

## "Disneyland"

At Disneyland one creates (with a great deal of help) the idea that Every Thing Not Required Is Forbidden. And so we see, as in any other totalitarian state, the internalization of authority, and its transformation into a Sense of Right.

**David Mamet**

The Goat pulled into the campground around 6:30 AM. Gib decided he probably could have shaved a half an hour off the time, on the desert road between Vegas and LA, but he had mulled over the wedding for most of the drive, picking out moments of enjoyment. As he indulged in instant nostalgia, his speed would drift off. He would eventually glance down at the speedometer and see he was only going 75, and curse his inattentiveness. He would accelerate back to a more reasonable speed of 95 and apologize to the GTO for embarrassing it. He said the words quietly, though, so Ruth wouldn't hear him and make fun of him.

A medium fog was lying over the campground, and it made the drive through it exceedingly spooky. To get to the Ragers's site, Gib drove past roads full of campers with senior citizens sitting outside already, even at the early hour. The camper people watched Gib and Ruth through the early morning fog without any expression -- not hostility, nor friendliness.

Finally, they saw a crowd of people standing around a cookfire and a picnic table. Almost all of the people had grey hair except for and two families with little kids and the three Ragers. Marion and Campy were cooking a huge breakfast, including oatmeal that was steaming in a huge pot on the fire, scrambled eggs, bacon and hot coffee. Garrity was serving out the food from the table and holding court. In the mist, it looked like a party that had started the night before and was still going strong.

Once Gib and Ruth walked up, Marion and Campy started to clean and pack everything while Garrity said goodbye and a couple of words to each person. Most people looked startled for a second when he brought up the environment, but Garrity charmed even the most reluctant of them. He left a stack of photocopied pamphlets on the table as he waved goodbye. Some of the older folks even picked them up and started to read.

"Come on," he said to Gib and Ruth as he put his arms around their shoulders and steered them toward the car. "Campy and Frank will follow us in the van."

"You're riding with us?" Gib asked, irritated but trying not to show it.

"Sure! You've got a cool car!"

Gib looked across at Ruth and she rolled her eyes as she mimed a chattering mouth with her hands. After helping Campy and Marion load up the van, they made their way back to 210 which would turn into 57 and head south toward Anaheim and Disneyland. Gib hoped against the odds that Garrity would nap, but instead he leaned over the back seat with his head between Ruth and Gib and started a non-stop talkathon.

"You ever been to Disneyland before, Gib?"

"No, World."

"Right. Epcot Center and alligators, the whole shebang. I'll bet you loved it."

"Not really."

Garrity looked shocked. "What? A kid not loving anything Disney? What was

wrong?"

"It was a class trip for high school and I was sixteen. The only thing a sixteen year old can do at Disneyworld is try to buy beer and hit on girls in front of her parents. And fail miserably at both."

"Geeze, Gib. Didn't you have any sense of fun? Amusements parks are great! Disney, Six Flags, Great Adventure. Anything."

"Ask Ethan about roller coasters," Ruth said.

Garrity's eyes widened with delight. "*Roller* coasters! I *love* roller coasters! They're the best thing in the world. When I was a kid, my Dad would take me along on business trips if they went anywhere near a roller coaster I'd heard of. I mean, one time in Cleveland, he ditched out on reservations at a four-star French restaurant when the Maitre D' told him about a rickety old wooden deathtrap at a traveling carnny thirty miles south of there."

"It's almost heartwarming," Ruth said.

"You can't tell me you don't like roller coasters, Gib."

"They're okay, I guess. Like cheesecake. I like it fine, but I never think to have it on my own."

"Wow, that kills me. I think they're as good as sex!"

Ruth laughed.

"No, seriously!" Garrity said defensively. "Maybe even better, cause they're reliable. Speed and centrifugal force."

"Wait, let me tell you my best roller coaster story. My Dad took me on a trip to New York when I was eight. I had read everything I could about the Coney Island Cyclone -- it was my whole life for the month leading up to the trip. The Cyclone opened on June 26, 1927. It's not the oldest wooden coaster still in existence -- there's one in Alltoona, Pennsylvania that was built in 1902. But it's a legend."

"That's pretty good," Ruth said. "How'd you remember all that?"

"I told you, this is my favorite roller coaster story. And the Cyclone is my favorite roller coaster. Here's what happened. We flew into LaGuardia at night, and we stayed in the Waldorf. I have this memory of staring up at the huge clock in the lobby of the Waldorf."

"My father had a business meeting at 7:30 AM, and he said he would be back by eleven to take me to Coney Island for the afternoon. I had found out there was an all-day price for the ride, where you could ride for as long as you wanted for most of the day, until about four o'clock. So at 10:30, I was ready and waiting in the lobby of the Waldorf. I was too excited to sit down, so I started pacing around, and every few minutes I would look up at the clock -- made out of this dark, dark, wood. They must have just polished it, because I remember that it smelled of lemon oil. I even remember asking one of the clerks if the clock had the right time. Because eleven came and went and Dad didn't show. I found out later the meeting ran long."

"But all I knew was that he wasn't there, and that the Cyclone was rolling up and down without me. Every time I looked up, it was like being stabbed."

Garrity paused and looked at both Gib and Ruth. "No, that's not right. That's me trying to be clever. I'm not a writer like you, Gib, so I probably sound stupid trying to make a metaphor or something."

"No, you're fine," Ruth said. Gib just nodded.

"Except I'm not telling the truth," Garrity said. "It didn't feel like being stabbed. It felt just like walking home from elementary school and having to pee. Maybe home is only four or five blocks away, but it feels like forever. You cross your legs and limp along and try not to think of waterfalls or rivers. I'll bet every little kid who walks home knows what that feels like. Unless maybe little girls pee differently, and it's easier for them to hold it."

Both Gib and Garrity waited for Ruth to chip in, but she just shook her head. "Trade secrets, gentlemen."

Garrity said. "So at twenty after eleven, I just took off. I got in a cab and asked the cabbie to take me to Coney. He didn't even look at me, just took off. About ten blocks south, he finally realized I was just a kid in the back seat. We were stopped at a traffic light and he gently asked me if I had enough money to pay for a ride to Coney. I didn't have any idea, so he took me to a subway, and told me to get on the train at this exact stop, and take it to the end of the line, and that would be Coney. He didn't even charge me for the ten block ride -- imagine a New York cabbie doing that.

"It took about an hour, but at the end of the line, I followed the crowd, and there was the Boardwalk. Nathan's hot dogs, freak shows, all that. I ran all the way to the ticket seller, and got a full pass. It didn't cost all my money, but I remember it was close to it. I didn't even have money for the subway ride back. But I didn't care. I just rode and rode for hours.

"Here's what I love about the Cyclone. The first drop. Some people even capitalize it." Garrity held up his hands and framed his words. "The Drop. It's amazing. There are taller drops around and crazy loop-the-loops and all sort of stuff, but The Drop is always the best. You hit the first crest and drop eighty-five feet."

"Eighty-five feet?" Ruth asked.

"Oh, that's actually not that big a drop for a roller coaster. Some of the big steel one are a lot higher and drop further. But the Cyclone does it at a sixty degree angle. It's amazing. And at the bottom, the whole area looks like a blown up lumberyard, with debris everywhere. Then there's another drop and then a third one. There's only one spot that isn't breath taking, and I think that's deliberate, so people don't die of heart attacks."

"Ethan, what's fun about that?" Ruth asked. "Dropping a long way at high speeds sounds crazy to me."

"Oh, no. I told you it was like sex. You get pulled up to the top, the chains clacking the whole way, and that's like the foreplay, but it doesn't waste so much time. And then you get this huge blast of speed and terror and gravity where all your muscles lock and clench and you can barely breathe but you just disappear into the sensation. And then you get another moment of that, and another. Sounds like every description of a multiple orgasm I've ever heard. What's not to like about that?"

Ruth didn't look convinced. "What was your dad doing during all of this?" she asked.

Garrity laughed. "That's the craziest part. He got there at about noon, if I remember right. When he couldn't find me, he went ass over teakettle. Called the cops and everything. The cops get there, and they get pretty hopped up, because a kid vanishing in the Waldorf would be pretty big news.

"So they were calling all cars or sending out APBs or whatever it is cops do. Then the desk clerk tells them he saw me walk out. So they ask the doorman, and he says he got me a cab. And they track the cabbie down on the radio, and he tells the whole train to Coney story. The upshot is, a couple of hours later, I'm coming into the last turn and I see all these cops at the entrance to the Cyclone, and when I finally step out of the last car, there's my Dad, his face white as a sheet.

"He walked right up to me, and while he did he started cursing. It was quiet at first, but then he got louder and louder until finally he screaming out 'Fuck, shit, goddamnit' and standing right in front of me. Then he grabbed me up in a big bear hug and started bawling. I didn't know what was wrong, so I started crying, too. The cops were worried they were going to have to pull him off of me, like he was a crazy child beater. Dad was shaking, so we got a hot dog and sat and ate it while I said how sorry I was for leaving without him. Because, you know, the Cyclone was so cool and it was a shame he missed it."

Ruth burst out laughing. "Not because you got the cops involved, or because you'd almost frightened him to death, but because he couldn't ride the Cyclone with you."

"Yup."

Ruth kept laughing, and Garrity had a satisfied smile on his face. Gib chuckled a little bit, but mostly, he tried to imagine Gibson Senior laughing, crying or hugging, all at once, and couldn't do it.

Finally, Garrity patted them both on the back and laid down in the back seat. Gib thought he was sleeping, but Garrity had one last thing to say.

"The only decent roller coaster at Disneyland is Space Mountain, and it's just average. There's some other okay rides there. We'll make sure to hit them all, if we don't get kicked out quick for causing trouble."

