

Eve's Rib

A Tale of Hope

by

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The last flakes of a snow shower fell in the late afternoon darkness as three figures made their way up the sidewalk in an old working class neighborhood east of Massachusetts Avenue and south of Harvard University. Just ahead of two women in their late twenties a young girl of about six years darted to and fro catching snowflakes in her mouth, loudly celebrating each success or miss. At a walkway to one of the houses on the tree-lined street, the women stopped and called the young girl back to join them. Margaret Danlon took young Eve Danlon's hand as they walked up the front walk and climbed the stairs to the porch. Electric candles glowed in the front windows, a simple gesture to the Christmas Season.

Margaret rang the doorbell and then knelt to face Eve while balancing a casserole dish on her knee. "Now, Eve. Remember your promise. It's very special that our friends let us bring you tonight. Okay?"

Eve forced herself to look serious. "Okay." Margaret stood up, satisfied, but Eve spoke again. "And you remember your promise, right?"

Margaret looked down, but Kathy Smith, the other woman, spoke for her. "Don't worry, Eve. She'll be here." She turned to Margaret. "The old woman certainly has her caught in her web."

Eve scowled vigorously at Kathy. "Aunt Sophie is not a spider!"

Kathy laughed and tousled Eve's snow-flecked hair, but Eve scowled and pulled her head away from Kathy's hand. The sound of the front door opening interrupted them. Beth Torrance opened the storm door, and they all exchanged greetings.

"Sorry we're late, Beth. We couldn't get away from the lab," Kathy offered. Beth just smiled and nodded understandingly.

"Thanks for letting me come Aunt Beth," said Eve.

Beth pulled her close in a quick standing hug. "You're very welcome, Eve. Now, come on in and get warm."

Inside the foyer, they took off their coats. "Here, let me take that for you," Beth said. She lifted the casserole dish from Margaret's arm and headed into the dining room where a table covered with food had already been well worked over. "There's hot cider and tea in here," she called back.

Eve, her coat off, headed into the living room to the left of the hall with Kathy in tow. The room was filled with women in their late twenties and early thirties, some standing, others sitting on chairs, sofas, or beanbag chairs, all intently talking over the low music. Several women stopped Kathy to say hello, but Eve couldn't wait and made her way alone, finally stopping at a comfortable chair next to the warmth of a blazing fireplace. In the chair an older woman in her

late fifties was talking to a young woman but turned immediately to greet Eve, who threw herself into the older woman's warm, joyful embrace.

Margaret, having fetched a mug of warm cider, had crossed the hallway and standing in the doorway watched as Eve and Sophia held an enthusiastic reunion.

In a corner of the living room Vanessa Langemann, a tall, elegant, dark-haired woman in her early thirties watched the reunion as well, then after a moment, made her way gracefully to the doorway where Margaret stood. Margaret saw Vanessa coming toward her. She didn't recognize her from earlier gatherings.

Vanessa reached her and extended her hand in greeting. "Vanessa Langemann." Margaret took her hand, but before Margaret could answer, Vanessa continued, "And you must be Margaret Danlon."

Their hands lingered a little, acknowledging a mutual attraction "That's right," Margaret said. "Have we met before?"

Their hands parted but they held their gaze. Vanessa smiled. "No," she said, "but Beth has spoken of you..." She nodded vaguely toward the room of women. "...and your friends."

"Do you know everyone?" Vanessa asked now turning and surveying the crowded room.

"Most of them," Margaret said. "How do you and Beth know each..."

"I met Mary Horton," Vanessa said, stepping on Margaret's words and nodding toward a heavy-set woman sitting against the wall, balancing a plate of food on her knees and sipping from a mug. "PhD in Political Science and quite involved with the National Organization of Women. I read her book on the politics of rape. Interesting, but I'm just not sure I buy all the psycho-babble."

Margaret felt a flush of paranoia and wondered how much Vanessa knew about her. Vanessa continued her survey of the room and gestured toward the fireplace. "And the older woman?" Margaret followed Vanessa's gaze to where Kathy was kneeling at Sophia's side watching Eve in the older woman's lap gesturing as she explained about how, sure, maybe each snowflake was different from all the others, like her teacher had told them in school, but she bet some of them looked alike, like brothers and sisters.

"Sophia," Margaret answered.

"Yes, Sophia," said Vanessa. "A spiritual name—not her given name. I understand she is an actual blood princess—Romanian, or someplace like that. And I heard she is starting a women's commune of some sort." She turned back to Margaret. "I'm not so sure a feminist utopia is going to solve any of our problems," she continued, and Margaret felt her gaze searching deep. "She certainly has your friends in a spell. I understand your friend Kathy is a geneticist like yourself."

"Smarter," said Margaret.

"Perhaps," Vanessa said, "but not, I think, as strong." She turned to look at Sophia, Kathy, and Eve. "And our youngest guest? What..."

“Sorry to interrupt,” a voice interrupted them from behind. It was Beth Torrance. Next to Beth stood a woman that neither Margaret nor Vanessa recognized. “We’re going to get started with the meeting,” Beth continued and then saw the two women looking at her companion. “Oh, I’m sorry. This is Laura Smucker. Laura, this is Margaret Danlon and Vanessa Langemann.” The women exchanged brief handshakes and smiles. “Laura and I were roommates and best friends at SMU during our undergraduate years. Surely I’ve spoken of her, haven’t I? Anyway, Laura is up from Houston for a holiday visit.” She put her arm around Laura and gave her an affectionate side hug. “Come on,” she said to her friend, “let’s find you a seat.”

Beth pushed past Margaret and Vanessa into the living room, found Laura a seat, and went to the fireplace on the other side from Sophia, Kathy, and Eve. “Can I have everyone’s attention, please!” she shouted over the drone of the conversation. In a moment the room went quiet, and she continued. “Thank you all for coming tonight. As most of you know, Councilman Ed Hutchins and I are the Cambridge area coordinators for the first ever Earth Day celebration, and believe it or not, April is just around the corner...”

On one of those hot, humid evenings that gave our nation's capital the nickname “The Swamp” the President of the United States found himself naked in bed on his back looking at his equally naked wife as she rode him like one of his workhorses back at the ranch in Crawford. He'd forgotten—for how many minutes he couldn't say—everything a President is supposed to think about, worry about. He'd forgotten he was the man and was supposed to be on top, “doing it” to his wife. Instead he was on his back, relaxing and enjoying his wife making love to him. No, that wasn't quite right. It was as if she were making love to herself, except he found himself moving with her, matching her rhythms.

He watched in wonder as Laura Smucker Rush, the mother of his children cantered, then trotted, and finally galloped to an orgasm unlike any she'd ever had before, and then fell off onto her back next to him. The President propped himself on his elbow and looked at his wife.

“Good Lord, George!” Laura said, her eyes closed, her breathing fast but starting too slow. “That was amazing. You've never stayed with me that long.” She laughed and shook her head slightly. “And me on top!”

Even with the air conditioning on, both of them had worked up a fine sweat, and the President let his fingertips playfully slide across the slick patina of wetness on his wife's stomach. He nuzzled and kissed her neck. “I don't know what's gotten into me,” he said. “Maybe it's your new perfume.”

Laura smiled, opened her eyes, and rolling onto her side, pushed the President onto his back. Her fingers played in the hairs on his chest. “The President of the United States not only loves freedom—he knows how to love a woman as well.” The President smiled. Laura felt a stirring in her belly again. They hadn't made love twice in one night since their courtship, but she found her fingers moving to the President's nipple and giving it a playful but gentle squeeze.

Suddenly the smile disappeared from the President's face. He sat up abruptly, swinging his legs over the edge of the bed, his back to his wife, the mood completely gone. She reached out and touched his back. “George. I'm sorry, I just...”

The President turned his head slightly to her. “No, honey. It's not...I...I just need to pee.” He rose and padded to the bathroom as his wife watched with concern.

In the bathroom, the President went to the sink, supported himself with one hand on the edge, and leaned into the mirror. He looked intently at his reflection, as the fingers of his other hand gently probed his nipples and breasts.

From the bedroom, his wife's voice interrupted his studies. “George? Is it the headaches again?” He didn't respond, turning his attention back to his explorations. Laura appeared in the door.

He leaned back from the mirror now, both hands still on the sink, and turned his head to his wife. “No, Honey, it's not the headaches.” He turned back to the mirror. She came up behind him, resting her head on his back and putting her arms around his waist.

“It's the war, then,” she said.

“No. There's something...” he started to explain, but her words cut him off.

“There's nothing to worry about,” she comforted, and putting her hands over his chest, pulled him close.

With that the President winced, pulled his wife's hands off his chest, and spun around to face her...

“George?” she asked, alarmed. “What on earth is going on?”

One disturbing month of denial later, the President found himself running the high-tech medical gauntlet at Bethesda Naval Hospital: MRIs, X-rays, blood drawings—the works.

Finally, in a consulting room next to the office of Dr. Phillip Lasiter, the President sat and watched as his personal physician studied ghostly images of the Presidential brain and other organs hanging in front of an array of light boxes lining one wall.

“Well,” Dr. Lasiter said, turning to face the President, “the good news is there is no evidence of a brain tumor, or other tumor, that would produce such high levels of estrogen in your body. I’m putting you on a drug that will block the production of this hormone.”

He moved to the desk in front of which the President was sitting in shirtsleeves and tie, his suit jacket folded in his lap. Sitting on the edge, he continued, “You will still need the plastic surgery, but I want to wait a few weeks. The drug will cause tissue shrinkage, so you’ll heal faster.”

President Rush rose and set his jacket on the chair. He moved to the light boxes, surveyed them, and then turned to Dr. Lasiter. “And the bad news,” the President said, “is that you don’t have the slightest idea what is causing this.”

Dr. Lasiter folded his arms across his chest. “That’s not entirely true,” he said. “I still want to see the results of the infectious disease studies, which will be ready in about three weeks.”

President Rush coughed out a laugh. “Infectious disease studies?” he asked in disbelief. “What are you talking about, Phillip?” He cupped his hands under his breasts, compressed beneath his shirt by a flesh-colored woman’s sports bra, and gave a quick double-pump. “This isn’t exactly a case of the flu we’re talking about.”

Inside a lab at the National Institutes of Health, Dr. John Winslow sat at a computer, scrolling and re-scrolling through a multi-colored sequence of nucleotides. He was interrupted by the appearance of Phillip Lasiter at his side.

“You got here fast,” Winslow observed.

“It's an important patient, and this has taken far too long,” Dr. Lasiter offered curtly. “What have you got?”

Winslow ignored the criticism. He minimized the window he was looking at, clicked an icon on his desktop, and navigated to a spreadsheet displaying a list of names. Lasiter leaned in over Winslow's shoulder.

“We found the usual viruses,” Winslow said as he moved the mouse pointer down the list and then stopped on one name, “but we almost missed this one.” He clicked the name, and another window opened, showing banded columns of antibody gelatin blocks. “It didn't match anything in the database, so we completely sequenced it and came up with a match—well, sort of a match.”

“What do you mean 'sort of a match'?” asked Lasiter.

Winslow brought up his first window displaying the sequence of nucleotides. “The sequence is very close to that of a retrovirus that causes Green Monkey Encephalitis, but it different by a few nucleotides in several genes. We weren't sure of the match, so we fed it to a culture of human brain cells. That's why the testing took longer than usual.”

Lasiter was confused. “John this virus doesn't infect humans,” he said, straightening up.

Winslow looked up at him. “It does now. But here's the really strange part. When this virus reproduced itself inside our test cells, the viral copies passed through the cell walls without destroying the cells.”

Silence hung in the air as Lasiter processed this information, then he looked down at Winslow. “This thing has been engineered,” he said with shocked dispassion.

Winslow nodded. “It looks that way. Does your patient work in a genetics lab or something?”

“No,” said Lasiter distantly, already measuring the consequences of this information. He brought himself back and spoke strongly and directly to Winslow. “We may have a very serious problem here, John. It's very important that you don't say a word of this to anyone until I get back to you.”

Winslow nodded, and Lasiter rushed out of the lab. In the corridor outside the lab he walked briskly as he flipped open his cell phone and hot-keyed his secretary's number. “Martha, get me the President.”

Robert Howard closed the door to the massage room silently, noting the slight tackiness of

the knob from a build-up of oil. Inside the room his client enjoyed the final minutes of her relaxation alone in the near darkness and silence. Robert always scheduled his clients so they could “bring themselves back” naturally. Within reason, of course, since some would fall asleep and had to be coaxed back to reality.

Down the hall, he checked the waiting room for any walk-ins and found none. He closed his office door quietly behind himself and checked the answering machine. One message. He punched the playback button and heard his mother's voice. “Robert. It's Mom,” she said, her voice shaking. “Your father is gone, Robert. He died last night.” He listened to her fight for control. “The funeral is Friday,” she said. “I hope you'll come.”

Robert sat down at his desk, resigned to the trip he would soon have to make. Yes, Mom, for you I will come, he thought, because you never took sides. He knew that even with his father gone this visit home would not be an easy one. His father's Life would be there—all the testosterone-soaked machismo of an FBI man's “family” would be there to echo his father's judgment and condemnation.

His dark reverie was interrupted by a soft musical tone coming from a small wooden box next to the phone. An LED on the box glowed red. His client was coming out of the massage room. He knew the drill. In a moment he would connect with his client and smooth her transition back to the rat race of life. They would discuss the massage and anything noteworthy that she had experienced, physical, emotional, or spiritual.

Mostly of his clients were female. Massage was a word-of-mouth type of business, and word of his special connection to the Feminine Spirit had been passed from friend to friend. It was the way Robert liked it. This was his special gift—a gift his father could never understand and because of which their father-son relationship had suffered and finally died. This was an intimacy unknown to most people, and it was food for his soul.

Robert opened the door to his office and stepped out once again to embrace The Goddess.

Inside the terminal of San Francisco International airport, Robert made his way toward his gate after passing through security. He stopped to retie a loose shoelace and noticed a large group of people gathered around a television in a gate waiting area. He went to the edge of the crowd to get a better look. The President of the United States was standing behind a podium finishing a press conference.

“Once again, I want to assure the American people and our friends in Iraq and Afghanistan that this action in no way signals a weakening of our resolve to see freedom, peace, and prosperity in this part of the world.” With those words the President turned and walked out as the press shouted questions.

The crowd around the television dispersed with a mix of reactions. Robert asked a woman next to him what had just happened.

“The President is bringing the troops back from Iraq and Afghanistan,” she said.

Robert was stunned by this totally unexpected news. He turned back to the television and edged closer. On screen, a reporter who had been inside the press room at the White House was speaking. “...in case you just joined us,” he said, “President Rush has just announced the immediate withdrawal of our troops from Iraq and Afghanistan and the phased closure of all our bases throughout the Middle East. This comes on the heels of the White House announcement that the President will enter Bethesda Naval Hospital next week to undergo surgery for an unnamed problem...”

The talking head in the studio thanked the reporter. “And now with reaction from Congressional leaders we go to our Capitol Hill correspondent...” Robert looked at his watch and hurried off to his gate.

At the airport outside Providence, Rhode Island, Robert rented a car and drove north on

I-95 into Massachusetts, then east and north again, over the highways of Southeastern Massachusetts, heading for North Easton. His visits home had been few over the years, and after all the time he'd spent in the San Francisco Bay area, the drive through this part of the country always made him think of gnomes. So many trees, and so much oak and beech, rarely seen on the West Coast. The trees and the steeply pitched roofs built for snow loads that San Francisco would never see.

Flight delays made him too late for the memorial mass at his family's Catholic church. On the passenger seat were the directions to the cemetery, but he knew the way from when his younger brother had been buried, a casualty of the Gulf War. His brother John, two years younger, the “hero” of the family, because he not only had served his country with honor, but he had rescued his father from the “loss” of his eldest son to a life he could not fathom.

He almost missed the burial as well. At the cemetery he added his rental car to the long line of cars, a multi-colored mix of various civilian vehicles interrupted by stretches of black sedans with their federal license plates.

At the side of the grave, Father McGonagle, the aging family priest—inexplicably still above ground himself—was beginning the service at the head of the casket that sat on the elevator that would soon lower its burden six feet under. Eleanor Howard greeted her prodigal son with a quietly impassioned and brief hug, as she remembered her place in these proceedings. Still she held Robert's hand, discreetly, squeezing it from time to time, dabbing her tears with her other. Robert surveyed the solemn sea of black coats but recognized no one.

