

A beautiful oak tree overshadowed most of the background view, making it difficult to catch a keen glimpse of the children running frantically about the schoolyard. Its arms stretched gloriously, and it seemed as if one might reach out and grab you. The golden leaves drifted into autumn breeze, slowly descending to their death.

But the existence of life was reassured when one glanced upon the beautiful young girl sitting upon the huge roots that bulged beneath, twirling through a book of some sort with a smile of thin patience amidst the sounds of administrators directing mischief about. The traffic was slow, and finally you could hear her begin to shout, showing attentiveness as she gathered her things into her backpack. She rose from the old tree eagerly, looking quite splendid in her plaid uniform. The door of a black and affluent luxury car flung open.

“Dad,” cried the beautiful girl as she marched toward the opening.

“How’s my little girl,” uttered the driver softly.

“I’m doing fine, Daddy!”

“How was school?”

“It was OK! We played on the playground and had a Halloween party. I even ate some cupcakes.”

“Well boo, what did you learn today?”

“What did I learn, Daddy? I didn’t learn anything today.”

“You didn’t learn anything? That’s not why I am paying for this private education, is it?” He looked at his daughter as if she was the culprit. “I think I need to have a talk with someone!” Car horns honked as he pressed the breaks anxiously. “Shit! Watch where you’re going! These people need to have their driving audited! It’s ridiculous!”

“Daddy, what did you say?”

“I didn’t say anything.”

“Ahh-hun, Daddy. You said…”

“Hey! I don’t wanna hear it. Daddy said a bad word, and you better not let me catch you saying one.”

A liberal smile rained across her little face and curiosity set in. Hardly much was said the rest of the ride home, each apparently caught up in looking at the

scenery. Just a few blocks from home, the girl saw a boy dressed in a Count Dracula costume who appeared joyful. “Daddy, are we going trick-or-treating tonight?”

“We sure are, and we’re going to collect a lot of goodies.”

“Yeah!”

The car thumped a bit as it ascended the raised driveway, and they were home at last. He couldn’t quite park in the four-car garage because it was already full. There was also a huge boat parked in the driveway. They jumped out and the girl sprinted toward the gorgeous oak doors. She was in a hurry to greet her mother, but her dad followed only by casual advancements, and his mind seemed to be drifting.

“Mommy, Mommy!”

“Hello, my little sugar pie. How was school?”

“It was fine. Daddy said we’re going trick-or-treating.”

“Yes, and we’re going to get a lot of candy.”

“Oh yeah.”

“OK Pookey, go get out of your school clothes and put on some play clothes.”

“We’re going outside!” cried the little one.

“No, you are going to clean your room, or no trick-or-treating.... Well, hello handsome!” she said as her husband entered the house. “How was your day?”

“It was OK, I might say, and yours?”

“I just ran a few errands, got a trick-or-treat costume for our angel — and some champagne for tonight after our beautiful girl is tucked away.”

“Hmmm,” he said with a grim but sensual smile. The two kissed and hugged each other because everything between them was great. They were rich, fairly young, and had a beautiful daughter. He treated her with love and respect, and she treated him likewise.

“Mom! Dad! What will I wear?”

Parting abruptly from their lustful embrace, her mom replied, “I brought you a Sleeping Beauty costume.”

“Ooohh! Mom, can I put it on! Please! Please!”

“Not yet dear, it’s not quite time for trick-or-treat, and besides, we would eat dinner first.”

“Can I just look at it, then?”

“OK . It’s in the bag on the bedroom floor next to my desk.”

The little one darted upstairs as her parents continued where they had left off with the mush. Several smacks repeated each other until she declared breathlessly, “I’d better get dinner ready!” However, the kisses continued as she pried herself loose from the grasping arms of her husband. “You wanna eat, don’t ya?” she said with humorous sarcasm. He finally gave into the demands and allowed her to slowly slip away, but he pretended that she was sneaking away and tried vainly not to let her. He blew her one last kiss and then proceeded to his den to take care of some business while she prepared dinner.

As she finished putting the final touches on dinner, the sunset began its display in the western sky and she proceeded upstairs. “Dainisa, did you finish your room? Honey, dinner’s about ready.” There was no response, so she peeked through the door and noticed that the room was half clean. What can you expect from a six-year-old, she thought. She stepped down the hall to the master bedroom to find her daughter engulfed in her Halloween costume. It was obvious that she had even tried it on. “Hey, Princess! What are you doing!?”

Her mom’s comments startled the little girl, and the look crossed her face that said she knew that her mom expected the mischief. The clothes were wrinkled in a way that told on her. “I know you didn’t put that outfit on.”

“No Mommy. I was just looking at it.”

“Go downstairs and sit at the table” her mother said in a voice that meant business as she pointed her finger to give direction. The little one scattered downstairs to sit at her normal spot at the dinner table. “Rich,” she then said as she proceeded down hall toward a narrower door about 30 feet away. She reached the door and placed her hand on the knob, pushed the door open just enough to get her head through the doorway, and peaked

around the corner. The dim room was illuminated by only a single lamp connected to a massive cherry oak desk. “Rich, are you in here?” She sent her soft cry into the room where he usually worked on his writing, and where he went to have a little peace to himself. “Rich,” she once again uttered in her tenderest voice. Then she half-shouted, “Hey!” With a sudden jolt he had his hands around her waist. She nearly jumped into the room, startled more than she could ever remember. “Stop that,” she said with a sudden sigh of relief.

He began to hug and kissed her passionately, while rubbing his crotch up against her very thin nightgown. She could feel his print rub against her and it felt as if his life-giving muscle pulsed with pleasure. She then suddenly snapped out of it, firmly stating, “Go eat,” with her look of business, but deep beneath she was holding the rages of nature within. The longer he remained in her presence the more difficult it was to avoid succumbing to fleshful urges of love and lust.

Finally, they were all at the table, and the young girl’s mother sat down after fixing everyone hearty plates. “Mom, what took you so long?” she asked innocently.

“I had to go find Daddy, Dear.”

“Where were you, Daddy?”

“I was making you a surprise.”

“For real?”

“Yes Boo, but it’s a surprise. I can’t tell you, at least not until later.” Mrs. Dickenson sat with a puzzled look, while Daddy’s little girl had her way. “Oh Darling, this roast is delicious. You must have taken your time on this one.

“I’m glad you’re enjoying it.”

“Yeah, Mommy. It’s good.”

“Well, thank you, Sweetie. Make sure you eat all of those green peas too, not just your meat.” The little girl began gobbling up all her food, but besides that, there was an eerie silence looming in the air.

Richard broke the silence with the loud clatter his fork made from being rigidly placed upon fine china. “I have a meeting with the board tomorrow.”

“What is the purpose of this meeting, Dear?”

“Well, it’s to get funding for this project.” “Oh my, aren’t we secretive! What

project?”

“To build a shipyard in South America. I also want to build the resort on other portions of South America.”

“What? Have you found your Latin women now, hmmm?” Susan was trying to sound like she was joking, but there was hint of distrust in her voice. Her voice now betrayed her doubts completely as she said, “I don’t know, Dear. That seems like an awful lot.”

“Look! I just wanted your support, and you’re being negative.”

“I am not being negative, and you have always had my support. I just want to make sure nothing happens to you — and the only way I can assure that is to make sure that you are as happy with me \ as possible.”

“I know, but once this is over, we will be set for generations. Everything will be fine, then.”

“Honey, we already have enough. We don’t really need anymore.”

“Look, this is what I do. This is my career. I am a businessman! I capitalize on opportunities, and this one I can not let slip by.”

“Hmmm, you’re also an insensitive man!”

“What!” Richard sucked his teeth hard and continued as if uninterrupted. “I may be out of town for several days, for a potential presentation. Would you like to attend?”

“Sure, Honey. I would love to go. It beats this house.”

“Mommy, I ‘m finished!”

“OK, Dear!” her mother said submissively. “Go wash your hands and face and then go in my room. I’ll be right there.”

“We’re finally going trick-or-treating, huh Mom, huh? Are we?”

“Yes! Now hurry along, Dear.”

The girl darted with excitement, nearly stumbling over the stairs because of the eagerness that rose inside her. After dressing her in the splendid Sleeping Beauty costume, her mother began to take pictures, catching some of the brightest smiles imaginable. The man of the house joined them, and they set out for a night in the neighborhood, gathering candies and joy for their little sweet one. All the sounds of night echoed, and grim sounds of trick-or-treat rained from a house in the distance. The little

girl sprinted up to every door, leaving her parents to wait behind at the sidewalk. She was sure to fill her bag as full as possible, for it was in her blood. Is it not her father who's bred to capture and seize all opportunities, no matter the cost? She even rudely surpassed some of the other children in seeking to fill her bag with goodies. Having no fear, the little one shoved some of the older children to make her space in the front of the group at the door, to seize her opportunity. In spite of her mischief, her parents could not help but let her enjoy herself.

After a few hours, her feet were sore after a long stroll through the neighborhood, and Dainisa had sticky fingers and lips from the many treats she had devoured on the way home. The night was breezy, but not quite cool. A nice fresh fall essence gloomed about the night. Soon there were little lights left on in the streets, and it appeared that trick-or-treating was over. It seemed that they were the last ones on the block still walking through the night. Despite that notion, there was no rush to get home. In fact, this was a romantic setting with joy as the catalyst. Life seemed promising, and indeed it would be for the ideal American family, the family happily chasing the American Dream. They traveled down a long newly paved street that included a beautiful landscape of hedges and trees, all tiered and in front of immaculate brick houses. The family approached a large Emory brick house that outshined all the rest. The beautiful driveway lighting was one reason this house outshone the rest, but the steel gate that was black as raw oil and pointed straight in the air like large spears was another reason this property stood out among its neighbors. The gate was almost too tall for anyone to attempt to climb it. Its stature was indeed intimidating, as was the guard who stood in a booth dead center of the steel gated entrance. Steel designs that curled about like ribbons gave the entrance a true royal feeling.

"Good evening, Mr. and Mrs. Dickenson."

"Hello, Hayword," Rich intoned in voice that seemed lackadaisical. They proceeded through the drive way to the front door, their arms gripped tightly around each other. Mr. Reynolds proceeded to secure the graceful gates and immediately returned to his idle duties. He gazed at the stars as he always did, just to pass the time. This lack of anything to do was something he had to get used to, but the job paid his bills. There should not be many complaints, he told himself, because he made more than the average

American. In fact, you could officially call him a member of the middle class with what the Dickensons paid him. However, he did not picture this quite being the career of his dreams. There had always been a desire to secure a job at one of Mr. Dickenson's firms, or maybe as a security travel agent that prevented attacks by terrorists. He had to think big, but for now he was content to work for the Dickensons, but his was an inbuilt determination to make the best of his possibilities.

Inside the comforting home, you could hear Mrs. Dickenson declare firmly, "Give me that bag." With a look of innocence, little Dainisa slowly proceeded towards her mom and handed the bag of goodies over. "You ate enough of this. Now run upstairs and your daddy will be up to read you a bedtime story." The little girl scampered up to her room with joy because she had stashed several small pieces of candy in her Sleeping Beauty pouch. She accelerated as she neared the top of the stairs to assure that she had time to hide the goods under the pillow and to get out of the outfit before she was discovered, frantically undressing as if she could have cared less if the costume was purchased in the first place. Throwing it into the closet forcefully, she carelessly stuffed a piece of candy in her mouth while approaching the pillow to stash the rest.

She had just reached for the edge of her pillow to slip the goodies to safety when she heard, "Hey. How is my little precious one?" in a deep and gruff voice. Startled, but her composure maintained as she tried to hide open rapper in her palm that hadn't been discarded yet. She also tried not to make obvious the sucking of a hard clump of sugar and artificial flavorings. She jumped on her bed as nonchalantly as possible.

"What book do you want me to read?" her father asked.

"Auglr gytr!"

"What!?"

"*Three Little Monkeys*," she said, the words spoken with a slight gargle.

"Didn't your mom take that candy from you?"

"This was my last piece, Daddy"

"OK. Let me start." He read the story as his little girl snuggled down inside her blanket. When he was finished, he said, "Good night," following a light kiss on the forehead. He looked into her closed eyes, instantly getting a feeling of warmth and appreciation. Rising slowly, he continued to remain locked on the sight of her sleeping

face. Click! The sound of her light switch echoed preceding a Ka-Klumb! as he slowly closed the door. Immediately, she began to slip her hand under her pillow to reach for her stash. As her father walked down the hallway, he could hear the sound of rain pounding on a surface, but it was not so. It was his sweetheart showering, and his mind jumped to the possibility that she was freshening up for him, so that he might have his trick-or-treat. With a slight blush at his own carnal thoughts, he hurried to the room to shed all of his garments except for the silk boxer shorts that she brought for him. Feeling fine, he laid back, his head resting upon a plush pillow in silk pillowcases. His eyes slowly drooped to near sleepiness, until he was awakened by soft and tingling kisses from a wet tongue, not to mention the mildly cool body that pressed against his. Nothing much was said, but sounds of passion, love, and lust filled the room.

CHAPTER ONE

A strong glare penetrated through the partially closed blinds and began to invade the crevices of slumberous eyes. The annoying sounds of shrieks from the alarm clock pulsated as he lay flat on his back seemingly unaffected. In fact, he had not even noticed the shrieks until well after his eyes opened and engaged in a soporific stare. The glare became unbearable. He reached for his pulchritudinous one, realizing she must have gotten up early. He smelt the aroma of sizzling pork, and something unidentifiable baking in the oven. Compelled by the scent, he reached over to rid himself of that godforsaken shriek that never did stop pulsating. While heading for the master bathroom for a badly needed shower, he realized his odor from the film that enriched his mouth and the garlic smell that precipitated from the deep forest of his armpits. A bathing was certainly needed. Besides, he had to impress the investors.

This meeting had been on his mind most of the time for the last couple of weeks, and even while making love to his wife the night before. It had taunted his mind with the fear that he would squander the chance of a lifetime. Never before was anyone able to amass this many investors or this amount of capital. Richard could afford to put up some resources to support the venture himself, but for obvious reasons preferred not to. A simple plan to capitalize is what loomed foremost in his brain day in and day out. Richard squinted a little upon entering the hot water. The first limbs he washed were arms, legs, and neck. He washed his crotch thoroughly, including applying an overdose of Pert Plus to his pubic hairs, and combed every strand like a cosmetologist. He thought to himself that his presentation needed to go well. They could not resist a vacation tour of the site, mixed with the hype of a tropical getaway. He had even purchased tickets and reserved rooms for each of the investors. His bulletproof plan included a tour of the construction site and a dinner banquet.

“Mr. Neuheisil, you see I have plans to corner the Western hemisphere’s export/import industry by building a state-of-the-art shipyard, but of course we must place it in a strategic location.” He went on rambling while the water became lukewarm. “You see, the Amazon is easily navigable and has multiple branches that connect to different parts of South America. Using the Amazon along with a few manmade lakes or

canals to connect two key branches of this amazing river, we could reach sixty percent of the continent just by boat passage alone. This will allow the Southeastern tip of Brazil to be properly distributed.”

A voice veered from the crack of the bathroom door. “Hey you and your friend in there, breakfast is ready.” Snapping out of his rehearsal, he turned the water off, completely immune to the fact the water had chilled severely. Richard was running late, so he quickly dried off and dressed himself in a fine suit accompanied with one of the brightest white shirts ever seen. Blazer cuffed in one hand, brief case in the other, he descends the stairs to prepare to scarf down a quick meal.

“Oohh, Mommy! I like the way you cook your eggs — they’re so fluffy. Mom, they look like blubber. There good.” There was a great deal of excitement on the little girl’s face, especially when her father joined them. “Mom! Are eggs good for you?”

“They have their good and bad points.

“Good and bad, Mommy?” cried the little one with a puzzled tone.

“Just eat. Well! Look who’s decided to join us? About time, your eggs are about to get cold.”

“Yeah Daddy, eat your eggs, they’re delicious.”

“OK, Dear!” He took a few bites and then seemed to hurry from his seat, but he was certain to get a kiss from the women he loved. Jetting out of the door, he figured to leave the ladies to their business. He had serious business of his own that needed its own special attention. Jumping in the automobile that allowed him the smoothest departure, without hesitation the car was in reverse and nearly beat the electronic gate open. The sound of fresh rubber screeched from the sudden pressure administered to the throttle, and off he went.

Following a smooth and swift ride, Richard pulled up at a splendid suburban office park embellished in white marble walls and blue stained-glass windows that were extraordinarily large. A huge sign greeted visitors, Dickenson Consulting Inc., preceding a physical address. After parking in his usual reserved space close to the entrance, he jumped out briskly. As he entered the building, his mild mannered receptionist and several others, who casually passed, greeted him immediately.

“Some one needs to fix this elevator, he thought. It’s only five floors, jeeze...”

Ding! One of the elevator doors opened, and he entered with a sense of relief. He did not particularly like elevators. He always complained about this one, which was too slow for him. The door closed after pressing button five — what was routine now seemed dilatory and extremely repugnant. Every thing now seemed to move slowly, especially as the time rapidly approached for the decision for the project. “Ding!” He exited, ardently hooking a sharp left and using long and graceful strides to reach his office in no time. “John, let me see you a minute,” he said toward John’s open office door just before he entered his own.

“Sure, I’ll be right there!”

Richard approached his coffee maker to make a cup, creamed down, and sweetened like hot cocoa. This was how he always made it, and he always enjoyed it kicked back in a plush maroon leather seat that resembled an expensive lazy boy.

“Yes, Mr. Dickenson.”

“Are those reports and maps ready for my presentation?”

“Yes sir, it’s all right here. I figured that would be the first thing you would ask for.”

“Good observation, which is why you’re my right-hand man. OK, that is all.”

Rudely excused, John turned, appearing to snub Richard’s comments, and walked off silently. Before John could escape the confines of Richard’s office, he said, “John, please contact me immediately when those investors arrive.”

“Absolutely!” The door shut and John felt as if he had escaped a lion’s den.

“Hello, Suzie! How are you doing today?”

“Fine, What about yourself? You look like you were just chewed out.”

“No, I’m fine.” It’s just that the boss isn’t himself. I need you to get on the phone with that client. I think he’s a little on edge because this project.”

“Of course, I’ll get right on it.” Suzie looked curious, but questioned nothing and continued with her normal duties. The sounds of phones rang, the strokes of keys be struck echoed, and moderate conversations filled the background — the typical office environment. John decided it would be a good idea to hang around the front office to get a first glance at the investors to see if they lived up to their billing. Indeed, his plan worked, and he greeted five men and notified Richard via the receptionist’s phone. After informing his boss of their arrival, he waited there, staring at these men and marveling at

their appearance. In his mind, he thought exuberantly, “Hmm, those sure are some lovely alligator shoes that slender one is wearing. Gee, look at that watch.” It nearly blinded him when the wearer waved his arm casually. The ice that surrounded the face, not to mention the ones that made up the Roman numerals, was the essence of that hypnotic glare. It was almost as if that watch had mystic powers: because of its the beauty and richness, you couldn’t help but want one. He also noticed that the other two men were also quite wealthy, and he could now see why boss was on such edge. This had to be important!

“Ding,” softly sounded from around the corner, preceding sounds of hard bottomed shoes utilized aggressively. “Hello, Gentlemen! So glad you could make it,” Rich said, approaching the men with the keenest posture and the readiness of a news anchor. He greeted the men each in turn, saying, “I appreciate you giving us this opportunity! Mr. Winterlin, Countenance, Neuhesil, Caviling, and Mr. Palanas. Welcome to my base of operations, and I hope that you find your stay here enjoyable. My assistants will show you to our conference room, where you will find refreshments and seating for my presentation. I’ll be there shortly.”

John immediately directed the men down a hallway. “This way gentlemen.” The sounds of their shoes clattering on the marble floors echoed, but this time the sound was not as aggressive. It was more smoothly this time almost in a rhythm. Deep voices vaguely clouded the halls as the gentlemen conversed on various topics. “Here we are gentlemen.” John said, pointing rigorously while panting quietly. “You may sit wherever you feel most comfortable.” John exited quickly, knowing that one wrong look from one of those guys could mean his job.

The men wasted no time devouring the donuts and bagels, and each one was invited to make themselves some coffee tailored to their specifications. Each investor sat in a seat and looked as if there was no room for small talk. Richard Dickenson entered the room. “Good afternoon gentlemen,” he said boldly while closing the door behind him. “The reason I have gathered you here today, as you know, is to offer you the opportunity to embark on a project that will allow us to strategically dominate a whole hemisphere.”

Mr. Countenance curled up in his seat with a look of intrigue. The other men continued to listen. Richard held a large detailed map of South America’s geological make up, especially the rivers and forests of Brazilian, which was, in fact, strategically

chosen. “You see gentlemen! This is the mouth of the Amazon. As you pass these islands, the river splits in two.”

“Em hum. Yes, I see, uttered Dick, along with similar acknowledgements from the others. “Go ahead, Mr. Dickenson. I think I know where you’re going with this.” All of these men dabbled in the shipping business, distribution, or export/import of some sort. They were all on the same page.

Richard continued! “We will build a huge shipyard! Right here where the river splits in two. I mean a huge state of the art facility. I want service yard, trucking depots etc. — I want the whole nine yards.”

Mr. Caviling began scuffing his chin replying, “And how might this allow the kind of dominance you speak off?”

“Oh! Simple! You see the Amazon River is very navigable. It has multiple branches that connect to different parts of South America, as you see here. You can reach most of the continent by boat alone. Bu utilizing a few manmade lakes or canals, depending on recommendations from contractors, we could centralize the Americas. Look!” Pointing forcefully at the map, he by now had his projection screen out and many other maps displayed. His pointer moved briskly, as did his lips for the proceeding comments. “You see, right here at Cuiaba’, if we deploy a manmade canal here, or even hydro damn it, and again about one hundred miles Northeast, we can connect two key integrals, and with trucking depots, we can supply the entire southern tip of Brazil. The territories of Minas Gerais, Sao Paulo, and also over here, Moto Grosso, are some of the countless other places that will be under our shipping control. And we won’t have to worry about the northern part of Brazil and into Peru, Bolivia, and Columbia, as you can see.”

Richard began to point even more fiercely, taking his excitement completely out on the projection screen. “The rivers many branches extend over the territory we need. Think of the coffee from Columbia or sugar from Northern Brazil. With respect to South America, we can ship externally and internally.” He was now pointing again. “Boa Vista, Manaus, Rio Branco, and Porta Velho, all have their own ports. So then! We can be their source and conduit to the North and East portions of the globe.”

“Excuse me,” uttered Mr. Caviling. “It appears to me that the Southern tip

wouldn't get adequate coverage. As you see! As you like to say, the rivers don't reach that far. See!" The man was pointing even more aggressively than Richard had been, and it was definitely noticeable. "Those cities on the coast, right there." He pointed at the area in question continuously and waited for a response.

"Yes sir, good observation! As you know, there are always pros and cons to any endeavor, but that is why we concentrate our truck depots at these two manmade canal sights." Richard was pointing now as if it had become a competition. "Due to the dense population in Southern Brazil, there are sufficient roads to make it easy to create a reliable transport system to and from these two spots. Cuiaba is the future sight of shipyard two, but for now, we will have just trucking stops at the end of each of these four rivers. Branching our distribution outwards, besides a factory, shipyard, or even a trucking depot, would be inexpensive due to the cheap labor. If really necessary, we could use this route." He is now pointing at the project site and dragging his pointer towards the mouth of the Amazon with a graceful passion. He followed along the shores of Brazil until reaching the city of Pelutas. "You see, the land is purchased already. All we're waiting on is to begin the construction process."

George sat back with a look of eagerness, while Neuheisil asked the rest what they thought so far. Tony Palanas remained silent the whole time, assimilating information exponentially. Mr. Caviling blurted, "Isn't this in the middle of a forest?"

Dick interrupted him anxiously. "Yes, and not your typical forest. In fact, a thick rainforest."

In a combative tone, Richard exclaimed, "Gentlemen! We are losing sight of the big picture, which is big enterprise, and of course this will be a task in the amount of deforestation required, but with our cooperative effort, it will not be as painful as if only one or a few of us were to take on this project. If necessary, however, I will forge ahead myself, a lone soldier. But I warn you, companies are lined waiting to cut down that blasted jungle, to make something civilized." The investors were pretty much sold, but at this point, he wanted to take it an extra step. He wanted to be assured that there would be no back outs. "Gentlemen, I invite you to have a living experience of what I have in store for this project. We will also enjoy some celebration festivities. He pulled his brief case out and reached for an envelope. Handing them all airline tickets to his private jet, which

was parked at a reserved spot at the international airport. In addition to hotel accommodations, the gentlemen accepted with intrigue showing on their faces.

Dick blurted out, "I could use a little rest and leisure." Richard said his goodbyes to the men as they departed, and then he returned to his office to enjoy the moment. While flopping back in his plush seats, a grin of enthusiasm covered his face as he checked his messages. They included unimportant ones that could be disregarded. His relaxed mode would have to impress the investors even better during their vacation. He reached for the phone and pressed one button.

"Yes!"

"John," shouted Richard. "Come to my office please." Richard waited while using crumbled pieces of paper as tools to improve his jump shot. John peeked around his door and before he entered completely, Richard declared, "I will be leaving soon. Make sure those reports are finalized. Has Judy secured Data Inc.?"

"No sir, not yet."

"Hey, just because this project is about to change everything doesn't mean we get complacent. We are still who we are."

"Consider it done, sir!"

As John closed the door, Richard Dickenson followed right behind, eager to get home to his wife after a long and eventful day. Arriving home with excitement, he entered, finding his family's feelings were mutual. It was not because they had a good day at the office, but because the man of the house was home.

"Daddy," shouted the little one. That was followed by warm greetings from his wife. He accepted the welcomes like a king, for there was a sense of the untouchable and cockiness in his demeanor. He wasted no time in telling her of the vacation in a smooth and enthusiastic manner. "Pack your things, Dear. We're going to South America."

"What? On such short notice?"

"I told you."

"Yeah, this morning. I didn't know it would be so soon."

"I've invited the investors for a vacation."

"What? Just out of the blue — let's go on a vacation?"

"I've pretty much got them convinced. I just want them to get a feel, and then

there will be no second thoughts later.”

“OK ay!” With the slightest hesitation and a smile upon her face, she proceeded to say, “What about Boo, and when, where, and how long?”

“Well Dear, we’re going to Macapa, to allow us to get that feel like I talked about. There’s going to be a dinner party, but most of the time will be spent in the hotel with me.”

She got close to him and uttered, “That’s sounding a little better.”

“At least the first day. You see, originally I had planned a three-day trip, but there is nothing spectacular about Macapa. Most of the time will be spent in the hotel.”

“Great Sweetie, when do we leave?”

“Tomorrow morning.”

“Well, I’ll go get my things ready and make arrangements for our baby.”

Chapter two

Meanwhile, somewhere at a prestigious University, Professor Julian Akbar was doing what he loved best. That was of course the study of ancient cultures and indigenous tribes. He was just about to call a recess in one of his advanced history classes, when suddenly a student blurted, "What do you suppose the reason was? I mean, do you know why they were left behind?"

"Well Amy! Civilizations usually sprout where the environment is beneficial, and I suspect that some of these people were isolated from these areas of civilization growth."

"How, then, did they survive?"

"Remember, some of these ancient people knew nature better than we do today."

"Dr. Akbar, how could that be true? When they believed their gods were the elements and vice versa."

"Well let me ask you! Who is your god?" There was silence from the student and Julian continued. "Some of those stories were passed down for centuries and were believed to be true."

"You don't believe so, do you?"

"What I believe is irrelevant." He began to read the homework assignment, effectively cutting the conversation short. "OK class, I'll see you next week, and don't forget your essays on the Mayans. Class adjourned!" The students raced through the door like the gates of the Kentucky derby had been opened. Each student represented a prize thoroughbred galloping frantically. This was an understatement because obviously this metaphorical race was really happening, except for the professor, and from where he stood, he anticipated the impending emptiness of the classroom.

The silence filled the room thereafter, and a sense of loneliness loomed. It was a perfect setting for the professor, because that he was. His wife had left him not long before, and so had the student with whom he had an affair. She just played the role for improved grades. It wasn't secret information, but the professor disregarded her ulterior motives. He had no one, nothing, nothing but his knowledge. His knowledge of people, people who did not even exist anymore, was vast. What use is a language that no one

uses anymore? Obsessed with this edifying endeavor, however, he ran his only true love away, and he had killed all chances of interest coming from any other. So he stood there, alone in his room of instruction reading his book. He seemed to always read sitting at his desk from which he gave award-winning lectures, fitted in a tight short sleeve dress shirt and solid colored clip on. It appeared he had no regard for fashion.

Suddenly, gathering his things in an instant, he made for the door. It seemed someone had activated him with a push of a button and abruptly commanded him to exit the room. Arriving home, he threw his briefcase full of books and research papers on top of all the mess that had already accumulated. He flopped himself on the leather sofa and reached for the remote. Before pressing the on button, he again resorted to his own remote control instincts and darted for the refrigerator. Grabbing a beer, he chugged half of it before returning to his chair. He belches after sitting and presses the power button.

“And the Nation...” “Johnny, you know I love you”... “He backs him down, and the shot”... “Giving”... He continued to scan the many different channels with an apparent confusion as to what to watch. Hearing his kitten at the door, he jumped up to let it in, the channel inadvertently remaining on some news program. He walked to the door to greet his cat while the television continued to pulsate. “Scientists have discovered the ozone’s rapid deterioration, and that it may be linked to global warming. We have Dr. Shaynick, the professor for meteorological and geological studies at the University of Berkley.

“Thank you! The problem we have is not the human release of toxins into the atmosphere, but the destroying of the Earth’s natural combatants against those harmful toxins. The many projects that cause deforestation. The fewer trees we have the worse off we will be. We also...”

“Ring, ring, ring!” Pressing mute on the remote control, the professor picked up the phone. “Hey Julian! How have you been? My buddy ol’ pal.”

“Rich, is that you?”

“Well of course it is. Who did you think it was? Mitch! Anyway, I called to tell you of my project.

“What project, Mitch, I mean Rich?

“Yeah, you’re hilarious, but I’m having some investors build a shipyard on the

banks of the Amazon.”

“How ironic,” replied Dr. Akbar. “I just heard a report on this new channel saying...” He paused shortly. “Some program, a news report talked about rainforests and cutting them down or something. Don’t you have to cut down some forestry to accomplish this?”

“Well yes, but that shouldn’t be a problem because we could probably use the lumber anyway.”

“No Rich! I mean who owns the land, and if you own it, how did you acquire it?” Richard responded confidently and sarcastically at once.

“The provinces were persuaded with a little currency and political influence.”

“Well, you always knew how to get your way, even though you dropped out of college.”

“Hey man, I wasn’t interested in people in the past, or people who still live in the past. Hell, this is modern times now — capitalization for civilization is my motto.”

“You sure seem to know what you want. Hey, good luck.

If you need me, just call me.”

After terminating the call with the professor, he felt a sudden sleepy urge. Realizing he wanted to call Joe Geshy, his friend for many years, however, he propped himself up. Their wives were friends due to their relationship, and it seemed somewhat forced, but they willingly accepted their husbands’ comradeship. The phone rang several times more than he usually allowed, but the sleepiness caused laziness and he neglected to hang-up. The phone did answer after about twelve rings.

“Hello!” responded Joe with a deep and exhausted voice.

“Joe!” Richard shouted as he was awakened out of his near sleep with that deep and raucous voice.

“Yes, this is Joe! Who is this? Is this Rich?”

“What, people don’t know my voice now a days?”

“Shit, I was sleep, and it’s not as if you call here frequently anyway. My best friend calls every blue moon.”

“You know that I am very busy, besides I have a new project that I’m working on. That is why I called you. To spend a little time with my buddy.”

“Oh yeah! What, you need my help?”

“Ah...no.” The words dragged out slowly. “I just called to invite you to this vacation in Macapa”

“Macapa,” replied Joe with the most confused voice. “What the hell, or should I say, where the hell is that?”

“It’s in South America, where I’m starting this big new project. What is Mrs. Geshy doing the next couple of days?”

“She’ll be out of town for a few. She’s visiting my in-laws.”

“Good! It shouldn’t be a problem then if you give me a little company, especially while entertaining those dull-ass investors.”

“Who?” Joe exclaimed.

“The investors!”

“Oh, sounds like this trip is very important. I guess I’ll go, but in fact, I’m surprised you’d invite me to such a thing. I suspect you already have my ticket.”

“I sure do. Therefore, you have to go. We are flying in one of my private jets.” Joe asked for the details of his invitation. Richard advised him of all details and that he would pick him up from the airport just before show-and-tell.

Just before the two terminated the call Joe shouted, “Hey Richard! I just remembered I can’t leave at ten like you planned. I would have to leave in the afternoon.”

“Oh well, no problem! I’ll just have a separate flight available for you. Hey, your fate is to come with me. You may soon work for me and make a lot more than what you borrow.”

“Great!” They both exclaimed in turn. Sitting back like a large couch potato having one too many beers, Richard drifted quickly asleep. His thoughts of all he planned to attain ran through his sleeping mind, and he had a glorious rest, even though he had a crook in his neck. He twisted his neck slowly and aggressively, hoping to hear it crack, but to no avail! “Dear!” he shouted as his fingers scooped the cold build up from his eyelids. Truly an intolerable sight, but his wife had to deal with it for years, and had learned to love him.

All things were settled, and they arrived at the boarding gate to meet the

gentlemen being entertained. "Hello, Mr. Neuheisil," Rich said with a tone of joy in his voice. "This is my wife."

Each man said, "I am pleased to meet you, Mrs. Dickenson," in turn.

Richard greeted them all individually and honorably. "I hope you enjoy the flight, gentlemen, and of course my presentation and entertainment." He began to direct his wife and the gentlemen towards the entrance gates. They were all engaged in their own individual conversation and paid no attention to the intercom, but automatically preceded towards the gates to board the plane when the flight was announced. The entrance ramp was a nippy 62 degrees, but everyone was prepared with their healthy blazers. Rich's wife sported a thick pearl white cotton turtleneck by Ralph Lauren and a blinding diamond necklace that illuminated her garments and appeared to have a connection with the matching bracelet and watch. Richard's wife decided to sit in the seat closest to the aisle because she had a thing about planes, especially looking out of the window while ascending miles above, which made her more deathly afraid than simply nervous. Reaching over from the window seat and kissing her valiantly, Rich assured her silently that all would be fine. She smiled, but before she could even savor the moment, the captain was explaining the flight destination and giving a firm statement to fasten their seatbelts until they were informed otherwise.

She could feel the massive plane swing around to approach its necessary runway. It then darted the lengthy runway at twice the speed of a well tuned car, streaking the length of many football fields before taking a forty-five degree jolt upward. With its extremely large wingspan, the air allowed Bernoulli's law to take effect. Richard watched the airport get tiny and the cars resembled matchboxes. Suddenly they even became too small to distinguish, and all you could see were the faded roads and dots protruding along them. Richard continued to gaze through the window, noticing that all manmade things had vanished below and all that was left to see were the tops of trees. These trees were thick and appeared as though that was all the earth was made of, and it seemed nothing could penetrate them. The plane was continuing its ascension; therefore, the trees too fell victim to invisibility. Somehow, the clouds did not appear to gather Richards's attention as much, leading him to blurt, "Hey, is there any service!?"

His wife responded softly, "If you would look on your own plane, you would see

the button for service right here.”

With a pale look, he pressed the button only to smile gingerly afterwards. “Oh I didn’t see that.

“Hello, what can I get you?”

“Well, what do you have? I don’t see any menus lying around.”

“All we have is beverages and snack items.”

“What kind of drinks and snacks do you have?” These words were spoken harshly, and it was obvious that the flight attendant struggled not to become obviously disgruntled.

Mrs. Dickenson said, “Please excuse him. He’s just...”

But Richard interrupted. “Oh No! Don’t you excuse me. Just get me a Coke and what, ahh... roasted peanuts, and what else, maybe some crackers and cheese. Just get me a variety of your little snacks.”

The way the flight attendant walked off indicated what she was thinking: what a rude, obnoxious, and egotistical pig. She returned with a basketful of an assortment of nuts, crackers, and cheeses. It even included smoked beef that resembled jerky, along with a crisp glass of ice and cold canned Coca Cola. Mrs. Dickenson was fine, but Mr. proceeded to devour the insufficient nutrients. The remaining plane ride was smooth, including the landing. Afterwards, they were all escorted to their hotel rooms.

CHAPTER THREE

There was not much to do in this isolated area of South America, except for what was in the rooms and banquet room. The banquet room served mixed drinks and had a live band arranged to play an unexpected Brazilian tune. The sound played by the band was vivid, which gave the atmosphere a truly tropical feeling. The rooms were spacious and actually resembled suites; however, and surprisingly, there were neither phones nor televisions. They were equipped with saunas, and the balconies looked over vast plains. The rooms were definitely far from technology equipped and brought the true meaning of the term “third world” to their occupants.

The men all felt comfortable within their rooms, however, and made use of the opportunity for a much needed rest. They would need it for the upcoming presentation, especially after the long flight.

“Damn, no phones!” Rich whipped out his cellular phone while glancing at his wife briefly. “I guess he’s on his way,” he said after allowing the phone to ring several times unanswered, saying as he hung up, “Dear, I must go and see if the transport boat is ready.”

Mrs. Dickenson gave a look of acceptance and advised her husband to be careful. He nodded and walked out the door. There was still nothing to worry about, he told himself. The helicopters were delivered previously, and a medical boat was ready at the dock. Preparedness was far from the issue, but rather, knowing what he was in for, which made his stomach knot and unknit spasmodically. Deciding to use the boat to transport the investors was on his mind at the moment. He thought it would be more appropriate since it was roomy enough to fit everyone aboard. It would take both helicopters to fit all seven people, and he was the only pilot available. He was anxious to get to the docks to assure that everything was situated before bringing the investors along. It was a very short distance to the docks of the mighty Amazon in the southwestern Macapa region of Brazil! The tropical scenery dominated as he made his way by horse and wagon taxi. Before his eyes sat two beautiful helicopters and a boat in the background floating powerfully, a testament to the preparations made for this project. Many Brazilian people

walked about, and there were more than usual about because they could not help but notice the Americans' arrival.

Richard walked the docks to his boat, and some of the strangers even stared. What exactly went through the gazers' minds was unclear, but their expressions revealed curiosity and admiration. Unaffected by the watchers, he entered the boat and immediately inspected all of the instruments. Boating and navigation was one of his hobbies, so this went smoothly. Richard gazed upon the instruments and then out the window at the scenery, squinting his eyes against the sun.

His emotions were high because things were going superbly, and his mood, in combination with the familiar scenery, ignited reminiscence: "Honey, I'm going fishing!" "OK dear." Richard gathered his favorite pole and in the other hand carried an expensive tackle box very firmly. It was no time before he was out the gates in his sports utility vehicle. The tires performed their normal screams when leaving with Richard at the helm. More screams, but opposite in pitch hollered when he decided to make a stop at Owens bait and tackle shop. There were bells that jingled upon opening the door to the shop as he was met by cold still air, which chilled his sweating skin from the hot and muggy morning that it was. That cool down was welcomed with unapparent gratitude because the business of getting fishing utensils was his priority. Richard gazed at various bait and tackle and was obviously unsure what type to use. Scratching his chin and squinting his eyes as if he had a hard time seeing.

A suitably rustic man asked, "What type of fishing will you be doing?"

"I don't know."

"Will you be fresh water fishing or salt?"

"Oh, I see. Well I guess fresh water."

"Well, what type of fish were you wanting to catch?"

"Any that will bite."

"Oh, I see," said the rugged man with a bit of a chuckle. He continued on in his overly drawn voice. "I guess you've never been boating a mile off the coast?"

"I've been on many cruises!" "Not cruises! Fishing! Have you ever been deep-sea fishing?"

"No, I can't say that I have!"

“You look like a well off man. You deserve to get the prize, the biggest and best fish you could ever dream of reeling in.” Richard gained interest in the man's comments and allowed himself to be lured into a verbal entanglement. “What’s your name?”

“Richard! Richard Dickenson.”

“Well Mr. Dickenson, I don’t say that fishing is a serious hobby for you. Maybe you hunt and now have decided to expand. Well, let me tell you, fishing is the best experience you could ever have. Drifting the ocean current, searching for a spot to send our chosen traps deep below, hoping something so hungry and desperate for food will chomp at our sharp hooks, snatching up the biggest and baddest creatures of the sea, is the best pastime imaginable. You’re under control then, Mr. Dickenson.”

“Call me Richard.”

“Richard! What, have you not driven a boat before?”

“No! I always had someone to do it for me.”

“Even though you’re well off enough to hire someone, it’s still a good skill to have. You may need it someday.”

“What! So, do you teach boating lessons?”

“Oh no! I’m no teacher, but I’ve been raised around boats since I was an itty-bitty youngen. I became very skillful at it, even could probably navigate you around the world.”

“Probably?” Richard declared with impressions of not wanting to be a guinea pig.

“Oh, I say that because I never actually attempted it.”

Richard stood there giving eye-to-eye attention before blurting, “You’re unsure, and so I’m afraid I will make me have to pass.”

“I’m sure I could if I did try. I know the maps of the oceans real well, and I keep up with all current weather conditions. This isn’t about that; it’s about fishing, and I offer you to join me the next time me and a few of my buddies go deep-sea fishing.” Richard had been game, and they exchanged information quickly.

However, the Brazilian sun's strength broke his concentration and that became his final thought as he blurted out, “Oh shit! I forgot! I needed to pick up Joe from the airport.” It was a small private dismal airport, all of the stops by privately owned planes. He rushed himself to the spots where the airplanes could land. Upon arriving at this pint-

size airport with one shaky tower and about four measly runways that were really just roads, it became clear Joe had not yet arrived. Richard looked around and noticed no one was immediately in sight. “Hello, is anyone there?” He screeched over the vast opening the airport allotted.

“Hello, Joe! Is anyone here?” He shouted, walking around to the towers control room entrance. He entered the staircase and glanced upward, and he could not help but indulge in multiple grunts and sighs as he realized that he had a steep climb. He figured someone had to be here. He proceeded with determination. Huffing and panting controllably, but aggressively, he proceeded up the flight of stairs. In no time, he reached the top, not realizing actually how many stairs he had climbed. Opening the door to his left, he entered eagerly, only to notice a letter “U” shaped console and a shiny coated figure sitting dead center. Glancing upwards through the windows, he paid particular attention to the nearly empty runways, then looked at the sky, noticing an eerie emptiness. “Hey, wake up! Wake up!” Pressing the seat with both hands and shaking aggressively, he heard grunts coming from the front of the seat. Richard continued to say, “Hey wake up! Wake up,” now repeating quickly after one another. “Wake up, Wake up!”

The man jumped out of his seat, replying with a phrase of some foreign language. “Hey, speak English,” said Richard.

“What did you do that for?” replied the man with an unidentifiable accent.

“There was supposed to be a flight due.”

“A flight,” repeated the man, curiously shrugging his shoulders, his expression one of affliction. “No sir, I don’t know of any flight! I don’t know what you are talking about.” His words were spoken with an irritating accent that now seemed amplified.

“Look sir,” Richard then said firmly. “There is a flight due. Look for it and call me.” Richard jotted his number down swiftly and handed the information to the mysterious man, who accepted it with a peculiar look. “Is that going to be a problem?”

“No, no.”

Richard gave a disgusting look and asked, “Where the hell are you from anyway.” There was no verbal response from the man, but a simple waving of the hand and nodding of the head for him seemed to suffice. Richard shook his head in disappointment

and proceeded down the staircase. Eager to get back to the suites to get the investors onboard, he descended the staircase faster than he had ascended. He wondered where Joe was on his way back, but he figured he was just running late. Nevertheless, the presentation had to begin. Joe was just a friend to keep him company, but his tastes contrasted sharply with those of the investors and Richard thought that was a needed element in this discussion. He even found himself wishing he could have waited a little longer, but his reasons for being here had little to do with Joe. Getting back to the suites now seemed to take longer, and his impatience grew. Arriving at his destination not a moment too soon, his patience converted into an eager aggression, maybe even obsession; nevertheless, he remained cool as he gathered all the investors.

Everyone had boarded the boat while Richard quietly and swiftly checked all necessary instruments. It would be a more difficult task since Joe was not there. They had been on many navigational missions together. Whether it is fishing or just enjoying a cruise with their loved ones, he would be on his own for this trip, but it did not bother him a bit. His determination to make this a success dominated all other thoughts. Releasing the last ropes that secured the boat, they were soon off. The boat was built well, and had good speed.

Their destination was a particular riverbank 100 miles southeast of Macapa. Richard maximized the velocity of the mid-sized yacht and administered the skills in boating that he had so conveniently inherited indirectly from a bait and tackle shop visit. He could hear the wind drift swiftly from the rear of the boat, and he could also hear snippets of the conversations of intrigue.

“Dick! What do you think?” said one of the investors, standing with both hands gripped upon the boat’s railing and looking puzzled indeed.

He replied saliently, “Think? About what Peter?”

“I mean, here way out in the wilderness! Do you think this is a little extreme, us being out here for a presentation?”

Mr. Neuheisil began to gleam as if he had all the answers, and responded confidently. “Well, you know, I think it’s a good idea. It gives us a chance to see the realities of this so-called, quote-unquote, project! And its true potential! Thus far, it’s proving possible, but I am beginning believe only now, since he has decided to bring us

along here. We should make the best of this, and we need to use this experience to help us decide if it's even possible, or even profitable for that matter."

"Yeah right, you know...." The men continued casual conversation amongst themselves while Richard shuttled the yacht to its destination.

"Richard, you got it under control, I see," exclaimed Jim, who was standing next to Tony Palanas. "Where exactly did you learn to navigate boats?" Richard turned to see the two men watching him like private eyes.

He responded casually and gently. "Boating has actually been a hobby of mine for many, many years. A friend once turned me on to deep-sea fishing, and it was on from there."

Dick looked at Richard first with a smile that showed he was impressed. He then looked at Jim and Tony simultaneously, grabbing one shoulder of each and speaking on their congress. "Here we are, drifting upon the bayou like Amazonians, really living this endeavor. Some may have thought initially this was extreme, being out here, but I must say Richard, for me it's truly been a tropical experience. I want to congratulate you on this conception; and I hope that you men see this as an opportunity, to really understand the realities of this idea. The men looked ahead of them, each with their own characteristics. Their eyes lit up as they approached a large gap in the River, sort of like a huge lake, but in actuality, the river now split in two.

This was the spot. Now, Richard thought, if I can only rely on either side of the land directly ahead. He headed the vessel towards the point where the land split the river into a western flow and a southern flow. "OK, gentlemen," he said, notifying all crew members, "prepare to dock." Richard guided the boat as close to the edge as possible, but he realized that there was no where to dock the boat. The gentlemen all gathered on the side railings of the boat while Richard spoke loudly. "Unfortunately, I didn't anticipate not being able to dock the boat and getting our feet dirty, but I see a patch of trees right over there, an opening where we could have landed the choppers. Nevertheless, this is the spot you were shown on the map," he said, lifting the map to everyone and assuring their visibility was not hindered. He pointed at the map and continued, "Now you see, gentlemen! Can you feel what I'm envisioning here?" He was pointing fiercely and finger tracing the exact dimensions along these multiple branches of the Amazon. Getting

excited, he pronounced, “We can ship coffee from Columbia.” He then traced his fingers along the Amazon eagerly, passing Manaus and moving upward on one of many Amazonian branches until that particular one ended. He now suggested, “We can add a trucking depot here. See right there!” He pointed even more aggressively. “The Orinoca River branches off, and this upward branch is very close to Bogota, Columbia. Now you see this lower branch of the Amazon is just 100 miles or so below. This Amazon branch should be equipped with a loading and unloading dock, while the trucking depot could be placed at this upper branch of the Orinoco.”

Jim interrupted, saying, “You might as well place a loading and unloading facility there, on that Orinoco branch as well. There are all sorts of rivers that the Orinoco is connected to within Columbia, not to mention it exits near Trinidad and Tobago. If I’m not mistaken, that may shorten the route to America.”

Richard looked at him with surprise and replied, “Now you see! You see, you really understand what I’m envisioning here. They also have gold, oil, and emeralds.”

Jim, with an ulterior motive gleaming in his eyes, advised, “I’m quite aware of what Columbia has to offer.” He patted the quiet Tony Palanas on the back and gripped his shoulders, now obviously acting as Tony’s spokesperson. Tony continued to sit back, not saying much, but he was indeed interested. His family had real ties within the drug hierarchy, and Columbia was a known producer of many such products. This massive shipping industry project and future operation would be perfect for trafficking and laundering. Tony’s seeming lack of interest was just a ploy. He was in fact eager to get this project going. That easy access couldn’t be passed up. The plan was to smuggle contraband out of Columbia, transfer products in this newly proposed control center, and allow products to leave the eastern shore of South America. In a totally different ship, it would be difficult to for the authorities to discern where the drugs were going. He gleamed inside at this opportunity, only to be interrupted out of his reverie.

Richard spoke loudly. “That’s not all, gentlemen. We may ship sugarcane and rice from Venezuela, as well as wheat, barley, and corn from Peru. Need copper, Peru is the place! Oh, don’t forget about oil in Guaza, newly discovered. Since Bolivia refuses to ante up, or perhaps has no capitol, we can be their source capitol. We can partially own Bolivia. Remember, I told you gentlemen about the depots at Cuiaba. He pointed once

again with an aggression that captured all the men's attention. "You see this river; it allows us to ship into Paraguay and Uruguay, and finally exiting through Rio de la Plata."

That final comment Richard uttered gained grunts of approval, and Dick suggested, "I think this allows us access to Argentina as well. What do they have to offer, Mr. Dickenson?"

"Well, that country has Buenos Aires, a large port city that is near Cordoba. They produce automobiles and buses."

"Hmm!" Dick said, but Richard did not give him a chance to say anything, because he continued to blabber.

"You see men, even though we are unable to walk on the land, I believe you all get the idea of where this project is eventually going to go. First, we must get this contract location established."

Peter commented, "We don't know if a project with such a magnitude can even be possible, besides what is the constructability of this land?"

Richard blurted out excitedly, "Sure! That is why I have scheduled a survey crew and a few engineers to come build, well, first and foremost, somewhere to dock this boat. They will be measuring and surveying, or what ever it is they do. Look! I didn't say this plan was going to be stumble free, but I assure you that the engineers will probably approve this site for said construction. And we will be on our way to establishing a shipping empire."

Suddenly, Richard's eyes sharpened as he looked towards land. Just before opening his mouth again, he noticed something appearing to dash across, or through, the forest. He looked puzzled, but he is careful to conceal his expressions immediately with silent gulps of air. He had just about scratched his head, wondering aloud, what was that? However, he really began to think, who was that? It looked like a buck-naked man running, weaving through the thick masses of trees. He was almost certain it was someone, because he had noticed the eyes peeking from around a tree just before the body became a blur. Direct contact, eye-to-eye, seemed to be what happened and is the reason Richard was going crazy. Those eyes seemed to be staring at him just before he, she, or it ran away.

Richard's reverie was interrupted by Jim. "Is something the matter? It seems as

though you've seen a ghost?"

"Oh no! I just thought I saw a deer or something." Ring! Ring! His phone loudly interrupted the moment. "Excuse me, gentlemen." He answered his phone briskly. "Yes," he said, then patiently waited for a response.

"Mr., that flight you spoke of, earlier. It should arrive in two hours or so. They dispatched in — I just received the pilot's message."

"OK , great! Richard glanced at his watch, noticing that it was already mid-afternoon. He then remembered that Joe was originally supposed to be on that later flight in the first place. Nevertheless, he whipped the boat around and they headed back for Macapa. They all enjoyed the ride back, as the sun's heat began to subside and made the ride more bearable. They had several drinks and were quite joyful at the prospects of making so much money on this project, and they did not realize they were nearly to their destination. Finally, they had all exited the boat and headed for the banquet room to continue to gorge themselves with alcoholic beverages.

CHAPTER FOUR

Arriving at the mini-airport, Richard noticed Joe sitting down waiting for him. Richard got off the wagon and approached the building. “Hey, Joe! Joe!” Richard exclaimed.

“Rich! Rich, hey Richard.... Old buddy how you doing.”

“I’m fine, Joe. What about yourself?”

“Just marvelous. I see you got us here way out in the tropics and shit.” Pausing just briefly as they walked away from the building, Joe then blurted hilariously, “Oh shit, we got the horse and wagon! Damn! What the hell is going on? I mean you did say something about a project, but gee! I had no idea.” The two men boarded the carriage and proceeded to the suites. “So what exactly are we doing here anyway?”

“Well Joe, I really called you to help me with the navigating, but your late arrival eliminated that plan.”

“Well excuse me, but what navigating?” He spoke frankly and naively.

“I just took the investors on a cruise to the central construction site”

“Wait a minute, hold up! Investors? Cruise? Navigating? You’re confusing me.”

“Joe! Remember when I called to invite you to the presentation. I need their capital.

“Oh I see. You’re putting your swindle techniques to good use. I still don’t understand the cruise.”

“Damn Joe, be imaginative. The project is about 100 miles southwest from here by boat on the Amazon.”

“Boy, you sure can be an adventurer. You started me with that shit a long time ago, talking about deep-sea fishing, and shit. I guess you needed my help on the boat.”

“No! You don’t say.”

“Hey,” Joe said sharply, pausing long enough to assure that he had captured Mr. Dickenson’s attention. “Fuck you, OK! You probably wanted me to do all the work while you ran your mouth to people richer than you. Now that is a sight.”

A grin crossed Rich’s face as the men approached the suites, but that was short

lived because he began to blabber. “Hey, the sun has a few more hours of light. Let’s take the helicopter to the site.”

“What site, man!?”

“Damn Joe! Where the shipyard is to be built.”

“Shipyard! Now I knew you were crazy, but whoa! I didn’t imagine.”

“They say a genius is crazy, and I see you haven’t been listening to anything I’ve been telling you.

“Hold up, Rich. I have been listening. It’s been a long flight and I wouldn’t mind getting one of those tropical drinks in me.”

“Come on Joe, I didn’t get a chance to tour the land.”

“Well, why not,” Joe exclaimed with unacceptable tones.

“We hadn’t had a chance to build a dock, and that prevented us from exiting the boat. I didn’t want to take the small boats with those inexperienced nincompoops.” Joe stood back with a humorous look while listening to Rich. “My plan is to take the choppers, build a dock, and survey the land. Get an engineer to approve construction, and let my investors’ money do the rest. I want to at least know what I’m up against.” Richard uttered these last comments unusually out of focus; a thought of the buck-naked man may have crossed his mind. However, he continued on, “Besides, you don’t need that alcohol shit anyway. It can kill you.”

