

BRING THE MOON

A NOVEL?



by Lucky Louis

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Prologue

As if out of nowhere, a vehicle appeared in a Florida field on a starless night. A lone man climbed out, and moments later the vehicle disappeared again. The man stretched for a few minutes and then jogged toward a nearby road. The man then began to run west toward the Gulf Coast. There was little traffic on the road, and the man sprinted very fast—marathoner-fast. Whenever cars appeared, he slowed to a more normal jogging pace, and then sped up again after the cars went by.

As dawn broke, the man reduced his overall speed. Sometimes he walked and sometimes he jogged, but only when he was out of sight of any homes or vehicles did he run at full velocity. By midday he reached the Gulf of Mexico. Retracing his steps to the last major highway he had crossed, he turned north and headed toward the city of Sarasota. He walked or jogged north until he reached a sign indicating he had entered the city limits, and then he slowed his pace to a stroll.

He had passed pedestrians on his way to Sarasota but had spoken to no one. Once in the city, however, he approached a man on the street and handed him a card inscribed with the words *WHERE IS THE HOMELESS SHELTER, PLEASE?* The man ignored him, so he tried again.

The next few people he approached told him they didn't know or rebuffed him rudely. Finally a pedestrian who knew the location of a shelter tried to direct him. He seemed not to understand the man's words, but he was able to comprehend the hand gestures and head in the right direction. As he got closer to the shelter, other people gave him additional guidance. By early evening he found the shelter and went inside.

In a later interview, the shelter's director recalled his first meeting with the man:

"When he first came in, I noticed him immediately. He was very different from our typical clientele. He was young, maybe in his twenties...tall, clean-shaven, and strikingly good-looking. His hair was kind of long and shaggy, but he didn't look like he'd been in the street for long. His clothes seemed sort of odd, although I can't really describe what was unusual about them. He spoke only a few words, and he had an accent that I couldn't place. I assigned him a bed and told him when we served dinner. He had no belongings with him, and I figured that he probably had more clothes and maybe some toiletries stashed someplace else—like many of our guests—but I never saw him carrying anything.

Bring the Moon

“I kept an eye on him to be sure that none of our regulars bothered him. He seemed so curious about everything he saw—like it was all very new to him. He touched the bed and felt all around it as if he had never seen a cot before. Then he just stood in the men’s bathroom observing some of the other men while they showered, used the toilet, or washed up at the sink...but he didn’t seem to have any underhanded intentions. He made some of our other folks nervous by watching them, and one of them shooed him out of the bathroom. Pretty soon he was back watching again, so I pretended to be cleaning up to keep him in view for a while.

“Finally I noticed that he used the sink to wash up. Then he went into a stall instead of using the urinal. After he left, I heard the next man who went in there call out, ‘Hey, we’re homeless but we’re not pigs! Flush the toilet next time, will you?’

“Later he followed other people into the food line and seemed to be watching them to see how they got a tray, selected cutlery, and chose their food. I especially remember the way he sort of struggled with the knife and fork—it didn’t seem natural to him. At first he was clumsy, but then he seemed to pick up the knack pretty quickly.

“I lost track of him until the next morning when he came to me and asked about getting some work. I called the Goodwill and set him up for a day of sorting clothes in their warehouse. When he got back that evening, I asked him about his day and noticed that his accent seemed to have changed—he sounded a little like an African American in his speech and choice of words. He told me had earned twenty dollars, and then he pointed to a bag of clothes that he had purchased at the Goodwill store.

“He stayed with us for three or four days but didn’t go back to work at the Goodwill. He spent all his time talking with other men who were staying at the shelter. At first he made a pest of himself, but after a few days he’d made some friends, and everyone seemed willing to talk with him. He mostly asked questions...got people talking about themselves, their lives, and anything else they wanted to talk about. Last thing I heard was that he asked directions to a lawyer’s office—some lawyer he’d found in the newspaper ads. Off he went, and I never saw him again. I don’t know what he’s done that’s made so many people so curious.... I’ve had a number of people asking about him since then, though.”

Chapter 1

They call me Lucky...

Still sweating from his early morning workout at the new fitness center, Lucky Louis started unpacking the forty-two boxes full of stuff from his old life. He wondered how much of it would fit into his new life. Looking around the fully furnished “manufactured home” he had moved into the day before, he also wondered how Lu would have liked it.

She would have liked it, he thought...except she would've called it a trailer. Lulu always called things the way she saw them—no phony stuff for Louise Louis! Lu always used to say, “I’m the luckiest girl in the world, married to the luckiest guy in the world.” *Lulu sure was a lulu,* Lucky thought for the millionth time.

How lucky was Lu? She’d died of cancer the year before—a year before their retirement. How lucky was that? She couldn’t have children, though she wanted them so bad. How lucky was that? *All that time, she puts up with all the crap that comes with being a cop’s wife, and then before she can even retire to the sunny South, she dies.* How lucky was that? But Lulu always believed she was the luckiest girl in the world. She had made him feel like he was the best thing that ever happened to her, and he sure knew that Lu was the best thing that ever happened to him.

The house was certainly newer than the one they’d lived in together. It was fairly well built, nicely furnished, if somewhat generic looking, and quite a bit roomier. He wondered what he would do with all the space. He looked at the pile of boxes in the living room and picked one to open.

The first box was filled with clothes. He put them away, thinking that they didn’t look like the stuff his neighbors wore. All his pants were long, and he’d seen nothing but people in shorts on his jog back from the workout. His shirts were all long-sleeved, and he’d always worn them with a tie. “I hope I’ve worn my last tie,” he said out loud, and then wondered whom he’d been talking to. *Maybe Lulu.*

The next box held a scrapbook his mother had kept for him in high school. “Louis Makes ‘Lucky’ Catch,” the headline read. There was a photo of him as a teen with his helmet tucked under his arm, smiling broadly, blond hair askew. Lucky could see it all again in his mind. Three

points behind with six seconds on the clock—the Hail-Mary play into the end zone. Three different players had touched it or tipped it, and Lucky had caught it. How lucky was that? Was it luck or skill? He didn't know how to tell.

Although his first name was actually Joseph, everybody had called him Lucky since he was ten. Back then he'd been bicycling near his house when a speeding car hit his bike from behind. He still couldn't remember getting hit, but bystanders said he flew twenty-five feet in the air. They said he landed on the grass, rolled like a ball, and got up unhurt. The doctor checked him over at the emergency ward and said he must be the luckiest boy in the world. The name had stuck. He wondered whether he was lucky just because everyone called him that. He'd wondered his whole life about luck.

Below the scrapbook was the stuff he'd kept from his tour in Vietnam. He fingered the Bronze Star, the Silver Star, and the Purple Heart. He didn't like to think about what he'd done to earn them, but they confirmed what all of his buddies thought: He was Lucky. The Purple Heart was another lucky thing. Jake had stepped on a mine, and Lucky got a piece of shrapnel in his butt cheek. Jake lost a leg, while Lucky got a bandage that was gone in a week. They both got a Purple Heart. Was he just lucky or was Jake unlucky? Lucky didn't know.

He fingered the stack of plaques and commendations he'd earned as a patrolman, a sergeant, and then a detective. Each one told a story, and he remembered them all. With a name like his, everyone wanted to be his partner. As his experience grew, his reputation grew bigger. He really had been lucky, though—he'd never lost a partner, and he seemed to be able to solve more cases than other guys. When the brass had a tough case, they'd ask him to take it over. Police work took persistence and lots of patience. You'd work yourself crazy on legwork...and then—out of the blue—you'd get lucky.

As he put away his mementos, he wondered if he'd be lucky in his retirement. Did writing take luck? Would luck be an interesting topic? He decided, *I don't know and I don't care. I'll give it a whirl and see what happens.*

By five o'clock he'd unpacked the last box and was pleased with his efforts. Everything was in place, neat as a pin. Lu would have been proud of him. Tomorrow he'd unpack his computer, set up his office, and start writing.

Chapter 2

It was a dark and stormy night...

...which was not unusual for a late summer in Florida. The phone rang, and Lucky fought off the urge to answer “Louis” as he had for so many years on the job.

“Hello,” he said instead, feeling again the newness of civilian life.

“Hi, Lucky. This is Roland...your neighbor down the street. We met yesterday when you were moving in.” There was a pause, and then the voice went on. “Some of us guys get together for nickel-dime poker once a week, and we’ve got an open seat. Do you play? Would you like to join us tonight at seven-thirty?” “Yeah, I’d like that,” Lucky told him. “I played a regular game up north for the past twenty-five years, whenever I could make it. I’d like to meet some guys down here.”

“Okay, great,” Roland replied. “We’ll see you at my place this evening...three doors down, same side of the street.” “Thanks for asking,” said Lucky. “See you then.”

Lucky thought about his regular game up north. He almost always won. The fellows said it was because he was lucky, but he knew better. He knew that every one of the guys had a “tell.”

For example, “Irish” O’Conner’s pupils dilated when he had a good hand and constricted when he was bluffing. When his pupils got real big, Lucky knew it was time to fold.

Irish got his nickname because he worked for the IRS. Everyone had a nickname and a tell. “Doughboy” James got real quiet when he had a good hand; otherwise, he talked nonstop. Doughboy got his nickname because he worked for the US Mint. Everybody had a nickname except Colin Blake, who worked for the SEC—the Securities and Exchange Commission—and nobody could figure a nickname for him. He was a serious sort of guy, so they called him “Sir.”

Sir Colin’s tell was how he held his hand. If he had a normal hand, he held it in the regular way. But if he caught a good hand, he’d put it face down in front of him. If he had a really good hand, he’d close the hand up tight and put it down close to himself. If he closed his hand up, put it down, and stacked some chips on top of it, everybody knew they’d better just fold.

Lucky wondered how long it would take him to spot the tells in this new group of guys. He felt sure that he would do okay at poker tonight. He just felt lucky.

Chapter 3

Poker night

“What’d you do before you retired?” asked Roland as he dealt the cards.

“I was a cop in Washington, DC,” said Lucky. “Thirty years as of the end of last month.”

“Not bad, retiring so young,” said Tom, who was sixty-five and looked it. “You must be, what, fifty?”

“Good guess,” said Lucky. “I got out of the army at twenty-two and went right into the department.”

“You’re too young to retire,” said Harold who must have been near seventy. “What are you going to do with yourself?”

“I’m going to become a writer,” Lucky replied. “I’ve never written anything, but I figure it makes a great hobby.”

“How do you just start being a writer?” asked Roland.

Lucky had asked himself that same question every day for the past two years. He’d found a Web site that was a place for writers to chat and ask for help when they needed it. On the Web site, writers would look at your work, and you could look at other writers’ work and then help each other out. Lucky had sent a message to the other writers, explaining that he was just starting out and asking for advice on how to get started. They told him, all right. He got some great responses about which Web sites to use, books he could read, and stories about how other guys had gotten started. He got a lot of crap, too. He got all the clichés writers use with each other.

“You stare at the blank page until blood drops form on your forehead,” one guy explained.

“You write one word at a time, forever,” offered a helpful woman.

Lucky tried to simplify what he’d learned so that Roland would get it.

“Well, I figure you start out with a subject, you research it, and you write to share what you’ve learned with others,” he said. “I’m going to write about luck. I want to find out what is luck and what is fate or genes or something else. I think some people are lucky a lot, some people are unlucky a lot, and most people have some of each. I want to know why. If you’re a lucky person, is there something you can share with others that would make them luckier?”

“How are you going to start?” asked Tom.

“First I plan to ask everyone I know, and a lot of people I don’t know, for names of people they consider to be very, very lucky. Then I’ll contact those people and try to find out if they have been consistently lucky throughout their lives. It’s like police work—a lot of digging and legwork, and then maybe you get lucky. I’d like to identify some of the luckiest guys in the world and then try to figure what made them so lucky. Is luck just an attitude? Can you make yourself luckier? That kind of thing.”

“Your deal,” said Harold, announcing in a nice way that he’d come to play cards and not hear about Lucky’s new hobby.

Two hours later Lucky swept up the last pot of the night. “Wow, I’ve sure been lucky tonight,” he said.

“You should take up gambling instead of writing,” Harold grumbled. “You’re the big winner.”

“I would, but I don’t really gamble. Thanks for inviting me, though. I’m sure you’ll get it back next time.”

The other players got up and stretched as Lucky said his goodbyes. “I’m glad to meet you guys. I feel much more at home here now that I know more people.” As he reached the door, he turned back to them. “If any of you know someone that you think is really a very, very lucky person, I’d appreciate you giving me their name. I’m going to start my research tomorrow.”

Chapter 4

How do you find lucky people?

Lucky realized that he still looked and walked like a cop, but he figured he could work on losing the typical stance. Years of wearing a gun and an equipment belt had left him with a slightly unnatural physical attitude. Instead of holding his arms normally when he walked or ran, he still seemed to swing them a little away from his body, as though to avoid bumping into the things he used to carry.

Jogging to the fitness center, Lucky felt the warm, balmy air of April in Florida and thought about his new life. He wasn't too old to start again, he figured, and he was in pretty good shape for a man entering his second half-century. He'd kept his weight down over the years and didn't have a paunch, and he even had most of his hair, although it was showing some gray amid the blond. Lulu always said that he was "a good-looking son of a gun." He'd been called rugged-looking, but Lu insisted that what he described as wrinkles were really laugh lines. He used to laugh so much with Lu. He wasn't exactly filled with enthusiasm for living now that she was gone, but he was looking forward to the writing.

He scanned his new environs. The sun flooded everything, and all the palm trees still looked strange to him. The flowers were different, the color of the sunshine was different, and the other residents of the park who waved to him as he passed were different from what he was used to. He wondered if any of them were lucky. Somehow, he doubted it. If you were truly lucky, wouldn't you have enough money to live somewhere better than a mobile home park—even a nice one like this?

So, if he was so lucky, why wasn't he richer? Well, he certainly had everything he needed. His pension would provide for his needs in abundance. Thirty years as an honest cop had taught him to live frugally and spend wisely. The last few years of Lu's illness had exhausted most of their savings, so he didn't have a lot of money in reserve, but he felt very comfortable financially.

Today he would start the research for his book. He figured it would be a lot like police work. He'd consider everyone a source. As he met people, he'd ask them for names of the people they thought were the luckiest people they'd known. He'd collect tons of leads and then follow

up with phone calls and interviews to identify the truly luckiest. He liked the idea of being...or becoming...a writer. For thirty years, when he'd met new people and told them he was a cop, they had gotten that "look." Every cop knew the look. Whether it stemmed from fear, anxiety, respect, or whatever, it didn't matter. People had him labeled; he was a cop. Most times, people didn't explore much further.

Recently, the few times he'd introduced himself as a writer, he'd gotten a different look. People were curious, maybe respectful, but each time they asked questions. "Fiction or nonfiction?" they might ask. One thing he noticed for sure: he didn't get the old creeped-out and wary or knowing looks of the past.

At the fitness center, Lucky started on the weights. Today he was working the legs. Yesterday he'd done his arms. Tomorrow he'd do aerobics. He thought back on his lifetime habit of fitness. Thirty-four years as a soldier and cop, he'd stayed hardy and healthy with almost daily workouts and jogs. His arms were strong and his stomach was still flat. He was proud that his uniform size had remained the same over the years. "Solid like a rock," Lu used to say.

His health had always been good. On his twentieth anniversary as a cop, he'd earned a commendation for never having taken a sick day in twenty years. He supposed that health was part of being lucky. What good would it do to win the lottery if you were too ill to enjoy it?

Freshly showered from his workout, Lucky booted up his new Macintosh and thought how lucky he was to have the best writing machine. On the writers' Web site, other scribes were pretty strong with their recommendations of Macintosh. His experience at the office with Windows had been mixed. He'd lose files, the machine would freeze, and he'd get frustrated. If he were going to be a writer, at least he'd have the best tools.

The plan was to find people who were consistently lucky. He knew he would have no problem finding people who were consistently unlucky, for the sake of comparison. He also knew that people could be lucky without ever striking it rich, but he thought that his book would have more drama and reader appeal if the lucky people he found had made it big financially.

He already had hundreds of names in his online address book. Some were cops he'd worked with or communicated with on the job. Some were neighbors and social friends he and Lu had met over the years. Some were his poker buddies, fellow handball players, or other assorted people he'd met up North. He e-mailed everybody in his address book and asked them to offer names of people they thought were particularly lucky.

His initial premise was that the candidates he was looking for might be people who'd won the lottery — something that involved pure luck—or maybe people who had made a lot of good bets in the stock market. Winning in the stock market took luck as well as knowledge and experience—sometimes more luck than sense or savvy. If he could find people who made an extraordinary number of good investments and very few bad ones, there had to be a large

element of luck. Another idea he had was to canvas the casinos to see if he could identify gamblers who won consistently in games of chance. There, too, he'd look for people who won a lot and didn't lose very often.

A search on the Internet revealed that many lotteries throughout the country listed the names of the winners. He figured he might be able to contact them directly and interview them to see how consistently lucky they'd been throughout their lives. He also found a couple of Web sites frequented by lottery winners seeking information, ideas, and advice from other lottery winners. He joined the chat groups and sent messages explaining his mission and what he was looking for. He listed the kinds of things he was interested in finding out about luck and offered to share his findings with the group as he made discoveries.

Identifying stock market winners was more challenging. He decided he would broadcast e-mails to branch managers of brokerage houses, explaining his quest. He would ask them to consider forwarding his message to each of the brokers in the office to broaden the search. What he was looking for were individuals who had made a very high percentage of winning bets on the market—the kinds of people who were considered so lucky or so smart that when they bought a stock or an option or sold short, the brokers in the office would do the same thing for their personal accounts.

He would explain that he was aware of the confidentiality issues involved and was not asking for names. What he wanted the branch manager or broker to do was call the individuals, explain Lucky's quest, and ask if they would accept a call from him or phone him to be interviewed as part of the research for a book. He hoped that the investors would enjoy being identified as truly lucky and might be willing.

Lucky also joined several Internet chat groups where investors talked to each other about stocks. He found one that seemed to have brokers and analysts as regular visitors, and he joined in, explaining his search. He asked them to share stories of investors who had an uncanny skill at buying low and selling high—hopefully, investors who made mostly correct calls and had prospered mightily during the late nineties boom and who correctly called the stock market bust in early 2001.

Lucky also knew that casinos kept very complete records of their regular customers. They would be aware of the people who were big gamblers and who won regularly. The hard part was finding a way to get the casinos to divulge the information. Casinos were very concerned about security and would be extremely reluctant to breach their confidentiality obligations. He searched the Internet for chat groups where casino people hung out and found a few that seemed like good prospects. He joined the conversations, explained his search, and offered a small reward for stories about extraordinarily lucky gamblers that he would pay if their stories ended

up in his book. He asked for names and contact addresses or phone numbers, and he promised that he would never divulge his sources.

Lucky spent the first half of April trolling for leads. He got better and better at finding good, online chat-groups for lottery winners, stockbrokers, and casino workers and at telling the story of his search.

By mid-April Lucky had more than a thousand leads. He'd found a cell-phone service that offered unlimited long distance calling at a reasonable price, and he spent hours each day and evening talking with people who'd been referred to him as extraordinarily lucky. He used a list of questions he'd created to help him identify people who were consistently lucky.

He was really getting into it. It was like he was back at work again, but this time he was his own boss. He followed only those leads that he chose to follow. He made his own decisions about when to work and when to relax. He could start when he wanted and end when he wanted. He loved it. Originally he'd planned on working only four hours a day, but the constant stream of e-mails and returned phone calls kept him busier and busier until he was working on his project eight to ten hours a day.

Chapter 5

The parade of widows and divorcees

One thing about retiring to Florida that surprised Lucky was the constant stream of ladies who called him or dropped in unexpectedly. Women dropped by with casseroles or pies or plates of cookies to welcome him to the neighborhood. They called to invite him to cocktail parties or community events or to offer a spare ticket to a community theater.

Lucky soon realized that if he had bothered to research the demographics of retirement communities in Florida, he would have discovered that the population included an excess of widows and divorcees and a shortage of eligible men. While Lucky was getting deeper and deeper into his own project, he himself was becoming a project for a growing group of lonely ladies. Other men informed him that the ladies in the community had been buzzing about that new blonde, handsome, fit, friendly, fifty-two-year-old widower in their midst. The interested women explored every possible avenue to get acquainted with this new find.

Lucky was flattered to be the object of so much attention. Having been married for almost thirty years, he knew nothing about contemporary dating or courtship. He also discovered that he felt pretty uncomfortable about the whole idea. He'd been missing female companionship but didn't really feel quite ready to get emotionally involved with anyone. Then Linda Sue appeared.

Recently widowed, relocated, and no longer needing to work for a living, Linda Sue Brown seemed to have a different type of interest from the other women in the neighborhood. She phoned Lucky one day and expressed her fascination with his research into luck. As they talked, her enthusiasm for the project seemed to grow until she offered to help him with the project. She was feeling at loose ends now that she wasn't working every day, and she suggested to him that she could act as his secretary, screen phone calls, keep files on his leads, and help with whatever else he needed to have done.

"Many hands make light work," Linda Sue pronounced cheerfully.

Lucky offered to meet her for coffee to discuss the idea. He felt a bit overwhelmed by the number of leads he had generated, and he realized he could actually use some help.

Over coffee Lucky learned that, although just forty-five, Linda Sue had already been widowed for two years. She had been able to retire so young with the insurance money her husband had left her and returns on the successful investments they had both made. She had worked as an analyst in a brokerage firm and was an experienced researcher. She made it clear that she would work on the luck project for free, but only so long as it held her interest.

During their meeting Lucky had the impression that, although she certainly wasn't obviously beautiful, Linda Sue must have plenty of suitors—even in a community with a sparse pool to draw from. She had nice skin and warm eyes, although her medium-length, light brown hair looked a little bit out of control. It was apparent that she didn't live in a beauty parlor. She was certainly nicely put together, and her face was very pleasant and handsome, if not conventionally pretty. It was something about her energy that impressed him most. He could sense that Linda was a deeply sensual woman, but she didn't wear her sexuality on her sleeve, nor did she dress to reveal it. If anything, she dressed as if to conceal it.

Lucky also noticed that Linda gave the impression that she was not involved with anyone at present. She mentioned that it was still too soon to get over being widowed and told him that she doubted she would ever remarry. He knew just how she felt. Although she was certainly an attractive woman—apparently as nice and as caring as she was fit and energetic—Lucky was somewhat relieved that she seemed to have no interest in him personally. Yet while he was skittish about the idea of dating anyone, he did feel lucky to meet someone who seemed genuinely fascinated by the challenge of researching luck.

Linda Sue turned out to be a godsend. Lucky had organized the project pretty well, but as he soon discovered, Linda was truly a professional organizer. She categorized and prioritized his leads and set up a contact software program that made his follow-up calls much easier. She also found new chat groups to explore, took over much of the e-mailing, sorted the e-mail responses for his review, and screened his telephone calls.

Lucky soon turned the extra bedroom into an office for Linda Sue, and gradually they settled into an easy working relationship. They each started the day with exercise. Linda was a serious biker and took a ten- or fifteen-mile ride each morning. After cooling down and showering from their respective workouts, their workday would begin around nine when Linda would bring in some bagels and they'd have a light breakfast while they made plans for the day's work.

At around lunchtime, Lucky would set out some sandwich meats, cheeses, and a salad. They'd have a meal and talk about what they'd each discovered that morning.

Over lunch one day in late April, Linda Sue said, "I found a great new chat group today. It's a Web site set up for employees of a large stock brokerage to talk about business and to keep up on what's going on in their branch offices and at headquarters. Sometimes the brokers tell

each other about stock ideas. The ‘back room’ people talk about administrative changes, and the analysts talk about what they are recommending.”

“Do you think you can join in and explain our search?” asked Lucky.

“Yes...I’ve already done that, and a broker responded with a story about a customer who had won the lottery and wanted to invest about eleven million in the market. The customer apparently had a financial advisor who was so good that she turned eleven million into more than four hundred million between late 1999 and the end of 2001. It seemed like everything the advisor bought went up, and they sold everything at the peak. Then, starting in January 2001, they sold stocks short, bought puts, maximized margins, and converted everything into tax-free municipals by the end of 2001. During that time, the advisor had made hundreds of trades and had been right almost every time. The brokers in that office started to follow the customer’s trades and made a bundle doing whatever the customer did.”

“Bingo! That’s just the kind of story we’re looking for. Do you think the broker would ask the customer if we could contact him to discuss our project on luck?”

“Already in the works. The broker said he’d explore the idea with the financial advisor to see if the customer would be willing to cooperate. The broker has never met the customer and has only dealt with the financial advisor. I’m wondering who’s the lucky person here—the customer or the advisor?”

“Let’s go for both of them. If they would both cooperate, we’d find out. I’ll put them on our Top Ten list. Meanwhile, I’ve found a lottery winner who won almost seventy-thousand dollars in the Florida lottery, but the good luck ended there,” Lucky told her. “After the lottery win, the fellow got divorced, was ripped off by a scam artist, bought the business he was working for, and promptly drove it into the ground.”

“Maybe we could use him as an example of really bad luck when we get to that phase of the project.”

“I don’t know,” he replied. “People with really bad luck don’t generally win the lottery.”

“Well, I think we might add some material about ‘false’ good luck, don’t you?”

They each went back to work to pursue those leads and new ones.

At five o’clock Lucky stuck his head into Linda’s office and said, “I’ve had it for today. I’m ready for a beer, and I’ll fill you in on what I’ve found. Want a beer?”

“I’ll have a glass of wine, thanks, if you have it...and I’ve got a few things to share, as well.”

As Lucky set out some cheese and crackers and got their drinks, he remembered how it used to be with Lu when they would settle down in the kitchen and share stories of their day. *I’ve missed that*, he thought as he waited for Linda to shut down the computer and gather her active

files. For the first time, he wondered if working with Linda could lead to something. Maybe she'd help fill the emotional void he'd felt since Lu passed away.

"I've pretty well struck out on my phone follow-ups with lottery winners," he told her. "I haven't found even one of the lottery winners who had much luck prior to winning or much luck afterward. I'm not ready to give up yet, but I'm thinking that maybe lotteries aren't a very productive source of leads."

"I've got the same problem with the brokers' stories," Linda responded. "Lots of great stories about people betting big on certain high-flying stocks during the late nineties boom, but almost all of them kept pushing past the peak and lost a lot during the bust. I'm going to refine my search to people who bet big on the market on the way up and then sold at the peak or people who sold stocks short at the peak and didn't cover until the stocks became almost worthless.

"What we need are more stories like the one I got this morning where somebody bought big on the way up, sold at the peak, and then bought puts or sold short as the stocks sank.

"You know, what we're doing is work," she said, "but it's a lot more fun than most kinds of work, and it's pretty exciting hearing these great stories about people who've been really lucky, even though some of them came up short in the end. I heard one today about a guy who started with twenty thousand dollars and used it to buy Internet IPOs when they first came out. He used maximum margin loans and built his portfolio up to a half a million in less than two years. But he stayed too long in the market and just recently closed out his account...at twenty-five thousand. Of course, that's better than some of the stories I've heard, stories where people were wiped out...but it's got to eat at this guy. In a short time, he's worth a bundle, and then he's right back where he started. Let me tell you another one I heard..."

"Why don't we do it over dinner?" Lucky interrupted her.

"Yeah, sure, I can do that," stammered Linda, "Give me thirty minutes, and I'm ready to go." They had a nice steak dinner at a local diner, and Lucky was feeling very pleased with himself when he turned in that night.

The next morning over bagels, they discussed the casino strategy. They had collected many stories but hadn't yet found anyone who had won consistently. One story they had gotten was about a dot-com multimillionaire who came to the casino with a hundred thousand and left after three days with four million. They were able to get his name and permission to talk with him. In the discussion it turned out that the fellow had lost three million on four prior visits. He was ahead at the moment, but there were too many unlucky episodes to support the notion that he was truly a consistently lucky fellow.

"I think we should put casino wins on the back burner and concentrate on lotteries and stock market wins," Lucky suggested.

“I’m for that,” said Linda. “I’m really getting some good stories through the stock market, and I have a feeling we’ll get lucky with that angle.”

While he was working the phones that morning, Lucky got a call from a broker that intrigued him.

“I’ve got a story that might interest you,” the man told him. “A female tax attorney opened an account for an investment trust with fifteen million dollars and wanted us to act as brokers but preferred not to divulge the owner of the trust. We kicked it upstairs for approval, and the legal guys insisted that we had to know the beneficiary of the trust and the source of the funds or we couldn’t legally handle the account. The attorney reluctantly agreed, and our folks checked out everything. It turned out that the tax attorney herself had won the Powerball lottery around the middle of December in 1999 and had formed a trust to collect the money and invest it. Well, she checked out okay, and the lottery folks verified the source of funds, so we were cleared to go. Are you with me?”

“Yes,” said Lucky. “How did the investment account do?”

“That’s where the story really gets interesting,” the broker continued. “She mostly bought calls on a series of high-tech companies. Everything she bought was right. She started in January of 2000, when everything was still pretty much going up. She built the fifteen million into eighty million by the end of 2000. Then beginning in January 2001, when the market started to collapse, she closed out all her long positions and started going short. She bought puts or shorted the same stocks she had used to build up her pile. She rode them all the way down until November and December, when she cashed out of the market and put everything in a diversified municipal bond portfolio. She turned the eighty million she started with into about seven-hundred million by the end of the year.”

“That’s exactly the kind of story I’m looking for! What are the chances that you could tell this lady about my research on luck and ask if she would talk to me?”

“I don’t think there’s a chance she’d go along,” he replied. She’s absolutely firm about her privacy. When she was doing so well, it raised all kinds of red flags in the account reviews we perform internally. We had to report her to the SEC because the SEC wants the opportunity to review extraordinary gains. They want to look for things like insider trading or money laundering. One of our senior executives came to the branch and examined the account. He couldn’t believe that virtually every bet she made was right on the money. She bought low, used maximum allowable margins to multiply her bets, and sold at the peak. Then she did the same thing on the downside when the market began collapsing. She was furious when I tried to set up an interview with the executive. She threatened to move her account. She wanted no part of any interviews or publicity.

“We did what we had to do to stay legal, but she wouldn’t cooperate in any way. If she thought I was telling an outsider about her, she’d leave our brokerage in a second, and it wouldn’t surprise me if she sued. I don’t know what you can do with this story for your project, but it seemed so perfect for you that I just had to tell you.”

Lucky grinned. “Thank you...the story is definitely perfect. It’s just what I’m looking for. I’ll keep your name and number, and if I can think of any way I could dig deeper into the story without any risk to you, I’ll get back to you. Thanks again.”

Lucky hung up and ran to the next room.

“Linda—have I got a story for you! I got a call from a broker, in the strictest confidence, that sounds as good as the one you got from the fellow yesterday. Like yours, the story starts with somebody winning the lottery and then having an incredibly brilliant run in the stock market. Your story was about a guy, and this one is a woman. The numbers are different and the time schedule is different, but we’ve got at least two examples of people who seem to be amazingly lucky. Have you been able to follow up on your story?”

“No, I haven’t. When the broker contacted the man’s investment advisor, the advisor went ballistic. No way, no how...! And the advisor told the broker that he would be in for a huge lawsuit if he ever told anyone else about the account. The advisor told him to close out the account and said she was moving to another brokerage house. The broker had to beg, plead, and grovel to get the advisor to keep the account with him. Since then, the broker won’t even take my calls. It’s absolutely a dead end.”

They decided to keep thinking about ways to get through to the two luckiest people they had found in their search while they looked for more leads. If they’d uncovered two incredible stories in one month, they felt sure they’d find more as they went on.

A week went by with no new stories that came close to the two they couldn’t use. Lucky found himself getting closer to Linda, and he began to find his thoughts drifting more often to Linda as a woman, not just his colleague.

Another week went by. Soon they were working all day and discussing stories and leads over dinner together every evening. By then the casseroles and cookies from neighbor ladies had long since stopped arriving at Lucky’s place, and walking to their respective trailers after dinner became slightly more awkward with each evening that passed. Lucky reminded himself that Linda had said she didn’t want to become involved with anyone. He wondered somewhat hopefully if she might be changing her mind.

Chapter Six

Linda Sue has longings

Linda was wondering what it might take for Lucky to see her more as a woman and less as a friend and coworker. Soon she was doing everything she could to let Lucky know she was interested. She stared soulfully into his eyes. She hung on every word of his stories. She tossed her head coyly. She touched his arm regularly. But every night after dinner, he would walk her to her trailer, thank her for her good work that day, and walk back to his place.

Some detective, thought Linda. I've given him every clue in the world, and he still can't solve the case.

By mid-May their work had become more frustrating. They had two really great stories they couldn't use, and neither of them had found anything nearly as good that they could use.

At the end of one particularly frustrating day, she said, "There's a nasty storm forecast for this evening. Why don't we order in some pizza and stay dry? Nobody told me that West Central Florida was the lightning capital of the world. I'm used to the lightning now, but the possibility of tornadoes scares me to death. Tornadoes seem to aim at trailer parks, no matter how glorified they may be."

"Sounds great," Lucky replied. "We can just hunker down. With our luck the storms will go elsewhere."

The storm blew in, bringing rain, thunder, and lightning, and it seemed to break through the reserve that had plagued them. Hunkering turned into huddling, which became cuddling. Touching turned to kissing, and they soon discovered some truly wonderful new things about each other. Linda's relief seemed very mutual.

"You're amazing," Lucky murmured as he curled around Linda when it came time for sleep.

Snuggled against him, she could tell that Lucky was feeling quite lucky that night—and so was she.

Chapter 7

Who is Lucky Louis?

Lucky's ex-partner Charlie Young called him from DC.

"What the hell are you doing down there? You're being investigated by a private detective!"

Lucky was stunned. "I don't know what you're talking about. I've just been working on my book, and you know all about that."

"This retired cop from New York named Kelly set up shop in Sarasota as a private detective. He says you've been nosing around about his client, and he was hired to find out who you were and what you were up to. He's talked to the lieutenant and five or six guys who have worked with you or partnered with you. I told him what I knew about your project and that you were the cleanest of clean cops. Whose tent do you have your nose under?"

"I have no idea. I've got my name out everywhere, and I've talked to hundreds of people whom I've asked about their good fortune, whether in the stock market or winning the lottery. Also, I've talked to lots of brokers and asked them to contact some of their luckiest investors to see if they'd be willing to talk to me about their good fortune. Maybe my search for lucky people has touched somebody's nerve."

"This guy Kelly left his phone number for me in case I thought of anything else. Maybe you should give him a call."

Lucky took the number. "Thanks for the heads up! I'll let you know if I find out what's going on." He hung up feeling a little shocked and very curious.

The detective answered on the first ring.

"Kelly."

"Mr. Kelly, this is Lucky Louis. I understand you've been asking around about me, and I want to know what's going on."

"I was hired to find out who you were and what you were doing. I found out, gave my report, and that's the end of the story."

"Who was your client, and why is he interested in checking me out?" asked Lucky.

“Can’t tell you who my client is because I don’t know. The whole thing was kind of hush-hush. I was a cop myself, so I was suspicious when the lady wouldn’t tell me anything about herself or her client. She told me she got your name from her broker, who said you were searching for people who had been really lucky in the stock market and asked if she’d be interested in becoming a subject in a book you were writing. She seemed kind of bent out of shape about it, if you ask me. I couldn’t see any danger to her in being asked. She said no to the broker but then couldn’t let it go. She hired me.

“When I found out you were a fellow cop, I didn’t want to go further, but when I told *her* you were a retired cop, she got even more agitated. She offered more money, so I agreed. I was real relieved, I can tell you, when I found out that you are a real straight guy, a war hero, and a highly decorated police officer, and that your project is out in the open and straightforward and seemed damned interesting. I wrote her a report on everything I found out about you, and it was all good. She didn’t react when she read it. She paid me and thanked me, and that’s the end of the story.”

“How can I find this lady?” asked Lucky.

“It wouldn’t be ethical for me to tell you even if I knew, but I don’t. She said she represented an investment trust, gave me a name I’m guessing is phony, and left only a P. O. box number as an address. She came to my office to get the report, and I had to wait for her to call me before I could set up the appointment. She took my bill, and I was paid the next day with a cashier’s check delivered by a courier.”

“Sounds like she’s got something to hide, and that makes me curious,” Lucky replied. “Thanks.”

Over dinner that night, Lucky told Linda Sue about Charlie’s call and about his conversation with Kelly, the PI. “We’re onto something here...we just don’t know what.”

Linda asked, “What do you want to do about it?”

“I think we should focus on our two top stories and do a little investigating about the secretive woman who hired Kelly. This whole project is beginning to feel more like an investigation to me than research. Maybe I spent too much time as a detective, but I feel like I did back then. You chase down hundreds of leads; most of them are dead ends. Then, bingo! You get the lucky break that solves the case. I’m ready for that break.”

Six days later, Lucky got his break.

“Lucky, this is Irish. How’re you doing?”

“Great, Irish. It’s good to hear from you! How are all my poker buddies?”

“Everybody’s fine, Lucky. How’s your luck project coming?”

“Runs hot and cold, Irish. We’ve got a couple of great stories we can’t use, and a little mystery, but we’ve got hundreds of leads. We’ll find what we’re looking for.”

“I called because I have a story that should be in your book. First, I gotta say that everything I tell you is on the q. t. It’d be my job if anyone found out I was telling IRS stories out of school. This one, however, is just too good to pass up. I may have a lead on the two luckiest people on the planet. Have I got your word that nothing I tell you can come back and bite me?”

“You have my word, Irish...thirty years a cop, I protect a source with my life.”

“Okay, how about this. A guy wins the Florida lottery in August 1999. He files a tax return in April 2000. We think it’s pretty weird because he’s twenty-five years old, has never filed a return before, and there’s nothing on the return but the sixteen- or maybe eighteen-million gross income from the lottery. He pays his full taxes, but there isn’t anything else on the return. No income, no deductions, no nothing. It’s like the only thing this guy ever did was buy a lottery ticket. We flag it for audit, just to see if we can figure out what’s going on. In August 2000 our auditor makes an appointment with the client, and his tax attorney shows up and does all the talking.

“Our auditor had checked out the win with the Florida lottery people, and that was legit. Our guy just wanted to know why this guy had never worked before, had no other income and no deductions. It was perfectly legal, but it looked pretty weird. He gets nothing. The story was that the client had never needed a social security number before because he had never worked. He was raised on a farm in North Dakota, born at home, and schooled at home—subsisted on farm products...blah, blah, blah. His folks lose the lease on the farm and move to Canada to become part of a cult. He doesn’t want to go, so they give him a bus ticket to Florida. He enters a homeless shelter. The shelter gives him twenty bucks to buy clothes at Goodwill, and he buys one lottery ticket. He wins. How am I doing so far?”

“Well,” says Lucky, “So far, the guy sounds like a real loser who got lucky once.”

“It gets better. We flag him for a follow-up look at his next return for 2000. We look it over and all we find is that he’s done really well in the stock market—but so did everybody else, so we didn’t make anything out of it. Meanwhile, we had flagged the lady tax attorney for review because we had no record of her as a tax preparer before or after she represents the guy. We think that’s kind of weird, so we just want to take a look. What do you know? Her 2000 return shows that she’s won the Powerball lottery in DC. She wins twenty-four million plus, and she pays her taxes. We don’t know what to make of that, but we’ve got no beef. We just remember the story, you know...stories float around the place, and this is a little story. The story starts to get real interesting this year. Are you still with me?”

“Yeah, I’m starting to get interested. What happened on this year’s filing?”

“Hold on to your hat—this is where the story gets wild. In this year’s filing we learn that Mr. Florida lottery winner has married his tax attorney who won the Powerball lottery. We have

two lottery winners, filing jointly. And guess what they did with their twelve and fifteen million dollars, respectively?”

“Okay, now I’m fascinated. Tell me. Tell me!”

“I’ll tell you this. They paid Uncle Sam over four hundred seventeen million in taxes. They probably have more than a billion dollars left—that’s with a *B*. They bought stocks when things were going up, they sold at the top, and they used puts and short sales to ride the stocks down. I looked at their return myself—pages and pages of trades. Almost all of them were right. Here and there throughout the pages, they made a few small trades that lost money, but everything else was pure gold. They have to be the luckiest two people in the world, or there’s something funny going on. We’ve flagged it for the SEC in case it might be insider trading, and it triggered a flag for the FBI, in case it might be money laundering.”

“Did they have two different accounts at two different brokerages?”

“How the hell did you know that? You’ve been doing well at your detecting—but you missed one. They had another account, as well. Are you already onto these folks for your book?”

“No, I couldn’t break through their privacy walls, but I’d bet my pension that they’ve been onto me. Somebody hired a detective to check me out. I must have rattled them. So tell me, who are these lucky folks?”

“No can do, Lucky. It’s my pension if it gets out that I’ve said *boo* to anyone. Even for a free copy of your book, I can’t tell you. I got a hunch you don’t need me to tell you anything. It sounds like you’re almost ready to find them yourself. What the hell...you’re a detective, right?”

Chapter 8

Lucky the detective

“That’s a hell of a story!”

Lucky had just filled in Linda Sue on the details.

“We thought we had two stories,” she marveled, “but it’s really one, and it’s a dandy! Where do we go from here?”

“If you agree, I think we drop everything else we’ve got going and focus on finding these two people. We’ve got lots of places to look. We can start with the Florida lottery office—maybe we can identify the guy right there. We can try to break down the trust that was founded to cash in the Powerball ticket. We can chase down the P. O. box that the detective, Kelly, was given. We can try to break through the privacy wall at one of the brokerages. We won’t do anything illegal...but I spent most of my life in DC, and almost everyone I knew worked for some level of government or another. These people are likely law-abiding citizens, but they might have tried to skip out on at least some of their taxes. If they’ve followed the law, then they are listed in governmental documents in many places. Don’t worry...we’ll find them.”

