

Chapter 1 **Barnabas Gets A Flattened Indian Head Penny**

Barnabas Lovitt struggled to get the manure off his boots as he waited for his turn before the company boss. Something he normally wouldn't be concerned with, but he wanted to make a good impression. Payday wasn't till the end of the week, so the timing of this gathering was unusual and meant the rumors could be true.

They probably are true.

Standing behind Barnabas was a long line of filthy, stinking, dung and mud covered men, all of them either vigorously brushing the filth from their clothes with dirty hands or using the long, bent nails they carried to pick at the dark, gelatinous muck embedded between the treads of their work boots. They were queued up before a battered rectangular table that leaned at an angle because of the uneven ground. Standing before the table, in front of Barnabas, was a tall, thin man with unnaturally long arms and legs, big hands and big feet, who everyone called, Scarecrow. He wore torn overalls that were a size too small and he was nervously kneading an old, dirty, beige hat that he held dutifully before him. Barnabas was close enough to see that he was crying. There were thin clear lines of flesh under his eyes where the tears had fallen and washed away the grime.

I'm next.

Sitting behind the table with a black metal cashbox at his side was Mr. Jones, an older man, somewhere in his fifties, about the age Barnabas' father would be if he were alive. Mr. Jones was bald, but made up for that with shaggy grey sideburns that dropped down to the bottom of his chin and curved back up to meet in a large bushy mustache. Barnabas wasn't sure if his first

name was Scott or Seth or... was it, Stephen? In any case, he was their boss and to Barnabas and everyone else in that long line he was, Mr. Jones.

Standing slightly behind Mr. Jones were two much younger men Barnabas didn't recognize. Both were large and muscular with long greasy black hair and unkempt beards framing wide oval faces that accentuated small, close-set eyes. They looked to be identical twins, only one had a broken nose that slanted to one side of his face and the other an ugly, ropey white scar across his right cheek. Both carried baseball bats. The one with the broken nose was swinging at imaginary balls while his brother rested his bat on a shoulder with one hand and picked his nose with the other.

Broken Nose and Scarface, Barnabas named them.

A slow continuous rain had fallen for three days straight, but this morning the sun finally broke through burning off the clouds to reveal a washed out, pale blue sky. Curtains of mist still rose from the saturated ground and the backs of thousands of sodden cattle and hogs to swathe the dirty clapboard buildings of the Chicago Union Stockyards in a hazy diffused light. The retched smells of manure, urine, sweat and fear infused the thick air. Livestock cried out plaintively, exhausted men cursed loudly and new machinery screeched as trains rumbled around the perimeter of the extensive grounds.

But, on this hot, oppressive, July morning, it wasn't the heat or the smell or the muck or even the deafening clamor that distressed Barnabas and the men standing behind him, it was the all-consuming dread of losing their jobs with no hope of finding another.

Shoveling manure was the only steady work Barnabas had been able to find and it was all that was keeping his strained relationship with his wife, Helen, intact. The last four years of off and on again employment had taken a toll in their relationship. He was trained as an accountant

and had been employed as one with a bank when he and Helen married and started a family. His dream had been to own or manage his own business one day. It didn't really matter what the business was or even what industry it was in, all that mattered was that he was in charge, successful and admired like his idols, William Vanderbilt, Andrew Carnegie, and John D. Rockefeller. But when the "Panic of 93" set in, everything changed and Barnabas' bank along with several others across the country closed and, just like that, he was out of work.

Barnabas tried to find another position in his field, but competing for the few jobs that remained against older, more experienced men willing to work for less proved to be futile. Eventually he found a job as a sales clerk for Marshall Fields, but that only lasted a few months. With a decreasing number of shoppers, there was less need for sales people and no need for Barnabas. After that, he spent half of a year in a factory supervising boys working on the line who were less than half his age. He was fired when one of the youngsters had a hand crushed in the machinery and in a rage he protested the work conditions. Next he worked as a baker's assistant and although the pay was low, he was able to bring home bread and pastries for his family to help stretch their food budget. That ended when the baker died from tuberculosis and the shop shut its doors. What followed was a series of lesser jobs as a waiter, cook, busboy, stable hand, handy man, chimney sweep, street cleaner and day laborer, but Barnabas was inept at each and they all ended quickly. After that, there was no work and only the small wages Helen made as one of two-hundred seamstresses in a third-floor shop on the south side and money from her parents helped the family survive.

Barnabas knew Helen hated her work, despised their life in Chicago and wanted to move back to her parent's farm in Bloomington. He refused and as their financial struggles grew, she threatened to take the children and leave him. They fought often. When he was offered the job in

the stockyards, he hoped that despite the lowly work there would be an opportunity for him to advance in the company. He had the skills. All he needed was an opportunity to meet the right person at the yards and prove it. Helen reluctantly agreed to give it a chance.

No chance now. Only failure and ruin and...

The high-pitched shriek of a train whistle pulled Barnabas away from his dark thoughts. He turned to look for the source and saw a flock of magpies and smaller birds that he couldn't identify take flight from the roof of a slaughterhouse on the east side of the stockyards. A single plume of black smoke boiled up from behind the building spewing tiny, glowing red embers high into the air. The whistle blasted again followed by the hiss of breaks releasing, the sudden mechanical squeal of couplers straining to stay connected and the steadily increasing click and clack of heavy iron wheels turning faster and faster as they gained traction on slick steel rails. Then the top of the black plume of smoke began to shear off horizontally as the train, still hidden, moved forward. Barnabas knew that it was empty and headed to Union Station, but where would it go from there?

It doesn't matter, anyplace would be better than here. I wish I was on it. I wish...

A heavy blow from behind knocked Barnabas to the ground face-first into a muddy puddle, then a heavy weight fell on top of him pushing his face deeper into the disgusting muck. Sludge and polluted water filled his mouth and forced its way up his nostrils. He gagged and sputtered and spit out the grunge as he spread his arms wide to push himself up. But the ground was too slick and his hands slid out from under him as the weight on his back shifted and pressed his face down into the mess again.

Straining against the weight, Barnabas tilted his head to look up and saw an old, dirty beige hat and a rusty hoof pick on the ground before him. The rectangular table lay on its side a short

distance away with Mr. Jones sprawled on the dirt behind it. Men were shouting, “Get up! Get up! Fight! Fight! Fight! Get up!” And then a forest of legs and work boots blocked out all else as the yelling grew louder and a single pair of legs separated from the rest to come forward with a baseball bat hanging at their side.

Barnabas craned his neck to look up further, saw Broken Nose and watched as the big man raised the bat high into the air. “No!” Barnabas screamed as he ducked his head back down into the disgusting puddle and braced for the blow that was sure to come.

The bat hit an instant later. Barnabas felt the force of it despite whatever lay between him and the point of impact. He grunted with pain and involuntarily took in another mouthful of muddy water. Then whatever was pinning him down rolled off and he was able to get enough of a grip in the liquid ground to push up and get to his feet. He was covered in a thick layer of muck from head to toe and despite the heat, he was trembling. On the ground where he had lain, he saw Scarecrow tucked in a fetal position, moaning and rocking back and forth. Broken Nose was standing over him with his bat ready as if the damaged man still represented a threat. Behind them, Scarface was helping Mr. Jones to his feet. And the men who had surrounded him and been roaring for a fight, a moment before, stood silent and still.

And it was quiet.

Barnabas wondered if it was the mud in his ears blocking out the usual clamor of the yards or had every person, animal and machine paused for a moment? But then he heard the train whistle muted and thin and he looked up to see its black plume of smoke now no more than a slight smudge on the horizon and he wished again that he was on it.

Then the din of the yards returned in a sudden mad rush rolling over him like a wave.

He heard Mr. Jones shouting to be heard above it, “Get back in line. Get back in line, now! The show is over. We have work to do. Get back in line.”

And he watched as the men obeyed, soundlessly ambling back to their places, arms hanging down at their sides, their heads drooping in defeat, only their slow deliberate movement showing that any life still existed within them.

Broken Nose pointed to Scarecrow and asked, “What should I do with him? Should I throw him out?”

