad?"

"I'll never tell," she replied.

"Joe Bob! That's not a nice thing to ask a lady," scolded LuAnn.

The two missionary couples refused the offer of beer or tequila and went to sit with the Reverend, who was reading his bible by the van.

Luis and Maria hadn't come all the way into the camp but were standing under the palm trees, holding hands and talking softly.

"It looks as if Maria and Luis have quite a bit in common," mentioned Rebecca.

"Luis is old enough to get married," replied Carlos. "Maria seems to be a very nice girl who would make a beautiful bride and a good wife."

Carlos shouted Luis, "As soon as the tide is out, repair the fitting before it gets too dark." Luis and Maria walked down the beach toward the boat, hand in hand.

Joe Bob got up and went to his pickup, saying, "Speaking about darkness, I'd better put up the tent before it gets too dark."

It took only a few minutes for him to pitch the Eureka tent and throw their sleeping bags inside. When he returned, he brought along several pieces of driftwood he had picked up along the beach for a camp fire. When the fire was burning brightly, everyone formed a loose circle around it.

It would be difficult for one to find three more totally opposed theories of religion than the Mormons, Jehovah's Witness and the Reverend; who were now involved in a heated theological battle near the van. The Reverend was waving his arms and shouting, "The Baptists have the only true faith. They alone know what Christ really said."

The Mormons countered with, "Joseph Smith was a disciple and actually talked with Jesus Christ. He read what was written on the golden tablets. We have the true word."

"We are the true witnesses of Jehovah," replied the other missionaries, "So we have the word first hand."

It was all too much for the Reverend to endure so he dropped to his knees, clasped his hands and began to pray. "Oh Lord, you have sent me to this land of sin and degradation and cast me into the midst of pagans, drunkards, fornicators and false believers. Please, Oh Lord, give me the strength to make these poor lost lambs see the errors in their ways and help me lead them back along the path of truth and righteousness."

"One thing that you can say for Jesus freaks," said the hippie. "They sure know how to blow a good party all to hell."

"What we need is a little music to turn this party around and give it some life," said Joe Bob as he returned from his pickup with his guitar. He strummed a few off-key chords, twisted the tuning knobs and said, "OK, everyone join in and we'll sing The Yellow Rose of Texas, the Texas National Anthem."

When they finished the song, Joe Bob told them, "Did you folks know that the woman that song was about was the reason why Texas won its independence from Mexico? She was a mulatto whore who got Santy Anny into bed with her and kept him so busy that he plumb forgot all about old Sam Houston, who was just over the hill, beating hell out of the Meskin army. By the time that he got his pants back on and figured out what was going on, the war was over and he'd lost."

The hippie spoke up, "We appreciate the lesson in Texas history, but do you know anything else?"

"I shore do, pardner. I know lots of other songs. Fact is, I'll do a special one just you and your dog," replied Joe Bob as he began to sing.

"Don't pet my dog, he'll mistake it for romance.

One scratch of his ear sets him in gear,
And he'll teach your leg how to dance."

Blackie seemed to know that the song was about him because he perked up his ears when he heard it. Then he got up and went to sit beside Joe Bob. As soon as Joe Bob began to sing again, Blackie tilted back his head and added his own discord.

"What kind of dog you got here?" asked Joe Bob as he scratched Blackie's ear.

"He's called a Rottenwilder," replied the hippie.

"Don't you mean a Rottweiler?" asked Travis.

"Nope, Rottenwilder. He has a rotten disposition and was wilder than a box of snakes when he came here," said the hippie.

Joe Bob set his Tecate down after taking a sip and Blackie deftly tipped it on its side and began to lap up the beer as it flowed out.

"Smart dog you got here, Tom," said Joe Bob. "Where did he learn that trick?"

"I have no idea," replied Tom.

"Must be the company that he keeps," replied Ginger. "He seems to have taken a liking to you."

"Well, damned if I am going to drink after you, Blackie," said Joe Bob. "And you waste too much like that. Go get something for me to pour your beer in."

Blackie got up and trotted around back of the camper. A few seconds later, he returned, carrying a beat up old aluminum pot in his mouth.

"That's more like it," said Joe Bob as he poured half a bottle of beer into the pan. After that, each time that Joe Bob would take a sip of beer from his bottle, Blackie would also lap some from the pan. Before long, it was difficult to tell which of the two was the more inebriated as they harmonized in drunken songs about Texas.

"I've got drunk a lot of times with big, black, mean football players; but this is the first time that I ever got drunk with a big, black, mean dog," said Joe Bob.

