

Time's Fool

HOTSPUR:

O, Harry, thou hast robb'd me of my youth!
I better brook the loss of brittle life
Than those proud titles thou hast won of me;
They wound my thoughts worse than sword my flesh:
But thought's the slave of life, and life time's fool.



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PROLOGUE

SEPTEMBER 1996

*In which we are introduced to our protagonist,
in media res, mid-fight, mid-flight...*

"Bathroom Reading"

A man can be happy with any woman, as long as he does not love her.

Oscar Wilde

Gib's knee buckled as Reuben's foot chopped into it from behind. He had been half-expecting her attack, so he crumpled to the cheap carpet and rolled toward the kitchen. He tried to get back to his feet, but her heels followed him – *chok! chok! chok!* – like guillotine dreams chasing the ghosts of French noblemen. He kept rolling until he heard -- *felt*, really, in the small of his back -- one of her heels snag in the carpet. Instantly, he twisted around, grabbed her ankle where the carpet had trapped it, and *yanked*. When he did, she gave him a shot with the other foot, but she didn't have a lot of leverage. The heel dug into his lower stomach; awful, but not paralyzing.

Paralyzing? If she'd hit what she'd been aiming at, it might have been crippling. Castrating.

Reuben tried to pull her foot away for another strafing run, but it got caught in his shirt. Gib was able to trip her to the floor as she tried to pull away from him. A good hunk of his t-shirt stayed with her shoe, a ripped streamer of cotton connecting the two of them.

Her breath blasted out in a giant gasp as she crashed into the floor. Gib hoped she'd be out of breath long enough to recover from her vein-popping anger, but he wasn't willing to bet his reproductive capacity on it.

He decided to hide. But first, he yanked her business jacket up over her head, so she looked like the loser in a hockey brawl. Then he grabbed her gun out of her shoulder holster. When he jumping to his feet, the front of his t-shirt ripped away, a matching sound to the wheeze of Reuben sucking air back into her lungs.

With rhymes flying through his head –

He who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day.

He who runs and runs away, lives to run another day.

-- Gib ran through the kitchen and into the attached half-bath. He slammed the door and looked for a lock.

There wasn't one.

Gib jammed the side of his foot into the corner formed by the door and the yellowing linoleum floor. Luckily, he was wearing tennis shoes, so he was able to use more of his foot as a doorjamb than thick boots would have allowed. Just as he gripped the door handle with both hands, he felt Reuben slam into the door.

"Come out of there, you chickenshit!" she shrieked. After that, the words rose in pitch until they were incomprehensible -- homicidal threats from a psychotic porpoise. Gib felt the door handle start to turn in his sweaty grip, and try as he might, he wasn't able to hold it steady. He abandoned his tug of war with the handle and just leaned hard into the door.

Reuben screamed in triumph as the handle clicked open, slamming her shoulder into the door. It bounced open a bit, and Gib was able to see her red face pushing against the door in the mirror on the bathroom wall. Pumped with adrenaline, Reuben pushed the door further and further open. At least that's what Gib thought during a second of panic.

In reality, she wasn't moving the whole door. His foot was such an effective doorjamb that Reuben could only get the door to bow inward at the top. When Gib realized this, he slackened his effort a bit, fought back just enough to keep Reuben occupied.

After a few minutes of straining, Reuben let loose another furious wail and backed away from the door. Gib turned around so his fresh foot was the new doorjamb, and leaned comfortably against the sink.

As he looked idly at the magazine rack next to the toilet, he heard the sound of smashing glass. He laughed quietly to himself, satisfied that Reuben was going to break things less valuable than his bones. Unidentified smashes, crashes and thumps came from the kitchen, some directed at the bathroom door, but he felt confident he could wait her out.

After hiding her gun in the water tank for the toilet, Gib looked around for something to read. The only choices on the magazine rack were for gun nuts -- *Guns and Ammo*, *Deer Hunter*, *Shotgun News* -- or right-wing jackasses. The least rabidly right-wing available was the *National Review*. Gib leaned over and snagged the *Review*, figuring he could at least get a laugh out of the apoplectic arts coverage.

At one time, such second-rate bathroom reading material would have really irritated him, but Edward Gibson -- whose identification, from fake driver's license to false credit cards, all named him as "Gibson Edwards" -- didn't really expect any better from the FBI anymore. Being trapped in the half-bath of an FBI safe house by Reuben, his jealous supervisor -- *with nothing good to read* -- was just the latest disappointment. Ever since he had started working undercover, it was just one damn thing after another.

PART ONE

MAY-AUGUST 1996

*In which we learn how Gib got into
his complicated circumstances, and how family
may or may not be destiny...*

"Relatives and References"

About morals, I know only that what is moral is what you feel good after and what is immoral is what you feel bad after.

Ernest Hemingway

Let's back up a bit.

What chain of events wrapped itself around Edward "Gib" Gibson and dragged him to a half-bath in a generic row house in the East Bay? Undercover?

Nepotism.

Not that the provider of the nepotism would have called it that. Uncle Joseph would have called it *access*.

The undercover gig had been presented to him on a humid June day in 1996 while he was sitting in his Uncle Joseph's office. Uncle Joseph was Joseph Arlen, Deputy Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. He wasn't really Gib's uncle, but the best friend of Gib's father Philip.

Let's back up a bit more. When you're talking nepotism, it's important to understand lineage.

Lineage

Philip Gibson and Joseph Arlen had been one of the most feared pair of Fixers in Washington DC for pushing thirty years. Usually, a Fixer takes a client's cash and spreads it around to get the desired result. Anyone who's read a newspaper in the last, oh, two hundred years isn't shocked by this. No matter how many editorialists want to trot out the ol' "End of American Innocence" tripe for another go-round, this is a country that has the following as part of its history: scalping; blacks defined as 2/3rds of a person in the Constitution; smallpox-infested blankets; barbed wire; the Middle Passage; the Haymarket Riot, the Red Scares, and Jim Crow. Not to mention the entire political careers of (short list) Alexander Hamilton, Andrew Jackson, John C. Calhoun, James Buchanan, Ulysses S. Grant, Warren Gamaliel Harding, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and Bill Clinton.

And Americans are expected to be shocked that Fixers with money can influence politics? Big deal. The main thing that offends most Americans is that the price list for legislators isn't a matter of public record. If the Capitol Dome could just add a drive through window, that would make it dead solid perfect. But instead, the prices are only known to people in the know, the Fixers.

That said, there are the common run of Fixers. They buy expensive dinners, provide nice boat trips, fine cigars, sleek whores. Guys you're happy to play poker with because they're sure to lose a bundle, every time. Then there are Fixers like Philip Gibson and Joseph Arlen.

Philip Gibson had met Joseph Arlen during 1966, when a liberal Congressman from California was up for re-election. Said Congressman had been declaring his opposition to the war in Vietnam. As well, he was calling for investigations into kickbacks in Defense spending. Captain Philip Gibson, then a member of Army Intelligence, had been assigned the job of finding dirt on the unpatriotic (mouthy) son of a bitch. Tracking down leads had put him in touch with Joseph Arlen. It turned out that

Joseph Arlen had much to offer. Both he and Gibson were vigorous in their agreement that no damn California Commie was going to derail the war effort.

(Not that either man actually fought in the war. As Uncle Joseph put it, "Dying in a humid jungle in some pissant backwater would guarantee an unsuccessful career.")

It was near the end of J. Edgar Hoover's long reign as Director of the FBI. And Hoover was getting a bit senile. Forgetful. For example, Hoover had to write down combinations. Which he would leave in his desk drawer. Where an enterprising young agent could discover them, use them to open the safe to Hoover's secret files, and to take photographs.

This took some serious balls, since it took Arlen eight months, a few minutes at a time, to copy the whole collection. Hoover had been collecting dirt for 50 years, after all. The file on Franklin Delano Roosevelt alone took Arlen two weeks to get on film.

Looking through the files, it had taken two phone calls to get the California Congressman to withdraw from the race to, as he claimed, "concentrate on my family". Which was odd, since the Congressman was single.

This proof of their newfound power decided Philip Gibson it was about time to start making a lot of money. Uncle Joseph had a similar goal in mind, but he didn't want to give up the access the FBI gave him. So the two men made an informal arrangement.

Philip Gibson instantly quit the Army with an honorable discharge (one phone call). He got George Washington University to issue him a law degree (two phone calls). Entry to the bar quickly followed, without a test (one phone call).

Then he married the richest ugly heiress who would have him: Susan Hayes, only heir to a toilet paper fortune. Her cousin was a member of an old establishment law firm, Hayes and O'Neill, which was happy to give a partnership to an up-and-comer with family connections. With the firm to give them an air of legitimacy, and the Hayes toilet paper fortune to fund further development of blackmail files ("research"), Gibson and Arlen made their first million in six months. That million bought four tax code changes, two changes to the Federal budget, and three Congressmen deciding not to run for more terms.

Within a year, Hayes, O'Neill was known as the premiere dirty Fixer firm in the whole city.

Normal Fixers are the kind of guys who get nicknames. Like "Big Al" and "Happy Johnny", or "Chester A. Arthur". Even the low level dirty Fixer will often get a nickname, like "Blackie Lawless" or "The Backdoor Guys".

Gibson and Arlen are made of sterner stuff.