The brief ceremony ended, and the crowd began to disperse, stopping where Eleanor and Robert stood, to shake hands or hug and offer their condolences. Robert felt glimmers of recognition, but names still eluded him, so he smiled solemnly and acknowledged the sentiments. With gratitude he acknowledged that he felt no judgments from the members of his father's “clan”.

Then out of the vague parade, suddenly a clarity, as a tall man about the same age as his father, stood in front of them extending his hand to Eleanor. It was Nelson Ayers, his father's closest friend in the Bureau. They'd come up through the ranks together in the Boston office. His father had been made Special Agent in Charge of the Boston office, but Headquarters must have flipped a coin to decide which of the two of them to promote. Then a few years later Nelson had been called to Washington. It was a contact at FBI headquarters that had served his father well over the years.

Nelson embraced Eleanor, then took her hands in his. “The Director asked me to personally express his deepest condolences. The Bureau has lost one of its finest.” His mother kept her

poise and when their hands parted, she dabbed her eyes. Robert started to put his arm around her, but Nelson turned to him and Robert accepted his extended hand. Nelson looked at him as firmly as he gripped, but it was a warm connection. "It's good to see you, Robert." He held Robert's hand and Robert could feel a surge of energy from the man. "I know you and your father have had your differences over the years, but I know he'd be pleased that you were here for him now." Robert was touched by Nelson's directness. He was also surprised to feel his emotions well up and was grateful, given the circumstances, that he hadn't forgotten how to choke them back.

"Thank you, Nelson. I appreciate that. And I appreciate your coming up from Washington." They released each other's hand, and Robert could feel the energy in his arm and chest begin to ebb. Then, Nelson stepped back and his son Jeff replaced him. The younger Ayers hugged Eleanor, offered a few words of sympathy, and then turned to Robert. They both felt the instinct to hug each other, as they might have done after a victory on the basketball court, but instead they just shook hands and smiled as enthusiastically as they dared under the circumstances. Even Eleanor smiled at the reunion. Here was someone from his father's world that he had sincerely missed—his best friend growing up. As much as Robert had discarded their fathers' world, Jeff had embraced it, and, like their fathers, Jeff was a rising star in the Washington FBI office. Their lives had gone in different directions, but their friendship was there, as fresh as ever, whenever they met.

Eleanor spoke to Nelson, who also seemed to enjoy this reunion of old friends. "Will you be coming back to the house?" she asked.

"No," Nelson replied. "I'm afraid I have to fly back to Washington immediately, but Jeff will be there for both of us. I'm sure he and Robert have some catching up to do."

Back at the Howard home, Robert and Jeff stood near the sliding glass door at the back of

the house, drinks in hand, and surveyed the gathering on the spacious back patio. A cluster of well-wishers had gathered around Eleanor Howard, and Jeff noted that she was smiling as she talked with them.

“She seems to be holding up pretty well,” Jeff suggested.

Robert was looking at the trees at the back of the spacious backyard. He looked at his mother and nodded. “Oh, yes. She's fine,” he said. “A classic FBI wife.” He took a sip from his scotch on the rocks and then continued. “Hoover would have been proud—an impeccable facade.”

Jeff ignored Robert's judgments. “Can we talk somewhere more private?” he asked.

“Sure,” Robert replied, finding the request for privacy a bit curious, since the nearest guests were well outside of hearing range.

Jeff gestured with his head toward the interior of the house and then turned and headed inside. Robert followed as Jeff crossed the dining room and headed for the door to the basement. At the bottom of the basement stairs they entered Mark Howard's private den. Robert hesitated, feeling the resistance he always felt when entering his father's sanctuary. He surveyed the familiar scene: the large wooden desk at one end with its pipe rack at the ready, the bookcases, the walls covered with letters of commendation and pictures of his father with various FBI and political celebrities, and friends, the dark oak gun cabinet, and, staring stonily down from high on the walls, the mounted heads of big game shot and killed on numerous hunting trips to Northern Canada.

Jeff went over to the fireplace and pulled down an antique black powder musket. He took a bead on the antlered head of a Canadian elk, pulled the trigger, and made a gunshot sound, lifting the barrel in faux recoil.

He looked at Robert. “At least you and your father had one thing in common...” he said as he sighted down the barrel again at another silent animal, then lowered it, “...deadly aim.”

Robert snorted a laugh. “My father may have wanted to deny it, but, yes, I did get some of his genes.” He walked over and took the rifle from Jeff's hands and put it back on the rack over the mantle of the fireplace. “In the end it was the things we didn't have in common that killed things for us. I'm surprised my head didn't end up on this wall.” He turned to Jeff. “So what's on your mind?”

“You could have been a great agent,” Jeff offered.

“C'mon, Jeff,” Robert said, surprised to hear these words coming from his friend. “Let's not go there.”

“How would you like to make it up to the old man?” Jeff continued.

Robert laughed. "I don't have anything to make up, Jeff."

Jeff ignored his response and studied Robert for a silent moment. Robert felt uneasy, then Jeff continued. "The more I thought about you on the flight up here, the more I realized how perfect you are for the job. You're a writer, an environmentalist, and a feminist. You're perfect."

"What job?" Robert asked suspiciously.

"I know this sounds crazy, but I want you to work for me at the Bureau," Jeff said.

Robert looked at him in disbelief. "That is crazy," he said and started for the stairs.

"No, wait, Robert. Listen to me," Jeff urged. Robert stopped, his foot on the first step up the stairs. "You'd be working undercover for one of our Special Support groups. Three weeks tops. You can stay with me in Georgetown."

Robert looked at him from the stairs. "Even if I wanted to, I have a business to run."

"Three weeks tops," said Jeff. "You must have someone who can take care of your clients for a few weeks." He watched Robert processing, knowing that his hesitation was a good sign. "I'm not trying to do family therapy, Robert. This is an important situation, and I think you can help us."

Jeff watched as thoughts and emotions rattled around inside his friend then settled. Robert looked around the den and then at Jeff. "So, what do you want me to do?" he asked.

"How much do you know about genetic engineering?" Jeff asked.

Inside an office at the National Institutes of Health, Eve Danlon and her assistant Karen Reed navigated stacks of cardboard moving boxes as they filled the last of them with books, notebooks, and papers. Karen stopped and looked through the window into their lab full of equipment.

“It's still hard for me to believe we're leaving this place.” Karen said and turned to Eve. “I wish you'd take your mother's offer seriously. It's my career, too, you know.”

Eve gave her a hard look. “Don't get started again, Karen. I promised I'd listen to her, and I will, but you know perfectly well the idea of helping her and Vanessa design perfume makes me sick.”

“And the idea of you disappearing into the hills of West Virginia makes me sick,” Karen countered.

“I'm not going to fight about this again. You don't understand Sophia or her commune, and that's fine, but I swear your possessiveness makes those hills more and more attractive.”

Karen grunted, giving up the fight. She closed the box she had been filling, sealed it shut with a tape gun, and started on another. “So, what's the deal with this reporter from the Post?”

Eve stacked another carton on a pile. “His name is Robert Howard, and the deal is he wants to interview me for a feature he's doing on sexual genetics. He's calling it “The Lie about Y”. Can you believe it? It's a long shot, but the exposure might help us get our funding back.” She sat down at her desk and began pulling files from a file drawer. “We're going talk over dinner tonight.”

“Over dinner? Is this an interview or a date?” Karen asked skeptically. “Are you sure you even remember how to do with a man?”

“You're misreading this, Karen. This is not about sex, and your jealousy is really uncalled for. There's a lot at stake here, and I wanted the interview to be as informal as possible.”

Karen harrumphed, slapping another strip of sealing tape across a box with a screech of the tape gun.

In the bathroom of her apartment, Eve leaned into the mirror putting on the last touches of eyeliner. From the living room, soft music was interrupted by the doorbell. She looked at her watch, put down the pencil, and headed for the front door. Through the security peep hole she saw a man matching the picture Robert Howard had emailed. “Yes?” she spoke through the door. “It's Robert Howard,” came the reply.

Eve opened the door and let Robert in, gesturing to the sofa. “Make yourself at home Mr. Howard. I need another minute to finish putting on my face. Packing up the office took longer than we anticipated.”

“Take your time Dr. Danlon,” Robert assured her. “Our reservations aren't until 8 o'clock.”

Eve disappeared down the hall. Robert ignored the couch, surveying the room: fireplace, bookcases, green plants, television, and audio system. In one corner sat a low table covered with a sea-green fabric. It was adorned with quartz and other gem stones, some well-burned candles, and a boat-like incense holder. In the very center sat a beautifully framed portrait of a gray-haired woman. A bud vase next to it held a single rose bud. Robert studied the woman's face a moment and then moved to the bookcases. They were filled with books covering a surprising range of topics: genetic engineering, as expected, but also many on feminist topics, particularly the environment and rape. He pulled down one titled *The Genetics of Violence* and flipped through it briefly before putting it back in its hole. He was beginning to see why the FBI was interested in learning more about this woman.

He turned to the mantle of the fireplace and scanned several framed pictures, one of which showed Eve and another woman standing arm in arm in a wilderness setting, snow-capped mountains framing them.

“My best friend, Penny Warren,” said Eve from behind him.

Her tone indicated that she was unconcerned with his explorations, so he moved to the altar and pointed to the old woman. “And this woman?” he asked.

“Her name is Sophia. She's my spiritual teacher—and a dear friend.” She could see Robert was wanting to hear more, but right now there was something more important for him to know about. She held up a DVD jewel case and wiggled it to get his attention. “Since we're not as rushed as I thought, I'd like to show you this before dinner.” She moved to the TV, put the DVD into the player, and sat down on the sofa. With the remote she turned on the TV and started the DVD, gesturing with her free hand for Robert to sit down next to her.

He joined her, and on the screen he saw Eve standing behind a lectern on a stage, but she scanned forward until she found the section she was looking for. "I'm not sure how much you know about my research, so stop me if I'm covering anything you already know."

"Not at all," said Robert. "The more I hear it, the more I understand."

"Good. The basic concept that underlies my research is that the Y chromosome of the male is really an X chromosome that has lost most of the genetic material from two of its arms." As she spoke she made a V shape with the index and middle finger of both hands, holding one hand upside down and next to the other so that the knuckle end of the fingers were next to each other, forming a crude X shape. She then took away the upside down fingers, leaving a single pair of fingers pointing up in a victory sign.

"It's called a Y chromosome, but it's really more of a V chromosome with the two shortened arms twisted together. Anyway, the cause of maleness turns out to be not the presence of genes on the remaining regular arms of the Y chromosome..." she said, wiggling her upright fingers, "...but rather the absence of genes on the shortened arms," she said, wiggling the upside down fingers she had pulled away.

"So, what your suggesting..." Robert began.

"Yes," Eve finished. "The bible got it backwards. God took a rib from Eve to create Adam. Only it wasn't Eve's rib that got snatched. It was two pieces of her X chromosome. My early work proved all this quite conclusively, but the really important research came later." She turned back to the TV screen. "One of the big differences between men and women is the way their brains are wired. Watch," she said, pressing the play button.

On the screen was a large cage filled with a half dozen white mice. Despite the room in the cage there were brief aggressive skirmishes between the mice. "This is a group of males of a rather special breed of mouse," Eve explained.

A lab worker's hand appeared and through a door in the cage dropped a large piece of cheese into the center of the cage floor. Immediately a vicious and bloody fight erupted for sole ownership of the food. Eve paused the movie. "We affectionately call them 'Killer Mice', and you can see why. But watch."

She hit play and the screen faded to black and was replaced by another cage of mice similar to the previous, but these mice were exhibiting no signs of aggression. In fact some were grooming others. "These are males of the same breed," she said.

"You're kidding," said Robert, fixed to the screen. A human hand appeared and delivered the cheese as before, but this time the mice moved calmly to it, each taking a spot and nibbling peacefully.

Eve paused the DVD. "This second group of killer mice have had some of their missing genes replaced. Remember?" she asked, wiggling the fingers of an upside down victory sign.

Robert half-turned on the couch. "So you're saying two things, then. Genes that are missing from the Y chromosome cause maleness, and by putting some of the missing genes back you can make males less aggressive."

Eve smiled, pleased with his summary. “Yes. Exactly. The genes that are missing are actually special genes called “repressor genes” that shut off other genes on the two remaining arms of the Y chromosome. The missing genes are like a finger on the switch of a light bulb, keeping the light off. Without those little fingers, the remaining gene switches get switched on and are able to express themselves and cause maleness. Most people don't realize that all human fetuses are females until about four weeks of gestation. At that time—if there is a Y chromosome present—the transformation to the male form begins. The vagina and clitoris become a scrotum and penis and the ovaries become testicles and descend from the abdomen into the scrotum. But most importantly, certain brain cells develop a sensitivity to the testosterone coming from the newly formed testicles and under the influence of this hormone they begin to wire themselves into a distinctively male pattern.”

“Which is characterized by aggression,” Robert added, “as we saw exaggerated in your killer mice.”

“Yes, but not just aggression. There are other important differences between the male and female brain wiring patterns. We've just focused on aggression for purposes of this experiment. What's really exciting is that we've been able to re-wire the brains of adult males. The pattern of neuronal connections in the adult male brain can be re-configured long after the initial pattern is established in the mother's womb. The mice are males in every way except the way their brains are wired. And you saw the difference in behavior between the two groups.

She watched patiently as Robert processed the information.

“So what you saying is that you've been able to selectively change the testosterone sensitivity of adult neurons?” Robert asked, with a bit of amazement coloring his tone.

Eve nodded enthusiastically. “In mice anyway. We don't know if it works with humans, because, after all, who would let us do such an experiment. Would you volunteer?”

Robert shook his head, then turned away, lost in some conflicting thoughts and feelings.

“I didn't think so,” Eve continued, “but it does make you think, doesn't it.” She looked at her watch and turned off the DVD player and TV. “We need to get going.”

In the parking lot of Eve's Rockville, MD apartment complex, Robert faced one his greatest

challenges—whether an avowed feminist man should open the door of a car for an avowed feminist woman. He decided to test Eve's tolerance for traditional paternal social patterns. He pulled his keys out and thumbed the transmitter, electronically unlocked his waiting Toyota Camry. As he moved to the passenger door, Eve stopped him.

“That's a rather unusual key chain you have, Mr. Howard,” she said taking his hand and exposing his key chain. “It's a piton, isn't it?” she asked.

Robert separated the rock climbing device from the other items and held it up. “Yes,” he answered, “and a good luck charm. My second time—and last time— climbing I lost my grip, and this piton was the one that held. You've done some rock climbing?”

“Once.” Eve smiled as she opened the passenger door and climbed in. “I prefer my feet on the ground,” she added and closed the door after herself.

Robert took Rockville Pike into Washington, and during the drive into town, he and Eve shared their stories. Robert kept the conversation focused on Eve, who seemed quite happy to talk about her research, but when he probed the eco-feminist roots of her studies, she became reticent, so he backed off. In Georgetown, he parked the car at Jeff's condo, and during their short walk to the restaurant, he told Eve a story about Jeff that was filled with enough truth to make his lies easier to share.

The restaurant, an Italian place Jeff had recommended, was quiet enough for easy conversation, and they continued theirs over lasagna, ravioli, and some hearty red wine. After several glasses, Robert had decided to dig a little deeper and see what he could provoke.

“No,” Eve said, playing her fingers against the stem of her glass at the base, “I don't hate men. I feel sorry for them. Men are just an experiment in genetic design that has worked out badly for this planet.” She lifted her glass, took a sip, and then continued, since Robert said nothing. “I don't know how to say this gently, so I'll just say it. Your brains are fucked up. You're wired wrong.”

Robert held back a smile. He really liked this woman. Once he got her to talk about her feminism, he found that he agreed with a lot of what she had to share. He was starting to wonder if maybe Jeff had made a really bad choice in asking him for help in this investigation, but stayed in character and played the devil's advocate. “Wrong?” he asked.

“Yes, wrong,” Eve said. She hadn't meant to be so blunt. After all, this man at least appeared to be sympathetic to her views, but the wine was pushing her from behind, and she found herself

plunging ahead. “You have a disease,” she said, “that causes you to see the world very differently from women. Women see things whole.” Her hands moved apart expansively. “They feel connected to the people and things around them. A perfect example is the birth experience. For nine months a woman knows that she and her growing baby are a single being, sharing breath and blood. At birth they separate physically, but the mother knows, in a way that is difficult to express in words, that she and her baby are still a single being.”

“And men?” Robert asked.