For the next eleven days, Lucky and Linda worked the phones, met with rental agents, took a couple of plane trips, called in several favors, studied old newspapers, checked out every known tax attorney and financial advisor registered in Central Florida, and then put together everything they’d found.

Based on the location of the two brokerage offices they knew about, they narrowed their search to central Florida. They figured they were looking for a tax attorney or financial advisor. They knew she had married in 2001. They assumed she had an office. By crosschecking lists of Florida bar members and lists of people married in five different counties, they finally came up with a name. They learned that attorney Dagne Lindstrom had married a John Galt on April nineteenth. A notary public, who filed the marriage certificate in Sarasota, married them.

They learned that Dagne Lindstrom had opened an office in Sarasota in August of 2000. A search of homeless shelters led to the discovery that a John Galt had entered one in Florida on August 17, 1999. He’d moved out six days later and was rumored to have won a prize in the lottery.

Bring the Moon

They had them! They knew their names. They knew their story. They just didn't know where they lived or how to reach them. Every record showed an address of an office that was rented in the name of AO Investment Trust but was almost empty and had no phone. The other thing they uncovered was the commercial mailbox address that the detective had been given. The problem was that the mail office that serviced that box had only another P. O. box for a mailing address of the owner. A chain of mailboxes, an empty office, no phone...these people didn't want to be found.

Chapter 9

Who is John Galt?

Lucky decided to take a direct approach. He and Linda Sue carefully crafted a letter that they sent to each of the commercial mailboxes they'd found, as well as to the nearly vacant office:

June 3, 2002

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Galt,

My associate and I have been researching *luck* as the topic for a potential nonfiction book. In our research we believe we have discovered the following things about you:

In August of 1999, Mr. Galt entered a homeless shelter.

In August of 1999, Mr. Galt won either sixteen or eighteen million dollars in the Florida lottery.

In December of 1999, Ms. Dagne Lindstrom won the Powerball lottery, collecting \$24,463,084.

On April 19, 2000, Dagne Lindstrom married John Galt in a private ceremony conducted by a notary public named Winston Garand.

Using three different brokerage houses and incredible luck and skill, you managed to turn your combined lottery winnings into more than a billion dollars. We believe that you two may qualify as the two luckiest people on earth.

We're aware of the steps you have taken to protect your privacy, and we realize that you do not seek, and indeed shun, publicity.

We ask that you meet with us to help us understand the nature and source of the incredible luck you have had. If you are unwilling to meet with us or unwilling to tell your story to us, our only option would be to make you two the stars of our book without your participation.

We also pledge that if you are willing to meet with us and are forthcoming in sharing your story, we will protect your privacy with as much energy as we have expended in seeking you out.

Respectfully, with admiration and awe, we are,

"Lucky" Louis

Linda Sue Brown

(941) 555-1776

Chapter 10

The Galts' reply

“Mr. Louis?” inquired the quiet, controlled voice on the phone.

“Yes, this is Mr. Louis.”

“This is Mrs. Galt. I think we should meet. Can you and Ms. Brown meet me today at one o'clock at my office? I think you know where it is.”

Lucky felt the kind of excitement he had felt throughout his career as he closed in at the end of a case. “Yes, We'll be there...and thank you for seeing us.”

Lucky and Linda Sue had spent the previous two weeks imagining various possible scenarios that might explain how the Galts had done what they had. They'd considered possible tampering with the lottery, but they set that idea aside because while tampering with one lottery seemed nearly impossible, to tamper successfully with two separate lotteries seemed way beyond any possibility.

They considered how an investor might work with a crooked broker to build stock positions with post-dated orders or shift winning bets from someone else's portfolio to the Galts'. This would be highly difficult and dangerous for both the Galts and the broker. When they tried to imagine conspiring with three different brokers at three different firms, again the idea seemed wildly improbable. It also didn't account for the fact that two of the brokers had told them about the good fortune of their clients. If the brokers had been involved in a scam, they surely would have kept it secret.

No matter how many scenarios they considered, the only one that made any sense was pure luck. While they were undoubtedly also smart and cagey, the Galts truly had to be the luckiest people in the world.

Lucky found himself pacing the floor of his trailer. He felt a level of excitement he had experienced only just before a combat action in the Army, as he closed in at the end of a case, and when he was setting up a perpetrator for a bust.

Lucky and Linda Sue had considered whether there was any way that the meeting with Mrs. Galt could be dangerous. If the Galts were hiding something terrible, was there a chance that they might try to eliminate Lucky and Linda? Just to be safe, Lucky had collected all their

notes, contacts, e-mails, letters—everything that would prove the Galts’ involvement—and had packaged it all up to be sent to his former partner in DC. They asked his neighbor Roland to hold the package and to mail it only if Lucky and Linda were to disappear suddenly.

Roland agreed, but only with the stipulation that Lucky would tell him later what was causing all the mystery. “This is the most excitement I’ve had since I retired” he chortled. “It’s like a movie!”

Lucky told him it was part of the manuscript for his book, and he didn’t want to take any chances of it getting lost if he and Linda were somehow to have an accident. Roland didn’t totally buy the story, but he was willing to go along with it and help out if necessary.

Chapter 11

Meeting Dagne Galt

Arriving at the sparsely furnished office, Lucky and Linda Sue saw a slender, well-dressed woman sitting inside at the desk. She rose to unlock the glass door and let them in, saying, “Please have a seat,” then silently locked the door behind them.

Lucky studied the woman. The most obvious thing about her was her utter beauty—she was so stunning that he could feel his gut tighten as he looked at her. She was about five-foot-six, he figured, around 120 pounds, perhaps in her mid-thirties, and she moved with an athletic grace. Maybe she’d been a dancer, he guessed. Her features were fine and strong, and her skin was flawless and creamy looking. Her thick, shoulder-length, auburn hair was cut evenly just above the shoulder, framing her strong jaw and long, slender neck perfectly. Her expression gave no hint of her emotions. Lucky was excited and expectant, while the woman seemed calmly at peace.

She took her seat and studied them both with a grave intensity. Lucky’s years of experience with police interviews taught him to be silent. It was wise to let the other person feel the silence and speak first.

“What do you want?” she finally asked.

“As you know, we’ve been studying luck and trying to find lucky people. Our goal is to find out if there are characteristics that lucky people share that would help ordinary people become luckier,” said Lucky. “We’ve identified you and Mr. Galt as the two luckiest people we’ve found, and we want to know just how lucky you have been. Perhaps by studying you two, we will find something helpful for our book.”

“Yes, I know all that,” she said curtly. “You found me and my husband in your search. You also learned that we are extremely private people. We’ve made it clear that we don’t wish to participate in your work, yet you threaten us with publicity we wish to avoid. I’ll ask again. What do you want?”

Lucky had no ready answer. “Good question, Mrs. Galt. I’m not sure, myself. I only know that you and your husband appear to be the luckiest people we’ve found—maybe the

luckiest people in the world. I think that is an incredible story, and in my new career as a writer I want to tell the story.”

The woman quietly stared at each of them in turn for several minutes. Linda Sue became unsettled, but as they had agreed in advance, she was ready to let Lucky handle the interview and say nothing unless she was asked directly. Lucky sat quietly, letting the endless seconds pass.

With a calm that seemed almost unimaginable considering the situation, the woman finally broke the silence. “Our privacy is our first priority, and, as you know, we have considerable financial resources. We would be willing to pay you well for the time you have wasted researching us. We are prepared to offer you each one million dollars to leave us alone and stop invading our privacy.”

Lucky and Linda looked at each other. A million dollars each would ensure financial security for both of them for the rest of their lives.

The offer was sorely tempting, but Lucky was unwilling to let the story go. He silently shook his head at Linda, and with a lift of his eyebrows inquired whether she was with him.

Linda spoke for the first time, replying to Lucky’s signal, “I’ll go with whatever you decide.”

“I’m sorry, Mrs. Galt. We didn’t go into this for money. I’m curious, and I don’t want to live the rest of my life without knowing what’s behind your good fortune, no matter how much money you offered to make us go away.”

The woman considered them for a long moment, and said, “I didn’t suppose you would. We know a great deal about you, Mr. Louis, and we’ve learned that you have what people have described as a dogged persistence. I’m going to give you my final offer. We would pay each of you five million dollars to go away and leave us in peace. If you say yes and sign a contract guaranteeing that you’ll never write anything about my husband and me, we will pay you five million dollars apiece.”

Lucky and Linda looked at each other, stunned. “Could we have a little time to discuss this privately?” Lucky asked.

“Certainly,” said the woman. “Whatever you decide, you must both make the same choice. We would not pay one of you to leave us alone while the other is free to write about us.”

Lucky and Linda left the office and walked to the parking lot to discuss the offer, which was truly staggering to both of them.

“We’d each be very rich,” said Linda. “And if we were to stay together, we’d be unbelievably rich.”

“We’d never know how they did it,” said Lucky. “Could you live the rest of your life always wondering what the story was... wondering why they were willing to pay ten million dollars to keep us quiet?”

“I’m evidently not as curious as you are, Lucky. I’d take the money and work on a book about the changes that sudden wealth makes in your life.” She paused a moment to consider the alternative. “On the other hand, we’re in this together, and if you think we should turn it down, I’ll go along with whatever you decide.”

“It’s probably my lifetime as a cop, but I can’t help wondering what secret they’re hiding that they’re willing to pay ten million dollars to keep buried. Now I’m thinking there may be a crime hidden somewhere. Maybe there is more than luck involved. Maybe this isn’t a story about luck but about how two people broke through lottery security and brokerage security to become incredibly rich? I’m torn between wanting you to have your five million dollars and wanting to discover the real story here.”

“Don’t worry about me, Lucky, I didn’t have five million dollars when I woke up this morning, and I’m still the same contented person. I’m happy with my lot in life. I really enjoy working and being with you, and I can live the rest of my life without wealth. It’s your call, and I’ll be happy whatever you decide.”

Mrs. Galt again opened the door for them, locked it behind them, and took her seat.

“I’m sorry, Mrs. Galt,” Lucky began, “I believe there’s a story here that cries out to be told. I want to tell it. It’d be wonderful if you and your husband would cooperate, but my detective’s instincts tell me we can find it, with or without your help. For your sake, I hope you’ve done nothing illegal. If you have, it will make a great story if we can uncover it. If you haven’t, then your incredible luck still makes a great story.”

Chapter 12

Mrs. Galt's Offer

“Frankly, I’m not surprised at your refusal. We’ve had you both investigated and have found nothing but good things in our search. It takes a lot of integrity and commitment to turn down five million dollars on the chance that our story would be worth it to you, assuming you could uncover the details. My husband predicted that you would turn down the money.

Lucky and Linda glanced at each other and stiffened their resolve.

Mrs. Galt continued. “First, I will tell you that our story is not the story you are seeking. There is no luck involved in our success. Nor, is there anything criminal. The story is much larger than luck or crime. In my judgment, you have stumbled on the biggest story you will find in your lifetime. We are willing to share our story and our mission with you if you are willing to accept certain clear-cut conditions.” She paused and looked at them silently for a moment, then went on.

“The first condition is that you can’t tell anyone else what you learn—not friends, not relatives, not anyone—ever. It will not be easy for you to keep this pledge...but unless you are willing to make it and live by it, we cannot share our story with you.

“You may write a book about it, but only if you write it as a novel. It cannot be a nonfiction book. We also require that you allow us to edit what you write. We will be the final editors of your manuscript. You will quickly learn the reasons this must be so.

“Next, you must agree not to submit your book for publication or distribute any preliminary manuscripts to anyone prior to January first of 2003.

“Finally, when your book is completed and submitted for publication, you must disappear from public access and promise not to write anything more about any information contained in the book. You may later write about other subjects, but you must write under a different pen name. Nothing more is ever to be written under the names you use as authors of this book.

“We realize that we are asking a great deal in exchange for sharing our story. We want you to think carefully about these conditions and decide whether you are both willing to make such a commitment.

“If you decide to commit, we will place ten million dollars in a revocable trust for each of you. You will receive a monthly payment from that trust for the rest of your lives. You may

exercise complete control over how the money is invested, or the trustee will handle that for you. The reason we place the money in a revocable trust is so that if you ever violate any of our conditions, we can pull the money out of your trust and effectively take back our payment to you. We think this will be a strong incentive to you to be true to your commitment.

“In addition, in December each of you will receive a lottery ticket that will win something over five million and less than ten million dollars. If you have lived up to your commitment by that date, this will be yours to keep and cannot be revoked.

“In December we will disappear. We will change our names, take our children with us, and make a new life someplace where we cannot be found. We recommend that you plan to do the same thing.

“On this paper I’ve outlined the conditions and given you an untraceable telephone number to leave a message for us. Now I must ask you to take a day or so and consider carefully what we are proposing. If you decide to go forward under our conditions, we can begin immediately thereafter. Call and leave a message when you’ve decided.

“On a personal note, I hope you’ll agree to join us as we complete our mission. I have kept my secret for a long time, and I’m eager to have associates I can share it with. Do you have any questions?”

“Thousands, but only one for now,” responded Lucky. “If we decide to participate under your terms, how can we be guaranteed that you’ve done nothing illegal and that what you call your ‘mission’ does not involve anything illegal?”

“You have only my word, Mr. Louis.” Mrs. Galt replied. “If at any time you find anything illegal that we have done or intend to do, you may walk away but will still be bound by your commitments. If that turned out to be the case, you would keep your trust income. I’m not concerned about that happening, and I encourage you not to be, either.”

She stood and gestured toward the front of the office, and they rose and walked toward the door. “Goodbye,” she said, as she showed them out. “I look forward to receiving your call.”

Chapter 13

Should we take the deal?

“We’d be rich!” said Linda Sue when she and Lucky climbed into his car.

“I have to think about this,” Lucky responded. “I’ve got my ethics, and I need to be sure that going along with them doesn’t get me into something I couldn’t live with. I’ve lived my entire career clean and straight, and I can’t let myself be bought. Why does this feel like we’re being bought?”

“We *are* being bought,” said Linda, “but we can live with the conditions, and we can walk out anytime if we find something illegal. It’s not so different from making a book deal with a publisher....”

“What if we find the whole story so incredible, so compelling, that we can’t stand *not* telling it as a nonfiction work?” asked Lucky.

“We’ll be able to tell it in the novel. We could write it like *The Life of Pi*, which was a novel, but readers are left with the idea that it may be true,” said Linda.

“How could they promise us a winning lottery ticket for next December? I can’t believe that there isn’t something illegal about that...like maybe they’re fixing the lotteries or something.”

“I don’t know, but somehow they seem to be able to predict lottery numbers...and we stand to be rich for the rest of our lives anyway and also win a lottery just as an extra perk.”

“I don’t think I could walk away from this story, even under the circumstances. I’m dying to know what’s going on. I think I can live with their conditions, and I really think I could get used to being rich. I say we go for it.”

“Me, too—I’m with you all the way!”

Lucky left a message on the Galt’s answering service, saying, “We agree with your conditions, and we accept your offer. We’re eager to start. Call us with instructions on the next step.”

Chapter 14

Dagne's story

Following the directions they received to the Galt home, Lucky and Linda navigated a series of two-lane roads east of Sarasota and turned into a driveway at the address they'd been given. They identified themselves over a speaker at the unguarded entry gate and heard Mrs. Galt's voice telling them to follow the road through the orange grove and park in front of the main house. The gate slid open, then closed behind them as they wound their way through the orange trees for a considerable distance before they saw the house.

Pulling up to a parking spot in front of the home, Lucky surveyed the house and noticed its extensive security system. Cameras rotated to follow them as they left the car and climbed the steps to the front door.

"Come in, and welcome to our home," said Mrs. Galt as she greeted them in the nicely appointed foyer. She was wearing dark tailored slacks and a simple white blouse, and her auburn hair was pulled back and clipped at the nape of her neck. She turned toward one of several doors to the rest of the house. "We'll sit in the library. It's too warm to be out on the deck."

She led them into a beautifully furnished room lined with packed bookshelves. The décor was warm and natural, and everything was in very good taste. It looked to Lucky as if most of the furnishings and many of the books were new.

"What can I get you to drink?"

"I'll have coffee, Mrs. Galt...black," Lucky replied.

"Please, call me Dagne. What can I get for you, Linda?"

"I'll have the same, with cream, please."

Dagne pressed a button that flashed small lights throughout all the rooms Lucky could see from the library. A neatly dressed young woman came into the room, and Dagne began to communicate with her in sign language. When she finished, the young woman smiled and nodded and left the room.

"Her name is Essie," Dagne told them, "and she's profoundly deaf. She helps around the house and will watch the children while we talk. The children are working on their studies in their classroom. You'll meet them later."

Dagne sat in an armchair, and Lucky and Linda sat on a matching love seat across from her. She seemed pleased to talk with them.

“Since I met John, I’ve never been able to tell anyone anything about him or about our lives together. It’s quite a relief to finally be able to talk to someone about him. I’m not even sure how to start. It’s an incredible story.”

“Perhaps you could begin at the beginning.” Lucky suggested gently.

Dagne thought for a moment, and then said, “I was born and raised in Maryland in a relatively affluent family. I went to very good private schools and graduated from the University of Virginia. I went on to Wharton for an MBA, and finally to the University of Michigan for a law degree.

“After that I worked for a law firm in Manhattan, specializing in tax law. Our clients were people who managed money for themselves or for others. I met and married a lawyer from the same firm. We had two children, and I became a stay-at-home mother. We were very happy and content until my husband was killed in a plane crash while on business in Asia. I had some family money, and with the proceeds from my husband’s insurance policy I had enough to live the rest of my life without working.

“After a year staying at home, I got restless and felt I had to move somewhere else—someplace where I wouldn’t be surrounded by memories of the loss of my husband. I also felt lonely not being with other adults. I arranged to get my legal accreditation in Florida, and I moved with my children to Sarasota in July of 1999. I opened an office, put ads in the paper, hired a nanny, and felt good about getting on with my life.”

She suddenly smiled, and Lucky almost felt it in his gut. He figured she could easily have been a fashion model or an actress if she hadn’t gone into tax law. She went on.

“I hadn’t been in my new office a week when John Galt came in. He showed me a winning lotto ticket and asked me to help him collect and invest the money. He was a very unusual man. For one thing, he was the handsomest man I’d ever seen—movie-star good looks—yet his speech seemed very strange. He seemed to have only a limited vocabulary, and he spoke with a strong accent that I couldn’t quite place. It turned out that he was living in a homeless shelter, wore clothes he’d bought in a secondhand store, and had no cash. He told me he would pay my fee when we cashed in his winning ticket.”

Lucky glanced at Linda, who was whistling silently in amazement. Dagne smiled at Linda and continued with her story.

“According to him, he had no Social Security number and no identification cards. Of course, I was both curious and suspicious. I thought he might be a foreigner, but he seemed to have no papers at all. I quickly informed him that he would need identification, a social security number, and an address in order to cash the lottery ticket in Tallahassee. I asked him some

questions about his background, and he told me he had been born at home to a couple that sharecropped on a large farm in North Dakota. He said that his parents were members of a cult of some sort that practiced an unorthodox religion and didn't believe that the government—any government—had power over them. He told me that his birth was never registered, his parents schooled him at home, he never attended any school, and he lived a subsistence existence on the farm. Never had a job outside of the farm, either.”

“Wow!” Linda exclaimed. “That’s some weird tale...!”

“There’s more. He told me his parents spoke a dialect that had its roots in the Amish language. His family had no television and no radio. That seemed to account for his limited English and his unusual accent. When he was twenty-five, the farm was sold. All the families who had worked on the farm were suddenly without homes. Broke and angry, his parent relocated to Canada to join others in their sect, but John didn’t want to go. His parents bought him a bus ticket to Tampa because he had heard about the warm weather in Florida, and he arrived on the Sun Coast penniless. He found his way to a homeless shelter. He worked at Goodwill for a day where he earned twenty dollars. He used it to buy clothes at a thrift store, and he bought one lottery ticket. That was the winning ticket. I checked the lottery ticket numbers and found that he was telling the truth. He had won more than eighteen million dollars.”

“That’s some story!” said Lucky, “but it still seems kind of implausible...”

“That’s what I thought. Several elements of his story didn’t seem to jibe, either. His hands were gentle and soft, not those of a farmhand. His skin was smooth and showed no evidence of having been exposed to much sun. It was hard to believe he’d never been anywhere off that farm before...never even a neighboring town or city. But he was such a kind and beautiful man that I was willing to put aside my suspicions. He just didn’t seem like someone who had any ill intent, so I decided to follow my intuition and help him.

“John Galt became my sole project for the following two weeks. I found him an apartment, bought him decent clothes, and arranged for a telephone, electric service—everything necessary to begin life as most of us lead it. He was with me constantly. He asked me question after question about routine things I was doing. He met my children, and he was kind, gentle, and loving with them. He seemed to glow when he was with the children, and the kids took an instant liking to him. He took joy in their play. He was fascinated with their toys. They seemed to communicate with him at some level deeper than they could with me or anyone else.”

“What was he like as you got to know him?” Linda asked.

“In some ways, he was absurdly innocent and naïve. In other ways, he was sophisticated, worldly, and aware of things such as national and international affairs that were way beyond my understanding. He was a living paradox.”

Essie returned with a tray of mugs, a coffee urn, and cream and sugar, and Dagne stopped talking for a moment to help serve their drinks. After Essie left the room, she looked directly at Lucky.

“Now before I go further, I must tell you about something I did that was not strictly legal. I want to tell you now, before we go further, because this is the only thing that either of us has done that borders on wrongdoing.

“John had no identity papers. He had nothing I could use to get him the Social Security number he would need to collect his lottery winnings. We needed something that would indicate that he was born in the United States and give proof of his age. He told me he couldn’t reach his parents. They were living somewhere in Canada and probably working illegally, and he didn’t know where to contact them at that moment. It might take quite some time to track them down, but even if he could, he assured me that they had no papers for him in any case.

“I finally called a family friend in Maryland and asked if he could help me get a baptismal certificate showing that a child named John Galt was born August 14, 1974, and baptized in the Church of the Common Good on August 19, 1974, which was the information John had given me. A week later I got the certificate in the mail. Although I figured it was probably illegal to forge a baptismal certificate, it didn’t seem like a very serious crime. Then I took him to the Department of Motor Vehicles and got him an identity card and a permit to learn to drive.

“I then took him to the Social Security office. Because of John’s age, the clerk looked at me questioningly, but when I rolled my eyes and shrugged my shoulders, I think she got the impression that John might be a little behind on the IQ curve. On the strength of the baptismal certificate and the DMV paperwork he was issued a Social Security number. I figured these IDs would be sufficient to collect the lottery winnings in Tallahassee.”

Dagne sighed and smiled again at them both. “Now, Lucky...is that sufficient evidence of criminal activity to prevent you from continuing?”

Lucky thought for a moment. “If that is the extent of any criminal activity by both you or John, I have no problem with it. Please continue your story.”

Dagne directed her next comments to Linda, who was listening with rapt attention.

“From the moment I first met John, I found myself attracted to him. As we spent the first week together, I became more and more attracted, and by the time we were into our second week, I realized I was totally infatuated. When you meet John, you’ll see how charismatic and charming and unaffected he is.” She smiled at Linda and dimpled slightly, her eyes sparkling as she went on.

“Then there was the fact that he adored the children, and they adored him. Pretty soon I began to imagine marrying him and living happily ever after, but I still had nagging doubts. All

of the odd things were too much to ignore. His story about being a home-schooled farm boy was clearly not true.”

She paused and looked at them both for a long moment before speaking again.

“By the end of our first week together, John’s strange accent had nearly disappeared. He seemed to be adopting my speech patterns. If I hadn’t known better, I could have believed that John was raised in Maryland. At first, idioms were totally foreign to him. By our second week together, he spoke with a Baltimore accent and used idioms fluently. His vocabulary grew at an unbelievable rate.”

Lucky and Linda glanced at each other in disbelief as Dagne continued.

“He watched television as though he were studying. He watched shows about science and history, and he read voraciously. He read everything at hand in my house. He read law books and could soon talk with me about cases I had studied in law school. He seemed to have a natural proclivity for the law. He read my entire library of books on tax law. In three days, he had become more knowledgeable about our tax code than I was. If he was home-schooled, then his parents had to have been far better educated than he had led me to believe.”

She paused again and smiled, then directed an aside to Linda again.

“John seemed to be attracted to me, as well. He looked me in the eye, and he hung on my every word. By the second week, I was openly flirting with him. I found myself looking into his eyes, touching his arm, even twirling my hair. He smiled at me more and more, but it was as though he couldn’t read the signals I was giving out and act on them.

“There were many more odd things. John couldn’t drive and didn’t want to learn. He avoided riding in cars as much as he could. When he got into a car, he’d sit in the back seat, strap himself in, and ride everywhere in a braced position, as though ready for a crash.”

She chuckled and then took a sip of coffee.

“Well, I’m dragging out this story a bit, but I want you to know all the details up front. Anyway, we went together to Tallahassee to collect his lottery winnings. The lottery people wanted to make a big thing about John, but he wouldn’t hear of it. He wanted no publicity at all. He didn’t even want his picture taken.

“I had arranged for a trust for John’s winnings, and after we deposited the funds, my job was essentially done. I had put together an investment plan with a broadly diversified portfolio and was intending to ask the trust officer to execute the plan.

“John would have none of it. He wanted to select the stocks and wanted me to be his agent and represent him to a brokerage firm. I was aghast. I argued strongly that he had a significant sum of money, and he shouldn’t even consider managing it himself. What did he know about investing? Let a professional manage the money, I argued. John just handed me a list of stocks he wanted to buy. They were all NASDAQ stocks, dot-coms, and telecommunications

companies, as well as some IPOs that were not even available at that point. There was no diversification—nothing in bonds, nothing in large-cap growth companies—nothing but a bunch of risky, half-baked companies.

“He asked me to do it his way until the end of October. If his choices didn’t work out, he would then do things my way. So, we did it his way. We bought into the riskiest, sometimes silliest businesses I’d ever heard of. We put the money to work around the middle of September of 1999.

“I figured that once he had collected his money and established himself in his new apartment, my job would be done, but that was not what John had in mind. He asked me if I would be willing to work solely for him. He told me that I had become so important to him that he wanted me to be his agent and partner. By that time, I was so in love with him that I wanted nothing more in the world than to find a way we could be together on a continuing basis.”

Dagne exchanged a knowing glance with Linda as she went on. “I asked him, ‘John, when you talk about becoming your partner, do you mean just on business matters, or do you mean something more?’ He said, ‘I want you to be my partner in every part of my life.’

“We had never even kissed. I had wanted to become intimate with John, but somehow he wouldn’t take the first step, so I was unsure of his feelings. I asked, ‘John, are talking about marriage?’ He replied, ‘Yes. If you would have me, I would very much like to marry you.’

“I was thrilled but at the same time confused and afraid. I still had many nagging doubts about him. I needed him to be honest with me, so I confronted him. I said, ‘John I would love to marry you, but before I can say yes, I need you to help me understand who you really are. Marriage is based on trust, and there are too many things that don’t make sense to me. I don’t trust you completely, and I want to trust you. Help me to trust you.’

“He said, ‘I will tell you the truth about everything. When I do that, you may not want to marry me or even be with me. I will leave the decision completely in your hands. I ask one thing from you. If I tell you everything, can I trust you to never tell anyone on earth what I tell you now? Can you swear to that? I believe that if you promise to keep my secret, you will keep it, whether or not you decide to marry me. Can you make me that promise?’

I agreed, and until today I have kept that promise. However, I now have his permission to tell you two the story. It will probably seem unbelievable to you...but in time you may come to believe and understand. Are you ready to take a leap of faith and temporarily suspend your disbelief until you meet him?”

Lucky and Linda glanced at each other, then Lucky nodded for both of them, and Dagne continued with the story.

“John comes from a time very far in our future. He hasn’t told me how far.”

She paused again to allow Lucky and Linda to digest that information.

Linda shook her head and then looked at Lucky, and he rubbed his hands over his face and then smiled at her before turning to Dagne again. “Okay. So you’re saying that he knew what to invest in because he was coming from a time when the outcome was already a given?”

“Yes. Precisely.”

“Okay,” he replied. “I’ll bite. So, why is he here...in our time?”

“I realize that this all sounds like science fiction...but he’s actually here on a mission. Just hang in with me, and I’ll explain some of the details. In John’s time, the earth is threatened with collision with a piece of an exploded star that’s many times larger than Earth. The people of that time have been prepared for such an event. They’ve already built huge machines around the planet known as thrusters, which have allowed them to manage the weather. They have also used these thrusters to extend or shorten the orbit of the earth around the sun so they can combat periodic changes in the earth’s cycles of warm periods and cold periods. This way, they are able to extend the earth’s orbit to avoid the collision.”

She paused a moment to be sure they were both following her, and then continued.

“But that’s not the problem. When the thrusters were being built, the planners considered whether or not to install thrusters on the moon, as well. The question was whether it was worth the investment and effort. The people making the decision decided against equipping the moon.

“Now, people in John’s time are faced with the urgent need to change earth’s orbit at a rate that will not allow the moon to remain in orbit around the earth. In effect, they will lose the moon.”

Lucky and Linda exchanged another glance, and this time Linda spoke up. “So, how did John get here...or I guess I mean, how did he get to our time...?”

Dagne smiled again. “For many centuries, people from John’s time have known how to go backwards in time. They conducted experiments and found that when they did go back in time, the results could have unpredictable effects on the future. It was decided that they wouldn’t ever go back in time except in the direst emergency...and they are now facing such an emergency in John’s time. John was sent back to our time on a mission aimed at informing the people of what they refer to as ‘the interim time period’ that they—well, we—must equip the moon with thrusters so that when they extend the orbit of the earth, they can bring the moon along.

“People in John’s time do not know how to move forward in time, so he will be staying in our time for the rest of his life. John was specially equipped for this mission with an information database about our present time. The purpose was to enable him to acquire the financial resources he needed to execute his mission and to become independent and live out his life here.”

“So he knows everything that’s happened before his time.” Lucky said.

“Yes, and this explains how John was able to win the Florida lottery. It also explains how I was able to win the Powerball lottery, and it explains how we can give each of you the winning lottery numbers we promised you. John’s database made it possible to invest the lottery money on stocks we knew would go up and sell stocks short that we knew would go down. I’m afraid that there is no luck involved, and you can see that our success was not built on any crimes.”

Lucky and Linda glanced at each other again, and Linda said, “Well, it’s definitely farfetched, and I’m not sure I buy it at this point, but it certainly explains the luck factor.”

Lucky asked, “Can you tell us some more about John’s mission here in this time period?”

“Certainly. John’s mission is to set in motion a chain of events that will result in the people of the Interim deciding to bring along the moon—to equip it with its own thrusters. An important directive of his mission is to live here in our time without doing anything that would change anything radically in the future. For example, he must make certain that he does nothing that would cause a young person—a future parent—to die. To do so might rob the future of progeny who are otherwise destined to make a significant difference in John’s time.

“Finally, the people who sent John are very concerned that the people of today might learn something from John’s visit that could change the interim period in ways that might be harmful to the people of his time. That is the reason for our passion for secrecy and also the reason you must live up to your commitments.”

Dagne refilled all their mugs with coffee and then asked, “Do you have any questions or comments about what I’ve told you so far?”

“Wow!” said Lucky. He took a deep breath. “Pardon my skeptical nature, but what evidence did John have to back up his story?”

“There are many things, but two were extremely persuasive to me. First he showed me the device that holds his database. Think of a Personal Digital Assistant, a PDA—like a Palm Pilot, for example. Now think of how that device might evolve in a thousand years or so. He had brought with him a very small device with such a large capacity that it stores the entire library of newspapers and magazines published around the world between September 1995 and August fourteenth 2003, among a great deal of other data. The device is as light as a feather, as thin as a handkerchief, and as flexible as a piece of tissue. John showed it to me and demonstrated it by asking what the winning Lotto numbers for the Florida lottery were on November sixth, 1999. The device gave him the numbers. My doubts were greatly alleviated that evening when I watched the balls being drawn on television. The numbers were the ones I’d seen on the device.”

Lucky asked, “What did you say to John when he told you his story?”

“I told him I wanted to think about it for a couple of days. I thought about what it would mean to the children to have a stepfather with a secret they couldn’t share. I’d like to tell you I thought about it rationally, but I was too deeply in love at that point...so I rationalized. After

watching the lottery drawing with him, I told him I wanted to sleep with him that night. I promised to give him my answer the next day. Instead, I gave him my answer after an hour. I said yes, and I haven't regretted it one moment since. In point of fact, Lucky, I think you were right when you said I might be one of the luckiest people on earth.

Linda said, "I hope you won't think this is a rude question...but what made up your mind so quickly?"

Dagne laughed. "The second thing I had discovered, which was even more persuasive, was the difference in his body. This is going to be hard for you to imagine, but it's born out by the physical evidence. Sometime in the interim between our time and his, scientists made some improvements to the human body through genetic modifications. They evidently didn't favor the natural exposure of the male genitalia, apparently for reasons of safety. John's body has no external genitalia. Everything is hidden within the body. Think 'porpoise.' Everything works like it does in our time, but the genitalia are protected from the painful injuries sometimes inflicted on males today."

Lucky smiled in spite of himself

"We were not legally married until April of the following year, but we were married in every other way from November seventh on. I made the investments, we made a great deal of money...and you know the rest."

Linda digested the information for another minute and then asked, "Tell me about your life with John. How do you spend your time?"

"John is a truly devoted and attentive husband, and he understands me in a deeper way than I have ever known before. He adores the children...except for his mission, being with them and teaching them is the most important thing in his life."

"How have you handled all this with the kids?" Linda asked her.

"We home-school the children. Although they do play with other children in the area, we do this partly because John is concerned that they might inadvertently disclose some differences about him to teachers and fellow students. We school them at home especially because John and I are able to teach them things they could never learn in a traditional school environment. When John isn't involved doing something with the children or with me, he reads voraciously, watches television, or explores the Internet to learn what we know about history, science, and the arts."

"I realize this has been a lot to digest, but it was necessary to give you as much background information as possible. Do you have any questions about what I've told you so far?"

Lucky and Linda thought about it and then shook their heads. "Not at this moment," Lucky replied, "although I'm sure I'll have a lot of questions as time goes by...."

"All right. Now, are you ready to meet John?"

Chapter 15

Meeting John Galt

While they waited for Dagne to get John, Linda asked Lucky, “What do you think?”

“I’m in a daze. I can’t get my mind around this yet. If John can convince us that what Dagne says is true, then we are on totally uncharted ground.”

“I don’t know if a gadget or device could convince me, but that physical thing might do it,” said Linda, giggling.

Dagne returned with John, and Lucky and Linda could do little but stare. Using powers of observation he’d honed as a cop, Lucky tried to quickly size up every aspect of what he saw. John Galt appeared to be a normal human man, but he was staggeringly handsome. He was dressed casually in a plain blue shirt and slacks. He was tall, maybe six-feet-two, Lucky estimated. From what Lucky could see, he had perfectly smooth, almost hairless skin and a well-conditioned and ideally shaped body. He had hazel eyes and a full head of dark brown hair—, which was slightly long and shaggy and looked like it had been cut by an amateur— and a medium complexion. He moved very smoothly and gracefully and seemed to have a certain charismatic presence that immediately held their attention. He looked to be in his mid-twenties, and Dagne’s story would place him at twenty-eight. Before Lucky could rise from his seat, John spoke up.

“Welcome to our home. I hope you’ve been made comfortable,” he said in a perfectly smooth, warm voice with no detectable accent. His tonality and vocal patterns suggested to Lucky that he might have been studying Peter Jennings’ voice on the evening news.

“Thank you for making us welcome,” Lucky replied. “You have an amazing story, and I’m still struggling to get my mind around it.”

“You gave us little choice,” John replied. “I still have reservations about letting strangers share our secret. I must trust you completely before I’m willing to confide much more about my mission.”

“...and I must give you my deepest apologies for forcing Linda and myself into your life against your wishes. Now that I know how difficult this has been for you, I feel guilty for

intruding. I want to think more about it, but I'm wondering if Linda and I should just bow out of your lives and let you live in peace."

John responded, "If we come to really trust each other as I suspect we will, then I will welcome your entry into our lives. Dagne and I regret that we must live a very secluded existence. We both miss having close friends. We miss knowing people in whom we can confide and who can confide in us. As we talk, I will learn more about you as you learn about me. I have learned to be confident of my intuition and judgments. It won't take me long to know how much I can safely tell you. What do you need to know about me that will allow you to believe I am who I say I am?"

"Dagne told us that she became convinced when you demonstrated your database device and showed her your physical differences. Either one would probably convince me," said Lucky.

"In my time, all citizens of earth share a common language. The word for it in that language translates as 'the Learning Language.' The device that Dagne told you about uses this Learning Language. Let me show you."

John took the device from his left pocket, and as Dagne had said, it was astonishingly light, thin, and flexible. "I'll ask it for a headline story in the Tampa Tribune for tomorrow...June 13, 2002."

John spoke into the device in a language that was totally unfamiliar and unfathomable to Lucky and Linda. Then he said, "I'll turn up the volume so you can all hear the response." The device responded with another incomprehensible series of words. John interpreted the response and said, "A headline story on the front page of the *Tampa Tribune*, soon to be written and printed overnight tonight, will be titled 'Lamenting Raggedy State Of Old Glory.' You can check on that tomorrow. I could give you other examples, but I have to be sure I don't give you something that might cause you to do anything different from what you would ordinarily do in the future. This story seems innocuous enough, but it will serve as an example of what the device has stored and makes available to me. Would you like to look at this?"

Lucky and Linda took the device, felt it, flexed it, and examined it. The characters printed on the touch pad were unlike anything either of them had ever seen before.

"Even if you could speak the language, you wouldn't be able to use it," John said. "It will respond only to me, and it knows me because I have something implanted in my body that tells the device that this is me and no other person."

"I'm convinced," Lucky said. "What about you Linda?"

Linda replied a bit haltingly, "If it wouldn't be too intrusive, I'm curious about the physical differences Dagne told us about."

John smiled and answered, “In my era, we have none of the modesty that is so pervasive in your time. I do my best to behave as people in this time do because I must hide my differences from most people, but I am quite comfortable showing them to you as a way to build trust.”

John disrobed, and Lucky and Linda stared at his body in utter amazement. Just as Dagne had said, there were no external male genitalia. There was a slit in the flesh over his pubic bone, from which Lucky could only imagine an engorged penis would emerge when necessary. His body was clearly different from any male human body they’d ever seen before.

“I’m convinced,” said Linda. “I just need time to digest all of this.”

Lucky spoke up. “How will we know that you’re not actually from some alien race—not really human after all?”

John laughed. “I wish I could prove that, but for now, you’ll just have to take my word for it.”

Lucky shrugged and smiled. “Okay.”

“Is there anything else you’d like to ask me?”

“Not at the moment, but I will have to start thinking about how I could tell this story in the form of a novel,” Lucky replied. “Could we meet again tomorrow?”

“I’d like that. Dagne and I have many things to share, and we’ve missed having other people to talk to,” said John, smiling warmly at them. “Come at the same time, if that’s convenient.”

Chapter 16

Lucky and Linda make plans

Neither Lucky nor Linda spoke much as they drove back from John and Dagne's home, except for an occasional "Wow!" or "Jesus!" or "Frigging unbelievable!" or "What have we gotten into?"

Back at Lucky's place, they quietly poured drinks and sat down together in the living room. Lost in their own thoughts, they were quiet for a long time. Finally Linda spoke.

"Where do we go from here? The questions we had planned for a book on luck aren't relevant at all now. What do you ask a man who comes from the future?"

"I don't know," Lucky answered. "My mind is racing so fast I can't even imagine. Should we even think about a book now? Maybe we should just back out of these people's lives and let them go on with whatever the mission is...but we've stumbled onto something so huge, I can't see just letting it go."

"Why did they let us in on their secret? They could have kept stonewalling us, and we would have had to back off. I know we threatened to expose them to publicity, but I'm wondering if we would really have done that."

"I think we would have gone public with the story we thought we had. It was a great story all by itself, even if it was the wrong story."

"Well, all of that is history. Now we have a story about a man who has come from the future on a mission we didn't even ask about in greater detail."

"They've been very clever," said Lucky. "They knew they couldn't control our story, so they co-opted us with promises of wealth we could never have dreamed of. Now, they get to control what we write by editing out anything that compromises their mission. We aren't free anymore to write whatever we discover. We'll only publish what they are willing to have us say. And if we have to write it as fiction, nobody is going to believe it anyway. They've put us in a box, and they control everything."

"Is that so bad? In a way it frees us to write whatever we want without having to worry about telling secrets that might compromise their mission. We'll just write the story as we discover it, and they'll be responsible for editing out anything that John would worry about

before the fact. We can just tell it like it is, and we won't have to worry about messing up the future."

"What *is* our story?" asked Lucky. "The story we have so far is a guy who comes back from some future time in order to save the planet as it exists sometime in the future. He builds quite a nest egg easily because he can read everything that happens in our future, and he's going to use it all to execute his mission and live happily ever after."

Linda giggled. "That's the story if you're writing a police report. Let's take a broader look. What if we don't write the story from his perspective? Another view of the story is that of two people, you and me, who stumble onto a man from the future, and we're the only ones who can tell people what we have discovered. That's what you and I have. We have an opportunity that no one else in the world has. We get to interview a man from the future. What do we ask him? What would other people want to know about what lies ahead for our future generations? What questions that plague us in our time do they have answers for?"

