

The Search for the Dice Man



Luke Rhinehart

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Rhinehart L.

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The sequel to the cult classic *The Dice Man*, available in e-book format for the first time. The rules are down to you. The rules that stop you seducing your neighbour downstairs, that stop you hitting your boss, that stop you leaving your family and leaving the country. The rules that stop you living. The dice don't do rules; the dice do life. Luke Rhinehart is a psychiatrist, a husband and a father, his life locked down by routine and order – until he picks up the dice. The dice govern his every decision and each throw takes him further into a world of risk, discovery and freedom. As the cult of the dice grows around him the old order fades: chance becomes his religion, the dice his god. If you haven't lived the life of the dice, you haven't lived at all. Let the dice decide. And roll with it.

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LUKE RHINEHART

THE SEARCH FOR THE DICE MAN

HARPER

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Accident is the creator of life.

Charles Darwin

Life is at best a tenuous and hazardous enterprise, but mankind's puny efforts to protect himself from its instability and randomness seem worse than futile. It appears the best course is simply chancing it.

Emerson

It is necessary to resign from the human race – with a forged signature, of course.

Luke

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Preface

You don't know about me unless you've read a book by the name of *The Dice Man*, but no matter. That book was made by me and I told the truth, mainly. There were things which I stretched, but mainly I told the truth.

In my fashion.

The book was all about how I came to make all my decisions by casting dice, to convert and pervert my psychiatric patients into the dicelife, and to blow my previous life to smithereens.

Now the way that book winds up is in the middle of a sentence, with me dangling on a vine over a cliff. That was in the seventies.

This book you're browsing through now doesn't pick up the story then. It skips a bit – about twenty years. It's mostly about my son Larry and his quest to locate me and give me a piece of his mind. He runs into a lot of my friends and followers and gets a little confused. He tells some of the story himself and I tell some, and to keep the intellectual reader awake, we've thrown in some excerpts from my journals. It's a good read.

Luke Rhinehart

Second Preface

The man is an incorrigible liar. He and his followers are utterly untrustworthy.
Larry Rhinehart

1

I might never have gone on a quest for my father if it hadn't been for an unexpectedly light rain in Iowa. I was long three hundred futures contracts of December wheat based on a forecast of torrential rains in the Midwest. I expected the heavy rains to ruin the harvest and raise the price of wheat. Unfortunately, the rains didn't fall mainly in the plain. They fell primarily on Cleveland, Chicago and Detroit, where very little wheat is grown. The price of wheat plummeted the next day and I lost about two million dollars for my clients. My employer called me in for a chat. My clients phoned me for chats. My employees and colleagues avoided me. The only people who phoned or dropped by were people who wanted to shoot me.

I'd lost big money for my clients a few other times, but somehow having to explain that 'I thought it was going to rain harder' was the sort of explanation that incites rather than soothes. And it didn't help matters that the rains that didn't fall mainly in the plains hadn't been my only recent miscalculation. For almost three months I'd been on what is charitably called a losing streak. If my indicators said corn and wheat were going up, corn and wheat immediately changed their minds and took a dive. If I took a long position in the stock market, some unexpected inflation report or mad Iraqi dictator would set stocks spiralling downwards.

For three years I'd been something of a trading hotshot – ever since at the tender age of twenty-five I'd accidentally made a name for myself. I happened to be short several stock market futures on that lovely day in October 1987 when the stock market dropped six hundred points. While all around me friends, colleagues and strangers stood shell-shocked at the monitors watching the value of their stock holdings nosedive, I stood beside them watching myself and my clients grow richer and trying desperately to repress giggles.

In the fickle ways of Wall Street, that day I made my name at Blair, Battle and Pike (BB&P). At dawn I'd been a mere associate trader, given minimum leeway to dabble at my own ideas for trading. At dusk I was a Vice President and Senior Trader.

Mr Battle, the firm's esteemed leader, knew that he would feel more comfortable being able to tell people that his Senior Trader had been right on that infamous day rather than wrong, so he adroitly changed Senior Traders. In the morning the previous Chief Trader, Vic Lissome, had been king and I merely a peon. In the evening Vic was sitting blank-eyed in a local pub wondering how the market could have clobbered him so badly, and I was humbly thanking Mr Battle for his confidence – and trying desperately to remember why I'd decided to go short those futures.

And from then until the summer of 1990 I'd been a consistent winner, but in the last few months I'd begun to lose money. So when my father began to intrude again into my life after a fifteen-year absence, it came at a time when I was in a vulnerable position – financially, socially and emotionally.

My troubles began when I arrived back at the office after lunch. On a Friday afternoon in September, trading tended to be on the slow side, and this Friday was no exception. Jeff Cannister, a short, dynamic fireplug of a man who always greeted me with shades of nervousness ranging from nail-biting tension to total panic, announced that gold had gone down over a dollar and a half in the ninety minutes I'd been gone. Jeff always managed to report such market movements as if my personal absence had led to the fall in gold – or the fall in the yen, etc. – and that had I stayed in my office staring at my monitor I'd have held up the price and saved the firm money.

With Jeff tailing along behind, I continued to stride through the mass of open cubicles at which brokers and traders sat in various states of controlled frenzy. I was aware of how incongruous the two of us were, my tall and lanky frame towering over the squat Jeff so that backbiters, as I knew, sometimes referred to us as 'Mutt and Jeff'

So gold had fallen slightly when I thought it was about to rise; at least it hadn't fallen through the floor, as wheat had done the week before.

‘Any news to cause it?’ I asked Jeff.

‘Nothing I saw,’ said Jeff. Despite his thick solidity, Jeff was totally unfit for the traumas involved in making and losing large sums of money in short periods of time. Still, he was good at what we did and I was happy having him as an associate trader – until he burned out, got hooked on coke, discovered religion or ceased to sleep. Then he’d have to be pensioned off – at the age of twenty-nine, probably.

‘The grains are rallying now, especially beans,’ announced Jeff gloomily – as if all over the country corn and wheat and soybeans were bursting upwards in a personal effort to thwart Jeff and his firm.

‘Just maintain our stops and let me know if they get hit,’ I said, flinging my suit jacket over the back of a computer monitor and throwing myself into my swivel desk chair.

As Jeff left I began examining my main monitor, which had quotes on all the stocks, bonds and futures I was actively trading. My phone line buzzed.

‘Yes?’ I said.

‘Hi, darling, I miss you,’ came the lovely voice of my fiancée. Honoria, who also happened to be the daughter of the head of the firm, Mr Battle. Oh, I was a winner in those days.

‘Hi, sweetheart,’ I said, leaning back in my chair and smiling.

‘Daddy’s house guests this week are two inscrutable Japanese bankers, one of them with a conspicuous interest in sex. When the tall one first met me he was masterful and flirtatious and eyeing all the more protuberant parts of my anatomy, but when he learned I was a VP at Salomon Brothers and engaged to you he lost interest and spent the day with an old issue of *Playboy*.’

‘Say,’ I interjected, ‘what are two Japanese bankers doing as Mr Battle’s guests, anyway?’

‘I asked Daddy that and he was strangely secretive. I think he may want them to invest in the firm.’

‘Not likely unless they actually buy him out. He’s not thinking of selling, is he!?’ I added with a brief flash of panic.

‘Of course not, dear. He’s grooming you to become head of the firm as soon as he retires at the age of ninety-nine.’

I frowned at the thought of Mr Battle’s longevity. ‘You know,’ I said, ‘I’d just as soon not see any more than I have to of your father and these Japanese this weekend. Maybe we can spend the day on my sailboat.’

‘No, no sailing, dear. When I want to be bored and seasick at the same time I’ll let you know.’

‘Oh, yeah, right.’ Honoria only liked water that was as flat and predictable as concrete.

‘However, we can take a walk down to the river. When are you coming?’

‘On the early train tomorrow morning. And I’m really looking forward to being with you this weekend.’

‘Me too, darling. Oh, oh, big call coming in, have to say bye-bye. I miss your cock.’

And she hung up.

Her abruptness was typical. She enjoyed wealth and style, but liked to mask her enjoyment by sudden small eccentric acts of rebellion which made her seem detached and cynical. She was really a sexually conservative woman, and her saying that she missed my cock was one of her tiny acts to *épater les bourgeois*. When we were actually making love she somehow rarely seemed to notice my cock.

After I replaced the phone I let my gaze wander to the photograph of Honoria and myself on the bookshelf beyond my desk and complacently admired the handsome couple we made: me tall, dark and broodingly good-looking – a sort of gangly Richard Gere; she slender, blonde, nicely proportioned, exquisitely coiffed, flawlessly complected, and rich – an elegant Cybill Shepherd.

From the first time I met her, about a year earlier, I loved being with her, loved exchanging Wall Street gossip and admiring each other’s trading coups, loved telling people we were going to get

married, loved calculating our yearly income. A check of all the technical and fundamental indicators rated Honoria triple-A – a definite ‘buy’ I knew that I, a poor orphaned nobody, was lucky to be where I was, if only I didn’t blow it.

Another incoming call.

‘Mr Potter on the line,’ said Miss Claybell, my secretary. ‘I believe he wants to talk to you about his investment in the BBP 21st Century Futures Fund.’

‘I’ll bet he does,’ I said. ‘Put him on.’

The BBP 21st Century Futures Fund was my personal brainchild, a mass of money – currently about eighteen million dollars – which we invested in various futures markets. The fund was unique in that we guaranteed a return of at least 2 per cent, even if the fund’s value shrank and showed a loss. In effect, the company was promising to absorb any losses that the futures trading would show over a one-year period. This unique gimmick made the selling of a futures fund to conservative investors much easier. After all, how many investments – other than treasury bills and bonds – were guaranteed against loss? And the BBP Futures Fund promised it might return anywhere between 15 and 50 per cent per year. Since its inception two years earlier, money had come pouring into the fund, money from both speculators and more conservative investors like Mr Potter. And the fund’s value had increased about 32 per cent a year. I had every right to be proud. Except for the last three months.

‘Hello, Larry Rhinehart speaking,’ I said in my dynamo trader voice.

‘Ah, yes, Mr Rhinehart,’ said the gravelly voice of the filthy-rich Mr Potter. ‘Arthur Potter here. I see the net asset value of the fund fell for the third straight week.’

‘That’s right, sir.’ I was tempted to say, ‘I purposely let it fall again so we could have a chat,’ but knew the irony would be either resented or lost.

‘Markets tend to go both up and down,’ I continued aloud, ‘and our BBP Fund is no exception.’

‘Since I put that million in eight weeks ago the value of the fund is down about 7 per cent,’ Mr Potter went on. ‘If the fund goes bust how do I know –’

‘The fund is not going to go bust, Mr Potter. You’ve seen the record over the full two years. Does it look like the record of someone about to go bust?’

‘Those figures could have been fabricated.’

I sighed. The trouble with Wall Street was that since so many people cheated it was hard for an honest man to be trusted.

‘Then why haven’t we fabricated the figures for the last eight weeks?’ I asked. ‘If we’re cheating, why stop cheating?’

‘I don’t know,’ said Mr Potter. ‘Perhaps you’re just being clever.’

‘Mr Potter, sir,’ I said, ‘for you to lose your money the firm of Blair, Battle and Pike would have to go bust. You don’t seri –’

‘Like Drexel, Burnham. Lambert,’ said Mr Poner.

With the phone gripped between my right shoulder and ear, I snapped a wooden pencil in two and resisted the urge to throw the fragments across the room.

‘Normally, as you know,’ I answered coldly, ‘we ask clients to commit their funds for one full year. If you wish to withdraw your money I’ll personally recommend we make an exception, but you’ll have to take your 7 per cent loss. If you want your guaranteed 2 per cent profile you’ll have to wait the full year.’

The silence on the other end of the line made me know I’d scored a direct hit.

‘Mmmm,’ said Mr Potter, and within thirty seconds he had hung up, having indicated he wanted to stay in the fund.

I finally smiled and dropped the two pieces of pencil into the metal waste-paper bin. The other thing that made the BBP Fund unique was that BBP, in return for guaranteeing the investors against losses, was taking one-third of the investors’ profits, the highest profit percentage in the industry.

I tipped back in my swivel chair and felt a little angry at Potter and his ilk. No one seemed to appreciate what I'd accomplished since October 1987.

Up until that month – all through the 1980s – BB&P had made money the way most firms did – the old-fashioned way: by doing nothing. That is, they bought and sold stocks for other people and themselves, using all sorts of interesting theories or no theories at all, and despite all their efforts or lack thereof they made money.

For most of the eighties if you had money you made money. You bought a condominium – you were clever. You bought a stock, any stock, you were a genius. You bought a house, any house, you were sharp. It was an era when rich dumb guys finished first and richer dumb guys finished even firster.

Until October 1987, anyway. Then a funny thing happened. Almost everyone who for at least five years had been a genius was suddenly in one calamitous day a jerk. Seldom in human history have so many bright wealthy men awakened in just one day to discover such an unambiguous truth: that they were neither so bright nor so wealthy. Their clever condominiums became rather quickly empty and unsellable. Their genius junk bonds became ungenial junk bondage.

We humans don't take kindly to such awakenings. I suppose that when you lose several trillion dollars in one day you can be pardoned for not saying the obvious: all the wisdom of the previous five years had just been normal human stupidity. I'd happened to bet right on that horrible day but later I'd come to wonder whether if I'd been more mature and less cocky I might have examined 19 October 1987 a lot more carefully. Its most obvious lesson, I, like everyone else, never learned: what the market does on any given day may bear no resemblance to what it has ever done before.

Then my secretary marched into the room without buzzing. Miss Claybell was a chubby middle-aged woman who consistently wore clothing that looked as if it had been collected from church bazaars, applied too much make-up and never had an original thought. However, she was everything I wanted in a secretary – reasonable, unemotional, efficient, obedient and totally dedicated. Her very unemotional efficiency meant, however, that her slipping into my inner office unannounced must mean something was up.

'There are two gentlemen to see you,' she announced. 'They say they're FBI agents.'

2

At first I felt nothing; I just stared back at her, tipped forward in my chair and lowered my arms from behind my head.

‘FBI agents?’ I echoed vaguely.

‘They won’t say why they want to question you.’

I looked up at Miss Claybell neutrally, but with my heart now pumping panic and my mind desperately searching for the crime I must have committed. But since I was compulsively honest in all Wall Street financial dealings, my mind was filled with unpaid parking tickets, with a nineteen-year-old Goldman Sachs broker trainee I had seduced and abandoned, a 1987 income tax return that contained several creative deductions.

‘Should I show them in?’ Miss Claybell asked, watching me with that bland composure that made everyone else at Blair, Battle and Pike seem slightly panicky.

I came slowly to my feet, still staring at her uncertainly. I had an urge to pace, but managed to hold my feet to the floor, although my upper body rocked back and forth and my right hand was wrestling with pocket change.

‘Yes,’ I managed. But as Miss Claybell turned to leave I realized a futures trader being questioned by federal agents was bound to arouse a lot of not totally favourable conjecture.