Mr. Jones walked over, looked down at the broken man and said with a soft voice, “No, take him to the infirmary and then come back here... and be gentle about it. No need to hurt him more.”

Broken Nose shrugged, picked up Scarecrow as if he was a child and carried him off.

Scarface picked up the table and chair.

And a moment later, all was back to normal as if the fight or whatever had just taken place, had never happened. Mr. Jones was sitting at the table with his cashbox beside him. Scarface was at his place behind him picking his nose. The men were queued up as before.

Then Mr. Jones cleared his throat, looked at Barnabas and called out, “Next.”

Barnabas looked around in the crazy hope that maybe Mr. Jones wasn't referring to him, but he stood alone in front of the men and knew that it was his turn and there was no hope.

“Next!” Mr. Jones called again.

Barnabas swallowed, wiped the remaining dirt from his face as best he could, ran his hands through his hair to comb it back and stepped forward.

“Are you all right? Are you injured?” Mr. Jones asked.

Barnabas glanced at Scarface for an instant and then back to Mr. Jones and said, “I’m not hurt.”

Mr. Jones nodded. He was holding and studying the rusty hoof pick Barnabas had seen on the ground. After a moment he held it up and said, “He called me a corrupt official, said that I was an *overseer* trampling on the rights of men, and then he tried to rip out my throat with this, a damn hoof pick. He must be an Anarchist, or maybe a fool, or maybe just... desperate.” He looked at Barnabas. “Are you an Anarchist?”

“No.”

“Do you know what an Anarchist believes?”

Barnabas thought he knew, but wasn’t certain. He had heard many of them speak, at his neighborhood tavern, on the busy streets and avenues of Chicago, standing on soapboxes in the parks and even outside the gates of the stockyards. But they all said different things. Some preached about equality for all, some spoke about the power of individualism, some railed against the evils of governments – all governments, some advocated for violence against anyone in authority including business leaders, the clergy, politicians, even the president, some sounded reasonable, some sounded crazy. “I think they want fairness and equality for every man,” Barnabas answered.

“And aren’t those things you also want?”

“Yes, but...” Barnabas couldn’t find the words to explain.

“But, you also want to be in charge someday, don’t you?” Mr. Jones answered for him.

“You want to be a boss with wealth and power. A leader instead of a follower and that would not be allowed under the Anarchist’s code, isn’t that true?”

Barnabas didn’t answer.

“I know about you. I know that you are an educated man, trained as an accountant. You understand numbers and the hard decisions that must come from their analysis. Surely, you must understand why you and I and all of them,” Mr. Jones swept his arm out to indicate the men standing quietly in line, “are gathered here today.”

Barnabas remained silent.

Mr. Jones tossed the hoof pick on the table. “Well, maybe you can explain it to me because I don’t understand it. I know that times are hard and industries are suffering, but I look around this dreadful place and see its size and scope and know that fortunes are also being made and I don’t understand it. All I do know is that a man sitting in an office on Michigan Avenue who has never set foot in the yards and never will set foot in the yards has passed judgment on us all. He has looked at the numbers, as you were trained to do, made his calculations and made his decision to whittle our workforce. I wonder if your decision would have been any different. In any case, the decision is made and I have my job to do.” Mr. Jones opened the cash box and retrieved an envelope.

“It isn’t right,” Barnabas finally spoke up.

“No, it isn’t right and I am truly sorry. You have a family, don’t you?”

“Two boys, five and seven, Lee and Markus.”

“I have a son, Stephen Junior. He is twenty-five and in the navy. He serves on the *USS Maine*. I haven’t seen him in almost two years. I miss him and look forward to his return. At least your family is here for you and can support you.”

Not after today.

“I wish there was another way, but I don’t make the decisions. My job is to do what I have been ordered to do and I have been ordered to eliminate fifty men. That includes you and those

behind you.” Mr. Jones handed the envelope over to Barnabas. “This contains what the company owes you through today. I wish you well.”

Barnabas knew he was being dismissed. He took the envelope, but as he turned to leave, he said, “Numbers are only numbers, I would’ve made a different decision.”

Near the limestone entry to the Union Stockyards were several long canvas tents where workers both began and finished their shifts. In each tent, were rows of tables filled with tubs of soapy lukewarm water, freestanding wooden walls with small open cubbyholes and hooks for clothes, rickety folding chairs and a pot-bellied iron stove. Flies, gnats, and mosquitoes swarmed everywhere.

This was an odd time of day and so there were only a few men washing or changing when Barnabas arrived and like him, most had just lost their job. A few were bickering, one was sobbing, and the others stayed by themselves as did Barnabas. He reached into an inside pocket and retrieved a small sepia photograph of him and his family. They were wearing their best clothes and posed formally, Helen sitting on a plush, striped chair with baby Lee on her lap, Markus standing to her side, Barnabas standing behind the three. They were all smiling. The picture was taken when Barnabas still had his job with the bank. The photo was damp, but it had survived. Barnabas kissed it and placed it on a shelf above the tubs. Then he stripped off his soiled clothes and boots and scrubbed the grime away as best he could with a stiff brush. When he finished, he retrieved his street clothes from a hook, dressed and pocketed his photograph. He didn’t have an extra pair of shoes, so he used the same brush he had cleaned himself with to scour the mud and manure from his boots. Finally, ready to go, he reached for his dirty work clothes to bring home for washing, but then decided to leave them and walked away.

They are as worthless as I am.

Barnabas exited through the Union Stock Yard Gate, walked a few steps and then turned back for one last look. On his first day, the massive stone edifice with the bust of the prize winning bull, Sherman, prominent over the arched entryway had impressed him, even filled him with a sense of pride since he was part of the organization. Now he saw the structure as nothing more than a fraud and worse, a symbol for something he could not have. He looked for a stone to throw at it, but saw two guards watching him, so he spit at the gate instead and hurried away.

After a few blocks, Barnabas came to a railroad crossing and stopped. The tracks ran north and south; his home lay to the east. He hesitated. It was only mid-day, too early to go home and he needed time to think. He stepped onto the tracks and followed them north toward Union Station.

In just minutes, Barnabas was back alongside the stockyards only this time he was walking on the raised embankment of train tracks to the east and able to see the facility in its enormous totality. It filled the landscape all the way to the horizon, a vast grey and brown complex of massive buildings, enormous pens bursting with livestock, and men scurrying about like ants. It looked like what it was a man-made abomination upon the earth with no hint of mercy or kindness, only misery for all men and beasts confined there.

The area on the opposite side of the tracks wasn't much better. Dilapidated shacks stained with soot from passing trains bordered the rails alongside shabby bars, rundown boarding houses and cheap brothels. Barnabas could see drunks sleeping in alleys while nearby rats fearlessly picked through piles of litter heaped against the walls.

Is this all there is? Does it ever get better?

Barnabas couldn't bear any of it anymore. He hung his head down and focused hard on the railroad tie below him to block out his surroundings. Then, still looking down, he stepped

forward to the next tie and the next after that and the next after that. He had to lengthen his stride to reach each of them and it didn't feel natural, but it forced him to concentrate and that was good. He started to count each step and when he reached the number four, he started again.

1 2 3 4

1 2 3 4

He quickened his pace.

1 2 3 4

1 2 3 4

1 2 3 4

His cadence smoothed, transitioning into an almost hypnotic rhythm.

1 2 3 4

1 2 3 4

1 2 3 4

1 2 3 4

He began to notice small details, the different patterns of grain on each passing tie, the shine of the rails where wheels had polished them smooth, pieces of white granite mixed in with gray gravel, thorny weeds a few inches tall, a single yellow daisy too low to the ground to be threatened by the trains.

1 2 3 4

1 2 3 4

1 2 3 4

Then, in Barnabas' peripheral vision, he saw patches of dark velvety green mixed with radiant spots of gold and white and scarlet. He looked up. To his right were the backyards of

homes, some bordered by white picket fences, some open, some with kids playing on swings or chasing after each other or a dog, some filled with vegetable gardens, most with wildflowers scattered across the lawns, and a few overgrown with high, prickly weeds. On his left was a pasture separated from the tracks by a barbed wire fence. In the distance, horses grazed on the fresh grass that three days of rain had brought. The sky was a brilliant blue and the sun golden. The air was filled with the buzz of insects and the sweet fragrances of grass, flowers and damp earth.