Put it this way: Roy Cohn was one of the most infamous dirty Fixers ever. Roy Cohn never had a nickname. Unless "that slimy fuck" counts.

Many senior members of Congress, who have seen the scorched earth lobbying tactics of Gibson and Arlen – which include blackmail, slander, whispering, secret video and audio recordings, and files that go for miles – are even afraid to say the names "Gibson and Arlen" out loud. As if the very mention will summon them, like Rumpelstiltskin, to claim the first born of the household as well as all future campaign donations. When people want to reference Gibson and Arlen, they just say "Cancer".

What happened to John Johnson's vote on the environmental bill? I thought he was a lock. He even campaigned on that issue.

Cancer got him.

Growing up, Gib knew almost none of this. He knew he was part of a rich family, but thought Philip Gibson was a successful corporate lawyer who had to travel around 300 out of 365 days a year. Gib's mother, the former Susan Hayes, started drinking to fight off boredom around 1969. When she was pregnant with Gib, Philip Gibson had demanded she stay dry. (The demand included a threat to have her committed to an institution which would chain her to a bed for nine months.) After Gib was born, she filled her time with interior decorating and vodka. Sometimes with ice.

So Gib hung with Uncle Joseph a lot. In the expensive Virginia community where the Gibsons lived, the Arlen place was the next mansion over. Uncle Joseph had two boys and one girl, Wallis. As his sons, Joe Junior and Owen, got older, Uncle Joseph discovered he disliked both of them. And he was pretty clear about it, nicknaming both of them when they hit the age of five or so. Joe Junior was "The Chimp". Owen, "The Faggot". Uncle Joseph thought Wallis was fine, but had no real interest in her. Even though Wallis and Gib has always gotten along well.

So Uncle Joseph and Gib had grown very close. It was Uncle Joseph who first come up with the nickname "Gib", after he discovered Gib hated the name "Edward".

"We could try Ned. Or Ed," Uncle Joseph had said. "Eddie?"

"How about Ted?" then-Edward had asked.

"Nah, you don't want the same name as that Kennedy son of a bitch." Uncle Joseph had a distaste for all of the Kennedys. If a political family couldn't keep their dirty laundry secret, how could a Fixer make a living?

"Maybe Gib?" Uncle Joseph suggested.

Gib it was.

Philip handled the details -- paying bills, signing report cards, and making sure Gib got to dentist or doctor appointments (even if it was a secretary who took him). As long as Gib got high-enough grades, and was glib and gracious whenever he had to be seen socially with Philip, he was left alone. Which was just fine with him. But Uncle Joseph was the one there for his triumphs and defeats, his highs and lows.

Over the years, Uncle Joseph had been at most of Gib's public triumphs outside of school. He had been the person who congratulated Gib after he won win his first Little League pitching trophy, and had also been the only friend to see Gib lose the last game of the Virginia State Baseball championships his senior year of high school. They had spent many afternoons watching the Orioles play over the years.

For all of that, Gib didn't think of Uncle Joseph as a surrogate father. Because Philip Gibson had his own fatherly lessons to impart. Like the Sally Field Face.

The Sally Field Face.

Once, Philip Gibson had taken Gib to task for walking around with a perpetual smirk on his face. Worse, the subject had also come up during a public event. Gib's seventh grade home room teacher had specifically singled out his smirk as a cause for worry during a parent-teacher conference. Normally, showing up for those things was Gib's mother's job, but that was one of her Smirnoff Days. Philip Gibson's own concern was now amplified by institutional reproach. In Philip Gibson's world, allowing any kind of authority to have worries about you was not allowed. *Absolutely not allowed*

Philip had brought home a brand-new VCR, with as many Sally Field movies as he

could find. They had started with films, but Philip had called some colleagues in Los Angeles, and shortly thereafter, pirated copies of "The Flying Nun" and "Gidget" had started to arrive in Philip Gibson's Washington, D.C. law office by special messenger.

For months, Philip had demanded that Gib study Sally Field in excruciating detail, looking at her masterful earnest expressions. And then Gib was required to practice duplicating his own Sally Field Face for an hour every night before he went to bed.

Absence of Malice had been good to study. The *Smokey and the Bandit* films less so. But the champion of heart-felt earnestness had been *Norma Rae*. Gib had worn through six copies of that movie.

During the first month of the training, Philip had watched closely as his son spent hour after hour trying to duplicate the Oscar-winning expressions. Soon after that, Philip started the challenges.

It began one night during supper. While Gib's mother watched over the top of her glass, Philip began an innocuous conversation with Gib about school. Then, as Gib was smirking about a successful vocabulary test, Philip thundered, "LOOK EARNEST!"

Gib had gaped, open-mouthed, at his father.

"Look earnest, goddamn you! Show me the Sally Field face!"

Gib had broken out into terrified laughter.

"Damn it, Edward! Why do you think you've been studying this? Do you want to be perceived as a smirking idiot for the rest of your life? Show! Me! Earnest!"

Gib tried; he tried very, very hard to stop laughing and look earnest. He choked back the laughter, straightened his lips as best he could, and tried to look unthreatening. Then the giggles overcame him, and the humiliating release felt like he had pissed his pants. Philip Gibson's face went dark as Gib continued to laugh, with just a bit of hysteria mixed in.

"Come over here, Edward," Philip said.

Gib walked over, dreading whatever punishment was coming, even as he wondered why he didn't just turn and run. Or hide. Or scream, collapse, and pretend to be in a coma. Anything, anything, but walk up next to his father.

When he got next to Philip, he looked at the floor and tried to hold his breath to keep the giggles from coming.

"Look up at me, Edward."

As Gib met his father's eyes, he was shocked by a brutal slap across his cheek. It almost knocked him to the ground before he grabbed the tablecloth, pulling a china place setting to the floor where it shattered. The herd of giggles were instantly slaughtered by a startled gasp of pain.

When he regained his balance, he looked across the table at his mother, who merely shrugged and reached for the bottle of red wine to refill her glass.

"Edward," Philip began, "My son will not be perceived as a shallow fuckup. This is not a matter where laughter is a suitable response. If I have to, I will hire surgeons to cut the muscles in your face that allow you to smile. Do you understand how serious I am?"

His father slapped him again, though more lightly this time. This was clearly just to keep his son's attention. Gib felt scalding tears of humiliation spring into his eyes.

"Don't you cry, Edward. Crying is for women."

"No," Gib said, childish negation the only form of resistance he had left.

"No what? You aren't crying? Or you don't understand?"

"I don't understand."

Philip sighed. "Edward, no matter what you may think, the world is a very simple place. The powerful survive, and the weak die. Serious-minded people flourish, and frivolous ones fail. Nothing in the world is as important as being strong."

Gib said nothing.

"Now, you may be thinking, 'I am just a child.' That is no excuse. It is all about strength. Strength of will, and strength of purpose. Even you don't have strength, you still must be *perceived* to have it."

Philip caressed his son's cheek in some faint relation to affection. "Now, it is true that you are still a child in many ways. You have enjoyed yourself until now, haven't you? You haven't lacked for anything? Not for food, or clothes, or toys?"

"No."

"Well, now is when you begin to earn these things. Weak people will always follow the people they know to be strong, Edward. And my son is going to be a leader."

Gib felt a single tear run down his slap-reddened cheek, but his face remained motionless.

"Do you understand?" Philip asked.

"I think so."

"Fine. Now go study that earnest bitch some more. I never want to hear a teacher talk about my smirking son again. I never want to see you fart around or play the clown. Is that perfectly clear?"

"Yes." Gib turned and left his half-eaten supper behind. Just as he was about to step out of the kitchen, he heard his father call his name.

"Before you go, try your earnest face again."

Gib, knowing he would break apart if he tried to shift his face even the tiniest amount, simply stared at his father. Philip looked closely, satisfied.

"No, that's anger," Philip said. "But it will do for now, Edward."

Gib briefly thought about walking to his bedroom, burying his face in his pillow and weeping until his eyes felt like they would burst. Instead, in inexplicable combination of fear and stubbornness, he went to the bathroom instead. There, staring at the mirror, he spent the next hours leaching the anger out of his face. This blank, emotionless face was as far as he was able to progress for a few weeks, even though Philip Gibson's pop quizzes continued.

Gib would get ready for school, or baseball practice, and Philip would call out, "Sally Field Face!" Gib would turn and stare at his father, until his father gave a rating and dismissed him.

Six months after the incident at dinner, Gib came home to find his father waiting in the kitchen. His father had lightning flashing in his eyes, and Gib wondered what was wrong.

"I just had a meeting with your teacher," Philip said. "I wanted to get a progress report. When I asked her to describe you, do you know what word popped right out of her? Completely unprovoked."

"No, what?"

"Earnest'." Philip laughed loudly, the storm clouds replaced by blue skies. Or at least grey ones.

During the Sally Field Face quiz period, Gib had asked Uncle Joseph about strength and appearances. Surprisingly, Uncle Joseph had disagreed with Philip Gibson.

"Fuck what people think. You dad only starting thinking that when he started throwing cocktail parties," Uncle Joseph said. "The only important thing is to get what you want. Fuck all the rest."

A Meeting

This summer of '96 had begun with struggle for Gib to avoid what he didn't want. And what he didn't want was Philip Gibson. After Gib was graduated from Georgetown Law School (top third of the class, careful not to stand out too much), Philip Gibson had a choice of jobs lined up for him. Instead, Gib asked Uncle Joseph to get him accepted into the FBI cadet program.