Luis shouted from the boat, "Papa, the leak is fixed. Maria and I are going to walk around the point to see Tia Lupita. We'll be back before the tide comes in."

"Speaking of leaks," remarked Joe Bob as he laid down his guitar and walked off into the darkness. Blackie trotted along behind him until he reached the pickup, where he lifted his leg and anointed each of the big tires.

Joe Bob returned, sat down and remarked, "You don't buy beer, you just rent it."

Carlos stood and began to walk toward the beach, "I'd better go check the boat to be sure that it will be ready when the tide comes in."

Rebecca rose and followed him into the darkness, saying, "Hold up a second, Carlos, and I'll go with you."

Ginger was wearing a short, yellow sun dress which rode up well above her knees as she sat on the box, giving Travis, who was seated directly across the fire from her, an occasional flash of her matching yellow panties. It was obvious to everyone around the fire that he found the view to be most interesting. By the same token, the growing bulge in his trousers hadn't escaped Ginger's attention.

Ginger removed her sandals, walked to the van where the verbal holy war was raging even hotter, picked up a folded blanket and returned. She held out her hand to Travis and said, "Let's take

a walk along the beach to see if we can find some more driftwood for the fire. Better leave your shoes here so you don't get them full of sand,"

As they disappeared into the darkness, Joe Bob laughed and said, "Driftwood, my ass. That's the last that we'll see of that pair tonight."

"I never saw anyone take a blanket along when they went after firewood," said the hippie.

"They're probably going to chop a bunch of wood out there in the dark, but I'll bet that they don't bring any of it back for us to see," laughed Joe Bob.

"You men are all alike. You have dirty minds and think from your pants," scolded LuAnn.

Carlos reached down and helped Rebecca climb the ladder into the boat, catching her as she stumbled and holding her close for a second. A chill ran up and down her spine as he slowly released her. "Would you like for me to hold a flashlight or anything for you?" she asked.

They descended the three steps into the cabin and Carlos took a flashlight from a cabinet. He opened the door leading down into the engine compartment and pointed the light inside. "It appears that Luis has the repairs done and all of the water is out of the bilge."

He turned off the flashlight and without a word, slipped his strong arms around Rebecca's waist and kissed her firmly on the lips. She put her arms around his neck and returned the kiss.

"Here we are, acting like a couple teenagers, kissing in the dark," she said with a laugh.

It had been such a long while since he had felt the warmth of a woman in his arms. He could feel her firm breasts against his chest and gave her a long, passionate kiss.

The firm bulge in his trousers pressed against Rebecca's pelvis and she began to quiver and shake. Suddenly she realized that she was actually having an orgasm, something that she had never done before from simply kissing a man. In fact, while she enjoyed sex with her husband, she seldom ever had orgasms with him.

Carlos opened the door to the bedroom beneath the forward deck and led her down the two steps into the semi-darkness. The only light in the cabin came from the moon shining through the small port hole. She heard him turn a lock on the door. They kissed again and his hands moved slowly over her body. As they slid up her sides, raising her light blouse over her breasts, she lifted her arms and allowed it to slip over her head. Then she released the snaps on her bra and dropped to the floor.

When she put her arms around his neck again, she could feel that he had removed his shirt and the hairs on his muscular chest tickled her breasts. Rebecca had spent many hours working on the exercise machines in health clubs and was proud of the fact that her figure was still as striking as it had been when she was twenty.

Their lips clung together as his hands moved over her body again, pushing her skirt and panties along as they slid slowly down her legs. She had never wanted a man so much in all her life, not even her husband when they were first married.

Rebecca felt him unbutton his trousers and heard them drop to the floor, then he held her close and laid her back on the lower bunk. She could feel another orgasm coming, but tried to hold it back so she could experience it with him.

She lifted her leg over his waist and pressed her body tightly against him. She felt him move and press back against her. Then it entered slowly, the biggest penis that she had ever felt. How could a man who was no taller than Carlos, have such a massive organ? Perhaps when he was a boy, most of his growth hormones had concentrated in his penis instead of using their power to make him grow taller. She gasped for breath, pressed back against him and found more.

They rolled and moved together for what seemed to be an eternity. She not only had the orgasm which she had been holding back but one after another in close succession until it seemed

that she would faint if she had one more. When the lovemaking was finally over, she was exhausted and drained of all energy. She had never even fantasized being with such a man.

They held one another close and basked in the afterglow of lovemaking. When the incoming tide began to slap against the sides of the boat, they dressed and she asked Carlos, "How much money will it take for you to repair the diesel engine on your boat?"