"What kind of trouble?" Gib asked.

"You'll see. Make sure to get one of the cameras out of the van. You guys are our backup if the main cameras get taken away. We've heard Disney is notorious for confiscating tapes."

"Seriously, Ethan, what's the plan?" Gib asked. "What's going on?"

"Gib, Gib, Gib. If I told you, it wouldn't be a surprise. I'll tell you this, though. First we're going to stand in line, and then we're not going to stand in line." In a couple of minutes, they could hear Garrity snoring loudly, even over the wind.

They got to Disneyland a while later, parked and waited for Campy and Marion to join them. When the van finally showed up, Garrity walked over and jumped in the side door. Gib assumed the Ragers were doing some Spicoli action, until the van door opened again. Both Marion and Campy had large bags full of video equipment, including stacks of blank tapes and extra batteries. Marion handed a third bag to Ruth, showed her how to use the camera. Then they all walked to the gate.

"You ever been to Disneyland, Campy?" Ruth asked.

"Yeah." Campy's face invited no more conversation, and he walked to the front of the group.

At the entry gate, Garrity made sure that Gib and Ruth were a few admissions behind. "We don't want anyone to know you're with us until it's too late. You're our ace in the hole," he said with a grin.

When the three men had walked a bit ahead, Gib commented to Ruth, "Do you have any idea what they're going to do?"

Ruth shrugged. "Who cares? Just try to enjoy yourself."

And for a few hours, they did. They followed the Ragers around, and talked about nothing in particular, and made dumb jokes while they stood in lines. The lines were already getting long, even this early in the day. But the five of them, in their separate groups of three and two, rode every ride that was even marginally exciting, finally finishing with Space Mountain before the Ragers led Gib and Ruth to a restaurant in Main Town, USA, where they all sat down together.

The restaurant was meant for the family crowd, and most of the tables were filled with parents trying to keep their kids' screaming down to tolerable volumes. The combined effect of all the excited children was like standing on a runway at an airport, listening to planes take off. Gib felt a headache developing.

Annoyed, he asked Garrity, "I thought we were supposed to stay far away from you guys."

Campy grunted agreement. He seemed surprised to agree with Gib about anything. Garrity waved it off.

"It's just breakfast. I don't see any surveillance cameras, do you?" Garrity asked.

Frank Marion said, "There's one over by the hostess' table. There's another one out in the main area. That's it."

Gib, not having thought about it, twisted around but couldn't spot anything.

"Nothing to worry about," Garrity said. "Disney has surveillance on everything, all the time. Just make sure not to pull out your pee-pee."

"Let's just enjoy lunch, okay?" Ruth said, annoyed.

After the drinks arrived, Garrity decided to make small talk.

"Gib, we've been wondering how you heard about The Space."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, we know you hung around originally because you thought there was a story. Turned out to be true! But Campy was wondering how you heard about us in the first place."

"I don't really remember."

"Oh come on! Everything about The Space must be really important to you! You do all that volunteer work. And we all have a pretty good idea of why you're still hanging around." Garrity winked at Ruth. "When are you two crazy kids going to tie the knot?"

Gib, desperately trying to change the subject, blurted out: "Yesterday!"

Ruth looked at him with horror. Both Campy and Marion looked extremely interested, but Garrity hardly noticed.

"Yesterday?" Garrity laughed, clearly thinking Gib was making some sort of joke. "Oh, so you're *newlyweds*! That's really sweet." He winked broadly. The other two men, reassured because Garrity thought it was a joke, leaned back in their chairs.

"So this is your *honeymoon*?" Garrity said. "We should get you a gift. What's the day anniversary? Gold? Silver? Paper? Wait, I think it's 'keychain'."

Marion laughed.

"I'll bet I can find something in the gift store outside." Garrity got up just as the waitress arrived with their food. Before anyone could say otherwise, Garrity was off and

running. When Gib saw him stop and talk with the hostess, he groaned. Whatever Garrity was planning, it was going to be extremely embarrassing -- no question about it.

As the rest of them ate, the only bit of conversation was Campy, who at one point snorted, said to himself, "Married," then laughed quietly as he drank his coffee.

Suddenly, Garrity reappeared and presented Gib and Ruth with matching Mickey and Minnie keychains.

"Thanks, Ethan," Gib said. "Hey, what were you talking about with --"

"No time, Gib. Food's getting cold!" Garrity ate quickly, keeping his mouth too full to talk.

Just as the waitress was clearing the plates, a large group of Disney characters walked into the restaurant and started posing for pictures with kids and their families. Gib tried to drink his coffee, but the flashes fanned the flames of his headache. He put his face in his hands and tried not to look.

When he finally looked up, he was surrounded. On one side of the table, near Garrity, were Goofy and Pluto. Snow White, Belle and one of the three pigs were helping Ruth out of her chair. Campy and Marion were laughing uproariously. Gib found himself pulled gently out of his seat and listened as Snow White announced, "We have a pair of *newlyweds* here today!" The restaurant broke into a wave of applause and cheers. When the applause died out, there was a tiny little voice that asked, "Ma! What does 'newlyweds' mean?"

The hostess and a couple of waitresses wheeled in a cake and presented a knife to Gib. Stunned and confused, he had no idea what to do with the blade. As if she expected that reaction, the hostess passed the knife on to Ruth, who sliced into the cake. She asked the hostess to hand out slices until they ran out.

At that point, Garrity jumped up and yelled, "We need a picture!" He herded the characters into a group behind Gib, Ruth and the cake. Campy walked behind the whole group to stand next to Garrity while Marion pulled out his non-video camera and started asking people to move in closer together.

Garrity was behind Pluto, and he couldn't see over the big dog's head. Finally, desperate to be seen, Garrity jumped on Pluto's back right when Marion yelled, "Say cheese". Piggybacking, Garrity wrapped one arm around the dog's neck, swung his other hand and his face around the plushy dog's shoulder, and flashed a peace sign at the camera just as the flash went off.

No one except Marion had noticed what Garrity had done until the group was breaking up, all full of smiles. Garrity slid off Pluto's back and let go. Pluto took an angry step away, bumping the Little Pig into an adjoining table in the process, then turned around to face Garrity.

Garrity had the strangest expression on his face as Pluto angrily stood in front of him, furry fists clenching. Garrity looked over at Gib and blurted out in a wondrous voice:

"Pluto's got *tits*!"

At which point, Pluto punched him right on the chin.

Garrity went spilling over the table behind him and crashed to the floor, which kicked off a general pandemonium in the restaurant. As Pluto ran out of the restaurant, knocking over the wedding cake as she ran, Campy picked the stunned Garrity up off the floor, then shoved him toward the exit. Stopping only to pick up the camera bags, Campy

tossed a pile of money on the table and dragged Marion with him as they followed Garrity.

Snow White ran off after Pluto, while Goofy and the Little Pig turned angrily toward Gib and Ruth. Belle just tried to keep a smile on her face. Evidently, it took all the control she had, because she didn't move a muscle, except to pull her smile tighter and wider.

Gib grabbed Ruth's hand and pushed his way past the costumed actors, yelling, "We don't know them! We were only sharing a table!"

The two of them raced for the exit. Goofy and the Little Pig tried to follow, but they kept tripping up on their oversized feet. The last thing Gib heard as he left the restaurant was a high-pitched voice asking, almost crying, "Mommy! What did he mean, 'Pluto's got tits?' What are tits, Mommy? What did he meeeeeeeean?" The final wail followed them out into the park.

Gib and Ruth couldn't find the Ragers at first, until Ruth finally realized the obvious destination. Back at Space Mountain, the line had stretched out longer than seemed possible, but Garrity and company were only a few feet ahead when Gib and Ruth joined the line. Garrity was standing just behind a family of four. The father was a rigid-looking sort, his hair in a buzz cut and his khakis neatly creased.

As they watched, Marion pulled out his video camera and started focusing and setting levels, preparing to film Garrity as they stood in line. After about ten minutes of the gradual crawl toward the front of the line, Garrity started talking in a loud, self-involved voice.

"You know, *statistically*, this is one of the safer rides in the whole park."

That gave Gib an idea of where things were heading. He felt really unpleasant watching Garrity go into a familiar character -- the loud, trouble-making pedant. Campy played along while Marion hung back and tried to act like a specific kind of camera-obsessed misanthrope, needing to film every single minute of his Disney trip.

"Really?" Campy said, and looked ready to receive wisdom.

"Oh yeah. Far as I remember, the only bad thing ever to happen at Space Mountain was one kid fell off the ride and ended up a paraplegic. Space Mountain isn't too deadly, not like the Matterhorn. And don't get me *started* on the PeopleMover."

The buzz cut father turned around to say something, but ended up staring directly into Campy's chest. Campy looked at Buzzcut like an ape observing his first banana of the day. The hostility faded from Buzzcut's face to be replaced by weariness.

The sun was beating down on the guy's head, he was herding two kids around, and to add to the fun, there were a couple of assholes talking about unpleasant stuff in front of the kids. *Big* assholes, though. Buzzcut's wife took one look at the situation, and put a pleading hand on his arm. Buzzcut rubbed his face, then announced to the kids that the line was too long; they'd come back later after getting a coke. The kids were unhappy, but Buzzcut added a bribe of ice cream to the coke, and that quieted them down.

Gib turned to Ruth and murmured in her ear. "This is making me really uncomfortable. I'm going to go get a drink. Hold my place?" He took the guide rope and lifted it up so he could limbo under.

"Maybe I will," Ruth said, "and maybe I won't."

Gib dropped the rope and turned around. "Uhhhhhh...?"