“OK , Ok, but I am a grown-ass man, and I will have me several of those drinks as soon as we return from your weird obsession, or journey, or even quest, whatever it is. Something! Something has gotten into you.”

Richard seemed preoccupied, but he managed to exclaim harshly, “What!”

“You heard me! Your crazy ways are going to get you killed one day.”

“Oh yeah, well at least I wont die an old man having doing nothing but scarf down barley and hops and smoke cigars until my lungs resemble a pot of boiling tar, stressed from extensive manual labor and mad because of all the things I could have done.” A silent and concealed chuckle that sounded like the letter ‘K’, sputtered from Joe’s mouth. “Let’s go!” Richard hopped off first, followed by Joe. The two men approached the area where the helicopters rested. In the large tower, the old man glanced briefly at the men before returning to his book and stuffing some unknown fruit in his

mouth. "It shouldn't take us much more than thirty minutes to reach the spot." They both climbed in and fitted themselves in properly.

Richard gauged the instruments and soon they were off. "How is Clair?"

"Oh, she's fine. She had that meeting and she is really moving up. I'm proud of her achievements, and especially as a wife. Is everything OK with you and Susan?"

"Oh sure! Sure! She's at the room waiting for me."

"Oh my, aren't we lucky." Before Richard could indulge in the compliment, Joe was blabbering some more. "Or might I say unlucky. All these beautiful Brazilian women."

"You're married!"

"I know, I know! A man is going to be a man. You understand what I'm saying."

"Yeah, right! Fuck around and bring Clair back a splendid case of Malaria."

"Oh, funny!"

"Hey Joe, you know you are my good friend and I'm really glad you could make it." His tone is suddenly softer, less obsessive.

"Yeah man, no problem." Silence set in, and then suddenly the helicopter blades' whisper became more noticeable. The helicopter ride was pretty smooth, and before long, they were approaching the spot. Richard looked down to focus on exactly where he wanted to land.

"Hey Rich, do you know where you're gonna drop this baby?"

"Yes!" Richard exclaimed with a hint of irritation. "I spotted this location when I brought the investors out here."

"Yeah, if you say so." The helicopter-descended right where Richard wanted to land, and the men hopped out quickly after Rich slowed the rotors. "Damn, man!"

"What now, Joe!"

"This ground is kind of mushy."

"Yeah, well let's go up the bank a bit. It's probably dry ground there." They walked some distance away from the river, noticing all the sounds of wild birds, insects, and other unidentifiable creatures lurking in the forest. The two men did not notice the eyes concealed behind trees that obscured the watchers. These were the keen eyes of many men in ceremony. Richard walked around with dignity, unaffected by the eerie

sounds of the jungle. They walked down a pathway that naturally split the forest slightly. Joe looked around several different times trying to locate what was actually making those sounds.

The trail ended, but this new area had space to go several different directions. The thick layer of trees blocked the sunlight, which made their range of sight only fifty to seventy feet. Any further than that was not possible to see because a bundle of trees layered in tropical vines of some sort blocked the view. Richard stood about twenty feet away in one corner and listened to Joe expound on their surroundings.

“Is that a parrot? I have never seen a bird with so many different colors, and so bright. The next thing you know you’ll have me out here having conversations with wild birds.”

“Well Joe, for you that’s probably fitting. I’m sure you all would have much in common,” replied Richard with extreme sarcasm, just like the two friends were used to.

Joe responded, first with a look that he said he’d had enough. “Look!” which was spoken firmly, “you already have me out here in a Western version of our motherland, thinking we are part of Harubu nation. Biiiiiitch....!” This was spoken with a serious drag, but firmly and the tone seemed to be hateful. However, that was not the case. The two friends were used to crude humor — it was just a part of their usual jocular ways. “We might as well paint our faces and hold spears while chanting syllables we have never even heard before, maybe go comatose from some of these unrecorded psychedelic plants.”

Richard could not do anything but release gentle laughs and smirks. “You are a damn fool.” He continued laughing.

“You’re laughing, but I’m serious,” replied Joe with a smirk of his own. The men walked through the other end of the opening. They began walking another path, and ahead of them were eyes watching them, but the two friends did not notice. Richard walked ahead and Joe followed, but they were still unaware that they were being observed. Where was the watcher? In a tree? It was unclear since they did not notice the eyes at all.

The two friends could not hear them, but there were chants of high praise, the sound of wood clicking as if primitive drums were being played. The sun descended

toward the western skyline. The sounds of primitive instruments of string also echoed and blended well with the looming nighttime forest chatter. A gloomy mist lifted, as did an aurora of the mystic. Images of primitive dancers indigenous spirits flashed about, accompanied with sounds of dancing and chanting, this intensified fiercely, but Rich and his companion could not hear this. In fact, to them it did not even exist. The eyes belonged to real men but also to the spirits that were being called upon. The sounds grew louder and the images flashed more intensely as pre-darkness snuck upon them.

"Richard, it's getting dark." Richard walked as if he did not hear his friend speaking to him. "I don't know what it is you're trying to do out here. I mean way out here in no man's land. I mean, I mean, there are probably species we haven't seen yet. And you got me out here after sunset. And it's shit out here, what if a goddamn wild cat, or a muthafuckin...uh...uh...whatever the fuck. It's all kind of shit out here. I don't even know what to name. And you wanna come digging shit up. Something's gotten into you, that's a clear understatement. You're just crazy. I feel like I'm in ancient Aztec."

His reverie rudely interrupted, Richard replied, "Excuse my impudence, but it figures. With your mental capacity, obtuse as it may be, you couldn't begin to grasp the benefits."

"Well fuck you, and whatever you said. Just because you're Rich, Rich! You know I'm gonna speak my mind."

"I guess we better get back," Richard said swiftly. "Just follow me down this path we previously trotted."

"I hope you know your way out of this Jungle."

"Joe, don't be a fool." As they walked about in search for where they had landed, the sounds of night now overlapped the earlier sounds they heard. Their ears sent their brains messages that were more eerie still. Joe again looked with panic as he tried to locate a sound his ears continued to register but his mind could not identify. Richard walked fast, and Joe seemed to fall further behind. The mysterious forest sounds and the unfamiliarity of the wild life terrain slowed him. Then suddenly he began to sprint up a hill perpendicular to the pathway. "I need to take a leak. Hold up man, hold up!" Richard was far ahead and barely heard him.

"What Joe?" He continued walking unaffected by the watchers and sounds.

“Oh shit!” Joe replied. In his mind, he thought, Damn, I must have slid down the other side. The fact that he needed to release urine didn’t change. He yelled out, “Richard, Richard!” Richard stopped in his tracks well ahead, turned around and softly replied. “Joe, what? Where are you.” He spoke softly, standing in his tracks with a bit of impatience. He began to slowly walk towards Joe’s cries. Joe decided his bladder needed emptying now. He chose a huge tree to stand upon to do his dirty work. No one was presumably looking, but he decided to choose a tree to conceal himself anyway. He probably was used to a huge Maple or Oak, and the bulging roots were normally used as stepping-stones. Joe did what he was used to and participated in one of the best releases ever. Standing there on two huge roots, he began to let her rip. He cocked back his head and relaxed while enjoying a much needed drainage. As the last morsels dripped out, he cocked his head back even further and enjoyed the shiver he received. “Oh shit,” shouted Joe. His body cocked forward from the sudden collapse from underneath him. It appeared the surface beneath had given way. What happened to the roots he was standing on? That was far from his mind. “Oh shit, damn!” yelled Joe, and he loudly repeated his friend’s name over and over. “Richard! Richard! I’m stuck in some kind of trap. Shit man, come get me out of this shit.”

With a smile passing over his face, Rich replied, “I’m coming, I’m coming.” After yelling, Richard whispered to himself. “What has he gotten himself into now?” Richard walked forward, but then began to yell again.

“Joe! You know, when you bad-mouth the land, it’s not nice to you.”

Joe could not actually hear him; he was still a good distance away. “Hey! Hey! Oh shit, Oh shit,” yelled Joe at the top of his lungs. He continued with a certain increase in despair, “It’s squeezing me. I’m being... Oh shit man, something’s squeezing me. Augh! Augh,” yelled Joe. Richard began to hear scarcely that his friend was in distress.

“I’m coming Joe,” Richard replied while accelerating his efforts towards the cries. Joe continued struggling as something beneath entangled his legs. Joe did not realize the mysticism involved in his attack. All he knew was that something was squeezing his legs very tightly. They had his legs entangled and it felt to him like anacondas wrapped around his legs crushing them. He could not scream much more because of the exhaustion caused by his efforts to be free. Just above him, two massive branches

plummeted down on Joe's head. They were unnoticed because Joe was about ready to pass out. The branches cracked his skull, and thick goo oozed down his grotesque face.

Richard slid down the same slope Joe did, and then sprinted down the same trail. He called out, "Joe, Joe." He was curious as to why he could not hear his friend's big mouth anymore. "Joe, Joe," exclaimed Richard repeatedly while running in circles frantically. Eventually, he came across what was left of Joe. He stumbled in full stride and his face immediately reflected his disbelief and shock. He stopped completely and kneeled over, both hands on corresponding knees, and began to barf profusely. He noticed that Joe was definitely dead and buried from waist high near a tree. He did not stand around much longer; Richard turned and ran fast as he could down the same path non-stop. Richard mind began flashing on the image of Joe's fractured skull. It was horrendous to look at and could have made anyone freak out.

Stumbling a few times, Richard finally made it to the mushy terrain where he had landed the helicopter. His feet constantly got stuck as he ran the final fifteen meters before jumping aboard his escape module. Mud dripped from his feet and sweat poured from his face caused by the hyperventilation and sheer panic. Richard ignited the engine, commanding the chopper to take off. It managed to ascend into the air even though it was partially buried in the soft ground Richard noticed nothing but the images that flashed through his mind. Pure panic reigned supreme in Richard's mind as he fondled the complex instruments. During the whole flight, his eyes were fixed in a placid stare and would have mesmerized anyone who dared to look into them. Breathing frantically, the images were flashing more rapidly than before through his mind. Then he noticed the tower to his right, and where the other helicopter sat unmolested. He quickly commanded the chopper to descend to the right forty-five degrees. Richard had no clue as to what had happened; in fact, confusion was just a small portion of what was brewing inside of him. The helicopter landed safely but roughly as Rich continued to wrestle with his psyche. Controlling it proved laborious and indeed hideous. He jumped out of the craft and scampered about the field appearing extremely anxious. The erratic flying aroused vigilance in the little man in the tower, and he now gazed at Richard running for the nearest transport. The little man was puzzled out of his wits, sat down after scratching his head and merely shrugged his shoulders.

Richard arrived in his room, paranoia the major ingredient in his state of mind. He made a valiant effort to turn the knob of his room's door, and then entered, anxiously closing the door behind him.

"Hey Boo!... What's wrong?" Mrs. Dickenson said, curiously waiting for her husband's response.

"What?" His words were spoken sharply as he came to his senses. "Oh, nothing is wrong!"

"Well why did you close the door like something was chasing you?"

Richard turned and looked at the door, pausing before saying, "I didn't know I closed the door any kind of certain way."

Mrs. Dickenson's eyes showed her concern. "Well, what took you so long? The investors are in the banquet room waiting on you. And did you pick up Joe?"

Richard listened with a sense of preoccupation and responded suspiciously. "That was the problem. I got a call that his flight would be delayed. I went to pick him up and he never showed." He sat on the bed with nervous gestures and rejected his wife's soft touches and condolences.

"Well, Boo, your letting this project get to you, maybe you need..."

"Maybe I don't need shit!" Richard exclaimed rudely. "I don't need anything. Look, this project is very important and is sure to cause some anxiety."

"That's fine baby, but damn! If it is going to have you like a paranoid nut, then this project needs reevaluation."

"Look bitch! I don't need any of your badgering. I don't need anyone on my back about this project. I'm the one who envisioned this and no one else."

Richard arose from the bed, snatching away from his wife and making his way to the door. When he slammed the door behind him, for some reason it triggered those awful flashes again. This time they weren't images of Joe, but images of blue. The images intensified as he approached the banquet room, and the images made it difficult to make a straight face. Now they were also accompanied by some strange and blurry flashes of red. Joe flashed through his mind as well, but this time there were men all around the late Joe. It soon became apparent those men that surrounded Joe were the authorities, and the red and blue lights were accompanied by a loud siren. Richard began

to examine the idea that police would slow down the project, if not nullify any chances of the investors supporting him. With that very distinct notion, he straightened his face and joined the investors' celebration.

"Mr. Dickenson, hey! Where have you been," said Dick joyfully just before he guzzled another martini down his trap.

"Just call me Rich!"

"Hey man. What is the matter with you anyway? Dick exclaimed like a true drunken sailor.

"Gentlemen, Gentlemen! Hey Richard! Nice presentation! Everything looked smooth!" Tapping Richard on the hand, Peter continued to say, "Dick! Hey, don't you agree?"

"Sure, Sure," Dick responded with a slur.

"You're drunk! I'm sure glad we didn't leave this discussion entirely up to you." All three men drank glass after glass until Richard's wife walked through the room with a very unhappy look on her face. As usual, Dick was the first one to blabber. "Hey, Mrs. Dickenson! What's wrong?"

She replied softly, "I'm fine!" as Susan continued past the gentlemen, rolling her eyes at Rich as she approached the bar for a drink.

"What's wrong with your wife?" Richard shrugged his shoulders and walked away from the gentlemen. "Jim, come join us!" Dick shouted. Jim walked over to join Dick and Peter with his own drink tightly gripped in his hands. Dick blurted, "Hey Jim whets up? Lovely project!"

Jim replied gingerly with body gestures while Peter exclaimed, "I think Mr. Dickenson is acting a little strange."

"Well you saw that his wife seemed angry!"

"Yeah, that's enough to make any man act strange." Peter accepted his comrade's suggestion, but his face complemented his previous skepticism. "I don't know." "It's probably just married problems"

"Richard probably gave her a quickie and escaped out here with us."

"Yeah! I do that to my wife all the time."

"Yeah Dick, but you aren't ever trying to escape somewhere."

Dick stood, obviously mystified and trying to grasp Jim's comments. The gentlemen continued to talk amongst themselves while the other investors were enjoying their own conversations. Richard sat down alone on a lobby couch, with his hands draped over his face and head slanted downwards. Jim Winterlin walked from down the hall, drunk, but his keen eye noticed Richard sitting there. "Hey... Hey, Richard! Hey, what are you doing over here? Why are you not over there entertaining your guests?" Richard tried to respond, but just before he could say anything, Jim spoke again. "Hey Richard," spoken firmly as if trying to suppress his intoxication. "Is there something wrong? This isn't the same extremely excited Richard. The presentation did go well, and we're telling you that, so why the sad face. Is there something you need to tell us?"

Richard immediately realized the inflection in the other man's voice could mean danger, or maybe it was just his own paranoia, and he responded quickly. "Oh no, there's nothing wrong. And there's nothing to worry about. Not at all. I just want to make things back right."

A confused look crossed Jim's face. "What back!"

"What I mean is, I wanted to make sure things were in order and I can get back the glory."

Jim replied, "Glory huh!?"

"Yes sir, this will allow us to conquer South America's shipping industry."

"Well I'm glad you think big, Richard. That is why we have our faith in you and this task you brought to the table. Just don't worry about it — don't let it get to you. You have our financial backing. You just execute." He patted Richard on the back while rising to return to his drunken swagger. His destination was more drinks.

Richard calmly remained seated, hands on knees, and regaining his composure, he began to realize there was no stopping now. He noticed the soft touches of his wife's hand pulling his to join her. He arose and kissed his wife as if there were nothing wrong. "I'm sorry dear, for being a Jack Ass. I just let all that presentation stuff get to me."

Susan politely put her finger on his lips and replied, "Let's go dance." With a satisfied smile gleaming across her face, the two finished the night drinking and dancing.

CHAPTER FIVE

The flight home was restless for Rich. He contemplated what happened repeatedly, and he knew that he needed to succeed to make some good come out of this terrible loss. During his deep thought, he watched the trees disappear with the plane's ascension. When there was nothing but clouds to observe, he thought again, on how this project would be successful and his friend would not be lost for nothing. Finally nodding off, his daydreams carried over to his eventual sleep. Not even realizing he had nodded off, the sight of a man in the midst of the forest made up his mental imagery. His back was turned away from Richard, so all that he could see was the figure of a man standing mysteriously just about beyond his vision. He decided to walk toward the man because his curiosity grew overwhelmingly and could not be denied. As he got closer, he noticed the man began to walk away as if he knew someone was following him. The man never did look back, which is probably why Richard's inquisitiveness began to commandeer his very thoughts and actions.

He tried to catch up, but to no avail, and before a full effort could be administered, he realized the man had vanished. Richard stopped in his tracks after losing sight of the man, and he looked around, assuming he must have hidden behind a tree. Looking back and forth and all around robotically, assuring full coverage of all areas he could at least see would not be overlooked. No matter the effort, there was no sight of the man and the place where he stood now seemed the same. Nevertheless, he was compelled to search, and he looked behind that vining tree to his right. "Oh, shit," Richard blurted, after being startled by a hand gripping his shoulders, which caused him to turn around rapidly. This man had obviously sneaked up on him, and Richard realized that maybe he was mystical in some way. Looking more attentively, Rich noticed the man was Joe. This frightened him dearly, causing sheer panic to curl beneath his lamina of courage. The mysterious man then placed his other hand around Richard's neck and began to shake furiously. Richard shouted at the top of his sleeping lungs and opened his eyes to notice his beautiful wife was now that man. She was only shaking him softly to advise him that they were the only ones left on the plane.

“Come on, Richard. We’re the only ones left. Get Up!”

Malicious grog spilled from Rich’s mouth and his face showed his wide awake vigilance. “I’m up! I’m up! I must have dozed off,” said Richard convolutedly, realizing that he must have been dreaming.

“Well you don’t say,” uttered Susan with splendid mordacity. “Come on, let’s go!” She pulled him up and they exited the plane.

After picking their little one up, they arrived at the gate before their home, and not a moment too soon for Richard. “Hello, Mr. and Mrs. Dickenson,” they heard the guard exclaim joyfully after activating the beautiful gates.

“Hello, Hayword,” Susan said softly. Richard and Dainisa just looked on.

“Everything is fine and secure here, sir! Nothing old Hayword Jeffries can’t secure, or even protect for that matter.” He talked to Richard with encouraging gestures in an attempt to please him. He rambled on, but his words seem to evade Richard’s ear, because he continued walking until he was entirely through the door. Richard actually headed straight for his bed to pass out into a deep sleep.

“Mommy! What’s wrong with Daddy?” “Oh, Boo! Daddy is just tired. We had a long trip. Are you hungry dear?”

“No ma’am. I ate pizza. Can I play the game?”

“Sure, I’ll be in your room to hook it up in a minute.” The little girl dashed to her room with joy to gather her components. Susan found her favorite book, made a cup of tea, and set the items where she had normally sat by herself to read. Proceeding to her daughter’s room, she peeked at her husband to see him just about hibernating. She shook her head and continued with her previous task.

“Mommy, Mommy, I want to play this game first!”

Susan concentrated on assembling the components and connecting the necessary wiring to each respective outlet. “OK dear! Cut the power on.” The little girl pushed the button. “OK , let me hold that. I need to set it up” She placed the game on easy and adjusted the other settings to assure a lengthy game. Her plan was to get the little one out of the way so she could concentrate on relaxing while reading her book and sipping her tea. After sitting down, she sighed from the deepened relaxation she felt from the soft seating. Her face indicating relief after tasting the hot scorching tea, Susan made soothing

grunts and moans. Taking another sip, she reached for her book while gulping down another sip, and then she placed the cup down with a frown from the hot tea. A quick thought of her husband drifted into her mind. Shrugging it off, she slowly opened the book at the ribbon she had placed between pages before and began reading.

The little one had played the game until she was sound as sleep, but the game continued to play even though there was no one operating it. Three hours had passed and it was extremely late. Susan continued reading, not realizing she was now halfway through. She had no intentions of stopping. Besides, she had reached a part in which events unfurled unexpectedly, and it ate at her to know what would happen next. Intrigued, she continued to read diligently as curiosity flamed her every thought-spoken. The reading intensified paragraph after paragraph, until... "Ring, ring! Ring, ring!" The ringing continued, but she tried to ignore it. However, it became unbearably harsh. "Ring, ring!" Annoyed, she placed the book down with its face open and rushed to answer the phone. "Ring, ring!" She accelerated her efforts unaware that her hustle was futile, because the caller on the other end had no intention of hanging up.

"Hello," she said exasperatedly.

"Hi, is this Susan?"

"Well, yes it is!"

"I'm sorry to call so late, but is Richard available?"

"Oh! No! He is asleep. Who might I say is calling?"

"I'm sorry! This is Claira Geshy. I was calling to see if Richard had heard from my husband Joe."

"Oh, hi Mrs. Geshy. I didn't recognize your voice. No! I think he said Joe had called and said his plane would be late, but he never showed."

"That's strange! Susan, do you happen to know which flight he was supposed to be on?"

"One of Richard's private jets."

"Oh dear! Well, thank you. You have been a big help," Claira said sadly.

The two terminated the call, and Susan now lost all interest in her book, deciding to cut the lights off in preparation for bed. The first task was to tuck her Boo away in bed and to cut off her lights and gaming console. When she reached her own room, she

immediately cut the room's illumination to nil and jumped into the bed to eye her husband like a private one. She wondered why he was acting so strange, and the call from Clairra seemed stranger still, but she nudged those thoughts aside and went to sleep.

The next morning she awakened on her side with her eyes still closed, and she proceeded to roll over until flat on her back. She rolled again, but this time flat on her face with her legs stretched as if she were making an angel in snow with silky white sheets. "Honey," she said, her voice muffled from her facedown posture. "Honey..." she said rolling over quickly again and raising up on her buttocks, supported in a sitting position by her hands spread behind her like twin kickstands for a bike. She now opened her eyes only to confirm what she already knew — he was gone. Now she knew this project was more important than she was.

Richard had stepped into his office at the same moment his partner was wiping the early morning grog from her face. The first thing on Richard's mind was to get on the phone and contact the necessary party to assemble a survey crew. Intensity raged as he approached the phone. He knew this team had to be special, because they needed to be special. A good camp site was needed, as well as somewhere to dock the boats. He thought he would take a shortcut, because all he needed was an engineer to approve the site. This would allow construction ships and crews to be amassed at his visionary location without having to use his own capitol. He needed two civil engineers to go with the survey crew, but they were not available as soon as tomorrow. This prompted two trips, because there could be no delay.

"I need three land surveying contractors trained in navigation, also some helicopters pilots and field surveyors." Demands continued to spill from Richard's mouth. "And no matter what credentials. I need skilled people."

A panicked utterance followed from the other end of the line: "No problem, Mr. Dickenson. We have the skilled party you need. I'll fax you the contract specifications."

The men terminated the call, and a pleased smile ripped across Richard's face. He pressed a memory button on his phone, and a few moments later he blurted, "John! Let me see you in my office." Richard cocked back his legs for relaxation and sipped some of Columbia's finest.

John entered the room, hesitantly uttering, "Yes sir!?"

“I need you to assure the survey crew gets on the plane and arrives in South America safely. I also want you to maintain communication with them, and report anything to me, immediately!”

“Yes sir! Yes sir!”

“I’m going home. I’ve been neglecting my wife, but be sure to call me if anything happens.”

“Yes sir!”

“You may dismiss everyone else for the day, but you need to be here to assure phase one is completed.” Richard turned away from John’s unappeased face and walked gallantly out of the office. It was no time and his car sped off with seemingly no regard for traffic regulations. He was still filled with uneasiness because the project still needed the engineer’s approval, but it was just a matter of confirming structural integrity. That is why he had delayed any other engineers’ arrival on site — he needed his special engineer for the job. His plan was to send the survey crew just to get the dimensions of the land and to label that a specific site. Then later he’d introduce this labeled site to the engineers as a point on the map, not mentioning the exact measurements and hoping just an inspection of the general area would suffice. All he could think about was shortcuts and that nothing could delay this process.

CHAPTER SIX

Meanwhile, Milo Evans briefed Ron, Nick, and Gary on the subject matter. “Mr. Rivera, Mr. Fusil, and Mr. Russy, may I get you gentlemen’s attention for a moment. Are you ready to work.” The crewmen were puzzled because their boss had never spoken out like that about a job.

Nick Fusil replied, “What! What are you talking about? I’m always ready to work! What is this? Did some client complain? Gary! Are you ready to work? What about you Ron, are you ready?” Ron sat there with a deadpan face and said nothing. Gary had stood there all the while in his overalls, his rough beard and mustache seemingly two in one.

The hefty man replied, “Milo, What’s up?”

“No one complained, but I have a job in which there can be no complaints. It’s a field job, and it will pay some good money.”

Nick’s cockiness soared. “Well, we’ve done plenty of field jobs.” Before he could blabber on further, Mr. Evans explained. “No, this is no ordinary field job. The only reason I even took this job is because I have my aviation license.”

With excitement, Ron blurted out, “Oh shit! We have to fly this trip!”

Gary intervened while puffing on his extremely large cigar. “Where exactly are we going, Milo?”

“Well gentleman, this is an international job. Gary was stymied from replying because of the smoke engorged in his throat.

Ron Rivera sat with wonder, but slowly he managed to respond. “You mean we’re leaving the country?”

“Yes, we are going to South America!”

“South America! What? Why do we have to go all the way to South America,” Ron said with a truly opposing tone in his voice.

“Because, that is where the job is located, you idiot. Look, we take his plane to a city in Brazil. There are helicopters waiting, where we will use them to go to the designated spot and survey the area.”

Still enriched in the aroma of tobacco, Gary replied. “Where exactly in Brazil?”

“Central Brazil!”

“Isn’t that thick forest?”

“Yeah, but we will measure along the North and East coast. Gary! I need you to build a small dock, or just something sufficient to tie boats to, also a camp, which may take a few days. I think Mr. Dickenson wants everything to remain so that he can bring other inspectors”

Gary replied with a peculiar tone. “Mr. Dickenson?”

“That’s the client who wants the work done. He’s actually a very wealthy man.”

“Oh!” With his curiosity somewhat alleviated, Gary said, “So I see! You called upon all of us for our individual abilities. Ah, now I get it.”

Nick blurted, “Yeah, Milo has always been slick. We may not want to go all the way to Brazil to work in a thick jungle. Besides, we have enough business as it is. You said it will pay a lot, but I doubt that it pays that much. Yeah, I heard about South America, and what I heard wasn’t peaches and cream.”

Ron was anxious to get his two cents in too. “Yeah Milo! How much is this Mr. Dickenson willing to pay?”

“Damn! I thought I could count on you men, but I guess I need to find some other people.”

“Naw, Milo! I’m with you,” responded Gary with a deep hillbilly accent.”

“You still didn’t tell us how much it pays.”

“Hold on, I’m getting to that.”

“I thought you didn’t know.”

Ron looked at Milo with a sarcastic expression, and Nick muttered, “Man, we just fucking with you.”

“Yeah man, lighten up.”

The leader of the group took a deep breath before offering his defense. “Well, the exact figures aren’t worked out just yet, but...”

“What?” The word was spoken sharply by both Ron and Gary simultaneously.

“Calm down! Calm down! The pay, let’s say, will be well over three times as much as each of you made last year, and that is still being modest. That is why I said not everything has been worked out completely yet. I’m trying to get the most money for you guys.” There was a bitter silence as the men contemplated the possibility of working for triple a year’s normal salary.

Milo Evans continued to give the particulars of the job while he had his crew’s undivided attention. “He seemed very eager to have this done ASAP. I told him! Hey, I’ve got four men who will be away from their families for a while, and on such short notice. Check this! I said hey, a long-range trip like this will probably be in the mid to high six figure range. That is for all of my men.”

“OK , OK , Milo!”

“Hey wait! I told him, I don’t even know how much land is to be surveyed and how harsh the terrain may be.”

“Oh, Milo! I get it! We have the flexibility to tack on additional fees. Yeah, I like that.” Ron turned and looked at Gary and Nick while Milo observed them all. The men remained silent as their faces appeared to gleam with avidity.

“OK, We’ll meet here early, before dawn, and fly out tomorrow at dawn. Gary! Be sure to order all the equipment and materials you may need. They need shipping before we leave.”

“Aye sir!” The words were spoken as of through congestion, due to the massive smoke that curled around Gary’s face.

Hayword opened the beautiful gates to let Richard in. He seemed preoccupied, but in a pretty gingerly mood. Everything was moving according to plan, except he had forgotten to check with John to assure a cargo helicopter was delivered to the site. He refused to call him, declaring he’d had enough for one day. Besides, he figured it had better be there or John would have to answer to him.

“Hello Mr. Dickenson,” Hayward said with a dole of anticipation. Richard nodded his head, but continued for his doorway incessantly. Hayword had dreamed of being able to confront Mr. Dickenson, hoping to move up in stature. People even thought he was a little on the loose side because he had been seen talking to himself. More like a full

blown conversation is what they actually witnessed. What the watchers didn't know was that he was just practicing for a conversation with Richard and was determined to make his worth known. "Mr. Dickenson! Blurted the gentle servant, but his boss seem unphased. "You know Mr. Dickenson. I know how to get the maximum potential out of me." The servant got the boss man's attention as indicated by the capricious look that landed on Richard's face.

He responded sarcastically. "Son, if I'm not receiving maximum potential from you, than there's no point in having you."

"Well, no sir! What I mean is, I have a lot more potential to be filled. Basically, you're using me ineffectively and inefficiently. That doesn't quite correlate with the grand scheme of things, does it?"

"No it doesn't Mr. Reynolds. So what is your point?" Mr. Dickenson said rudely as he gripped his door handle and pressed his thumb down to open it.

Hayword exclaimed, "I'm not just your ordinary security guard who is good for nothing but opening and closing gates all day. I have keen vision and much courage that will secure anything. Richard was well in the door before he was even halfway through his statement. However, Hayword still seemed relieved even though the door was slammed in his face.

"Honey," hollered Richard in a pleasing voice despite being hampered just moments before. Just a moment drifted without an answer, as he fumbled through today's mail. His attention was captured by an eccentric colored envelope that, for some reason, reminded him of his wife, maybe because the color resembled their wedding invitations. Nevertheless, he failed to open any of the mail, instead hollering loudly, "Sweetie!" Unsure if her silence was intentional, he called out again very sharply and with a touch of mendacity. Richard even looked around his huge house in that very manner, wondering where she could be. "Hey! I'm sorry dear! I know I haven't been showing you much attention, and I know I've been putting work before my precious dear." After no response, Richard's expression turned sour with possibilities.

"Honey, Where are you?" He squealed deplorably, but there still was no response, and the house seemed to grow extremely quiet. It was obviously affecting him intensely because he began to search the rooms frantically. Sprinting upstairs like a training athlete,

so overwhelmed by his sorrow, he failed to check their room until last. That is where she sat in her elegant and comfortable reading chair. Her eyes showed a touch of enjoyment at his search for her, but her face was also earnest. Richard stared her in the eyes after all of his pleading and approached her position gently. She curled up in her chair as if it were her last stand. She tried to stiffen her stare, and pressing her body against the plush leather chair.

“Boo... Look! I’m sorry,” he said grandly but with the softest tone. “I’m sorry, I know I have been neglecting you, and you deserve so much more.” Grabbing her hands softly caused her harsh expression to melt a bit. “Oh baby, I love you so much, and I know I haven’t been showing you this, but baby, tonight I confess, I’ve known all along I couldn’t mentally function without you. Let alone live with out you.” After talking in a continuous monotone, he had his wife nearly hypnotized. Sliding his hands up her arms gently, he made his way behind her to slowly kiss her neck, whispering, “I’m so sorry baby, I realize I better straighten up my act before I lose you. Oh baby, I don’t want to do that.” He kissed her neck repeatedly, and then softly said, “Well, you forgive me, huh baby?”

Besides small smacking noises, there was silence, and Susan’s last stand was far from being as admirable as the famous stand of Stonewall Jackson. In fact, it had weakened severely like Vicksburg, and she became susceptible to sudden passionate surges within her. She was trying her damndest to hold back, but she knew she had failed when she reached her left hand behind her and caressed his cheeks and neck.

“I love you so much, Dear. If you just bear with me, my services will no longer be needed on this project, and I can spend more time with you. Honey, that makes me feel so good.” All Susan could do was listen while she continued to take on lustful surges that had no signs of letting up. This was so because she had succumbed to his verbal manipulation. Her caressing got more passionate, because her strokes increased in length and quantity, and you could hear a sensual moan trickle along her tongue as she glided it along her perky lips.

“Ohm... Baby... I forgive you,” she said softly. Richard heard his loved one only vaguely, but kissed her as if those very words evoked true love in him. He placed one of her hands in both of his, and began to administer single kisses, progressing upwards. He

ended his trail of kisses at her wrist and began to grace his tongue across the traces of her fingertips, like jet skis gliding across the substance of life.

The next move involved the placement of each of her fingers into his mouth one by one, being sure to give each adequate sucking and slobbering to enhance his attempts to arouse her. It was like a kid eating a popsicle from a craving driven by inordinate heat. By this time, Richard had made his way around the chair, and from his knees he finished up the finger-licking appetizers. He then placed his head against her inner thighs, kissing both sides while massaging her lips. These actions made it irresistible for diving his nose in between, and he purposely rubbed the bone in his nose up against her bone until he heard a deep inner grinding sound. This made Susan experience heightened sensation especially when Richard softly bit both lips and licked all around.

There were no objections from Susan. In fact, it appeared she was not speaking our language at the time, and maybe was not even in our reality. Whatever the case may be, they made love on the sofa chair. Richard stroked hard for fifteen solid minutes, where they both shared satisfaction simultaneously. “Oooh...Baby,” screeched Richard with depleting breath. There were moans from his loved one, but with a little more control over respiratory functions. “Come on ...,” exclaimed Richard, grabbing both hands and pulling the Susan’s seemingly lifeless body. The path was for the bedroom and she followed like a princess in distress, holding tight to her prince.

The first action taken upon entering was diving on the bed, where the two cuddled for about thirty minutes. Their kisses and smooches were periodic, but all of a sudden they became more frequent and mostly generated by Richard. “I love you. Look what you make me do!” Pressing hard against her, Susan realized quickly it was time for more action. Richard was definitely full surged and tingled within, but so did she. He wanted some more and Susan was surely sodden in between. They made love again. This time he had more leverage, and she reached more than one goal this time. After several different postures, she obtained three on the scorecard, but Richard wasn’t about to stop. However, stamina was drifting, so he needed more feeling to maintain strength. “Turn around,” commanded Richard. “Here, like this...” Susan obeyed his every command. Back in the original standard position, so to speak, he watched himself stroke slowly, very slowly, in and out until almost pulling completely out. “Oooh yeah baby, you’re so wet, I want to be

inside you.” With just the tip barely touching the inner lips, then inserting slowly and as deeply as possible, he watched this process repeat itself with greatened pleasure. After about ten minutes, he placed both hand even with both of her shoulders. Placing her legs spread wide, he literally did push ups. This caused for a different entry point and gave Susan a totally different sensation. After about ten minutes, he panted because fifty pushups meant fifty strokes. A full work out was performed on, Susan and she enjoyed every minute. The love in Richard’s body poured because this process repeated throughout the night, with time intervals varying between an hour and a little more. At one point, he had even scarfed down a snack and harked up a cigar before delving into his wife’s lust once again.

The next morning, that glare was commanding once again, causing Susan to toss and turn. “Honey,” poured out of her lips, which were smashed from her face and mouth being pushed do far into her pillows that she was nearly suffocated. Feeling her hands about the bed, she noticed only her hands glide across silky sheets, and that the sun was undefeated. She rose with a bit of frustration from the empty feeling her bed gave. Upset at the fact she couldn’t hold her honey was enough, but that glare was truly the dominant factor in her rude awakening. It was proven because Richard experienced that same glare about thirty minutes before. Susan sat up and turned her back towards the glare, taking nearly an hour to get out of bed.

Meanwhile, Richard was already directing the office personally, gathering any needs for the project. The survey crew was on their way. The plane flight was smooth and the four gentlemen finally landed in beautiful but wild Amazonian land. The small airstrip had remained the same since Richard’s last invigorating encounter. The air was sill accompanied with the sun’s vibrant shine, and the humidity was overwhelming. The four gentlemen exited the bombardier built jet Richard had reserved for them.

Nick Fusil was the first to exit the plane in his same confident and cocky manner. “Goddamn! Shit! It’s hot as fish grease. I see why we’re getting paid, quote-unquote, big bucks.”

The others exited, and with no hesitation, Ron replied, “Nick, man, you can stand a little heat for the bread.”

Nick looked at Ron with a pitiful gaze, replying. “Yeah, I’ll bet! You Mexican,

Spanish, Puerto Rican muthafuckas are used to this heat.”

“Nick, don’t start with me, because your black ass is pretty scorched yourself. The last I heard, it was pretty hot in Africa.”

“Man. I haven’t been to Africa in over four hundred years. Shit, we the brown race now, just living in America. At least we’re not so damned emotional.”

Gary looked at the others and said, “Knock it off. We’re here to make some money and that is all.”

The scrawny old man from the tower approached the men. “Hey gentlemen,” he said shrewdly and still with an unidentifiable accent. “I guess you gentlemen are Richard’s men. That big old cargo helicopter sitting over there just arrived. The pilot should still be inside. He can help you all load the chopper and fly you to the destination.

“Excuse me, but who are you?” Nick declared, stepping in front of everyone and sounding very demanding. The old man shrugged his shoulder and kept silent.

He started walking towards the helicopter and Milo Evans followed. “Come on guys, follow me,” uttered Milo. The old man proceeded in front of the crew with a swagger and said nothing for the moment.

“Damned hot, and I thought Florida was hot!” cried Nick while continuing to complain about the fierce heat that seemed to hold him down and pound on him. Gary seemed unaffected as he puffed away. Milo and Ron were engaged in their own conversation that brewed with laughter.

Finally reaching the chopper, the old man said, “Gentlemen! The pilot!” Not quite sure of his name, he continued, sputtering, “He can fly you all and help load or unload, or whatever it is you need to do. I don’t know what the plan is, but the man seemed obsessed.” The men loaded the helicopter and the old man returned to his tower. The pilot was silent as he sat in his cockpit and fiddled with the gadgets before him.

The gentlemen sat down, but Nick couldn’t resist blurting out, “Well, Mr. Rude, I guess you don’t speak...”

Milo interjected, “Excuse me, sir. What is your name and function, or at least after you drop us off?” The pilot remained silent for a moment, looked at Milo and then glanced over at Nick, and finally declared, “I was instructed to fly you to the project site, and to help with any unloading.”

“Are you camping out with us.”

The pilot chuckled before saying, “Oh No...! I’m just a pilot who is dropping you off at your destination.”

Nick spoke out boldly as if Milo’s interruption irked him. “You mean you’re leaving us out here! Oh, Hell no! Just leaving us in the middle of nowhere?”

“Hey look!” The pilot yelled dejectedly. “I’m not paid to go camping in a thick rainforest.” He chuckled again before completing his statement. “Oh no! I’m sorry.”

“Hey Nick, we’re getting paid for this, OK. Be easy,” replied Ron.

“The pilot yelled, “Hey, will you tell Mr. Bungalow over there to put that cigar out, damn! Everybody doesn’t find it easy to inhale the smell of crude tobacco and used motor oil. My helicopter is not an auto shop.”

Gary said nothing but continued to puff away.

“Just fly the damned helicopter,” replied Nick.

Milo looked out of the window and noticed the drifting Amazon below, and he asked, “What about an emergency, how can we contact you.”

“There’s radio equipment that you all will be setting up in your camp. Mr. Dickenson will arrive in a couple of days.” The gentlemen registered discomfort on their faces, but they had nothing else to complain about. The remaining flight was calm, but the pilot was aggravated from the smoke Gary persisted to exhale. “OK gentlemen, we are finally here. Now you men can get the hell out of my sight.”

“Well, thank you too,” replied Nick.

The pilot adjusted the helicopter controls and proceeded to descend. The landing was smooth and the four men were eager to get out of the cramped helicopter. Nick jumped out of the helicopter and looked around excitedly. With an amazed look upon his face, he shouted, “Goddamn. Now where the hell are we?”

Milo replied, “I showed you on the map.”

“Yeah, I know, but I didn’t imagine we’d be in the middle of a jungle.” Ron looked as if he had seen a ghost. “Oh man, how in the hell are we going to start this survey with all these thick trees, man?!”

In the meantime, Gary unloaded his supplies while Ron and Nick continued their complaints. Gary then walked over to the banks and scanned the scenery. “Milo!”

shouted Gary.

“Yes Gary, what do you need?”

Gary trudged over with an obvious look of disappointment. “There’s no way in the hell I can build a boat dock with this limited equipment.”

“Well, what are you missing?” “Well, first of all, look at the shoreline. I’m going to need some digging done, not to mention special equipment. The boat is too big.”

Milo looked puzzled, but then advised Gary to improvise. “Just build a small one. We may have to anchor the boat and bring smaller ones to shore.”

“OK! That will work.”

“Oh Gary, do you have enough bagged cement to build a landing pad for the choppers, because this area seems a bit soft and mushy to land.”

“Yeah, I noticed that. That Briscoe guy must be used to this area.” The pilot had finally told them his name in flight.

“Hey Briscoe, this ground is pretty tough to land on, huh!”

“Well, this cargo chopper has a strong motor to take off with — quick sand probably won’t stop it from ascending.”

“Great! Great!” Milo declared, but he was continuing to speak commandingly. “Has all the equipment been unloaded?”

“Yes,” exclaimed Captain Briscoe. The pilot advised of his departure and told them to radio if they encountered any problems. Nick looked on, anxious to chastise.

“Hey, you fucker! You better not leave us here, shit. I don’t do jungles, and where I’m from, we kick the ass of any muthafucka who wants to strand another muthafucka!”

“Calm down, Nick! Gentlemen, listen up! We need to devise a plan to get this job done.”

“I don’t know man, Milo! It seems, I don’t know! Something hasty to me.”

“I don’t understand Nick, look at it this way. We will be able to contact him by radio.”

“Are you sure about that,” replied Nick with a slander in his eyes and his anger boiling within.

“Yes, I’m sure the radio is adequate. Isn’t that right Mr., or Captain, Briscoe!”

Briscoe showed slim patience and offered an agitated response. “The radio is already set

to the necessary frequency. You just make sure you connect it to adequate power. A good generator, like the one I helped unload, should suffice.”

“Gary, that’s a check... OK, great! Gentlemen, first we need to get started on the camp, and Gary, do the best you can with the dock situation. Make sure the camp’s rain proof. I hear there’s a lot of rain in this part of the globe.”

“Yeah, all we need now is to get drenched and have to radio in.” Nick hawked in his throat and spit out a huge pile of cold mucous after letting everyone know how he felt.

“OK men, let’s get that camp up first. We’ll be sleeping the night here. So the camp is first, and the dock is second.”

“Hey, Milo! Do you think it would be better to take first recordings along banks and mark those as endpoints.”

“Go ahead, Ron. I’m listening.”

“That way, all we have to do is follow the eastern coast of this godforsaken land, to whatever distance is necessary.”

Captain Briscoe had overheard the conversation just before departing and said, “Hey, that’s a shortcut. I don’t know if my boss would appreciate this.

“The math will do the rest,” Ron continued despite Briscoe’s rude butting in. “That’s all we want right, the dimensions! I heard something about measuring dimensions and that’s all.”

“Yeah!”

“But he will need us again when he brings the engineers with him, so there may be more money involved,” replied Milo after huddling his crew to keep Briscoe from hearing them again. They were all amenable to the prospect of more money, but Nick doubted he would return. Just as that thought was chemically induced, he slapped his legs and blurted, “Yeah, I don’t need any money, or whatever, more money. This will be enough! These damned mosquitoes, or shit, I don’t even know if they are mosquitoes. Well, some are, but damn, they look like little dragons. What the fuck is this?” Nick ground at his face and slapped at his other leg. “You see what I mean. I must have sweet blood. I know ya’ll being bit, but you act like you’re not. See, I was tricked into this job, so yeah, I’m going to take my money. Then, I’m getting the fuck out of here, and I’m never coming back.” Nick had comical intimations in his tone, but he was always serious.

Gary proceeded with preparations for building the camp, but first he mixed the concrete with Amazonian waters. He prepared a mixture to help build a simple foundation for the camp, about thirty to fifty meters from shoreline. Nick began setting up their tents, while Milo and Ron set up the survey scoping equipment.

“Ron! Here’s the plan. I’ll walk down the north bank, to the east. I’ll go until I reach the shoreline. We’ll record in increments of 100 meters. After we have completed this side, we will then walk south along the eastern bank and repeat the process.”

“Well, how far down do we go?”

“We are supposed to be very close to the midpoint of this project, so according to this map, not tremendously far.”

Meanwhile, Gary hacked away with his hammer, his cigar hanging from the corner of his slightly closed lips. “Hey Nick, hold that, will ya please?”

“Yeah! Hold up and let me finish tying this down and I’ll be right over there.”

Ron and Milo proceeded with their plan, and Gary, with some casual help from Nick, built a waterproof lab equipped with a gas tank for fuel and a power generator. The next thing was living quarters suitable for the living conditions of a rainforest. He didn’t really need much of the concrete, so he built a mini-wall around the tents Nick had set.

“Nick, give me a hand with this digging.”

“Hey, you didn’t tell me about this. I’m not a digger.”

“There’s a shovel in the lab,” Gary said with a bully’s mentality. Nick did join him and they proceeded to dig. Maybe an hour went by and the heat poured grossly upon the men.

“Shit, it’s hot as fuck,” Nick said, seemingly with his last breath, and the clatter of his shovel as he tossed it to the ground served as punctuation.

“OK, that’s enough, we can stop.”

“No!” Gary exclaimed, “just a little more.”

“Oh no, I’m through.” Gary said with a look of disappointment growing upon hearing his friend’s reply.

“What’s wrong with you, man. We still got more shit to do. You’re trying to make this extremely laborious in this bug-infested land.” “OK, OK, let us lay the concrete. At least can you get the finisher while I set up and prepare to pour.” Nick fetched the water

while Gary continued to work rigorously, like he always did. He was a hard working man, and his appearance supported that claim. On the other hand, Nick was a hotshot-know-it-all, but he didn't know it all, at least all that his attitude would suggest. He was indeed keen and aggressively outspoken, quite the opposite of Gary, especially the hard work part. If it weren't for his brilliance, he wouldn't be here, and the fact that these two were antipodal is probably why they worked well together.

“So Gary, what do you think?”

“What do you mean, Nick?”

“Well, about out here! Isn't this kind of extreme?” “Indeed, I guess the extreme part of it is what it takes for the big bucks.” Gary spoke in spurts because he puffed his cigar in three second intervals, and Nick watched pathetically.

“Hey, it's a job, and if this is what it takes for the real money, then I'm all for it.”

“Hmm...,” Nick smirked, and the gentlemen finished the task.

Chapter 8

The sun was beginning to descend into the latter part of the western skies, and those who could see it were astonished by the glistening reddish-orange King as it completed one more cycle.

“Hold up, Milo. You’re moving too fast.”

From the distance came an echoed reply. “I’m trying to hurry up and finish before... oh shit!”

“What’s the matter,” Ron called out frantically as he accelerated his pace.

“Damn,” was all Ron heard, and he replied. “What! What is going on? Milo!”

There was a stagnant moment of silence before Milo could explain his grief. “I didn’t see this on the map,” Milo whined.

“What Milo? What?” Ron yelled as he approached closely, noticing Milo point with aggression.

“Holy shit, a goddamn stream.” Ron had a puzzled look as he gazed at the roaring waters raging through the jungle.

Milo continued, “We need to get across to measure the remaining distance to the eastern shoreline.”

Ron scanned his readings and suggested, “Well, how far could it be. I mean, we’ve measured this far.”

“But look, Ron! This stream isn’t on the map, so I don’t know if its 100m or 250m.”

“We’ll, what the fuck are we going to do?”

“Tell you what, let me see,” Milo said with a tone of growing confidence. “I’m going to run along this stream and see if there’s some way to cross it.”

“Ah huh.” A chuckle sputtered from Ron’s mouth and he said, “I don’t know if we can ford that stream — it’s roaring.”

“Hold this,” cried Milo as he darted his way boldly alongside the stream. Ron accepts his comrade’s instruments, and then he watches as Milo slowly disappears into the thick forest. Ron clutched what he was holding harder as Milo became more and more

difficult to see. He watched until Milo dropped out of his sight. In fact, the men knew that they needed hurry up with the remaining land because the light was dimming noticeably. Ron found this out when he tried to run after his boss.

The sun was indeed setting, but it was difficult to determine because of the thick trees, but they had also underestimated the evening illumination in this forest land. It was not easy to see far ahead, and Milo was the first to find that out as he fought his way through thick branches, dense vines, and rough terrain. This proved even more difficult than it would normally be in a rainforest because he traveled on the edge of this mighty stream. The current traveled deep into the thick forest and showed no sign of an ending.

Milo began to get frustrated and did not realize how far downstream he had traveled. "Damn it!" His grunts and moans grew in frequency with his agitation. "Shit, Hmm..." The frustration now was being translated into determination, however, and he continued to fight through. At this point, he had forgotten what the true objective was in crossing the stream, but he wasn't aware let alone concerned about the loss of focus. Eventually, it became apparent there was no way across, and this caused him to now refocus into his own little zone. His paces began to increase as did his breathing, which corresponded to his every dedicated effort.

Clump, clump!

"Argh! Oh shit damn, damn, damn! Shit, I'm bleeding? I didn't see that damned sticker bush," screamed Milo in pain and showing it all as he stared the bush down. Milo picked himself up and sat on a tree stump to try to regain his breath. Blood ran furiously down his leg, and he neglected to wipe it, only to mope in disbelief. It was getting quite dark now, and he had wandered quite far. He looked at the stream with vengeance, because it was the reason why he was in this situation in the first place. He glanced at the blood that ran down his leg, almost giving it a dull stare, but then he quickly looked up at the stream with the same attitude for just a short moment. The path he thought would get him back to camp was now what he wanted to locate. However, he did not move. He only looked around several times before getting stuck gazing only at the roaring stream.

He began to notice the beauty, then in the corner of his eyes, "What the fuck!" Looking up quick and distorted, he thought his eyes had caught the glimpse of a buck-naked man dashing through the forest. He dismissed this as an illusion, a hallucination

brought on by his circumstances, and continued to stand hunched back over this huge tree stump. He thought to himself how amazing this stream was that he'd found flowing through the forest, but somehow the trees remained rooted. It resembled a river flowing through the jungle, and the beauty of the stream struck him again, but the sight of that man disturbed the wild elegance the stream represented. He could not deny what he thought he saw now. In an effort to see what, or who, seemed to be watching, Milo stumbled over the tree stump, and immediately called out in distress, hoping Ron could hear him even though he had traveled very far.

Just before, when Milo had raged in terror, Ron believed he had heard something of that nature. He couldn't really decipher the sounds, or even the fact his buddy called out in distress. The fact that fear engulfed him, and his inability to make sense of all the different forest sounds, is probably what distorted his hearing. Nevertheless, Ron walked forward because Milo had not returned. The Latino man was reluctant to follow the treacherous path Milo had trotted moments before. "Milo!" Ron yelled loudly, again and again. "Milo," again exclaimed Ron even louder than before, but to no avail. He began to drift beyond his current position because he couldn't see very well. He also began to worry after several calls went unanswered. In a terrified manner, Ron quickly darted back toward camp to get the other crew. His frantic get away was evident, because he nearly stumbled over every other stump that was in his way.

Finally making within shouting range of camp, he yelled, "Nick, Gary, hey man I need your help. Milo went off into the forest and wouldn't answer when I called for him. I thought I heard him cry for help." The men's attention was disrupted from their feasting upon a squirrel Gary had skinned and roasted. They both looked up to see why Ron was panting.

"What's wrong?" yelled Nick.

"Oh man! Fellas, you all got to help me."

"What! Where's Milo?"

"That's the problem. He went off into the woods and has not returned."

A chuckle came from Nick's mouth and he said, "He's probably fucking with your scary ass."

"No way, man! We came across a stream and he went to see if it could be crossed

but he never came back. I think he may have tried to cross and fell in — no telling what is in that murky water. We need to find Milo.”

“OK, OK, calm down! Calm down,” said Gary in a surrendering tone.

Before he could say anything else Nick blurted, “Calm down, damn! You scary fuck, we’ll find him.” Come on Gary, let’s go and find Milo for this scary cunt.”

“Man, fuck you. I know when something is not right.”

“Oh yeah, sure Ronnie boy!”

Ron became frustrated at Nick’s comments, but he ignored him by speeding ahead of the crew to the last spot he saw Milo.

Milo still sat next to the stream that wound within the depths of the forest and revealed no true beginning or ending. Blood had run unceasingly from his wound caused by his earlier blunder. There was also a botch on his head from his stumbling over the stump that he now used to relax and observe the stream, perhaps the man he’d seen in the trees if he showed himself again, and his wound. The head wound was the cause of his disorientation, and the reason for being severely startled as he plunged headlong into the water. Splashing violently, the relative coolness gave way to a burning sensation as his nose filled with water. The water also soothed his injuries with coolness. Finally floating to the top after plunging deep, he was when able to gasp for air and cough any trespassing water out. Even though he got this somewhat relief, his wound did not stop bleeding. This fact made the blood permeate the stream, and it began drifting on the currents, which he knew was not a good thing for him because he did not know what could be lurking in this winding stream.

His wounds weren’t making his panic better, which now pulsed with pain because the cold water effect had worn off. The blood continued to drip, making a long and scent filled trail. He was certain that there were all kinds of things in this water: alligators and crocodiles, water moccasins and anacondas. There were certainly all types of creatures lurking in the forest, especially a small isolated stream whose source was the mighty Amazon. There were fishes of all types: eels, stingrays, and even blood sucking leeches. Milo floated about, trying rigorously to stay above water, not only to catch his breath, but also not to notice what was beneath him. In fact, what was below these murky waters were all sorts of unknown creatures. There were also things of beauty swimming

below — gaudy uncatalogued fish that were colorful and swam in synchronistic formations giving true meaning to nature. There were also spotted bass with their black dotted spots on their tails all about. At the bottom were beautiful fish with red bellies that swam in huge schools, their swimming patterns resembling military formations. They appeared more organized than any other fish, and reflected that same beauty from a distance. But all of a sudden their harmonious and synchronistic swimming became erratic and unstable. They appeared to have been aroused and now began to swim in huge swarms. The scent of blood was evident to these Amazonian creatures.