Usually, the Bureau liked to see a candidate who had a little more going for him. Not that there was anything wrong with his resume, but nothing really stood out, either. All that he really had going for him was a good reference. Of course, that was like saying that all the sun had going for it was a little bit of heat.

Naturally, by this point, Philip Gibson and his son very seldom talked. Philip considered the FBI job to be a waste of time, and had threatened to disown Gib. He had even stopped talking to Uncle Joseph, for the time being. Except for work-related business, of course. Philip would never let personal issues get in the way of business.

After Quantico, Uncle Joseph had gotten him assigned to easy duty in DC. Gib spent his first two months as a Special Agent doing "research" on homegrown terrorist activity. Mostly, that meant he spent Monday and Tuesday of each work week combing the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and other papers for topics that would lead to the kind of bland documents that had gotten him through seven years of college and law school. By Wednesday morning, he had skirted the edge of plagiarism, never came close to original thought, and was ready to turn in a report.

So his work week was done by Wednesday afternoon, usually. He spent the rest of the week sitting in his office with the door closed and reading Tom Clancy and Robert Ludlum novels. Also, taking long lunches to see his girlfriend Katy Maitland, who was getting ready for her third year at Georgetown Law.

After two months, he had eight reports under his name that were stunning in their careful mediocrity. The titles included "Militias: The Homegrown Menace?", "Bullet Proof Vests: A Case of Overconfidence?"; "Fundamentalist Islam: A New Jersey Case Study"; and "Basement Bomb Making: Could It Blow Up in Our Faces?"

That last title had worried him. Alliteration and dumb puns were probably more noticeable than they should be, but since he had made the title a question, he thought it was very clear that he would draw no actual conclusions, and present no actual opinions of his own. Besides, it was his eighth and last report, so he figured no one would even bother to read it. By that point, he was so bored that he had entertained the notion of titling the report "Bomb Making: On the One Hand, but On the Other Hand".

That next Monday morning, Uncle Joseph's office called. He went home before the meeting and changed into a clean suit, fresh from the dry cleaner's plastic. His white

shirt was starched, and his tie was a dull maroon. He wore an old Omega wristwatch with an expensive leather band. It had been a gift from Uncle Joseph many years ago, and Gib knew that Joseph would notice. The meeting wasn't until one, so he took the time to get a fresh haircut before arriving at Uncle Joseph's office.

As he checked his appearance out one final time in his car window, he noticed his hands were a little shaky. A little case of the yips. Gib knew this meeting was going to be the real launch of his career. So he had to show the right Special Agent style, or lack thereof. He got a cup of coffee as camouflage for his shaky hands.

As he walked in the front door, Gib thought about how the building itself was an impressive example of Joseph Arlen's ability to clout. Ten years ago, Uncle Joseph had used a report about "overcrowding" in the Hoover Building as an excuse to move his offices, along with a full complement of support staff to a building on M Street where DC started to rise toward Georgetown and Dupont Circle. The building had been a Quaker gathering hall at one time. When Assistant Director Arlen had moved in, the Bureau paid for the expense of moving all the other tenants to new buildings for "security reasons" and the massive rehabilitation of the building, including black glass walls that rose out of the religious-looking base of the building. When the renovations were done, the building looked like a space age Cathedral. And since the FBI now owned all this new office space, various working groups – like Bank Fraud – were moved from the Hoover Building to the newly-named "Arlen Building". And, of course, Joseph Arlen was put in charge of all these departments.

After it was all over, Uncle Joseph had told Gib the icing on that particular cake. He had commissioned the original overcrowding report himself, massaging statistics until they relaxed enough to give him what he wanted to justify buying the new building.

Uncle Joseph's office and staff took up the entire top floor of the Arlen Building. Gib waited in the lobby for an elevator that would bring him up to the floor exactly at eleven. Not a minute too early or a minute too late. He had to wait the standard ten minutes of obeisance time in the outer office, watching Joseph's various assistants, secretaries, and agents scurry around the office in an orgasm of time wasting. From experience, he knew that at least a third of any of the people he saw on the floor were actually there to report back to some of Uncle Joseph's political enemies in the Bureau and in other government agencies.

Eventually, Gib was escorted into the inner sanctum. Waiting only ten minutes was actually sign of respect in many ways. If he had just been one of the many Special Agents under Uncle Joseph's command, the wait would have been nearer to twenty, just on principle.

Joseph Arlen rose from behind his huge cherrywood desk (four foot wide by six feet long if it was an inch) as the secretary closed the door.

"Gib! God *damn* I'm glad to see you! Finally made it. Can't tell you how proud I am." Uncle Joseph often had a weirdly clipped manner of speaking, especially when he was excited. It was as if he didn't want to give out any more subjects, objects or predicates than were absolutely necessary.

One of Joseph Arlen's favorite ways to start any meeting was to wrap his meaty hand around someone's fingers and squeeze with all his strength. Gib made sure to get his hand deep into the crook between Uncle Joseph's forefinger and thumb. That way, no

matter how hard Arlen squeezed, it would never be more than he could handle. Best not to get into a pissing match, though. He squeezed Uncle Joseph's hand just firmly enough.

"Man's handshake, Gib. Always important. Sit."

Gib sat.

"Let's get right to it, Gib."

"Sounds good." Gib lightly echoed Uncle Joseph's cadences, easily falling into the rhythm.

"Been reading your reports. Impressive. Especially this last one, 'Basement Bombs'. Gave me an idea."

Gib was more than a little taken aback when Uncle Joseph pulled out the report he had turned in last Friday morning.

"How do you feel about the environment, Gib?" Uncle Joseph asked.

This was an easy answer. "Well, I like a picnic as much as the next guy, but I'm no tree hugger," Gib said.

Uncle Joseph grinned back. "Pretty good. But there's more than tree huggers out there. Terrorists. Monkey wrenchers, some of them call themselves."

"Throwing hard-working American loggers out of work is what that is."

"Exactly," Uncle Joseph snarled, his eyes glittering. "Knew you'd see. Knew you'd be ready for this."

"Ready for what, sir?"

"First field assignment. Under cover."

This was surprising. Undercover work was usually extremely dangerous. Gib wondered why Uncle Joseph wanted him to take this job, out of all the possible cushy assignments out there.

And that damn report! Gib had gotten the idea from the Section B of the *New York Times*. In fact, he had even lifted entire paragraphs wholesale, assuming no one would recognize them out of context. But to use it as the basis for Gib's first assignment was ludicrous, and more than a little alarming.

And worse, investigating eco-terrorists meant he was probably going to be stuck in some backwater town in Oregon or Montana. Not a glamour detail. What was the point of having a mentor like Joseph Arlen if it meant you shuffled off to Bumfuck, Oregon, trying to earn the trust of granola-loving dirt munchers? Gib was just about to object when Uncle Joseph continued.

"This group of bums in San Francisco. Who I want you to get. Very important. Very!"

San Francisco! It was a good thing he'd kept his mouth shut.

"Important why, sir?" Never can have too many "sirs" in a conversation like this, Gib knew.

"Got a report from local SAC in San Fran. This bunch of longhairs talked about blowing up a nuke plant."

"A nuclear power reactor? Really?"

"Yup. Ready to do some man's work, Gib?"

"Bet I am, Uncle Joseph!"

Arlen gave him a friendly glare, but he knew he had pulled out the familiarity at just the right time, as a show of solidarity. *I'm your guy, Uncle Joseph. Time to go do a*

man's work out in scenic San Francisco. Nice weather. Good-looking women Just give me the ticket. Maybe I can learn how to surf.

"Thought so," Uncle Joseph said. "Best part. Don't have to be there for a month. Take a vacation, drive out. See the country."

"Thank you, sir!"

Uncle Joseph stood up and walked Gib to the door, clapping him on the shoulder as he did. "Always been a son to me, Gib. Not like my real boys, useless shits. Chimp and the Faggot." For a minute, Uncle Joseph looked uncertain. "Fucking Faggot. Embarrassment."

Gib wondered what Owen had done this time. Another trip to rehab?

"Make me proud, Gib."

"I will, Uncle Joseph."

"Get sit rep from my secretary."

"Will do."

The two men shook hands once again, and Uncle Joseph got just a bit of an edge on his fingers this time, so he squeezed to his heart's delight. His almost-son was happy to let him do it.

Gib got the situation report from Uncle Joseph's secretary, and then went to his house in Virginia to pack.

Packing

Katy was supposed to be at classes all day, but he yelled out her name as he walked in the front door, just in case. No answer.

He got to work, changing out of his suit into a pair of jeans and a white tee-shirt.

Gib decided most everything should fit into a big garbage bag.

From the kitchen: two big plastic cups (one that had the Baltimore Orioles logo); a handful of utensils. Can and bottle opener. Into the garbage bag.

From the bathroom: disposable razors, two towels, a bar of soap. His toothbrush and toothpaste. Into the garbage bag.

From the bedroom: his baseball mitt, assorted balls, pocket knife. Into the garbage bag.

Clothes were an exception to the garbage bag. Suits and related fancy stuff got tossed into a big suitcase. All his other clothes, all the tee-shirts, socks, jeans, and underwear he would ever want, he threw onto the bed, then tied up the four corners of the blanket.

