HARVARD VAGABOND POOL HUSTLER

Bob Ticer

John Luck leaned back with his legs on the footrest of his Lazy Boy chair as he watched three dimensional images from his hybrid, a computerized television, communication and camera system. Towers with numerous small apartments appeared as the heart of the city with only a few people out and about. He felt as if he was only one of many tenants inclined to be mere loners, being victims of modernization.

He pushed buttons on the remote he held in front of his frowning face. Vice President James Simmons appeared on the screen. The president candidate for the next election was being questioned by a male reporter.

“We need to prosecute those criminals violating the law at Summer Lake,” he answered.”

A female reporter raised her hand.

The Vice President and president candidate pointed at her.

“Exactly what law has been violated?” she asked.

“They don’t pay their share of tax,” he replied with a mean stare and his finger pointing right at her.

“They pay a lot of property tax,” she noted.

“They do,” he admitted, “but just to support Oregon, which is democratic socialism. They hardly pay any federal tax.”

John shaking his head no and flipping his hand goodbye at the screen noticed a blue light suddenly appearing at its lower right corner. He pushed the blue button on his remote. A tall and slim elderly fellow of African descent dressed in a business like suit appeared in place of the Vice President.

“Hello,” John greeted him.

“Hi John,” the fellow greeted back, “I’m Jack Cavish of your dad’s law firm. I heard you were accepted by the bar. Your dad said it’s your decision to join us. I’m just calling to let you know that I welcome you. How about it, are you ready to provide the community with lawful procedure?”

“No Jack,” John replied, “I’m taking a good look at Summer Lake: can’t wait to be there.”

“Are you serious?” Jack asked with a serious stare. “Aren’t you going to join us? There’s more than the law firm can keep up with. We could sure use your help.”

“I studied mostly online,” John replied. “Even though I now have a degree from Harvard and I’ve been approved by the bar, it feels as though I need to get out of prison to find out what the world really has to offer.”

“We’re in its mix,” Jack replied with hand on heart. “If you just come and join us, you’ll experience it first hand.”

“I don’t think so,” John said shaking his head. “Robots and computers do it all. We just communicate online, being nothing but loners needing more challenges in life. I want to enter the pool tournament at Summer Lake. I know I can win it.”

“What’s the big deal?” Jack asked. “It’s only three thousand miles to the west coast. Those small planes fly fast. You can fly there in a day, play your games and be back in another day.”

“I want to drive my electric car to have a little time to enjoy it,” John replied nodding his head as though he was confident he was choosing his best path in life. “That car has been in the family for more than three hundred years. There’s a remarkable family history of scenic events on its computer. I want to meet people, find out what they’re really like and get to Summer Lake early to find out if it’s really as good as they say it is in that area of the country.”

“You need lots of debits just for a room at that resort,” Jack was frank to point out.

“I have it covered,” John replied with a quick snap of his fist near his eyes. “I’ll just become one of those indentured servants they need to prevent forest fires.”

“Why?” Jack asked with a more demanding tone of voice.

“Because I want to live my life,” John explained. “Right now, you and my dad want to live it for me.”

“No we don’t,” Jack replied with a serious tone. “We just want you to join us and be part of the team. We help everyone get through tough times. It’s sure a rewarding experience when it succeeds.”

“You don’t live you own lives,” John said turning his head to stare at the wall. “Computers and robots live it for you.”

“They just make it easier,” Jack countered back.

“They take away the challenge,” John said shaking his head no.

“They show the way,” Jack continued the debate. “We still need to determine what’s right and wrong. Besides, if you think you know everything, then you’re not willing to learn.”

“Yeah, I know,” John replied. “Curiosity with an open mind is addictive. Figure out one answer and another question pops up just to trap you into more thought.”

“It’s a challenge,” Jack replied. “Isn’t that what you want?”

“You make good points,” John replied as he began nodding his head yes, “but my curiosity and open mind already have me addicted. I’ll get going on that higher level after I win that pool tournament. I’ll then know for sure.”

“The resort has been a special client for us,” Jack warned. “Some of those indentured servants have been violent criminals. You could be getting into a dangerous situation.”

“The law firm helped defeat the lawsuit against that resort, didn’t it?” John asked.

“It did,” Jack confirmed, “but all those indentured servants are still demanding their right to have dangerous weapons.”

“Aren’t they too busy about this time of year clearing the forest to prevent those forest fires they’re expecting in the hot summer?” John asked flipping his thumb up in front of his eyes. “It should be enough to keep them out of trouble.”

“They’re still demanding their second amendment rights,” Jack explained. “Who knows what those gangs might be up to?”

“Well,” John replied, “I’m sure all those identity bracelets they’re required to wear and spy cameras everywhere they go are just a couple things to keep them in check. They can also be easily sedated for them to pay even more captivity for their crimes instead of them just passing onto another life.”

“They can still gang up on you,” Jack warned while pointing his finger at John.

“I’m sure the resort will have me protected,” John insisted, “and I’ve taken classes in martial arts. Lawyers do need to be prepared for dangerous situations during investigations. Such experience at Summer Lake will prepare me for that. Besides, it is claimed to be the origin of a great economic revolution. I’ve studied the history of economics at Harvard. It could be helpful for resolving political issues in court.”

“Your dad told me you refuse to hurt anyone.” Jack replied, “even if you’re getting beat up.”

‘Yeah,” John admitted with a shrug, “I remember putting on boxing gloves at another student’s house when I was only seven. Although I wrestled everyone and won, I couldn’t hurt anyone. I couldn’t punch back. One of the guy’s in one of my classes tried to bully me. I just let him. An inferiority complex of being a loner had me from there on. I need to prove to myself I can succeed and be acceptable doing it.”

“You say you’re gotten addicted to wanting to know,” Jack recalled. “Have you learned much?”

“Descartes once said I think, therefore I am,” John replied. “Well, is it only me? Am I alone or is there more of us?” What is reality? Did it have a beginning? Does it have an end? Is this all just mind or matter, If if’s matter, is there empty space between it?”

“What do you think?” Jack had to ask.

“Can it even be explainable?” John asked back: “No matter. Never mind. Descartes proposed it’s just a plenum of something beyond matter. There is no wiggle room even for wave motion. The only possible motion is circular. Descartes also proposed it’s composed of circular motion within circular motion. There was this guy a few centuries back, David Hine, proposing the size of our universe is in ratio to pi multiplied by itself many zillions of

times for it equating as the Hubble Constant. I just hope it tastes good."

"Good luck," Jack said. "I hope we don't have to bail you out if you get into more trouble than you can handle on your own."

John grinned as he waved his hand goodbye. He then eyed the sealing in the small apartment of no windows. Automatic cameras revealed local scenery outside the apartment building. Besides the screen and cameras, inside the apartment was only living space with a small kitchen, small bathroom and the lazy boy chair that converted into a bed, as John did to it after he finished eating a sandwich, drank some warm milk and turned on some soft music.

Instead of watching towers of numerous small apartments filling the heart of the city, he pushed buttons on his remote to tune into three dimensional views of natural wilderness. He was about to travel, and the Summer Lake area had become one of the best natural wildernesses left in the northern hemisphere.

The screen showed an arid region north of Reno, Nevada. A nuclear power plant was being built to supply the region with enough energy to develop its potential. Up north into the state of Oregon east of the Cascade Mountains that potential already had been achieved. A multitude of greenhouse farms replaced the once high desert area. A herd of deer at a farm at the foot of the Cascades was grazing on grass close to Silver Lake, a town farther north from Summer Lake. Farther east, horses roamed about here and there. There were trees and birds aplenty.

John seemed to enjoy the view as more gratifying than the dull gray walls of his department. Besides, there seemed to be more opportunity to participate. Indentured servants up in the snow packed mountains gathered brush and fallen branches of Ponderosa Pine along with other trees and brush.

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"Cook oats at medium temperature," the lady on the big screen said.

As Nelly Nelson faced the big screen while listening to the lady instructing her, a blue light came on near the lower right corner of the screen. She pushed the button on her remote.

"Hi Nelly," a middle age lady said. "Are you studying your nutritional lessons? Hope I'm not interrupting."

"Yes mom," Nelly replied. "I'm studying and welcome your call. I can get a replay. What's up?"

"I'm worried about your dad," she replied. "I believe he's been investigating something serious. He seems concerned but reluctant to say anything about it."

"He's just a reporter," Nelly said. "If it's serious, he'll let the police handle it."

“He thinks he needs to be a hero,” her mother replied. “He thinks he must save the world.”

“You know,” Nelly said, “I think I’ve seen him disguised as someone else. He’s been entering a small RV parked near others. It’s not too far from here.”

“I thought you might have,” her mother replied. “He said you were interested in what he was investigating at Summer Lake, and it’s gotten serious. He noticed you watching him and seemed concerned about it, and I believe it has to be more than just messing up a good story. You are very inquisitive. Please don’t be. It could be very dangerous.”

“Thanks mom for the warning,” Nelly said. “I’ll be careful,” she assured.

“Please don’t get involved,” her mother pleaded.

“Don’t worry, mom,” Nelly replied, “I’m just going to keep an eye out just in case I need to make a call on his behalf, and I’ll be sure he really needs it before I do.”

“Okay dear,” her mother said, “please stay safe, and come see us when you have some time to spare.”

“Yes, mom,” Nelly replied. “If some day I have the time, I’ll be there, and I don’t think I need anymore summer classes. See you soon.”

As the screen turned off, Nelly folded her arms tight to her chest and stared at the wall. She then pushed a button on her remote.

“Hi,” her dad answered as he appeared on the big screen.

She took time to examine his surroundings, but she did not see anything out of the ordinary.

“What’s up Patsy?” her dad asked.

Nelly rubbed her chin while eyeing the ceiling.

“I came up with this new recipe for cookies,” she replied with the realization she had intruded into a serious situation. “You’re going to love them.”

“Yes,” he replied, “I’ll drop by tomorrow. I’m sure they’ll be delicious.”

“They’ll be out of the oven in only five,” Nelly replied after staring helplessly at the screen. “You’ll have them in ten.”

“No,” he blurted out, “I’d rather have them tomorrow.”

He squeezed his eyes and teeth grimacing. The screen went blank. She then pressed her lips tight and crinkled her nose. She stood up from her cushion chair. She paused for about a minute, shook her head and walked into the kitchen, opened an oven door and reached for a pan of cookies. Being tight lipped, she rubbed her forehead.

“He could need me,” she said to herself, “but I need to be careful.”

She was soon walking alone late at night down the street to arrive at a small RV in the midst of several others. She pushed

the doorbell. The door opened. A short bearded fellow about her height stood before her.

"I'm selling cookies for a special children's event," she said. "Would you like to buy some? The guy who lives here said he'd like to have some. I'm Patsy."

He waved his hand signaling her to come on in. She only leaned forward to peek through the doorway.

"Sorry," she said holding a hand up with its palm facing him, "I'm in a hurry; must get back to the shop before it closes."

He pointed a pen-like device at her that spurted something on her forehead. She closed her eyes tight. Instead of turning to escape, her hand slapped her forehead. She dropped the sack of cookies when he grabbed her arms and pulled her on into the RV.

She grabbed the pen like device from his hand after he let go from pulling her. He stepped back from her pointing it at him. He was not a lone. A tall fellow standing about ten feet away to her right was pointing a phone camera at her. She pointed the pen like device at him, but she also started staggering about.

She fell to lie unconscious beside a man lying on the floor. The tall man with the phone walked over and placed the phone in the hand of the man on the floor, and he walked to the door to get the cookies. He squirted the cookies with what was in the pen gun.

"What are we going to do with them?" the tall man asked.

"Take them with us," the short man answered. "All she'll know is she poisoned her father with cookies. He'll have to talk to save her. At the least, he won't say anything as long as he knows we have his daughter. His wife could be next on the list."

"Why don't we just finish them off?" the tall fellow asked as he reached forward with the pen like device showing it to be pointing up at the ceiling.

"Don't be stupid," the short fellow quickly responded. "It'll just bring on an investigation for them to find out what he has refused to tell us and probably has recorded somewhere that is ready to pass on to someone else if he dies. It'll surely be found with an investigation of his death."

"We should just silence them for good," the tall fellow said. "That pen gun has her fingerprints. The phone has his, not mine. I'm wearing gloves. She's guilty."

"No Dirk," the short fellow replied leaning forward with a stare. "How could he have taken that picture lying unconscious on the floor? They'll know she's not alone and that she's being framed. Besides, these pen guns are a secret. It's over if anyone finds out we have them."

"So what, Peter," Dirk replied while reaching down to pick up the phone. "She kills him and commits suicide by eating her own poisonous cookies. What else is there to investigate?"

“Because she’s also been drugged,” Peter quickly pointed out. “They’ll still investigate it to make sure it was suicide. We not only need them to conclude that, we have to be completely out of the investigation.”

“You’re partly right,” Dirk answered. “They’ll investigate for sure and find nothing, but just leaving them here alive is what’s not good. She’ll wake up and remember in a couple days what happened, as will he. We can’t let that happen, can we?”

“You’re also partly right,” Peter consented, “but there’s no way we can do them in here at this time. I need his information. I’m taking him with me. She needs to fear his life is at stake. It’s a critical part of the plan.”

“What else can we do?” Dirk asked with his arms extended out to each side. “If we take both of them with us, they’ll wake up and spill the beans.”

“Okay,” Peter answered while rubbing his chin, “we should not take both of them with us.”

“Yeah,” Dirk agreed, “we need to dump her off somewhere hard to find. If she runs away, hides and starves to death, that’ll be okay. We keep him locked up thinking we have his daughter framed for murder.”

“That’s not a good idea,” Peter said.

“Why isn’t it?” Dirk asked with his palms face up in front of his chest. “I know where there is a good place to take her where it’s too lawless for her to do anything about it.”

“Because,” Peter explained, “keeping them alive allows us something to bargain with if they find out what we’re up to.”

“We should just get rid of them,” Dirk insisted.

“You don’t know what I know,” Peter exclaimed staring at and pointing his finger at Dirk. “There’s too much at stake.”

Dirk turned his head to face the wall. He then turned his eyes back towards Peter and nodded a few times.

“Okay,” he replied smirking while again nodding his head yes, “I know just the place to take her. It’s secret enough to let her live and private enough for no need to worry.”

“Are you sure it’s secure enough?” Peter asked creasing his brow.

“Definitely,” Dirk claimed. “It’s been a family tradition for a long, long time.”

“How’ll you get her there?” Peter was quick to ask.

“You take him in your rental,” Dirk said grinning, “I take her in this rental. It’s as simple as one, two, tree.”

“No!” Peter blurted, “It’s not simple. You could get stopped along the way for just a traffic violation. They’ll know you’re in a stolen RV. You’ll be arrested. That’s not simple thinking.”

“You don’t get it,” Dirk accused.

“I don’t get what?” Peter asked with a serious stare.

“What you don’t get,” Peter explained, “is I take her in this rig where I get another rig. This rig drives itself to a forest to be found unoccupied. It looks as though someone got out of it only to get lost. They’ll search for him in the forest instead of where you take him. Get it?”

“It doesn’t drive itself without someone behind the wheel,” Peter informed.

“Whoops!” Peter uttered. “You’re right, but I know trusted friends who can come get me after I secretly drop her off.”

Peter eyed the ceiling and started nodding his head.

“Yeah,” he finally replied. “They do need to be separated. You can take her in this rig. I’ll make sure he gets locked up in a secure place at Summer Lake. It’ll be one-hundred feet below ground where he can never be found or even noticed. She also needs to be kept alive. If not, then you’re no longer with us. Get it? ”

“Got it,” Dirk replied while he shook his head along with a tightlipped grin.

“I need that pen gun,” Peter said reaching out to take it.

“I need it too,” Dirk replied holding it firmly in his hand.

“Give it to me,” Peter demanded pointing his pen gun right at Dirk’s eyes. “They are a highly classified secret. If the Feds get wind of it, we’ll be fully investigated and arrested.”

Dirk grimaced handing the pen gun to Peter.

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John had taken the southern route with a warmer climate of no snow and ice, and the scenic view seemed more enjoyable to him than would had a northern route with such hazardous weather conditions as flooding from the rapid melting of snow and ice with the upcoming hotter summer than those of recent past centuries.

He noticed all the dome buildings partway above ground to better withstand hurricanes and tornadoes. He looked up to see large blimps floating in a northwestern direction. He noticed a small blimp house hovering over a greenhouse unloading some of its bathroom content to the recycling facility. The sky above was filled with the countless number of small airplanes moving fast here and there, and with drones and small and large blimps moving slower in between.

“What are all those blimps, planes and drones doing in the sky?” John asked his car computer.

“People live in the house blimps,” the computer answered, “the cargo blimps and drones transport goods and services. The planes transport mostly people to different locations.”

“What else do they do?” John asked.

“They have sensors and response mechanisms,” it replied, “to monitor atmospheric conditions and prevent the forming of hurricanes and tornadoes.”

He drove through the Texas panhandle near the Oklahoma and New Mexico borders where he noticed many large blimps carrying water tanks. In place of centuries past desert areas of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and the southern part of Nevada, as appeared on the screen in the center of the dashboard, there appeared countless greenhouses. He took further notice of the various multitudes of flowers and animals that the transport of water in the modern day enabled them to flourish as such.

He drove through Las Vegas, as not to check it out because of Summer Lake being on his mind as more venturous. Heading north, he saw ahead of him drones, blimps and small planes flying about. He shook his head in contesting their appearance. He knew those small planes could indeed get him to Summer Lake in no time, and his electric car was a lot riskier.

His electric vehicle pulled a small trailer with the battery having enough charge for him to drive about three thousand miles, but only if moving during the light of day with sunlight to recharge the battery, and with enough warm weather for more lasting use of the battery. He had enough debits to spend on a battery recharge, but he might need them to rent a room in the northern part of Nevada where he could freeze. He realized he needed to allow the sun to recharge the battery for it to get him to Summer Lake with more assurance. Hopefully, he would have enough debits for the cost of a more pleasurable time during his stay at the Summer Lake resort.

He approached a small town and noticed a sign in front of a tavern having the picture of a pool table and pool balls. For it to allow more time for the battery to recharge, he decided to pull over and stop. He guided his car into the parking lot where only a couple electric bicycles were present. After parking beside the bicycles, he reached for his pool stick from behind the front seat, opened the door and made his way into the tavern.

A couple guys were at a pool table shooting as he walked up to the bar and showed his hand to the bartender.

The bartender pointed to a screen on the bar. John licked his finger before placing it on the screen.

“Mister Luck,” the bartender asked after watching it, “I see you’ve had your medical checkup. What will you have?”

“Just a beer and couple games of pool,” John replied.

“That’ll be ten debits,” the bartender said after he filled a large glass with beer and placed it on the bar in front of John.

Seeing the code number on the bar computer, John pushed the buttons on his phone to transfer his debits. He then turned to watch the pool shooters. As he sipped on his beer, he noticed they knew how to draw the cue ball back, but they didn’t apply

left or right cue ball English for more ways to win. John shook his head watching them not take shots he could easily make.

"Do you play straight eight-ball calling only it?" one of the players asked after pocketing the eight-ball. "It's only for a beer or ten credits. We don't take the game that serious. It's only for fun and a little incentive to win for it to be more interesting."

John nodded as he walked over to the table and racked the balls for the big fellow about six feet-four inches tall to break.

After the guy broke and made a smaller number ball than the eight on the brake, he made another couple smaller number balls before missing and leaving the cue ball in a fairly difficult position for most players to pocket a ball because of having less knowledge of cue ball English.