‘And I want you to be present,’ I added.

She hesitated, nodded, and then, leaving the door open, disappeared.

The two men who soon entered looked like slightly unsuccessful businessmen who’d come to try to sell me some penny stocks or a supplemental health insurance policy. They introduced themselves as Hayes and Macavoy. They sat down stiffly in the two extra chairs while Miss Claybell, memo pad in hand, stood unobtrusively – or as unobtrusively as someone who dressed like Queen Victoria could – near the door, which she gently dosed.

The one called Hayes, a hollow-cheeked man in need of a shave, glanced briefly back at her.

‘We’re here to question just you, Mr Rhinehart,’ he said. ‘Your secretary can go.’

‘She’s staying,’ I countered quickly. ‘I want a written record of our conversation.’

Hayes looked so expressionlessly at me that it was like looking at a computer screen whose language I didn’t know.

‘Have it your way,’ Hayes said. After the briefest of glances at Macavoy he cleared his throat and continued. ‘Is Luke Rhinehart your father?’

That stopped me cold. Parking tickets, male chauvinism and creative IRS deductions all disappeared, and I was left with the image of the big smiling father I’d barely known.

‘Was my father,’ I said.

Hayes stared hard.

‘You believe your father is dead?’ he asked.

‘No, I mean Luke Rhinehart was my father until he deserted his family over fifteen years ago.’

‘I see,’ said Hayes. ‘And do you know where he is now?’

‘No.’

‘When did you last speak to him?’ Macavoy suddenly interjected. He was a slender man too, but taller, gangling, younger than Hayes. He looked like a prematurely aged teenage hoopster.

‘Ten years ago,’ I answered.

‘What was the occasion?’

‘My mother ... had been killed in a car accident a week earlier,’ I said as calmly as I could. ‘He called to ask if my sister and I wanted to come live with him.’

Hayes and Macavoy waited for me to go on.

‘Well?’ Hayes finally asked.

‘It was the first and only contact I’d had with him since he’d disappeared five years before. I told him to go to hell.’

Hayes blinked once and then nodded.

‘And you’ve had no contact with him since?’ he asked.

‘None.’

‘But you’ve had contact with his followers.’

‘They’ve occasionally harassed me, if that’s what you mean,’ I said irritably.

‘How have they harassed you?’

‘By showing up. By telling me how my father has transformed their lives. Or ruined their lives. By being assholes.’

Macavoy coughed.

‘Didn’t any of them ever bring you a message from your father?’

‘No.’

‘Or told you some of the marvellous things your father is doing?’ There was a sarcastic bite in the question.

‘Look,’ I snapped, abruptly standing. ‘I really don’t want to talk about this. How can you possibly be interested in pursuing my father for the stupid things he did fifteen or twenty years ago?’

Hayes looked at me a moment and then exchanged glances with Macavoy.

‘We’re not interested in what your father did twenty years ago,’ he finally said. ‘We’re interested in what he’s doing right now.’

I hesitated.

‘Right now!?’ I managed.

‘Yes.’

‘And what do you think he’s doing right now?’ I asked, sinking slowly back down into my chair.

‘We can’t go into that,’ said Macavoy. ‘Let me ask you this: has anyone been acting strangely around you lately?’

I stared at him a moment and then laughed.

‘Everyone. All the time. What else is new?’

‘I mean has anyone new come into your life that struck you as odd?’ the gangly hoopster persisted.

‘No,’ I said irritably. ‘What are you driving at?’

‘We have reason to believe that your father may try to get in touch with you,’ said Hayes.

‘I don’t know what you’re talking about.’

‘Good,’ said Hayes. He stood. ‘But when you do, we want you to get in touch with us. Immediately.’ He reached across the desk and handed me a card.

‘May I ask why my father, after all these years, might now want to get in touch with me?’

Macavoy too now rose.

‘He’s your dice daddy,’ Hayes said. ‘Maybe the dice will tell him to.’

3

His father – his father was still alive somewhere.

After everyone had left the office, Larry sat frozen in his chair, trying to control the trembling in his hands, his lips, even his gut. The man whose betrayal had poisoned his life was now injecting some new infection into its present flow.

A successful psychiatrist, in the late sixties Luke had thought he'd discovered the cure for human misery: injecting chance systematically into one's life. He thought he could break down the normal stuck-in-the-mud personality and thus expand human experience, role-playing, and creativity. He embarked on the mad enterprise of trying to explore the malleability and multiplicity of the human soul. He introduced himself and his patients to diceliving – the making of life decisions by casting dice. His theory was that humans tended to get stuck in trying to live with one set of beliefs, attitudes and behaviour – one self – when the healthy human would be better off feeling free to be many selves, with many inconsistent attitudes and behaviours.

In dice therapy he encouraged his patients to create a variety of optional actions or roles, and let the dice choose their behaviour for a given hour, day or week. The goal was to break down the usual single stuck self and discover new habits, loves and lives.

Of course in successfully attacking his own personality, Luke broke up his family, ruined his professional standing, alienated friends, and broke enough laws to attract numerous law-enforcement agencies.

He also became somewhat famous – or notorious, dice therapy and diceliving becoming something of a fad in the early seventies. Luke became a minor cult figure like Timothy Leary or Ram Dass, seeming to symbolize the rejection of society's traditional values in favour of individual creativity and multiplicity. By jumping bail after his trial and disappearing from sight, he gave his life a certain romantic aura lacking in other counterculture figures who were raking in dollars on the lecture circuit, but the aura faded as his disappearance seemed increasingly final. Total absence is a difficult state to keep exciting.

As he sat in the office that day trying to steady his hand on the flat desktop, Larry remembered bitterly that as an eight-year-old child he had liked his father's dice games, both for their own sake and for Luke's playing them with him. He'd once cast a fat red die and seen it choose the option that he go fight a bully who'd been hassling him for months. He remembered knocking the snotnose down, and never having any trouble with him again. For a week, anyway, the event had made him a believer in the dice.

Another afternoon he'd let the dice continually choose in which direction he walk and, giggling, he kept ending up with his nose against some building's walls.

But his father had become increasingly erratic. He remembered one morning Luke's eating his eggs with his fingers and grunting like some animal, the eggs mostly not making it into his mouth, he and his sister giggling, Larry's mother in the background silently glaring. And he remembered his father, who never bought a Christmas present for anyone, unexpectedly bringing home half a dozen presents to both him and his sister, including a gigantic five-foot-high bear that he'd loved for years. And of Luke's striding around their apartment all one weekend, declaring in stentorian tones, like some Shakespearean actor, lines which were probably muddled quotations from plays somehow appropriate to what was happening.

But most of his memories of that time were less pleasant – of the tense parental silences, of his mother always shouting at his father and her fury when she caught Larry using the dice, shouting that if she ever caught him doing that again she'd send him to a foster home.

And when Luke finally disappeared without a word, Larry came to feel it was the dice themselves that had made him leave and ruined Larry's life – hence his bitterness against not only his father but against everything his father had stood for.

Nevertheless, there were times when he wished he'd accepted Luke's offer to take him in after his mother's death, since from that moment on he'd been on his own and broke. He'd had to work full-time every summer and part-time during all his college years, while most of his classmates were apparently free to loaf. In reaction against his father he'd come to believe passionately in the value of control, order and reason. His psychiatrists pointed out that making a religion of order was a dramatic rejection of his father's interest in irrationality and chance, and that he'd even chosen his profession in reaction against his father. One of the more notorious features of Luke's dice living had been his followers' remarkable success at picking profitable stocks and bonds using the dice. At Wharton Business School Larry had determined to prove the value of reason and research over his father's bastard deity, Chance.

But in the last five years of conquering chance with his trend lines, resistance areas, momentum figures, stochastics, point and figure charts and Eliot Waves, how often some chance event would send a market reeling in a direction contrary to that predicted by all his indicators! And how annoying that, even without any measurable chance event, markets somehow refused to perform as all his technical indicators forecast they would.

Despite Larry trying to picture his father before he'd taken up his quixotic quest for the cure to human misery, he had absolutely no memories of him before the age of eight. That was a sure sign of repression, Dr Bickers had assured him. He groaned at the thought of having to talk to Dr Bickers about this FBI visit: how the man would smirk at this archetypal return of the father. And he grimaced too at realizing that despite his dislike of Dr Bickers he seemed to be consulting psychotherapists almost as often as his father used to consult the dice. He ought to bill his father.

Over the years he'd think he was making progress, announce to friends that he'd finally made a key breakthrough, and then a few weeks later tell these same friends that his therapist was a charlatan – and possibly a secret diceperson.

His reveries were abruptly interrupted by an official buzz from Miss Claybell: Mr Battle wanted to see him in his office immediately.

Ah, yes. Nothing like a visit from the FBI to make a trader's boss want to have a chat.

4

Mr Battle's being both the head of the firm as well as Honoria's father meant that his every word, sigh and stare had significance for me far beyond its merit. Every time I had a losing trade it not only meant a few fewer digits in the asset column, but also that my son-in-law rating went down several points. Rains failing to fall mainly in the plains constituted not merely a small financial disaster, but also a threat to my marriage, a marriage I devoutly and greedily desired. And there'd been far too many rains not in the plains recently.

When I neared the old man's cavernous office I veered off into the executives' men's room to do a bit of grooming. Mr Battle was a stickler for appearances. A trader with shirt unbuttoned, tie and hair askew was a man communicating not concentration and busy-ness, but rather a state of being overwhelmed. Since most traders *were* overwhelmed, such normal grooming was elsewhere the norm, but not at BB&P. Mr Battle wanted *his* traders all to look as if they'd just emerged from a men's fashion ad in the Sunday *New York Times* magazine section – cool, elegant and unflustered – million-dollar profits something they pulled off between aperitifs.

'A tie is a symbol,' he'd explained to me once when he'd caught me alone in my office with my tie off. 'A symbol of caring about power. If it doesn't always represent actual membership in the successful levels of society, it at least represents the wish to do so. Failure to wear a tie represents either rebellion against or indifference to everything that counts.'

'But I'm alone in here, sir,' I'd protested.

'*God* sees,' he said.

Mr Battle had been one of the three founding members of the firm back in 1977, Blair having the money. Pike being the brainy trader, and Mr Battle contributing a little money, his high social standing and extensive social and financial connections. Blair and Pike had had the goodness to die over the next decade, leaving Mr Battle as majority owner and de facto boss. He was legendary for his ability to charm the rich into sharing their wealth with BB&P ('investing'), but hopelessly out of his depth in any intricate financial dealings. As long as I made money for BB&P and seemed a socially acceptable and presentable young man, I'd be in his favour. If ever I began to lose money for the firm or, even worse, turned out to be black or Jewish or the son of mongoloids, I'd be dropped with peremptory swiftness.

As I stared into the mirror to straighten my lie and brush my hair, I knew that I was not cool, would never be elegant and was as flustered as I ever got, since the thing that really flustered me was my damn father.

'Seeing the chief honcho, huh?' a voice said from behind me.

Changing the angle of my vision I spotted in the mirror the lugubrious face of Vic Lissome, the onetime Chief Trader I'd replaced three years earlier. Vic was seated in an open cubicle, fully clothed, reading the *National Inquirer*, a periodical much favoured by traders. Reading it kept them in touch 'with the pulse of the nation', said Vic, although I felt it kept them in touch primarily with three-headed dogs and childbearing men.

'Yeah,' I replied. Many people at BB&P assumed that I was a suck artist who'd somehow managed to wrap Mr Battle around my little finger, when in fact I usually lived in mortal terror of Mr Battle. I felt that everything I'd achieved had been achieved *despite* Mr Battle's preferences rather than because of them.

'You look like shit,' said Vic helpfully from his cubicle hideaway. 'You look like you just got hit with a Saddam Hussein.'

Ever since that August day two months earlier when Saddam Hussein had unexpectedly sent his troops into Kuwait to conquer six infantrymen and a mentally ill housewife (the only documented resisters) and thus sent various futures markets reeling off in new directions, any unexpected news

development had been called, genetically, a Saddam Hussein. This 'in' argot would last until the next notable Saddam Hussein.

'Actually it's more a minor domestic problem,' I said, not wanting to have to talk to Vic about the failure of the rains.

'Domestic?' said Vic. 'You mean the old fart is not too happy with your porking his daughter?'

'I got to go, Vic' I said, moving quickly to the door. 'A man who is late is a man who is not there.'

This last line was not my own but a famous quotation from Mr Battle, a man noted for pithy sayings of questionable value.

'Ah, Rhinehart!' he said from behind his desk, a gigantic monstrosity of glass and metal tubing that closely resembled a glass pingpong table without the net. He was a large, good-looking man with beefsteak jowls and he dressed with immaculately tailored dignity. With his magnificent sweep of bushy hair nicely streaked with grey, he usually looked as if he was posing for an ad for some exotic liqueur.

'What's this about the FBI raiding your office?' he went on.

'Raiding my office?' I echoed uneasily. 'It wasn't anything like that.'

'One FBI agent talking to someone is an inquiry,' countered Mr Battle, spouting one of his aphorisms. 'Two agents is a raid.'

'Yes, sir,' I said, stopping to stand in front of the desk like a pupil before his principal.

'Exactly. Now tell me all about it. I believe in confronting unpleasantness immediately and wrestling it to the ground.'

'There, uh, was no, *is* no unpleasantness. The FBI was making an inquiry about someone I haven't seen in more than fifteen years. I couldn't help them and they left.'

'Really!?' exclaimed Mr Battle, scrutinizing me as if wondering if I'd really thought he'd swallow that one. 'Fifteen years It must have been a pretty horrendous crime. Who was it, some serial killer?'

'They didn't say why they were seeking the man,' I said. 'They were vague and ambiguous. But I can assure you the whole thing has nothing to do with me or my work here at BB&P.'

Mr Battle continued to gaze at me as if wondering why I was telling all these lies.

'And who is this man the FBI is so curious about that they seek out people who haven't seen him in fifteen years?'

Oh, Jesus. Here it comes. Everything I'd been trying to hide.

'Uh, a relative, sir. A man who disappeared a long ti – fifteen years ago.'

'A relative!' said Mr Battle. 'That could be distressing. Not a close relative, I hope.'

Oh, Jesus.

'I ... uh ... was never close to him.'

'Who is it, an uncle?'

I stared back at Mr Battle numbly.

'My father,' I said.

Mr Battle looked not surprised but confused.

'But your father is dead.'

'Uh, not necessarily.'

'Not necessarily! I distinctly remember when reviewing your personnel file a few months ago that both your parents were deceased!'

'Uh, yes, sir. My mother was killed in an auto accident and my father hasn't been seen or heard from in – more than a decade. I, uh, assumed that he was dead.'

'And now you discover he is a serial killer!?'

'No, no, I'm sure he's not – the FBI didn't say why they wanted to contact him.'