He hauled everything out into the living room. Looking at the bookshelf, he wondered if there was anything worth taking. The Riverside Shakespeare was Katy's, and Gib remembered that it had been given to her by a man she had been engaged to during college, before she had met Gib. He looked at the inscription.

To Katy,

Let me not to the marriage of true minds

Admit impediments. Love is not love

Which alters when it alteration finds,

Or bends with the remover to remove:

O, no; it is an ever-fixèd mark,
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and
cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and
weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

*Love, ever-fixèd,
Steve*

Anyone named Steve, Gib decided, was bad news. A Steve was straight white teeth and inconsistent moral rectitude. As far as Gib was concerned, the best thing Katy had ever done in her love life was leave Steve. It would be better if she was never reminded of him again, really.

So, Shakespeare: into the garbage bag. It would be something to read on the trip.

His CDs and tapes were in a two milk crates next to the stereo. Gib had always been careful to keep his music separate from Katy's, so if any of hers were in the crate, it was her loss.

And that was pretty much it for the packing. He stuffed the bags into the trunk of his car, a '69 Pontiac GTO convertible. He fiddled with his keys before he decided he should leave a note.

Smoking a rare cigarette, Gib stood at the kitchen table and tried to compose a goodbye note.

Dear Katy:

*These past couple of years have been amazing. But I got assigned out of town,
and I'm not allowed to talk about it.*

*Love you much and I look forward to possibly seeing you again in the future.
Thanks for everything.*

*Love,
Gib*

No, too wordy. Plus, he probably shouldn't mention the job, either. There might be some kind of security problem with that.

Dear Katy:

These past couple of years have been great. I look forward to possibly seeing you again in the future. Thanks for everything.

*Love,
Gib*

Now it sounded like a business letter. Awkward, and overly polite. He tossed a few more sheets of paper in the garbage before he pared the note down to something that satisfied him.

Dear Katy:

Thanks for everything.

*Love,
Gib*

That said it all, really. Tossing away the cigarette butt, Gib used a magnet to stick the note on the refrigerator.

He was halfway down the driveway, and he was fucking around with the radio before he realized that he had forgotten his jam box. He parked the car on the curb next to the driveway and walked back into the house.

Looking for the box turned into a bigger-than-expected project. Not in the bedroom, not in the kitchen. Not the living room or back porch. Easily a half an hour of searching resulted in a big pile of nothing. Finally, he remembered that Katy had been refinishing an old table down in the basement. As he opened the door, he saw the box sitting on the chair itself, right at the bottom of the stairs. Two steps down, he heard Katy walk through the front door.

"Gib? Where are you? I saw your car outside!"

So much for a clean break. As quietly as he could, he stepped back up the stairs. When he heard Katy walk down the hallway to the bedroom, he stepped into the kitchen and carefully opened the back door.

"Hey, what happened to the blanket?"

After closing the back door, Gib ran for his car. He was just pulling away from the curb when he saw Katy come out the front door and wave at him to stop. He waved back, figuring she might think he was going to run an errand. Then he saw his note in her hand.

Step on the gas. No need to make a scene right in the middle of the suburban street. Gib drove to the huge mall complex at Tyson Corners and bought himself the best portable CD player he could find.

"Driving Lessons"

It is impossible to calculate the moral mischief, if I may so express it, that mental lying has produced in society. When a man has so far corrupted and prostituted the chastity of his mind as to subscribe his professional belief to things he does not believe he has prepared himself for the commission of every other crime.

Thomas Paine

Statistics about Gib's two week drive from Washington, DC to San Francisco.

Mileage: 3754.2

Major cities viewed: Baltimore, Pittsburgh, Cleveland, Gary, Chicago, Memphis, St. Louis, Kansas City (Mo.), Kansas City (Ks.), Cheyenne, Denver, Salt Lake City, Reno.

Best meal: Pizzeria Uno, Chicago.

Worst meal: Jenny's Grub Steak, Reno.

Number of times pulled over: 5

Number of tickets avoided through use of FBI ID: 4

Women wooed: 127

Women successfully wooed: 6

Wooing Success Rate: 4%

Notable moments: 3

Notable Moment #1. Chicago.

Gib wakes up next to a drummer named Geraldine from a band called Meow Mother, who he saw play the night before. The drummer stirs and notices his erection. She smiles and grabs hold, ready for a wake up call.

Happy to perform, Gib hides the reason for the erection: he had been dreaming about the first girl he ever kissed. Wallis Arlen. Uncle Joseph's only daughter.

Uncle Joseph's two boys, Joseph Junior and Owen, were only friends with Gib because of close contact. Uncle Joseph's constant negative comparison of them to Gib hadn't helped.

Wallis Arlen was a different story. Uncle Joseph's had no real interest in his only daughter. Sons were the important thing, even if they were inadequate.

Wallis, however, disagreed. She thought herself a very useful subject indeed. From a very early age, Wallis tried out ideas. She would dragoon Gib and her two brothers into war games, into make-believe science experiments, and other creations of her imagination. Her brothers had varying levels of interest in the games she came up with, but Gib never failed to be fascinated by her ability to create whole worlds on the spur of the moment.

One night, Joseph, Jr. and Owen, had been playing pool in their basement while Gib (12 at the time) and Wallis (13) were upstairs watching *Star Wars* on tape for the millionth time. Wallis turned to him and said, "You want to try something cool?"

"Sure," Gib said.

"Close your eyes."

"Okay."

"Now hold your breath for as long as you can."

"That's it?"

"Trust me," Wallis said.

So Gib held his breath, and when he finally gasped for air, he felt Wallis cover his lips with her own. A slippery explosion enveloped him. Much later on, he would realize it was probably oxygen deprivation. But right then, it was the most important feeling he had ever had. Not like an orgasm, which he knew from masturbating. More as if every muscle in his body had gone slack except for his lips. White starbursts ignited on the back of his eyelids.

When he finally opened his eyes, he knew that the hunger in Wallis' eyes was reflected in his own, like the endless room created by two facing mirrors. The couch turned out to be big enough to hold them both, at least until their inexperienced flailing dropped them on the floor. All in all, Gib had been overwhelmed by the experience. He had been too nervous afterwards to ask her the two questions he wanted to know: Was this her first time, and had she liked it?

They had gone on having sex, though, which seemed to answer the second question. After a few months, Gib had told Wallis he was in love with her.

"Spade calling," he said. That was their personal code, that it was time to call a spade a spade. A time for whole, unadulterated truth from one another. Given their parents, it was an important ability for both of them to have. "I love you, Wallis."

"Never get sex mixed up with love, Gibby," she said. "You'll embarrass yourself."

Gib had kept his feelings about her to himself after that, and a few months later Wallis had gotten a steady boyfriend. And that was the end of that, what he laughingly called his first love affair.

Even without all the details, Geraldine the drummer didn't seem to mind the result.

Notable Moment #2. I-80, East of Cheyenne.

Driving 89 miles per hour with the top down, Gib drags out the file that he got from Uncle Joseph's secretary. He skims the first four pages and learns the following facts:

The "eco-terrorist" group has a name. They call themselves "Green Rage". There are only three members of the core group. Ethan Garrity, Stanley Campanella, and Frank Marion. The first two are white guys from Wisconsin, the third one a black guy from Chicago.

They are also a band. Garrity sings and plays guitar. Campanella plays bass; Marion, drums.

Quickly bored, Gib puts the file in the back seat. The loose pages in the folder promptly begin to swirl out of the car, showering six miles of the Wyoming countryside with confidential surveillance data from the FBI. When Gib finally realizes what the fluttering noise is, the first thing he thinks is relief that there's nothing wrong with the car. His '69 Pontiac GTO. The Goat.

The Goat.

Gib's '69 Pontiac GTO convertible was one of his oldest friends. When he was fourteen, just about to enter high school, he had decided that he needed an activity he could call wholly his own. Even baseball, as much as he loved it, was tainted by his father, who thought of it in terms of how sports looked on a permanent record. Gib learned to

hide his passions, to keep them from becoming assignments.

He picked cars, for two reasons. Because they would be a place to fuck, and because he knew his father would never want him to do it. Fixing cars would never get him into Yale or Columbia.

On the sly, he cashed some bonds, began stealing as many twenty-dollar bills as he could from his parents without them noticing, until he could finally buy himself a broken-down '69 Pontiac GTO convertible for three hundred dollars. He had become obsessed with getting a GTO after reading about it. The Goat was the kind of American that you pointed and fired. As long as you didn't have special requirements -- like being able to, say, turn tight corners at high speeds -- it was a beautiful monster. One reviewer of the original Goat had written, "I don't know what the top speed of the Goat is because, frankly, I didn't have the guts to find out."

Gib realized how beaten down the car had to be to go for as little as three hundred, even with an engine that wouldn't run, a missing rag top, and non-existent wheels. In fact, the only reason this Goat hadn't been trashed by the junk yard owner was because the man had owned a Goat himself, once upon a time. But regardless of how shitty the car was, Gib had confidence he could make it a worthwhile car again. He scoured libraries for books -- Chilton and Haynes and Mitchell -- and traded scut work at a local garage for storage space and off-hours access to equipment. Even begging for advice from every mechanic he could find, it took him six months to get the engine to turn over even once. But after that, he got the hang of it. Another two months and the engine started to sputter on a regular basis.