Barnabas slowed his pace and stopped counting.

After a while, the homes thinned out and the pasture turned into an overgrown field. A small stream bordered by giant Cottonwoods flowed from the west to meet up with the tracks and run parallel with them to the north. Ahead, the stream turned east to merge with a river in a narrow gorge that ran under a railroad bridge.

Barnabas saw a small figure emerge from the gorge, walk over to the tracks on his side of the bridge and lay down on the ground with his head resting on the rails as if he was listening. Then the figure reached into a pocket, placed something on the rail and stood up. He looked back, saw Barnabas and waved.

Barnabas waved back, puzzled by the man, wondering if perhaps he should turn around or just leave the tracks right there and cut across the fields to home. But then, far off in the distance, he heard the familiar sound of a train whistle. After a few moments, the rails began to hum and when he stepped on one, he felt vibrations pass from the steel up through his body. A minute later, he saw it, first as a black dot on the horizon and then as it came closer and its shape took on definition, as a great, black behemoth advancing relentlessly toward him. In another minute, it was approaching the bridge, the sound of its engine piercing and shrill. Barnabas saw

the man leap from the tracks to stand several feet away and he did the same. A moment later, the train was roaring past the man and then past Barnabas, passenger and freight cars whipping by with frightening speed, the sound deafening and changing from a high-pitched wail to a low thunderous rumble as it went on its way.

Then, as quickly as it had come, it was gone and the man was back on the tracks stooping to pick up whatever he had placed there. He examined it for a moment, then turned toward Barnabas and called out, “Hey, this is a good one. Want to see it?”

Barnabas thought again about turning back, but he was curious. He walked forward.

“You don’t look like one of the brotherhood, are you here to ride the rails or just out walking and enjoying this fine day?” The man asked with a Bostonian accent that sounded almost foreign.

“I’m not a hobo, if that’s what you’re asking,” Barnabas answered as he approached.

“Well, that’s okay. I won’t hold it against you.” The man smiled as he extended his right hand. “My name’s Adonis Alexander Smith and I am a traveler of the rails or ‘Hobo’ as you likely name it.”

“Adonis?” Barnabas responded shaking the offered hand. The man was small and compact. He had long, fine brown hair that fell limply from under a plaid beret and a wispy beard that only partially covered a badly pockmarked face. Despite the heat, he was wearing a red union suite under a flannel shirt with rolled up sleeves and a worn pair of denim jeans.

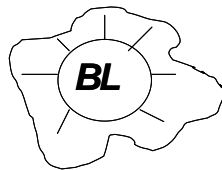
“I was a good looking baby,” he grinned in reply. “My friends call me Donny or Don, though I mostly prefer, Donny.”

“My name is Barnabas Lovitt. My friends call me, Barn or Barney. Either is good with me.”

“Well, pleased to meet you, Barney. Want to see what I just made?”

“Yes.”

Donny opened his left hand to reveal a flattened Indian Head penny. “It’s a beauty, isn’t it? See how it shines and the shape is all sort of here and there, kind of like an amoeba. I saw a picture of one of those once in a book in my parent’s library. And look here, on this side you can just make out the Indian head, but on this other side all the words and images are gone. It’s flat and smooth and if you wanted to, you could add to it and make it into something brand new. I’ll show you.” He retrieved a pocketknife, opened a small blade and used it to engrave a circle with lines radiating out and the initials, **BL**, in the center.



When Donny was finished, he handed the flattened penny to Barnabas. “Now it is unique. There is no other penny in the world like this one and it is just for you.”

“For me?” Barnabas asked hesitant to take it.

“It surely is, it’s got your initials on it,” responded Donny.

“Thank you, but I can’t take it. You made it, it’s yours. Besides, don’t you want it?”

Donny reached into his pocket and pulled out a handful of flattened coins. There were more Indian Head pennies mixed with Liberty nickels, Barber dimes and quarters, and two bright Morgan silver dollars. All were engraved. There were initials or words on some; others had symbols and larger coins were decorated with tiny intricate etchings of trains, flowers and animals or profiles of people.

Barnabas looked through them all amazed and impressed with the quality and artistry of the work. “These are incredible. You are a real artist.”

Donny blushed. “Hell, I just like doing it. Each time I flatten a new coin, I see something in it that I want to bring out.” He put the coins back in his pocket except for the one with Barnabas’ initials and tried again to hand it over.

Barnabas took the coin this time and said, “Thank you. I only wish that I had something to offer you in return.”

“Shucks, you just gave me something worth more than just anything I can think of when you said I was an artist.”

Barnabas smiled.

“So, Barney, where you headed this fine day?”

“I don’t know. I was just let go from my job and I needed to walk and clear my head, and I just ended up here.”

“That sounds like providence to me.” Donny said in a more serious tone. “Maybe, you picked the tracks for your walk because it’s time for you to leave this place. Maybe it’s time for you to find your destiny?”

Barnabas looked at the flattened penny in his hand and then up the tracks to the north and then back to Donny. “Where are you going?” He asked.

“Me, I’m riding the rails to Alaska. There are stories in all the papers about a couple of miners that came into Seattle from the Yukon with tales of finding gold and I want to get me some.”

“You want to be rich?”

“I want to find me a big nugget of gold and put it on a train track and flatten it and etch something real good on it. And...” he grinned, “I want to own the train that flattens it too.”

Barnabas laughed.

“I ain’t crazy, you know. Why don’t you come with me? I can teach you the tricks of the road and rails.”

Barnabas looked again at the coin in his hand and then the tracks. After a few long moments, he sighed, shook his head, and put the coin in his pocket. “I want to go with you, but I can’t. I have a family.”

Donny shrugged. “I understand. Well, Barney, I need to be going. I got me a train to catch. I wish you and your family well. It was good meeting you. And, who knows, maybe someday we will meet again, maybe even on another set of tracks. Take care of yourself, my friend.”

“You take care of yourself too, friend... and thanks!”

They shook hands and parted.

Barnabas stayed where he was for a while watching Donny shuffle off to retrieve a satchel from beside the creek in the gorge before continuing on the tracks toward Union Station. When the figure of the small man was just a speck in the distance, Barnabas left the tracks to cut through the fields and find his way home to his family.

Home was a small two-room apartment on the second floor of a rundown tenement. There was a drunk sleeping on the stoop before the entryway. Barnabas knew the man and liked him. His name was Brian Gruber and he lived in the apartment next to Barnabas with his wife and three girls. When he was sober, he was a kind, gentle fellow and a good neighbor always willing to help out. When he was drunk, he could be mean. Sometimes, late at night, Barnabas and Helen could hear him and his wife fighting, mostly yelling and screaming, but every once in a while there would be a loud thud and the sound of something breaking followed by sobbing. Barnabas studied the man and wondered if the women of the Temperance movement had a point.

He thought about waking him and taking him home, but decided that perhaps it was best to let him sleep it off where he was. So he stepped over the snoring body and walked inside.

There were kids playing on the stairs surrounded by toys and clutter. Muted laughter, mumbled conversations, arguments, and music filled the space mingling with the mixed aromas of different foods being prepared from supper. Barnabas realized that he hadn't eaten since that morning and suddenly felt very hungry. He quickened his pace expecting to find Helen, Lee and Markus already sitting at the dining table waiting for him. He was wrong. Helen was there preparing dinner, but the boys were gone and there were just two place-settings on the table. She turned to face him and she was crying.

She knows.

Helen wiped the tears from her eyes, ran to Barnabas and hugged him fiercely. He hugged back just as intensely. "I'm sorry," she said with her face buried in his chest.

"Don't be," he whispered fighting back his own tears.

They held on to each other until the plop and fizz of a stew boiling over on the stove intruded and Helen pulled away to move the pot and extinguish the fire.

Barnabas watched her work and not for the first time, noticed the lines forming on her face transforming her features prematurely into a permanent frown. She was pretty still with long blonde hair, hazel eyes, straight white teeth and a clear complexion, but she looked tired and beat down.

It's my fault.