Ruth grabbed his shirt and pulled him close. "I can't believe you opened your big

mouth about getting married."

"Sorry! I wasn't thinking. I was thrown off by the whole restaurant scene."

"The *scene* wouldn't have happened if you'd kept *quiet*."

"Ruth, it just popped out. I'm sorry, okay? I wasn't thinking."

He looked into her eyes for a long minute until she finally let go of his shirt as the line made a spasmodic lurch forward. Her eyes were still tight with anger, but she indicated she was willing to let things go by smoothing his shirt over his chest.

Gib sighed quietly in relief and stepped over the new section of rope. "Do you want me to bring back a cold drink or something?"

"Fine."

Gib took a long time to find a drink stand, not wanting to get back to the line any sooner than necessary."

"Give me a large coke and a beer."

"We don't sell beer here, sir."

"I can't get a beer? Jesus Christ."

The vendor looked offended at his language. "Do you want two cokes, sir?"

"Fine."

By the time Gib got back to the Space Mountain line, Garrity's act had advanced up the line so far that it took Gib five minutes of walking just to find Ruth and the Ragers. Garrity's act had finally bogged down behind a Japanese family that appeared to think he was part of the entertainment provided by the park. Every time Garrity emphasized some statistic, they laughed and applauded. Frank Marion had even stopped filming.

Gib handed the drink over to Ruth, who looked grateful to see him. She held his hand and whispered in his ear, "Sorry for losing my temper. They didn't know you were telling the truth."

As Gib watched, the man he had built up as one of the biggest terrorist threats to the United States since the bombing of the Murrah Building was jabbering in front of a family of Japanese tourists who thought he was the cuddliest thing since the Pillsbury Dough Boy. By this time, even the people behind Garrity were laughing at him, people who had previously seen he and Campy as fairly threatening. As Gib watched, the Japanese father had his wife and two children pose with Garrity while he snapped their picture. Even Campy smiled.

Suddenly, Gib realized how on the edge everything was. Gib knew that, by now, if he was honest with Masturbatin' Bob, the worst he could get Green Rage arrested for was noise pollution. Norman Haddal had been all he had.

And Reuben would be no help. Garrity had spouted some environmental marketing, caused a traffic jam, showed some videos, and she had seen him as someone who would be bombing the White House as soon as he was ready. Maynard had agreed with her because he saw Green Rage appear on TV and in magazines. And Gib had fed their paranoid flames because it made his life easy.

Because Gib could feel that Maynard and Reuben were anxious to move. It was clear from the way Reuben had been reacting to his reports, and the way Maynard blew up after the article came out. If Gib didn't have something to give them soon, they would move with what they had. It might only amount to harassment, but it would ruin everyone involved, from the FBI to The Space.

Worst of all, Gib realized, this would all reflect badly on Uncle Joseph, who had as much as hijacked this investigation and put Gib in the catbird seat. When Gib was shown to be a complete flop, Uncle Joseph would lose a lot of clout. Gib had no illusions that part of the clout that remained would be used to grind Gib like hamburger.

If only Garrity and Green Rage had been something real! Something beyond an image and a nice haircut! If Green Rage had some big plan, some grand idea that Gib could present to Maynard and Reuben, then Gib knew he could work this case to whatever outcome he wanted. He could keep Ruth out of it. Garrity and Campy would have to be arrested, but Gib might even be able to keep Frank Marion out of trouble.

If he had something to offer.

Instead, he had these twerps.

Under air that felt like lead, Gib hunched his shoulders and looked at the back of Garrity's head, wondering what it would be like to punch him there as hard as he possibly could. No, punching him in the head would break his knuckles -- better to club him with an elbow and then kick him when he dropped to the ground. But then Campy would get involved, the damn dirty ape, and he would grind some Hamburger Gib. Even so, for the whole time it took to get to the boarding area for the ride, Gib contemplated mayhem.

The Japanese family was just about to board the ride when Campy started speaking to them, in what sounded like fluent Japanese. For the first couple of sentences, the father laughed happily, but he got entirely still and silent, while his wife gripped her children defensively. The little girl broke out into hysterical tears and had to be forced onto the ride. The attendants stood by, unsure of what to do, while the father and sat the purple-faced child next to him, pointedly putting himself between the girl and Campy.

After the train had left and Campy was standing at the head of the line waiting for the next one, Gib heard one of the attendants ask the big man what he had said to the family. Campy stared emotionlessly at the smaller man for a few moments. Then he said, "I told them about the 50-year old woman who was thrown out of the rear car of one of these things and bounced along the track. She wasn't able to get to her feet before the next train car hit her dead on, and dragged her along the tracks until her corpse, which was wedged under the lead train car like a doorstop, finally stopped the car after a full train length."

The next train car pulled in.

"That's a lie, of course," Campy said to the stunned attendant. "That didn't happen here, it happened on some other roller coaster."

Gib was glad he didn't have a gun.

Campy and Garrity got into the front car, while Frank Marion climbed into the next car -- alone, as no one else seemed to want to get too close to Campy.

"Better strap me in tight," Campy said calmly to the attendant, who got away from Campy as quickly as his duties would allow. He was still muttering to himself when he strapped Gib and Ruth in, one car short of the rear.

The ride itself went without incident.

Afterwards, the Ragers trucked off into the park, looking for more chances to wreak havoc. First, they stood in a few more ride lines, following the pattern they had started at Space Mountain. Mostly it was death statistics, but Garrity also crafted special spiels for particular rides. In the Small World line, he talked about kinds of child

prostitution and slavery from around the world, spending particular time describing what he called the "famous child whores of Thailand." During the ride itself, he called the out the sexual position trick most associated with each country.

"Hey, kids, French Kiss. That's when a boy and a girl tongue wrestle! In Amsterdam, prostitution is totally legal, did you know that? Do you know what Dutch Treat is?"

Waiting for the Pirates of the Caribbean, Garrity went into a graphic description of exactly what was involved in being "keelhauled." He included a specific description of what the "gizzard" was. There was also a rant about the nature of Caribbean slavery, using the phrase "the most overlooked genocide in history" more than once.

In the line for the Haunted House ride, Garrity described -- in excruciating detail -- an execution by lethal injection. Then he moved on to the intricacies of the electric chair.

Oddly enough, Gib noticed that the kids in the lines either ignored Garrity, or clapped and shouted approval at his graphic descriptions. A few looked as if they might have cried, but Garrity was too cheerful as he talked. The parents were another story, but Campy's ability to loom defused those situations. At Pirates of the Caribbean, Campy had also gulped down some pills that looked like Norman Haddal special mixes, chasing them with a large cherry drink, which spilled over his cheeks as he drank. The red drink had dried on his cheek like streak of blood, which he declined to wipe away. That alone had driven six families out of the line ahead of them without Garrity saying a word.

At least Garrity kept quiet during the rides themselves -- or, more precisely, the only sound he made was delighted shouting. As they followed along, Ruth explained to Gib the basic idea behind Garrity's antics.

"Campy told me they're demonstrating, let me see, what was it?" Ruth pulled a red colored pamphlet out of the bag of video equipment. "They've been dumping these handouts all over the park. Here's a quote. *We oppose the stultifying fascism beneath the surface of any controlled environment, especially one that tries to control nature instead of living in harmony with it.*"

"That sounds like a bunch of crap to me," Gib said. "They're just making people look uncomfortable on film. And what are they going to do with the footage, anyway?"

"Frank said something about taking the funniest stuff and editing it with some information about how Disney destroys the environment both in Florida and California. Then they'd send it to public access TV shows, film festivals and so on. Maybe try to get it on HBO."

Late in the day, all five of them were standing around the central circle of Disneyland, looking up at Snow White's castle and having ice cream. As far as Gib could tell, the pills Campy had taken gave him the screaming munchies, an occasional twitch (as if he were fighting off the impulse to dance), and a incongruous merry grin. Campy still hadn't wiped the scarlet streak from his cheeks.

Garrity didn't seem to notice anything wrong, but Frank Marion was handling Campy with kid gloves and had signaled for Ruth and Gib to join them. With the daylight starting to fade, Marion had told Garrity that they probably had enough footage. Campy was sitting on a bench eating a slice of pizza, a hamburger and a coke, in addition to the ice cream that the other four had gotten. As he ate, he was watching a bunch of teenagers with glassy intensity.

Gib wondered what Campy found so fascinating about the group of kids. They were just Goths. The park was full of Goths. Ruth claimed it was an example of how *everyone* came to Disneyland, even those dedicated to black makeup and vampire lifestyles. For all of that, the Goth kids didn't look to be having a good time. Their pale skin, their black clothes and makeup, all of it combined to make for a glum-looking bunch of people who milled around the park grimly, sneering at passers-by. They seemed to enjoy the sneering, though.

"It's very depressing. Why are they here?" Garrity said about the Goths while Frank Marion was loaded up a fresh tape into the camera.

"Maybe they just come here to get cheered up," Gib said. "That's what Disneyland is supposed to be for, all of your fun and games notwithstanding."

Garrity looked at Gib. "You don't think today's been fun? You don't think we're doing something meaningful?"

"Meaningful? I think you're just getting off on being an asshole. You don't care whose day you ruin so long as you look good on film."

Campy leaned into the conversation suddenly. "You think these kids are here to be cheered up?" Campy asked.

"Yes," Gib answered angry to be intimidated. "I do."

"Well, hell, we should help," Campy said. "Don't you think so, Ethan?"

"Absolutely!" Garrity instantly agreed.

"Wait, that's not --" Gib said, trying to backtrack.

"You're absolutely right, Gib," Campy said. "We're not seeing the true spirit of Disneyland. We should get with the program. We should join in and be good little Mouseketeers."

Campy was near-shouting.