As long as he kept his lies consistent, his parents never noticed his late nights, his vaguely-explained activities, or his continuing assault on their twenty-dollar bills. Anyway, it wasn't as if they wanted him home any more than he wanted to be there. Baseball and training was an all-purpose excuse, as was going to the library to do schoolwork.

When the Goat was finally able to run with some consistency, if you ignored to occasional cloud of black smoke, Gib began his methodical approach to getting laid. One semester of high school later, after many sessions in the back seat of the Goat, he and Wallis were hanging out.

"Spade call," Wallis said. "You the girls are calling you the Test Pilot, don't you?"

"The what?"

"You're the guy a lot of them want to have their first time with. Because they know you'll be at least OK, and you'll keep your mouth shut."

"Test Pilot! Cool!"

Wallis frowned. "But none of them want to date you. I mean, you're fine in bed, but otherwise everyone thinks you're kind of an asshole."

"Well, mission accomplished, then."

There were a few snags in all his plans, of course. A bout with genital warts was kind of humiliating, but not as bad as the painful visit to a clinic in DC that took care of it. Vigilant, almost fanatical, condom use kept him from having any pregnancy scares.

His sex life entirely depended on the ongoing success of the car scam, though. The Goat was transportation, hotel, and confessional. He spent hundreds of dollars on getting the interior cleaned, though.

When he finally turned eighteen, near the end of his senior year, the car scam reached endgame. One morning, he found a brand new BMW waiting in the driveway.

"Nice new car," Gib said to Philip, who had followed him outside.

"Good thing you like it, since it's yours." Philip Gibson had an opened envelope in his hand addressed to Gib. "You've been accepted to Yale." Gib had gotten into four colleges, as it turned out, including Yale (two phone calls) and Virginia (none).

Gib's hatred for the BMW was intense. It was too perfect a symbol for how little his father knew about him, or cared. This foreign piece of shit couldn't measure up in any way to The Goat. His father hadn't even bothered to ask what Gib wanted in a car.

So one day, Gib decided to take care of it. One night, after his father's pleasure about Yale had faded back to business as usual, Gib headed out to take care of the BMW. Earlier in the day, he had driven the Pontiac to a mini-mall a junkyard. He had called Wallis to pick him up. When she had asked him why he needed a ride, with a brand-new car in his parents garage, he had brushed her off. Now, he pushed the BMW away down the driveway and away from the house before he started it.

At four in the morning, he found himself driving to the junkyard. When he got there, he pulled a sledgehammer, a crowbar and a carpet knife out of the trunk, and then proceeded to destroy the BMW as thoroughly as he could manage. He beat the shit out of it with a sledgehammer, shattering every light and window, bashing in every panel and door. With a knife, he shredded the upholstery and pissed in the slashes. The only thing he removed with care was the stereo and the speakers, which he intended to install in the Pontiac. Waste not, want not, and Gib had to admit that the stereo was much better than the shitty AM radio he had in the Pontiac.

After the destruction, he walked across the street to the mini-mall feeling much as the first bombardiers over Berlin must have felt in 1945 as they turned back for home. Mission accomplished, destruction rained down upon German industry, and now it was time for a beer. Just as he popped open to trunk to put away the tools and the stereo, he was blinded by a sudden pair of headlights. *Well, officer, it was my car. I don't why you would have a problem with me pissing on it.*

"I knew you were up to something. You *really* didn't like that car, did you?" Wallis asked from behind the lights.

He collapsed onto the lip of trunk with relief. "Jesus, Wallis. You scared the piss out of me." He dumped the tools in the trunk and slammed it closed.

"So," she said, ignoring him, "instead of just telling Philip you don't like the car, you're going to tell him it got stolen, right? 'Shocked, Philip, I'm *shocked!* Right from in front of the *Burger King!*' Spade call, Gibby. You're turning into one crazy son of a bitch."

"I don't know what you mean."

"We're *spadecalling*, and you're going to play dumb? Deny, deny, always deny. Our fathers would be proud."

Gib didn't say anything. She walked over to him and ran her fingers through his hair. "You're a mess. You know that? A different personality situation. Philip Gibson's perfect son. The star pitcher. The car thief. "

She kissed him. When he cupped her breast through her shirt, she gasped. He couldn't tell if she was offended or amused.

"And that's the Test Pilot." So maybe she couldn't tell, either.

After looking into his eyes for what seemed an eternity, Wallis sighed and pushed his hands away.

"I don't think so, Gibby. Certainly not until you oil up some of those rattles in your skull."

Patting his cheek, she walked back to her own car. A BMW, Gib noticed. As she was getting in, she hesitated and turned back to him. "Gibby, you can't do this forever. Soon, you're going to have to figure out who you are, and stick to it. Maybe our fathers don't see it, but they only understand the worst parts of people. Only what they see in secret reports and on secret tapes."

"Seems to work for them. If you want me to spadecall, that is."

"But is that what you want to be? The next Philip Gibson? Hell, you might end up being worse, because at least your father takes comfort in his dedication to being an asshole. You don't even have that much to hang onto." Wallis shook her head as she got into her car and pulled away.

The next day, Gib was shocked, *shocked* to discover his wonderful new car had been stolen. Philip let him buy his own car this time, using about ten grand of the insurance money. About a week later, Gib drove his dull-looking Pontiac into the Gibson driveway for the first time. Even though Gib found that revving the GTO's engine never failed to bring a look of distaste to his father's face, Philip Gibson didn't seem to care enough about the car to make an issue out of it. "Get a decent paint job," was all that he said.

And so, the car scam came to an end with Gib ten grand richer.

The Goat kept going through college. Gib avoided Yale and went to the University of Virginia on a baseball scholarship instead. Then law school at George Washington. As far as Gib was concerned, if he kept changing and replacing parts, the GTO would be effectively immortal. By this time, he knew the rumble of its engine better than his own heartbeat. He paid more attention to it, after all.

Notable Moment #3. Reno.

Maybe he was tired of the view. Maybe all the truck stops were starting to blend together. But by Reno, the trip had gotten creepy. He kept seeing UFOs out of the corner of his eye, waiting to swoop down and pick him up. He heard phantom sirens that disappeared when he looked for the State Trooper car. The road had taken on a hallucinatory quality.

Finally, in Reno, he stopped at Jenny's Grub Steak, a diner with pretensions. He ordered a cup of coffee and a hunk of meat loaf. Next to the bathrooms were a row of slot machines, and one had an old woman slipping quarter after quarter into it. Coming out of the bathroom a few minutes later, he had a direct view of the woman's face, which meant he had a prime view of the thin line of drool coming from the side of her mouth. Too disgusted to eat, he paid for the meat loaf and got the coffee to go.

From there, he drove straight through to San Francisco, where he parked near the Embarcadero and called the Golden Gate Avenue offices of the FBI.

"Enemies and Salutations"

A memorandum is written not to inform the reader but to protect the writer.

Dean Acheson

The Supervisory Special Agent in charge of the investigation into Green rage was Bob Maynard. That was one of the few things Gib had written down, and so the name didn't fly out of the car with the rest of the report.

They met in a cheap restaurant in Oakland. Bob Maynard had spent hard decades on the job, and they all showed on his cramped, florid face. He wore a toupee that fitted so poorly that his entire skull seemed misshapen. In the lapel of his threadbare green sports coat, he wore a small American flag pin with most of the white paint worn away. . In appearance and manners, he looked like a seedy salesman, the kind who would sell you a car that would run perfectly just long enough for the warranty to expire. If Bob Maynard were a car, he would have a sticker on his ass that read "If you can read this, call 1-900-EAT-SHIT". In short, Bob Maynard was one pair of slightly stained boxer shorts away from being presented to the scientific community as the missing link between man and ape.

Gib couldn't figure out how some one like Bob Maynard still had a job with the FBI. Until he thought: Maynard must have some files on people. Files and tapes and photos. Just enough to keep him on the job, but not enough to get ahead.

Maynard also had the filthiest mouth Gib had ever heard, combined with a bizarre tendency toward nicknaming. No one was ever a "suspect" in Maynard's vocabulary. They were a "cockgoblin' commie symp ." Or a "tree hugging pillow biter."

"Okay," Maynard said after they both had ordered food, "I've got the whole frikkin operation set up. Bugs and phone taps are in place everywhere, in all these ass-faced flag burners' apartments and their shithole warehouse space, too. Your direct contact will be meeting us here. Her name is Jan Reuben. For an affirmative action broad, she could be worse. She's got a hell of a pair, too. Two pairs, if you count her brass balls. You know what I mean."

"Sure." Gib had no idea. Tits? Ass? Eyes?

Maynard passed over two sheets of paper with addresses, names and numbers. "That first page there is all your contact information. Address of a safe house in Berkeley. Two phone numbers you can call. And the frikkin bureau is in the book, you know. So if your sweet white ass is hanging fire, you can always call collect. The other page is a flyer for these tree-fucking faggots and their club. The Space. They have a meeting or party or whatever you call a meeting of morons. Tomorrow night."

"They have parties every Friday, right?"

"Right. I guess you read my report, then."

The little he had scanned before the Wyoming wind took the report away had read like a weird parody of a FBI report. It was full of phrases like "threat to our American way of life", "strong show of force", and -- Gib's personal favorite -- "a cavity in the gleaming teeth of America." Gib had never had the guts to be that over the top in his report writing.