Sometimes when Barnabas couldn't sleep, he lay next to her studying her face, marveling how in slumber her wrinkles disappeared and the youthful carefree glow of the woman he had

proposed to returned. He wished that her life wasn't so hard. He wished that he hadn't made it so hard. "Where are the boys?" He asked stalling for time.

"They're still with Mrs. Winter. Considering what's happened today, I thought it best for us to have some time alone." Helen wiped her face with a folded dish cloth and looked over at Barnabas. "Where are your work clothes?"

"I left them at the yards."

Helen studied him for a moment and then went back to preparing their meal. "Mrs. Winter told me that Markus was almost hit by a motorcar today. He and Lee were playing in front of the building. Markus ran out into the street to get a ball without looking and the motorcar had to swerve to miss him and almost hit another vehicle. According to Mrs. Winter, the driver was very upset."

"Markus is alright, isn't he?"

"Yes, but he... we were lucky. This could happen again and next time it could be much more serious. Barn, this is no place for kids to grow up. In a way, I'm glad I lost my job. It forces us to make a decision. It forces me to make a decision. I don't want to leave you and I'm not truly leaving you, but there is no way we can survive here on just your wages. I am taking the kids and moving to my parent's farm. I want you to come with us, but I am willing to let you stay since you still have work and feel there might be opportunity for you at the yards. I understand that you need time to find out if you can actually make a future here in this city. I'm willing to give you that time, if you are willing to let us go to the farm."

"You lost your job?"

“Yes, it was awful.” Helen started to cry again. “They called forty of us girls into an office one by one and told us that business was slow and they had no need for our services anymore. Three of the girls fainted and one tried to stab our boss with a knitting needle. It was horrible.”

Barnabas walked over, wrapped his arms around Helen and kissed her on the cheek.

She doesn't know.

“Barn, I hope you understand. I don't see any other way. Leave this ugly city and come with us. It can be a good life on the farm.”

“I...” Barnabas struggled to answer. He knew that he should tell her that he too had lost his job, but he couldn't speak the words.

“Barn,” Helen continued. “I know you feel you have something to prove, not to me, but to yourself. If you stay, you must promise me that if you lose this job or are unable to find a better position with the company, you will give up on this dream or whatever it is that compels you and join us on the farm. Can you promise me that?”

Barnabas stepped away from Helen, unable to speak, unsure of what to do, afraid that she might see the truth on his face. He reached into his pocket and felt for the hard, uneven shape of the flattened Indian Head penny. He gripped it tightly and a kind of clarity came to him and he said, “Yes, I promise.”

Chapter 2 **Greg Gets A Performance Review**

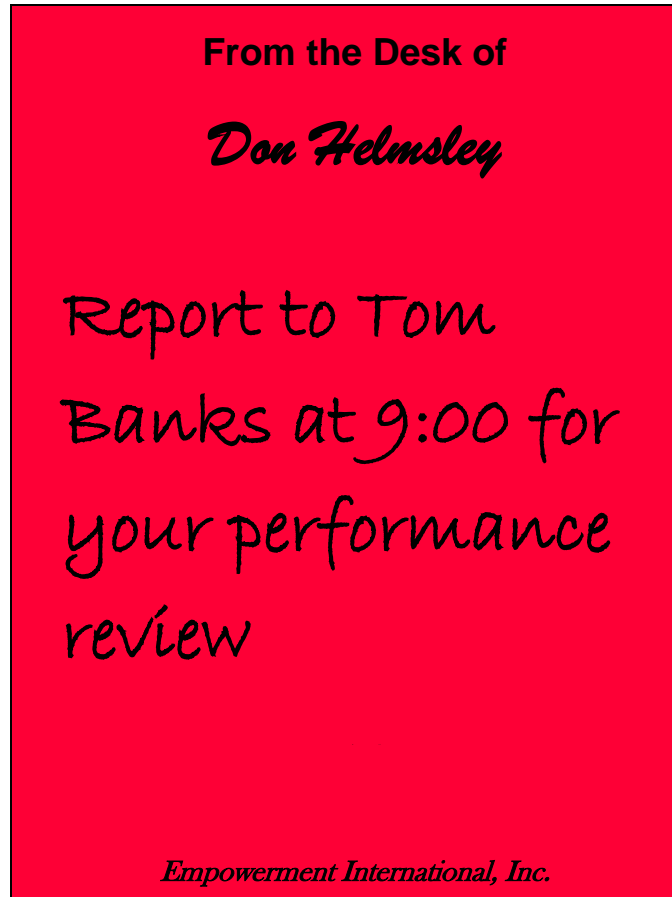
Greg Lovitt knew there was a red memo waiting at his desk as soon as he entered his row of cubicles. Coworkers avoided eye contact and the normal sounds of the busy work place were hushed with only a few coworkers mumbling a “hello” or “good morning” in response to his greetings as he walked by.

He understood their fear.

No matter what, I persevere.

Reflexively, Greg reached into his pocket and wrapped his hand around his great, grandfather’s flattened Indian Head penny. It was encased in a cheap plastic coin protector. In his other hand, he held a glass of water. He strode between the cubicles with a slow deliberate pace, his back straight and his head held high. There was vigor in his steps more like a younger man’s, then someone approaching sixty-five.

Greg found the red memo face-down on his desk chair. He picked it up and tossed it on the cubicle shelf that doubled as a desk. Then he put his glass of water down next to his computer monitor, removed the flower from his lapel – today it was a yellow rose – and put it into the glass. Next he took off his suit coat and carefully draped it over an old wooden hanger that he hooked over the top of one wall of the cubicle. He didn’t need to wear a suit or tie anymore, not since his last demotion, but he still did, every day, alternating between a dark blue and charcoal grey ensemble. Both suits were decades old, but they were all he had and he took care of them. Then he sat down, adjusted the chair’s height to match his own instead of the woman who sat there on the previous shift, logged into his computer, sighed, and picked up the memo.



Greg's hand began to shake ever so slightly as he read the note. He felt a weight on his chest and blood rushing to his head. His vision fogged. His heart raced. He needed air. He needed escape. For half a heartbeat, he thought about giving up and running away. But then he closed his eyes and whispered, *no matter what, I persevere*, and repeated it until he was back in control and angry.

Don Helmsley still knew how to hurt him.

Tom Banks was less than half Greg's age and had only been with the company for two weeks. He was the new Director of Sales, a position Greg had once held, and his office was Greg's old office. And this young, unaware, inexperienced, junior manager was going to give him a performance review, another humiliation in a long list of humiliations.

No matter what, I persevere.

Greg put the memo back down on his desk and checked the time on his watch, an old Timex with a white analog face, black hands and a knob on the side that he turned every evening. He had forty minutes to prepare for his review.

Permanently mounted on the cubicle wall above the phone was the “Smile Mirror.” Greg turned to it and studied his reflection. Looking back was an old man with a full head of silver hair, an old-fashioned pencil thin mustache, a deeply lined face, and green eyes that still sparkled despite the years and hardships. He knew that at first glance he conveyed an illusion of elegance like a matinee idol from decades ago or the Maître’D at a fancy restaurant. But when Greg smiled and revealed two noticeable gaps where teeth were missing, the illusion was shattered.

Greg hated the “Smile Mirror.”

No matter what, I persevere.

Greg turned away from his image and forced his mind to focus.

All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players; They have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts, his acts being seven ages.

What part shall I play for this review... or shall I call it a performance?

Shall I be as manipulative as Richard III or as cruel as Black Bart or the Black Knight?

Shall I play a friendlier, more engaging character such as Falstaff or Curly McLain and hope to get Mr. Banks on my side?

Or shall I just confound the young man with the aggressive and erratic behavior of Stanley Kowalski?

What is certain is that I must not play the part of the character I feel closest to, Willy Loman.

After all the highways, and the trains, and the appointments, and the years, you end up worth more dead than alive.

Or shall I just be myself and hope for the best?

No matter what, I persevere.