As if he knew, Milo began to swim more frantically, sensing something in this water may want him for a meal. He knew he needed to get out the moment he plunged in yelling, “Help! Somebody help!” The water gagged him slightly and it was heard in his every cry. “Help, oh shit, oh shit! Ahhh...!” Milo yelled as loudly as he could manage. A huge swarm of piranha’s teeth had engaged his wound fiercely, and they continued to strike by the hundreds. In moments, they had disintegrated his wound and continued to saw away with their teeth. Ten seconds later, Milo had a vacant stare upon his face. The very blood that kept him alive had dripped out of him, and the menacing fish continued to munch away leaving gapping holes in his legs. Hundreds of muscular fish with dentures that the local Indians used to cut their clothes were now being used to cut Milo. Thirty seconds had passed and they were now inside his cavity, feasting upon liver, heart, and stomach. Continuing in massive swarms, they engorged into what’s left of the organs and finished the remaining flesh.

There wasn’t much left of Milo, except his partially torn clothes still hanging upon his skeletal frame, specifically his coat. The brain was valuable for its nutrients, and the fish ate every morsel as soon as they chewed through his neck cavity. Only scarce remnants of flesh remained, and dangled from his bones. Milo’s horrible death had brought much joy to other life forms. All anyone would have seen was his coat floating above water and the splashing the carnivore fish made. The currents drifted him down stream that winded within the dark expanse of this grim forest. Finally, a branch caught the coat, which left what was left of the lifeless Milo suspended in one spot while the fish continued to assure every opportunity to get some calories was met.

Meanwhile, the others were unaware that their rescue attempts were slightly

behind schedule. After running far ahead of the others, Ron stopped to gasp furiously in an effort to catch his breath. He waited for his friends while he continued to swoon from his extreme adrenaline rush. Ron stood with his hands on his knees and looked firmly in the direction he believed Milo had vanished. Fierce and timid eyes alike produced uncertainty in him as they peered from the darkness, and he began to shudder inside upon hearing Gary and Nick's cluttered conversation approaching.

"Are you trying to leave us, Ron?"

"Yeah! Goddamn, your running your ass off, and you ask for our help. Since you're running your ass off, why in the fuck you ain't run your ass off and find Milo?"

The men were now all together, but Gary uttered immediately after Nick spoke, "There's no way he could have crossed this. How?" Gary questioned. "I'm sure he knew that."

"Well let's go, he went this way along the stream." The three gentlemen followed the path in search of their missing comrade. Nick led the bunch, followed by Ron and Gary. Ironically, Nick walked ahead. It seemed Ron's enthusiasm had worn off, but they all called for Milo and fought the same rugged terrain. They were all pumped up now. Their hyperventilation was due to a sense of urgency to hear their comrade's voice. Ron was actually pumped for more than one reason, however — the other was Nick's constant mouth. He wasn't scared, and courage was all about him this very moment. Gary remained calm, but one thing was different about him. Forgetting to light a cigar usually didn't happen no matter what the emergency, but this occasion seemed to mark that as fair minimum.

"Milo!" Ron called out trying to avoid the response from Nick.

"Well, where did he go?"

"I don't know, man."

"What do you mean, you don't know? Where did you last see him?"

"Ummm, I last saw him..." A bit of hesitation as to their location had set in and his pondering where they were at was evident. "Where I waited for you back there." Ron pointed in the direction of the spot where he had waited for them, when he first ran off ahead of Gary and Nick.

"You mean you didn't even go look for the man before you came running to us?"

At least you could have gotten some sense of direction. You see what I mean, Gary.” Nick looked at Gary and shook his head in disgust. He pointed his flashlight downstream and began to observe while speaking, “I don’t see much of shit. You think it’s a good idea to split up.”

Gary pondered this possibility for a brief moment, and Ron helped by adding, “I don’t know if that’s a good idea. I know Milo. He was looking to conquer this stream. Believe me, he stood close to the edge.” Nick looked at Ron, and for once, he convinced them. The crew minus one stood together now and fought their way downstream. However, by this time, Ron was a little ways ahead of Nick and Gary. His confidence had been boosted by speaking his mind. He was determined, because without Milo, Nick was left to run all over poor old Ron. He searched with his flashlight, and he saw in the distance light water disturbances that produced a cause for urgency. He directed his flashlight in that direction. “Milo!” he hollered sharply. Then Ron noticed what appeared to be Milo’s raincoat, who had been wearing it for the protection it offered from mosquitoes. It was complimented by a pair of yellow rain boots, and Ron noticed one over there by the tree stump, which initially caused him to sharpen his eyesight. “Hey, I found one of his boots. I told you! I told you! He must have fallen in,” cried Ron.

Nick pointed his flashlight in the direction of Ron’s cries as they approached him. In the near distance Ron cried, “It looks like he’s holding onto a branch or something. We’ve got to get him and pull him out.” Ron squealed louder, waiting for Gary and Nick, “Milo! Milo! We’re coming! Hold on!”

Gary and Nick arrived at that very tree stump Milo once rested upon, and they immediately noticed bloodstains. This alarmed them and made them take Ron cries a little more seriously. Ron was just ahead and he continued to call out. His comrades heard, but they were awed at what they currently laid their eyes upon. Gary looked puzzled. “Why in the hell was he doing? I know he wasn’t trying to cross here.”

Nick gazed at the curious setting and advised strongly, “Come on, let’s find out what Ron’s squealing about.”

“Hey guy’s, over here! I think I found him. Look... over there.” They all gathered around to focus in on the apparent presence of Milo, but before moments could pass, Ron blurted. “That doesn’t look like splashing!”

“What is that?” Gary exclaimed while he squinted his eyes to fight the darkness. “Oh shit man, I don’t think he’s holding on. I don’t think he’s holding on. Oh shit man, what is that?” Ron proceeded to try and reach for Milo.

“Get your hands back!” Nick shouted while pulling Ron back fast. “You wanna get your ass ate up, or at least bit up.”

“What!?”

“Don’t what me, you see.”

“What the fuck,” replied Ron with amazement coupled with exasperation.

Gary said, “Oh man, those piranhas had a feast.”

Ron looked at Gary and Nick, and then glanced upon what was left of Milo before he started puking. “Oh no man, no man, shit! How could this happen?” cried Ron.

“Because you left his ass, dummy.”

“Hold on, Nick. Now leave him alone. Let’s get the hell out of here.”

“We need to call that Richard muthafucka to get us the fuck out of here, or that pilot. Or whoever.”

“How do we get back?”

“See! See! I told you we shouldn’t have let that pilot leave us.”

“Calm down Nick, just follow this same stream.”

The men ran back the way they came as best they could and hysteria ran rampant in the air. The entire way back, the men bickered continuously. although Gary spoke hardly at all, except for the few times he had to save Ron’s neck from Nick’s constant verbal abuse. In fact, Gary kept them on track to camp, because if not, Ron and Nick would probably have wandered off into the wilderness.

“Man, I don’t believe this shit... You done let Milo fall in the water and get eaten by fish...,” said Nick disappointedly. “I mean how and the hell can that happen?”

Gary intervened with smooth comments. “Gentlemen, we need to remain focused. I believe just ahead is where we need to take that left path.” They made their way closer to camp before Gary was the first to say, “Ron, didn’t you have a cell phone. I know it’s a long shot, but see if you can get a reception. Call that Richard guy.”

Ron reached for his phone and Nick asked, “Do you even have the number, a klutz like you.” “Yes you jackass. It’s in the phone. Now leave me the fuck alone.”

“Call him,” exclaimed Gary.

Ron searched for the number while complaining. “I’m not sure if we’ll get a reception.” He pressed the talk button and paced back and forth trying to get the clearest reception. “Here, I think I can hear OK.” He stood over a patch in the forest where he could see the night sky and that was manageable. The phone rang and Ron stared for some reason away from the western flowing river, but towards the same jungle that had consumed Milo before. “Hello, this is Susan. How may I direct your call?”

“I need Richard!” Oh I’m sorry. The office is closed. You will have to call back during normal business hours.” Ron stared into the eyes of something that concealed itself behind a tree that lay in the distance. It was dark, so his sights were dim, but what he could see was stunning and terrifying.

He lost contact with the eyes when Nick snatched the phone from his clutched hands. “Give me that,” he said abruptly! “What the fuck did they say, Ron? Hello, is anyone home? Earth to Ron. What the fuck did they say?” “I don’t know man. I don’t know,” replied Ron with the panic evident in his voice.

“What do you mean, you don’t know? What the fuck is wrong with you man? You look like you saw a ghost. Gary, man, get a hold of that young man.” “What’s the fucking number you dimwit.” Nick proceeded to call the company after literally squeezing the numerals out of him. The phone rang again and Gary consoled Ron, trying hard to find out why he was in a daze.

“Hello this is Susan. How may I direct your call?”

“Yes, I need Richard.”

“I’m sorry, but...”

“This is an emergency, what do you mean I’m sorry,” exclaimed Nick with agitation boiling in his voice. “What is his home number?”

“I’m sorry but that information is unavailable.”

“Is that all you are is sorry? What do you mean it’s unavailable. I need someone immediately, and I can care less about how sorry you are.”

“Sir, listen! The office is closed. Would you like his voice mail?” “Look lady, there’s been an accident. Who’s in charge of this project in South America.”

“Oh, the project. One moment please.” The operator transferred the call as soon as

she realized who was on the other end.

“This is John! How can I help you?”

“Look John, is that your name?” A polite yes followed and Nick continued his yelling. “You need to get Richard on the phone, now!”

“Wait, who is this?”

“Nick, with Milo and Sons Contractors Inc. You know, we were hired for this jungle bullshit.”

“Oh yes sir. How’s it going?”

“Not dandy, that’s for damned sure. Look, I suggest you get us the fuck out of here. One of our men has been eaten alive. I hope you all don’t want us to stay here and be done the same way. I think not. I think you muthafuckas are crazy if you expect that.”

A silence persisted after Nick had gotten the frustration off his chest. The sounds of the night time forest vibrated all around them. While Nick waited to be connected to Richard, Gary and Ron had a quite conversation between them. However, those eyes watched the gentlemen once again. There were now other eyes around other trees and the sounds of the jungle seemed amplified.

Chapter 9

There were chants and the sound of wood being struck echoing as if primitive instruments were being beaten upon. The scent of the mystical loomed in the air. Images of indigenous primitive dancers performed around an intense fire. These images began when they waited to be connected to Richard, and they flashed throughout the night. However, the men were unaware of these rituals being performed within the deep expanses of the unknown. This actually had been going on ever since the foreigners arrived with their selfish intentions. Every night this ritual was being performed, every night since Richard laid eyes upon one of the natives. This ritual required consumption of rare plants and mushrooms to invoke psychedelic effects and constructive hallucinations. Although, the intruders could not hear it, the spirits were being called upon. No matter the reality, the sounds grew louder and the images flashed more intensely.

“Richard here!”

“Rich,” Nick said, with impudence and exasperation in his voice.

“How dare you,” exclaimed Richard.

However, Nick paid little attention to the fact that his address had disgruntled the other man. “Well Rich, how about you get your ass right here to South America, and get us the fuck out of here. I hope you have your checkbook as well.” Nick stood awaiting an answer, and the remaining members of his crew were paying full attention.

“Well, who am I speaking to first?”

“Fuck all that. You know who you brought down here. We don’t have time for name games, and all that bullshit... Man, my boss was just eaten, and you’re lollygagging! What the fuck?”

“OK. Ok, wait a minute! Did you say Mr. Evans?”

“Oh, now you know who we are.”

“What happened?”

“Just please get us the fuck out of here before we call the National Guard for rescue, and I’ll tell them you left us out here stranded. Law suits up your ass.”

“Hold up, sir. There’s no way I can get there tonight. The contract was for a minimum of two days, besides how do I know that this is not some prank call.”

Nick failed to respond because the rage boiled so deeply and stymied any focus for his emotions, which were in a state of flux. He thought, I didn't want to be here, but some how I had no choice. Gary was paying complete attention to this conversation, but Ron glanced off periodically to notice those eyes again. He tried not to look, but something compelled him to do so. He wanted to avoid staring directly into those eyes, but the tendency to look was too strong. He fought hard by looking in different spots, only to notice there was no escape because they were all around. His awareness had veered away from Nick's verbal assault on Richard. Just before alerting the others, he looked in one direction and noticed eyes that didn't look like the others. These were even spookier and remained in one particular spot longer than the others. The darkness in combination with thick masses of trees made seeing clearly nearly impossible. These eyes that now had Ron's full attention were even more still and shined more brilliantly.

"Hey fellows, I think we're being watched."

Gary redirected his attention from Nick's conversation to Ron. "What's up Ron?"

"I think someone is watching us! Look! Those eyes! Ron pointed at the mysterious eyes watching them, and Gary took heed when he too noticed the sharply cut eyes.

Nick saw that his companions were staring and said, "What are you all looking at." He approached their position to try to get equal view to his comrades, but his sight was not as keen. "What do ya'll see." The men didn't reply but remained focused on the hypnotizing eyes. Nick reached for his flashlight simultaneously flicking the switch, and pointing the beam of light directly at the eyes all in a smooth motion. This startled the eyes and the sound of a crackling roar followed by a suspended hiss came from directly in front of them, and the eyes darted towards the gentlemen. Like a stalker in the night and a keen predator, the jaguar chased the men like it had cubs to feed.

Ron blurted, "Oh shit a lion."

"I don't think lions are in this part of the world," exclaimed Gary standing there still. Nick had jetted before any conversation, and Ron followed before Gary could get the last words out. Nick darted faster than a track star getting out of the blocks and had a few meters on Ron. The wild slick cat was in hot pursuit, while Gary stood in the same spot and watched the cat and mouse game unfold. The two headed towards the woods

instinctively, and it was unclear who exactly the cat had his eyes on. Tree branches and limbs crackled from the panic in Nick and Ron's decampment. The cat's movements were silent and stealth itself, the creature gracefully fast. They probably intended to stay together when they first scampered off, but instincts proved Ron and Nick had different fates. Ron seemed to be slightly quicker for his fear propelled him considerably.

They began to drift apart like a 'v', and definitely not a straight one. The jungle brush made it difficult to work their way ahead, and this hungry animal closed fast. Gary was amazed that brief moment he viewed his colleagues' escapade. He had even stood there moments after they were out of sight, his eyes staring into the night. Paralyzed for just a moment, he darted for camp with severe clumsiness. He hadn't smoked a cigar, and this was longest he had gone in a while. Desperately arriving at the camp, he began immediately to fumble with the radio. Static fuzzed from his constant attempts to establish a frequency. "Please come in! This is Gary needing rescue assistance. I am transmitting from 61 degrees latitude and 15 degrees longitude, please respond. If anyone can hear me, I beg that you please respond." Gary's breath was ragged and he was raving into the headset. He then attempted other frequencies not realizing the radio was already set. "Do you read me, please come in. This is a distress call!" This was repeated constantly before hearing Captain Briscoe.

Meanwhile, Ron and Nick's fate was just about to be decided. Their voices echoed in terror. Not really sure of where to run, Nick had chosen a tree to climb. This seemed silly initially, since cats have no problem in that department. However, the cat didn't chase after him — it decided to pursue Ron. Nick looked down with breath gasping enormously from mouth and nostrils, clinging tightly to the lower branches of a winding tree. "Oh shit man, run! Run! Run!" Nick yelled louder and louder until his breath now had control over the volume of his vocals. Ron didn't need his advice one bit, nor did the wild and arcane feline, which was closing fast. The two played a brief zigzag game. Ron tried to evade the fierce cat's agility by ducking, dodging, and running with all his might. Despite his efforts, the cat continued to close on him rapidly. He used the bushes to weave through, hoping to compensate for his predator's superior quickness. That didn't help, because the cat sliced through the jungle, proving it was at home and not Ron. Nick had remained in his tree, shattered with disbelief, and he showed no signs

of coming down.

“Captain Briscoe responding to the stress signal transmitted on delta/gamma frequency, copy!”

“Hello! Hello!” Captain, please, we need rescuing!”

“What seems to be the problem...copy.”

“One of our crew members is dead, and we’re being chased by wild animals.”

“Is this the crew I flew to the site?”

“Yes, you dimwit.”

“Well, if you would have said who it was.”

“Just get here in a hurry!” Gary spoke his last words as if that is exactly what they were.

Captain Briscoe immediately reported in to show his loyalty to Richard. “This is Captain Briscoe, assigned to project Rainforest.”

“John here.”

“I have a distress call from your crew.”

“Are you still communicating with them?” “I have them on delta/gamma frequency.”

“Keep them calm. I need to get Richard on line.”

“This is Briscoe. Crew, are you still transmitting?”

Gary did not answer because he had just departed with some sort of manmade weapon carved out of leftover material from building the camp. He was going on a mission to help his comrades. “Do you read me? Crew, please respond.”

Gary had forgotten something of importance and heard the incoming transmission accidentally as he returned to the camp. “Yes, this is Gary. Are you fucks on your way.”

By this time Richard had been patched in for the conference call. “What’s the problem?”

“Look, you all have dropped us off in the middle of no where, basically unprepared. Shit, if I would have known, I would have brought my goddamn rifles. Shit, I did know, but this was such a rush I didn’t have time to bring ‘em, but I’ll be goddamned!”

“OK, OK, tell me what happened.”

“I really don’t have time to tell you a story. You better get here ASAP. I need to go and find the other surviving crew members.” Gary turned away from the radio, but he then turned and stared at it as if it were responsible for their delayed rescue. He reached for a cigar with one hand and had a weapon clutched in the other, and then he darted off to find where his friends and co-workers could be.

Gary’s demeanor resembled Milo’s when he was trying to conquer the stream. It was also similar in the sense that the adrenaline level was a hindering factor. Not to mention the fact he didn’t know where to start searching. All he knew was the general vicinity where the chase initiated. They scattered so quickly, and it all happened so fast, that it was tough to know which direction to take. Somewhere in the middle is what he was thinking, following the river until he reached the spot where the cat first lashed out. He spoke to himself aloud, “Just follow along that path. I should find something. If I turn my back towards the river, and search directly in front of me, I should run into to Nick or Ron.” He proceeded with vigor. Ron now grew silent and only sounds that came from his direction were his feet clashing with brush. A pure rush of adrenaline fueled his movements, which also gave Ron the ability to survive one more thing. He made a sharp cut and tumbled down an abrupt incline. The bruises and dirt accumulation went unnoticed — he seemed immune to the pain because his life was more important. After getting up, he quickly resumed running, Ron’s fear pulsating in an invisible aura around him. He could feel the eagerness reverberating in the cat’s eyes, and then he could hear the roars. Ron’s next step was vital because it not only sealed his fate but rearranged it totally. The bushes crackled, so did the leaves, and the brush that was pushed aside. A deep and desperate southern accent cried out.

“Nick!” A pause followed, but the night was far from silent because the forest was filled with creepy sounds. It was pitch black by this time, and Gary only had a simple lighting utensil. Another cry uttered from Gary’s mouth. “Ron.” Panic loomed in Gary’s mind, but he struggled to keep it under control. Lighting a cigar, he stood there wondering if he should continue to go straight ahead. Puffing rigorously to assure it was lit, he felt a sudden calm from the initial inhalation. He walked forward like a soldier experiencing guerilla warfare. Little did Gary know, the spirits of the forest were literally

his counterparts in some ritualistic battle. The chants didn't stop. In fact, they got louder and eyes pierced throughout the forest. Gary penetrated deeper, looking very hard while calling out for his colleagues. Deep sounds of bass echoed from some primitive instruments within the forest and slowly became noticeable to Gary's ears. The harmonic thumps caused curiosity in Gary's mind, and began to severely distort it. He now veered off a little from the task of finding Ron and Nick, but instead opted to investigate the sounds that intrigued him. It required splendid effort to cut through the brush, and darkness was not an ally. Sweat poured, and he probably burned a few pounds in his efforts. His breath was also depleted to the point that he discarded his cigar gratefully.

Ascending a slight slope was partial cause for his lack of respiration, not to mention his obesity. Tired from the sudden trek, he yelled, "Shit!" Deciding to sit down near a tree that sat at the top of this slope, he received an unexpected view in some uncharted section of the jungle. He tried to regain his breath in huge heaps. Gary rolled over on his stiff stomach, which resemble a sturdy blubber pad. The mist was heavy, and his eyes struggled to see through it. The thick jungle brush also played a tag team partner in his vision impairments. If only his hearing senses were impaired, because the sounds of owls, unidentifiable insects, and other miscellaneous creatures were enough to make him crazy. The thumps also got louder and chants were now becoming recognizable. Gary's breath had finally achieved equilibrium, and the mist drifted apart just a bit. The right breeze helped in the manipulation of the mist, and made it manageable in eyesight terms. However the view was little, and required that he squint, confirming that the breeze did a lousy job. Nevertheless, he began to focus just a little, and he noticed darkness all around him. His pupils dilated severely as he adjusted to the simple light at an angle. The dark patch began to become a little clearer, as he noticed a huge tree that was larger than any in the immediate forest. He even looked up at the tree next to him and thought, 'Wow!' There were huge trees virtually everywhere, but he refocused on this one because it had an attractive aurora that captured anyone who looked too long. He stared at it and the dark area became clearer. He noticed people, and he thought of Ron and Nick, but he knew it couldn't be his friends he was seeing. The tree's magnetism, and maybe even some telepathic essence, stunned Gary and left him speechless. All he could do was look, and it was strange that these people were all black

people, or no! He realized they looked like Indians. This conclusion was drawn from the programming of a child, when cowboys and Indians were the main theme in his culture. These people with paint on their faces, wild briefs, and tattoos fit that very description. They were doing exactly what the childhood hoopla portrayed, dancing around that same gigantic tree with primitive instruments, chanting something harmonically that was undecipherable. There was also a spiritual essence that got stronger, and so did Gary's eyesight towards. The chants and praises seemed to pulsate vibrantly, and helped him overcome his visual constraints. He tried to think about Ron, but his thoughts were vague.

In fact, at that very moment, Ron was making that step to the left to avoid being razored with claws, but where he stepped was a soft spot that soon collapsed. A screeching shout escaped from Ron's mouth as the ground beneath him gave way. The fall wasn't long, but it wasn't easy to get grip to pull oneself up. Realizing he had fallen in some kind of hole, panic raged in his efforts to raise himself out. Grunts and groans were the sum of his attempts until he thought he needed to settle down. He figured that he shouldn't be hasty anyway and climb into the paws of a hungry feline. Ron leaned up against the dirt walls of the hole that capture him. Covered in grime, his fears convinced him he was doomed. "Help! Help!" screamed Ron to the top of his lungs. Not only was this a hole it was also a home, but Ron was just finding that out. He noticed huge red spots darting across his shoes and ankles at great speeds. The red spots Ron observed also had darker red spots on them. There were so many now. "Oh shit!" Panic and fright filled Ron's soul as hundreds and hundreds crawled all over his body, and they bit hard. Hundred of thousands of bites from head to toe is what Ron experienced, and it wasn't pleasant. He must have jumped, skipped, and danced all over the tiny space trying to run, climb, and pull himself up, but to no prevail. He screamed and raged in agony. "Ahh shaaaahhhhtttt...Shit! Help! Oh my God, please, please. Get them off me, ahhh!!!" This yelling should have been heard throughout the forest, because the small bites came by the hundreds. He must have slapped, punched, and clawed himself to misery because of the little critters. He even tried to scrape them off frantically, but that didn't help because he was caved into a nest. Hundreds even thousands overlapped his body entirely. They bit and bit until they eventually caused him to faint. He was now unconscious and being

eaten alive slowly but surely, their bites and stings seeping slowly into his blood stream. Ultimately, the toxins were the cause of his fainting, but the rest was taken care off by their enormous appetites. A body this huge would take a while, but that didn't matter. They were accustomed to working hard to stockpile enough food for the harsh seasons. Besides, there was a queen to look after, and this was enough to feed their nest for many seasons to come.

Ron now had an out-of-body experience, drifting about the forest to never return to his tomb to officially die, but instead to loom forever, trapped with the spirits of the forest. The ants sure didn't mind one bit.

The strength in the chants grew and the essence of the forest seemed to need feeding. Gary was another possible meal as he stood entranced by that stunning tree. He still stared at it vigorously, even though naked men danced around this very object. The focus he maintained became eerie, and images pulsated in Gary's mind. The forest sounds began to mute and the chants and praises were heard only as background noise. There was a connection between the huge tree and the one he was standing under. Suddenly, all sounds muted entirely. The focus on the tree before him grew stronger, and the only sound he noticed was a crackling, which was very loud, since it appeared to be the only sound that penetrated Gary's zone. It was the branch above him snapping and descending with full force. The rapid dissent in combination with the branch's mass crushed Gary's back. It squeezed the life out of him

CHAPTER TEN

It was near dawn and things had subsided. There was one rule even the bad spirits adhered to, and that was no foul play while in the presence of the King, the Amazonian sun — your majesty was due and the mist turned into morning dew. The breeze blew pleasantly as if this were paradise. The birds chirped pleasant tunes and whistles, and even the frogs croaking had a good sensation. Near camp, the sound of helicopter blades twirling through the beauty of the natural sounds could be heard. They landed the best they could, and with no delay, Richard and Briscoe jumped out.

“This is where the crew should be.”

Richard scanned the immediate area while standing in one place before replying, “Yeah, I know! This is where I instructed them to build a work station. Let’s check over there.” After pointing his hands in the direction of the camp, Richard led the way. “It sure gets hot early here.”

“Yes, so I see. The sun wastes no time in this part of the world.” Richard arrived at the camp an instant before Captain Briscoe, but lingered on while the Captain looked inside Gary and Nick’s hasty creation.

“Hello,” Briscoe said timidly, as he arched his head around to peek through the entrance. The echo was vaguely clear, but it was also clear the room was empty. “Hello, I’m responding to your stress call.” His boots clattered against the frail floor as a search of every square inch was performed. “There is no one in here. Who are we expecting, the same gentlemen I transported, correct!?” Richard looked as if he didn’t want to talk about it, and blatantly ignored him. Richard continued to walk forward, paying the questioner no attention. “Hey excuse me.” Briscoe blurted in a real effort to break Richard’s silence. He stood there, hand on chin with his elbow rested upon the arm folded beneath, and refused to take another step.

Richard did not let that stop him and he carried on, looking around but not appearing to be searching for the missing party, but just browsing casually. You could only imagine what was in his mind at this point, especially if judged by the way he

looked around. Traveling far off from Briscoe, he remained in an up, down, left, right, scan pattern that seemed systematic. Richard was indeed keenly aware of certain dangers, because he walked in a specific pattern so as to easily trail back. It was almost as if he felt his way around and this was just the beginning. Richard wasn't trained in safari ordeals, and he was he an amateur when it came to natural habitats. The fact that he walked through the forest without fear seemed strange, but maybe the sun was out and vision was sufficient gave him that courage.

"Hey! Hey! What the hell are you doing up there? What are you doing here?"

He stretched himself for a better view of the man in the tree, only to realize he was partly sleep. There was no other choice but to climb up. "OK ! Let me see! I probably can, nah! I should hmm... If I can just." His mumbling and muttering went on, but soon he began to dart his way up the tree. He propped himself on the same branch and scooted his way over to make contact with the slouched over Nick. Richard placed his hands upon Nick's shoulder and spoke softly, "Hey, excuse me!" while shaking him softly but assuring not to stop his utterances. "Sir, wake up! Wake up!" His requests became louder, sharper, and even the hand shoulder relationship got rocky. "Hey! Wake up," he said softly but with a sense of aggravation.

"Oh shit!" Shouted Nick in an amazing effort to hold on to the branch. The assaults on his sleeping had nearly startled Nick to an uncomfortable fall. Both men experienced unsteadiness, grabbing each other's shoulders to try and maintain a sudden interruption of their balance. That attempt failed, however, and Richard and Nick plummeted to the ground. Richard ended up slightly on top of Nick after the fall, and caused temporary damage to his leg. Nick yelled at the top of his lungs, "Shit! What the fuck is going on? I! Hold up... it's about time. Damn, where are the others, we need to find them. Oh... Oh...shit!" The pain from Nick's leg pulsated and caused agony to the third degree, which caused unclear thinking mixed with the trauma of the night before.

"Hey, calm down. Nick, that's your name right. I need to get you back to the helicopter — you're injured."

Nick's mood did not get much better after those seemingly sincere comments. "Have you found my friends? Oh shit... Milo! He's fucking dead, oh no! Richard watched Nick descend into sorrow and was curious as to why, but he refrained from

asking for details. “We haven’t found your friend yet, because you are the first one we have run into. I will send a search crew.”

“Good! I’ll lead them.”

“No, I’m getting you out of here. You’re in no condition to be searching for anyone.”

“No, fuck that! Look, I lost my boss, man. I won’t listen to the shit you’re talking. Matter of fact, you better have your checkbook ready, because you owe four gentlemen major bread. If I don’t leave here with something, for all this bullshit I done been through, shit, I’ll have the National Guard out here. This is the perfect story for a book, with the sinister character’s name slandered all in the mud, so don’t fucking play with me.”

“Calm down, Nick! Listen, I just have to get you safely back home. I assure you that all of your finances will be taken care of.”

Nick continued his raving, but he was a bit calmer after Richard’s guarantee of compensation. The men followed the path Richard had set out before and made it back fairly quickly. Briscoe had stood in the same spot, but now squinched over watching the ants crawl and other miscellaneous creatures linger about. He instantly stood upright when becoming aware of someone slouched over Richard for assistance.

“Help me get him in the helicopter.” Briscoe opened the door and allowed them to use his hand as leverage. They slumped Nick in ruggedly and proceeded to secure themselves. Briscoe commanded the helicopter to lift off. Richard’s eyes were the reflection of patience running thin as he glanced upon the white fluffy of clouds above them.

“What happened?” Richard exclaimed, while turning his full attention to the answerer. Nick looked at him, his eyes emotionless, and he remained quiet.

Briscoe looked at Richard after giving Nick a strange gaze. “If I would have know this was loud mouth here, I might not have answered that radio.” That got both of the men’s attention.

“Fuck you! What the hell, who is this guy?” Richard sat back and looked at Briscoe wondering why in hell he made that comment. “First of all, you muthafuckas are crazy. I know you wouldn’t have left me out here, and you better not leave my friends out

here. Milo's already dead, if anyone else is..." Nick paused as if he had to hold back any soggy emotions because he was a man. "You all won't hear the last of old Nick." A silence loomed for a brief moment.

"Wait a minute. There's more people back there, and someone's dead?" declared Briscoe with disbelief. "I assumed the others were already gone. I only spoke to one person on the radio, but... I think he did mention someone, or he had to find somebody."

"Yeah, you must have spoken to Ron or Gary, and matter of fact, it was Gary. It had to be, because me and Ron had to make a break for it."

"A break for it?"

"Yeah, a lion or something attacked us."

"No, it wasn't a lion. It had to be a jaguar, or something."

"Well, whatever he fuckin' was, he was trying to eat us. I don't know if it got Ron, oh no."

Richard blurted sympathetically, "Calm down, Nick. Calm down. We will find your friends."

Briscoe still wasn't through with all of his inquiries. "Well what happened to your friend Milo?"

"I don't know, man. It's strange."

"What do you mean you don't know?"

"Look! All I know is Ron and Milo was establishing dimensions of the site, and he mysteriously fell into a stream."

"So he drowned?"

"No, not quite. He got eaten by piranhas. Don't ask me how it happened, because it's beside me." Nick stood there looking ignorant, as someone trying to reason with logic itself. Stupefied by his own gestures, he listened in that same manner.

"You don't think your friend Ron might have pushed him in."

Nick snapped out of his condition and initiated his normally defensive attitude. "What the..., that's idiotic. That couldn't happen. Ron couldn't push anyone in any way. I don't care if he sneaks up from behind, he still wouldn't succeed." Nick began to find brief humor in Briscoe's acquisitions, but he remained defensive. "So, Rich. Are you going to call the police?"

Richard snapped, "What police? Forget the police. Were all the way in South America."

"I tell you what then, I'm calling the National Guard."

"Look, I have a friend high up in the FBI, and I'll pay him to get a scout troop," said Richard.

"Yeah, and you better pay me, or like I say, I'll have the National Guard out here. I'm sure the media would love a story like this. A greedy business man stranding his workers to perish in the deep expanse of the jungle. As a matter of fact, don't find my friends and I'll have a law suit so far up your ass you start shitting me money. Turds of thousand dollars bill, muthafucka."

Rich's face grew red, but he remained calm as he noticed Briscoe's gestures appearing to favor Nick's arguments. "All right now, we have a long plane flight ahead of us, so no need for the bickering." Everyone was tired, so they pretty much remained silent the entire flight. Briscoe remained in South America, at the tower where he was stationed. Nick and Rich were a third of the way home, and that's where they wanted to be, short of being all the way home. It was late afternoon and approaching evening, and their wives were waiting. However, the hospital would intercept Nick to take care of his dehydration and busted leg.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Dickenson had dinner prepared, and even nurtured the little one until she retreated to her room to indulge in computer games.

Mrs. Geshy was trembling from the constant accusations from her mom. "Goddamn it, I knew that muthafucka would waltz up and leave. Oh dear... Is there anything I can do, just ask."

A simple cry issued from Mrs. Geshy's mouth, then she said, "No matter, hey I'm fine...I'll call you back." Clair seemed stunned, locked in a meditative glare, but her thoughts were extraordinarily intense, as indicated by her swollen and throbbing temple. Sweat ran down her face. Fire is what was actually going on inside her, because she felt she was in control of the relationship, and it would have been her to leave him. The fact that he up and split was out of the question, and with that notion she picked up the phone.

"Precinct seventeen. Detective Andrews speaking."

"Yes, I would like to report a missing person."

The detective knew there were tears when he heard the soft cries pour from Clairra's lips. "Ma'am, what is your name?"

"I'm sorry! My name is Clairra Geshy."

"Let me transfer you to missing persons, one moment please."

Clairra continued crying while waiting for someone to respond. "Hello! Mrs. Geshy, this is Lieutenant Harrington. I would like to ask you a few questions. First, who are you reporting missing?"

"Joe Geshy, my husband."

"When was the last time you saw your husband?"

"Oh dear, he was suppose to go on a trip to South America several days ago, and I haven't heard from him."

"Well, have you and your husband been going through any problems?"

Clairra replied defensively, "No!"

"Well, what business did he have in South America?"

"He was to go with a friend, and as a matter of fact, I talked to the wife of my husband's friend, Mrs. Dickenson. She said they haven't heard from them."

"I take it that you all were friends."

"Yes, but look! My husband was happy with his relationship at home."

"I'm not disputing that, Mrs. Geshy. It's just that..."

"Look Lieutenant, all I'm asking is for you to look into it." "I'll do what I can Mrs. Geshy."

The phone hung up abruptly and Clairra sat there crying, for her life was now in shambles, with no explanations as to why. Liquid overflowed the rim of her eyelids triggering a waterfall effect. She asked herself over and over, why? She questioned her confidence and started wondering about what her mom said. The questions agitated her: Did something terrible happen, or did he really leave? "No, he didn't leave! Something terrible has happened." Her tears increased like developing cumulonimbus, and sadness soaked in.

Harrington had a sneer lingering on his face that captured the attention of his team members. "Who was that?" exclaimed Rick Powers.

"Oh that was some broad crying about her husband leaving her."

“Yea,” said Rick, “I mean, what do they want us to do? I mean, there’s nothing we can tell the husbands, you know. What do we say? Hey come back to your wife? You vowed until death do us part when you married the silly heffa.” Rick’s colleagues found tremendous humor in the subject. He even provoked a few laughs from his fellow officers.

Rick’s direct supervisor, Lieutenant Harrington, was also finding humor in his comments, but he responded ironically. “Since you find so much humor in this matter, I’m assigning you to the case. I know you understand we still have a duty to our civilians.” Immediate discomfort filled

Rick when assigned to what he thought was a repugnant case. He glanced at the address Steve displayed. “These people must be well off to live in this district. What do these people supposedly know?”

“Well Rick, that is what you are to find out. Mrs. Geshy said he was to make a trip with Mr. Dickenson, but they claimed the trip never materialized.”

“Well why didn’t it?”

“The guy never showed up. Hey, I’m not telling you to be Sherlock Holmes. Just get over there and question them, so we may get the report concluded.”

Rick sipped his coffee and looked like, Oh well, another day, another dollar. Exiting the precinct building, Rick caught a discomforting glare from the late afternoon sun. However, that did not stop him from executing his duties.

That same glare also indicated Rich and Nick were just about home. They had not broken their silence because the bickering, trauma, and shock created deep exhaustion. Nick was hurt a little, but getting paid was always revitalizing. He also knew to use that as leverage, if he told before he could get flimflammed. Nick just stared at Rich, and that stare intensified by the moment. The thought of his plans had to be just as intense. Nick had not decided who he would tell yet, but he knew he probably would tell someone as soon as he was paid.

Richard sat in front of Nick and stared steadfastly into his own world, unaware of the plot the other man was conjuring. Flashes overwhelmingly consumed. He gazed and gazed, and tried to wait patiently the rest of the flight. Only about forty-five minutes remained before arriving home, but this was not soon enough. He shifted constantly in his

seat from the violently flickering thoughts that assaulted his brain: images of Joe and what happened to his workers. He also had images of his wife, and that caused him to dismiss his friend's death as purely accidental, to tell himself that everything would turn out fine. Thinking of her helped soothe the stress that was growing significantly.

There must have been some type of mental connection, because as he thought of her, she thought of him as well. As she tended to the pots that brewed on the stove, his presence filled her thoughts and created eagerness in her cooking. Susan was actually upset with her husband, but she really missed him and waited impatiently for him to arrive. It was now less than thirty minutes before his arrival, and everything was about done. She sat down and began to read her book, while periodically glancing at their home's entrance hoping he would burst through the door. An extremely anxious demeanor was reflected in every grunt and gesture. It was not that something was extremely wrong. She just missed her loved one a lot. It was not that he was ever gone long, but he was gone frequently. Jealousy soaked in her consciousness like liquid into a sponge, and she knew this silly project assured a good reason for her envy. She tried to find comfort in dozing off on her cream velvet sofa in her casual living room, the one hardly anyone sat on. Moments after her set her drink on the luscious glass of the cast-iron end table, it was half gone and half watered down. She wasn't totally asleep because she took sips periodically.

The brief sleep she did get was thin in substance, and any little sound would awake her. A sudden exclamation blurted from Susan's mouth. "Oh shit!" Partly startled, she awakened not really sure what the cause was. She looked around like surprise filled her eyes. Redness also filled her eyes from the brief respite she did get. The bell on her door rang loudly once again, and she finally realized what had awakened her. Wonder drifted upon her face as she pondered who could be at the door. Approaching the door slowly, curiosity loomed in her head. She wasn't convinced her husband had returned, but she didn't know if his flight had arrived early or not. One thing she did know was that he wouldn't be ringing the doorbell. Gathering herself together, she made her way for the door.

Hayword had already screened the guest, so there was no effort to ask who it was. The fact that they rang proved it wasn't her husband. Shock waves rippled across her face

when she stared at a stranger on the other side of her huge oak doors. The man stood there briefly without saying anything. "May I help you," exclaimed Susan.

"Yes ma'am. I'm detective Rick Powers!" he said, showing his badge briskly. "I am responding to a missing persons claim. I will need to ask you and your husband a few questions. Is it OK for me to come in?"

Susan was still groggy from her short sleep but managed to say, "Sure!" This visit was truly unexpected, and she tried to figure out why the visit was taking place. "Here, sit down... Did you say Detective Powers? So, what missing person are you speaking of, and what does this have to do with us."

"Well, Mrs. Dickenson! It may not have anything to do with you, but we just want to make sure we gather all the information that we can."

"Yes, yes. Sure! Would you like some tea or coffee?"

"Sure, coffee please." He sat down and skimmed through his notes, while she fixed him a hot cup of coffee. Returning with two steaming hot cups, placing his next to him while hers remained in her hand. She preferred to sip her tea while it was scorching hot.

"So, who's missing?" Susan asked.

"Well, we received a call from Mrs. Geshy, and she indicated that her husband was to accompany your husband on a trip to South America."

Susan's eyes lit up in disbelief. "Like I told her when she called me, Joey was supposed to meet my husband, but never showed."

"OK, so when was the last time you saw him?"

"To be honest with you, I can't remember. My husband offered to take him on this trip and he never showed for the flight."

"How long have you known the Geshys?"

"Oh, it's been years."

"Were they having any problems?"

"Claire did talk once about leaving him, but that was years ago. I figured they had worked things out."

"OK Mrs. Dickenson, you have been a big help." Rick rose leaving his half-empty coffee cup on the table and shook Susan's hand to show his appreciation. "Oh, by the

way, where is your husband?”

“He’s out of town.”

“In South America, I presume. What’s going on in South America?”

“He is working on a land development project.”

“OK! That’s all I need. You’ve been a great help.”

He shook her hand again and made his way to the door quickly. Closing the door behind him, she thought that something appeared strange, but she dismissed it casually as her imagination. Suddenly in panic, she is reminded of the cake she was baking when she fell asleep.

CHAPTER 11

The plane descended and Richard had an escort waiting for them. He helped Nick limp off the plane and they exited eagerly. Neither of the men had bags to unload, so they quickly debarked and jumped into the escort vehicle. Nick moaned and groaned from his aching body, which made Rich grow more concerned about his mouth.

“Look Nick, I’ll take you to my doctor. The best in the business. I’ll take care of you man, and your friends will be OK as well. As soon as I get you cared for, I will send a group of people to recover your friends. Whether there dead or alive.”

“What do mean dead? They better not, I...”

“No, No I said that because of Milo. Look, I didn’t want this. Milo has done much work for me. He was a good man. Everything will be fine. You see, we are home — you’re home!”

Nick looked at Richard with pain and discomfort, but not just solely from his injuries. “That’s fine and dandy, but you put me through hell. I expect to be compensated accordingly. If my friends end up like Milo, I know something!”

“Everything will be OK. I’m sure they got lost briefly and now have found their way back.”

“Lost in that jungle means doom because of all that wild shit roaming around.” The two gentlemen arrived at the hospital’s emergency room and wasted no time entering. Richard walked to the service desk and immediately requested his doctor. He was well known, because even the healthcare assistant knew him, and she quickly adhered to his request. While waiting for the doctor, Richard secluded Nick in the corner of the hospital and said, “Nick, here!” Richard had previously pulled out his checkbook and began to write fast. “This is compensation for the job, for you and your comrades.” He handed Nick the check and watched his eyes glow significantly. “Nick! I know this is

perilous times, but all I ask is you to be quiet and allow me to handle this tragedy. I have all the sympathy in the world, but the man that I am, someone's probably waiting to use this ordeal to beef up their careers and..."

Nick interrupted with slickness, "You mean to tell me people are dead and missing and you're worried about your reputation — this is unbelievable. Is this a bribe or something?"

"Wait a minute. This is not a bribe! That check is for services rendered, and maybe a trip for hard labor."

"Hard labor, huh..." Nick was flabbergasted, but he couldn't help but be amazed at the amount of money he had in his hands.

"All I am saying is I can do the job. As you can see, I have enough money to pay anyone to find your friends. I just need to keep this private."

Nick eased back and looked hard at Richard. "I don't know, man. This shit is crazy. There is something eerie about that jungle. Now if I accept this, then I'm gonna be 'noid', because I got this shit on my conscience. I don't know, man?" Nick continued to shake his head negatively.

Richard reached for his check and uttered, "Well just hand me that back and you do as you will."

Nick jerked his hand back swiftly, and refused to give his check back. He looked at the check, and the realization of nearly a half million dollars made Nick blurt, "You better find my friends, or you haven't heard the last of me." The men stared each other down like cowboys in a draw to the death.

Richard replied, "I thought you would see it my way." He walked towards the approaching doctor.

"Hello Mr. Dickenson, what can I do for you?"

"My worker has been injured."

"What is wrong with him?"

"Doc, I believe delusions and dehydration, and possibly hyperventilation."

"How did this happen?"

"In the forest."

"Forest?!"

“Well, actually in the jungle. I am building a shipyard.” Richard grabbed the doctor and spoke to him now with a whisper, and assuring Nick couldn’t hear. “Doc, you know! Fix him up permanently.” “Sure, I’ll take care of you.” Richard gave his doctor the special cue and waited for a confirmation.

“Mr. Dickenson, consider your problem eliminated.” A smile flashed on the doctor’s face, as he knew this was a big task and lucrative opportunities were available.

Richard walked past Nick again before exiting, declaring softly, “If you speak of anything, especially to the authorities, I’m calling that in as a forgery.” He continued to walk gracefully out the door.

The doctor proceeded to introduce himself to Nick, who wasn’t very responsive. All he could think about was getting the check transformed into cash. “This way sir! Go into that room and wait for the nurse. She will need to get a few readings. I’ll be with you shortly.

The doctor closed the door and the room was coldly silent and extremely bright. Nick thought about his bank, that it was a twenty-four hour banking center, and that he should make a late deposit drop. If this man is rich like he says he is, then the funds should be available soon, maybe even by 2 pm tomorrow. He literally licked his chops, and his thoughts of his crew dimmed, but thoughts of his future surely lit up.

The doctor had put together a special mixture as commanded by Richard, for which he knew he would be paid handsomely. A pale, cold, and cunning look supplemented his actions, as he prepared himself to convince Nick this was the medication he needed. The doctor walked out of his preparation room connecting his needle and testing the injection device in full stride — he was eager to get this done. Nick was unaware of his fate, as the doctor planned to play a grandiose part in it. The fact that the money was on Nick’s mind probably played a role in his ignorance. He couldn’t contest the doctor; besides, doctors were to be trusted with one’s health..

The doctor entered Nick’s room and noticed he was gone. Just moments before, he got up and walked out the door and down the hall. Nick exited the hospital without treatment, and his fate was still undecided. He called his fiancée collect and told her it was an emergency. “Hey baby, I need you to meet me at the downtown bank. I can’t answer any questions, just do it.” He hung up the phone and sprinted down the busy

downtown streets. Nothing would stop Nick from getting this done, and all he had to do was wait until tomorrow to get the money. He had treated this like a bank robbery, and the next step was to launder the money. His fiancée pulled up in what instantly became the get away vehicle. “Let’s go!” Nick declared with sweat pouring down his face, and the smell of a bum was the dominant aroma.

Nick was clearly in a rush and his fiancée couldn’t help but say, “What the fuck is wrong with you?”

“Just drive!”

“What is wrong, Nick. You look like shit, and where the fuck have you been? I know, some project, you claim, but that wasn’t due to be over until two more days, and pee-uuu...smelling like that. What some bitch got you drunk and made you sleep on their back porch, and her dog pissed on you. Maybe even shit on you, I don’t know. I can’t even identify the smells on your ass. Not only did the dog get your ass, but it smells like...”

Nick sharply interrupted, “Man...!” Slightly dragging the word out, and then with a bit of sarcasm, he continued, “We rich! Shut your ass up and drive!”

An ignorant look loomed across Tameka’s face. “What! What have you done?” Looking at Nick, she suspiciously yelled, “Nick!?”

“What? Look, I don’t want to talk about it. I’ll talk to you about it later — just drive. Get me home safely, will ya, please!? That’s all I’m asking. How about saving the interrogation for later. I just want to get home, baby, I didn’t know if I would even see you again, baby! I just want to get home.” He slouched his seat back as far as it would allow, and laid himself back to rest.

Tameka was boiling to know what was going on but didn’t make a sound. The car was the only thing heard: the bumps, the grazing winds, and other miscellaneous sounds from the car’s interaction with the natural elements. They did have a peaceful ride home.

Richard walked through the door to find his wife sleep on the sofa. He walked past her and into the kitchen. He noticed dinner but could not summon an appetite. The only thing he wanted to do was to sit and relax, and that is exactly what he did. As soon as he was through diving on the den sofa, he began to switch stations with the remote. He wasn’t interested in anything he saw and pressed the buttons carelessly. Finally, the

station remained on some sports news network, where he glanced at some football report, but the relaxation of his gaze caused him to slowly lose hold of the remote.

His mind pondered many things as to what went wrong. Joe was the first thing, but now he had more to think about. The images of what happened in his mind were only fragmentary, and this restricted him from accurately ascertaining what exactly happened to Joe. Then he caught a glimpse of his survey crew's job undone, and he knew he needed to go back immediately, but time was not in his favor. These thoughts gloomed through his head as the television became an annoyance, but he remained locked to the sofa.

He noticed soothing hands begin to caress his chest, but he swiped them away abruptly. "I don't feel like being bothered."

Susan's drunken condition made for a slurred reply. "Fuck you!" She walked off as Rich returned to his meditative agony.

Then he heard a soft cry uttered. "Daddy, are you watching this?" He was hesitant to answer, and so his daughter slipped the remote from his loose grip.

She began flipping through channels as her father began to notice, "What does my Boo want to watch?"

"Ohh Daddy, snakes!" Home box office had a presentation of a bounty hunt on a huge mythical anaconda, and the excitement the actors presented on screen from chasing and being chased by this huge snake, brought amazement to little Dainisa's eyes. Father and daughter continued to watch the movie with intrigue. Richard had inner thanks for his daughter's rescuing him from his dark thoughts. The movie was winding down to the near end, and the surviving actors floated on a river winding through the thick jungle. In their sight now stood a group of indigenous peoples of the jungle who had never before been confronted by or communicated with outsiders. They stared in awe at the surviving actors.

Richard stared in awe, and then he jumped up and darted for the phone. Anxiousness controlled him as he tried not to fumble with the phone receiver. Eagerness was his foe, because he had to repeat the dialing process due to his shaking fingers striking the wrong buttons. The phone rang! "Hello, Julian! This is Richard!"

"Oh, hello Richard, you sound so hyper."

“Oh no, I just needed your help. You remember, you said if I need you to call.”

“OK, what’s up Richy?”

“Well, let me ask you first! In South America, particularly, central Brazil, do you think Indians are living there?”

“Well, the Indian population is scarce, but I guess so, depending on who you classified as such.”

“No, no! That’s not what I’m saying.”

“Well what are you saying?”

“Are there tribes of barbarians living in the jungles of South America?”

A chuckle spilled from Julian’s mouth. “No, I don’t think there are barbarians, but indigenous tribes. I’m sure they are all over in the forests of Brazil.”

“Oh, yeah!?”

“Yeah, some of which civilization has no idea exist, or we haven’t communicated with them at least.”

“Do you think they are violent?”

“They could be territorial, especially toward Europeans.”

“I have a proposition for you. Would you like an expense-paid trip to study these savages?” Julian sat silently as he pondered Richard’s request. “I’ll also pay you for your services. I will need you just in case we have any confrontations with a tribe. You will be the best choice in attempting to communicate with them.”

“Yes, you’re right! I also have an Indian colleague whose ancestors are from the central Brazilian rainforest, and he speaks some similar dialects. I have mastered that particular language from dealing with him for so long.”

“Oh great, what is his name?”

“Poncho-twinytoe!”

“Great. Can we meet tomorrow morning?”

“Wait a minute now. You’re rushing me. I can not act on such short notice.”

“Julian, I know! I know, but don’t you want to study these people up close and get paid significantly for doing it.” “OK! I never could say no since you always stood up for me in college. However, I don’t believe my friend Poncho... I might not be able to contact him on such a short notice. Richard, now. How about giving me until the next

morning, because I believe he is out of town? I'll call you tomorrow evening to confirm the final departure arrangements."

The men terminated the call and Richard immediately headed towards the bed. He crashed mentally into a deep sleep, tossing and turning as nightmares filed on through his brain. He rolled in agony, but he was sleeping hard, and thoughts of death brewed from his nightmares. He awakened in the wee-hours of the morning dripping in sweat and truly glad his sleep was interrupted. Richard glanced at his wife, and he was not the only one having trouble sleeping. The visions of her husband not returning saddened her, and she sat there in her dark bedroom weeping. Richard watched her until his exhaustion once again got the best of him.

The next morning shined brightly and the temperature wasted no time increasing its intensity. Richard had a streak going getting up ahead of his wife in the morning, and this time was no different. Actually, he was already at the office drawing up his plans. He used the phone frequently to call many different numbers, haste exuding from him. The worry that this project might be slipping from under him pounded his neural pathways. A plan was needed, and he began conjuring up all schemes imaginable. He considered all the people that could be used, but this needed to be a private ordeal.

Richard picked up the phone once more and began dialing viciously. After ringing for a good minute, a pleasant voice answered, "Federal Bureau of Investigation! How may I direct your call?"

Richard responded boldly, "Yes! Kyser Finley, please."

"Who may I say is calling?"

"Advise that Rich is on the phone."

The receptionist placed Richard on hold while she patched through to Agent Finley's office. "Hello Rich! How you been?"

"I've been very busy."

"Yeah, but how are you?" Kyser exclaimed with a delighted chuckle, glad to hear from his old pal.

"Oh I've been fine, except for one problem."

"What's the problem," declared the agent. "What's the problem, Rich? You know I'm here if you need me."

“Well Ky! I have a project going in South America, and I suspect there may be a tribe of people, or some jungle savages, who are trying to sabotage this project. I paid a great deal to acquire this land, and...”

“Well hold up, Richard! First, you sound like you’re juiced up, and what exactly are they trying to sabotage?”

“I’m building a shipyard on the Amazon. I’ll have to cut a tremendous amount of trees in doing so.”

“Richard, what makes you believe a tribe of savages, as you say, are the problem?”

“I have a friend, a profesor at the University of Saint Helen’s, and he has indicated there are tribes living in the area that could be territorial. I’m bringing him along because of his understanding of the many dialects of central Brazilian languages.” “So, I guess you want me to go to South America.”

“Yes, and a few of your agents. Just to look out for things. There will be substantial pay for your services. Just consider it an overtime gig.”

“Oh yeah? This project must be very important to you. How much will this compensation be exactly?”

“I’m paying you and three others fifty-thousand dollars for three days. If I need you longer than that, then there will be more money, but I really don’t think you want to talk about this over the phone.”

“It’s fine. This line is secure.”

“All you need to do is patrol the area and investigate any out-of-the-ordinary occurrences.”

“OK , Rich! I’ll assemble a team. When exactly did you want to leave?”

“In the morning!” “My! Aren’t we in a hurry!”

“Yes I am. So, I’ll have someone pick you and your crew up in the morning.”

Agent Finley gave a peculiar look after hanging the phone up, but the money was good, so he shrugged off Rich’s apparent urgency. Finley continued to fog his office up with a large pipe, and allowed the aroma to soothe his pondering. Richard, on the other hand, didn’t have time to sit and smoke leisurely. He was too busy. He frantically called every individual that he could beg, plead, or bribe into helping. He called the professor to

assure his arrival would be tidy. He checked with his assistant, John, to make sure he had called the engineer. There was a tremendous effort to get some work done, because he disliked being behind schedule. The investors would be looking for a report on the land and its constructability, and he did not want to disappoint them, nor did he want to disappoint himself. Everything had to be in place, which is why he called the FBI, so there would be no screw-ups. Whatever was delaying this process must be stopped.