"Yeah, I read the summary. That's all I was given. I don't have the full report

with all the background material."

"What? Fucken DC buttlicking bureaucrats. You should have come out here fully briefed."

Gib shrugged his shoulders and said something plausibly generic. "You know the Hoover Building."

"Wouldn't know which end of a gun to pistol whip someone with." Maynard laughed. "That was a joke, kid."

"Right," Gib said. "Anyway, can I get a full copy of the report?"

"Post haste, you'll get one. PDQ, you hear what I'm saying? But I'll bet the broad with a badge will have a copy."

"Maybe you can give me your perspective before I read anything."

"*Perspective!*" Maynard mimicked Gib. "My perspective is that these plant porkers are gearing up for a major operation. That scene in front of PacPow was only the beginning. And the media whores gave them so much coverage, it makes you want to vomit like a street bum after three bottles of ripple."

Eventually, Gib talked Maynard into giving a summary. Obscenity removed from the story, the event that had first brought Green Rage to the attention of Supervisory Special Agent Bob Maynard was an recent impromptu protest march that had snarled traffic all over downtown San Francisco, and had led off every single TV news report that night.

Apparently, at the beginning of June, Green Rage had sponsored a free concert at their performance space/community center that had brought hundreds of people together to dance, drink, drug. In between the bands, the crowd heard some educational material about the environment. Which must have made nice background noise on the way to the bar or bathroom, Gib thought.

Green Rage came on stage last. Lead singer (or "the motherfucken mastermind") Ethan Garrity had screamed into his microphone about taking the protest to the source, and he had jumped off stage and led the crowd to the street. Outside, he had hired a fleet of flatbed trucks to take the entire audience to the headquarters of Pacific Power, known as PacPow. The trucks had blocked off the street for forty-five minutes while Garrity led the crowds in anti-nuke chants, directed at the controversial Devil's Arroyo nuclear power plant.

Devil's Arroyo had been in the news that week for some sort of safety scandal. But this scandal was just the latest in thirty years of protests, lawsuits and scandals involving Devil's Arroyo. Maynard's report was unclear whether the current scandal involved kickbacks or fault lines or radioactive waste disposal. Maybe a combination of all three. *Probably* a combination of all three.

"The fucken liberal media trumped up some bullshit," Maynard scoffed. "And this Che Guevara wannabe used it as an excuse to incite public unrest." The next few minutes involved convoluted comparisons to the Weathermen, the Black Panthers. All irrelevant ancient history to Gib, about the Bay Area and it's legacy of protest and Maynard's legacy of fighting the protestors.

Just before the police had arrived to break up the Green Rage event, Garrity had yelled to the crowd to scatter. "Time to go, before the cops bust things up." Shortly, the only remnant of the impromptu protest were the trucks and the backed-up traffic. Even

the TV crews hadn't been able to get to the site fast enough to get tape, but the other members of Green Rage, Stanley "Campy" Campanella and Frank Marion, had videotaped the whole event. So they happily provided footage on to every TV station, along with some anti-Devil's Arroyo literature. In the end, the city, as much through confusion as anything else, ended up only charging Garrity for having a parade without a permit

Based on this, though, Maynard had decided that Green Rage was a massive threat to American society. Bigger than unwed mothers, bigger than militias, bigger than Islamic extremists, bigger than the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations.

By this time, Gib felt ready to take a nap, and was desperately trying to find a waitress to get him a cup of coffee. Unfortunately, none of the waitresses wanted to hear Maynard rant, either. Maynard was about to begin another ear-curdling discourse on the state of American society (inadequate) when a woman slid into the booth next to Gib.

"Reuben," Maynard grunted, cut off in mid-obscurity. "Nice of you to show up on time. Were you too busy washing your hair or munching some rug?"

Jan Reuben turned to Gib. "I have to sit across the table from Maynard because the stench from his toupee always turns my stomach. Plus, it makes it harder for him to look down my blouse."

Maynard instantly turned the red of an infected fingernail, with scattered splotches of white. Then he pretended to laugh it off.

"Maynard, aren't you going to introduce us?" Reuben asked. She turned to Gib and shook his hand. "Jan Reuben. I'm your contact. All reports go through me to the higher-ups. Believe it or not, that description even includes Bob." She turned away from Gib to look at Maynard in mock surprise.

"Bob Maynard! Are you still here? I thought you had to get back to destroying your liver in your office with that bottle of bourbon in your desk you think no one knows about."

Maynard hurriedly got out of the booth, bumping the waitress who had just arrived with coffee. "Fuck you, quimlicker." Maynard snarled as he walked out.

Reuben stared bullets at Maynard's back until the door closed behind him. Then she crossed over to sit across the table from Gib.

"Is it his vocabulary?" Gib asked.

"Everything. Look, did he pull the "not bad for a broad" approach?"

"Uh, yeah."

"He pisses and moans about affirmative action, but if it weren't for the old boy network, Bob would have been out on his ass years ago. If he was a dog catcher, cocker spaniels would rule the world."

Gib didn't want to get sucked into somebody else's office politics, so he kept quiet.

"Sorry," Reuben finally said. "I'm just angry because Bob snatched this operation out from under me. It was my idea in the first place."

"Your idea? He was just telling me about the march on Pacific Power."

"Before the march on PacPow, Bob was using my report about Green Rage as an example of why women agents shouldn't write during 'that time of the month.'"

Reuben sighed. "Anyway, fuck Maynard. I think we'll work together just fine. I was very impressed with your analysis in 'Basement Bomb Making'."

That report keeps circulating, doesn't it? Gib thanked her. Then he asked, "Why

don't you give me your perspective on Green Rage. I wasn't issued the full report before I got out here."

Pleased to be the center of attention, Reuben began her description of the menace of Green Rage,

Which Gib ignored. He narrowed his eyes in a pretense of concentration and snuck looks at her chest under hooded eyelids. Every once in a while, he let loose with an "uh-huh" or an "I see", while he debated if Reuben was wearing a bra or not.

"Profiles in Courage"

A good face they say, is a letter of recommendation.

Henry Fielding

Not.

On his way to the Berkeley safe house (where Reuben had said he could crash for a couple of days), he picked up a pizza. Tomorrow, he would have to find an apartment, but with FBI resources, that shouldn't be that hard. Reuben had said the DEA had any number of apartments available, confiscated under RICO laws.

Over sausage and pepperoni, Gib read about the members of Green Rage.

As Gib scanned through all the background information, he developed a suspicion about Green Rage; that maybe to Ethan Garrity, Frank Marion, and Stanley "Campy" Campanella, Green Rage-the-band was more important than Green Rage-the-environmental-group. Maybe it was one bullshit artist recognizing the work of another.

Ethan Garrity.

Age: 26

Place of Origin: Madison, Wisconsin

Role: Lead singer and guitarist.

Notable Item #1:

Garrity had spent at least four years trying to maintain a status as a perpetual undergraduate at the university of Wisconsin. According to interviews with a Dean of Students, Garrity was a rich kid with too much time on his hands. After the usual four years, Garrity had carefully manipulated the university system to always keep at least one required credit away from graduating.

During one semester, though, the requirements for graduation had changed without Garrity knowing it, and one of his classes (Basic Brewing, which Garrity was taking pass-fail) suddenly and unexpectedly fulfilled his final requirement. Near the end of the semester, the Dean of Students had called Garrity in and gleefully told him that it was time to rent a cap and gown. And there was nothing he could do about it. Garrity threatened to fail Basic Brewing, but eventually resigned himself to his fate. Unhappily, Garrity had received his accidental degree. Under protest, of course.

Notable Item #2:

One of the reasons Ethan Garrity had stayed an undergraduate was his comfortable position in the Madison protest community. He wasn't a thinker, or a writer, or even very influential. But he could get out the crowds better than any one else on campus. Gib had known a guy like Garrity while at Virginia. There, it was Sam Pennyman, the guy leading every candlelight vigil, every sit-in strike, every petition to have someone removed from a job or appointed to one. Probably every college in the country – except for maybe Princeton or BYU – had two or three guys like that who made a full-time job out of being holier-than-thou, thou, and *especially* thou. (Actually, even BYU probably had a guy like that, but he was advocating *more* restrictions on dating.) The word for this kind of figure

at Virginia had been "a Frenchman".

The president of the Campus Greens had put it like this: "Well, you always need someone to yell loud, right? Garrity couldn't negotiate his way out of a paper bag, but he's really good at making authority figures nervous."

After conducting a full week of record searches and background interviews, the Agent doing the research in Madison had come to the conclusion that Garrity was a pest, but about as dangerous as a fuse with no firecracker attached. In fact, most sources had assumed that the reason the FBI was asking about Ethan Garrity was because he had sold out and gotten a government job.

In fact, the Milwaukee Agent's final conclusion was that the investigation into Ethan Garrity was a false alarm. One phrase had stuck in Gib's head: "If we want to waste time chasing after bullshit artists, why can't we at least stick the Chicago office with the job?"

Frank Marion.

Age: 23

Place of Origin: Chicago, Illinois

Role: Drummer. Engineer.

Notable Item:

Marion's record showed him to be a math prodigy who had gone to the University of Chicago lab school. Marion was also an accomplished computer programmer who had secretly been on a watch list of potential hackers since the age of fifteen. It seemed that as long as it involved numbers or machinery, Frank Marion could make it sing, scream or stand on its head.