A shadow passed over Greg and he looked behind to see Don Helmsley or as the rest of Empowerment International called him, *The Don*, studying him with a mixture of amusement and malevolence. It was like looking into another kind of mirror. Both men were the same age, both had silver hair and green eyes, only *The Don's* hair was sparse and cut close to the scalp and his eyes were dull and sinister and his face showed the telltale signs of cosmetic surgery so that his skin was smooth and hard.

Don Helmsley smiled thinly and said, “Hello Greg. I see you have received my memo. That’s good. I’ve told Mr. Banks all about you, even about your criminal history. It will be interesting to see how he handles you. He is ambitious, so I expect he will do what is required.” His thin smile broadened into a grin. “Do you really want to put yourself through this ordeal?”

Greg didn’t respond.

“I can’t fire you, the contract prevents that,” Helmsley continued. “But you lost your share to this company when you became a felon and since you have no heir, well... let’s just say that your line ends both physically and economically when you pass from this world to the next.”

The words hit Greg hard, as they were meant to, but he forced his face to remain neutral, he was an actor before becoming a businessman, and he knew how to cover his feelings and project other emotions in their place.

The Don stretched his hands out, palms open, as if he had nothing to hide. “There just doesn’t seem to be any advantage to continuing in what must be for you, a very difficult situation. There is a solution that can bring you peace as well as provide both you and your poor sick wife with an extremely generous financial settlement to ensure a comfortable life in your

final years. Just hand over your copy of the contract and sign over your family's share. A simple thing to do, really, when you think about what your life is like and how much better it could be away from the stresses of this place.”

“You haven't won yet,” Greg replied.

“Of course, I have. You are beaten but you are just too stubborn to accept it. You are a sad, pathetic clown pretending to be brave. But I know better. Since the day our great grandfathers first met, the Helmsleys have always beaten the Lovitts.”

“Not in everything. Not where it's really mattered.”

Don Helmsley did not respond.

A few long moments passed in silence as each man stared at the other and then Helmsley broke the quiet and said, “Well, I will leave you to your many important duties here in your... box. Of course, you know the way to Mr. Banks office, it was yours once.”

Before Greg could react, *The Don* turned and walked away.

The framed poster was still there on the wall behind the desk that Greg had once occupied. It was one of the first motivational prints produced and sold by the company. A stirring image of a couple holding hands on the deck of a sailboat looking out over a deep blue sea under a vivid blue sky. They were maybe in their late thirties, smiling, happy, conveying a sense of blissful contentment. Two people living their dream – together.

Underneath the image was the quote.

Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined.

Henry David Thoreau

Greg remembered how when he first moved into the office, he thought the poster cheesy and absurd, but as he grew accustomed to it he came to accept it and became inspired by its message

believing one day it would be him and Margery in some similar or more exotic location pursuing their dream. But that never came to be and then, as the years passed, Greg grew to resent the poster and its message. Now, as he studied it for the first time in a long time, he knew the words were correct but that he had lost his direction. A deep sense of melancholy filled him and thoughts of what could have been broke his heart.

“Are you listening to me?” A voice intruded and Greg realized that he had drifted away. He turned from the poster to face the young man behind the desk and said, “Yes, I’m listening.”

“It didn’t seem like it. Look, I know this is difficult for you. It’s difficult for me. Can we just focus and get on with it?”

“Yes, of course, but I still have questions for you,” Greg responded as he pulled himself together. He did not want to make this too easy for Mr. Tom Banks, so he had decided to play the part of a stern, stubborn, self-righteous man like Judge Danforth in the *Crucible*. He saw that it was working. The younger man’s face was pale and there were beads of sweat on his brow. He was fiddling with a walnut and brass nameplate that was engraved with his name and title and he was having a hard time keeping eye contact with Greg.

“Thank you,” the younger man responded tersely. “As I’ve already said, I’ll get to your questions, but first we must talk about the quantity of sales calls you are making or...not making. You are not hitting your quota or even coming close to the average number of calls your peers are putting out. I believe this has been brought to your attention before?”

Greg ignored the question and asked his own instead. “Have you had the opportunity to listen in on any of my calls?”

“Yes...” Tom drew the word out as if, Greg thought, he was afraid there was a trick hidden in the question.

“And have you also listened in on my peer’s calls?”

“Yes...” Again the word was drawn out.

“And?”

Tom put the nameplate down on his desk and said, “The quality of your calls was much better and percentage wise, you have a better closing rate. I admit it. But that isn’t the point.”

“What is the point?”

“The point is that we have certain standards to meet and you are not meeting yours.” Tom picked up his nameplate again. “I’m sorry, I really am, but I have no control over this.”

Greg knew that was true and felt some sympathy for the young man. He softened his voice, pointed to the framed poster on the wall and said, “Thoreau was right.”

“What?”

“You still have time.”

“Time for what? I don’t understand what you are talking about.”

Greg heard the distress in Tom’s voice, saw it on his face and felt guilty. True, this situation was a farce designed to hurt him, but he had no right to make this young man, who was just the messenger, suffer like this. He decided to abandon his act. He saw no point to it anymore. He would be himself and he would be honest and he would make Tom Banks realize what was truly important here. He pointed again to the poster and said, “You are still young. You still have time to try things, to experiment with life, test the possibilities, define your dream and move toward it. I don’t.”

Tom looked up at the poster, silently mouthed the quote, and then turned back to Greg.

“Look, I’m not sure what you are talking about. I think you are trying to help me and that is

decent of you, especially considering the circumstances, but you can help me most by staying focused on this review.”

Greg wasn't ready to give up, not yet, he had to find a way to make this young man understand. He leaned forward and asked, “Are you married?”

“Yes,” Tom answered exasperation clear in his voice.

“Any kids?”

“No, not yet, we're waiting for the right time. Can we please get back to the review?”

“We had a daughter,” Greg continued not willing to let it go. “She was in the World Trade Center when the planes hit on 9/11. She never made it out.” His voice quaked as he spoke the words, surprised to hear them out loud after so many years, his grief still as intense despite the passage of time. “My wife has never gotten over it. Neither have I. How could anyone? She's very ill now and requires oxygen and medicine and almost constant attention. Our life is hard and not what we imagined it would be. It didn't turn out like that poster.”

Greg let the words sink in for a moment as he studied Tom looking for a hint of understanding. The younger man was clearly moved, but did he comprehend Greg's meaning? He continued, “I'm telling you this not to gain your sympathy, but to help you appreciate what it is I'm trying to say.”

Tom had to clear his throat before he could speak and still had some difficulty getting his words out. “I'm sorry for your loss. I... I don't know what to say. But, no, I don't understand what you are getting at.”

Greg leaned back in his chair and asked, “What do you know about me? I mean in addition to the number of sales calls I make.”

“Good and bad. The bad from Mr. Helmsley, stuff about embezzling the company and jail time and some things about your families and a rivalry going back generations. The good, well, that comes from everyone else.”

“What do you believe?”

Tom didn't answer and Greg decided not to push him. He thought for a moment and then said, “You know me as Greg Lovitt, but my stage name was Greg Love. It sounds almost magical doesn't it?” He smiled, but kept his lips pressed together so he would not reveal his missing teeth. “In the seventies, when I was just a little younger than you, I was an actor as was my father, grandfather and great, grandfather before me. I was under contract with Universal Studios and playing all sorts of parts on a wide variety of television shows including westerns, science fiction, cop shows, doctor shows, adventures, everything there was. I remember one particular day very clearly. I was working on a sitcom in a small role opposite Farrah Fawcett. You know who she was?”

“That name sounds familiar. Hey,” Tom grinned, “wasn't there a poster of her in a red bathing suit, a slim woman with long blonde hair and blue eyes?”

“Yes.”

“I remember that poster. My dad had it on the wall in our basement by the pool table. I remember that made my mom angry, but he refused to take it down. Farrah Fawcett was hot.”

“She was 'hot' and I was smitten with her. But I knew that she had been dating Lee Majors, *The Six Million Dollar Man*, and believed that I had no chance with her. However, on that particular day, we were on set standing on opposite sides of a couch in a large fake living room waiting for a sound check. I was watching her like a star-struck teenager, trying to not be obvious about it. I wasn't successful. She saw me looking at her and gave me the biggest most

gloriously dazzling smile I had ever seen. Then she blew me a kiss and winked at me and I thought, maybe, just maybe, I have a chance. That moment, I planned to ask her for a date after the shoot.”