Richard again dialed ferociously, and a few rings later, Julian answered. “Yes Rich! What is it now?”

“How are we coming?”

“Oh just fine. Just like the last call.”

“I’m just checking.”

“Look, I’ll be there, and on time, and we can get on your plane to South America. I still haven’t figured out what you want from me. Do you want me to speak to them? If we even see any tribesman.”

“That is exactly what I want from you. In case we do encounter these folks, you’ll be the most qualified to handle any communication efforts. I mean, we do have to tell them to move and that we plan to build there.”

A sarcastic laugh pearled from the professor’s lips. “OK. Whatever! I don’t have a life anyway, so it’s probably meant for me to go on some endeavor. Maybe I’ll find a new life or something.”

“Well Julian, I can’t promise that, but I’ll give you a little bit for your troubles.”

“Oh man, I have enough money. Besides, I would love to help you while honing my skills.”

“We will see you at the airport.”

“Great, great. This is going to be an enlightening experience.”

The phone was hung up with a bit of satisfaction in Richard’s heart, but before he could enjoy it, he was yelling to the top of his lungs. “John, John! I need you in my office.” Richard had placed John’s office next door, so he couldn’t help but hear the shouts. John walked to Richard’s office with the usual look of disapproval. “What is the update on the civil engineer. Have you been able to get one to accept the job.”

“No problem at all. You were offering a substantial amount of money, so there

were many offers.”

“Well, I don’t have time to go through an audition. Who do you suspect is the best for the job? Come on John, that is why I hired you. You are my right hand man. You better have an engineer and crew ready to go by morning.”

John had already decided on Brutus Salapore. Research was done and John had noticed that the privately owned contracting company had done several jobs dealing with forests and marshlands. It was a large engineering firm with survey crews of their own, which would be the perfect accommodation for Richard’s needs: a navigator was needed to sail boats to and from the site, and as many helicopter pilots as possible would be helpful. These positions were filled easily upon signing Brutus and his contracting firm. They were all to meet at the airport at the same time as the FBI crew, and Julian was to arrive soon thereafter.

Richard was thorough, and his arrangements were precise. They would all catch the same private Lear jet to Macapa. He felt his first sense of relief in a while, and the departure day was approaching fast. He decided to turn in early, to rest well before morning. The ride home was pleasant, but his thoughts about Joe grew more compassionate, and he began to miss him.

However, he wasn’t the only one thinking about Joe. So did Clair, and in fact, at that moment she was deciding that she was finished thinking about her husband and going to do something about her circumstances. She needed to know what had happened to him. She picked up the phone and dialed precinct seventeen. It rang severely before an operator could answer. “Is Rick Powers available?”

The operator contacted Rick Powers instantly, and in the background she could hear his colleagues acknowledge his call. One officer had even blurted, “It’s that silly broad whose husband left her.” Laughter followed.

“This is Rick Powers. How can I help you?”

“I was calling to find out how the investigation was going?”

“Investigation!” A smirk spilled from Rick’s mouth, but miles of fiber optics concealed that. “Mrs. Geshy, there’s really nothing we can do at this point, not until someone calls in with a tip or evidence of foul play turns up. There’s nothing...”

“I don’t like your attitude! Let me speak to your superior.”

“Sure,” he said with a sense of pleasure. Rick transferred the call to Lieutenant Steve Harrington.

“This is Harrington!”

“Yes, this is Claira Geshy. I spoke to you before about a missing husband.” Claira wanted badly to continue her statement, but Steve had orchestrated a smooth interruption. “Yes, and like I told you before, there are many calls similar to yours, and really, there is no way to determine if his vanishing was voluntary or not. You know, sometimes when you don’t expect it, these things happen.”

“Look! You people are not listening. I told you that was not the case, and you have just the same attitude as that slick Rick guy. I can’t believe this. In fact, I’m not getting anywhere with you. Who’s your superior?”

“That would be Captain Gunther, and I believe he is on a call. I don’t know if ...”

“I’ll hold on !” Claira declared with no retreat. “Don’t make me come up there to talk to Captain Gunther. I’ll be sure to exercise my first amendment rights in the middle of your facility.”

“Calm down, Mrs. Geshy. That won’t be necessary. I’ll go to his office and brief him on your call, and we will see if he will accept the call.”

“Yeah, you go do your briefing.” She waited patiently, not doubting one bit that he would get on the phone. Harrington proceeded around the corner to softly tap on and then open the captain’s door. He signaled him silently with a look of shame.

The captain muted the phone in an old-fashioned way, wondering why he was being interrupted. He cocked back in his chair, impatience showing in his eyes. “What!”

“Captain, there’s a women who insists on speaking with you.”

“Well, who is this woman?”

“Her name is Claira Geshy.”

“And why does she want to speak with me?” “She called in a missing report for her spouse, Joe. We have done everything routinely and strictly by the guidelines, but there’s no evidence of anything. I told her it’s possible her husband has decided to go off for a little while. She is very rude and continues to ask for someone up the ranks, but like I told her, that doesn’t change the procedures.”

“Pass the call through... Yes, let me give you a call back.” The captain hung his

previous call up, and awaited the transfer. “Yes, this is captain Gunther! How can I help you?” George exclaimed very friendly as if a sales pitch was to follow.

“Hell, Captain! My husband is missing and nothing is being done about it!”

“That is not true. My officer has told me everything has been done, at least all that can be done.”

“According to your officers, hmm. That is a damn lie. What the hell has been done?”

“Mrs. Geshy, what do you expect us to do?”

“Have you questioned the Dickenson’s?”

“Yes we have! You see, we have been doing are job.”

“Well who did you talk with? Have you even spoke to Richard?”

“We spoke to his wife, Susan.”

Claira really began to blow off some steam, and her tone increased. “I don’t give a damn what she has to say — she has nothing to do with this case. In fact, she doesn’t know shit. My husband was to go off with Richard, not Susan.”

“Mrs. Geshy, please calm down the foul language. He was out of town at the time.”

“Out of town, oh that’s just great. When in the hell will he be back?”

“Look! Calm down. Your profanities will not speed this matter up. He was in South America.”

“South America,” yells Claira with severe disappointment. “What the hell is going on in South America? My husband goes there and never returns, but this Richard is always in South America. What the fuck is this? I definitely need to speak to my attorney. Richard is a multi-millionaire, and that is why my case is being neglected. I’ll slander your so-called police force. You’d better have Mr. Dickenson questioned, and I will be checking.”

The phone was slammed down roughly, and the captain was baffled. “Harrington, get in here.”

“Yes captain!”

“Why was I not informed this case involved Richard Dickenson.”

“Well sir, we treated it like a normal call.”

“What do you mean a normal call? Richard is far from normal, you morons!” The captain was getting angry, his tone rising a few octaves.

“I don’t know? In all my years on the force, I still couldn’t tell you what a normal call is.”

Captain Gunther chuckled but had business written all over his face. “Harrington, one question. What is an above normal call, or better yet, what is a below normal call? You idiot! Who could you put on this case? Because if Rick slanders Richard’s name and is incorrect, Richard won’t stop until Rick’s career is destroyed.”

“That’s only if there was some suspicion of foul play. There’s no evidence of that.”

“I know, but I have a feeling this case has mud all over it.”

“Why do you say?”

“This Dickenson is always in South America, according to Clair.”

“Oh! I see. I wasn’t aware of that.”

“The missing husband was to join Mr. Dickenson. That is what happens when you refuse to listen, but do you see how this can get ugly in an investigation? All types of personal question will have to be asked.” Captain George Gunther sat back and pondered the situation, while giving Harrington a keen stare. All of a sudden he blurted, “Put hot shot Pullins on the case. He’s been causing a stir lately, and since he wants to be a hot shot, this will be the case that makes or breaks him. And call old Edward Bot in my office. I know when he first questions Richard, oh man. I would love to see that scene.”

“You think Richard would be offended when you send Edward to question him?”

“Yes, I’m sure he would be, especially if he had nothing to do with it. Go and get Mr. Hot Shot.” Captain Gunther sat patiently while he waited for Edward to be fetched.

“Yes Captain, you wanted to see me.” The man spoke firmly, but only because a trip to the captain’s office usually meant being written up. “What seems to be the problem, Captain?”

“There is no problem with you, but there is one I would like you to solve.”

“Oh!” A pause followed and Edward again responded in an unconvinced manner. “I’m being assigned to a special case, oh boy. I know something’s about to fall out the sky.”

“OK Edward, cut the small talk. I want you to question Richard Dickenson at this address about the disappearance of Joe Geshy. Read this report. It will tell you everything you need to know, so go by there this evening if you want, and choose a partner if you like.” The captain knew he would choose Gary Stevens, the one he had been fooling around with. The plan worked, because there was no one else Edward could dig up.

The two left for dinner before they took the trip to the Dickenson’s. The two detectives departed the precinct eager to solve a mystery. “So Ed, what’s up? Catch me up to speed.”

“Read the report that summarizes the issues.”

“No! Man, forget a report. What’s going on?”

“Some guy name Joe is missing, and his wife said he was supposed to go to South America with that rich guy named Dickenson. We are to question him and search for any clues as to why he is gone.”

“Do you think maybe her husband just left her?”

“I don’t know, Gary. I really can’t say.” Edward shook his head.

Gary said, “We will see soon.” They stopped at a casual restaurant to get a quick bite to eat.

CHAPTER 12

Food was far from Richard Dickenson's mind. He was home in deep sleep, and the prospects for any change in his consciousness status soon looked bleak. Mrs. Dickenson took care of some chores around the house, and everything was peaceful until Hayword alerted her that two gentlemen were requesting to see her husband. The urgency was obvious in Hayword's voice, which compelled Susan to move quickly. Richard remained asleep through the initial commotion. Finally, Hayword was face to face with Susan and said, "Mrs. Dickenson, there are two detectives who want to speak to your husband. Mr. Dickenson is not in trouble, is he?"

"No Hayword, no! Now run along. I will handle this." Susan saw Mr. Reynolds on his way, and then she headed to face the detectives. "Yes," replied Susan curiously. "How can I help you gentlemen?"

"I'm detective Edward Pullins, and this is my partner, Gary Stevens. We would like to speak to your husband." "OK ..., just a moment. Let me notify him of your presence."

Susan walked swiftly to get her husband, wondering why the police were back at her home. The fact that there were different detectives caused more concern. "Richard! Richard! Honey, honey, wake up." Susan spoke sharply, and here words were followed by a few jolts. "Wake up, the police want to talk to you."

Richard woke up groggy "What, what! What Dear?"

"There are two detectives out here who want to speak to you. Some other detectives came by yesterday evening to ask a few questions. What is going on dear?"

"What kind of questions — and a fine time to tell me?"

"First of all, you've been ripping and running all over the place, and I haven't had the chance. You're up in the morning and gone before I know it. So what the hell am I supposed to do? It's not like I could have called the office real quick."

Richard headed for the door to let the detectives in. They introduced themselves

to Richard, and they were offered a seat.

“Well what can I do for you gentlemen?”

“We just have a few questions for you. When was the last time you heard, or have seen Joe Geshy?”

“Well he was supposed to meet me in South America, but his plane was due late. When I went to pick him up at the airfield in South America, he wasn’t there.”

“That is not what I asked you.”

“Hah, pardon me?”

“I said that is not what I asked you!”

“What! What are you talking about?”

“I asked, when was the last time you saw Joe Geshy?”

“What, oh! I... I don’t know. I mean it’s been a while, I guess. That is why I invited my friend to go along. I hadn’t seen him in some time.”

The two detectives stared at Richard as he answered their questions. Edward was good at smelling fish.

“What were you doing down there, if you don’t mind me asking?” asked Detective Pullins in the calmest tone imaginable.

“Well it was a mini-vacation, in celebration of a project I am building.”

Gary sat quietly for a while, then said, “Were you and Joe friends, or primarily business associates?”

“We were friends! Look I don’t know where this is taking us.”

Edward was not convinced, declaring abruptly, “You say that his plane was late. Was that flight booked out of the local airport?”

Richard only nodded his head as if still listening to Edward’s questions.

“What flight? Do you know what flight he was to be on?”

“I’m not sure what flight.”

“Well Mr. Dickenson, Joe’s wife indicated that he was to fly in your private jet.”

“Oh yes, but I’m not sure what flight it was numbered, or if they even bother with private flights.

“There’s a record of every flight and a passenger count,” replied Gary. Richard’s look became that of someone gone numb, but he tried hard to conceal it. Edward

demands, "I need the dates and times of your flight reservations. I'm sure you wouldn't send me to get a warrant and have me tearing up your house for a simple piece of information I know you have."

Richard looked at the gentlemen and appeared concerned, but his cool sustained adequately. "Sure I'll get that info no problem." Richard did just that and the men were on their way. Richard was furious after their departure and let off some steam that showed he was in no mood to talk. His wife was the first to find that out as her condolences were lashed at. His concerns now showed, and if the detectives were here, he would be near a confession. Then Richard thought, a confession of what? I haven't killed anyone. They would even have to prove he's dead. Richard's logic got full firing support from his neural net. Joe's way down in South America, in the jungle. Who's going to find him? He considered many scenarios to try and calm his nerves. It finally worked because Richard was back to sleep.

The next morning was hectic. Richard was up early as usual, assuring that his team arrived on the plane. Detective Pullins was eager to check the airport records, and that was the first task he would complete. He went alone while his partner did some research on their suspect. Ironically, Rich and Ed were at the same airport, but Richard was a step ahead and his posse on their way to South America. Edward immediately asked around when arriving at the airport, and specifically searched for who had private flight records. After talking with many people, he was finally directed to the same gate Richard departed from.

"Excuse me," he said politely. The attendant behind the ticket counter gave him her complete attention. "I'm detective Edward Pullins." He flashed his badge while continuing his polite manner. "I need some information pertaining to private jets and their flight schedules for the last two weeks. Also, if you know of anyone arranging flights by the name of Richard Dickenson, he usually has private jets departing from here."

The attendant took a moment to review her records, and responded gingerly. "Yes! I think so. He and a large group of people just departed."

Edward squinted his eyes and grew eager to hear some more, but he asked, "Their destination wouldn't happen to be South America."

"Yes, I believe so, but they are not required to release that information; however,

I could hear some of them speak of a rainforest, and ... South America!" A grim look surfaced upon Edward's face, and he began to feel like a hound dog hot on a trail. "He has actually had more than one flight, and they were all to South America."

"Hmmm..." responded Edward.

"That's funny," declared the attendant, but then she visibly shook it off as nothing.

"What's funny?" Edward asked.

"Oh nothing. It's just that his last flight had only one guest."

"OK, thank you. You have been an extreme help!" Edward jetted out of the airport fueled by his ecstatic emotion from what he had just heard. He hauled ass back to the station to inform his partner. The hasty driving caused him to curse a few drivers along the way. Nevertheless, he arrived safely, and there were no casualties. "Hey Joseph! Have you seen Gary?"

"Stevens!?"

"Yes, where is he?"

"He should be back there."

Ed accelerated in the indicated direction. "Hey Gary, do you know that Joe guy did get on that plane of Richard's. So he did make it to South America, but Joe, hmmm! Apparently he didn't make it back."

"We still don't know if he just wanted to leave his wife."

"Your right, but why did he lie? He knew all along Joe was on that plane."

"Yeah, but maybe he is covering for him. You know, if I had a million dollars, I'd probably up and leave my wife too. That is if she doesn't get half, then it's cheaper to keep her. You know they are friends. Richard probably assisted him in his departure."

"Friends!? According to him, but I just don't know? Something about this feels unbelievable." Edward Pullins had to ponder deeply after that final comment. He snapped out of his reverie and said, "Let's get a bite to eat."

The detectives were just about to walk out of the precinct, but a fellow officer called out, "Pullins! Someone is calling in a missing report. I think you want to take this call. The guy is very irate and he's saying something about South America. Should I just hang up on this guy — it may be a prank call."

“Oh no! No!” Edward grabbed the phone after a few short steps. “Hello, this is Edward Pullins.”

A voice on the other end raged. “Hello, Hello! Hey that Richard guy left my friends to die.”

“Who is this? What are you talking about? Is someone dead?” Edward signaled the fellow officer to begin recording the conversation in pursuit of a trace.

“He left them. My friend Milo is dead, and I haven’t heard from the others.”

“Hey wait a minute. What others?” The anonymous caller terminated the call just before they could get a trace. Edward took the tape and the statement of the ticket clerk to seek a warrant. “Gary, lets get a warrant. This scum bag is hiding something.”

The officers did just that and headed for the home of Richard and Susan Dickenson. The captain was glad to issue the warrant because he still believed they were barking up the wrong tree. The search of his home, and the temporary detaining of Richard, would be very embarrassing to his reputation. In fact, the captain felt strongly that Edward could jeopardize his career for wrongly accusing a well established man. George wanted Edward out of his way anyhow, and this was the apparent way to accomplish that goal. George Gunther sat back in his chair and wondered about the situation, concluding everything would turn out for the better.

Gary and Edward were already driving off in a dark grey Crown Victoria with dark tinted windows and no signs of police decals visible. Gary took the honor of chauffeuring while Edward scanned a few issues. Gary looks at Edward a few times, but only briefly due to the congested traffic. He was dying to say something, and finally he did, “Well Ed! Do you think this could be foul play?”

Edward gazed up at Gary and treated his comments as premature. “I really can not say! I know he’s hiding something, and that’s exactly why we’re on our way to his house. His dishonesty caused that, and we’ll find out why?”

“What did the captain say?”

“Well he seemed eager, but I don’t know why. I have wondered why I was put on this case, especially since someone else was already on it.”

“Maybe you’re being set up — I don’t know? Just be careful.”

“Don’t forget you’re my partner, so more than likely, whatever happens, you’re

coming with me.” Edward turned to look through his side mirror and continued, “Well, whatever the case maybe, I drug you into this shit. So, I fall, you fall!”

“Oh no buddy, because I’m covering my ass.”

“Yeah you do that.”

“Oh I will! You just don’t do anything stupid.” A brief silence loomed momentarily, but Edward snapped that by directing Gary to “Turn up here!” The detectives were approaching the Dickenson’s estate.

“Damn, every time I see this house I’m awed. It’s lovely.”

“Yes it is! That is why I’m not quite clear on how to approach this case.”

“Yeah, I see. I wonder why he put you on such a high profile case,. The media may be all over this. Yeah, the captain is setting you up alright, either that or testing you.”

“Well maybe, but I will do my job the best way I can.”

“Oh man, that is what scares me.” Gary paused and looked upward. “Look at these gates.”

Hayword had recognized the men and let them in. “What can we do for you gentlemen this time.”

Edward responded instantly once he was fully out of the car. “Are Mr. or Mrs. Dickenson available?”

Hayword gingerly replied, “Yes, she is in there. Let me get her for you.” He walked toward the house but wondered why they followed so closely behind him. Hayword hollered, “Mrs. Dickenson... We have guests!” He repeated his shouts as the door flung completely open. There was amazement when he realized the detectives followed right behind him. Susan proceeded down the stairs, a shocked response upon her face when she realized that Hayword had allowed the detectives to barge in.

“Yes, may I help you. What is it you want this time?”

Edward replied, “We have a warrant to search the premises.” He flashed the document with the judge’s John Hancock scribbled illegibly.

“On what grounds?”

“I’m sorry, but I reserve the right not to disclose that information, only to the owner of this house.”

“What! Does marriage mean anything anymore.” Susan felt the fire of anger up under her skin, but she couldn’t say a word that would help quench her anger.

The detectives looked around, not sure what they were looking for, but it scared her as she didn’t know what was going on. Hayword looked on in amazement. Susan gave him a look that said he should get lost. He took heed, but his nosiness aloud that to be but brief. Hayword headed for Richard’s private room, knowing she was programmed not to approach that room, especially when Richard was gone. Hayword was a smart fellow, understanding that this search was about Richard and everything they were looking for was in here.

Susan couldn’t bear the fact that her home was being ransacked, and to top it off, her little one ran into the house to see what was going on. “Mommy, mommy. Who is that? Why are they here? Are they Daddy’s friends? Mommy, tell them to leave. Why are they messing up everywhere?” Susan grabbed her little one and hugged her tightly. She walked her to the den’s sofa and sat down to cry. “What’s the matter Mommy. I’m scared of those men — they’re ugly. They are monsters.”

“Oh dear, don’t say that. They are not monsters. They’re just doing their job.”

“Well, why are they making you cry?”

“Baby, they’re not making me cry. I just feel sad because I miss your father.”

“I do too, Mommy.”

The men searched room after room before searching the one Hayword had retreated to. They opened the door and Hayword looked as if he was caught red-handed.

“We need to search in here now,” announced Edward. They began looking while Hayword stepped aside and watched on. Edward asked Hayword, “Do you know where he keeps his information on his back-and-forth trips to South America.”

“Well if I did, what’s in it for me?”

Gary replied anxiously, “You get to live!”

“So, what! Are you going to beat me up right here? That wouldn’t be smart of you, especially with Mrs. Dickenson in the next room.”

Edward immediately thought of the captains hidden agenda and restrained Gary from any assaults while beginning to negotiate. “Well what did you say your name was again?”

“Hayword!”

“Oh, Hayword! Look, my partner isn’t going to harm you or anything.”

Gary lowered his voice to growl and said, “Let me get a hold of his smart-mouth ass.”

Edward continued, “Look Hayword! We are just trying to conduct an investigation. Tell you what! Tell me about yourself. Tell me about your dreams and aspirations. Maybe I can help you.”

“Well first! I am tired of this boring ass job, securing his home. Hardly ever shit happens here, so of what use am I. Just greeting people like you. I have a lot more potential, and all Richard does is pass me off.”

“Well why does he get you angry?” replied Edward in the softest of voices.

“I’ve been trying to get him to post me at one of his office buildings or something. Anything to save me from this agony. I even asked him to take me along on one of his trips to South America. I could secure things there, but no, I get left here. The same old-same old!”

“You said South America. Where does he keep information on that.”

“I was snooping around one day, and right under here, you see it, is a concealed compartment under this chair.” Hayword pulled out a couple of maps and documents of Richard’s detailed plans.

Edward read the city that was circled in red. “Macapa!” He also noticed a little area Southwest of Macapa that was circled as well.

“Gary! I think we have what we were looking for, and we now need to start looking elsewhere.” The gentlemen quickly headed back to the car, for they were eager to get back to the station. All you could hear was burning rubber from the tires of a well maintained Ford.

Gary said, “You still haven’t told me what we have found, and especially why we left without completing the search.”

“Let’s just say we have more insight thanks to his travel agent.”

“What!”

“We’re going to see just why he’s constantly in South America, and maybe, just maybe, we can find out why in the hell South America is so damned important.”

“Are you suggesting we go all the way to South America? I don’t believe the captain will go for that. In fact, he may just say wait until he gets back.”

“We can’t wait.”

“Why?” asked Gary with a curious look?

“Because, I think we will find whatever we’re looking for right down there. I’ll bet Joe went down there with Richard, whether it was voluntarily or involuntarily remains to be seen. Gary’s face contained a stunned look; he knew they were on to something, but exactly what was unclear. Edward parked the car quickly and exited the car. Gary wasn’t as eager to get into the building, but was one-hundred percent with his partner.

“Hello Ed!” “Edward.” “Yo Pullins!” And many more hellos went unanswered as he focused on Captain Gunther’s office. “What’s wrong with Edward?”

Gary shook his head and replied, “Well, He’s... I guess you can say, he’s on a mission.”

“Oh yeah, what now? He doesn’t plan on getting into anymore trouble?”

Gary knew that was a possibility when recalling the last incident. Gary’s head had throbbed briefly knowing Edward knew for a fact those gangster’s were dealing, but he rushed them with no regards for their rights — no warrant and just a hunch for a probable cause. Gary understood because they did witness illegal activities, or what appeared to be illegal, but sometimes there are procedures that must be followed. Edward seems to forget that at times, and with that very thought, Gary exclaimed, “You’re right! I will be sure to keep an eye on him.” Gary followed the path his partner had taken through the precinct. As he came around the corner, he saw that Edward Pullins had opened the captain’s door.

He heard the sternness reflected in a grumpy voice from just beyond Pullins’ entryway. “What do you want Pullins.”

“Well sir, I have to report!”

“Yes, I’m listening.” “Well, I questioned Richard Dickenson. He’s guilty of obstruction of justice.”

“Oh! How so?” This really got Gunther’s attention.

“Well, you already know he said he had no knowledge of a flight, when in fact, it

was his plane that provided the transportation for the missing man. The attendant at the airport reported this mysterious flight, because it was only one passenger. He did get on that plane Richard provided and went to South America. That is why we can hardly ever speak with Richard — he's always in South America."

"Hold up! Slow down and hold your horses for just a minute. Did she identify the passenger as Joe...well did she?"

"No, I don't believe so."

"You see! Even if it was the missing man, then you still have nothing. Nothing but a one way trip without evidence to suggest otherwise, as far as I'm concerned. It was an unexpected one way trip, or maybe expected, would be a better way to put it. Detective Pullins, you're not married are you? I didn't think so. The fact that Richard is constantly in South America makes it seem to me this missing guy is in fact not missing at all. A new tropical life in South America does sound splendid."

Edward was not amused by Gunther's unwillingness to reason, and he replied shrewdly. "If that's so, why did he have to withhold all this information?"

"Look, just because he didn't want you snooping around his affairs doesn't mean he's committed a crime. Maybe he doesn't want the guy's wife to know it was deliberate. Have you considered that they may be dating each other?"

"Oh come on be serious," replied Edward in a most disturbed tones.

"I'm serious, and I find no grounds to think otherwise. Besides, to go all the way to South America would be futile." Edward stood there staring through furious eyes, but it mattered not. The captain raised his voice. "That's all Pullins!" Edward's heart dropped and disappointment filled him. He turned slowly and exited the door, slamming it behind him.

"Whoa! Hold up! What's up," asked Gary. Edward said nothing while walking to his desk. Fellow teammates observed his tirade and Gary did the same. Ed sat there thinking of his predicament, but only shortly due to Gary's interruption. "I guess the captain wasn't buying it."

Edward replied sarcastically, "No he wasn't. I don't know. He was eager to get me on this case, and as soon as I get a lead he shoots it down." Edward continued to shake his head in disbelief. "Wow, I have to tell this lady we aren't going to do shit about

her case.”

Gary looked on with empathy. “Tell you what, Ed! Let me go shut down my pc, you make the call, and I’ll treat you to a few drinks. The Taj Mahal downtown maybe, hang out for the rich and famous.”

“The drinks there are expensive.”

“Just an act of appreciation for a partner and friend.”

“OK,” he said and picked up the phone while Gary went to shut down his system. He allowed the phone to ring three times, finally a frail voice answered. “Hello!”

“Mrs. Geshy, this is detective Pullins.”

“Yes!”

“I’m sorry to inform you, but there’s nothing else we can do at this moment.” Clair’s profanities were exhausted, she just cried. “Mrs. Geshy, Mrs. Geshy!” Edward said repeatedly with a caring voice. “I know how hard this is for you. I found a few leads; however, my captain is restraining me, so be patient. I promise you I’ll get to the bottom of this, OK? That is my promise.”

Clair responded finally after trying so hard to break her crying spurt. “OK , Mr. Pullins! What leads are you referring to anyway?”

“Well, I believe Richard’s plane did have your spouse on it. He lied as well, so I have to go to South America to find out. This is where I’m currently restricted, but you just hold on and I’ll figure something out.” He terminated the call and joined Gary in exiting the building.

They jumped in that same Crown Vic and sped off. Gary drove quickly through the streets while trying to cheer Edward up. “You know you’ll like this place, lovely women and good music. I also know the bartender, so we can get as many drinks as we like. They have the best wings in town, and I want to beat your ass in some eight ball. Take a few of your dollars in the process should be fun, to me at least.” Gary gave Ed a sharp shove, “Man, cheer up.” Gary failed to get a smile out of his partner, but did get a response.

“First of all, I’m as cheerful as I’m going to get. Secondly, you won’t do shit in pool. I own you, eight ball, nine ball, or whatever! You can’t touch me.”

Gary surely disagreed. “I hope your money is where your mouth is. because here

we are.”

Shortly after parking the Crown Victoria, the men entered the building. Upon doing so they could instantly pick up on the cluttered sounds of adults mingling. The air was stuffy from the many smokers, but the temperature was cool from the facilities high powered carrier unit. Ed was still in a grim mood, but he couldn't help but smile as beautiful women smiled at him.

Gary patted Ed on the back and yelled, “You'll love it here. I know you noticed the chicks checking you out. Get relaxed man, and don't worry about work. It's time to play.” Gary slapped his comrade on the back again, but he took heed of Ed's don't-do-it-again stare. “Come on! Let's get a few drinks,” shouted Gary as he directed them to a particular section of the bar. The bar was packed, but fortunately two stools became available. Gary reached for a menu while Ed sought comfort on his stool. Looking around at the many people was probably what restricted his comfort, but suddenly his attention was redirected.

A smile coupled with an eager voice greeted the detectives from behind the counter. “Hey!” A triangle eye contact, each person looking at the other in turn, was accompanied by a vibrant voice, which continued. “Gary! I haven't seen you in a while. Good to see you again.”

“Yeah, you the same Tee,” replied Gary.

“What can I get for you gentlemen?”

“I'll have a martini on the rocks,” said Gary, his voice nearly sparkling.

“What about your friend?”

“Oh, I'm sorry Tee! This is my partner, Edward Pullins.” Ed gave her a hand gesture.

“I'll have a bud draft.”

“Any appetizers with this tonight.” Edward didn't pick up on that final comment; instead, he was trying to get the attention of someone. He thought that maybe eye contact would get her to notice him like he noticed her.

Gary's voice grew prominent and it was evident as he uttered, “I wouldn't mind those hot wings. Twenty pieces would suffice, and maybe some breadsticks. I'm getting a little hungry, I don't know about you!” Gary looked at Ed after jolting him on the

shoulder a few times. “Ed! Ed! Oh...I see you got your eyes on something.” By this time, Ed had her attention and both were gazing at each other. “Hey man, do you want anything to eat.”

Edward snapped out of his trance. “Yes let me get the house salad, with Italian dressing. Extra dressing please.”

The entire brief moment Gary watched Edward place his order. “I see you enjoying yourself already. You haven’t even mingled around — oh let me check that — you’ve already started.” Gary now gave a stunning look at his partner and continued his verbiage. “When I whip your ass in pool, don’t let me damage your attitude.”

Edward gulped his draft to the halfway point and then looked back for the mysterious woman, but she was not in his immediate sight. He returned his head and drank on. The two indulged in small talk while sipping and waiting for their meals. You could hear the bar get a little more rowdy, and crowds began to clutter together. They noticed a particular gathering at the far end of the bar, but chose tee’s delivery instead. The crowd in that far end became more noticeable, but their foods kept them concentrated. There was no violence appearing to brew, but profanities could be heard spewing from the thick crowd. The grub was glorious, so the men ignored the commotion and dug in. You could tell the place had good food because the entire bar seemed to have hearty appetites. The detectives were a bit tipsy from the alcohol and their contents of their plates were pulverized.

Edward thought he now had the energy to mingle, when suddenly, he spotted the woman who had captivated him previously. He quickly darted towards the beauty to ask her to dance.

Gary walked about making lewd comments to every human of the opposite gender. “Pssst...pssst... Hey sexy thing.” His comments seemed to be something these women wanted to ignore. He started sensing that, so he gave up and headed back to his seat at the bar. The women in here were particularly in search of the rich and famous, or at least someone pretending to be well established. It was hard to tell the difference because everyone did their best to spend money, which is why the place prospered and so did the women. The experienced women could tell the difference between a rich man and average one, which is probably why Gary got no play. Edward was smooth and had an

aurora about him, so the women could easily become attracted to his pure honesty. The woman he danced with proved his fox instincts as she showed all signs of enjoyment. The detective was single, so he welcomed her eagerness. The men enjoyed themselves, and continued to dance and drink.

CHAPTER 13

At the small airstrip, Richard's plane had already landed and his guests were escorted to their living quarters. There set up was a conference room with tropical chairs made of bamboo. They were very sturdy and comfortable, so the crew had no problem gathering around this conference table. Richard spoke. "I'm glad you were all able to make it. We have a tough, but rewarding task ahead of us. You all have been briefed on your assignments. As you know, this is not the actual spot where we will be working. As you recall from your maps, it's Southwest from here."

Richard continued his speech and mostly directed it towards the five FBI agents. They sat in a group of their own just to the left of Richard. The leader of this team was Kyser Finley, a well rounded man who had been crime fighting for years. He commanded a large number of agents at the Dallas office, but he had selected only the four agents beside him. Wesley Zimmerman was the only one who questioned any and everything that moved, said, or was done. He grew up in a family that regarded themselves as of the highest quality, which caused aggressiveness in his style, but that trait was balanced by understanding loyalty to his commander. His best acquaintance was fellow agent Adam Newfield who hardly ever spoke but was extraordinarily observant, and being friends with Wesley improved his manhandling skills. The relationship with Roy Beavers was not as dandy, and was just dealt with. His loving and kind attitude was no way to approach criminality, or at least in Wesley's eyes.

Opposite in gender with a slight deficiency of physical output, but just as efficient, Pamela Slaughter was the icing on the cake to what would prove to be a resilient group. She got along with the rest of the group fine, except for a few erroneous remarks it would be an excellent environment. Nevertheless, she shrugged them off and proved to be a tough gal who was well bred. They all were loyal to Kyser, and rightfully so, because he was a fair man.

Brutus Salapore vaguely listened to Richard and put more effort in reviewing his notes. Thorough indeed, Mr. Salapore could always be seen working on something even when just sitting. This was no exaggeration; if he wasn't eating, shitting, or sleeping, then he was reading, writing, or reviewing. These facts made him the most prepared to go out here and get some work done. The FBI team really didn't have a function but to patrol the area. Richard had panicked the last time, so he felt good with a few licensed shooters on his team. This seemed to be a good move, and Richard spoke on. "That is why I need you...ah, hmm..!" Richard grunted again to interrupt Susie and Andrew's lustful bon voyage. "As I was saying, Susie! We need you, so you and your spouse should keep your home affairs private, and at home. You are transportation to and from the site, also to haul any and everything we need." He stopped for a moment and spoke again sharply. "Brutus! Are you not the leader here? Keep their hormones at a manageable rate, or they will definitely be of no use." Brutus face showed his acquiescence. "Oh! Jerry Kratz is it." He acknowledged affirmatively and Richard continued on. "Pretty soon, we will need to transport heavy equipment here. So your first duty will be to sail a boat to the site and set anchor. The vessel I have provided can be used as an emergency medical facility. My dear old friend here, Doctor Julian Akbar, also specializes in language and medicine — quite some talent the doc has." Julian grinned and invited his introduction with arms open.

"You say he specializes in language and medicine. What else does he specialize in?" asked Agent Zimmerman. Julian remained silent, but he continued to gleam as he allowed Richard the honors.

"He also studies ancient antiquities and indigenous peoples of the Western hemisphere."

Wesley looked puzzled and glanced at Adam and Kyser before responding. "I hope this isn't some kind of science field trip, because I hated science."

Richard quickly soothed his confusion. "Oh no, believe you me! We are here to make preparations to build a state of the art export/import facility. In fact, a wonderful shipyard and maintenance complex. All of you will own the first shares. Just think of all the people who passed on Microsoft, and think about the few that owned the first shares. They are billionaires, to put it quite bluntly. Your money then can equal mine, well not

quite mine, but possibly close. However, until then, you have to help me.”

After Richard’s blabbering, he almost had everyone sold, but Wesley had to question all he’s said. “I understand about all of your money, and all the money you want to make, but I have one question. Why did you call, or NO. Excuse me. What caused you to feel you need the FBI or a professor of antiquities?”

“That is what I had planned, but...that’s another story. The fact is that I need a report on the area’s constructability delivered into the investors’ hands. The professor advised of the possibility of this area containing tribes who are territorial. It’s possible they won’t give up this unofficial land of theirs without a fight.”

Wesley, for some reason, remained puzzled. “What gave you the idea to ask him if tribes were in the area? Have you seen any?”

Richard looked stunned and replied negatively. “Well Wesley, I did my homework. I know tribes are plentiful in tropical rainforests all over the world. I know also that they have some strange beliefs that can even be cannibalistic. I just want to have someone on my crew I can rely on if we happen to run into any of these savages.” His comments had sufficiently nourished Wesley’s curiosity, but only a moment, for his appetite was tremendous.

Klinton Westfield was the other member of the team who remained silent. He was a well built man who was a good friend of the Kemp’s. The many years they worked together helped build that strong bond.

“You all know your jobs, so get ready to travel to the sight at dawn. As for now, enjoy yourselves, as I have Caribbean foods being cooked as we speak. I also have mixed drinks, but don’t get too pissy because we have a job to do.” Richard walked away and the crew adjourned, scattering their separate ways. Some remained in groups to talk, or some just had their own separate conversation. For instance, Wesley and Adam approached the grill area, while the Kemps sat on rocks that trimmed a crystal clear stream.

Andrew threw pebbles into the water and observed the evening sky. “Baby! We’ve been married for little over a year now, and I think I love you all over again.” Susie seemed surprised by the comments and hugged her loved one tight. At this point, anything he said had the ability to lift her off her feet. Klinton interrupted the bliss by

blurting, “What are you two lovebirds doing out here? You know, when they say until death do us part, well! If that be the case, I’m sure your hormones will play a dominant role.”

Andrew loosened his grip and replied to Klinton’s friendly sarcasm. “What are you talking about?”

“Oh you know that old saying: live by the sword, die by the sword. How about the same thing that will make laugh can make you cry.”

“Hey! A man can’t indulge himself into his wife, the one he loves and cares for, and cherishes?”

“OK! I didn’t mean for you to get all mushy on me.” Klinton looked around and whispered to Andrew, but before the listener could understand a word, Susie intervened.

“Get lost Klinton!”

“Alright, alright. I can see when I’m not wanted. That’s OK, I’ll let you newlyweds sicken yourself with an overdose of mush.” Klinton chuckled at his friends’ love and joked with them only because they were loving friends.

Susie grabbed Andrew and seductively declared, “Now that we have gotten rid of our diversion...” She pecked him on the lips several times. “Sorry we were interrupted.” Smacks sounded, but no one could hear them because the sounds of nature proved prominent. Wesley and Adam talked over some jerk and curry chicken, a Caribbean recipe that was unfamiliar to them. However, the way they devoured it proved it was delightful.

“Hey Adam, I didn’t hear what you think.”

“About what!” Wesley looked at him in disbelief and said, “About this job. Doesn’t something feel eerie.”

“I don’t feel anything. I’m just here to earn these twenty-five thousand dollars, in what, five days. You can’t beat that. What, five thousand a day?” Adam’s head filled with imagination when he wished this was his normal fulltime salary. “I’m not disputing the money’s good, but forget the money. Is it not strange he would call us just to look around.”

“Hey Wes, cool out man. I’m glad he needed us.” Wesley sipped his drink and grunted in disagreement. “Stop being so damned skeptical. It might just be a legitimate

way to make a decent living for a change.”

Wesley drank on and uttered softly, “Hmm...I hope you’re right.” He drank the last of his drink and grunted in the grimmest of tones. Wesley quickly fetched another drink, declining to follow Adam. Adam walked towards the living quarters where nearly all the crew had gone.

Kyser spoke to Richard, but no one could hear their conversation because they were some distance away. Pam and Roy battled in a game of chess on the central waiting room display set, which was made of stone and commemorated the ancient Aztec civilization. The bishops, kings and queens, and other pieces were practically sculptured. Pamela was the one who decided to make better use of it, other than just as a simple display set. It took some convincing just to get Roy to play. After trying to talk her out of it, Roy succumbed. She was a pretty good chess player, and it showed when she nearly checkmated him, but Roy was also worried about tampering with the beautiful piece and couldn’t really concentrate. His heavy drinking did not make his play much better either, but not much worse as well. He was used to the heavy doses of alcohol because it almost ruined him.

Pam hollered across the room, “Hey Adam! Do you want next on the shellacking I’m putting on Mr. Beavers here.”

“No thanks!” Adam was more interested in speaking to Kyser. Nevertheless, it was getting late, and everyone was heading to their rooms. Brutus had been embarked on a review of their situation all the while, but he was now exhausted from the staring of a lap top. Wesley made his way to the quarters pissy drunk, as was Roy and some of the other members of the crew.

So were Edward and Gary thousands of miles away, but they continued to have a good time and had no plans to turn in any time soon. Actually, Gary’s good time was an illusion, but he made the best of his intoxication. Sitting at the bar, he turned his head instantly when arms grabbed his shoulders. It was Edward Pullins with a great big smile upon his face. “What’s up! Cheer up!”

“Yes, easy for you to say. You’re getting all the women.” Edward’s smile burned like fire and refused to extinguish, but the commotion in the far corner of the bar nearly acted as a commonly used fire prevention tool. He noticed someone dressed expensively

and buying every one drinks. It was obviously this guy laced with alcohol who was walking a thin line between being just obnoxious and unbearably obscene. However, he would eventually fall over into that gray area because the bartender became annoyed. Tee asked the detectives to scare him a little. He didn't want to instantly eject the man from the bar, because he was spending quite a bit of money. However, if he didn't calm himself, then ejection was inevitable.

Gary jumped off his stool eagerly because this was his only real action all night. Edward followed along reluctantly feeling he was off duty, and that was that. Gary rushed on, so he followed. They approached closer to the commotion and noticed a well dressed man in the middle of the crowd. Gary said, "Excuse me sir! You're going to have to calm down, or you'll be asked to leave." Edward watched the man respond.

"Well who the fuck are you?"

This attitude ended Edward's silence quickly. "That doesn't matter! What matters is that bartender over there sent us over here because he's tired of your disturbances." The spiffy man continued to be obnoxiously entertaining to the people who were watching and benefiting from his generosity. Gary reached out and grabbed the man.

"Hold up! Get your fucking hand off me. I don't know you," declared the drunken man, jerking from Gary's grasp.

"Look sir, do you want to go to jail?" asked Edward.

The well dressed individual puffed himself up and replied, "I don't give a damn. I'll bail right out. If I'm a disturbance, then let him tell me." He pointed directly at Tee. "Who are you anyway, talking about jail. I haven't committed any crimes." The two detectives immediately flashed their badges and reached for the man.

"Hold up, Hold up!" the man yelled, jumping back and thereby resisting their attempts to restrain him, he continued blabbering. "Look man, I don't want to go to jail. I didn't know you were police, and I definitely didn't know I was a disturbance."

Gary had already grabbed the man's arm and maintained a squeeze. "Now you know," Gary advised with a heavy dose of attitude in his tone. He was eager to boot him out and was not paying any attention to the man's plea to give him a break.

"Look officer's, I'm just trying to relieve some tension. Let me buy you some drinks."

“Oh we don’t accept bribes,” said Gary.

“Give me a break. You police always want to arrest someone, but when you need them, where are they? No where to be found.”

“Shut up!” Gary blurted with bitter annoyance.

The man got more emotional when saying, “Oh yeah! You don’t want to hear that. They talk about the good, but hush-hush about the bad.”

Edward said, “Handcuff this fellow. We are taking him down ourselves.” Gary responded gracefully.

“That’s fucked up — you all taking me to jail.”

“We asked you to leave and you refused.”

“Look officers, I’m a law abiding citizen...”

“You look like a drug dealer to me.”

“Now I’m being stereotyped! Oh, a man like me can’t have expensive shit? That’s fucked up. You have to be confirmed rich. You know what, fuck you! Take me to jail. I’m not rich, but well on my way thanks to a certain, should I say, misfortune. It happened to turn an unfortunate into my good fortune.”

“Is it something you want to tell us?” Gary asked. “No! I don’t want to tell you shit. Except that if I were a white man then you would have passed me off as a rich and well established American citizen, but since I’m black I’m a drug dealer, a thug, or some sort of criminal. The fine things I have on must have come through illegal means. I know it, yeah, I know it. And if you think so, then you’re wrong. The fact is rich people get away with murder. Where were you guys when I needed you, when that rich motherfucker abandoned my friends.”

Edward looked at Gary and abruptly stopped what he was doing, paying strict attention to the last thing he heard. “What rich guy?”

“Man I can’t talk with these handcuffs on.” Edward began walking again as if no conversation had started. “OK, ok, some rich man named Richard.”

“Last name,” exclaimed Gary.

“I don’t recall his last name. We had a job in South America and I was the only known survivor.”

The detectives were shocked. “Survivor of what?” they said simultaneously.

“I really can’t tell you — it happened so fast. What does it matter? He abandoned my friends and I definitely won’t be going back.”

“Well, did you see anyone get murdered,” replied Edward.

“No! I just ran and actually fell asleep in a tree. He arrived the next morning.”

“He? The rich man?”

“Yes, that’s why I’m here. I haven’t heard from my partners and I fear they might be dead, like Milo.”

“You called the office, didn’t you?” The man failed to respond to Edwards’s comments, but he obviously felt relieved at being released from the handcuffs. The detectives offered to escort the man home after he told them his name.

Detective Pullins talked with him one on one. “Look, I didn’t tell you this. I’m investigating that case, but I hit a little snag. Are any of your partners named Joe Geshy?”

“No, and that name doesn’t ring a bell, but if you need any help, I will do whatever I can! Those are my friends, lost in the wilderness.” Edward thought things over for a moment while his partner could only wonder what he was pondering. “We can help each help each other. I help you with details and you help me by finding my friends and co-workers, but wait a minute. You said you hit a snag. What kind of snag?”

Gary took it upon himself to answer. “The captain won’t fund this one.”

“Why not?”

“Because the evidence is not clear, but wait, you could testify that Richard had abandoned your crew.”

Edward rejected that idea, “No! We won’t tell the captain this bit of information because something tells me he’s not that interested in successfully closing this case.”

Gary wondered what his partner was scheming. “Why not Edward? Why are you going to keep this a secret from the captain.”

“Something tells me he doesn’t want this case solved, or at least by me.” Edward turned to the man and said. “Well Nick! I’ll help you find your friends. You seem well off financially, can you contribute to our expenses? We can all go there together.”

“Oh no! I’m not going back there. I’ll fund the trip, but I’m not going anywhere, but especially that place — it’s creepy.”

“What’s so creepy about it.”

“That thick forest overnight, but I suppose you’ll find out.”

“What were you doing out there, you and your crew?”

“He paid me for a job, money that me and my crew were to split, but they didn’t return. The job was incomplete.”

“Well, why did he pay you?”

“I threatened to tell what happened. He told me to basically shut my mouth or he would report the check he had written me stolen.”

Edward looked at his partner. “Now do you still believe there’s nothing going on with this Dickenson character?”

Gary couldn’t disagree. “Are you going?” Gary asked.

Edward replied, “Of course.”

“Well, I’m with you.” The men exchanged information so they could get together in the morning to make preparations for South America. The night had conquered day entirely and the stars were no longer restricted from view. The detectives escorted Nick home and turned in themselves soon after.

Many of Richard’s crew had turned in because they had a busy morning as well. All sounds of nature crept, and made their distinctions by vociferating broadly about the forest. If one were to tour the forest at this time, he might find the surroundings exhilarating, but not if he was a native to the surroundings. The indigenous people had a bond with the forest, and so did the plant and animal life. This bond was so strong that the presence of foreigners was immediately recognized by the forest dwellers. This was a fact to the ancients because they believed every plant and animal on earth was designed to flow according to the laws of nature. They also believed that nature was expressed in the form of spirit, which were pure energy and consciousness absent physical form. Every living thing had spirit: plants, animals, and even humans, who are also animals.

A spirit with good intentions could sense a spirit with bad intentions. The crew was instantly sensed, especially because their intentions weren’t exactly soaked in holiness. They wanted to destroy life for their own personal gain, and this was a direct blasphemy of life itself. Anyone who could commit such vandalism couldn’t believe what the ancients believed. They knew for a fact that the earth was alive and represented the mother of life. The modern day members of the tribe hadn’t been in touch with their

ancestral knowledge for quite some time. Most of what they knew was passed down through oral story telling. Even though some of their ancestors' cities had survived the ages, they had no access to them. Not that any tribal member would be able to read anything from those times, but most of the records had been destroyed anyway. This very fact caused their beliefs to become distorted and incomplete.

However, the foundation of their beliefs remained intact, such as: spiritually, sorcery, and nature having God-like tendencies. It is believed that these people made the forest their permanent homes when the Europeans first colonized the West. There were even ancient texts that indicated the arrival of these Europeans would mark cursed times for their people. After generations, it is understandable how one could lose their civilized traits. However, it seemed they resorted to what their ancestors would have wanted. That is to live on the land and flow peacefully with nature. That is what they did for thousands of years, with their immaculate cities of gold and designer stone, sturdy as a continent and thus still standing even to this day. The cities also resembled alignments that complimented the stars victoriously. The curse was brought upon us to remember where we came from. In the old days, kingdoms got grand, because now that they were civilized and had amassed an enormous amount of culture, but they forgot where they came from. So now the curse would return them to the state in which they came, and they would now appreciate the next time the world was under their direction. The curse has gotten out of hand. The lands that were once relied upon to evolve a civilized people were threatened by a worldwide epidemic. So, the spirits were called upon, and by chance, all parties setting foot on ancient soil were now asleep.

There were chants of high praise. They were loud, as evil was near. It was time, and in the deep expanses of the soon to be explored forest lurked eyes that belonged to animals of all types, but how many and what kinds was impossible to know. Exactly how many belonged to fleeing descendants of those ancestors was also unknown. There are said to be many groups that speak languages that are unknown to modern civilization. However, these languages may be related to others that are known by outsiders, to similar dialects, and the professor specialized in language, but his skills were no guarantee that his companions would be able to communicate with the people they found. In the vicinity of the project site were a few of those people whose language was unknown to outsiders.

They danced around enormous trees and appeared to be trying to communicate with them, for they believed that the tree is the wisest living thing on earth. Everything about the lifecycle of a tree can be translated into human life experiences. They also believed the tree could be spoken to telepathically. Through certain sounds and vibrations produced with mouth and instruments, the tree was called upon for protection. This is what was happening, and the vibration got very loud, penetrating the dream state. Every one who stepped foot on this soil had an immense flash during their R.E.M., and the entire crew was affected, some worse than others. Joe's image invaded Richard's nightmares, and it too flashed intensely.

Nick had felt deep sorrow for his friends and waved goodbye to them. He was slowly carried away by a mysterious force; however, his eagerness to leave was nil.

Edward rolled over in his sleep several times. He was suddenly and rudely awakened by Richard's image flashing in his mind. He sat up worrying upon the night sky, pondering heavily on why this had appeared to him. Could he really be dreaming about a man he doesn't know? He passed it off as anxiousness and laid his head back down. Tiredness crept inside of him, and it was more than sleepiness that drew him back to sleep so quickly. The night carried on fierce in spirit, and the elements brewed in strength and terror.

The forces of nature in this part of the world were thought to be spirits, and spirits could be called upon. This has been depicted in many cultures and communicated in multiple shapes of diverse distinctiveness. Even unsuspecting cultures have these ideas secretly placed to program the children. One example is the x-men comic book super hero, "Storm." Her abilities to call upon nature's wrath and direct them in the purposes of her self defense proves just that. Even the brave, beloved, and bizarre Tarzan, who beat the odds and survived being raised by animals, to eventually obtain an essence and spiritual unity with nature unheard of by modern day man, is such an example. Nevertheless, your heart must be clean and sincere to now step foot on ancient property.

The sun pierced the eastern horizon and the radiance from its rays were slightly visible. Muggy indeed was the air that seemed to hug you tight. The sun assisted began to pound and sting like razor sharp clippers performing a close edge. The first individual to bear those strenuous conditions was Brutus Salapore. It did not fail, he was immediately

drawn to the work planned for the day. They had to get up early anyway. He was to take the boat with Jerry and Klinton. Their first job was to scan the bank where the river split to flow west and south. Getting on shore was the second objective. Brutus had to give a report to the investors as to the sufficiency of building such a structure. To do so he had to trek the jungle and decide how to go about producing this envisioned design. He walked out the door of his sleeping quarters to raise Jerry and Klinton.

Jerry had been up smoking a Salem while scarfing down black coffee. He was used to getting up early back on his Louisiana farm, which was where he acquired his talent to navigate — coasting the Mississippi River and Lake Bruin honed his skills. “Early to rise makes a man healthy and wise! Well good morning to you Brutus.” The whole while Jerry smiled ecstatically, but Brutus walked on past, replying gracefully.

“Yeah Jerry. We have a lot of work to do.” Jerry followed along to gather their final team member. Salapore briefed Jerry on their way to Klinton’s room.

They halted briefly before knocking on the door, and Jerry said, “This air reminds me of back home. The way it stuck to you felt like a cruel punishment. Even these damned mosquitoes are just as fierce.” Slapping one to smithereens was exactly what he was doing before admitting, “I think I have to give these here the edge.”

Brutus knocked on the door while calmly replying, “Yeah, they do seem to attack fiercely, sacrificing their lives like kamikaze’s just to feed their youngens, and to die without knowing they’ll grow, a pity.”

They knocked harder now, with both contributing to the ruckus. “Klinton!” Just behind the wood that divided them, Klinton lay there, seemingly lifeless, but the ruckus his comrades caused slowly respirationed him. Opening his eyes was essential, and so he wiped the mucus that permeated them, because it rendered his sight temporarily useless. However, his ears worked fine because the noise from beating of the door could not be ignored. Klinton finally got out of bed to throw on his work outfit. It wasn’t actually a uniform, but pieces of clothing he felt comfortable in. He opened the door casually, a groggy look upon his face. He seemed annoyed.

“Its time to work! Man, let’s get up! Klinton! Klinton!” Jerry continued in an enthused manner.

“I’m up, damn it! Just because ya’ll are workaholics, don’t make me one. Shit! I

just do my job, and I'm Audi-5000," Klinton said fiercely. "I'll bet you didn't have a problem getting old Mr. Outback up! Did you Brut? Hell no!" Klinton uttered smoothly and directly. With a grim look upon his face, he said, "That's because you're used to being awakened by a filthy male bird, to remind you of your chores, to feed your swine and milk your bull's mate. I didn't have the luxury growing up sailing boats and building engines with sire and siblings. Mine was astray anyway, Brut! What's on the agenda?"

"You know what Klinton? You're crazy," Jerry replied.