'Contact him!' Mr Battle exclaimed, now sitting ramrod-straight in his chair and glaring at me. 'Arrest him, you mean! My God, man, you must have some idea why they're looking for him!?'

‘I really don’t!’ I answered, feeling myself squirming. ‘Years ago – almost twenty years ago – he got in some trouble with the FCC for disrupting a television programme and the unauthorized release of mental patients, and, uh, a few other matters. But the FBI indicated they wished to see him now about something else.’

Mr Battle, still eyeing me, rose from his chair and moved slowly forward with the soft tread of a predator about to pounce on its prey before the hypnotic spell was broken.

‘This is a serious business, my boy,’ he said.

‘Yes – I mean no. I’m sure my father hasn’t done anything serious. I think they just wanted to talk to him about something.’

‘Nonsense,’ said Mr Battle, coming to a halt three feet away and gazing at me again with that sceptical-physician stare that implied he was still seeking the exact nature of my fatal illness. ‘The FBI doesn’t send two men to question a son who hasn’t seen his father in fifteen years because they only want to talk to the man.’

Mr Battle stared on another moment and then turned away with a sigh.

‘This won’t do, Larry, won’t do,’ he said as he slowly returned around the pingpong table to his seat behind it. ‘I can’t have my daughter marrying the son of someone on the FBI’s “most wanted” list.’ With another sigh he sat down and swung around to face me.

‘I want her to marry the son of a man who is respectably deceased. I think you may tell people that this FBI visit was to ask you about a former employee. Do you understand?’

‘I think I do.’

‘It’s safe to say it’s in your interest to see that your father stays boringly buried.’

‘I agree, but suppose –’

‘Your personnel file states that your father is no longer alive,’ Mr Battle said, beginning to shuffle some papers on his desk. ‘Let us be content with the official truth.’

He then rang for his secretary and turned to gaze at the monitor on his desk – the interview was over. Until I could prove otherwise, my father would probably remain, in Mr Battle’s mind, a corpse and a mass murderer.

5

Larry's session later that day with Dr Bickers began with Larry's claiming that when he began to lose money in his trading it made him feel as if his whole life was getting out of control, and he wanted to be able to control this anxiety with something other than tranquillizers.

Dr Bickers, ignoring Larry's usual complaint, asked why he was so upset this afternoon. Only then did Larry briefly mention the FBI visit to his office that morning.

Dr Bickers, scrunched in his chair like a shrivelled potato, rarely made more than two or three explicit comments during an entire hour and was content now to revert to his traditional commentary.

'Mmmmm,' he said.

'No, no,' Larry said irritably. 'After these months now with you I don't think my problems have anything to do with my father.'

As Dr Bickers reverted to his usual silence, Larry leaned back against the back of the deep leather chair he was sitting in, and with the memory of the damned FBI visit, felt his irritation rise.

'Not that it's been easy,' he said, trying to give his voice a soft confidence he wasn't exactly feeling.

'After all, he deserted me when I was barely twelve, disappeared to go off and lead his own mad life with no thoughts for me or my mother or sister. As you know, for a while I let that act poison me just a bit, made me resent traits he had, mentions of him, every aspect of him that I noticed in myself But thanks to these sessions together, I really don't think that he's my problem any more. It's the trading losses.'

Larry straightened himself in his sitting position and glanced at Dr Bickers, who was peering up at him expressionlessly, a wrinkled turtle peering at a passer-by.

'Hey, it's not easy. I have to endure constant reminders of his life and what it stood for – not only the physical garbage of the book he wrote and articles about him, but human garbage too – people showing up and telling me how much they adored him or hated him Me throwing them out after the first faint words of praise.'

Larry sighed.

'It's been hard,' he went on, 'but I've been toughened by it. By committing myself to order and reason I think I've managed to pretty much erase his presence from my life. Sitting here today I can say with some confidence that that he's not an important factor in my life.'

'Mmmmmmm,' said Dr Bickers' voice from off to one side. It was his third major contribution to the day's session. Agreement? Question? Larry was so used to rambling on he barely paused to wonder.

'I suppose some sons might have succumbed to the temptation to follow in their father's footsteps,' he went on. 'But not me. I've gone the opposite way. And hey, look, I'm rich, successful, well adjusted – except for these recent nightmares about being caught naked, too many calls and going bankrupt – and in five months I'll be marrying Honoria! A beautiful woman who shares all my interests and – so I really can't complain, despite my recent losses and having a father who betrayed and deserted me and will always stand as a symbol of irresponsibility.'

'Mmmmmmm,' said Dr Bickers firmly.

Larry stood up and began to pace.

'... A man who stands for all that's perverse in human nature, a man who was willing to destroy everything to pursue his harebrained theory, a theory that defies all that is sacred, dignified, restrained and decent in life, a man who was mad, besotted with sick sexual salaciousness, a slave to inconsistency, a man who couldn't bother to bring up a son, a poor helpless child who worshipped him, but who this madman tempted into adoration and then abandoned for fifteen years, fifteen terrible,

hateful monstrous abandoned years that I had to live through until this moment when I am ... uh ... at last ... at last ... uh ... cured.'

White-faced, breathing heavily and with fists clenched, Larry stopped pacing and turned to face Dr Bickers.

Dr Bickers, his chin lowered toward his chest, glanced up over his rimless glasses.

'Mmmmmm,' he suggested.

6

'Hubie's Tavern' was the local hangout for futures traders, and I headed there automatically after fleeing my unsatisfactory session with Bickers. Bond traders had a more elegant hangout (their 'drinking establishment') a few blocks down; stock brokers had a half dozen local pubs they indulged in; the clerks had their watering hole; presumably, the custodians had theirs too.

Since Hubie's was home to two or three dozen young men (futures traders were mostly young men – there being no such thing as an old futures trader), all of whom considered themselves brilliant and daring, the tavern was considered lively and trendy. Actually it was noisy, crowded, smelly, dark and undistinguished, but since none of us ever looked at anything or anyone except each other and the occasional beautiful woman who made an appearance (a professional in every sense of the word), we thought it was terrific.

When I arrived I was immediately hailed by Brad Burner from a corner table and unthinkingly traipsed over. I didn't usually join the daily after-hours parade to Hubie's and had forgotten that I'd be forced to talk to people. Only as I was lowering myself into a chair did I notice that the other people in the booth were Jeff and Vic Lissome.

'We *know* it's been a bad day when Larry's driven to drink,' commented Brad, who was Vice President in charge of all trading and thus my only superior other than Mr Battle himself. Brad was a big, bluff man, good-looking in a rugged sort of way, who nevertheless wore clothes even more elegantly tailored than those of Mr Battle.

I slid in beside him.

'Not a bad day at all,' I said. 'Just couldn't resist seeing more of you guys.'

'I think he's forgetting about his two visitors today,' said Vic, who as usual was himself quite far along the path of forgetfulness. 'You guys must be in even worse shape than I thought.'

'We didn't do bad,' said Jeff. 'Especially compared to *last* week.' Jeff had an innocence that often meant that no secret and no loss was ever long kept from the curious public at Hubie's – or anywhere else Jeff went.

'What's this about visitors?' asked Brad. 'We getting some new clients?'

'Yeah, tell us, Larry,' said Vic. 'How many shares of the BB&P Fund did the FBI order?'

'FBI!?' echoed Brad. Both he and Jeff looked at me in astonishment.

'Yeah,' I said casually. 'They're investigating the largest case of insider trading in history and have reason to believe Jeff's involved.'

Jeff went so pale and looked so terrified that all three of us burst out into raucous laughter.

'So what was it all about?' Brad asked after we had all quieted down, although Jeff was as pale as before.

'They wanted to find someone I knew once,' I answered as casually as I could. 'I couldn't help them. It had nothing to do with finances.'

'Are you sure!?' asked Jeff, as if his life depended on it.

'I'm sure. And if we are involved in massive insider trading I sure as hell wish it would show up more on the bottom line.'

'Yeah,' said Brad, grinning broadly. 'Another few months like you've been having and we'll have to get Vic back in there, right, Vic?'

'He can have the fuckin' job,' said Vic, snorting into his now empty glass. 'It's all a fuckin' fake anyhow.'

'True,' said Brad, still grinning at me. 'But some of us are better at faking it than others.'

7

I spent the weekend, as I often had during the summer, at the Battle mansion on a hill overlooking the Hudson River in upstate New York. The place was originally built by the financier Jay Gould as an early-twentieth-century rural retreat. The fact that it had thirty rooms and resembled an eighteenth-century English manor house didn't seem to faze either Mr Gould or Mr Battle, both of whom looked upon the estate as roughing it. After all, trees could be seen, grass, wild animals (rabbits and an occasional deer) and even mountains – the distant Catskills looming across the river in the distance. The fact that they usually viewed these wonders past the heads of the household help waiting on them hand and foot didn't interfere at all with their sense of roughing it.

The mansion was ornate, the grounds gracious, the view of the Hudson River and distant mountains spectacular, and Mr Battle pointed all this out to every new guest and then never noticed any of it again. But someday, I hoped, if I could just stay on the straight and narrow path of upward mobility, it would all be mine!

But as I drove up the winding drive that Saturday morning in a cab from the train station I knew that chance was always trying to upset the applecart of my personal life with the same arbitrary interventions that ruined some of my most scientific trades. Accidental meetings, absurd attractions, arbitrary diseases, suddenly exposed secrets – life had a horrible tendency to undermine the orderly man with sudden chaos. The unexpected appearance of the FBI and my having to confess my father's existence to Mr Battle was a tiny tremor of warning that accident, like death and taxes, was always with us.

Now as the cab slowed to a halt opposite the ornate columns of the formal entrance, and the tall and lugubrious Hawkins came with slow dignity down the steps to greet me, I was both pleased by the opulence and a little depressed by it. I knew that the place would be so crawling with well-dressed people that life would seem as formal as a tea party. Mr Battle even insisted that Honoria and I sleep in separate bedrooms, whether from the illusion that we hadn't yet slept together, or to maintain the façade of Victorianism, I couldn't tell.

I got slowly out of the cab, paid off the cabbie and watched Hawkins pick up my suitcase and lead me up the steps. The 'family', Hawkins announced solemnly, was out back on the patio.

Although my whole march up the ladder of success led to precisely this elegant mansion owned by my boss and future father-in-law, something about it made me feel out of place. What was it? Why didn't I feel comfortable with the people who shared my vision of a life of reason, rapaciousness and riches? Why didn't I care more about the things I was supposed to care about? Why did Brad Burner's enthusiasm for various numbered or named Porsches or BMWs seem so trivial? I owned a Mercedes but only as part of my uniform of success. I honestly couldn't tell the difference between driving my Mercedes and driving a Honda Accord or Chevy Corsica, but knew if I began driving around in a Corsica I would soon be seen as on the way out.

I continued through the huge lower hallway to follow the formal and funereal man in black, then up the long winding stairs towards my guest bedroom. Along the staircase were hung paintings and drawings: a Matisse next to a Norman Rockwell; an oil portrait of a grinning Ronald Reagan next to what looked like a giant Rubens nude.

Why couldn't I appreciate my colleagues' obsession with their clothing, furniture, cars and connoisseurship of art? I myself owned three original oils by a famous avant-garde artist whose name I could never pronounce, but I thought of them like my car and suits – part of my necessary uniform. And I derived less pleasure from looking at my art – or anyone else's – than I did at looking at a sunset over the river. Since I hated spending a cent more than I had to, it pained me considerably to have to pay thousands of dollars for things I didn't really want. Looking at them as necessary business expenses, I deeply resented the IRS for not letting me deduct them from my income tax.

And the subtle differences between suits, sports cars, vacation spots, athletic clubs somehow escaped me. Mr Battle had almost ordered me to quit the Red Rider Athletic Club, pointing out with a subtle shudder that most of the people who belonged to it were athletes.

I had always assumed that I would have to spend time doing what I didn't really like doing in order to become rich and successful so I could then do what I *did* like doing. Instead, I was finding that success consisted of doing a lot of additional things I didn't like doing.

As I turned at the top of the stairs to head down the upper hall I suddenly said: 'What am I doing here, Hawkins?'

'Preparing for lunch, sir,' Hawkins replied without breaking stride.

'Ah, right.'

When Honoria arrived at my room to bring me down to meet the guests I embraced her with a pleased smile. Seeing her dressed with stunning casualness in a pool-blue jumpsuit that showed off her figure, I realized that I'd never caught her off guard: she was always groomed, coiffed, made-up and ready. As I held her my heart didn't leap, but my male vanity felt its usual surge of satisfaction: what a priceless acquisition! And mine! Or soon to be so. I gave her an extra squeeze.

'Is that Jap still on the make for you?' I asked after we'd exchanged a light kiss and were headed down the stairs.

'Oh, yes, last night he came on to me like an eager college sophomore,' she said gaily, linking her arm in mine. 'But today I think he's shifted his interest to Kim.'

'Kim?'

'Yes, you know, that kook cousin of mine whose escapades I've told you about.'

'Oh, her,' I said, looking to see if the Japanese were down in the hallway. 'I thought she moved to the west coast or something.'

'She did. She went there to see some famous guru.'

I vaguely remembered Honoria's telling me about some black sheep of the family who was shamefully interested in things like the I Ching, tarot, nature hikes and nuclear disarmament, and even more shamefully unable to hold a job or accumulate money.

'Oh, yeah,' I said as we headed through the hall towards the patio where some sort of meal was being served.

'But now she's back,' Honoria went on. 'Much to Daddy's disgust. And when she's not chatting with sexless spirits on some astral plane she's often enticing sexually charged bodies on this earthly plane. I think she's already got Akito salivating and – ah, speak of the devil.'

As we moved out on to the patio Mr Battle was standing near a large round table, and past him three figures were making their way up the lawn towards us. As I casually tried to brush down my hair in preparation for meeting them I was puzzled to see Mr Battle frowning at the approaching people as if in disapproval. As we came up beside him he turned to me and whispered fiercely: 'Be brilliant.' And added strangely, 'And ignore the girl.'

The girl. Walking with a jaunty bounce between the two neatly-dressed Japanese bankers and clutching them both firmly by the arms was a lovely young woman whose striking photograph I realized I had noticed once in one of the Battle albums. Dressed with heretical informality in sneakers, jeans and a sweatshirt, she was laughing easily at what the taller and more impressive of the two men had been saying. She had a glowing vitality that immediately made her seem out of place, impolite even, her vibrancy almost resembling that of a woman in heat.

Although the two Japanese were dressed identically in business suits, they were otherwise opposites, the one being tall and broad-shouldered with a thick head of wavy black hair, and the other short, plumpish, grey-haired and bespectacled. When the three grinning newcomers came to a halt near the table, Mr Battle bounded forward with a sudden warm smile.

'Ah, Mr Akito and Mr Namamuri,' he boomed. 'I hope you've had a pleasant outing.'