“Men see things divided,” she said bringing a single hand down through the air between them like a slow knife. “You feel cut off from people and from Nature. The planet is dying, Robert, and it's not by women's hand. At your core you men feel separate from the whole. Death for you is a very final, fearful experience. It's no comfort to you that when you die, life as a whole goes on. That,” she said, “is why death-defying adventures give you such a thrill.”

Robert laughed. “Like rock-climbing?”

“Sure, like that—but especially war,” she said holding his gaze. “You spend your lives trying to control things, trying to own everything.” She leaned forward. “You know the expression 'he's the big cheese around here'? Where do you think that comes from?” She sat back. “You men are just a bunch of killer mice—each trying to control the whole chunk of cheese.”

At that moment the waiter appeared. “May I get you some dessert this evening?” he asked.

“Yes,” Eve said to the waiter, “my friend Mickey here would like a big piece of cheesecake. A really big piece—all for himself.”

The waiter looked at Robert and getting no reaction said to both of them, “This is some kind of joke, right?”

Robert shook his head and held up a negating palm. “Nothing for me, and yes, she's joking, but I don't think she's kidding.” He smiled at Eve and she smiled back.

After dinner Robert and Eve enjoyed a slow walk along the tow path of the nearby section of the C & O canal. Eve sensed that she'd been preaching to the choir over dinner. She could feel that Robert understood and shared her concerns, and she felt herself open a little.

“Why do you think your funding was denied?” Robert asked.

“Politics, I suppose,” Eve replied. “Our work on male sexuality contradicts a well-entrenched theory in genetics. Some researchers in our field have even accused us of fraud. Karen—that's my lab manager—she thinks it goes beyond science. She says the implications of our work are simply too scary for people—for men anyway, and they are the ones controlling the funding. She may be right. Over the years we've had a lot of trouble getting our research results published, and even when we did, it was in somewhat marginal journals that are not widely read.” She stopped and looked out over the water, as a boat full of people glided by. “Now even those publications won't take our latest results.”

Robert stopped next to her. “Yet, despite all that, you consistently got funding—at least until now, that is.”

“It's true,” Eve admitted.

“And now your mother has offered you a position at Scentek?”

Eve pulled back from her thoughts, glanced at Robert, and started to walk again. “Yes,” she said, “but it's not going to happen. She was my mentor, you know. We worked together at NIH—until two years ago. That's when she left to join Scentek—to design perfumes.” Eve's disgust at the idea was clear.

“It does seem like an odd career move,” Robert observed.

“Perfume is so...I don't know. It's just so passive,” Eve said. “I can't think of a more perfect symbol for women's impotence in the face of men's actual physical power. Anyway, we haven't spoken to each other since she left.”

She shook her head as if to shake off a spell. “I don't want to talk about this anymore.” She grabbed Robert's hand and started off down the path toward the stairs leading to street level.

“Come on,” she said. “I want to show you something back at my apartment.”

Robert slowed, resisting her pull. “I don't know, Eve,” he said with mock concern. “I mean, we hardly know each other.”

Eve stopped, half-turned, shook her head. “Men,” she said. “I swear. If it's not cheese, it's sex.” She pulled him back into motion. “Don't worry. I won't wear any perfume.”

In Eve's apartment Robert sat silently on the couch while Eve lit some candles and incense,

cautioning him not to get any “ideas”. Then she disappeared into her bedroom and returned carrying a photo album. She sat down on the couch close to him and laid the album on the coffee table before them. She rested her right hand on the aged brown leather cover of the album, turned to him and said, “This is what I wanted to show you. This is my alternative to working at Scentek.”

She opened the album. Centered on the very first page was a single photo of a group of people in a city park, a posed picture with everyone attentive to the camera. Robert studied the photo. In the center a smiling man held a five-year old girl on his right hip. Four women surrounded him, two on each side. To the right of the young girl stood a woman in her late-fifties. The other women were in their mid-twenties. Arm in arm, all smiled energetically for the camera.

Eve started to turn the page without comment, but Robert stopped her. “Wait,” he said, “I know this place. This was taken at Mount Auburn Park, near Harvard Square. When was this taken?” he asked.

“1972,” Eve answered. “I was five.”

“I recognize Sophia. And this,” he pointed to Margaret, “is your mother.” He looked at Eve, his finger resting on the woman standing to Sophia's right.

“Yes,” Eve confirmed. She pointed to the woman at the man's left. “This is Mary Horton. She is a professor of Political Science at Georgetown. And this,” she pointed to the woman to Mary Horton's left, “is Beth Torrance.” She tapped the picture a couple of times adding, “I'm not sure what Beth does these days.” Finally she pointed to the man holding her. “And this,” she said, “is my father—Bill Jernigan,” but her finger did not linger.

Robert looked at Eve's face and then back at the man in the photo a couple of times. “Definitely a resemblance,” he observed, and Eve smiled slightly. “So, who took the picture?” he asked

“My mother,” Eve answered.

“What?” asked Robert, turning a puzzled face to Eve. He turned back to the photo and pointed to Margaret. “I thought this was your mother.” He looked at Eve, who seemed to stare through the photo at some old memories, as if trying to decide whether to trespass. Finally she spoke.

“Margaret is my adopted mother. My real mother died when I was seven. Margaret adopted me and raised me.”

“But why did your father give you up for adoption?” Robert asked.

Eve closed the album. She turned to him. “Robert. My father killed my mother. He went crazy, and they locked him away someplace. I don't know where, so don't ask. It's ancient history, and I

prefer not to talk about it.” She turned back to the album and reopened it. “What I want to show you is more important.”

She turned past the group photo and found pages with photos taken at a farm nestled in a beautiful valley surrounded by rolling hills. One photo captured a spectacular overview of the valley. Several photos showed women doing various farm chores.

“This,” Eve said, placing her hand on the pictures, “is Sophia's commune. Women only, and, as you can see,” she tapped a photo of a woman guiding a plow behind draft horses, “they do everything.” Then she pointed to the panoramic view. “This,” she said, “was taken from my favorite spot in the world.”

“It is beautiful,” Robert said.

Eve flipped the page and pointed to a photo of a woman crouched in a garden, holding up a huge squash that was still connected by its umbilical cord to its mother. Eve's voice softened slightly.

“This is Penny Warren, my soul sister.” Her finger lingered a moment, then pointed to another photo of her and Penny standing in a martial arts pose, feet apart and fists ready. “This is us in the rape prevention training.”

“Though,” Robert said wryly, “I don't expect Penny gets to use those skills too often at a women's commune.” He regretted his levity immediately and shifted gears. He pointed to one of Eve's bookcase. “I noticed earlier that you have quite a number of books on rape.”

“Yes,” Eve replied distantly, “I had a bad experience once...” but before Robert could respond, she closed the album and rose from the couch. “It's getting late,” she said, looking down at him.

“Eve. I'm sorry if I upset you,” he offered.

“No, I'm fine. I've just got a stressful day ahead of me, and I'm tired.”

She started toward the door, and Robert rose to follow.

“I'd like to get together again,” Robert said, trying to salvage their connection. “You've given me a lot of information, and I'm sure I'll have follow-up questions.”

They stopped at the door. “Sure,” she said without enthusiasm, “you can call me here, but this is really a crazy time right now. I've got some important decisions to make, and I have no idea what my schedule is going to be. Tomorrow is out for sure. I'm meeting my mother at Scentek, and then I'll probably drive to Boolerville to sort things out.”

“Boolerville?” Robert puzzled.

“Sophia's commune. Boolerville is the closest town.”

Eve opened the door, and Robert stepped out into the hall. He thought her openness about her uncertainty was a good sign—that and her hesitation at the door.

“Maybe you can just give me a call when you get back from the commune?” he asked.

“That's probably better. I will,” she said cradling the door.

Robert smiled softly. “Good,” he said and turned to go.

Eve closed and dead bolted the door. Leaning back against it, she opened the album to the group photo and focused on her father's face, dissolving into the memory of that day in the park.

It was a birthday party—lots of eating, drinking, laughing, and dancing. Her father and she were dancing to some wild music, holding each other's hands at arm's length, circling around and around, when suddenly he lifted her off her feet, whirling her through the air like some carnival ride. The surprise turned instantly to joy, and when he returned her safely back to earth, she was a wobbly, giggling mess. He grabbed her before she could fall down, took her into his arms, and hugged her warmly.

"I love you, Daddy," she whispered in his ear.

"I love you, too, Princess," he whispered back. "Happy birthday."

Eve wiped a tear from her eye, glad that she had broken her own spell and let herself explore those memories—memories so difficult to reconcile with what she'd been told. She closed the album and headed for the bedroom.

Robert stood, coffee cup in hand, at the kitchen window of Jeff Ayers' condo, looking out into the small Georgetown backyard, watching birds eating breakfast at a feeder. Jeff, suited up for work, came into the kitchen, poured a cup of coffee, and sat down at the table, on which Robert had parked his laptop and printer. Jeff glanced at the laptop's screen. He saw the results of a Google search on the keywords “jernigan” and “murder”.

“How did it go last night?” Jeff asked.

Robert drained his cup and poured another at the coffee maker. He sat down at the laptop. “I think there's something there. Dr. Danlon's most recent experiments involve genetically altering the behavior of adult mice, and she has apparently succeeded.”

Jeff was surprised. “Adult mice? That wasn't in any of her papers,” he observed.

“No, but it's wasn't your researcher's fault. She hasn't been able to get these results published. But there's more. Do you know anything about a company called Scentek?”

Jeff shook his head, and Robert continued. “They make perfume, which in itself isn't remarkable, except that one of their researchers worked with Doctor Danlon at NIH before leaving to join Scentek a couple of years back.” He pulled a sheet of paper from the printer output tray and handed it to Jeff.

Jeff put down his coffee. “What am I looking at here?” he asked.

“According to Doctor Danlon, her father killed her mother when she was seven years old. She wouldn't talk about it, so I've been searching some of the government databases you gave me access to. Google gave me nothing, so I checked CRIMESTAT for state and federal prisoners. Nothing there either. But NEWSDEX gave me a report in the Boston Globe.” He gestured to the sheet in Jeff's hands.

Jeff started reading. It was a half-column back page piece based partly on a preliminary police report. “Damn,” Jeff said. “He emptied an entire clip into her...9 millimeter Beretta...neighbors called the police...investigators think he was on LSD. Listen to this. 'At the time of the murder, the couple's daughter Eve was staying with Doctor Margaret Danlon, a friend of the family. Danlon, a researcher at Harvard University, told police that Jernigan had a history of violence toward his wife.’”

“So, where is this guy?” Robert asked.

Jeff finished his coffee in a gulp and rose to go. “Meet me at my office,” he said. “We'll run him there. If we can't find this guy, he's not real.”

At Scentek's laboratory facility, Eve entered the lobby, checked in at the security desk, and got the required badge. In a moment she and Margaret Danlon entered an elevator, where Margaret swiped a key card and punched in a pass code. Eve felt the elevator descend, and in a moment they were stepping out into small room with a door opposite the elevator. Margaret swiped her key card and put her right eye up to a retinal scanner. The door opened with the clunk of a lock, and they passed into a small but fully outfitted lab, glistening with stainless steel equipment. They stopped just inside the door, and Eve looked around. There were no lab workers around, and the equipment and benches appeared unused.

“Our new perfume will be released soon, and we're moving on to some new and exciting projects,” Margaret said, breaking the silence.

Eve walked over to a piece of laboratory equipment and ran her fingers across the smooth cold metal.

“It's the latest synthesizer from Rheimer Scientific,” Margaret said of the machine Eve was admiring, but Eve said nothing. “We want you to continue your brain feminization studies here at Scentek...” Margaret continued. Eve pulled her hand from the stainless steel and gave her mother a puzzled look. “On humans,” Margaret finished.

Eve's look shifted into protest, but before she could speak, Margaret explained, “We'll be working with a special segment of the federal prison population—extremely violent male prisoners. All volunteers of course.”

Margaret could see that Eve was processing some difficult thoughts and feeling. She moved closer to her, wanting to reach out, but stopped herself. “Your father was a brilliant, creative man,” Margaret said. “What he did to your mother...well, there's no reason why he should spend his life in a cage. You have a chance—we have a chance to free him.”

Margaret turned and gestured for Eve to follow. “C'mon,” she said. “I want to show you something I think will interest you.”

Eve followed her a short way into the lab. They entered an office at the side of the main floor. At a computer workstation on the desk, Margaret logged in and clicked on an icon on the computer's desktop. A program called Missing Link started up. From the pocket of her white lab coat she pulled a DVD and put it into the DVD drive. In a moment Eve was staring at a snaking trail of multi-colored bands—a sequence of genes.

“It's a retrovirus of some sort,” Eve observed casually. She took the computer mouse from Margaret's hand and with a few clicks zoomed into one of the colored bands, revealing its sequence of RNA base pairs, a seemingly random sequence of the letters 'A', 'U', 'C', and 'G'. She

scrolled and studied several pages of sequences and then stood back. “It's a Green Monkey Encephalitis virus.”

Margaret smiled. “RV-GM231 to be precise,” she confirmed. “Our delivery system. We've made the necessary adaptations, and it's ready to go.”

“Then this shouldn't take very long at all,” Eve observed.

“Not for you,” said Margaret, retrieving the DVD and shutting down the computer.

“And these men will be strictly volunteers?” Eve asked.

Margaret nodded. “Volunteers who understand clearly the purpose of the experiment. There will be no surprises.”

They retraced their way back out of the lab and onto the front steps of the building. Margaret hugged Eve briefly, then held her by the shoulders at arm's length, looking strongly into her eyes. “Take a day to think about it,” she said, “but remember—not a word about this to anyone, especially the media. We're not ready for any publicity on this yet.”

Mid-morning at his office in the local branch of the FBI, Jeff stood at a window looking out over the Potomac River as Robert flipped through and read the contents of a brown file folder. “Vanessa Langemann took over Langemann Pharmaceuticals from her father in 1972. She created Scentek that same year and shifted most of the company's resources from pharmaceuticals to perfume manufacturing.” He sat down at his desk. “Do you know anything about Operation Paperclip?”

Robert glanced up and shook his head.

“It was,” Jeff continued, “the code name for our effort at the end of World War Two to grab the best Nazi scientists before the Russians got them. Ms. Langemann's father was one of the German specialists in chemical warfare. The US gave him immunity from war crimes prosecution in exchange for his help with our own chemical weapons development. Langemann Pharmaceuticals was a cover for that effort until 1972 when the US signed the global treaty banning such development.”

Robert looked up from his reading. “And since then Langemann has been totally legit?” he asked.

“As far as we can tell,” Jeff said. “We confirmed your lead on Margaret Danlon, but security at Scentek is surprisingly tight.” He handed Robert another file folder. “Meanwhile, we'd like you to talk with this man.” Robert took the new file, opened it, and read the first document. “He's at the Bridgewater State Mental Hospital in Massachusetts,” Jeff continued. “There are no records of his arrest for his wife's murder or his transfer to the psychiatric facility, but we think it's Dr. Danlon's father, William Jernigan. You leave immediately. Everything has been arranged. Same cover.”

Robert took a late morning flight, and for the second time in a matter of weeks he landed

in Providence, Rhode Island, rented a car, and made his way across southeastern Massachusetts. He arrived in the countryside outside Bridgewater, and after the drive up the long access road, parked in the small guest lot of the imposing and aging brick structure known as the Bridgewater State Hospital for the Mentally and Criminally Ill. In the lobby security gave him a security badge and escorted him to the office of the Director of the hospital, sixty-year old Dr. Harold Wexler. Robert looked at the walls of the office, covered with pictures of Wexler smiling and glad-handing various political and other celebrities.

After the customary handshakes, Dr. Wexler gestured to a seat in front of his desk and Robert sat down. Dr. Wexler sat down as well and opened a file on his desk. “I must say,” said Wexler, “it surprises me to see interest in this particular patient. William Jernigan hasn't had a visitor in over thirty years. Your editor at *The Washington Post* was vague. What exactly is your story about?”

“I apologize for any confusion, Dr. Wexler, and I certainly appreciate your time. I'm doing a profile on Mr. Jernigan's daughter, Eve Danlon, for a special article on recent breakthroughs in genetic engineering. Frankly, the stories she tells be about her father are rather horrible, but I believe his illness may have influenced her research.”

Dr. Wexler laughed, leaning forward onto his desk. “Personality,” he opined, “is a very complex thing, Mr. Howard. Genes certainly play a role, but it takes the right—or should I say wrong—environment to produce someone like Mr. Jernigan.”