Brutus took note as he continued to lead them to their destination. "Listen up, gentlemen! There's an island, basically lying on the equator, southeast from here. Captain Briscoe will take us by chopper. This is where we will rendezvous with the science vessel, and of course board it and set sail." He grabbed Jerry's shoulder and reiterated, "Now this is where I need you. See, you have to sail us down the Amazon about a hundred and fifty miles southwest from our current position. This is where we reach the corner where the river splits, and also the spot where we will drop anchor. I guess a half mile or so off coast. It may be better to take smaller boats and view the coastline in that manner. Five square miles should be sufficient, so splitting up should yield faster results."

The men watched Brutus as he rambled on and hardly even noticed Jerry's interjection. "Well Brutus, are you sure we can split up? I mean, will both crews know exactly what we are looking for? It's only the three of us. He's the surveyor," he said, pointing swiftly and hastening to make his point. "You're the damn mathematicians, or whatever. The engineer, excuse me! I'm just a boat captain."

Klinton grabbed Jerry's shoulder and replied, "And a damn good one!"

Brutus looked as if he could not disagree, he calmed the men with his soft and murky voice. "I guess it would appear we are a little undermanned. I wonder if Captain Briscoe has any qualifications to assist us."

Klinton replied, "Brutus, me and you can go on separate boats. I pretty much know what you're looking for. I may not be a civil engineer, but working with you for eight years has developed my skills."

Brutus replied in the same calm and easy manner. "I guess you're right. I have taught you well..."

Klinton interrupted smoothly, “Yes you have! I only have an associate of science in surveying and mapping, but working with you, I’ve learned a lot.”

“What do you expect? I have a way of rubbing my talents off on my workers. It could be the equivalent of a doctoral program. Maybe when I retire I’ll...”

Jerry was quiet for a moment, but couldn’t help but interrupt. “That’s all fine and dandy, Mr. Teacher and Pupil, but I’m the only navigator. Does Briscoe operate boats?”

Klinton blurted, “I really don’t know who this Briscoe guy is.”

Brutus did know and explained to his workers. “I think he has a few skills under his belt. I’m pretty sure it wouldn’t be a problem to operate a small motorboat. In fact, from what I hear, he’s quite skilled, possibly a hit man for Richard.”

“You think!”

“I’m just kidding, he’s just a good handy man.”

The leader of the group explained the plan, especially to Klinton. He had to be sure Klinton would analyze the shores exactly as they should be analyzed. This was all done, and Brutus now advised them of the arrangements. “OK Klinton! You and Jerry take the east bank, traveling south. Briscoe and I will take the north shore traveling west. We may need to travel up to five miles down river.” Brutus used his two way radio to alert Briscoe of their readiness. He also wanted to explain that they needed his help. Briscoe was OK with that. He was in fact being paid well by Richard. The three men waited for Briscoe at the helicopter.

Briscoe was actually consulting with Richard while Brutus and his crew waited. “They need your help,” declared Richard. He continued on in a pumped up manner. “Actually, I need to be getting the rest of the crew set. You go ahead. Brutus knows exactly what to do. I’m going to get Andrew and Susie, just help them out with whatever they need. By the time your crew is finished we should already be there.” Briscoe ran off to meet the men who waited for him, and Richard turned the opposite direction to get his crew ready to go. He rounded them up quickly, advising them to meet in the helicopter field.

Already in those fields, Jerry was saying, “I think that might be that Briscoe guy.” They stared the best they could into the rising South American sun at the man that approached them. The humidity could be measure using only your skin, and the sphere

now above the horizon made it evident that there was a blistering day to come. As early as it was, the crew still had to shade their eyes for Briscoe was traveling west. He approached them rapidly with the old man's tower just behind him. The little man in fact watched on.

"I'm Briscoe," he said bluntly while reaching out his hand.

Brutus accepted his hand and replied, "Brutus! This is my crew, Jerry and Klinton." They looked each other eye-to-eye before Jerry halted the stand off.

"OK gentlemen! Are we ready? I hope you're a good pilot." Brutus and Briscoe separated themselves from Jerry's seeming touchiness.

"That I am. I hope you're as good at whatever it is you do."

"The best," said Jerry, but before he could say anything else.

"Concentrate men. We have work to do," Brutus replied. Klinton said nothing, just wanting the job to be over. The amount of his pay even slipped his mind.

Jerry looked at Klinton and joked, "Why aren't you saying anything, boy? Yah getting scared?"

Amusement followed, but after that comments spilled from Klinton's lips instantly. "I told you. I just want to do my job. All that yibber-yabber, I really don't need. So if you'll excuse me, I need to concentrate on what I was thinking about."

"Whooah... The man is..."

"Let's go, men. We need to get this chopper headed for the island." They complied with those commands, and off they flew.

"I told you gentlemen, we had to hurry because it will take us several hours to get to the spot. This time does not include the job we have to do once we get there," exclaimed Brutus.

Briscoe flew the chopper undisturbed, but Klinton responded to Brutus' previous reminder. "OK Brut! We are on the way. No need to huff and puff."

As Jerry listened he couldn't help but add his own two cents. "Yeah Brutus! We're the best you got. Shit man, we're all you got! We'll get the job done!" He slapped his hands on Brutus' shoulder.

"Well, I hope so, because it pays a lot of money."

"Oh yeah," drawled Jerry in a deep and groggy country accent.

Klinton said, “I don’t care about the money! I just want to get the work done and get home. Unfortunately enough, I work with you lunatics. Jerry! I don’t know what you are so excited about, because Brutus is going to pay you whatever he wants. Shit, we work for him.”

Jerry wasn’t fond of Klinton’s prior comments. He had a disappointed look upon his face as he replied, “Brutus! We haven’t discussed pay. I know we’re salaried, but this isn’t no ordinary job.”

Brutus was obviously annoyed, but he did not look Jerry’s way and responded casually to his comments. “This really is not a good time to be discussing salaries. We need to be concentrating on the work at hand. But, to keep your minds at ease, there will be huge bonus incentives for a job well done.” Jerry and Klinton looked at Brutus as if he had spoken uncivil words. Klinton didn’t give a damn — he was used to Brutus and his impudence. That is why he set his mind on just getting the job done.

Klinton gazed out of the chopper’s window and felt deeply that he didn’t belong here, and he was certain that he really didn’t care to be here. “I’ve been coerced!” He thought.

Jerry’s actions were similar, but his thoughts were manifested verbally. “Is that the type of response you give? I’m out here...like crocodile Dundee, slash Tarzan, some type of hybrid because I navigate boats, and I get an answer like that about my money? I thought we were better than that! We didn’t even get a chance to talk about money. Forget, you called us in the wee hours of the morning and came just short of demanding our presence or our jobs were suspect. Oh, I’ll give you a good job alright, but first, me and you must talk.” Silence loomed for a few moments before Jerry continued his raving. Looking at Klinton, he said, “You believe this...”

“Sit your happy ass down,” declared Klinton, growing impatient with the noise. Captain Briscoe looked back at Jerry and felt a little compassion. His empathy was because Jerry wanted proper compensation, and who could argue with that? As he brought the chopper down, Briscoe decided to comment only on the fact that he intended to land.

The landing and the following journey went smoothly, which led them to a well equipped science vessel that made Jerry extremely excited. Neglecting to help the others

check off all needed supplies, he quickly familiarized himself with the helm. He found touring the entire boat an ongoing thrill. He now understood who it was that he was working for. To supply such a vessel proved that Richard was a man of means indeed. He thought hard now, “I need to talk to Brutus! Money like this...” Jerry immediately searched for Brutus to discuss his salary further. Brutus was not far off, just at the other end of the vessel. He was setting up scopes and measuring equipment for the landscape. The vessel was large enough to carry three emergency boats, two had a motor and the other was a wooden paddle boat. This particular boat hung in the back of the vessel, and the motorboats hung on opposite sides.

“Excuse me...Brutus! Can we talk?”

“Sure! What is it plaguing your mind?”

“Well, I’m sure you know my concerns. I’m far away from home, and I don’t know the dangers this job might entail. Look man! We’re all the way out here! Do you see more than just duty?” Jerry continued to rave on, not giving his boss much time to speak. Finally, Brutus did satisfy Jerry after advising him of his pay. It wasn’t really what could have been, or should have been, but Jerry was not keen to current labor trends. Nevertheless, it was more than he had been accustomed to. He was eager to sail now, and that’s what the crew did.

The other crew was being gathered by Richard Dickenson, alongside Kyser Finley. The two made small talk while waiting for the others. Andrew and Susie were the first to gather around Richard and Kyser. “Hello, gentlemen,” declared Susie with a delightful voice. She was this way because her spouse had his hands rapped around her, and she continued to feel tremors from earlier that morning. The newlyweds truly had love, passion, and lust boiling within. They were unlike Jerry in that they were more informed as to their compensation. In fact, they just about doubled what Jerry managed to negotiate. Wesley and Adam approached, and they too were engaged in their own small talk.

“Adam!” Wes hollered. “You ready to fly in this jungle, to watch a bunch of smartass engineers survey land? I think you’re right — this must be the easiest, not to mention most, money I have ever made on a side job.”

“I think it’s going to be pretty boring, if you ask me.” Adam looked at Wesley as

if he waited for a response.

“I guess your right, but if the money’s good...”

They approached Kyser Finley and the others, where greetings were exchanged, and Roy and Pam finally dragged themselves along.

“OK, listen up! Once again, I would like to thank you all for being a part of this team. This shouldn’t take long, two full days at the most. Then we are out of here. Obviously we need two choppers, so if I can break you two love birds up.” He grabbed Susie Kemp and placed her on the opposite side of Andrew.

“Who’s the best pilot?” asked Richard.

They both hesitated before Susie exclaimed, “Why, of course, Andrew. Clearly, he taught me.”

Richard turned to Andrew and said, “I’m riding with you!” He proceeded to separate the team, and they boarded their respective helicopters.

At the precinct, Edward and Gary sat at their respective desks and assumed they were alone. Everyone was either on duty or at lunch or somewhere else deep in precinct confines, except Rick Powers. He was walking down the hall towards the gentlemen.

Gary looked up at Edward and said, “Where are you going? I’m going with you.”

Edward looked at him sternly. “Shhhh!!!” His index finger split his lips dead center and pointed to the sky. He moved as close as possible to Mr. Stevens and said, “I don’t want this to leak.” Around the corner, that very statement halted Rick Powers. Rick wanted to know what wasn’t supposed to be known. He eased alongside the wall and tried honing his hearing. Edward whispered to Gary once more, “I’m leaving before noon. I have a hunch that, even if Richard didn’t kill someone, he knows a lot about it.” Edward got even closer to whisper again, with even more reduction in volume. Rick tried hard to hear more, but the whispers became vague since the first comments. Richard changed his mind on going into the room with Edward and Gary, especially after hearing some portion of the scheme.

He turned one hundred and eighty degrees to head down the previously trotted path, eager to reach George Gunther’s office. Barging into the captain’s office was never a good idea, but he was intoxicated with hot news.

Gunther looked up, startled, and declared bluntly, “Oh, this had better be good.”

Gunther held his hand over the receiver of the phone. It was obvious that his patience were wearing thin with his subordinate. Rick clumsily carried himself into the captain's office with the thinnest of breath. "Captain, Captain," said Rick with excitement. "I heard Edward saying something about Richard."

"Well! What did he say?"

"He said something about Richard murdering someone, and he didn't want anyone to know."

Gunther looked intrigued by the information just given to him. "You're excused, Powers." Gunther wondered what Edward hadn't reported. "Murder, that's absurd!" thought Gunther, but what if Edward really had something. Captain Gunther told the person he was speaking to that he'd call them back, then called an authority within the precinct. The two collaborated on a plan. The first step was to call Edward into his office. He buzzed Edward at his desk, "Let me see you please, Mr. Pullins."

Edward looked at Gary and both were puzzled by the sudden summons. Edward headed for Gunther's office with butterflies tingling within his stomach. He walked hesitantly down the hall, wondering what Gunther could want with him. Edward slipped the door open as if regret gave him the power to do so. As soon as he was fully inside Gunther's office, he was consumed with an anxiously heavy voice.

"I called to notify you of a change."

Edward was baffled but responded in a tempered manner. "What change?"

"I'm taking you off the case."

"What?! What the hell is going on?" Edward's rage was nearly not containable. "Why am I being...what reason do you have for pulling me?" Edward stuttered with his speech, but he continued on frantically pleading his case. "What have I done? I don't understand."

"It's not for you to understand. I've just decided to make a change. I feel someone else would fit better on this case. Besides, you haven't gotten anywhere with the case yet, have you?"

Edward snarled and blurted, "No! I haven't, but who in the hell will be better than me."

Gunther ignored Edwards's last comments and said, "Are you sure there is

nothing else to report about this case?”

“No there isn’t!”

“Hmm... Well, to answer your question, I’ll make an announcement when I see fit. You’re dismissed.”

Edward was stunned and it delayed him from leaving the captain’s office. When he did leave, he made sure that the door was slammed behind him. Edward’s rage now boiled over. Before he could get back to his desk, he noticed fellow officers going through his files.

Gary sat and watched with astonishment. “Hey Edward, man! I asked them what they were doing, but they continued on as if I wasn’t here. Edward watched Gary through the corner of his eyes to hear him out, but most of his attention was drawn to the exploiting officers. “What the hell are y’all doing, Mike! Pete! What’s going on?”

Detective Mike Sasson looked up and responded as if he owed his colleague nothing. “We are seizing all records for the Dickenson case, by order of the captain.”

Gary and Edward stood there shocked, but it didn’t stop Edward from declaring rudely, “This is bullshit!” Then he stormed out the door.

The humidity was far from letting up, for it had just begun. The crew who shuttled the science vessel experienced this from front row seats. Jerry stood tall in front of the boat where he steered and enjoyed the view. Briscoe and Klinton sat in the quarters and played cards, while Brutus walked alongside the boat railing checking out different views. They were a ways from their destination, so any view now was just recreational.

The helicopter crew had already caught up with the departed science vessel in no time. Susie Kemp’s aircraft lead the way, with Richard and her husband close behind. Their flights were going smoothly, and besides the choppers’ ruckus, you could hear small talk. Richard didn’t have much to say, because he dealt primarily with Brutus Salapore. He in turn was the point of this entire trip. It so happened that he needed extra pilots for the extra men Brutus would need. The premonition of the professor’s skills coming in handy was the reason he felt the need for this man’s services. The FBI crew was considered a buffer for his protection, but uncertainty set in fiercely and was the cause for his dense thoughts. What was about to occur was truly the unknown, and that fact heightened Richard’s every sensation. Nevertheless, Richard did not restrict his

pilots from proceeding. In his mind, all he needed was for Brutus to write the report, even if it was exaggerated. That was the driving force for his eagerness, and nothing seemed to be able to stop him. At least that is what he believed, especially since he could pay whatever price was necessary to get what he needed.

“So, Andrew! That is your name, right?”

“Yes it is,” responded the pilot sarcastically.

“I’m sorry, I’m not good with names. So I see your wife is a pretty good pilot. She’s really flying that baby” He noticed her because she led the way to a sharp left turn. They were just about ready to land. It wasn’t that short of a ride, and they were all ready to stretch out their stiffness.

One of the FBI agents blurted, “Damn, we’re not there yet?”

Kyser Finley rode in the chopper with Andrew and Richard and heard the comments his fellow mates made clearly. It wasn’t a problem until the same agent continued to blabber. “You know what, this is extreme! If we weren’t making what you are paying us Mr. Rich guy, there’s no way I would be on this trip, not for a penny less.”

Kyser Finley immediately responded to the last comment. “Now that’s not appropriate to say.”

Richard said, “Oh no, that’s OK! I like a man that is concerned about his money. That reminds me of me. You see how I’m able to pay all of you? Sure the hell is not by not worrying about my money. You see, this is why I’m out here. This project will leave me strikingly rich, allow me to reach another level in which you all become peasants. My goal is to be number one in the funds department.”

Richard sat back indulging in the silence his listeners now bathed him in. Then he continued, “You know I do a little flying myself. Maybe we need to take three choppers so we can race.”

“Just make sure I’m not a passenger!” Klinton replied meaningfully.

“It’s just about time to land,” Andrew indicated to Richard. Susie made that apparent as her helicopter dipped severely, and Andrew followed her same procedure. It was difficult to land because the jungle was very thick and would not cooperate. To find clearance was difficult because they didn’t arrive at the already prepared landing field. Susie had drifted off course a little, but even so, the previously prepared area would be

difficult to land in due to the thick trees.

Andrew followed his wife's trajectory to a tee, until receiving a radio transmission. "What is it baby?"

"This spot ahead is clear of trees, like a little patch, and it seems to be flat ground. I'm going to land here."

"Roger that!" They landed the choppers on soft ground, and had to walk about 200m to the camp that was built by the late Gary Russy.

Drifting along in the beautifully equipped boat, Jerry shouted, "There's land just ahead of us."

Brutus approached Jerry to give him instructions. "Jerry! Sail the boat right along there." He pointed exactly where he wanted and Jerry comprehended quite well. The next step was to drop anchor, for this was a good spot. A continuous scrape and rattle sounded loudly from beneath the boat, and before you knew it the boat was idle. The men quickly released the two motorboats.

"You think we should release the reserve boat?" Klinton asked. Jerry said no, but Klinton had already started to untie the boat. Klinton did stop, but had neglected to tie the boat back tightly, and the inevitable was for the safety boat to drift away. For now it seemed secure, so the men paid no attention. They were more interested in loading the motorboats with the equipment they needed. All supplies were loaded, and it was now time to survey the land, and map the shores.

Briscoe and Brutus cranked their motor as soon as they were fully loaded. They were floating away from the sun because it was a little after noon and they sailed west. Jerry and Klinton headed south. The science vessel pointed directly towards the land that looked like a pointer itself, because that is where it split the river in two. It was the main reason one crew went west and the other went south. Brutus had his boat moving smoothly while Jerry and Klinton barely qualified as being setup.

Brutus looked back at what he could see of the science vessel. "They are just leaving. Why are they so damned slow? Looks like they let the emergency boat free. I don't know why? They don't need the damn thing."

He seemed annoyed, and it carried over to Briscoe. "What Brutus? They weren't supposed to?"

“I don’t know what for — they don’t need it.” Briscoe shook his head in disbelief and continued on with his westward survey.

Jerry and Klinton finally got going after scuffling over petty matters. The two always bickered; however, their friendship allowed it to be humorous sarcasm in content.

“Goddamn it! Klinton, let me drive the boat.”

“You’re not the only one who can drive a simple motorboat. Just because you’re a self-proclaimed captain don’t mean a damn thing to me.”

“Ahh... put a sock in it,” replied Jerry. He continued his defense in their war of words. “You just survey the fucking land while I boat on.”

Several hours had come to pass, Brutus and Briscoe’s trip went fine in the meantime. They worked well together and got much accomplished. In fact, they were just about to turn around and head back for the science vessel. Things weren’t so speedy for Jerry and Klinton. During their several hours of conflict, they managed only half the work their counterparts produced. It was at least another hour before they could turn around and head back to the big ship. At that rendezvous point, things were undisturbed, except for the reserve boat that slowly drifted away. It floated slowly down stream southward, and if Brutus saw this it would outrage him just because he knew the two could hardly get anything done together. The boat continued down the river southbound, and nothing was stopping its departure. It did not float fast, but briskly enough. No motor nor sails powered it, but the strong river currents moved everything else and it was no exception.

Even though it had been hours, Jerry and Klinton still tangled with each other about every little thing. They had argued about Jerry going too fast and Jerry going too slow. The bickering also resulted in Klinton inadvertently hitting Jerry in the head with the equipment he was using. A hard clump with a scope was enough for Jerry. “Will you watch where the hell you’re going with that?”

“I could if you keep the damn boat still!”

“I don’t see you driving it, do I?”

“I tried to remember, but you wanted to make yourself useful for a change.”

“That’s the problem with you people. You learn how to do something and you get careless and think you know everything.”

Klinton was not fond of those comments, and stared with a sharp and short tempered glare, responding in a hyperventilated manner. “What the fuck... did you say... you people!” Then Klinton carelessly mishandled the scope, blundering into Jerry’s head again.

“Goddamn it,” Jerry shouted in tremendous discomfort. He jumped up at Klinton. In defense, Klinton lunged to grab Jerry in an effort to slow him to a halt. However, that did not work the way he wanted. They locked up in a bear hug, both trying to do something that was unclear. The uncertainty of their tussling loomed large since they had little room on their four-party boat. Usually, when two men tussle, it is meant for one to over turn the other. That is what happened, but who overturned who was not clear, because both went overboard. The two remained entangled causing a large splash in the water. A deep plunge into the deep trenches of the Amazon was the last thing on their minds. Winning the entanglement was the first thought, but when they finally reached the surface of the water their feelings had changed. They both gasped for air as they came up, and Jerry shouted, “Shit, oh shit...” His shouts weren’t because they had fallen into the water. He was used to that, but it was what Klinton stared at so hard. He even seemed stunned from the view, and for that, Jerry continued his raving. “Help, what we gonna do?” Klinton said nothing for the moment, but used that energy instead to tread water. He still couldn’t stop looking at what was before him. “Klinton, man save me, shit. I didn’t mean it.”

“It’s your fucking fault,” Klinton shouted, but he said no more for he knew his energy would be needed.

On the other hand, Brutus and Briscoe were on the way back to the science vessel to record their information. “I hope those gentlemen are about on their way back,” Brutus exclaimed.

Briscoe listened and offered comforting suggestions. “Well, I’m sure they are right on schedule.”

“Hmmm...,” Brutus muttered in a not so convinced manner. “Knowing them two...Hmmm... you don’t know them two.”

“Relax, Brutus! We are here to make a little money, and at least we are in the tropics. Just look at it as a vacation.”

Brutus looked at Briscoe with an unappealing smirk that had disgust written all over it. "I hardly call this a vacation," replied the engineer while slapping the life out of a life sucking insect.

"Well, I'm sure you can't disagree that the money's good."

"You're right, I won't deny that." A momentary pause set in, just about a second, "Oh shit!!!" Briscoe shouted while barely holding onto the side of the boat. Brutus had a tight grip, with both hands clutched to the boat's rails opposite of each other. The boat took a large jolt. Brutus calmed the situation, declaring, "We got hit by a serious wave, or maybe the current, or something." The boat did however stay afloat and continued along its original path. As they moved along the murky waters, their senses felt like they were in overdrive.

Briscoe's eyes were keen, because he noticed a boat ahead. It seemed similar in size to the one he was on, but maybe his perception was disrupted from the overuse of his senses. "Look Brutus! That looks like Jerry and Klinton but they are supposed to be on their way back to the science vessel... I... I don't think anyone's on that boat. The motor is running and it's headed right for us." The men shouted and kicked into overdrive in an attempt to get out of the way of the runaway. It was an exhilarating experience, not to mention there was no one seemingly here to save them because they were a bit short on the lifeguards. Because their deadline was short, they gave no effort to catch the runaway. Instead they continued on their course for the science vessel. Intrigue and suspense dominated the two men.

"I wonder how in the hell could they manage that. Probably fooling around with that other boat, and messed around a lost... the fucking boat."

Briscoe softly replied, "I hope they are not overboard. These waters are filled with things North America has yet to see." Brutus seemed worried, and pushed the boat as fast as it would go. In no time they had reached the science vessel.

"Think we should check the boat."

"I don't think they are on the boat. Something tells me they're out there somewhere. I knew something was strange when they released that emergency boat. What in the hell are they up to? Now they lost the most valuable one. I told you, you don't know these dimwits." They began to speed off towards the south.

There was no more bickering and fussing between Jerry and Klinton, because they concentrated on saving their lives. Klinton yelled as softly as he can, “Just be quiet and still.”

“I’s tired of treading. What are we going to do?” whined Jerry?

“I don’t know, damn it. Just swim.” Klinton did just that, and very fast. He thought he could reach the science vessel by swimming, but he was wrong, because to swim two miles or so would be extremely tiresome. If, in fact, he made it that far before being eaten. There were definitely things lurking that would love to eat him. They weren’t bleeding was a plus, but the havoc they made trying to swim was not. It proved to be an extreme negative, when their initial plunge disturbed a nearby crocodile that was absolutely territorial.

“I’m tired of swimming, Klinton!”

“Stop crying and swim. I can’t carry your ass. Shit, I’m tired too, but what? Are you gone give up and just sink.”

“No! I’m swimming toward shore. It must be some ways ahead. It’s shorter to land.” Klinton stopped for a moment and tread water in place. He glanced toward shore, noticing it probably was closer but still a stint. The fact that the rugged shoreline resembled swampland was also noticed, and Klinton realized the difficulty of maneuvering trying to get ashore. Without notification, Klinton continued to swim northward. Jerry started for shore just as quickly as Klinton, but their paths were perpendicular. They both were extremely tired, nearly causing them to surrender to the river’s demands. However, they both had fight left in them and continued on. The disturbed reptile got more and more agitated. Jerry splashed heavily, and strikingly close to his territory. The prehistoric lizard could swim fast, and Jerry was an intruder and something had to be done. The lizard beast lunged his intimidating jaws out at Jerry and chomps down forcefully.

Klinton was continuing to swim and leaving Jerry far behind. He appeared now to be swimming at some distorted angle, heading directly towards what appeared to be a boat. He swam fast and aggressively because, if he didn’t, the tiredness would set in. Finally reaching the boat, he climbed in clumsily. He was ever so tired, and he didn’t even think about Jerry just yet. He had to recover from the exhaustion of swimming and

treading. A loud shriek echoed, and Klinton jumped out of his recuperating status and began to row towards Jerry's distress call.

A near miss with the alligator sent Jerry underwater briefly, but he managed to pull himself above water. He quickly tried to swim away from the dinner menu. Chance was in his favor for the beast had already eaten a hearty meal. The prime reason for striking out at Jerry was for the protection of his territory. Nevertheless, Jerry swam ahead, to the north where his partner had gone. It was a panic swim, but he did reach his comrade halfway.

"Jerry, Jerry, hold on," yelled Klinton ecstatically. He reached over to pull Jerry aboard.

"Oh shit, oh my goodness," Jerry said through his panting. He was exhausted but happy to be alive. Fortunate for them both, they were safely aboard the runaway reserve boat. There time wasn't now, but it had been a particularly close call for Jerry. They rowed away soaking wet.

"Thanks Klint, man! I thought you might leave me."

"Oh no, then I could pester you. Even though you say some foul shit, you still my friend. We have a job to do besides that, and I can't do it without you."

"Hey! Thanks man, you're right. We have money to make." Klinton looked at Jerry as if to say that all the previous comments were simply forgotten.

Just ahead, again Briscoe's keen eyes were put to test. Briscoe informed Brutus of his detection of a moving object before them. Brutus rose cautiously trying not to shake the boat. "I think that's a boat," said the captain.

Brutus added his verbal contribution slickly, "It appears I am correct in my assumption." The captain was not clear what these comments meant. Brutus sensed that and continued, saying, "I believe we've found our distressees, and why they gave up the motorboat for that row boat is unapparent. I told you, these two together... So how in the hell did you manage that?" asked Brutus, as soon as they were within hearing. He turned to Briscoe, but still commented on the quicksilver his two employees produced. "Now, tell me! How in the hell do you manage that? You see... didn't I warn you, Briscoe... These guys are nincompoops. So, let's hear it. How in the hell did this happen, you're all wet... Oh, I'm eager to hear this!" Brutus had spoken erratically while Briscoe watched

on.

The two alleged dimwits spoke out simultaneously. "I, We..."

"Can I hear one at a time, or better yet! I do not want to hear a thing. Just make sure you row that boat all the way back. Follow us and you better not fall behind. We are not a search team, so try not to get lost. We may not be able to come search for you." Brutus cranked his motor and headed west. He was on his way to the campsite to meet Richard.

Klinton and Jerry watched them pull away briskly, and hustled to begin rowing behind them. "Come on! We need to keep up."

"I'm rowing as fast as I can. I know your weak ass ain't talking. Don't act like you on the all kayaking team, rowing your ass down wild white water rapids. You forgot, all you good for is headaches and sailboats. But when it comes time to depend on your physique, we're in trouble." The two rowed on even though Brutus and Briscoe were no longer in their sights.

As it became impossible for them to see their co-workers, Jerry's face became longer, even speaking of his demeanor to Klinton. "You know Klinton, something's real funny, you know. I've been feeling strange." A small stutter followed before Jerry finished stamping his complaints. "I mean we're supposed to make all this money, and I think Brutus said something about a small partnership in whatever he's building out here... and why did he pick all the way out here anyway? Isn't that funny! Goddamn it, everything's funny around here."

Klinton had heard Jerry gracefully and wanted to respond eagerly. He did so, and with a motivational tone comically delivered. "Shit! You just almost got your ass ate by an alligator. I'd feel funny too, but I told you! I don't wanna be here. First off, it's damn near winter, but I'll be damned if they heard of that around here. It was hot as fish grease when you all woke me up, and what time was that? No telling what time zone we're in. Shit, you're the sailor. Can't you look up at the stars or something and tell me where we are." Klinton looked up at the piercing sun receiving the best view, because on the water the trees were wedged away. It nearly blinded him. "I guess not. Well, can you look at the sun and tell me what time it is... I would say it's about some time around after noonish, since the sun is just above us."

Jerry listened casually, because he was amazed by the conglomerations of the trees on both sides of him. Klinton again asked, “What do you say about that?” Jerry snapped out of his visual entrapment and gave Klinton a submissive response.

“Yeah sure.” Jerry, not fully free of his observational engagement, watched on while ignoring Klinton’s efforts to get him to help row. Nevertheless, they carried on slowly down the river.

The Kemp’s and their passengers were safely landed. They placed the choppers down on soft land, and not the concrete laid by the late Mr. Russy. Richard forgot to tell them that is where to land, but since Susie led and he rode with Andrew, it slipped his mind. However, for the time being it remained a sufficient spot. They did indeed drift off course by several meters, which made for a good trek to camp. They traveled in a crooked line with Richard leading the way. He blabbered about how he was appreciative that they had come, promising a relaxing trip filled with new experiences. Kyser Finley was second behind Richard along the light-evading path. For some reason, Richard’s gut feeling for direction was extraordinary, as if his soul has been here and knew the proper direction well. Whatever the case might be, he quickly directed them to camp. In the meantime, the group engaged in small talk amongst themselves. They had broken off into groupings that switched periodically depending on the conversation at hand. Except for Kyser, he remained behind Richard and mostly engaged in conversation with him. If he wasn’t talking to Rich you could hear him slapping his arms for the constant bites

In the back of the line, agent Adam Newfield was occasionally watched by the professor. However, agent Newfield was unaware and continued picking and poking at wild plant life. “Ahhh... shit!” Adam yelled as he pricked his finger on an unidentifiable plant that drew some small portion of blood.

Just as he experienced the slight pain, the professor blurted, “Hey! What did you say your name was?”

“Adam.”

“Well you know Adam, you may not want to go around fondling unfamiliar plant life. Catch yourself a serious case of poison ivy.” It was ironic the professor would say such a thing, because Adam had an object in his hand at that moment that appeared to be

some type of small dried up berry he picked from that most recent plant.

He replied in a cocky manner, "I appreciate your concern, but I believe I'll be OK. I've been trained in identifying certain type of plants. I know what poison ivy and poison oak look like." He placed a period at the end of his statement by flipping the unknown berry out of his hand. It hurtled ahead of the pack, skipping over Wesley and Pam and popping Roy Beavers in the back of the neck. Agent Beavers looked up quickly to see what had fallen on him. He realized maybe nothing fell when, like radar dishes, his ears began to pick up soft chuckles that were supposed to be concealed.

"Alright back there, who's being the wise guy," replied Roy, but it did nothing but fuel the giggles.

Pam had exclaimed a bright and vociferous screech. "Ahhh..." femininely echoed throughout the forest. This was caused by her looking down at a snake slithering below her. Roy was a witness as well, and he jumped in the opposite direction, as did Pam. The crew paused momentarily while they watched Wesley pull out his favorite blade and jump to chop off the snake's head off. He said with ridicule, "What's the matter? Are you scared of a little snake?" He laughed uncontrollably as the snake's nerves shook like a puppet. Kyser alerted the crew that they needed to continue along, because Richard carried a fast pace. He stretched his arms fairly aggressive and chanted, "Let's move along, gentlemen." The pace was resumed and so was the small talk.

"I'm not too fond of snakes. I'm glad you did away with that one," said Julian.

Wesley responded grimly. "I hate them too."

The professor continued the conversation with good intentions, "It seems you do have something against snakes. Did you have some childhood encounter with snakes that caused your disdain?"

Wesley replied, "No! I used to catch them to cut their heads off."

The brilliant one was puzzled, but like all scholars, he lived by a simple dictum: if you don't know, ask! "Well why did you do that?"

"I used to get a kick out of watching the snake shiver the last life out itself."

The professor instantly concluded that Wesley's heart was cold. He made his way to Pam to offer a gentle word. "Never mind him. I'm sure he didn't mean it!"

Pam was not cooperating with Julian's pep talk. She exclaimed, "Sure, I bet. You

know he's a pig and can care less about my feelings about snakes."

"Oh! How do you feel about snakes?" Pamela looked as if surprised he actually wanted to know. Nevertheless, she told him. "Since I was a child, I had a few encounters with snakes that terrified me. My brother used to keep them as pets, and they used to get out sometimes, and..." She broke down her speech a bit just before crying surely ended her statements prematurely. The professor placed his arms around her for comfort. In fact, he had needed it more than Pam. This was a splendid opportunity, one that hardly ever came Julian's way, to be close to a woman. "It will be OK," the professor uttered softly.

Pamela turned away from the professor's unwanted fondling. "Excuse me... I think I'm OK now." She picked up her pace and left him behind with Adam. Julian looked at him with disgust. As if he lost his big chance to score, and this was his just reward.

At that moment, Agent Newfield belched out a horrendous sneeze. "Oh excuse me. My allergies are having a hard time in this humidity." The professor tried to get some distance from Adam because he seemed gross after snot blew from his nostrils.

They finally arrived at camp after their short hike through the woods. Fortunately for them it was a manageable trail. Needless to say, that was for the time being and only before nature had a say so.

"Is this what you call camp," complained Akbar.

A voice pierced from around the corner boldly saying, "Well it will have to do!" Whose voice was irrelevant because the statements were true.

"Well who made this place any way," exclaimed Agent Newfield. No one seemed to want to answer. Even the most qualified one remained silent momentarily.

After feeling a jolt in his conscience, Richard said, "That's not important. What is important is that this trip was prearranged, and it should go smoothly. We can set up the tents over there, and there's even... I know it's not luxury."

"You can say that again."

"Well that is why you are paid so well, so it will have to do. I'm sure you won't have a hard time adjusting to make do."

"Ahhhchooo..." disbursed from Adam's mouth and nose, and the professor

replied treacherously.

“Your sinuses are bad.” He looked at Adam while assuring he kept some distance. Adam said nothing, but showed signs of a minor cold brewing. The professor went away to blabber his life’s history to Pam while Wesley assumed the conversation with Adam.

“You alright!?”

“Yes I’m fine.”

Roy Beavers, Kyser Finley, and Richard Dickenson sat in circle casually conversing. “So, Rich!” shouted Kyser, but not really loudly. After scratching his arms he patted Richard on the back and said, “So, what is the real reason you brought us out here and are paying us so much money? It doesn’t seem like a place for the FBI I mean something must have really scared you.” His speech was a little slurred. It became apparent why when he sipped out of a container stashed in his vest pocket.

“Hey man, what are you doing? I need you gentlemen alert, not half drunk.”

“Ah, don’t worry. I’ve drunk liquor and solved cases like milk goes with babies. I’m a grown man and am voluntarily on your payroll, which really isn’t a payroll anyway, so don’t give me no shit. Goddamn it.” Kyser began to shout in a drunken escapade. He shouted in discomfort again, scratching his arms roughly. “Ever since those flies bit me, I’ve been itching like crazy.”

Pam had overheard. “Oh great! The flies here bite? Snakes and man-eating flies are enough. When are you going to be finish with your stupid survey?”

“Wait a minute,” exclaimed Kyser, butting in with impaired verbiage. “You still haven’t told me what scared you. Why are we here?”

Richard seemed cornered, but smoothly escaped by declaring, “Look! I paid you to guard the area...so do I have to go through the third degree! I’m here to complete a job and report to my investors.”

Richard was saved from the scrutiny as from as distance he noticed Briscoe and Brutus coming ashore. He immediately walked towards the gentlemen because he was eager to hear Brutus’ initial report.

Wesley snatched Kyser’s stash and began sipping. After gulping a significant swallow, he declared, “I think that asshole’s hiding something.”

“Sit down,” commanded Kyser, snatching his drink back.

Wesley looks at Richard walking away and shouted, “Hey! What the hell are we to do now? Just sit around and wait here? What the hell are we guarding?”

“Sit down and shut up!” Pam declared softly but firmly. Wesley didn’t take orders from a woman, but he calmed because everyone else looked at him. Richard consulted with his employees, eventually introducing them all to the group. They of course already met, but there had been no real time to make that formal. This ritual now designated who the authority was in this situation. Richard was indeed in charge, and Kyser stepping in only if there would be trouble. However, Brutus Salvatore did the directing, and that he made sure he did well. He instructed groups to cover certain distances strategically placed on his map. He advised them to search for any streams, brooks, or small bodies of water that would render a detour route. These spots would have to be thoroughly examined. He wanted to know the high and low ground, or rather, whether it was soft or hard ground. To cover all this area, they needed to split up, and that was what they did. Pam and Kyser grouped together, and Wes and Adam did the same. Roy and Briscoe ended up together by chance. The profesor went on his own — he had other things to do. The newlyweds insisted on being together, trotting off on their own assignment. He put them all to work, even Mr. Dickenson.

All you could hear was tires squealing from an abrupt stop. Next, there was a clatter that indicated a car’s door had been slammed. The driver’s feet then clattered from his acceleration, eager to get to the front door. Detective Edward Pullins knocked anxiously at a door that was gently opened by a beautiful women with dark and hair and eyes. “May I help you?” the women said softly.

“Yes, excuse me. I’m detective Pullins. Would Mr. Fusil be available?”

The woman kept the crack she peeked through small while advising the detective, “One moment please.” She politely closed the door, but that attitude was not portrayed in her following declarations. “Nick, Nick!” she shouted. She searched for him briskly and wondered about the money. She thought, “Oh dear, I hope Nick hasn’t gotten all this money...” Her thoughts were interrupted by a sudden run in with her fiancée. “Nick! What is going on?”

“Baby, what? What are you talking about?” Nick gently shoved her.

“There’s a detective out here. Is there something you want to tell me? Where did you get all that money from?”

Nick waved his hand, signaling he was paying no attention to her tirade as he opened the door to greet Detective Pullins. “What brings you by,” asked Nick after shutting the door behind them.

“Oh, this is my soon-to-be wife... since she is going to make it impossible for her not to be seen.” The gentlemen sat down, which relieved Tameka. She figured out that the detective was here on business of his own, so she quickly fetched them beverages. “So, did you find my friends?”

“That is why I’m here. I’ve been taken off the case, and just when I was on to something.”

“Oh! What are you onto?”

“Well, I believe your friends weren’t the only ones he abandoned. I want to arrest him for obstruction of justice and hold him for questioning. A jury might even find him negligent.”

“So, what do you need me for?”

“Well I need you to show me exactly where to go”

“Oh no! I’m not going back there no way are you going to get me back in that godforsaken jungle.”

“Look! I need you! Don’t you want me to get that scum bag and bring him to justice?”

“Yeah, but if it takes my presence, he’ll be a free ass. Because I am not going back, absolutely not.” Nick made it clear that he meant what he said.

Edward gave up, and the two sipped on their drinks. “You sure, Nick? I really need...”

Nick gave him a stare that had no deeply imbedded in it. However, it was getting unbearably difficult for Nick to decline, but it was no longer impossible, and at some point it was no longer even improbable. Nick’s rejections were continuous, however, but empathy got the best of Nick, and he replied. “Look! I told you I was not going, but I guess I could help.” Edward looked at Nick as if he had no choice but to be grateful, and to take whatever it is Nick was offering. “I’ll tell you what. I’ll arrange for you to get

there, but you're on your own then. I'll arrange for you to be flown directly there, if you don't see any helicopters, then... they are probably where you want to go. I got a feeling he's still trying to do whatever it is he's doing. I just hope he doesn't abandon anyone else." Nick scratched his head before snapping his fingers in excitement. "You know! If there are no helicopters at this landing site, then they will probably eventually have to come back. If I were you, I would wait."

The two men rambled on, and Nick's sweetheart took full advantage of the information session. She had been totally in the dark and now made it her business to be included in the conversation. She had been curious ever since the night she picked him up and he had all that money.

The gentlemen concluded their initial plans, and Edward stepped through the door quickly, just catching Nick's last remarks. "Hey, you just be here early. And I'll get you there. I know exactly where to go." Edward climbed into his car and sped off, causing his tires to scream louder than they did when he arrived.

There was the same anxiousness within Klinton's eyes. He was tired of rowing, and the so-called camp was where he wanted to be. Not that it was his first choice, but it sure beat rowing on an unfamiliar river. It was hot and humid and that alone made it hard to breathe. Klinton declared suddenly, "I'm tired of rowing. It's your turn." Jerry just lay there not responding at all. "I'm not playing with you." Klinton dropped the paddles and their boat floated on current alone. Jerry's idle motion appeared unchangeable. Klinton grabs Jerry forcefully declaring, "Man, you better get your ass up!"

Groans escaped from Jerry's mouth. Klinton allowed the boat to drift because Jerry continued to stall on helping. Klinton finally got fed up. He grabbed Jerry aggressively and ordered him to get up. "Wake up, damn it!" He shook Jerry furiously until he slowly arose with sluggish body movements and the attitude of a lazy person. It wasn't that he didn't like work, but exhaustion had set in from swimming for his life. There wasn't going to be much effort in him because he was really tired. He whined to Klinton about just that, but Klinton responded in a rude manner. "Well shit Jerry, I'm tired too. What do you want? Me to save your ass and row you to safety too? Oh no, I don't think so." Klinton paused only momentarily just to scream, "Get your ass up!"

Klinton scooped as much water as he could with the cup of his hands and splashed Jerry's face.

"Hey, hey! What did you do that for?" Jerry exclaimed, awakening with a look on his face that cut like sharp knives.

It didn't phase Klinton, because he responded bluntly, "I don't give a damn about you looking the way you looking. I'm not fixin' to be on this water til night time. Matter of fact! How much further do we have to go?" Klinton tossed the other set of paddles forcefully, while demanding participation. Finally the two caused the boat to go faster, not that Jerry contributed much. The heat beat down upon them and the water they floated on didn't cooperate. "Hey! I'm tired too. Remember, I saved your ass. So at least you can help."

"Shut up, I'm helping now! Don't give me none of your shit."

Jerry was now more alert than ever. They began to row faster, and luckily so, because they were in another gator's territory. However, they quickly drifted by. "Hey," shouted Jerry, "There's Brutus' boat." They veered the boat to head for shore, finally arriving at the spot they called safe from the treacherous Amazon.

CHAPTER 17

Richard Dickenson had managed not to do much work. Instead, he fiddled through maps and other writings with footnotes. Brutus was on his way back and so were the rest of the crew. Phase one of his survey was complete, but he thought to himself that he could journey to a few more spots. He had already extended further than he was supposed to, but he always put in extra effort. Brutus stopped for a moment and examined every view within sight. His eyes were strained because thick trees, vines, and other green life made viewing difficult. He suddenly heard footsteps, but from what species was unclear. It was not possible to see whatever it was, so he continued on. He had an eerie feeling, as if someone was watching him. It wasn't a strong feeling, but it caused him to discontinue all efforts for the day. He headed back to camp baffled by feelings, which seemed unexplainable.

Adam and Wesley were the first to arrive back at the campsite. They stood near the river, about fifty or so meters away, but a fair view was obtainable. Adam sneezed and Wesley said, "Hey look, there's a boat. Let's see what's going on." The two FBI agents, not realizing the passengers of the boat were a part of the crew, stormed forward. Wesley's previously sick look changed dramatically as if boredom had been cured. Adam could only keep up, for that took enough effort. Just like his immune system, because that was being battered and bruised. Sneezes poured forth as they walked toward the water, and then more as they stood and watched Klinton and Jerry jumped out of the boat.

Wesley exclaimed, "What are you doing here? This is official business!"

Klinton turned and looked at Jerry in awe before replying, "What the hell is this guy talking about?" Jerry shrugged his shoulders as if he didn't have a clue. Klinton tried to proceed, but Wesley grabbed his hand to prevent him. Klinton jerked his hand and declared, "I saw your damn ass this morning and last night. What in the hell is wrong with you?"

"Well I don't remember your faces!" Adam said nothing because he didn't appear to be capable of taking sides.

“I don’t care what you remember... You better get your hands off me.” Klinton turned toward the river and demanded that Jerry help him with the boat.” Since we can’t tie the boat down, help me put in up shore somewhere.” Jerry and Klinton pulled and tugged with much effort. Wesley felt embarrassed because he was being defied. It made him so intense until his face grew red and he nearly wanted to pull his piece. Adam didn’t say a word, because he didn’t feel good. He also knew that his partner was being a jerk. They all walked towards camp, except Klinton and Jerry. They detoured to the left a bit, “Hey!” Klinton suggest, “Over there. Let’s put the boat over there.” They dumped the boat in some brush.

Wesley approached Richard and said, “Hey, are these...” He was pointing hard, but Richard didn’t allow him to finish his statement.

“Oh sure, they’re my workers. Of course, they work under Brutus — you met them.”

“Oh! I didn’t recall.” Adam just wiped the mucous from his nose while nodding his head in discomfort.

After the two placed the boat in between two trees, they were totally naïve to the fact the boat was stuck. It would take lots of effort to pull out since it was in a pit of shrubs. Nevertheless, they joined the rest of the crew. Klinton felt like speaking to no one and made sure his face represented that. Jerry stood next to Adam and Wes while Klinton paced, tired and angry with Jerry and Wesley. After that, he just stood off to himself.

Jerry said to Adam, “It looks like you need to take something for that. Are you sure you didn’t eat something?”

Adam looked puzzled and responded accordingly, “No!”

“Well... did something bite you? Adam didn’t respond to that, but Jerry could care less. He was just being friendly. He then began to scoot away from Adam, because his allergies became unbearable. Hardly anyone in the crew could bear to observe him clearing mucous with leaves and his bare hands and wrists or his constant sneezing. Their supplies were well stocked with the small ommittance of tissue.

However, Richard did keep toilet tissue within the camp’s barracks. “There’s some tissue in there,” exclaimed Richard while pointing in the appropriate direction. “I think you may need some.”

“I’d say,” pronounced Jerry. Wesley looked on as if he didn’t want them pestering his pal. However, the symptoms that were being displayed kept Wesley’s lips sealed.

Pam and Kyser approached the crew gingerly after enduring their simple task. “Ky! You sure are scratching your arm quite often. What is the matter? Did you rub yourself across some poison ivy or something?”

“No, Dear!” Kyser blurted with a chuckle. “I think something may have bitten me.”

“Oh dear, let me see.” Pam grabbed his arm and began to examine with anguish. “Oh my, its red and you need to stop scratching it. You may spread an infection with your long nails. I need to get you to the med kit as soon as we get back to camp.”

Kyser tried to escape from her sympathy, but she gripped his arm and commanded the acceleration of their efforts. They got there pretty quickly thanks to Pam’s encouragement, but upon arriving within speaking distance of her comrades, she couldn’t help but say, “Oh my goodness! What is wrong with Adam? Adam! Why are you over there by yourself?” She walked over to him and noticed the odor of vomit. He sneezed aggressively in increments of three, and had not nearly enough tissue. His hands and shirt were covered to take up for the lack of paper. “Oh dear, I need to get you both in here with this med kit.” Pam sat the both of them down and began opening a supply kit. The first instrument she pulled out was a thermometer. She plugged it in Adam’s mouth, and amazingly it seemed she never turned loose of Ky’s arm. “Let me see if there’s some type of ointment cream in here,” she said, fumbling through the various different compartments. She pulled out a small tube. These flies sure are pretty big, and they keep flying around me. Did one bite you?”

“I think so, that’s why I slapped myself back there in the path.”

Pam was no doctor, but a woman with compassion and common sense. She observed his arm, particularly at the huge red spot, and the smaller ones that formed a circling rash. It appeared his scratching had gotten the best of him. Pam applied the substance from the tube to various spots on his arm, also administering multiple dosages to the big red spot. She turned and snatched the thermometer out of Adam’s mouth while dodging one of his sneezes. “Oh dear, you have a high fever.”

Wesley’s voice could be heard outside the science barracks. “There she goes

babying Adam, and the boss. We are here to do a job, not hold a clinic. You're no doctor, nor are you a nurse. So, why bother wasting our time. If they want to get better, they should help us do the job faster, then we can get out of this blasted forest faster."

Pam's ear's only caught a glimpse of what Wesley was saying, but his negativity surely registered. "I don't see you in here making sure these gentlemen are all right."

Kyser lifted himself, tending to agree with Wesley. "Yeah! I'm all right," he said as he walked away from the medical attention. "Thanks Pam." Adam stayed where he was, because something rendered him ill. It seemed like a bad case of the flu; however, the method of infection was unknown. The environment did not seem appropriate for a cold. The others were fairly healthy, so none of them could have passed on their misfortune. Adam always had minor sinus problems, but these symptoms occurred after arriving.

Wesley and Kyser had conversations with Richard. Klinton stood off by himself, but Jerry made himself available to hear everything that was said. Klinton tossed rocks, twigs, and other jungle paraphernalia liked projectiles into the thick forest before them. He had little concern on his face, but was only thinking of being home with his girlfriend. He thought about her, and wished they could be married. Klinton began to succumb to sensitivity, believing he would propose the next time he saw her. He even wondered if she was being faithful right now, while he was away, so far away from civilization. He was distrustful because he had messed around several times. This is something she'd probably never know, unless he told her, but that would never happen because he loved her now, or at least he knew it now.

He caught glimpses of the sun's rays as some barely got through the thick masses of trees and vines, which also made it appear to be later than it really was. While Klinton appeared to meditate, he heard some crackling in the bushes. It got louder, eventually causing the others to disengage their small talk. They all looked towards the commotion with keen eyes. Directly ahead there seem to be a passageway being opened from within the brush. It was Brutus peeling back the tree limbs and thick green plants that resembled elephant ears. "Hey gentleman..."

"Hey"...shouted Richard from a distance, but Brutus paid him no mind.

"Hey, Klinton come with me. There's somewhere I want to explore, and I need your help." Klinton was eager to get away from the crew. At least Brutus didn't ramble

and was efficient when he talked. The two men cut through the obvious passageway and disappeared. While cutting themselves deeper into the brush, Brutus noticed Klinton's dismay. "What is the problem Klinton?" He stopped in his tracks. Even the life of the vine ahead was spared for a brief moment. His long knife paused right before striking, as he awaited a response.

"Oh no! Just that Wesley character! I ought a pop his ass in the mouth."

"Now! Now! Anger is not the answer. Sometimes you have to let fools be fools and geniuses be smart asses."

"What, he's a damn fool if you ask me, far from a damn genius." Brutus cut down a thick vine in order to proceed. "What exactly do you want me to do here?" "I want to examine the surface of this area that seems to have sunken in. It also has a steep hill to climb, so we must be careful not to fall down any slopes." The two men began to plod their way upward until reaching the top. "It appears this sunken area is surrounded by this hill...I want you to circle one side and I the other. I want to see if we will meet on the other side."

"Wait! What are you talking about?" Brutus held up a map and blurted, "Look! Picture this through this path here. There is a hill obviously not on this map, which is here. Since we now have climbed this mysterious hill, at least at the point this path intersects..." Brutus glanced upward, appearing to be steeped in thought. "This sunken pit, it's not very deep. It may drop, so I don't recommend testing it. This hill encompasses this sunken pit like a circle. I wonder if this hill meets on the other side — I suspect that it does. I want you to see if on your side the lower ground is soft, hard, marsh, etc. You know what I mean, don't you?"

"Sure!" Klinton was a surveyor, and had special training in soil composition and geographical structures, and he had also had training from the meticulous Brutus Salapore. So they headed to complete the task at hand.

The Newlyweds were finally on the way back to the campsite. At least sort of, but they hadn't done any work, but rather had playfully enjoyed themselves. They kissed and hugged between two healthy trees, showing that they were in love, or lust. With them it was hard to tell the difference. Andrew lowered his arms, wrapping them around her buttocks in a grip tight. He received joy in lodging his tongue repeatedly in and out of her

mouth. The Mrs. welcomed it with arms wide, and even used her very same wet tool as a clamping device. You could hear them giggle because it was kinky to make out in the middle of a jungle. There were trees all around them, and there were also eyes all around those trees. They were even all throughout the trees' mighty umbrella. Some tended to their own natural flow of nature, but others appeared distracted by these two, who were not aware because they were too busy assuring their tongues weren't swallowed by one another.

Susie abruptly detached herself from her husband's grip and ran off. Her giggles evoked a hide and seek game, the naughty version. Running her way through the woods, she shifted her hips and ducked around a bush. Andrew came eagerly behind her, chanting at the same pace that he tagged along. "Where are you honey? Where are you... my precious little cupcake!?" Andrew darted his eyes at everything that moved. He didn't notice her hiding and looking at him right before his face. He even overlooked the eyes that watched the two of them. "Susie! Susie!" he shouted. "Deeeaaaarr... Where are you?" He chuckled with the panting of her name. Andrew loved to call his wife by her first name, but he always added a little spice by dragging it along, "Soooo... Szzzzeee..., Soooo...Szzzzeee..." She giggled at his chanting, and he heard her. It caused him to now look harder, and this time he called her, "Sweety, sweetie, Where are you?" His loud voice caused some of the eyes that watched him to scamper off, but others remained undeterred. They now all watched each other except for the fact that the newlyweds were keen on one another. All of a sudden, she ran off, causing crackling and clatter from the vines and brush she weaved through so ruggedly. The noise was immediately detected by Andrew and he darted towards the direction of those sounds. "Baby, Sweetie, Honey! I see you." He really didn't see her yet, but his ears honed in on her sounds of fleeing. Laughter filtered from Andrew's mouth, and he repeated the calling of her name. "Sooo Zeee... Sooo Zeee... Baby I'll find you." She giggled when sensing him before her. However, for some reason, the eyes that watched the two still went unnoticed. It may have been because of her loving fun, and she now wanted him to catch her. Ready to now indulge in that naughty children's game, she darted through some bushes in the blink of an eye.