"Hmm," said Lucky. "I think you're onto something. Let's make a new list of questions. I want to know what life is like far in the future. Maybe they've answered the age old question, why are we here? In our time, people ask, 'Is this all there is?' I want to know what else they've chosen to change about the human body. I want to know if they've solved the problems that we face, like war, disease, crime, and poverty."

"Let's go in and get on the computer so I can type up some of these questions. I want to ask Dagne what its like living with a man from the future. I want to talk to the children and see if they've noticed anything different about their stepfather. I want to see how different they are from regular kids—kids that haven't been home-schooled by a man from the future."

They went into Linda's office, and she booted up her computer and started typing a list of questions.

Lucky felt more enthusiastic with each new question he imagined asking. "Let's ask what they do about guns. What are their politics? What kind of houses do they live in? How do they get around—cars, flying machines, trains, or what? What did they do when the oil ran out? What did they do about runaway population growth? Have they found anything in the search for intelligent life on other planets? Have they encountered aliens? Are there really UFOs?"

Linda was really excited now, too. Typing as fast as she could, she said, "I want to know how they entertain themselves. Do they still have television, or do they have something better? How do they raise their kids? What are the schools like? What religions have lasted? Are there any new religions?"

Lucky mused, "I wonder how they dealt with global warming. Did the ice caps melt? Are the oceans still polluted? I want to know more about the Learning Language. And what is this mission he's on?"

“Lucky, I think we’ve got ourselves a hell of a story, and we haven’t even talked about the miracle of time travel or other science fiction stuff. We’ll write it from our perspective. We can even start writing now, just filling in the story on how we came to find the Galts.”

“Okay, let’s do it. We can always add or delete as we get more of the answers.”

Chapter 17

Another meeting

The next day on their way to the Galts, Lucky stopped to buy a *Tampa Tribune*. They really didn't feel that they need any further convincing, but just to be thorough they looked on the front page for the story John had known would be there. They found it immediately. It was a harmless human-interest story about a man and a flag. Although they weren't very surprised at that point, it gave Linda the shivers to see the prediction come true.

In their meeting with the Galts, they outlined their ideas and reviewed the questions they'd listed.

"I think that's an excellent approach," Dagne remarked. "As someone from our own time, I've asked all those questions myself, and I know you'll be fascinated by the answers."

John added, "Even though I trust Dagne completely, I've been very careful as I've spoken about my time. I cannot take chances on revealing certain things that are still to be discovered during the Interim. In answering those questions for you, I'll use the same method I've used with Dagne, and wherever possible I'll refer you to writers or visionaries available in your time who are pointing the way to the future I come from."

"Fair enough," said Lucky. "Could we start with your mission? Why have you been sent to this time period?"

"There is a man living today—unknown right now except to a very few—who in our time is considered a visionary of great renown. This visionary began the investigation of the idea for the thrusters that have become so vital to maintaining the ecological health of Earth in the future. He also explored the way the mind works, which led to the creation of the Learning Language. He introduced the concepts of focus, scope, and level, upon which the Learning Language was constructed. His contributions were immense, and he is highly revered in my time. He envisioned a new view of education, which in a highly evolved way, is in use today in my time. In history of my era, this man died on December 9, 2002, in an automobile accident. Many of his writings are yet unpublished today. His wife then put his writings on the Internet as a posthumous memorial to his life. During the Interim, his posthumously published works became the basis for the development of the Learning Language."

John looked intently at Lucky, who felt an almost physical effect from the intensity of the younger man's gaze. He went on.

"His vision of thrusters included the idea of shifting the tilt of the earth to moderate annual climate changes, as well as the idea of adjusting the orbit of the earth to manage the warming and cooling cycles that had been natural to Earth in the past. He envisioned being able to use the thrusters to evade collision with space debris, the situation we face in my time in the future. Thanks to what he started, we will be able to avoid a collision that would otherwise destroy the planet. But the Visionary didn't deal with the question of the moon. He theorized that if we made moderate shifts in Earth's orbit to cool or warm the planet, the moon would still circle the earth, although in a more elliptical orbit. He proposed that by further, perfectly timed moves of the earth, it would then be possible to recapture the moon into its traditional orbit. He was correct, and that is what the planners did during the Interim. However, the Visionary did not envision that we could lose the moon if we had to make a fast and fairly drastic escape maneuver to avoid a collision."

"So what will you do in our time to change things?" Lucky asked.

"My mission is to meet with the Visionary, ask him to add to his writings and to stress the urgency of equipping the moon with thrusters, as well. Our leaders think that this will cause the Interim leaders to equip the moon to keep it harnessed to the earth. The movements of the moon will be matched to the movements of the earth, and our problem will disappear. I've also been instructed to convey to the Visionary the thanks of the people in our time and to tell him of the high regard in which he is held. Also, by timing my meeting to coincide with the date of his fatal automobile accident, we can save his life. It is risky to save his life, because he might write more that could have unpredictable effects on my time, so I've been instructed to ask him not to write any more than he has already written and to spend the rest of his time living quietly and interacting with as few people as possible. As you can see, I am making the smallest possible intervention in your time. If things go as we have predicted, it will have a very large and positive impact in the future."

"What if it doesn't?" asked Lucky. "Does the future depend totally on your mission?"

"Not necessarily," John replied. "Another mission has been prepared for an intervention at the time of the decision about equipping the moon with thrusters. If my mission is successful, then the decision will already have been made. For reasons I can't explain, the second potential intervention is much riskier than mine, so we all hope that mine will succeed."

"What happens if neither mission is successful? What's wrong with losing the moon?" asked Linda.

"Even in my time, the moon is vital to the health of our oceans. The moon causes the tides, and tidal action sweeps the ocean onto and off of the shores in a manner that powerfully

affects marine life. The loss of the moon could mean the end of the aquaculture that feeds billions of our people. We have performed many ‘throw-and-catch’ maneuvers with the moon as we have adjusted earth’s orbit. We know that when the moon is on the far end of an elliptical orbit, the tidal forces are greatly diminished, and we have lost a lot of marine life as a result. When the moon is at the near end of its elliptical orbit, tides are much stronger, so we quickly move the earth to ‘catch’ the moon and restore the normal orbit.”

Lucky considered the new information. “If I understand your mission, then it’s simply to meet with this fellow you call the Visionary, save his life, say thanks from the folks in the future, and ask him not to write anything new during the rest of the life you have saved. Oh...and to tell people to ‘bring the moon.’ Is that right?”

“Yes,” John replied. “That is absolutely the minimum possible intervention we could make. We anticipated that there would be some changes just by virtue of my appearance in this time, but the only serious complication so far has been you two. After letting you know the rationale, we now feel confident that whatever you write will be dismissed as science fiction, and no significant negative or disruptive change to the future will result.”

“What will happen in your time if your mission is successful? Will all the people wake up one day and find that their world has changed? Won’t that be kind of a jolt?” asked Lucky.

“It doesn’t actually work that way,” answered John. “The people in my time will never know that they ever had a problem. People during the Interim will have installed thrusters on the moon, and in my time period we will already have had many years of experience in maneuvering the moon. The people who sent me will never even know that they initiated this mission or that they needed to.”

“Tell me about the Visionary,” asked Linda. “Where is he, and can we meet him? Would it hurt your mission if we were with you when you met with him?”

“I’ve thought about that,” John replied. “I think it might be helpful if Lucky came along. I don’t know how the Visionary will respond when I drop into his life, claiming to be from the future and ask him to add to his writings. Perhaps Lucky will attest to my authenticity and make the intervention more effective.”

“Have you contacted the Visionary yet?” Lucky asked.

“No. I’ve been instructed to arrange to meet him this coming December ninth and not before then. It was not made clear to me what might happen if I deviated from the timetable, but I trust that it is meaningful. I assume that an earlier intervention might add additional risks, or perhaps the planners were simply being overly cautious.”

“That gives us a lot of time to work on our novel before December,” Lucky said. “Right now, I’d like to know what other changes have been made to the human body during the Interim.”

“There are many differences between our bodies. Most are not immediately obvious because they are internal. My genetic structure is different from yours. Today your scientists are just mapping the human genome. In the interim between our times, scientists will discover a great deal about what genes do and which genes have which roles. I have additional DNA that keeps me free of diseases that afflict humans today. Barring an unforeseen accident, my life span will be nearly two hundred years. My brain operates at more than seventy percent of its capacity. This compares to estimates of less than five percent in your time. Work is still ongoing, and our scientists hope to reach at least ninety percent of brain capacity within a few generations. Some of the increase in brain utilization comes from scientific breakthroughs in brain chemistry. Part of the increase also comes from the use of the Learning Language.”

“This stuff is fascinating,” said Linda, “but, if we’re writing a novel about your visit to our time, it seems to me we need some sex or violence or danger or conflict to keep the readers’ interest. Otherwise the book is going to be pretty dry. It’ll seem like nonfiction to our readers.”

“I can give you some ideas about that,” offered Dagne. “I’ve learned some things from John that will help you reach and engage your readers.”

“Good,” Lucky replied. “Do you want to continue with that tomorrow, then?”

“Yes, that sounds like a good plan.”

When they left, Lucky thought about John Galt all the way home. He was certainly unique; entirely unlike anyone else Lucky had ever known. For example, when he spoke his hands were so expressive as they moved, as though they were adding content to his words that couldn't be expressed in the limited English language the two men shared. Of course, that might be partly because John was also expert in sign language, as was Dagne.

Chapter 18

The Sage Model

The next day, Dagne began teaching Lucky and Linda about the science of John's time and how it applied to their book project. The two couples were settled in the library again, but John let Dagne do most of the talking.

“As the Visionary first suggested in his book *Sagery*, your real audience isn't Tom, Dick, Harry, or Susan,” she began. “Your real audience is their various gene groups. When Tom reads your book, and his conscious mind processes the words, each of his gene groups observes what is coming in and examines it to see if the input affects that group. The most interested gene group adds some things and then takes the input and compares it with its data store of expectations, beliefs, and prior learning. The comparison creates an emotional response, either one of comfort or discomfort.

“Excuse me for interrupting,” Linda said, “but I'm not sure I understand what you mean by a 'gene group.'”

“I'll go into greater detail later on. Meanwhile, if you start thinking about each of your readers as having an internal collection of gene groups with different interests, and you write your story to engage as many of these gene groups as possible, you will have your readers' total interest and the opportunity for maximum emotional response.”

“Using one persona or another in a drama, the interests of various gene groups stimulates a response in the observer. For example, what happens in a movie? The hero kisses the heroine. This engages the internal gene group most interested in romance and relationships. If the characters have been played convincingly, and the viewer has reason to think positively of the characters, and the relationship hasn't violated any beliefs, prejudices, or judgments, then the viewer will get good feelings about the romance progressing and may respond with a smile or a tear. If, however, the heroine is married to someone else, and this kiss is leading towards adultery, the viewer's negative judgment—which is brought about by a different internal gene group—may create feelings of discomfort, which might produce a frown or feelings of disgust. Now if the heroine has children, you also engage the gene group most interested in parenting. The kiss will produce feelings and reactions from the parenting group as well as the gene group

invested in romance. Add the gene group invested in beliefs, and the kiss has really grabbed the viewer with multiple feelings.

“Fascinating....” mused Linda. “How do I apply that to our writing of this adventure?”

“I must confess that I am very interested in your writing this story. I cannot ever talk to anyone else about John, yet I am living what could be one of the most incredible lives ever. I can’t wait to see what you do with the story. Of course, it’s really John’s story, but I am also living it. John wants the story told so that linguists, rocket scientists, educators, and others can glimpse the future and turn their work in the right direction. My reasons are more personal. I want to have my story told and see my life in print...or maybe even on the screen.”

“So you’ll help us write it?” asked Linda.

“Yes, I’ll help in every way I can.”

“Help me understand what you are talking about with gene groups and how that relates to our telling this story,” Lucky asked.

“*Sagery* identifies nine different gene groups. The first group is the ‘me’ group. This group is the part of you that thinks only about *you*. It’s the self-absorbed aspect of the human personality. The job of this group is survival and replication, among other things.

“The second group is the one that seeks a mate. This group is interested in romance or conquest. This is the element that takes over the whole mind and body when an individual becomes infatuated. The third group is the part of us that wants children. It wants to nurture them, protect them, teach them, and see them thrive. The fourth group is the part that values the extended family, parents, siblings, cousins, etc. The fifth is the group of genes that wants to work, to contribute, and to make a difference. The sixth group is the part that needs, creates, or chooses beliefs. When you act on your beliefs, this part is governing your actions. The seventh is the part that is curious about the world and wants to learn new information. You use this aspect for hobbies, for reading, for solving puzzles, for listening to or playing music. The eighth part is territorial. This aspect of us needs a group, a place, a town, a state, and a nation to belong to. This is the motivation that manifests patriotism, nationalism, and other collective identities. The ninth is the sage group, or internal harmony aspect. Its job is resolve the conflicts between the other parts and to bring peace out of emotional chaos.”

“Do you think you could write that down for me so I can take a look at it later?” Linda asked. “I’m not so sure I’ll remember which is which....”

“I apologize for this long explanation, but I’ll tell you how it applies to your writing, and maybe you’ll think it’s worth examining.”

Both Lucky and Linda leaned farther forward, encouraging her to go on.

“If you want a book that really engages a reader, try to find some story element for each gene group. Once you have each group interested, offer a mix of story elements that each aspect

can feel good about, as well as some that produce tension or other feelings of discomfort that can be resolved later on.

“In this case, you’ve got Lucky as a leading character. He’s a heroic figure that men will identify with. You’ve got me—a very lucky woman—for women to identify with, as well as yourself. You’ve got John, a stranger in a strange land. You’ve got the Visionary, an obscure character whose vision changes the world.

“To engage the ‘me’ aspect, you’ve got sex galore—just wait until John tells you about sex in the future! You’ve also got sexual tension. For example, will Linda want to have sex with John? Will John want to have sex with Linda? What would that be like?

Linda’s face reddened slightly, but she didn’t glance at Lucky as Dagne went on.

“For the second gene group, you’ve got a deeply loving married couple, John and me. You have the budding romance of Linda and Lucky. Will you or won’t you stay together by the end of the book? Will Dagne be jealous of Linda? Will Linda threaten John’s marriage?

Lucky began to look embarrassed, and Linda laughed out loud. Dagne just smiled at them and continued her overview.

“For the gene group interested in children and parenting, you have our two children. Will home schooling by a man from the future make them geniuses or misfits? Can a deaf woman be a capable nanny, or are there dangers to the kids because she cannot hear?

“For the gene group invested in work, you have John’s heroic task. Will he or won’t he save the planet? You have your book project. Can two amateurs write a novel that works, even if they’ve never written anything before?

At that, Lucky buried his face in his hands, and they all laughed. Dagne went on.

“For the gene group invested in beliefs, you have a story that challenges the beliefs of virtually every reader. Time travel? Sure! Wait until John tells you about religions in the future. You wonder about our reasons for disappearing when the mission is accomplished and the reason we insist that you do the same. You’ll understand when the first Islamic cleric calls for a jihad against Lucky Louis and Linda Sue Brown for publishing thoughts inimical to Islam.

“Oh, that’s just great!” Lucky sputtered.

“I’m just getting warmed up. Wait until John answers the questions ‘For what purpose are we here?’ and ‘Is this all there is?’

Linda looked at Lucky with a knowing glance. “We were wondering about those questions,” she told Dagne.

“You will also support many of the beliefs that are held dearest by virtually every man woman and child when John tells you about education, about parental love and nurturing, and about marriage in the future.

“For the gene group interested in learning new things and solving puzzles, you’ll have something for everyone: answers to the peril of global warming, new directions in education, solutions for overpopulation, a new language for linguists, and most especially, how will life differ in the future?”

“Are we going to be including all this information in what’s supposed to be a fiction novel?” Linda asked her.

“For some of it, you will refer the reader to the writings of the Visionary. If readers are interested, they can learn how to engage and strengthen their own sage element. They can learn how to manage the internal discord created by gene groups that seem to fight one another.

“Wow!” Lucky exclaimed. “Sounds like all this information might really help the people who read it.”

“Yes, but first you’ll need to write a compelling book, of course. You’ll have some powerful appeals to each and every gene group within every reader. You have all the elements of dramatic tension. You’ll have everything you need to create a gripping, powerful novel.”

“But we’ve never written anything before...at least not fiction,” Lucky reminded her. “Writing was just supposed to be a way for me to stay busy in my retirement. I never considered that I might run smack into the biggest story of all time.”

John chuckled and then spoke up. “I think that maybe you really *are* lucky.”

“Okay, John...with that big brain of yours, how would you advise us to proceed?”

“I advise you and Linda to write the book as well as you can. Dagne and I will edit it to be sure that nothing is included that I think may endanger the future. When you get the edited book back, ask other writers to review your work. If they think you’ve got a good novel, publish it. If they think you’ve got a great story but the writing is somewhat amateur, then contract with skilled writers to help you tell your story in a more professional way.”

“I love it!” said Linda. “All we have to do is write a credible first draft.” She turned to Lucky. “That takes the pressure off us. We can concentrate on putting together the story elements, and maybe a professional writer can make it as good as it can be.”

“That feels good to me,” Lucky agreed. “Meanwhile, I’ve got to admit that I’m curious about the sexual angle. Tell us about sex in your time, John.”

Chapter 19

Sex in the future

The next day, John explained to Lucky and Linda that during the Interim, when the geneticists were modifying the male body, they had to deal with the problem of sperm temperature. He mentioned that as they were probably aware, the male scrotum evolved externally as a way of keeping sperm at a lower temperature than they would be if the testes were located within the body. In the unmodified male, when the outside temperature is low, the scrotum automatically draws the testes closer to the body to keep them warm. When body or air temperatures are warmer, the scrotum lowers to keep the testes further from the body and thus cooler. With the testes housed within the body, the sperm would become warmer and would suffer a decrease in motility.

The scientists then considered the fact that most sexual activity for human males was not intended to fertilize an egg. They decided that they needed to allow for cooling the testes only when procreation was the goal. They found that cooling by use of an external ointment would lower the sperm temperature to revive motility effectively. Consequently, in John's time, birth control became the job of the male. Unless the ointment was used, men were infertile. John explained that when a couple wanted to have a baby, the man would apply the ointment. Because of other genetic improvements that were made, couples could then expect to conceive easily.

"That's a nifty idea, from what I can tell," Lucky agreed. He couldn't help but think about the years of misery and shame that Lulu had undergone, trying to have a baby.

"Yes," said Linda. "It certainly takes the burden of birth control off women, too! What else did they do?"

John replied that men were also altered to be naturally multi-orgasmic. Although women had always had the potential for multiple orgasms, their natural potential was also genetically enhanced. As a result, virtually all women in John's time were multi-orgasmic, and so were the men. The geneticists also discovered how to increase the libido of both men and women, so in John's time, recreational sex was often enjoyed several times a day.

"In addition, both men and women are genetically programmed to be emotionally comfortable mating with many different partners. I'm sure you're aware that as humans evolved

from the early hominids into homo sapiens, the urge to have a variety of partners was discouraged through cultural and religious taboos in order for people to be more certain who the fathers of children were. Consequently, seeking sex outside of marriage was traditionally the source of enormous conflict and drama throughout history.”

“That’s for sure!” Lucky chimed in.

“The new genetic programming was readily accepted, but the desire for multiple partners was not always fulfilled literally. In my time, what you now think of as ‘virtual reality’ ...in a vastly advanced and more realistic form...allows anyone seeking sexual recreation to enter a computer-generated experience in which they can have a sexual interaction with any computer-generated partner they chose. This way, if a married man meets a married woman he finds attractive, he will simply ask for the name of her computerized avatar and can then explore the woman sexually through that avatar.”

“What’s an avatar?” asked Linda.

“An avatar is a computer-generated replica, or you might say a ‘body double,’ of an individual. It’s three-dimensional and physical, in a manner of speaking.”

“Like a kind of hologram that you could touch.” said Linda.

“Yes, that’s the description you might use in this current era.”

“What about jealousy? Linda asked. “Wouldn’t the wife be jealous if her husband wanted to have sex with the avatar of some stranger he’d met?”

“No human would ever feel jealous of an avatar. Besides, it works both ways. The man’s wife could have virtual sex with any avatar of her choice, as well. She could choose her favorite media star or her mate’s best friend, for example. It wouldn’t matter because they were both expressing their natural genetic predilection for variety in a socially acceptable manner.”

“Don’t husbands and wives have sex with each other?” Lucky asked him.

“Yes, and quite frequently, compared with what I read about the great majority of couples in this current time period. Also, if I am to believe what I have read, it is not uncommon for a man or woman today to fantasize about someone else while having sex with his or her partner. In my time, when people have sex with a partner, they are thinking only about their partner.”

Lucky considered all the new information and then glanced at Linda, who seemed almost breathless with wonderment. “Thank you for explaining everything with such clarity,” he told John. “Let’s meet again tomorrow and continue our lessons.” Meanwhile he figured that, if Linda was willing, they might take time that evening to give expression to some of their own sexual urges.

“Before you go,” Dagne chimed in, “I should give you the papers for the trusts we’ve set up for you. Each of you is named as the beneficiary of a trust, with ten million dollars in each account. You will notice that we maintain ownership of the trust, which we will turn over to you

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when all our stated conditions have been met. In the meantime, each of you will receive a check for thirty thousand dollars in interest every month. Here are your initial checks.”

A smiling Lucky and Linda took their checks and the papers, thanked the Galts profusely, and left for home.

Chapter 20

We're rich!

“Thirty large!” marveled Lucky, weaving his car back and forth on the empty road. “I’ve never had this much money in one chunk in my life. We’re rich!”

They had just pulled away from the Galt’s property and were on their way back to Lucky’s.

“It’s staggering!” Linda exclaimed. “It’s just hitting me. Wooieeee!” she crowed with joy. “What do you think you’ll do with your money?”

“I don’t know. Maybe I’ll get a new car. Maybe we could buy a house.”

“We? Are you thinking about moving in together?”

“Well, we’re practically living at my place now. You only use yours for storing the bulk of your clothes.” He couldn’t tell how she really felt about the idea. “What do you think? Would you like to move in together?”

“I don’t know, Lucky. It’s a little quick for me to take that big a leap. So much has happened so fast, my head is swirling. I’d like to take it a step at a time.”

He was slightly annoyed at her lack of enthusiasm. “The way I see it, we’re teamed together on this book for the duration. We share a secret we can only talk about with each other. We work together, we sleep together, and we get along so well. To me, it makes sense to move in together.”

She turned toward him in her seat. “Are you talking about marriage?”

He swallowed hard and then plunged ahead. “I think so. In some ways, it’s like we’re already married.”

She chuckled. “If this is a proposal, I’d give it a score of two out of ten in terms of romance.”

He laughed and then said earnestly, “It’s more like I’m opening up the subject for discussion. I think about it. Do you?”

She smiled. “Yes, I’ve thought about it.”

“Well, when you think about it, what do you think?”

“I think it’s possible. I’ve already told you that I’m in love with you. You’ve told me that you love me. I think we’re moving down the marriage road. If you wanted to buy a house, I’d live in it with you...but I’m not sure I’m ready to commit to buying a house together like we would if we were married.”

He thought about it, concentrating on the road for a few minutes before replying. Finally he said, “Maybe I’ll hold off on a new house for a little while. Things are happening pretty fast. I like the idea that we’re moving down the marriage road. We’ll see soon enough where that road takes us.”

That evening, their lovemaking was more passionate than ever before. As they lay spooned together before sleeping, Linda said, “Being with you has certainly brought me incredible luck. I think your luck must rub off, and I feel blessed. I love you, Lucky Louis!”

Chapter 21

The hard stuff and the soft stuff

The next morning they stopped at Roland's house to pick up the package Lucky had left with him.

"Seems like you're not so worried about an accident any more," said Roland.

"You're right," Lucky agreed. "And I've found another way to protect our manuscript. Thanks for helping me out, though!"

On their way to the Galts, Linda said, "We need a plan for the book. Dagne suggested a number of ways we can appeal to the readers' various interests. What would you think if I took the human-interest elements and wrote about those, while you take the scientific and futuristic elements? You know, break the story elements into the hard stuff and the soft stuff?"

"That makes sense. I want to explore the 'thrusters' thing. What do you want to work on?"

"I want to find out what its like for a woman of our time to be married to a man from the future. Why don't we split up today? You take John and talk thrusters, and I'll talk girl-talk with Dagne."

"Sounds like a plan," Lucky agreed.

They got quiet as they approached the Galt's place. Lucky planned the questions he would ask about thrusters and other hardware. Linda thought about Dagne and the extraordinary situation she was in. Both were very curious.

As they drove into the grove, Lucky said, "I am so excited about what we're doing. I can't wait to get up each morning and get going. We're hearing stuff that no one else currently on earth is going to know about, except what we're going to tell them."

"We have a wonderful opportunity and a great responsibility. I feel the same way you do. I'm excited, thrilled, and really curious!"

Greeting them at the door, Dagne brought them into the living room and asked them to be seated.

Linda told her about the conversation in the car on the way there. Dagne said that she and John had already thought of the idea of separating into gender pairs for awhile, since it seemed

natural to take advantage of what each of them was most interested in discussing and learning about.

“Tomorrow you’ll meet the children, too. We’ve been so secluded that they will surely be curious about who you are, why you’re here, and what we are talking about. We don’t wish to lie to them, except perhaps by omission. The children do not know that John is from a different time, and we justify not telling them because to do so would endanger the mission and possibly endanger them, as well. They do know that John is interested in the future and that he frequents Internet sites that attract futurists. He often participates in chat groups. It would be very natural for you to have met online, Lucky, and we’d like you to sign on to a Web site tonight and chat with John. That will make our story essentially true. We’ll introduce you two as writers, which you now are. We’ll tell them that you’re writing a novel about the future, which is true, and that we have offered to collaborate.”

“Sounds fine with me,” Lucky told her.

“Good. John is outside getting ready for his workout. He is waiting for you to join him. Linda and I will chat while you’re gone. “

Chapter 22

Thrusters

Lucky joined John in a jog around the grove while they talked. He couldn't help but notice that John was exceptionally fit. They started out with a few wind sprints, and Lucky estimated that John could run several times faster than he could. As they started jogging steadily, John slowed down to Lucky's speed and was still easily able to talk comfortably while they ran.

"It all started with a Web site that the Visionary placed on the Internet, entitled 'The Thruster Project.' He hoped to start a dialogue among rocket scientists, meteorologists, and computer programmers about the possibility of installing thrusters around the globe. He theorized that thrusters could be used to adjust the earth's tilt to moderate summer/winter seasonal changes. He also proposed considering the use of thrusters to modify earth's orbit around the sun in order to combat global warming or excessive cooling similar to the Ice Age. He suggested that orbital changes could be used to escape any future threats of collision with asteroids or other space debris, as well. You can see the Web site on my laptop. I downloaded the entire site while it was still on the Web.

"After a year or so, the site hadn't attracted much interest, so the Visionary took it down and went on to pursue other interests. What he didn't know and never found out before he died was that a number of scientists became curious about the ideas and began pursuing them separately. Some years from now, a doctoral thesis will be written on the idea, and it will take root in the scientific community. The gist of the thesis is that strategically placed thrusters could indeed accomplish all the goals envisioned by the Visionary, but that certain breakthroughs in energy creation and thruster technology would be required before the ideas could be realized.

"Generations from now, new discoveries will make thruster technologically feasible, although many more generations will pass before the political barriers to their creation will be lowered. In fact, the thruster project will eventually lead to a global governing body. Over many generations that body will grow into the global governing body that exists in my time."

"How did a scientific effort stimulate so great a political change?" Lucky asked.

"I'm going to speak in the past tense now, from the point of view of my time period. During the Interim, individual nations began to see how they could gain great climactic

advantages for themselves by installing their own thrusters and improving their own climates, to the detriment of other nations. For example, Russia, Canada, Alaska in the United States, China, Greenland, and Iceland all had large regions that were useless frozen wasteland. Each became interested in the potential that could be unlocked if thrusters were used to keep the North Pole tilted toward the sun all the time. Of course, the nations in the Southern Hemisphere would then have been victims of year-round winter, so they began to plan their own thrusters to counteract thrusters placed by those in the northern climes.

The threat of ‘thruster wars’ was more than the world could stand. Connected as they were by then through the Internet, many people formed a powerful coalition of global voices to force the nations to create a governing body to manage thrusters wherever they might be used around the globe. That group was the first political body charged with managing the resources of Earth as a whole, without favoring any single national interest. That governing body was answerable only to citizens throughout earth who could vote via the Internet. Generations later, personally empowered global citizens also forced the formation of the global body that governs in my time.”

As they began a cool-down walk, Lucky requested, “Tell me about how changing the tilt of the Earth changed the weather. Can you talk about that?”

“Yes, I can tell you because it’s information that has been available on the Internet and may be available again if the Visionary chooses to put the Web site back online. The earth today is tilted at about twenty-three degrees. As the earth rotates around the sun each year, the tilt causes the North Pole to be pointed toward the sun for half the year and the South Pole toward the sun for the other half. At the midway points—you call them equinoxes—the northern hemisphere and the southern hemisphere get equal amounts of sun.

“The tilt causes summer and winter, as you know them today. The Visionary speculated that by reducing the tilt, people could moderate the extreme weather that winter and summer bring to each hemisphere in turn. During the Interim period—when new propulsion energy forces had been discovered, computing was at power levels undreamed of today, and meteorology had advanced greatly—scientists gained the political consensus needed to begin changing the tilt. They did it gradually.”

“How did it all work?”

“They started at a one-half degree reduction in tilt. Then they waited about ten years to observe the results. Then one-half degree at a time, and gradually moving to a degree each time, they began observing huge improvements in the global climate. Winters moderated, growing seasons lengthened, and people all over the globe were very positive about the changes. Originally the goal was to bring the tilt toward zero, so the entire earth would have eternal springtime. I can’t tell you where they ended up, but I can tell you they eventually went past the

point later considered optimal, and after ten years of consideration, they restored the tilt the last one-half-degree. They kept the tilt at that optimal point afterward. It was that way in my time.”

“Why can’t you tell me where they ended up? We could save future generations from making the same mistake that they have already made, and we might enable them to move to the optimal tilt more quickly.”

“I can’t tell you because to do so would rob the future of the valuable lessons they learned each step of the way by going too far. Much of what is learned in science is learned by discovering what doesn’t work. I can tell you that the world in my time is much better off because of what they learned when they went beyond the optimum. I cannot betray my mission by revealing enough to potentially change the future substantially. I can only reassure you that it will all work out well in the end.”

“What else did they use thrusters for?” asked Lucky.

“Many scientists are currently quite concerned about global warming. Other scientists are concerned that we may possibly be entering a new Ice Age. At some point in the future, scientists will reach a consensus, and when they do they will use thrusters to extend Earth’s orbit to reduce the direct heat from the sun. At other times they’ll use the thrusters to bring the earth’s orbit closer to the sun again. They’ll be able to combat the twin risks of global warming and drastic cooling. Of course, the earth’s orbit is not perfectly spherical. It is slightly elliptical. They’ll use the thrusters to achieve an even more spherical orbit. It turns out that a more spherical orbit has some benefits.”

“When they change the earth’s orbit, what happens to the moon?”

“Some clever people worked out a process of throw-and-catch. In my time, they first accelerate the earth’s speed through space, which extends the orbit. That causes the moon’s orbit around the earth to become elliptical. Then, timing everything exactly, they move the earth back into the center of the moon’s orbit. This then restores the earth/moon relationship. It was the throw-and-catch scheme that convinced people that they didn’t need to put thrusters on the moon. It was known at the time of the decision that Earth’s orbit could be changed to avoid collisions like the extinction event that occurred millions of years ago.”

“So, what was the problem?”

“The error was in underestimating the risks of an event like the one we face in my time, when we will have to change the earth’s orbit faster than the throw-and-catch process can handle. We’re not even absolutely certain that we can avoid collision with the moon on our way out of our present orbit. We’re fairly sure, but it’s by no means a one hundred percent certainty. Can you see how important it is that either my mission or the other, riskier mission planned for the time of the decision succeed?”

“Yes. Is there anything else I should know about thrusters?”

“We’ve solved the problem of earthquakes. We use thrusters to oppose the movement of the tectonic plates, which causes earthquakes. So far, we can keep the plates from moving together or sliding against one another. We’re able to keep them in stasis. The scientists are attempting to gain a global consensus to reverse the movement of some of the plates. Reversing the movement would lower various mountains that were formed by plate movement. Lowering the elevation of those mountains would eventually allow deserts that were formed next to mountains to be restored and used for agriculture. However, there is a great deal of concern about the effects of pulling the plates apart. People fear that earthquakes will be triggered as the mountains gradually sink.”

“I am sure this thruster stuff will be fascinating to some readers, but I worry that it will be pretty boring as part of a novel.”

“I understand. Perhaps we can find other topics you’ll find more interesting.”

Chapter 23

Security

John and Lucky each showered and changed into fresh clothes that were waiting for them in the gymnasium next to the main house. Lucky was continually impressed with the Galt property and with their lifestyle, which was seemingly quite self-sufficient, but as a former police officer, he found himself concerned about their future safety.

“Let’s talk about security, John,” he suggested. “If we found you, maybe others will be able to find you, as well. Some people already know that you’re a billionaire. If they spread that information around, doesn’t it expose you to risks that ordinary people don’t face?”

“Dagne has done well to shift our investments among three brokers that don’t know each other. They each know that we’ve done well, but none of them knows how well. As far as security here in the grove is concerned, I can show you what we have created in order to protect our home and family.”

Lucky was certainly interested in the security setup around the Galt compound, but he wasn’t quite finished discussing finance. “There is one area where your wealth is apparent in its entirety,” he offered, “and that’s with the IRS. Your tax return is unusual enough to attract attention. In addition, the SEC is always flagged on unusual brokerage activity. They are concerned with things like insider trading, so they might be dropping in on you one day to see whether you’ve been incredibly lucky or whether you actually have inside contacts at some of the companies you’ve invested in.”

“You’ll have to talk to Dagne about the IRS and the SEC. I trust she’ll know what to do if such issues arise. I can tell you about our home security setup, though. Would you like to see that?”

They walked over to the staff house. Lucky had seen many service people around the Galt’s home but was surprised at how many lived in the staff house. John took Lucky inside, greeting and signing to the hearing-impaired staff members as they proceeded. Lucky noticed a rack of portable radios being charged. He counted forty in the rack, with twenty empty slots. He recognized the radios as similar to the type that patrolmen carried on their beats in DC. They looked just different enough that he made a point of examining one up close, and he observed

that instead of speakers, the radios had an array of tiny lights. *Of course*, he reminded himself. *The staff are deaf, and they would need lights to communicate with each other.* He decided that he would investigate the light-radios further later. He wanted to see if these were items that could be purchased or whether John had created them using his advanced knowledge.

They walked through the staff dining area, and from the number of chairs he saw, Lucky surmised that the staff must number nearly a hundred. He was not finished with being surprised, however.

The security room they visited next was filled with monitors revealing views around all the walls and corners of the grove, each gate, and the outside of the house. He soon realized that he was walking through one of the most advanced security setups he had ever seen...and he had seen a lot of them. Here, four staff members were watching the monitors, as well as some advanced computer gadgets that were apparently set to issue light alerts if a watcher were to miss something changing on the monitors. John explained the arrangement to Lucky, who was even more impressed. He had seen much less sophisticated setups handling the security at important government offices in DC.

“Okay,” he said. “I think you have a real good handle on the local security. Let’s hope it’s overkill and you never need it, but if anyone wishes you harm, I believe you’ll know about it.”

Chapter 24

Linda and Dagne have a chat

While the men were jogging and talking technology, the women sat with their coffee and had a good chat about relationships.

Linda asked, “What’s it really like living with a man from a different time?”

“John is the most interesting man I could ever imagine knowing. He always seems to know exactly what I need. Sometimes he seems to understand me much better than I understand myself. We are forced to live a lonely and protected existence, and there are times when I feel frustrated or upset by the limits on our life. Somehow John always finds the right thing to say to improve my mood.”

“Sounds wonderful!”

“He’s also devoted to the children. He spends more time with them than any present-day father would, even one who didn’t have to go out to work for a living. When he’s with them, he seems to speak their language—he almost becomes one of them. Before John, the kids always seemed to be fighting or bickering. Now they never fight. They cooperate. They help each other. They’re openly affectionate with each other. It’s unbelievable how they’ve changed.”

“That must make you really happy. What do they do together most of the time?”

“He’s taught the children the essence of the Learning Language—not the words or sounds, but the structure of thought that underlies the language. I realize that this probably doesn’t make any sense to you, but the Learning Language is structured to aid thought and adds a level to everyday conversation that is vastly deeper than contemporary language can offer. Sometimes I worry that the children will seem odd or unusual when they interact with other kids, but there doesn’t seem to be a problem. When they interact with their playmates, they have the same effect on others that John has on us. They bring peace to squabbling. They resolve conflicts with just the right words. I’d like you to spend some time with our children, you’ll see what I mean.”

“I’m looking forward to that! Now stop me if its too personal, but I’m dying of curiosity about your sex life. John is configured so differently. Is that a problem?”

“I’ve actually been hoping we could talk about that. I haven’t had anyone to talk to.... John is the most incredible lover I could imagine! He is patient and gentle and seems to know exactly what I want and need. You know, sometimes you want sex to be slow and easy. Sometimes you want it to be hard, fast, and passionate. I never have to ask or explain what I want. John adapts to my body and to my needs in the moment. I feel like my body is an instrument and he’s a virtuoso.”

“Wow! That sounds pretty amazing! You must want to be with him all the time.”

“At first, I couldn’t get enough of sex with him. We had sex three times a day, and I quickly began achieving multiple orgasms. I’d been with a few other men before my first husband, and then I lived many years with him. During all that time, I never had multiple orgasms. From the beginning, I became multi-orgasmic with John. He has multiple orgasms, too, and enough drive and stamina and desire to go on for an hour or more. I was in heaven from the start. But, I’ll tell you, I simply can’t keep up. As enjoyable as it is, I just can’t always handle several times a day, every day. John’s been very understanding. He lets me set the schedule, but I love him so much that I sometimes tell him I’m ready when I’m really not.”

“Hmmm...that doesn’t sound as great as the other stuff.”

“When I’m honest about my feelings, I worry that I’m depriving him. Still, when I push myself to accommodate him, I don’t find it as enjoyable. I mean, if he were like regular men from our time, it wouldn’t be so bad—ten minutes, and the guy is happy. But with John, it’s always so much longer.” She laughed with embarrassment. “I can’t believe I’m complaining about having too much of a good thing! I can see now the reason that people in the future have virtual sex with avatars.”

“It sounds both wonderful and potentially awful. I have no idea what I would do if I were in your shoes.”

“Well, frankly, I’ve been hoping you might be willing to get into my shoes with me! I hope this won’t sound too shocking, but...do you think you might be willing to have sex with John? I feel certain he would enjoy that, and I would actually feel relieved. John has no other outlets. There is nothing in our time like avatars and virtual sex. He couldn’t visit a prostitute because of his body differences...and I don’t think I’d want him to anyway. I know he likes you and finds you attractive. What do you think?”

Linda was blushing a deep red, but she spent a minute thinking about Dagne’s request and finally said, “After our conversation about sex yesterday, I must admit that I fantasized about it. He is so incredibly handsome, and his body is like Greek statuary. If I were considering just myself, I’d probably say yes in a minute...but I have to consider what Lucky would say.”

“Oh, of course, I understand that.”

“You say you would feel relieved, but wouldn’t you feel a little jealous?”

“I understand your question, but John has taught me that sex can just be about recreation, while marriage is about love and passion and sometimes procreation. In our times, the two are intertwined morally. In the future, they become separable without being debased. John tells me that there is virtually no divorce in his time. He claims it’s because people have learned that sex and marriage can be separate issues and they’ve also learned the skills for resolving differences in a loving way. Marriage is for love and passing on your genes through your children. Sex can be about indulging a physical need that can be very pleasurable in the context of healthy fun. I know that John loves me and would never leave me, nor would he leave the children. I feel wonderfully secure in our marriage and in his love. In the same respect, you wouldn’t be choosing between John and Lucky. You obviously love Lucky, and perhaps one day you’ll marry him. But you might also enjoy having sex with John. Could you separate sex and love in your mind?”

Linda thought about her question for a moment. “Yes, I think maybe I could, but I don’t know about Lucky. I’d have to ask him.”

Chapter 25

Lunch is served

Sitting comfortably in the formal dining room, the two couples enjoyed a good meal served by a young man who was obviously hearing impaired. The conversation was filled with pleasant banter as the four spoke of the progress on the book, how it felt to have a lot of money, and other light topics of discussion.

“I really enjoy having you two here,” John told the other couple. “I wonder if you might consider moving in with us while you work on your book. We have two very large guest suites. You could use one for a master suite and the other for offices. We could put in writing desks and computers and whatever else you need to do your work here. Dagne and I are both curious and excited about your book, and perhaps we could help with the writing as you go along. What do you think?”

The invitation was something of a surprise to Lucky. “Well, that’s a nice offer,” he replied. “Linda and I will talk it over tonight and let you know tomorrow.”

Less surprised than Lucky because she had already talked it over with Dagne, Linda replied, “I think it’s a wonderful idea. If it doesn’t interfere with our book—and I can’t see how it would—I’d certainly vote to move in. Our homes are quite comfortable, but this place is so sumptuous. We’d also get a chance to see firsthand how the other half lives, since we haven’t had much time to change our own surroundings yet.”

Lucky was surprised and found himself feeling pressured. He stared at Linda and said, “We’ll talk it over tonight and let you know tomorrow.”