As he introduced the two men Kim looked at me with such mischievous boldness I worried my trousers were unbuttoned. I nevertheless put on a superficial smile and bowed to Akito's bow and pumped his hand with as much warmth as I could, which wasn't much since Akito had a grip whose vice-like crush implied long hours practising karate or some other fortifying regimen. We exchanged a few brief inanities about the markets and then turned back to the women.

'Don't I even get a "hi", Nori?' asked Kim, and, after the briefest of pauses, the two women embraced, Honoria smiling at Kim as might a mother at a lovable but incorrigible child. 'Nori' was the family nickname for Honoria and a vast improvement it was over the original, but Nori preferred Honoria, especially from her inferiors, which was almost everyone.

Laughing, Kim broke away from Honoria and, ignoring me, seated herself in a patio chair quickly held for her by the good-looking Japanese, Akito.

'Well, Kim,' said Honoria, her blue eyes intense with something, but whether pleasure, interest in her cousin's escapades, or combativeness, I couldn't tell. 'Where have you been?'

'Into New York last night,' Kim said. 'Then here this morning. Then Mr Akito kidnapped me as I arrived and insisted he show me the river.'

From behind her chair Akito smiled easily and, after his older colleague and Mr Battle had settled into chairs, seated himself next to Kim.

'The victim went willingly,' he said in barely accented English. 'It may even have been her idea.'

'Details,' said Kim. The point is we had a lovely morning, and – how are you, Uncle?' This last she addressed to Mr Battle, who looked as if he deeply disliked being called 'Uncle', which, I guessed, probably accounted for Kim's using the term.

'I'm fine, Kim,' he said with a scowl. 'I'm fine. I'm glad you've all enjoyed yourselves. Gentlemen, have you had lunch?'

'Miss Castelli introduced us to a most interesting pizza restaurant,' said Akito. 'Part of a chain, as I understand it.' I was impressed that his little half-smile indicated absolutely no suggestion of what he might be thinking about the merits of eating at the local Pizza Hut.

'How are you, Nori?' asked Kim, her wide brown eyes mischievously alert. 'Haven't you got a wedding coming up one of these days?'

'Oh, yes, I think you're right,' said Honoria. 'But in the winter, I believe. I'll have to check my calendar,' she added in a tone of heavy irony.

Kim finally turned her eyes on me, a glance that although little different from the one she'd bestowed on the others, nevertheless sent my heart unexpectedly racing ahead as if a fire alarm had been set off. Although Kim was smiling and her eyes were bright, I, though unaware of it at the time, was glaring at her: I knew chaos when I saw it.

'And you must be Larry,' she said. 'I bet you know the date. Nori says you've got a good head for figures.'

Since my head, if not my eyes, had been gaping at her breasts, which I was sure had been swaying bra-lessly beneath her loose sweatshirt, her statement that I had a good head for figures seemed to be some sort of *double entendre*. I flushed.

'February twenty-eighth,' I managed to answer.

'He wanted the twenty-ninth,' said Honoria, smiling. 'But I pointed out there was no such date.'

While everyone else smiled at this little hit, I felt another burst of annoyance. I knew that the invasion of Kim was a Saddam Hussein: a sudden, unexpected new element which was bound to upset the markets. Chaos had come.

8

The rest of the day only proved my first intuition was correct. When we ended up playing tennis for an hour and a half Kim continued to be provocative – in all senses of that word. While the rest of us dressed in trim white shorts, blouses, socks and tennis shoes, Kim came out as the feminine equivalent of Andre Agassi: scruffy sneakers, raggedy cut-off blue jeans, and a multicoloured T-shirt that looked like an explosion in a paint factory.

And her playing style was no better. Whereas Honoria and I had competitive spirits of Superbowl quality – she'd been taking lessons from the age of six – Kim played as if she didn't have a care in the world. Honoria and I, partners, fought for every point as if our victory alone would stave off a nuclear holocaust, and Akito played the same way, racing and diving and grunting and grimacing with quite un-Japanese passion.

But Kim played as if she were a child at a Sunday picnic, each point a lark. If she missed an easy overhead she smiled and shrugged. If she accidentally hit a woodshot that turned out to be a winner she laughed, not noting that her accidental winner was sending both Honoria and me into the kind of deep depression that normally takes years of therapy to overcome. Kim played hard but didn't seem to distinguish between her winners and her losers. Even Akito, lusting after her with his healthy male appetite, was clearly annoyed at her lack of devotion to beating the crap out of us. He tried to join in her smiles when she smiled and her laughter when she laughed, but his smile came out a grimace and his laughter like a sumo wrestler's grunt.

And I hated the way Kim frolicked around the court in her raggedy shorts and tight T-shirt, her breasts bouncing and swaying and doing all in their power to take my eyes off the ball. She was a few inches shorter than Honoria and more compact, with taut tanned legs that looked as if they belonged on a gymnast. And it also irked me that Akito often seemed as distracted by Kim's swoops and sways of breasts as I was. Chaos.

When it was over, Akito shook hands with us, the winners, with all the grace of his ancestors on the battleship *Missouri* at the end of World War II. But Kim bounded to the net as if greeting long-lost friends, her dark hair wild, sweaty and straggling about her face as if she'd almost drowned. Honoria, who had played twice as hard, although gleaming with perspiration, was nevertheless still as neat and dignified as a monarch greeting commoners at a royal reception.

Then later, when we were all having drinks on the patio, Kim showed up with a sweatshirt emblazoned with the logo 'Losers enjoy more free time', a clear affront to her guardian and all the right-thinking, high-earning people present.

'This Château Borgnini is one of a kind,' Mr Battle announced to one and all, holding up his glass so that the sunlight shimmered through it, giving it a deep purple glow. 'It's so expensive most French people don't even know it exists.'

'It is delightful,' pronounced Akito, with a smile and a slight bow of his head to his host.

'I prefer a cold beer,' said Kim. 'But it does look lovely in these glasses, that I admit.'

'Daddy bought it last spring in Paris,' said Honoria.

'It cost three hundred dollars a bottle,' announced Mr Battle proudly. 'You might give it a decent try.'

'I've always wondered what an eighty-dollar glass of wine would taste like,' said Kim, taking a small sip from a fresh goblet poured for her by Hawkins. She paused. 'And now I know.'

'Wonderful, isn't it?' suggested Mr Battle.

'Yes it is,' said Kim. 'I'm glad I've discovered something else I can do without.'

'Aren't you being a little ostentatiously philistine?' I said, annoyed at her rudeness. 'Most women I know would fake an orgasm from a single sip.'

‘I save my fake orgasms for men,’ said Kim, and poked Akito with an elbow to show she’d just made a good shot. Akito joined her in loud laughter.

‘Oh, Kimsy, stop trying to shock us,’ said Honoria, smiling. ‘It’s adolescent.’

‘I know,’ said Kim calmly, looking at me. ‘But being surrounded by parents does that to me.’

‘What happened to that guru you were so enthusiastic about?’ Honoria asked, changing the subject.

‘He was brilliant,’ responded Kim, now drinking again from her beer. ‘I decided I wasn’t quite ready to become totally enlightened.’

‘No?’

‘I’m too young. I’ve got too many mistakes I haven’t made yet. Enlightenment is for people who’ve grown tired of their mistakes.’

‘What about people who never make mistakes?’ asked Honoria ironically.

‘They don’t need enlightenment,’ countered Kim. Then she smiled. ‘Only friends.’

Mr Battle and Mr Namamuri, who had shown little interest in the subject of enlightenment, were now both standing.

‘Ah, gentlemen,’ said Mr Battle. ‘Enough of this frivolity. If you would be kind enough to bathe and, uh, get dressed, Mr Namamuri and I would like to have a chat in the library. There’s a Jacuzzi down by the pool, Mr Akito, but – in half an hour if you don’t mind’ – this last directed to me as if I were the only one who might be delinquent.

With that he marched off with his older guest, and Akito and I, mere vice presidents, scurried off to do as we were bid.

Mr Battle’s ornate study had ceiling-high bookcases on two whole walls, an impressive map of the world filling the third wall, and floor-to-ceiling windows on the fourth. As far as I could tell, Mr Battle himself rarely entered this room except to impress certain visitors. His actual working study was a smaller room near his bedroom which contained only quotron machines, stock tables and tax guides. Whenever I’d seen him in the formal study the old man liked to stare with quiet dignity at the rows of books, as if he might absorb their contents without actually bothering with reading. When I once asked him what books he had in his library, he’d turned and gazed at me for a long moment with his usual dignity, and replied: ‘Hardcover.’

After Hawkins brought some brandy Mr Battle offered everyone a cigar, only the older Japanese accepting. I was baffled about what this meeting with the Japanese was all about. Mr Battle was the principal owner of the privately-held firm of BB&P and as far as I knew was not interested in selling any of his interest.

‘Gentlemen,’ he began, standing with dignity in front of his giant wall map of the earth as if he were Patton about to outline his latest offensive. ‘I believe we may be able to help each other.’

It was indicative of Mr Battle’s isolation from the common men of Wall Street that he was clearly unaware of the ancient joke that had been going around for months that Ivan Boesky always used this classic line as a preface to his requests for illegal insider information. The two Japanese bankers, sunk as deeply into huge cushioned chairs as I was, stared back at the grinning Mr Battle with their usual classic inscrutability.

‘We need capital and you need our expertise,’ Mr Battle went on. ‘In particular in the area of futures trading. Although our dollar volume may be below that of other firms, I can say with pride that Mr Rhinehart here is at the cutting edge of futures trading, a man with vision and discipline, an asset for which other firms have envied us for years.’

I doubted that more than a handful of people on Wall Street had ever heard of Larry Rhinehart, and BB&P’s futures trading operation was so small Merrill Lynch would probably account for it under ‘misc. operations’ and ‘petty cash’ Would the Japs fall for this line?

‘Your bank,’ Mr Battle continued, pacing with slow dignity back and forth in front of the huge map, as if plotting the final outcome of a world war, ‘wants access to a futures trading operation. We have one of the best. It is time to talk.’

Indeed.

Akito, dressed with almost unrealistically neat elegance, cleared his throat. Mr Battle looked at him politely.

‘We would like to speak with Mr Rhinehart alone for a few moments if you could be so kind,’ he said, then smiled and bowed his head slightly.

A flicker of doubt crossed Mr Battle’s face before it was replaced with a smile.

‘Of course, of course,’ he said. ‘Although, although . . . Of course!’

As we all stared at him expressionlessly Mr Battle looked a trifle upset at being kicked out of his own study, but with one final ‘Of course’ he turned and strode with dignity from the room. As baffled as he, I sipped at my brandy and hoped I looked inscrutable.

As soon as the door closed with the minutest of dignified ‘thumps’, Akito rose, strode to the window and stared out a brief moment at the glorious gardens. I couldn’t get over how Western Akito seemed; only his smooth olive complexion and slightly slanted eyes and inevitable collection of small bows identified him as Japanese. Otherwise, he was too large a man, too athletic, too handsome, and too interested in Kim to be a stereotypical Oriental. As I stared, the man suddenly wheeled and addressed me with a small bow and slight smile.

‘Why do you gamble with your firm’s money?’ he asked softly.

My inscrutability, if it ever existed, was now shattered.

‘Gamble?’ I managed to reply.

‘You risk your firm’s money but guarantee profits to the clients. You can lose, the client cannot. Since no one can predict the direction of markets, you are gambling.’ Although Akito again bowed slightly and was still smiling, the content of his words was like an artillery barrage. I could feel myself flush.

‘Gamblers always lose,’ I now snapped back. ‘You may have noticed that I do not.’

‘True,’ said Mr Akito. ‘and we wish to know why you do not.’

‘Why?’ I echoed, again baffled. ‘Because I know what I’m doing. I use systems which –’

‘Excuse me,’ interrupted Mr Akito, ‘but systems are bullshit. Systems do not work. Systems are gambling.’

He marched towards me across the deep carpet, his shiny narrow shoes sinking deeply in, as if he were crossing a lush lawn, and stopped a few feet away. Didn’t the man know that the Japanese hate confrontation, hate directness, believe in saving everyone’s face?

‘We have noticed how in your trading when one of your trades loses money it seems to be always relatively small amounts,’ Akito continued. ‘But then every now and then you put larger sums into a trade and inevitably it seems these trades turn out to be profitable. We are alone now. We wish to know how you manage to avoid losing.’

Damn him! What the hell is he driving at!?

‘By hard work, damn it!’ I wanted to shout. And then I suddenly felt a quiet burst of joy: the bastards must really think I’m something if they suspect I must have a secret formula. Or did they think I was cheating in some way? Were they actually asking how I cheated?

I relaxed and let a quiet smile appear on my never inscrutable face.

‘A lot of people would pay a lot of money to know the answer to that question,’ I announced.

Akito, towering with un-Japanese bulk, looked down at me with intense scrutiny.

‘Yes,’ he finally said. ‘I believe they would.’ He continued to look down at me.

‘My official answer,’ I went on, ‘is that I have a knack for using some of the many technical systems for entering and leaving markets and for determining the amount of capital I put at risk for each trade.’

‘Yes,’ said Akito, ‘a knack.’ He turned briefly to Mr Namamuri, who was sunk so low in his easy chair and was so engulfed in cigar smoke that when I first followed Akito’s gaze I thought it was a pile of smouldering rags with two shiny shoes attached. A voice miraculously emerged from the smoke.

‘We interested in buying your “knack”,’ the old man said, his round face and thick glasses emerging briefly from the haze, then fading.

‘But not,’ said Akito, turning to stare down at me again, ‘without having a clearer idea about what it is.’

But it was only a knack! A lot of damned hard work, some sharp brains, and a knack! I managed to meet Akito’s blank gaze with my own nearest equivalent.

‘Perhaps you have some theories about my knack,’ I suggested.

‘Perhaps,’ said Akito.

‘Well?’

Akito again turned to look at the older man, who from behind his cigar apparently released some smoke signals that Akito was able to interpret, although nothing I could catch.

‘Our theories are irrelevant,’ he said. ‘Our bank is interested in creating a futures fund, possibly through your firm, a fund that would begin with approximately a hundred million dollars and expand from there. It is possible we would be interested in having you as one of the traders, possibly the chief trader. All this is possible, but not before we know all there is to know about your knack.’

A hundred million dollars!! My God, with that amount of money you could affect markets, work them up and down like yoyos!! And the chief trader! I’d be watched by everyone on the Street to see my every yawn, my every burp!! ‘Rhinehart’s just bought soybean oil!’ someone would report and the price of November bean oil would go through the roof!

I leaned back deeper into my chair, sipped my brandy and tried to keep my hands from shaking the tumbler. I attempted an exaggerated yawn.

‘That’s interesting,’ I said. ‘A big futures fund managed by my ... knack’ I sipped at my brandy. The only trouble was if I started to try to tell Akito what I thought my knack consisted of – namely disciplined following of the technical indicators I’d developed – Akito would think me a fool or a liar – a fool if I thought my system would continue to work, or a liar because I was actually beating the markets with some kind of inside information. I wished desperately that I’d accepted Mr Battle’s cigar so I could hide behind some smoke the way Namamuri was.