“What happened? Did you go out with her?”

Greg laughed softly, “No. Lee proposed to her that very day and any chance I might have had, was gone.”

Tom laughed too and said, “Imagine that.”

Then they sat for in silence for a moment, Tom seemingly lost in thought as Greg watched him fiddle with his nameplate.

When Greg spoke next, his voice was so low that Tom had to lean closer to hear him. “I met my wife the very next day. She didn’t look anything like Farrah. She had short, dark brown hair that caught and reflected the light, warm, kind, brown eyes, a full figure and an olive complexion that glowed as if from an inner light. I thought, and I still do, that she was and is the most beautiful woman I have ever known.”

Again there was silence as this time Greg was lost in thought.

After a few moments, Tom put his nameplate down and asked, “What happened then?”

Greg looked at the younger man and said, “We married, had our daughter and I continued to act. I was gaining a reputation as a reliable character actor, getting bigger parts and even nominated for an Emmy. I was achieving my dream, although I didn’t realize it at the time.”

“And then what happened?”

“I came here.”

“You came here. Why?”

“It’s a long story,” Greg replied suddenly feeling very tired. “My chance is gone, but you still have yours. You still have time to determine your direction and live the life you truly want. Do you understand?”

“I think so. I do. It’s just that I always thought my direction was here, or least that here is a place that will move me forward in the direction I do want.”

“I once thought the same thing,” Greg replied. Then he pointed to the review and said, “Perhaps we should focus on this now?”

Tom looked at the review and then back to Greg. “I need to tell you something. I didn’t write this, Mr. Helmsley did. I don’t believe it’s accurate and I don’t think it’s right or fair. You are being demoted to an entry-level customer service role. I want to take it back and meet with Mr. Helmsley and write my own. I…”

“You don’t have to say more,” Greg interrupted. “I understand.” Then he reached into his coat pocket and withdrew a golden pen which he used to sign the review with a theatrical flourish as if he was signing an autograph. “In the grand scheme of things, this is nothing,” he said. “What is important we have discussed and that is enough.” He put the pen away, stood up and extended his hand to Tom.

Tom took his hand. “I don’t know what to say.”

“Just think on what has been said,” Greg replied. Then he turned to leave, but just as he reached the door, Tom called out, “How do you do it? How do you keep on going?”

Greg stopped, turned to face the younger man and smiled, this time revealing his missing teeth, and said, “No matter what, I persevere.”

Chapter 3

John Helmsley Smokes a Cigar

John Helmsley walked through the crowd gathering along the Hudson River front for the Macy's fireworks display. It was early evening and the Independence Day show was still a few hours away, but the area between 18th and 43rd streets was already teeming with spectators, vendors, street musicians and police. American flags of all sizes dominated the landscape. Sounds of laughter, conversation, vendors hawking their goods, the nervous whinny of horses, an occasional backfire from one of the new motor cars and the erratic staccato bursts of small firecrackers reverberated off the buildings and echoed across the river.

Two boys ran by John with lit sparklers as a smaller girl, struggling to keep up, screamed for them to wait. One of the boys turned to look back and almost ran into a man on stilts dressed in bright red and white striped pants, white shirt, brilliant blue jacket with a flag sown on its back and red stovepipe hat with another smaller flag perched on top. The man screamed an obscenity at the boy. The boy screamed one back then disappeared into the crowd. Next, a young couple, arm-in-arm, passed by followed by two men engaged in animated conversation and an elderly woman dressed in a white, lacy blouse with high puffy neck and a long black skirt that brushed the ground. In one hand she held a white parasol at an angle for protection against the sinking hot July sun, in her other hand she held a leash leading to a tiny, long-haired, black and tan dog that pranced before her.

In a park nestled between two buildings on John's right, he saw a mass of people crammed before a podium, some struggling to listen to the speakers, Mayor Robert A. Wan Wyck and Governor Frank S. Black, while most yelled insults. Many had hoped President McKinley

would have come, but he wisely decided to avoid the angry masses and was spending the day in Canton, Ohio with his mother.

Looking across the river, John could see the fireworks' barges still swarming with workers making final preparations for the night's display. Further out hundreds of assorted ships lay at anchor on choppy waters. There were yachts, ferries, fishing vessels of all sizes, row boats, a passenger liner, three and four-masted traders with their sails furrowed, a few ships with large paddle-wheels mounted to their sides and even a navy frigate and destroyer.

A collective sense of shared experience and excitement united all there except John who walked alone and aloof studying each individual he passed calculating, categorizing and judging.

Fools, suckers, prey. Sheep for the picking.

And with a practiced eye, John did see that there were predators among the sheep. He watched pickpockets working in pairs, one creating a distraction while the other stealthily lifted wallets, jewelry and with the quick slice of a razor-sharp blade, the contents of a purse or bag. Hucksters lured passersby into rigged games of chance on shaky tables made from planks of wood propped on barrels or crates. On the periphery of the crowd, thieves were selling stolen merchandise while in the shadows of the alleys and doorways con men engaged the gullible in small, amateurish scams.

John viewed both victims and their perpetrators with equal derision.

Fools, suckers, prey.

John mostly practiced his trade at a much higher level than these petty offenders and with a much more affluent clientele. He knew that no matter how much a person had, it was never enough. Some were driven by greed and some by the need for increased status and prestige, but for most it was the desire to show off to their peers by prospering from an opportunity no one

else had been smart enough to see. John knew how to present such an opportunity. Sometimes it was a chance to invest in large tracts of property and land grants suddenly available to those with the right connections in fictitious new South American countries. Sometimes it was the promise of getting in on the ground floor of a new technology like electronic healing devices made from spark generators and undulating purple Tesla coils. And sometimes it was a dummy construction company working on the expansion of rail lines in the northwest where work still continued despite the bankruptcy of many railroads elsewhere in the country.

It was an investor in one of these dummy companies that John was walking to meet. The man, Doyle Lonnegan, had invested twenty-thousand dollars and was threatening to expose John unless his money was returned. John had plans for that money along with all the rest he had raised and would not return it or risk exposure. But Lonnegan was stubborn and smarter than he looked and John knew he would be difficult so as he walked, he played out different scenarios in his mind preparing for whatever was to come.

“Beheaded, cast in the river! Beheaded, cast in the river! Read all about it! Beheaded, cast in the river!”

John heard the words over the din of the crowd and turned to see an older boy on a corner surrounded by stacks of newspapers holding one over his head shouting to get the attention of the throngs passing by him.

“Beheaded, cast in the River! Read all about it!”

Intrigued, John approached and asked, “What’s this?”

“Haven’t you heard, sir?” The boy responded breathlessly. “Body parts are appearing all over the city. A headless and legless torso was found floating in the East River and two lads picking blueberries by the Harlem River found two severed legs in the bushes.”

“You don’t say.”

“I do, sir, and so does Mr. Randolph Hearst.” The boy held out the newspaper and pointed to the garish headline. “Why Mr. Hearst has got his ‘Wrecking Crew’ looking for the body’s head and is even offering a \$1,000 reward to any reader who can solve the case. Who knows, that could even be you, sir. It’s worth a penny to buy a copy and read more about it.”

“Hmmm,” John mumbled stroking his chin as if in thought. “So this must be the latest edition of the *Evening Journal*.”

“Yes sir.” The boy answered in a loud voice. He was tall and gangly; his face dirty with a streak of ink across his forehead, his eyes light blue and his hair a wild blonde tangle that stuck out at odd angles and covered his ears. “And it’s much better than the *New York World*.” He pointed down the block to another paperboy who looked to be his twin hawking a different newspaper.

“And why is the *Evening Journal* better?” John asked.

“Because... why because Mr. Hearst knows how to tell a good story better than anyone and he stands up to those in power and fights for us average people. He is a great man and one day I’m going to be just like him. That’s why.”