"Maybe these little middle-class fucks who claim to be so depressed they have to *dress* that way need to be cheered up! So let's buy every little Goth kid an ice cream! And then we can dance!"

Campy went back to the vending area and bought two fistfuls of vanilla ice cream cones.

"Start filming, Frank. Let's show Gib how cheery we can be, okay?"

"Whatever you say, Campy," Garrity said agreeably. Now even Garrity looked a little nervous at Campy's sudden intensity, but he was clearly determined to go along with whatever his friend had in mind.

Campy walked over to the nearest group of Goths and, with Garrity's help, shoved ice creams into their hands. Campy ended up one ice cream short, so he said, menacingly, to the last two Goths in line, "I didn't bring enough for everyone, so you two better share." The kids might have been dressed up like vampires, but they recognized a monster when they saw one. Not a one of them dropped the ice cream cones, though two of them tried to edge away. Campy walked over to those and squeezed them close with each arm.

"Hi, kids!" Campy shouted. "My friend over there doesn't think you look happy enough for Disneyland!"

All the Goth kids suddenly had the look of Siamese watching a St. Bernard for any signs of which way to start running. Trapped in a bad situation beyond their control, they

clearly hoped whatever was about to happen would at least be over quick. Like going to the prom or losing your virginity.

One Goth, a tall boy with no eyebrows and heavy pancake makeup, tried to placate the big man. "We're not unhappy," he said. "Thanks for the ice cream, but we should get going."

"Go? Oh, no! Not until you're good and *fucking cheery!*" Campy grabbed the tall boy's hand. A Goth girl behind Campy ran away, terrified.

Frank Marion cackled happily as he filmed it all.

Gib suddenly remembered seeing Campy like this after the Burroughs party, ranting about redemption and blood. The Goths were almost cowering in fear as Campy herded them into a circle -- a group of kids being emotionally mugged by a man demanding they cheer the fuck up.

Garrity and Campy grabbed the hands of some of the kids and started to dance stumblingly around in a large circle. Campy sang the Mickey Mouse Club theme as a rhythm. He didn't seem to quite know the words, and the tune came out more like a chain gang song.

"Here's the *club*, that *bangs* a *drum*, that 's *made* for you and *me!* Come on, sing along!"

The Goth kids unhappily joined in the chorus. "M-I-C-K-E-Y, M-O-U-S-E."

"Mickey Mouse, Mickey *Mouse*," Campy shouted. "For *ever* let us *hold* our cherry pies! *High, high, high!* Come along and smoke a bong and join the jubilee! M-I-C-K-E-Y, M-O-U-S-E!"

More than a couple of the Goth kids were crying now, the tears cutting lines through their white pancake makeup. One girl tried to break out of the circle and run when Campy shouted "high, high, high" directly at her. But the tall Goth boy who had spoken earlier held her hand and desperately whispered into her ear. She shook her head at him, and twisted away, but didn't break the circle of dancers.

The singing drew a crowd of laughing park guests who applauded the unwilling dancers. They didn't notice the terrified expressions and awkward stumblings of the Goths. Maybe it was the naturally pale demeanor of the Goths that confused the audience, who couldn't seem to realize the faces were white with fear. Maybe they thought it was a dance about the Haunted House. The audience clapped a rhythm for the dancers, and other gawkers sang along with Campy. Almost all of them snapped pictures.

Gib's temper broke. He walked up to the dancing circle and grabbed Campy by the arm, stopping the dance. The audience booed the interruption, but all of the Goth kids used the opportunity to escape. The sound of black boots running as fast as possible was a paradiddle drumbeat that inspired the watching crowd to break into a long round of applause.

"Leave them the hell alone!" Gib shouted, one hand digging into Campy's shoulder.

The big man laughed contemptuously and slapped Gib's hand away. "I'm just cheering them up. Isn't that what you wanted?" Campy poked Gib in the chest. "Didn't you say we had to get in the spirit of things? I just forced those kids to be fucking happy. Walt control freak Disney would have loved it."

Furious, Gib cocked back a fist and prepared to throw it.

That was when Disney security showed up.

## "Power (of) Suggestion"

Never 'for the sake of peace and quiet' deny your own experience or convictions.

**Dag Hammarskjöld**

Ethan Garrity and Frank Marion were the last ones to be kicked out of the park. Security pounced on Gib and Campy right away, because they were about to start brawling right in the middle of Main Street USA. Garrity and Marion took off running. Later, Gib would see Marion's steady camera work as Garrity ran back to Space Mountain, eager for one more ride. Somehow, Ruth got away.

Shouting, "Fight the power! Cut in line! Fascism with a smile is still fascism! Cut in line!", Garrity ran to the front of the long, long line waiting for the roller coaster and hopped into the first open seat.

The kids running the ride had no desire to play rent-a-cop, so they stopped the line, buckled Garrity and Marion in, and sent them down the line. Garrity whooped with childlike glee the whole way. As the two men exited from the ride, a platoon of security guards were waiting to confiscate the video tapes and take them to Disney jail.

None of the Goth kids wanted to get involved, so the guards figured it would just be easiest to kick all the troublemakers out of the park. So they did, after confiscating all videotape and issuing their sternest of warnings. Luckily, none of the guards connected this particular ruckus with the near-riot involving Pluto earlier in the day.

When the four of them were escorted through the underground tunnels, they emerged a short way from the front gate. After being kicked out with a warning never to return, the four of them found Ruth waiting for them at the cars.

"So they stole all the video?" Campy asked.

Frank Marion smiled, and reached into the front of his pants. He came back out with three videocassettes. "They only got the blanks."

Campy and Garrity cheered.

"Celebrate some other place, okay" Gib suggested. "Let's get the fuck out of here."

Campy looked over at Gib. "What's the problem? You afraid Mickey and Donald are gonna come out, gunning for revenge?"

"Fuck you!" Gib shouted. "You and your goddamn bullshit!"

Garrity, realizing how upset Gib was, finally stopped laughing. "Hey, guys, let's not get upset here. What's wrong, Gib?"

Gib sputtered. It had been a long, ridiculous day. He had been humiliated, irritated, and enraged.

Fuck it.

"What wrong is all this superficial, self-serving *bullshit*. You guys are about as radical as an enema, and ten times more unpleasant!"

Garrity tried to interrupt, but Campy put a hand on his shoulder.

"All this environmental shit is just an excuse for you three to fuck around," Gib continued. "You play your fucking awful music, drink, and fuck and get high, and instead of people seeing you as the *posing shitheads* you are, you get *praised* for being socially *conscious* you are!"

"Well, *fuck you!* I've been watching you useless turds for weeks now, and you know how environmentally conscious you are? You don't even water your own plants!"

Gib paused for a moment, trying to catch his breath. He felt like he'd been running for hours, but he could feel more words burning in his gut, like molten bile. He looked around at the four people in front of him, expecting to see anger, but all he saw were neutral, wondering faces.

"All you want to do is get on TV. Maybe it's more important that 10 million couch potatoes see the smug, smirking face of *Ethan Garrity* than something *meaningful*. Maybe that's true! Maybe it's more important for Stanley Campanella to ruin some poor Goth kids day than for Disney to have ten more satisfied customers. Maybe so!

"But I'd like you fuckers to be a little less self-righteous about it!"

Again, Gib had to pause to catch his breath. This was months of pressure relieving itself, like lancing an ancient boil. All these weeks of pretending, of being one thing to the FBI, another to Garrity and the boys, another to Pinkwater and the Black Helicopter folks, and, most importantly, pretending to be whatever he was with Ruth. He couldn't stand it anymore. And the pus was bursting out.

His eyes felt as if he were crying, but when he put fingers to his cheeks, he couldn't feel any tears.

He heard a voice ask a question.

"What?" Gib asked, looking up.

It was Campy. Garrity and Marion had backed up, but both Ruth and Campy had stepped closer to Gib. Ruth had a look of worry on her face, but Campy looked curious, even expectant.

"I asked what you think we should be doing," Campy repeated.

"What? I don't know. Why don't you do something Devil's Arroyo? That's how I heard about you people in the first place. You were protesting Devil's Arroyo."

Gib lowered his head again to try and get his breath back. When he glanced up, Campy looked electrified, but Garrity and Marion were staring at each other uncertainly.

"Devil's Arroyo?" Campy asked in a careful voice. "What would you suggest?"

"Who cares?" Gib said, angry at hearing yet another excuse. "Blow it up! Do I look like a fucking strategist?"

"No, you don't. But you finally don't sound like a narc anymore, either," Campy said.

Gib could feel his face turn white. "What?" he gargled out. "What did you say?"

"Campy," Garrity said, "Are you sure you know what you're doing? I'm still not so sure --"

"Ethan," Campy interrupted, "I don't think anyone could fake a performance like that, do you? That was a spontaneous suggestion if I ever heard one. And, as I think more and more about it, it's exactly what we've been waiting for. What could be bigger than shutting down Devil's Arroyo? Blowing it up?"

"It's a nuclear power plant, Campy," Marion said. "None of us know shit about how dangerous that could be."

"Well, I think I know just the person to do some research," Campy said.

"Someone who wants to prove he's not a narc. Someone who thinks Green Rage doesn't do enough."

## "Open Mouth, Insert Plan"

He entered the territory of lies without a passport for return.

### Graham Greene

So Gib started researching Devil's Arroyo. On the way up from LA, Gib stopped and took a some photographs of the Devil's Arroyo area. Then he trucked into Black Helicopter as soon as he got back into town. He used the Web to rediscover all the information Ethan had told him the first day he went to The Space. The ongoing legal battle, the blockades, the seismic fault, the whole thing. After 10 hours of research, Gib came to two conclusions. First of all, the woodsy area didn't bear the vaguest resemblance to an arroyo, so whoever named Devil's Arroyo was a complete idiot.