‘It might make a quite profitable marriage,’ Akito said, a soft smile crossing his face for the first time. ‘Our capital and your ... knack.’

Swallowing the last of my drink I stood up and strode forward and brazenly patted the huge Akito on the shoulder.

‘It might, it might,’ I said, grinning. ‘But of course, as Mr Battle said, others have also expressed an interest in my knack. I’m afraid you’ll have to give me a bit of time to think it over.’

‘Oh, certainly,’ said Akito, smiling politely. ‘We totally understand. But you do see that we must have confidence in your technical indicators before we could entrust such a large sum to your excellent guidance?’

‘Oh, yeah. No sense in tossing away a hundred million on gambling.’ I grinned again. A hundred million! Just to begin with! If only I had a saleable knack!

‘Exactly,’ said Akito, and he gave me a return smack on the back that sent me staggering several steps across the room like a drunk.

Namamuri’s slitted eyes followed my staggering surge like those of a snake following a wounded mouse.

9

Although I went searching for Honoria to gloat with her about what a big deal the Japs thought I was, it turned out I wasn't given much chance to brag about my triumph. In the gardens out east of the mansion she and Kim were sitting on a stone bench overlooking a small pond on which four or five ducks swam in picturesque bucolic charm, but, from what the gardener said, probably shitting and pissing the pond into an unusual state of pollution. It was a lovely Indian summer afternoon, with a few early-fall leaves floating in the pond like tiny toy golden ships.

But Honoria and Kim were clearly oblivious to the weather. They were bent in fierce concentration over some document. Kim, still wet from a dip she'd taken in the pool, was wrapped in a gaudy striped towel over her black one-piece suit. When I approached, the two of them looked up at me with disturbing seriousness.

'Have you see this?' Honoria asked and handed me three photocopies of something.

At first I thought they were copies of some financial article and was thus unprepared to see some pages of the tabloid *World Star*.

'What's this all about?!' asked.

'Someone showed it to me in LA,' said Kim, who now began towelling her shoulder-length hair, wild with untamed natural curls. 'I recognized the name and remembered that Nori'd told me your father had an interesting past. He sounds great!'

When I looked carefully at the first page the main headline sent a chill through me: 'Dice Cult Creates Robots' A lesser headline proclaimed modestly: 'I was a Random Sex Slave'. The next page was equally straightforward: 'Dice Commune Worships Chance and Chaos', and a subhead proclaimed: 'Mysterious Leader Still Sought.'

Standing in front of the bench I looked down balefully at Honoria, who looked back with her usual cool aplomb. Then I slowly lowered myself on to the bench next to her and read on.

According to former sex slave Anita Ransom, the commune brainwashed people into giving up their free will to the commands of dice. Diceguides forced everyone to break down habits and inhibitions and become random multiple personalities. Ms Ransom painted a lurid picture – cult indoctrination into a 'schizophrenic existence where you had to be somebody you weren't', 'where you could lose your life savings in a second, or make money by stealing or prostitution' 'Nothing was taboo,' said Ms Ransom. 'People were doing everything!' The cult worship of their Dice Daddy Luke Rhinehart led to random 'contributions', orgies, and perhaps even some sort of Russian roulette human sacrifice. Luke himself appeared constantly in new disguises and personalities, a master fox, thus evading the FBI now for twenty years.

There were only two small photographs connected with the articles – one of Anita Ransom of sex-slave fame, who looked about as sexy and abused as a slightly stoned McDonald's counter clerk; and a second of Luke, a photo I immediately recognized as having been taken fifteen years earlier at Luke's trial. My father was smiling benevolently through his thick glasses at the camera, looking for all the world as threatening as a slightly tipsy stamp collector.

With a grunt I shoved the pages away on to Honoria's lap.

'Utter total bullshit crap,' I said, angry at the articles for both their lies and their probable truths.

'But such entertaining crap,' said Kim.

'I'm afraid that the accepted cliché is that where there's smoke there's fire.' said Honoria.

I looked at her and slowly shook my head.

'Jesus. And yesterday two FBI agents wanted to know if I knew anything about my father.'

When both women expressed surprise I had to fill them in on the interview, talking about it adding to my overall annoyance. When I'd finished, Kim was sitting on the edge of the bench in

bright-eyed excitement, her soggy towel folded on her lap and her tanned legs stretched out in front of her, while Honoria was looking again at the pages.

‘I hate to think what my father would think of this,’ Honoria said after a pause, then turned to me. ‘You’ve got to find your father. If he has anything to do with this nonsense you’ve got to convince him to stop.’

‘Shit on that,’ I snorted, the idea of wasting any time at all on my father having all the appeal of a barium enema.

‘And if he’s alive,’ Honoria went on, ‘you can find out what this is all about and get your father clear of this mess, maybe offer him some money, if that’s what he needs.’

I stood up and strode away from the bench, staring bitterly at the cluster of ducks which had paddled over hoping for a handout. First my father deserts me when I need him, and now he seems to be returning when I least want him.

‘I don’t care about this fucking mess,’ I snapped. ‘As far as I’m concerned this man is not my father.’

‘Unfortunately, his name *is* Luke Rhinehart,’ commented Honoria.

‘So?’

‘So my father will go through the roof if he sees an article like this. If we can’t clear it up there’s no telling what he’ll do about our getting married.’

‘It’s company policy,’ I said, looking sullenly back at her, ‘that my father is dead.’

‘I’m afraid *this* father,’ said Honoria wryly, holding up the xeroxed pages, ‘is not dead.’

‘But what can I do!?’

‘Find him and kill him,’ said Kim gaily. ‘Isn’t that the Freudian solution?’

I turned back to the ducks and the pond. ‘It looks to me like a hornets’ nest,’ I finally said. ‘And my father’s already stung me enough.’

‘But it would be an adventure,’ protested Kim. ‘When do we begin?’

‘Begin? Begin what?’ asked Mr Battle, abruptly appearing along the path alone.

‘Begin to clear up the, uh, unpleasantness that may be brewing about Larry’s father because of the FBI,’ explained Honoria, casually folding the xeroxed pages of the article and shoving them into a pocket of her jacket. ‘By going and finding him.’

‘No, no, no,’ said Mr Battle. ‘That man should be buried, not dug up.’

Honoria blinked uncertainly at her father but then continued.

‘And by finding and confronting his father,’ she persisted, ‘he could complete his relationship with the man and stop being insane on the subject.’

‘Nonsense,’ said Mr Battle. ‘He’s perfectly fine the way he is. I never understood why he bothers with psychiatrists anyway. Any man who can sell short November soybeans on Monday and buy them back on Friday for a two hundred per cent profit has no psychological problems whatsoever, believe me.’

‘Thank you,’ I said gloomily, now facing the three of them with my back to the ducks, who were squawking in discontent.

‘If he weren’t obsessed with his father he might have made three hundred per cent,’ said Kim.

Mr Battle frowned as he considered the suggestion.

‘Well no, no,’ he finally concluded. ‘It may well be that Larry’s brilliance as a trader depends on his complicated attitude towards his father. Perhaps a cure would ruin him.’

‘Heaven forbid,’ said Kim, winking at me.

‘But Daddy,’ protested Honoria. ‘Think of how upsetting it would be to have Larry’s father dragged back here in chains spouting his idiocies about dice – just when Larry and I are going to be married.’

‘Well, perhaps,’ said Mr Battle, scowling, ‘but the easiest solution is news management – perhaps even prepare some papers proving he was an adopted child.’

While staring absently out at the ducks I found my irritation and confusion slowly coalescing into something firm and undeviating: anger.

‘Larry is perfect the way he is,’ Mr Battle finally added.

‘Except when he raves on about his father,’ said Honoria.

After an awkward silence had stretched into too many seconds I turned back to the others.

‘By God,’ I said. ‘I’m going to *find* the bastard!’

That’s terrific,’ said Kim, springing up and running to give me an unexpected kiss on the cheek.

‘You’re going on a quest!’

‘I say the Dice Man is better off dead,’ Mr Battle muttered grimly.

‘I do too,’ I said firmly. ‘And one way or the other I’m going to bury him.’

I stood there feeling angry, determined and noble.

Behind me the ducks continued to paddle and poop.

FROM LUKE’S JOURNAL

Exactly what are the problems we humans would like to solve?

The problem of unhappiness. Men don’t like being unhappy. Frowns are bad for the complexion.

The problem of death. Death is felt to be a drag. Its silence is suspicious, a bit malevolent maybe.

It is considered somewhat too permanent.

The problem of failure. It’s not considered as much fun as success but seems to arrive more frequently.

The problem of pain. Ingrown toenails, arthritis, headaches: the body always seems to stay one step ahead of Extra-Strength Tylenol.

The problem of love: it doesn’t last, isn’t returned, or is returned too zealously and jealously.

The problem of purpose: we don’t seem able to find one or, having found one, we lose interest too rapidly.

The problem of reality: it’s never quite clear what it is. John’s and Jane’s always seem to differ. Today’s reality is tomorrow’s illusion. And today’s illusion

The problem of evil: usually other people’s. Too many bad people are doing it to too few good people. God’s police force is understaffed.

The problem of self: we can never quite figure out who we are or, having figured it out, find it pretty depressing.

The problem of enlightenment: we often want it, but seldom have it. We know there is some better way of life, know we’re currently not living it, and want to get there from here.

Life, as the Buddha said, is a thousand follies. And the sage is he who plays with the thousand follies.

‘There is one way to be wise,’ said the Buddha.

‘What is it, O Master?’

‘To play the fool.’

10

What a weekend! Here I was being offered by the Japs a chance at wealth beyond my wildest daydreams while at the same time my engagement and job were under threat from my father's suddenly crawling back into the daylight.

And the threat was real. Mr Battle had tolerated my lack of wealth because I was showing some potential for rectifying the oversight, but there would be no way to rectify the Luke of the *World Star* and Lukedom. I didn't want to return to the struggles and humiliations of my college years, to have to start again at the bottom somewhere, especially in the middle of a recession. Frankly I liked getting Rolexes from Honoria on my birthday, and huge Christmas bonuses, and becoming a vice president when only twenty-six. It was all a fine revenge on my father, and I was determined not to let him come back and steal it all away. What would Akito and Namamuri think of making market decisions by casting dice – they even thought trying to follow technical indicators was gambling!

I had to figure out what I could say that would convince them that I had a more reliable knack than simply following technical indicators. Like every trader I daydreamed of having an insider at some government agency who could tip me off about key economic data that would send markets reeling in one direction or another. Unfortunately, the only government official I knew worked for the City Welfare Department, and the only inside info he ever dropped on me was the number of unwed mothers getting food stamps.

And as if the weekend weren't complicated enough, I also had to deal with Kim. On Sunday I'd tried to escape from everyone by taking a sail on the river on my thirty-five-foot cutter, but Kim and Akito had showed up in the Battle speedboat. When Akito motored off to look at the ancient Hudson lighthouse I had a tantalizing conversation with Kim that strongly hinted that chaos was closing in.

'Nice-looking boat,' said Kim, bouncing into the small aft cockpit and looking bright-eyed around. She was dressed again in jeans and a red T-shirt with the same beaten-up sneakers she'd worn at tennis. 'How often do you use it – five or six times a year?'

'A little more than that,' I said, checking the sails as we ghosted slowly downwind in the light breeze. 'Actually I own only half of it.'

'I hope it's the half above water,' said Kim, smiling. She moved to peer down the companionway into the salon.

I looked at her rounded rear and grimaced. How I hated a behind like that, a cute behind that pretended it didn't know it was cute – one of the prime sources of chaos loose in the universe.

Kim turned back to me, shaking her head.

'I like canoes,' she said, sitting down again, this time on the settee opposite me.

'Me too.'

'Then why'd you buy this monster?' she asked.

'I thought you said it was nice,' I said, meeting her gaze evenly. What a little bitch.

'Well?'

'Because I can afford it,' I said.

'You can afford to help the poor too, or the arts. Done much of that lately?'

'Not much,' I said, wondering why she had it in for me – unless she was attracted to me as I was to her, and it was annoying her the way it was me.

She turned away and let her eyes follow Akito, slowly receding towards the lighthouse in the runabout.

'Me neither,' she said unexpectedly.

'Are you always this critical of people you meet?'

'No. Only a few. I can never understand why rich people spend money the way they do. Jerks can never give me an interesting answer. I thought you might.'

Akito had reached the lighthouse and seemed to be slowly circling it.

'I think we spend most of it in order to make sure we'll be able to have more to spend,' I answered quietly. 'And to make sure that other people know we have it.'

She nodded and looked away.

'What a waste,' she said.

'Why do you spend your money?' I asked.

She laughed.

'To eat,' she said. 'To keep the rain out. Say,' she added, turning suddenly serious, 'I think you ought to know that Honoria's a lot nicer than she seems.'

'Well, I would hope so,' I said, laughing.

'No, I mean it,' said Kim with unaccustomed sincerity. 'She comes across as cool and controlled, but I want to assure you, underneath all that is a heart of steel.'

This time we both laughed.

'She's the only rich relative that I ever have any real fun with – except some of the men, of course, who figure that since I'm usually penniless I must be easy. Nori's a little spoiled, but too bright to be a snob like the rest of them.'

'Thanks for the data,' I said, still grinning, 'although I'm not sure I'll quote you to her. By the way, where do you plan to work now that you're back east again?'

Akito was now on his way back.

'Beats me,' she said. 'I'm good at a lot of things, but most of them aren't marketable. I can chart an astrological sign, maybe get in touch with some spirit from some other dimension, but the esoteric is unfortunately not very interested in money.'

'Do the spirits ever tell you anything about the future?' I asked, smiling at myself for even now looking for an insider angle.

'Not really,' said Kim, as she stood and shaded her eyes to stare at the approaching Akito. 'She – the spirit – tells me to get off my butt and get a job, to stop living hand to mouth, stop mooching off rich Uncle William.' She turned to me with a smile, her damn eyes glowing as if she were approaching orgasm. 'No matter how many times I ask, it still tells me to work and settle down. A million spirits on the astral plane and I get a Republican free-enterpriser.' She shook her head.

I couldn't help smiling back.

'I might be able to find something for you – not necessarily at BB&P.'

'That'd be more mooching,' she said. 'Besides,' she added over her shoulder as she stood to greet the returning Akito, 'you've got your quest to worry about.'

'Oh, yes, that,' I said, although my gaze and thoughts were again on a cute behind.

11

But that evening, back alone in my East Village apartment, I did begin to worry about my quest. My father's fresh intrusion into my life wasn't as distressing as his ancient departure, but it was bad enough. The decision to *find* my father was exhilarating, much more a challenge than a burden, even though part of the thrill was the danger involved. If I ignored the FBI and the tabloid article then I'd have no control over what might explode next on to the public scene, not to mention what Mr Battle might do about it. On the other hand, if I actually found Luke, could I really hope to get him to cool it until I was safely married and had stashed away my first few million? It seemed doubtful.