John examined the table. When he lined up to strike the cue ball, his opponent stood gazing with a crinkled nose. John stroked his cue stick with follow through to where it struck the cue ball left of its center. When the cue ball hit his high number object ball, the object ball rolled straight into a corner pocket while the cue ball continued on to scatter other balls to more favorable places for an easier run out of his other balls.

"You hit my ball first," his opponent claimed.

"No, I didn't," John replied while pointing at the bartender.

"He had to hit my ball first," his opponent said facing the bartender, "there wasn't enough room for the cue ball to hit his ball where needed."

The bartender watched a replay on a screen at the end of the bar.

"Good hit," the bartender replied with a shrug.

"That's dirty pool," his opponent gripped as John nearly ran the table in easily pocketing his balls. To win the game, he had only the eight ball left to pocket.

"How much do you pay bartenders to allow you to cheat?" his opponent asked.

"Nothing," John answered. "I don't cheat. I just know more than you and other pool players do."

"That had to be a masse," his opponent contended. "That's illegal."

"Not by APA rules," John pointed out, pointing straight at the bartender. "I'm a lawyer and he's the judge. According to the American Pool Association established back in the twentieth century a masse is legal. I'll admit, grand masses are according to house rule, but that was no grand masse."

His opponent faced the bartender.

"Did his pool stick go above his shoulder?" the bartender asked.

John's opponent shrugged.

"It was legal," the bartender ruled after watching again the replay of the shot, "case closed."

John pointed at the side pocked to his right. With the eight-ball lying next to the rail left of the other side pocket, he banked it into the side pocked next to him that he had pointed at.

"Damn it," the guy said while grabbing a ball and bouncing it off the table, "I guess you do take the game seriously."

"Don't get mad at the table," the bartender bellowed.

"He's right," John agreed. "You claim not to take this game seriously. Okay, just blame the balls for not doing what they're supposed to do and then make them do it."

"Ha, ha," the guy mocked while flipping his hand forward and turning to walk over to take a seat beside the other fellow. "Sorry," he yelled back, "I don't buy cheaters beer."

"I guess that's why nobody I know wants to play me," John said to the bartender as he walked up to the bar. His glass was still half full, but he said, "I'll have a couple more for my friends over there."

"You're welcome here anytime," the bartender replied.

John gulped down the rest of his glass of beer before going over to drop off the other two at the table where the guys sat.

"Here you go my friends," he said, "have one on me."

"I'm sorry I flipped," the big fellow said. "We only have few food credits to spend per day and they're not good for alcohol."

"I understand," John replied. "I've sort of felt like I've been in prison. It'd be nice to be able to do what you prefer."

"Yeah," the big fellow said, "but Vice President Simmons is going to free us after he gets elected President."

"I doubt it," John said shaking his head no.

"Hey," the big fellow asked, "don't you listen to him? Look what he's already done helping the President. They're trying to change the damn laws favoring those rich environmentalists up at Summer Lake, Oregon."

"It's just politics," John replied with a shrug.

"You don't believe in politics?" the big fellow asked. "Don't you care? Don't you want to help get us out of prison?"

"One President inherits a recession," John noted. "The next one inherits a recovery. That's typical politics. Take all the credit you can for positive results; blame someone else if they turn out negative."

The big guy pointed at the other guy at the table.

"He'll get a lot more done if it weren't for the democrats controlling congress," the elderly man with gray hair said.

"It seems like he wants to be a dictator," John accused.

"We need a strong leader," the elderly man replied.

"They fire anyone disagreeing with them so that they'll be above the law and able to do as they please," John accused.

"A divided house can't stand," the elderly man pointed out with a finger pointing at John.

“That’s why we need someone who’ll work with congress,” John replied.

“You’re a damn socialist,” the big fellow blurted out.

“I used to teach economic history,” the gray haired fellow said. “There used to be what was called actual money. It gave us a lot more freedom until socialism took over.”

“It had negatives and positives,” John countered. “I’ve also studied economic history at Harvard.”

“Yeah,” the gray haired man said, “at least with real money you were able to purchase whatever you wanted on the open marked. Now we’re more controlled by government instead of being free to compete like our guy Simmons wants us to be.”

“We still have to earn it,” John replied. “Paper money was only a convenience. It speeded up the process, but real wealth is the product you buy with money, not what you buy it with.”

“Yeah,” the gray-haired man replied, “but money was once gold. It took labor to produce. By buying produced wealth with produced wealth, you earned it.”

“Not exactly,” John countered, “People who hoarded gold became richer with its scarcity. Similarly, paper money enabled those with it more advantage to become richer by lending it to those in need of it for a price. People lived on the edge and fell off during recessions, not being able to pay their debts. Besides, what’s more valuable if you’re in the middle of a desert needing water to survive, a ton of gold or a canteen of water?”

“I’ll have the ton of gold,” the big fellow said.

“You know,” John said while glancing at the big fellow, “A lot of good things have developed from social policies.”

“Like what?” the big fellow asked.

“Like free education in the US before other countries were willing to finance it,” John answered. “By government finance it enhanced knowledgeable competition and a higher standard of living. Right after World War II it was the US who helped finance the recovery of Europe. It was charity, but the US dollar became standard, as other countries used it to purchase our products. Our economy then became robust for decades until the richer became even richer at the expense of the poor.”

“How’d that happen?” the gray-haired man asked.

“Social policy did contribute to it,” John admitted. “With construction of freeways for ease of travel, competition became more widespread. Local producers competing against the world needed to invest more in advertising and so on. Bigger became an advantage over the smaller. It also became too big to fail. Monopolies and oligopolies took over. Competition is great, but when only one wins, the game ends. Social policy contributed to it, but even more social policy was needed to make it work. It could’ve worked if it had been done right.”

“You’re a damn socialist,” the big fellow said. ”We could earn our wealth and freedom with real money instead of having only these damn debits and temporary credits we either use or lose.”

“I needed to get good grades at Harvard to earn my debits,” John informed the guy while gazing down at him.

John waved goodbye to the mean stare he was receiving from the big fellow squeezing his fists. He hurried to his car. As he opened the door, he heard, “You know, we don’t put up with pool hustlers around here.”

John turned to face the big fellow having his fists before his chest ready to punch.

“I bought you a beer,” John said. “What’s the big deal?”

“I don’t care about your debits,” the man replied. “You just need to know the consequence of being a hustler around here is not welcomed.”

The man attempted a jab at John’s jaw, but John’s duck was quick enough to avoid it. The guy swung furiously, missed and ended up off-balance. Not punching back, John closed in on him instead, swirling to his backside to trip him as he tried to escape. Landing on the guy’s back, John locked his arm with the guy’s. When the guy tried to get up, John kneed his rear end to flatten him again on the ground. He grabbed the forward part of the guy’s locked arm, pulling it to the backside where it was in an awkward position easy to break, and John listened to the guy groan from a slight press of his arm up towards his neck.

John noticed the elderly guy standing nearby.

“I’m a lawyer,” John warned, “I’ll just call the police and file charges. The bartender will have to testify under oath. You’ll be a lot less free than you are now.”

“Come on Dave,” the guy standing said. “We’ll be okay. We just need to wait awhile to do more time on that cleanup crew. We still have enough freedom to somehow trade food credits for something better to enjoy. After all, we as customers are still needed. They’ll trust us to be silent as long as we don’t mess up too much.”

“Okay Ted,” Dave replied, “I’ll behave myself.”

The big guy stayed put letting John’s shorter and leaner but quicker body get up and leave.

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Nelly appeared bewildered as she looked out the window at packed snow that had been removed from the road. She was sitting in a chair behind the driver seat of the RV and was locked in tight by a seat belt.

“Recognize anything?” Dirk asked while staring at her with no need to steer the self driving vehicle.

She slowly shook her head no, as seemingly being unable to know what to say.

"Do you know who you are?" he asked.

She again slowly shook her head no.

"You're a prostitute," he said. "I'm your pimp."

"Why am I a prostitute?" she asked with a frown. "Why are you my pimp?"

"Because you're wanted by the law," he answered while holding a smart phone up for her to see herself standing next to where her father lie on the floor in a position his identity was not easily identifiable. "You murdered that guy. If you use your credit allowance to buy food, they'll know where you are. You'll be arrested, convicted and will have to wear an identity bracelet revealing every place you go. You'll have to play by their rules and work wherever you're needed."

"Don't I deserve it?" she sadly asked bowing her head. "If I killed that guy, don't I deserve it?"

"Yes, you deserve it," Dirk answered, "but you can make it up by helping me. That guy was my best friend."

Nelly bowed her head facing the floor while shaking it with a frowning face. Seeing nothing outside other than the road up ahead, which was surrounded mostly of non populated desert area of winter snow. It was not encouraging to say the least.

***

"Mr. Aaron Luck" Jack said to John's dad sitting at a desk with papers in his hand, "John is on his way to Summer Lake. He could be there for a couple months at least."

"Sometimes you have to learn the hard way," Aaron said nodding his head yes. "If he doesn't get into too much trouble, the experience could pay back in the future."

"It's not good living on the edge," Jack pointed out. "Those who did in centuries past usually were the ones who fell off in being poor and going bankrupt. Those of them who were more conservative usually came out on top to benefit from the losers."

"Some of them only benefited selfishly," Aaron replied. "Credit was paper money back then. It needed to be recycled back for more opportunity to innovate. And the rich still needed customers for them to stay rich with more overall productivity to sell, but credit became controlled by the wealthy few with worse conditions others suffered from. The economy became more prone to recessions. Even the rich suffered. They became losers as well. Even though they were blessed with more money to spend and survive, they lived in an unfavorable environment with more chaos than they wanted to experience."

"I have to agree," Jack said. "Some of the rich got rich with lies and deception. They were greedy, but a lot of the socialists

were just as greedy and dishonest. They stole from the people as well. Some of the rich were good people. They helped out the poor with more productivity. It was those getting rich by taking advantage of the poor that I only find fault with."

"I know," Aaron said. "It just needed to balance out and be in control of voters who were more educated and informed of what was really going on instead of only accepting political lies that told them only what they wanted to believe."

"Unfortunately," Jack replied, "It's still going on and is a lot worse in some places at that."

"That's life," Aaron replied.

"It might not be in the near future," Jack said with a stern look on his face, "not from what I heard from one of our clients about five years back."

"How serious is it?" Aaron asked with raised eyebrows.

"Do you know about Peter Moffert?" Jack asked in turn.

"Is he involved?" Aaron asked alarmingly.

"It's what he knows and who he knows," Jack answered.

Aaron shrugged.

"He wanted to join the space program," Jack continued to explain, "but he was refused by the head man, Rudolf Hamilton, and he was convicted of revealing classified information that he didn't even have authorization to have. He ended up sentenced as an indentured servant with the Forest Service near Summer Lake, but not for long, as Vice President Simmons persuaded the President to pardon him."

"How's that a threat," Aaron asked, "and how do you know about it?"

"I know from whom he knows," Jack replied.

"Okay, who does he know?" Aaron asked.

"He met another indentured servant," Jack answered, "Dirk Banks, who was our client who also ended up at Summer Lake. He wasn't explicit, but he hinted this Peter Moffert knew a lot and was disgruntled by not being allowed to join a Mars colony. This guy claimed Peter infiltrated classified information of how to turn Earth into a giant bomb. I checked it out. Indications of government documents indicate Peter is intelligent enough, but he is also revengeful and dangerously suicidal."

"Do you really think he'll attempt to blow up Earth?" Aaron asked.

"I think Summer Lake has the capacity for it to be possible," Jack answered. "With that giant electrical diamond battery grid being created the last three centuries, he could try to make it possible for the sake of extortion, and he might go ahead with it if he doesn't get what he wants. He's emotionally disturbed."

"Why Summer Lake," Aaron asked.

"It seems to have the capability," Jack replied. "The electric grid from that giant diamond battery is not only fueled by solar

energy, it includes nuclear waste for it to have enough potential energy to be the most powerful bomb ever exploded on Earth, especially with more volcanic potential forming at Yellowstone and in the nearby Cascades."

"I don't want my son to get involved," Aaron said as he sat with a fixed gaze. "Don't we have some follow up business with the resort?"

"Yeah," Jack replied, "I should enter that pool tournament. I haven't played in awhile, but we also have a lot more work to catch up on with our other clients at Summer Lake, and to die there won't be any worse than dying here."

"I guess I'll have to put in a little more overtime," Aaron said as he eyed the ceiling. "It'd be much better than having all that future consequence on my mind."

***

The RV drove up to and parked near a restaurant and inn. Dirk waved his right hand forward as he opened the door.

"Come on pretty girl," he said. "This is where you work."

She seemed to stare in disbelief.

"Come on," Dirk shouted. "If you don't do your thing here, then you'll be left in the woods to starve and freeze. It's been awhile since you've eaten. Is that really how you want to spend the rest of your life? Have a little fun before you go out paying back for what you've done."

With a frowning face she opened the door to get out and walk forward around the front of the car. Dirk locked her arm with his to guide her into the restaurant.

"Take a seat at a table over there," Dirk said while pointing at the table.

He walked up to the counter as she went over to the table.

"Hello granny," Dirk said to the elderly lady at the counter. "How's Mary?'

"She's doing her thing," Granny replied looking away.

"Wouldn't she like to have more breaks?" Dirk asked. "I've got someone here that can take her place."

"Who is she?" Granny asked as she stared at Nelly.

"Oh," Dirk said, "just someone wanted by the law."

"Do we need to disguise her?" Granny asked. "She is nice looking as she now is."

"It'd be a good idea." Dirk said nodding yes. "You probably need to show her the ropes. She might be a virgin."

"That is not good," Granny replied. After a bit of hesitation she said, "I'll get Mary to school her on what to do. She'll fix her up to look real good. She already does seem young and pretty. We just need to make her look a little sexier."

"I'll be her first customer after a good meal," Dirk said with a wink. "It'll teach her a lot. She'll enjoy it. I'm such a nice guy."

Granny grinned squeezing her teeth tight.

"Here," Dirk said reaching out with a bag of cookies, "leave these for her to have after it's over. She'll enjoy them enough to become a faithful servant."

***

"How much battery charge is there?" John asked his car.

There is enough charge to last ten miles at this speed," was its reply.

He squeezed his teeth and shut his eyes tight. He suddenly noticed an inn up ahead. He took control of the car for slowing it down to enter the parking lot. He parked beside an RV, got out with his pool stick and walked towards the restaurant.

John caught sight of granny guiding Nelly out the door. As they went their way to his left, he continued his entrance into the inn where he noticed a counter, restaurant tables, two pool tables and an apparent customer at a nearby table.

"All rooms taken," Dirk informed John who had walked up to the counter.

"Darn it," John said grimacing. "It's cold out there. There's barely enough room to lie in the back seat of my little electric car, and I don't have enough battery left to keep me warm or to get me to where I need to go."

"I tell you what," Dirk said. "I see you have a pool stick. I'm a nice guy. Would you like to play a game of nine-ball for a room and meal? It's only for a couple hundred debits. You win, it'll be yours. I win you pay twice, for me and the room."

"Don't you need the room?" John asked.

"Not really," Dirk replied. "That's my RV right outside there. I have enough juice to get me to wherever I need to go."

Granny entered the restaurant. Dirk walked over to the counter to greet her as John walked over to sit at a table next to a pool table. With a hand behind his ear to listen in, he faced his upcoming opponent.

"We're about to play for room and meal," Dirk said to her. "It looks to be my lucky day."

"Okay," she said shaking her head as in doubt, "but I don't want anymore trouble out of you. If you lose, he gets it. Is that clear?"

"Yep," Dirk replied with a thumbs-up, "no problem."

He walked over to the pool table and racked the balls.

"Do we call the nine-ball on the break?" John asked.

"Of course not," Dirk replied. "It wins, but we lag for break."

Dirk picked out a cue stick from the rack on the wall as John opened his case for his. Dirk then walked over to the table and stroked the cue ball. It rolled down to the other end of the table and back to about a half inch from the rail.

“Beat that,” he said while walking over to where John sat to hand him a different cue ball he had gotten from the other table. “Don’t hit my cue ball,” he warned.

John stroked his cue ball. It rolled down to the other end of the table and back to about an eighth of an inch from the rail.

Dirk grimaced shaking his head no. John walked over to the other table to replace the cue ball that had been taken from it. He then returned to break the nine balls that had been racked.

John bent over with the cue ball close to the side rail within the pool table kitchen. He stroked the cue ball hard and below center. The cue ball hit the one-ball in front slightly to its right. The balls scattered with the nine-ball rolling into the far right corner pocket.”

“That was damn luck,” Dirk bellowed out. “Do it again and prove it.”

“That’s my name,” John replied, “and I’m also a lawyer. Do I have to make a call? I might just have your words recorded on my phone and ready to pass on, and a nuclear power plant that has been built nearby by the government should be about ready to go. I’m sure they’ll like to know what’s going on here.”

“It’s your room,” granny yelled. “It comes with a dinner of your choice. Do you want to see a menu?”

“I’ll just have your special,” John replied as he walked over to a table and sat as Dirk dropped his pool stick and walked up to the counter.

“Prostitution is no longer legal in Nevada,” granny leaned his way to whisper. “Around here in this remote area they don’t care, but he could know someone in that power plant that does.”

“He heard you and is using you,” Dirk answered just loud enough for John to hear and wonder about what else was going on.

She shrugged.

“I’m out of here,” Dirk said walking towards the door.

After John slowly drank a glass of beer, Granny served him his supper and handed him the key to the room he was to stay at for the night.

“It’s the only room available,” she said, “but you’re in for a pleasant surprise. Whatever happens is separate from here. My employees sometimes do things they’re not supposed to.”

John shrugged as he sat at the table ready to enjoy a steak dinner he had won, expecting it to be an enjoyable change from his own cooking.

***

“I know something happened to them,” Wanda Nelson said facing the police captain sitting at his desk. “I know they aren’t just missing.”

“Your husband is a reporter,” the captain replied, “and we do have concern for his safety.”

“Don’t you have concern for the guys he investigates?” she asked. “They could be lots of trouble.”

“We do,” he replied, “and we will find out whatever we can for our own interest as well as yours. The information you have provided us could be helpful. Please keep us informed of all else of what you might remember or here from somewhere else.”

“Thank you, captain,” she replied. “I surely will.”

When she left, a man in suit and tie soon stood before the captain in her place.

“Did she provide us with any new information?” Detective Dixon asked.

“Only that the daughter was eavesdropping on the father,” Captain Hodges answered.

“Yes,” the detective replied, “She’s a student studying food, as for nutritional health. Some of the crumbs we found on the ground with poison were likely her cookies. There was a phone conversation between her and her father. She could be in on it.”

“I’ll notify the Secret Service,” the captain said. “They have had interest for some time in what he’s been investigating. How exactly does his daughter fit in?”

“I don’t know,” the detective answered. “Both of them are missing. Her father might have included her in the investigation, or maybe they used her and now have them both. Who knows? Maybe she became addictive to drugs. She did have more debits to spend with all those good grades, and you know how much they like to see what they can do with it.”

“Well,” the captain said, “She’s now the main focus of our investigation. She might have joined up with the guys her father suspects is a gang of very dangerous criminals. The FBI has been focused on them and might not be aware of her role in it.”

“I’ll probably need to go to Summer Lake,” Detective Dixon said, “but that’s out of our territory. It’s not against the law just to go up there and investigate, but the secret service can object to it if it interferes with their investigation.”

“Well,” the captain replied. “Aren’t you due for a vacation about this time?”

“I sure could use one,” the detective replied with a hopeful expression.