"Much money," he replied with a sad note in his voice. "To do it properly, it would cost at least six thousand American dollars just for the parts. I can do the work myself, but it would take two months to complete the repairs. By then, the Marlin season will be over."

"Why can't you just buy a new engine for it?" asked Rebecca.

"There are new engines in La Paz, but one would cost at least ten thousand American dollars. I don't even have the money for the parts to repair it, much less a new engine."

"I have a suggestion," said Rebecca. "I'll furnish the money so you can go to La Paz and buy a new engine to get your boat back in operation immediately. Then I'll stay here for a while and help you run your boat. Would you like that?"

"Very much Senora," replied Carlos. "But I do not understand why you would want to do that."

"Just say that I like you and that the money is a loan," she replied. "Since we are going to be more or less partners, why don't you begin calling me Becky. That's what all my friends call me and Senora sounds so formal."

Travis and Ginger held hands as they walked along the beach. A yellow moon was rising out of the Sea of Cortez and the sand felt warm against their bare feet. The stars in the inky black sky appeared so close that one could almost reach up and touch them.

"Talk about ironic situations," said Travis, breaking the long silence. "Would you believe that I am supposed to be on my honeymoon in Acapulco at this very moment?"

"You're kidding," said Ginger. "Why are you walking with me on a beach in Los Cabos when you are supposed to be in Acapulco with your wife?"

"To make a long story short, there is no wife. She left me standing like a fool at the altar this morning."

"That's awful," said Ginger. "Why on earth would any woman do that to a man whom she loved enough to agree to marry?"

"Actually, she never really loved me at all, and now I realize that I didn't love her either. We were just sort of going along with her mother's plans until she realized what was happening just in time to keep us from making a very big mistake."

"You poor baby," said Ginger as she held his hand tightly and kissed him on the cheek.

They stopped walking and he held her close. He could feel her firm, round breasts and erect nipples pressing against his chest. Ginger was so very different from either Daphnie or Doris. He wanted to hold her and feel her warm body against his, something which he never found appealing about the others. In fact, he had never really wanted either of them to touch him. He kissed her lightly on the lips.

To Ginger, Travis was someone very special, totally unlike any man she had ever known before. She had never really felt any love for either of the two boys whom she dated in high school, just that she could feel comfortable having sex with them. She put her arms around his neck and gave him a wet, lingering kiss while moved her pelvis slowly against the bulge in his trousers. Her tongue explored places which had previously been known only to his dentist and toothbrush.

When the kiss was finished, a hot flash came over Travis. He was left breathless and felt as if his knees were about to buckle beneath him. "Where did you ever learn to kiss like that?" he

asked.

"Don't worry about where I learned how to kiss, just always remember who taught you," she replied.

Ginger spread the blanket on the warm sand and they sat down. They held one another close while they talked. The moon rose higher in the sky, casting black shadows around them bouncing sparkling diamonds off the slow rolling waves of the Sea of Cortez. The light surf filled the night with soft sounds as it crushed against the beach a few feet from where they sat.

Finally, Ginger said to Travis, "You are supposed to be on your honeymoon tonight, so the least that I can do is see that you have a part of one." While some people only have sex, Ginger and Travis made love in the most classical sense.

The moon rose higher and they had to move the blanket higher on the beach as waves licked at their feet. A pair of coyotes talked to one another in the darkness of the hills behind them while the sound of voices drifted from where the boat was beached. They heard the engine start and the boat pull away, but they didn't care because they were lost in a special bond which was being formed between them. They were each falling in love for the first time.

The moon had plunged into the Pacific Ocean and the sun was sending pink daggers into the gray of the east when Travis and Ginger awoke. The air had become damp and chilly and they had pulled the blanket tightly around them. "Good morning, darling," said Ginger as she kissed him lightly on the lips. As the red ball of the sun rose out of the Sea of Cortez, they folded the blanket and began to walk back along the beach.

"The van's gone," said Ginger when they came into view of the hippie's silent camper. When they arrived, her suitcase was setting beside their shoes and five twenty dollar bills were folded and stuck in the handle. "Looks like the Reverend has dumped me. I hope that this will be enough money to get me all the way back to Kansas," she said as she counted it and put it into her purse.

"You told me last night that you had always wanted to see San Francisco, so why don't you stay here with me for a few days and then we can fly there together. I'll be glad to give you a first-class tour of the town," suggested Travis.

I certainly can't afford airline tickets, besides, do you think that we can get reservations out of here?" she asked.

"You don't need to worry about the cost of tickets and I assure you that I can get reservations on the airplane which will take us there," replied Travis.

What should we do with this blanket, keep it as a reminder of last night?" said Ginger.