“Ah, yes,” Robert nodded, “the old nature nurture dilemma.”

Wexler sat back. Robert could see he was pleased by this exchange. This guy needs to get out of the house more, Robert thought, but he put aside his judgment and stayed on task. “May I take a look at his file?” he asked leaning and pointing to the file on Wexler's desk.

Wexler frowned and shook his head. “Not without a court order, I'm afraid,” he said and slid Jernigan's file into the center drawer of his desk. “But you can see him, for what it's worth.”

Wexler escorted Robert through a series of hallways, stairs, and attendant stations. Finally they arrived at a security checkpoint. Wexler waved to the guard and a barred gate slid open with a clanging sound. They passed through and continued down a hall, finally stopping just inside a large day room. Robert saw Eve's father on the other side of the room. He was thirty some years older, but clearly this was the man he'd seen in Eve's photo album.

Bill Jernigan was sitting, gazing out through the windows, which were covered with bars on the outside and embedded with chicken wire. A half-eaten tray of food sat on the small TV-dinner

table in front of him. Robert followed Wexler and they stopped in front of him. Dr. Wexler called his name to get his attention, but he continued to gaze vaguely out the window.

Dr. Wexler gestured to Robert, inviting him to try to make contact with the patient.

Robert moved closer. “Mr. Jernigan?” h said, stooping a bit and extending a hand across the dinner tray. “My name is Robert Howard.”

Bill remained fixated on the window. “I’m afraid,” Wexler said, “that’s about all you’re going to get out of him, Mr. Howard.”

Robert withdrew his hand and straightened up. He looked at Wexler and then at Bill. He hesitated, but then did what came naturally—he reached over and touched Bill gently but firmly on the shoulder. Bill Jernigan’s cataleptic stare broke, and he turned and gazed blankly, first at Wexler and then at Robert, and finally at Robert’s hand. Robert released his shoulder. “Mr. Jernigan? I’d like to talk to you about your daughter—Eve.”

Bill’s expression remained unchanged and after a moment he turned back to the window. Just then a black attendant in his fifties interrupted them. Robert read the man’s name tag: Andy Willis.

“Excuse me, Dr. Wexler,” Andy said, interrupting them, and then he turned to Bill and asked, “You done with this, Bill?” Bill’s gaze remained fixed on the window, but his hand lifted in a small gesture of dismissal toward the food tray.

Andy took the tray from the table and looked at Robert. Robert smiled and nodded. Andy turned to Wexler and said, “I’m going to eat my own lunch now. I’ll be in the cafeteria if you need anything.”

“Thank you Andy,” Wexler said. “We’re almost done here.”

Robert watched Andy walk away and then turned to Wexler. “I’m afraid you’re right. A long trip for nothing.”

Wexler lead Robert back to the security checkpoint. As they waited for the gate to slide open, Robert said, “I’m starved myself. Any chance I could get something at your cafeteria before I head back to Washington?”

“Of course,” said Wexler with a chuckle, “if you can stand the food.”

Robert followed Dr. Wexler's directions, and after a couple of false turns through the maze

of hallways and stairwells, he found the cafeteria on the first floor. It was still serving lunch, and Robert bought a sandwich and drink. After paying the cashier, he surveyed the room and saw Andy Willis sitting by himself off to one side. Robert walked over, stopping opposite the attendant.

"Hello again. Mind if I join you?" Robert asked.

Andy, his mouth full, kept chewing and gestured for Robert to sit. Robert introduced himself and explained his interest in Bill Jernigan. "I'm a reporter with *The Washington Post*. I'm doing an article on Mr. Jernigan's daughter."

Andy gave Robert a brief look of surprise.

"I was hoping to talk with him," Robert continued, "but he seems to be a man of few words."

Andy took a sip of his drink. "He never told me he had a kid," he said.

Robert leaned forward a bit. "You know, Andy, I realize you're probably not supposed to talk about your patients, but maybe you can help me." Andy took a forkful of meatloaf and said nothing, so Robert went on. "Have you taken care of him very long?"

"A long time," Andy replied. "Since he got here."

"Did he ever talk about what he did? Why he got sent here?"

Andy searched his memory. "I asked him once, early on, before, you know," he said, making a slicing motion across his forehead with his forefinger.

"They gave him a lobotomy?" asked Robert.

Andy nodded. "He said the CIA got him."

"The CIA!?" Robert exclaimed.

Andy chuckled. "Don't get too excited," he said. "A lot of them here blame the CIA, or the FBI, or the KGB. But there was something else," he said. "A woman's name. Rebecca...or Contessa...something like that."

"Vanessa?" Robert asked.

Andy's eyes widened. "Yup. That's it. Vanessa."

"What did he say about Vanessa? Can you remember?"

Andy thought a moment, then shook his head. "Sorry."

“Listen, Andy. I need to ask you a big favor. I need to ask Mr. Jernigan about Vanessa. Will you help me get back into the secure ward?” Robert was afraid this was asking too much. Andy forked the last of his lunch into his mouth, slowly chewing his food as he studied the reporter sitting opposite him. When he was done he glanced around and then stood up. “Come on,” he said.

Back at the security checkpoint, Robert stayed close to Andy's side, and the guard let them through as if it were Andy all by himself.

“He'll be watching TV,” Andy said, as they passed through the gate.

Of course, Robert thought. His other lobotomy.

In the day room they found Bill Jernigan sitting on a couch in front of a television, just as Andy had predicted. Andy stood in front of him, blocking his view of the TV. Bill looked up at Andy. “I've got someone wants to talk with you, Bill. He says he's a friend of your daughter. You never told me you had a kid.”

Robert pulled a chair over and sat down next to Willis who continued to block the television. “I'm a friend of your daughter Eve, Mr. Jernigan,” Robert began.

“Call him Bill,” Andy said to Robert. “Nobody around here calls him Mr. Jernigan, except maybe Dr. Wexler.”

Robert nodded to Andy, then continued, “Eve showed me a picture of you. At her fifth birthday party. At a park near Harvard Square. Your wife Kathy took it.”

At the sound of his wife's name, Bill Jernigan's eyes squinted slightly. “You remember, don't you?” Robert prodded. “Sophia was there, and Margaret...and Vanessa.”

At Vanessa's name, Bill straightened slightly and his eyes opened a bit. He looked up briefly at Andy, then returned to staring straight at Andy's mid-section, as if he could watch the TV right through him.

Robert moved from the chair and sat next to Bill on the couch. “Bill?” he said more softly. “I don't believe you killed Kathy. Who set you up? Was it Vanessa?”

Now Bill's eyes welled with tears. He turned and looked at Robert. On seeing the reaction from Bill, Andy knelt down and studied Bill's face. “Now that's something I have never seen,” he said almost to himself.

Robert looked into Bill's eyes, and continued, “Your daughter Eve loves you, Bill. In her heart she knows the truth.”

Bill closed his eyes a moment, pushing a tear down one cheek. He caught it at the corner of his mouth with his tongue and then slowly and deliberately wiped his cheek with his hand. He looked first at his wet fingers and then at Andy. Andy put his hand on Bill's knee and nodded at him, smiling. “That's right, Bill. Water of life.” Then he rose, looked at Robert, and said, “You get your answers, Mr. Howard?”

Before Robert could say anything, Bill Jernigan rose slowly from the couch and walked to a window. Robert stood up. “Yes,” he said. “Some answers and a lot more questions.” He pulled

out his wallet and handed a card to Andy. “If he says anything more, give me a call. And thank you, Andy,” he said, shaking Andy's hand. “You've been very kind to me and clearly a good friend to Bill.”

At the window Bill Jernigan stood with both palms flat on the chicken-wired safety glass, looking beyond the bars to the spacious grounds beyond. His fingers curled against the pane.

Eve's apartment was dark except for several candles in the living room and several more in

the bathroom. In the warm water of the spa Eve and Karen sat opposite each other, their legs entwined, only their heads above the herb-infused water. Then Karen sat up and worked the cork from a champagne bottle, launching it across the bathroom. She filled two champagne flutes and handed one to Eve.

“Here's to our new career at Scentek,” she said, raising her glass to Eve. Eve clinked her glass against Karen's, but said nothing and took a sip. “Oh, c'mon, Eve,” Karen pleaded, “we're supposed to be celebrating.”

“I know,” Eve responded. “It just bothers me that for two years Margaret has been at Scentek duplicating my research and never once said a word.”

Karen gave a short laugh. “Hey, it's not like you two have been talking at all.”

Eve shook her head. “Still...” she said and took another sip of the champagne.

Karen set her glass down on the edge of the tub and slid over next to Eve, snaking an arm around her waist. With her other hand she turned Eve's head gently and kissed her. The champagne kiss was delicious, and when their lips finally parted Eve seemed more relaxed. Still, her face drifted away from Karen's, pulled by her thoughts. Karen coaxed Eve's face back with a gentle finger on her chin. “Who cares, Eve?” she implored, “You're going to be able to continue your work.” She smiled at Eve, kissed her quickly on the lips, and slid back over to her glass. Rising from the foam, she tossed down the last few sips in one gulp. “C'mon,” she said climbing out of the tub. “Let's make some dinner.”

Eve felt better having something to do instead of thinking. Only the sound of vegetables being chopped and lettuce being washed and spun dry interrupted the easy silence as the two women, dressed in sweats, prepared their meal.

The phone rang. Eve looked at it but kept chopping. “Let the machine get it,” she said to Karen, who had stopped and turned. When the outgoing message finished, a man's voice came from the speaker.

“Eve, it's Robert. I apologize. I know I was supposed to wait for your call, but I have some news that couldn't wait.” Both women stared at the answering machine. “I've seen you father,” Robert said, and Eve put down the knife. “It wasn't easy,” he continued, “but I found him at a hospital in Massachusetts. I know this sounds crazy...”

The speaker of the answering machine went silent as Eve swept the phone off the charging station. “What the hell are you doing, Robert?” she asked angrily.

“Eve! I thought you were at the commune...” Robert said, but Eve cut him off.

“I told you I didn't want to talk about my father, and I meant it. Why are you doing this? Why are you snooping around?”

“Hey! Whoa! I'm just doing my job. This is part of your story, isn't it?”

Eve was silent a moment as she took a deep breath to calm herself and calculated the recent changes in her situation. “Look, Robert. I can't do this article with you. I'm putting an end to this right now.”

Now it was Robert's turn to calculate quickly. “Eve, wait. We can work this out. I obviously misread your feelings about your father. I really thought...”

“It's not just that,” Eve said stepping on his words again. “Things have changed. My mother has invited me to continue my research at Scentek, and she asked...I mean...It's just not a good idea anymore.”

With that, Robert's tone changed suddenly from urgent persuasion to puzzlement. “I thought Scentek made perfume?” he asked.

“I'm sorry, Robert. Really. I'm sure you'll find someone else for your story.”

“Eve, please. Think about this some more. Will you?”

“No, Robert. I don't need to.”

And yet, Robert thought, you haven't hung up on me. “Okay then,” he said in a conciliatory tone. “Thanks for your time, Eve, and good luck. I did enjoy meeting you.” He hung up the phone, feeling a little sad, but not without a flicker of hope.

Eve heard the click and put the phone back into the charger. She leaned against the counter, her arms crossed and her feelings mixed.

Karen's voice brought her back. “What the hell was that all about?” she asked. “I thought your father was in prison.”

“I thought he was, too,” she said.

Dawn was just breaking as Margaret drove urgently into the staff parking area at the

headquarters of Scentek, Inc. in Maryland, just north of Washington. She parked in her reserved spot and hurried to the entrance of the modern two-story building .

She made her way quickly past security and through the building. On the second floor she entered the spacious office of Vanessa Langemann. Vanessa was standing, arms folded, looking through the glass wall out onto the production floor. Along another wall, a fairly nondescript man in his fifties sat on a couch and looked up briefly from the contents of an open file in his lap. Vanessa turned and gestured to Margaret to take the seat in front of her desk.

“So, what's so urgent?” Margaret asked, as Vanessa sat down at her desk.

“Carter's people got a call late yesterday from Doctor Felix Wexler, the Director of the Bridgewater State Hospital. It seems our old friend Bill Jernigan has had a visitor from a reporter with *The Washington Post*. The reporter told Doctor Wexler he was doing a story about a genetics researcher named Eve Danlon,” she said dramatically.

Margaret's mouth parted in disbelief. Carter Hodge got up and handed Margaret a photo from the file. “It's beginning to look like an FBI investigation,” he said returning to the couch. “At least, that's our theory at this point.” Margaret studied the slight blurry head shot of Robert Howard. “It's an enlargement of a byline photo from a trade magazine he writes for,” Carter continued. “We know his name is Robert Howard and that he is a massage therapist and a free-lance writer. He is reporting directly to Fred Paxton, the managing editor at The Post, and we know Paxton is tight with the FBI. They've used him for cover in the past.”

Margaret handed the photo back to Carter, who continued his report. “We're not as concerned as we could be. The fact that the FBI chose to use a civilian to shake Eve's tree means that this investigation is most likely part of their post-911 fishing expedition. Nevertheless, we've got all the resources we need working to resolve this problem. Mr. Howard's credit card charges were not helpful, but last week he made a number of calls to the main number of the FBI's Washington Metropolitan Field Office and to the Georgetown home of Jeff Ayers, a special agent with the Anti-Terrorism unit. We're watching agent Ayers' house in case he shows up there. ”

“Did this reporter, or whatever he is, get anything from Bill?” Margaret asked, clearly concerned

“No,” said Carter. “At least according to Doctor Wexler, who chaperoned their little date.”

Margaret looked at Vanessa. “You think Eve is involved?” she asked.

Carter answered. “Her phone calls are clean, but, of course, if this is an FBI operation, we can't be sure we have all her calls. We're going to watch her—very discreetly of course. If she is involved we can take appropriate action, and if she isn't we don't want to expose ourselves.”

Vanessa rose from her chair and sat on the edge of her desk between the other two. “Let's pray she's not involved,” she said to Margaret. The G-8 meeting is in less than three weeks, but the security of this project comes first. If we have to postpone our launch we will. I'm sure with enough time you can fix the design yourself.”

Carter rose. “If you ladies will excuse me, I've got a busy day ahead of me.” They said their goodbyes, and he left the women alone.

Vanessa returned to looking through the glass wall and spoke as if to her own reflection. “I was thinking earlier about the day we met—thirty-four years ago—at Beth's house in Cambridge. The moment I saw you I knew you had the strength to see this through. I was just as certain that Kathy did not...and of course she proved me correct. How ironic that now, at the moment of our triumph, our success should depend on her child.” She returned to her desk, pressed a button, and sat down, as the curtains behind her closed over the window wall, hiding the production floor. “Do you think,” she asked Margaret, “that treachery can be inherited?”

On the other side of Washington, just after dawn, Robert drove through the industrial area

that surrounds the FBI's Washington Metropolitan Field Office. He guided his car up the long ramp and disappeared into the middle of the building. Jeff met him as he passed through security, and Robert handed him a report of his investigation. As they made his way to Jeff's office, Jeff filled him in on the latest information from his end.

"It seems," Jeff said, "you've stepped on someone's toes. An unknown person hacked into the computers at The Post last night looking for you. We checked Doctor Wexler's calls, and just after your visit he made a call to a Tyson's Corner business that appears to be a front of some kind."

"CIA," Robert said.

"We're not sure. We're looking into it," Jeff responded.

"No," said Robert. "It's not a question. I'm saying I think it is the CIA."

"Oh, right," Jeff said. "You mentioned that last night."

"I put it in my report," Robert said.

"That's good, Robert, but the truth is, it's not a very compelling lead."

They reached Jeff's office. Jeff went to his desk, tossed Robert's report on it, and sat down. Robert took the seat opposite him. "The FBI won't open channels to the CIA unless we get something much more solid than the 35-year old memory of something one of the patients said to a nurse aide at a mental hospital. However, Scentek is a different story. We need to find out why Scentek and Eve Danlon—have suddenly developed a mutual interest. Are you still optimistic about reconnecting with Eve?"

"Guardedly. I still think the key is her emotional reaction to my visit with her father. I really don't think I'm misreading her. He means more to her than she's letting on. I just don't see how to play it."

"Maybe this professor at Georgetown can help? The one in the picture you mentioned. Go talk to her. She might give you something, some leverage with Eve."

Andy Willis looked around the day room. Bill Jernigan was not there.

“You just missed him,” the guard at the security station told him. “He left with Doctor Wexler.”