“Just cooperate if you’re asked to and don’t interfere,” the captain emphasized.

***

“You’re now looking nice and sexy,” Mary said.

“I don’t think I can do it,” Nelly replied grimacing.

“Just do what you can,” Mary advised.

“What if he doesn’t want me?” Nelly asked facing down.

“If they’re shy,” Mary again advised, “rub their leg close to the groan. It’ll get them going.”

Nelly just kept on frowning.

“You’ll be okay.” Mary encouraged her. “I’ve got to go. Just enjoy the experience and hope the guy doesn’t take too much advantage of you.”

“Thanks,” Nelly replied still frowning.

Mary walked on out, meeting John when opening the door.

“The room is ready,” she said, “I’m sure you’ll enjoy it.”

When John entered the room he stood in awe of what he saw before him. The blonde girl wearing glasses was covered by a blanket except for bare shoulders. They stared at each other, her appearing to be sad and him appearing to be bewildered.

“Who are you?” John asked.

“Who are you?” she asked with a shrug.

“I’m the renter of this room,” John replied. “What are you doing here?”

“I’m your servant,” she replied still frowning.

“Why do I need a servant?” John was quick to ask.

“I don’t know,” she replied. “I’m just here to do whatever you want me to.”

“I’m only renting the room,” he informed her, “paying for no more.”

“I come with it,” she informed him.

“You don’t seem very happy about it,” John pointed out.

“Sorry,” she apologized. “I’ll try my best.”

“Sorry,” John answered, “I’m no rapist. You’re free to leave anytime you want. I won’t say anything to anyone.”

“I have nowhere to go,” she pleaded.

“Well, we have twin beds. I guess you can stay in yours if I can have one of those cookies.”

She nodded yes and pointed her hand towards the cookies that had been placed on the dresser. John went over and picked one out to eat, which he seemed to enjoy while chewing it.

“Who are you?” she asked.

“I’m John Luck,” he said before grimacing as to realize he should not be revealing such information that could be used for extortion. “I just graduated from Harvard to become a lawyer, but for now I’m just on my way to Summer Lake to enter a pool tournament. What’s your name and what brought you here to do something you obviously don’t want to?”

“I reckon I Mary Luck,” she gestured as indicative of her not having the will to reveal her true identity.

“Well,” he replied, “you’ll have luck, but it’s not marrying me. It’s you not having to do your thing with me.”

John suddenly staggered about.

“What is in those cookies?” he asked as he wobbled over to the bed and fell face down on it.

Nelly went over to him, turned him over, and then covered him with a blanket.

"Sorry," she said to herself as if guilty of another crime, "I must've fed you poisonous cookies. I need to somehow get out of this mess and do more good stuff instead of bad."

***

Peter sat behind the steering wheel watching where the RV was headed. He uncrossed his arms, turned and stared at Bert lying unconscious on the floor with his mouth and nose covered by a mask linking to a respirator.

"I reckon Dirk squirted too much into you," Peter said to himself. "You don't even remember to breathe. It's fortunate I hooked you up to that respirator. You'd be gone by now." He shook his head no. "Maybe you are at that."

He nudged Bert's shoulder with his fist. Bert's eyes opened.

"Do you remember anything?" Peter asked.

Bert appeared dazed when he focused his eyes on Peter.

"Do you know what I'm saying?" Peter asked.

Bert still appeared dazed.

When Peter got out of his seat, the RV slowed to a stop. He lifted Bert up off the floor to seat him behind the wheel.

"Continue to Summer Lake," he ordered the computer.

He then walked back to stand beside a microscope where he picked up a sack of pumpkin seeds.

"I know you're unable to digest enough of these," he said to himself, "unless they become tiny cell salts, those miniature particles that absorb right into the system. They're sweeter than sugar, but unfortunately a bit too much can also do you in."

He poured a few seeds into a small container below the microscope. He then turned on a laser and used the microscope to observe and control the conversion process as the RV moved west towards the small town of Paisley.

A couple deer ran out onto the road in front of the RV that suddenly braked to swerve off the road and hit a large rock. The RV stopped with both Bert and Peter lying on the floor.

Peter got up to make sure Bert was okay. He had to replace the respirator mask back on Bert's face. He then got back in the driver seat for the RV to continue. It moved forward slowly with a screeching noise coming from one of its wheels. For it to make it all the way to Summer Lake did not appear feasible, and there was the small town of Paisley just up ahead. It was able to drive to a parking space at a Paisley resort.

"Need help?" Peter heard someone yell out.

"No," Peter yelled back facing the floor grimacing, "there's a toll truck on its way. It'll be here any minute. Thanks for your concern. There's no need to notify anyone else."

"Good luck," he heard the guy yell back and drive off.

“I’m going to need it,” Peter said to himself as he got up to check out if Bert was still alive.

***

John woke, sat up and eyed the room as though he did not know where he was.

Nelly opened her eyes. In taking notice of John, she nodded her head while eyeing him.

“What’s the matter?” she finally asked.

He shook his head as if in doubt.

“Do you know who you are?” she asked.

He shook his head no.

“You are John Luck,” she told him while nodding her head yes and eyeing the ceiling. “I’m Mary Luck. We are husband and wife. We’re on our way to Summer Lake to participate in a pool tournament.”

John shrugged.

“We need to get going right away,” she urged. “We barely have enough time left to get there on time for us to enter it.”

He shrugged again.

She quickly dressed herself. As she started to lead him out the door, she noticed his pool stick in a case on the floor. She picked it up and handed it to him.

“See,” she said, “here’s your cue-stick.”

He eyed it curiously.

She went back to the dresser to find anything she could she might need.

“Let’s get going,” she said as she started out the door while grabbing his arm and pulling him her way.

Only one car was in the parking lot, as a few house blimps and a small plane were elsewhere. They had been there on her arrival. She noticed the RV she had arrived in at the resort. The car was parked beside it. It had not been there on her arrival.

“Give me the key,” she demanded. “I’ll drive.”

John stood dazed.

“Give it to me,” she demanded as she pointed at his pocket.

He found the key in his pocket and gave it to her.

“Hurry,” she said, “get in the car. I’ll drive. We need to get out of here now or it’ll be too late to enter the tournament.”

When she seated herself behind the wheel, she noticed a few things on the front passenger seat. She removed them by cramming them with the pool stick and a load of other stuff into the back seat.

As John slowly made his way over to the car and was barely able to seat himself in the passenger seat and to shut the door, Nelly sat behind the wheel staring at it and shrugging.

“Start,” she finally commanded. She had regained some of her memory.

“State destiny,” the car computer requested.

“Summer Lake, Oregon,” she complied.

The car drove itself onto the road heading north.

Dirk rose to peek through a window of the RV. He watched the car drive away before he could do anything about it. He hurried to get behind the wheel and start the RV. He backed it up to turn it around and floor the pedal. He reached to open the glove department. He pulled out of it a handgun.

“Exactly where are we going,” Nelly faced John to ask him, “Summer Lake Resort or somewhere nearby?”

He shrugged.

She noticed a red light shining on the dashboard.

“Computer,” she asked, “what does the red light mean?”

“The battery is low of charge,” it replied.

“How much time do we have with it?” she asked.

“Less than ten miles at this speed,” it replied.

“Turn right on the next road ahead,” she commanded the computer after noticing a large dome building a ways off on the right side of the road.

The car computer obeyed, slowing down and turning onto a road leading to a tall fence. There was a no-trespassing sign on the fence. Nelly stared at it helplessly. She trembled recognizing the RV pulling up and stopping behind the car she was in. It was trapped between the RV and the fence. Dirk was soon out of the RV with gun in hand.

“You are trespassing on federal property,” was a message of a voice coming from a small blimp floating their way from the other side of the fence.

Dirk, raising his arms high above his head, turned around to get back into the RV. It soon turned around and drove away out of sight.

“I’m stuck and lost,” Nelly yelled out.

When the blimp lowered to the ground, a middle aged man got out of it. With a pistol in his hand, he walked over to the car.

“Who are you?” he asked after Nelly lowered the window.

“We are John and Mary Luck,” she answered, “We just got married in Reno and are headed to Summer Lake to be in a pool tournament. It’s also our honeymoon.”

“What’s the problem?” he asked.

“Our battery is nearly dead,” she answered.

“That’s fixable,” he said, “but there’s a much more serious problem.”

“Like what?” she asked leaving her mouth wide open.

“Your small car isn’t going to make it up this desert road to California and Oregon,” he said. “A strong wind is forecasted to last a day or two north of here. You’ll be blown off the road into the desert and covered in snow with little chance of rescue.”

“What can we do?” she asked. “Where can we stay?”

He bowed his head and rubbed his eyebrow.

"Why was that guy pointing a gun at you?" he asked.

"He was stalking me," she replied. "He's jealous of John."

"We do have a cargo drone scheduled to pick up supplies at Lakeview, Oregon," he finally said. "It'll be leaving within the hour. That small car and trailer should just barely fit into it."

"That would be great," she replied. "How much will it cost us?"

"There's no charge," he replied, "but technically you can't board it here. You're trespassing. If I see you parked somewhere up ahead in distress, I can lower it to rescue you."

She waved goodbye and ordered the computer to continue and stop one half mile ahead. It did, as ordered for them to wait, wait and wait.

***

Granny entered the room shaking her head, disappointed seeing no one in it. She noticed the cookies on the dresser. She put one of them into her mouth. "Good," she said to herself as she walked out of the room eating another cookie and holding onto the rest of them.

As she entered the restaurant while eating another cookie, she glanced at Mary.

"These are nice cookies," she said before falling down on the floor and passing out.

Mary walked over and squatted down by her side to say, "I know I'm not supposed to call the authorities, but if I don't, you might die, and I have nowhere else to go. I could stay here to be able to take care of this place while you're in the hospital."

She walked over to the counter, reached for a phone. She pushed the emergency button.

"What is the emergency," she heard a recorder ask.

"The owner of this inn just passed out and is now helplessly lying on the floor," Mary answered.

***

After a couple hours the cargo blimp finally landed twenty feet in front of them. The rear door folded down into a plank.

"Move inside the cargo blimp," Nelly ordered.

Being inside a cramped area of a small loaded vehicle was even less tolerable than the long wait to get into it. They could only close their eyes and hope for the best, as to withstand the cold while being confined to a small cramped space for an hour after another and another.

When the blimp finally arrived at a warehouse in Lakeview, Oregon and they unloaded from it, Nelly was still aware of the battery needing to be recharged. She noticed a used car, house blimp and RV lot being close by.

“We need to sell this car,” she told John. “It’s very old and must have title papers.”

When John shrugged, she pointed at the glove department. After he opened it, she pointed at the title and registration. He handed it to her.

“Why do we need to sell it?” he asked frowning.

“It’s not right for Summer Lake,” she answered, “and more debits will be needed when we get there.”

She drove over to the car lot, got out of the car and met up with a casually dressed fellow walking out of an office.

“It’s for sale,” she said pointing her hand at the car.

“I’m Bart Jones,” he said walking around the car and eyeing his cell phone. “I’m the salesman, manager and owner.”

“We’re just selling,” she replied.

He walked around the car while also eyeing his cell phone.

“It’s a classic antique of the twenty-first century,” he said, “but I can only give thirty thousand debits for it.”

“We need to get to Summer Lake,” she said. “Can we get a couple months free rent with a house blimp?”

“One month,” he answered.

“It has to be two,” she insisted.

“Okay,” he finally agreed after a pause, “I do have one, but it needs a little work. If you don’t hurry it, it should be okay for a couple months at least.”

She nodded yes. He pointed at the blimp.

After John signed the title over and recorded the contracts with his phone, she and he transferred John’s belongings along with her fewer ones onto the blimp. To adjust to all the added weight and be nearly weightless, Bart increased the amount of helium in the dome of the blimp. It then lifted them up to about four hundred feet into the sky.

***

”That damn bartender no longer sells me beer for just food credits,” the big fellow said to Ted. “I don’t want to jeopardize your social security. I’ll work. Do you know someone who’ll hire me?”

“They’re in need of indentured servants in the mountains,” Ted replied. “It’s too stormy in northern California and Nevada. They’re getting it going up there in the Oregon Cascades. I know a guy and girl couple heading up there tomorrow. They’ll stay in house blimps provided by the forest service, and they’ll get free plane credits. They also told me a couple guys canceled out of it. There should still be a couple spots open.”

“You’re going?” Dave seemed to ask.

“Yes,” Ted confirmed with a nod. “I’m not quite yet eligible for social security, and I don’t have any disability on my medical records.”

“I’ll go in my house blimp,” Dave said. “Since forest service is federal, it’s alright to take it out of its confined area.”

“No,” Ted warned, “It’s too far for the slow blimp to make it there in time. You’ll have to go with us.”

“Tell them I’m eager to go,” Dave said with a thumbs-up.

Ted pushed buttons on his phone.

“Hello,” he heard.

“Is Mean-Dean and Malice-Alice there, Ted asked, “or are they still trying to become Bonne and Clyde?”

“Hey, my man, what’s up?” he heard.

“I have a friend, Brave Dave,” Ted answered. “He’s in a bad way wanting to come with us.”

There was a long pause.

“He needs to be here in the morning before ten,” he finally heard.

“Thanks,” Ted said to them, “We’ll be there.”

“It is set,” Ted said to Dave. “We get to camp out for awhile in those lovely Cascade Mountains. That pool tournament they have every year at Summer Lake; indentured servants might get us into it. We’ll just need to win a cheaper tournament at Silver Lake just north of it. We indentured servants can pool together with enough credits among us for the winner to enter the main one.”

***

John and Nelly had entered the house blimp. It was in flight on its way to the Summer Lake resort.

The house blimp was guided by GPS. Connecting to the dome was a cabin beneath it. In front of the dome were passage ways through the blimp to electric rotors around the rest of the blimp pointing up and down in various directions for steering. It was also equipped with an air scrubber and laser. The scrubber abstracted hydrogen and carbon from air; the laser was needed to convert the hydrogen into helium. The process enabled more flexibility of flight with helium being non-explosive in contrast to hydrogen exploding upward for the blimp house to be shoved hard to the ground. It also converted human waste into carbon and hydrogen for more fuel for whatever needed.

“The blankets are filled with bird feathers,” Nelly told John as they seated themselves inside it. “They’ll maintain the same warm temperature inside them no matter what it is outside.”

“Are we really married?” John asked as they sat facing each other on small sofas as the blimp was in flight guided by GPS on its way to Summer Lake.

“Do you not want me?” she asked. “Am I not good enough for you?”

“You’re very attractive,” he replied. “How could I not want you? But why would you want someone who is unable to even remember who he is?”

“Because you’re trustworthy and very nice,” she answered, “and I need you. Don’t you want to love me?”

“I’m sure that would be very nice,” he replied, “but I’m not sure I’m good enough for you.”

She snuggled up close to him and kissed him on the lips. He hugged her. She started to undress, and she pointed at his pants and then rubbed his leg near the groan. She helped him lower his pants.

***

“What’s the problem?” the policeman asked Peter as they stood beside the RV.

“The front axial bent,” Peter replied. “I’m in a hurry to get home at Summer Lake.”

“What’s the rush?” the policeman asked.

“I’m Peter Moffert,” he replied, “and my friend in the RV has a rare disease. He’s under quarantine and his medicine is at home. I’ve been immunized and you’ll be okay with us both in the back of your van with the wall between us.”

“Didn’t you call for an ambulance?” the policeman asked.

“He’s fine until tomorrow at least.” Peter said confidently nodding. “He might need his medicine by then.”

“Who is he?” the policeman asked.

“Dirk Banks,” Peter replied. “I can only get you some hair ID for now. His saliva is contagious.”

“I’ll get my gloves and coat,” the policeman said pointing at the RV and then at his van.

Peter rushed to go inside the RV, removed the respirator mask, poked holes in a nylon sack, covered Bert’s head with the sack and replaced the respirator mask just before the policeman arrived wearing his gloves and coat.

Peter pointed at the respirator and then at Bert’s shoulders. The policeman helped lift Bert. They both lifted him by means of locking arms up against Bert’s shoulders. They carried both him and the respirator with each of their arms.

An RV drove up and stopped just before they reached the van. Peter grimaced.

“I know him,” Peter said. “He can take me to Summer Lake. Go ahead and have my RV toed. It’s insured by the rental place. It’ll be okay.

The policeman faced the RV and then his phone to discover it was rented in Reno by Bert Nelson. He showed it to Peter.

“Yes,” Peter said. “We go back a long way. We grew up in the Summer Lake area. You must not have.”

“You are right,” agreed the policeman, “I’m just filling in for someone on vacation. He’ll be back soon and I’ll be back where I belong, up north at Bend.”

As they carried Bert and the respirator over to the other RV and put him inside it, Dirk went over to Peter’s RV and brought back some of the cargo, including two small boxes of pen guns.”

“Are those pens,” the policeman asked when noticing Dirk putting a few of them in his pocket.

“They’re antique souvenirs,” Peter answered. “I’m going to sell them at the pool tournament.”

“I need to make sure this RV gets tolled out of here,” said the policeman with phone in hand.

“Okay,” the policeman finally said after some discussion on the phone, “the owner of the lot said he’ll have mechanics here to fix it. You’re clear to leave.”

Peter let out a sigh of relief.

“Sorry Peter,” Dirk apologized, “the girl snuck out and got away. She headed this way, but she’s nowhere to be seen. I see your plan is also not working out so well.”

“We need to get going,” Peter was quick to reply turning to enter the RV.

***

The house blimp finally arrived at the resort after its flight over the lake part of Summer Lake.

“We need to go in and register for the tournament,” Nelly said facing John.

He shrugged.

She locked her arm with a little tugging to guide him all the way into the resort to a counter in front of a restaurant.

“We want to participate in the pool tournament,” she said to the clerk when they arrived at the counter.

“It’s one-thousand debits to enter,” was the female clerk’s reply. “Do you need a room to stay in?”

“No,” Nelly said, “we have a small blimp house.”

The teller pointed at a small screen.

Nelly pointed her finger at John, her mouth and then at the small screen on the counter. John licked his finger and placed it on the screen.

“I see you are John Luck,” the clerk said to him. “We need to know her name too.”

“I’m Mary Luck,” Nelly interrupted. “We were just married in Reno. It was paid for by a generous donor.”

“Well,” the clerk said with a smile, “this is a nice place for a honeymoon. Are you sure you don’t want a sweet? It along with a daily allowance of food comes with the rent. It’s the special of the year for newlyweds. But entering the tournament includes a

space to park your house blimp. There's some space next to the road slightly left of here where you can set it down for now."

"We do need groceries," Nelly said. "Is there a store we can go to this late at night?"

"You should be able to order them from your house blimp," the clerk replied. "We have drones for automatic delivery. I wish you luck. The pool room is available for tournament players to practice, but it's filling up. Early morning is the best time to get an available table."

"Thanks," Nelly replied with a smile. "We are the Lucks."

The clerk smiled back. Nelly then eyed John and pointed at the front door.

"You need to register for the tournament," the clerk said.

"I thought we just did," Nelly replied gazing and leaving her mouth open.

"Mr. Luck did," the clerk replied. "You have to do the same."

Nelly grimaced as she walked over licking her finger to put it on the screen.

"You are Nelly Nelson," the clerk informed.

"I guess the priest hasn't reported our marriage yet," Nelly replied.

"Well," the clerk said, 'officially you're still Nelly Nelson."

"I guess I'll just have to live with it," Nelly replied hoping to be able to stay alive as well.

"I'll send information and directions to John's phone," the clerk said. "It includes start times and the different places where to play."