Marion was graduated three years before Garrity, even though he started two years after him. Since then, he had been a freelance programmer for software companies from Chicago to Minneapolis. Other than that, he was a model citizen, and the investigating had found out next to nothing.

Frank Marion had met Ethan Garrity his sophomore year, when Garrity took an Introductory Programming course. Frank Marion was so established in the Math and Computer department at Wisconsin that he was the Teacher's Assistant for Garrity's section. Garrity had found out that Frank played the drums and recruited him for the band he had decided to form with his friend Campy.

Stanley "Campy" Campanella.

Age: 26

Place of Origin: Madison, Wisconsin

Role: Bass player. Songwriter.

Notable Item #1:

Campy was a childhood friend of Garrity's.

Campy had been a low-priority in state recruit to play linebacker for the badger football team. The newspaper article was about why Campy had eventually left the football team. Three games into his sophomore season, the two guys starting ahead of him had gotten injured in the first quarter against the Indiana Hoosiers, and Campy had gone

wild with his chance. 8 solo tackles, a sack and a fumble recovery. It was a Knute Rockne kind of moment. After the Badgers won, 16-13, Campy probably could have gotten a free blowjob from every Wisconsin fan, male or female, in the stadium.

But then the after-game prayer huddle formed.

Campy had forced his way into the middle of it, screaming and cursing. The captain of the Badger team, a devout Baptist cornerback from Macon, Georgia had tried to force Campy out of the prayer huddle. At which point Campy hit the captain in the face with his helmet. Two teeth went spinning across the sidelines, and X-rays later showed a fractured jaw.

A brawl ensued, which basically amounted to Campy against every player on the field who professed a belief in any god, from Christ to Kali.

The visiting sports reporter for the Indiana Daily Student had gaped in disbelief, then taken down just about everything Campy screamed as he taunted his teammates. Choice quotes from the story included:

To his own teammates: “Fuck prayer! Why don’t you hit the weight room?”

To the Hoosiers: “Admit it! God *hates* you because you lost.”

Thirteen guys had tackled Campy and beat on him as he started screaming “Fuck God” over and over until security cleared the stadium.

The Wisconsin college paper printed a bizarre manifesto written by Campy himself as a sidebar to the article about the game:

Item 1.

If any athlete ever uses the term “god” in any way, his team should take away 10% of that’s athlete’s salary and donate it to the nearest church as a tithe. Then he should be smacked with a Gideon Bible and told to keep his trap shut.

If it’s an amateur athlete who does it, he just gets the smack.

Item 2.

If any politician ever thanks any god in any speech, offers up a prayer, or speaks at a prayer breakfast, he should instantly be impeached and required to work in a church soup kitchen for minimum wage for five years or until he has written the words “separation of church and state” on a blackboard *one million times*.

Item 3.

If any busybody preacher anywhere – from Pat Robertson to the Pope – opens his yap about politics or sticks his or her nose in anybody’s personal business, the tax exemption for that preacher’s church should instantly be revoked and should be enforced *retroactively* to the founding of that church in America.

Item 4.

Have a Nice Day.

The President of the College Atheists praised Campy, but he was the only one.

Notable Item #2:

When Campy got kicked off the team and lost his scholarship, Ethan Garrity's rich parents paid for Campy's tuition for the remaining two years.

Green Rage.

Originally, in Madison, the band had called themselves "Yelping Goldfish". The investigating agent had not been able to find out why. As soon as they surfaced in San Francisco, the name of the group had changed to "Green Rage". They played a few gigs, but by all accounts, they were not just ordinary, they were spectacularly mediocre -- the very pinnacle of barely adequate.

However, they had one important thing going for them, and that was Garrity's parents. And their checkbook.

The Space.

After writing an ambitious business plan, Garrity got his parents to loan him a large chunk of cash to buy a warehouse, grease wheels for a zoning change, and run a performance space. Which he named, creatively enough, "The Space".

Garrity's parents had a fortune made from distributing bratwursts, and they were overjoyed that their oldest son had finally come up with some idea about a business. So as unlikely a profit center as The Space might be, it had more potential for success than another semester of college.

Naturally, Green Rage played a lot at The Space. But they also booked a lot of other groups that could actually draw crowds -- mostly dance club nights, jam bands, and a mix of others. In addition, The Space was used during the daytime for meetings, day care, AIDS outreach, art openings, and a host of other activities.

In her one trip to The Space, Jan Reuben had seen a lot of what appeared to be controlled substances passed around, but the most prevalent drug was alcohol. The Space also offered a wide variety of trendy foodstuffs, like independent soft drinks, smart drinks, herbal speed, and a host of other useful or entertaining substances.

These two aspects of The Space led to files of two other people involved with The Space besides Green Rage: Norman Haddal and Ruth Radley.

Norman Haddal.

Age: 34

Place of Origin: Lubbock, Texas

Role: Drug dealer.

Notable Item:

In 1994, Haddal had been finishing a Ph.D. in Chemistry at Berkeley, but he had dropped out after some scandal involving designer drugs. While his career as a chemist had ended in any legal sense, Haddal was known around The Space for his special mixes of mood enhancers, hangover cures, stimulants, and depressants. That, in addition to his

ability to provide crystal meth, cocaine, Ketamine, Ecstasy, or any other party drug.

Haddal had been running a lab somewhere in the East Bay for a year and a half, but the DEA had been completely unable to find it. Meanwhile, Haddal continued creating drugs so new that it was unclear that they were even illegal.

Ruth “Boo” Radley.

Age: 28

Place of Origin: South Bend, Indiana

Role: Manager.

Notable Item:

Ruth Radley's connection to The Space was much less sinister, even though she had apparently been a recommendation of Norman Haddal when he saw how poor a manager Ethan Garrity was.

She:

arranged for the deliveries, for the cleaning, and for booking many of the bands.

She:

ran all the accounts, signed most of the checks, and juggled the daytime schedules for all the meetings and community outreach.

All of this, with only one or two part-time employees. But many of the people involved in the daytime activities did volunteer work that made it possible for everything to run, if not smoothly, then just out of the reach of total chaos.

* * *

Gib only skimmed the profiles, but studied the surveillance photos with deep fascination.

Ethan Garrity was fashion model beautiful, almost too much so, until you saw the photos of him talking. Then, helpfully, he seemed as dumb as one would expect a model to be. Narrow eyes resting under a head of blonde hair. Teeth straight and white, his nose straight and narrow. Nice tan. Worst of all, from Gib's viewpoint, was that when he wasn't singing or making speeches, Garrity seemed to only have two expressions. A self-satisfied smile: the brownnoser putting the apple on the speech teacher's desk; or a look of total earnestness: the brownnoser delivering his speech to the class.

Frank Marion was a geek, plain and simple. He wore thick glasses, carried around a noticeable gut on his bird-thin frame, and had skin that looked greasy even in photos. Less Denzel Washington, more Urkel. The only break genetics seemed to have given him was that his tight, curly hair didn't look as greasy as it probably would have if it were straight and blond. His only noticeable features were his hands, which were huge, with long, delicate fingers.

Stanley Campanella, the bass player, was a brute. Meathooks for hands, and a huge muscular frame. His hair, shagging and thick, framed a face with intense, Old Testament eyes. Gib easily could picture him starting a holy war with his teammates. The only expression his face ever seemed to show was a numb hostility.

Norman Haddal was a medium-sized man, with a shaved head, a jutting beak of a nose, and a Scandinavian brow hovering over dark brown eyes. A Keane painting turned

drug dealer. He dressed simply, always in black and white. Sometimes just black. He was pale as notebook paper, and radiated calm, like a picture of the Alaskan tundra.

Finally, there was Ruth Radley. According to the report, she was 5'9", but she looked shorter to Gib. Possibly because her face had a certain monkeyish quality, which made her seem slighter. A *cute* monkey, but a monkey nonetheless, with her round face, wide eyes, and snub nose. Gib took a closer look at a series of pictures of her jogging, wearing shorts and a cutoff shirt, and was intrigued by the clean cut of her shoulder muscles, her lean legs, her washboard stomach. But other than that, she just looked tired.

He tossed the remnants of the pizza, along with the reports, into the garbage and looked at the final piece of paperwork. Jan Reuben had given him an easy-to-remember false identity, with a Virginia driver's license, by simply flipping his names. So "Edward Gibson" was now "Gibson Edwards". And either way, he'd ask people to call him Gib. Easy enough. The next day, he would scout The Space for himself.

"Kettle, Pot. Pot, Kettle."

Everything that is beautiful and noble is the product of reason and calculation.
Charles Baudelaire

The next day, Gib actually stated by tracking down a place to live. Through Jan Reuben, he contacted a DEA agent in charge of confiscated properties around the Bay Area. The agent, Bobby McDonnell, was a haircut of a man, with a suit (silk) and a car (BMW) to match.

"Nice car," Gib said.

"Yeah. Thanks to RICO."

"Who?"

"RICO. It's some law, means we can confiscate all of a drug dealer's things. Suits, cars, houses, whatever. It's how we got all these buildings and condos for you to choose from.

"So," McDonnell continued, "where do you want to live?"

"I have choices?"

"Sure. What's your cover?"

"What do you mean?"