Andy made his way quickly down the hallway in the secure section but slowed as he neared Bill Jernigan's room. Doctor Wexler was standing in the doorway, looking into the room. Bill was in the hallway, sitting in a chair against the wall opposite his room. Andy came up quietly behind Wexler and peered in. A man wearing a business suit was in the room filling a suitcase with Bill's clothes and his few other possessions.

“What's going on, Dr. Wexler?” Andy asked trying to maintain his usual respectful tone.

“Good morning, Andy,” Doctor Wexler said glancing over his shoulder. “Mr. Jernigan is being transferred to another facility.”

“But why?” Andy asked, concern rising in his voice.

“Please go back to your job, Andy,” Wexler said coolly.

“Doctor Wexler, I don't mean no disrespect, but Bill is my job, and has been for a long time.”

Now Wexler half-turned in the doorway. “We all appreciate the care you've given Mr. Jernigan over the years,” he said, in his best fatherly voice, “but he is no longer your responsibility. There's no need to be concerned. I assure you, Mr. Jernigan will be in good hands. Now, please go. You have others to look after.”

Andy looked over at Bill who sat with his eyes closed. “Can I say good-bye?” Andy asked the doctor.

Wexler glanced over at Bill. “Of course. But please be quick.” He turned back to the room to watch the man in the suit.

Andy went over to Bill and knelt on one knee in front of him. “Bill,” he said, touching Bill's knee gently. Bill opened his eyes and looked at Andy. “Bill, they're taking you away.”

“Yes,” Bill said softly.

Andy let his head fall and shook it in resignation and sadness.

Then Bill spoke Andy's name. Andy looked up, surprised that Bill would initiate a conversation. He leaned his ear close to hear better.

“Tell Eve...Tell my daughter...” Bill started, but his barely audible words were overwhelmed by the much louder voice of Doctor Wexler.

“No, you can leave that,” Wexler said, directing the man in Bill's room.

Andy glanced away toward Wexler's voice, distracted, but Bill continued speaking. As Andy turned back to him he was barely able to sort out Bill's last words from Wexler's. "...Mary Horton knows the truth," Bill said.

Across the hall, the man carrying the suitcase and Wexler were exiting Bill's room.

"I will, Bill," Andy said. "I'll tell her."

"Thank you, Andy," Bill said, and Andy could tell it was for more than delivering a message.

Andy nodded silently. His eyes filled with tears and he could see the emotion in Bill's eyes as well. Then Wexler and the man carrying the suitcase were standing above them.

"Time to go, Mr. Jernigan," Wexler said.

Andy rose and backed off as Doctor Wexler got Bill to his feet. He watched as the three men moved down the hall. It had all happened so suddenly.

Robert made his way across the campus of Georgetown University, stopping to check his

map a couple of times, and finally he found the building that housed the offices of the Political Science Department. The directory in the lobby gave him his final clues, and he made his way to the office of Professor Mary E. Horton. It was a typical academic office in many ways, with lots of books on the walls and lots of papers and files on the desk and floor. It was distinguished, however, by an old poster for NOW, the National Organization for Women, hanging proudly on the wall next to Professor Horton's desk.

Robert sat in the chair in front of her desk and after the usual introductions, he got quickly down to business. Behind her desk Doctor Horton leaned back, her head cradled by her interlaced hands, happy to pull up old memories.

“Sure,” she said. “I remember. I can see it like it was yesterday. We had some wonderful times in that park.”

“Then you remember a woman named Vanessa Langemann?” Robert asked.

Mary's face clouded. “I've tried to forget her,” she said. She unlaced her hands and looked at Robert. “I understand she's done quite well with her perfume business. Too bad she's so tight with the money she's made.”

“She hasn't supported the women's movement?” Robert asked.

“Not a penny. I tried without success to get her involved back in the Seventies. We just never got along. Her argument was that business and professional success was the best politics. 'Who do you think runs the politicians?' she would remind me, and of course, she did have a point.”

“And she and Margaret Danlon became good friends?”

“Almost immediately,” Mary said. “They began spending less time with our group.”

“Are you aware that Margaret now works for Vanessa at Scentek?”

“Yes. I heard about that. I wasn't surprised, except that she was willing to give up her research at NIH to make perfume. She did some breakthrough work on sexual genetics—a real contribution to our understanding of the genetic roots of our differences.” She gestured back and forth between Robert and herself.

“I understand that she and her daughter Eve Danlon worked very closely at NIH,” Robert said.

At these words, Mary Horton sat up and leaned forward on her desk. “Eve is not Margaret's daughter,” she said strongly, then caught herself. “I'm sorry,” she said, sitting back and clearly struggling with some painful memories. “It's just awful what happened to her mother.”

Robert knew he had to be careful here. He gave Mary a moment, but he had to press on. “What can you tell me about her real mother?” he asked.

Mary paused, collecting her thoughts, then spoke. “She was a rare flower,” Mary said. “A brilliant genetics researcher herself.” She laughed. “You know the expression 'The acorn doesn't fall far from the tree'? Well, that's Eve and Kathy—her real mother.”

She fell silent again and looked away, troubled. Robert took a slightly different path. “What was Eve's father like?” he asked.

Margaret brightened. “He was an artist. A painter, actually, and a good one, too. Sensitive. He did some really interesting work—quite visionary.”

She rose and walked to a gable jutting out from the middle of her top floor office. Robert hadn't noticed it as he'd come in, but on the wall of the gable hung a large painting. It was a somewhat surrealistic image of a black-skinned, multi-armed, fierce-looking female, wearing a necklace made of skulls. One hand held a raised sword and a second held a spiral strand of DNA. A third clutched by the hair the severed head of a man. Each of the skulls on her necklace was labeled with the name of a major US corporation. At her feet, all around, lay slaughtered armies of men, dead and bleeding. Their blood collected into several red streams flowing into the background and turning green as they entered a peaceful, pastoral scene, where men and women tended farm fields and gardens or relaxed in open wild lands.

Robert bent close to see the details, and then stepped back. “Wow,” was the sum of his feelings.

“It's Bill's updated vision of the Hindu goddess Kali,” Mary said. “According to Hindu mythology, Kali was called into being by the female gods to help them defeat the male demons that were destroying the Earth.”

“Yes,” Robert said. “I know about Kali. But this is quite an interpretation.” Robert continued to study the painting, trying to match it up in his mind with the broken man he'd met at the hospital in Massachusetts.

“This particular painting caused a lot of problems for Bill,” Mary continued. “His wife Kathy was opposed to violence of any kind, and, as you can see, Kali doesn't take prisoners.”

“You and Bill were friends,” Robert said, stating the obvious.

“Yes,” Mary said. “Good friends. The three of us were.”

“You were surprised, then, when he killed Kathy.”

“Surprise doesn't begin to describe it—absolutely shocked. We all were. It didn't make any sense to anyone who knew him, least of all me.”

“But, the painting” Robert said.

“Be careful trying to understand Kali,” she said. “She is not about violence, and neither was Bill. If he had a weakness, it was LSD. He saw it as a part of his artistic explorations. The rumor at the time was that he was on some bad acid when he killed her. That's the only way he could have done such a thing.”

“Margaret Danlon told the police he had a long history of violence toward his wife,” Robert countered.

“Well, that,” Mary said, “is just a lie.”

After his meeting with Mary Horton, Robert spent the rest of the afternoon at the Library of Congress researching the history of LSD. On the table around his laptop, a pile of books accumulated: *LSD: History and Chemistry*; *The Search for the Manchurian Candidate*; *The CIA and Mind Control*; *Journey into Madness: The True Story of Secret CIA Mind Control and Medical Abuse*. The more he read, the more the glimmer of a nasty possibility grew in his mind.

Robert went into Jeff Ayers' living room, set his cold beer on the coffee table, and turned

on CNN for the news. A commercial break was ending, and two anchors began what was clearly a recap of some breaking news.

“Once again,” the anchorwoman began, “our top story this evening is the veto by the President of the bill opening up Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling. The announcement sent shock waves through oil markets around the world.”

The anchorpersons were replaced on screen by images of the President of the United States in a bathrobe standing inside his spacious hospital room. The First Lady was at his side, and he was gesturing as he spoke. The voiceover of the male CNN anchorman recapped events over the silent replay of the President's press conference.

“Security was extremely tight today as reporters got their first look at the President at Bethesda Naval Hospital where he is recovering from surgery for an undisclosed problem.”

The image of the President was replaced by the CNN anchorman back in the studio.

“After having championed the drilling in the park for years, the President said that...”

At that moment, Jeff burst through the front door, shedding his suit coat and shoulder harness, his nine-millimeter Beretta still in its holster.

“What the hell is going with the President?” Robert asked rhetorically. “Have you heard the latest news about...”

“Yes. Earlier,” Jeff cut him off. “Listen, we have to talk.”

The portable phone rang and Jeff picked it up. “Jeff Ayers,” he answered. “Sure, hold on.” He brought the phone to Robert. “It's for you.”

“This is Robert Howard...Andy! Wait. Hold a second.” He covered the microphone with his hand and said to Jeff, “It Andy Willis. Bill Jernigan's attendant at the hospital.”

“Put him on the speaker phone,” Jeff said.

Robert got up and placed the portable phone back in its charging station and pressed the speaker phone button. “Go ahead, Andy,” he said.

“They moved Bill this morning,” Andy said.

“What? Where?” Robert asked.

“They wouldn't tell me, but I talked to him before they took him away. He gave me a message for his daughter, and I didn't know who else to call.”

“I'll give her the message, Andy. What did he say?”

“He said, 'Tell Eve that Mary the Whore knows the truth.'”

“Mary the Whore?” Robert asked. “You mean like Mary Magdalene—from the Bible?”

“I guess,” Andy said. “I 'm pretty sure that's what he said.”

“Did he ever quote scripture to you before?”

“Not to me,” Andy said.

“Okay, Andy, listen. I'll give Eve the message. She may know what it means. I'll call you as soon as I talk to her. Meanwhile, don't say a word to anyone about this, okay?”

“Okay. Thanks, Mr. Howard,” Andy said and then hung up.

“Mary the Whore?” Jeff asked.

“I haven't got a clue,” Robert answered. “But what I do have now is a good reason for Eve to talk to me.”

“Good, but we're going to have to change the rules a little. Starting tomorrow we're putting a counter surveillance tail on you. Whoever hacked The Post computers looking for information about you was very good. Our Computer Analysis and Response Team hasn't been able to trace them. So from this point forward we should assume that you are being watched and...”

They both looked at the phone.

“Listened to,” Robert finished.

A man wearing a headset and seated before a bank of electronic monitoring equipment pulled the headset off and spoke to a companion seated next to him.

“We just got made,” he said.

In her kitchen, Eve was pouring steamed milk into a cup of espresso when the doorbell rang.

She set the latte on the coffee table in the living room and went to the door. Seeing a FedEx delivery man through the security hole, she opened the door and signed for a large overnight envelope. As she closed the door she looked at the return address, which read “William Jernigan, Bridgewater State Hospital, Bridgewater, MA 02324”.

She walked to the sofa, put the envelope on the coffee table, and stared at the package. She reached for her latte, took a sip, and then reached for the package. It contained several sheets of paper. She read the one on top.

“Eve—

“The truth is I am no longer sure where your father is. He was moved last night without warning. The hospital authorities refuse to discuss it. Before he was taken away, he asked his attendant to give you this message: 'Tell Eve that Mary the Whore knows the truth.' I don't know what this means, but I am convinced of one thing—your father did not kill your mother. I believe you know this, too, in spite of the lies you've been told. Until I visited him the other day, he'd been buried alive for over thirty years, and now the people responsible have hidden him again.

“If you care, and I think you do, meet me tonight. The people who did kill your mother are watching you closely, so follow the enclosed instructions carefully.”

Eve closed her eyes in thought a moment, and then read the remaining sheets.

In a conference room at FBI headquarters on Pennsylvania Avenue, an agent slid several photo across the table toward Jeff Ayers. Jeff looked at them. They were surveillance photos of Carter Hodge entering and leaving Scentek headquarters and getting into his car in the parking lot.

“These were taken yesterday morning at Scentek,” the agent said. “It took us longer than expected to ID this guy. His name is Carter Hodge. He left the CIA in 1972 and supposedly died while free-lancing in Lebanon in 1974.”

Jeff slid the photos back across the table, and the agent continued.

“In light of this information and the lead Mr. Howard gave us after his trip to Massachusetts, we've decided to ask the CIA a few questions. Until we get a response from them, we'd like you to put Mr. Howard on ice. He's done an excellent job, but we can't have someone with his lack of training and discipline active in this investigation, given the sensitivity of our queries to the CIA.”

Jeff nodded. “I understand.”

Margaret Danlon entered the main lab at Scentek's laboratory facility. Across the room

Karen was working with two technicians on the Rheimer synthesizer, adjusting tubing and typing configuration settings into a software program on the attached computer console. Karen looked up, exchanged hand waves with Margaret, and then returned to the machine.

Inside her office, off the main floor of the lab, Eve was sitting at her computer, working on the corrections to the human X chromosome sequences that Margaret had spliced into the Green Monkey Encephalitis virus. In the two years since Margaret and Eve had parted company, Eve had made some critical discoveries that Margaret knew nothing about. As a result Eve now had the solutions pretty well worked out. Still, the translation from human DNA to the virus' RNA required care. Eve tried to stay focused, but the package she had received from Robert had disturbed her.

Eve looked up as Margaret appeared in the doorway to her office.

"How is it going," Margaret asked, pulling up a chair and sitting next to her.

"Almost done," Eve responded. "You were very close. The sequences for secondary sex characteristics are surprisingly close to the ones for neuronal patterning. I made a similar error about eighteen months ago." She laughed. "With your version, I'm afraid we would have ended up with a bunch of prisoners wearing bras."

"No. We can't have that, can we?" Margaret said, forcing a smile.

"We should be ready to run tomorrow morning," Eve said. "Right now Karen is loading the sequencing program she wrote for me at NIH. We'll load my revisions first thing in the morning."

"This is such good news," Margaret said.

"Yes," Eve said a bit flatly, and Margaret couldn't ignore it.

"What is it, Eve? I would have thought you'd be more excited. This is a very important achievement."

"Yes, I know," Eve said, searching for a path through her conflicted thoughts. "It's just that..." She stopped and looked away.

"What is it, Eve?" Margaret asked again, feeling her motherly instincts awaken, along with a little concern.

Eve turned back to Margaret, took a breath and began. "Just before I agreed to help you with this project, I was contacted by a reporter from *The Washington Post* who..."

“Eve,” Margaret stopped her. “We absolutely cannot talk to the press about this work. The arrangements we’ve made with the federal authorities are far too delicate to survive the controversy that would follow any media exposure.”

Eve was struck by the strength of Margaret's reaction. “I understand that,” she said, “and you can relax, because I’m not working with him. It’s just that he said some disturbing things about my father.”

“What things?” Margaret asked, feeling her concern rising.

“He said that he didn't kill my mother.”

Margaret shook her head. “Oh, Eve,” she said. “That is so cruel. We all know what happened. The police made a thorough investigation.” She leaned forward and took Eve's hands in her own. “Stay away from this man, darling. He's a troublemaker.”

“But why would he say such a...” Eve started to say, but Margaret cut her off again, letting her hands go and rising from her chair.

“Just stay away from him,” she said, her motherly tone gone. “And if he makes contact with you again, let me know immediately.”

“Yes, of course,” Eve said to Margaret's back as she turned and hurried out of the office.

In her office Margaret called Vanessa and shared her conversation with Eve. Then she headed across the Scetek grounds for the main building. As she entered Vanessa's office, Vanessa was finishing a phone call and hung up.

“Carter was right. It's an FBI investigation,” she said. “Carter says they contacted the CIA a short time ago, asking questions about our operations here at Scetek and—are you ready for this—about a certain patient at Bridgewater State Hospital.”

Margaret felt her concern turn to fear. “God, Vanessa. We're so close.”

“Don't worry,” Vanessa reassured her. “It's not a problem. Carter will stop the FBI investigation immediately. He doesn't think they have any damaging information. In fact, he thinks they're just trying to stay off the CIA's turf. He's got it under control.”

She leaned forward onto her desk. “There is one small problem. Do you remember any prostitutes among the women we knew back in Cambridge?”