Susie suddenly approached a huge tree. The roots of the tree were bulging out as

if they had been partially dug up. It was a huge tree whose massive branches were impossible not to notice. Susie looked down at the base of the tree and noticed something half-buried inside the tree roots. She paused to get a keen glimpse of some object. When she did get a good look, it terrified her. Screams poured forth: “Ahhh, ahhh... Oh Honey help... oh my god. Ahhh ahhh...” Her voice truly echoed about the jungle.

The first to hear, besides those to whom the eyes belonged that watched them, was her husband. Her screams terrified him, because he had no idea what it was that causes his baby to scream so loudly. “Honey, I’m coming. I’m coming.” Anxiety polluted Andrew’s mind, body and soul. Fear began to get the best of him and his voice crackled. “Oh baby, hang on. I’m coming.” He thought in his mind, ‘What the hell is going on?’ The first thought after the adrenaline leveled off was that she was fooling with him. However, he wanted to take no chance that his loved one was in danger. Andrew shoved his way through bushes and vines — nothing was going to stop him. He accelerated faster because his wife didn’t stop screaming. That was horrifying for Andrew, but it gave him a little reassurance. At least he knew she was still alive. Andrew hustled because he was still did not know exactly where she was, only that her horrified voice seemed just ahead. He never knew a time that he was more excited, and for all the wrong reasons. Crude fervor crept inside of him, and the shrubs and vines made things worse. “I’m coming, Dear!” Sweat poured, and his huffing and puffing acted as humidity’s ally. Luckily for him, the same vines and shrubs he fought so hard to get through also protected him. The unforgiving sun’s rays were blocked. “Oh baby, hold on! I’m coming, I’m coming.”

Indeed he was, and just before him, there she stood. A blankness emerged on Andrew’s face as he watched her stand there and scream at the top of her lungs. “Oh Baby, what is it? Thank God you’re alright. What’s the matter?” He walked towards her quickly, even before all of his words could come out. Grabbing her arm quickly, he noticed a crude odor, the one that went unnoticed by his counterpart. “Oh my God”, he squealed. “Who could it be... Oh my God, we need to tell the others.” Andrew covered his nose as he tried not to puke. Holding his wife tightly, assuring she went nowhere but forward with him, he said, “We must get back to the camp.”

They hustled along. “Ah!” squealed Mrs. Kemp, falling down. However, her husband picked her up quickly and helped her continue.

The eyes of Wesley, Richard, Kyser, and Jerry all focused on the newlyweds as they pierced their way through the brush. They all looked at the Kems with curiosity. Mrs. Kemp was extremely hysterical, and her husband had effort written all over him. Andrew headed straight for the small barracks to calm his wife. He sat her down.

Pam instantly stopped attending to the helpless Adam. "Oh my, what's wrong?"

"Just calm her down for me!" he said as he darted out to inform the crew before they starved of wonder.

"Oh dear, what's the matter," asked Pam? Tears ran down Susie's face and she could barely speak. She tried but it came out like mumbo-jumbo.

"Hey! What's going on," shouted Wesley as Andrew approached the gentlemen. They all turned to what Mr. Kemp had to say.

"There's someone dead up there, and it smells really, really bad. I suspect they've been there a few days, or so."

"What!? A dead body? Where?"

Pam could get nothing out of the frightened Mrs. Kemp. "Are you alright now? Will you be OK if I leave you and Adam here?" Susie looked down at the sickened Adam and nodded hesitantly. Adam didn't quite agree, because he was receiving tender treatment from Pam, which was what he needed, and the last thing he wanted was to be left alone with a hysterical nymph. Pam left anyway, barely catching the direction the men cut through the bushes. Andrew led, but she caught the tail end of the line, which was Jerry. "Hey! Where are all you going? What is wrong with her back there? She seems as if she saw a ghost!" They paid her no mind, as the possibility of action required all of their concentration. Wesley now led the pack, right along side Andrew. Kyser and Jerry followed close behind. Pam was getting no response, so she had to increase her efforts to catch up. She looked back several times, wondering about Susie and Adam, and this ultimately led to her hesitation in gaining on her comrades.

Susie had finally calmed down. She was now sitting and rocking herself back and forth, with her knees tucked up against her body. Staring at Adam seemed inevitable, because she wondered why he was so sick. She hadn't really noticed him before, but now he seemed intriguing. Sneezing away, Adam looked up at Susie. "What's the matter, how did you get so sick? Did you eat something poisonous... or did you get bitten..." Adam

said nothing, but his was a grim look. “Can I get you something,” asked Susie. However, Adam wouldn’t respond. He began to get up, slowly squatting up. His body ached, but what he had in mind would soothe that. She looked at him wondering what his pain was like. By the time Adam could stand straight up and look her in the eyes, she began to speak. Her eyes remained focused on him, and for good reason, because Adam lunged at her, attempting to put his arms around her. He tries to grip and get a tight hug. “Susie...” She scratched him and shoved the weakened Adam away. At first he had his leverage by leaning enough to make it hard for her, but eventually he was peeled from her air space and went tumbling down. He didn’t get up to pursue because he meant no harm. He just felt really bad and Pam had spoiled him.

Pam was good at showing kindness, but apparently she was good at catching up as well, for she once again caught the eager crew. “Kyser! Do you mind telling me what the rush is?”

“I think these men are following Andrew. He and his wife apparently discovered someone dead.”

“Oh my goodness!” They all followed Andrew and Wesley through the remaining patch of the jungle before reaching the mystery.

“Oh, shit man, what the fuck happened to his head?” exclaimed Wesley.

Richard stood there stunned, and Kyser sensed something was amiss. He didn’t get into the FBI by accident. He was a vet, and solving crimes was in his instincts. “The first thing that alarms me is... How, or should I say why, in the heck is he half buried.” The busted head was not stunning to Kyser, although gross indeed, as was the odor. However, they all had to endure. “Hey, stand guard, and look around for clues. What’s the matter Richard, never seen a dead body?” laughed Kyser as he scratched his arm in relief.

Richard responded slowly. “No, actually I haven’t.”

Kyser looks on for clues. Pam couldn’t stop looking at the dead body, and she began stepping back until she bumped into Andrew. They looked around the vicinity, searching for any clues. Pam finally got a grip and joined her FBI counterparts in the investigation.

Jerry took her place in conversing with Andrew. “Hey!” Jerry whispered. “Do you

see that look on Richard's face. It looks as if he knows the damn man."

"How can he recognize him without a head?"

"Shit, boy, I'd know your body without head or limbs."

"You think so?"

"Let's go ask him, shall we?" They approached quickly. "Hey, excuse me Richard! Did you know that gentlemen?"

"No! Why would you ask that?"

"Well, the way you're looking," exclaimed Andrew.

Jerry also spoke openly. "Yeah, you should see the look you had on your face — creepy!"

"Oh yeah, you are overreacting. I'm just shocked this is happening. I hope this isn't something that could stop the project, because I had big plans for this piece of the Earth."

"With a look like that, I hope you succeed."

"Hey, over here," shouted Wesley. Everyone converged on the spot where he stood. "What you got Wesley?" exclaimed Kyser.

"This branch here — I think it has dried blood all over it. It may have been used to cause the head injury.

Kyser bent down on his knees to get a closer view. "This is a huge branch, and it must have fallen down on him, but then his head would have been smashed inward." Kyser stood up and looked at the tree above. The height however made it difficult to examine. They all followed Kyser to the body. He stood there looking at the body buried beneath. "I think it would be too tough to even dig him up. I mean, look at those roots that appear to have him tied up — this is weird."

"Hey, why don't we try and dig around the body and see if we can reach his pockets." A silence loomed and everyone had strange looks on their faces, especially Richard. Nevertheless, Pam, Kyser, and Wesley began digging with their bare hands. Richard stood there and watched — his thoughts favored termination of this procedure. However, it was in motion and Kyser was determined. It took them a while and tremendous effort, but they did get a big hole dug.

Wesley reached his hand in the hole and felt around for a few minutes. Finally, he

shouted, "I feel something. I think he has a wallet. Oh my God he stinks. Now I see what a coroner goes through. I got it." Wesley pulled out the wallet and FBI agents converged to his spot. Richard watched on, and that look Andrew and Jerry noticed reappeared. Wesley began fumbling through the wallet, reading through various materials such as: receipts, business and credit cards, etc. Wesley declared his name: "His name appears to be Joe Geshy."

"Poor Joe," exclaimed Pam. "What happened to him?"

Kyser said, "If we knew that, then we wouldn't be all around here puzzled, would we now? Unless you know something we don't. Is there something you want to tell us?" He was addressing Richard.

"I don't think so."

After realizing that darkness would fall soon, they decided to conclude the investigation until morning. They were all about to head back to camp when they all picked up on sounds lurking in the jungle that appeared to be close. They stopped to look around. It soon became apparent that whatever made those sounds was approaching. Wesley drew his pistol, as did Kyser just moments later. They both were now aiming directly towards where the sounds were coming from. The next thing you knew Pam gave the impression she didn't want to be left out. Jerry and Andrew looked on in amazement, while Richard still sat there stunned from this discovery. Wesley moved in a little closer, and Kyser backed him, as did Pam, all of them moving slowly forward in a crooked line. The rattling of vines and brush got louder and the agents focused on what was approaching.

"What could it be?" Pam exclaimed.

"Shhhh," followed from the two lead agents. They wouldn't move closer because their surroundings became dim. The sun was about to set, and the trees already caused vision impairment. They waited as the rattling of the vines got louder and louder, and did the pumping of adrenaline also increase within them. The rush of danger and their mutual addiction to the feeling that came with it compelled them. Whatever was getting ready to emerge from behind those vines had better be ready. Three guns were pointing directly at the grand entrance. They could now see some vines receding backwards, and the clutching of guns sounded as they each gripped their weapons more tightly. For a

moment, Andrew thought this intense moment had just surpassed the one he and his wife experienced previously. He thought that whatever killed that man might be just about to make its way up that path. This event sort of snapped Richard out of his stunned condition, because he was now curious as to what had killed his friend. He watched on and was the first to catch sight of what was behind those bushes. As soon as the men caught sight they sharpened their aims. They were indeed intense, and the decreasing visibility made things worse. The fact that someone was dead, and mysteriously, contributed severely to the tension. It looked like an accident, but the FBI wondered how an American citizen ended up here. Those were Kyser's exact thoughts, which made him clutch his gun nearly the hardest. He fell short, however, because his itch was unforgiving, and he had to scratch his hand and arm with one hand while continuing a sharp aim. The men and women were tense and the forest's charge was brilliant.

CHAPTER 18

The daily sunset ritual was being performed somewhere in the jungle. It was a ritual common to the area, but this time a special element had to be added. The chants and praises began. The land was in danger, it knew, they knew it, and even the eyes knew it. The spirits, however, were the first ones to know it. They were angry, and it was inevitable for things to get ugly. Lost souls would especially be upset at the situation at hand. Life was all energy, and so were the spirits, and the trees, and animals. The intruders were the energy supply the spirits sought. This was ancient stuff. Magic and sorcery passed down through the generations as told by stories. The myths were now being tested. Why did the ancients call her mother earth? Is it because she is really alive and gives birth to splendid life every day? Is it because she supports life and is the sole reason we are able to exist? The ancients would answer yes to all of these questions, but the real question was: Could the spirits be called upon? The ancients probably would say yes to that as well.

So the sun began to set, giving its last thirty minutes of daylight. This was important because tradition was imbued in the setting of the sun. This event was even considered a separate God in some ancient cultures, and some of these people have never been contacted by modern day civilization but are still around today. That is how vast the jungles are in which the trespassers found themselves. There are even plants, insects, and animals living here that are undiscovered and extremely rare, many different trees, plants, and vines that may or may not be dangerous to humans.

The chants were now going once more, and somehow there seemed to be a deeper emotion to the chanting. They were all aware intruders were on the loose. The purpose of the chants was to assure the trees, the spirits, and all of those eyes were included in this ritual. Together, they would watch closely and defend their home from these very intruders. The situation was about to get spiritual. The spirits were all called upon, and

anyone who departed prematurely might find themselves wandering the jungle for quite a while. Upset by their spiritual entrapment, they might decide to do something haunting. A thin mist better began to lift from the earth, making it even more difficult to see.

Klinton and Brutus were the first to experience the worsening conditions. After climbing that hill and going their separate ways, they hoped to meet on the other side. The first task was not to fall in the middle, because just below could be a sink hole. It could even be some type of trap, and they were cautious enough not to find out. They were just about a small arc's length from meeting, but they were unaware of this fact because visibility was not up to par.

The sight of Captain Briscoe and Agent Beavers wasn't any better. The fact that they were a little lost was the proof, and they began to get frustrated. It was funny because, just before the chants, it seemed as if they knew exactly where they were. One had even shouted, "Where the hell are we going! We've been walking around in this forest for a while, with no sign of anyone, but plenty signs of everything. Are we lost? I thought you were this jungle scout that rich guy hired. Don't you know your way around?" Briscoe remained silent and continued to cut threw the massive green floristry. "I figured you'd know your way around this here jungle, after all your Richard's right hand man, aren't you. Ya'll have already explored this, haven't you? How far are we from camp? It's gotten dark and maybe the fact that we can't see far ahead, it why were lost. So I don't blame you or nothing. I just want you to say something, for crying out loud. I mean, it is dark and a mist is beginning to lift — look at it. I can nearly scoop some up with my hand, it's so thick. Hey! Is this typical for this type of climate?" Roy rambled on, but Briscoe was less talkative. He concentrated more on cutting the two a path to walk through. "Answer me. I haven't heard any of the crew. Do you even know where you're going!?" Roy's peaceful ways became disrupted. The owners of the eyes that watched them made sounds Roy's ear could not register. Those eyes were the cause for his uneasiness, and the fact that they were fixed on Roy didn't help.

The forest sounds echoed. In some area's it was intense, as Klinton was the first to find out. He glanced up at strange birds nesting in a huge tree. They were gorgeous and could probably be found in many other trees other than the one above him. He noticed those eyes first, but then he saw there were beautiful stripes of many different colors. A

true tropical symbol was in his sight, but because of the night the true elegance could not be experienced. He tried to walk forward, but what he could see of the bird had him captivated, thus making the eyes that watched him go unnoticed. He didn't move a step forward because of this trance. Luckily so, because the spot before him was unsafe and it seemed the birds may have saved his life. On the other hand, they may have had nothing to do with anything at all. However, he continued to watch them with astonishment. He began now to notice other eyes within the trees. The dimness of light made him concentrate a little more, merely rendering him hypnotized. Even the footsteps that clattered seemed to be ignored, but Klinton's ears were not impaired like his eyesight.

He finally snapped out of his daze by looking down, away from the birds, because for a brief moment he thought he saw a buck-naked man. Klinton's astonishment forced him to step sideways instead of forward, only to try and capture a better view of the nude man. It was hard to see, so he began to decline the slope, as if a trance made him do it. It was not easy as it seemed, because slippery was not the word. Klinton began to slide downhill fast. Soon his slide became uncontrollable, and Klinton shouted, "Shit, ohhh damn!" He had even lost interest in what started the ruckus in the first place. However, he did give some concern to the buck-naked man running loose. 'He was of color, and I'm the only one on the trip...' Klinton continued to ponder, 'Well not as colorful as this! Strange, this nude man disappeared so cleverly???' Klinton's tumble helped stymie his awareness, ultimately making his once limited eyesight now useless. Besides, the effort it took to try and stop his freefall was tremendous.

He wouldn't recover soon enough because he had smacked himself unconscious on a huge tree stump. Blood dripped from the wound that was caused by the impact, and those eyes didn't stop watching. Except for maybe the eyes of those lovely birds he once had watched.

Brutus had reached the point where they were to meet. He looked around for his employee, but to no avail. Brutus walked on, looking all around for Klinton. He had no interest in the jungle's beauty as Klinton had. He was more programmed to just work, and he only kept his eyes on any other eyes he noticed. He was a survivalist. He was now on Klinton's side of the circle where he had fallen. His eyes noticed that the hill rose again about a hundred meters ahead. It proved to be very uneven ground. Brutus began to

approach the small hill, and all of a sudden, he heard a whip sound and Brutus' ankle was caught in some type of trap. It swiftly hurled him upward attached to a tree branch, leaving him upside down. "Ahhh!!!" exclaimed Brutus. He continued to yell and plead for someone to rescue him. Klinton couldn't hear, because he was lying there half asleep. He hung there wondering how in the hell this could have happened. Many thoughts rushed through, even though he shouted continuously for help. "Goddamn, an ancient tree trap. This is ridiculous. I thought this only happened in movies. A man walking along the woods is sprung into the air and left hanging by one leg, the one who somehow managed to step on misfortune. The one who now is being strangled by the leg, with some device made of terribly tough vine, and other immediately unidentifiable accessories. Oh, and that someone had to be my dumb ass." He thought about this momentarily while entertaining a recess to his distress calls. One thing for sure. his ankle hurt from the primitive entrapment that tore away at the skin on his ankle. It would not let go, and his weight and gravity caused the peeling of his skin. The bawling contributed to his energy depletion, along with the fact that most of his blood rushed to the top of his head. It rendered him silent for a moment, nearly fading him into unconsciousness. His eyes did remain slightly open, but that didn't help because delusion set in. He surely could not see clearly, and the fact that he cared not to look at anything other than what could harm him did not help. That was his rationale all a long. If it wasn't something that would increase efficiency in his work, then he figured there was no need for it. So he had paid no attention to the eyes that watched him from the forest. Of course not! Nevertheless, even though his attention to his surroundings was at a bare minimum, the eyes that watched him were all the more heedful. In fact, they were always alert and paid strict attention to anything lurking. He hung there like a sitting target, completely vulnerable and with no way to get free. The eyes registered his predicament and realized the threat was immobilized. However, one particular set already knew of Brutus and his incapacitation. They watched from around the unusually large tree from just beyond his sight.

The eyes that watched Roy and Briscoe were also unnoticed because these two were too busy trying to find their way back from their far off wandering. Another contributing factor was Briscoe's attempt to ignore Roy's complaints, and Roy was too

busy complaining to notice anything. That, and perhaps fear also, caused Roy not to want to notice anything, especially anything that could be watching him. All of a sudden Briscoe halted. "What's wrong," exclaimed Roy in his usually frail voice.

"Nothing. I think that hill will allow access to camp. We need to go over it." "Well? What are you waiting for? I'm ready!" The two gentlemen proceeded toward the hill. "What now!" exclaimed Roy, wondering why Briscoe had stopped again.

"I think that's a body laying up there," declared Briscoe.

"Wait a minute, a body! Can you really see something? It is kind of dim with the sun's recent departure."

"I know! I have good eyesight, and I think that's a body lying there."

"Oh no man, what's a body doing lying around here? It may be one of the crew." Briscoe ran quickly forward, briefly leaving Roy in his tracks. Roy caught up with Briscoe momentarily. "I think this is that Klinton guy. He's just lying here. It looks like he injured his head. We need to help him." Briscoe watched Klinton, and Roy watched Briscoe help Klinton, and the eyes watched them all.

Meanwhile, Professor Julian Akbar pulled a thick elephant branch back and walked out into an open space. His eyes filled with splendor, and adrenaline and excitement filled him. His life had flashed right before his eyes and the threat was coming from three different directions. He shouted, "Hold it, Hold it, wait a minute. What's the problem? Put those things away. What is the matter with you all? What has caused the paranoia?" The guns of the agents were put away, but no one answered him. Instead they looked over towards Joe, and Akbar instantly received the message. "Oh... my! What caused this?

"No one knows. We were cautious upon your arrival because we don't know how this happened. You could have been..."

"Point taken, sir. So what is the story?"

Kyser scratched his arms and neck while informing the professor, "Well, there is something very strange about this man's death."

"What do you mean?"

"It appears to be a trap, and this branch is apparently part of it, but just doesn't add up."

“Hey! We’re not here to investigate.”

“Yeah, I agree. Let’s head back to camp.” The group began to leave the area and head back to camp. Pam stood there as she now became the obvious one to trail the group. She couldn’t keep her eyes off of Joe. It seemed as if Joe was trying to tell her something, or that he was delaying her for some reason. It was possibly just captivation that caused her idle stare.

That same type of stare was on Brutus, as those eyes watched him. He hung there, just about to shut his eyes, for his entrance into the unconscious state was imminent. The eyes of a non-civilized being approached and stood right in front of Brutus with an incomprehensible stare and long spear in his left hand. The paint of summoning was decorated over his body, but primarily his face. Walking around Brutus, the misunderstood one began to dance primitively around him. He began to chant an undetermined phrase that produced sounds of harmonizing parallel to the chants and praises that echoed deep within the forest. These noises awakened Brutus, but only from being unconscious. His eyes slowly began to open and he noticed this buck-naked man dancing around him. This caused terror within because Brutus now confirmed his previous thoughts. His thoughts began to rush again. “Oh shit... I’ve been captured by some cannibalistic tribe.” He thought he was surely dead as well. “Help! Oh shit! Help! Help!” he grunted and moaned now from the struggle to get free. Fear had now compromised his vocal chords, causing distortion. Nevertheless, he screamed frantically, “Oh no, get the fuck away.” He feared the tribesman was about to stick him with that spear. His sudden scream actually jolted him forward. He began to swing on the very contraption that hung him. This swinging action allowed him to bump the tribesman timidly. The nude one ran off, deep within the forest. At a small distance away, Pam heard an echo. It snaps her out of her trance, prompting her to try to catch up with the crew.

Brutus continued to scream. “Hey Kyser, I think I hear something.” Kyser halted the group to hear what Pam had to say. However, Briscoe, and Roy heard the screams. They were just next to Brutus.

Those shouts from Brutus along with Briscoe and Roy’s chanting finally awakened Klinton. “Oh, my god,” exclaimed Klinton as he finally confronted the pain

that awaited him. An excruciating throb worse than any migraine pulsated from under his wound. However, he thought about his boss as he heard screams for help. Briscoe helped Klinton up. "It sounds like its coming from there." They darted in the direction of the screams.

"Oh my!" Roy exclaimed.

"What the...", declared Briscoe.

"Oh shit... Brutus...", shouted Klinton running towards him to get a better view. "Brutus! How did this happen?" yelled Klinton while the other two called for help. "How are we going to get him down?"

"I don't know, just keep calling for help."

Meanwhile, Kyser advised Pam that he didn't think she actually heard anything. "What is it Pam?" Disapprovingly. Pam said nothing, but continued listening. She couldn't hear them right at the moment, and Kyser's continuous interruptions did not help the matter. "You see, there's no one screaming. Come on. The rest of the crew is probably waiting for us at the camp. The others agreed, but for some reason, Pam remained still.

"Let her stay there and hear ghosts." Wesley exclaimed. Pam did not agree as she began to hear, or maybe just possibly sense, those screams again, but this time the volume seemed to be doubled. Pam ran off in the direction of the screams, and the crew turns to see Pam dart off. Kyser scratched away at a crude itch wondering what had gotten into Pam. Wesley stalls abruptly declaring, "Let her run off. Fitting if she runs into a big snake." Wesley chuckled.

"No! Let's go after her. I'm responsible for you all."

"Come on! I don't think we need to go after her paranoia."

"Can it Wesley!" the professor declared sternly, adding, "Just because you're this super FBI agent doesn't mean you would like to be left alone."

"Who asked you, Arab."

"What's with this guy?"

"Alright gentlemen," declared Kyser. "Let's follow her." The crew set out to catch up with Pam.

The others examined all around the tree from which Brutus dangled, but to no

avail. It seemed an impossible feat to climb it, but yet someone had to save him. It was only a matter of time before someone heard them, they thought, and so they waited, screaming and yelling, for this seemed to be their only option. Indeed, Pam was on her way, and suddenly, she noticed Brutus hanging there. “Oh my God,” exclaimed Pam, walking towards them with dismay.

“Hey where are the others?” shouted Roy. “Pam! Pam, snap out of it,” Roy exclaimed urgently. However, she stood there staring at Brutus, still informed by some higher force. “Can’t you hear us? Where are the others?”

“There’s no use for this girl. Damn!” exclaimed Klinton.

The crew they asked for just pierced the horizon and noticed all of the commotion. “Hey! Help us .”

“What the hell?”

“He’s in some kind of trap.” The crew converged around Brutus. Everything seemed under control, except for a method to get him down. Because the entire crew was there, they had a sense of control, but they were in a state of shock. Pam stood there motionless as that very moment the sounds of the forest were muted. Dire eyes were probably what made things silent, but the crew made crackling sounds from the plant brush as they approached closer, but that wasn’t the only cracking sound. The branch above that held Brutus began to crack.

With that fact came the first understandable words from Brutus, “Oh my God, I feel my leverage slipping. I think you better think of something fast.” The crackling sounded once again. This time it was a bit louder than all other sounds. It sounded like a lumber jack conquering a huge tree. “Aughg aughg !!!” Pam screeched. She experienced some strange force, and she knew, that right before her eyes Brutus would fall to his death a split second before it happened. Landing head first, Brutus died instantly. The whole crew watched in amazement .Pam gave out a final scream as Brutus made contact with the unforgiving earth. The crew rushed to his aid, Klinton being the first to announce his death.

“Whoa... wait a minute. This is now two that are dead,” exclaimed Julian.

“Who else is dead,” shouted Roy. Kyser filled Agent Beavers in on the discovery of the late Joe. The crew pondered how best to get Brutus’ body back to camp. However,

not before examining the scene.

Wesley noticed the tree's vitality, that it seemed to be in its prime. "I'm not sure how this branch broke. I don't think his weight caused it."

"Then what did?"

"I'm not sure."

"Well what are you sure about?"

"One thing is for sure! In the morning, we need to search the area for more traps so that no more of this tyranny occurs." They all agreed, passing it off as an accident. Pam didn't say anything, but felt it was no accident. They all evacuated the scene and those particular eyes watched their departure. A patch of cumulonimbus clouds began to cover the night sky. On their way back, some pondered the strangeness of both deaths.

"Hey Richard!" exclaimed Wesley. "I think it was kind of odd for you to figure you needed four FBI agents, but now it's making sense. Is there something you are not telling us about your little project? Because, if there is, I might have to kick your ass."

"Wait a minute, no one talks to me that way, and Kyser, get your employee in line before I have his job. If I have to pay for it."

"What the fuck, this guy's not threatening me."

Kyser settles the gentlemen down and added, "I do think all of this just doesn't add up. Now Rich, me and you go way back, so what's going on?"

"I don't know?"

"Oh yeah! Is that why you brought the professor?" exclaimed Wes.

"Hey, leave my name out of it."

"There was suspicion that there could be a tribe of some sort, but I've never seen anyone. Maybe an indigenous tribe is responsible for all of this."

"Hmmm, maybe you're responsible!"

"That is absurd. What the hell would I have to gain and how would I mysteriously... I just won't entertain that comment."

"Knock it off!" declared Kyser, scratching his head like it hurt. "Professor, what do you say?"

"Well, there are likely to be tribes living around here."

"Well... how likely is it?"

The professor gave a look of deep thought and answered calmly. "I should say highly likely. On my journey today I've seen signs of someone's passage."

"Oh, what sort of signs?"

"I've seen a few abandoned campfires as well as what appear to be some discarded tools, most of which were defective spearheads, or maybe even somehow broken off into some animal, which were eaten on the spot."

"OK, we just asked you a simple question and that was more than enough," replied Klinton.

Andrew had slipped over a bit to whisper to Wesley, "He looked quite suspicious when that Joe guy turned up."

"He did, didn't he? I thought I was the only one to notice."

Andrew had slipped away and Wesley got Richard's attention. "Richard, I think we all need to talk." Everyone looked. "Andrew tells me that you looked suspicious when that Joe guy turned up. I think you know something and your crew demands to be told." An eerie silence was amongst them. All that could be heard were natural forest sounds.

"Oh, you have nothing to say, do you?" Wesley uttered.

Richard was fed up and his response showed it. "Look, I told you! You don't know who you think you are talking to. I'm going to show you first thing in the morning, because now you're trespassing on my property and I want you off the premises."

"Wait a minute sir! I don't think so... People have been turning up dead. I think that is where our expertise is needed. So, frankly! I don't think we are going anywhere?" Wesley and Richard had drawn up on each other as if they were to begin the fight of the century.

Richard responded with his fists clenched at his sides. "Oh, I think you will be leaving, because you have no jurisdiction here in South America. This is private property, and if I want, at the press of a button, I can call the correct authorities. I know that you're not the correct ones. I'll contact the Brazilian government and have you removed!" Richard's face began to redden. His fists remained clenched while his eyes focused on Wesley's.

Wesley could care less about Richard's threats, or even his intentions. He did however care about his money, and there was no way Richard was going to get out of

paying him. What he thought was easy and boring income now became exciting and intense. This was up his alley, just as it was up Richard's.

The two would have had a standoff, but Kyser did what he did best, lead. He sliced between the two quarreling men and stated boldly, "Are there people living back here?" He said looking directly into Richard's eyes.

"Look! I have no Idea!"

"Well, damn it Richard. I know you're a thorough man, so why wouldn't you have already surveyed the land. I mean, you bring a civil engineer and now he's dead... and now you have his crew who seems to be worth diddly. Well maybe except for the two pilots. I mean what the..."

"Hey! Wait a minute now!" Klinton exclaimed. "I'm a surveyor as well, and I worked hand in hand with Brutus. I ain't got a degree, but shit... Shit! I'm dam near an engineer. So whatever the job, it still can be done. Shit, fuck a degree. Just because I ain't got the money to get a degree don't mean I can't learn the shit. Like I said, whatever the job, it still can be done."

"Yeah... Well, Mr. Klinton, or whatever your last name is, you're not the only one who can do a few things around here. I'm a navigator, and I can sail you around the world."

The professor scratched his chin and said to Kyser, "I think you offended a few people in your negotiation speech. Because I surely am. If there are people living back here, I think that you would all need me to negotiate."

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend anyone," Kyser said mildly, a look of shame upon his face. "It's just that these two are getting out of hand."

"You all just stop it, stop it!" Pam cried out. She felt things now deep as a soul touching her. Whatever the case may be, she wanted things quiet.

Laughter poured from a few of the men as Wesley whispered loudly, "My, my are we getting a little touchy?"

Pam ran off. The noise became too much to bear.

"Pam! Pam! Officer Slaughter!" Kyser called out to her and commanded the gentlemen to follow her. Pam ran directly for her tent to lie down and go to sleep. She wanted to avoid what she was feeling and hearing. However, most of the crew went their

separate ways caring less about Pam's masquerade.

Andrew headed directly to check on his wife. Klinton decided to lie down just like Pam, but the rest of the crew seemed to have a little more energy to dissipate.

"Oh...baby! Are you alright?" Andrew kissed his wife on the forehead. "No one came to bother you?" She lay there, hesitant, prompting him to ask again. "What happened?"

"Oh, nothing... It's just that Adam tried to force his hands around me. I gave him that kick, and boo-yah. He was reminded of his place."

"Oh hell no! What the fuck...you little pervert!" Andrew's rage soared as he reached to choke Adam. "You sick fuck, how could you put your fucking slimy hands on my...wife?" Andrew cried loudly as he shook Adam as if he was trying to shake something loose.

Adam struggled to maintain his balance, but his sickness weakened him severely. Andrew roughed him up a little, with no regard to an illness. To him the illness was disrespecting his wife. Huge steps came from behind Andrew, followed by a hard kick in the ass, and now a tight hold had commandeered Andrew's assault. "Leave him alone, can't you see he's sick," replied Wesley.

"I don't care! He better not put his hands on my wife again!"

"Look wise guy. How'd you like it if I roughed you up?"

That's exactly what Wesley intended. However, Roy Beavers had heard the ruckus and quickly broke the rampage up. "Hey, hey, you guys cut it out." He split the men with his body and pushed them in opposite directions.

"Come on Roy, he's picking on poor Adam. If he weren't sick, I'm sure this bullying wouldn't happen."

"I know Wes, but the guy said he's protecting his wife."

"Hmmm... He better protect himself, because I'm about to...!"

"Hey, hey! Stop it!" Kyser exclaimed from a distance.

Finally they stopped bickering, thanks to Roy and Kyser's intervention. Andrew's face showed that he was still upset, and you could hear it in his voice. "Come on dear!" He grabbed his wife and they headed for their tent. "Are you alright, baby?" These words were spoken softly and sincerely.

“Yes, baby. I’m fine. I could have handled myself.” Her voice resembled that of kid engaged in show and tell. The rest of the crew could hear Andrew rumble big bad words regarding his standoff with Wesley.

“That motherfucker came on me from behind. I should have popped him in the mouth as soon as that Roy guy broke us up. I can see now, I might have to pop him one.”

“Baby, just calm down. Everything is OK.” She tried to calm him because he forgot now why he was so angry in the first place. It was because Adam tried to give his filthy germs to his loved one. He saw the condition he was in before they discovered Joe, and it was unbearable to be around. Except of course Pam’s sensitivity rendered her immune to the sneezing, coughing, and wiping of mucous. She had a kind heart indeed, and they say that is where the soul rests.

It seemed that Joe’s innocently deceased soul had reached out to her. She wouldn’t find out now because she was asleep. In her dreams, Pam pictured a baby, but the infant somehow was able to walk freely about the forest. It seemed innocent enough as the baby weaved through thick trees and vines. There was nothing seemingly threatening to the baby, and maybe for that reason Pam was drawn to the infant. She tried to catch up with the little one, but she gained no ground. Her stumbling over huge tree stumps, thick vines, and other various green life caused her attempts to gain terrain come up lame. Her pace seemed to be afloat, and she had no control over her own movements. It caused her deep sorrow, but not sadness. For sorrow is an emotion of blessings from events you have no control over and that cause things to be in disarray, but sadness is something you can control. Therefore, sadness is an illness. The values you set for yourself cause one to be sad. This was sorrow because Pam had no control over the current situation, and she did feel sorrow. How these emotion are translated from sleep state to real time remains to be seen.

Roy, Wesley, and Kyser gathered in real time and had a few adult beverages while plotting against Richard. It wasn’t as though they thought he was a criminal, but they knew these two accidents weren’t an accident and Richard seemed to know something. The fact needed investigating, but the two men were exhausted.

Kyser had plans to pack it up in the morning and head back to the states. “Hey, I advise you guys to pack up, because we’re out of here in the morning. So you best get

some Z's, because I mean... first thing I morning." They all took heed.

It was quiet once every one was asleep. The Kems however remained eyes open engaging in what newlyweds usually parlay in. They got noisy and Susie wanted no one out here to know her exotic side. The moans and groans she loved to carry out were truly a sensational thing to listen to. They decided to run off so no one could hear them. They could really let it all out, like the animals they were, and they were in the proper place for their instincts. However, most mammals disengage in sexual activity once conception is achieved, but the Kems new nothing of nature and its fine tuning with life. Nevertheless, she wanted to experience an occasion in the jungle. It seemed it could be a fantasy from childhood, all of those adolescent years loving Tarzan and always thinking he was a hunk, even wondering about wandering off with him deep into the jungle where he would then rape her — but she enjoyed it.

All of those years her mother cooped her up, she thought that was the way it was done. The animals on television showed her no differently. She had even believed her mother's scolding as a child, about boys and various other evil perceptions of sex, and so Susie started out as a Tomboy. Wearing her caps backward and beating up boys her age was just half the battle of her rocky childhood. But nearly growing up with a sexual identity crisis snapped at the loss of her virginity. Ironically, this event spawned a little hatred and disobedience towards her mother. It all happened at the age of seventeen. That particular night her parents had to leave in an emergency. Susie sat there watching television and she nearly fell completely asleep. However, a loud ring from the phone startled her wide awake. She thought it was her parents, but it was her drunken girlfriends. They laughed and giggled trying to entice an invitation out of Susie. She declined, because she had no idea when her parents would return home. Just moments after hanging up the phone, it rang again. It was her mom saying it would be tomorrow before they could get home. Susie sat back in the couch and gazed at the television, not really paying much attention. She thought about how much fun her friends seemed to be having and how bored she was. Her not expecting that call from her mom even crossed her mind gracefully. In fact, she had answered the phone with a commanding "no", which puzzled her mom. Susie thought she was her friends trying once again to convince her. But now Susie didn't need convincing, and she called her friends back and invited

them all over. To this day her mother has no idea they had boys over getting drunk, and that all lost their virginity that night. Well some of her friends had experience and they plotted on Susie. The alcoholic beverages clouded her decision because it felt dangerously good to her, especially for it being her first time. Her being drunk caused her to feel no present pain. She lay there allowing a young man to stab all of his might in her. She realized how much that would have hurt if she weren't drunk the next morning. She could barely walk, and when her parents arrived home she remained in bed and claimed to be sick.

After snapping out of her reverie, she and Andrew chose a huge tree with bulging roots to sit upon. He cornered her upon this huge tree and began kissing her rapidly. She moaned freely while returning kisses of equal or greater value. Her kisses were accompanied by caresses that were always soft and smooth. These acts of foreplay continued until they slid down the tree. Susie's hardly appropriate blouse obtained a rip from the bark that would cut you like fish scales, but it was unnoticed because they nearly ripped their clothes off. They perfected this art of mild aggression to the point in which the clothes would still be wearable. Andrew wasted not time in engaging into sexual intercourse with his wife. The circumstances seemed to be a rush, and that's what he did, because that's what filled him. Now that both of their eyes were either closed or blinkered they could no longer do any watching. However, there were always eyes watching them, from the moment they left their tents. This time they were in one spot the eyes could now focus on their targets.

The chants and praises had begun the moment the King descended the horizon. It really never stopped, but faded further into the background in daylight. It really did go on now as the eyes watched closely. The mysticism had intensified proportional to those very same chants and praise, and also with the deepening of night. The dances the indigenous ones performed around specific trees helped as well, but that was deeper into the jungle, deeper than had ever been reached by civilization. The noise cascaded throughout and a silent roar came upon the entire rainforest. This didn't stop the eyes from watching. It only intensified as they watched the Kemps engage in indecent exposure. Andrew was on top of Susie with her hands stretched out. She gripped the tree roots to absorb the thrusts. He had to work hard to please a woman with her sexual past.

Her hands were beautifully layered in jewelry he had brought her, and her fingers were long and slender and sported a French manicure. Absorbing all of Andrews love and even throwing a little back, she was in bliss as she clung to the branches. Andrew had his leverage as well on those very same bulging roots. He placed both feet upon them and used them for pushing power, because those roots were strong, sturdy, and surely wouldn't give under measly human power and stretched in an uncontrollable pattern. Susie could even prop her head up on one of the many branches, the very same one her hands were stretched out upon. In fact, the tree's roots seemed pretty useful as it allowed Andrew thrust with much more love. He was no minute man; but indeed he was, because fifteen minutes into pure thrusting, they both were about to reach a rewarding climax. Susie was into this one because she'd already had two. The third would probably be the knock out blow she would welcome.

In light of all this, she had no realization that she had no apparent control of her arms, which were no longer gripped atop the roots but now lay beneath them. The climax was coming and it made things for the moment all seem like a dream. However, the roots that lay on top of her beautiful hands started bearing down. She began to struggle a little, noticing that the grip got tighter and tighter. Andrew had his tongue down her throat so her distress calls were plugged with flesh. There were three options for her: to push him off, but her hands were sealed; the verbal command was obviously a no-go; and her last and final option was tough because Andrew had her legs pinned tightly with his arms while stroking fast and hard. The ground rumbled and Andrew started slowing his kisses down. Finally stopping, he could vaguely hear his wife squealing but his tongue had drained her ability to scream. He sensed she was in distress, but by the time it was clear, Susie was being pulled beneath the earth. The roots were responsible as they began to clamp down on Andrew's heels, immobilizing him. In fact, he screamed loudly as the roots broke both of his heels with such awesome power. Susie was now completely consumed and the roots gripped Andrew tightly and began to suck him beneath the earth. Their fate was suffocation from being squeezed by the limbs and buried alive.

In Pam's dream she had heard Andrew scream, because at that moment she stood straight up in her sleep, and that moment she realized that she had lost the baby. The spiritualistic mysticism had sustained her in this deep sleep. Eventually, Pam fell back

down and went into a deeper sleep. That instant the night, and specifically the area around camp, seemed gloomy. A dissident evil filled the air. Nature is often referred to as cruel and evil, but it's just the laws that were laid down. Whether it be a rodent being devoured by a wild beast or rain flooding the entire area, Nature's wrath was always thought to be spiritual in essence.

If a stranger tried to run you away from your home, would you kill? Would you be killed? Most people would probably kill and this was the predicament the jungle inhabitants had to face. They were less civilized so this rule was probably second nature. Pam had been suddenly awakened, but only briefly. It seemed this awakening corresponded to the Kemp's vital signs. However, after their signs had terminated, that eerie roar was vibrant once again. It was not from some wild rainforest animal, but from fierce thunder that followed behind bright electrical bolts. Down poured rain and the crew scattered to their tents for cover. The droplets were heavy and the sounds from them hitting the ground muted everything, except for the activities of the cumulonimbus. They say life is energy, and what was in those clouds was as well. All who have died here may have had their spiritual energy merged, and because of that are forced to haunt this very jungle indefinitely. It also may intensify them. It may cause them to call out in rage.

The rain that poured so heavily upon their tents made rhythms for their dreams, like hundreds of mini-drums being pounded on by little drummer boys using the tents as their drums and the rain as their sticks. It was surely horrific music to their hearts. The good hearted were filled with sorrow. The cold hearted were filled with terror. The aurora that filled the minds of the intruders were like dream invaders. It caused them to be pinned down with an inability to move and deflated any desire to awaken. The intensity of their emotions was no help in the matter. The rain seemed to represent something holding them down in this spot. It was like the clouds spit nails, and the impact pinned them down like a carpenter sealing plywood with an air-gun. However, the rain of nails pinned the crew to their dreams of sentient nature. It seemed they were trapped inside a bottle and they yelled at the top of their lungs, but no one heard them. They were too small to be seen, but they did scream, but only in the confines of their dreams.

Richard tossed and turned but could not wake up, no matter how hard he tried. Voices echoed inside his sleeping brain. It was Mr. Neuheisil pressuring him. "What's

going on, Richard? Why haven't we got that report yet? I know you want to seize this opportunity, so I wonder if there isn't something that you're not telling us." Richard faced Mr. Neuhesil and got a cool chill, because the rest of the investors surrounded him. They all agreed, especially the keen Winterlin. They all supported Mr. Neuhesil's scolding of him too. To Richard they looked like humans possessed by demons and they were just a nail clipping from eating him. Richard was terrified. So he ran off, but instead of running, he had levitation abilities. He floated off into the thick and dark forest scared out his wits. For some reason, a burning desire fueled Richard. This desire was geared toward getting the project done, because the investors struck horror within him. There was no awakening, so he had better fly off and get this project done like the demon investors suggested. He flew himself through the woods but he couldn't see a thing. Sweat poured down his face, giving testimony to his fright. He was also worried because he floated about the jungle alone. There were no clues surfacing as to how to please them. He worried more and more as he flew deeper and deeper. It got gloomy as he flew further in. It seemed like hope was overshadowed by darkness and all that could be seen was dark shades of massive trees. They too seemed to be possessed and might even devour him if he got too close.

In his dream, Richard opened his eyes wider in an attempt to see, but he didn't realize his fear caused him not wanting to see. The only part of his body that worked above normal was his emotions. All emotions were tied to the mystic force, just as the Egyptians were tied to worshipping their sun. The only difference here was that Richard had no choice. Those same eyes that watched in real time watched in dream time, but this time Richard seemed to notice more of them. He went along with his deep emotional fear that attracted him to this long dark path. He got more nervous when he still could find no clues or anyone to help him. He knew the investors were demons, so he made himself cautious. For some strange reason, that feeling of being eaten wouldn't leave. Paranoia flamed up out of control like flares that helped to boil his blood. As he began to slow down, he felt panic from the uncertainty of his dreams. Why was he slowing down? What lay before him? The reason he was slowing down was the first of his concerns, but he really didn't figure out why he was moving. What he didn't have time to understand was that his fear and anxiety were directly related to his movements. As he came to a

complete stop, his feelings climaxed upon connecting eye to eye with a painted face. His might have been the most wide open closed eyes that there have ever been. His face absorbed shock, but in a calm and restrained manner. He could not move. A stiff fearful stare was all that was allowed. Both sets of eyes did just that, but frustration wore down on Richard, because he wanted to run and could not. It was dark, but to Richard, the eyes captured all. This fact and that painted face grew his fears based solely on the ignorance of his misfortunes. Richard had already pointed his fingers. He grew a hate for those unknown eyes and all that they represented.

The dreams intensified and Julian Akbar stood in the middle of the dark forest and wept. It was unclear if it was because he was lost in the forest or simply just a part of his dream. His excitement soared as he noticed love at first sight sifting through the forest. A nude indigenous woman ran playfully about. The professor's urge to follow became unbearable. The pursuit was initiated and sorrow glowed within him. He could not catch up, and the darkness made his prey fade away in the distance. His fear now began to rise when he realized he was not going to catch her. He found himself deep in the masses of trees and vines, but he never stopped the pursuit. The sorrow-fear balance fluctuated severely. For the moment, sorrow remained down on the see-saw as he tried so hard to catch that woman. There was no woman back home, so why not? Love haunted Julian because he never experienced it. The sad part was that this probably included his family and students. Loneliness contributed to his sorrows, but when the painted face man made an appearance it contributed to his fear. There he was, genitals rapped in simple cloth and wearing nothing else to cover his body, except for the many different colors that patterned his face like some ritualistic tattoo. It did indeed conceal the identity of this man, but Julian had no problem seeing the spear he tightly gripped. All this happened instantly, because they were already in pursuit.

Julian ran as fast as he could through the thick jungle, but he ran into a dead end. His life flashing before him sent a shockwave throughout his body as he looked up at what was blocking his way. It was a zombie version of Wesley, who had a thick snake wrapped around him like a skirt. There was also a snake around his neck. Wesley seemed abnormally large and the look of an animal seeking its prey. Julian swiftly cut left while continuing his getaway, but the man with the spear had just about gained on him. Mr.

Akbar approached an open space in this dream world jungle. He gained a little relief when he noticed his comrades spread out. They stood there motionlessly staring at Akbar. Julian called out in distress, and a hand reached out to Akbar, but as the helper reached to help him, the spear was launched in his direction. He fell down abruptly as the spear pierced the throat of the helper. The body tumbled on top of Julian making it hard for him to get up. When he did get up, it was too late. He had been captured and carried off deep into the forest, possibly never to be seen again.

The professor's captor was strong and well built. It was apparently simple for him to carry the professor quickly. Slouched over the indigenous one's back, the professor seemed helpless to escape. However, he was astonished at the manner in which his kidnapper traveled through the forest. It became apparent the native knew exactly where he was and where he was going. A huge ceremony was going on in the middle of the forest before a tremendous bonfire. There were dancers that performed a ritual. A huge barrier of massive trees separated an area from the rest of the forest. The professor's heart pounded as he sensed something. This heart pounding sensation became noticeable to Julian causing him to worry. He knew that South American cultures performed ceremonies in which the heart is extracted using a priest's bare hands. There were all kinds of myths revolving around the heart. It was thought that is where that little speck of light in every living being shines so brightly, the burning point that empowers the soul. This particular culture believed a sacrifice of the heart at noon would be a sacrifice to the sun god. This would send the sacrificed's soul straight to the heavens, to perhaps become a star to guide generations to come. The fact that it was nighttime puzzled the professor. He recalled learning that, if performed at the crescent of a full moon midnight, then a soul could be banned to the underworld. This truly frightened him. Although his colleagues thought the subject matter to be myth, Julian had taken to heart some of those myths. The fact that this could be performed on him didn't sit well. However, the ceremony already seemed to be in progress. All of a sudden he was slung to the ground next to some tribal woman. It appeared to be the one he was chasing. However, before he could even rejoice his victory in capturing his loved one, he sensed something about to happen. There were guards all around him. They began to push him and the woman forward as the drums increased their rhythm. The professor's eyes were grim when he looked behind him and

noticed those guards were Jerry and Briscoe. Fear was increased by the fact that a spear was lodged through Briscoe's throat and a huge chunk seemed to have been bitten off of Jerry's face. The professor screamed to be awakened, but could not awaken no matter how hard he tried.

CHAPTER 20

The golden king's ray pierced the horizon, banning all darkness and all who dwelled spiritually. The spirits were the first to dissipate in the glorious sunlight. The small nocturnal rodents and insects followed. However, there were some who did not fear the sunlight, but enjoyed it dearly. The crew members were the main ones because it was the only thing to help them break their sleep.

Another happy candidate was Edward Pullin. It wasn't because he experienced the stress and turmoil of his suspect's crew, but he seemed actually anxious to be on his way to South America. He had never been outside the country, and to be going on an unauthorized bounty hunt awed him. Edward Pullins gave praise to Nick's valiant stand in rejecting his request to guide him. He had no clue as to why Nick was so reluctant to return. Edward had no real interest on why, so he boarded the prepared flight with no hesitation. Although rejection still entangled his emotions, he was surly glad he was on his way. Thoughts of heroic proportions coupled with courage and bravery slithered through all of his veins. Just like running water, but in his case, the movement of emotionally contaminated blood from the heart to the thinking muscle, supplied his thoughts with the fuel he needed to capture Richard.

Edward was also a little uneasy. He wasn't sure why he was so excited. A tingling feeling ran through his spine and caused him concern, because it was the same way he felt this morning when he abruptly awoke. He considered it with humor because he never really remembered his dreams, but this one was vaguely with him still. Simple flashes and glimpses were all he had at his disposal. He tried to block them out by gazing out of the window and putting much emphasis on small items getting smaller. He didn't remember fully, but enough to experience the chills throughout his nervous system. It also seemed to be associated with his desire to get to the town of Macapa. The town was mysterious to him because he knew nothing of it, but this town he'd never heard of before had all the importance in the world. His eagerness to reach his prize, Richard's capture, boiled within him. He understood the *what* and *who* he was after, but he failed to comprehend the *why*. Nevertheless, there was a deep passion now for Richard's capture,

no matter the cost. That very determination could be the reason for Edward's success or failure. This mental frenzy made time seem to go fast because the next thing he knew it was about thirty minutes before arriving in Macapa. These last thirty would take a toll because his mental stability began to falter. He thought about those dreams, in flashes and pulses, causing him to nod his head against the window. It appeared migraines took over but he was actually thinking about Gunther. What would he say if he knew where he was headed? All these emotions fueled his desire, and before long he would see what he was up against.

Kyser Finley was almost the first to be roused by the piercing sun, but in this case, the severe humidity that followed a night full of rain was king of a day that was destined to be scorching. The only relief anyone had was from the thick umbrella the jungle formed with its trees and vines. It wasn't hard for Kyser to be one of the first to awake — his severe itch made sure of that. However, the intense dreams that the pouring rain seemed to cause were the only reason his irritation didn't keep him from sleeping. One of the few signs of daybreak was the sun clearing the pour of hydrogen double teaming oxygen. The sun could only be seen partially in patches of the jungle, and this was at high noon. The sun was not the only thing to rise, for the heat did the same.

"Ahhg," screamed Adam. He continued in a painful way. Pam seemed to be only one to hear him, or at least the first to show a little concern. Kyser actually was the first, but he ignored the man's screaming for a moment.

Then he did peek inside Adam's tent. "Oh my, are you alright Adam? You look like shit." Adam didn't respond in a communicable way, but by undecipherable moans and groans. "Hold on man, I'll go get Pam."

Kyser released his hands from the crease of the tent bearing a look of disgust. "Oh, oh, oh," Adam tossed and turned and never did get any sleep. The sickness had taken over and was the main reason he now spoke in groans.

"Pam!" Kyser yelled. "Pam, could you please see about Adam? He looks like... I don't know, I guess shit."

Pam replied softly, "You don't look well yourself. Look at this," she said as she grabbed his arm and exhibited some severe bruises. They were extremely red and appeared to want to blister. "Look at these bruises. How did this happen?"

Kyser snatched his hand away and replied in a defensive way, "I don't know. Maybe its poison ivy."

Pam looked at him with ridicule and advised, "Oh no, I don't think this is poison ivy. I really don't know what it is."

"Well, that's because you're not a doctor. You're an FBI agent."

"You know... it really doesn't take a doctor to know this isn't poison ivy. It appears to be something more severe." Pam pulled his arms closer and noticed multiple abrasions. "Come here, Ky!" She lifted his shirt to examine his body and noticed severe scratch wounds he had applied to himself throughout the course of the night. "Oh dear, Pam cried with dire empathy.

"I'm fine!" Kyser exclaimed forcefully. "While we're sitting here lollygagging about a few scratches and bruises, Adam seems to be about to burn up."

"What? Did you take his temperature?"

"Do you see a fucking thermometer or do I look like a medic to you. I figured... well because he's sweating real bad, and he looks like he really wants to die. So can you help him? Shit, you're the woman, and you're more fit for that nursery type stuff."

Pam looked at Kyser in despair, gathered her med kit and rushed over to help poor Adam. Kyser followed her briefly, but quickly veered to gather the others. He slipped his hands through the crack of Roy's tent and exclaimed, "Hey Roy, get up!"

"I'm already up! I couldn't help but be up because of your loud mouth. Are you still itching? I noticed that last night. Did something bite you?"

"You sound like Pam."

"Oh yeah, well then maybe she was right."

"About what? That I need to be treated? Well, I know that, but I see no one here is a doctor, are they!"

"That's funny you would mention that. I had a funny dream last night. I couldn't awake from it. It seemed some doctor was trying to kill a man. The man...I think was trying to get here. Yeah, here right where we are. Hmm...I think he was trying to tell us something."

Kyser chuckled. "What was he trying to tell us? Was he trying to warn us that someone was trying to kill us too? Ha! If there is any vision to your dream then it still

wouldn't' come true, because we will be long gone. We are getting the heck out of here. Adam looks like he might be the next one to die, and because we partially witnessed this tragedy it's only our duty to get the body home. Besides, now the one we need to do the survey is dead, who's going to do the job? No reason for us to be here."

"Yeah, I guess you're right, and I don't believe your friend is telling us all there is to know."

"Oh dear, look at you! You need to be in a hospital somewhere," said Pam.

"Come here!" She went to take Adam in her arms to comfort him, but at the same time fondled through her med kit. These actions made one wonder why she was not a nurse.

"I'm cold Pam," uttered Adam in a soft and squeaky voice seemingly on a verge of collapse. Sweat poured down his face.

"Listen Adam! You have to tell me what you may have come into contact with."

Adam rolled over in Pam's arms, staring in her eyes with a look of defeat.

"I..I..I'm not sure."

"Did something bite you? Maybe it was poisonous. Did you touch some kind of plant? I need to know because Kyser seems to have been affected too, but you guys seem to be affected differently." Pam tried hard to get information out of Adam. The first gesture Adam released was a horrendous sneeze that resulted in a swift head maneuver by Pam to deter her face from being the bull's eye. It also manifested sarcastic remarks from her crew members.