"I don't know about you, but I'll never need anything to make me remember that night as long as I live," Travis answered. "Let's leave it for the hippie; he looks like he could use it."

"Should we wake Joe Bob and LuAnn?" she asked, looking toward their silent tent.

"It's too early to bother them. Let's walk up to the road and see if we can catch a ride into town."

They put on their shoes, Travis picked up her suitcase and they walked up the hill to the paved highway where the burned-out hulk of the rented car had been shoved into the ditch. They had gone less than a quarter mile when they heard a car approaching from the rear. As they looked around, a black Mercedes sedan pulled to a stop beside them.

The well dressed Mexican who was driving the Mercedes asked in perfect English, "Would you folks care for a ride?"

Ginger and Travis held hands and sat very close in the back seat of the car. "Could you tell us how far it is to the Hotel Cabo San Lucas?" asked Travis. "I'm supposed to have a reservation there."

"Only about a mile," said the driver. "That is where I am going. What is your name?"

"Travis Taylor. Why do you ask?"

"I'm the manager of the Cabo San Lucas. Your bags came from the airport on our van yesterday, but when you failed to arrive last night, I notified the local police that you were missing. When they reported early this morning that they had found the remains of your rental car, we became concerned. I'll notify them that I found you because they are planning to begin a search of the beach for you this morning. Did something happen to you."

"You might say that something did, but I can assure you that it was the best thing that ever happened to me in all my life," replied Travis as he squeezed Ginger's hand.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Tom Davis wasn't sure whether it was the sound of Joe Bob's pickup driving away or if it was the sun shining into his face through the window of his camper, but something woke him up. Judging from the angle of the sun and the gnawing in his stomach, he figured that it must be somewhere around half-past breakfast. He had a watch, but it hadn't run in about three years. He had long since given up any thought of trying to regulating his life according to the hands on a clock. Now, he got up when it was daylight, ate, if he had it, when he was hungry and went to bed when it was dark. He kept the lifeless watch hanging on a nail driven into one of the poles that supported the roof of his palapa, but had no idea why. If he had ever considered it from the viewpoint of a psychologist, he would probably have come to the conclusion that keeping the watch was his way of retaining one small link with a lifestyle which he had come to Baja to escape.

He struggled for a few seconds before he realized why he was unable to rise; there was a big black dog lying across his midsection. "Get your mangy ass off me, you drunken mutt," he said as he shoved the dog off the bed and onto the floor. "How in hell did you get up here in bed with me anyway?"

He managed to rise to a half-sitting position, which was as much that the low ceiling of the cab-over part of the camper would allow. Rolling his tongue around in his mouth, he said, "Damn, my mouth tastes like the whole Mexican army marched through with their socks off. That must have been some party last night."

He fumbled in the small cubby hole at the end of the bed for one of the joints which he kept rolled to help him wake up and face a new day each morning. He lit it, took a couple deep drags and blew the smoke toward an ugly and obviously very pregnant cat curled up at the foot of the bed. The cat coughed, sneezed and hopped from the bed to the table, where she began to lick her paws and wipe them on her face.

"Go catch yourself a nice fresh mouse for breakfast, Matilda," he told her as he shoved her off the table with a club foot.

The poor, ugly creature had wandered into his camp three or four months earlier and had been immediately set upon by Blackie, who had every intention of turning her into a cloud of multi-colored hairballs. Instead of running for cover, she had fuzzed herself up to about twice normal size and stood her ground. Blackie charged in for the kill but came out with blood dripping from the claw marks on his nose. It took several trips into the fray before Blackie was convinced that discretion was the better part of valor, especially when it came to an determined cat with sharp

claws. As soon as Blackie decided that the camp was big enough for the both of them, Tom gave her the name of Matilda, the Goddess of Combat.

Every regressive ugly-cat gene in all of Baja must have gathered to suddenly become dominate in Matilda. Every known color which had ever been found on any cat, could be found in the crazy quilt patchwork of fur on her. She had no two matching parts or appendages which were the same color. Even her eyes were even of different colors, one being yellow and the other a sort of green.

As soon as Matilda had eradicated a family of mice which had established a homestead in Tom's camper, she took a few days off to find a willing tom cat with predictable results. Not too many weeks would pass before she would increase the cat population around Tom's camp by at least half a dozen.

Tom looked down at his feet and said, "Well, I see that you are still there, you poor crippled bastards. Every time that I look at you, I hope that some damn Viet Cong dies a thousand deaths."

He struggled down to the floor where he was able to stand erect. First he scratched his chest, then his stomach and finally both hands went inside his shorts to give his crotch a good scratching. He yawned and said, "According to size, if women get as much pleasure out of scratching their tits when they get up as I do scratching my balls, I don't see how they stand it."