John admired Hearst too, though he also resented the man’s success. He felt that in truth, there was not much difference between the two of them. They were both schemers, but Hearst worked in the open with legitimacy achieving the respect and adulation of an adoring public along with great wealth. John, out of necessity, worked in the shadows with assumed names receiving no credit or praise for his substantial abilities and innovation ventures and though he had accumulated some wealth it did not equal Hearst’s vast fortune. Well, one day soon, if all

went according to plan, John would be just as legitimate with his own company and his fame would eclipse Hearst's.

“So, will you buy a paper, sir?”

John smiled at the boy, reached into his pocket and retrieved a shiny Morgan silver dollar. He held it up showing both sides and said, “I’ll you flip for it.”

“What do you mean, sir?”

“It’s simple. You pick heads or tails and we flip a coin. Whichever side is facing up when the coin lands is the winner. If I win, I get the paper at no charge.”

“And what do I get if I win?”

“You get this coin.”

The boy’s eyes widened. He gulped and stepped closer, his whole body seeming to vibrate with excitement as he reached out to touch the gleaming silver dollar. But then he clenched his fist, stepped back, and in a voice filled with regret said, “I can’t sir. I am not allowed to make wagers and besides, I might lose and then I’d have to pay for the paper. It’s only a penny to you, but it’s much more to me.”

John dug into his pocket and pulled out four more silver dollars just as bright and shiny as the first. He placed all five on top of a stack of newspapers. “What if I was to add these to our wager?”

The boy did not hesitate. “Yes, sir, I’ll make that wager.”

John frowned. “Five dollars against a single penny, do you think that a fair wager?”

Confused, the boy stammered, “No, sir.”

John pointed to a bulging canvas pouch hanging on the boy’s belt. “Does that bag contain the proceeds of your day?”

The boy placed his hand protectively over the bag and said, “Yes, sir.”

“How much do you have in there?”

“Ninety-four cents.”

“I will wager my five dollars against your ninety-four cents. That’s almost a five-to-one payoff for a game that gives us each an equal chance of winning. I imagine you could do a lot with five dollars. Do you have a family?”

“Yes, sir, my mother and father and brother.”

“With five dollars, you could do something very nice for them. Something special you would all enjoy and remember. Perhaps a day’s outing at Coney Island or a dinner at Delmonico's or maybe one of the vaudeville shows? Of course, those shows can be rather racy for someone of your few years and limited experience.”

“I’m old enough.”

“Yes, of course you are.”

The boy unhooked the bag of coins from his belt and put it down next to the silver dollars.

“Let’s flip the coin mister.”

“Heads or tails?” John asked.

“Heads... tails... I mean... heads.”

“Are you certain?”

“I am.”

“Then heads it is.” John reached into a different pocket and retrieved yet another gleaming silver Morgan dollar. Then, with a single fluid motion, he flipped it high into the air. As the coin rose, it tumbled end-over-end reflecting the late afternoon sun in rapid bursts of sparkling

light until it reached its zenith and for half a heartbeat froze suspended above the two of them before beginning its fall back to earth and landing on the ground.

“No!” The boy cried out. “It’s tails. It can’t be. Do it again.”

“Do you have anything left to wager?” John asked as he reached down to collect the silver dollar and put it back into his pocket.

“No, that was everything I have. But it’s not fair. You tricked me. I need that money. I have to pay for the papers I’ve sold. If I can’t, they’ll take the job away from me and give it to someone else. I made a mistake. I should never have wagered with you. Please, I...” He lunged for his bag of pennies on the stack of papers, but John was too quick and took hold of his wrist before he could reach them. “Please,” the boy pleaded. “I’ll tell the police you tricked me. I’ll...”

Still holding the boy’s wrist, John pulled back one side of his coat with his free hand to reveal a pistol tucked under his left shoulder in a holster. He grinned as he watched the boy’s face contort into a shifting mixture of panic, surprise, and awe. Then he let his coat fall back, scooped up his five silver dollars, put them back in his pocket, and stuffed the bag of pennies in another pocket on the front of his jacket before releasing the boy’s wrist.

The boy stared at him as tears started fall and in a whisper, asked, “What shall I do?”

John thought, *There are many things you can do. Take my gun from me and shoot me. Follow me into an alley and stab me. Bludgeon me with a club or piece of lumber. Go to the police. Do what you need to do to take your money back.*

John said, “Tell your boss, your money was stolen. Sell more papers. Steal from someone else. Accept your fate.”

The boy just kept looking at him, his mouth quivering, his body shaking, tears now flowing freely, trying to speak but unable to form any more words.

Fool, sucker, prey.

John picked up one of the newspapers, tucked it under an arm, nodded at the boy, turned and walked away. As he strode through the crowd, he reached his free hand into his trouser pocket feeling for the double-sided silver dollar with the tiny spot of wax on both sides denoting “Heads” and the other one with two spots of wax denoting “Tails” and remembered the look of surprise on the boy’s face. He grinned and began to whistle the *1812 Overture* as he quickened his pace. He had an appointment to keep.

Doyle Lonnegan was waiting for John in the entryway of an office building, leaning against the door frame, cracking his knuckles and tapping his right foot as a matchstick bobbed in time between clenched teeth. When he saw John, he straightened up, spit out the matchstick and growled, “It’s about time.”

“Sorry I’m late. I was in a meeting with a representative of the Hearst organization. It ended well.”

“Ended well,” Lonnegan spat out the words, “You mean you took the poor fool, whoever he was, for a bundle.”

John shrugged.

“Did you bring my money?”

“It’s in my office.” John pointed to the building.

“It better be.” Lonnegan leaned over John as he spoke. He was a big man who used his stature to intimidate.

It only amused John, but he kept his face neutral. “There is no need for threats. I said I have your money. Let us go to my office and we can take care of everything.”

Lonnegan pointed to the front entrance and said, “After you.”

Businesses were closed for the day, so the entrance was locked. John produced a ring of keys and used one to unlock a large double- door, but before opening it, he looked down the street in both directions. Satisfied that it was deserted, he pushed the doors inward and entered the building with Lonnegan following. Then he led the way down a corridor to the right stopping before a much smaller wooden door with a large pane of frosted glass in the middle and the name, **Enterprise Investments**, painted in black. He unlocked it, leaving it open as he walked into the small office. File cabinets made of cherry wood covered most of the wall to his left, matching bookcases filled with leather bond books covered the wall to the right. In front of him was a massive desk, also made of cherry wood, and a single window behind it that overlooked the street. What light was left from the late sun poured in through dark, amber curtains to mingle with the existing overhead illumination bathing the compact room in a pale, sickly yellow glow.

John heard the door close, but did not look back. He tossed his copy of the *Evening Journal* along with the ring of keys on the desk and was about to sit down when Lonnegan said, “Stop and raise your hands.”

John stopped and raised his hands. “This is a little melodramatic, isn’t it?”

“Be quiet and turn around slowly, but keep your hands up,” Lonnegan responded.

John did as he was told, turned and faced the bigger man to see a gun pointing at his chest. He saw that the weapon was held with a steady hand and that was bad, but he noticed a bead of sweat on Doyle Lonnigan’s brow and that was good.

Fool.

Lonnegan extended his arm pressing his pistol into John's breast just above the heart. "If only I'd been smart enough to have you pegged earlier. But at least I know what you are now. You're a thief and a con man and a mealy-mouthed, boat-licking, prick! I can shoot you right now if I choose. No one will hear me, they're all by the river waiting for the fireworks and if someone should hear a shot, they'll just think someone is celebrating early."

John said nothing. He knew he was safe until Lonnegan had the money.

"And I know you wear one of those fancy shoulder holsters," Lonnegan continued. "You can't hide it from me." He ground the barrel of his gun harder into John's chest while reaching with his other hand under John's coat to retrieve the hidden gun. He looked at it for a moment, smirked, and tucked it under his belt. Then he patted John down stopping when he felt the bag of pennies. "What's this?"

"Some of your money."

Lonnegan pulled the bag out and spilled its contents on the desk. "Pennies? Who did you rob for these? A paperboy?"

John said nothing.

"No one is safe with you. Next you'll be stealing candy from a baby. Sit down and keep your hands where I can see them."

John lowered his arms, walked around the desk and sat down.

Lonnegan took the chair opposite him, his arm still extended with the gun aimed at John's chest.