Tactfully changing the subject, Dagne told Linda, “I understand that you made Beta Gamma Sigma at Kellogg. I was fortunate to be so honored at Wharton. I went right on to law school, so I wasn’t recruited by any employers. Did you find it helpful when you were interviewing for jobs after graduation?”

“Yes, I think the interviewers were impressed with that, but...”

“What’s this about Beta Gamma Sigma? Lucky said, interrupting. “I thought you went to a business school in Evanston, Illinois.”

“I graduated from the Kellogg graduate school of business, which is part of Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. BGS is an honorary society for students who do well.”

“You didn’t tell me that before. Why would you keep something like that a secret? I thought you went to business school...like learning typing, filing, things like that,” he countered, feeling a little stupid to be learning something important about Linda just then that Dagne and John already knew.

“Kellogg is rated as having one of the best MBA programs in the country, Lucky. You should be proud of Linda,” said Dagne.

“I am proud,” said Lucky, “now that I know....”

John excused himself, saying that he was going to look in on the children.

Lucky felt a surge of anger rising inside. He thought, She didn’t tell me about getting an MBA at a good school. She let me think that she had gone to a business school in Evanston. Did she downplay her education on purpose? Did she think an MBA would scare me away? Was she thinking about the gap between an MBA and a high school diploma? He’d certainly been embarrassed to learn about it in front of the Galts.

“Speaking of the report I received, Linda,” said Dagne, interrupting his thoughts and changing the subject again, “it also mentioned that you lost an eight-year-old daughter. That must have been extremely difficult for you.”

“That was the worst thing I’ve ever gone through. Even losing my husband to a brain tumor wasn’t quite as tough as losing my daughter. She had a rare form of leukemia, and she fought very hard but didn’t have a chance. I still think of her practically every day.”

Lucky felt relieved that this at least was something he and Linda had already discussed at length.

“I can’t imagine the grief it must cause to lose a child!” Dagne said. “You’ve certainly had more than your share of losses.”

After lunch Lucky begged off on any more discussions that afternoon. He told Dagne that he and Linda needed to catch up on their writing so they wouldn’t fall behind. Linda wasn’t sure she agreed with him, but she reluctantly said goodbye and joined Lucky in the car.

Chapter 26

The argument

“Why didn’t you tell me more about your education?” Lucky demanded. “Didn’t you want me to be aware of the vast difference in our educational levels?”

“I wasn’t hiding anything, Lucky. I just didn’t feel like making a big deal out of it. Anyway, if you had been more curious or more interested in me, you could have asked more about my background. I think I’ve learned much more about you than you’ve learned about me. All you seem to think about is working on the book.”

Feeling a bit sheepish, he backed off. “You’re probably right about that. I have been totally preoccupied with the luck project and now the ‘alien’ project. I’m sorry, I should have shown more interest in you and your prior life.”

“Lucky, for what it’s worth, I think you are a very bright man. I believe that if you had gone on to college you would have done very well. Instead, you chose to fight for your country and serve and protect the public. I’m proud to be with you. I’m proud of what I know about your career, and I never even think about the differences in our educational level. When I think back on it, though, I may have downplayed my education a little bit originally because I didn’t want it to be an issue. Can you forgive that?”

“Sure...and I’m sure you didn’t mean to condescend to me. I’m sorry for getting all up tight about something so petty. I was just embarrassed that the Galts seemed to know more about you than I did—although I guess that’s understandable, since I didn’t have you investigated the way they did.... Speaking of the Galts, what do you think about moving in with them? I keep wondering if they’re trying to co-opt our book and influence our writing even more.”

“Lucky, they already have co-opted us. They own us. They control us with money and have the right to edit everything we write. I don’t see how they could gain any more control over us by having us in the same house. I think it would be very convenient for us, and we would get to know them better on a personal level, which is particularly important for my part of the project. I think we should do it.”

“Maybe so,” said Lucky. “If it doesn’t work out, we can always go back to our own places.”

Linda was silent for a few minutes and then spoke again quietly. “Before you decide, you should know about something Dagne and I talked about today.” She fell silent for a moment, and then finally broached what was obviously a difficult subject. “Dagne asked me if I would be willing to have sex with John. She said that John is used to having multiple partners in his time, even though they are virtual-reality partners. He’s able to separate recreational sex completely from love and marriage. Dagne told me that she would welcome some relief from John’s extraordinary sexual drive...and I’ll tell you honestly, I’m tempted.”

Taken by surprise and rather shocked at the suggestion, Lucky didn’t feel he could respond right away. He took several minutes to gather his thoughts and then said, “We’re not engaged, Linda. I don’t have any exclusive claim to you. You’re free to do what you want with John and Dagne. But I need to say that right now I feel like we’ve left the marriage road we said we were on. I don’t think I can separate sex from love and marriage.”

She didn’t respond immediately, so they sat in silence awhile as he drove. Finally he spoke again. “Do you still want to work with me on the book?”

“Of course I do.” She turned toward him. “I love you Lucky. I’m also fascinated with the idea of having sex with John because I find him attractive, and I’m very curious about him and about myself, too. I don’t know whether I can separate sex from love and marriage the way Dagne and John seem to be able to. I do know that Dagne isn’t threatened, and she has learned to separate sex from love through her relationship with John. I want to know if I can do that...but I won’t even try it if it means the end of us.”

“I don’t know what it means for us, Linda. If it’s important to you, do it. We’ll both find out down the road what it means for us. In the meantime, while we’re at the Galts, let’s use separate bedrooms and do our writing in our own rooms.”

With their uneasy truce arranged, Lucky and Linda went to their separate homes, packed some clothes and toiletries, and prepared to move in with the Galts.

Chapter 27

How did you get here?

“How did you get here from your time?” Lucky asked John during their run the following morning.

“I can’t tell you that in detail,” John replied. “I can only tell you that in your time there are serious people working on the question of time travel. In his book *Contact*, Carl Sagan stimulated a number of scientists and cosmologists to ask themselves how time travel might be possible. I’ll just say that their work spawned the work of others in the future, and during the Interim the problem was solved. You can read a couple of books written for the nonscientific reader that will give you clues. But the answers are not even close to being available in terms of today’s science and without some very important discoveries yet to be made.”

“I don’t think I’d read them, but if our future readers wanted to follow this trail, what books are you talking about?”

“They could start with *Black Holes and Time Warps* by Kip Thorne or *Hyperspace* by Michio Kaku. At least they would discover that some of the world’s brightest scientists are beginning to ask serious questions about the possibilities of time travel.”

“Can you tell me if you came here in a UFO?”

“I came in a vehicle—that’s all I can really tell you. A vehicle left me at a place in Florida that hadn’t changed much in my time. The vehicle then flew into the deepest trench in one of your oceans, and it’s now lying on the bottom. The people from my time put in a time capsule with everything known about my mission. If the vehicle is still there when my era arrives again, the capsule will signal and send a message, and people will read about my mission. If it has survived, they will then know whether my mission changed the future in any important way.”

“Do you have UFOs in your time?”

“No. We know of them only from reading historical accounts. We don’t know what they really are. The hypothesis in my time is that, if they exist at all, they might come from a time in *our* future. It is possible that people further on in time might become more aggressive in

attempting time travel. However, the so-called ‘flying saucers’ that are reported in your time don’t fit anything we know about in my time.”

“Could they be aliens from other worlds?”

“Anything is possible. I can’t tell you what we know about other civilizations. I know that you’ll find out during the Interim. In that time, there will be at least three very important discoveries and breakthroughs. It is important that nothing I say to you interfere with the science that is going on today. People today are listening and signaling. Those efforts are important.”

“John, people in my time have been struggling with the philosophical questions ‘Why are we here?’ and ‘Is this all there is?’ Can you talk about that?”

“People in my time know the reason we’re here. At least, there is universal consensus. We know that our genes created our bodies and drive all our actions. We exist, you and me, to allow our genes to replicate. We exist to grow up, mate, have children, and bring them up so they themselves are able to mate, have children, and help them to mature. Our genes go on and on in an endless stream. We—you and I—are only temporary phenotypes whose job is to continue the stream. You ask, ‘Is that all there is?’ Everything we know tells us the answer is ‘yes, that’s all there is.’”

“Why do you think the question is so troubling in my time and not in yours? What did you find out that answers the question?”

“Each of us has a gene group whose job is to insure our survival. That gene group will fight to maintain life to the last gasp. That gene group finds it comforting to believe in an afterlife. Many people in my time choose to believe in an afterlife because it is so comforting to our survival gene group.”

“I don’t understand. How can an individual know that we are...what you call phenotypes that only live to continue the stream, and still believe in an afterlife?”

“People in your time have little awareness of beliefs and their purpose. You aren’t aware that beliefs are chosen and not necessarily facts. You aren’t aware that many of your beliefs are contradictory. Contradictory beliefs create paradoxes, and yet you have no awareness of this. For example, people in your time believe that sexual skill is a valuable asset in a marriage partner. You also believe that it is wrong for children to practice sexual relations before marriage. These contradictory beliefs create a paradox. You want a sexually skilled marriage partner, but you also want a marriage partner who is virginal.”

“Yeah,” said Lucky, “that is kind of paradoxical. How do we get out of the paradox?”

“You’ll resolve that paradox and many others when you become aware of the gene groups and come to learn that one or several gene groups are controlling your mind and body at any given moment. Each gene group has its own needs and promotes its own beliefs. They coexist and aren’t aware of each other’s agendas. This was one of the breakthrough concepts

contributed by the Visionary. In the paradox I've mentioned, the mating gene group wants a sexual partner who is sensitive, thoughtful, and capable of bringing maximum sexual pleasure. The parenting gene group believes it is best to protect children from sexual activity before they are fully mature. Each gene group has its own beliefs that coexist with contradictory beliefs held by other gene groups. In other words, what you believe at any given moment depends on the gene group controlling the phenotype—you."

"You make it sound like I'm nothing but a body that's run by a batch of different gene groups."

"That is what we know to be true in my time. When you grasp that concept, you understand our purpose for being here, and you can begin to resolve the conflicts between the gene groups and bring peace and harmony to your mind. Most people in your time find their conscious minds running a mile a minute, flitting from one thought to another. In our time, people have inner peace and harmony because we are always aware of which gene group is motivating us at any given moment, and we understand how to resolve the conflicting needs of the gene groups."

"Overload. Warning! Overload!" Lucky quipped. "I'm lost. I've taken notes on what you said, but I need some study time to make sense out of it."

"I've tried to tell you in a few minutes something that the Visionary spent an entire book attempting to explain. I've found a copy of the pre-publication draft of the book, called *Sagery*. Perhaps that will help clear up any confusion."

"I'd like to read that," Lucky agreed. "You were just talking about beliefs. Could you elaborate on that? Perhaps I can understand that more easily."

"Let's talk about beliefs later. You have enough to digest for the moment. Come on into the house, and we'll catch up with the ladies."

While he showered and put on fresh clothes, Lucky thought about his personal experience of John and suddenly realized that John's mouth and his voice seemed to change periodically, depending on whom he was talking to or talking about. He didn't seem to be able to help himself. For example, when he was quoting something another person had said, his voice would change subtly—his accent would begin to resemble the speaker being quoted, his vocal pitch and volume might shift higher or lower, and his mouth seemed to reshape itself in an imitation of the original speaker's lips, almost as if it became the mouth of the other speaker.

Strange quirk, Lucky mused...another special characteristic of the man from the future. He found himself worrying about how he might measure up against John in Linda's estimation.

Chapter 28

The children

Lucky felt disoriented as he sat in his new quarters. Earlier that day, when he and Linda had told the Galts they would move in and would take separate bedrooms, Dagne and Linda had set about getting the rooms ready. Now Linda showed him to his own suite. His clothes were already put away, and he noticed there was a new Macintosh computer identical to his own, ready for his use. Linda had already made copies of their work on CD, and Dagne informed them that they had separate phone lines in their rooms and could forward their calls to the new numbers.

He felt overwhelmed at how quickly everything had been accomplished, and a hint of suspicion arose in his mind. The Galts must have planned this in advance to have new, dedicated phone lines installed before they had agreed to move in—or at least planned for the contingency. He examined his new computer and found that it had broadband cable access on an in-house local area network. That also had to have been planned in advance. He realized once again that the Galts were running this show, and he felt uneasy. He felt a little like a puppet, with the Galts pulling the strings.

Okay, he said to himself. *It's their show—let's go along and see how it turns out.* Lucky joined the others in the dining room and was surprised to see that the Galt children were joining them for lunch. He had met them briefly on several occasions but had not yet spent much time with them. Andy was ten and Lori, six. He was definitely curious about these kids. How normal could they be? Each looked to be about the average height and weight for their ages. Andy was a redhead, with the requisite freckles, and Lori was a slightly fragile-looking blonde. Pretty normal looking, he concluded, as Lori gave him a big smile of greeting, showing gaps between her teeth that were par for six-year-olds.

A fresh-faced young man named Michael served the lunch. He was the fellow Lucky recalled from their previous dinner. Lucky noticed that John, Dagne, and the kids all used sign language with him very naturally. Lucky asked Lori, “How did you learn to sign?”

“On the computer,” she replied. “Dad got us each a program when Essie came to take care of us. Now all of the people that work here are hearing-impaired, so everybody signs.”

“All the employees are graduates of Gallaudet University in Washington, DC,” said Andy. “They’re very smart, and sometimes they teach me things they I can’t find on the Internet.”

“I know Gallaudet,” said Lucky. “I worked in DC, and as a policeman I ran into college students more often than I would have liked. The students at Gallaudet are model citizens compared to students from most of the other universities.”

“Do you miss police work?” asked Lori, in a manner one might expect from an adult.

“Sometimes, Lori. Police work is hard work, but it has many satisfying moments.”

“Did you ever shoot anyone?” Andy asked him.

This was a question Lucky had gotten a lot whenever he’d worked with kids. “No, Andy. I was very lucky. Thirty years on the police force, and I never shot anyone. I had my gun out a number of times but was never forced to use it.”

“What was your most interesting case, Lucky?” he asked.

John interrupted. “You’ll have plenty of time to ask about police work, Andy. Let’s allow Lucky to eat his lunch in peace. What have you been working on this morning?”

“I’m still working on my paper about the pros and cons of using a Base-12 numbering system in a Base-10 world.”

“I’m eager to read it,” John assured him.

“What grade are you in, Andy?” asked Lucky.

“If I were in a regular school, I’d be in sixth grade—but being home-schooled, I’m in a different grade level for each subject. I’ve committed to stay at least at the sixth-grade level in each of my subjects, but I’m much farther along in the subjects I like. I can read at the level of a college senior, but I only write at the level of a sophomore. I really love computer sciences, and I’m working in that at the post-graduate level. I think English is boring, so I just keep up with my basic class level. I can’t see the value of parsing sentences. Who but an English teacher cares what a past participle is? As long as I can write well, articulate clearly, and use grammar correctly, I can live without parsing.”

Lucky was astonished and tried not to smile too broadly.

“Lori, how about you?” asked Linda. “Are you at different levels for each subject, as well?”

“I’m at least at the first grade level in everything, but mostly I’m farther than that. I love art and art history. I do everything else as fast as I can so I can get to my art classes sooner. I’m taking two arts and art history classes at the college level on the Internet. I’m also up to high school in mathematics, but I’m kind of struggling with geometry.”

“A lot of people get stuck on geometry, honey,” said Dagne. “I had trouble with it when I was in high school. I’m sure it’s useful for some work, but even throughout graduate school and

the work world, I'm not sure I used geometry more than a few times, aside from in another math class. What was your experience, Linda? Did you ever use geometry outside of the classroom?"

"Maybe I did," she replied, "but I sure don't remember it. I wonder about educators making all of the children learn skills that only a few will ever use."

"That's just what I've been thinking," said Andy. "As a prerequisite to a class I wanted, it was suggested that I learn calculus, but I don't know when I'd ever use it unless I became a mathematician."

"How do you like being schooled at home?" Lucky asked him.

"It's wonderful," said Andy. "I've only been home-schooled for two years...since Dad came to live with us. When I was in fourth grade at school, all I could learn was what the other kids learned, so the pace was very slow. I didn't advance beyond my grade level in any subject. We always went at the pace of the slowest student, which made school boring. I didn't want to be there. Now, with the computer doing the teaching, and Dad and Mom doing the synthesizing, I've been able to learn at my own pace and follow those subjects that interest me. I love to learn now."

"What do you mean by 'synthesizing,' Andy?" asked Linda.

"Dad will ask me what I learned in my study session with the computer. Then he asks questions that get me to relate what I just learned to other things I've learned before. He and Mom give me a context for the things I've just learned that includes what I already knew. For example, yesterday in my Internet class I was studying the rise of Communism following World War II. I had already studied the rise of Fascism that led to World War II. By themselves, they were just pieces of history. But Dad and I had a long discussion about the values and benefits of the Right versus the Left, and he helped me see the importance of each political thrust and what each meant to the typical citizen."

He paused for a moment in thought, then looked back at Lucky and continued. "History is very sterile all by itself. When it is synthesized, or placed in context, it becomes exciting and more thought provoking. I think all teachers should work that way. Let the student learn the subject at his own pace on the computer, and then make sense of it all by helping the student contextualize what he's just learned."

Lucky realized that he was sitting dumbstruck, listening to a ten-year-old speak like an adult about learning theory. He also realized that he was hearing something very important but didn't know how he could include it in his book.

During his career as a detective, he'd tried to strip out all the nonessentials and net out the whole thing. He now found himself writing about this in his mind as he would write a police report: *Subject had five years of normal education. Subject then began learning over the Internet and advanced to college-level skills in some subjects. The parents/teachers don't teach; they lead*

the students to integrate each lesson with prior lessons and help the students to “synthesize” what they’ve learned.

Now all Lucky had to do was to find out more about what *synthesize* means. He wondered whether this kind of instruction could only be done with a teacher who was an advanced human life form or whether a relatively normal contemporary person like Dagne could do it just as well. He decided to watch a study session with Dagne and see for himself.

The children were both very well mannered and seemed totally at ease conversing with adults. Lori reported that she had studied the works of Degas in her art class that morning. Dagne asked questions about Degas’ subjects, and Lori said that she liked the paintings of the dancers best. Dagne probed with questions that brought out Lori’s observations about how the dancers posed and how the artist had used static poses that actually suggested the action of the dance that might follow. Lucky wasn’t really familiar with the artist or the works being discussed, but he learned quite a bit about how he might view them if he were to see them.

After lunch, John and Dagne went off with the children for teaching sessions, while Linda and Lucky settle into their offices and wrote about the morning’s activities. Lucky did some studying of his own. He looked up *synthesis* and found that it meant “building a whole,” or integrating. He looked up *phenotype* but still didn’t understand how John had used it. He would have to ask John to explain it further.

After the children’s tutorials with John and Dagne, everyone gathered in the library for some conversation. Then Lori and Andy were sent off with Essie for their daily play sessions with children of staff members, who were also being home-schooled. Dagne and John made sure to arrange for blocks of socializing time when the children could play with other kids their ages. Lucky thought it sounded a lot like the recess time he had as a kid at school.

Chapter 29

Genes and beliefs

While the children were playing, Linda and Dagne decided to do some aerobic dance, and Lucky met again with John. Lucky was anxious to make sure he understood John's terminology.

"You say we are just phenotypes, produced by our genes so that genes can be passed on to our offspring. What exactly is a phenotype, and do people of our time know anything about this concept?"

"Yes, people of your time know a great deal about genes and phenotypes. One of the people from your time still recognized by scholars of our time is an Oxford don named Richard Dawkins, who wrote many books explaining and defending the concept. In our time we still use the phrase 'The River Out of Eden,' which was the title of one of his books. Since I've been living in your time, I've reread his books in the original English. He is a visionary today, and he is well remembered in my time. I have his books here, and if you want to understand phenotypes, read *The Extended Phenotype*. His book *The Selfish Gene* will help you understand the power that genes have to influence our every action. *The River Out of Eden* will answer the questions you asked earlier: 'Why are we here?' and 'Is this all there is?'"

"Tell me, if we have the information available to us today, why don't we adopt those principles?"

"You have too much information available today that conflicts with Dawkins' ideas. Most of the teachings today are built on beliefs that have no basis in science or fact."

"We're back to beliefs again. Is this a good time to talk more about beliefs?"

"Certainly. In my time, one of the first things we teach children is an understanding of the nature of beliefs. Yet in your time, I find that nobody seems to understand them at all. Everyone has beliefs, yet no one seems to comprehend the basic concept of belief."

"I'm all ears," said Lucky. "What are the basics of beliefs?"

"All humans are genetically driven to be curious. We feel curious when we have questions without answers. In terms of our experience, that's a good thing if there is a true answer to the question, because it leads to learning. It's a bad thing if there is no ready answer to

the question, or if the true answer isn't yet known. To resolve the discomfort of the unknowable, we create an answer, just to resolve our discomfort.

“For example, let's examine the question you asked earlier, ‘Why are we here?’ Virtually every human who has ever lived has wondered about that. Every family, tribe, or clan has had to invent, create, or borrow an answer to that question to alleviate discomfort with the unknown. Many creation myths have been invented to provide an answer to that question. The ancient Greeks invented a group of gods to explain all the phenomena they didn't understand. The ancient Romans, Celts, Egyptians, and Saxons each created their own gods along with unique answers to the same questions. They created beliefs to resolve the discomfort of not knowing the answers to essential questions.

“Okay,” said Lucky. “That makes sense.”

“So, the basics of beliefs are simply these: A belief is something we create—or borrow from someone else—to answer a question to which the true answer is either unknown or unknowable. A belief is not a truth. If a new idea were proved and known to be the truth, it would no longer be a belief. It would be an absolute fact.”

“I've spent my life dealing with facts...or what I believed were facts,” Lucky admitted.

“The difference is that a belief is a choice. Its purpose is to bring peace of mind and resolve the tension of not knowing an answer. Among competing beliefs, each of us is free to choose a belief we will adopt. Since a belief is a substitute for a true answer that may be unknown or essentially unknowable, it is wise to choose a belief that brings peace and harmony to the gene groups inside us that prompt us to be curious. It is unwise to choose a belief that brings disharmony or discord among our internal gene groups.

“Let's use the idea of ghosts as an example. It is unknown at this time whether or not ghosts actually exist. Each of us is free to choose whether or not to believe that there really are such things as ghosts. I might choose to believe that ghosts exist because I find that my gene groups like the idea of ghosts. Some of my gene groups might use a belief in ghosts to feel fear, excitement, eerie feelings, or other feelings that they enjoy or need for one reason or another. You might choose to believe that ghosts don't exist. The idea of ghosts might produce feelings in one or more of your gene groups that are much too uncomfortable. The idea of ghosts might make you exceedingly fearful, or the idea of ghosts may be in conflict with other beliefs you have chosen.”

“Beliefs have definitely caused some conflicts between people for a long time,” Lucky mused. “So how does society in your time handle people's differing beliefs?”

“In my time it is considered unwise, arrogant, disrespectful, and discourteous to impose or attempt to impose a belief that you have chosen onto someone else. It would be unwise, arrogant, disrespectful, and discourteous of me to attempt to force a belief in ghosts on you. I

may offer information or ideas. I may share my good feelings about believing in ghosts. But if you have already chosen a different belief and don't want to reexamine your choice, it would be rude to persist."

"That sure isn't the way most people handle their personal beliefs these days."

"Every child on earth learns that basic respect in my time. These simple truths about beliefs underlie the harmony we enjoy. The failure to understand these simple truths is the basis for much of the disharmony in your time."

"It certainly is," Lucky agreed. The planet is just packed with people trying to inflict their beliefs on anyone who will listen...and too often on people who won't!"

"Yes, people today are continually fighting wars over beliefs. People don't understand the difference between a belief and a truth. People think their beliefs are truths. Many people believe it is their duty to impose their beliefs on others, as though theirs were the only right and true beliefs. You have global madness today because you don't yet teach these simple truths to every child in every land. I feel sad when I think of the human loss you accept as the norm."

"Wow," said Lucky. "What you say is inarguable. It certainly sounds like the truth to me! It's simple and obvious. Why haven't we discovered this in our time?"

"Next time we talk, let's discuss the word *why*. You've just asked an unanswerable question...or, rather, a question that has almost an endless number of answers that are probably equally right and wrong. I'll explain the reasons we don't have a word for 'why' in the Learning Language and how I learned the way people of your time use it. Meanwhile, how about getting some exercise before dinner?"

Chapter 30

Everyday life in the future

After their workout and showers, Linda and Dagne rejoined each other in the sunny breakfast room. Linda looked around at the crisp, cheerful curtains, peach-colored walls, and subtle decorations. Everything was very tastefully done, inviting, and comfortable. She had carefully examined each of the twelve rooms in the house for signs of anything revealing, but she had yet to find any sign of something unusual. The rooms were decorated in warm, eye-pleasing colors, with uncluttered furnishings, draperies, and wall hangings. Nothing she had seen suggested that a man from the future was living there.

As she relaxed with a glass of mineral water, Linda marveled at the beauty of her hostess. Styled simply and gracefully, Dagne's freshly washed auburn hair flowed down to her shoulders, framing striking brown eyes that seemed to sparkle with life and energy.

"I love the way you've decorated the house, Dagne. Every room has such quiet elegance, although the furnishings are simple and comfortable. Did John help with the decorating?"

"John was very interested in what I was doing, but he never offered ideas of his own. He just seemed to marvel at how the house was taking shape and often asked how I had chosen this color or that fabric or a particular piece of art. I got the feeling that he was simply observing how people in our time furnish a home. When I would ask him to help choose fabrics or art, he always deferred to me, saying he had great faith in my taste."

"Has John told you how people in his time live — how they decorate a home?" asked Linda.

"I've asked him a great deal about how people live in his time, and he has told me of how different it is. They don't live in houses, as we do. They live in apartments in huge buildings. The buildings are like little cities unto themselves. They are mostly built on spaces created over water, near the shores of oceans. Each family apartment has a room for each person and a common area for family gatherings. They have no kitchens because all the food is prepared in a facility down below the apartments and sent up whenever they order it. I don't quite understand how it works because there are no workers involved in the process. Individuals can eat in their rooms or together with others in the common area."

“Wouldn’t that be nice!” Linda commented. “No one ever has to cook.”

“In each individual room, the walls and ceilings are similar to our television screens, only they’re flexible and movable and resemble what we would call fabric. Upon entering your room, you tell your device what you want it to be, and the room reconfigures itself as you wish. If it’s sleep that you want, the room becomes a virtual-reality bedroom. He uses terms like ‘virtual reality’ because it is a term used today, and I can comprehend it. But he tells me that the rooms are beyond anything imaginable today.”

“Too bad he didn’t bring photos....”

“Really! As I was saying, if someone wants a conventional bedroom for the time being, a virtual reality bedroom materializes. He can ask for anything he desires. If he wants to sleep under the stars on a shore next to a running stream, then the ceiling and walls create the scene he’s chosen. A bed materializes out of the floor, and whether he’s chosen a campsite scene or a cot or a four poster, the bed materializes in the desired form.”

“That sounds like it could be fun!”

“These aren’t solid beds as we know them. They actually sleep on a heavy gas that he says is similar to a dense liquid, like very buoyant salt water. The gas adjusts to exactly the temperature you choose, and air also flows gently over your body at the temperature you wish, so bed coverings are not needed or normally used. When you wake up, the gas disappears into the wall, and the bed, which is partly an optical mirage and partly a reconfiguration of the floor, also disappears. You can then ask that your room convert into an office or dining room or virtually anything you want. Imagine that—one room becomes a thousand different rooms, just by telling the device what you want!”

“It really does sound like fun, although it isn’t real....”

“All the family members can configure their rooms exactly the way they want to use them at any particular time. John said that a person today would have to have a castle with a thousand rooms to achieve the same kinds of choices that every man, woman, and child has in his time.

“It would certainly give you more time for other things you might want to do.”

“John was amazed at the number of chores that need to be done by our staff to make our house function smoothly. There are evidently no chores in his time. If you want to eat, you program your personal device. The order is prepared downstairs somewhere, probably by robotic devices, delivered up through the walls to your space, and placed on the table of your choice in the style of dining room you’ve requested. When you’re finished eating, the table, remnants, and eating tools disappear back into the walls or floor and are recycled for another use...so no dishes, no dish-washing, no bed-making, no sheets to wash. Laundry is unnecessary because clothes are

made by automated machinery and are simply recycled rather than reused. It sounds like heaven to me.”

“I have trouble even imagining it,” said Linda. “But in some ways it sounds like a lonely way to live, with everyone in their own rooms, not interacting.”

“John says that you can have as much interaction with others as you want. If you want to spend time with your spouse, you can join her in her room, or you can summon her avatar into your room and talk, listen, make love, or whatever other interactions you wish. If you want to visit your mother and father, you can go to their space and be with them physically or summon their avatars and be with them in a virtual manner.”

“But isn’t that a little generic and bland?”

“It’s actually more personal than it sounds. People are connected at all times to the umbrella of satellites that surrounds the earth and travels with it when the planet is moved. Highly sophisticated computers store and process everything about you and everything you do. Your body monitor is constantly communicating to your device. Your device is constantly in contact with the computers through the satellite umbrella. The device keeps track of everything about you and for you.

“So if you summon your mother’s avatar, the avatar knows everything that your mother has done and is doing. For example, if you ask your mother’s avatar how she enjoyed her dinner last night, the avatar knows what your mother ate and can report how much she enjoyed it. If your mother spoke yesterday with Aunt Joyce, her Avatar can tell you how Aunt Joyce is doing. John says that there is almost no observable difference between interacting with your mother directly and interacting with her avatar. After you’ve had your conversation with your mother’s avatar, the avatar will communicate the entire conversation to your mother, so your visit is mutual...even though you’ve only spoken directly with the avatar. If you want to speak to your best friend or a coworker or your old school buddies, for example, you can meet with them in the flesh or with their avatars. He says there is essentially no difference, so people interact with avatars as readily as with the live individuals they represent.”

Linda wasn’t sure that really sounded better than the current style of communication, but she decided to reserve judgment. “Let me try to absorb all of that later. I’m sure I’ll have a million questions about what you’ve told me. Let’s get back to the present for a minute. Dagne, I want to know your thoughts about raising and teaching the children. Are you bringing them up entirely the way that children are raised and taught in John’s time or more as we do in our present time?”

“I’ll tell you what I’ve learned from John about how children are raised and taught in his time. You’ll see that it wouldn’t be possible to do it quite that way today. There is far too much

technology that we don't have, but we've adopted a few things from John's time that we can do today."

"I sort of figured that might be true."

Dagne explained, "In John's time, children grow up in their personal rooms. During infancy, either the parents or the mother and father's avatars are with the child at all times. The child is fed, nurtured, cuddled, and attended to by the mother herself or by her avatar. The child is always attended to. When the child sleeps, the avatar waits by the bedside. When the child is awake, the mother chooses the combination of play, learning, or playmates that most pleases the child. Avatars of teachers attend to the children, one-on-one, to give a combination of play and teaching that's just right for each child. Each child's device is always aware of the physical or psychological nurturing needs of that infant."

"Well, so much for separation anxiety...!" Linda chimed in. "What else?"

"Teaching and learning are a natural part of the child's experience almost from birth. Each child progresses at just the right rate for that particular child. There are no schools or daycare or any of the ways that we use today to bring up and teach a child. The child has everything he or she could ever ask for from birth onward. As children grow and can absorb more experiences, they have those experiences safely, right in their own rooms. From the beginning, teaching is done by the mother, the father, or the most skilled teachers, either in person or as avatars. Parents can summon the avatar of the teacher proven best at giving any particular type of instruction. One brilliant teacher can be replicated in millions of homes, with millions of different children interacting with that teacher's avatar."

"Wow! Well, you obviously can't do that here and now."

"We do what we can to approximate that experience. Our children learn skills or concepts from the best teachers available. For each subject, we choose the best teacher we can find who's available through computer software, videotapes, DVDs, television, or streaming video. Once a skill or concept has been learned, we help them integrate, or synthesize, what they have learned into what they already know and provide a context in which they can use and practice what they've learned.

"And what about the constant attention?"

"We're almost always at home and available to them when they need us. We love, nurture, and play with them as much as they want or need. Even though we have a staff that could do almost everything for them, we teach them responsibility by asking them to do one or two specific chores themselves. All that we do is still just a poor simulation of what could be done for a child in John's time, but we do the best we can with what is available to us. Since the children and I began living with John, the kids have changed so much it's almost a miracle.

Since we began schooling them at home, their learning rates have jumped incredibly. It's like night and day."

"How do you help them socialize with other children?"

"The children have daily play-dates with other home-schooled children of staff members and neighbors. In addition they participate in children's activities at the local YMCA and the community center. They talk with their friends using instant messaging on their computers, and they participate in supervised chat rooms with children their own age. They seem to be very well adjusted socially, in spite of not having daily contact with other children in a conventional school setting."

"The children seem to be very advanced intellectually. Does that give them any problems in dealing with kids their own ages?"

"I don't think so. Andy takes part in chat groups with people of all ages who are students of computer science, so he has an outlet for that interest without having to find kids his own age who are as advanced as he is. Lori participates in college-level discussions of art history with students from all over the country. I doubt that the other participants have any idea she is only six years old, and even if they guess that she is much younger, they treat her as an equal because of her extensive knowledge and interest in the subject."

"She is certainly advanced for her age." Linda remembered something else she had wanted to ask Dagne. "You mentioned once that John is fearful of riding in a car. Can you tell me more about that?"

"People in John's time don't have or use cars or other personal vehicles. I remember being surprised about this, because my vision of the future included everyone buzzing around in flying machines. John explained that people have virtually everything they could want within their own rooms. They haven't eliminated vehicles in the future; so much as they have eliminated the necessity for anyone to travel. Maybe that's why I can't get John to travel anywhere."

"But travel can be exciting in spite of the uncertainties...or maybe because of them. Don't you miss it?"

"One time I told John that I wanted to go to Paris and Rome, but he won't go anywhere until next year because he'll do nothing to put his mission at risk. He views any travel, even a car ride, as an unnecessary risk until after December.

"Isn't he at all curious about other places?"

"He told me that in his time, he could be in his room and walk the streets of Istanbul in virtual reality. He could stop for breakfast in a Parisian café. He could stroll through the ancient markets of Egypt, and then have lunch at a German restaurant in Munich. He could choose

anywhere in the world, and virtual reality would take him there. People in his time have no need to travel or much interest in traveling. They can see the world from their own rooms.”

“Don’t they even have to commute to work?”

“Evidently not. Some people work in agriculture or raise animals or crew on ships or work in factories. Those people have to travel to work, I suppose. But John says that most jobs are involved with information and creative projects. Those jobs are largely done at home using virtual reality to provide what we would think of as video conferencing, e-mailing, or instant messaging with coworkers. Most work tends to be project work, where skills and interests are matched up with specific projects, and you work as part of a team until the project is completed. If you do work for an organization, and the organization has offices, odds are good that your office will be within the city complex of buildings in which you live. Going to the office would only require some form of elevator or moving walkway, making it unnecessary to go outside.”

“Even so, it seems somewhat restrictive for John, not being able to take any risks until next December. What was his purpose in coming so early? Couldn’t they just send him to arrive in November of this year?”

“John won’t explain it to me, but evidently the magic of time travel isn’t exact in his era. They knew they could place him back in time within a certain window, but they couldn’t be more accurate than plus or minus two years. They prepared his device with information starting in 1997 and ending December 9,2002. He arrived on earth fairly around the middle of the time window, on August 14, 1999. Arriving early also gave him time to establish himself in our time period.”

“Tell me the reasons there is no data extending beyond the end of the mission.”

“The people who prepared John for the mission briefed him on the dangers of living in our time, dangers that could kill him or injure him or interfere with the mission. You and I take for granted that we could be in a car crash, be mugged, or be killed in a robbery. All of those things are unknown in John’s time, and to him our time must seem very dangerous.

“Yes, I can imagine....”

“The information held in the device about the future until next December would be incredibly valuable to anyone, as it has been for us. If someone found out about John and his device, they might possibly torture him, or they could threaten to kill the kids or me. They might do anything to try to force John to give them data about the future. Once the mission is completed, John won’t need any more future data, and the device will have no value to anyone.”

“What about Lucky or me? Is John afraid that we might steal the device to get the information?”

“He has no concerns about that. He trusts you both. He has some way of knowing about people’s motivations. It’s as though his genes can communicate in some way with other people’s

genes. I don't pretend to understand it, but somehow he is sensitive to other people in ways I can't comprehend. Anyway, if you stole the device, you couldn't access it because it's tuned to something implanted in him at birth. Only he can use it. Besides, you couldn't read it or understand what it says, because it speaks and presents information in the Learning Language."

"Would you mind if we talk about what we were discussing yesterday? I told Lucky about our talk...and I told him I might want to have sex with John. He said that I was free to do whatever I choose. He reminded me that we're not engaged, and he doesn't have any claim on me. I think he's pretty upset about the idea, though, because he also said that as far as he is concerned, we're no longer on the marriage track. He decided he didn't want to share a room with me. I'm really torn because I don't want to hurt Lucky, and yet I'm finding myself obsessing about the idea of having sex with John."

Dagne took her hand. "John values love, marriage, and children above everything else. Although I told you that I thought John would like to go to bed with you, I haven't yet talked to him about it, so I can't be sure. Let's continue on as we are, and if you feel less torn and decide you really do want to sleep with John, I'll discuss it with him."

Linda agreed with the idea of waiting until her feelings were resolved, one way or the other. She didn't like leaving the issue in limbo, but she realized that she was of two minds about sleeping with John. Part of her was curious and eager; another part was concerned about hurting Lucky.

Chapter 31

Linda and Lucky in love

Linda knocked on Lucky's door early in the afternoon. "Come in!" he called out to her. "You don't have to knock. Come in anytime. Having separate rooms doesn't mean we aren't still lovers and a team."

They both felt that it was important to keep each other fully informed and up-to-date on their separate conversations, and Lucky briefed her on what he had learned from John. Without mentioning the discussion of going to bed with John, Linda told Lucky what she had learned from Dagne. They divided the new information into chapters and broke them up so that each could work with the specific pieces they had agreed to write.

While they were working together, Linda tried to read Lucky's mood, looking for any sign that their relationship had changed. She was relieved to find that there didn't seem to be any tension between them...at least not on Lucky's part.

Back in her room later, she thought about how lucky she was to have a man who loved her so much that he was seemingly able to accept or at least tolerate her desire to have sex with someone else.

Lucky came in as she was writing and said, "I'm fascinated with the idea that 'why' is a poor question. John told me they don't even have a word for the question 'why.' He says that they don't need the word in the Learning Language because there is always a more productive way of expressing the question. What would you think if we adopted the idea and stopped using the question 'why' and replaced it with other questions instead? We could test the idea ourselves and challenge ourselves to find more constructive ways of forming questions."

"I'm game," she replied, "but we've already written a lot, and we've probably used 'why' a lot at this point. Do we have to go back and rewrite everything we've written?"

"I don't think so. We wrote what we wrote before we considered the question. The readers won't be looking for it until they learn that it isn't an optimal form for a question. Once readers learn about that, they might begin looking for it, so let's work to avoid using it from this point on. If you find a question that can't be formed without using the word *why*, let me know."

“By the way,” said Linda, “here are some books that John wants us to review.” Lucky picked up a couple and read the spines. “Richard Dawkins...this is the fellow who wrote about genes and phenotypes. I guess we’ve got some homework to do.”

Chapter 32

Peter the good

After lunch the next day, the two couples were sharing stories when John asked Lucky about his police career. “Are there any stories you can share with us? What was your favorite case? Or if you prefer, what was your toughest case?”

Lucky thought a minute and decided to tell the story of Peter the Good.

“My best case and my worst case may have been the same one. I was working Homicide and chasing a contract killer by the name of Ben Bennett. I finally got a break. I arrested a thug for the brutal battery of another really bad guy. It would have been his third felony, and he was in for a very long sentence. I had him cold, and he told me that if I would reduce the charge to Misdemeanor Battery, he would give up Ben Bennett. It was worth it to the DA, so I made the arrangements and got the evidence I would need to arrest and convict Bennett.

“You need to know that among all the bad guys, there are occasionally ‘good’ bad guys, and Pete Peterson was such a good guy that his nickname was Peter the Good. He did bad deeds, but the only things he was involved with were what are known as victimless crimes. He ran a service with high-class call girls, and he was also the bookies’ bookie. When a bookie gets a bet that’s bigger than he can handle, he places part of it with another bookie, and Peter was one of those bookies.”

“Peter was nicknamed ‘the good’ because he was the most honest crook in all of DC. He took wonderful care of his ladies. He saw to their health, he helped them with their personal and family problems, and he made sure they were as safe as possible. The ladies loved working for him and trusted him totally. With the other bookies, he was also trusted and respected. He seemed to know every bad guy in Washington, but nobody had a bad word to say about him. The Vice guys couldn’t touch him because nobody would ever rat him out. Peter was so good that he was admired and respected by all the bad guys and even by the cops.

“To make a long story short, I set up a raid on Ben Bennett’s apartment. We went in with a SWAT team and broke in while Bennett was having a party. Some of the women were Peter’s ladies, and Peter himself was at the party and was swept up in the raid. One of his ladies had left

some marijuana in his car...enough marijuana to get him arrested for possession with intent to sell.

“It was one of my best moments as a cop because I had caught a contract killer and had enough evidence to convict him. I earned a commendation in that case. It was also one of my worst moments, because the task force arrested Peter the Good and convicted him on Possession with Intent to Sell. It was a bad rap because everybody knew that the dope wasn’t Peter’s—but it was found in his car. Because of mandatory sentencing laws, Peter was sentenced to fifteen years in prison. He’s been in for seven years now.”

“So, even among the bad guys, there are some relatively honest and trustworthy people?” asked John, who seemed fascinated by the whole idea of criminals and “bad guys.”