"Different places," Nelly seemed to ask. "You mean there is more than one place to play?"

"Actually," the clerk said, "there are four different places to play at in the tournament. It is initially divided as four separate tournaments that combine into one by elimination to be played here at Summer Lake. You registered to play at this one, but you could've register to play at any of the others, which are at Silver Lake, Christmas Valley and Paisley."

"Do we still have a choice," Nelly asked reaching out as to receive information.

"I can just switch it right now," the clerk answered. "Which one do you prefer?"

"I like Christmas Valley," Nelly eagerly replied nodding her head.

***

Peter glanced at the house blimp hovering near the front of the resort as the RV continued on where it turned onto a dirt road to the right. It continued east along the road located at the north side of the lake.

“Is he still alive?” Dirk asked.

“Just barely,” Peter answered. “There’s no time to waste.”

The RV slowed down.

“I should be more careful on this road,” Dirk explained as Peter stared right at him.

They arrived at a mostly underground house beside a small blimp. Peter and Dirk together walked down the stairs from the dome roof together carrying Bert by each of them holding one of his arms above their shoulders pressed up against their necks.

“You need to park the RV somewhere else,” Peter told Dirk when they reached the living room beside a kitchen, bedroom and bathroom. “It has a locator. They can find it here.”

“I could use it,” Dirk replied. “I’ll need a place to stay near the pool tournament at Summer Lake after I win at Silver Lake.”

“Do you want them to find it with you in it?” Peter asked.

“No,” Dirk bellowed swiping his fist across his chest, “I just need to stay in it tonight and get a ride back in the morning, but I still need one to stay in after I win at Silver Lake.”

“My rental at Lakeview is damaged,” Peter reminded Dirk.” Their insurance covers the damage and another rental. Just go get it or a replacement with one of your buddies in a blimp and you’ll have an RV to stay in for the latter part of the tournament at Summer Lake.”

“I’ll trust you for now,” Dirk said as he walked on out to the RV, “but I better get that RV.”

“I’ll call ahead to inform them you’re going to get it for me,” Peter assured.

***

They were back in the house blimp where Nelly used John’s phone to order food. Within ten minutes a drone had appeared outside the blimp with a box full of food. She pulled out of it what she had ordered: Tamari Roasted Pumpkin Seeds, green tea, oats, milk and a few other items.

“Let’s find a place to cook and eat,” she said.

John nodded yes.

She guided the blimp house up into the mountainous area were she spotted a camping area where they could start a fire. There was just enough room for the house blimp to park.

“We need wood,” she told John when they stood outside the house blimp within the surrounding area of large and small trees.

He roamed about gathering dead limbs that had falling on the ground.

“That’s Mountain Mahogany,” she told John when he laid some of it on the pile. “It burns too hot for oats, but it’s a good fire starter.”

The Mountain Mahogany burned hot enough not to smoke. After the camp fire warmed up the area, she placed two paper cups of water in the hot coals.

"Won't that burn the paper?" John asked.

"Paper ignites at about a thousand degrees," she answered. "Water boils at one-hundred and eighty. With the water in the cup it won't even scorch it, but try to put out a real hot fire with water, such as by cooking with grease, it'll only fuel it."

"That's interesting," John replied, "but how can the fire not burn the paper?"

"Heat is kinetic energy," she explained. "The atoms bounce off each other for their motion to continue right on through the paper to the water molecules that absorb most of it."

After the water came to a near boil, she picked up the cups of water and placed green tea bags in them. She then opened the sack of Tamari Roasted Pumpkin Seeds, put a few of them in her mouth and handed the bag to John.

"They activate neurons in the brain," she said, "and that'll help restore your memory. Seeds are hard to digest, but they're full of nutrients. They're like medicine. Chew only a tiny amount of them up good and you won't overload your digestive system."

As John chewed on a few seeds and drank tea, she began cooking oats. She first filled a kettle half full of milk. She added tiny amounts of salt, ginger, nutmeg and cinnamon, and a sliced up banana. She handed part of the banana to John.

"It tastes good by itself," she told him, "as do oats, but it's better to synthesize them together. Bananas contain potassium. It balances out the sodium in the salt and milk."

"That's an interesting recipe," John said.

"It's very nutritious," she answered. "There's nearly perfect balance of minerals in milk. Cinnamon helps control blood sugar from the high energy lactose in the milk. It synchronizes it with muscle instead of just being stored as liver fat. Nutmeg has all kinds of healthy benefits, ginger helps digestion, oats are a good source of protein, and the iodized sea salt provides the chloride for the hydrochloric acid the body needs to digest food. The real trick is not to cook too hot and too fast."

"Why's that?" John asked.

"Do you know what they do with the wasted wood around here?" she asked.

"What?" he asked in turn.

"If it's heated separate from air at seven hundred degrees," she answered, "the carbon becomes good fertilizer. If heated at a much higher temperature, the carbon becomes fuel, such as charcoal, or it is used to make bombs and even diamonds. More heat helps bonds stuff together. If food is cooked at too high a temperature it also becomes more bonded, as being harder to digest. It accumulates in the joints and veins, causing sore knees

and heart attacks. Too much of anything is not good. Too much good oats and bananas can plug the bowels with too much fiber that, in turn, can result in more gas and heartburn if not burped out."

"That's not good," he acknowledged, "Why are you telling me all this?"

"I'm a nutritionist," she answered. "You're a pool hustler. I teach you how to be healthy and you teach me how to play pool; you promise?"

"You bet," he replied. "I promise."

He noticed how thick the oats became from her continual stirring. They seemed to have expanded in bulk with the liquid.

"Aren't they too thick?" he asked.

"No," she answered, "it is not that they couldn't be if you cook them much too long. The good thing is that it's reversible if they are. Just don't overdo it. Even with a good immune system one more straw could be enough to break the camel's back."

After they finished eating their oats, they got back into the house blimp and floated it back to be near the inn. John started coughing.

"My nose is plugging up," he informed her. "I think it was too cold up there."

"Your immune system is probably overreacting to the cold and spring tree pollen," she informed him. "You need to give it time to adjust."

"How do I do that?" he asked.

"Lie on your right side and find out if the left side of your nose clears up. Lay a little less on your left side. If you gas, burp it out. If you notice your mouth filling up with saliva, swallow it before it gets sticky. If it plugs your nose, cough and spit it out before it plugs up the throat."

She handed him a bottle of saline nasal spray. He stared at it.

"A tiny bit of this salt water will help clear it up," she said. "I'll also light a vanilla candle. Vanilla clears up the sinuses, but it doesn't cure the cause, and it can interfere with your immune system if you use too much of it at the wrong time, as mucus is created to protect the brain and the body. It won't be easy at first. Just stick with it."

"Okay, I will," he said as he laid back to pour a little saline down each side of his nose. He then laid down on his right side. When he turned over to lie on his left side, he soon coughed. After a little time lying as such, he turned back over to lie on his right side, but it also resulted in a plugged up nose from that previous lying on his left side.

"Stick this bottle of Saline up the right side of your nose," Nelly told him. "Just sniff it. Take it out about ten minutes later and sniff a little on your left side. Then try to sleep mostly on

your right side. Breathing more through the left side gives your right side more time to adjust."

He took the bottle of Saline, sniffed on it from each side of the nose, in turn, and finally fell asleep minutes later because of a clearer nose through which to breathe.

***

With the sun beginning to rise in the east, Dirk came out of the RV walking up to road 31 and then to the four story building with the pool room on the ground floor. All doors of pool rooms inside the large room were open. There was just one guy with a pool stick shooting.

Dirk went over to a pool rack and picked out a cue stick. He then walked over to where the guy was shooting.

"Who's winning?" Dirk joked.

"The pool table," the guy answered. "I'm Gary. Would you like to play a game or two?"

"Yeah," Dirk replied, "what do you want to play for?"

"All I got," the guy said, "is my stick."

"That's a nice stick," Dirk said eyeing it. "I also need a ride to my blimp. I'll play a couple now and a couple later before I go over to help out in the mountains over by Silver Lake."

***

John removed the feather blanket when he woke up in the morning. He sat up seemingly confused of recent events. Seeing the pool stick lying on the floor, he put on his pants, shirt, shoes, socks, wig and fake beard of black hair. After picking up his pool stick he left the Blimp House on his way to find the pool room.

He held his phone in front of him and asked, "Where is the pool room?" On the screen he read the question, "Which one: Summer Lake, Silver Lake, Christmas Valley or Paisley?"

"The one here at Summer Lake," John answered.

"It is in a four story building beside road 31," John read.

John walked up to the door of the building. Inside it was an elevator to upper floors. Above a door to the elevator's left was the words pool room. John walked on into it.

It was a large room divided into parts. On the other side of the room from where he had entered were four doors. Three of them were open. He entered a small pool room next to the one with the closed door.

"I received a call early this morning," John heard a familiar voice say. "I was told my grandmother lost her memory and she might not recover."

"I can feel it," he heard another voice say. "My grandfather died last year. It's difficult to lose those relatives that have been such an important part of your life."

“A prostitute gave her cookies spiced with memory poison,” the familiar voice said “She’s dead meat. I’ll find that bitch and I’ll make sure she suffers for it before she goes out.”

John creased his brow and then, with eyes squinted and a clinched fist, he picked up his pool stick with his other hand and found his way back to the house blimp.

“We’re not married,” he yelled at Nelly as she buttoned up her dress. “Why are you deceiving me? Who are you? Why did you poison me with those cookies? Why’d you sell my car? Why do you want me to get you pregnant?”

“I’m wanted for murder,” she replied bowing her head as a response to his twisted mouth.”

John stared at her with his mouth opened.

“I believe I’ve been framed,” she continued explaining.”You said you’re a lawyer. I need your help.”

“You have to turn yourself in,” he replied. “Otherwise I’ll be an accessory and lose my license, and I could even go to jail with you. Besides, you stole my car. I know you’re guilty.”

“No, I didn’t,” she replied. “I just helped sell it.”

John swiped his fist in front of his chest and then picked up a remote by which he turned on a screen. He pushed buttons. His dad suddenly appeared on the screen. With all that temper, John had suddenly regained his memory. He knew what he was doing.

“Hi dad,” John said. “Jack advised me not to come here to Summer Lake. He was right. I’m now in big trouble.”

“You need to practice your pool,” his dad replied. “Get with it, now, while you have someone to show you how.”

The screen went blank. John’s left hand landed on the top of his forehead. He shook his frowning face no. He left heading back to the pool room.

***

Jack woke from a buzzing sound at the screen. He reached from under the cover for the screen remote. Aaron appeared on the screen after Jack pushed the button.

“What’s up?” Jack asked.

“You need to practice your pool,” Aaron replied.

“It’s early,” Jack replied with a grimacing face. “We arrived after midnight. It’s a good thing we had called early to rent the room. This place is filled up with players and the news media.”

“It’s critical,” Aaron warned. “You need to win.”

The screen turned off.

Jack climbed out of bed rushing to put on a shirt, pants and shoes. His wife opened her eyes and faced him. Jack flipped his hand forward, as to wave goodbye, as to continue his hurry out of the room.

***

John went on in to be the only pool player in the room. He stood with a frowning face and blank stare. He walked up to a table, reached down to get balls from the section of the table they rolled into from the pockets. He placed all fifteen balls on the table and began practicing, but kept missing one shot after another.

"I reckon I'm no longer a pool player," he said to himself. "I just can't concentrate."

Hi John," John heard a familiar voice say from behind him. "I hardly recognize you with that beard and black hair, and you missing all those shots. It's unexpected. Is something wrong?"

John turned and stared at the guy.

"Hello Jack," John finally said still standing with a fixed gaze. "Why are you here?"

"I and my wife Betty decided to join the tournament," Jack politely answered.

"You were right," John said. "I'm in more big trouble than I can handle. I sure hope you're here to get me out of it."

"What happened?" Jack asked.

"I shared a room with a prostitute," John began explaining, "I ate her cookies and lost my memory. She sold my car and we rented a room. She's wanted for murder, and she wants me to be her lawyer . . . and we had sex together. She's probably going to have my child."

"You need to be her lawyer," Jack calmly said.

"Has the world gone insane?" John asked with a fixed gaze. "She has to turn herself in."

"No," Jack answered. "You need to be undercover to find out what going on. She could be your only way out of the mess you've gotten yourself into."

"Why?" John sternly asked.

"Look John," Jack said, "I already know too much. You are on a need to know basis. Otherwise, I could be exposed and be in more danger of being killed. An eavesdropper could be doing it right now. Didn't your dad give you the hint?"

"I guess he did," John acknowledged frowning as he walked away staring into space.

When he left the building he did not continue walking back to the blimp house. He continued in an opposite direction along the road instead, as becoming physically lost as well as mentally lost.

***

Bert Nelson with his arms tied behind him and to a chair was being hand fed by Peter Moffert.

"We should just do him in," Dirk Banks said with pool stick held up ready for it to stab Bert in the chest.

“Shut up,” Peter replied. “You’ve screwed up enough. One more and you’re out.”

“What difference does it now make?” Dirk asked.

“We’ll be able to use him,” Peter said. “When the place fills up with pool players, he’ll be able to roam about with them and not be discovered.”

“So what,” Dirk demanded. “You mean,” he continued to ask after a pause, “you plan on releasing him? I don’t like telling you this: His daughter got away from me because I was visiting my grandmother. I just found out this morning she ate some of his daughter’s poisoned cookies. They’ll be searching for her as well as for him, and I know she was headed here to look for her dad.”

“Sorry about your grandmother,” Peter said, “but when the time comes we’ll need someone who knows what going on to get the message out to the right authorities. We will then be in command to reap the benefits. That’s part of the plan.”

“What’s the plan?” Dirk asked shaking his head in disbelief while standing with a crinkled nose and creased brow.

“Sorry,” Peter said. “I only tell what I know to those whom I fully trust, and you’ve proved that’s not you.”

“Well,” Dirk answered, “I don’t think I want to be part of it. Why should I. What’s in it for me?”

“You’ll get to be part of the elite,” Peter answered. “I know where you get your heroin. I know a lot more. Are you sure you want to drop out and probably expose us? This plan will reclaim our freedom from that restricted socialism. Don’t you want it?”

Dirk stood still with his mouth wide open.

“I do,” he finally pleaded. “I really do. You can trust me. I’ll prove it.”

He turned to leave. As Peter faced Bert, Dirk walked up the stairs to get into the blimp and float in it to Summer Lake where he wanted to play a few games of pool before heading to Silver Lake.

***

John, walking back and forth, finally turned heading back to the house blimp.

“No one to practice pool with,” Nelly seemed to ask when John came back inside. “Did you turn me in?” she continued to ask after a pause. “How much time do I have?” she asked while bowing her head and pressing her fingers against it.

“I’ve decided to give you the benefit of doubt,” he replied, “I like your oats, and I promised you I’d teach you how to shoot pool. I never break a promise, but you now need to deserve it. I need to know what’s going on. If you still want my trust, then you’ll have to trust me with all you know.”

“Keep your promise,” she replied. “Teach me how to shoot pool and I’ll tell you everything I know.”

“Let’s go,” he said pointing at the door.

She led the way over to the pool hall. There was one pool room with an open door. He scattered the pool balls out on the table and had his pool stick ready to show what he could do.

“Here’s a good stance,” John said leaning forward with his eyes straight above the stick. “You need to see straight ahead with balance to swing straight ahead. Hit the ball dead center and it’ll move straight ahead.”

He demonstrated by hitting the cue ball to the other end of the table just in front of one of the dots by the rail. The cue ball bounced back to the other end rail in front of the dot that it had been stroked from.

“See if you can do that,” he said.

She took his place and stroked. The cue ball came back on the left side of the dot in front of her.

“You need to stand whereby you can swing straight,” John advised, “and it needs to be with you seeing straight down the cue stick. Just imagine you’re wearing a tie that’s pointed down from your neck where you can see straight ahead, and be aware of how your stance is balanced enough to swing straight. Just do it to find out. If you miss, then you need to adjust.”

She tried one practice stroke after another to be sure she hit the cue ball dead center, but she inadvertently miscued.

“Just take a practice stroke and then hit it,” John advised. “It’s how you train your mind. If you see where you hit the cue ball instead of looking to see where it’s going, it’ll go where you hit the cue ball. With enough practice you can close your eyes and stroke it where you want, but it’s mentally more complex. If you look to see where it’s going instead at where you hit it, then you tend to miss angle shots.”

She practiced a few more strokes with only one practice stroke before stroking the cue ball. She soon was able to hit the cue ball straight forward and back between the dots.

““Now you’re ready to shoot balls,” John informed her.

Nelly shrugged.

Practice angle shots,” John said, “and be sure to keep your eyes on the center of the cue ball when you stroke.”

She shrugged again.

“To make an angle shot,” John said, “you need to imagine a ball right behind the direction you want it to go. You aim at the imaginary ball’s center instead of where it touches the object ball. The actual hit is twice distance, being curvature distance of both the cue ball and the object ball. If you eye the object ball where it needs to be hit when you stroke, you tend not to hit the cue ball center. Either train you mind to hit the cue ball

center or make sure you hit it center by eying its center when you stroke it."

After she made several angle shots, John walked up to the table.

"Here's what will happen when you don't hit the cue ball center," he said.

He lined up for the cue ball to hit the object ball straight on, but not into a pocket. The corner pocket was slightly to the right of the object ball and only a few inches away. The straight path was also obstructed by two other balls, one slightly between the cue ball and the objective ball about halfway; the other slightly between them and close to the objective ball. Even if the cue ball curved to hit the object ball, there was not enough room to hit it as a straight shot into the corner pocket. Only by spin on the cue ball could it be made. He stroked the cue ball downward, hitting it above center on its left side. The cue ball was pushed slightly to the right, but it gradually curved back left around the first obstructive ball. It then hit the objective ball straight on but with its spin pushing the object ball slightly right of the expected path into the corner pocket.

"How'd you do that?" Nelly asked.

"It's complicated," he replied, "but it complies with physics and geometry."

"Do I need to learn physics and more geometry, then?" she asked grinningly.

"No," he replied, "you obviously have had courses in bio-chemistry. You're capable of knowing, and I learn by doing, as to apply what I already know. To win in pool you need to plan how to do it, as for a better strategy. The more you know the more options you have to win."

"Doesn't that apply to just about everything?" she asked as if she already knew.

"Exactly," he answered, "and I need to know a lot more of what's going on. You used me. You say you trust me. To really get my help, you need to trust me more. I'll then trust you."

"I was just afraid you'd mess up," she admitted.

He placed two balls together lined up straight with the side rails, being short of and closer to the left side pocket. He placed the cue ball about a foot back slightly to the left of the two lined up together.

"I'm calling the first ball to go in that pocket," he said as he pointed at the left side pocket and the ball closer to him. How it was not blocked by the other ball from being able to go into any pocket was a mystery to most players.

She shrugged with her hands face up in front of her chest.

He stroked the cue ball hard, hitting it slightly downward at its lower right side. The cue ball glanced off the left side of the object ball. The object ball slid to the right off the ball in front of

it. It then banked off the opposite side rail to the right into the side pocket on the left.

"How did you do that?" Nelly asked.

"Hitting the cue ball low gives it enough backward spin for it to give the object ball a little push forward closer to the line between the side pockets. Hitting the cue ball on the right also gives it counterclockwise spin for more forward push on the ball it hits. It also gives the object ball clockwise spin moving to the right for it to then bank slightly forward into the pocket I called. I don't mess up. Trust me."

She crossed her lips with her finger and pointed at the door. When they left the pool room on their way out of the building, she trembled seeing Dirk waiting to shoot pool. She nudged up against John's side for Dirk to not be able ro recognize her.