And what if my father were innocent of Lukedom and of whatever the FBI was after him for, perhaps even leading a dull, conventional life that would satisfy Mr Battle that he was as good as dead? Maybe Luke was a harmless eccentric, being used by others for nefarious purposes. That was it! My father was a dupe, a fallguy! But I was a little depressed at this image of my father; I preferred the darker, more compelling image of some hidden malevolent power manipulating strings behind the scenes. Still, innocent dupe or harmless corpse were both solutions to the threat hanging over me.

As I paced back and forth across my large loft living room, from the wall of bookcases with scruffy paperbacks to my trading corner with computers and fax and reference books, I realized that I felt more engaged by this decision to find my father than I had by anything in years. It almost seemed as if I'd been treading water most of my life but now at last was starting to swim out at full power. Confronting my father and all he had done to poison my life – and was now doing again! – seemed right, seemed to energize my being in a way my trading and getting and spending wasn't. At last I was to meet the enemy. The great personal quest of my life had begun.

Larry's highly personal quest naturally included using his secretary, and Miss Claybell proved to be as efficient a demon digging into Luke Rhinehart's past as she was at digging into the dirt behind corporate reports. From the New York Library she brought Larry back copies of an amazing array of old newspaper and magazine articles about Luke and his dice followers, most from the early seventies; after that Luke dropped from sight. Occasionally they stumbled upon some reference to him in more recent articles or books about the counterculture of the sixties and early seventies, most references referring to him in the past tense – as if he were already dead.

In fact, Miss Claybell discovered two or three pulp magazines that did in fact report his death. One story had Luke tragically dying while wrestling with an alligator – a one chance in thirty-six option supposedly chosen by the dice. Since the alligator had ended up with the upper third of Luke's body, identification was a bit tenuous, but *The Investigator* was certain of the facts.

Another story had Luke dying of a heart attack while enjoying an orgy at one of his still existing dice centre communes. In this case, reported *The Nation's Reporter*, Luke's body had been cremated in an elaborate religious ceremony attended by all eighty of the commune members. One former 'bride' allegedly tried to throw herself on the funeral pyre, but was restrained by less fanatic hands.

There were also references to Dr Jake Ecstein, Luke's old friend and colleague, and to the numerous articles and books Jake had written in the seventies about chance and personality. But references to Jake too tailed off to nothing. The library seemed to be a dead end.

And in other ways too that week was an unproductive one for Larry. He was trading exactly as he had for most of the last four years, but remained in his trading slump. And knowing that the Nagasaki Somu Bank had invested fifteen million dollars in the BB&P Futures Fund didn't help Larry's peace of mind. Fifteen million had seemed like small potatoes when Mr Battle had given him the news on Monday, and it was also discouraging that the Japanese insisted that Larry provide a complete accounting of every trade to good old Akito, who was staying on in New York as manager of their New York branch. Knowing that Akito and a many-billion-dollar bank were watching over his shoulder made each tiny reversal that week twice as painful as usual. Now. just when it would

be most helpful for a few of his indicators to work like clockwork, they were working like Mexican jumping beans, only with even less reliable predictability.

Jeff Cannister came into Larry's office on Thursday of that week looking as hunched-over and pale as Larry had ever seen him.

'The sky is falling,' said Jeff blankly and, without another word, left as quickly as he'd entered.

Larry stared after him for a long moment and then had the uneasy feeling that Jeff had finally flipped: that the losses, which were unnerving the usually cool-headed Larry, had crushed the last remnant of sanity of the excitable Jeff. With reluctance and dread he shuffled out of his office to find Jeff and see just how serious it was.

Jeff was standing in the middle of the large open office area and staring blankly at a monitor in an unoccupied cubicle. Larry eased up to him cautiously.

'How's it going?' Larry asked with as much casualness as his frayed nerves could manufacture.

'The sky is falling,' said Jeff, in the same dull voice he'd used in the office, a nerve jumping in his jawline.

'Uh, how badly is it falling?' asked Larry carefully. 'Has it broken through support areas?'

Jeff continued to stare at the monitor for a long moment and then turned blankly to Larry.

'The centre will not hold,' Jeff announced dully.

'Which centre?' asked Larry, hoping no one was watching, no one hearing.

'*The* centre,' announced Jeff.

'Ahhh,' said Larry, 'that one.'

'The market's in free fall,' went on Jeff.

Larry glanced quickly at the monitor to reassure himself that Jeff was not reporting a factual condition of the market and saw that the stock market was doing nothing unusual. In fact, none of the futures markets was doing anything unusual either, unless you counted losing money for BB&P.

'Free fall,' echoed Larry nervously.

'The nail is in the coffin,' said Jeff.

'Ahhh.'

'The last helicopter has left the roof.'

Larry took Jeff gently by the elbow and began to steer him towards the elevators. There was a doctor on duty on the third floor, a psychiatrist actually, for exactly this son of development.

'*Après moi, le déluge,*' said Jeff.

Larry smiled heartily at a Vice-President for Business Affairs whom they passed.

'Mighty Casey has struck out,' announced Jeff.

At the elevators Larry pushed the down button and waited impatiently. He suddenly realized that Jeff was the calmest Larry had ever seen him, pale and dull-eyed, but totally calm.

'The missiles have left their silos and no one remembers the recall code,' said Jeff, looking suddenly at Larry with a slight frown of worry.

'It's just war games,' Larry suggested.

Jeff stared at him for a minute, and then, as the elevator arrived, sighed.

'And worst of all,' said Jeff, and at last his face broke into its more familiar lines of anxiety and pain and his voice became a cry of anguish, 'our gold positions are down another point and a half.'

Of course as soon as Jeff began wailing uncontrollably about a point and a half movement in the price of gold, Larry knew he was totally sane and needed no medical help.

12

When Miss Claybell had exhausted the resources of the NY Public Library I had her begin calling the New York City Police Department to see if they were still involved in the case. Unfortunately, or fortunately, depending on what mood I was in, no one seemed ever to have heard of Luke Rhinehart, repeatedly suggesting to Miss Claybell that she try lost and found. When Miss Claybell asked about the Lieutenant Nathaniel Putt who had been a prominent pursuer of Luke twenty years before, no one had heard of Putt either. Finally she located a Detective Cooper in the 20th Precinct who was reputedly an old friend of Putt's, and he agreed to talk to me.

He turned out to be a hollow-voiced man who listened stonily until I mentioned the Dice Man. 'Oh, Jesus, him,' he said affably. 'That guy just about drove Putt into the loony bin.'

'You remember the case?'

'Sure,' said Cooper. 'I mean how many guys accused of something tell us the dice told them to do it? Drove Putt bananas. One day this guy Rhinehart would confess to half the things we were after him for, and the next he'd say the dice had told him to lie in confessing, but that now the truth was that he was innocent. 'Course the dice told him to say that too. Poor Putt.'

'Where might I find him?'

'Putt thought Rhinehart was a murderer, embezzler, rapist, forger, traffic violator and general all-round menace.' Cooper went on, ignoring the question. 'But until that lime he helped those Commie radicals raid the TV station he could never prove anything. Had to go after him for breaking FCC regulations. Putt was on the case for seven months officially and two years after that on his own – after Rhinehart jumped bail.'

'Did he find any leads?'

'Not so you'd notice,' said Cooper. 'He got pretty closed-mouth about it after a while, though. A little nuts, you know? He told me once just before he left the force that he prayed every night that God would give the man what he deserved. "What's that?" I asked. "Castration and dismemberment," says Putt.' Detective Cooper laughed.

'Do you have any idea how I might locate this Mr Putt?' I pressed again, irritably.

'Sure,' said Cooper. 'Try the FBI. Putt got his law degree and joined the bureau. He likes to wear suits.'

I couldn't decide whether to pursue the Putt lead into the FBI or not. It seemed a little silly to go and ask them where Luke was when just two weeks before they had come to me with the same question. Instead I decided to see what I could find out from the *World Star*.

Kurt Lyman was a ton of fun. He received me in his office at the *World Star* with a hearty handshake and a big grin. He was a small wiry man whose conviviality seemed inconsistent with his slight build. His office was a mess and throughout our talk a chunky secretary kept scurrying in and out, scavenging for papers or notes either on the desk or in a file cabinet, but ignoring Lyman and me as if we were custodial help.

'So you're the guy's son, huh?' asked Lyman after he had motioned me to a chair still slightly buried in papers and had himself sprawled back in the tip back chair behind his desk. 'He must be raking in millions, right?'

'I wouldn't know,' I answered irritably. 'I haven't seen him in years and need to locate him.'

'Hey, if I had a daddy who was worshipped by thousands of assholes with money I'd want to find him too.'

I did a wondrous job of not showing active displeasure.

'You indicated in your article that no one seemed to know for sure where this Luke Rhinehart was,' I went on. 'Do you have any ideas about where I might look for my father or how I might find him? I assume you have a lot of material that you didn't include in your article.'

‘Hey, I never even went to the place,’ Lyman countered easily. ‘The whole article is based on this girl who came to us. Even the photo of the church comes from some Polaroid she took when she was there.’

‘Did she say she’d ever met this Luke Rhinehart?’

‘Met your father?’ echoed Lyman, grinning. ‘No, she says she met some people who claimed they had seen him in the commune – one girl even claimed the Big Dice Daddy fucked her in the orgy room – but our source herself never saw him.’

‘Why didn’t your paper send someone to the commune to dig up some more juicy stuff?’

‘Funny you should ask,’ said Lyman, poking at his nose with the eraser end of a pencil. ‘Griggs wanted to go for it but seems the girl couldn’t tell east from west or Paris from Pittsburgh. She says a girlfriend drove her there through a lot of back-country roads someplace down in Virginia or North Carolina or Kentucky. We spent about half an hour over some road maps with her and we might as well have been throwing darts. We couldn’t narrow it down any better than a big circle of more than a hundred and fifty miles’ diameter. Turns out she was asleep or stoned most of the way.’

‘She doesn’t sound like too reliable a source.’

‘Reliable source!’ snorted Lyman with a grin. ‘Christ, compared to some of our sources she was integrity incarnate. She was simple, sincere and spacey. Everything in that article of mine is the God’s truth by the standards of the *World Star*.’

‘So the commune exists and people say that my father is there,’ I suggested, looking at Lyman sceptically.

‘Yep.’

‘Is there a chance I can talk to the girl?’

‘Sure, there’s a chance,’ said Lyman, tipping forward in his chair and vaguely shuffling among some of the papers on his desk. ‘But not much of a one. She gave us a phone number in Pennsylvania where she said she was going, but when I phoned there a week ago to ask her something, they said she’d never showed up and they wanted nothing to do with her.’

‘Can I have that phone number?’ I asked.

Lyman was still groping absently at his papers.

‘The number?’ he said and finally looked up at me. ‘Of course not,’ he added. ‘We have to protect our sources.’

13

More than two months before Larry had been visited by the FBI Jeff had known he could take it no more. He saw clearly that there was some Malignant Force permeating the financial markets that was perversely working to thwart his every move. Whenever he or Larry would be making a profit on a trade Jeff would be furiously wondering how this Malignant Force was using this temporary profit to trick them into a much greater loss. Jeff had concluded then that every profitable trade was in fact a demonic trick to lure Jeff on, to give him a false sense of hope, to make him believe that he still might possibly make money as a futures trader.

He couldn't tell Larry about his new discovery. Larry was an agnostic. Larry had no sense of the Divine which moved through and controlled all things, especially the Malignant Divine. But Jeff knew. Jeff was a believer. The Gods did not take kindly to mere humans presuming to be able to predict the future. And what was futures trading if not the arrogant act of a man thinking he could predict the direction of the price of something? The Greeks called it *hubris*. The Hebrews called it pride. The results were the same: the arrogant presumer ended up a cripple, a crackpot or a *clutz*.

Jeff had finally decided to do something to end his madness. No longer would he challenge the Gods' domain over the future. He would never again presume to know something that only the Gods could know. He would become religious. He would honour the Gods. He would acknowledge that only factual knowledge should or could be used to take an investment position. He solemnly vowed that he would never voluntarily trade again except on the basis of privileged insider information. That, he knew, the Gods could accept.

Cheating was not presumptuous. Indeed, the Gods expected it of man. Cheating was a man's way of acknowledging that he knew no way of beating the laws of chance. Cheating was, in fact, the rational man's answer to the great Mystery of Life. Some men of course simply surrendered to the laws of chance and let themselves be buried by random events, content to be rich or poor on the basis of something no more purposeful than the toss of a coin. Not Jeff. Not a full American. The American way was to attack the unexpected, eliminate the unexpected, control the unexpected. In the futures markets there was only one reliable way: you cheated.

It was an incredible breakthrough for Jeff when he had this religious conversion. He felt like a gay must feel who, after many years of trying to go straight, suddenly and finally gives in to his deepest desires, and becomes what he fundamentally is. He'd known for almost a year of a certain person, X, who was able to give insider information to certain people, information which tended to make those certain people look very brilliant to others who had no such means of being certain. It had filled Jeff with gloomy and agonized anguish to know that Pete Riddles of Shearson was getting promoted and doubting his bonus because he accepted that certain person's info, while Jeff, corrupted by the influence of Larry, still desperately believed that intelligence and skill could permit him to triumph over the future and futures and the Gods.

But then, luckily, Larry's system had begun to produce losses with almost the same dull consistency that it used to produce gains. The Gods were beginning to make their move on Larry. Jeff would save Larry. Jeff would confess his *hubris* to the Gods, agree never to challenge their domain over the future again, and make money for BB&P by cheating – the way every great American had made his success.

He had phoned the certain person for the first time two months before Larry's papa problems had come crashing down on him. He made his first trade based on insider information two weeks later. It had involved going short the Japanese yen the day before the US balance of trade figures were to be released. Since BB&P already were short some yen contracts Jeff was able to use his discretion to triple the position. The next day the BB&P Fund had its best profit in more than a month, and Larry had gloated that maybe their little slump was over.

Three weeks later Jeff had scored a smaller coup when 'X' had given him advance information on an FDA approval of an anti-Aids drug that would make a certain biotech stock soar. Jeff had quietly bought shares of the stock for various of his managed accounts and some call options also, mostly in his Aunt Mildred's account. He'd mildly recommended the shares to Brad Burner, but not in a pushy way and Brad had ignored it. When the biostock shot up after the FDA approval of its drug, Jeff himself didn't make any money – in fact he lost some since he had to give 20 per cent of his profits in cash to 'X' – but his personal stock with Brad and his clients rose considerably. For a few mad moments Jeff almost relaxed.