“Yes,” said Lucky, “the world of cops and robbers is a strange, almost surreal subculture. Some are so bad you couldn’t trust them to tell you the time. Some are such straight arrows that I would trust them with my life. Peter the Good was one of those.”

“Maybe some time in the future there will be a way for law enforcement to tell the difference.” John replied somewhat cryptically.

Chapter 33

A phone call from Irish

Lucky's phone rang while he was writing. The ring startled him because he had gotten fewer and fewer phone calls since he stopped pursuing leads on the luck research, and the phone now rang very rarely.

"Louis," Lucky said, reverting to a lifetime of habit.

"Hey, Lucky, it's Irish," said Irish O'Conner, his old poker buddy. "How's the research going? Did you ever find the luckiest people in the world?"

"Hey, it's going great, Irish," Lucky replied, trying quickly to figure out what else to reveal to him. "We've met the people I told you I was looking for, and I think they are the luckiest people in the world. We finally broke through their security wall and got them to talk to us. It turns out they're the nicest couple you'd ever want to meet, and they're helping us with the book."

"Us? Who is 'us?'"

"Oh, I haven't told you about Linda Sue Brown. She's someone I've met down here, and she got interested in researching luck, too. She's been a great help. We're working together on the book."

"Do I detect a possible romance here? Tell me she isn't a doddering, blue-haired dowager. Tell me she's a smoldering, red-hot blonde."

"No smoldering, Irish, but she and I are a possibility... for the future."

"That's wonderful, Lucky! You deserve to find someone to make the old Golden Years richer." They both chuckled. "Anyway, I called to find out about those folks who are so lucky. Are they on the up and up, or is something going on there? The reason I ask is that I just saw that they've been flagged for an in-home audit. Their tax return is so amazing, we just had to check it out."

"It's a waste of time," Lucky said hurriedly. "These folks are pure as the driven snow. It's an amazing case of being incredibly lucky, and we're out to discover the attributes and characteristics of the world's luckiest couple. I think we've got a great story to tell. When you read my book, maybe you'll learn how to get luckier in your life."

“Maybe so,” said Irish. “Meanwhile, I was talking about the case with Sir Colin, and he got interested in it, too. He thinks it sounds like they might have had some insider information. I believe they’re going to look into it, as well.”

“Tell him not to bother, Irish. There is nothing in there to interest the SEC. I’ve gone through their trades with them, and every one is based on public information. They were just lucky in picking out the right research reports to guide their buys and sells. There isn’t any shady stuff. I’d bet my pension on it.”

“Great, Lucky. I’m glad to hear they are clean. But it’s still a hell of a story. It should make a fascinating book. How’s it feel to be a writer?”

“I love it! I’ve stumbled on a super story to tell, and these folks are nice enough to help us. I’ll send you a copy when it’s done. You’ll love it, too!”

“Well, I have to get back to the grind, Lucky,” Irish told him. “Good luck on your book, and give your girlfriend a little hug from me. Tell her she’s one lucky gal.”

“Take care, Irish. It was good to hear from you. I’ll keep you updated on the book. You keep after the bad guys...and don’t hassle the lucky ones.”

Lucky hung up feeling worried. The IRS and the SEC weren’t the easiest groups to handle. The Galts were apparently in for some serious governmental attention.

Chapter 34

Playing defense

Lucky had kept Irish out of the picture, so far. Now he felt he had to tell the others what he knew. He felt sheepish about admitting that he'd had a little unofficial help from his friend when he was searching for lucky people, but he got Linda and the Galts together and told them about his phone call.

Dagne was quick to pick up on the risks. "I've been expecting an audit. Our return was quite remarkable, and I knew it might draw some attention. I didn't think it would be so soon, but I'm ready. John and I have both studied the tax code inside and out. Our return is cleaner than clean. We can back up every item on the return. We'll pass the audit without a worry. I just hate it that more and more people are learning about our private affairs."

"What about the SEC?" asked Lucky. "I've had friends there for years, but I've never heard about them going after individuals—just corporations."

"They're probably looking into the possibility of our using inside information or hacking into company files to get information to trade on. We've stopped any investing since we first heard you were tracking us, Lucky. We realized that we were leaving a trail that others could follow. We're invested only in municipal bonds now, and nobody will be interested in that."

"What can we do to make the SEC go away?" asked Lucky.

"All we have to do is find plenty of sources of investment advice for our former trades," Dagne replied. "If we can find something in writing to support each trade, we can show that there wasn't any inside information. We can show that we used publicly available research reports for our investment decisions. I've already done some of that in advance, but we should probably have even more background material."

"I can help there," said Linda. "I used to do investment research on Wall Street. If you'll show me your lists of trades, I can find something that was published that you can point to that will show a reason for any particular trade." "I can't thank you enough," said Dagne. "I'll feel a lot less vulnerable with your support and help."

Chapter 35

How the earth has changed

When they'd arrived for their first interviews, Dagne had told Lucky and Linda that the children didn't know that John was from a future time. They knew nothing about his mission or any physical differences. John and Dagne decided to keep the children in the dark for their own safety and to protect the mission. Lucky and Linda were always aware of this when they were with the children. They worked hard not to let anything slip that might give the children a clue that their father was different from any other man.

"Children find it hard to keep secrets." Dagne had said.

John was finishing some work before joining them for dinner with the children and Dagne that night. During a lull, Lucky offered a conversation starter for the group.

"Andy, what do you plan to do with your computer science education?"

"Dad showed me a Web site that introduces the idea of using thrusters to change the tilt of the earth to begin managing the weather. I want to write a computer program to model global weather patterns that might result if the tilt were changed," said Andy.

"That sounds very ambitious," said Linda. "Aren't there programs that meteorologists use to forecast weather? Couldn't you use programs that already exist?"

"The programs already in use depend on supercomputers, and to the best of my knowledge they don't have the ability to explore different tilts. They're also using very detailed views of microclimates for weather forecasting. I am interested in the macro view. I don't want to forecast weather in Des Moines. I want to take a global view and attempt to discover the weather patterns across continents and using a range of possible tilts."

"Wouldn't you need even larger supercomputers to take on global weather patterns?" asked Lucky.

"I want to write a program that can be broken into pieces and assigned to small computers, then reassembled by the main program. For example, now that you two are on our network, we're linking seven different computers. The program I want to write will break down the job into pieces that could use all seven of the computers on the network. They would work in the background while you write or surf the Internet. They would just use the enormous power of

the computer that mostly goes to waste while you're using it for word processing or other undemanding tasks. There are people building networks of thousands of individual computers that could be accessed whenever they're not in use by the owners. If I can get my program to work on our seven computers, it could possibly use thousands of other computers if I can get access to a network. I think I can."

"Has your dad been helpful in suggesting various tilts that you might explore?" asked Lucky, wondering whether John was giving his son a head start on work that might not otherwise be done until the Interim era.

"No, he hasn't. He supports my goal and has been helpful with ideas, but he hasn't suggested any particular tilt that might be better than any other. I'm especially fascinated with what would happen if the tilt were brought to zero. That would give the earth spring weather all the time. Weather would be constant throughout the year. To me, that sounds like perfection. I want to know the effects that would have on wind patterns, storm creation, and the movement of ocean waters, like the Gulf Stream."

"Our novel is about things that take place in the future," said Linda. "Maybe we should put in some of your assumptions about how weather might be different in the future."

"I'm very eager to read it when you're ready to show it to others. I'm interested in the future, like my dad," said Andy proudly.

Lucky thought to himself, *we have to keep the writing away from the kids. We don't want them to suspect the truth about their father.* He was also curious about the children's view of their father. Did they suspect that he was different?

"Lori, what do you see for yourself in the future? Do you want to become an artist one day?" Linda asked her.

"I have an idea for something, but I don't know if I could do it. I've dreamed about a computer program that could create paintings of subjects in different styles. For example, you might take a picture of a still life scene, like a bowl of fruit. My fantasy is that we could scan the picture into a computer, and the computer would be programmed to redo the photography as a painting, in styles of different artists. I could ask the computer to show me how Matisse might paint the scene, or Monet or Manet. Right now, I'm studying the various artists that I like, so I can learn how they've achieved the results they have. Someday, maybe when I'm Andy's age, I'll work on a computer program that could get the computer to paint pictures in many different artists' styles. I think this would make studying art really easy, but I need to know a lot more about various artists' techniques before I could tell the computer what I wanted it to do."

Linda's jaw almost dropped. It was so hard to believe that the girl was six years old. She wasn't born a genius; Dagne had said she was a normal four-year-old when John came into their

lives. How was it possible that she now had the dreams of an adult and the sophistication of a graduate student?

“Fascinating, Lori,” Linda heard herself mumble. She thought to herself *what do you say to a six -year-old with dreams like that?* “Did you learn your love of art from your parents?”

“I don’t know.” Lori replied. “I don’t know where passions come from. I’m passionate about art. Andy’s passionate about computers. Mom and Dad have their own passions. I would guess that genes play a role in the passions that any individual might have.”

Spoken like a graduate student in psychology, Linda thought. These kids were beyond belief. She wondered how they would fare when they got out in the world. Would they be so unusual that people would think they were weird, or would they just be considered normal, run-of-the-mill geniuses?

“Well, that’s nice, Lori. I wish you well in realizing your dream,” Linda said lamely.

Just then, John joined them, and they all finished eating together.

“It’s time for your entertainment hour,” Dagne told the children. “Go along with Essie while we adults talk, and Dad and I will be up to read stories before you go to bed.”

Chapter 36

Religion in the future

As the four adults settled down with after-dinner coffee and tea, Lucky addressed John. “You’ve mentioned the possibility that what we write may cause a negative reaction, possibly from extremists in religious groups. What is it that you think they might find offensive?”

“In my time, organized religions are virtually nonexistent, but we do view the founders of religions as great men and powerful leaders. We revere Abraham, Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, and others as fascinating historical figures. We respect them for their leadership and are impressed with the great movements they began—movements that today count millions of people among their followers.

“The difference is that in my time we don’t view them as gods or sons of God. Those in my time who have faith in God believe that this higher power placed on earth the genes that evolved over millions of years into the species you know today. Evolutionists are understood to be correct in their beliefs about genes as the cause of the evolution of life. In his book *The Blind Watchmaker*, Richard Dawkins clarified how genes might have evolved without a God. Many people in my time believe as Dawkins did. Others choose to believe that a Creator must have had a hand in the creation of the first genes. Each is free to choose the belief that brings them the most comfort.

“I’ve been reading some of Dawkins’ material that you supplied,” Lucky said. “It’s certainly interesting!”

“In my time, those who believe that God began the evolutionary process also believe that God is within them in the form of their genes, and they revere this genetic process. People who have chosen these beliefs also believe that the great prophets who are revered in your time were sons of God in the same way as all other humans are children of God.”

“How did the people of your time learn to see God differently from the way God is conceived of today?” asked Lucky.

“I suppose it was because the understanding of genes and their power grew during the Interim period. When scientists began modifying genes to improve humans, animals, and crops,

evidence to support the evolutionists grew until it became irrefutable. With the advent of universal education and the development of the Learning Language, everyone had access to all the evidence, and beliefs gradually changed. It took several generations because the religious organizations had a powerful hold. But gradually, beliefs changed.”

“You’ve told us of some of the changes that your scientists made in the human body. What changes did they make in animals and crops?” asked Linda.

“In your time, the animals that are raised for food are those whose forms evolved relatively naturally. In the current era, scientists have begun modifying those animals genetically to make them grow faster and larger and be tastier to the human palate. During the Interim, scientists began creating entirely new animals. Some animals were created that could take nourishment from new food forms that would otherwise have been considered waste products. The goal was more meat, more nutritious meat, and animals that cost less to raise.”

“Tell them about the shmoo, darling,” prompted Dagne.

“One of the favorite food animals in my time would not be recognizable to you today. I was struggling to explain it to Dagne. Then I saw a comic strip by a man named Al Capp. It was called *Lil’ Abner*, and Capp had created an imaginary animal called a shmoo. His shmoo is the closest thing I’ve seen to the animal that was created by scientists as an excellent food source. The cartoon schmoo was a roly-poly creature known to lay eggs and give milk, and if you were lucky enough to catch one for dinner, it tasted like both steak and chicken.”

Linda said, “I’ve never heard of Al Capp or the schmoo.”

John replied, “You were just a child when his comic strip was popular. You can check out his work on the Internet.”

“Okay, I will.” Linda continued with the earlier theme. “What about crops? What changes did they make there?”

“Your scientists today are genetically modifying crops to make them more bountiful, more resistant to disease, and easier to harvest, ship, and store. I’ve read that there is a lot of opposition to these changes, but the scientists are on the right track. In my time, agriculture is so changed by modified genetics that it would be totally unrecognizable to you today. Crop yields are hundreds of times greater than today. New strains of food crops have been invented that yield enormous bounties of delicious food for the many billions of people that Earth supports in my time.”

“Speaking of billions,” she added, “what did future generation do to control population growth?”

“Population growth presented many challenges. People in my time need less personal space in housing because technology turns one room into thousands of rooms. We’ve lowered the oceans to create more available land. We’ve built our cities overhanging the ocean shores, far

away from the center of the continents. The gradual movement of cities to the shores has made even more land available for agriculture; so more food can be grown to feed more people. The scientists have created foods that can be produced in factories, using raw materials that are in great abundance and are not useful in their natural state, such as sand and rock. We've mastered aquaculture. We use the seas as gigantic fish farms. As bountiful as the oceans seem to you today in terms of sea life, you are doing very little to increase the number and variety of seafood available to you. In fact, your sea-life populations are shrinking drastically, along with all other wild animal populations. In my time, we've cleaned up the oceans that present generations are fouling. Earth in my time can support geometrically larger populations than would be possible today. We've found innovative ways to propagate sea life and ways to assure the health of the seafood. We eat more seafood in my time than you do today. We have more varieties, and they are tremendously bountiful."

"How in the world did you go about lowering the oceans?" asked Lucky.

"During the Interim, people began to be concerned with melting of the ice caps. There was concern that if the polar ice melted, shores would flood. Research began on how it might be possible to restore the polar ice. I think initially they tried nuclear and geothermal energy to shoot water into the air, utilizing the polar temperatures to turn it into ice and snow and the polar winds to blow it inland. All of that was fairly primitive, but they learned a great deal. When new, low-cost power sources were invented, the process became much more feasible. In my time, it is possible to store as much water as we wish in the form of polar ice. We can raise or lower the oceans, virtually at will."

"Let's take a break and talk more tomorrow," said Dagne. "John and I have to see to the children and get them to bed."

After saying their goodnights, Lucky and Linda went to Lucky's room to discuss the day's events and their writing plans. Lucky was excited by the amazing things they had learned and was eager to add to his writing. Linda, however, was concerned that the things they were hearing were all "so global" and might be too boring to keep a reader's interest. She began to plan her questions to provide more human-interest material. As they reached an end to their discussion, the two felt some tension about how the evening would progress.

"You are going to write, and so am I," said Linda. "When we're done, I'd like to come to bed in here, if you want me." "What about you and John?" asked Lucky.

"That's still up in the air," said Linda. "I told Dagne I was torn between my curiosity about sleeping with John and my feelings for you. I guess I really don't know whether or not I can separate my feelings about sex and love. She said not to do anything until and unless I feel less torn and you feel less uncomfortable about it."

“I’d like you to come in here to sleep,” said Lucky. “I just don’t want to be compared to a sexual athlete like John. The whole idea makes me feel inadequate, and I don’t like that feeling. As long as you haven’t gone to bed with him, I can write the whole thing off as curiosity. Let’s sleep together unless and until something happens with you and John. We can go on just as we have been for the time being.”

Chapter 37

The days dwindle down

As June became July and then August, the two couples fell into an easy rhythm. Lucky and Linda spent their time writing and rewriting. John and Dagne spent their time as usual, with the children and managing the staff and the affairs of the house and the orange grove. Lucky and Linda got their thirty thousand dollars each month and hadn't yet found the need to spend any of it. Lucky, Linda, and Dagne spent a number of evenings going out to dinner or attending cultural events, but John wasn't willing to risk the dangers of the streets, so he stayed home with the children.

The two couples found themselves becoming good friends. What had begun as a fairly formal relationship became very casual and relaxed. The tension and distrust that had marked the early days disappeared. The question-and-answer interviews became more conversational. The children became comfortable with Lucky and Linda as part of their lives. Lucky and Linda each took the sign-language computer course and then spent many hours in conversation with staff members.

Lucky developed a particular skill at signing and began signing with the children just for fun. Linda, who had a little less facility with it, often found it difficult to understand, especially when Lucky would sign with Andy. With typical preteen humor, Andy enjoyed signing so quickly with Lucky that Linda couldn't follow the conversation.

For her part, Linda was busier than ever. She had used the Internet to find archived research reports to back up virtually every trade Dagne had made. There were so many conflicting research reports that it was pretty implausible that someone could invariably pick the right one to use, but they put together a defensible explanation to back up every trade that Dagne had made. The only remaining explanation for her investing success was a combination of innate practical wisdom and pure luck.

Chapter 38

The day John cried

“I’ve never seen John express any negative feelings,” Linda remarked as she and Dagne were having coffee. “Is he hiding them, or doesn’t he have them?”

“Since I first met him, I’ve been aware of the same thing. He never seems to get upset or angry or have any of the normal range of negative human emotions, although he frequently expresses the positives. You’ve seen how often he laughs. He easily expresses joy and often expresses love.

“On the negative side, I’ve told you that he gets fearful when he has to face our local ‘dangerous throngs,’ and he hates riding in a car. But in interpersonal relations, he’s incredible. He’s never let the kids get to him, even in the early days before he began to affect them. I’ve really only seen him down or depressed once in our entire relationship. It started September ninth last year. I could see him change from his usual cheerful, friendly self into someone who was deeply sad. At first, I thought it might be something I’d done or said. When I asked him about it, he said it was something he couldn’t talk about...something terribly sad.

“The next day, September tenth, he was worse. He promised to tell me the following morning what was bothering him. He paced around the house like he was lost. I’ve never seen anyone so deeply pained. On the morning of the eleventh, he was crying. Tears fell, and he kept saying, ‘I’m sorry. I’m sorry.’ I couldn’t understand what he was sorry about. At 9:30 he turned on the television, and we watched and listened together. He held me close and wept as the towers fell and the other plane hit the Pentagon, and finally, as the last flight crashed in Pennsylvania. When the Pennsylvania flight crashed, he said, ‘It’s over. That’s all there are.’”

“Oh, my goodness,” Linda moaned.

“I began to understand the intense pain he must have felt, knowing what was going to happen and yet being so committed to his mission—being unable to say anything that might change history. I was a wreck, myself. The pain I felt for those people who died, the horror of it all...I’m sure millions of people felt the same pain that day. But I can assure you, no one who didn’t lose a relative felt more pain than John did. He was perhaps the only civilized, humane person on earth who had the knowledge necessary to potentially prevent that insane horror. The

burden of that knowledge and his responsibility for his mission were almost more than even John could handle.”

Linda couldn't think of anything appropriate to say.

Chapter 39

The day that Lucky cried

After he read Linda's writing about the day John had cried, Lucky cried too.

He found himself reliving the horror of that day. He'd been off duty the day the plane crashed into the Pentagon. He was still grieving over Lou's death, and as he'd watched the television coverage of the crash into the towers, he'd felt the horror build up in him. He'd felt the pain of the loss of so many lives. He'd felt fury towards the inhumane animals that could kill and maim thousands of people in such a sick, distorted homage to their religious and political beliefs.

With the first report of the Pentagon crash, he'd put on his uniform, called in to say he was going to the crash site, and left to navigate the crazed streets of DC. He'd joined in with the police work at the crash site. He'd seen the bodies driven away in ambulances. He'd seen the pain and anguish of the injured. He'd helped the grieving wives, mothers, and fathers. He'd seen the horror firsthand. Working the scene had given him a way to take his mind off of his pain. He hadn't slept again for more than thirty hours.

When he'd finally returned home, sleep had come very hard for him.

Yes, he remembered 9/11. He remembered it as a sickening jumble of horror, pain, anger, fury, and hatred. He'd lived September eleventh, and September eleventh still lived in him.

As he read Linda's record of her interview with Dagne, all those feelings came over him again. The anger, the fury, and the hatred came up again and focused on John. He could have stopped it. He knew it was coming. How could he have stopped himself from saving those people? The only other people who could have prevented it were crazed, murderous religious zealots. John was sane. John could have stopped the madness.

The fury raged for an hour—a full hour of out-of-control anger and hatred directed towards John. As the rage began to ebb, he started to see the situation from John's standpoint. He argued within himself.

He could have stopped it.

But he is on a mission to save Earth.

Yes, but he could have stopped it without putting his mission at risk. He could have called in tips about what was going to happen. He could have done it in a way that wouldn't have revealed his identity.

Yeah, but who would have listened? It would have sounded like just another lunatic phone tip.

Yeah, but he's smart enough to have figured out a way to stop it without coming across like a lunatic.

Right. "I happen to come from the future, and I know something is going to happen. Put marshals on these four planes."

Lucky thought for another hour about how John could have stopped it and not put his mission at risk. It wouldn't have been easy, but he felt sure that John could have done it. Then slowly—a glimpse at first, and then more and more—Lucky began to realize the awful jam that John was in. Saving three thousand lives was against his mission orders. Lucky understood mission orders. John wasn't allowed to save one single life while he conducted his mission. Well, maybe one life—the Visionary. But outside of that, he couldn't take a life or save a life without risk to the future.

Gradually, Lucky came to see the problem John had faced. He began to feel the horror that John must have felt, the helplessness, and the pain. Three hours after reading Linda's report, Lucky cried.

Chapter 40

The meek inherit the earth

“Tell me about the people in your time, John” asked Lucky. “How are they different from people today?”

“People today are a very rough bunch. You have many criminals, many killings, rapes, robberies, and all kinds of other crimes against people and property. In my time we have none of those things. I’m not sure what caused the change. I know that people in the future have been genetically evolved to reduce aggressiveness. That might be an important factor. I know that universal education has given every person on Earth equal opportunity, and that has eliminated ignorance and hopelessness. I know that everyone on Earth has access to anything they may want through what you would call virtual reality, although it’s actually something vastly more advanced. No one need take what another owns, because they can have it for themselves, either in real form or in virtual form.

“So technology was greatly responsible for the change? These days, people don’t trust technology that much. They think it dehumanizes us and makes us less loving.”

“The people of my time are devoted to their families and especially to their children. They know their purpose in life is to mate and have children that will in turn mate and have children. They wouldn’t do anything to put their families or children at risk. They also honor their mothers and fathers and appreciate their contributions to their welfare.

“If I had to pick just one thing that might have been the most important difference, I would pick the Learning Language. The language of my time facilitates peace and harmony between people. The languages of today are very weak. The Learning Language is incredibly powerful; it facilitates thought and communication and clarifies ideas.”

“Is language the most powerful influence on people?” Lucky asked.

“In developing the Learning Language, linguists were aware that language controls thought. A weak language limits thought. A powerful language facilitates thought so effectively that the least capable mind in my time is able to be vastly wiser than the wisest of the wise who are using the languages of today.”

“You think wisdom can be built into a language?”

“Yes, I know it to be so.”

“...and wise people are less likely to act in an antisocial way.”

“Yes, I know that to be so. In your work with criminals, did you ever find a criminal who was wise?”

“Smart, yes. Strangely enough, many of them were known as ‘wise guys.’ But wise, no.”

“In my time, the least intelligent person among us is still wise.”

“I don’t want to oversimplify, but in comparison to our time, do the meek truly inherit the earth?”

“Yes.”

“Well, that is at least one prophecy that comes true.”

“Universal equality.”

“Universal equality?” asked Lucky. “What do you mean by that?”

“The people of today have great diversity and widespread inequality. Born in America, a child has opportunities not imaginable to someone born in Africa, Indonesia, or Afghanistan. In my time, every child in every part of the globe is implanted with a communicator and given a device like mine. Even the tiniest infant is linked to the global network of computers and communications that will monitor his or her health and assure access to nourishment, emotional support and education. Everyone, without exception, is given this support regardless of race, creed, or gender.

“The poorest of the poor in my time is richer in every way than the richest of people in your time. I don’t mean rich in terms of what you would think of as wealth. I mean rich in terms of opportunity, education, support, and nourishment. Access to healthful nourishment, education, and opportunities are universal rights to every human born in my time. This will become true in the Interim, when the global government comes into being.”

Chapter 41

The world's richest poor

One evening at dinner, the four adults and two children were enjoying the playful banter and good spirits engendered by a good meal and good company when John raised a question for the entire table.

"I'd like to conduct a thought experiment. What do you suppose would happen in this country if you could, by decree, take away everyone's money and then give every man, woman, and child ten million 'new' dollars? What would you expect to find ten years after the decree?"

"I would expect that you'd have terrible inflation," said Linda.

"Let's imagine that we could abolish inflation with the same imaginary decree," said John.

"I think you'd have some very happy children," said Lori. "They'd have every toy they ever wanted."

Lucky added, "I think in ten years you'd find that some people would have a hundred million, some would still have their ten million, and others would have lost or spent down their fortune until they were down to their last million or less."

"I agree," said Dagne. "In terms of statistics, you could expect a normal distribution of wealth, with some people having very little, some people having a lot, and most people having something in between."

"Okay," said John. "How would we be talking about people at both ends of the normal bell curve? Would we be describing some people as very rich, some people as middle class, and some people as poor?"

"I suppose we would," said Lucky. Everybody agreed.

"What should we make of that?" asked Linda.

"This country's politics are based on class divisions. For example, historically, poor people tend to vote Democrat, and rich people tend to vote Republican. The political agendas of each party are based on doing what is best for either the poor and lower middle class or the upper middle class and the rich. In our thought experiment, we've boosted the total net worth of each group overall, but there are still people with less and others with more. Do you suppose that we'd

still have the same political divisions, the Democrats representing the less affluent and the Republicans representing the more affluent?”

“It’s hard to say, but I suppose we would,” said Lucky.

“I think so too,” Dagne agreed.

“What conclusion do you draw from this thought experiment?” asked Linda.

“I’ve concluded that rich and poor are only relative terms,” said John. “I think that no matter how much actual money people have, the people with less will think of themselves as poor, and the people with more will see themselves as rich. I say that because this country, at this time, may have the world’s richest poor.”

“The world’s richest poor?” said Dagne. “That’s an odd observation.”

“I’ll go further,” said John, “I think today’s American poor are richer than the richest king of two hundred years ago.”

“That sounds a little crazy, Dad. How could a poor person have more than a king in any age?” asked Andy.

“Think of a king back in 1802, say, in Austria or some other European country. Imagine that he has a castle for protection and to house his courtiers. Imagine that he has bountiful lands to grow crops for food and forests full of game to eat. He employs a large staff to tend his crops, keep poachers from his game, light the fires to keep warm, light the candles so he can see, cook so he can eat, sew so he can be clothed. Even with all that, he lives in drafty quarters and goes to the toilet in a chamber pot. For entertainment, he employs an orchestra and a court composer and a jester to tell jokes and play the fool. Everything he needs is within his court. If he chooses to visit other royalty or another of his castles, he has horses to pull his carriage.”

“Okay,” said Lucky, “how does a poor person in America have all that?”

“You all know the story of my stay in a homeless shelter. I was as poor as anyone can get, and so were those around me. Still, I was fed three nourishing meals a day, just like the king, although maybe not quite as sumptuous a spread. I had a bed for sleeping, and my mattress was probably as clean and maybe even more comfortable than the king’s. I was in a building that was kept at an ideal temperature, something the king could not arrange no matter how many attendants fanned him or tended his fires. Showers were available to me, with warm water and good soap. The king had to make do with a tub of rapidly cooling water and perhaps some lye soap. I even had the use of a flush toilet, which carried my waste away immediately, while the king had to use a slop basin and wait for someone to come and carry it out.

“If I was sick, immediate medical care was available—and I’d stack any contemporary American doctor against the best doctors available for the king. I didn’t need my own orchestra or composer. I had Mozart, Beethoven, or Brahms at my beck and call on the radio or on TV. I didn’t need a jester or fool, because the TV gave me that on twenty different channels. If I

needed to go to the next town, I could take a bus, which was much faster than the king's carriage. I was clothed in good sturdy clothes, given to me for free or available for pennies at the Goodwill store. All my clothes were as well made and tailored as the king's finest garments. I could go on and on, but I think there is something to the argument that the poorest person in America today can live better in many ways than the richest person of yesteryear."

"I see your point," said Lucky. "With every decade that passes, the poor have greater access to things that make life more comfortable, more interesting, more varied, and more healthful. So, for arguments sake, let's buy the idea that the poor of today have life better in many ways than royalty of just a couple of hundred years ago. How do you figure that America has the world's richest poor?"

"Any of a dozen European or Scandinavian countries could lay claim to the title of having the world's richest poor, and perhaps, in some ways they would be correct. Maybe their welfare systems are more bountiful, but when you add in the freedoms enjoyed in America and the richness of the media, and many other subjective factors that are unique to America, a good argument can be made for being poor in America. In any case, if you are poor in America, you are likely to be wealthier, safer, healthier, better entertained, and have more options and choices than the vast millions of poor in Africa, India, Indonesia, China, Mexico, South America, Russia, and virtually any other place on the globe."

"If I follow your argument, Dad, you said that being poor is a relative thing. Even if you had a million dollars, and everybody else had more, you would think of yourself as poor. You said that the poorest of the poor could, in many ways, live better than the richest person a couple of centuries ago. You've said that the best place in the world to be poor is in America. So, what are we supposed to make of all that? Do you think we should stop supporting the poor?" asked Andy.

"No. I've taught you that the rich must share their wealth with those in need, and we do that. I think, however, that there are some valuable things to learn from this thought exercise. First, time will inevitably make things better for those with the least. One hundred years from now, the poor will be vastly richer in many ways than the richest of us today. Second, while it is important to share wealth with those who have less, through taxes and charities, we can do so without the guilt that so many seek to heap on the rich simply for being rich. Third, while we can feel sympathy for the poorest of the poor, we can take some satisfaction in the fact that this country and this society already makes if possible for its poor to be the richest poor in the world. Fourth, living in the wealthiest country in the world also imposes on us a duty to help the poor in the poorest countries of the world."

Lucky laughed. “Not long ago, John, I might have been willing to argue with some of your points. Now, having recently become affluent, I’m relieved to find a rationale for affluence without guilt.”

“For me,” said Dagne, “riches come from family, love, and good health. Now I think we should take these poor children to their rich beds. Shall we go?”

As they left the table and went to their rooms, Lucky asked Linda, “Did you get what he was saying there? I think he’s saying that the poorest of the poor in his time are vastly richer in every human way than the richest of the rich today.”

“Let’s give a big hand to our descendants,” Linda replied, “then let’s go to bed.”

Chapter 42

Behind the scenes

Since 9/11 the FBI had been an integral part of the anti-terrorism war. The nation counted on the FBI to find and root out sleeper cells of terrorists. The FBI, of course, continued its war on organized crime, but 9/11 gave it a new focus. The INS was also shaken by the events of 9/11. It was about to become part of the new Homeland Security Agency.

The Gants, of course, were neither terrorists nor illegal aliens, nor were they engaging in organized crime. They did, however, start showing up in files and on lists as the nation began to search for terrorists. When, in the normal course of events, it came to the attention of the local authorities that the new owner of an orange grove had installed two-hundred-fifty thousand dollars worth of very high-tech security equipment, the fact was written down and filed.

In a search for al-Qaida money caches, the Gants' enormous wealth was also duly noted and filed.

As the INS searched for illegal aliens, the fact that John Galt had gotten his first Social Security card at age twenty-five was recorded and filed away. Luckily for the Galts, none of the agencies involved in this entire information gathering coordinated their efforts, so the tiny nuggets of fact lay quietly in files, and no one noticed.

Chapter 43

The lightning storm

Since moving to southwest Florida, the lightning capital of the world, Lucky had become aware that the area experienced storms almost nightly during the summer. A night with thousands of lightning strikes was not uncommon in the Tampa Bay area and neighboring Sarasota, so it surprised no one, including Lucky, when lightning struck in the area of the Galt's home. Several trees in the grove were hit, telephone service was knocked out, and an electrical substation was also struck.

The Galts' backup generator kicked in immediately, and after a momentary flicker of darkness, lights were restored to the house and the staff quarters. All seemed well, but there were a few problems. When he went to check, Lucky discovered that lightning had knocked out the security center in the staff house and had so damaged the wiring that the monitors didn't come on again, even after the generator kicked in and lights were restored. This was not a deep concern for those on the security team, however. It had happened before, and the procedures were well established. Security teams spread throughout the grove, wearing ponchos to keep them dry and carrying the strange portable radios with coded lights by which the hearing-impaired people communicated.

Lucky went to bed.

When the lightning fried the security system, a cell-phone circuit automatically sent a signal to a security monitoring company that there was trouble at the grove. The procedure for the monitoring company was to telephone the residence and, when failing to get a response, to telephone the individuals on the backup list—in this case, a Mr. Lucky Louis and a Ms. Linda Brown.

Failing to get an answer at any of the forwarded numbers because the phones at the Galt residence were out of service, the procedure then called for alerting the police to visit the residence to check for further problems.

The police were then notified of the alarm at the Galt residence. Because they lived in the lightning capital of the world where lightning strikes routinely set off home alarm systems, and

because false alarms were reported by the hundreds every time a storm hit, the sheriff's deputies set about slowly and without concern to check out twenty residences per active patrol car.

It was well after midnight when the patrol car reached the gate at the Galt grove. They noted the well lit house because it was the only residence they had seen in the last few miles that had any power. One deputy pushed the button at the grove gate, but no one answered. The phone lines were still out. Still, they had a job to do. They had to check to make sure that it was a false alarm, even though they felt certain it was.

One of the officers banged on the gate with his baton, hoping to arouse someone they could talk to. No one responded. The house was too far away from the gate for anyone to hear, and the monitor cameras seemed to be inoperative. The two deputies flipped for which one would go over the fence and walk to the house. The younger one lost and, with a lift from his partner, went over the fence. That was when all hell broke loose.

A magnesium flare went up, lighting the gate and the adjacent area. The younger officer froze in his tracks in the center of a circle formed by a dozen men running towards him.

"Halt!" he heard someone yell, although the word was strangely spoken. Each of the men was carrying a baton and a radio with odd, flashing lights. The officer raised his hands as though in surrender, in case the men were armed.

When the security men saw that the intruder was a policeman, they immediately stood down and approached the deputy with their hands visible.

Lucky was almost asleep when the flare went up. He jumped out of bed and saw the sheriff's car and the security men racing for the front gate. He pulled on his pants, grabbed his shirt, and raced barefoot out to the front gate.

When he arrived, the deputy was trying to explain the reason he'd jumped the fence. The dozen deaf security men had trouble reading his lips because they were shaky from the shock of the encounter, and they encircled the deputy in a way more curious than threatening.

"Evening, officer," said Lucky. "What's up?"

"The security company called in an alarm because they couldn't raise anyone at the house," said the shaken deputy. "Your phones must be out, so we were sent to check to make sure everything was okay."

Lucky began signing with the head security man, and after a few moments the guards all took off in different directions.

"Sorry for the flap, officer. Evidently the security monitoring equipment took a lightning hit, and the staff was out on manual patrol. Everybody is fine here—we have no problems, except we're on backup power and the phones are out."

Lucky walked the deputy back to the patrol car. “Thanks for coming out to check. I’m sorry you had to jump the fence. The gate connection to the house must have been hit also. I hope you have a nice, peaceful evening.”

The shaken deputies reported in and continued on their rounds. After awhile they began to see the humor in the event. The deputy who had remained outside started laughing when he remembered his partner inside the fence, raising his hands in shock. By the end of the shift, the two deputies were back in the office filling out their activity reports and telling the story to their associates. The story grew funnier with each retelling. By the tenth repetition, the number of deaf security men surrounding the deputy had grown to fifty, and the difficulties in communicating with them had been exaggerated greatly. The number of flares had grown from one to a stream of continuous flares. All in all, the story brightened up the normal routine for the entire shift of men coming off duty and the next shift going on.

By the time the administrative officer read the report of the incident, he had already heard the story in exaggerated form. As he prepared to file the report, he remembered a fax from the FBI alerting the sheriff’s office to be on the lookout for unusual events and unusual security set-ups that might lead to sleeper cells or Mafia bosses’ locations. Not knowing what he had, he faxed a copy of the report to the local FBI office with a big question mark on the cover sheet.

At the FBI office, another routine document was entered into the computer, filed, and forgotten.

Chapter 44

The Learning Language

“If you and Linda want to hear about the Learning Language, I’ll excuse myself. I’ve heard a great deal about it, and it puts my head in a spin. Good luck,” said Dagne, as she left the others with their coffee.

“Have both of you finished with the Visionary’s book, *Sagery*?” asked John.

Lucky and Linda nodded.

“The Learning Language is structured around the Sage Model. Conceptually, any statement from one person to another must include many elements that are not even described in languages today. For example: What gene group or groups are speaking? What is the focus of the statement? To which gene group or groups in the listener is the statement directed? What scope is the speaker choosing? What level is the speaker choosing?”

“Let me use the example I’ve used with Dagne. She says it makes her head spin, and I’m curious whether it will do the same for you. Maybe a lifetime with a very limited language such as English makes it impossible to get one’s mind around something as simple and yet as complex as the Learning Language.

“Let’s talk about the question of abortion. Are you for a woman’s right to choose, or are you against it?”

“I was raised Catholic, so with a few exceptions I’m anti-abortion,” Lucky replied.

“I’m for a woman’s right to choose,” said Linda.

“I’ll start with the anti-abortion case,” John continued. “Speaking from my gene group concerned with beliefs, I want to speak to your gene group concerned with beliefs. Focusing solely on the fetus—not considering the situation of the mother, the father, the mother’s extended family, the mother’s community, the interests of the state, the country, or the world—I (the gene group that’s presently speaking) am against aborting any fetus. Are you with me so far?” Lucky and Linda nodded in agreement.

“Lucky, I’m going to give you some hypothetical situations. We’re going to explore your other gene groups, and I’d be surprised if we didn’t find some significantly different beliefs held by various gene groups.

“Let’s start with your ‘me’ gene group, the part called the “selfish gene.” Let’s propose that you met a drunken woman at a bar, had one night of sex with her, and decided that you never wanted to see her again. Two months later, she calls to tell you you’ve made her pregnant. She gives you two choices. You can pay four hundred dollars for her abortion or you can pay child support for the next eighteen years. What would you tell her?”

“I’d probably pay for the abortion,” Lucky admitted. “A promiscuous drinker is probably unlikely to make a good mother anyway.”

“Okay, let’s talk to your gene group that is most interested in mating or pairing. You are sixteen years old. You have sex with your fifteen-year-old girlfriend. She gets pregnant. She asks you what you want her to do. Should she have the baby and maybe marry you, or should she have an abortion?”

“Okay, I see where you’re going. I’d probably have told her to have the abortion.”

“Next we’ll question your genes interested in parenting. Your thirteen-year-old daughter tells you she is pregnant, and she isn’t sure who the father is. She asks you whether she should bring the baby to term or to abort it. What do you say?”

“Okay” said Lucky, “I’d care more about my daughter experiencing the body changes and emotional repercussions that come with childbirth than I would about the fetus, so I’d probably suggest abortion. I suppose you’ll also be asking my genes involved with my extended family if they would vote for abortion for my pregnant thirteen-year-old niece. Yes, I would recommend abortion.”

“I won’t prolong this exercise, but I would predict that your work as a policeman might prompt you to suggest abortion to a pregnant crack addict, regardless of her race, because of the devastating effect of drugs on the baby and on the community welfare and educational systems.

Lucky looked a bit sheepish and nodded.

“Your gene groups hold different points of view, and your thinking changes as you adjust your focus from the fetus alone to the mother and fetus, to the father, mother, and fetus, to the extended family, to the community, and so on.”

“So, I guess I’m not really as anti-abortion as I thought I was,” said Lucky. Is that your point?”

“My point is that you can’t make a simple statement very rich in content using the English language as it is today. Linda, you probably hold your view on abortion because your focus is broader than just the fetus. Your focus is at least broad enough to encompass the mother and the fetus, and even larger if you are also considering effects on the father, the extended family, and the community.

“I used this illustration to explain the Learning Language. In the Learning Language, every statement includes the source gene group, the chosen target gene group, the specific focus

or the range of focuses, and the additional elements of scope and level. The Learning Language is extremely rich in content, and we can use it to say a great deal in a few words. I certainly don't mean to insult you, Lucky, but since language indicates and to some extent dictates thought, people using the Learning Language could never say anything as barren of context as 'I am anti-abortion.' The language simply won't work unless the speaker identifies his source gene group, focus, and target gene group.

"To put it another way, a speaker in your time, speaking to one in my time, might say something like, 'Speaking only from my belief gene group, and speaking only to your belief gene group, and ignoring all focuses except the most limited focus of the fetus, and speaking only to your belief gene group, I am against abortion.' Otherwise, the person being spoken to in my time would wonder how anyone could possibly even think in such a limited way. In your time, people only speak in such a limited way and typically think in such a limited way because the rather barren languages of today permit it and don't require deeper thought."

"I take it, then, that you'd disagree with those who march on abortion clinics or bomb them or shoot abortionists?" asked Linda.

"If that happened in my time, our scientists would take such people and examine them to see what kind of madness was at work. To think in such a narrowly focused way is an indication of mental limitation. To act in such an arrogant, aggressive, disrespectful, and rude manner would suggest a sociopathic orientation from which others would apparently need to be protected. The abortion terrorists display a single-focused madness almost identical to the sickness displayed by the Muslim terrorists with which you are currently at war."