Robert sat in an overstuffed chair in the Library of Congress reading a copy of Feminist

Utopian Thought. On the table next to him lay a copy of *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975*. He felt his cell phone vibrating in his pocket and took it out. It was Jeff Ayers calling. He got up, stretched, and returned the books to the circulation desk. In the pay phone area he called Jeff back. The conversation was brief, and Robert headed for the exit.

He waited outside the library. In a few minutes Jeff pulled up, and he got in. They drove up Pennsylvania Avenue to FBI headquarters, as Jeff broke the news. "The investigation has been called off," he said.

"What!? Why?" Robert asked.

"Whatever you stepped in is making some very important people very nervous. The order came from the Director of Homeland Security, but it's pretty clear our call to the CIA triggered it. The CIA hasn't responded to our query, but even if they do, you can be sure it will be bullshit."

"Damn," Robert said. "I really wanted to talk with Eve."

"That's good to hear," Jeff said, "because you're going to get that chance."

Robert looked quizzically at Jeff.

"Let's just say the Director is not satisfied with the order. He's asked the President for a face-to-face to verify, which is a little tricky with the President at Bethesda recovering from surgery."

"Meanwhile, you want me to meet with Eve as planned?" Robert asked.

"Yes," said Jeff. "But listen carefully. This is getting a little dangerous. Our technical people swept my house this morning and found several bugs and confirmed that my phone had been tapped. Our counter surveillance hasn't been able to spot them yet, but we're certain you're being watched."

"Spy versus spy," Robert said wryly.

"It's not a joke, Robert. If this goes down badly, we may not be in a position to give you immediate help. And ultimately, our authority for your actions may be denied. Are you okay with that?"

Robert was sobered by Jeff's tone. He thought a long moment about Eve's father and about his own. "Yes," he said finally.

"Okay," Jeff said. "But I'm not letting you go unaided on this one."

With those words they reached 935 Pennsylvania Avenue. Jeff rounded the corner, turned into the garage entrance, and descended a long ramp into the bowels of the FBI building.

Inside the firing range in the basement of FBI headquarters, Jeff and the Range Supervisor watched as Robert stood in a firing station and emptied the eight-round clip of a Sig Sauer nine millimeter semi-automatic pistol. Robert hit a button on the wall of his station, and the human torso silhouette target came floating on its pulley from its downrange position. All three of the men examined the tight cluster of holes in the center rings. Jeff smiled. The other agent leaned close to Robert and shouted through his ear protector. "Nice shooting." Then he turned to Jeff and gave him a thumbs-up.

Out in the hall they all removed their ear protectors, put them back on the rack, and went down a short hall to the Range Supervisors office. There he fitted Robert with a calf holster. Robert put the Sig Sauer into the leather pocket and dropped his pant leg over it.

"Walk around a bit. See how it feels," said the Supervisor.

Robert walked in a tight circle while the other two men studied the profile of his pant leg. Everyone nodded their satisfaction. Robert hid more than the gun, as a slight wave of fear washed through his gut.

It was early evening and darkness had fallen as Eve drove into Washington from her

Maryland apartment. She wore the same dress she had worn on her dinner date with Robert. Behind her two men in another car tailed her at a discreet distance. At just the place Robert indicated in his instructions she started to speed up until she was well past the speed limit. A police cruiser, lights flashing, pulled her over and stopped just behind her car.

The men in the tailing car pulled over as well and watched from a distance through binoculars. The officer who was driving the police car walked to the driver's window of Eve's car. She got out and walked back with him to the police car. The second patrolman riding shotgun got out and walked around the rear of the cruiser blocking momentarily the view the tailers had of the back seat of the cruiser. The first officer opened the rear door, and Eve climbed in and immediately lay down on the seat out of sight below window level. At just that moment a female police officer wearing exactly the same dress as Eve and a wig identical to Eve's hair sat up onto the seat from her crouched position in the foot well. Eve carefully withdrew her lower legs from under her clone's knees and lay still.

The officer closed the door after Eve and then, sitting in the front seat, went through the motions of running a computer check, talking into the radio and writing up a ticket. Finally he returned to the rear door. He opened it, motioning Eve's clone out, handed her a ticket, and finally escorted her to Eve's car.

In a moment the left blinker of Eve's car went on, and her car pulled out into traffic. The men in the tail car pulled out as well but were blocked from following by the police cruiser that quickly pulled out behind Eve's car. Traveling at just the speed limit, the police car let Eve's car gradually increase its distance from the tail car until suddenly her car turned a corner and disappeared. The tail men, still stuck behind the cruiser, watched her GPS-guided blip crawl across a computer map on the console between them, speeding up and making several turns. Finally the police car turned at an intersection, and the tail car sped up, trying to catch up with Eve's car.

The locator on their map finally stopped, but as they caught up with her physical car, they found themselves in the parking lot of a large suburban mall. As they parked and got out of their own car, one of the men spotted Eve's clone disappearing into the entrance of an anchor store of the mall, and they raced across the parking lot to catch up with her.

Inside the store Eve's clone moved quickly through the female shoppers in the women's department and entered the women's dressing room. On the door of one of the stalls was a sign that read "Out of Service—Do Not Use". She pulled open that door, went inside, and closed the door behind her.

The two tail men entered the store, quickly surveyed the shoppers, and did not see their target.

Inside the stall, Eve's clone found a new dress with price tags attached. She pulled off her wig, revealing her blond hair, and then slipped out of her dress, revealing a completely different one underneath. From her purse she retrieved a pair of glasses and a shopping bag printed with the name and logo of the department store she had entered. She put on the glasses, stuffed the wig and the copy dress into the shopping bag, grabbed the new dress off the hanger, and left the stall.

Out on the main floor, she bought the new dress and then made her way across the mall, stopping to window shop and browse a couple of shops. After about twenty minutes, she exited from the opposite end of the mall, got into a car that had been previously parked there, and drove off.

No one followed her.

Several unmarked cars drove up the exit ramp at FBI headquarters and dispersed into the night traffic, each going a different direction. In one of the cars, Robert lay flat on the backseat. “Try to get comfortable,” the driver said. “It’s going to take a few minutes to verify that we are clear.”

Twenty minutes later, Robert was in the parking lot of the park across the tidal channel from the touchdown stripes of the main runway of Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. He leaned against the car that had been left there for him. As he waited he heard the crescendo of an approaching airliner. Then the plane appeared from over the trees against the night sky, its headlights blazing, and the roar of its engines amplified by the extended flaps of the wings. It passed over the channel and with a series of rubbery burps, the plane was down and braking hard with its reverse thrusters.

The next plane was already making its approach in the distance when a police cruiser pulled up. Robert walked over as Eve got out. The officer at the wheel waited until Eve was safely out, and then, with a wave to Robert, he drove off. They stood together a bit awkwardly.

“I’m glad you came,” Robert said.

“Your letter upset me,” Eve said.

“It was supposed to,” Robert said. “Come with me.”

He took Eve’s hand to lead her out into the grassy open field under the flight path of the approaching planes, but she didn’t budge. The din of the next plane was fast increasing.

“You didn’t arrange all this by yourself,” she said, raising her voice a bit.

“No,” Robert said loudly, “I didn’t. The FBI arranged this.”

Eve stood unmoving and let go of Robert’s hand. He put his finger to his lips and then beckoned her to follow.

“Come on. We need to go somewhere noisier,” he shouted and then turned to walk toward the field.

Eve hesitated and then followed a few steps behind him out onto the grass.

“Wait,” she yelled as the plane roared directly overhead. “Is this really necessary,” she hollered, pointing up at the plane. He stopped, came back to her and whispered into her ear, as the sound of the plane’s braking faded. “Maybe not. I think we’ve lost the people watching us, but it can’t hurt. Let’s wait for the next one.”

The next plane was already approaching, and Eve leaned into Robert’s ear. “I feel totally crazy. I trust you and distrust you at the same time.”

Robert laughed. "The feelings are mutual," he said.

They traded ears, their voices rising with the approaching plane.

"At least I'm not working for the FBI," she said.

"No. In your case it's the CIA." Robert said.

"What are you talking about?" she hollered, forgetting their ear ballet and yelling into his face.

He studied her a moment, trying to read her, and then leaned into her ear. "Look. I know there's some distrust between us, but that's not what brought us together tonight. We'll do better if we keep that in mind."

"So, what do you know about my father?"

Across town the two men who had been tailing Eve sat watching her empty car and slowly they drew the inevitable conclusion. The driver pulled out his cell phone and made the call to his handlers. "Stay with the car," the voice from the phone said. So, they sat and waited.

Robert and Eve sat on the grass. He kept his pant legs carefully pulled down in order not to frighten her with his weapon. In installments, timed to the arriving planes, he unfolded his theory.

"How else can you explain his sudden policy shifts?" he asked. "Not to mention his mysterious hospitalization."

Eve nodded. She was also starting to wonder about the President's mysterious surgery.

"If I'm right, there's no way the President's exposure was accidental," Robert continued, "and it certainly wasn't voluntary. He's a guinea pig, pure and simple. And these prisoners Margaret told you about—if they really do exist—you can bet they aren't volunteers either. Frankly, it sounds like a cover story."

"You may be right about that," Eve said a bit sadly, remembering also how Margaret had used the hope of a cure for her father as a lure. "Margaret knows my feelings about violence."

"I just don't see why the CIA is involved," Robert puzzled.

Eve smiled. "It figures a man wouldn't see it," she said. "Remember the mice I showed you—in the video at my apartment?" Robert nodded, and she continued. "If the CIA could feminize the male leaders of America's enemies, they would have the same control over them that they have over women. Violence always trumps non-violence."

"And a virus would do that silently and invisibly," Robert added. "This is a biological weapon they're developing."

"Yes," Eve said, standing up and brushing herself off. "The problem is, it would be relatively easy for a targeted group to develop a vaccine, to develop immunity."

“Sure,” Robert said, “if they knew about the virus—which explains why the CIA is so nervous about exposure.” He stood up. “I’m guessing that Margaret and Vanessa recruited your mother, and she threatened to expose them.”

Eve nodded sadly. “Yes.”

“And your mother told your father.”

“Very likely.”

“So, Vanessa and the boys at The Agency took care of their little problem. Which,” Robert added, “leaves only us.”

“No. There’s one other person that might know—Professor Horton. If my father and mother knew about this, then Mary knew, too. They were like this,” she said holding her index, middle, and ring fingers together.

Robert stared at Eve’s fingers. The lights going on were not from the plane overhead. “Oh, God, of course,” he said. “Mary the Whore’. She told me herself she was best friends with your mom and dad.”

“Mary the Whore?” Eve asked, confused.

“No. Mary Horton,” Robert said, not bothering to explain further. “I spoke with her after you pointed her out in the picture—the birthday party in the park.” He was moving now, heading to the car. “Come on. I’ve got to talk with her again. There’s a good chance she didn’t take your parents seriously. She may know more than she realizes.” And, he thought, she may be in more danger than she realizes.

Robert and Eve said little as they drove to the mall. He pulled up to an entrance on the side opposite where her car was parked.

“You’ve got your extra key?” he asked.

She held up her key, and then her expression got serious. “I’ve decided to sabotage the virus,” she said.

Robert thought a moment. “Won’t they know?” he asked.

“Eventually, yes, but it takes several weeks from the time of exposure for behavioral changes to appear. It will take at least that long for them to realize it’s not working. Do you think there’s anything the FBI can do to help us.”

“I don’t think we should involve them anymore. I’m not so sure they’d be opposed to this project,” he said wryly. “In fact there’s a good chance I was recruited to investigate you in response to the President’s condition.”

Then they just looked at each other, bonded by their intention but not sure how they could help each other further. Finally Robert spoke.

“Let me find out what I can from Mary,” he said. “I’ll get a message to you as soon as I can. You’ll know it’s from me because it will start with the words ‘I need your help’.”

“Okay,” Eve said, and then she took Robert's hand in hers and squeezed. “Thanks for pushing,” she said. “And please be careful.”

“You, too,” Robert said, and then Eve got out and walked into the mall.

Robert stopped at a quick market that had a phone booth outside, and flipping through the raggedy phone book hanging inside, he found Mary Horton's number. At least he hoped it was hers. There were several Mary Hortons and one M. E. Horton. The latter lived on a street that sounded familiar from when Jeff had given him information for his first visit. He'd chosen to visit her at her office, and now he wished he'd written down her home address and phone number as well. He tore out the page of the phone book and punched in the phone number on his cell phone as he walked back to his car. No answer. He let it ring a couple of dozen times and finally gave up. Inside the market he bought a street map of Washington, found M. E. Horton's street, and drove off.

Robert found the address and parked in the driveway of a darkened house across and down the street from M. E. Horton's building. No one bothered him, but he knew he couldn't stay long. Just then a car drove by, slowed, and stopped in front of Mary's three-story apartment building. He watched as Mary Horton got out and said goodnight to the woman who was driving. He started the car, backed out onto the street, and drove toward the apartment, but Mary had disappeared into the lobby before he could get her attention. He slowed but kept going, deciding to find a real parking spot.

In a car parked on the street across from Mary's apartment, another man watched as Mary entered her building. He lifted the radio to his mouth.

Inside Mary Horton's apartment on the third floor, two men sat in the semi-darkness of her living room. The lead of the two-man team wore a communication headset, and his ear piece suddenly squawked in his ear. The lead man spoke into the microphone that hugged his cheek. "Okay," he said to the man in the car downstairs. He turned to his partner. "She's coming up," he said. Using a small flashlight, the second man went to the phone he'd located earlier, took a small fixed blade knife out of a calf sheath, and cut the wire.

Mary reached the third floor landing, walked down the hall to her apartment, and unlocked the door. As she entered the apartment she flipped the light switch by the door and saw the second man for a split second before he planted his Taser gun in her ribs and she slumped into immobility and unconsciousness. The man caught her body with a grunt and kicked the door shut with his foot as he struggled to drag the large woman to the center of the room.

The closest street parking spot that Robert could find was several streets over. He looked at the map to get himself re-oriented and then jogged to Mary's building.

The second man left the light on. He'd closed the blinds and curtains earlier. They didn't want the apartment to be dark in case any neighbors had heard Mary's return, but they also didn't want anyone looking in. On the couch the lead man opened a small black bag and removed a dildo and a small vial of creamy white fluid. He unscrewed the cap of the vial and held it over the business end of the dildo, but nothing came out. He shook the vial like a ketchup bottle, but still the contents refused to budge.

"Damn it," he said. "I think this shit is still frozen. I'd like to know whose fucking idea this was anyway."

The second man, standing beside Mary Horton's inert body on the floor, watched the lead man and grinned.

"What are you waiting for?" the lead man asked, as he put the vial under his armpit to warm it.

The second man stopped grinning and sat down on his heels at Mary's side, facing her head. He pulled his knife from its sheath on his belt, and plunged it into the wood floor in front of him. Then he tore open her blouse and undid her belt and zipper, preparing to pull her pants off.

Just then the lead man's ear piece came to life. "Wait!" he shouted to the second man. He held out his hand to stop the second man's efforts, his thumb and index finger encircling the dildo in an obscene "OK" sign. With his other hand still holding the vial of semen, he pressed the ear piece to his ear and listened to a warning from his partner in the car.

At the front door of Mary's building, Robert found her name on the directory and pressed the buzzer next to it.

Inside Mary's apartment, the door buzzer shattered the silence. "Did you hear that?" the lead man said into the microphone, to the man in the car. "He's buzzing this apartment! Shit!" The second man froze, staring at the lead man, and the lead man froze, staring at the apartment door.

At the front door Robert pressed the button again and then tried the front door. It was locked. He pressed the buzzer one more time, gave up, and walked down the stairs and back up the street, retracing his steps from the car. He had seen Mary go in, and though his mind entertained the thought that she might have gone out again while he was parking the car, his concern for her safety was rising.

Inside the apartment, the lead man heard the message from the man in the car and said to the second man, "He's gone," then nodded toward the door. "Did you lock it?" he asked.

"No. I was dealing with her," the second man said. "She's a lot bigger than we expected."

"Lock it," the lead man said, "and then let's finish this."

The second man got to his feet and started toward the door, but Mary was recovering from the Taser charge, and began rolling her head and moaning. The second man stopped halfway to the door and returned to her body. From the table where he'd left it, he picked up the Taser and checked the charge on the weapon.