He hobbled out the door, around the corner of the camper to his favorite spot for taking a leak. When he finished, he came back to the table under the shade. He poured some water into a basin and washed his face and hands, after which he combed his hair and beard with his fingers.

He pulled on his ragged jeans, which long ago had been torn off at the knees, and selected a wrinkled T-Shirt from a pile of clothes on the floor. The faded remains of a silk-screened message proclaimed, "SAVE US FROM DIABLO CANYON". After a quick sniff, he decided that it would be good for a few more days wear before it would have to be either washed or thrown away. He pulled on his old combat boots and laced them up. He still wore the boots because they gave his ankles some support.

He opened the door of the small propane refrigerator in the camper. The only thing that he could find that looked even slightly edible was a pan of beans, two slices of bacon and two tortillas. There was two or three other things lurking in there but they were covered in a green fuzz and looked like science projects of some sort. "Good thing that my government check comes in a few days or I'd have to start catching fish to eat."

He sniffed the bacon, shrugged his shoulders and dropped both slices into a black iron skillet which sat on one of the two burners on the tiny range. He turned on the gas and struck a match to light both burners. As the bacon began to sizzle, he picked up a dirty coffee pot, threw the contents around the corner of the camper and poured in some fresh water from the jug on the table. It went on the other burner. When the water began to boil in the pot, he dropped in a handful of coffee. The pot boiled over immediately, creating a cloud of steam and putting out the burner.

When the bacon was done, he removed the slices and laid them on a plate. Then, he chopped half an onion he found in a jelly jar into the skillet and as it began to simmer, he spooned in two large globs of beans from the pot. As they sputtered and started to boil, he began to mash them with a fork and stir them around to mix in the bacon grease. When they were hot and well mashed, he spread half of the beans on each of the two tortillas, rolled them up and put them on the plate with the bacon. Then he poured a cup of steaming, black coffee, picked up his breakfast and went to the table under the palapa to eat.

Blackie was sitting nearby, licking his chops and eyeing the plate. "Don't you even think about it," said Tom. "Grab my breakfast and I'll pound the hell out of you."

The dog looked at him with his sad, brown eyes and Tom finally gave in, "Oh, what the hell. You have to eat too and the sea gulls have already gotten anything which might have been on the beach."

Tom poured about half of remaining beans into the aluminum pan which served as Blackie's beer dish the night before. "There you go, Blackie. It ain't meat but if they are good enough for me to eat, they are good enough for you. I'll bet that you'll have the stinking dog farts for a week."

Laying on the seat of his dilapidated old green chair was the folded blanket which Ginger and Travis had taken with them to the beach the night before. On it rested a bottle of Jose Cuervo Gold and one of El Presidente Brandy. Tom opened the bottle of brandy and poured a shooter of it into his coffee. He raised his cup in a salute to Blackie, who was lapping up the beans. "Here's to the breakfast of champions and that loudmouth Texan, Joe Bob Puckett. I suppose that he wasn't such a bad sort after all. At least he has a good taste in booze and women. That LuAnn had the best looking tits and ass that I've seen in many a day."

As Tom ate his breakfast, he surveyed the wreckage of last night's party. A tiny curl of smoke rose from the smoldering remains of the campfire. Five empty bottles lay scattered about on the ground. Besides the one which had contained his Cien Fuegos, there were three empty Jose Cuervos and one which once held a very good brand of Mexican rum. The girls' favorite drink at the party was rum and Coke, except that Coke isn't sold around there and they had to use Pepsi. There was also a pile of Tecate cans and at least a case of empty Superior bottles thrown here and there. Lime peels which had been squeezed dry of all juice, were strewn everywhere. "I suppose that I'll have to clean this place up in a day or two. On second thought, perhaps the flies and ants will take care of most of it. At least the return deposit of a fifty pesos each on those Superior bottles will make it all worthwhile."

Just as he finished his breakfast, he looked up and saw someone coming toward him along the beach. As the figure came closer, he could see that it was Lupita Morales. She was carrying a stack of tortillas wrapped in aluminum foil in one hand and a live chicken in the other. He looked down at his crotch and said, "OK Shorty, Lupita is coming to see us this morning, so it's time for you to get up and do your duty."

"Hola Tomacino," shouted Lupita, waving the chicken. "Que tal?"

"When I got up this morning, I figured that this would be just another dull day in Baja, but it looks as if it is going to turn out a lot better than I expected," he thought to himself.

"Muy Bueno!" he shouted back.

THE END