"Ouch, I think we'll leave that out of the book," said Lucky.

"Not on your life," said Linda. "We'll find a way to work it in."

"Of course, we're actually discussing the Learning Language," said John. "The abortion question was just an illustration.

"How did the linguists construct the language?" asked Lucky.

"The linguists studied all the languages of the world with the idea of determining the most useful elements of each. That didn't work well because most were so barren. By studying them all, they discovered the wide range of ways in which thought was expressed. They borrowed clicking sounds from aboriginal peoples. They borrowed some tonalities from Chinese dialects. They used syllabic emphasis in a creative way. From German and a few other languages they borrowed the ability to build large ideas by adding meaningful syllables together in compounds.

"The entire effort was built on the awareness that various gene groups are the speakers as well as the intended audiences for any verbalization. They modified the subject of a sentence to incorporate its gene group. They aimed for efficiency. The goal was to say the most with the

least number of words, so as you listen to me speak, you'll hear clicks that define the gene group that is speaking, and tonalities to address the gene group I wish to speak with. The syllable I emphasize describes the focus I wish to use. Indicators of scope and level modify the verb. Every assertion is clarified by a word that describes whether I am expressing a thought, an idea, a fact, a belief, a guess, a speculation, etc. It's a very rich language. Consequently, people using the Learning Language are able to think much more powerfully than those using the languages of today can. Even the least of the speakers in my time are made wiser than the wisest of your time, because in many ways language affects, supports, and often limits thought."

John then spoke a few sentences in the Learning Language. Lucky and Linda tried to decipher the meaning but didn't even know where to begin.

When John was finished with his overview, the budding authors went back to their rooms to work, hoping to be able to communicate in their writing something of what they had learned.

Chapter 45

Supercomputers at work

The chief computer operator for the supercomputer at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory was doing routine bookkeeping for the nighttime shift at the lab. As he was searching files, he suddenly discovered a program that had run for two hours during the night but that he couldn't find on his run sheet. Somehow, a program had been introduced into the computer without anyone's permission. It had taken up two hours of computing time, finished, and sent its results out on the Internet to an address he wasn't familiar with. He called in one of his subordinates.

"Frank, it looks like someone has hacked into our machine again. It doesn't look like there was any harm done because the program just ran and exited, but this has got to stop. We charge our partners thousands of dollars an hour for computer time. We can't be giving it away to hackers who just show up and steal time."

"Got it, chief. I'll run a dump and check out the program and see where the answers went. I'll find him."

The following week, Frank returned to his boss and reported, "Chief, I've got the lowdown on that hacker from last week. The program was sent to us as a piece of a larger program running on UCLA's Cray. That's okay because we have the inter-use agreement with UCLA, but it turns out that UCLA didn't know where the program came from or what it was. We had a couple of people look at the program and found that it was a meteorological program, so we sent it to NOAA. They broke down the code, and it looks like someone is running a simulation of earth's weather, with some pretty bizarre assumptions attached. The base assumption is a series of ecliptics, and that's pretty weird."

"What the hell is an ecliptic?" asked the chief.

"It's the path the sun traces onto the earth as we rotate around it. The only way the ecliptic could change is if we changed the tilt of the earth. It's pretty good code, and it's smooth in the way it breaks apart and uses other computer resources, but who would want to know what would happen if the earth changed its tilt?"

"Do you know where the answers went?" asked the chief.

“Yeah, we traced it to a home network somewhere in Florida. The IP address of the network is registered to AO Investments. Nobody ever heard of them.”

“Enter it in the log as computer time theft, and notify whoever the hell is responsible for that,” said the chief.

“Have done,” said Frank. “We sent it to the FBI. Let them figure out what to do with it.”

At the FBI office, a form was filled out, entered into the computer, and filed. In accordance with the latest information-sharing procedures, the record of the event was forwarded to the Department of Homeland Security.

Chapter 46

Essie goes to market

One afternoon as Lucky and Linda were finishing lunch with the Galt's, Essie came into the dining room looking flushed and frightened. Clearly upset, she began signing rapidly to Dagne.

“Slow down, please,” Dagne signed back.

Essie then signed that she had gone shopping and was stopped by a policeman for some reason she wasn't able to comprehend. When the officer couldn't understand her signing, she was taken to police headquarters, where a man in a dark suit flashed a badge of some kind and asked her a lot of questions. The man had a sign language interpreter with him. To Essie, this indicated that the man must have planned the interview in advance.

The man had wanted to know who lived at the grove and what they did there. Essie told him that four adults and two children lived in the main house. She described the security staff of about a hundred hearing-impaired people. She told them about the deaf children who learned computer skills from the staff, as well. She explained that the staff were all college graduates, had advanced computer skills, and used many of their skills to do programming by contract over the Internet.

Essie continued to sign, telling Dagne that the man had asked questions about the Galts and wanted to know about the other two, meaning Lucky and Linda, and what they did there.

“I told them the truth about everything I know,” Essie signed. “I don't know what they wanted. I don't know what they were looking for. When they finished with their questions, they let me go.”

Dagne signed back, “I'm sorry you were questioned. I don't know what is going on, but somebody is clearly curious about us. I'll try to find out who.”

A few minutes later, Lucky left the grove on his way to the barbershop. As he turned his car left from the driveway onto the two-lane road leading toward town, he noticed a rather nondescript sedan parked off the road with a man sitting in the driver's seat. A lifetime as a police officer made him look carefully at the driver, just to be sure he was all right and not in any trouble. The man looked away as Lucky drove past. Lucky slowed a little and watched in his rear

view mirror as the man brought a camera to his eye, apparently taking a picture of the rear of Lucky's car. Having spent years on stakeouts himself, it wasn't hard for Lucky to make a determination.

He reached for his cell phone and called Linda. "Will you wait ten minutes, then get in your car and meet me at the coffee place on Bee Ridge Road?"

"Sure," Linda replied. "What's up?"

"I don't know for certain, but I think someone is staking out the Galt property. I'm going to circle around and watch him as you drive by. We'll talk at the coffee shop."

Lucky made four right turns and positioned himself about five hundred yards behind the parked car. As he waited for Linda to come out of the grove driveway, he retrieved a small pair of binoculars from his glove compartment and studied the car. It was pure government-fleet of some kind. It didn't have a yellow plate indicating it was a local, county, city, or state vehicle. It had a regular Florida plate. It could be any agency, but he had a hunch it was federal.

As Linda's car came out of the driveway and turned left past the parked car, he could see the driver turn his head away from her. Then as her car passed, he brought up his camera and snapped a picture.

At the coffee shop, Lucky filled Linda in on what he had seen and what he thought it meant.

"What would cause a federal agent to stake out the Galts, and what reason would they have to be interested in us?" asked Linda.

"I don't know," Lucky replied. "But I'm going to find out."

Chapter 47

Lucky gets another phone call

“Lucky, it’s Charlie,” said his ex-partner Charlie Young. “What the hell are you doing down there? I just got through being questioned by a guy from the Bureau. He thinks you’re involved with something shady. He told me not to talk to you, but I told him to shove it. He thinks you could be involved with some terrorists and says that Homeland Security has flagged you as a ‘person of interest.’ I told him you were the straightest guy I’d ever known, and I told him that you’re writing a book about luck and are working with people you think have been really lucky.”

“Thanks!”

“Well...he’d have none of it anyway. He asked me if I could explain how come you’ve made three deposits of thirty thousand dollars each over the past three months? Of course I couldn’t. What the hell’s going on? Have you joined up with the bad guys?”

“Not in this lifetime, Charlie...but a few interesting things are happening down here. The folks I’m working with on my book have truly been the luckiest people in the world. I’m just documenting their good fortune. I think I’ve found some of the secrets of being lucky, and you can read all about it when my book is finished. I know their success has prompted an IRS audit, and the SEC wants to talk to them about possible insider trading, but I don’t have any idea how come the FBI or Homeland Security are interested. These people are the straightest, most honest people I’ve ever met. They have a wonderful family, and I would know if they were dealing with any bad guys. They aren’t. I’m not. And, if the Feds surface, we’ll make sure they know that.”

“I trust you, Lucky,” Charlie responded, “but I found the thirty-thousand a month you’ve been depositing a little startling. What’s with that?”

“I can explain it, Charlie,” said Lucky, trying to think of an answer that would satisfy him. “They are hugely wealthy. They are intensely private. When I penetrated their screen, they agreed to cooperate with my co-author and me, and they offered us thirty thousand a month while we write the book. In exchange they have total rights to edit it to be sure I don’t reveal anything about them that they don’t want to become public. Hell, I figured that if they wanted to pay me thirty grand a month, I’d take it. And, frankly, I don’t think there is going to be anything

in the book that they wouldn't approve, so I got not nothing to lose and everything in the world to gain."

"Jesus," sighed Charlie. "You are one lucky S. O. B. You fall into retirement and get paid thirty grand a month to do what you wanted to do anyway! Man, that's lucky...but you'd better keep your guard up. The Homeland Security folks think that you and your friends might be up to something nasty. They don't know what it is, but to them it smells like possible terrorism."

Chapter 48

Drugs in the future

John and Dagne were remarkably calm as Lucky filled them in on the call from his ex-partner.

“At least it explains the stakeout,” Lucky told them.

“I think we need your help,” said Dagne. “I can handle the IRS audit with no problem. I’ve hired a former SEC attorney to help me with the SEC inquiry, but I don’t have any idea what the FBI wants with us. Could you handle that situation for us, or should I hire a criminal attorney to represent us?”

“Maybe both,” said Lucky. “I’ll handle it as far as I can take it. I want to see what we’re up against, but I’d feel better if you could get a really good attorney on retainer. I don’t want to bring him in at the beginning. To a cop, it smells bad when the suspect brings in a big-shot attorney before he knows what the problem is.”

“Well, that’s settled,” said John. “Now what would you like to talk about today?”

“I’m curious about drugs in the future. Will you talk about that?”

“Of course,” he replied. “In my time, we have very little use for recreational drugs. We’ve learned how to get the chemical stimulation we seek from our gene groups. For example, if I wanted to become stimulated or feel excited, I would simply put my ‘me’ group in charge, and that part of me can produce adrenaline and endorphins at will. If I’m not getting what I want, I merely create a virtual experience in my room that will produce the results I feel like experiencing. All of the chemicals that people ingest today for recreation simply stimulate the body to produce hormones or other chemicals that create the emotional experiences they seek.

“For example, infatuation is one of the most powerful sensations that humans can experience. Infatuation is produced by a set of chemicals that the gene group in charge of mating can release. Infatuation chemicals take over the entire body and dominate all other gene groups for the duration of the infatuation. When it happens naturally, infatuation can last for weeks or months, and one forgets about family, friends, work, beliefs, etc. We’ve learned to induce infatuation for brief periods of time. Usually we direct it at our mates to further bond the marriage, but one might occasionally induce a short period of infatuation with a media star or

someone otherwise unobtainable. We get all the drug-induced experiences we seek from our own bodies by utilizing the desired gene group and stimulating the chemical responses we want to enjoy.”

“What do you think we should be doing about our present-day drug war?” asked Lucky.

“My knowledge of your immediate future ends in December of this year. I did, however, study the history of the century after this one in preparation for living in this time-period after my mission is completed. I don’t remember anything in particular about a drug war, so it must have ended in the near future, perhaps in the way that the Visionary suggested.”

“The Visionary had a solution to the drug problem?” asked Linda.

“Yes, I read everything he wrote, and that was found among the papers that were published after his death. I suppose the only people who know much about it are historians and scholars from my time.”

“Maybe we could ask him to write about it now. We sure need some answers to the drug problem,” said Lucky.

“My mission calls for minimal interaction with the Visionary, so I won’t prompt him to write about that. But you could probably determine his thinking on the subject and write about it yourself.”

“Can you tell me what you remember of what he said?” asked Lucky.

“He likened the ‘drug war’ to the prohibition of alcohol early in the nineteenth century. Prohibition was sponsored by people who thought they should decide what other people should and shouldn’t have access to. As history informs us, Prohibition caused the creation of a huge governmental bureaucracy to fight smuggling and bootlegging. People actually drank more liquor per capita when it was prohibited. Many police and politicians were corrupted, and liquor flowed freely. When the people rose up and said, ‘Enough!’ Prohibition was repealed. The bureaucracies that were built during Prohibition quickly turned their attention to drugs so that they would have a purpose to exist. They demonized relatively harmless drugs as well as more harmful ones so they could justify their existence.”

“The Visionary said that the war on drugs was a function of bureaucracies maintaining themselves and of the arrogant attitude that bureaucrats know best about what is good for other people.

“The Visionary wrote that the war on drugs was perpetuated by the FDA bureaucracy and the pharmaceutical companies and promoted by the MDs’ monopoly on prescribing drugs. Among them they created a situation in which only criminals could supply recreational drugs. Millions of criminals were created around the world as supply was generated to meet the demand. Again, bribery and corruption flourished, and prisons around the nation were filled with ordinary people whose only crime was seeking to control their moods with recreational drugs.

“The solution, according to the Visionary, would be to allow ethical drug makers to produce safe, pure drugs which would produce the effects people had been seeking in the impure, unsafe drugs available only from the street. He recommended that these drugs be sold over the counter to adults only, similarly to alcohol and tobacco sales today, and not require approval by the FDA. These legal drugs would be offered with instructions on dosage and warnings against driving under their influence. He said that if this were done, the drug problem would virtually disappear. The criminals would be out of business. The corruption and bribery would stop, and an entire bureaucracy could be disbanded or put to work on something of greater value to the citizenry.

“The Visionary also said that there might be a few drugs that were so dangerous that even safe, pure, equivalents wouldn’t be tolerable to society. For example, it might be determined that the ‘crack’ form of cocaine was too dangerous and addictive to simulate. He suggested that users should first be warned, and then the supply could be contaminated with something devastating but potentially curable, such as anthrax, and reintroduced to the illegal marketplace. A few people might die in the process, but he predicted that far fewer people would die from poisoned drugs than currently die from gang wars, crimes by addicts, and other nasty results of the so-called Drug War. The net effect of poisoning the illegal supply would be to reduce demand to near zero and to put the remaining criminals out of business.”

“Wow!” Linda marveled. “Let’s see if I got this right: You don’t legalize criminally produced drugs; you simply allow ethical drug manufacturers to produce safe products that induce the desired effects. You don’t allow the bureaucracies of the FDA and AMA to block the plan, and the drug war is over. If criminals still offer drugs that no ethical drug maker would produce, you kill the demand by poisoning the illegal supply.”

“I can see the reason you call him a visionary. The concept sounds very simple, and I think it would work,” said Lucky. “It also does away with the tragedy of gang wars and the decimation of the young minority population.”

“I wonder if we could ever elect a leader with the vision to bring about the changes the Visionary suggests,” Dagne mused.

All four sat deep in thought, pondering her question.

Chapter 49

The Audit

The IRS audit letter had come in plenty of time for Dagne to get ready. She had prepared the forms herself and could recall every item on every line.

The IRS field agent assigned to the audit had phoned for an appointment. Dagne had tried to arrange the meeting at her office, away from home, but the field agent, a Mr. Payne, said that the audit involved the operation of the grove as well as their personal finances, and he wanted to have the meeting there.

Lucky joined Dagne in her home office, along with Mr. Payne, the auditor. To promote a more relaxed atmosphere, Lucky told Mr. Payne his reasons for attending the meeting. “I’m a retired police officer from Washington, DC,” he said. “I’m writing a book on luck, and I’ve identified the Galts as perhaps the luckiest people in the world. Everything they’ve touched has turned to gold. I’m hoping to find out if there are things that lucky people do or say or think that could help normal people get luckier. I wanted to sit in so I can write about how lucky people handle something unlucky, such as an IRS audit, and Mrs. Galt agreed.”

“You’re welcome to sit in, Mr. Louis. Mrs. Galt can bring in anyone she wants,” said Mr. Payne rather stiffly.

Lucky sat next to Dagne and across from Payne as he began his interview.

“I want to examine your investment results, Mrs. Galt. Frankly you’ve had an amazing record of investments. And, I’m also curious about your grove of trees. You’ve got quite a place here, yet there are no declarations concerning the revenues and expenses of running the grove.”

“Let’s start with the grove, Mr. Payne,” Dagne replied. “As you can see from our tax forms, we have indeed become very wealthy. We run the grove not as a business, but as a hobby, so we didn’t deduct any expenses involved with our hobby.”

“What do you do with the oranges?” asked Payne.

“We give them to the local food bank, which distributes them to the needy.”

“Why haven’t you claimed a charitable deduction for the oranges you give away?” Payne continued.

“We prefer to be conservative on our taxes, Mr. Payne. The value of the oranges we donate could be hard to quantify, so we made no charitable claim.”

“I noticed that you have many laborers working in the groves, yet you’ve claimed no deduction for payroll costs or any of the other costs of the grove.”

“Again, we view it as a hobby. The workers perform other personal services for us, and you’ll find that we pay their salaries, medical insurance, social security, and unemployment taxes, but we don’t deduct their salaries or expenses on our forms,” said Dagne.

“This is quite extraordinary, Mrs. Galt,” replied Mr. Payne. “You have failed to take advantage of any of the tax credits available to people in your position. You’ve not deducted the expenses of running the grove, you donate the oranges, and you’ve taken no charitable deductions. Would you care to explain that to me?”

“Mark it down to our own peculiar preferences, Mr. Payne. Shall we get to the forms we filed? I have thorough records to support each item of income, interest, and capital gains, and I think you will find everything to be in order.”

Lucky watched as the two went through stacks of records to support every item on the tax form. It became clear to both Mr. Payne and Lucky that there was nothing omitted, exaggerated, or in error on any line. Payne’s questions were limited to things that could be used to lower the taxes, not to increase them. Each time, Dagne said, “We prefer to be conservative, Mr. Payne. We believe in paying our full share of taxes. Clearly, if there are omissions on this form, they are deductions and claims we could have made but didn’t. I believe that is our right. It may be unusual, but it is certainly no basis for audit.”

Finally, after carefully examining the copious records, Payne could think of nothing further to ask. He thanked Dagne for her time and told her that she would get a clean bill of health on her audit and would receive a letter to that effect. Mr. Payne excused himself and left.

“You apparently overpaid your taxes by quite a lot, Dagne. The IRS has a special code for the few forms they receive in which taxpayers purposely fail to minimize their taxes,” Lucky told her. “People who don’t take the deductions to which they are entitled raise suspicions. They figure that taxpayers that take extraordinary steps to avoid an audit must have something to hide.”

“It might have been a mistake, but I didn’t want to give them any possible reason for auditing us. It appears that my strategy didn’t work.”

“They know a great deal about your finances, but I believe they’re satisfied with your thorough record keeping—and even if they’re still curious, there’s not much more they can do. I don’t think you’ll hear from them again.”

Chapter 50

Governments

After lunch, the two couples talked about the FBI probe, the newly evolving Homeland Security force, the SEC inquiry, and the IRS audit. The Galts lamented that governmental forces were impinging on their privacy.

Lucky was the least worried, since he had worked in government his entire career and felt he understood how they operated. “Once they discover they are digging a dry hole, they’ll go away and work on more important issues,” he assured them.

“How does the government work in your time, John?” asked Linda.

“Everything is very different. The need for government is much less, and official functions are quite different from what you see currently. First of all, there are no wars. Since the global government came to power, there are no sovereign nations to go to war with other nations. In the United States today, it is unimaginable that Texas would declare war on New Mexico. It’s that way around the globe in the future. The entire planet is one union of states, so there are no armies and no major conflicts.

“Education is handled by the private sector. Companies are formed to create new instructional programs. Competitions are held each year to rate the comparative quality of each program, so the instructional processes get better each year as competition forces innovation and creativity.

“Hmm...that’s an interesting concept,” Linda responded.

“All global issues are solved by global voting. Every citizen has the right and the social duty to vote. A citizen of any age can vote as soon as that individual passes qualifying tests on civic duties and obligations. All voting is done through individuals’ personal devices. Votes are counted instantly and continuously. Any individual on earth can run for election to a global office. Regional elections are held to select the best possible candidate from each region.

“If I choose to vote in a regional election, I am obliged to study each of the candidates and pass a qualifying test to assure that I know and understand what each candidate has done and promises to do. Once I am qualified on the candidates and issues, I can vote for the candidate of my choice. This continues at the global level. Perhaps eight or ten candidates might win regional

racers and be presented to the global electorate. I can go into my room and interview an avatar of each candidate. I can then begin to feel as if I know each of them personally. Then I must pass a qualifying test that assures I know enough about each candidate and the issues they support or oppose. When I am qualified, I can place my vote. This right is given to each and every person on the planet.

“Do most people vote, or is it like here, where only thirty to forty percent of the people even bother to vote, at maximum?” asked Linda.

“Virtually every person on earth seeks to be a good citizen, so voting is almost universal. People spend the time to become familiar with the issues and the candidates. It is a very personal thing. When I’ve spent time with an avatar of each candidate, getting to know them, I feel I can make an informed choice.”

“Does government operate through huge bureaucracies, like it does now?” asked Lucky.

“Bureaucracy is almost unknown in my time. Virtually all governmental efforts are done by ad hoc teams of the best possible experts from around the globe who are brought together for the life of the project and then disbanded. There are many continuing governmental processes, but the teams that perform them are subject to citizen review, and a new team replaces any team that fails to satisfy the citizens. Citizens who care enough about the issues to become qualified to vote on them will constantly evaluate performance at every level for each project.”

“Sounds great!” Lucky remarked. “Continual performance reviews by informed and qualified citizens...I can see where that would get rid of bureaucracy.”

“Do you have political parties, as we do?” asked Linda.

“No. Interest groups are constantly forming and reforming around specific issues. Citizens who care enough to become informed and qualified to vote on an issue make up the interest group for that issue. The political parties that you have today in this country are monopolists. You think you have democracy, but you are presented with just two principal candidates to choose between. The people who chose those candidates give their loyalties to a party, not to the nation. Only a fool could believe that the two candidates you can typically choose between are the nation’s best candidates for the job.

“So, would you call your government a true democracy?” asked Lucky

“In my time, we have achieved a much more effective form of democracy. Everyone has to qualify to vote by displaying a working knowledge of the candidates and the issues. Everyone is eligible to qualify. The best candidates present themselves and open themselves up to thorough examination by anyone willing to take the time to get to know them.

“Issues that are up for discussion and voting are explored and debated by the wisest of the wise, both experts on the pertinent subjects and philosophers, as well as other specialists, such as ecologists, sociologists and futurists. If you are interested in an issue, you can witness the

debates among the avatars of the wise in your own room and are free to question them if you wish. Then when you've demonstrated adequate awareness and knowledge of the issue, you are qualified to vote on it."

"That's too far out for me," said Linda. "I can't see any way we can get from where we are to where you are. We don't have the technology to inform every citizen. We don't have any way to test our citizens to qualify them to vote—and who would devise the tests? In our current state of affairs, my informed vote counts no more than the vote of an ignoramus who knows nothing about the candidates or the issues, but how would we begin to improve the situation?"

"I wouldn't worry about it. All of that will be accomplished in the Interim. In five or ten generations from now, things will begin to evolve into really fine new forms of democracy."

"I've got a couple of issues left on my list," said Lucky. "Would you talk about weapons in your time?"

"We have no guns or other weapons that are made to be used against other individuals. We have no need for them."

"I'm curious, John. In our time, you are an incredibly handsome man. Are you representative of people of the future?" asked Linda.

"Scientists in your time already know that one of the universal aspects of perceived beauty is facial symmetry. That means that the left and right sides of the face are mirror images of one another. With the importance that both sexes place on this kind of beauty, future geneticists put a high priority on making the changes necessary to assure that all children would be born with very symmetrical faces. This work will probably begin within the current century. The pictures in my history lessons showed people with symmetrical faces many hundreds of years ago. Notice that Dagne's face is almost perfectly symmetrical. Her left side is nearly a perfect a mirror image of her right side. That's one of the reasons she's so beautiful. I was immediately attracted to her because my genes find symmetry attractive, as do most people's."

"Tell us about weight control. You seem to maintain an ideal weight. How do people from your time control their weight?" asked Linda.

"It's all done for us. My implant keeps a record of every calorie I ingest and every calorie I expend. Depending on what I've programmed into my device about the weight I wish to maintain, my caloric portions are controlled to assure I remain at the weight I've chosen. If I eat more or exercise less, my device cuts down on my portion sizes or increases the workload in my exercise routines. This balance of diet and exercise is well known today, yet people become too heavy. It is clear to me that the people of today have never learned about their sage element and don't know how to use this sage knowledge to keep their gene groups in control."

"Speaking of implants," said Lucky, "how does yours work when it can't be connected to the larger grid anymore, or whatever you were describing before?"

“My implant can easily work independently of a network,” John replied. “It maintains all its independent functions, but it no longer communicates information to any type of satellite umbrella, as it would in my time.”

“Hmmm...” Lucky mused. “Must seem lonely to you in some ways, doesn’t it?”

John turned his intense gaze away and lowered his lids for a moment. “You have no idea of the culture shock. I can only feel infinitely grateful for Dagne and the children.” He glanced at Linda and then looked Lucky in the eye again. “...and now for you two, as well.”

Chapter 51

The SEC inquiry

The next day, Dagne showed Lucky a letter that had arrived from the SEC a few days earlier, informing the Galts that an inquiry had been initiated into certain stock transactions conducted during the prior two years. A meeting was requested to take place the following week, and Dagne had already contacted the SEC and arranged to meet at her own office. At Lucky's prompting, she immediately hired a noted Washington attorney, Eric Fischer, who had once been a senior executive within the SEC and specialized in SEC inquiries.

Dagne asked Fischer and Lucky to join her at the meeting with the SEC investigator, a Mr. Stockton. Lucky was to be there only as an observer, to document the interview for his book. The SEC was specifically interested in Dagne's investments in Enron, Global Crossing, Worldcom, and Adelphia. Each of these companies was being investigated for fraud or insider trading, and the SEC had been reviewing records of large stock investments in companies that looked suspicious.

Dagne and Lucky met with Fischer at her office the following week and discussed the situation before Stockton arrived, which he did about an hour later. After the introductions were completed and coffee was poured, Stockton got down to business. "Mrs. Galt, in each of these situations, you made a number of purchases of the stocks in question as they were rising. In each case, you invested between fifty and a hundred million dollars in these four stocks. According to our records, in each case you sold at or near the top and then shorted them or bought puts on them. You then rode each of the stocks down to their lowest levels. This looks as if you may have had information that wasn't available to other investors."

In preparation for the meeting, Linda and Dagne had researched each of companies in question to find any available analysts' recommendations or research reports or articles in periodicals such as *Barron's* or *The Wall Street Journal* from that period of time. Linda had prepared a report connecting each purchase to an article, analyst recommendation, or research report that recommended buying the stock. For each sale, she had included a second article, report, or recommendation that would support a sale. Dagne carefully walked Mr. Stockton

through these records, purchase-by-purchase and sale-by-sale, showing a legitimate foundation for each action she had taken.

Mr. Stockton asked a number of questions about personal relationships with key figures at the companies in question. In response, Dagne asserted that she had never met any of the figures being investigated. She explained that the Galts were very private people and did not circulate with any of the jet setters under investigation. She added that she had never taken any recommendations for buys or sells from the various brokers she dealt with.

Mr. Stockton was left with nowhere to go. He certainly had no evidence that the Galts had ever known or were known by any of the figures being investigated. The meeting was conducted smoothly and professionally overall, and Mr. Fischer never needed to speak in Dagne's defense. After examining the supporting documents and finding nothing that could be disputed, Mr. Stockton said, "Mrs. Galt, you have been extraordinarily successful in your stock investments. You bought low, watched the stocks rise, always raising your bets. You sold at the peak; you rode the stocks down to the bottom, raising your bets the entire way down. You've shown me various reports or recommendations to support your decisions. What *isn't* here is any mention of the vast number of reports or recommendations available at the same time that suggested the opposite actions. How was it that you selected not only the right stocks but also selected *exactly* the right recommendations out of a sea of information?"

Lucky glanced at Dagne, and she nodded. "Let me respond to that question, if you don't mind, Mr. Stockton," he said. "I'm a former metropolitan police detective in very good standing. Since I retired recently, I have been researching exceptionally lucky people. I wanted to find out what lucky people seem to have in common so I could write a book that would help ordinary people get luckier, if that were possible. What you say is certainly accurate. Mrs. Galt was truly very fortunate with her investments. I have discovered many other ways in which the Galts have been very fortunate. In fact, according to the research I've done, the Galts may be among the very luckiest people on earth. That's the reason they are the proposed subjects of the book I hope to write. I agree with you that unusually good luck such as this can raise suspicions, and I think you were right to check to see if there was something here beyond luck...but in my opinion as a longtime professional investigator, I'm afraid you've wasted your time. Mrs. Galt *was* extraordinarily lucky...and fortunately that is not illegal."

Stockton cleared his throat and looked a bit sheepish. "I think you may be right, Mr. Louis. I've never seen such a record of good investment decisions. Mrs. Galt, you are to be congratulated on your good fortune. I believe your part in our investigation will be over when I've made my report."

The meeting broke up quickly. Mr. Fischer had hardly said a word, but Dagne thanked him for being at her side. Dagne and Lucky returned to the grove, much relieved.

Chapter 52

Health in the future

At this point, both Lucky and Linda were beginning to run out of burning questions to ask John. All they could think of were questions arising out of their own experiences, and they felt very poorly qualified. Lucky wished there were some way he could come up with the kinds of questions that wiser men might want answered.

“Tell me about health in your time, John,” Lucky asked.

“Our health is monitored continuously by our implants and our devices. Each implant monitors everything that is going on inside the body and reports it to the device continuously. Whenever a measurement deviates from standard, the device reports the deviation to the net of computers that supervises everything. What you might call ‘expert systems’ are accessed, the best thinking of the best doctors is automatically made available to the device, and thus to you. The device tells you what to do to restore the measurement to standard. The answer may be something simple, such as to eat a particular vegetable or get more rest. If something is seriously wrong, a medicine may be prescribed.”

Linda was thoughtful for a moment and then said, “You still have your device, and it evidently still monitors your health. What will you do if it suggests that something is wrong when you know our doctors can’t do anything to help?”

“All of this discussion about health is rather hypothetical, really, because health is so good in our time that interventions are hardly ever needed. Professional athletes may need more medical care because they must keep their bodies in virtually perfect shape, but for the normal person, the standards aren’t so demanding, and medical interventions have become quite rare. If something happens to me, my device includes an extensive database it can tap for suggestions about correcting my condition, and the device itself can direct my implant to make various changes to improve my health.”

“Okay. Now I want to hear about childbirth,” asked Linda. “Has it gotten easier in your time?”

“Yes. I’ve heard your futurists speculate that as humans evolve, their brains will get bigger and their heads larger. That hasn’t happened. As you can see from looking at me, heads

are still of similar proportion to those of people today. Brains don't need to be larger because we have found ways to increase the effective use of the brains we have. The changes that have made childbirth easier are both genetic and psychological changes in women in our time. The structure of the female body has evolved to make the bones of the hips wider on average, so birth is simple and easy compared to today. Because of these changes and other health improvements, babies are almost all full-term. We have a very low incidence of stillborn babies...they are almost always normal and healthy."

"I'm so glad to hear that!" Linda exclaimed.

"So am I," added Lucky. "That would make life much easier for many couples these days."

"Can you tell us about dating, romance, and marriage in your time?" asked Linda.

Chapter 53

The future of dating, romance, and marriage

“Finding an ideal mate is very easy in my time,” said John. “Our devices know everything about us. Mine knows how often each of my gene groups is controlling my phenotype. It knows my personality, my habits, my interests, and the women I find particularly attractive. If I had remained in my time, when I reached the age of marriage and wish to find a mate, my device would begin communicating with the devices of every eligible female I met or came in contact with. If our two devices sensed a very high level of compatibility, my device would ask me how attractive I found a particular woman to be. Her device would do the same. If I found the woman to be really dazzling and she found me to be really desirable as well, a match would have been made. One or the other of us would initiate contact, and we would begin to date. If infatuation ensued for both parties, we would spend more and more time together. However, no marriage would be considered until infatuation waned for both of us. Infatuation robs people of judgment, reason, and the ability to make wise decisions. It is a wonderfully fun time, though, and infatuation is highly prized.”

“If only we had a system like that now,” Linda said, “it would sure save an awful lot of people years of misery...or even lifetimes...!”

“Only when reason has been restored to both people is marriage seriously considered. If both parties are very positive about the prospect of marriage, the devices will report to each other, and then they will tell us that a marriage proposal is desired and would be accepted. This process has been developed and perfected for hundreds of years. It is my understanding that primitive forms of device matching will be perfected and available in this century. As I’m sure you’re aware, right now computer dating services are becoming more popular than any other way of meeting, particularly in urban areas. Perhaps Andy and Lori will have available some primitive form of device that will aid them in finding partners when they are ready. If it doesn’t happen that soon, I feel sure that their children will have such aids.”

Linda laughed “Well, how did your device help you to fall in love with Dagne, since she doesn’t have one?”

John thought for a moment and smiled warmly. “I fell in love in what you’d probably call the old-fashioned way. Her beauty matched my imprinting, her charm and grace led to my infatuation, and her wit, brains, and personality led to my proposal. Her children were a wonderful added bonus, but I still can’t imagine anyone more ideal for me.” He looked at Lucky with an inscrutable expression. “I guess it was just luck.”

Chapter 54

Lucky meets with the FBI

Two weeks later, the FBI was apparently still on the Galts' trail. The stakeouts had continued, and Lucky alerted John and Dagne to the possibility that their phones might be tapped. A phone tap wouldn't reveal anything to anyone because Dagne seldom used the phone except to deal with her bond investments. John never used the phone.

Lucky and Linda were very careful in their use of the telephones, and neither would ever say anything to anyone that might endanger the family or the mission. When Lucky used the phone, it was mostly to chat with friends and to report that he was progressing well with the book project. He never revealed anything specific because the book he was really writing was far different from the book his friends thought he was writing.

With the IRS audit and the SEC inquiry out of the way, Lucky felt it was time to deal with the FBI. He called the Tampa office and asked to speak to the Special Agent in Charge. An agent who was given the call then asked Lucky what he wanted to talk to the SAC about. Lucky introduced himself and explained that he was a recently retired police detective and that he had determined that either he or his friends were the subject of some kind of investigation. He mentioned the stakeout and the questioning of Essie and other clues he had noticed.

"I don't know what's going on, but if I'm a suspect in anything, or if any of my friends or associates are, I want to know who's interested in us and the reasons for it." Lucky was then transferred to the SAC, introduced himself, and made the same request.

"I am aware of the case, sir," the man replied, "and if you want to talk to us, we will be happy to talk to you. I'm going to put you on hold for a minute or so. I need to call someone else so we can schedule an appointment."

After several minutes the SAC finally came back on the line. "The agent in charge of the case can be in my office by tomorrow at two o'clock. Can you meet with us then?"

Lucky replied, "I'll be there," and confirmed the address.

The next day Lucky was ushered into the office of the SAC of the Tampa bureau, an agent named Alberts. He introduced himself, and Alberts introduced Agent Headstrom from FBI headquarters in DC.

Lucky filled in the men regarding his quest for lucky people, his intention to write a book, and his discovery of the Galts as the luckiest people he had found in his search. He explained that Linda Sue Brown was his writing partner on the project. He told them that he had recognized the signs of an investigation and hoped that by discussing it they could resolve any questions.

He ended his overture, saying, "I've come to know the Galts very well over the past several months, and I can see no basis for any criminal investigation. I'd like to know what's going on."

Headstrom listened carefully, and when Lucky was done, he replied, "We've learned that you and Ms. Brown have each deposited thirty thousand dollars in your bank accounts in each of the past three months. How do you explain that?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Galt are very rich people who are also very private. They wish to protect their children and themselves from the dangers that extreme wealth brings. When we approached them about writing a book about their extraordinary luck, they offered us their cooperation and a monthly retainer if we would allow them to edit the book when it's finished and take out anything they thought might identify them or put them or their children in danger. Linda and I felt that the lavish fees were excessive, but we were willing to give up a portion of our artistic freedom for the money and also for their full cooperation."

"What have they told you about the source of their money?" Headstrom asked.

"I had already investigated them before approaching them about the book. Before they met and married, each of them had won a lottery. That is an extraordinary piece of luck in and of itself, but it also gave them something in common and an equal financial basis for a relationship. Mrs. Galt then invested their money in the stock market. She bought when things were going up, sold at the peak, and shorted stocks all the way down. Again, she was extraordinarily lucky. That's the reason we're so interested in them for our book."

"Do you believe them? We're aware of your reputation as a decorated police officer and an excellent detective. Didn't you find all this a little suspicious?"

"At first I was highly suspicious, of course. I thought they might have found a way to rig the lottery. Well, maybe that would be possible for one lottery, but they each won a different type of lottery. I can't imagine how they could have fixed two entirely separate lotteries, can you? Then Linda and I tried to think of how someone could rig the stock market or get three unrelated brokers to cheat for them. It just seemed impossible, and they didn't seem to know anyone who had inside information, either. At this point, we have stopped feeling suspicious at all because we just can't find a reasonable cause for suspicion. Now that we've gotten to know them very well, we're convinced that they are highly intelligent, straight, honest, and decent people who have just been unbelievably lucky."

“If I could convince you that they are not what they seem and that they are very dangerous people, would you be willing to work with us on the inside to help your country?”

“Yes, of course,” said Lucky, “but it’ll be hard to convince me. I believe them.”

“Okay, I’ll fill you in what we know. You and Ms. Brown are in a position to work undercover for us on this case. If you work with us, we can keep you out of trouble. If you don’t work with us, you’re going to be arrested right along with them on charges of terrorism and treason.”

“Terrorism?” Lucky shouted. “How do you figure they are terrorists?”

“They must be very crafty if they have you fooled. Homeland Security, the department that’s being formed to search out terrorists inside America’s borders, has been looking into large sums of money being laundered and funneled into this country to fund terrorist cells. We think the Galts are going to be the central bank for cells in this country. To function as a central bank for terrorist cells, they had to launder money to make it look legal. If they just transferred a billion dollars into US banks from Saudi Arabia or other Middle Eastern states, Homeland Security would spot it and freeze it.”

“So how did the lottery connection work?”

“We think the Galts brought money into the country in increments. We think they paid lottery winners to buy their tickets for full price so the winners would get the money free of taxes. Then the Galts cashed in the tickets and paid the taxes. That effectively laundered the money and made it appear to be legit. Then we think they put hundreds of millions of dollars into investment accounts and bribed stockbrokers to give them paper records of trades that would explain how the money got into the account. The paper records were probably all faked, after the fact, to account for the money they put into the accounts. We’ve looked at the personal accounts of the brokers they dealt with. Since each of them began dealing with the Galts, they have become very rich men. Each is worth millions.

Lucky considered what the man was laying out, but he said nothing.

“We don’t believe in luck like you do, Lucky. We think our explanation makes a lot more sense. Jesus, have you seen their investment records? Every investment was a winner. It’s just not possible. There had to be another explanation, and we think we’ve found it. We can’t prove it yet because we wouldn’t be able to determine who really bought the lottery tickets and got the entire amount from them without ever paying taxes. And the brokers won’t budge—they all claim the records haven’t been fudged and the investment bets were dead on. They explain their sudden wealth as coming from imitating whatever Mrs. Galt did, once they saw how unerringly successful she was. I can understand why they won’t admit anything. They’d have to give up their bribes and be kicked out of the investment profession and would likely go to prison.”

“Unbelievable,” said Lucky. “What else do you have besides suspicions? Do you have any hard evidence?”

“Yeah,” said Headstrom, “we know this John Galt is an illegal alien. He’s probably from the Middle East somewhere. We know his papers are phony. There is no record of this guy anywhere in the United States—being born, schooled, working, anything. We think he arranged for phony papers, sneaked into the country, and has been playing the role of a rich, reclusive American ever since. We know they overpaid their taxes. People think this will keep the IRS off their backs, but it just raises suspicion.

“We know they have a private army of deaf people and what looks to be a better security layout than we have in this building. That suggests that they have something major to hide. We know they’re doing something fishy with computers. Their home network was caught running a computer program on the supercomputer at Lawrence Livermore National Labs. The program had something to do with projecting the weather if the tilt of the earth were changed. Our guy figures that maybe the Galts have a nuclear device or something to screw up weather. We can’t make hide nor hair of it really, but it’s hard evidence that something strange is going on. We’re about ready to pull them in and give them the third degree. We’ve got DNA tests that can tell us where this guy Galt really came from.”

“Holy Mother!” Lucky exclaimed. “All that makes sense. I’ve been sucked in. They’ve had me bamboozled. Now that I know what’s really going on, I can try to figure out what the hell they’re up to. I suppose they are paying us and pretending to help with our writing to keep us from exposing their money laundering. How can I help you guys?”

“I’m glad you want to help. We’ve heard you are a hell of a detective. I couldn’t think of anybody better equipped to go under cover for us, and you’re already on the inside. Can you trust Ms. Brown, or do you want to keep her in the dark? We get the impression that you two are intimately involved.”

“I’ll keep her in the dark, but I’ll still need her help. I do trust her completely, but I want to protect her, too. We’re probably going to end up married. She can be a big help, even if she doesn’t really know what I’m doing for you. She is very close to Mrs. Galt.”

“Sounds okay.”

Lucky thought for another moment. “I want minimum contact with you guys. Don’t call me. It’s too dangerous. I’ll call you. And please pull your surveillance. I noticed it; they’ll notice it. With me on the inside, you don’t need anybody peeking over the fence.”

“Done,” said Alberts. “I’ll keep everybody clear.”