"What do you want to know?" Nelly asked when they were outside.

"Anything you might know," he replied. "If you know how Summer Lake revolutionized modern economics, then I'd like to know it too."

"My dad's dad is a historian of economics," she answered. "He lives just north of here up in the Christmas Valley area. He'll tell you all you need to know about it."

"What you know," he said, "is what I want to know."

"All I know is that this high desert area east of the Cascades had been semi arid with alkaline soil," she said. "There was only enough water to support a limited population. They competed against animals and killed a lot of them, even using rabbits for target practice."

"That doesn't sound good," John noted.

"They probably had a good reason for doing it," she said. "I doubt they do it anymore. It seems a lot more environmentally friendly now than it was in the past."

"Isn't that more expensive?" he asked eyeing her with his slightly bowed head.

"Grandpa is the economist," she informed him again. "His name is Donald Nelson. I'm sure he'll give you a good answer."

"Come on Mary, or Nelly, or whatever your name might be," John persisted, "Tell me what you know."

"This area was semi arid," she revealed, "but it had enough solar potential from wind and sunshine to create an oasis, as for it to become an ideal place to retire. Retirees took it over and it became self financed."

"Yeah," John said. "Credit and debit cards became a natural replacement for paper money, but that paper money provided a sense of freedom, as you were free to choose whatever to buy without having to inform the government. You now have a lot

less privacy and freedom to do what you want. It's what I hear from critics of this place."

"Donald should know a lot about that," she claimed.

"Okay," John said, "I guess that'll have to do for now. Will I get to talk to grandpa sometime soon?"

"I'm ready if you are," she answered.

"I'm ready," he confirmed.

"We're on our way," she reconfirmed.

***

Peter walked over with a banana to stand before Bert tied up in a chair.

"Where are we?" Bert asked.

"What do you remember before here?" Peter asked.

"I remember you and someone at the door. He sprayed me with something," Bert answered. "Why'd he do it? What do you guys have against me?"

"Don't you know who I am?" Peter asked.

"You're Peter Moffert," Bert replied with direct eye contact.

"You have your memory back," Peter said. "You know, your daughter visited us. We have a snapshot of her standing by you. Her cookies on the floor are filled with poison. You die and she'll get convicted of murder."

"Why are you doing this?" Bert blurted out. "What did I do to you to deserve it?"

"You've been spying on me," Peter accused. "I just want to know what you've found out."

"I found out you're out of your mind," Peter bellowed. "I'm just a reporter. You're just a story, and a bad one at that."

"I do know you've been cooperating with Detective Dixon," Peter said shaking his head no. "I'll need to know what you told him. Come on, spell it out."

Peter waved the banana.

"I'm just a reporter," Bert reiterated.

"It's up to you to save the world," Peter said nodding yes. "I bet you know enough to know that, and you're only chance of doing it is to cooperate. It'll be your fault if you don't try, and your only chance of success is to cooperate with me."

"You're crazy," Bert said, "but you're right. I know you have a brilliant mind. You know how to make this place into a giant bomb, that you were convicted of revealing secret information that you weren't authorized to have, and that President Tombe pardoned you, but that's nothing more than what the general public already knows."

"What's the plan against me?" Peter asked.

"My only plan was to find out if you had something else in mind for the use of your special talent," Bert replied. "What's wrong with that? What do you expect to gain that you couldn't

get simply by using your gifted mind? There's no need for this. You haven't really committed a serious crime as far as I know. I won't press charges on you for what you done to me, and if my daughter hasn't been harmed, I'll convince her not to press any charges either."

"What I'll get out of this," Peter said, "is more freedom for me and the rest of society. Socialism has taken over. We've just become its puppets. Our pets now have more freedom than we do."

"We have all kinds of freedom," Bert argued back. "We're just not as free to break the law as some of us just want to do."

"Yeah," Peter skeptically acknowledge, "except that there is now too much law for us to enjoy a better life."

"Look, Peter," Bert informed, "civilization has become a lot more peaceful now that there's food aplenty. There's less need for the poor to steal. Only imperialists want to cheat for them to become more powerful in control of us. Is that what you want?"

"I could do a lot more for all of us if I was in charge," Peter claimed.

"Like what?" Bert asked.

Peter untied Bert and then handed him the banana, and he then walked over to the other side of the room with a remote in hand. When he pushed several buttons on the remote, a part of the wall began moving away from him, opening up another part of the house.

Peter waved for Bert to come on over and get into the part of the house Peter had just opened up. Eating his banana, Bert decided to obey. When they stood inside, Peter pushed another button. That section of the house began lowering. An elevator it was. It took them down to a deeper level.

"As you know," Peter said, "I grew up here. It's not just my house; it's my ancestors' legacy. They helped create this electric grid of a diamond battery."

"I always thought it was more than just a house," Bert said.

"It's a secret part of that grid. Only you and I now know it exists."

"What's it capable of doing?" Bert asked.

"If it could destroy all of earth," Peter asked in turn, "would you kill me if you had to in order to stop it?"

"What do you think?" Bert asked.

"What if it is already set to go off and no one except me is able to stop it?" Peter further asked. "Would you still kill me?"

Bert turned walking away and shaking his head.

"What do you expect to get out of it?" he finally and loudly asked.

"With the right people on my side," Peter replied, "we'll be able to change the world for us to be free to create a lot better world to live in."

“Do you really think I believe you or this place is capable of such mass destruction,” Bert challenged. “That’s a tremendous amount of energy.”

“Those diamonds batteries are fueled by the use of nuclear waste,” Peter informed. “It’s a lot more economically feasible to produce harmless and usable energy from it than dispose of it somewhere its radiation is still contagious. Besides there being no harmful side effects of diamond batteries, their charge has a half life of more than five hundred years. They provide all the energy needed around here far beyond our lifetime.”

“Yeah,” Bert replied, “but nuclear radiation is how they are energized. Isn’t that dangerous but only around here?”

“It could be,” Peter replied, “but this place is fortified with laser technology, as was created for long-range travel into outer space. It’s a closed system. Everything is recycled for food to eat and air to breathe, the same as is needed for colonies on Mars and the moon, and for venturing deeper out into space.”

“Couldn’t pure oxygen ignite those diamonds?” Bert asked.

“You’re not just a reporter,” Peter accused. “You know too much. If you want to save the day, get with it.”

“How’d you get access to this place?” Bert asked.

“I was being considered to head a new Mars colony,” Peter replied. “This place was created by my ancestors in anticipation of it. It’s only a small part of the whole system, and it’s a secret part, but it all connects.”

“If you don’t get what you want,” Bert said, “you try to get even by accessing classified information and passing it on. How does that make a better life for you to move forward?”

“You need to do what you need to do,” Peter replied. “Just do it and we’ll all move forward.”

“They’ll find you here,” Bert warned.

“Like I just told you,” Peter informed, “this place is a secret. My ancestors created it. I’m the only one who knows the way in and out.”

“How are you going to explode that bomb?” Bert asked. “If you try to extort the government, it’ll need to be convinced.”

“I can get all the uranium I need from a new nuclear power plant in Nevada,” Peter informed. “It will just be a trigger. There is plenty of volcanic potential nearby to finish the job.”

Bert looked up at the ceiling.

“You’re not going to blow up Earth,” he said. “I know that you’re too smart for that. It’s too risky. It’s just a diversion. The pen guns are the real threat, aren’t they? Isn’t that the reason you went to Reno?”

“I thought you were more than a reporter,” Peter said with a furrowed brow. “Who else is unto us?”

“If I told you,” Peter replied, “wouldn’t they just be put to sleep along with the rest of the opposition of the coupe?”

Peter winked.

"You know I couldn't have taken a picture of my daughter," Bert said, "not unconscious. Aren't those pen-guns a secret?"

Peter gave Bert a thumbs-up, saying,

"You're winning a battle," he said, "but I'm still winning the war."

***

"Have you seen this lady?" Detective Dixon asked the clerk when he approached the desk clerk at the Summer Lake resort to show her his phone. "I'm Detective Dixon of the Reno police department.

"She seems a little familiar," the clerk answered.

"Her name is Nelly Nelson," the detective informed.

"Yes, I remember," the clerk responded, "she registered for the pool tournament with her husband, but she had blonde hair instead of dark brown."

"What's her husband's name?" Dixon asked.

"John Luck," she answered after checking the files.

"John Luck is not married," Dixon said after examining the data on his phone. "He's been approved by the bar as a lawyer, and his dad has a law firm. You have been one of its clients."

"The young lady said they were just married in Reno early that morning," the clerk informed him back," and that her name is Mary Luck."

"You don't change both your first and last names when you get married," Dixon said shaking his head. "If you can remember more what she looked like, I'd appreciate it."

"She was a nice looking blonde about five seven and slim," she answered.

Detective Dixon pushed more buttons on his phone.

"Captive," he asked, "didn't the girl at that inn up north say that those cookies belong to a young lady that was disguised as a blonde but was actually a brunette?"

"What's going on?" the clerk asked Detective Dixon eyeing the ceiling after nodding yes.

"I'm just trying to locate a missing girl and her father," was his reply. "Please do not interfere with the investigation."

"I didn't hear a thing," she replied.

"Thanks," he replied,

"Thanks captain for the information," he said walking away with his phone close to his mouth. "We have a new suspect. She knows nutrition and seems to know how her good looks can get lonely guys to help her with whatever she's up to."

***

John watched as Nelly directed the house blimp. Right in front of them was a tall rock cliff towering above the pool table building and below evergreen trees of the Cascades.

"That's diatomaceous earth up there on what is known as Winter Ridge," Nelly said, "This area was once part of one huge lake after the last ice age ended. The diatomaceous earth is fish bones and previous life stuff that had settled at its bottom. Over to the east side of the road, below about ten feet of clay, they have drilled as far down as three thousand feet and only found filled in soft dirt."

"That must've been about the biggest lake on Earth," John replied.

"It was just a tiny part of something that preceded it," she added. "At the end of the last ice age there were glaciers miles deep. Lakes formed within them. There were ice dams holding tremendous amounts of water. When it heated up underneath, they busted releasing tremendous floods creating scablands all over the northwestern states. England as an island was similarly created millions of years earlier."

"What's your real name?" John asked. "What's going on?"

She crossed her lips with her finger and pointed away from the cliff. After they had moved a good distance away from it, she faced John. "I'm Nelly Nelson," she said. "My dad's name is Bert Nelson. He has supposedly been a news reporter, but I now know it was just a cover. He warned me about communications being hacked into. The government has techniques to scramble and unscramble, as by resynchronization every hour, but there can be undercover spies amongst them with sound detectors."

"Why are you using me?" John asked.

"I had no choice," she replied. "I was desperate. You were honest and trustworthy. I was in a situation I couldn't get out of. If I told you the truth, you probably wouldn't have believed me. Even if you did, I'd be getting you into a dangerous situation you could unwittingly be misled with not knowing enough about it."

"Well," he replied, "I did enjoy loving you. You did seem to be very nice at the time, but what right do you have putting my life in danger and selling my car. That car's computer contained centuries of family history. It's now lost thanks to you."

"I suppose I'm not so nice after all," she replied. "I am sorry, but I'd do it again if I have to. You already put your life in danger by coming here. I'm just trying to save it along with everyone else's."

John turned away from facing her. He shook his head no a few times. He then nodded yes a few times before turning back to face her again.

"You have more guts than I do," he said. "I have to give you credit for that, and I still like you." He paused. "However, I do have a fear of commitment along with a fear of rejection. If you

become pregnant, I'd be responsible for your child having the opportunity of a lifetime to succeed."

"You fear both rejection and commitment," she seemed to ask. "Will you want me to get an abortion?" she did ask.

"No way," John replied with squinted eyes. "It'd be mine as well as yours. Killing it would be part of killing me."

"You sure want to be responsible," she noted.

"Yeah," he replied, "my dad was a womanizer. He and my mother divorced when I was young. I was in her custody and we moved around a lot. She worked. Being an outsider, I became a loner."

"You do seem to be intelligent with good skills," she said.

"When I was six and my mother quoted the alphabet to me," John bragged, "I repeated it in ten seconds. I just thought that was normal. When I excelled in sports and other things, I figured it was just because I tried harder. By winning and not being welcomed, I developed an inferiority complex thinking I wasn't socially acceptable. Some rejections were painful. I never intended to hurt anyone. I saw one of my dad's friends steal something, and I stole something when I was only six. I didn't get caught, and you're first to know about it. I did not feel good about doing it, and I told myself that I'm better than having to steal to make a living."

"I know it takes some of us more time to mature and learn what is right and wrong," she noted. "What do you want to be?"

"I just want to be accepted as a good person," he replied.

"You have superior qualities," she praised.

"It's subjective," he replied with a shrug.

"Why's that?" she asked.

"A big guy is great if he protects you," he explained, "but if he attacks, he's bad, even if respectively so."

"And you don't want me to have an abortion," she said, "I did you wrong. Don't you want me to suffer for it?"

"No way," John said, "I accept my path in life as a learning experience. It's how I grow and become what I become. I just hope you accept me for whom and what I've now become."

"I already do," she replied, "and I am thankful for you not wanting me to have an abortion. I want to love you now as my husband and hope you'll love me as your wife."

"Are you serious?" John asked. "If it's not for a lifetime and no doesn't actually mean no, then I'm confused. We would not then be right for each other."

"I'm serious," she replied.

"I reckon we're as good as married," John said nodding yes. "Let's continue checking out the scenery. I'm not yet convinced of it. It'll haunt me for the rest of my life. I do need to know the real truth."

"Trust will be earned in due time," she ensured him.

***

Detective Dixon entered the pool room of players sitting in chairs waiting for an open table to play at. He walked on over to question one after another.

"I'm Detective Dixon from Reno," he said with cell phone in his hand having visions of Nelly and her father appearing on the screen. "Have you seen either of these two? They are reported missing."

The player shook his head no, which was the reply received from others at each chair he visited. A particular exception was Dirk.

"The bitch poisoned my grandmother," Dirk replied.

"You must be Dirk Banks," Detective Dixon said. "I was told you came with her to an inn in northern Nevada, and you're the grandson of the owner."

"She was a stowaway," Dirk replied. "She snuck into my RV. She told me someone was threatening to kill her. I dropped her off at the inn. That's all I know."

"Don't you know Peter Moffert?" Detective Dixon asked.

"Yeah, I know him," Dirk answered. "He's a good guy with good intensions."

"What are his intensions?" Dixon was inclined to ask.

"He just wants our lost freedom to be restored," Dirk said respectively. "We're not allowed to do anything anymore."

"Would he have something to do with the missing of Nelly Nelson and her father," Dixon asked with raised eyebrows.

"No," Dirk replied, "he's too nice a guy to do anything bad to someone even if they deserve it, which she does for feeding my grandmother her poisonous cookies."

"Why would she do that?" the detective had to ask.

Dirk shrugged flanking his hands up above his head.

"Do you know where Peter is?" Detective Dixon asked.

"Isn't he home?" Dirk asked snarling with twisted lips.

"No one answers," Dixon noted.

"Nope," Dirk answered. "He's secretive, keeping to himself and only occasionally bumps into someone he likes."

"Are you saying he's a hermit?" the detective asked.

"I reckon that's what he's become," Dirk said nodding yes. "Thanks to what you guys did to him he now needs to be secret where he goes and with whom he contacts."

"If you see him again," Detective Dixon asked, "would you mind telling him I'd like to ask him a few questions?"

"Not at all," Dirk replied with a serious stare. "I'm sure he'd like to ask you a few questions as well. . . By the way, that guy in that picture was in here the other day and left his phone. I think he's that girl's father. He left his phone here."

“Thanks,” the detective said with tilted head and pressed lips when Dirk handed him the phone with Nelly on the screen holding a pen and standing beside a guy lying on the floor.

Detective Dixon continued on with his investigation.

“You must be Jack Cavish,” he said when Jack and his wife came out of the room they were playing pool in. “I’m Detective Dixon. I know you’re a lawyer at Aaron Luck’s law firm back east. Do you mind me asking you a few questions?”

“Hopefully,” Jack replied, “it’s only a few.”

“Have you seen either of these two?” Dixon asked showing Jack the phone with Nelly and John’s pictures on the screen.

“Just the guy,” Jack answered. “He’s my boss’s son and was here this morning. He’s signed up to play in the tournament.”

“He obviously knows the girl,” Dixon said. “They checked in together as husband and wife. He along with you could seriously be in trouble of being debarred.”

“I’m just here on vacation with my wife Lucy for us to enter the pool tournament,” Jack replied along with a shrug. “I really don’t know anything about what’s going on. What’s she wanted for?”

“She’s a murder suspect,” Detective Dixon answered with a stare.

“John did mention someone was using him,” Jack revealed. “He did seem to have been drugged. That’s all I know. Who has been murdered?”

“I hope he’s clear headed when I get to talk to him,” Dixon said. “Do you think he’s being extorted by her?”

“Maybe she’s being extorted by someone,” Dirk suggested. “Have you considered that possibility?”

“Who do you think would be the extorter?” Dixon asked.

“My guess,” Jack replied, “it’s most likely Peter Moffert.”

They received mean stares from players waiting to play at a table when it became available.

“What do you know about him?” the detective asked.

“I only know what has been on the news,” Jack answered. “He was convicted of stealing government secrets only to soon be pardoned by the President. Wouldn’t he be the likely suspect of the murder if indeed someone has been killed?”

“Do you believe President Tombe made a critical mistake?” Dixon asked.

“I’m a lawyer, not a politician,” Jack answered. “Won’t you tell me who has been killed if indeed it is true?”

“I’m just fishing for answers,” Dixon admitted.

“Well,” Jack offered, “politicians tell voters what they want to believe to get their votes. The President knows how to sell all he knows, but I don’t buy lies.”

“I sure hope you and John don’t tell them,” Dixon replied walking away.

***

That nuclear plant in northern Nevada will get me elected President," Vice President Simmons said to the President. "We helped get it financed."

"Yeah," the President replied, "and now we're responsible for storing more nuclear waste."

""We'll just sell it to Summer Lake," Simmons advised. "It'll be less storage just as well as profit, and Summer Lake will pay less tax for their sell of diamonds to the space programs. It's a win-win situation for both of us."

"Haven't you campaigned against it?" asked the President with a fixed gaze.

"Sure," Simmons replied. "That's politics. The Summer Lake area is prosperous. Northern Nevada needs to be. There's more need for that waste other than producing diamonds. Someone special at Summer Lake wants to buy it. It's classified top secret. He'll help promote the Nevada project. We'll all be winners."

"How will our government win?" the President asked.

"There's a new secret weapon," Simmons informed. "Only a select few of us know about it."

"Why don't I know?" the President asked with a stare.

"Sir," Williams replied. "I trust no one with it, not even you. One slight leak and it'll be used against us."

"You don't trust me?" the President asked again.

"You need to fire a few heads for us to have loyal servants," Simmons advised while tugging at his coat.

A pen fell from inside it. Simmons reached down picking it up from the floor.

"Is that a pen?" the President asked with a fixed gaze.

"Yes," Simmons replied. "I don't trust talking computers. I only reveal such critical stuff on paper I can light a match to."

"Well," the President replied, "I reckon in times of war that secrecy is part of our defense."

"Yep," Simmons agreed," and lies and deceit are a winning strategy in the game of poker. Truth can be our enemy."

"Try telling that to a scientist," the President countered.

"It's a part of nature," Simmons said holding his hands face up beside his shoulders. "Animals survive because they're able to deceive other animals that want to kill and eat them."