(Not far from the truth: In 1843, an alcoholic Spanish missionary named Diego y Garcia and a mind-boggling stupid explorer from Virginia named James Whirter encountered each other on the exact spot that would house the Reactor #1. After exchanging bottles of liquor, they had argued about what to name the area.

"We'll call it Whirter-Garcia Arroyo," Whirter had suggested.

Drunk as Father Garcia was, he knew that the tree-lined coastal area was a lot of things – full of trees, empty of people, full of frightening animals he couldn't identify -- but it definitely was not an arroyo. The two men quickly came to blows. The marginally less drunk Whirter beat the priest bloody, then loaded the half-conscious Garcia on his burro and sent him on his way. At the top of a ridge, the priest had regained awareness enough to scream, "You are a devil! A devil!"

"And it's my Arroyo!" Whirter said. "A Devil's Arroyo!" The name stuck like dog shit on a shoe.)

His second conclusion was that he was totally stymied. Because the list of what he needed from a plan, included:

- 1) Satisfy Campy and Garrity by shutting down Devil's Arroyo.
- 2) Satisfy Maynard and Reuben by getting Campy and Garrity arrested.
- 3) Not be too dangerous.
- 4) Keep Ruth out of it. And maybe Frank Marion, if possible.
- 5) Cure cancer and get elected Pope.

He fell asleep on the couch, the reading material he had collected scattered around him. By the time he woke up, things were out of his hands.

He awoke with Jan Reuben sitting on the couch next to him. She was dressed in workout clothes, clearly ready to run him ragged. Reuben had grabbed up a sheaf of papers and was studying them.

"Devil's Arroyo, huh? What's going on?" Reuben's tone was hostile and aggressive.

"They want to do something about Devil's Arroyo, and they asked me to come up with a plan."

"They asked *you*?"

"Yeah. It's kind of a challenge. I thought maybe they could try and stage

blockades, like what happened back in '91.”

Reuben considered. “Doesn’t sound big enough to me. If they want you to plan, why not plan big?”

Reuben made some aggressive phone calls and they both drove down that Saturday morning to a VIP tour of the Devil’s Arroyo facility.

**Beef.**

Their tour guide was an affable engineer named Wellington Fan.

“Call me ‘Beef’,” he said as they introduced themselves. “What can I do for you folks?”

Reuben asked, “Tell us the best way for a group of terrorists to shut down Devil’s Arroyo.”

It took a half hour for Beef to believe they were serious. And then *another* half hour to prove they were classified enough. But after that, Beef seemed to take a certain glee in planning the destruction of his workplace as he toured them around the facility in a golf cart (rigged to go 35 mph). Gib sat in the back of the cart, craning his head around to try and keep track of the conversation.

Beef: “What kind of explosives will they have?”

Reuben: “Who knows? Maybe just dynamite. Maybe a van full of fertilizer. What would a truck bomb do if it crashed the gate?”

Beef: “Oh, that wouldn’t work. Security would stop a truck in a second. I’m not saying people couldn’t sneak onto the grounds if they really wanted to, but not with a truck.”

Reuben: “What about things they could do outside the grounds?”

Beef: “Well, you could try the access roads. If you trashed them, no one could get in or out.”

Reuben: “Aren’t vehicles going up and down this road all the time? They’d be spotted right away.”

Beef: “Probably.”

Gib (trying to stick his two cents in): “What about the power lines?”

Beef slammed on the brakes, and Gib almost went flying into the front seats. The engineer turned around and looked at Gib in horror. “Are you *crazy*?”

“What’s the problem? The attack cuts off the power going out from the reactor by knocking down the lines. They can claim it shows how nuclear power doesn’t supply enough power to be worth the danger. The poles are outside the facility area, so security isn’t an issue. And that way, the facility isn’t damaged at all.”

Beef said, in a strained voice, “Not unless you count melting down, or spewing radioactive gas all over Northern California.”

Both Reuben and Gib stared at the engineer in confusion. He sighed.

“The cooling towers and software controls aren’t plugged into the reactors. The power grid’s just not designed that way. You can’t just plug shit directly into a nuclear reactor. We get our power from outside, just like any other business.”

“Um...” Reuben said.

“Those lines are bringing power in, not sending power out.”

“Don’t you have backup power? What happens when a power line gets knocked down in a heavy wind?”

“We can handle that. But backup generators only go so far. We can do a controlled shutdown, maybe, but that’s not really something you want to do on a whim. And this isn’t just a line getting knocked down. And what happens if blowing up the lines sends a huge power surge down the line? It might short out containment equipment, or maybe all the computers so we’d have no control. Hell, I don’t know. I’m a nuclear engineer, not electrical. Thank god this is all theoretical.”

Gib said, “So you’re saying that, theoretically, if these theoretical terrorists blew up these non-theoretical power lines line, it might theoretically turn this place into Three Mile Island West.”

“Three Mile Island wasn’t such a big deal. More like Chernobyl.”

Gib gaped. “How the hell did you people get approval to open up something this dangerous?”

“Aw, it’s not that dangerous.” Beef looked around involuntarily, as if someone might be listening. “The main problem isn’t the technology, it’s that PacPow doesn’t want to spend the money to keep this place totally up to date. They spent so much on legal fees to get this place opened, that they’re always trying to cut costs, including keeping the tech up to date. They try to run Devil’s Arroyo like it’s a coal or a hydro plant, some kind of old, well-developed utility.”

Gib just stared at the engineer.

Reuben said, “Well, in any case, I think we’ve found what we’re looking for. I think you’ve got your plan, Gib. Write it up.”

Beef said, “I’d appreciate it if you don’t put my name on anything.”

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Gib left Devil’s Arroyo with a bag full of marketing material, including a coffee table book that PacPow had published in the early 90s. It was full of beautiful nature photography of the Devil’s Arroyo area, and PacPow had tried to use it to show how they weren’t treating the area badly at all and how all good conservationists should support the friendly and helpful Devil’s Arroyo nuclear power facility.

It didn’t take long for Gib to write the plan down. Complete with colorful illustration ripped out of the book. He turned a copy of the plan into Reuben in two days. She promised to read it and decide whether to pass it on to Masturbatin’ Bob Maynard.

Then Gib sat around the rest of the week, ducking calls.

That Saturday, the Ragers were throwing a barbecue in Golden Gate Park, which they were calling “Taste of Wisconsin”. They had wheeled kegs of Point and Leinenkugel (shipped especially from Wisconsin) into the park, set up a few charcoal grills and asked for a small donation that would go to a variety of environmental organizations, including Green Rage itself.

“I miss Madison sometimes,” Garrity had confided to Gib one day during a game of Hearts. “I get real nostalgic.” So this was a party to alleviate a bit of homesickness on Garrity’s part.

When Gib showed up at the tent, Garrity was dressed in a white chef's hat and apron, dishing out brats to a winding line of people. During the walk from his car to the party, Gib had thought long and hard about his plan. There were just too many things that could go wrong, he decided. This wasn't "Basement Bomb Making: Could It Blow Up in Our Faces?" If he gave a plan, even one designed to be as safe as possible, to Stanley Campanella, the big man might mutate it into something entirely beyond Gib's control.

As Gib joined the brat line, he folded the sheaf of papers and held it unseen below the level of the grill. He decided he wouldn't show the plan to the Ragers after all. It would cost him some face with Ruth, maybe, but that was probably all right.

That was the key to all of his reticence. Ruth.

And more than that: all of his life in San Francisco. If he dumped this plan, he would make a quick trip back to the DC to give Uncle Joseph his resignation. After that, he could work with Black Helicopter, with Pinkwater and all the rest. He'd have to find a new apartment, but that couldn't be that big a deal in a big city like San Francisco.

So that was it. He took the folded pages of the plan, stuffed them in his back pocket and planned to keep them there.

At the front of the line, Garrity handed him a brat and welcomed him to the party.

Gib got a beer to go along with the sausage and joined a table where Ruth, Marion and Campy and some regular Space volunteers were eating and talking. Ruth cleared some space on the picnic bench and Gib sat down next to her, across from Frank Marion and Campy.

As soon as he took a bite of the brat, Gib heard Campy address him in a snide voice.

"So," Campy said. "Do you have a plan for us, Gib? Or is this going to run out like that *Rolling Stone* story? More hot air promises, followed by piss poor execution?"

Gib looked Campy in the eye and shook his head. "I didn't really come up with anything."

Campy smirked. He turned to Marion and Ruth and said, "Told you. Pay up."

Ruth and Frank handed over twenty dollars each. They both looked at Gib with real disappointment. Campy folded up the money and slipped it into his pocket.

"What's going on?" Gib asked.

"I bet Ruth and Frank you wouldn't come up with shit. You inspire real faith in them." The big man leaned back and drank some beer. "With Frank, it doesn't surprise me. Frank's an optimist. He thinks the best about everyone. He's really kind of lovely that way."

"Shut up, Campy" Marion said. "You won your bet. Just leave it alone."

Campy ignored him. "But Ruth, that surprises me. I know she and you are *going steady*" – the big man's smirk widened at the phrase – "but Ruth's a realist. She's always prepared for the worst."

Gib could feel Ruth staring at the side of his face, but he resisted the urge to turn and face her.

"So when I bet them you'd punk out, I was surprised she took me up on it. She must think you're really something. Whereas I know better."

Marion said, "Gib, ignore him. If you couldn't come up with anything, then there must not have been anything there." Gib appreciated the gesture, but it made him feel

much, much worse. Frank looked like a kid who sat down on Santa's lap, only to have the drunk bastard try to feel him up.