At the end of the block Robert turned and a short way up the street found the alley running behind Mary's building. He jogged up the alley with urgency. He'd counted the buildings and easily found Mary's. There was a small parking area behind the building. A security light bathed the area in white. A fire escape zigzagged up the back of the building. The lowest spring-loaded section was too high to be reached by a free jump. He considered jumping off the bumper of a nearby parked car, but it was quite a leap, and he didn't want to deal with a car alarm going off. Then he saw the rusted, tireless remains of a men's bicycle lying in bushes next to the dumpster. He propped it against the building under the ladder, and with a short running leap toward the wall he planted his foot on the top tube of the frame and launched himself high enough to get a finger grip and then a hand grip on a stair tread. His weight should have pivoted the section down against the spring mechanism that held it suspended, but rust or bad hinges prevented its movement. With great effort, using upper body strength and his feet against the bricks of the building's side, he managed to pull himself up onto the ladder. He rested a moment, catching his breath, checked the gun in its holster and then made his way quietly to the top. From the third floor level a caged ladder anchored by bolts to the wall led up to the cornice overhang of the roof. There the caging ended and hand rails arched over the cornice and onto the tarred flat roof.

At the top Robert looked around then stepped onto the roof and walked quickly but quietly toward the little structure that housed the roof access door. As he approached the door, it occurred to him that it might be locked, but when he tried the door, it opened with a low groan. He moved down the stairs and stopped at the end of the third floor hallway.

The second man straddled Mary Horton's legs as he leaned over to apply the Taser's contact points to her exposed abdomen when suddenly one of her legs came up hard into his testicles. The Taser fell from his hand to the floor. As he collapsed to his knees with a groan, Mary pulled both her legs back and with a hard thrust drove the heels of both her shoes up and into the stunned man's face. His head twisted violently with a hideous cracking sound, and he crumpled backward to the floor.

Mary pulled the knife from the floor and scrambled to her feet. The lead man on the couch threw the dripping dildo and empty vial to the floor and reached for the gun in his shoulder holster, but he had to duck as Mary threw the knife at his head. He blocked it with his arm and it bounced harmlessly off his head, but his defensive move dislodged his headset, and it went flying off somewhere behind the sofa.

As soon as she threw the knife, Mary started yelling for help and ran down the short hallway to her bedroom, slamming the door shut behind her to buy some time. She grabbed her revolver from the drawer of her night table, scrambled across the bed, and crouched down behind it. Still

yelling for help at the top of her lungs, she held the gun in a perfect cup and saucer grip, the sights lined up shakily on the closed door.

Moving along the dimly lit hallway outside Mary's apartment, Robert heard Mary Horton's muted calls for help and felt an adrenaline surge. His heart was pounding, but he tried to control his heaving lungs. He stopped just long enough to draw his gun from the calf holster and pull the slide, chambering a bullet. He thumbed the safety off and followed Mary's yelling until he saw the apartment number on her door.

He stepped past the doorknob to the center of the door and started to raise his leg to kick the door open but hesitated and moved back to the handle side of the door. With his left hand he slowly turned the knob. The door was unlocked. It silently unlatched and fell open a quarter of an inch. He stepped across to the hinged side of the door and listened. There were no sounds except for Mary's yelling, which continued. Then Robert heard another voice—a man's.

“Christ, what a mess,” said the man. “Are you okay?”

Inside the apartment, the lead man was crouched beside his partner, who was lifting himself on one elbow and touching his bloody face. His nose was badly broken, his front teeth rearranged in their sockets, and blood poured from a cut over right eye. He spat one tooth out as he sat upright and drew his gun from his shoulder holster. He got to his knees, and from his pocket he pulled out a silencer and attached it.

“I'm going to kill that fucking bitch,” he mumbled through his broken teeth and badly split lips.

“No,” said the lead man. “Cover the door. Someone may have heard her yelling.”

Then the lead man stood up and made his way cautiously down the short hall to the closed bedroom door. The second man got to his feet and wiped blood from his eye, trying to clear his vision.

Out in the hall, Robert leaned back, raised his leg, and kicked open the unlatched door, bringing his gun up quickly into an isosceles stance. The second man, surprised and still half-blinded by his own blood, wheeled around, ready to fire at whoever came through the door. Robert saw the man's gun coming up and fired first—two shots to the chest.

The lead man, standing against the wall outside Mary's bedroom door, turned at the sound of the crashing door and the gunshots just in time to see his partner's body fall with a heavy thud through the doorway to the living room. From the red color blooming at the center of the second man's chest, he knew that, like himself, his partner hadn't bothered to wear a vest. This simple if strange mission had turned suddenly into a deadly dangerous one.

Hearing the gunshots, Mary Horton had stopped yelling. Robert froze in the silence just outside the doorway, shaken, but holding his shooting stance. The door, having slammed 180 degrees against the inside wall, rebounded and swung back, half-shut and obscuring his view of the hallway leading to Mary's bedroom.

The lead man left his position outside the bedroom door and edged carefully toward the doorway his partner now occupied. He paused at the edge of the opening, then, stepping over the dead

man, he swung quickly to face the living room, aiming his silenced pistol first toward the center of the room and then on the half-closed front door.

Robert moved closer to the hinged side of the door frame. With his left hand he slowly swung the door open while holding his gun up and ready. Inside, the lead man watched as the door slowly eased open, and he fired twice through the door torso-high. Splinters of wood exploded from the door. Robert jerked back instinctively and his gun flew from his hand, disappearing into the shadows of the hallway. He hesitated only a second and then ran for the stairs to the roof.

The lead man heard Robert's feet first in the hall and then on the stairs, and he went after him.

Robert ran across the roof toward the fire escape. The lead man burst through the access door and fired a shot. Robert heard the cracking sound of the bullet near his ear just as he reached the edge of the roof. There was no time to climb down into the caged ladder. He grabbed the arched handrail on the right side of the ladder at its farthest point from the building and leaped, pivoting around and down. He felt his hands slip down the metal until they hit the first circular cross brace of the cage, jerking him to a halt and almost loosening his grip. He got his feet planted on a cross brace further down and edged as close to the building as possible.

His thoughts raced. There was no time to use the fire escape and he couldn't jump from this height. The cornice overhang above provided some cover, but he knew that in his current position, if the gunman leaned over the cornice, he would see his legs. He knew his only chance was the gunman thinking he had somehow made it down to the ground and run off. He had to hide under the cornice—and quickly! His mind raced, and then he remembered. His climbing piton, attached to his keys.

He had to work fast. With his right foot still on the lower cross brace and holding on to the uppermost cross brace with his right hand, Robert faced the wall of the building. With his left hand he reached and probed along the bricks high up under the cornice, looking for a gap in the crumbling old mortar. He could get his fingertips up to the first knuckle in a couple of chinks, but he'd need more than that. Finally, reaching almost as far to his left as he could, he felt a loose piece of mortar and worked it free. He stuffed it silently into his shirt pocket, and then from his pants pocket he pulled out his key chain. Reaching out again he jammed the climbing piton into the hole he'd create and seated it as best he could with a painful slap of his palm.

Up on the roof the lead man was moving cautiously toward the fire escape. Robert could hear the soft sound of his steps coming slowly closer. He wedged the fingertips of his left hand into one of the shallow chinks he'd found a couple of feet from the cage. Then, holding onto the cage with his right hand, he swung his left leg up and out to the piton. The tips of his left shoe caught the piton, and it held. Now he moved his right leg up to join his left. There was no room on the piton for both feet, so he wedged his right shoe between the brick wall and his calf being careful not to push his left toe off the piton.

He could hear the gunman just above him now. He had to get his right hand off the cage. With all his strength he dug in with his left hand and let go of the cage. In a one shot move he brought his right fingers quickly up to the other chink, the one closer to the cage. It wasn't the best hold and

he adjusted his fingers as best he could. He felt the joints and ligaments of his fingers, hands and arms straining to their limit. He barely breathed.

Above him the lead man had reached the edge of the roof where Robert had gone over, to the right of the fire escape. He couldn't see or hear anyone on the fire escape or on the ground, but he couldn't see the area near the base of the building. To get a better look he knelt with his left knee on the overhanging cornice and leaned as far forward as his balance would allow, placing his left palm on the edge and curling his fingers over the edge. In his right hand he held his gun ready.

Tucked as he was, high up under the cornice, and facing the wall, Robert could turn his head only enough to see the fingers of the gunman's left hand over the edge of the cornice. With all his strength Robert let go of the left hand chink and reached up and around the cornice, grabbing the gunman's wrist and pulling down with all his might. The lead man pitched forward over the edge of the roof. Robert's effort dislodged the piton at the same time as his right hand lost its hold on the wall. Both men were falling. As his body rotated away from the wall, Robert desperately reached out with his left hand and briefly caught the cross brace his feet had rested on. With his strength gone, his grip held just long enough to pivot his falling body toward the cage. As he fell down and away from the building, his right leg went through an opening in the cage, and with a painful jerk the back of his thigh and then his bent knee caught a cross brace and stopped his fall. Below him the lead man hit the ground head first with the cracking sound of tree branch snapping.

Robert hung upside down on the fire escape, like the Hanged Man of the Tarot, for what seemed like a long time. Finally, he recovered enough strength to pull himself upright and made his way down the fire escape. As he reached the last section, the frozen hinge broke free, and he was spared a ten foot drop to the ground. The gunshots had gotten attention. Lights were coming on in windows all around. He limped over to the dead man and took the gun from his hand. He uncocked it and put the safety on. He could see that even without the silencer it wouldn't fit into his calf holster, so he stuck it into his pants waist at his back and covered it with his shirt tail. Then he went to the base of the building and found his car keys. For the second time in his life he gave the piton a kiss, put the keys in his pocket, and limped-jogged down the alley. In the distance he heard sirens.

After finding her car in the parking lot, Eve drove into the suburbs west of Washington, followed by the two men who had lost her at the mall. Margaret's house was dark as Eve parked in the driveway. She rang the doorbell, and a moment later the light in the front hall went on, and Margaret opened the door.

“Eve!” she said. “I didn't expect to see you tonight. Is there something wrong at the lab?”

“I need to know the truth,” she said firmly.

Margaret stiffened slightly. “What are you talking about?” she asked.

“No, Margaret” Eve said firmly. “Don't do this. I need—I want to know the truth.”

Margaret studied her a moment and saw that the usual lies were not going to work. “Okay,” she said. “I guess it's time. Come in.”

They talked as they walked by moonlight across Margaret's back lawn and stopped at a small creek that ran at the edge of her property. It was a warm evening. Clouds floated across the moon and stars, and insects provided pleasant background music.

“Even back then,” Margaret said, “almost thirty-five years ago, a few of us knew there was no way women could ever get power through political means. This was the only way to stop the madness.”

“But why give the CIA a vaccine?” Eve asked. “The men running this country are probably the most dangerous of all.”

“Yes, of course,” Margaret said, smiling. “That's true, but we needed their money and their protection. So we made promises we had no intention of keeping.” Margaret rose and brushed off her sweatpants. “Besides,” she said, “some of those men have very special wives.”

“Like the President?” Eve asked.

Margaret smiled. “Yes,” she said, “like the President.”

“Then it's true,” Eve said. “Your design has already been tested.”

“Yes,” Margaret said. “We believe that the President's recent policy changes suggest the basic soundness of the prototype, though he certainly could have benefited from your improvements.”

“You mean his recent surgery was...” Eve asked.

“Yes,” Margaret said, nodding, “a boob job.” She gestured with her hand. “Come with me. I want to show you a little surprise we've cooked up.”

Inside her home office, from a wall safe hidden behind a painting, Margaret withdrew a pile of folders and papers and spread them on her desk. She selected a full page magazine ad and set it on top. It was an image of a woman's manicured fingers removing the glass stopper from a cut-glass perfume bottle. The applicator attached to the glass stopper was the shape and color of a tiny curved white rib. A glistening drop of perfume hung from the end of the bone. On the bottle's label and in the copy was the name of the perfume: Eve's Rib. The slogan: "Real power for real women."

"This is our initial delivery system for the virus," Margaret said. "Don't you love the name?"

Eve studied the photo and some other material. "Very expensive," she observed.

"Yes," Margaret said. "The price will come down, but our first release will target wealthy women. Money is power, and powerful women tend to associate with powerful men—our real target." She collected the material and put them back in the safe. "Wherever possible," she continued, "the CIA will use direct dispersal techniques without the fragrance—like building ventilation systems." She gave the combination wheel a twist and swung the painting back in place. "Our debut is scheduled for the upcoming G-8 meetings in New York. That's the deadline we've been under."

She went to her desk and sat down, crossing her arms and leaning back. "The CIA will get their virus, and it will be very effective," she said. "Their vaccine, however, is simply not going to protect them."

"Surely they'll test the vaccine," Eve said skeptically. "They'll know it's defective."

Margaret smiled. "That," she said, "is the beauty of our little double-cross. The vaccine is not going to be defective."

Eve looked puzzled. Margaret explained. "Everyone thinks that the Green Monkey Encephalitis virus is the only one we'll be using to deliver our genetic fix."

"You've developed another?" Eve asked.

Margaret nodded. "A special one," she said, "just for our American patriots."

In Margaret's spacious bathroom/terrarium Eve relaxed, up to her neck in the bubbling spa, her eyes closed, drifting between her thoughts, her senses, and nothing at all.

Margaret appeared in the doorway. "I'm going to bed now," she said softly. "You're welcome to stay in the guest room."

Eve opened her eyes. "Yes," she said, "I will. Goodnight, Margaret."

Margaret turned to go, but Eve stopped her. "Margaret?"

Margaret stopped and turned back to Eve.

"I want to see my father. Can you arrange that?" Eve asked.

"I'll speak with Vanessa," Margaret said.

“Thank you,” Eve said, and she closed her eyes again.

Robert made it back to his car and drove quickly north. He was having trouble driving

because of the damage to his right knee and hamstring muscles, and his body hurt all over. He had a nasty gash in his scalp above and behind his left ear. With his bare hand he held pressure on it, and it finally stopped bleeding. After a few miles, he pulled into the parking lot of a supermarket and called Jeff Ayers on his cell phone.

“No,” he said to Jeff. “I’m not all right. I just killed two men—and my leg is pretty fucked up.”

“Is it serious?” Jeff asked.

“Hell, yes, it’s serious,” Robert said. “I just said they’re *dead*.”

“No, I mean your leg.”

Robert probed the back of his knee. “I think it’s just ligament and muscle damage—but I’m pretty banged up in general.”

“Okay,” Jeff said, “here’s what I want you to do. Go to the safe house I told you about. Put the car in the garage behind the building and stay put. I’ll call you there as soon as I can.”

Robert had trouble finding the safe house following Jeff’s directions alone, but his street map was still in the first car the FBI had given him, and looking the way he did he couldn’t risk entering a market to buy another one. Finally, he found it, drove up the alley behind the house, parked in the garage, and closed the door.

With his gun drawn, he entered the house and checked out the rooms. Satisfied, he went to the bed, put his gun on the bedside table, and lay down. He felt a huge relief as he got horizontal. A sigh flowed from his lips. He closed his eyes against the harsh ceiling light and fell instantly asleep.

The phone next to his gun shattered his sleep. He rubbed his eyes, squinting against the light, and struggled to his elbows. The blinds were closed. He had no sense of the time. His watch showed: 3:13 AM. He rolled and pushed himself to a sitting position on the edge of the bed and reached for the phone.

“Yes?” he said.

“We’re in the middle of a bureaucratic shit storm,” Jeff’s voice came from the ear piece. “The CIA came at us for failing to shut down our investigation, so we questioned them about the attack on Professor Horton. They denied any involvement, of course, but it shut them up.” He paused. “A deal has been cut.”

“A deal?” Robert asked.

“Yes,” said Jeff. “We close our investigation—for real this time—with no questions asked, and they won't retaliate in any way.”

“Retaliate?” asked Robert.

“Don't try to understand it,” Jeff said. “It's a power game. Anyway, I'm officially taking the heat for failing to shut down your activities, but it's just a charade to satisfy them. The police have been taken care of, so you're clear with them. You were never at Mary Horton's.”

“Did you find out what they're doing?” Robert asked.

“No questions asked from either side. That's the deal,” Jeff said. “The Bureau assured them that all the information discovered by our investigation was secured, but we're not sure they're convinced about you.” Jeff paused. “You need to be very careful, Robert. This whole situation is way beyond the law. If we try to bring you in, we'll lead them right to you.”

“Jesus, Jeff. What are you suggesting I do? Disappear?”

Jeff hesitated then spoke words that sent a little chill through Robert's body. “It's not a bad idea,” Jeff said.

Robert was silent a moment. “Well, I can't say you didn't warn me,” he said.