"They also become socially trustworthy," President Tombe replied as he pointed his finger straight up. "If the enemy or any circumstance is too big to overcome individually, cooperation is a must."

"If our enemies use truth against us," Simmons explained, "then it's our enemy. But, if the enemy is too big to overcome by our individual efforts, then we'll need social cooperation and loyalty to defeat it. I agree, but we also need to know who our

enemies really our. I also know you have secrets hidden in your closet. If I didn't keep my mouth shut, you wouldn't have been reelected President."

"True," the President acknowledged, "but my time is about up. Yours is about to begin. You could be used as you used me. I made mistakes not knowing what girls really wanted. They were paid to stay quiet. I matured. It's now your turn."

"You don't know what I know," the Vice President claimed while holding the pen close to his mouth.

***

The heat of the day expanded the size of the blimp for it to be similar to a hot air balloon. It rose to float northeast over a hill and towards a small resort area.

"You know," John said, "this area can again become a giant lake after the next upcoming ice age."

"How's that possible?" Nelly asked.

"Hasn't summer time been getting hotter?" he asked.

"It sure has," she answered.

"Aren't winters now colder?" he asked.

"Right again," she agreed.

"As you know," he began explaining, "the earth's rotation and its revolution around the sun aren't exactly perpendicular. Earth has an axial rotation cycle of about twenty six thousand years long. For about thirteen thousand years one pole Is closer to the sun during summer and farther from it during its winter. Right now it's the South Pole, but it's been changing. The North Pole has been getting closer to the sun during its summer and farther from it during its winter."

"Is that why we're getting more rain over here east of the Cascades and more snow up in them?" she asked.

"Sure," he confirmed, "water absorbs heat and evaporates for air to become more humid, but that's only part of it. With all the change going on, parts of earth become plugged. Volcanoes erupt. Sunlight is reflected back into space. It gets even colder."

"Are there then no hotter summers?" she asked.

"They can be canceled," he acknowledged, "but meanwhile they propose other problems."

"Yeah," she replied, "I know warmer lakes and rivers have toxic algae. Viruses become pandemic. A healthy diet is needed to survive them. What else can we do?"

"We need to learn all we can," John informed. "The more we know the more options we have for success."

"That's Christmas Valley over there," Nelly said pointing at it and then at what appeared to be sand dunes. "This used to be the midst of what was a high desert area. Those sand dunes over there and the so-called Lost Forest over there are remains of a similar origin. The Lost Forest has depended on a particular

moisture source. It is from a volcanic eruption that is now Crater Lake. Its eruption blew this way. It helped store an underground water supply from which that ponderosa pine has been there for thousands of years."

"There's something over there," John said pointing at it.

A couple horses half buried in sand appeared on the screen. Nelly directed the house blimp their way.

"They need to be fed before we dig them out," Nelly said. "My grandfather lives not very far from here."

She directed the house blimp northeast over a hill where farmlands with houses appeared on the screen about six miles away. When the house blimp approached closer to the houses, they could see a well-dressed man standing in front of the door of a house talking to an elderly man just inside it.

"I know that guy," Nelly said, "He's a Reno detective. I need to stay here. You go; please, don't mention me."

"Okay," John replied as he made his way out of the house blimp and over to the farmhouse. "You trust me; I'll trust you."

John left the house blimp and approached the house.

"Hi," Nelly heard John say as she turned up the speaker for her to eavesdrop on them, "I spotted some horses half buried in sand. They need help."

The detective handed John a cell phone. Nelly appeared on its screen to be beside a middle age man lying on the floor. She was only slightly recognizable to John as a brunette not wearing eye glasses. He closed his eyes tight and shook his head no.

"Did she kill him?" He asked.

"That's one possibility," the detective replied. "It's now just under investigation, and there is a lot more to be known before we'll be able to file charges. The man on the floor is her father. Both of them have been reported missing. Have you seen either one of them?"

John shrugged and handed the phone back to the detective. The detective pointed at his own ear, his phone, and then at John. John showed him his phone. The detective eyed his own phone.

"I see you are a lawyer," the detective said. "Let me know if you see them. I'm sure you don't want to be disbarred. I did notice you had a strong reaction to what you just saw."

"I'm sensitive to bad situations," John replied, "as they tell me not to become a lawyer."

"Hopefully," the detective replied, "you'll get over it and be more truthful. Is your wife in the house blimp?" he asked facing it.

"She's just my client," John replied with a serious stare.

"Can I ask her a few questions?" Dixon asked with a shrug.

"Do you have a warrant?" John asked back.

"I'm just searching for the truth," Dixon replied.

“When I know it,” John replied back, “I’ll let you know it.”

“Don’t you know,” Dixon asked again, that you pretended to be married when registering for the pool tournament.”

“All I know,” John began confessing, “is that I won a room for the night at an inn. I didn’t know it included a girl servant. I traded for a cookie instead. I passed out after eating it. I had no memory when I woke. She guided me here and claimed that she was being framed for murder. Whoever she is, I’m her lawyer.”

“You’re also now a suspect,” the detective noted.

John nodded as the detective walked towards a small plane from which he got into, floated it up and flew away.

“What do you need?” the elderly man asked staring.

“Just a shovel and some food for the horses,” John replied.

The elderly man led John to a shed, squatted down to his knees, picked up a couple shovels and then pointed at a bale of alfalfa. John picked up the bale of alfalfa. He followed with it the elderly man to a blimp just large enough to carry a person, the alfalfa and a couple shovels. After loading it, John headed back to the house blimp.

“It sure looked like you sprayed your father,” John accused Nelly of doing when he entered the house blimp.

“Peter Moffert placed it in my hand after he sprayed and dragged me into the room,” she replied. “He framed me.”

“Peter Moffert,” John blurted out. “Don’t tell me he’s part of this mess.”

“He is the mess,” she affirmed.

John sat sadly staring at the floor while the house blimp led the way to the horses. When they arrived, the elderly man came out of the small blimp holding the shovels. John walked over to get a bale of alfalfa and follow the elderly man to the horses.

Nelly came out of the house blimp, being unnoticed as she walked over to where John and her grandfather stood beside the horses. As she approached close to them, her grandfather leaned forward glancing at her closely.

“Nelly,” he said, “what’s going on?”

“Hi grandpa,” she answered. “I’ve been framed for murder. They claim I killed Bert, but I heard the detective say we are just missing. I don’t know if he was killed or just taken somewhere as I was. I used this guy to free me from being a prisoner and a prostitute. He’s now helping me. I owe him.”

“Well, then,” grandpa replied, “I owe him too. He had told the truth. Let’s save the horses. We can then figure out what we need to do to get you out of this mess.”

Nelly eyed John and pointed at the horses.

“All we need to do,” she said, “is to show them we’re here to help. They’ll then have no fear of us to be our friends for life. They’ll then even want to serve us if we show them how with no

fear. Their helping us gives them purpose, as they want to use all that strength in their legs."

"They put pool tables in the barn for the tournament," said Donald. "The horses must be roaming around for other sources of food."

They all went over and hand fed the horses with alfalfa and rubbed their foreheads. Nelly kept rubbing their foreheads as John and her grandpa shoveled sand away from their bodies.

When the horses were finally freed from the sand, the lack of food they needed for healthy bodies was evident. After they finished eating most of the bale of alfalfa, grandpa went over to his small blimp, showed the horses the rest of the alfalfa he had in his hand, and waved his hand forward.

"See you at the house," he yelled out to John and Nelly.

The Blimp House followed the small blimp slow enough for the horses to slowly follow them.

"It'll be a good place for us to park the house blimp," Nelly said to John. "The detective knows you, but those horses give you reason for being here. Besides it's where we start playing in the tournament."

"I'll miss you," John replied.

"No, you won't," Nelly informed him with a wink. "Besides, there's a place to shoot pool at the Christmas Valley lodge. You did promise to teach me how to shoot, didn't you?"

"I did," John said with a shrug.

"You do understand, don't you," she asked, "that you need to sleep in the house blimp while I get the guest room?"

"Of course," he acknowledged.

"You'll get all you can eat," she informed him, "and they'll be no charge for the pool at the lodge. My grandpa is one of the owners."

"Sounds good," John said nodding his head forward while eyeing her.

"You know," she said leaning back and looking up, "I have a mother in Reno that's probably going through a lot. My grandpa should go down there and visit her. Would it be okay for him to use the blimp house while we stay at his house to practice and play at the resort?"

"I don't know why not?" John answered.

***

"Hello Detective Dixon," the captain greeted answering his own phone, "how's the investigation going?"

"It's a mess," the detective replied.

"How's it a mess?" asked the captain.

"It doesn't add up." Dixon replied.

"What doesn't add up," asked the captain.

“I was given Bert Nelson’s phone by Dirk Banks,” Dixon said. “There’s a snapshot of Nelly Nelson standing beside her father lying on the floor. She’s holding a pen.”

“Doesn’t that indicate her?” asked Captain Hodges.

“Who took the picture?” Dixon asked.

“There must be something to add,” the captain said.

“I’ve gotten some information from the police department,” Dixon explained. “It’s conflicting. According to one police report Peter Moffert was in a RV on his way to Summer Lake before it broke down. He claimed Dirk Banks was inside quarantined, but another RV stopped that had been rented by Bert Nelson. Peter claimed he knew the driver. The policeman made a good report. He has since transferred out of the area, but he reported in very good detail. It included the license plate of the RV. I was able to check out what happened to the other RV. Its locator indicates it is right here at the lodge’s RV parking space, but I cannot find anyone admitting to have seen him.”

“It seems you have a lot of adding to do,” the captain said.

“I’m puzzled about something else,” Dixon said.

“You must have more to add,” the captain replied.

“Peter had bags of pens in his RV,” Dixon informed.

“Okay,” the captain said, “What’s he doing with pens?”

“Nelly was holding one in the photo as depicting it to be a weapon of some sort. Some of those indentured servants have been demanding their second amendment rights.”

“Keep adding,” the captain advised. “You need to clean up your mess.”

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John carried over a bale of alfalfa as Nelly brushed the back of one of the horses. A windmill got his attention. It was simply made of a bamboo frame and half cylinder plastic barrels. They extended upright around a stainless steel pole. Three cylinders were adjacent to each other at one-hundred and twenty degree angles. The open inside part of each cylinder was to the left, as one of them or another could catch the wind from any direction. As they rotated clockwise, wind was reflected from the cylinder on the right partly towards the open cylinder on the left. It was unique in that it did not matter what direction the wind blew. The same rotation occurred from any direction.

“It’s free energy,” Nelly’s grandfather said as he walked up to where John stood. There’s tiny ones all around to catch the breeze and larger ones to catch the wind. All that’s needed for electricity is wires and magnets.”

“I know,” John said, “a change in the magnetic field induces an electric current in the wire. It just has to move. With the wire circling, it becomes an induced electromagnet. It’s the simplicity I’m impressed with, easy to build, fix and maintain.”

“And it’s cheap,” the grandfather added.

“You know,” John added, “Vice President Simmons claims the Fed isn’t getting its fair share of taxes from around here.”

“The tax wasn’t fair,” the grandfather pointed out.

“Why wasn’t it?” John asked.

“The area paid more than was received,” Donald claimed. “There was state property tax. There were all kinds of needs of stuff from somewhere else, like essential medicine, fuel, clothes, water and whatever. This semi arid area of alkaline soil was only able to produce so much.”

“What happened?” John asked.

“Some rich guy bought land at Summer Lake and used solar energy to produce industrial diamonds for long lasting batteries needed on Mars and the moon colonies. Golf courses and pool halls were built, but the revenue was for a select few and their imports. However, the new facilities attracted retirees living on social security. The land became more valuable as taxation, but it was taxed more than what most of us could afford. There was only one way to survive. We needed to volunteer to help each other instead of paying taxable wages.”

“They claim this area of the country has been an economic revolution,” John spoke while nudging his chin.

“This high desert area east of the Cascades had been semi arid with alkaline soil,” Donald replied. “There was only enough water for a limited population. They competed against animals and killed a lot of them, even using rabbits for target practice.”

“Yeah,” John replied, “Nelly told me. That’s not good.”

“They multiply fast,” Donald replied, “They’re everywhere until they get infected and nearly all die out. Shooting them was somewhat of a solution. They’re now controlled more humanely. Greenhouses provide them with just enough food and, in turn, their droppings fertilize the soil. Rabbit disease is controllable as of now.”

Nelly leaned over and picked up something.

“It’s a bat,” she said. “It’s still alive.”

“Are you going to save it too?” John asked.

“They consume a ton of mosquitoes,” she replied.

“Aren’t they then prone to spread a disease?” John asked.

“We’re now more in harmony with nature,” Donald noted. “We even have bee hives in our greenhouses. Destroying those pollinators is no longer permissive.”

“Conservatives claim it’s costing us more,” John informed.

“What is the economic value and cost of air we breathe?” Donald asked.

“If its good air,” John answered, “it’s free to breathe. If not, then there’s health cost to breathe it and environmental cost to clean it up. I reckon it has negative economic value even though it has essential social value in being essential to life.”

“Very good answer,” Donald acknowledged. “Isn’t our food and water now nearly as free as is our air to breathe?”

“It nearly is,” John answered, “even though for some of us it’s limited to only a few credits per day that expire at day’s end.”

“Even though this area was semi arid,” Donald explained, “it had a lot of solar potential from wind and sunshine. It only needed to be used to create something of value. It was used to create an oasis as an ideal place for retirement. With volunteer help from retirees, there were no outside expenses except for state property tax, which retirement income covered. Retirees included doctors. With development of greenhouses compatible with both robots and animal support along with more houses for comfortable living there became no more need for money. With volunteer help here and there, there was hardly any tax of income to consider. It caught on around the globe. With paper money becoming obsolete because of its use of credit and debit cards, government had to conform to a totally new system of economics.”

“I know,” John said. “Credit and debit cards were a natural replacement for paper money, but that paper money provided a sense of freedom, as you were free to choose whatever to buy without having to inform the government. You now have a lot less privacy and freedom to do what you want.”

“Yes,” Donald said, “and the credit included food stamps. With more credit to buy food and farmers needing to sell it to pay property tax, it has become as free as air to breathe. There became more of it to feed the world population ten times over. We the people have become freer to pursue other interests. Those of us who used our free education more wisely now have more debits. There is still innovation to overcome competition for higher standards of living. Someday it’ll be realized as such.”

“Money still empowers us with a sense of ability to become what we want to be,” John counter argued. “It’s restrictive a lot more now than it was in the past.”

“True,” Donald acknowledged, “but what’s more valuable if you’re alone in the desert, a canteen of water or more credits to spend on nothing available to buy?”

“The canteen of water,” John again acknowledged as usual, “of course.”

“Isn’t roads part of social capitalism?” Donald asked. “What does it cost to build them?”

“It takes a lot of debits,” John answered, “debits that we all can be taxed for.”

“No,” Donald replied, “it only takes effort. Money as credit is not real wealth. It only facilitates the creation of wealth. Real wealth is what it can buy. Build it and then we have it. Money is only credit that facilitates the process.”

“We still need incentive to build,” John argued.

“We just need the energy,” Donald argued back. “The sky is full of it. We just needed to learn how to use it productively, as was done at Summer Lake. Now, instead of super highways and worldwide communications increasing the level of competition to make local competition more difficult and to benefit the rich to become richer, local production is now more competitive. Its means just include temporary free food credits for the poor, a greater amount of water supply to grow food, free education to learn, and free medicine and hospitalization for those in need of it.”

“Yes,” John acknowledged, “but life now seems to be more boring. People still prefer to gamble and compete. That’s why I shoot pool. Although there have been a lot of winners with free energy, those who had profited from fossil fuels became losers.”

Donald shook his head no.

“The difference,” he said, “is that we now have a friendlier environment than before. It is a lot safer and more productive. It’s become self-efficient in regions everywhere. Governments had to follow. Too big to fail is no longer too big because we can become big enough to replace them. There were losers claiming to be victims of social policy, but adjustment was needed. When a crisis is too big for individuals to overcome by themselves, it is time to come together and apply majority rule.”

“We still need competition for incentive to innovate,” John continued the debate.

“Too much competition to sell the same thing increases the cost of production,” Donald argued back. “Innovation is needed for more diversity of product. It still applies, just now on higher levels. However, what happens with international trade winning out is bigger and fewer producers. Creating more opportunities for variable items of production is vital for adequate distribution of capital. More local and smaller producers can eliminate the too big to fail problem, and they are more likely to be social to maintain a better environment for all us to live harmonious in it.”

“I’m not sure about the higher levels,” John replied. “There seems to be something going on here that could be tragic.”

“My lawn is greener than your lawn,” Donald replied with a twist of the head and lifted brow, “What else is there to say?”

“What about a ferocious war monarch?” John asked.

After Donald shrugged, John faced Nelly.

“What’s going on?” he asked.

“It’s mostly about secrecy and trust,” she answered as John continued with his concerning stare.

“Aren’t I trustworthy?” John asked. “What do you know?”

“My dad is a journalist,” she answered. “He investigated. If he notified the police, he became compromised. He figured he had to inform only whoever he could trust, like family.”

“What did he find out?” John asked.

She faced the ground.

“Remember what I said about boiling water in a paper cup,” she finally said. “The heat goes on through the paper as kinetic energy. Water absorbs a lot of it. However, try to put out such a hot fire as from cooking with grease and it’ll only fuel more of it. That kinetic energy in water becomes stored energy.”

“I’ll buy that,” John commented. “What does it lead to?”

“Remember what I said about carbon and diamonds,” she continued to say. “Heat and pressure also bonds them. They’re able to store more energy. Tiny diamonds store electric energy as batteries. They’re durable enough to last five hundred years. Summer Lake has been creating them for three-hundred years. There’s a gigantic electric grid all around us along with hydrogen and oxygen fuel used underground that provide more energy with pure water as its byproduct.”

John faced the ground while rubbing his forehead.

“That’s a lot of energy,” he said. “I reckon it could make for a big bomb. . . Oh no! What could set it off?”

“As big as it is around here,” she answered, “it’d have to be something very powerful.”

“You must be referring to atomic energy?” John asked with a wide eye stare.

“It could be the biggest bomb ever,” she replied.

“Where can they get what they need for it to work?” John quickly asked.

“Nuclear waste fuels those diamond batteries,” she replied, “they’re a safer energy source for production instead of having to be stored somewhere at taxpayer cost, but, as I’ve said, too much of anything is not good. For someone to make that giant bomb happen, all they need is to get the right stuff to make it somewhere they won’t get detected.”

“What are we supposed to do?” John quickly asked.

“Diamond batteries at Summer Lake are down deep,” she said. “It’s secretive. Whoever is in control of it, we need to find out what they are up to. Some pool players in the tournament are from this area, like that guy Peter knows who plays pool. It’s a risky challenge, but it could be our only way in.”

“Why don’t we just let the authorities do it?” he asked.

“We could be compromised,” she answered. “Trust needs to be established. The stakes are too high.”

“How’s your mother doing?” Donald asked.

“I don’t know,” Nelly replied with a frown. “She warned me not to get involved. I haven’t seen or talked to her sense. Most likely she’s all alone not doing well.”

“You know,” Donald said, “I like to see her. It sure would be nice to have a house blimp.”

Nelly turned her head to face John. He shrugged.

“You got one,” Nelly said facing Donald and pointing at the house blimp. “It’s most likely being watched and we’ll be much better off sneaking around on horses.”

“Thanks,” Donald replied seemingly wanting more peaceful conversation.

“Thank you,” Nelly replied. “John and I will take care of the house while you’re gone.”