McDonnell glanced over. When you go into a class, half-asleep, and the professor asks you a question;

and you don't know the answer;

and sitting next to you is some full-on frat boy;

and he knows you don't know the answer, and that the professor knows, too;

and the he looks at you with contempt unleavened with the slightest trace of pity; that's the way McDonnell glanced at Gib.

"If you don't have a cover planned, why don't you call yourself a writer? That gives you an excuse to ask questions. And you don't have to dress up."

Rankled, Gib asked, "Where in San Francisco does a writer with a bad wardrobe live?"

McDonnell considered. "There's always the Mission."

Shortly, the two of them were standing in an old warehouse that had been converted to other uses. The ground floor had a bar (Club Pied), while the top floor was a huge loft space. The loft had an unfinished look, with a minimum of furniture and decoration. As if a group of workers had put in just enough work to call the place finished, but not enough to call it nice.

It was huge, though,. Convenient walking distance to The Space. Plus, there was parking in back.

"Where do I sign?" Gib asked.

That night, he pulled out an old ratty Fishbone t-shirt, yanked on some jeans, and went off to The Space. The cover was ten bucks for three bands. After Gib handed over his ten to the doorman, he struggled his way through the hugger mugger until he got to the main performance area, where a shitty rock band was abusing the audience with the classic rock licks.

The Space was carved out of an old warehouse that had a similar look to Gib's new building. The main area held maybe as many as a thousand people. Plus, the balcony that overlooked the space probably held a hundred more. He was reminded of Irving Plaza in New York or the Metro in Chicago.

The stage was on the left as he walked in. More importantly, the bar was on his right.

A third of the bar was partitioned off for selling stuff besides drinks. After getting himself a beer, Gib walked over. Band t-shirts and CDs being flogged. Posters, stickers, "sign up for our mailing list". In addition to the band junk, there were also big piles of photocopies -- flyers full of environmental factoids, protest announcements, and contact information for various groups. Also, stacks of books with titles like *Monkeywrenching!* and *Spike the System*.

Gib turned to wander through the crowd. In the time it took him to drink his beer, he spotted enough drug dealing to anesthetize Timothy Leary, with enough left over to stun Hunter S. Thompson. He passed around some Jefferson and got back some Miranda Warnings waiting to happen. Penny-ante drug busts were bullshit, though. Busting pissant dealers by the dozens might be all right for a beat cop or a DEA jagoff like Bobby McDonnell, but neither Jan Reuben or Bob Maynard would care. If the Chairman of the Federal Reserve found a dollar on the street, it would be nice; but it wouldn't make the papers. Gib went back and got another beer, walked over to pick up some of the activist info.

As he was folding photocopies and stuffing them in his back pocket, there was a lull in the activity around the bar. One of the women behind the counter noticed him and he recognized her as well. Ruth Radley.

She took a lousy picture, Gib realized. If Indians had believed the camera captured a bit of your soul, Ruth Radley clearly had found a way to defeat that theft. It was the difference between reading a Rand McNally roadmap of Monument Valley, and watching a John Ford western set there. With one, you got vaguely familiar with the routes through. The other gave you all the life between the roads. Cowboys and Indians. Slapstick and tragedy.

Life and death.

Plus, a spirit that loomed over everything like the sun. The kid of energy that gave contrast and clarity. When it went away, the landscape existed only in the grey and ordinary.

John Ford westerns had John Wayne to fill that role.

And now Gib had Ruth Radley.

She walked down the bar toward him and he shook, like iron shavings fighting a magnet. He returned her grin as she grabbed the bar in front of him. He noticed how her biceps popped out as she swung back and forth on her heels. His eyes snapped back and forth, trying to capture every detail of her.

What the fuck IS this? Gib thought, watching his hand quiver.

"Hey, there!" Ruth yelled over the music. "You a narc?"

"A narc?" he sputtered.

"Yeah! You scored about a hundred bucks of shit in the last ten minutes. So how come you're here for a beer?"

He tried to laugh it off. "I'm not a narc! "

She shrugged, not believing or disbelieving. "Wouldn't make a difference anyway. Not with what you bought." Then she reached over and grabbed his beer out of his hands, took a long drink and handed the bottle back. "Here. Saved you the dregs."

"Thanks. Hey, what's with all the material?" He tapped some of the stacks of flyers.

"You interested?"

"Maybe."

"Here." She picked up one of the flyers that Gib hadn't seen. "Read this. There's a meeting tomorrow afternoon." She looked back over her shoulder. The band had finished its awfulness, so people had flocked over to the bar. "Hey, I gotta go. Maybe I'll see you tomorrow."

"Hey, wait! Look!" As she turned around, Gib pulled a random dose of something out of his pocket and ostentatiously put it in his mouth.

She laughed.

He took a last drink of his beer and backwashed the dose back into the bottle. He carefully carried the bottle out of Ruth's sight before throwing it away and ordering another.

Wandered through the place, Gib looked for any of the other targets. As it turned out, there was also a bar up in the balcony, so he kept drinking while he looked. Two more beers and a shot of whiskey later, he hadn't seen any of the three members of Green Rage. But he had spotted Norman Haddal, who seemed to be the most popular dealer in the whole place.

Up in one of the corners of the balcony, the bald dealer held court, giving away fully as much as he sold. It was confusing until Gib saw one of the guys he had bought a hit from come up to Haddal and pass him a huge wad of bills. At that point, Gib realized the dealers inside The Space were franchisees, and Haddal was their Ray Kroc. And there was little chance the people who ran The Space didn't know about it. Maybe they were even involved. This was a lot better than just some low-level drug crap. By itself, it was probably enough to shut The Space down. And McDonnell and his DEA pals could swing a big RICO stick as well. Done right, the Feds could probably come in and confiscate everything. Though it still probably wouldn't impress Reuben or Maynard.

It was a pretty good beginning, so he called it a night. Maybe he hadn't spotted the three main guys, but he didn't want to push his luck any further. And the new band was the same as the old band -- maybe worse.

Then when he hit the main floor, he realized the new band was Green Rage. He smacked himself in the head ostentatiously, disgusted with himself. They had been standing right in front of him -- Ethan Garrity singing and playing guitar, Stanley Campanella playing bass, and Frank Marion on drums.

Green Rage played a generic kind of pop punk. Frank Marion and Campy were actually an adequate rhythm section, but Ethan Garrity was incredibly uneven. It took a full song before Gib realized what the problem was. If Garrity was just playing guitar, he fell into a pretty stable groove with the two other guys -- if you could call the stomping around a groove. The reason was clear if you looked close: Garrity was actually mouthing the names of the chords as he looked at his fret boards. "G, C, D. A, C D."

But whenever he sang and played at the same time, everything turned into sonic stew.

As for the lyrics, mostly Gib had no idea what the hell Garrity was saying, until he finally realized that the current song was in French -- until it hit the chorus. When Gib heard the awkward translation, he finally realized the lyrics were ripped off from Baudelaire:

*"I have my wet lips and have the science
to bury in your bed my worn-out conscience"*

He had liked the lyrics better when he hadn't understood them. Romantic pretensions presented in public made him wince. Unless you were actually dying of consumption, it was always better to keep your grand romantic gestures to yourself.

On the other hand, at least Garrity was smart enough to rip off something good like Baudelaire. Gib appreciated poetry for its use for first dates and 4 AM apologies, so he memorized it at every chance. He even got to like some of it, because in reasonable doses it was okay, just like tequila or jogging. Gib thought of it as the Showtune Theory of Life. A couple of showtunes here and there were tolerable, but whole evenings with drunk friends belting out the greatest hits of Mitzi Gaynor made Gib want to start dealing out tonsillectomies with a cleaver.

Campy took over the mike for the next song. It was a slow, moody song, and Campy spoke the lyrics as much as sang them, while Garrity played harmonic and feedback tricks with his guitar. The lyrics went something like:

“What am I thinking?
I'm in love with you. Can't you tell?
I'm in love with you. So I don't talk to you.
I'm in love with you. So I don't walk with you.
I'm in love with you. I don't look you in the face.
I'm in love with you. I will never speak your name.
I'm in love with you. So I will never tell you.
I will never tell anyone.
I will never tell anyone.”

Two love songs, and nothing about the environment. Gib didn't want to push his luck. He went back to his warehouse and gave Jan Reuben a call, figuring he had earned some takeout after such a rough night of work.

As it turned out, Reuben wasn't answering her phone, so after leaving a message on her machine, Gib selected a random pill out of the batch he had bought, figuring he should test what Haddal produced. He popped the pill, then settled down to watch TV.

A few hours later, higher than a Cessna, Gib found himself talking to Jan Reuben. The phone must have been ringing, but he had no memory of picking it up. He realized he had been dreaming about his conversation with Ruth Radley, filling in smarter answers on his side.

Reuben wasn't able to meet him and seemed genuinely distraught about it.
“Are you OK, Gib? You sound a little stuffed up”

"I'm fine, Ruth."

"Ruth? Who's Ruth?"

It was an ice cube in the crotch. "What? Reuben? I said 'Reuben'! I think you're right. I'm coming down with a cold. Stuffed up." Sympathies and recommendation followed. Gib finally hung up after promising to take Zinc and Vitamin E. Or maybe C.

The buzz from Haddal's pill was killed, but a clear weariness sprung out of the corpse of the high. Like waking up from a refreshing nap. Gib sat on the couch and entertained images of Ruth Radley. He couldn't get her out of his head.