“I want some time to figure this out. Then I’ll let you know what I need. Who’ll be my contact? I only want to have one guy to meet with, and we meet in a public place, like a park,” Lucky told them, making it up as he went along.

“Alberts will be your contact,” said Headstrom.

“How about next Thursday at the automobile museum on North Trail. I can go out for a haircut. How’s two o’clock?”

“I’ll be there. Be ready with a list of whatever you need to make this work. If we’re correct, we might be right in the nerve center of the terrorists in the country. They’ve laundered a billion dollars, net. That’ll buy a lot of weapons.”

The meeting ended, and a shaken Lucky returned to his car.

Chapter 55

Lucky and Linda question the story

Lucky hadn't wanted to worry the Galts, so he hadn't told them he was going to meet the FBI. When he returned to the grove, the four adults had a quiet dinner. Lucky excused himself quickly after eating, claiming he was eager to get back to his writing. Linda followed soon after and joined him in his room.

"What's going on with you?" asked Linda. "You had a meeting with the FBI this afternoon, and you didn't mention it at dinner at all. What happened?"

"Either they have everything all screwed up, or we've been taken in by a bunch of lies. I wanted time to think it over and talk to you about it," said Lucky.

Lucky told Linda the whole FBI theory. Neither of them fully understood money laundering, but for the first time, they could see an alternative explanation for the double lottery wins and the incredible performance in the stock market.

"You mean that terrorists brought over a billion dollars into the country and paid taxes on it, plus bribes to the stock brokers, so they could show a clean record for the funds?" asked Linda.

"That's the FBI theory. I think we know the real answer, but the FBI explanation is a lot simpler and actually more believable than the man-from-the-future scenario that John and Dagne tell us. Let's check our proofs," Lucky suggested. "We've seen and heard the device, but they could have fooled us with that. We don't know what those weird symbols are all about. Maybe they're Arabic or something. We heard the device respond in a strange tongue, but I suppose it could have been some code that the terrorists use."

"What about the newspaper headline for the next day's paper?" asked Linda. "How could they fake that?"

"I don't know. It sure convinced me. On the other hand, that story was probably already written the day before. Maybe somehow Dagne knew the writer or knew the story was going to appear."

"What about all the stories about the future? They sounded so real."

“I don’t know.” Lucky felt confused and frustrated, but his gut feeling about the Galts won him over. “I’d bet my life that John and Dagne are who they say they are. My thirty years of police experience have taught me to trust my instincts.”

“The most convincing thing for me is John’s anatomy,” said Linda. “How could they have faked that?”

“We never took a really good look at that, Linda. I think we were both so shocked, we didn’t think to touch it or look for scars or to see if it was faked, like special effects for a movie. What if John was originally a woman and had some kind of strange sex-change operation? What if there is a flap over female genitals? What if he was an ordinary male and had some type of surgery to make him look that way? Would we have noticed?”

“But why fake all that if they’re just ordinary terrorists? Why do that when they didn’t even know we would be in the picture at all or ask to see it until right before we saw him naked? I’d bet anything that John and Dagne are telling the truth,” said Linda. “Unfortunately, we can’t really ask them now to show us again.”

“What if you ask Dagne if you can have sex with John?” Lucky suggested. “You know I’ve been feeling jealous about the idea, but I’ve been extremely curious, too. It would absolutely convince us both, and it would unmask John if he’s just a freak from our own time.”

“You’re asking me to have sex with John? You want me to get final proof that John is from the future? You want to use me as a tool to further your investigation? Is that what I’m hearing?”

“Whoa, not so many questions all at once, but yes, I’m using you in a way—at least so both of us can find out what’s driving us nuts with curiosity. I wouldn’t want you to do it if you really didn’t want to, though.”

“Would you still love me if I did that for you? Could you handle it?”

“Yes, I could handle it. I would still love you, and I wouldn’t be jealous—not of John.”

After a few moments of consideration, Linda said, “Okay, I’ll do it.”

Linda returned to the living room to find Dagne reading a book. They talked, and Linda discovered that Dagne had indeed spoken with John about the idea, and he was definitely interested. Dagne said that it was still fine with her, and she would tell John that Linda was interested, too.

Later, Dagne told her that John would knock on her door in an hour. Linda returned to her room, showered, shaved her legs, blew a puff of perfume from her atomizer and walked through the puff, put on her most attractive nightgown and then got in bed to wait for John.

The next morning, Linda walked into Lucky's room. "Lucky, the FBI has got it wrong. John is truly who he says he is. I absolutely guarantee it! No man from our time is even remotely like John, and none of it could possibly be faked. He is really incredible."

"I realize that it was wrong to ask you to have sex with him just to check him out...but thank you for telling me. I don't think I really need to hear any more details about how amazing he is, though. I hope this doesn't mean that you won't want to be with me anymore."

"You're forgiven...and I don't want to do it again. It was a bit too much for me. But all in all, it was certainly an experience I will never forget. By the way, there's some good in this for you, or rather me...or both of us. I'm now multi-orgasmic. You'll see tonight!"

Chapter 56

The plot thickens

After breakfast, when the children were at their computers doing their schoolwork, Lucky convened the foursome in the study for a meeting. Lucky filled in John and Dagne on his meeting with the FBI and explained the FBI's theory. Dagne and John were shocked to know that the agency knew so much about them.

John was visibly shaken. "Would it be possible to stall them until after December tenth? I must be available to meet with the Visionary. I can't have them take me in for questioning. If they took fingerprints or a DNA sample or drew blood or saw me naked, I'd be detained, and my mission would be compromised."

"Priority One," said Lucky, "must be to keep them away from you until after December tenth. I'm sure I can arrange that...I just have to work out a detailed game plan. Were you planning to disappear on the tenth?"

"Yes," John insisted, "particularly now that I know the authorities know so much about us."

"Okay, I'll build my strategy around a December tenth end-date. Let me work on it today, and then let's review it this afternoon and see if you can find any holes in it."

"What do you plan to do about the staff, the house, and the grove?" asked Linda.

"We've already told Essie and the other staff that we are moving out of the country in December. We've promised to deed the house and grove over to a foundation for the deaf that we will fund and they will run. They are gearing up to take over the house, augment the computer network, and expand their contract computer programming work into a national enterprise. They also plan to further develop their school for deaf children. They are very excited about it and feel they can be models to inspire hearing-impaired people everywhere. If you need their help as part of your plan, I'm sure they will do anything we ask of them, as long as it's legal."

That afternoon the four met again while the children were at recess with the other home-schoolers. Lucky showed them two different schedules. First he went over the fake schedule he was going to show to the FBI. With everyone's help, the fake schedule was shaped and modified

until they all believed it would be convincing. When they had finished with the FBI schedule, the team did the same with their own, real schedule. By dinnertime they were finished with both, and Lucky knew what he needed to request from Alberts in his meeting the following Thursday.

Chapter 57

Lucky meets with Alberts

Lucky arrived at the car museum at the appointed hour, found a bench, and waited for Alberts to find him. Alberts came in wearing shorts and Hawaiian shirt, carrying a camera case, and looking like a typical tourist, which wasn't especially difficult since he was so nondescript looking to begin with. He found the bench where Lucky was sitting and sat at the other end as though the two were strangers.

“Alberts, you guys were right! I've been such a sucker. The Galts really had us fooled. I sneaked onto Galt's computer and turned on the file-sharing utility. Now I can access his computer on my own PC and look at any files he has without him knowing about it. I scanned through his files last night and found an e-mail that he sent to somebody name Abdulla. The e-mail contains a schedule. I made a copy for you.”

He handed Alberts a printout that read:

Dear Abdulla,

Our grove is blooming heartily. Thanks to you, we will enrich our land and protect our grove from winter's threats.

On December 12 and 13 we expect to receive one truckload each day of fertilizer to enrich our soil further. Your drivers will return to you immediately after the delivery.

On December 16 we expect you to send a truck with fuel oil for our grove heaters. We must protect our crop from possible winter freezes. The driver will return immediately.

On December 17 we expect the fourth truck, which we will use to return to you the first of our bountiful crop. The driver will return immediately.

On December 18 we expect four new drivers who will help us prepare for the holiday festivities.

On December 20, we will send the trucks and drivers back to their homes so they may prepare to celebrate in a new way the miracle of Christmas Day.

Tell everyone at home that we expect this to be the best Christmas ever.

“Jesus, Lucky!” said Alberts. “I think you’ve hit the mother lode. How do you read this?”

“I think it’s pretty clear. This guy Abdullah is going to send four trucks over four days, filled with ammonium nitrate fertilizer and fuel oil. Of course, that’s what Timothy McVeigh used to blow up the building in Oklahoma City. On the eighteenth, the four members of the cell arrive to mix the stuff up and make the four trucks into bombs. On the twentieth, the trucks leave for various destinations and blow up four different targets on Christmas Day.”

“That’s what it sounds like to me, too. Man, this is big. Wait ’til headquarters gets a load of this. They’ll be all over Galt’s place like ants on honey.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of,” said Lucky. “I don’t think anybody should do anything until after the cell members arrive on the eighteenth of December. Until then, you’ve got nothing but trucks, fertilizer that’s needed for the grove, oil that’s needed for the heaters, and the Galts. If you wait until the twentieth, you can catch the trucks full of the fertilizer and oil mixed into bombs, the four cell members, and the Galts. It’ll be the biggest story of the year. Think of the headline: *‘THE FBI SAVES CHRISTMAS.’*”

“We can’t just let them build four huge bombs in the middle of Sarasota County,” said Alberts.

“They aren’t going to explode them here,” Lucky told him. “That doesn’t get them anything. On the nineteenth you can set up a blockade around the whole grove. There are two entrances. Block each one so tires are destroyed and the trucks can’t get out. On the twentieth, you wait for the first truck to try to leave, and then you come down on them like gangbusters, arrest the drivers, arrest the Galts, and save Christmas. Hell, you can bring the press if you want.”

“I’ll get this up to headquarters and see what they say. Now, what do you need?”

“I don’t need anything. Now that I know what’s really going on, my book on luck is a dead end. I’m going to get Linda Sue and move out of there,” said Lucky.

“Oh, Lucky,” Alberts said, “You’ve got to stay on the inside. We’re on top of the biggest terrorist bust in the country. You’ve gotta stay. We couldn’t get anyone else inside right away, and we have to know what’s happening.”

“I’m retired, Alberts,” said Lucky. “I’ve given my time as a soldier and a cop. I came down here to enjoy the sun and live out my golden years.”

“Just stay until December, man. Do this for your country,” Alberts pleaded. “Think how you’d feel on Christmas day if these guys blow up a bunch of people and you could have stopped it!”

Lucky waited a couple of beats and replied, “Okay. I’ll stay a while...but if it gets hairy, I’m out of there. I’ll see if I can get Linda to leave, though. She’s a civilian, and I can’t risk telling her what’s going on here.”

“Okay. Get Linda out. We’ll debrief her and find out what we can about the Galts. Maybe she knows something that’ll help us. In the meantime, what do you need from us?”

“The Galts keep asking questions about my days as a detective. They want to know about criminals I’ve known and put away. They gave me some long song and dance about an American woman who married a Saudi, gave up her U.S. citizenship and became a Saudi citizen. Now her husband is dead, and she supposedly got smuggled back into the States, and the State Department won’t give her a U.S. passport. Some story about her husband being a prince in the Saudi Royal Family and that the politics are too difficult. They keep asking if I know someone in DC who can help their friend get a passport that will pass all of the security checks. If I’m going to stay, I should do that. I’d like to bring a guy in that I know I can trust,” said Lucky.

“We can do that. We can put one of our guys in there, undercover.”

“No offense, Alberts, but if I’m going to be sitting in the middle of this powder keg, I want somebody I can trust doing the leg work for me. When I first approached the Galts, they checked me out right down to my underwear size. I can’t take a chance on them finding out the guy I recommend is a cop or a Fed.”

“You think you can find some criminal you can trust?” asked Alberts. “That sounds crazy to me, Lucky.”

“I know a guy who’s in prison right now, halfway through a fifteen-year bad rap. I trust this guy. Check him out. You’ll find he’s a straight arrow. I want you to parole him to my custody. If he does what I tell him and keeps us informed, he can help us find any other people who might be in the cell. His name is Peter Peterson. He’s at Western Correctional in Cresaptown.”

“I’ll see what I can do, Lucky. In the meantime, I’ve got a couple of bugs for you to plant. Do you think you can put them in safely? I want to hear what’s going on in there.”

“As I think you’re already aware, they’ve got security that won’t quit, Alberts. They sweep the house daily. They’d catch anything we installed, and they’d know I put them in. I can’t take that chance. I can snoop, but that’s about it,” said Lucky.

“When can we meet next?” asked Alberts.

“Let’s meet on Fridays. I always go out on Friday to do personal errands, so they won’t be suspicious. Let’s meet here again on November first at two o’clock.”

“Good luck, man. And, thanks. You’re doing the right thing.”

“I know,” Lucky told him, with tongue firmly planted in cheek.

Chapter 58

Hurry up and wait

With Lucky holding off the Feds, the foursome felt relatively safe for the moment. They began executing their plan. Dagne ordered three Quonset huts to be delivered to the ranch and assembled by the staff. By paying premium prices and a hurry-up bonus, she got the delivery date she asked for. Meanwhile, Lucky traded in his car for a new conversion van. The van could hold six plus the driver, had extra-dark window tinting, and could sleep two if necessary.

Linda and Lucky worked on finishing their book, and John and Dagne edited each chapter as it was finished. Their deadline was December third.

Dagne instructed the brokerage houses to sell her municipal bonds and convert everything in her account to cash. She made travel plans for a supposed vacation trip. She would leave Monday and briefly visit a number of islands that had offshore banks and then end her trip in Switzerland.

John had new laptops delivered to the house and, after making CDs of all the files they needed, used a shredder program to destroy anything sensitive on the hard drives in the household desktop computers. Lucky and Linda transferred their manuscripts over to their new laptops, and then shredded the information on their desktop computers. From then on, all writing would be done on the laptops and not on computers connected to the network. They took no chances that anyone could hack into the network and read the book manuscript.

Chapter 59

Alberts, Headstrom, and the Homeland Security Department

Alberts had forwarded his findings to Headstrom, and Headstrom had alerted the newly formed Homeland Security department. Meetings were held, memos flew back and forth, and everyone wanted a piece of the action. The resulting infighting and political land-grab occupied everyone for the next week.

FBI agents and people from Homeland Security descended on the Western Correctional Institution to find out all about Peter Peterson. They were astounded by what they learned. The warden at WCI reported that Peter the Good, as he was called, was a model prisoner and one of the most respected convicts in the facility. Peterson had brought peace and harmony to the prison population almost from his arrival. Presently he was conducting classes for the inmates on ethics, integrity, and honesty in dealing with other criminals. Gangs dissolved, convicts worked together as interracial teams, and except for the hardest of the hard guys, the prison staff had almost none of the disciplinary problems that plague other prisons.

With political pressure from the FBI and homeland security, the Governor of Maryland issued a parole order for Peterson, and he was released into the custody of the FBI. Western Correctional hated to see him go.

Chapter 60

Lucky meets with Alberts again

At the car museum on November first, Lucky asked Alberts to join him in the van. Lucky then drove around town as he explained that security had been tightened even further at the grove, and he couldn't be sure that he wasn't being watched.

"We've gotten Peterson out of WCI," said Alberts. "He's being paroled in your custody. We didn't tell him anything. We'll turn him over to you on the sixth. You play it any way you want with Peterson and the Galts. All he knows is that if he cooperates and helps us on this case, he'll be free and not on parole...and if he does everything you ask, his record could even be expunged. Can you meet with him on the sixth?"

"Yes." said Lucky. "Bring him to the museum on the sixth at ten in the morning, and I'll find an excuse to get away from the grove. Then you and I'll meet again on the eighth. I'll have my van parked at the discount store on Cattlemen Road. I'll leave it open. While I'm in the store, you get in the van. I'll be there at two.

"Got it," said Alberts. "What about Linda Brown. Is she coming out?"

"No," said Lucky. "I can't tell her what's happening. She's a civilian, and I can't be sure she wouldn't slip up accidentally. I tried to convince her to go without alarming her, but she's so involved with the book, she won't leave the work or me."

"Okay, for now," said Alberts. "Headquarters is worried about her because she is a civilian. They want her out of there so they can debrief her. I'm sure she knows some things about the Galts that might help us work the case while you're on the inside."

"I know. I don't want her in danger, either. I'll keep working on it."

Chapter 61

Lucky and Peter the Good

Lucky picked up Peterson on the morning of the sixth, and they drove around in the van while Lucky briefed him.

“What the hell’s going on, Lucky? They paroled me into your custody, but nobody told me squat. I hope you don’t think I’m going to work your side or give anybody up. You know me, man, I’m not like that.”

“Relax, Peter,” said Lucky, “I know you got a bum rap on the possession thing. I tried to get you cut loose at the time, but the DA wouldn’t give it up. At the moment I have some friends in the same situation. The Feds think they’re dirty and are going to come down on them hard. They’re really clean as a whistle, but they can’t stand up to close scrutiny for other reasons. I’m trying to help them disappear. I need a bunch of things from your side of the law, and if you help me, you’ll be free and rich and your record will be wiped clean.”

“Rich?” asked Peter. “What do you mean, rich?”

“My friends are willing to pay you one million dollars up front. If you deliver everything we need, you get four million dollars of clean money in a Cayman Islands bank account. How does that sound?”

“Tell me what you need, and I’ll tell you how it sounds,” said Peter.

Lucky handed him a manila envelope. “There is a list inside of everything we need and the precise schedule on which we need it. Read it carefully, and tell me what you can do and what you can’t.”

“Okay,” Peter agreed. He pulled out the list of items and skimmed it. “I know a guy who can get the passports. Are these the pictures and all the information?”

“Everything’s there,” said Lucky

“Yep,” said Peter, “I can also arrange for the trucks and drivers. I’ll make sure they’re heavily insured.”

“What about the appropriate corpses?” Lucky asked, pointing to an item on the list.

“I can get dead bodies. I can’t guarantee the ages, but I think we can get close. Do you want them fresh, or can they be frozen?”

“Formerly fresh, then frozen to keep them that way.”

“Jesus, Lucky,” said Peter, as he continued down the list. “You’re asking for a lot of C4. I’m not going to ask you what you’re going to do with that, but you could make a big hole in something.”

“Yep, but no one will get killed.”

“This last thing, I can arrange that, too. I know an ex–army ranger who did this kind of stuff until he was thrown out for dealing coke.”

“So you can do it all, keep everything on schedule, and keep our Fed friends in the dark?”

“Is anyone going to get hurt when this goes down?” asked Peter.

“That’s the beauty of this operation, Peter. No one gets hurt. The Feds look like heroes, you become a hero, and my friends and I disappear. When you read about this one in the newspaper, you’ll laugh your ass off. And while you’re laughing, you have the pass code to four million bucks. You’ll be out of prison with a clean record. Can you do your end and keep quiet about it?”

“For a million down and four at the end, you get the most complete silence you ever heard. I might just give up my career and retire to a beach somewhere.”

Chapter 62

Meanwhile, up in the air

True to their word, the federal agents dropped all ground surveillance, at least the obvious stuff that had been so easy for Lucky to spot. At a distance, however, the surveillance was intensified. From the top of nearby cell phone towers, remote controlled cameras and remotely operated listening devices were scanning the grove continuously.

The sky above the grove had always contained a fair amount of air traffic. Planes landing or departing the Bradenton-Sarasota Airport had flown over the area for years. Small planes landing or departing the local Vandenburg Airport routinely flew over, too. Student pilots also used the surrounding area, far from the populated coast, to fly training maneuvers.

Adding to the normal amount of air traffic, federal agents now began a comprehensive program of aerial surveillance of the Galt grove and the surrounding roads.

On the eighth of December, Lucky came out of the discount store and climbed into his van. Alberts was inside, sitting in the back. As they drove, Alberts filled in Lucky on what was happening on the outside.

“We’ve been trying to get authorization to freeze the Galts’ assets. Now that we know it’s terrorist funding, we ought to be able to freeze it, but you wouldn’t believe the bureaucratic quagmire that’s involved. Every part of the soon-to-become Homeland Security Department wants to be involved in this deal. It just means meetings, memos, and infighting. I think we’ll get our authorization next week, if we’re lucky.”

“Good luck on getting everybody onboard.”

“What’s happening on your end?” asked Alberts.

“Security has been tightened even more. I think your stakeout alerted them that they’re being watched. The security teams are touring all the roads around the grove, looking for any signs of surveillance. You had better keep your guys far away from the grove area or they’ll be spotted.”

“We don’t have any more on-ground surveillance. We’ve got phone taps, and we’re working on hacking their network. We’re doing photo surveillance from the air, and we’ve got remote cameras at a distance and listening devices, but so far we’ve heard nothing.

“I can’t look through Galt’s computer anymore. His hard drive has been overwritten, and there’s nothing there. I don’t know whether he suspects I’ve had access or whether he’s just being careful. Everything he had on the computer must be on his laptop, and it’s no longer on the network.”

Alberts looked disappointed.

“I do know one other thing that’s interesting,” added Lucky. “The orchard staff told me they’re building a cement base for three Quonset huts, right in the middle of the orchard. They’ve been told the buildings are to house orchard equipment and fertilizer trucks.”

“We’ve seen them working on that from the air. We’re guessing they want to keep the trucks inside and out of sight when they come. Do you think the deaf people are in on what’s going on?” asked Alberts.

“No. I’m sure they’re not. Linda and I have been told to finish the book manuscript right away and move out by mid December. The staff members will be going on an all-expenses-paid cruise, early on December eighteenth, as a sort of Christmas bonus. They are very excited about it. I’ve probed many of them. I’m sure they aren’t involved.”

“We’re certainly fortunate to have you on the inside, Lucky. I guess they call you ‘Lucky’ for good reason.”

Chapter 63

Dagne takes a vacation

Dagne waved goodbye to Lucky, Linda, John, and the children as she set off for her whirlwind trip. She checked her itinerary one more time. Everything was set. The itinerary was an unusual assortment of stops. Some were normal tourist stops, like the Cayman Islands and Switzerland. The other tourist spots—especially Damascus and Cairo—were much less often visited by vacationers. Her appointments were set and confirmed in advance. With luck she would be able to open accounts in several cities and get back in three days.

While Dagne was gone, a steady stream of trucks entered the grove. The first were bulldozers for building an access road into the center of the grove for the heavy equipment that would follow. Then came cement trucks so the staff could lay a foundation for three buildings. Following those, seven trucks arrived, carrying prefabricated parts for the Quonset huts. Following simple instructions and using a rented crane, the orchard staff assembled the buildings quickly and efficiently. The work was so routine looking that the outside observers didn't notice when one of the team working on the roof used a steel cutting saw to cut a thin line down the center of the section that would become the mixing area. A fellow working with him quickly filled in the new gap with pitch to keep rain from seeping in.

Chapter 64

The Galts edit

Lucky and Linda had been writing the book as they went along, so the final writing phase simply required tying all the pieces together. With their first draft printed out, they handed copies to John and Dagne and waited anxiously as they read them.

“Remember, this is my first try at writing a novel,” Lucky reminded him, with the normal amount of nervousness he figured any writer must feel when his work is being read for the first time.

Each wielding a red pen, John and Dagne worked energetically on the manuscript. In spite of themselves, Lucky felt uneasy as he saw them strike whole paragraphs and add sentences.

“I can’t watch this,” he told Linda as he excused himself from the editing session.

When the Galts were finished, the authors repaired to their rooms and both felt a little ill as they turned page after page filled with red pen marks. Lucky walked away until Linda called him back.

“Look here, on page twenty-four...they took out all the good stuff,” Linda squawked.

Lucky grabbed the manuscript she held out to him and read the deletions.

“Wait until you see what they did with Chapter Forty-three,” Linda told him. “I don’t see any danger to the future from explaining a little about time travel.”

“They’ve taken out simple words here and replaced them with bigger words. Some of these words I’m going to have to look up in the dictionary,” Lucky admitted.

“Well,” said Linda, “here they’ve made it better, at least. Neither one of them may be a fiction writer, but I think they’ve added some clarity, as well as making it a little harder to read. I think they’re writing it for a more highly educated audience than we planned. I don’t know whether that is going to work for a novel like this.”

“They don’t care how many people read it,” said Lucky. “John told me he was really only interested in reaching people like linguists, rocket scientists, and futurists. There is no way this is going to reach a mass audience.”

Grumbling, mumbling, whining, and complaining, the two first-time novelists worked through the next few days trying to smooth out the changes and reclaim greater ownership of their book.

Chapter 65

Preparing to meet with the Visionary

Lucky knew that John and Dagne had begun laying the groundwork some time before their hoped-for meeting with the Visionary. Dagne had joined the community country club where the Visionary and his wife lived and played tennis. She then joined the ladies' tennis team and had begun to cultivate a social relationship with the Visionary's wife.

John had e-mailed the Visionary some time before, expressing interest in his proposed thruster-engine project. The Visionary seemed quite willing to talk about his ideas, and the e-mails grew in number as the two traded their thoughts. It was a natural progression of events when John suggested that the two meet to get better acquainted to advance their joint interest.

John proposed that they meet on Monday, December ninth, at ten in the morning. The Visionary responded that ten was difficult because he had a haircut scheduled, but he suggested that one o'clock would be fine, or perhaps they could lunch together at his club at noon.

John e-mailed back, explaining that he wanted to bring a friend named Lucky Louis to the meeting because Louis was also very interested in the thruster idea and wanted to help John to disseminate the information throughout the scientific community in any way he could. He wrote *...but Louis has an airplane to catch and can't meet any later than ten. May I please prevail upon your generosity to reschedule the haircut and meet with us at ten? I realize it is an imposition and a lot to ask, but the meeting is very important to Mr. Louis, and me, and scheduling conflicts make it virtually impossible for us to meet at any later time.*

As Lucky was now very well aware, John was one of two men alive (including himself) who knew that the Visionary would be killed in an automobile accident on his way to that haircut if he kept his plans, so it was vital to the mission that he manage to convince the man to change the prior appointment.

The Visionary was very gracious in his return e-mail. I too am eager to get together with you and Mr. Louis, and if the only time we can arrange is 10 AM, then I will reschedule my haircutting appointment. Please join me at my club at ten. I'll call the gate to have you admitted.

Chapter 66

Lucky and Alberts, November 15 and 22

“We’re getting nothing,” said Alberts as he and Lucky drove aimlessly in the van. “We know the Quonsets are up. We’ve watched them all the way, but outside of that, we know zip, *nada*, nothing. We get nothing on our listening post. We see nothing on our long-lens camera. We’ve got nothing on our phone taps, and we’ve also got nothing on our intercepts of their e-mails.”

“Well, don’t despair, because I’ve got something really important for you,” said Lucky. “When the Galts want to talk privately, they use sign language. I was observing them from two rooms away, using a mirror in the sunroom and a mirrored wall in the dining area. I could read their signs perfectly. The shocker was when they said, “. . . after they killed Dagne, and you took her place.”

“You mean Dagne Galt isn’t really the woman known before marriage as Dagne Lindstrom?” said a shocked Alberts. “We’ve been compiling a complete history on Dagne Lindstrom, and she’s dead? This’ll jolt them at headquarters. When did this woman replace Dagne?”

“I don’t know. I guess whoever’s behind this thing couldn’t trust Dagne Lindstrom and replaced her with this woman, or maybe they killed Dagne Lindstrom and replaced her before Galt even came into the country. I wonder now about the kids. Are they Dagne’s, or are they Dagne’s replacement’s?”

“Can you get any photos? It makes perfect sense when I think about it. There was nothing about Dagne Lindstrom that would suggest she could ever be caught up in a terrorist plot. Now, we don’t know who this Dagne is.”

“I’ll see if I can take some photos, but it might be very hard to get decent ones without compromising myself. I’ll also work on the kids’ angle. I’ll try to get you something on that next week.”

Lucky and Alberts met again on the twenty-second. As they drove, Lucky said, “This is the last time we can meet. They’re getting suspicious every time I leave. I spotted one of their

security guys trying to tail me when I left today. I gave him the slip without seeming like I was trying to, but it's too dangerous for me to leave for any set appointments."

"Do you think you can e-mail me without being caught?" asked Alberts.

"I'll try if I think I can do it safely. Otherwise, I'll see you on the eleventh when we have to move out."

"Headquarters will go nuts when I tell them. They're already crazy just waiting around for this thing to go down. They want a copy of your book. They think it'll help them learn more about the Galts. Can you e-mail me a copy of what you've got so far?"

"Hell, the book is garbage. I built the whole thing around two people who are supposed to be the luckiest people in the world. Everything they've told me is a bunch of lies. Neither one of them is who they claim to be. I've started to write the real story in my mind, though. I'm inside on one of the biggest stories of the year, and I want to have a book ready to go as soon as I can. I want to cash in on the biggest terrorist bust of all time."

"What about Linda?" asked Alberts. "Is she still working on the original book about luck?"

"Yeah, she is," said Lucky. "But, as I said, there isn't anything in there that is worth a damn. I don't believe a word they've told us anymore. They must have had some pretty good laughs, telling us stories about how lucky they've been throughout their lives. It's all bullshit."

"What about your new writings? Can I give that to headquarters?"

"All I have is what you already know. I've got everything down in very cryptic notes, so if they snoop, they won't know what I'm doing. I don't think it would mean anything to anyone but me. I'll show you what I have when I see you on the eleventh."

"Come on, Lucky," said Alberts. "Help me out here. The pressure from the top is unbelievable. I've got to give them something."

"Tell them I think the kids were adopted. They evidently have been told that they can never talk about it, but kids aren't that clever. I had long discussions with Andy and asked a lot of questions about his life. He let it slip that he didn't grow up with his sister. And another time, he used the phrase 'my other mother.' Then he corrected himself, and I pretended not to notice. So, if you want to give headquarters something to work on, have them see if they can trace two adopted kids or two missing kids with their descriptions. I have no idea how they'd even start, but at least it's something they can try. Maybe it could lead to finding out who the woman really is."

"Okay, that's good. That's something they can work on. What else do you have?"

"Well, I got a peek at Dagne's itinerary when she returned from her trip. It has some pretty weird places on it."

“Yeah, we know all her stops. We tracked her while she was on her trip. We were hoping she would lead us to some other terrorist cells, but all she did was visit banks and open accounts. The guys at headquarters figured they were moving money out of the country so it’d be safe when their Christmas party lights up. The bad news is, by the time we got authorization to freeze their funds, the funds had already been moved out.”

“Where’s the money now?” asked Lucky.

“We don’t know. We’re still trying to track the transfers, but as soon as it left the U.S. it was wired to one bank and then another, and then another. The bad part is we can’t get the banks to cooperate with us. I don’t think we’ll ever find it unless it comes back into the U.S. to fund future events. That means that after we nab them, the money is gone forever.”

“Does that mean they’re essentially broke now?” asked Lucky.

“No, they left several million here, and we’ll freeze it the minute we have them in custody, but all the rest is gone.”

“Bad break....” Lucky shook his head soberly, firmly suppressing a chuckle.

Chapter 67

Meeting with the Visionary

John ended his morning run at the new Quonset huts, and then went inside to admire the new facilities. There was covered parking for three semi-trailers and the fuel truck. There was a large area that could be used for mixing fertilizer and fuel oil. There were sleeping quarters for eight people and a single large bathroom with shower facilities and toilets. He was satisfied with the arrangement. Then he quickly showered there and changed into the clothes he would wear to meet with the Visionary.

He heard Lucky's van pull into the truck area and then watched from inside as Lucky toured the facilities and walked around the entire Quonset area, making sure he could be observed as he made his tour. Then John gave the shorts, T-shirt, and hat that he'd worn on his morning run to a waiting member of the staff who was about John's size and weight and coloring. The other man donned the clothes, walked around the huts as though inspecting them, talked briefly with Lucky, and began to jog back to the main house.

Lucky drove out of the Quonset hut with John well hidden in the back of his van, and the two made the trip to the Visionary's country club. The guard waved Lucky through when he gave the name of the member he was meeting. Lucky drove to the clubhouse, pulled in under the covered portico, dropped John off at the entrance, and parked.

Lucky then joined John inside the club, and they found the dining area. The host pointed to a table where the Visionary was already rising to greet them.

Lucky had spent months waiting to witness this meeting, and he was wondering how John must feel, having traveled through time for this one brief moment.

After introductions were complete and coffee was ordered and served, John thanked the Visionary for meeting with them and then began the discussion by asking, "What do you think of the possibility of time travel?"

The Visionary replied, "That's an interesting question. Some bright people are exploring the notion. They speak of wormholes, multiple dimensions, time warps, and other such phenomena. I do believe that if it is possible, humans will eventually find a way to do it."

“I prefer to be as direct with you as possible. I’m here today as evidence that time travel will be possible far in the future,” John told him. “I come from a different time, and I have been sent on a mission from the future to meet with you today.”

Without blinking the Visionary said, “Well, welcome to 2002.”

Lucky had waited a long time to see how the Visionary would react to John’s announcement and was quite surprised at how sanguine the Visionary seemed at the news.

“Would you like some proof?” John asked.

“If you like, we could do that later,” said the Visionary. “I’m curious about your mission. What brings you to me, and how was this date chosen?”

“My mission has three purposes. First, I bring greetings and thanks from the people of my time for the many contributions you have made to our time. This date was chosen because our history tells us that you were killed in an automobile accident today, and we wished to spare your life as a token of appreciation for all you have given us.”

“I would have been killed in an automobile accident today? I wasn’t going anywhere today...except to my barber. Oh, now I see your reasons for asking me to reschedule my appointment.” Glancing at his watch, the Visionary continued. “I guess I would have been dead by now. Thank you, and do give my thanks to those who sent you.”

“Incidentally, I can’t go forward in time again. We are only able to go backwards. I will be remaining here in your time for the rest of my life,” said John.

“What was so important that you had to leave your time and come to see me?”

To Lucky, John seemed remarkably relaxed, and his eyes held their typical warmth, as well as their typical intensity.

“I came because we face an imminent danger. As you first suggested, thrusters will be installed over the future centuries. They will do what you envisioned. In our time, we control the planet’s orbit and the weather, and we avoid collisions by using thrusters. During the interim between your time and mine, however, a critical mistake will occur. The decision will be made not to install thrusters on the moon. We have previously used the ‘throw and catch’ process you suggested. Now, we face a crisis because a potential collision we can now foresee will destroy earth unless we change the orbit quickly. We must change the orbit so quickly that ‘throw and catch’ won’t allow us to keep the moon. We will lose the moon, and the absence of tidal flows will destroy our aqua-culture.”

“How can I help you?” asked the Visionary.

“Very simply, we hope,” replied John. “We want you to add to your writings that the moon must be equipped with thrusters as well as the earth. We ask you to warn of the dangers we now face. We ask that you explain the limitations and the downsides of the ‘throw and catch’

strategy. We ask you to tell the people of the Interim to make it possible to bring the moon along as they move the earth.”

“Okay,” said the Visionary. “I can do that. I *will* do that.”

“Then my mission is a success. Thank you,” said John, starting to rise from his chair.

“Please stay. If you don’t mind, I have some questions. How do you know of my writings? Most of what I’ve written has not been published.”

“From the point of view of our history, after your death, your wife published your writings on a Web site as a memorial to you. They came to widespread attention when all literature was eventually translated into what we call the Learning Language.”

“Now that you’ve saved my life, how can you be sure that she will still publish my writings? It’s possible I might outlive her.”

“Perhaps our mission planners failed to consider that. On the other hand, now that you know how important your writings will turn out to be, you and she can work together to put the writings on the Web site.”

“You seem anxious to leave. You’ve come a long way for this meeting. Could you stay and answer a few questions about the future?” asked the Visionary.

“The leaders of my time were fearful that I might say something to you about the future that would change your writings. Every action I take in your time must be weighed against the possibility of affecting the future negatively.”

“I will take care not to change my writings, except to ask the people of the Interim to ‘bring the moon,’” said the Visionary. “I’m curious about which writings made a difference in your time.”

“Your Sage model, from your book *Sagery*, is the basis for our Learning Language. The structure of the language follows the structure of thought in the Sage model. You described what you called ‘parts.’ We know them as gene groups or a set of genes involved in the roles of each part. Each sentence in our language contains the source part, the destination part, the focus, scope, and level. It is an immensely rich language compared to the relatively shallow languages in use today.”

“Did anything else I have written prove useful?”

“In this new century, schools will adopt the approach to education that you envisioned in one of the books you published. Also, every schoolchild in our time is taught the purpose of beliefs and how to choose them. One more thing...the war museum you envisioned turned out to be hundreds of museums around the globe, with many that bear your name.”

“I am deeply honored by your visit, and I am overjoyed that my work will make a difference. I’m sure I will have further questions. How can I reach you?”

“You can’t,” said John. “After today I will disappear from this area and will later seem to others who might meet me to be a normal person of this time. Lucky and his friend Linda have been writing an edited version of my trip, and he has a copy for you today. It will answer virtually any question that I’m permitted to answer. Read it, and meet again with Lucky this coming Wednesday, if you are available. Lucky must also disappear soon. I trust he will leave you with an e-mail address if you have follow-up questions for either him or for his co-author.”

“Thank you for coming. You are a brave man to be willing to leave the future and return to this primitive time without being able to return to yours. I applaud you,” said the Visionary.

“Wait a minute,” said Lucky. “You just met a man who claims to be from a time in the future, and you accept him at his word. Don’t you need any proof?”

“There are only two possibilities. He is either telling the truth or he’s lying. If he’s telling the truth, I don’t need any proof. Even if he is lying, I choose to believe him. One is free to choose what one believes. Besides, no one from our time could know what he knows about my work,” said the Visionary as he took his wallet from his pocket. “Take my card, Lucky, and call me to set up a time on Wednesday when we can talk in depth. I’ll read your book with interest.”

“One more thing,” said John, handing an envelope to the Visionary. “I have a device that enables me to know the winning lottery numbers before the drawing. Here is a winning ticket. This is a gift of appreciation from the people of the future.”

“Thank you!” said the Visionary.

As they left the club, they repeated their earlier arrival procedure. Lucky got the car and retrieved John from under the portico. Even though Sarasota was having an all-day rain with low clouds that would interfere with observation from the air, Lucky didn’t want to take any chances.

Chapter 68

The last supper

The foursome came together for cocktails before supper. John took a drink for the first time since any of them had known him. The mood was ebullient, and John's face was a picture of joy. Everyone took satisfaction in the completion of his mission. The stress that had marked Dagne's face since the discovery of the FBI's interest had disappeared. They toasted the success of the mission, and all watched John as he took his very first drink of alcohol. They laughed as he winced and shook his head in mock distaste. "How can you people drink this stuff?" he said, coughing and breathing hard, and then he laughed with the others.

Dagne announced to Lucky and Linda that she had withdrawn the Galt name from the trust accounts, and now they were fully owned by Lucky and Linda. They could no longer be taken back. "You've proven to be utterly trustworthy and good and loyal friends. John and I both trust you to keep your pledges of secrecy."

Dagne held out two envelopes and said, "Each one of these envelopes contains a winning lottery ticket. One must be claimed in the next three months, the other must be claimed sometime in the next five months. They are both substantial winnings. One happens to be half-again larger than the other. If you stay together, it won't matter, of course. If you go your separate ways, however, one will prosper more than the other will. How would you like to divide them?"

"I want Lucky to have the larger one," said Linda. "This has been his show from the start, and I've just been along for the ride."

"I would rather just put the winnings together, file the taxes jointly, and divide the remainder equally," said Lucky.

John said, "As I remember the tax code, you can't file jointly unless you're married."

"I was going to do this privately, but now seems like a perfectly good time for it. Linda, if you'd have an old goat like me, I'd like to file jointly with you."

Linda laughed. "Lucky, you old romantic, you! In spite of a proposal that rates a One on the romance scale, I'd like to file jointly with you, too."

Dagne laughed and applauded, and tears formed in her eyes. "I was hoping you two would get together long-term, but I have a piece of advice for you anyway. If you cash in your

tickets before the end of the year, you can still file separately for 2002, and your tax returns probably won't attract the same notice that ours did. You don't want to be the subjects of the next search for terrorists."

When the children joined them, they all sat down to a veritable feast. Knowing that this was the last meal she would prepare for the family, Essie had done herself proud. Even John departed from his normally strict regimen and joined in the festive supper.

Chapter 69

Nobody noticed

Dawn didn't break clearly on the tenth of December because of continuing low clouds and rain, but the morning shift of governmental watchers took up positions in their command post and did their best to see whatever they could. With sixteen remotely controlled cameras covering every aspect of the Galt property, many eyes watched the activities around the grove, looking for signs of anything out of the ordinary.

The watchers had learned that the Galt grove was a busy place. With a staff of almost a hundred people working there—maintaining security, attending to the household chores, and operating the contract programming business—there was a lot of coming and going to watch.

At two o'clock each afternoon, fourteen staff members drove out of the grove to pick up deaf children who were learning computer skills. At 4:30, the same cars left the grove to return the children to their homes.

Every day, several staff members typically left the house to run errands and shop for necessities. Nobody noticed two particular staff members who got into cars that afternoon, rain hats shielding their heads, and drove out of the compound. One headed for the local supermarket, and one went to a building supply store. Later, nobody noticed that when those staff members left the stores, they wore outerwear that had been reversed to a different color, and they got into different cars from the ones they had driven there. Nobody noticed that those two cars then headed downtown to a four-story parking garage next to a movie theater.

Nobody counted the children brought into the staff house for their daily instruction in computer skills. Nobody noticed that when the drivers left the staff house to take the children home, there were two more children than had come in earlier.

Nobody noticed that after the drivers dropped all the deaf children off at their homes, two children remained in the cars.