***

The sun was rising in the East when John and Nelly arrived on horseback at the Christmas Valley Lodge. They unsaddled the horses at one of the many greenhouses in the area and let them wander off.

John took notice of a medium size greenhouse. Roofs were held in place by plastic barrels on top of each. The houses were well insulated. Grass and plants had grown outside them at the bottoms, as for horses and other animals to feed on.

“All those barrels of water,” Nelly said, “maintain a longer period of heat as well as drip irrigation for the plants. By using a little wind and sun energy, they maintain for the winter.”

“Doesn’t it get real cold here in the winter?” John asked.

“Actually it gets a lot less cold here in the high desert than it does in the Willamette Valley over there on the other side of the cascades,” she replied. “The air is less dense and dryer.”

They soon entered the lodge and on into the dining area.

“Hi,” Nelly said to an elderly lady serving food to an elderly guy at a table. “I’m Nelly Nelson, Donald’s granddaughter. This guy with me is a pool shark from Harvard. We entered the pool tournament and are here to practice.”

“Yes,” she replied, “I got the message. Robert called us last night. Is he really that good? My daughter is eager to learn.”

“I’m eager to find out,” Nelly replied with a smile.

“Would you like to have breakfast before you start?” asked the lady.

“We’ve already had it,” Nelly replied. “I’m a nutritionist. I’ll volunteer to cook and he’ll wash dishes. And your daughter can join us anytime.”

“What do you like to cook,” the lady asked.

“I make a lot of cookies,” Nelly replied.

“You know,” the lady said, “we could sell a lot of cookies at that pool tournament, and our bartender has signed up to play in the tournament. He wants to practice at night.”

“John could bartend and I’ll make cookies,” Nelly offered.

“That’s dandy handy,” the lady replied. “Pool tables are in the bar room right over there. My daughter should be doing her home work, but I’ll let her know you’re here.”

Nelly and John walked on into the bar room and up to one of the pool tables.

“You know the physics,” John said. “Just do as I told you.”

“I hope I can remember it all,” she replied.

“It is better you figure it out,” John advised. “You learn by doing, even after you’ve been told.”

She walked over and picked out a pool stick from the rack. She eyed the tip, “It’s about the curvature of one of those old fashion nickels,” she said. She balanced the stick, holding it with her fingers, whereby the tip of it slightly tended to fall. She then rolled it on the table to be satisfied it was straight.

“Hi,” a teenage girl said walking into the room. “I’m Linda. My boyfriend beats me all the time. I’d like to learn from you.”

“Watch her practice,” John said pointing at Nelly, “and I’ll answer any question you have to ask.”

Nelly placed the cue ball within the table kitchen where it was also in line with dots opposite on the rails at each end. She stroked the cue ball. It came back slightly to the right of where she had stroked it. She adjusted her stances for better balance. She bent over with more balance to see straight ahead. After a practice swing, she stroked the cue ball again. This time it came straight back.

“You have to find that balance,” John told Linda, “and you have to make sure you stroke the cue ball dead center. She is now going to do a few tap shots to get the feel of it whereby she’ll be able to progress from there.”

“Why tap shot?” Linda asked.

“It’s easy,” John replied. “You need to start simple to get a good feel of what you’re doing. After a tap shot, follow through with farther push on the cue ball to see the difference. It is how you learn how to control where the cue ball goes for the next shot.”

John got up, walked over to the table to place the cue ball and an object ball for an easy side pocket shot.

“Tap it in,” he told Nelly.

She did as told.

“Now just follow through a little farther on your stroke,” he advised. “Be smooth and see what happens.”

She followed through on her stroke, pushing the cue stick a little farther beyond where the object ball had been. It enabled the cue ball to roll farther after hitting the object ball than it did with the tap shot.

“See the difference,” he said as he again repositioned balls and also say, “Do it again but hit the cue ball a lot harder.”

She again followed instructions. After the cue ball slammed the object ball into the side pocket at its right, it only slid a little ways to the left.

"Hit the ball hard," John explained, "and it'll slide, but only so far. There is more friction to overcome with more distance. It causes them to roll. It's physics. The balls being of the same size and weight allows them to just transfer their momentum except for either a forward or backward spin, or any spin. With all that, you need to know the table. With experience you'll learn how to hit the ball in a certain manner, as how hard and so on."

He repositioned the balls, saying, "Now do the same thing in aiming for the cue ball to hit the object ball head on, but hit the cue slightly left of center with smooth follow through."

She again did as instructed. The cue ball continued moving forward after pocketing the object ball, and further spun to the left off the rail.

"Try different things and learn what happens," John said to her. "I learn as such. It's life. That's its challenge. Success of it is achieved by using what you know to learn more."

Nelly scattered the fifteen object balls when placing them onto the table. She lined up and softly tapped the cue ball for a straight shot on the object ball into a corner pocket. She stared at another object ball.

"She trying to figure out where to hit it," John explained. "To cut it into the side pocket you need to consider both object ball and cue ball curvatures. Angular deviation from the straight shot is doubled. She still needs to focus on hitting the cue ball at its center. If she focuses too much on the object ball, she'll be prone to not stroke straight where she intends."

"Nelly stroked straight at the cue ball to pocket the object ball in the side pocket where intended.

"It seems too easy," Linda noted. "I need to learn more."

"It is complexity simplified," John advised. "You need good strategy to win. The more you know the more options you have to succeed. Think simple step by step for easy ways to make all the balls on the table. What seems complicated becomes easy, simple and doable."

"Show me," Linda said.

"Do you know how to play nine-ball?" John asked.

"Show me," Linda said.

John got up and walked over to the table.

"Linda and I are going to play a game of nine-ball," he said to Nelly.

Nelly nodded. John racked the balls.

"Do you want to break?" he asked Linda.

"You break," she replied shaking her head.

He stroked the cue ball for it to hit the one ball. The seven-ball was pocketed on the break. He then pocketed the one-ball

with an easy tap shot. The cue ball nearly stopped after hitting the object ball for a makeable shot on the two-ball. With more push and follow through on his next stroke, the cue ball moved on after pocketing the two-ball. With control of the cue ball he had makeable shots in order on the, three-ball, four-ball, five-ball, six-ball, eight-ball and nine-ball, but the nine-ball did not go all the way into the corner pocket. It nearly went in but hung up about one inch outside the pocket.

"It's your shot," he told Linda. "If you make that nine in the corner pocket you win the game."

"Really," she asked.

"Really," he confirmed. "Making the nine-ball is the name of the game.

She stroked a tap shot pocketing the nine-ball.

"You won," John said.

"Really," Linda seemed to ask. "You made all the balls."

John nodded eyeing Nelly. She nodded back with a smile.

"Miss one and lose," John informed as something good to think about. "Don't beat yourself."

***

"Rise and shine," Dirk hollered as he stood in the midst of three blimp houses.

The four occupants came out and stood in front of Dirk.

"There's the boss," Dirk said pointing at a cargo blimp that was hovering behind him a couple feet above ground. "I'm just a good guy here to show you the ropes."

"I'm Ted," he announced and started pointing at the others. "He's Brave-Dave; that's Mean-Dean and she's Malice-Alice."

"I heard there's a pool tournament to win that'll get you in the one that ends at Summer Lake," Brave-Dave said.

"You missed it," Dirk said. "I won it last week. There are a couple tables right below us at a bar in Silver Lake, but it's being filled up by players coming from everywhere. They've paid their way to play in the tournament starting tomorrow at Silver Lake."

"Damn it," Dave cursed, "we're just not free to do anything anymore."

"I hear you," Dirk agreed. "Another tournament place is at Christmas Valley. It's not as crowded. I'm going over there after I win at Silver Lake just to check it out. You're welcome to come along."

"My food credits don't include alcohol,' Dave informed. "I need it for my back pain. It's only how I can shoot."

"I have a few connections," Dirk revealed. "We're planning a protest for more freedom right after the pool tournament at Summer Lake."

"Count me in," Dave said.

“You’re in,” Dirk replied. “Right now it’s time to gather up dead limbs to put into the furnace, or you can take ashes from it and scatter them back into the woods.”

“Why?” Dave asked.

“Fires can burn up the forest,” Dirk explained, “but that is also how nature works to fertilize its soil and grow more trees. It needs to be managed. We’re here to do it for them before it gets too hot and dangerous.”

Dave squatted down and gathered up some dead branches.

“Is this hard on your back?” Dirk asked.

“Just bending forward is,” Dave replied. “Lifting is actually helpful. Using the rear muscles helps straighten it. Just bending over to shoot pool sends pain up my spine. I can only shoot pool good after a couple beers.”

“I can get you something a lot stronger than alcohol,” Dirk offered.

“Yeah,” Dave replied grimacing,” but I’ve gotten into lots of trouble drinking too much. I’m trying to behave myself while I’m here.”

“Well,” Dirk said, “that’s too awkward and slow. There are robots to pick this stuff up. There’s one inside the cargo blimp. It’ll be out in a minute.”

He pushed buttons on his remote. They watched as a robot rolled itself out of the blimp.

All you have to do is guide it,” Dirk said.

He pointed at their numerous roller-ball-feet at the bottom of numerous legs reaching out in just about all directions. There were numerous roller-balls joints in its legs, as were smaller and more numerous below the joints for the robot to have a better balance and easier movement over the rough outdoor surfaces. They came with controllers to help guide their directions and to okay acceptable items to pick up.

***

“Is this all you have to eat?” Bert asked Peter as they stood beside greenhouse plants of berries and vegetables. “Is this all they have on Mars and the moon?’

“It’s difficult growing big trees for apples,” Peter admitted, “but fruits and vegetable are nutritious. Chickens and their eggs provide lots of protein. Grapes can be grown. All you need is to provide water for the roots and to create enough sunlight. Birds and small animals are helpful sources. It can be a healthy place to live depending on how well you balance out all the stuff you have to work with.”

“My daughter is a nutritionist,” Bert informed.

“Yeah,” Peter said with a nod and a smile, “I wanted to eat some of her cookies, but Dirk was quick to take them with him.”

“If you bring her here,” Bert said leaning forward, “She can make lots of them and cook just about anything you want. Dirk is probably now getting the benefit of having her cook for him.”

“You’re right,” Peter admitted. “I’m going to check it out. I have a good use for those cookies. They’ll come in handy at the pool tournament.”

Bert stood eyeing Peter facing away, as if selling cookies for a little profit made no sense at all.

***

When John and Nelly walked into the barn to check out the status of the four pool tables, they were not alone. Tables were being used. Others players with pool sticks waiting their turn sat on bundles of hay. John and Nelly found a bundle to sit on next to an elderly couple.

“How’s it going?” John asked them. “Are you ready to win?”

“We don’t expect to win,” the elderly man said. “We came here mostly being on vacation and signed up because it was just something else for us to do.”

“John, here, is a pool shark,” Nelly said. “I’m here to learn.”

Most other occupants of the barn seemed elderly.

“Is everyone here on vacation?” John asked.

“There some from Fort Rock and other areas not too far,” the elderly woman replied. “It’s also something for them to do.”

“It looks like you’ll have a good chance to move on,” John said to Nelly.

“Yeah,” she replied. “I’ve played for two days. Doesn’t that give me an unfair advantage?”

“You never know,” he replied. “Linda beat me yesterday. It only takes one loss and your out.”

“Is it nine-ball?” she asked.

“It’s a nine-ball-eight ball combo,” John informed her. “It’s eight ball with pocketing your seven balls in order, one through seven or fifteen through nine.”

They watched players practice. There were a lot of missed shots on all four tables. When a game finally ended after a half hour time limit, the elderly couple beside John and Nelly got up to take their turn.

“They play a lot of defense,” John noted. “It’s a strategy to win. If you have a difficult shot to make, you don’t want to leave your opponent the advantage to win by leaving the cue ball at a place where he can run out.”

“What do I do?” she asked.

“If you have good control of the cue ball, just make sure of leaving it where opponent has a difficult shot if you miss. Even if you have no shot, don’t open it up for your opponent. Be smart.”

“What’s this about a time limit?” she asked.

“Whoever is ahead after a half hour wins,” John said, “If it’s tied, then whoever makes the next shot is the winner.”

“What if your opponent runs the table on the break?” she asked.

“You lose,” he answered. “You’re eliminated.

“Wow,” she said, “You pay a thousand debits to enter and you might not even get one shot for a chance to win.”

“You lag for the break,” John informed her.

“And it only cost a thousand dollars,” she informed him.

“You are from Reno, aren’t you?” John asked. “A million for a thousand is a good bet, isn’t it?”

“I thought it is illegal to gamble in Oregon,” she replied.

The playoffs at the four different places were to reduce the number of players down from one thousand and twenty four to two hundred and fifty six. After two rounds in three days at the different locations, the final eight rounds of elimination were to continue at Summer Lake.

After three days, John and Nelly had won their two games of rounds one and two. To play at Summer Lake, John and Nelly needed a place to stay at. However, Donald was on his way to Reno in the house blimp for his visit to his daughter-in-law. He had stayed to watch John and Nelly play.

***

After the house blimp passed on by the lake, Donald took notice of men working on an RV near a grocery store in the little town of Paisley. He also became aware of his house blimp losing altitude.

Donald pushed the alarm button and waited.

“What is the problem,” a male voice finally asked.

“The blimp house is losing altitude,” he replied. “The dome must be leaking helium.”

“Where are you?” he was asked.

“I’m nearby Paisley,” he replied, “on my way south towards Lakeview.”

“Indications of your present height and speed,” he heard, “are just enough to get you here in ten minutes. Its destination will now be directed from here.”

“Thanks,” Donald said grimacing.

The blimp house was only about twenty feet above ground when it reached Lakeview. It moved between buildings down a street to where it landed at a used car, RV and house blimp lot.

“You’re not John Luck,” Bart Jones said when Donald came out of the house blimp.

“No,” Donald replied, “I’m his friend. He’s lending me the house blimp so that I can visit my daughter-in-law in Reno. Her daughter has been reported missing.”

“I’m sorry,” Bart said, “it’s rented for two months, but you can’t stay in it here.”

“I just need to get to Reno,” Donald told him. “Do you have a car I can rent?”

“Right now,” Bart replied, “everything is rented, but some RVs and house blimps should be back soon from the pool losers of the tournament if you care to wait.”

“What else can I do?” Donald asked shaking his head.

“That’s a possibility,” the salesman said pointing at a RV in front of a warehouse.

Donald gazed at it and shrugged.

“It’s been rumored to bring something from Summer Lake,” the salesman explained. Another RV comes from Nevada, picks up something and goes back.”

“Is it an exchange of diamonds for nuclear waste?” Donald noted.

“That’s what a lot of people believe,” the salesman replied.

A small plane descended from the sky to hover in the air at the used car, RV and house blimp lot.

“That’ll be Detective Dixon from Reno,” the salesman said. “He probably wants to talk to you,” he said walking away. “I’ve answered enough of his questions.”

“Where’s John Luck?” the detective asked with a stare.

“I reckon he’s shooting pool,” Donald replied.

“Why are you using his house blimp?” the detective asked.

“He said I could use it to visit my daughter-in-law,” Donald replied. “It malfunctioned. I’m now stuck.”

“Do you need a ride?” the detective asked after a pause of folding his arms together and looking away.

“Sure,” Donald said, “but I can only tell what I know, which is mostly speculation.”

Detective Dixon pointed at the small plane. Donald walked over to it and seated himself in the backseat. Dixon handed him a loaf of garlic bread.

“Just something a bartender gave me,” the detective said. “Eat all you want. I really don’t care for garlic.”

***

Dirk and Dave got out of their house blimps after landing at the Christmas Valley lodge. Dave led Dirk all the way to the bar. They stood gazing at John.

“What’ll you have?” John asked.

“Do you remember me?” Dirk asked leaning forward.

“No,” John replied shrugging. “Do we know each other?”

“We played pool for the room,” Dirk replied. “You won. I’ve won at Silver Lake to advance to Summer Lake. I reckon you’ve played here. Do I now get my fair chance to beat you?”

“You could,” John said rubbing his forehead. “I’ve advanced from here as well. . . You know, I didn’t remember much after I ate a cookie. Somehow I ended up here at Christmas Valley. This girl I woke of with in the room led me here in my car.”

“Where’d she go?” Dirk asked with a crinkled nose.

Nelly came through the doorway.

John flung his left arm straight out to his left loudly saying, “I think she said she was going that way. Boy, I hated to see her go. I didn’t know what to do.”

Nelly slowly turned around grimacing as she walked out of the room.

“Well,” Dirk replied, “the bitch poisoned my grandmother with her cookies, and she’s going to pay for it.”

“Let’s go,” he said waving his left arm forward. “It’s urgent. I have to get somewhere. I need to go right now.”

“Where are we going?” Dave was quick to ask.

“You’re going back to the forest,” Dirk replied. “Where I go is my own business.”

“Do I have to leave now?” Dave asked.

“Nay,” Dirk muttered as he turned to leave, “stay as long as you want.”

“What’ll you have?” John asked Dave after Dirk left.

“I’d like to play for a beer,” Dave replied.

“Do you know that girl who poisons?” Dave asked.

“No,” John said, “I don’t know any girl that poisons, and I’m not sure that guy has his story right.”

“He’s been helping me out up there on the hill,” Dave said.

“Watch your back,” John advised him.

“How am I’m going to get back to Silver Lake?” he asked.

“You might find a horse to ride,” John answered.

Dave rose up from the chair and ran to catch up with Dirk. The blimp had started its rise.

“Wait,” Dave hollered waving his arms high above his head.

Dirk stared down at Dave. He decided to lower the blimp.

“Don’t leave me here with no way back,” Dave pleaded.

“Okay,” Dirk said. “I’m in the pool tournament at Summer Lake, but the RV I was going to use to stay at needed to be fixed. It’s now in Lakeview. I’ll take and drop you off there. You then can escort it to Summer Lake, but you need to keep your mouth shut about anything else that might be going on.”

“You don’t have to worry about that,” Dave replied with his hands pointing outward from his face.

***

“What do you know about Peter Moffert?” the detective asked while sitting in the front seat of the plane flying south to Reno.

“He was a smart kid growing up,” Donald replied as he sat behind Detective Dixon. “It was one thing after another.”

“How well did your son know him?” Dixon asked.

“They had a few run-ins,” Donald replied.

“What do you think is going on?” Dixon asked.

“All I know,” Donald replied, “is it seems to be a big mess.”

“You got that right,” Dixon acknowledged. “Do you know if your son, his daughter and John Luck are involved with it?”

“I believe Bert is concerned about Peter,” Donald replied, “his daughter is concerned of her father, and I think John is just a nice guy that stumbled into the mix.”

The plane descended towards houses on a hill just outside the city of Reno. It landed on the front lawn of one house.

“You know who else might be involved,” Donald seemed to ask as they stepped out of the plane.

“I’d like to,” Dixon replied.

“Well, the Vice President family made a fortune buying and selling property,” Bert informed, “but the Vice President himself has filed bankruptcy after he bought all that desert property in the northern part of Nevada. He has also invested in colonies on Mars and the moon, and he has personal contacts with some of the scientists working in the labs.”

“I know,” Dixon replied, “and our Peter Moffert was one of those scientists. He was convicted of disclosing secrets, and he was pardoned by the President.”

“Yep,” Donald agreed, “and who persuaded the President to pardon him?”

“It’s not easy going there,” Dixon noted.

“I reckon you’d be investigated by the Fed for anything you might have hidden in your closet,” Donald noted.”

The front door of the house opened before arriving close to it. Wanda stood just inside staring and waiting.