"I hope that isn't contagious, Kyser said. Pam looked in despair but didn't let that stop her from administering warmth and comfort for Adam.

"You take good care of him!" declared Wesley.

"Poor Adam. We need to get him home."

"I think you're right, Roy!"

"So, what is the plan?" Wesley demanded an answer. He had just recently joined the crew and felt behind on the agenda.

"I think we need to inform Richard of our departure — no need for us here. We also need a little medical attention." Kyser stared at Pam specifically and continued, "I think we are all men, and a little flu and itching won't hurt. We'll be home by tomorrow."

The three FBI agents left for Richard's tent. They all rushed to his tent like it was

a stake out, and they were US Marshal's on a bounty hunt. "Hey! Rich! Rich!" Mr. Finley chanted sharply.

Something enormous had gotten into Richard because he was just waking out of a nightmare. He greeted the men before they could even reach his tent bearing the look and actions of a telepathy informed individual. "Yes, gentlemen?"

"Rich! We need to talk." Kyser spoke softly and firmly in due respect for his friend. He wanted to make one thing clear. "We're packing it up."

"What! What do you mean?"

"I mean exactly what I said..."

"Yeah! I think he understands perfectly."

"Wesley...I'll handle this! You know Richard, you act surprised."

"It's just that I know this situation is tough, but I haven't gotten much done."

"Much done? What the fuck? Is this guy crazy?" said Wesley.

Kyser calmed Wesley down by placing his hands upon him to restrain him.

Richard stood tall, not scared a bit. His project was of utmost importance, so he continued his rebuttal.

"Look, I don't need much longer, perhaps one more day. This night wasn't so bad."

"I think you need to speak for yourself. I had a terrible nightmare last night and wouldn't care to be here another night." Roy had finally gotten a word in on the discussion. He was good spirited because he felt he was heard.

"I think the decision is unanimous — we're getting out of here," said Wesley.

Kyser had eye contact with Richard, but slowly drifted his eyes away. "Hey, tell Pam to come here," Kyser commanded and someone did just that.

Klinton Westfield had no problem sleeping late, but today couldn't match his record. I guess the night sleep wasn't pleasant, and the commotion outside worked his eardrum. He climbed out of tent with anger on his face, "Shit!" It wasn't the ideal place to wake up to. The muggy air disgusted him. The slick surface caused by the rain made walking a slippery ordeal. The heat and humidity seemed to be direct forces acting upon his grief. He trotted on to get his friends, the ones he could relate to Andrew and Susie. Trying so hard to walk through the muddy terrain, Klinton looked even more disgruntled

when he noticed their tent were empty. He then disregarded the problems the mud caused and rushed to the others. Klinton swept his way through Briscoe's tent, observing him lying there motionless. However, after looking for a moment, Briscoe raised his head just to look at Klinton for a moment. He then collapsed backwards onto his sleeping mat. Klinton made sure Jerry was awake, which wasn't easy, but no one had seen Andrew. "No one has seen Andrew and Susie!"

"Who!?"

"The pilots, you idiot. They're no where to be found." Just about everyone heard and gathered around Klinton.

"You mean no one has seen them?"

"Hey, hey, calm down. They were probably up early to check on the helicopters, but how about you and Pam go and check on the helicopters, anyway. You probably will find them on the way there."

Richard was not fond of Kyser's last comments and advised, "Look, you insist on leaving, but I had no idea these people would end up dying. Obviously what happened were just accidents, and that's no reason to stop working. I mean work continues just like life. I think we need to ship on the bodies off so they can get a proper burial and then simply finish our jobs."

"Wait a minute, what about your friend Brutus? He just perished recently, and how is still a mystery. I think we are dealing with morals issue here. I mean, at what point are we disrespecting the dead?"

"Well, there will be no burial for the Kemp's because I'm going to find them!" Klinton said and ran off.

"Wait a minute! We are a team. Don't go running off and getting lost."

"Well, I don't see us going far without the pilots." That tuned the got the crew's attention.

"OK , first why don't you and Pam go and check the helicopters while we search around here."

"Wait a minute! I don't work for you or any one of you."

"Well, what's your name again?" said Wesley sarcastically. He then pointed at the lifeless Brutus while vocally expressing himself. "You see, there's your boss. It seems

he's not going to do you much good."

There was no time for bickering, so Kyser interrupted. "Look! Gentlemen. We all need team work, and if you want to get out of here ASAP, then I suggest we work together. We also need to be wary of those traps that got Brutus in this predicament."

"You think one of the pilots is caught in one of those terrible traps?" uttered Pam.

Klinton showed her support. "Yeah, I think I need to find my friends."

"If we don't see about the helicopter, we're going no where any way, so that is the priority."

Richard obviously did not like what he was hearing, and it wasn't long before he felt it unbearable to go unheard any longer. "Everyone, we seemed to get over our panic. You act as if something is out to get us. I mean, these were freak accidents. We all know things like this don't happen often, so it is highly unlikely that anything like this will happen to those of us who remain. What about the brave citizens who decide they will do what ever it takes to feed their families..."

"Shit, feed my family. What the fuck this guy's talking about?"

"The point I'm trying to make is that many people lost their lives working in coal mines or on huge dams so our country could have sufficient energy, or what about the miners who mine your precious rocks and metals so that you can persuade lust to be the commander of your sins. We are those brave citizens. We have a job to do, and you are on my payroll — a contract has been signed."

Kyser cut his eyes at Richard. "Wait a minute, Richard. What about Brutus? He's dead. I...I thought my friend had more compassion than that."

Richard looked at himself and visibly straightened himself up. "You're right! Look, I have access to a funeral home on the third island to the east. Jerry and Briscoe can escort the bodies, for an extra incentive of course. That way Brutus' body will be preserved until we finish."

"Richard, but wasn't he the engineer, and the only one qualified for the job?"

"Yes, but Klinton Westfield is an officer of his company, and I'm sure he can finish the remaining tasks. It's just a simple report to my investors that this is an ideal spot for my project. Brutus spoke highly of Klinton."

Klinton was baffled. "He did!?"

“Yes Klinton, he advised me that you were the head honcho, next to him. Also, that his teachings were soaking in and you were now equivalent to a Masters in civil engineering. Your scholastics don’t mean a thing since the report will be filed under the company’s name.”

Klinton could not conceal a grin. “Well, I guess you’re right. I am skilled at what I do, but never will I work for your sleaze bucket type.”

Kyser broke the spell with soft words. “Pam! You and Klinton, see about those helicopters. I’m pretty sure your friends just went to check on our ride home.”

“Ahhg... Ahhg,” echoed from the only unchecked tent. The crew approached the cries with caution and a bit of worry. Julian Akbar emerged from his tent only to face incomprehensible stares and glares. “What! What are you looking at? I had a nightmare and couldn’t seem to awaken from it.”

“Well, everyone has had a shaky night, but it will be the last one.”

“Oh really. I thought we were here another day or so.”

“There’s been a change of plans.”

The professor wondered what the problem was. “Where’s Richard!” He was truly ignorant at the moment. “Can some one catch me up to speed.”

“Well we sent Pam and Klinton to meet the Kemps.”

“Meet the Kemps? Where?”

“I think they may have gone to check on the helicopters.”

“You think?”

“Well, we actually don’t know where they are at the moment, but we’re guessing where else they could be. It’s obvious they got up slightly earlier and did what any good pilot would do.”

“And what’s that Kyser?”

“Take care of their pride.”

“Pride, Kyser?”

“You know Kyser speaks sometimes in backward hieroglyphs.”

“Yes, pride in the vessel in which they pilot.”

CHAPTER 21

The heat of the day rose significantly along with bird songs and animal language. The humidity played the major role because the other heat source was mostly blocked by the massive trees that lay along the path Pam and Klinton took. The trees towered massively above their heads and gave true meaning to the concept of a jungle. Pam and Klinton traveled this path briskly, and lucky for them there was daylight. The two hadn't said much for the first twenty or so meters, but Klinton followed behind with a keen eye. He wondered why she was so interested in the different plant life.

"So, Agent Slaughter..."

"Oh, call me Pam. I think that at a time like this, Pam is more suitable."

"Well Pam, what brings you into crime fighting?"

"I guess God's grace."

"Well, where did you get your degree? Don't you have to have a degree to be an FBI agent?"

"I was military."

"You didn't go to college?" said Klinton, surprised. "I could have. I even turned down several scholarships that were offered to me, but..."

"But what!? I wish I had that chance to go to college. What, were you smart or something?"

"Of course, but that's not why they offered me scholarships. I was a sports person."

"What in Heaven's name makes you want to fight for Uncle Sam?"

"Well, I always dreamed of being in the army. You might laugh, but I think that, because I played sports at such an early age, and I remember that commercial, 'Be all you can be, in the army.'" Pam had sung it just as she remembered it. "I think my competitive nature in sports was sometimes fueled by that theme song. It really affected my desires in dreaming to be a high ranking official with the armed forces. High ranking women is what they lacked, if anything was inadequate about our military."

"Well! That just goes back to the question I asked you before. How did you

become an FBI agent?"

"Oh, well I found out the armed forces had me living a dream."

"What, you didn't move up at all?"

"Sure, I moved up. But most promotions were simple pay increases and had no true value. It led me to believe a woman would only be considered for advancement to just so high a rank and then be stuck. Of course they give you the impression you have a chance, but you really don't. I just basically gained as high a rank as I could get, or really as far as my patience would allow. I don't know, I guess I decided to apply and here I am."

"Oh, here you are! Ha! This is your idea of a job?"

"Hold up just one minute. It appears to me that your job has you right here with me." Pam was surprisingly feisty in her comments and gestures, seemingly quite the contrary of one of Pam's compassion.

Klinton picked up on her novel actions. "My, you sure are..."

"That's enough about me — what about you? And why are you here?" Pam's tone varied from this innocuous question. She tried to walk fast through the path, but her interest in various plants hindered rapid passage. Pam suddenly stopped to bend over with the sexiest of appeal. Klinton watched the splendor as she examined a piece of plant life.

"This, my dear, isn't a time for picking roses. In case you're not informed, I want to go home. I can show plenty of places back home where you can go gardening."

"Will you be quiet? I'm trying to see something."

"Do you mind me asking what?"

"The guys back there are sick, and I'm wondering if they might have come in contact with something unpleasant."

Klinton leaned his body for a closer look and advised, "Yeah, I think that would account for unpleasant. Look! It has those prickly things all along its stem. They look like little green needles waiting to rupture one's flesh."

"I'm not sure if Adam or Kyser has come in contact with this. I don't even know if this plant would cause those symptoms."

"I suppose you don't care to test it." Pam looked at Klinton ridiculously. "Here, give me that." She pointed at what Klinton was holding in his hand.

“What are you going to do? Take a sample, or something. You better be careful with that.” He reluctantly handed over the requested item. She proceeded to take the plant, trying her hardest not to get pricked. “Hey! Be careful, what the hell you gonna do make a vaccination or something... Doc!” Pam looked at him and thought, how and the hell am I gonna do that?

She responded, “No, I’m not a doctor, and I doubt if any doctor could synthesize a vaccine from a plant on the spot. We barely have adequate equipment to take temperatures or make bandages.” The plant was secured and they continued on their journey. As usual Pam darted out in front, fearless of the daytime forest setting. Klinton had no objections to this. He enjoyed the view better trailing Agent Slaughter, and what a beautiful view she gave.

“Pam,” said Klinton with ulterior motives.”

“You’re a sexy woman.”

Pam stopped in her tracks and exclaimed, “What!?”

“Oh, oh, I’m just kidding. I didn’t mean to say you were sexy. I mean, I mean, I, you’re a sexy women, I just didn’t mean to tell you that... at this moment.” Klinton stopped and looked at Pam. He pondered if revising those comments was even necessary. It didn’t matter much, because Pam looked at him briefly and carried on. “Wait a minute Pam, slow down,” he said, sprinting to catch up as his eagerness grew for his next line of questioning. “Are you married, Pam?”

“Oh now you’re hitting on me.”

“No! No, that’s not true. I’m not hitting on you or anyone else. I don’t even carry myself in that manner, just small talk. You must want someone to hit on you.”

“No!” A grin descended upon Klinton’s face as the two developed meaningful small talk. Klinton was still astonished by Pam’s figure ad purposely allowed her to walk faster. “You sure aren’t having a problem with this mud,” Klinton cried as frustration built because the mud attacking of his shoes.

“I was just bred to endure severe conditions, also not to whine about uncomfortable situations.” Pam spoke with confidence while not breaking stride.

“Oh I guess that’s a part of the job.”

“Exactly!”

“Oh, so when that snake jumped out at you, you endured then too didn’t ya?” Klinton laughed, but no response came from Pam. The approaching of the path’s end was eminent and the sight of the helicopters would soon be obtained. The sight of those blades poured relief into the hearts of Pam and Klinton. As they got closer, Klinton couldn’t help but exclaim, “I don’t think I see anyone. If the Kemps aren’t here, then where are they? How are we going to get home?”

Pam had a keen eye, and as usual was slightly ahead. “Yeah, something’s not right, Klinton.”

“What do you mean?” Pam reflected silence again as she approached their ride home. “Damn!” “What! What,” Klinton barked excitedly.

“Look at that. The helicopters are nearly engulfed in water.” The relief now dissipated, leaving them exasperated with fear. The water was just about to the entrance of the doors. “The helicopter must have landed on a soft spot and caused some sinking, because it’s under mud a bit. I hope this won’t hinder take off. Mr. Klinton, do you know anything about helicopters? It is a shame because I could have registered for pilot classes through the FBI but was fearful of flying. Anyhow, I wonder why they would have landed here.”

“Hey, don’t question my friends. They’re good pilots, and who would have known it would rain so hard last night? I see rainforest is a fitting name.”

“I’m not attacking your friends. We need to find them. But let me check something.” Pam examined closely, wondering how right she might be. Swishing and swooshing was the result of them finally getting their hands on the helicopters. Pam dipped her hand underneath the water while leaning the other hand against the helicopter.

“What are you doing?” Pam said nothing immediately, but merely looked exasperated by the feelings of thick gooey mud that buried the helicopters’ landing sleds.

“Are you trying to lift the helicopter? Ok, miss Hercules!”

“Shut up and just give me a hand.”

Klinton did so, but hesitated from the unsettled feeling of liquid dirt. There was no budging these big air vehicles, and now worry and frustration entered their facial expressions. After giving it one final jolt, Klinton declared, “I don’t think were going to budge it.”

“Let’s check the other one.” Pam rushed over several meters to the left to administer the same efforts, but to no avail. She found it was even deeper. “Come on let’s tell the others.”

“Tell the others what! That we aren’t going home?”

“No Klinton! Aren’t your friends missing?”

“Yeah!” “I think they will be the ones to fly us away from here, so we need to tell the others that they weren’t here, and unless we find them, we’re stuck.”

“Oh no, I’m not stuck. There’s a science boat off shore. I’ll make Jerry’s ass navigate me the fuck out of here.”

“Oh that’s right, a group of you did come by boat. You see we have a way home, after all.” They darted down the same path, omitting flower picking this time. This time they were pretty much even because Klinton cared not to indulge himself in the view from behind the agent anymore. There were other things on their minds.

“You must have been close to those pilots.”

Klinton looked at Pam while keeping his same pace. “Well, we did work together, so we kind of got to know each other. You know I used to think Andrew became friends with me for some ulterior motive.”

“Oh, what motive was that?”

“I can’t be sure, but we didn’t have many words for each other before... and I think his wife came on to me, at the time they weren’t yet married, but I had no interest in her. I think Andrew thought otherwise.”

“Well, how did you become friends?”

“That’s funny, because Susie invited me to a function she and her husband were to attend, and I got the feeling he wasn’t too fond of the idea. I think she had him whipped a little. She kind of told him what to do non-verbally, if you get my drift.”

Klinton had Pam’s full attention, but questions loomed and caused a curious reply. “Well, you still haven’t told me how you became friends. I get the drift, but... So I guess she encouraged this friendship.”

“Exactly!”

“Did she ever come on to you? You know, like you came on to me earlier.”

“No, and I didn’t try you!” “Hmm I’m surprised she didn’t.”

“No, you got it all wrong. She wasn’t thinking like that, besides they were engaged.”

“You’re not that gullible.”

“What! I am not gullible. You know, I have never had any one tell me that?”

“I hope you know, Mr. Westfield, that there’s a difference between being gullible and being stingy. Or being firm, or just plain out mean, and you’ve become apparent to me.”

“Hold up now, this is a prejudgment. That’s why I don’t have a woman now.”

“Yeah, I think you’re right,” she replied comically and with a sarcastic expression.

“You know what? You’re something else.”

“You’re something else too. At least I know why I don’t have a partner, but why don’t you?”

“That’s none of your business.”

“I think you’re scared. Yeah, I see that little brave heart over there does weep for fear at times. Just like everybody else.”

“Hmm, thank God it doesn’t matter what you think.”

“It matters what everyone thinks, because God speaks through the people, so you should listen to everyone, rich or poor. Something you may not be able to grasp yet in your development.”

“Well congratulations, you’re finally making sense, but the majority of the time you have a hard time obtaining clarity.”

“Clarity? What the hell is this: Speaking 101? Damn! Mini-athlete, mini-Hercules, and now you’re a speech expert. I guess we can call you a Renaissance woman”

“You’re not funny at all.”

“Oh, I’m not trying to be. It’s just that we have here is the American dream, who’s terrified of snakes. If we ever get out of this shambles, you’re sure to make the headlines: ‘Renaissance FBI agent overcomes her phobia of snakes to escape the trenches of the wild jungle.’”

“Ha! Chuckle. Chuckle,” softly spilled from Pam’s lips. “You are a fool.”

“No baby, I think you’re mistaken. I haven’t been fooled. I know what’s going on. Yeah, I know exactly what’s going on.”

“Oh, what’s going on then?” Pam replied with a smile.

“I’m feeling you. That’s what’s going on. You’re a beautiful, intelligent, and durable woman. If I did have a woman, it wouldn’t be a problem choosing you.”

“Hmm, I told you. You’re coming on to me.”

“No, no. I just speak the truth. If that’s coming on to you, then by golly I’m guilty.”

Pam was just a little flattered, but the moment was halted because camp was just ahead, “Kyser, Kyser,” yelled Pam as sight of the rest of the crew became possible.

They heard her cries and responded instantly. “Pam! What is going on?”

“The helicopters seem useless and the Kemp’s are no where to be found”

“What do you mean useless?”

“They must have landed on some soft spot because last night’s rain caused them to sink under mud and water.”

“What! Wait a minute. The helicopters are drowned in water.”

“No. Not completely. The inside isn’t flooded, but the landing sleds are deep under water and mud. Like a car stuck in mud, but this seems to be worse. We weren’t sure if the helicopters could still take off.”

“Where are the pilots?” exclaimed Kyser.

“I don’t know. They were no where around.”

“Well, who’s going to take us home,” cried Klinton.

Silence loomed until Kyser broke that. “Briscoe, aren’t you a pilot?”

He hesitated to respond, but then said, “Yes!”

“Well speak up! Can those helicopters take off?”

“That depends. I would have to see.”

“Let’s go!”

Klinton replied, “What about Andrew and Susie — they must be found. Don’t forget about my boss, who your letting decay here. What happened to everyone’s morals? I know I want to get home more than anyone out here, but damn!”

Pam was the first to stop and listen to Klinton’s worries, and the crew followed

shortly after. “Klinton’s right. We need to find them,” said Pam.

“May I suggest that there’s a helicopter on the first island. I can pick it up if Jerry boats me,” Briscoe uttered.

“OK , fine, then. We’ll stick to Rich’s plan initially. Take the body to the spot Rich mentioned and you can pick the chopper up. Richard, are they on the same island?” There was no response, but it didn’t stop Kyser’s questioning. “How long will this take, Jerry?!”

“I’m not sure. How far away is the place from here?”

“If we take that big boat, it may take six or seven hours. So that’s not including the time we will need to go ashore.”

“You mean it could be over half the day before you all return, twelve fucking hours before we can even begin to get happy about leaving? It could be dark by then. What time does the sun set around here anyway?”

“Calm down Klinton. That gives us ample time to search for your friends. In case we have no luck in finding your friends, I want to still test those choppers. So Briscoe, you and Jerry get back here ASAP. Maybe we can pry them loose with help from the other helicopter”

“Maybe?”

“Yeah, well maybe we need to form teams! Jerry and Briscoe, obviously you to are together. Pam, you stay with Adam, and Richard you with me. Roy and Wesley you guys stay together. While Kyser pointed the teams to their responsible areas to search, the professor wondered why he was not included.

“Hey what about me. You forgot about me. Don’t you people know genius when you see it?”

“OK, I’m sorry! Stick around and help Pam.” Julian had a look like he was depressed that he was unappreciated on his face. He felt as if they were disregarding his use to the team. With his head down, he headed off to aid Pam’s efforts. Jerry and Briscoe prepared the last motorboat and dumped the dead body aboard.

A huge thump sounded from the tossing of Brutus, and Jerry said, “This is creepy man. I never seen a dead body, and I already have seen two today. It’s creepy, isn’t it? I mean, my boss right here dead, whoa! I didn’t like it when he used to command me

around and work me to death. Ha! I guess I get the last laugh.” Briscoe had no words and really felt exhausted because Jerry began running his mouth profusely. “Fitting, such a fate for a hardworking man like the old Brut.” Briscoe said nothing during Jerry’s pauses for air, and the sound of the motor gave rhythm to his ears. It was his only escape from the verbal pyrotechnics Jerry put on. “You know what, he even tried to scam us on our pay. Oh, he didn’t tell us how much your boss was paying on this trip. And all I’ve been through. This fucking heat, I know I’m used to the heat, but goddamn, unknown things biting you. At least where I’m from we knew what it was that bit ya. I’ll bet you can’t tell me what that is biting you now.”

Briscoe looked down and slapped his hand against the creature, and Jerry clutched the corpse of his previous boss in a serious grip declaring, “Whoa, what if I happened to drop you in the drink? I wouldn’t say the gators would mind. One tried to eat me because of this misfortunate trip you volunteered us for.”

Briscoe said, “Oh, you almost got eaten by a crocodile. Hah, that’s funny.” Briscoe surely was amused, chuckling so hard he almost mis-steered the boat. A swerve in the commanding Amazon caused both to grip the boat. Jerry dropped the dead one to make sure he didn’t have a second round with those reptiles.

“Hey man, watch it. I’ve already been swimming for the day.”

“You idiot, the day just started.”

“I mean yesterday — you know what I mean. Shit. Ever since I came to this jungle my sense of time has been screwed up.” The boat was under good control now and they were on their way down the river. It was fairly peaceful along the way. The sun was piercing and more so because they weren’t protected by the massive canopy of trees that lie on both sides of the river. Jerry watched the bow of the boat slice through the river causing a ripple of waves. “I’ve never seen fish like this, their swimming so harmoniously.”

Briscoe took a look and replied, “Those are piranhas, and they aren’t as forgiving as a crocodile.”

“I’ll bet. I ought of feed them a Brutus meal.” Briscoe shook his head and continued to steer the small motorboat. “Hey, Jerry! It’s time for you to get ready to take over.”

Jerry stood up and gazed at the science vessel ahead. "It sure is a lovely boat. I wouldn't mind having it."

"Well pretend it's yours and maybe you will get us where we need to be safely."

"Oh, you don't question my abilities, do you? You know I've been raised around boats since I was yea big. You know when I was eight, me and my dad went on a fishing trip far out on the lake, and he got too damn drunk. The motherfucker passed out, and oh yeah, he's a motherfucker or else I wouldn't be here. I had to get us home. I was scared as shit, especially when I tried to wake his drunk ass. I really didn't know which way to go, or even how to turn the boat. I mean I watched my dad, but he hadn't got around to teaching me yet. I figured if I could turn the boat around and keep it straight, we could run into shore at some point. Luckily, we ended up right back where we started, but that trip made him teach me right away. I thank Jesus for that. He really cared for me then, but since I've become a man he hasn't shined down on me much."

Jerry needed a breath giving time for Briscoe to respond unenthusiastically.

"Touching story! I hope that you are finished because it's time to board your boat and get it moving."

"Sure, I'm ready. Let's getting it together." The two had a task ahead of them that would prove to be their fate, and the cessation of their sentient being.

Chapter 22

The scroungy old man lay tucked beneath his chair asleep and unaware of what was about to happen. The sound of a large engine came roaring from the sky, and by the vibrations he knew the plane was descending. The ruckus Detective Edward Pullins' flight caused aroused the old man from his nap. It startled him because he knew of no scheduled flights, but he also knew lately things around here had been strange. He jumped up to get a good look at what was going on. He looked long and hard at the landing and who might be exiting like a private eye who was hungry to solve another case. Fear and curiosity fought for domination, and the two did not compliment one another. He glanced at Edward Pullins as he descended the stairs.

Edward immediately placed his shades upon his face because he wasn't accustomed to this kind of heat. That variation between the air conditioned plane and this heat put a mild damper on his eagerness to catch up with Richard. He was here now, so there was no turning back. The first thing to catch the detective's eyes was the tower that stood above the area. It stood out because there were no trees to protect you from the sun's immediate attack. That fact increased Edward's eagerness to get to the tower.

The old man noticed that the man's build appeared familiar, but the shades made his identity unclear, but he knew the mystery would soon be solved because the detective was soon making his way up the stairs. The old man could hear his steps and braced for his entrance. The louder his sound grew from climbing the stair casing the more the anticipation grew for the both of them. The old man was curious as to who was approaching, and Edward just wanted some answers. Detective Pullins flung the entrance open. He had also gripped his pistol for reassurance.

The old man cried out, "No, no, don't shoot."

Edward replaced his firearm only after realizing it wasn't needed. "Hey, come here!" commanded Edward. The old man stood there, fear and anxiety now leaving him speechless. "What's the matter? You don't speak English? You spoke it fine when I was pointing this at ya. Do I have to point it again to get a response out of you?" The petrified look remained on the old man's face. Edward made his way to invade the tower keeper's

space. He then grabbed him with force, “Look!” Edward reached for his back pocket and pulled out various photographs. “Have you seen these people?” Edward quickly flipped through pictures of Richard, Joe, and Nick’s friends. The old man still was not as responsive as he would like, and couldn’t say that he’s seen any of them. “Wait a minute now!” Edward declared. He knew something didn’t add up. Edward began to increase the force behind the jerking of the old man. “Who do you work for? I was told this facility was run by this man,” he said, pointing aggressively at Richard’s picture. “You’re telling me you don’t know this gentleman. I see I may have to...”

“Oh OK, he looks familiar, but I work for a Captain Briscoe. I think I may have seen him with the captain. I know nothing else.”

“You’re sure you don’t know any of these men, that you haven’t seen any of them around here?” Edward made sure he got a good glimpse of the photos.

“No, I don’t know any of them.”

“I think you’re not telling me everything you need to tell me. I don’t know if you’re taking up for someone or if you’re just not recalling.” Edward gripped the poor old man with one hand with extremely great force. He used the other hand to point his toy at his jaw. “Now, I know there’s something you may have forgotten to tell me. Haven’t you?” By this time, sweat poured from the old man’s head, causing him to shiver a bit in fright. Edward shoved the photos in his face. “Look! I know you had to see one of these guys.

“No, no! I don’t know these people!”

“I know there’s been something strange going on. You must have noticed something — you’re the tower man. You get to see everything that comes here. I know you know?”

“Well, I did notice one time Richard and some man got a helicopter, but Richard returned alone. He seemed to be worried or something.”

“Well, where did they go?”

“I don’t know? All I do is watch. I never know anything.”

Edward released the old man and tucked his pistol away. He looked out the tower window, gazing at the glare. He noticed the thick trees that lay far in the distance. That very view was a foreshadowing of what was to come, but Edward was unaware. Fittingly

so, he rushed off to descend the stair casing to find out how to cure his desire.

Just before he exited, the old man decided to spill a little more information. “I suggest that, if you wanna find who you’re looking for, stand over there by those helicopter landing pads. They’ll probably make a stop today. You can get a ride then, but just wait patiently.”

Edward took heed and proceeded to exit the tower. Taking on the brutal sun was Edward’s first challenge, but being patient would prove to be the unapparent one. He stood in the baking sun and wondering how he would get to where he needed to be. There weren’t many trees in his area, and so he suffered. He gazed at the trees in the distance, wishing he was under one, but the closest was across the river. He had no idea where he needed to go, so he sat on the edge of the river and waited patiently.

Meanwhile, there were shouts for the Kemps in all different directions. The only one who seemed to be quiet was Richard. He didn’t give much effort in finding the missing pilots. Maybe the fact that he was a pilot himself had something to do with his calm demeanor. In fact, Richard was pondering what had become of his simple plan. Rage built up in him because the inevitable feeling of failure consumed him. He looked as if he could snap. The calls for the Kemps made it worse, as to him it seemed like harassing echoes. Flashes of previous dreams now started to correlate with the jungle sounds he was hearing.

Deeper in the forest, Wesley was saying, “You know what, Roy? I don’t think we’re going to find these guys. I think Kyser should have opted for the helicopters.”

“Wes, you know Kyser knows what he is doing.”

“I believe in Kyser, but two have already turned up dead. His own friend misled him, and us, so if you ask me Kyser looks sick and maybe it’s affecting his judgment.”

“No, Wesley, there’s nothing wrong with Kyser. If you were missing we would come looking for you. Or would you like us to just abandon you? Maybe I’ll keep that in mind the next time you’re in need.”

“Oh, save that crap,” exclaimed Wesley.

“Hey, don’t forget we are supposed to be scanning for traps. You saw how that guy died. We wouldn’t want that to be our end,” declared Roy.

“Well help me look and you won’t have that problem.” They continued on,

unimpeded by the inhabitants of the jungle.

At the camp, Richard snapped out of his mood when Kyser reacted in a distressed fashion. “Are you alright Kyser?” exclaimed Richard.

Kyser darted towards Pam and her nursing efforts. “Pam,” he called out pitifully. He appeared to be in a bit of pain from the serious scratching he had administered all over his body. The itching from his arms had now spread all over. He moaned, “Pam, Pam.” He looked inside only to notice Adam was alone. Kyser decided to search through Pam’s med-kit. He wanted to find something, anything that would soothe his itching. His hands caused chaos as he rummaged through the accessories, and he noticed some type of ointment that could be used for minor itch relief. However, what he was experiencing wasn’t minor at all — in fact it was quite severe. Parts of his skin began to tear because he had scratched so much. There were huge pink sores bulging out all over the infected areas of his body. Some of the soars had exploded because he scratched them so. He placed the ointment all over his body. Adam looked at Kyser briefly because it took some effort for him. He however felt a bit more comfort because someone else suffered.

Adam even spoke to Kyser frailly, “Oh, what’s wrong Kyser?”

Kyser responded slowly while rapidly scratching in various places. “I don’t know. Something must have infected me? This damn heat and sweat, and all this fucking greenery, oh it’s driving me insane.” He continued to scratch all over. “Oh, please stop. It itches, damn shit, it itches.” Kyser had scratched his arms, and then his neck, and all over his stomach. He tried hard to satisfy his back needs, but couldn’t produce comfortable results. “Adam where’s Pam? I thought I told her to look after you. Pam! Pam,” Kyser continued his rampage for Pam and showed no sign of letting up.

Fortunately for Kyser, Pam and Klinton had just returned from search efforts of their own. “Oh dear, what wrong?” cried Pam. Klinton immediately darted after Pam in her pursuit to respond to the calling of her name. Pam entered the tent and noticed Kyser’s despondency. “Let me see that,” she said. However, Kyser’s itch warranted a hesitation. Pam grabbed his hand with a more forceful command. “Let me see that. I told you, you should have let me see this before.” She examined those pink soars and cried, “oh my!”

“Pam, it itches. Please help me. what could it be? This ointment isn’t working one

bit.” Kyser scratched, but Pam tried to prevent him.

“Let me see it. I can’t if you keep your hands in the way.”

“I can’t help it.”

Pam extracted a sharp object connected to her key chain and began to jig at one of those pink soars. “Oow! Shit, now watch that.”

“I’m sorry,” softly replied Pam, looking up at Kyser with empathy.

“Oh my,” cried Pam as she squeezed and poked at one of Kyser unfamiliar wounds. More screams poured from Kyser’s mouth. Adam looked over and realized someone might be in as much pain as he. “Stay still, it looks like, oh my goodness...” Pam stuck her sharp object in the opening wound and pried a huge maggot from inside.

“Oh god, what is that?” Mr. Westfield cried out loud.

The professor stood quietly for some time, but he was amazed at what was taking place. He shouted, “Looks like you may have been bitten by the infamous South American fly — they lay their eggs in human skin.”

“Oh that’s gross. It looks like lots of eggs have been laid.”

“I need to extract the little things out of each and every soar you have.”

Adam had noticed much attention had gone towards Kyser. He cried out, “Ohh, ohh!” It seemed as if severe pain had crept inside of Adam.

Pam said calmly, “Please Klinton, go find the others. The professor and I have our hands full. Klinton marched off to find Wesley and Roy.

“Kyser, Kyser! I think something else may have infected you, because I don’t think this itching, or at least of this magnitude, is even associated with the fly bites. We need to get the both of you to a hospital is the bottom line. I hope that guy hurries back with that helicopter.” The FBI team really needed their leader, but he had succumbed to unconsciousness. Roy Beaver’s would be next in command, but Wesley often persuaded him somehow or another. Nevertheless, Pam tucked both of the sick men away as comfortably as possible while pondering what would be done next. “Damn professor, what exactly is your use. Don’t you know some type of plant or something we can extract the juices from to get my men better.”

“Oh yeah, right. I just study ancient cultures and indigenous tribes.”

“I don’t see how that’s relevant. I should say. That Richard fellow should have

brought a medic. No disrespect to you and what you do.”

“I didn’t ask to come here. Richard thought that there might be tribal members living around here.”

“Oh yeah, well I haven’t seen any tribes around here, or any cabals, or Indians for that matter.”

“Well, what do you say caused the mysterious deaths?”

“Hmm! I knew that Richard fuck was holding back something, but how would he figure tribes were around here?”

Pam got up and stormed outside the tent to deliver a few words to Richard. In the distance he was already engaged in conversation with Klinton Westfield. “So what do you say?” asked Richard.

Klinton shrugged his shoulders and responded, “You can keep your money and shove it up your ass.” Klinton had no interest in sharing his skills he had learned from the late Brutus. “You’re a sleaze bucket. I don’t deal with them. I wouldn’t be here if it weren’t for my job.”

Richard looked puzzled and responded, “What are you talking about? Every one is angry at Richard.”

Pam arrived and put in her two cents worth. “You know exactly what! Mr. Professor! What exactly did you need him for? We’re not FBI agents for nothing. Something’s going on and you better confess before conspiracy charges are introduced.”

“Excuse me lady, calm down! I’ve done my research. In fact, actually the professor and I had a conversation over the phone about this. It was only after I and my beautiful daughter were watching some movie and in the end there were these tribal people. They were in South America, so it kind of freaked me out, you know. That’s really why I called all of you, but I didn’t want to sound crazy. Like that was in the movies, so I didn’t think to mention it. We still haven’t seen any tribals, and I believe these incidents could be some freak accidents that... I’m sorry. I should have had us more prepared.”

“But Richard, I did say that there was a huge possibility that there could be tribes here.”

“Yeah, so why didn’t you tell us this. Then maybe your friend over there wouldn’t

be dead. Now it's making sense. He probably got caught in one of those ancient traps. We need to tell the others of this classified information Richard kept from us. Hey! Klinton, I thought I told you to find the others."

"Hold up, lady. You're not my boss. I don't think I have a badge, and I'm definitely not being detained. Am I?"

"Just go. I thought you said you want to go home. Well, you're not acting like it."

"First of all, this idiot here was trying to bribe me again, but it was futile. The only thing it did was get me ordered around by a demanding female."

"Oh! That female... It's a female with authority problem," she said as she looked at Richard as if she wanted to detain him.

"Oh excuse me. Let me go and find these people before me and you end up..." He didn't finish his comments only to point at Pam, and then he turned to run off into the woods. Klinton now wondered even more why his friends hadn't turned up. A question about tribes being involved loomed and it prepped his eagerness to inform the others. The sounds of beautiful birds, monkeys swinging from tress, and even roars from wild beasts gave him more adrenaline. However, he made a point to stay focused because you can easily get lost in this jungle. That was exactly what was going through his mind. He remembered the path Kyser assigned to them, so that was the one he traveled. His acceleration unknowingly placed him deep within the forest, but Roy and Wesley were just ahead.

"You hear that," cried Roy.

Wesley began to hone his ears a bit. "I think I hear somebody running, sounds like their approaching us."

"Hey gentlemen, it's me. You haven't found my friends?" Klinton was slightly outraged. "Where could they be? You know that Richard guy contends that tribes might be involved."

"What?" Roy and Wesley seemed to speak at the same time. They were both appalled.

"Yes. He said something about tribes being territorial and that's why he brought the professor."

"For what?" exclaimed Wesley.

“To communicate with them. He studies that ancient culture stuff.”

“Oh boy, this is unbelievable. So that fuck was holding back information. We could have been killed.” All three men now stood in the middle of some part of the jungle, tempers ventilated at Richard and his monstrosities.

“We still haven’t found my friends, but you know what, I’ll find them.” Klinton pulled out a piece he had concealed and assured it was ready for firing. “I’ll show those tribes. Where in the hell are they holding my friends? I’m going to find them.”

“Wait a minute,” cried Wesley. “I hope that thing is registered. A concealed weapon is a serious offense.”

“Well, would you like me to register it up your ass.” Klinton pointed the gun at Wesley causing complete submission. He then ran off into the woods.

Roy declared, “We need to get him before he does something stupid.”

Wesley’s response was not favorable. “No, let him run off and be a hero. He might end up dead.”

Klinton’s eagerness caused him to be careless as he ran through the forest. The heat along with his anxiety got the better of him. He now resembled Milo in his problem with crossing the stream. All of a sudden a loud gun sounded and the first thing to be startled were those birds. The monkeys and wild beasts followed. The second in line was Roy and Wesley, as they lifted their heads and ran swiftly in that direction. The third was a buck-naked woman that ran at a distance but right before Klinton’s eyes. He got a good glimpse as he lay on the ground from his sudden stumble. Klinton got up quickly and perused the woman. Wesley and Roy were just in time because they noticed Klinton disappearing into a patch of woods. The pursuit was on, and you could hear Klinton yell out, “Hey lady, come here. Have you seen my friends?” He gained on her. His pistol, however, was left behind where he fell and the gun discharged. That meant hand contact was a must because obviously the woman wasn’t about to stop voluntarily. “Hey lady, come on, I need to talk to you.” Klinton yapped on as he gained on her.

Roy and Wesley were also gaining on him. Roy asked Wesley as they ran, “What got him revved up?” Then for a minute there was nothing but huffing and puffing and feet shuffling through the litter on the forest floor.

Then Wesley responded briefly, “It appears he is chasing something. What could

it be?”

Roy began to lag behind a bit, but only because he failed to share Wesley's feelings. A sudden desire for heroism never was a part of Roy's repertoire. Nevertheless, he continued his pursuit.

Mr. Westfield reached out his right hand and grabbed the buck-naked woman's shoulder, causing disruption in both of their travels. It instantly caused the women to spin clockwise and fall to the left directly on her back. Klinton stumbled as well, but he used his left hand to prevent him from falling hard. The woman let out unidentifiable verbiage. She was helplessly crawling backwards, because Klinton had regained himself and immediately stood over her. “Have you seen my friends? Hey! *Comprende!* Have you seen them?” Klinton's frustration grew quickly and he aggressively pulled out a picture of the two pilots. It was the one Susie gave to him of their honeymoon. However, the mystery woman appeared terrified of the picture. The peoples of the rainforest weren't too inclined to have their pictures taken. She cried and pleaded in some unfamiliar language. “Hey!” Klinton grabbed the woman with both hands by her upper arms. He began lifting her and softly shook her.

A loud shout came from the path they had trotted just moments ago. “Klinton! What's going on? What are you doing?” Klinton's face didn't change much, but he did look over to see his counterparts approach. “What are you doing to that poor woman?” said Roy.

“Poor woman! Wait a minute! These people are responsible for... Look, she may know where my friends are. Our way home?”

“You're right. If we take her back to camp as to use to barter with, then we may be able to get the pilots back,” declared Wesley.

Roy wasn't pleased. “I can't believe you guys. We can't hold this woman hostage. Wesley! We have taken an oath to uphold the law, not break it.”

“You're right, Roy. I would never let my country down, but this isn't our country. She's definitely not an American citizen. Frankly, that oath doesn't apply. Besides she's a potential suspect in the disappearance of our way home.”

“Well Wesley, we aren't really supposed to be here. You ever heard of being out of jurisdiction. I think that applies.” Roy wasn't convinced they were doing the right

thing. He wished someone would convince him because he felt uneasy.

Klinton said softly, "You're right. We are not supposed to be here, but we are. I want to go home, and I'm sure you do too. Look, all we want is to get the professor and see if we can talk to her. That is why he's here, isn't it? Remember Richard's little secret — well now it seems to be correct. There is at least one tribe somewhere around here." The gentlemen began to listen to Klinton because he started to make sense. "Hey man, I never been the one to rough up a woman, but if you figure tribes are living out here, and he wants to build something... You get where I am going with this? Obviously, there's conflict. The fact that he is keeping this a secret doesn't fit, and something in the milk ain't clean."

They were all convinced now that they were doing the right thing, but all the adverse affects were not yet apparent. Nevertheless, Klinton's speech calmed Roy and added fuel to Wesley's fire. They secured the woman and made way for camp.

CHAPTER 23

The sun's grip on the sky was loosening and the sunset ritual was just hours away. Mr. Kratz had complete control over the navigation mission. The river was kind. They were inside the deck where they had been protected all day from the burning spear, but it didn't protect them from the humidity. The sun's decline gave a bit of relief. Jerry went up to continue steering while Briscoe remained below. He would prefer to avoid Jerry's verbal ambush. Even so, he didn't want to stare at a dead body most of the way. The odor began to be noticeable, so he decided to join Jerry. "Hey Mr. I think you need to go check on your friend."

Jerry released the boat's steering wheel and turned to face Briscoe. He replied calmly, "What are you talking about?"

"Your friend in there is looking so creepy."

"What? That's my boss, not my friend."

"Well at least cover him. I didn't expect to look at a dead body all day."

"Come outside and enjoy the beautiful view then. We're coming about the second island, and we'll soon be there."

"I didn't want to come out here. It was more pleasant inside away from the sun. I wish I would have advised you to let me off beforehand, but I see we're already beyond the first island. I'll be glad to get off this boat to get away from you and your boss."

"I needed your help, so you had to wait. We are almost finished, so it will be over soon. How about you let me know where that third island Richard talked about is located. I'll go and check on Brutus." Jerry carried a smirk on his face as he walked away. Brutus watched his exit, shook his head and turned to observe the view. "Hello! Mr. Brutus, are you in here? Mr. Brutus, Mr. Salapore! Are you in here? Do you need anything? Ha Ha!" Jerry was extremely amused and mocked his former employer with crude sarcasm. He had even crept up close to the body and with a slick grin uttered, "Hey! Can you hear me?" He pointed at the dead one and whispered, "Can you hear me? Hey, tell me about how it feels to walk that tunnel of light those people always talking about on unsolved mysteries. I suppose you can't answer. That's good, because I was

tired of your mouth. Jerry this, Jerry that, wee wee this, wee that, always crying about something. You know what though, look who's fucked now. And we are getting all that money you tried to keep secret, and more for dropping your ass off."

Captain Briscoe looked weary and shook his head in despair. He had noticed Jerry leaned over the dead body in full conversation. The whole reason he joined them was he thought Jerry was trying to speak to him. Briscoe asked softly, "Are you alright?" That comment was an adjustment because he realized later Jerry wasn't talking to him, but his late boss. Briscoe even waited for a response.

"Oh, Oh, yes I'm OK. I just had a few things I hadn't had the chance to tell him."

"Oh, I didn't know. It must be hard."

"Yes, I worked with him for years."

"Oh, so I am right. It must be hard. I see you two must have been close."

"Close wasn't the word!"

"Well! The word now is that the island is up ahead. So if you two can let each other loose, then maybe, maybe, you can anchor the boat and speed this ordeal up. If you didn't notice, I want to go home. Just because you are used to boat rides all your life doesn't mean I'm close to even liking a boat."

"I get it! It's safer to fly helicopters than to sail, huh! I don't think so!"

"At least when trouble occurs in a helicopter you can bail out in a parachute. Where the hell are you going to bail out when the boat goes down? In the damn water to drown."

"No, you idiot! That's why there's life jackets and reserve boats."

"That's great! Life spared by a jacket only to be devoured by some sea dwelling predator. I would rather be abandoned in the middle of no where on land than in the middle of some huge body of water. No thanks!"

"I'm finished debating with nincompoops. Let's get this show on the road."

"Yeah whatever!" declared Jerry as if he had to have the last word. The two men worked well together preparing the anchor. Everything was prepared except for their exact plan. "You think we should scout a shore to find out exactly where we are taking my boss." Briscoe heard Jerry loud and clear, but instead of responding he walked towards the point of the vessel. Jerry appeared curious as to his sail mate's actions, but he

remained quiet and followed closely behind. “You know, I don’t see how there could be a funeral home on this island, or anything that would be useful to old bossy.” Jerry spoke with astonishment as he slightly shoved Briscoe aside for the best view. He scanned all around and asked, “Are we in the wrong spot? What’s going on? I think this Richard guy is funny. How long have you worked for this Richard guy anyway?” Jerry continued his blabbering, not paying any attention to Briscoe. He was used to Briscoe’s non-responsive attitude. “Look, do you see where you can fit a building on that piece of land. Ha! That’s funny! Are you sure this is the third island. I don’t even see or hear any birds. All I hear is something lurking in these waters.” That last comment Jerry spilled was just slightly the truth, because he could hear various other sounds he seemed to be impervious to. The next moment you could hear the sudden breeze you sometimes naturally get when on the waters. The sounds of Jerry constantly changing his grip on the boat’s railing gave off a distinctive harmony. This was from the boat’s fight with the currents, which gave off its own sound.

Then came a loud, Bang! This sound was surely louder than all others before. However, Jerry could not respond because a huge hole was in the back of his head. His brain mucus spilled all over the place. Some had even splattered on Briscoe, but he proceeded to shove the body overboard. He politely re-concealed his weapon and marched towards the inner deck. He grabbed the late Brutus and dragged him about, only to dump him overboard as well. Captain Briscoe immediately headed for the motorboat. Releasing it briskly, he jumped aboard. The first attempt to turn over the motor was unsuccessful, but after three or four tries everything seemed to be in line. He sped off, and as he fled, you could see the reptiles and various other hungry river dwellers devouring Brutus and Jerry.

Briscoe felt behind schedule and his desire to get up river became apparent. He ran the motor full out. Passing the second island was just about complete. It wouldn’t be long before he could ditch what he hated for what he loved. This had all brought back vivid memories of Briscoe’s past, rushing his brain like an overdose of serotonin. Chills broke out all over his skin when he remembered almost drowning, and it wasn’t because he couldn’t swim. It was because his brother tormented him. They pushed him overboard. He instantly recalled them terrorizing him with stories of lake beasts and creek monsters.

He had even flashed back briefly. The chants and praise rituals the tribes had performed made the forest amplify all spiritual energies. And to them fear, anxiety, and panic were all spiritual energies, but on the negative side of the spectrum. Briscoe could hear his brother cry out, "Watch out, Scoe! Scoe!" There was a huge splash, and Briscoe found himself treading water.

"Ha, Ha, Ha! What ya doing man?" exclaimed Joey.

Peter had reached for the string. "I'm just breaking his balls." Peter pulled the string as hard as he could.

"Yeah! Let's scare the living shit out of him. Ha, ha!" Joey laughed on as he watched Briscoe look like a pale ghost. The engine roared, and Peter jetted off. However, he only moved the boat just out of Briscoe's immediate range.

"Hey Scoe! You know that story Granddad used to tell us when we were your age and he finally told you. Remember, about that lake monster. Yes, that monster I've seen." Peter screamed at the top of his lungs, "Oh my God, Scoe! No Scoe, No...Scoe, behind you."

Peter jetted off, but not before uttering. "It's gonna get us!"

Briscoe dared not look back. He was too busy trying to tread water. That seemed to be all he was doing, because he went no where. He screamed, "No, no, don't leave me. I can't, I...please. You guys, help. Help!" He cried and cried and all of that energy kept him from going anywhere. In fact, he began to lose the gracefulness in his treading, and his actions became desperate. Then you couldn't hear him cry anymore, only the sounds of splashing and the gurgling of water.

Peter stopped the boat about 30 meters away. "Ha, ha. He's scared out of his ass, holy shit. Ha, ha!" Peter just gazed at his little brother scampering for air.

Standing there momentarily before calling out, "Don't let it get you! Come on, pussy, come on... swim! Swim, you pussy. Damn, look at his ass. He's fucking freezing up. Swim! Swim! Dumb shit."

Peter looked on, but Joey's humor had run out. "Hey Pete, man... I don't know? I think he's having trouble, man. I think we better get him."

"Wait let him sweat a little. We are not gonna let him drown, cool it. I told you he needs a little toughing up." Joey took no chance by shoving Pete out the way and turned

the boat to get Briscoe. Pete had a cruel chuckle, but he didn't object to Joey's rescue mission.

"Eeeek! What is that on his arms and neck? My goodness," cried Roy grossly, and it got everyone's attention.

"That's where these flies laid their eggs. We had to pick them all out," said Pam gently.

"Oh no, that's gross," declared the professor.

"Is he asleep?" wondered Wesley.

"I think the itching got so severe he passed out. That's why I say that I'm not sure if all of this is attributed to this fly. Maybe he's been in contact with something else as well. He needs to go to the hospital, and by the way, have you run into the Pilots? No! obviously not." Pam noticed that fact as she just now had a chance to look up at the crew. The task of caring for Adam and Kyser was daunting. She had noticed that they weren't alone, but she was more interested in getting them treatment. "Damn, we need to be leaving. Don't forget about Adam over here. I don't know if he'll die, or not. He passes in and out. I don't know if any of these things are contagious, or if even..."

"Hey, calm down Pam! We will get out of here." Klinton grabbed her to get her attention. "Look, Pam they're going to be alright, and we will be OK too." Klinton spoke sharply and really believed in what he saying, and obviously Pam did to.

She had finally calmed down when Wesley shouted, "Now where's Richard!? I have a few words for him. I might just kick his ass." Wesley went searching for Richard and Klinton followed. Roy hesitated for a moment.

"Hey, I think we need to try and communicate with her," advised the professor.

"How so," exclaimed Roy? He was skeptical, but he was curious as well. "So it is true. You and Richard have ulterior motives. You were brought here to convince people of this project's merit, people like what we have here." He pointed at the tribal woman and tried to continue his speech, but he was interrupted by Julian's defense.

"Wait just a minute! I'm not a part of any secret plans or conspiracies. I just got a call from a friend and told him I'll do the favor he asked. I really had no idea."

"OK. Just do your job, whatever it is you specialize in."

The professor turned his head violently, but slow and smooth as he reached for

some scraps he was eating on. He took those very scraps and tried to offer it to the woman. “Food! Food,” said Julian! There was no response. She didn’t even accept the food. His next attempt was the offering of water. “Water! Water!” Julian’s hands acted as allies in their movements towards the woman. The point of those gestures was to explain himself other than verbally, but he also wanted to assure her that he wouldn’t hurt her. Amazingly, she accepted the water.

“Bali, Bali,” shouted the woman! She drank the water carefully. A few moments later it was obvious that she was thirsty. The professor then continued his hand gestures of offerings and repeated her words. “Bali! Bali!” He shook his head up and down. “Roy, hand me a lighter along with that metallic alcohol container. They made the item transfer and Julian quickly lit the lighter. The woman jumped back in fright. “Fire, Fire!” exclaimed Julian.

She softly responded, “Cemi, Cemi!” Roy sipped away while he watched Julian stuff something edible in his mouth. “Eat, eat! Eat, eat!” said Julian.

There seemed to be a slight grin on the woman’s face. She began to chant, “Call, call!” She belched a slight chuckle and surprisingly ate some of the food that was offered to her.

“You’re doing great,” exclaimed Pam gently.

Julian was proud to hear that, for he was dying for a little love. He even felt sympathy for the woman. That wasn’t easy, but the more he tried, the more he grew to care. Pam naturally cared for people, so the feeling Julian was having was slightly different. Nevertheless, like a good professor, he worked industriously to try to understand the woman’s words and then interpret them.

Klinton Westfield and Wesley Zimmerman worked assiduously to find Richard Dickinson. They were not yet successful, and that fact expanded their desire. The two didn’t get along, but that was obscured by their common goal — pursuit of Richard. The light began to fade. The sunset ritual was already beginning and the chants and praises were on. The souls from the recently deceased lingered about the forest mist. They gave extra strength to the mystical force that the chants and praises brewed up. This type of bonding was unknown to the civilized. Neither of these gentlemen took the possibility of ghosts seriously, but were these ghosts? It probably was something a little more complex,

but no one new. Except for the tribe and the spirits. They knew, but the strange thing was that the forest knew too. You could now add Jerry and Brutus to that list. They all now understood what was going on. All the pain and suffering assured that it was already too late. The mystics had begun nights before, and their efforts would persist until all intruders were banished. One of the tribe's beliefs was, if the weak are to be eaten in order for the strong to survive, then let it be. It was their explanation for why God allowed smaller animals to be preyed upon. Their feelings were so that it excluded them from any wrong doings, if and only if, it was an act of survival and your life absolutely depended upon it. This way of thinking correlated with a murder charge being dropped because of self-defense. In a sense, the aboriginals had a case, which is why they had no remorse for initiating such an evil spell. Once engaged, they knew even they wouldn't be safe, but that wasn't of concern. The spell was meant for the wicked. Most indigenous people have clean and caring hearts. They were just misunderstood, just as their ways of life were disregarded. Every piece of earth is not for big buildings and for doing business. Some areas are made just for freedom and natural rhythm. Materials synthesized by man such as concrete and steel don't mesh with the environment. The ancients feared Richard's plan was to synthesize the area they called home. Many other living things called this place home as well, including the trees and various other plant life, and the tribe called for the protection of all living creatures, especially the trees. Why wouldn't they? The trees protected them from everything else. However, nothing would protect Richard from the pursuit of Wesley and Klinton.

But as of this moment, they couldn't find him. After they made a big circle, they met back up empty handed. "No sign of him," cried Klinton with a gasp of a short winded sprinter.