And still Campy wouldn't shut up. "I think you've shown admirable taste to fasten on Ruth the way you have, but isn't this just about over? You're not interested in what she does, in what we do. You just want to fuck her. Tell me I'm wrong." Campy leaned back with a disgustingly self-satisfied expression.

An expression like that needed something. A punch, a slap, some kind of attack in response.

So Gib took the papers out of his back pocket and threw them at Campy. The papers bounced off the big man's chest and scattered across the table.

"You know that shit-eating grin you've got on your face right now? Use this to wipe it off." Gib barely resisted adding "you cheap fuck".

Campy slowly gathered up the pages and skimmed through them. After a few pages, he stopped grinning and started reading in earnest. When he was done reading, he looked at Gib and said, "This is interesting." The big man looked shocked, as if a spaniel had started explaining Einstein's theory of relativity to him.

"Give them their money back," Gib said.

"What? Oh!" Campy pulled the two twenties out of his pocket and handed them back to Frank and Ruth.

Gib turned to look at Ruth. He expected satisfaction, or pleasure, or pride, or any number of good things.

Ruth looked worried.

That's when Campy said, "But where the hell are we going to get bombs?"

## "Confession on the Street of the Gods"

There is a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart that you can't take part; you can't even passively take part, and you've got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus and you've got to make it stop. And you've got to indicate to the people who run it, to the people who own it, that unless you're free, the machines will be prevented from working at all.

### **Mario Savio**

That was when Gib made a deliberate decision to start drinking a shitload, a pantload, a freightload of beer and liquor, as much as his gut could hold, vomit, and refill. This process -- drink, vomit, repeat -- lasted for two and a half days. With a day-long time out dedicated to the hangover, Gib didn't see anyone who he knew until Thursday morning.

When Gib got into Black Helicopter that morning, he found a celebration going on. It wasn't Free Beer Friday yet, but the beer was flowing, music was blasting through the place, and people were even dancing. Shockingly, not a single work station was occupied by scrivener, coder, doodler, or scribbler.

Gib spotted Taylor Jackson dancing with three nubile young junior designers.

"Taylor, what's going on?"

Jackson jerked a thumb at Sidney and OddGreg, who were on a table top, spraying champagne at people.

"Black Box," Taylor yelled above the sounds of Soul Coughing.

Gib twigged. Black Box was ready to go. Today must have been the fully successful test run. Gib wished he'd been there to see it, though he'd seen earlier version of the box go through the motions any number of times. Still, it would have been nice.

Hours later, the party moved to dinner in Chinatown, which was spectacular. Pinkwater was friends with the owners of a place deep into the alleys, and they cleared out their banquet room and prepared a feast. Pinkwater appeared ten foot tall and nine foot wide, his arms wide enough to hug the world, as he toasted the development team and everyone else in the whole company. He had dressed up in a tuxedo, though the bowtie and cummerbund were still in a Hawaiian pattern.

"Stars you are, my people! Bright and fine and glowing! And in this pleasure palace, I decree that we will celebrate as if this night will never end! Some of you may not be aware that tonight is also my fiftieth birthday! But aging stops tonight while we celebrate! No corruption, no death, no sadness, just this one night of perfection in which we can live forever!"

Loud agreement followed as to the splendid nature of all gathered around, including the birthday boy. Fifty-odd people yelled and clinked glasses in celebration of fifty (probably odd) years.

"'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever: Its loveliness increases; it will never Pass into nothingness.' We are a thing of beauty, all of us here! And you'd all best remember that for the rest of your lives. Remember how we shine right now, tonight! Cheers! A toast to you all!" Pinkwater lifted his bottle of champagne and sprayed everyone nearby.

After that, everyone got in on the toasting action. The good ones were loudly

applauded, boring ones genially booed down. Taylor Jackson was assaulted by dinner roll artillery for announcing, "Here's to our wives and girlfriend! May they never meet!"

Eventually, every scrap of food was consumed, they pushed back the tables, turned down the lights and started dancing to music the management let them pump in. At one point, Gib was amazed at how Taylor Jackson was burning up the dance floor. During one of Jackson's few drink breaks, Gib complimented him.

"Magic of pharmaceuticals, my son," Jackson said, and handed Gib a handful of pills. "Try for yourself!"

Gib looked at the four large pink pills in his hand. Shrugging, he threw one into the back of his throat. In five minutes, when nothing kicked in, he threw another one after it.

At midnight, the party showed no signs of dying down, so the owners of the place gave Pinkwater a set of keys and asked him to lock up after himself. Gib was so impressed he decided to take the third of the pink pills. Two of them has sent his head to a lovely, happy place, with lots of nuclear energy to power his arms and limbs without his brain having to work very hard. Gib liked that just fine.

Hours later, he found himself in being lugged into the alley behind the restaurant by Sidney Pinkwater.

"Come along, Gibson," Pinkwater was saying. "Fresh air should help."

Fresh air didn't help. With Pinkwater holding him up by the armpits, Gib desperately tried to force his eyes to focus. With both hands, he clawed into Pinkwater's thick biceps and gripped so tightly that Pinkwater grumbled in annoyance.

"I'm not a life preserver, Gibson. You do not have to hold on so fiercely."

"Yes, I will, Sidney. I'll drown upwards." Gib could feel his feet leaving the ground, gravity reversing for him alone, while the full moon whispered seduction in his ear. "The moon *wants* me."

"You're not going to float away, Gibson."

"Yes, I *will*! Gravity doesn't affect me anymore!"

"Gravity is lying to you, Gibson, but I am not. You are tightly attached to Mother Earth." Pinkwater sighed. "And my right arm, unfortunately. How much did you have to drink?"

Gib felt his brain spin a roulette wheel and spit out a number. "Forty gallons, Sidney! *Forty gallons!*"

Pinkwater sighed. "I suspect it was a bit less."

"And eleventy pills from Taylor!"

Pinkwater said, "Eureka! The mist clears. What color was the pill that Taylor gave you?"

"Purple! No. Orange! Sidney! My hands are trapped in the fourth dimension! Every time I move them, they go out to Alpha Centauri. But at the speed of light! Alpha Centauri is light years away! I have to stand here for all the years it takes for my *hands* to come back!"

Pinkwater turned Gib around and leaned in so close that his face snapped into focus in Gib's vision.

"Gibson, listen to me. If you keep shouting, I am going to drop you here. I don't mind helping you out in a bad spot, but I can't countenance shouting. It's rude, and it will

wake up innocently sleeping citizens all around us."

Gib could suddenly feel the angry stares of awakened residents burning into his back. Twisting around in paranoia, he tried to pull away from Pinkwater, who effortlessly held on to him.

"Gibson."

Ignoring Pinkwater's hold, Gib started to walk anyway. When he tried, his feet moved out from underneath him, but Pinkwater's strong hands kept his upper body in place. It meant Gib was dancing like a cartoon character, with only his bottom half jitterbugging. Gib began hatching plots to pry lose from Pinkwater, but all his potentials plans involved the use of his hands, and *they* were apparently still somewhere around Jupiter. The traitorous bastards.

"Gibson."

Suddenly, Gib felt his hands return, and the relief was so great that he forgot all about escape, about the angry glares of sleeping citizens, about everything but twiddling his fingers as fast as possible, proving to himself over and over again that all ten digits were intact after their interstellar trip.

"Gibson!"

Gib finally looked again and saw the intense expression on Sidney Pinkwater's face. It was enough to bring on a moment of wavering clarity.

"Thank you for helping me get my hands back. You're very good at this." As Gib looked at him with awe, Pinkwater sighed again, and Gib saw light emanate from the big man's mouth. Looking up, Gib realized that Pinkwater also had a halo of light around him. "Why, Sidney," Gib said, tears springing to his eyes, "you're a saint."

"Jumping Jesus H. fucking Christ on a pogo stick. Taylor gave you the pink pills, didn't he?" Pinkwater grabbed Gib by the face and spoke clearly and carefully. "No, Gibson, I'm not a saint. Don't be an idiot. I've just been going to parties like this for twenty-five years. I've learned a little bit about being high in that time. And you clearly aren't ready for Norman Haddal's Special Blend."

Gib went limp. "Norman Haddal! He's in jail! Did he send the pills for me? *Norman Haddal sent me poison pills from prison!*" Gib fell absurdly proud to be the subject of such an elaborate plot.

"No, poor Norman isn't making anything in prison. Taylor just had some of Norman's last batch left over."

"How does Taylor Jackson know Norman Haddal?" Gib demanded. "Are they in league? In *cahoots*?"

Pinkwater looked surprised. "Norman loves the idea of revolution, and you know how revolutionary the Black Box will be. Norman was one of our first investors, before we started looking for venture capital. Hell, Norman was probably paying your salary."

"Huh." Gib was stumped and amazed. He started turning around in place, looking for enlightenment.

Pinkwater led Gib over to a red entranceway with a staircase. Gib looked up and saw Chinese decorations and a sign that said "temple" under some Chinese lettering.

"Are you taking me to heaven, Sidney? Why is your church Chinese? Is China on the way to heaven?"

"I'm not taking you any further than this step right here," Pinkwater answered.

Steering Gib by his shoulders, he sat the smaller man down, then rested one meaty haunch on a lower step.

The gravity reversal effect was back for return engagement, and the only way Gib kept from disintegrating entirely was to grab hold of his head with both hands, rest his elbows on his knees and concentrate on moving as little as possible.

Pinkwater said, "That temple *is* Chinese, but the decoration is a front, a pretense. Around 1880, the local Chinese businessmen in the city decided to embrace their ethnic heritage -- in the hopes it would increase the tourist trade. That why all these fancy pagoda tops have been grafted on the tops of perfectly lovely Italianate buildings."