Now Jeff was considering a new trade based on his third surreptitious phone call to his certain person. The information he'd been given was simple: at 10 A.M. the following Wednesday, an hour and a half after bond futures trading started, the government would release the beige book report on the state of the American economy. That report, so the certain person indicated, would show that the nation's economy was much weaker than expected. The bond market would rally. Bond futures might even soar. Jeff planned, over the next three trading days, to quadruple the long position in bond futures in the BB&P Fund and accumulate at least a million dollars of long-term government bonds for his clients and the house bond fund. In five days, if things were announced as the certain person said they would be, bond prices would rise sharply. So would bond futures.

Thus, humbly asking the Gods not to send an earthquake, revolution or presidential assassination between Friday and the following Wednesday at ten and thus mess up the works, Jeff promised the Gods to take his profits that day at noon. Far be it from him to predict what the market would do on its own without any advanced news from an insider.

FROM LUKE'S JOURNAL

Socrates once won first prize in an Athenian quiz game by answering that he knew nothing, but his answer has won few prizes since. Men continue to be ignorant of their ignorance, illuded by illusions. Playliving begins with the assumption that men are fools and the wisest man is he who plays the role to the hilt. Men's lives are based 90 per cent on lies; about the other 10 per cent we don't yet know enough to be sure.

Illusion and inconsistency are the two great enemies of Truth and Honesty, those twin deities of Western man which have caged him in the house of boredom. Both are basic to man's fulfilment and happiness.

In living life freely any insight held more than the moment appropriate to it becomes an illusion and a snare. For every name, idea, insight applied over any period of time deadens that part of the universe it touches. To name is to experience. To name a part of the flow always the same way is to experience it always the same way and thus to die to life. To live freshly entails continually re-creating experience, continually unlearning, continually destroying the old names, the old truths, and creating a new world and fresh experience by giving to the flow new names.

14

It had taken Miss Claybell more than a half dozen calls to locate Agent Nathaniel Putt. He worked in the Washington bureau. When Larry got back from his less than successful trip to Mr Lyman he phoned Putt and told him who he was and what he wanted. Putt said it might be helpful if they could meet. Larry derided this was too important to delegate to Miss Claybell, and Honoria was tied up, so he flew alone to Washington.

Putt turned out to be quite different from the image conjured up by Detective Cooper's stories. He was a large florid man in his fifties with a face that looked as if it had seen every crime ever committed and was therefore a bit sceptical about the human race. But he seemed subdued and only marginally interested in Luke Rhinehart.

'You're his son, are you?' Putt asked, after seeming to browse through some of the file he had brought out on Rhinehart.

'Yes, I am,' said Larry. 'I'd like to locate him.'

'Well, I can't see how we can help you,' said Putt. 'The bureau was on the case for a few years but didn't come up with anything. Then Carter got into office and discouraged us from chasing kooks and suggested we consider crooks instead. The file's been inactive for fifteen years – not closed but inactive.'

'But I thought –' Larry began.

'Actually, old Luke here is still wanted on about a half dozen federal charges. But he's probably long dead and buried. We got two or three reports of his death No corpse unfortunately.'

'But I thought – two weeks ago two agents who questioned me said he was wanted for what he was doing now!'

Putt peered at Larry over his thick horn-rimmed glasses. 'What agents?' he asked.

'FBI agents,' Larry countered. 'Two tall skinny guys. One of them left me his card. Here ...' He took out his wallet. 'See. A man named Hayes.'

Putt leaned forward to accept the card from Larry, sniffed at it, turned it over, and then shook his head.

'Oh, them,' he said. 'Just routine. The bureau has to follow up on every open case at least once every three years. They were just going through the motions.'

'It didn't seem that way to me,' Larry said.

'Nevertheless,' said Putt, slipping the card into the file. 'I'm afraid we can't help you locate Rhinehart.'

'What about his followers?' asked Larry. 'Didn't they form communities around the country – little dicedoms or something like that?'

'Oh, yeah,' said Putt, looking down at his file and then slipping back into his chair. 'According to the file here we sent agents into two or three of them.' As Putt perused the file the furrows on his brow grew and his flushed face flushed further. 'Seems that two of the agents left the agency without ever filing a report. The one agent who did file one claimed that nothing anyone ever said at this place was reliable so he had no new idea where Rhinehart might be.' A nervous tic rubberbanded twice across Putt's cheek and then subsided.

'But do you have the addresses of some of these places?'

Putt looked a long time at Larry and then excused himself for a few minutes. He was away half an hour.

When he returned he again stared a long moment at Larry.

'You're determined to find your father, are you?'

'I am,' said Larry.

‘OK then,’ said Pull. ‘Maybe we can be of help. We’re pretty sure that there’s one of these dice centres still in existence. It’s, ah, it’s a place called Lukedom – but it’s not on any map. We’re not actually sure where it is – someplace in West Virginia or Tennessee we think, but since the case is inactive we haven’t pursued it. You interested?’

‘Of course,’ said Larry. ‘But that’s not much to go on.’

‘There’s a lady,’ said Putt. ‘An Arlene Ecstein. She might know. She was Rhinehart’s mistress or something back when everyone was crazy. Her husband was a big deal in the movement. We even think the husband, Jake Ecstein, might be behind some of these dice communes. Anyway, if I were trying to find Rhinehart I’d question her.’

‘I remember Mrs Ecstein,’ said Larry, frowning. ‘My God, she became the flakiest of them all.’

‘Yeah,’ said Putt. ‘I think you’re right. She’s probably not too reliable.’

‘You know where she is?’

‘Got an address,’ Putt replied, looking down at his file. ‘It’s five or six years old. Might help.’

After Agent Putt had escorted Larry to his door, walking with a big slow lumbering waddle, he closed the door slowly behind him. Then he slammed one fist into another and his eyes blazed. He almost leapt to his desk and punched out a number.

‘Get me Macavoy!!’ he barked. ‘Get him in here!’

While he waited, he phoned to reserve a car for Macavoy and then began pacing back and forth. For fifteen years – ever since he’d been denied a promotion because of his failures on the case – he’d been after this guy Rhinehart and come up blank every time. He’d watched as the man’s influence had waxed and waned, but always spreading pornography, promiscuity, Aids, herpes, dope, violence, unwed mothers and welfare cheats. Now his kid, who must be as nutty as his father but seemed to hide it better, had finally decided to try to find his old man. It could well be the break Putt had been looking for all these years.

When Macavoy entered he stood at polite attention until Putt turned to him. Macavoy was a deadly serious young man, an agent for only two years and convinced that two-thirds of being a successful agent lay in being steadily sombre and serious.

‘Rhinehart’s son has decided to try to find his father,’ Putt announced gruffly, his bloodshot eyes blazing.

‘How is this going to help us?’ Macavoy asked.

‘These dicequeers won’t talk to cops or reporters or us,’ Putt answered. ‘But they may be willing to talk to someone whose last name is Rhinehart and happens to be the bastard’s son. Putt stopped pacing and made a facial expression which may have been a smile.

‘I want you to put a loose tail on this kid,’ he went on. ‘Stick with him for as long as he’s going after Rhinehart senior. Stick with him until he leads us to the old madman himself.’

‘You mean Rhinehart senior?’

‘That’s right. Rhinehart. The worst threat to American society since Karl Marx.’ Macavoy nodded soberly.

15

Arlene Ecsiein's phone number was in the Queens phone book, and it turned out she lived in Hempstead, Long Island, not exactly a bastion of kookiness. Larry was surprised on phoning her to find himself talking to a gentle grandmotherly woman who tended to babble on a bit about 'dear old Luke' and 'your wonderful mother', and 'wasn't it a shame ...' and so on.

He reported his meeting with Putt and his follow-up phone call to Arlene and his memories of her to Honoria and Kim at the Battles' Upper East Side luxury apartment. Luke's seduction of Arlene had been his first dice decision, his first step on his 'downward path to self-destruction' as Larry put it, or 'first test of the malleability of the human soul' as Luke's followers had since put it. In any case, as Larry explained, Arlene had soon become a fanatic practitioner of the dicelife, blossoming from a frustrated and unfulfilled childless housewife to an earthy mother, career woman and 'slut' – the last word being Larry's interpretation of her subsequent dicelife. Larry hadn't seen her since he was a boy. At first Honoria had seemed put off by Larry's recitation, but when Kim seemed eager to meet Arlene, Honoria wisely decided she would go with her fiancé.

It turned out that Arlene lived in one half of a somewhat run-down duplex in a mostly white neighbourhood that looked as if it was struggling to maintain its dignity. The doorbell didn't work, so Larry had to bang several times on the old wooden door.

When it opened, Larry and a tense, wary Honoria found themselves facing a large, white-haired lady wearing a long brown dress with a black shawl thrown over her upper half. She peered at them through thick glasses and then smiled warmly.

'My, how you've grown,' she said, as if imitating every ancient relative since the beginning of time. 'I'd never have recognized you if you hadn't phoned first. How's your father?'

Of course that's what Larry wanted to know, so her asking was a bit of a setback. But Arlene didn't seem to expect an answer and went babbling happily on about the good old days and wasn't it a shame and sugar? milk? or lemon? in the tea. As Arlene bustled away towards her tiny kitchen Larry and Honoria exchanged discouraged looks from the deep ancient armchairs they found themselves buried in.

When Arlene had returned she served them lukewarm tea with some stale Stella Dora biscuits. Then with a loud groan she settled herself down into the overstuffed couch.

'The arthritis does get to one over the years,' she said. 'I hope it hasn't hit poor Luke.'

'We were wondering where Dr Rhinehart might be,' said Honoria, wanting to get to the point. 'Have you heard from him recently?'

'Oh, no,' said Arlene 'Luke hasn't written or phoned me in years and years. He has to lie low, you know. The police are after him.'

'We know,' said Honoria. 'Where was he the last time he wrote or phoned?'

'Oh, that was years ago,' said Arlene, looking off into space. 'I'm sure he's moved since then.'

'Where was it?' asked Larry.

'Oh, here in New York, I guess,' Arlene answered. 'It's all rather vague now. He wasn't much for precision.'

'Where's your husband?' Honoria asked.

'Oh, Jake's down south, I think,' said Arlene. 'He's become a guru or priest or something, I hear, but still writing books. He'll never stop writing books.'

'I see,' said Honoria.

'He always wanted to be a king or a president, but I guess he's had to settle for a smaller kingdom.'

'And where exactly in the south?' asked Larry.

‘Well, now, let me see,’ said Arlene, frowning. ‘A little town in Virginia I think. Not even on the map. Lukedom. Jake named it after your father.’

Larry and Honoria both sat up straighter in their chairs.

‘Do you know where it is?’ asked Honoria.

‘Oh, my, no,’ said Arlene. ‘Jake says it’s not on any map. That’s why he had to send me instructions about how to get there.’

‘You have instructions about how to get there!?’ said Larry.

Arlene looked surprised.

‘My goodness, that’s right,’ she said. ‘I guess I do. I never went, so I never even bothered to read them, but I know he sent them. I wonder what I did with that letter.’

While Larry and Honoria sat on the edge of their chairs – or as close as the deep, broken-sprung chairs would permit – and exchanged glances, Arlene bumbled up off the couch to putter around her desk, mumbling happy apologies for her sloppiness and finally returning with a big smile and a letter.

‘See,’ she said. ‘I told you Jake had written instructions and here they are.’ She adjusted her glasses and peered down at the paper. ‘Lukedom. Dirt-road route to Lukedom. Were you thinking of visiting Jake?’

‘Yes,’ said Honoria. ‘Larry is interested in seeing his father and we thought this tittle village might have some people in it – Dr Ecstein, for example – who might have some idea where he is.’

‘How nice!’ said Arlene. ‘You’re going to see your father! Do say hello to him for me and tell that naughty man to write.’

Larry nodded, and a few minutes later, sketchmap in hand, he and Honoria said goodbye to Arlene. She wanted to have them take some of the stale Stella Dora cookies and offered to throw in some son of frozen pie she had made the previous year, but they politely declined. She told them to give Jake a big kiss for her and tell him she was getting along just fine. She said she’d like to find Lukie too and give him a piece of her mind. She was still babbling away when they finally managed to leave.

Larry and Honoria edged carefully down the old wooden stairs into the smelly night of Hempstead and were soon back in Larry’s Mercedes speeding towards Manhattan.

After Arlene had closed the door behind her two visitors, she grinned, shook her head, and began to shuffle back into the living room. Then she stopped in front of an old full-length mirror and looked at herself. She stretched and smiled again.

Then she reached up and began pulling at her white hair until, with a sudden wrench, the entire white wig came sliding off, revealing a mass of jet-black hair pinned down. After putting the white wig in a cardboard box with others on a closet shelf, she reached back and unpinned her hair, sending a cascade of touched-up black hair down on to her shoulders. She shook her head and smiled.

She checked her watch, frowned and took off her black shawl. Then, as she began to walk with a decidedly younger step towards the bathroom she flipped her shawl into a bedroom as she passed. On the way she took off her thick glasses and left them on a shelf in the hall. In front of the mirror in the bathroom she began to insert contact lenses into her eyes. When she’d finished she began to apply ‘the works’, as she called the creams, mascaras, eyeshadow, line erasers, blushers that were any woman’s staple when she wanted to look younger. This done, she left for the bedroom to change her clothes and prepare for her evening out.

But twenty minutes after Larry and Honoria had left there was a knock on the door of Arlene’s duplex. It was Agent Macavoy. He had dutifully followed Larry’s Mercedes and knew, when they had arrived at Browning Street in Hempstead, that the two were questioning Arlene Ecstein. After they’d left, he decided it might be worthwhile if he had a few words with the lady. If she told him what she’d told them it would simplify his surveillance.

The door was finally opened. A big-busted woman wearing a low-cut flaming-red dress and high heels greeted him with a slow smile. If Arlene had looked well into her fifties for Larry and Honoria, she looked closer to a well-preserved and heavily endowed forty now.

‘Hi,’ she said. ‘What can I do for you?’

Agent Macavoy pulled out his FBI identification and held it in front of her face.

‘Mrs Ecstein?’ he said coldly. ‘Macavoy, FBI. A few questions.’

Arlene didn’t even glance at his ID, but simply swung the door open wide and invited him in.

‘Sure,’ said Arlene. ‘I was just going out, but I love answering questions.’ She walked over to her desk and, with her back to Macavoy – for a moment he worried that she might be going for a weapon – she seemed to fiddle with something there before turning. As she came towards him he saw that it was just a couple of dice.

‘So,’ she said, coming back up to him with a smile. ‘What can I do for you?’

Macavoy halted at her approach and looked at her severely, hoping to put her in a properly respectful if not fearful frame of mind.

Arlene ran her tongue around her lips and idly routed her shoulders so that her breasts momentarily swelled up towards the neckline of her low-cut dress then receded – two round white tides swelling and receding.

‘Few questions,’ said Macavoy. ‘Like did you tell your recent visitors where they might find –’

‘My God, you’re a hunk,’ said Arlene, reaching her two hands up briefly to knead each of Macavoy’s shoulders and eyeing him up and down. ‘You work out every day?’