"I didn't see him either. Where could have that fucker gone?" They pondered for just a moment, but decided quickly to head back to camp.

CHAPTER 24

The sound of a small motor being annihilated echoed across the Amazon. There were also the splashes from feet dashing about shoreline in haste. Briscoe was now ashore and had no plans to abandon the helicopter that was there. He hurried because it was getting dark, which might interfere with his ulterior motives. Because he had been here longer than the rest, the edge of added experience, he was able to gather the severity of the ominous events that had been occurring.

He moved briskly across the island. This pursuit was where most of his senses concentrated on. His thought patterns were irregular, and also acted as a barrier to the sounds around him. Nevertheless, his sense of sight remained keen despite the coming darkness. The only aspect in his favor was the heat subsiding. However, that was reduced from his tremendous efforts to get to the helicopter, and he sweated and gasped from exhaustion. He released a huge grunt as he leapt aboard what he loved. It was sitting undisturbed where he left it a day ago. The doors had been left open leaving a distinct odor from the dried rain. That didn't stop Briscoe from starting his escape module. In fact, when the engines roared, there seemed to be no problems. However, the fuel gauges were near empty. "Damn," exclaimed Briscoe as he stroked different instruments. The command for flight was given and up he went. There was no way he could go where he originally intended, at least not until he refueled. It would be just a minor delay because the tower was not far.

"Pam, Pam! How is Kyser?" Wesley shouted loudly as they approached camp. He was indeed heard, but ignored. Pam and company had their own problems. "Hey! Hello! Have you seen that Richard?" shouted Wesley extremely loudly. He wanted to continue his loud antics until someone acknowledged hearing him, at least someone other than Klinton Westfield, but he failed. He would have to wait until eyesight was possible before any acknowledgements. When that did occur, Klinton and Wesley found Pam, Roy, and Julian interrogating the captured woman.

Julian waved his hand and fingers and softly said, "Gentlemen, gentlemen! You are just in time. I think we are progressing just fine here."

“Oh! How so?” Wesley asked. His loud tone even frightened the captured woman.

“Shhh! Sit down and listen,” cried Pam.

Everyone took heed and listened to Julian’s translation attempts. “Aakeichi, aakeichi,” cried the woman. It sounded as if she was afraid, not from her captivity, but from just speaking it. “Aakeichi, aakeichi,” she cried again in the same disdainful manner.

The professor decides to repeat her, “Aakeichi, aakeichi.” He posed a calculating look. The others were dumbfounded.

“Bali, Bali!” The woman cried.

“Bali! Bali!” The professor handed her some water and she drank appreciatively. The professor had already learned some of their basic words while Klinton and Wesley were on their escapade. Earlier, he had pointed at the sun descending, and she then called out what they acknowledged as the sun. Then he pointed at the sky in the same way. He wanted to get a feel for how they communicate. This helped, but it didn’t say what Aakeichi represented. “Aakeichi,” declared Julian. He prepared a spot on the ground, hoping she would understand to draw her meaning of Aakeichi. “Aakechi”, he said again while brushing his hands across the spot again.

There wasn’t a response except for Wesley’s ignorance. “This shit is no use!”

Deep down inside the professor feared he was correct, because it was hard to communicate with someone who has no written alphabet. If they did have one, she did nothing to indicate so. He tried another tack. “Ohun-er, Aakeichi,” said Julian.

She replied to Julian’s remarks by first repeating. “Ohun-er, Aakeichi.” Julian shook his head, hoping she would clarify. “Kha, Llic Belami a bibi Covo!” she cried with terror all over her face. Julian’s next move caused her to jump. Her legs were shaking and fear consumed her.

“What, the fuck did she say?” Everyone else looked at each other.

“I’m not sure! She said something about spirits and trees. Or, maybe wind, and ah, ummm... she did say something about evil and alive.” The professor gripped his beard and pondered for a moment. He left his crew abandoned in curiosity. A worried look crossed his face. “I think she’s saying the spirit of the forest is alive.” He listened to the woman ramble on, translating it accordingly. “She said an ancient curse has been

lifted, I think. Or maybe cast, making the forest eat wicked spirits.”

“What the fuck? Hold on now. I know you don’t expect us to believe that shit, right?!” yelled Wesley. This outraged him.

Julian continued his translation efforts. “I think she’s saying the forest will become an intelligent conscious entity to defend the inhabitants. We are not inhabitants.”

“That’s bullshit. I can’t believe this.”

“Wait a minute Wesley. You should hear them out,” replied Klinton.

He tried to grab Wesley’s arm, but Wesley jerked away bawling, “That’s ridiculous bullshit!” He pulled out his piece and cocked it back. “Fine, you all wanna stay here and listen to this bullshit while our population dwindles? You know what I translate from all this bullshit? I translate that these fucks are using a lame excuse to try and drive us away, so they resort to murder. I’m gonna catch me another one of those bastards and see what it has to say. I hope one resists because I always considered myself a cowboy. I’m gonna hunt me an Indian. That’s what they are, savages like their ancestors.”

“Hey man! Watch your mouth.” Wesley ran off in search of something to release his frustration on. Klinton watched his departure and for some reason felt compelled to follow. “Let the mother fucker run off and be a hero,” replied Klinton. The rest of the crew settled down to figure out what should be done next.

Roy Beavers usually never drank, but he stood over the unwillingly asleep Kyser. He tilted flask of liquor and chugged away. “Damn, you look like shit, Kyser.” He continued to stare at Kyser, and then at Adam. His alcohol levels rose and his stares got more hypnotic.

The professor, meanwhile, tried hard to learn more about the woman. The crew was unaware of it, but now understanding her became an obsession. This was fuel by him feeling the way he wasn’t used to.

Pam had asked Klinton simply, “Do you believe what the professor is saying?”

“Yes, I don’t think he would be lying.”

“No, of course not. I know the professor is sincere in his work, but I just think... maybe he’s not accurate. I mean, can he really understand her this quickly and under this kind of stress?”

“Well Pam! What else is causing the melee?” Pam looked at Klinton and begged

inside for comforting. She began to wonder how they would get home. She, however, didn't have to wonder about wanting to test the tribe's teachings.

Awakened by roaring helicopter blades, Edward Pullins lifted himself up to wipe the drool from his mouth. He had been dreaming after he fell asleep. The excitement caused him to roll over and observe the helicopter. It was obviously landing, but who and why remained to be seen. As the helicopter began to land, Edward darted toward a bush to conceal himself. He peeked about, wondering if he was finally saved and could now get on with his investigation. When the helicopter landed, Edward noticed a single man jump out with apparent haste. This intrigued Edward. He watched more closely, making sure nothing went unseen. He also wanted to make sure *he* wasn't seen.

Briscoe looked around. There was nothing but refueling on his mind. He looked over towards Edward before noticing one key factor was missing — the mobile gas vehicle was needed. He turned his head away from Edward's direction and looked directly at the truck. This change of direction forced Edward to adjust his position so he could remain unseen. Briscoe retrieved the vehicle and headed towards the helicopter. Edward Pullins began to creep at three quarters of a sprint directly behind the slowly moving gas truck. Briscoe positioned the truck so that it would be a quick attachment. Edward adjusted himself behind the truck so he wouldn't be seen. Briscoe began fueling the truck the whole while thinking of his plan, and how the slow pump was not helping.

Then Captain Briscoe put his hands high in the air after feeling hard steel digging at his back. "Where are we in a hurry to get?" Edward searched his pockets and other concealed compartments. "Oh! What's this, you need one of these. You haven't used this, have you? It's quite warm. Turn around!" Edward jerked Briscoe around and demanded roughly, "Where is Richard Dickenson?" Briscoe didn't respond, but looked foolish. "Oh you can't talk," shouted Edward calmly with the steel piece reinforced to the front of Briscoe's head with more pressure, which turned that foolish look into one of anguish. "Where's Richard?" A moment drifted by. "Oh, I see. You think someone would find you if I took your helicopter and threw you in the river. Oh, after leaving a bullet in your head." Edward tightened his hold on Briscoe. "You know what?" he said calmly. Edward turned Briscoe back around forcing the gun hard up against his back. "I don't think I need you. I can fly this baby myself." Edward bluffed like poker player. He forced Briscoe

towards the river, acting as if this was the end for the captain. Edward played with the trigger to try and scare the captain. They were just about near the river and Edward again pulled the gun up towards his head. Briscoe began to sweat furiously down his face.

Then Briscoe screamed out. "OK! Ok! What do you want?"

Edward shoved him back around towards the helicopter and replied, "Let's go! Take me to Richard's little project." Briscoe said nothing else. He just walked forward as commanded, compelled to obey Edward. In fact, detective Pullins could be very convincing when he used force. This was apparent because Briscoe appeared convinced, and the two men were on their way.

A fierce fire burned inside of Wesley as he gazed about the forest. It wasn't clear as to what he was in pursuit of, but he had made it already clear Richard or any tribesman better not come his way. The problem was there were more eyes than just Richard's or some tribe's people. All the eyes were hard to see because it was dark. However, some had sudden glows about them like the owls that stood in the tree above him. He noticed them because he had stopped his pursuit for a moment only to scan his potential pathways. Even though he seemed to be looking around very hard, he still paid no attention to the many eyes that watched him. Wesley scanned for the area for his prey, but darkness overwhelmed his sight. He did see trees, but they were too creepy to dare stare at them too long. Each one looked as if something lived in it, around it, and on top of it. They all were huge and blocked his view.

He gazed upon one steadily and then had what he thought was a gut instinct. He darted through a familiar path, eagerness boiling in his blood. He cocked back his grip and leapt over would be blockage, letting nothing stop him. His sweat poured even though the sun had set. The humidity remained like the ever present air latching to one's skin like sticky film. Up ahead, he noticed a medium-build slender man standing, looking at the useless helicopters. He decided to sneak up behind the man. When he realized it was Richard, Wesley lunged at him as if making a goal-line tackle. Richard's face skid in the mud with Wesley on top of him, "You fucking sleaze ball. All this shit has been going on, and you don't know shit. Well, we now know that to be a lie, and I'm going to kick your ass." Wesley yelled at Richard while turning him around for eye contact. He also followed with a shoving of Richard's head into the ground. "I'll teach people like

you. Think you got all the money and can do what you want?" His anger was let out not only by yells, but also by severe punches administered to Richard's face. Wesley manhandled Richard and treated him like scum. The next punch to the face burst it wide open. Richard's blood began to drip down his face. Wesley was upset he was stranded, and it was all because of him. He began to lift his right hand to kick off the next round of punishing blows. He decided to choke him for a moment, almost zoning out. He barely noticed the helicopter that circled above them, but ultimately it was the reason his gripped loosened from around Richard's neck.

The gun still posed a threat. So Briscoe tried to calmly place the helicopter down. "If I put it down here it may get stuck like the rest."

"I don't give a damn. Land the helicopter somewhere."

Briscoe commanded the helicopter to land, but the blades were mysteriously caught in a branch. It appeared that the tree reached out and grabbed the blade causing the helicopter to swirl out of control. The helicopter became unsteady and leaned to the left side, "Oh, oh," shouted the men as their body weight was thrown with the helicopter's tilt. They crashed into a tree.

"Damn!" shouted Edward. Briscoe slid barley holding on to his seat. His feet dangled outside the helicopter's door. He could hold on no longer and plummeted out of the tree. The impact caused a broken ankle and a few bruised ribs. The roots of the tree bulged above the earth abnormally, causing him to land awkwardly, and he lay there in severe pain. Edward managed to climb himself onto his seat. "Damn, how in the hell did I get myself into this shit!" He looked down at the injured Briscoe wondering how he could avoid the same fate. He carefully climbed out into the tree. He managed this through the other door. He needed all his strength, and luckily for him he was not depleted from the long treacherous stay in the rainforest. He remained safe in the tree, but the trees let the plane fall to the ground, which came crashing down atop Briscoe, cursing him and concealing his true agony by exploding heavily. Edward could feel the intense heat from up in the tree.

The sound of the explosion ironically is what saved Richard, because he was on his last breath. "What the fuck," exclaimed Wesley while letting loose of Richard's throat. He headed for the explosion. "Hey! What the hell is going on," yelled Wesley.

“Stranger! Can you help me out of this tree first?”

Wesley looked at the explosion and maneuvered around the flames to help Edward. “So what the hell happened?”

“The helicopter’s blade was caught.”

“Was anybody else with you?”

“Yes, but he’s dead.”

“Who is he?”

“I don’t know.”

“What do you mean, you don’t know? Who are you?”

“I’m detective Edward Pullins! Who are you?”

Wesley gazed at the badge being presented and hesitated before responding. “I’m Agent Wesley Zimmerman with the FBI”

“Oh shit. The FBI. What are you doing involved in this case?”

“Case! What case? No! I think you got it all wrong. We were hired by Richard.”

“Oh, funny.”

“Funny! What’s funny,” exclaimed Wesley? He began to get frustrated so he talked louder. “Why are you here?”

“I’m here to arrest Richard. I’ve been investigating him in the disappearance of Joe Geshy and apparently a few other people. Have you seen any of them?”

“Oh boy! I think I’ve seen a couple of them, but that Joe guy was a dead body we came across a day ago. Goddamn, I just let Richard loose. I had to give him a pulverizing, but if I knew he was a fugitive, like I thought he was, I probably would have choked him out. Let’s go.” Wesley led the way in the pursuit of Richard. Edward followed closely behind.

“Damn, it’s getting too dark to see in this damn jungle. It seems you know your way around a little.”

“Yeah we’ve been here a while, and it seems like forever.”

“This muggy climate, I don’t know how you all could have stand it.”

“Look! Did you come here to catch a criminal or complain about how hot it is?”

“Yes, your correct, but damn. Are we snappy?” The two trotted on their way not paying attention to what could be watching them.

Pam watched over the sick. Roy got drunk, and the professor courted the tribal woman. “Will you leave that damn girl alone? I think she’s a little annoyed,” replied Klinton.

Roy concurred in a drunken voice. “Yeah! What are you trying to do?”

“I’m just trying to get information out of her.”

“Well, you being all over her like that makes me wonder what type of information you are seeking.”

Kyser was now conscience and managed to get up. “Oohhh, damn. I’m still itching.” Kyser tripped and falls as his eyesight seemed affected as well.

“Watch where you’re going!”

“Sorry, sorry. Where’s everyone? Just because I’m hurting right now doesn’t mean you get drunk on the job. Roy! Damn!” Kyser scratched in rage, just like he did with his commands. “Pam! How’s Adam?”

“He’s not doing well.”

“Where are Briscoe and Jerry? Aren’t they back yet? What about the pilots? No one has found them? Where’s Richard? What’s going on? Haven’t you done any work? Do you guys want to get home, damn it. I do. So maybe a doctor can give me something for this terrible itch. Why is everybody looking at me that way? Don’t look, answer me.”

“Kyser! Kyser! Calm down. You’ve been out for a while.”

“Out! What!”

“Look, remember we had to dig larva out of your skin.”

“Oh shit, I forgot. That’s right, I’ve been infected by some fucking flies. We need to be getting out of here, and finding a way fast. What the... What do we have here? Where did you get her from?” Kyser was surprised, and for a moment it made his itching go away.

“Wesley and I encountered her in the woods. Yeah, your Richard guy has been exposed.”

“Oh, how so? Let the boss in on an update.” Kyser walked over towards her and the professor and stood directly over them. “So Julian, you seem pretty close to her. What have you communicated with her about?”

“Well sir, she says something about the forest being alive, and we are forbidden to

be here.”

“Where’s Wesley?”

“He ran off to find Richard.”

“Why do I get the sense he wanted Richard pretty badly? What has Richard done?”

“Well you know he has been slight less than honest, as you can see, withholding information about these tribes. They’re the ones who have been attacking us.”

“How can you be sure of that?” exclaimed Julian.

“Oh! I forgot you said that the spirit of the forest has come to get us.”

“Shhh!” declared Kyser. He had heard something, and everyone’s attention was placed upon the entrance. They watched Richard stumble in. “What’s wrong Richard?” Kyser said while picking him up. “Richard! Everyone is saying you are withholding vital information. Do you know why?” Richard looked up at Kyser while taking full advantage of the support Kyser gave him.

He responded ruggedly, like the battered and bruised man he was. “I don’t know what they are talking about.”

“What about this woman here? Everyone says you knew about these people.”

“Look! All I knew was what Julian told me.” Everyone now turned their attention to the professor as if he had better explain himself.

“Hey! All I told him was that there could be tribes living in this area. I also said they could be territorial, but we have no evidence of that.”

“Well, if you have not been here before, I don’t think you should expect to have any evidence. Has there been evidence the last couple of days we’ve been here?”

“Maybe, but it’s hard to say. If they are responsible for the deaths then I would say that’s evidence. Richard! Who beat your face up like this?”

“Wesley... Wesley did this.”

At that moment, Wesley and Edward had arrived. “Wesley! What is going on? Why did you assault Richard? Who is that?”

Edward Pullins and Wesley Zimmerman ignored Kyser’s questions, but Wesley whispered to Edward. “There’s Richard!” Edward walked toward Richard and Kyser.

“Richard Dickenson! You are under arrest for obstruction of justice and

interfering with a police investigation.”

“What! What are you talking about? What investigation. I’m not part of any investigation.”

“The investigation of Joe Geshy’s disappearance.”

“Wait a minute?” Kyser exclaimed. He stopped Edward in his actions. “What the hell is going on, Richard? You told me you didn’t know whose body that was we discovered. My guess is one of them is probably this Joe Geshy.” Kyser watched and waited for a response, but Edward wasn’t interested and continued detaining Richard. “Hold on! Mr.... What did you say your name was?”

“Detective Edward Pullins!”

“Well Detective Pullins, FBI holds jurisdiction in this matter.”

“How is that so?”

“We’ve been hired by Richard for security reasons such as this.”

“Well excuse me Mr... What did you say your name was? Oh, Mr. FBI man. I’m here on official police business, and it seems your business is unofficial. As far as I’m concerned you are working for a criminal. I don’t think FBI agents are supposed to be working with criminals.”

“Wait a minute. What are you trying to say? Look, there are four FBI agents to your one detective — who do you say is better suited to say who is in charge here?”

“I don’t give a damn. I’m here to arrest him and bring him to justice for crimes in his hometown. What has he done to you all here? Has he broken any laws?”

“Nothing!”

“Well then! I think you have no need for him.”

“OK, but the handcuffs are a little extreme. There’s nowhere to run anyhow. Shit, we all need to find out how in the hell we’re getting home. Once we are back, then you can do what you will to this lying scum bag.” Edward was heated. He wanted to cuff him and get his prize back home, but there wasn’t a way home yet!

“We’ll camp out here tonight. Tomorrow we’ll try to get that boat. Everyone go to your tents and get a good night’s sleep. You’re going to need your energy.” That’s exactly what everybody did.

The sky grew dark and the rain began to fall. It was slightly heavy, but fluctuated

to a drizzle at times, just as everyone fell asleep fast like the night before. The rain acted like music to their dreams. The first to take note was Richard Dickenson. Someone was as dragging him against his will to some unknown place. As he fell deeper asleep the rhythmic raindrops translated into deep heartbeats, which contributed to his agony. The uncertainty of where he was going was also key to his turmoil, and it all seemed so real. He could hear primitive music, drums and simple stringed instruments. They were played and orchestrated by some unknown source. The darkness helped this source remain concealed, but because of the mysticism that might not even matter. His curiosity as to this source grew when he could hear the addition of chants and praises. It felt real to him, and also to the rest of the crew as they lay deeply asleep. One thing was for certain, the tribes didn't offer any hospitality. To them, their spells were real. The wicked would perish and tribe's homes would be saved. They feared this intrusion would be an ongoing thing so the ceremony had to be performed, permanently awakening the soul of the rainforest. Richard's precious project was now becoming someone else's project. They both brewed evil and would inevitably collide with one another. The jealousy and rage in Richard's heart from not succeeding would probably result in the sabotage of anyone else's success. This angry soul would be cursed to remain in this very rainforest, and his very ways of evil and envy would be used to protect the tribe from future entrepreneurs. The chants and praises continued, growing more intense proportionately to the crew's deepening dream state.

"Oh dear," cried Pam. A beautiful baby flashed before her eyes and she wept in sorrow. "Come here, bookie. Come here. How is that little boo doing, yeah!" Pam reached out for her, but she could not touch the baby. She couldn't move forward, only wave her arms around in the same space she seemed to float about within. It agonized her, not being able to advance and hold the little girl. She seemed so precious and innocent. "Oh no! Stop!" Pam yelled. A painted faced man holding a spear grabbed the little one and stared Pam in the eyes. It was a horrifying experience for Pam. It brought tears to her eyes just to watch those other eyes, especially the red paint that outlined them. The baby seemed fine and continued smiling. The tribal man ran off with the little one, and Pam could no longer see them. Darkness was all that remained in her view. It caused her tears to pour harder.

In fact, they fell until they overflowed Klinton's tent. He began treading water. A stream now seemed to carry him. "Oh shit! Klinton screamed at the top of his lungs. He didn't know what was happening. "Oh shit! Someone help. Help!" He cried loudly, but it seemed no one could hear his cries. He was trying hard not to be taken under by the strong currents, but he noticed a boat caught between two trees. It was about to be jarred loose by the currents, but he made a quick swim for it, hoping the current would be kind.

"Come on. Come on," cried Julian Akbar. He grabbed the hands of the tribal woman and recited something that probably meant, "I'll set you free." An intense dream suddenly gave him the urge to wake up. She was curious as to why he was letting her go, but she gave no resistance and walked out into the rainy jungle with the professor. The professor spoke English to her the entire way. He felt he was through communicating with her. "Hey, sweetie, you know I love you. I never had anyone like you." The professor stopped in a spot near a tree and grabbed the woman. It continued to rain, and seemed to get heavier. "You know I wouldn't mind. Come here, sweetie!" You could hear smacks from Julian kissing the naked woman. She pulled back, but Julian forced himself on her. He Kissed, sucked, and caressed her sagging breasts. He wasted no time in slipping between the woman's legs with slight force. "Come on, baby I've never been this close. I wanna love someone." He forcefully shoved her legs outward and prepared his sacks to be dropped. He began to kiss out of control, and slobbering like it was his first time eating a mango. It was just that delicious to Julian and he subsequently penetrated her. "Oohhh, ooohh," he screeched in excitement. Then he went wild inside the woman. He was unable to control this rare feeling he was experiencing. You could hear nothing but cries from the lady and grunts and moans from Julian. The heavy rain was the last dominant sound. It began to pour even harder, hiding the massive sweat Julian administered. The rain didn't matter to him, because he continued to molest the lady. It rained so hard no one could hear her cries. The eyes that once watched probably wouldn't be returning anytime soon. "Oh baby, oh baby, oooh, oooh, ugg!" Julian groaned unimaginable sounds after climaxing inside the indigenous woman. His entire body relaxed, muscles loosened until there was no more force to hold her. This rush and excitement drained him. This became more apparent when he yelled, "Wait! Wait a minute! Don't run!" The professor tried hard to hold her with his hands, but that was not

enough. After she got a significant lead, he finally got up to chase her. “Come here, lady! Where are you going?” As he chased his obliged mate the spirits of the jungle roared in disgrace. One of the intruders had violated one who lived here, but it was too late. “Sweety, sweety! Where are you? I told you I love you.” The professor continued to plead in his own language. He sometimes got frustrated when trying to communicate with her, so he pretended she understood. Just like pretending the intercourse was consensual. “Dear! Come here! Just hold on. I’ll find you.”

The professor’s clothes and body were soaked. He ran fast, deep in the mist of the rainy jungle. His heart made it impossible to tell how far he ventured off from camp. There was no concern, however, only for the loved one he was in pursuit of. He could not see ahead of him because of the darkness and rain. At the current moment that rain poured so hard it stung as it hit his skin. It was definitely going to flood if the rain continued at its current pace. This didn’t stop the professor from continuing after the one he loved. “Sweety, is that you? Come out, I can’t see you.” He sharpened his eyes after wiping the downpour from his face. The view now was for a moment clearer, and he saw something that frightened him. “Ahhg! screamed Julian, as loud as the pouring rain would let him. He stared eye to eye with several naked men with painted faces and spears gripped tightly. They appeared unaffected by the serious rain, but they did seem concerned with the professor. He began taking steps backward, and the fear apparently momentarily changed his views about catching up with his loved one. As he continued to step backward he realized these mysterious men surrounded him. “Oh please, don’t hurt me. I’ve done nothing. Please let me go.” Cries spilled loudly from Julian’s mouth, but tribesmen had no empathy for tears. They were undistinguishable anyhow. “Oh no! Let me go, please. Where are you taking me?” The men forced Julian into the deep expanses of the jungle. “You better let me go!” He tried to sound like his old high school bully, but these men knew nothing of such words. “Where are you taking me? Please, I didn’t mean to — she was so beautiful. I never had a woman, and I love her.” The professor’s pleas were useless because they continued to take him deep into their territory.

They proceeded to tie the professor to a huge tree that was sort of isolated from the rest. It was humongous, and amazingly, they had his loved one tied to the other side of the tree. “Oh, dear! What are you doing here? Oh what is going on, baby? Won’t you

talk to them or something?” The professor cried aloud and wore the look of peasantry with his soaked face and clothes. However, they soon stripped him of his garments, and they both were now naked.

Panic caused him to think back into his studies. He wondered what was going on. They began chanting and praising around this tree they had been tied to. The professor thought, “It must be some type of ritual, but of what? He wondered if some saw him making love. He had no clue that conception was obtained and they now had to be included in this ceremony. “Don’t you worry, dear. I’ll get you out of this.” He struggled to free himself, but the material that held him was too strong. He screamed out. It echoed about the entire jungle. The naked men danced around the tree, unphased by the rain and mud. They chanted and praised to the sounds of primitive drums. The two captives were nearly passed out from dehydration. The chants got louder and the spirits screamed with anger.

Pam heard that loud scream, but she was deep asleep. The sound of roaring vibrated the ground. It was loud because it mixed with the recent arrival of lightning and thunder. The rain even became heavier and began to eat away at the soil. The crew’s deep sleep made them unaware of the threat this downpour posed. The sunset ritual was previously performed and the guest for the ceremony was finally in place.

An eerie setting loomed over camp while the crew dreamed. It intensified with their sleep as did the rituals and chanting. Klinton Westfield’s next exhale sounded of loud gargles. “Augg Augg, cough.” Klinton awakened with face full of water. He sat up. There splashes and he floundered in water. “What the fuck!” He noticed it had flooded in his tent. A huge roar came from the ground as the trees and their deeply imbedded roots began moving beneath. It caused the soil to give way. A thunderous roar sounded and the roots began to uplift. The roots roared themselves through the entire campsite, ripping everything apart. “Oh shit what the fuck is going on...? Hey, help! What’s wrong? Kyser, Pam, Wesley. Hello” Shouts came from all directions because the crew was in turmoil. The trees and their roots had made a huge hole in their camp. The tents were uplifted and thrown in the air. Pam’s tent was tossed in one direction, while Kyser’s and Roy’s tents flew in opposite directions. The main camp where Adam lie sank in the hole the roots dug up. The heavy rain began to instantly flood the immediate area. The crew was separated

instantly and was unaware of their new locations. They awakened after the ruckus, and by that time it was too late. They had already been thrown in their own separate directions. It was ominous and seemed as if the trees came alive. They were indeed alive and the spirit of the forest was hungry for more souls. Every single wicked heart was sought, but even the good hearted were mistakenly sucked into the realm if they got in the way.

The rain poured heavily upon Klinton's face as he lay there slumped against a tree. He was slightly unconscious from the impact his head made with the tree. Pam was just several meter from him in the same predicament. The rain poured so hard it nearly drowned them as what was now a stream raging through the forest carried them to their current locations. This time the trees acted as saviors, catching them like fish net. It did come with a painful price for Klinton, but nevertheless he was alive.

Just like Roy Beavers. He had a little more time because he was on higher ground. In fact, he even gazed downward to notice the sinking of the camp. "Oh, my goodness," cried Roy. "Damn! Hello, anybody! Is there anybody down there? Oh shit!" Roy tried with great effort not to fall down the sunken gorge, and only barely succeeded. He almost became like Adam, who was buried deep under all of that mess.

After Roy escaped near disaster, he went deep into the jungle to find the crew. "Hello, where is every body? Answer me, damn it! What the hell is going on?" Roy then noticed that his area was beginning to flood as well, but that didn't stop him from screaming at the top of his lungs and traveling deeper into the rainforest. Just ahead of Roy, Kyser walked very clumsily about the forest. He didn't call out for help. He was more interested in scratching himself. The ridiculous rain and mud aggravated his itch. It got unbearable again, and he stopped and sat on a tree to scratch his entire body.

"Ahhhgh. Oh God, please help. It itches," cried Kyser. He began taking off his clothes in order to reach other parts of his body. Soon there was a river of blood from the wound he scratched. He screamed loudly to offset the pain and agony. Luckily, Wesley and Edward were near one another and they both heard Kyser's screams. The both unknowingly were on an intercept course with the point where Kyser sat in distress.

"Hey. Hold on, I'm coming," yelled Wesley as he sliced through the woods. "Oh shit!" he shouted as he collided into Edward Pullins. "Hey watch where you're going."

"No reason for the fuss. I can't see much of shit ahead of me." The two bickered

for a moment, but they were interrupted by another distress call.

“Help, oh it..” It wasn’t quite clear what he was yelling, but it was obvious he needed help.

“I’m finished debating with you — my boss needs me.” Wesley ran off and Edward followed closely behind.

“What the fuck happened back there,” replied Edward with an extremely curious face that was partly obscured by the rain.

“I really don’t know? All I know is that...I was dreaming...and ...the next thing you know it feels like I’m on some rollercoaster ride. I think these fucking tribal people may have ambushed us.”

“Oh!” Edward was completely ignorant regarding what he was hearing. “What the hell is going on out here?”

“Well! You said you’re here to arrest Richard. Well, you’re here definitely for a reason.”

“Where is he anyway?”

“Hey! Kyser! Are you all right? What’s wrong?”

“Oh. It itches! I can’t take it anymore. Wesley, you got to help me.” Kyser reflected a pitiful look in his eye to eye contact with Wesley.

“Hold on, man. We’re getting out of here someday.” Wesley turned around and looked at Edward and declared, “We must find a way out of here fast.”

“Well what about Richard?”

“Look! I know you’re a hungry detective, like me, but do you want to find Richard or get the fuck out of here? I say leave his ass here.”

“I figured he should know how to get out of here.”

“That crazy fucker! He’s been trying to keep us here since we decided we needed to leave. This damn project has messed with his mind. Shit, he sold his soul.” The two were now mutually convinced that getting home was the number one priority. They discussed how they were getting out of here.

They paid no attention to Kyser and his anguish. He even whispered in anguish, “Oh I can’t take it. It itches. I can’t see. I can’t see. Oh it itches.”

Edward was frustrated Richard had gotten away, and Wesley was upset at the

entire situation, which kept them occupied in heated discussion. “Well how in the hell do you suggest?”

“Well, I...” Before Wesley could finish his statement, they heard a loud bang. The two turned to see that Kyser had shot himself to death. “Oh shit, oh shit, oh my God. Damn Kyser, why,” cried Wesley? “What the fuck you do that for. Damn! This is it! That damn Richard caused this. I might kill that fuck!”

“Hold on, Wesley. Let’s not get stupid. I don’t know what has been going on here, but we need to do the right thing and bring him to justice.”

“What! You forgot, we have no evidence, no jurisdiction, no evidence whatsoever for a courtroom. He has too much fucking money anyway, but he won’t buy himself out of this jam. I would rather abuse him.” Wesley ran off to hunt Richard down, and Edward followed. “There’s no reason for both of us to search the same area, you go there, and I’ll go here. Yell really loud if you catch up with the sleaze bucket.”

Roy finally arrived where Wesley and Edward had just departed. He looked downward and bellowed a large scream. “Oh my God Kyser, who’s done this to you?” Roy knelt down to comfort Kyser’s already dead body. “Oh, Kyser! What is happening?” He gripped Kyser tightly as if he was afraid to drop a little baby. “Tell me who did this.” A huge splash sounded from Roy dropping Kyser in a puddle of water. “I’ll find who did this to you.” He stood up and began to stagger his way down the path Wesley and Edward trotted. He was too drunk to notice the suicide weapon still clutched in Kyser’s hands. “Who the hell did this to Kyser? I’ll show you!” Roy pulled his gun and kept it ready for whatever killed his partner. “Wesley! Anybody, who did this,” screamed Roy nervously, because fear and alcohol did not mix. The rain didn’t mix well for him either, nor did it for the crew. Those left near camp experienced the worst of it. This area was flooding fast and soon would become a branch of the Amazon. If Richard would have gotten his report done, then he would have known this area wouldn’t sustain his structure. It would have advised him to start construction several miles deeper in the forest the original spot. This area has higher land, but it was too late. The campsite was already washing completely away. Deep in the mist another branch of the Amazon was being born, and Klinton was smack in the middle with water up to his neck. He spilled frequent gargles as the water splashed into his face. His hands slid backward in the mud

in attempts to keep his head above water. His feet slid forward from trying to get some type of grip. Klinton made no sound in the form of words, just gasps, grunts, and splashing water for his survival. Just as he positioned himself to maintain a constant breath, the surface beneath gave in. The mud he relied upon became too liquid to hold him. Klinton Westfield now was in fact submerged beneath a seemingly newborn river. At least the current felt that way because he had swallowed an extensive amount of water. Somehow he was able to swim to the surface and catch his breath, but he was unable to control his direction. The currents carried him fast and in the direction Milo had perished. That stream was the real reason the rain was able to overcome the terrain. However, Klinton was far away from that incident and was closer to camp. He twisted and turned, trying so hard to keep his head above water.

It was dark now and it continued to rain, so obviously there was no way to see what was ahead. Klinton was able to get some control of his constant spinning in every direction through his efforts at treading water. He was finally able to see what was in front of him. This sight gave him a look of anticipation. This was mainly because he wondered how this river could be flowing through this jungle. He also wondered how he would dodge the huge trees ahead that still lay rooted deep beneath this newly born body of running water. There was no way for him to stop, so he panicked a bit. In fact, the tree stopped him roughly, and even scratched him up in the process. He felt entangled by the various branches and gave in to his exhaustion. He hung there with arms extended, trapped in the branches. His feet dangled in the flowing water, while his different scars contributed blood to this flow. He felt actually relieved he could rest a bit and considered the trees as help. However, the blood he dripped in the newly founded Amazonian branch couldn't help because it was full of blood-thirsty creatures. He was too tired to worry about that, so he just hung there to rest. The blood he contaminated the water with lured Milo's demise unknowingly. This time they were a little more hungry and thus a little more fierce. Mostly, a grand plan was in progress because the tribe was tired of the continuing exploitation of their land.

The main culprit of the exploitation was Richard, and he was being anxiously pursued by a very angry man. After Wesley commanded the two to separate, it has been a hectic journey, particularly for Wesley. Edward Pullins was advised to go right, while he

reserved himself the left path. This routed him closer to the lands that were being severely flooded. It routed Edward deeper into the territories of the indigenous ones. It was there that he noticed Richard walking about. He wasn't sure it was him, because the rain's constant downpour made for the uncertainty. His gut instinct was to follow the man, and that is what he did.

However, Wesley's anger now clouded his judgment, so there were no instincts to deter him from sudden oblivion. In this area the trees seemed to be more alive, because they seemed to be attacking the camp and anything associated with it. The roots amazingly moved when they wanted and even were partly responsible for some of the deaths. It didn't seem possible, but the roots started surging behind Wesley. "Edward, did you find Richard?" yelled Wesley. He turned to see what was making that noise behind him. "Oh shit! What the fuck?" Wesley cried out loud. He noticed the mud being thrown up in front of him. It was like a huge worm slithering its way under the ground, and it headed directly for Wesley. He stood there in amazement, not able to move or say anything. Wesley turned around quickly and sprinted forward. He couldn't go that fast because the muddy terrain made for slipping and sliding, and not to mention his worry and panic. You couldn't tell the difference between the thunder and the sounds the trees made as they lunged their roots at Wesley. He ran with all his might, but the roots were a little too fast for him. As they got closer and closer the ground beneath gave way, and Wesley began to stumble. Just before falling, he tried to cover himself behind another tree, but those roots were alive too. They began to assist the pursuers by holding Wesley down by the feet and ankles. "Hey! Let me go! What the fuck is it? Something's got me." Wesley cried louder as he realized he couldn't run from what was chasing him any more. "Help, help, somebody! Edward! Detective, I need your help." He struggled severely to try and cut himself free, first by pulling and tugging at every piece of root he could get his hands on. The rain again played a major factor in that his grip was very poor. "How in the hell? I know the trees... It can't be. What the fuck is going on? These roots are moving. It's got me. Fuck! Let me go! Shit! Help! Help! Richard! Richard! I'm going to fucking kill you!" He reached for his knife and tried to sever trap that had him in its grip. The roots were too thick and strong. They seemed to squeeze tighter as he cut harder. One of his attempts to free himself had so much anger until his lunge with his knife sent

it hurling several meters away. The same strong force that had held Joe and the Kemps had gotten hold of Wesley.

The trees where Klinton hung were a little more friendly because they became useful to them. As the blood dripped from his wounds, the piranhas became blood thirsty. It was as if they had heard about the taste of human flesh from those fish that had feasted on Milo's flesh, and their frenzy was even more chaotic than before. Feeling a bunch of clatter beneath his legs, Klinton looked down. He began to feel uncomfortable as a swarm of piranhas attacked his dangling legs. "Oh shoot, what the fuck is it?" said Klinton. He grunted loudly from trying hard at pulling himself up from the munching. Luckily for him, the trees branches served as leverage to pull himself fairly clear from the water. The clatter continued from the splashing water. The attacking fish even jumped out at him, as if wondering where their meal disappeared to. He gazed down at the ruckus in the water, and then he scanned his surroundings, hoping to see anything that would help him escape his desperate circumstances. It proved hard to see horizontally, but downward had some hope. He scanned the various outlets the trees made with the water and realized it was a huge maze of trees and vines too creepy to look at. The rain and darkness helped in that aspect.

He then noticed a body floating along this waterway. "Oh my goodness, Pam! Pam!" Klinton yelled at the top of his lungs. "Hold on, I'll save you." He wanted to jump right in, but he hesitated a moment. He wasn't sure if those piranhas still had a meal on their minds. He thought that they hadn't harmed Pam, so he dashed in. Nothing was going to stop him from saving the loving and caring Pam. The stream's current instantly captured him. It was like déjà vu. The tussle with strong currents and gasping for breath were just part of the horrendous memories associated with this attempt to save Pam. Totally disregarding his performance the last encounter with the rapids, he swam forward. "Hold on, Pam! I'm coming." It took a deep dip to retrieve Pam's body because she had begun sinking. Klinton grabbed Pam around her neck and tried hard to hold her above water. Apparently, Pam failed to overcome the sudden change in terrain. The effort it took to sustain the both of them nearly caused Klinton to sink. The currents were back in control. They drifted along with the current, with nothing but hope and each other.

CHAPTER 27

There was no hope for Wesley because he now stared eye to eye with a huge reptile. Several moments had passed since his entanglement. It had even gone long enough for him to be about passed out from the struggle. However, the sight of a massive anaconda slithering its way toward him perked his efforts to get free. “Damn it! You stay away from me.” The snake paid no attention to his pleading. The rain, thunder, and lightning amazingly were just secondary sound effects to Wesley. That eerie slither the snake made with his tongue seemed more noticeable, as were its advances through the mud. The muscle this reptile was made of was bulky and seemed to be able to crush a wild beast. It had been slithering along, waiting to suffocate anything for nourishment. Now, it was time. The large strangling machine invaded his space and a defense was now needed. There wasn’t much he could do. The roots had his feet entangled. His hands were the only option, but using them to try and crawl away was useless. The roots’ hold was too strong, so his hands would have to be put to other use.

He reached out and grabbed the snake by what appeared to be its throat. “You muthafucker, I’ll squeeze your ass. You’re not going to squeeze me.” He groaned for strength to hopefully back his squeezing. That didn’t seem to work initially because the snake was still able to curl his body the way it wanted. The snake was also too massive, and began wrapping itself around Wesley. He reached for the knife only out of panic, because he knew it was out of his reach. Once the snake curled completely around Wesley, it slowed down. Then its movements came to a complete stop after it was sure it had its muscle wrapped completely around its prey. Hunger and natural instincts kicked in, and the reptile began squeezing with all its power. Soon his breath was depleted, but death wasn’t quite complete because Wesley remained slightly conscious.

Roy Beavers was trotting along and had just decided to take Wesley’s path. Roy’s blood alcohol content caused slow and clumsy travel. A sober scout may have had time to save Wesley from the snake currently engulfing him head first. The snake’s jaws were opened wide for this occasion, for it didn’t normally get meals this large. All that could be seen of Wesley was from the waist down. This may have been the point at which the snake decided that it needed to concentrate on breaking some of Wesley’s bulk down.

In the background, you could hear Roy's cries. "Anybody, who, tell me who? Please, I beg you. Tell me! Who? OOOh, why? I wanna go home!" Roy Beavers stopped in his tracks and knelt down with his gun still clutched. There had to be tears from the way he cried, but they were hidden by the rain. His emotions surged, and then he rose and began chanting, "I'll get you, whoever did this." He sucked the last guzzle of alcohol and tossed the bottle. He was already extremely overboard in his drinking and could have done without that last shot. Nevertheless, he stumbled along and was drunk as can be. He thought perhaps the liquor had been hallucinogenic, as he started seeing things. He even thought of a pair of boots familiar to him, and then he realized those were his partner's boots. He even remembered when Wesley brought them, and he now realized he was actually looking at his partner's shoes behind that tree. He could only see the shoes, and it brought out a curious yell. "Wesley! Wesley... is that you? What are you doing on the fucking ground?" Roy Beaver's instability made for a slow arrival, but when he laid eyes upon the scene, fright bewildered him.

Those were the exact same feelings Detective Edward Pullins was going through while in pursuit of his fugitive, when all of a sudden, two well built tribesmen grabbed Richard with force and began dragging him. Edward stopped in his tracks. He wondered why everyone seemed to have some desire to catch or do harm to his suspect. Everyone had an interest in Richard, and that fueled Edward. He gathered himself to climb a slight slope, tucking himself under a ledge to get firsthand view.. He watched the men easily deal with Richard's mute struggling. They both carried spears in their outside hands while dragging him with their inside ones. If not shocking enough, Edward noticed two individuals tied to a tree, and wondered, "What the hell is going on?" His better judgment told him to sit and observe, and he always listened to his instincts.

Speaking of instincts, Klinton's told him to reach out and grab an upcoming branch. Hopefully he could stop the uncontrollable travel the newly formed stream caused. He was only concerned with resting on another one of those water embedded trees that made like a maze of waterways. "Hold on, baby? We'll be alright," cried Klinton. A huge grunt belched next as he grabbed hold of a branch. Their movements were stopped just enough to hold them in that general spot. Exhaustion almost got the best of him, and that support branch couldn't have come at a better time. After propping

them both safely in the branches, he realized Pam was out for the count. “Pam, wake up. Pam,” cried Klinton. He shook her a few times next, but Pam didn’t respond. Klinton looked around, trying his best to see, but everything was just about out of his seeing range. However, he did notice an old wooden paddle boat that lie stuck between some other trees at a distance. His eyes lit up because he remembered the boat that he and Jerry stashed a few days ago.

Roy’s eyes widened when he saw the snake. “Oh! My God! What the ...fu...Oh shit..no! No! No, no no...no no... NO!” Roy yelled in terror and couldn’t take the sight any longer without vomiting all over the consumption process. That didn’t stop the snake from slowly but surely swallowing Edward alive and whole. However, before its meal could be completely consumed, Roy interrupted. After finishing barfing, Roy watched the feast in disgust. Then a blurred scream spilled. “You motherfucker, I’ll kill you!” Roy pounced on the snake and its victim. “I’ll kill you! Stop it! Let him go.” Roy pulled Wesley by his familiar boots and yelled, “Give him back! Give Wesley back, you fuck! Let him go. Wesley no!” Roy pulled very hard, but the snake’s muscles tightened up on its prey. His hands had slipped and slid all the way down, which was the reason he grabbed Wesley by his boots. All his might went towards freeing his partner. He grunted and strained like an Olympic weightlifter as he pulled. However, he had no way near the strength to equal the snake. All of a sudden Roy fell rapidly backwards sliding in the muddy surface. His eyes opened widely again, and there was that excitement again. It shocked him to see his body act as a projectile.

After coming to a complete stop, he threw Wesley’s boots down in anger and lifted himself off his butt. “Goddamn it! I’ll show you.” He sprinted a short distance just to get nearly point blank range with the snake. Roy began to fire his gun. A total of nine loud bangs sounded, one after one another, and then several clicks. Roy finally noticed he had emptied his clip in the snake. Huge hole were punctured into the reptiles scaly skin. “Ahhhgh,” screamed Roy. He threw his gun to the ground and began pulling Wesley’s legs again. The snake was injured and began to release the half dissolved body. Roy was hurled backward once again, but this time he had Wesley as well. The splash of water from their sudden crash sounded crisply, and then Roy shouted, “Wesley, I gottcha, hold on.” He did not realize that the snake’s breakdown acids and crushing muscles had done

Wesley in, but he did realize that his gun had also punctured holes through his partner. “Ahhg, oh my god, I shot you Wesley. What the fuck have I done? You could have survived.” Roy barfed once again and couldn’t stand to look at the grisly sight anymore. He made a dash for it. His voice echoed about the forest as he screamed and ran away from the terror.

Klinton couldn’t hear Roy’s troubles, but had the same thought. He wanted to make a dash for it. The sight of the boat gave him a moment of hope, but feelings of despair took over as debate set in. He wondered how he could get his hands on that boat. The idea of swimming in those waters didn’t appeal to him. The effort that it took was the deterrent factor. If he could leave Pam propped up on this tree, then swimming by himself wouldn’t be as bad. He started to secure Pam by slouching her over the branch, and he shook her to assure stability. Klinton dove into the waters and made an effort to save both of their lives. The currents were strong, but he was now used to carrying two people, making this swim a little easier. His desires to get the boat, to go home, and live were stronger than anyone else’s. He was able to grab the boat and climb aboard. He had a little trouble steering the boat by himself, but even getting it untangled proved difficult. However, if not for it being stuck, it probably would have floated away. After he accomplished the unweaving of the boat, he realized all in all it was a daunting task. Rowing through the rough current was only half the battle. He had given an effort he hadn’t given in quite some time. Those sprints coach used to require after football practice came rushing to his frontal lobe. All he could think of was the humiliation he would get from his buddies if he were cut from the squad. He rowed towards Pam’s tree with that same mentality, except for Pam was a driving force he didn’t have during his letter days. His life wasn’t on the line then either, but these were all after thoughts. The first thought was to get Pam and get home. A rough bump into one of the tree branches caused Klinton to jerk backwards. He dropped the paddle and stood up in the boat. It was easy to grab a branch above his head, but as he tried to get into the tree to retrieve Pam. His feet caused the boat to drift backwards and float away. Klinton was left hanging in the air by the branch. Frustration caused his eyes to blur, especially as he watched their way home float away. He had to think fast, because if the boat got caught in the current, then all hope would be lost. Klinton released both hands from the branch and plummeted

into the water. He swam quickly to retrieve the boat. He grabbed just as the current was about to sweep it away. Amazingly, Klinton mustered enough strength to pull the boat closer to him. He used a close branch as leverage. He slowly climbed back into the boat and rowed back towards Pam. This time he needed a plan. He decided to use the oar and the oarlock that held it to the boat. The first attempt to use the oar as leverage was his attempt to weave it through the trees somehow. That didn't work, because it moved too freely. It was designed that way. The clamp that held it to the boat allowed for movement for the sole purpose of rowing. This frustrated him, so he took the paddle out of the oarlock and used it to poke at Pam. He poked up high, and was successful at prying Pam into the water. A loud splash sounded from Pam's helpless fall.

"Hold on, Pam! I'm coming." Klinton cried as he now used the oar for what it was designed to do. He got as close to Pam as the boat would allow and pulled her in. "Oh dear, I'm sorry. It was the only way, Pam! Pam, Pam! Wake up." There was no response from Pam. He shook her and shook her, but that didn't help. Klinton was worried. He had never had anyone die in his arms. "Oh, Pam you can't die. I'm really attached to you now. Please don't die now. I think I wanna love you. Please, besides that, you are too sweet to die." Klinton held Pam in his arms and began to kiss her. He paid no attention to where they were drifting. His concerns were focused upon Pam's well being.

He and Roy had these emotions in common, grief for the loss of a close friend. The personalities were different so the results of these feelings were contrary. Roy now ran non-stop while bellowing. "Somebody, help my friends! They're dead! Is there anyone left?" Roy stopped at a slight slope and noticed someone up there peeking at something. The rain had subsided and that allowed him to see a bit better. He noticed the peeping Tom was detective Edward Pullins. "Hey detective! I'm glad to see you. Hey, what are you looking at? Roy propped himself up to join Edward in his spying. He continued to ask questions loudly, "What's going on?"

"Shhh..!!"

Roy looked stunned and wondered why he was being hushed. "What's the problem? Why are you being so, hey! You haven't told me what you're looking at." Roy focused his eyes in the same direction, "What! What is that? What's going on?"

Roy was baffled. "Huh! I was going to ask you the same thing," uttered Edward

in a calm tone. "I mean, you have been here for quite some time, so I think I need to be asking you. What the hell is going on here?"

Roy looked at Edward and stated drunkenly, "Beats the hell out of me." He turned back and continued his visual investigation. "Hey, isn't that the Richard guy? What are they doing with him? Why in the hell is he naked?" The slowed rain helped the two pick up a few more details. Roy's voice seemed to get louder and more obnoxious. "Who is that around that tree? Hey, isn't that the professor, and that tribal woman we had captured? What is going on?"

"Shhh! You're too loud, and we can't be seen."

"Damn it. You're telling me to be quiet. I just saw my boss's brains splattered everywhere, and my partner was just eaten by a snake, so I don't have shit to be quiet about."

"Oh yes you do. If those savages discover us, we'll end up down there as well. Oh! Who did you say that is, that professor guy?"

"What are they about to do to them?"

"Shit! Beats me. I just got here. What the hell has been going on here?"

"Well! There have been people turning up dead, and that Richard guy wasn't being honest"

"I'm not surprised." Edward turned to watch the ceremony. The two had no idea what the tribesmen had in mind for Richard, but they were about to find out.

CHAPTER 28

Klinton Westfield was about to find out a few things for himself, like where the boat was carrying them down stream. He wouldn't find this out immediately because his attention was on Pam. He softly kissed her. A tear pierced his eyes and then a revelation hit him. Past lessons of when he tried to be a lifeguard resurfaced. It was an unsuccessful attempt, but he did remember his mouth-to-mouth resuscitation program. He quickly made other uses with his mouth besides slobbering her with sorrow. He puckered his lips and sealed them against hers, and then began to blow. "Hold on, baby. I'll save you. One-one thousand, two-one thousand, three-one thousand..." He blew heavily into her mouth once again. "One-one thousand, two-one thousand, three-one thousand." He grew more tired with every exhalation. He tilted her neck back a little more, and blew. "Oh please, you can do it, you can do it! One-one thousand, two-one thousand, three-one thousand. Pam! Damn it, wake up. Pam Please." He blew again. "One-one thousand, two-one thousand, three-one thousand, four-one thousand, five-one thousand." A huge breath was administered. "One-one thousand, two-one thousand, three-one thousand."

"Ahgg, cough, a-huh, urrg," uttered Pam as water poured from her mouth.

"Pam, you're alright! Oh thank God. I thought you weren't going to make it."

Pam remained silent, but revealed appreciation in her eyes as she stared at Klinton. He held her in his arms and refused to let her go. However, those currents hadn't let up much. Fortunately, the newly formed branch dumped into the river itself. Klinton was familiar with that body of water because he and Jerry encountered this same river. It lit his eyes up because all he had to do was paddle his way home, which might take several long hours, but that wasn't much to ask considering the time they spent in the jungle. Happiness in the form of relief was brewing inside of Klinton, because he was on his way home and Pam was safe. He allowed the boat to drift downriver, choosing instead to have his arms around Pam. These events had brought them very close, and it would be interesting to see how the relationship grew once they were finally safe at home. Klinton's eyes, for the first time in some time, separated from Pam's to gaze downriver.

He was relieved that he was actually going home.

Edward Pullins did not have the same desires to get home, not before capturing Richard, but what he was witnessing made creepy feelings arise. He was also curious to the point that he wanted to question the loud and drunken Roy. That was no help because his efforts to remain quiet allowed the alcohol to get the best of him. Edward shook his head with disgust when he noticed Roy was passed out. He thought to himself, "How could one sleep in these conditions?" He turned back to watch Richard's kidnappers. Miraculously, they had gotten an enormously hot fire started in the damp forest. He scooted downward for a better view. The fire was actually circular in shape, and surrounded the tree Richard was tied to. Edward now understood at least why his gut instinct was so strong before even arriving here. He watched the tribe dance around the tree and weaving in and out of the fire. He decided to scoot even closer. The drum rhythms were ominous to him, as were the chants and praises. It was nothing he could translate, and offered him no insight into the reason they had Richard. He watched two long lines of painted face men, all holding spears. The lines were about ten meters apart and parallel to each other. They faced each other with a look of death and no shame at the fact they were all naked.

Edward focused on Richard's face and noticed that the horror must have caused him to pass out. He couldn't quite see the faces of the professor, let alone his counterpart. He couldn't hear the other two cry out for help over the overwhelming noise of the drums beating, the loud chants, and faithful praises. They sounded like maybe ancient Indians, he thought, but then Edward had never heard an Indian, let alone an ancient one. This was all new to him, for he had been bred in the city and in a culture of technology and capitalism. In the background, running underneath of all other sounds, he could hear a twirling whisper. Edward was about to see something he had never seen before, something few people outside the tribe had ever seen, but that twirling sound had caught up with Edward and translated into a profound splat. A grunt of pain sounded from Edward's mouth as blood gushed. A sharp arrow hurled from a precise bow pierced just inches from Edward's heart. He splashed face first into a muddy puddle and now was unconscious just like Roy. His faint breaths caused bubbles to surface in the puddle of water in which he was now face down. His blood continued to run from his body, leaving

him only enough to sleep, but the bleeding needed to be stopped, or he would be unconscious for good. But no one was available to pull out the arrow or dress the wound. Now there was nothing to stop the ceremony, to stop what had already been put into motion or the greater devastation that was to come. The first step in bringing the rainforest permanently alive was now being taken.