"Tourist trade?"

"Of course. Up until then, Chinatown had been perceived a place for two things, drugs and slaves. You don't sell a lot of egg rolls to lotus eaters."

"Why not?"

Pinkwater stopped short in his lecture. "Hmmm. Point taken. Perhaps you *can* sell egg foo yung in an opium den, but the middle class tends not to show up there for dinner after a night of Gilbert and Sullivan.

"In any case, aside from historical trivia, here's one of the lessons I've learned in a quarter century of parties, Gibson. When someone is as fucked up as you are, the only thing worth doing is to tell them a story. What kind of story do you want to hear?"

Gib looked at Pinkwater's unruly, thinning hair and saw where the halo had hidden itself, burrowing into Pinkwater's scalp. The big man's light fringe of blondish hair glowed in reflected light from the street outside.

"Your halo's hiding, Sidney Pinkwater," Gib pointed out, delighting in how much fun it was to pronounce the big man's name. "Pinkwater. Sidney Pinkwater."

"Yes, Gibson. Do you want to hear a story?"

"Sure I do, Sidney Pinkwater. What kind of a name is Pinkwater? You are so very, very Pinkwater. Tell me how you got to be so pink, Pinkwater, how you got to be so Sidney Pinkwater." Gib listened to himself giggle, and somewhere, far back behind the barricades of drug-induced stream of consciousness, he recoiled in humiliation at such drooling idiocy. Whatever Gib was thinking about himself, however, Pinkwater took Gib's gibberish in stride.

"That's a very extremely horribly odd question, Gibson. Even more horrible is the timing of it. As I turn fifty tonight, I am beset by an irritating case of nostalgia. Irritating because for many, many years, I have had no interest in my past at all. That is most likely why no one knew tonight *was* my birthday. More proof that coincidence is just another name for the interconnected patterns of the universe. I am a backward-looking fool tonight, and so you ask me a question about my past."

Gib didn't have the slightest idea what Sidney was talking about, so he merely grunted agreement.

"Gibson, are you sure you can be trusted with the answer to such a weighty question? You've been very helpful to me, and I think very highly of you, but can I trust you? Can you be trusted?"

"Can I be trusted?" Gib asked. "Well, I think --"

"What you think isn't quite relevant, young man. Interesting, but absolutely tangential to answering the core query. What lovely Ruth Radley thinks about you, what

steady Frank Marion says about you, what Norman Haddal appeared to think, what I have witnessed of you, all these weigh upon the decision, but your personal, heartfelt opinion of your own trustworthiness is of no earthly use to me."

"Uh, okay."

"So tell me anyway."

"What?"

"Tell me if you're trustworthy. I'm curious to your opinion on the matter."

Gib tried to think of what Sidney would want to hear. A rogue thought fired up like a bottle rocket: did he actually *have* an opinion? Who would bother to have an opinion about his own trustworthiness? Obviously, lying was a job requirement for what he was doing, but he liked to think of himself as honest about the important things. Whatever they were.

Maybe love. He was honest about that, mostly. To Ruth, anyway. He was in love with her, and he'd been honest to her about that. Maybe not truthful about his real job, or his real name, or any of those kind of petty details, but about what really mattered, she could trust him, trust what kind of person he was.

Of course, what kind of person was he? Edward Gibson? Who was *that* guy? He got laid a fair amount, and he liked his car. Past that, Gib wasn't sure anymore. That guy had thought he was pretty satisfied with his life, and in control. But Gibson Edwards had learned the pleasures of being out of control of his life, his emotions, and his body.

Finally, he decided what he thought probably wasn't very important. Sidney was waiting for some kind of answer, and Gib wasn't sure he had one. So he answered with a nervous shrug of his shoulders.

"I guess so," he said. He could feel his focus drifting away. Gravity was normal again for him, but his mind was still a bit unmoored.

"You guess?" Sidney laughed. "Such confidence truly bursts my heart with joy. Especially after all that serious cogitation. Let me pose you this pop quiz, Gibson. And you have to answer right away, without thinking. Without *guessing*. Have you ever been honored with someone's deepest, more painful and private secret?"

"Yes." *No?*

"Did you betray them?"

"No." *Yes?*

Moments after he answered, Gib wasn't sure which words he had actually said.

Pinkwater considered the situation at greater length. When he finally spoke, Gib already knew what the answer would be. One of the lights in the street outside the alley was on a timer, for the light winked out. But Gib could still see the remains of the halo light in Pinkwater's hair. With this continuing evidence of Pinkwater's sainthood, Gib knew the big man would reveal some dark soul secret, in full expectation of being betrayed. That was the role of saints, after all, to be martyred and betrayed.

His mind came back into focus as Gib's awareness of Pinkwater's thoughts brought out a smoldering anger in him. Sidney Pinkwater thought that Gib would find the Judas costume comfortable. *Well, fuck him*, Gib thought. There was no guarantee the Iscariot clothes would fit him. In any case, what awful secrets could a saint have? That was the problem with saints: they were men with an exalted sense of their own sin.

Finally, Pinkwater looked up at Gib, and even in the now-dark alcove, Gib could

see the gleam of Pinkwater's teeth. "I suppose I will tell you," Pinkwater said.

Gib smiled to himself, thinking that Jesus must have used the same tone of voice at the Last Supper. Irritating, self-righteous prick.

Pinkwater continued, "It's my birthday, after all. I'm fifty, and I would like to tell someone the story of my name. It will be my gift to myself."

"Then you think I'm trustworthy?" Gib asked, wondering what Pinkwater would decide to tell him.

Pinkwater smiled again. "Frankly, the deciding factor is that I don't believe you'll actually remember this conversation, Gibson."

"Oh. Fair enough."

"Let me tell you the story of my name." Sidney drew in a deep and dramatic breath.

"My name," Sidney Pinkwater said, "is Saul Hampton."

Gib wondered what the punch line was.

"That was my name from the day of my birth until 1966. In 1966, I killed a man."

Gib sat very, very still.

Pinkwater chuckled. "Oh, mercy me. I'm being overly melodramatic, and I do hope you'll pardon me for it."

"Sure, Sidney." *Saint Sidney.*

"In 1966, I was an undergraduate at Berkeley. But let me give you an idea of what I was like. Before I went to college, I worked for Goldwater. Law and order, something like that, was what appealed to me. At the time, I thought that extremism in the defense of liberty was a virtue. But when I left for college, I didn't have politics on my mind. I wanted to do two things: drink beer and play football."

"Football? You? Really?"

"Why does that surprise you, Gibson?"

Gib thought about it. "Well, you're so...placid."

Pinkwater laughed. "Years of practice. Plus, I don't drink as much as I once did, and no one's more hostile than a burly drunkard. In any case, I was a defensive lineman. And for that time, I was larger than the norm."

"For this time, too. Wait, are you going to tell me you killed someone playing football?"

Pinkwater's stare told Gib that in the history of the world, perhaps the only dumber question ever asked out loud had been when George Armstrong Custer had asked his chief scout, "That don't seem like that many Indians, does it?"

"No, I killed someone with stupidity, which makes a very lethal weapon,"

Pinkwater said. "If I had killed someone in football, I wouldn't feel guilty about it. Hell, I might almost be proud. Would have been a good hit, right?"

Gib felt a bit queasy. "You're kidding, right?"

Pinkwater peered at Gib. "Maybe. Anyway, after the last game of the year, I found out my grades were for shit. I had to stay and take summer school."

Gib noticed that Pinkwater was speaking very differently, less verbose -- less Wilde and more Butkus. He tried to picture a 20-year old Sidney Pinkwater and failed, before realizing that he was trying to visualize someone who had never existed.

"That summer I fell in with a permanent student crowd -- 26-year old sophomores,

that kind of thing."

"Like Ethan Garrity in Wisconsin."

"An accurate comparison, from all reports. All these guys were a lot older than me, and they could score anything, anytime they wanted -- drugs, women, anything. Because they had a cause, a revolution. Very seductive. I could quote you chapter and verse of their manifesto, but it wouldn't mean anything to you now. Frankly, it probably didn't mean that much at the time." Pinkwater looked around. "Shit. Wish I had a smoke. I haven't smoked in thirty years."

"So what happened? "

"I know, I know. I'm delaying. It's just such a cliché, that's all."

"What?"

"I dropped acid that summer, and it changed my whole perspective. A embarrassing cliché. After that, when school started back up, I got involved in a bombing plot."

"A bombing? What were you going to bomb?"

"The physics building, I believe. Some building where there were guys working on Department of Defense contracts."

Pinkwater smiled, sort of. "Wait, not the Department of Defense. The *War* Department. It was important to call things by their real names, not 'the bullshit rationalization of The Man'." I've tried to purge this from my memory for so long that I hardly remember why we chose the target. We stole some dynamite from a construction site, and I figured out how to jerry-rig some sort of mechanism and put it all together. But I had no idea what he was doing. I had just gotten some advice from a vet turned anarchist who was taking classes in summer school with me. It was a shit bomb. Nothing but shit."

"And someone died?"

"Oh, yeah. A grad student in Physics, plus five other people. But not in the building."

"What happened?"

"Since I was the one who built the bomb, the other guys claimed the 'honor' of setting it. So the four of them are driving over to the building to plant the bomb, at three AM. And because this was so important, they weren't stoned for a change. And of course, that set their nerves twitching like guitar strings. They were driving with their headlights off to avoid being spotted, and some woman walking her dog crossed in front of them. The driver -- that was a guy named Alex -- was so surprised he slammed on the brakes."

Pinkwater looked at Gib, who noticed that Pinkwater's eyes were desert dry.