‘Uh, every other day,’ said Macavoy, taken aback and actually retreating a step. ‘Uh, Luke Rhinehart, Mrs Ecstein. Did you –’

‘No, no, more than that,’ said Arlene, moving her hands inside his suit jacket to his chest and squeezing through his shirt the muscles around his nipples. ‘You must have played football or lifted weights, right?’

Macavoy was retreating sideways now, into the living room.

‘Basketball actually,’ said Macavoy ‘But, uh, what did you tell –’

‘And a belly like a steel wall.’ said Arlene, whose fingers were kneading his abdomen as the two of them danced slowly from the hallway across the living room, Macavoy retreating, Arlene effortlessly advancing.

‘Look, Mrs Ecstein, I –’

‘And thighs like –’

‘Aghhhh!!’ said Macavoy as Arlene’s fingers probed his inner thighs so suddenly he actually jumped, almost breaking their physical contact.

‘Great hard haunches of bullmeat,’ concluded Arlene.

16

After meeting Arlene Ecstein I confess I began to have some doubts about my quest. Arlene was so harmless that it rubbed off on to Luke: I seemed to be making a mountain out of a molehill. Besides, I didn't see how I could spare the time to go down into the southern wilderness to search for a man who probably wasn't there. And a pan of me was equally afraid he *would* be there. I passed over the first weekend I might have gone by escorting Honoria to a gala charity ball given by several old-line Wall Streeters as a way of showing their commitment to the needy – whether the 'needy' referred to those to whom a bit of the money raised eventually trickled down or to the socialites themselves was unclear.

The following week was a hectic one, marked primarily by Jeff's 'hunch' on bonds and bond futures proving to be a good one; our BB&P Futures Fund soared almost 6 per cent in one day. Akito phoned and complained he couldn't tell from my indicators why I'd taken such a large bond futures position and then, after making good profits in just two days, gone flat. I hemmed and hawed and concocted a series of mostly fictitious variables to disguise the fact that I'd taken a large position because one of my most unstable traders had a hunch, and gone flat for the same reason.

In his new strange state Jeff seemed to want to go flat in almost everything. It was like pulling teeth to get the poor man to go long or short anything, Jeff inevitably muttering darkly about risks and 'challenging the Gods', and only going away to execute the orders because he knew I'd have to fire him if he didn't.

But even as I pretended to throw myself into my trading and my life with Honoria I felt the pull of Lukedom. I finally decided that if I went the weekend before election day then even if I had to stay longer than two days at least the Tuesday of the election the markets would be closed and I'd miss only one day of trading.

Honoria didn't want to go with me. For one thing she couldn't afford to take any days off from Salomon Brothers, not even the Monday before election day. For another, that part of Virginia was the pits as far as she could tell. Lukedom appeared to be located at the far southern end of the state, buried in barren stripmine hills, probably surrounded by people who had starred in the film *Deliverance*. Kim seemed interested in going, but I knew that Honoria might not take too kindly to my travelling alone with Kim, so I pretended I didn't notice her interest.

Still, I decided to make one last effort to get Honoria to come with me. I arranged to meet her at 'Wipples', a fashionable financial district bar best known for having one whole wall on which customers had over the years written various stock, bond and futures recommendations. They also dated and signed them. 'Wipples' then saw to it that the best always remained, despite the efforts of their authors to remove them. Hence customers were able to note that one well-known Wall Street guru had urged clients to 'sell everything' in August 1982 just before stock were to take off like a missile launch. Another wrote in September 1987 that the market would hit 3,000 by mid-October. Instead it hit 1,750. But except for the wall – to which I'd wisely never contributed – the place was a simple, unpretentious bar that humbly charged all the traffic would bear.

Which was considerable. The bar had a reputation for being the place one went after a particularly brilliant or lucky financial coup, so going there implied one was brilliant or lucky. At any rate it implied you could afford to pay ten dollars for a shot of whisky, which certainly showed something.

When I arrived Kim was with Honoria, and wearing a dress, one of those new short spandex things, black, that hugged the body and begged you to watch each vibration. Since it was mid-thigh-length Kim's black-stockinged legs stuck invitingly out beneath the table. I hadn't seen much of her since she'd gotten a part-time job promoting some Upper East Side health club.

Honorina, like most of the other female patrons, was dressed in a more sedate and stylish manner, a mauve and white business suit which, with her blonde hair, was dramatic. As I sat down at the booth with them I couldn't help feel my male ego swell – the two foxiest ladies in the joint.

Kim, as far as I knew, normally avoided Wall Street types – except maybe the rebels and losers – and couldn't usually spend much time with Honorina, their lifestyles overlapping only in that both ate, slept and peed. As Honorina waved at me, I wondered vaguely why Kim was here.

I ordered the cheapest drink on the menu: I hated overpaying for a drink as much as overpaying for a security. Then I again urged Honorina to accompany me on my drive south to find my father.

'As I understand it,' Honorina responded, shaking her head with a mock groan, 'I am being asked to visit a hippie commune caught in some time warp left over from the sixties. Is that right?'

'Maybe,' I said. 'But I really don't care one way or another.'

'That Arlene Ecstein certainly didn't turn out to be a hippie,' suggested Kim.

'That's true,' said Honorina. 'If your father has degenerated into the male equivalent of Mrs Ecstein, then I suppose our worst worry would be that we'll be bored to death.'

'But it would be nice if some of the sixties was still alive today,' Kim went on. 'That two or three people still existed who weren't chained to chasing money and ripping each other off.'

'In those days,' said Honorina, 'parents were so stupidly liberal, their rebellious children didn't have to worry about money – doting parents sent moneygrams. Today we know better. Rebellious youth are disinherited before their hair even reaches the back of their neck. Reserve your compassion for condors and spotted owls.'

'Actually it's that we know better now,' I said, thinking that the sixties and my father were part of the same sickness. 'We want to make something of our lives instead of drifting with some flow that eventually strands us in a bog.'

'Yes, but the flowing and the bogs often seem so much more interesting than the upward march on the treadmill,' said Kim, grinning a challenge at me.

'Nonsense,' snapped Honorina, wriggling her bottom on the chair in annoyance. 'What's wrong with minding the store? Perhaps for you and the sixties the treadmill symbolizes repetitious drudgery. For us it symbolizes staying in shape and getting ahead.'

'Maybe so, but getting ahead for what?' countered Kim, her eyes getting brighter and a flush appearing on her cheeks. 'Staying in shape for what? As far as I can see people stay in shape in order to do better on the treadmill, and get ahead in order to get further ahead. Where's the joy? Where's the payoff?'

'The payoff is a six-figure income,' said Honorina. 'Not to mention that you yourself are being paid to get people to pay good money to use the treadmills.'

'Touché,' said Kim with a grin. 'But I'd still like to know if a place exists where people don't care about the amount of their income.'

'Oh, I'm sure you can find them all over,' conceded Honorina. 'And they're undoubtedly living in wrecks and hovels. You know, Kim, you might be living in one yourself if it weren't for us treadmill types.'

'Touché again!' Kim said. 'But remember, I often have lived in tents, teepees, shacks and hovels. I just visit you and Uncle Willy every now and then to get back to my roots.'

'You'd probably be right at home in Lukedom, then,' commented Honorina, signalling to a passing waiter for another drink.

'This is all very nice,' I interrupted, shaking my head at the sparring, and then addressing Honorina. 'But I'd still like you to come with me.' I reached across and took her hand and went on with an exaggerated seriousness. 'Come and console me as I plunge into the lower depths in an effort to redeem my long-lost father and win your hand in marriage.'

'Silly boy,' said Honorina, mollified. 'I think the myth insists the prince go off by himself and slay the dragon. He doesn't drag the princess along with him.'

‘That’s right,’ agreed Kim. ‘Maybe you should take me instead. I’ll be Sancho Panza to your Don Quixote. And then maybe I’ll stay in Lukedom and become a cube or whatever you call your father’s followers.’

‘I call them jerks,’ I said.

‘Yes, take Kim,’ said Honoria, stiffening. ‘She won’t mind a little mud and diarrhoea and, fitting in, she might find out things you couldn’t.’

‘I’m not taking Kim,’ I said firmly, fighting the racing of my pulse at the prospect. ‘I want you to go – just for a few days. It’ll certainly be more interesting than another trek upstate.’

‘Perhaps,’ said Honoria. As she paused to reconsider, she finished the last of her drink. ‘Just until Sunday night. You promise?’

‘Hey, I either find my father or get a lead or I don’t. How long can it take to get an address?’

‘You don’t love me,’ moped Kim exaggeratedly. ‘You prefer your fiancée to me.’

‘It can take a long lime to get an address – as the FBI has discovered,’ commented Honoria, her mind on the business trip and ignoring Kim’s taunt.

‘Well?’ I persisted, still holding Honoria’s hand.

‘I suppose I’ll have to come along just to keep you out of trouble,’ sighed Honoria.

I smiled and released her hand.

‘Good,’ I announced, having managed to keep chaos again at bay.

Although also smiling, Kim shook her head.

‘Lukedom will be wasted on you two,’ said Kim. ‘It’ll be like sending two nuns to a Playboy mansion.’

‘Or two Kims to a meeting of securities analysts.’ countered Honoria, standing up to leave. ‘But duty calls.’

‘Says who?’ said Kim.

On our drive south, Honoria and I stayed that first night at a small motel in northern Virginia, arriving at about ten, Honoria a trifle irritated that we’d passed up a Holiday Inn a half-hour earlier and had to settle for something called ‘The Molvadian Motel’ on the outskirts of nowhere. Actually the room was indistinguishable from one in a Holiday Inn – except perhaps to the two architects involved – and the television offerings were absolutely identical.

Being young and engaged, and intelligent and well brought up, we got right to it after quick showers and made hot and horny love for forty minutes. Then we found our attentions wandering to a PBS special on the greenhouse effect. This led us naturally to a serious discussion of the investment possibilities inherent in Long Island and Miami being three feet under water and the Berkshires becoming the new sun belt – possibly the new east coast line as well. We were both annoyed that the greenhouse effect would apparently take effect only very slowly over the next half-century, thus minimizing the possibilities of dramatic short-term capital gains.

Nevertheless, we concluded that we should be bullish on the American midwest and sell short the south east, since the latter was likely to become either a desert or part of the Atlantic Ocean, either of which alternatives would decrease its value. We discussed ways of selling short the south east but could think of nothing better than shorting the stock of Disney whose Disney World in Orlando, unless convened to an underwater theme park, would suffer a pronounced decrease in both gross and net. Cotton prices would soar. Companies involved in building bridges would do well. Perhaps boat-building would make a comeback.

We were soon as deeply engrossed in our speculations about how to play the greenhouse effect as we had been earlier in our lovemaking, the only difference being we reached no climax in our discussion. Instead Honoria suddenly found our speculations the most boring and unproductive thing she’d done in weeks and announced she was going to sleep. I made a few tentative pokes with various parts of my anatomy at various parts of hers, but receiving nothing more encouraging than a rather unsexy mooring sound, I soon rolled over to go to sleep. However, I spent the next fifteen minutes

daydreaming about cornering the market in sugar beets just before the millions of acres of sugar beet fields were flooded, thus becoming the richest man in the world since the Hunt family. Vaguely, just as I fell asleep, I remembered that the Hunt brothers had recently declared bankruptcy.

FROM LUKE'S JOURNAL

In the beginning was Chance, and Chance was with God and Chance was God: of this much we and sophisticated twentieth-century scientists are certain. While the old physics saw purpose, the new sees chance. When the old saw reassuring and ubiquitous causal nexus, the new sees ubiquitous randomness. When the old probed deeper they always found cause; when the modern physicist probes deeper he always finds chance.

'Was God playing dice when he created the universe?' The New York Times asked a Nobel Prize-winning biologist.

'Yes,' was the reply.

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The next day we ploughed on. Crossing the flat heartland of the central valley of Virginia I concluded that after you'd seen one cornfield you'd seen them all – unless of course I was long or short corn futures, in which case I'd have gotten out of the car every thirty miles to measure the height of the corn.

After two hours I took over the driving and Honoria settled back into the passenger seat. But I continued a silent brooding that had begun at breakfast and Honoria apparently noticed it.

'You know,' she said, 'the reason you're all hung up about your father is the old cliché that you're probably more like him than you admit.'

'I'm nothing like him,' I said.

'Not in any way?' she persisted.

'I suppose we both like the excitement of taking risks,' I finally said. 'That's the only thing we have in common.'

'Taking risks?' said Honoria with a frown. 'How so?'

'That's my job!' I said with some exasperation. 'You know that. There are two kinds of trading in futures. As you know, the whole purpose of hedging is to reduce risk – a kind of insurance policy against other positions one has in other markets. But I'm not a hedger. Jeff is our firm's hedger. My job is to make money for clients by pure speculation.'

'Gambling, you mean.'

'It's not gambling!' I shot back, taking a hand off the wheel to gesture emphatically. 'It's intelligent risk-taking. I suppose you could call it loaded-dice risk-taking. Gamblers at something like roulette or craps rely totally on chance, whereas I rely on knowledge, skill and analysis to overcome chance.'

'But if your knowledge always beats out chance then there's no risk,' said Honoria with annoying reasonableness.

'Damn it,' I said. 'It's still risk-taking! I sometimes lose millions in a week! It's just that in the long run my knowledge and skill beat out the pure diceplayer – beat out chance.'

'You don't have to get so excited,' Honoria said, reaching forward to retrieve a map that had fallen on to the floor.

'Look at it this way,' I said a little more calmly. 'I like sailing in strong winds. That's risk-taking. But I like to prepare my boat carefully, have a skilled crew member aboard with me. and carry all the latest safety equipment. But it's still risk-taking – intelligent risk-taking.' I frowningly thought of my father. 'My father, on the other hand, also liked to sail. But he thought nothing of taking some junkheap out on to the ocean without charts or safety equipment or weather projections and with a crew that had never been further out to sea than a bathtub. That's what I call stupid risk-taking – gambling, if you will. And of course his dice decisions were the stupidest gambling of all.'

'I see what you're driving at,' said Honoria. 'But it seems to me that the whole meaning of risk-taking is that you subject yourself to ...' she hesitated to say the word, maybe fearing it would provoke a diatribe, '... letting chance into your life.'

I didn't explode.

'Well, maybe,' I said. 'I guess my futures speculation is a declaration of war against chance. But as you said, if chance were actually beaten, then the game and the risk and the fun would be over. Yeah, I see that, but my father somehow wants to turn that fact into some sort of worship of chance as the great liberator or life-enhancer. What he failed to admit was that too much chance is like too much order – it ruins the fun. The only thing worse than fascist order is total anarchy, and that's what diceliving leads to.'

'Well, I agree completely,' said Honoria.

‘So,’ I concluded, hoping I’d won whatever argument we’d been having, ‘both my father and I enjoy risk-taking, enjoy – I admit it – the existence of chance, but I see it as an adversary that must be continually overcome while he saw it as a ... as a ...’

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