Nobody noticed when two different cars dropped off two different children at the movie theater.

Nobody noticed when two children left the theater at 5 p.m. and walked into the parking garage.

Nobody noticed when a family of four tourists left the parking garage in a rental car. There was a tired mother at the wheel, a happy father in the passenger seat, and a boy and a little girl in back—and all four were dressed in shorts and T-shirts from Disneyworld.

Nobody noticed as the happy foursome arrived at an airport sometime later. It might have been in Tampa. It might have been Orlando. It might have been Fort Myers.

Nobody noticed that several staff members left together in one of the cars and returned separately in two of the cars.

At the end of the day, all the cars driven by the staff were back in the grove. Everything looked like it was back to normal. As the evening staff of watchers came on duty, they were told that everything was normal. Nothing remarkable had happened all day.

Nobody noticed that all four Galts were gone.

Chapter 70

Lucky and the Visionary

Lucky and Linda awoke to a house without Galts. They walked around the bedroom that Dagne and John had shared. It was exactly as it had been. Most of their clothes were in the closets. All their toiletries seemed to be in the bathroom. They had taken almost nothing with them.

“It’s nice to have the money to just replace everything in your life,” Lucky remarked.

They walked through the kids’ rooms. Again, everything was there as usual. There were fewer CD-R disks than there had been; everything of importance had been burned onto CDs and was gone, along with the laptops. Otherwise, the children had taken nothing very noticeable with them. The rooms looked as though the children had just gone out for a moment and would be right back. Lucky knew that wasn’t true. The Galts were gone for good.

To make sure the watchers noticed nothing different, Lucky took his morning run with one of the staff members, and Linda took her daily bike ride. After showering, they shared a last breakfast with Essie and went about their day’s chores. Linda would spend the day packing while Lucky went to see the Visionary again.

Lucky left the property and drove to an office supply store. In case the watchers were keeping an eye on him, he wanted to have a reason to be out of the house. He shopped for a while, and then went to the coffee shop where he would meet with the Visionary.

“What did you think of the book?” asked Lucky.

“I liked your book very much,” said the Visionary. “It answered all the questions that were raised by the meeting with John. I am delighted to know that nearly everything we all worry about today has been resolved in the future. I feel very content.”

“Is there anything you think I should add to the book?” asked Lucky.

“I gave my word to John that I would not add to my own writings about the future, so I don’t think it would be appropriate to expound on my thinking in your book.”

“Perhaps you could speak about the present. What should people in 2002 be doing that would make things better for Earth in the near future?”

“In my opinion, education is going to be the solution to all of our future geopolitical challenges. With the World Wide Web and the coming decade’s likely advances in instructional technology, it looks like universal and global education is truly possible very soon. You could urge people to be more flexible about using technology to educate the world.”

“How are people today inflexible in regards to education?”

“Globally, we seem to be stuck with nineteenth century models of education. We still put thirty children in a classroom and teach them all at the rate of the slowest learner. Individualized instruction has always been the most powerful way to educate a child. Kings and princes hired tutors to educate their children, one-on-one, at each child’s individual rate of learning. Our current societies could never afford to hire enough teachers to be personal tutors, but with today’s computers and some new and powerful instructional programs, the computer can teach a child at the rate the child’s capabilities allow.”

“Sounds sensible to me,” Lucky replied.

“Teachers are being misused today. Teachers are forced—by habit, by their unions, and by inflexible school boards—to teach in a group format the topics, skills, and concepts that could be taught much better using technology. If we were wiser and more flexible, we could use computers to teach a child the basic skills, and we would use teachers to integrate the instruction and put it into a broader context. We would let machines do what machines do best. We would let teachers do what humans do best. In your story, Andy and Lori are excellent examples of how to teach children. We could begin doing that today.”

“Do you mean home-schooling?” asked Lucky.

“No. I mean using schools, teachers, and technology to teach children the way John and Dagne did. Machines teach the skills, and teachers integrate the instruction and provide context.”

“John said you have interesting ideas about our current ‘drug war,’ too.”

“The drug war is so obviously a total failure. As Prohibition proved, government attempts to prohibit experiences that a lot of people want will merely result in criminals providing those experiences. The prohibition today of drugs that alter moods has predictably resulted in huge bureaucracies, multinational crime rings, and widespread corruption. We have given criminals a monopoly on drug production and distribution. We could eliminate the drug criminals, empty our jails, and free the drug enforcers to fight terrorism...if we had leaders strong enough to solve the problem wisely.”

“What would you do today if you were President?”

“I would ask Congress for laws permitting ethical drug companies to provide mood-altering drugs that are pure, safe, and consistent in their dosages. These laws would allow the ethical drug companies to create their products without the lengthy FDA approval and druggists to sell them over the counter, without a doctor’s prescription. The laws would require strong

warnings on the labels and be allowed for sale only to people eighteen and over. Consumers would be warned that the drugs are not fully approved, are potentially dangerous, and are illegal to use while driving or working. Consumers would be forbidden to sue anyone if they had bad results from unapproved drugs. Doing this would eliminate the criminals' monopoly on supply. It would provide a safe, predictable, mood-altering experience and would free up law enforcement to do other important work."

"Do you mean legalizing crack or heroin?" asked Lucky.

"Not in those forms. I would trust the ethical drug companies to provide mood-altering chemicals that would be far safer and less addictive than the worst of the present illegally created products."

"Suppose no ethical drug company could offer a heroin-like experience. Wouldn't criminals fight back by supplying heroin and other even more dangerous alternative drugs?"

"Possibly. If Congress, in their wisdom, decided that heroin was too damaging and dangerous for the ethical drug companies to make a safe version, then a few consumers might still opt for heroin illegally. It should be clear that every drug banned would give the criminals a monopoly on that drug. But if Congress authorized law enforcement to taint or poison illegal drugs when they were confiscated and then reintroduce the tainted product back into the market, the threat of poisoning would kill the demand. Even if no drug were ever poisoned, the threat that it might be would kill demand for controlled substances.

"Remember the fear engendered throughout the nation when a criminal poisoned a few bottles of Tylenol twenty or thirty years ago? Sales of the product plummeted nationally. People fear poisoning. Drug users wouldn't trust the police not to poison drugs. They can't trust criminals to provide poison-free drugs, either, so the threat would work. People have better sense than bureaucrats give them credit for. With a wide array of safe, predictable mood-altering products, very few people would opt for criminally produced products."

"I remember discussing this with John and Dagne in less detail. If I put this in my book, aren't you worried that your reputation as a Visionary could be damaged?" asked Lucky.

"I live in the future in my mind. I see the world as it can be and it will be. When enough people realize that the Drug War has failed, and law enforcers are needed for other jobs—like fighting terrorism—and government sees the potential for taxing the new drug offerings like they do alcohol and tobacco, what I envision will happen."

"Does it worry you that there isn't enough political will yet to make the future happen sooner?" asked Lucky.

"Everything happens in its own time. Wise people will see the absurdity of the present method of limiting the public's access to mood-altering chemicals. When enough people are wiser, the 'drug problem' will disappear."

“Let’s talk about terrorism. How do you see terrorism being solved?”

“Terrorism is a product of desperation and ignorance. Ignorance can be addressed by making global education accessible to every human on earth. If those who create instructional products routinely teach people to understand the purpose of beliefs and how to choose beliefs wisely, then religious extremism will be moderated. Education will moderate desperation. All of this will happen in due time. Wise leaders can accelerate the process.”

“I find it amazing that you are so hopeful about problems that seem intractable today.”

“The future will bring solutions to today’s problems. New problems will arise. The future will bring more widespread wisdom, and the new problems will also be resolved. I believe in the innate wisdom of humans. I believe future generations will bring John’s world of peace, harmony, and wisdom to all our progeny.”

Chapter 71

The home stretch

“That’s pretty tedious stuff,” said Linda, reading the notes Lucky had taken after his meeting with the Visionary.

“Big words and boring lectures,” said Lucky, as he continued packing for the move back to their own places.

“Let’s get back home, finish up the manuscript, and get ready to leave town.”

Lucky shook his head as Linda leafed through the notes. “How are we going to get anyone to publish this book?”

“Let’s go ask the Visionary,” Linda suggested. “He’s published books—maybe he can give us some guidance.”

“Good plan,” Lucky agreed, “but first we have a few more things to do that might make the story more exciting.”

On December twelfth, Alberts and Lucky huddled over the video monitors displaying the pictures from sixteen video cameras.

“There’s the first truck,” said Alberts. “Right on schedule. That’ll show headquarters that we’re on top of this situation.”

“Nothing to do until tomorrow,” said Lucky. “I’m going home to work on my book.”

“Can I give headquarters a copy of what you’ve written so far?” asked Alberts. “They’ve been dying to get their hands on some inside stuff. They want to know what it was like being on the inside with the Galts.”

“I don’t have anything written yet that they can read. All I’ve got are the notes I made while I was in there, and I wrote them in a sort of personal code so the Galts wouldn’t know what they meant, in case they found them. I need to work on writing them in formal English so they’re readable to others, but there isn’t anything in them that you all don’t already know. I wouldn’t have anything if it weren’t for you guys.”

“If you had to, could you get back into the Galt property?” asked Alberts.

“I don’t think so. I think we wore out our welcome with them, and they’re probably relieved to have us gone. They didn’t even come out to say goodbye when we left.”

“Yeah, we noticed that,” Alberts remarked.

The next day, as Alberts and Lucky were watching the monitors again, Alberts noted, “There’s the second one. Another eighteen-wheeler filled with fertilizer. The whole grove has been pretty quiet for the past few days, and we haven’t seen much of anyone around but workmen. Galt has even stopped his running in the mornings. Either they’re worried about our watching, or they’re pretty busy getting ready for their big Christmas blast.”

“I don’t think they know about the stakeout,” said Lucky. “They were aware of an increase in airplane over-flights, but I don’t think they necessarily associate that with surveillance. It might be smart to cut down on the over-flights during this period. I’m sure they’re on edge and will be extra careful. I don’t have to remind you, but we’ve got nothing on them until the fertilizer and fuel oil are mixed. Until then, they’re just getting their grove ready for winter,”

“Yeah,” said Alberts, “but this waiting is making all of us crazy.”

Over the weekend of the fourteenth and fifteenth, Lucky and Linda worked on their manuscript at Lucky’s place. They added the meeting with the Visionary and the surveillance with Alberts. Like the Feds, they were getting anxious to get the whole affair over with.

“Let’s talk about where we go when this thing is finished,” Linda suggested. “Combining our assets gives us the twenty million in the trust accounts and the eighteen million in lottery winnings. What will we do with thirty-eight million dollars besides pay taxes on it?”

“Anything in the world that we want, I guess,” Lucky replied. “We have every possible choice available to us. That’s what makes it so hard to choose.”

“I’ve been reading *Money* magazine and *Worth* and some other publications for people with money. Lots of super-rich people buy two or three or four homes in different places and just jet between them whenever they feel like it,” said Linda. “How does that sound to you?”

“I think I’m sort of a one-home type. I don’t really want to be a jet setter. I don’t think I’d fit in with that sort of crowd.”

“Well, we could have a pretty great home if we only got one,” said Linda.

“Yeah. You should live in a really great home. I don’t want anything real crazy, though. I’m not a palace or mansion kind of guy.”

“How about cars? Would you like a fleet of Rolls Royce cars or sports cars, or what?”

“That kind of thing doesn’t do it for me, either. Frankly, I think one great house, one nifty car for each of us, and one boat for fishing will be plenty. We can travel if we feel like it and just rent things along the way. I can’t think of anything else I’d want, except to be with you.”

“I’m kind of sad to say I feel the same way. What’s the point of having tons of money if we don’t want to go throwing it around?”

“I think we’re the same kind of people. We’re used to a modest life, and I think we’ll just be ourselves. I guess that means we’ll just have to use our extra money to help people or give to charity. We can have a lot of fun giving money away.”

“What are the Galts going to do with all their money?” asked Linda.

“John told me that when he and the family are totally safe and don’t need all that extra money as insurance, they’re going to fund an educational foundation that he hopes the Visionary might start,” said Lucky, “but I don’t know if the Visionary is into starting foundations. He never mentioned it with John or with me. He seems willing to just let time solve all of the world’s problems.”

“Well, that could be an interesting idea for us, then,” Linda suggested. “How does the Lucky and Linda Louis Educational Foundation sound to you?”

“Sounds like a great idea with a very long name.”

Chapter 72

All the luck in the world

On the sixteenth, Alberts and Lucky again spent the day watching the video monitors.

“There’s the fuel oil truck. Jeez, it’s big!” said Alberts. “Can you imagine the kind of bombs you could build if you used semi-trailers to carry them? Timothy McVeigh blew up the Oklahoma City building with a truck just a fraction of the size of those eighteen-wheelers.”

“Are your guys ready to blockade the grove and surround the place when the last truck is inside?” asked Lucky.

“Headquarters ordered us to hold off on the blockade until the nineteenth. They want to make sure that the stuff is mixed before we possibly tip our hand. On the nineteenth, after our thermal imaging shows a lot of activity in the mixing shed, we’ll evacuate the surrounding farms and groves, put the tire shredders in place, bring a tank up to cover the rear entrance, and surround the perimeter with every law enforcement agent we can muster,” said Alberts.

That night, at home with Linda, Lucky worried out loud, “Thermal imaging? I never planned on thermal imaging. That must come from the military. I don’t know of any law enforcement agencies that have that kind of equipment. I hope the lights and the heaters in the Quonsets make it difficult for thermal imaging to show how many people are working on the mixing.”

“I think everything will work as you planned, Lucky,” Linda told him. “After all, this kind of operation takes a lot of luck, and you are the luckiest guy in the world.”

Two days later, on the eighteenth, Lucky and Alberts watched the monitors as all the staff members gathered in front of the staff house and boarded the bus to go to their cruise ship.

The phone rang, and Alberts answered, “Alberts. Uhuh. Uhuh. Okay. Thanks.” He hung up and turned to Lucky. “Thermal imaging shows the grove to be entirely empty. There is no human activity anywhere. Now we can relax a little because we know there isn’t any security in there. We’ll just wait for the four truck drivers to show up and then go into alert mode.”

Throughout the day and into the evening shift, watchers were alert in vain. No new vehicles showed up. No terrorist drivers appeared. Near midnight, the phone rang again. Alberts answered.

“Somebody came into the grove through a fence on the side,” Alberts repeated to Lucky. “He’s working his way through the trees towards the Quonsets.”

The tension was building as the silence got longer. “He just entered the Quonsets.”

There was a long pause, then Alberts said, “He’s moving into the mixing area.”

After another long pause, he told Lucky, “He’s working in the mixing area.”

Many minutes followed with no new reports. Finally, another update came through. “He’s moving out to the truck area. The lights have gone on in the entire Quonset area. Now we can’t tell what’s happening inside,” Alberts repeated to Lucky.

More long minutes of waiting went by before the next report. Alberts was frozen, phone to his ear as he waited for any new word. Finally he said, “The guy is moving again. He’s leaving the Quonsets and is heading back the way he came in. What the hell do we do now? Do we come down on this guy and tip our hand, or do we wait for the drivers to show up?”

“I don’t think we should tip our hand,” said Lucky. “Let’s track the guy until he is a long way from the grove and have a squad pick him up and find out what he was doing. On the other hand,” he continued, “that’s taking a big risk. Maybe he’s one of the drivers just sneaking in to see if everything is clear. Maybe he’ll go back and tell the other drivers that the coast is clear, and they’ll all come in. I think we ought to wait, but let’s keep watching him with the thermal imaging.”

“We only have one plane in the air that can do the thermal imaging. If we track the single guy, we could miss the four drivers entering the grove.”

“Okay, then I say we keep tracking the grove and hope that the one guy comes back with his three buddies, and they think they’re in the clear,” Lucky suggested.

“Okay,” Alberts agreed. “After all, my orders are to keep the grove covered. I’ve got no orders about tracking a single guy going in and out. My ass would be grass if I took my eyes off the ball and we missed something.”

They waited anxiously as the thermal imaging tracked the solo figure through the grove and out the fence. Even after they expanded the sweep of the thermal imaging, they soon lost the single man, and the grove remained clear. Unfortunately, with the lights and heaters on in the Quonsets, they couldn’t get a reading on what was happening inside.

Lucky and Alberts waited nervously as the time passed with nothing happening. At two-thirty in the morning, sandy-eyed and wired with caffeine, they heard from the crew on the plane again.

“We’ve got to land for fuel and a crew change. Expect us back in the air in one hour...or ninety minutes, max.”

“Damn!” said Alberts. “We’ll be blind for an hour at least. Maybe the terrorists have been waiting for the airplane to stop its patrol. Now they’ll be able to sneak in undetected. I don’t

know why I expected them just to drive in where we could see them. Well, there is nothing more we can do tonight, at least for another hour or two. Let's get some sleep and let the night-shift guys keep an eye on things for a while. They'll call us if they see anything."

Lucky drove home wondering to himself, *Was that lucky, or what?*

The next morning, the nineteenth, as Lucky joined the growing staff of other watchers, Alberts said, "Lucky, we have activity. The lights have gone on and off in the sleeping quarters several times, and the thermal imaging shows that the well pump has been going on and off since six this morning. Every time someone uses any significant amount of water, the well pump shows up with its heat signature. If our calculations are correct, there have been eight showers this morning and a few incidental water uses. Maybe they're making coffee or something."

"Aha! Then they did sneak in after the plane stopped its coverage. And it sounds like the Galts have joined them."

"That's what we figured, too. We can't get any heat signatures out of the house because of the roof, so we don't know if anyone is left in there, but the Quonsets are full of activity. The lights went on in the truck-Quonset this morning and have been on ever since."

Alberts pulled out the drawing that Lucky had made for him, showing all the areas of the three connected Quonset huts. He pointed out to Lucky the windows that had lit up since they had left the control office the night before.

"How do the guys at headquarters feel things are going?" asked Lucky.

"I don't know for sure because everyone is in the process of flying down here, but they must feel good. When the night crew told them we had activity, they all decided to come down and witness the bust. They're even bringing the media relations guy to be their spokesman to the press. They're planning to alert a number of media sources that it might be a good idea to have someone down here tomorrow when those trucks try to pull out of here."

"I hope nobody decides to visit the grove today. We still don't want the bad guys to know we're onto them. I worry about the over-flights. If they waited until the plane left, maybe they suspect that we're all over them with surveillance."

"Now that we have all this evidence of activity in the Quonsets, we ordered the plane to stand down. All we have now are the sixteen cameras, but it's daylight. We'll see the minute those trucks leave the Quonset."

"Have you begun the evacuation of the surrounding groves and farms?" asked Lucky.

"Yes. By the time you came in, everything within a mile of the grove had been evacuated. It's a little difficult because we can't tell the people the reason they're being moved off of their properties...but fortunately, the grove is buffered on all sides by other groves or farms, and there aren't too many people to inconvenience."

"Did you get the tank in place?" asked Lucky.

“Yep,” said Alberts, “and we did it quietly, too. We had three farm tractors running up and back behind the grove, and they made so much noise that no one could have heard the tank.”

“Have your experts told you whether the trucks full of fuel oil mixed with fertilizer are dangerous before the fuse is inserted?”

“Do you mean, is there any chance they could blow up when we surround them and pull the drivers out?” asked Alberts. “Well, don’t worry. If these guys know what they’re doing, which they certainly seem to, they won’t install the fuses until they’re ready to put them somewhere and then run off and leave them to blow up. Without the fuses installed, the stuff is relatively harmless.”

“It sounds like we have nothing more to do except to sit and wait,” said Lucky.

“Hey!” said the watcher with the earphones, tearing them off of his head. “That sounded like a small explosion.” Everyone immediately gathered around the monitors. “It looks like smoke coming out the seams. They’ve got a fire!”

As the entire crew crowded around the monitors, a huge fireball tore the roof apart, and the entire Quonset area was in flames. The explosion looked like a small atom bomb. A mushroom-shaped cloud formed high above the grove. No one could speak as they watched in shock. A monitor on the back gate showed the police tank breaking through and heading toward the Quonsets. Then it stopped and backed off.

“The whole damn thing has been blown away,” someone reported.

The command post was too far away from the grove to be affected by the blast. Moments after they saw it, they heard the sound of the explosion.

Alberts looked shell-shocked as he watched the devastation. Orange trees for acres around the blast sight were flattened. As the flames subsided, they could see that there was almost nothing left of the Quonsets or the trucks or anything that had been inside. The house remained relatively untouched.

In the now-silent command post, everyone watched as a stream of police cars, fire trucks, ambulances, and FBI agents descended on the grove and began their reconnaissance.

After staring at the wreckage in the grove and watching the activity for a good while, Lucky finally said, “I think it’s all over. I’m going home. Call me if you need me.”

Chapter 73

Christmas is saved

Lucky got home in time to join Linda in front of the television. Channel 10 News had the story first. It broke into the daytime programming with a preliminary report from the anchor and then handed coverage over to a news chopper that had raced to the scene and was taking aerial shots of the property from a distance. As it arrived above the grove, the videographer focused on the blast site and the flattened trees. Lucky and Linda watched the pictures of the fire trucks, police cars, the tank, and what looked to be fifty or more official-looking sedans spread around the grove. The coverage then cut to a reporter standing in the road in front of the property, describing the devastation the blast had created.

Channel 8 News had an interview going with a harried fire chief who knew very little. Finally the Channel 8 anchor announced that there would be a news conference in one hour, and until then the news staff would continue to investigate and couldn't yet confirm the source of, or reason for, the explosion.

None of the local channels went back to regular programming. They filled the dead time until the news conference with interviews of anyone they could find who had heard the blast or seen the fireball.

"How high was the fireball?" asked a reporter interviewing a man who had noticed the fireball from eight miles away and had come to see what was happening.

"Really, really, high!" was the answer.

Lucky muted the TV so they could be free of the useless drivel that would ensue until the news conference. Then he and Linda went for a brief walk to chat, just in case they could be overheard in Lucky's house.

"I hope the explosion didn't wreck the main house or the staff house," said Linda.

"I think the permanent buildings are okay. I'm really glad that nobody in the area was hurt. I worried about stuff blowing onto neighboring farms and groves."

"Me, too."

"We are both in for intensive interrogation about what we noticed when we were living with the Galts," said Lucky. "You won't have to talk about the latest events, since you weren't

even supposed to know about any of this surveillance stuff or my involvement in it at the time. You'll just tell them what we discussed and researched before we met the Galts and then agree that you were obviously taken in and totally fooled by two very clever criminals. Tell them about our original book project, how the household was run in general while you were working on the project, and that you never overheard any kind of terrorist planning or noticed that kind of activity while you were there. You can tell them that you've learned about my involvement in the surveillance since the explosion happened. When the interrogations are over and everything has quieted down, I'll fill you in on the rest of the details you missed."

"When do I show them the stuff we've written on luck?"

"That's the first thing they'll want to see. Just give them our original stuff the new material we've written since I had my first interview with the FBI. It's not very good and not very complete, but it covers our reasons for being here. Tell them we're going to trash it because we've now learned the truth from the FBI and plan to write about that instead."

They held hands and walked back to the house, then watched the muted television as they awaited the news conference.

Finally the fire chief came on to discuss the explosion. At that point Lucky turned on the sound. The chief assured the audience that there had been no injuries other than to the perpetrators. He expressed amazement at how such a huge blast could take place without anyone else being hurt.

The fire chief turned over the microphone to Alberts, who introduced himself as the local Special Agent in Charge for the FBI. He then introduced his chief from headquarters, who introduced the Deputy Director of the FBI from DC.

"I am proud to announce that the FBI has been taking part in a joint task force with representatives from INS, Customs, and other agencies. The task force was brought together to foil terrorists who were bent on destroying four of this nation's most treasured landmarks on Christmas Day. Thanks to extraordinary cooperation between the FBI and the many agencies that are being integrated into the new Homeland Security Department, we've been able to stop the terrorists before they could bring more disaster to our nation."

There was some applause from those attending the conference, and then he continued, "Thankfully, this devastating explosion hurt no one except for the terrorists who were killed in their own blast as they were plotting to destroy Christmas for this great nation of ours. I want to personally thank Agent Alberts and all the men and women who worked tirelessly to bring this investigation to a satisfying conclusion. I am proud to be part of an agency that, working with all the other agencies that assisted us, helped to save Christmas for America. Thank you all, and God Bless America."

Sarasota television continued to be filled with manufactured stories from the blast site. Everyone who went in or out was a candidate for an interview. The media frenzy lasted the rest of the day in Florida and got a full ten minutes on the national news shows. The FBI might have gotten even more coverage if the story had what the media referred to as “longer legs.” In this case, there was nobody to catch. One blast—everyone dead. There would be no arrests or trials.

Lucky heard later through channels that on the plane back to Washington, the Deputy Director was heard to say, “It had to happen on the Friday before Christmas. Everybody is shopping or partying or traveling to see family. The story will be dead by Sunday noon. We saved Christmas for America, and hardly anyone will notice.”

Chapter 74

The debriefing

The story of the Galts as terrorists was now finished and done. Alberts led the cleanup squad charged with documenting everything that had happened so the FBI could close the file. Alberts' paramount goal was to show that the FBI and other agencies had done everything properly, and nobody could be embarrassed by follow-up stories, if there were any.

Four agents from different agencies met with Lucky, Linda and her attorney, and Alberts to conduct the debriefings that would wind up the case.

"Why the attorney for Linda?" Alberts asked Lucky as they were pouring coffee from the side table.

"She lived for months with terrorists, Alberts. She's a civilian and totally clean, but you never know how law enforcement might misread her involvement. I suggested she bring an attorney just to make sure her rights are protected."

"I guess I'd do the same thing if it were my girlfriend. I just hate attorneys," said Alberts.

"Well, let's do this fast, keep Linda off the griddle, and he'll go away."

Alberts started the meeting by explaining Lucky's involvement to the other agents and telling them how valuable Lucky had been in finding the schedule that let them know everything that was going down. "If there is one person who should get the most credit for saving Christmas, it's Lucky Louis."

The other agents all nodded in silent approval and made their appreciation known by smiling at Lucky.

"I have put Lucky in for a commendation for his help. He will be getting the highest commendation available for a civilian."

Alberts turned to Linda and said, "Ms. Brown...may I call you Linda Sue?" Linda nodded, and Alberts continued. "Linda Sue, will you tell us if you ever became suspicious of John and Dagne Galt or their children?"

"No," said Linda. "I was the biggest sucker of all. We had done some research on them before we met them, and I thought we had a great story about the luckiest people in the world. They just filled us with lies about their life stories. I wrote down all the garbage and thought I

was reporting the truth. Lucky tells me now that the Galts were just stringing us along to keep us close so they could tell if we had caught on to them. I never did. Lucky knew a lot because he was working with you, Mr. Alberts...but he kept me in the dark at the time. I know he did it to protect me, and I appreciate it, but it just makes me the greater fool. I've brought you my notes and our drafts for the book on luck that we were planning to write. I don't think there is anything in there that you can use because I now know it's all lies."

"Did you know or ever suspect that the woman you knew as Dagne Galt wasn't really the former Dagne Lindstrom?"

"No," said Linda. "I never had a clue."

"Did you know or ever suspect that the children had been adopted and were not Dagne's children?"

Again, Linda shook her head. "No. I was totally surprised when Lucky told me that."

"Are you writing anything now, Linda?" asked Alberts.

"I'm planning to help Lucky write a different book, but I've been so shaken I haven't done anything about it yet."

"Okay," said Alberts as he turned to the other agents. "Any of you have questions for Ms. Brown?" The agents all shook their heads.

"Well, then, Linda. I think we're done. You're free to go."

Linda let her attorney leave and asked if she could stay with Lucky for his part of the debriefing. "Fine with me," said Alberts. "Any of you have a problem with that?" he asked the other agents. Again, all heads shook in concert.

"Lucky, you've been part of this since we first got involved, and I can tell you that without your help, we'd still be walking in circles. You've said you'll be writing a book about the inside story of living with terrorists. The Bureau is a little worried about that. Could we see what you've got, or would you let us read the first draft? We don't want anything embarrassing to come from someone who is getting the highest civilian honor we can bestow."

"I destroyed my notes, Alberts," Lucky replied. "I decided that the whole affair makes Linda and me look like fools. We didn't really discover anything. You told us the real story, so I didn't see how we could add anything that hasn't been written in the press already. I think we're just going to try to forget the whole thing."

"Headquarters will be happy to hear that, Lucky. I'm sorry you won't get a book out of this deal."

"No problem," said Lucky. "It's just a hobby, anyway. We've been talking about writing a novel about an alien from the future—you know, science fiction. We're going to weave some of our experiences with the Galts and other people that we've met in real life into a fictional account. It's nothing that you or the Bureau need to worry about."

“Okay, then,” said Alberts. “I’ve got some follow-up stuff you’d be interested in. We’re going to release it to the papers today, and you should know about it. We didn’t get any body parts bigger than a dime. Preliminary DNA analysis indicates that there were eight different bodies, none of them related. Four of the bodies matched DNA we got from combs and toothbrushes in the Galt home, so we’ve definitely identified the Galts as deceased. The ME has released their death certificates. The other four are untraceable so far.

“The tests tell us that you were right about the children being adopted, because their DNA didn’t match anyone else’s. We also got some DNA from Dagne Lindstrom’s childhood home, and it doesn’t match the DNA from Mrs. Galt, the woman who was posing as Dagne Lindstrom...so you were also right about this Dagne being a substitute for the real one. We’re guessing that they killed the real Dagne and her children and just thoroughly disposed of the bodies.”

Alberts looked around at the assembled men. “Any questions?” he asked. “No? Then I think we’ve about wrapped it up. We’ll add all the book notes to the file, and this case is officially closed.”

Chapter 75

The reading of the will

When the death certificates had been filed, the Galts' lawyer called Lucky, told him that he was named in the Galt will, and asked him to come to hear it read. Lucky and Linda went together to the reading, which was held in an empty courtroom the lawyer had borrowed because of the large crowd. All the members of the staff were in attendance, along with Alberts, who wanted to determine if any other possible terrorists had been named as beneficiaries.

The lawyer explained that John and Dagne's wills had been made out so that upon the death of one of them, the other would be the beneficiary. If they both died within thirty days of one another, the money would be placed in trust for the children, and Mr. and Mrs. Louis would be guardians of that trust. If, as in this situation, the children did not survive them, then the estate was to be divided up among several beneficiaries.

The gist of the will was that twenty-five million dollars would fund a foundation for the benefit of the deaf. The house, all its contents, and the grove and everything associated with it went into the trust. Five of the most senior staff members were named to the board of trustees for the foundation. The foundation was to continue in the training of deaf children in computer skills and to support the contract programming organization that was also turned over to the foundation.

The remainder of the money in the Galts' trust account was to be used to endow an educational charitable trust to be named The Lucky and Linda Sue Louis Educational Foundation. Lucky and Linda were named as trustees of the foundation, and they were empowered to name further trustees of their choosing.

"How do you suppose they knew that we were talking about setting up a foundation with that name?" Linda whispered. "I guess they knew us pretty well," Lucky replied.

"What kind of terrorists were these folks?" Alberts wondered aloud as he walked outside again with Lucky and Linda, shaking his head. "Well...I don't imagine the contents of the will would need to be included in the case file...."

Chapter 76

Honeymooning in the Cayman Islands

Lucky and Linda located the notary public who had married John and Dagne, and they were married using the new names that were on their passports and other identification cards. The ceremony was private, and the notary and his secretary were the only witnesses.

The newly married couple then flew off to begin their honeymoon at a luxurious resort in the Cayman Islands. They were thrilled with the beautiful honeymoon suite and had a relaxing and very romantic idyll.

Snuggling on a bench at the beach several days after arriving, and enjoying being caressed by balmy breezes, the happy couple was suddenly joined by one Peter Peterson. Linda noticed the easy camaraderie of the two jovial men.

“I moved down here to be near my money,” said Peter the Good.

“This is the beginning of our world-tour honeymoon,” Lucky confided.

“I can’t thank you enough for getting me out of prison. The FBI got my record cleaned up and thanked me for helping you on the terrorist case, and I’m living down here free, rich, and retired.”

“I’m glad it worked out so well for you, Peter. You did everything I asked, and it all came off without a hitch.”

“I read about it in the papers and saw it on television. I got a kick out of the FBI taking credit for saving Christmas!” said Peter, chuckling.

“Lucky kept me in the dark about a lot of the details to protect me from the possibility of becoming an accessory to a crime,” Linda told him, “so I’d like to hear what you did for him.”

“I got all the passports for you and the family, with the new names and identities that you’re all using now. Those passports are absolutely perfect. A guy who does them for the government was happy to trade me eight passports for ten evenings with some of my lady friends. I also arranged for a guy to lease the four trucks and got them filled with the fertilizer and fuel oil. I had drivers take them to the grove, leave them, and go back home. Then I got the bodies from a guy who runs a crematorium. He was happy to give them to me. He saved the cost

of eight cremation runs, and he had enough extra ashes anyway to fill urns to give to the bereaved. That one didn't cost me anything, and no one got harmed.

"The C4 was expensive, and I got some strange looks when I asked for five pounds of it. The ex-ranger I got to deliver and set up the C4 was so pleased with his twenty-five grand that he threw in a little preliminary blast for free. I thought that added a nice touch."

"When they spotted him with the thermal imaging equipment, I was pretty worried," Lucky admitted. "What was he going to say if they had caught up to him with a squad car?"

"He's so good, they never would have caught him," Peter assured him. "For three nights before the entry, he dressed up like a homeless guy, took shelter in a dry culvert, and fixed it all up with old booze bottles, papers, and old clothes. When he exited the property, he went right for his culvert and stayed another night. Even if they had tracked him, he would just have been a homeless guy looking for something to eat. His cover story was that he had walked into an open door in the Quonsets, rummaged around for food, set off the security lights, and run away.

"The most they could have pinned on him was trespassing, but the next day, before the blast, he got away clean." "I read that the DNA found in the fragments of body parts matched the Galt family DNA," said Peter. "How did you arrange that, Lucky?"

"When the staff unloaded the bodies, they used new toothbrushes, combs, and brushes to groom each of the corpses. Then they replaced the Galt family's toothbrushes, combs, and hairbrushes with the new ones. Even before that, they had all their clothing dry cleaned or washed. They wiped everything in the house clean of fingerprints after the Galts were gone. The CSIs used the comb and brush hairs and the toothbrushes to establish the Galt family's DNA."

"Pretty tidy, Lucky. Quite a dedicated staff they had! How did you avoid any casualties from the blast?"

"We had the roof scored so it would open up and direct the blast straight upwards. The FBI had the farms and groves on both sides evacuated, so there was nobody anywhere near the blast. I made sure the cops and agents all stayed clear of the area. The only people close enough to be in any danger were wrapped up tight inside a police tank."

"Pretty slick, Lucky. You would have made a great crook."

"That was my one and only venture on the dark side," Lucky replied. "I'll never go there again."

"What you did wasn't very dark," said Peter. "Even if you put it all in your book, you wouldn't be in any danger. Nobody in law enforcement is crazy enough to want to spoil the story about the FBI saving Christmas and make them all look like dupes."

"That's what's nice about writing the story as a novel, Peter," said Lucky. "It's all made up."

Chapter 77

The Visionary reads the book

A few weeks later, Lucky and Linda dropped off a copy of the final manuscript for the Visionary to read and made a date to meet with him the next day.

“I’m eager to hear what you think of it, now that it’s complete and ready to publish,” said Lucky when they were all seated.

“I like it,” said the Visionary. “I think you’ve done a wonderful job. John and Dagne gave you a difficult challenge when they asked you to tell the story as a work of fiction.”

“Do you think others will want to read it?” Asked Linda.

“I don’t know,” said the Visionary. “I’m biased because I lived part of the story, and I’m treated so generously in the book. I think you’ve had an amazing experience. You two are the only people in history who have ever known a man from the future intimately. I think you asked interesting questions, and I’m comforted by the answers John gave. Let me ask you the same question. How do you like the book?”

“I have mixed emotions,” said Lucky. “It was wonderful knowing John, Dagne, and the children. They are incredible people, and we’ll miss their friendship. I don’t think we’ve really done justice to them in the book—we weren’t able to bring them to life the way really skilled novelists could have. I’m uncomfortable with all the big words that John and Dagne added. In many ways, it’s more John and Dagne’s book than ours.”

“I’m sorry you feel that way,” said the Visionary.

“If *you* like it, perhaps you could take the manuscript and do something with it,” said Linda. “Would that be all right with you, Lucky?” she continued.

“It’s fine with me...if you want it,” said Lucky

“I could have some friends put it on a Web site and see how people react to it. If there is a lot of interest, I can publish it on paper and give the profits of any sales to your educational foundation. What would you think of that?” asked the Visionary.

“It sounds like a great plan to me,” said Lucky. “I had more fun living the story than writing about it. I thought writing would just be an entertaining hobby to pick up after my

retirement, but it turned out to be much more than that. For one thing, we became incredibly rich.”

“Don’t forget your charitable foundation, Lucky. I hope you two do some good work with that organization. If you want me to, I’d be willing to consult with you as a volunteer...and to show my faith in your effort, I’ll give you this lottery ticket that John gave me. Cash that in, and put it into good works,” said the Visionary.

Lucky and Linda were effusive in their thanks. As they were shaking hands with the Visionary and saying goodbye, Lucky added, “If anyone should ask, please tell them that we’re gone...and no one will be calling me Lucky anymore.”

Acknowledgements

I must acknowledge the many contributions of my loving wife and co-author, Linda Sue Louis. Her love and support sustained me through my trials as a writing novice, and her name should, in all justice, share the cover with mine.

I must acknowledge the countless contributions of John and Dagne, wherever they may be. They provided the basis for the main characters and made the book so much better, and they've added immeasurably to my vocabulary. I've grown particularly fond of *veritable*, *homage*, *sanguine*, and *engendered*. I might even use these in my next book, *How to Live Cozily with Millions and Millions of Dollars*.

I'm deeply indebted to the Visionary, without whom the events described in this book would never have happened (and who still refuses to be named).

I'm indebted to the FBI who, in their kindness and generosity, will surely forgive the dramatic license I took in describing their involvement. Their tireless search for terrorists deserves more respect than I was able to give them in this book.

I am indebted to the kind couple that volunteered to create and maintain the Web site <http://www.bringthemoon.com> where this book first appeared (they have also refused to be named).

I am obliged to assure the reader that no such person as "Irish O'Conner" exists, and no one from the IRS would ever tell an outsider anything about IRS business.

I am sad to say that no such organization of hearing-impaired people exists as is described in this book (although perhaps one should).

I must apologize to any reader whose beliefs may have been challenged uncomfortably by the beliefs chosen by characters in this book. The author is very respectful of your right to choose your own beliefs. You have probably finished the entire novel before reaching this addendum, and you might easily have made the choice not to read the rest of the book as soon as you encountered any idea with which you may not have agreed. If you found yourself at any point getting all nutsy about what you may have felt was an affront to your beliefs, please remember that it is "arrogant, disrespectful, and rude" to attempt to find the author and pummel him into believing as you do.

Lucky's notes

1. Out of consideration for Linda, additional references to my beloved first wife have been left out of this book.

2a. The title of this chapter was taken from the very bad writing of a Mr. Bulwer-Lytton and is often used to exemplify bad writing. In this, his first novel, the author identifies with Bulwer-Lytton and modestly suggests that the writing in this book may be simply dreadful.

2b. The poker players described in this chapter do not exist...but if you should happen to run across them, do not play poker with them.

The broker in this chapter was not from Merrill Lynch. Merrill Lynch brokers steadfastly refused to take part in the search.

No one from the IRS told the author anything.

9. The title of this chapter was taken from the first line of “*Atlas Shrugged*” by Ayn Rand.

John and Dagne Galt's names were borrowed, as well. Those are not real names.

15. There are several more differences in humans in John's time. We had many discussions about putting them in the story, but it became clumsy. We might have noted that scientists in the Interim enhance vision to include a much wider range of the light spectrum. John could see in the dark as well as a cat. His other senses were also enhanced. John could detect minute odors as well as a dog can, and his sense of taste surpassed anything we can comprehend. Every sense was enhanced so that it could potentially bring pleasure. Interestingly, sensory organs have also been modified in the future so that odors and tastes that are naturally unpleasant to humans are muted.

28a. In John's time, people use a basic set of twelve numbers (plus zero) rather than ten to do mathematics. There are evidently good reasons for this, but they were never made clear to the author(s).

28b. To fully understand *synthesis*, John referred the authors to *Bloom's Taxonomy*. We did not find a place to explain the gist of Bloom's taxonomy in this book, but if readers wish to understand fully the optimal role of the teacher, they should type *Bloom's Taxonomy* into a search engine and explore.

28c. The author(s) feel that, as products of the current era, the most useful information that we learned from John was about beliefs. Our foundation will focus its initial work on making instruction about beliefs available to everyone we can reach.

29. In John's time, individual avatars are available forever. If John wishes to consult an author or composer or even an ancestor who has died, he can summon their avatars and speak with them as though their human forms and personalities still existed.

54. The choice of the word *bamboozled* was not mine. Enough said.

55. We introduced doubt into Lucky and Linda's minds as characters so that we could resolve the sexual tension we were using as a literary device. In fact, living with John provided so many daily proofs that there was no doubt at all of his origins. For example, for ten miles John stayed ahead of Linda on her bicycle, and she can go faster than twenty miles an hour. Another example: John solved the *New York Times* Sunday Crossword puzzle in his head, without using a pencil, and read all the answers aloud in fewer than ten minutes. No, he didn't look them up on his device.

John did have consensual sex with Linda. He was a skilled and patient teacher. Linda continues to be multi-orgasmic, and she's working on me.