"Boom," Pinkwater said. "That's how shitty the bomb was. Slamming on the brakes too hard set it off. Took out the car, my four friends, the dogwalking grad student, and most of the crosswalk."

After a few moments of silence, Gib said, "You don't look that upset."

"What?" Pinkwater demanded. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"You don't look that sad about it. That's all I meant."

Pinkwater looked disgusted. "What did you want, a goddamn TV movie? Should I think about dead puppies and long dead students and let the ersatz tears rain down? I

think not. All these things happened thirty years ago."

"But it's pretty serious stuff. It's pretty powerful."

"Powerful. What the fuck does *that* mean? It's not Shakespeare. It's not tragedy; it's slapstick with explosions. The Three Stooges. It was just a traffic accident, with extras."

Pinkwater stood up and stretched, his shirt riding up over his belly. "I was once told that the French have a saying, Gibson. Picture the deepest, most heart-rending sorrow you can imagine -- your wife, children and parents are all wiped out in an earthquake that destroys your house, your car and your business. Fill in the tragic blank if that disaster doesn't suit you. Even that deepest, darkest of sorrows lasts for approximately three seconds. That's all the sorrow that the human soul can really take before it bursts. All the rest? That's just self-pity."

Gib thought about it. Somehow, in the last few minutes, his brain had gotten back to a state where it was able to process information again.

"That's a pretty harsh view of the world, Sidney."

"Maybe so. That's the French for you. After the bomb went off, I went underground. Five years later, I found myself getting a computer degree under a new name using ID I had bought from a member of the SDS. Ridiculous name, isn't it? But it's all I could afford at the time. No one else wanted such a silly-sounding name for an identity, so I got the papers cheap. And that's the story of Sidney Pinkwater."

Something popped up into Gib's head, a question. "Wait, you said the bomb killed five people. The grad student and your four friends. Who was the other one?"

Pinkwater shook his head in disappointment. "Isn't it obvious? Saul Hampton, failed revolutionary. That bomb blew him up along with the rest, and I sculpted the leftover bits of shrapnel, flesh and blood into Sidney Pinkwater."

Pinkwater reached out a hand and pulled Gib to his feet. "Come on, the pink pill should be starting to wear off by now. None of Norman's pills last very long. That's one of their charms. Let's go get a beer. Pissant nostalgia is thirsty work."

## "Between Bob and a Hard Place"

We can't be so fixated on our desire to preserve the rights of ordinary Americans.

**Bill Clinton**

The next day, his bladder thicker than a New York bagel, his legs shakier than a banker's ethics, his eyes bloodshot like a Jackson Pollock hangover, Gib awoke to the sound of the Inquisitor Telephone. It was Masturbatin' Bob Maynard, calling for a chat, which meant that he was full of threats and innuendo.

"This is it, the final lap, kid, the last chance saloon, the last roundup, the end of the road. All I've gotten from you so far is promises, promises. I can take that from my wife, the slimy cunt, but at least *she* sucks my crank every once in a while -- not that *you* ever better try something like that. And while you're shining me on, these terrorists in training are attacking people at Disneyland. *Disneyland!* What kind of sick fucks don't like Disneyland?"

Maynard went along in a similar vein until finally Gib's aching head got the better of him and he shouted "Bob! Bob! Bob!" into the phone until Maynard finally shut up.

"Yeah, kid? What do you got to say for yourself?"

"Did you talk to Reuben?" Gib said, hoping to put Bob off.

Clearly, Bob Maynard and Jan Reuben hadn't been talking, because Maynard launched himself back to Planet Rant. He spoke over every one of Gib's objections, overrode every one of Gib's explanations, scoffed at every one of his evasions, until finally Gib lost his temper.

Maybe it was the hangover. Or residue, either of the pink pills, or Pinkwater's unusual confession. No matter. Gib lost his temper and yelled back.

A single event, action, or sentence can often set into motion a whole morass of idiocy and tragedy. And so it was that with his next words, Gib, metaphorically assassinated Arch-Duke Ferdinand.

"Bob, you fucking jackass, they're going to blow up Devil's Arroyo!"

From thought to plot in one easy sentence.

Twenty minutes of explanation later, Masturbatin' Bob was convinced that Ethan Garrity and Green Rage were about to send all of California toppling into the sea.

"China Syndrome!" Bob shouted. "Mass murder! Armed insurrection!"

And then, quietly, Bob postulated, "Career advancement. Major headlines. Medal of Freedom."

Until finally, Bob asked, "Why didn't that cunt Reuben give me the paperwork? When do think it's going to happen? How soon?"

"Well," Gib hedged, "there is one major problem they have." This would be good. Bob would be convinced that Green Rage was still worth investigating. And that would give Gib more time to figure his way out the of the mess.

"What's that?" Maynard asked.

"They don't have any explosives, and don't know how to get them," Gib said, then held the phone away from his ear, expecting an explosion of sound.

The silence surprised him, and he carefully put the receiver back to his ear. After a minute or so, Bob finally said, thoughtfully, "Maybe that's even better."

"How's that, Bob?"

"Kid, you gotta know that if they're just making plans, it's just a heave from midcourt. No jury really cares about that, about *plans*. We need a slam dunk case, headlines and outrage. And for that, they gotta have the boom-boom.

"So we'll give it to them," Masturbatin' Bob Maynard said. Then waited in a happy silence.

"Uh," Gib finally asked, "what?"

Bob sighed. "Kid, you got no imagination. If we just let these nutbars go out and try and find boom-boom, it's not under our control. And if we have it under control, no one can get hurt. No fucking liberal reporter is gonna say we endangered the public."

"So," Gib ventured very carefully, "the FBI is going to supply explosives?"

"Shit, yes! It's goddamn genius."

After another long pause, Gib asked, "Real explosives?"

Slowly, as if talking to an addled child, Bob answered, "If it's not *real* boom-boom, those fucking terrorists will find out somehow. And without real explosives, there won't be as much jailtime. Plus, it'll blow your cover."

"Blow my cover?"

"Yeah. You been telling me all along that the biggest problem is getting these fuckwits to trust you. You bring them the semtex solution to all their plastic problems, and you are gold in their eyes. Gold! But if it's fake stuff, you're done and this whole thing is done with you."

Gib was silent again instead of answering.

Bob didn't seem to mind the silence, though. "Kid," he said, "There's just one thing."

"What's that, Bob?"

"This sounds real good, but how do I know it's not just a bunch of happy horseshit?"

"You'll just have to believe me, Bob."

This time it was Bob's turn to be silent for a while. Finally, "Kid, I just don't think that's going to work. It's now come down to this state of affairs, where you got one of two choices. Either you give me something that makes me full of shits, grins and trust, or I torpedo you."

"Torpedo?"

"I hammer you, kid. I take what I got already and then beat you like a rented mule. I pound you like a sailor with a two dollar whore. You're the guy who fucked up a major sting."

"That's bad, Bob, but it could be worse," Gib said, thinking that he could burn Maynard just as easily as Maynard could burn him.

"You bet it could, kid. How about jail time for drug offenses on federal property? It really was a nice party you at that DEA apartment that night. How long do you think it would take me to scare up some witnesses? Like that drug dealer pornographer on his way to lockup right now? You think he'd grab "get out of jail free" card if all he has to do is testify against the "rogue" FBI agent who set him up?

"Or maybe I just get you on misappropriation of funds. How much did that party cost, what with the kegs and the rest of the shit? Maybe it's been hidden for now, but I

didn't sign anything to cover up for you. And I didn't throw away any records. If it was more than a couple thousand dollars, it might even be felony fraud."

"I guess that's worse, Bob."

"Hell, let's go for D), all of the above! And better yet, I can toss in that blondie you've been tomcatting around."

"Leave Ruth out of this, Bob," Gib said. The coldness in his voice surprised him. He had been about to agree, saw no choice, until Bob mentioned Ruth.

"I *thought* you were sweet on her. Oh, maybe I can't touch her, maybe I can, but we've been bugging the phones."

"You've what? Why didn't you tell me?"

"Need to know, kid. I got tapes of her and you doing the dirty talk. And that'll get that cunt Reuben on your ass. Because we both know she's sweet on you, and the dirty talk will piss her off. The two of us can bury you lower than the devil's dick. And best of all, kid? You know what's best of all?"

"No."

"How do you think your uncle will react to all this? Your fucking associate director uncle? I'll bet he won't like it at all."

"I guess," Gib said, "I have to give you some kind of appetizer, then, don't I, Bob?"

"I guess you do, kid."

Bob waited while Gib thought about what he had to offer.

"If I give you something," Gib said, "Ruth is left out of it. Out of *all* of it."

"I don't know if I can promise that --"

"Bob," Gib cut him off, "I'm not asking. Without that, I'll torpedo this whole thing myself. I'll go from "rogue" FBI agent to "whistle blower" in five minutes on one nightly newscast. You can hammer me as hard as you want, but you can also suck my dick on the front page of the New York Times. Are those the kind of headlines you want? I don't think so, because that way, you get *nothing*. Nothing except the taste of my dick. After that, you and your bad toupee can go beat off in the Bay."

"All right, kid," Masturbatin' Bob said, easily. "For some reason, me and my toupee believe you. But you still gotta give me something."

"I already gave you Norman Haddal. Isn't that enough?"

"Old news, kid, and that's a DEA bust, anyway. So I ain't satisfied yet. Not enough to let you have the girl."

And so, finally, Gib tried on the suit of clothes that Sidney Pinkwater had measured him for the night before. At first, the suit seemed a bit tight, so tight it cut off his air. But Gib knew if he started talking, and kept talking, it would stretch to fit.

"How would you like to solve a thirty-year old murder case, Bob?"