For a long moment neither spoke or moved, then John started to reach into an inside pocket as he asked, "Care for a fine cigar?"

Lonnegan immediately jumped from the chair and shouted, "Don't move!"

John stopped just as his fingertips were just about to disappear within the fold of his jacket and said calmly, “I am getting a cigar case from my pocket. This has been a long eventful day and I need a smoke and I am going to have a smoke. You can have one too. These are very fine cigars. So you can shoot me if you want, but if you do, you will never get your money.” Not waiting for a reply, he reached into his inside pocket, took out a black leather cigar case and showed it to Lonnegan. “See, nothing deadly.”

Lonnegan sat back down. “Do something like that again and I’ll kill you and then I’ll tear this office apart until I find my money.” He cocked the hammer back on his pistol making a loud click to emphasize his point and continued. “You think me a fool, don’t you? But I know what you are doing. You hope that I will take a cigar, relax my guard and maybe put my gun down. It won’t work. My gun and my attention, all of it, will remain on you until our business is finished.”

“That is your misfortune, because these are truly quite excellent.” John replied as he opened the case and withdrew a long, thick cigar. He sniffed the length of it, then snipped the tip off one end with a cutter he picked up from the desk and lit the cigar with a wooden match inhaling steadily until the tip was glowing red and an even ring of grey ash was showing.

Outside the window, voices of adults and children could be heard passing by. A small firecracker went off bringing squeals of delight followed by the stern warnings of a parent as their voices faded away.

“Where is my money? I want to get this over with and see the fireworks.” Lonnegan demanded.

“Your money is in here.” John pointed with his cigar to a cabinet door on the right side of his desk that took the place of drawers. “I will need to unlock it and retrieve a valise.”

Lonnegan stood up again and walked around the desk so he could watch. “Do it,” he ordered.

John sighed, inhaled twice more on his cigar igniting a ring of fire in the tip that burned brightly for a second extending the length of the ash to almost half an inch. Then he balanced the cigar carefully on the lip of a white porcelain ashtray, took the ring of keys from his desk, bent down and unlocked the door. “Shall I take it out or would you prefer to do it?”

Lonnegan waved his gun towards the open cabinet. “Take it out, but do it slowly.”

John bent down and retrieved a black leather valise from inside the cabinet. “You know, I am actually pleased that we are resolving our business today. I have plans to leave the city for a new venture and it was important to me that I clear up all my unfinished affairs.” He put the big case down on the center of the desk.

Lonnegan walked back to his chair and laughed, “You mean cheat a few more paperboys most likely. Open it.”

John picked up his cigar and clamped down on it tightly between his teeth so he could continue to smoke while keeping his hands free. Then he reached over, unlatched the top of the bag and spread it open.

Lonnegan rose slightly, leaned over the valise risking a quick glance inside and exclaimed in a low voice, “Jesus.”

John took the cigar from his mouth with his right hand, formed his lips into an oval and puffed out a large expanding ring of blue smoke that circled the valise watching as Lonnegan’s eyes darted from the open bag to the smoke and then to the cigar which now had over an inch of dull grey ash at its tip. Then John balanced the cigar again on the tip of the ashtray careful to make certain that the ash would remain, lifted the satchel, turned it over dumping its contents

out. Several bound stacks of currency spilled across the desk top along with an assortment of official looking documents and newspaper clippings.

“Jesus,” Lonnegan said again this time more loudly.

John put the valise down on the desk next to the pile positioning it between him and Lonnegan and said, “Yes, it is quite a lot of cash. It represents several years of hard work and many investors’ faith in me, and it will be, not counting your money, mine and my client’s investment in a new prosperous future. I know that you don’t believe me, but I am actually quite glad that we are resolving our business. When I leave New York, I prefer to do it with a clean slate. I never thought our venture would go bad, but then I never expected so many railroads to declare bankruptcy and the need for the support services we invested in disappear. My intentions were honorable, but these are hard and unpredictable times and...”

“How much do you have here?” Lonnegan interrupted.

John picked his cigar back up, inhaled a few times to rekindle its fire and then waved it above the pile of bills leaving a trail of smoke hanging in the air as he spoke, “About a \$120,000 give or take.”

“Jesus,” Lonnegan said for the third time.

Somewhere in the building a clock started to chime. John counted the individual tones as he continued to smoke and study Lonnegan. This was the most dangerous moment. If Lonnegan was going to shoot him and take the money, it would happen now. But as the seconds passed along with the chimes of the clock, so too did the danger.

Keeping the cigar in his right hand, John used his left to grab four stacks of bills from the pile and toss them across the desk to Lonnegan. Then he rested his left hand on the edge of the desk behind the valise so that it was blocked from Lonnegan’s view and said, “I will need you to

count those, verify that you have your \$20,000 and sign a receipt and a short statement that we have settled our business amicably.”

“What?”

John gestured with his cigar, its ash now more than two inches long, to the four stacks of bills and repeated, “Please count the money so we can finish our business and both have time to see the fireworks.”

Lonnegan looked up at the cigar, focused for a moment on the growing length of ash and then turned back to the stacks of currency before him. “What are you going to do with all of this?”

Sucker.

John continued to smoke as he answered. “It is simple really. Our investment, yours and mine, failed because we... I trusted in another man’s ability to run their business wisely. That trust proved to be misplaced and that was my error. I have decided that going forward; I will only invest in companies I own and manage so that I can have confidence in the decisions being made. I plan to establish my first business in San Francisco with offices in Seattle and Skagway.”

“San Francisco?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

John clamped the cigar back in his mouth and dug through the pile on the desk until he found a newspaper clipping. He laid it before Lonnegan and then took hold of his cigar again with his right hand. The clipping was from the *Seattle Post Intelligencer*. The headline read: **Gold Discovered in Alaska.**

Lonnegan looked it over and asked, “Do you believe it?”

John smiled, took another long drag from his cigar, blew out another ring of smoke and answered, “I do, but what is more important is that thousands upon thousands of men and women across the country and across the world believe it and they are all going to Alaska to dig for gold, most through the city of San Francisco. For a fee upfront and a percentage of their take, my company will provide all of these hunters of gold with the tools, instructions, food, supplies, clothing, everything they will need for their venture. My company will ease these brave traveler’s concerns, lighten their burden and *empower* them to achieve their goal of great wealth.”

As John spoke, he grew more and more animated waving his cigar in great expanding arcs across the desk. The ash was now an incredible three inches long and he watched as Lonnegan unconsciously followed it because he knew that where Lonnegan’s eyes went, so too did the barrel of his pistol. Then, with one great sweep, John stretched out his right hand as far as he could away from the desk. Lonnegan’s focus stayed with the cigar and its impossible ash and John knew the time was right. He moved his left hand under the desk, reached for the derringer strapped there, felt for the trigger and pulled.

Prey.

An orange and yellow tongue of flame exploded from under the desk, Lonnegan fell backward, his pistol firing but the shot going wild as his arms flailed and a red bloody hole blossomed where his stomach met his groin.

John pulled the derringer free, rose from his chair and walked around the desk to look down at Lonnegan bleeding on the floor, holding his hands over his wound as blood seeped between

his fingers, rocking back and forth, keening in a high-pitched voice, his face pale, his eyes filled with terror and surprise and anger.

John bent down, picked up the dying man's gun along with his own and placed them on the desk. Then, making certain that Lonnegan could see him clearly; he took one last draw of his cigar and ground it out on the side of the desk revealing a thin crumpled black wire that had been run through the center to keep the ash from falling. He watched as recognition of the trick came to Lonnegan's face, savoring the moment before firing a final fatal shot.

In the distance, John heard the pops and explosions of the fireworks display, the celebration of the country's independence had begun. It was a celebration of his independence too. He put all three guns along with all the stacks of bills, pennies, official papers and newspaper clippings into the valise, snapped it shut and picked it up. The office wasn't his. It belonged to another investor who had loaned it to him to cover a portion of his investment instead of cash. John had used an alias so no one knew his true name. Only his face could be recognized and the man who could do him the most harm lay dead at his feet. Still, the authorities would be on his trail soon and he would have to leave New York. But this was expected, it was part of his plan.