“I would never have gotten you involved if I'd had any idea this would play out the way it has,” Jeff said.

“I know that, Jeff,” Robert said, and then he got back to business. “How long can I stay here?” he asked.

“The CIA knows about a lot of our safe houses. I'd leave as soon as you feel up to it physically, but don't take the Bureau car. It can stay in the garage.”

Robert was silent, his mind already processing his options.

“Good luck, Robert,” Jeff said.

“Thanks, Jeff. I think I'm going to need it,”

“If it's any consolation,” Jeff said, “I think your father would be incredibly proud of what you've done.”

“Maybe,” Robert conceded. “The question is, what exactly have I done?”

Robert studied himself in the bathroom mirror. In light of what Jeff had just told him, he

decided not to take a shower. At the sink he washed his face and neck, his hands, and his hair. He gently cleaned the gash in his scalp where he'd slammed into the fire escape. It would require stitches, and he'd need a tetanus shot, but it was hidden by his hair and wasn't bleeding. His clothes were a mess, but they wouldn't draw too much attention. His shirt was dark blue, so the blood from his head wound didn't show too badly.

He found cash in the closet where Jeff told him it would be—\$1000 in 100s and 20s. In minutes he was on his way. He called for a cab, and it picked him up several blocks from the safe house and dropped him off at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. He rented a car and drove west on I-66 and then south on I-81.

It was raining hard as dawn broke. Robert stopped for gas and bought a map as soon as he was in West Virginia. An hour later he was in the mountains of Randolph County somewhere off Route 33 and fast leaving the beaten path. At a country store and gas station near Boolerville he topped off his tank and did something few men seem willing to do—he asked for directions. The clerk scrawled a crude map on the back of a paper bag.

The solid gray clouds had lightened as Robert turned off the narrow two-lane paved road onto a badly potholed dirt road. The paper bag map on the seat next to him was not drawn to scale and the distances were “just guesses” as the map maker had warned. He reset his trip odometer and drove on. With each turn the road got rougher as he made his way through a labyrinth that was fast wearing him out. The energy he'd been able to regenerate back at the safe house was almost gone.

The rain came down hard again, winning the battle with his windshield wipers. He pulled over and shut off the motor to wait out the downpour. He found the release lever for his seat, leaned back, closed his eyes, and once again fell quickly asleep.

The sound of metal tapping on glass, startled Robert from his sleep. He opened his eyes and looked out the driver's window. The tip of an Uzi tapped against the rain-streaked glass. Two figures in hooded rain gear stood next to his door. The one with the Uzi stepped back and pointed it at him. A second one stood a bit further back and held a semi-automatic pistol trained on him.

“Get out of the car,” yelled the one with the Uzi. It was a woman's voice. Robert released his seat to an upright position, turned the ignition key, and rolled down the window.

“Are you from the commune?” he asked, holding up his empty hands so they could see that he held no weapon.

“Get out of the car!” said Uzi woman. “Keep your hands up, like that.”

“I've got to reach down for the door handle,” he said. “Is that going to be okay?”

Uzi woman stepped forward and opened the door for him and waved him out.

“Put your hands on the hood and spread your legs,” she commanded.

Robert obeyed. The second woman holstered her pistol under the rain gear, stepped up to Robert, and frisked him as Uzi woman continued to hold her automatic weapon on him.

“I need to speak with Penny Warren,” Robert said as the woman patted him down.

“Shut the fuck up,” Uzi woman ordered.

The second woman felt Robert's calf holster and pulled up his pant leg so Uzi woman could see it. She finished checking his other leg and stepped back.

“Where's the gun?” asked Uzi woman.

“It's in the car,” Robert said. “Under the front seat.”

The other woman went to the car, felt under the seat, and came out holding Robert's gun.

“It's got a silencer,” she announced and handed the gun to Uzi woman.

“I can explain,” Robert pleaded. “I'm not here to hurt anyone.”

The women ignored his words. The second woman pulled handcuffs from under her rain gear and brought Robert's hands behind him and into the cuffs. Uzi woman rolled up the window, took the keys from the ignition, and closed the door. She came up behind Robert and with the point of her automatic weapon nudged him into motion.

Eve left Margaret's house well before dawn and drove into Washington. The lab was empty

as she arrived. In her office she made the changes that she and Robert had discussed the previous evening. She burned a copy of the revised code to a CD and put it into the safe next to her desk. When Karen arrived at the lab and appeared in her doorway a few hours later, Eve was ready. From the safe she retrieved a CD in a blue jewel case and handed it to Karen.

Karen held it up for a moment, looking at it as if she were examining light reflections off a diamond. "We're really going to do this," she said.

Eve smiled. "It's all yours now."

Then her smile vanished and she grabbed the jewel case from Karen, ending her moment of awe. She rolled to the safe again, put the blue jewel case back inside, and pulled out a green one. She handed that one to Karen and saw the question on her face. She pointed to the CD in Karen's hand. "That's the latest version," she said. "I almost gave you the wrong one."

Karen squinted at her. "Are you sure?" she asked.

"Quite sure," Eve answered, trying to hide her moment of panic. "I put the final version in the green jewel case. You know, green for 'go'. We can check the MD5 hash against the version on my hard drive, if you want to."

"No," Karen said. "That's not necessary."

Eve smiled weakly at her.

"Okay. Time to make history," Karen said and headed out to the lab floor.

Eve watched her go, feeling badly about lying to her, but her guilt was interrupted by the ringing of her phone.

"This is Eve," she said into the mouth piece.

"I need your help, Eve," said a familiar voice.

"Penny!" Eve jumped up from her chair, practically screaming with pleasure, like a schoolgirl.

"What a wonderful surprise!" Then suddenly she realized what Penny had just said. "What did you just say?" she asked as her elation evaporated.

"I—need—your—help," Penny repeated the words slowly and clearly.

Out on the main floor of the lab, Eve stood next to Karen, who was seated at the Rheimer synthesizer. She had loaded Eve's sequences and was making final preparations before starting the first run.

“Sure,” Karen said, pouting dramatically. “Leave me here with all the drudge work, while you go off to play in the mountains.”

Eve gave her an imploring look and started to say something, but Karen cut her off. “Just kidding,” she said. “Go. You certainly earned some time off.” She turned back to the computer console. “Just promise me you’ll come back,” she said without looking up, and then, in an exaggerated country drawl, she added, “Don’t go losin’ your heart to none of them mountain girls.”

Eve bent down and gave her a quick kiss on the cheek. “Thanks, Karen. I’m going to clear this with Margaret.”

Karen watched Eve cross the lab and disappear through the main door. She looked over at Eve’s vacant office.

In the main office at Sophia’s commune in West Virginia, Robert Howard sat on a couch along a wall. He had showered and wore clean, dry overalls. A white bandage covered his scalp where a doctor had shaved his head and stitched his laceration.

At the desk, Penny Warren returned the portable phone to its charging station. “She’s on her way,” she said to Robert and to Megan Andrews, one of the managers of the commune.

Robert looked at the clock on the wall. “Depending on traffic she could get here by early afternoon. At least the rain has stopped.”

Eve arrived at the commune at a little after 1 PM. After a somewhat subdued reunion with

her old and dear friend Penny, they all got down to business. Eve and Robert sat opposite Penny and Megan at one of the long tables in the dining hall. The other members of the commune had gone back to work after lunch, and only the kitchen staff remained in the kitchen area, cleaning up and preparing for dinner.

“Then it's all true—what Robert told us,” Penny said, letting the reality of the situation sink in. Eve nodded. “Yes, except that neither of us imagined the double-cross the women have planned.”

“In a way I'm sorry you sabotaged the design,” Megan said to Eve.

“It's violence, Megan,” Eve replied firmly. “As long as the men have no choice, it's violence.”

“I know, I know,” Megan said. “But it's the last violence this planet would ever see.”

“Come on, Megan,” Eve countered, “Don't get Orwellian on us.”

“War is Peace” Robert offered as an aside, quoting from George Orwell's novel *1984*.

“Exactly,” Eve said.

“I was actually thinking about the goddess Kali,” Megan said to Eve. “She never had a weapon like this before.”

Robert flashed back to the painting in Mary Horton's office and understood Megan's position.

“We can argue tactics all day,” he said, “but what Eve has done is a fact. What we can do now is bring attention to the reasons these women were driven to such measures.”

“Consciousness raising,” Megan said with a hint of disdain.

“Yes,” Robert went on. “We need some massive media exposure. Unfortunately all my contacts are in the print media, and what we need is television coverage.”

They were all silent a moment. Then Eve spoke. “Wait,” she said. “I know someone who can help us. He has excellent media connections, and I think he's going to be very motivated. There's only one problem—I have no idea how to get in touch with him.”

In the main office of the commune, Robert finished a phone conversation with Jeff Ayers.

“No questions asked?” Jeff asked again.

“No questions asked,” Robert said. “You've just got to trust me on this.” And you owe me big time, he thought.

There was a long silence on the line, then Jeff spoke. "Okay," he said. "I'll get back to you with the arrangements."

Robert hung up the phone. "He'll do it," he said to Eve, Penny, and Megan, who waited expectantly as he spoke on the phone with his contact at the FBI. He turned to Penny. "Are you sure you're up for this?" he asked her.

"She can do it," Eve answered for her.

Penny smiled at Eve. "I can," she said, and then she laughed and added, "Besides, it will be a nice change from pulling weeds."

The President of the United States made his way down the steps of Bethesda Naval

Hospital under the tightest security since the 911 attacks. At the bottom, he stopped at a podium. A small, carefully selected group of journalists was waiting in front of the podium for their first look at the President since his still unexplained surgery, hoping finally for some information about his health.

They were disappointed again. The President responded briefly to questions about his recent policy changes, but he refused to answer any questions about his health and the reason for his recent surgery. He did take the opportunity of their questions to thank the American people for their prayers during his recent stay in the hospital. Then, just as he turned to go, with the microphone still live, a reporter shouted out loudly to him, “Why won't you tell us about your breasts?”

The President stopped and turned back to the podium, searching for the source of the question. Journalists were turning and looking at a woman that none of them recognized. The President looked at her, too. “I'm sorry,” he said. “I don't believe I know your name.”

“Penny Warren,” said the woman. “Why won't you tell us the truth, Mr. President?”

The journalists around her, momentarily stunned into silence, came back to life. Shouts to camera crews brought the lenses away from the podium to capture the source of these bizarre questions.

The President placed his hand over the microphone, turned to the Secret Service man next to him, and said something into his ear. The agent lifted his wrist to his mouth and said something into his cuff microphone. The President turned back to Penny Warren. “Ms. Warren. Would you mind coming with us?” he asked.

It was rhetorical question. Already two Secret Service agents had reached Penny's side and were separating her from the other reporters, escorting her toward the President, who had left the Podium and was heading for his car. She moved her purse to the front of her body and clutched it tightly. Inside were the documents Eve and Robert had prepared, and she wasn't giving them to anyone but the President.

In the falling light of early evening, a handful of cars arrived at the front door of Vanessa

Langemann's estate. Uniformed valets parked the vehicles in a parking area adjacent to the main building. Eve arrived and surrendered her car to one of the attendants. She made her way into the front hall with its huge crystal chandelier and was greeted by a servant who directed her to the main living room, where several small groups of people were standing, drinking, and talking quietly. A server moved about, offering hors d'oeuvres and champagne.

Eve didn't recognize most of the people, but she saw Margaret, Vanessa, and Karen talking together, and they saw her as she approached them. Karen looked at her coolly. Vanessa gave her a cold look. Margaret smiled weakly and briefly. Seeing their looks, Eve slowed her approach. Margaret saw her hesitate and left the two women and walked toward her.

"Did you just get back from Sophia's?" Margaret asked.

"Yes," Eve said, "I left as soon as you called." She looked around. "This doesn't seem like much of celebration. I thought you said Karen had completed the synthesis."

"She has," Margaret said. "without any problems. We do, however, have a situation we need to deal with." She glanced over at Vanessa then back at Eve. "Let's talk outside."

As they moved across the room to the doors leading to the rear terraces and garden, Vanessa followed them with her icy stare.

Outside Margaret stopped at the rock wall of the coy pond and sat down. She patted the wall next to her. "Sit," she said.

Eve sat down.

"Karen thought you acted a little strangely the other day at the lab, the morning you gave her the final code sequence."

Eve's expression went flat.

"After you'd left for the commune, she called me, and we retrieved the other CD from your safe. We compared it with the one you gave her, and it was easy for me to see the changes you'd made."

"Margaret, I...I don't know what..." Eve stammered.

Margaret held up her hand. "No, Eve," she said, "It's okay. There's no need to lie."

Eve was cautious. "You're not angry?" she asked.

Margaret shook her head. "No," she said. "Although, I must say, you gave an Oscar-winning performance the other night at my house."

Eve looked down feeling a bit ashamed.

“Look, Eve. I'm sorry for all the lies,” Margaret continued. She put her fingers under Eve's chin and lifted her head so they were looking at each other. “Let's just say we're even,” she said.

Tears welled in Eve's eyes and escaped down her cheek. Margaret reached over and with the back of her fingers wiped Eve's face. Eve reached to embrace the woman who had raised her and had been her mentor. Margaret took her in her arms, and they held each other a moment. Margaret broke their embrace, and, as Eve wiped her face dry, Margaret spoke. “Vanessa, as you can tell, feels a little differently than I do.”

Just then they were interrupted by a commotion at the back of the house. They looked up and saw Vanessa escorting the President and First Lady of the United States from the living room out onto the patio. All three of them stopped, and the President surveyed the grounds.

“And speaking of someone who is feeling a little differently these days...” Margaret said slyly.

As she and Eve watched the group on the patio, the First Lady pointed at them and said something to the President. He smiled and waved to them. Margaret waved back, but Eve felt paralyzed.

“Listen, Margaret, there's something you need to know,” she said urgently.

Margaret turned and looked at Eve calmly, with a faint smile on her face. “There's nothing to worry about,” she said reassuringly to her. “Penny did get the information to the President. However, unlike you, he agrees totally with what we're doing.”

Eve was stunned, silent. Margaret glanced at the group on the patio then turned back to Eve. “It appears,” she continued, “that my prototype did work after all. The President is our living proof—the first new man. And, thanks to your work, the others won't have such a—how shall I put it—”bumpy” ride.”

Eve shook her head in disbelief and then remembered something. “What about Penny? And Robert?” she asked.

“They're fine,” Margaret said. “Penny is heading back to the commune tomorrow. She's not a problem. She only helped you because she loves you. So, the press will get a titillating story about a crazy reporter, and people will forget all about it quickly.”

“Robert was picked up after Penny's meeting with the President. Let me just say that I like Robert. You know, when we detained him at the commune, he was more concerned about Penny and you than himself. Of course, we're going to have to keep him out of trouble for a while, but I think that once he has a chance to sample our new fragrance, he's going to be a powerful ally. He's a very brave young man, you know. He saved Mary Horton's life.”

Eve looked away. “Vanessa scares me,” she said.

Margaret smiled wryly. “It's true,” she said. “Sometimes I think she could use a dose of her own perfume. Still, without her, none of this would have happened.”

She rose and looked down at Eve. “I think in time you'll come to see the wisdom of what we're doing, but for now we've arranged a little exile for you that I think you'll find most agreeable.” She extended her hand, and Eve took it, rising. “Let's join the others,” she said.

Robert stood on the edge of a steep cliff overlooking the same valley he'd seen in Eve's

photo album the first night they met—her favorite spot in the world. He moved as close to the precipice as he dared and surveyed the rock and soil face below.

“No way,” he said to himself.

He walked back to the weathered trunk of a fallen tree, where Eve and Bill Jernigan sat looking out at the green valley and the hills and mountains that gently protected it. Eve sat on Bill's right, her arms hooked gently around his arm. Robert sat down on Bill's left side and leaned forward, speaking across him to Eve.

“You were right about this spot,” Robert said. “Incredible view. But I think I'll pass on the climbing.”

Eve just smiled.

Robert sat back, looked at Bill, and nudged him. “You ought to paint it for her, Bill,” he said.

Eve looked at her father, who continued to look out at the valley. His eyes glistened.

“Will you, dad?” she asked.

Bill hesitated and then nodded. “I believe I can, Princess...I believe I will.”

Eve kissed her father on the cheek and hugged his arm tighter. Robert watched them and then turned again to the view.

“So what about you, Eve? What do you women do for an encore?” he asked. “Cure PMS?”

Eve closed her eyes and smiled.

“Men,” she thought.

The End
The Beginning