“Nelly is alive and going after it,” Donald said. “She found a good friend who is helping her out.”

“Come in,” she said turning around and leading them into the living room.

“What about Bert,” she asked standing in front of them as they sat down on a couch.

“I don’t know,” Donald replied with a frown. “My guess is he’s being held by Peter Moffert.”

“He was investigating Peter Moffert,” she pointed out.

“They’ve had their share of run-ins,” Donald noted, “but I doubt Peter would harm Bert. He’s not that kind of guy.”

“I hope you’re right,” she said facing the floor.

“I’m more confused now than ever,” the detective said as he stood up. “I have to go. I hope it all turns out okay.”

“How are you doing these days?”Wanda asked Donald as Dixon walked out the front door.

“I’m . . . I’m . . . I got a pain in my chest,” he cried out as he bent over with his hands on his chest grimacing.

“Did you eat something?” Wanda asked.

“Just a load of garlic bread,” he managed to say.

“Oh no!” she said, “Too much garlic is toxic. Burp some gas out if you can.”

He shook his head attempting to burp.”

“Spit it out,” she yelled.

He tried spitting. He appeared to be about to throw up. His mouth suddenly became watery of saliva dripping out.

“Spit it out,” she demanded holding a small bowl in front of him.

After a bit he spitted out a gob of saliva . . . another gob of it after a few seconds . . . another gob . . . and so on. “It is working,” he said before spitting out another gob of it. “What is happening?”

“All that garlic gave you heartburn,” she explained. “There was gas in your lungs and too much saliva.”

“How do you know so much about it?” he asked.

“My grandfather had many health problems,” she informed. “During his fifties he passed out a few times when he ate too much. His bowels were plugged by not having a healthy diet. He also lived over in the Willamette Valley of Oregon where there are all kinds of pollens, and he was allergic to dogs. His wife had to have them. Mucus started coming out of his eyes.”

“What did he do?” Donald asked.

“She also liked burning candles,” Wanda continued. “When she burned a vanilla candle, all that mucus was suddenly gone. However, some of it was needed. When he breathed in smoke from a forest fire, he had the worst heartburn yet. He burped it out, but eating too much citric fruits also produced too much saliva. The saliva glands are right below the lungs and heart. It’s needed to clear the throat, but too much is toxic.”

“What can you do?” Donald asked.

“There’re several partial remedies,” she answered. “Vanilla from Mexico of a secret recipe does clear the nose, but does not cure the cause. Having better constipation helps. A short term medicine is Beano. A good nutritional diet is really good.”

“Is that why your daughter is a nutritionist,” he asked.

She nodded yes.

“What’s a good cure?” he asked.

“A placebo is good,” she replied.

“Yep,” he said, “it’ll cure fear and hesitation. What else is good?”

“Artichokes are very healthy for you,” she told him. “They have more protein than most other vegetables.”

“What’s so good about protein?” he asked.

“There’s something in it that neither water nor sugar has,” she informed him.

“What’s that?” he asked.

“What’s air?” she asked in turn.

“Mostly oxygen and nitrogen,” he answered.

“What’s sugar?” she asked.

“Mostly carbon and hydrogen,” he answered.

“Aren’t oxygen, hydrogen and carbon energy sources?” she asked. “What processes and controls them?”

“I reckon it’s the nitrogen,” he replied. “It’s sure needed to grow food.”

***

“They’re going to find me,” Nelly said to John sitting across the table eating his super.

“We’d be better off at Summer Lake,” John suggested. “It’ll be crowded with pool players.”

“Where will we stay?” she asked.

“Shouldn’t Donald be back with the blimp house by now?” John asked.

“He stayed to watch the tournament,” she said. “He’s now on his way. Sorry, I didn’t know we’d need it. I didn’t think.”

“I’ll go to Lakeview and get an RV,” John said nodding while eyeing the ceiling.

“How are you going to get there soon enough?” she asked.

“I guess I’m going to have to ask my dad to bail me out,” he replied.

“Do you think he will?” she asked.

“Most likely,” John said, “It’s just that we’ve been going our own ways until now.”

“I’ll understand if it’s too hard on you,” she said bowing her head,

“I wanted a challenge,” he replied. “I now have it.”

“Isn’t teaching me how to shoot pool a challenge,” she had to ask.

“Nope,” he replied, “no student is as good as you are.”

“How am I going to get there?” John seemed to be asking himself as he turned his head to face towards his left.

Nelly shrugged, lifting her shoulders.

He reached for his phone and pushed buttons.

“Hello,” his dad answered.

“My dear father,” John pleaded, “I’m now homeless.”

“Hold on,” his dad said.

“Hello,” John heard Jack Cavish say.

“John is homeless,” John heard his dad say.

“This place is filled up with players, tourists and the media,” he heard Jack reply, ‘but the resort would like to have more RVs

and house blimps to rent out. They just need someone to go get them. John just needs to go and get one."

"I need someone to come get me here at Christmas Valley," John said.

"There you are," his dad said, "case closed."

"When do you want me to come get you?" Jack asked.

"Anytime tomorrow will be okay," John answered. "I'll be here all day, probably shooting pool."

"I'm sure glad you didn't mention me," Nelly said when he hung up. "I hate to say this, but we should split up."

"Why?" John asked with a fixed gaze.

"Because I need to take care of the house while Donald is gone," she answered. "I have no chance of winning at Summer Lake, and it's better for us not be seen together, and we could learn a lot more on our own of what's going on."

"I'm not thrilled about leaving you alone out here," he said. "How are you going to stay safe?"

"I have a lot of experience at that," she replied. "You need not worry; I'll be okay."

He closed his eyes bowing his forehead on his hand.

"I'll be okay," she said again. "Don't we learn by doing? I've been learning how to take care of myself by doing it, haven't I?"

"Yeah," he admitted. "You've been taking care of me too."

***

"I played pool with that guy," Dave said. "He cheats."

"I played pool with him too," Dirk said. "His girlfriend fed my grandmother poison cookies."

The small blimp approached a house and hovered in front of it. Dirk led Dave into the house to sit in cushion chairs to wait. After a few minutes, Peter walked into the room to stand close to them.

"This is Brave Dave," Dirk introduced his new companion. "He's a good guy to have with us."

"The more the better," Peter replied. "What's up?"

"I believe Nelly Nelson is up at Christmas Valley. She could be onto us, whatever we're up to."

"I'll check it out and handle it," Peter replied. "You just go and take care of your end."

"How's her dad doing?" Dirk asked.

"It's not how he's doing that matters," Peter replied, "it's what he's going to do for us is what counts."

"Well, we've been sneaking away with it being Dave's first week on the job," Dirk said. "That's no longer an option."

"Do take care," Peter said walking away. "Thanks for letting me know about Nelly. I'll take care of it while you do your thing at the tournament."

***

They unsaddled the horses and let them roam about. With the sun rising in the east, they walked on into the resort and its restaurant.

"John is leaving us," Nelly said to Linda's mother, Kelley. "I have an idea. Summer Lake is filling up. We could sell them a lot of cookies. Mine are good and nutritious."

"Sounds good," Kelly replied. "When is he leaving? Linda is going to be disappointed. She does want more pool lessons."

"I'll teach her what I've learned," Nelly replied.

"I'm just waiting for a friend to pick me up." John said. "He could be here anytime of the day he prefers."

"Well, then," Kelly said, "You two go practice pool. I'll tell Linda you're here.

John nodded as Nelly smiled as they walked on into the bar to practice pool.

"I just need to learn by experimenting with what I already know," she said.

"A few more pointers will help," John advised.

She shrugged.

Linda came into the room as he placed the cue ball and one object ball on the table. She stood beside Nelly to listen to what John was about to say: "The hardest shot in pool is to draw the cue ball back after it hits the object ball."

"Isn't curving the balls more complicated?" Nelly asked.

"They're similar," John replied. "Curving depends on speed ratio to spin and distance. Stroking downward gets more spin to forward movement. It curves more. Hitting it hard left of center pushes it to the right with less left curvature per distance. Since it is pushed to the right, you aim to slightly hit the ball it needs to curve around. That way you don't need to curve it as much.

"Where you stroke the cue ball left or right also matters. If you hit it above center, it'll curve sooner. Hitting it below center and harder allows it to slow faster and curve later. Drawing back the cue ball is similar and more difficult because of the friction of the table needs to be overcome. For longer distance between the cue and object balls more backward spin is needed. Even for it to be hit hard to keep sliding is more difficult. It is not that it cannot be done; it being consistent with how much draw that is needed is what is most difficult. Controlling the cue ball for your next shot is important. Calling your next shot instead of the one you are taking is a good way to practice."

They suddenly became aware of Jack entering the room.

"Are you ready to go?" Jack asked.

"Have fun," John said facing Nelly and Linda.

As he left, Nelly scattered balls out on the table.

"You learn by doing what you know," she said to Linda.

***

"It's all arranged," Jack said as John seated himself behind Jack in the small plane. "I drop you off at a lot in Lakeview. You pick out a RV or small house blimp and escort it to Summer Lake. It'll take you to the lots. A blue tag with the number 37 is posted on the lot area where you'll stay with it."

"Sounds simple," John said.

"Hope it's not too boring," Jack mocked.

It took about twenty minutes for the small plane to reach Lakeview. It took about five minutes for John to get into an RV and tell it where to go.

When approaching the little town of Paisley, John noticed a little girl wandering about on the road. The RV slowed down to a stop.

"Pull over and park on the right side of the road," John told the RV.

The RV obeyed. John got out of it to walk over to escort the little girl back to wherever she belonged. When they arrived at a grocery store parking space, John noticed an RV parked in front of the store and a house to the left of the store. The RV was the same model and blue and red color of the one he was escorting.

"Where do you live?" John asked the little girl. "You should not be out here on the road. You can get run over. It'll hurt and you could be killed. Where's your home?"

She finally pointed towards the RV. It side door was open.

"Come," John urged her, "I'll help you get in."

John guided her on over to it and helped her get in. As he did, a policeman came out of the store and glanced their way. He continued on to get into his police car and drive away west and north towards Summer Lake. John closed the side door and went back to the other RV he had been traveling in to continue on to Summer Lake as well.

A man in work clothes came out of the store carrying a sack of cookies. He seated himself behind the wheel of the RV and it headed east and south towards Lakeview.

***

"I need an RV to stay in at Summer Lake," Dirk said to Dave who was letting the robot load itself with dead branches. "If you help me get it, you can stay in it too, have all the beer you want to drink while you watch me win the tournament. As I told you, there's going to be a hell of a protest."

"Where are we going to get it?" Dave asked.

"Follow me," Dirk said waving his hand forward.

They entered the small blimp. It was soon up and heading south. When they arrived at the Lakeview lot, they noticed only one RV was on it.

“Remember me,” Dirk said to Bart. “I’m Dirk Banks. I came to get that RV Peter Moffert rented. It broke down and he is still in need of it.”

“Where’s Peter?” Bart asked.

“He was injured in that accident,” Dirk claimed. “He rather not sue you, but he needs it for me to bring him to the hospital here in Lakeview when the time comes.”

“Why didn’t he call me?” Bart asked.

“I thought he did,” Dirk said. “Don’t you remember?”

“I remember him calling at the time of the accident,” Bart said pushing buttons on his phone. There was no answer.

“He’s unable to answer his phone,” Dirk claimed. “We need that RV. It’s urgent.”

After checking Dirk’s ID and credit status, Bart went into his office and came back out handing Dirk the keys.

“Have fun,” Bart said. “It’s tough to win it all, but there can be lots of fun trying.”

Dirk flipped his finger goodbye turning away from Bart and walking towards the RV. He pointed at the blimp when passing by Dave. Dave got into it. It was soon trailing the RV. Although the RV moved faster, the blimp was able to keep up by taking a straighter and shorter path over lake and mountainous land.

When the RV arrived at a vacant rental space right next to John’s RV at the rock cliff of Winter Ridge, Dirk opened the door between the driver and passenger parts of the RV.

“What the hell are you doing here?” he asked staring at the little girl lying on the floor.

“I want my mommy,” she cried out and continued crying.

The blimp landed beside the RV. Dave got out and walked over to the RV. Dirk opened the door staring at him.

“What’s wrong?” Dave asked.

“We have a passenger,” Dirk said as he stepped aside and pointed at the crying little girl.

“Why is she in here?” Dave asked with a fixed gaze.

“Hell if I know,” Dirk answered.

“What are we going to do?” Dave asked.

“You can go report it I guess,” Dirk replied while standing at the side door looking out.

Dave approached to walk out.

“Wait,” Dirk said, “police cars are approaching.”

“Looks like I don’t need to go vary far,” Dave said.

“Hold on,” Dirk cautioned.

A drone arrived at a nearby RV. John stepped out of it and picked up food from the drone. He was suddenly surrounded by police blimps hovering nearby. Two police cars drove up to park on opposite sides of him. A policeman from each car got out to point their hand guns at him. Rifles pointed at him from police in the blimps.

John had his hands reaching up over his head before it was to be ordered.

"Where's the girl?" a policeman approaching John yelled.

"What girl?" John asked standing without movement.

"The little girl you abducted," the policeman hollered. "We need to investigate inside your RV. Is there anyone else in there besides her?"

"There's no one in there," John replied. "Take a look."

The other policeman slowly entered the RV holding his gun ready to fire. After a couple minutes he came back out shaking his head.

"Where is she?" he asked with his gun pointing at John.

"You must be referring to the little girl in the small town of Paisley. She was wandering along the road. I just helped her get into an RV that she pointed at. The door was open. I thought it was her home."

"You're under arrest," he was informed. "Anything you say can be held against you after your right to call a lawyer."

"Can I reach for my phone?" John asked.

The policeman nodded with his gun pointed at John's chest. John slowly reached for his phone and pushed buttons.

"Now what?" he heard Jack ask.

"There's been a big mistake," John replied. "Police have me surrounded. I'm being arrested."

"I'll try to bail you out," Jack offered.

"I have nothing to hide," John said to the police. "I will tell you everything I know."

"Wait!" Dirk said as Dave started to walk towards the other RV.

When Dave turned around, Dirk placed his finger between his lips.

"Why are we being silent?" Dave asked after the police left with John in their custody.

"He's a cheater," Dave replied. "He needs to be in jail, and we could also be arrested for having the girl in our RV."

"What are we going to do with her?" Dave asked loudly as he walked back into the RV.

"I know where we can take her." Dirk said. "She'll be safe. At the right time we let her out to wander about, and someone will see her and call the police."

Dave shrugged while otherwise standing frozen in silence.

***

Peter stepped out of the small blimp. Walking to the door, he entered the resort and up to the desk.

"Remember me," he said to Kelly. "I'm Peter Moffert."

"Oh yeah," Kelly replied, "how you doing?"

“I’ve come up with a new sugar,” he said holding a bottle of pellets in his hand. “Try one,” he said opening the bottle and showing it to her.

She reached for a pellet to put into her mouth and taste.

“How is it?” he asked.

“It’s sure sweet,” she replied.

“They’d be great in cookies,” he suggested. “You could sell a lot of them at the pool tournament in Summer Lake.”

“You know,” she said. “Someone already suggested that to me and she’s in the process of making them.”

“I’ll give you all this salt for her to add,” Peter offered, “but it is my secret recipe; don’t tell anyone about it, not even her.”

“Mum‘s the word,” she replied.

***

With the sun rising in the east, Nelly unsaddled her horse and walked into the resort.

“Linda is already at the table practicing,” Kelly said to Nelly, “and she’s not happy about something.”

“I’ll get to the bottom of it,” Nelly replied.

“Thanks,” Kelly replied.

Nelly walked on into the bar to see Linda leaning over the table stroking the cue stick at the cue ball.

“How’s it going?” Nelly asked.

“My boyfriend doesn’t want to play with me anymore,” she replied frowning.

“It’s sad to lose,” Nelly advised. “The aim of the game is to win.”

“He won’t play with me anymore,” she replied shaking her head. “I win and now he doesn’t like me anymore.”

“You just need to give him more space,” Nelly advised.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“Life is confrontational,” Nelly explained, “as a natural part of nature. Animals confront other animals. They learn to survive, and they need to adjust to change. Giving your boyfriend more time to adjust is necessary. If you don’t, you’ll more likely break apart for good. Give him more space and in time he’ll compete.”

“How are you doing with your boyfriend?” Linda asked.

“He’s a little more difficult to beat,” Nelly replied smiling. “I suppose that a good thing for him and me at the moment.”

“Someone just called,” Kelley said entering the room. “We need to talk. Linda, do you mind?”

“Not at all,” she replied walking out of the room.

“What’s up?” Nelly asked.

“John’s lawyer is on his way here,” Kelly said eyeing Nelly.

“What’s wrong?” Nelly asked staring back.

“There’s been an Amber Alert,” Kelly informed, “and you’re friend John has been arrested. Are you sure about that guy?”

Nelly stood frozen with a fixed gaze.

"It has to be a mistake," she finally said. "I'm being framed. Most likely he's now being framed."

"Who's framing?" Kelly asked.

"Peter Moffert," Nelly claimed.

"No," Kelly said shaking her head, "he's too nice a guy. He was over here yesterday giving me a very sweet salt that you've been putting in your cookies."

"What?" Nelly asked staring with her mouth wide open.

"You have a visitor," Linda said standing in the doorway to step aside to let Jack Cavish walk into the room.

"I hope he's good luck instead of bad," Kelly said in her way out of the room.

"I just heard," Nelly said. "I know John didn't do it."

"They're searching for a little girl," Jack informed her. "The news media is all over it. John is locked up at Lakeview. Hearing for possible bail won't be until Monday. It looks like he's at least out of the tournament that starts Tuesday unless he gets bail."

"What can we do?" she asked with a frowning Face.

"I don't know," Jack replied. "All that media coverage isn't good. The safest place for him now is in jail. I'm not getting help from anyone, the police, the parents, or that RV place. I'm now hoping you'll clue me in on something."

"Have you tried contacting Detective Dixon," she asked.

"Do you think he'll help?" he asked.

"It wouldn't hurt to ask," she noted. "By the way, I need to be in the tournament. Is there somewhere I can stay close by?"

"There's the RV John rented," he replied handing his phone to her. "Do you know that guy?"

"Yes," she said staring at Jack, "he's one of the guys trying to frame me. He kidnapped me after Peter squirted me with the memory poison. I don't know what they've done to my dad."

"This guy is in an RV parked next to John's," Jack informed.

"Oh no!" she said gritting her teeth. "I still need to be there. They left something here I put into my cookies. I ate some that were okay. They must be planning on adding something to them at the tournament. I'll be framed again. I need to see them at it to somehow stop them. I'll be responsible for what happens if I don't at least try."

"When do you want to go?" he asked.

"Pick me up Sunday night," she answered turning her head away. "I need a whole lot more practice to keep playing in that tournament, and I'm taking care of the house I'm now living in."

"Donald is still in Reno," Jack informed. "The house blimp broke down."

"He needs to be back taking care of his house," she said.

"I'm on my way to Reno to see a detective," Jack noted, "It won't be any trouble bringing him back with me. Let him know."

“Thanks,” she said not very pleasingly. “I do need to call my mother and let her know I’m okay. . . Well, at least I’m still alive.”

***

Vice President Simmons stood facing the President sitting at his desk.

“Now, what do you want?” the President asked.

Simmons crossed his lips with one finger and reached with his other hand pretending to write something with his pen gun.

“It’s out of ink,” he said shaking it above a doughnut on the desk. “Sorry,” he said, “hope I didn’t get any on your desert.”

“It’s okay,” the President said after tasting his doughnut.

“I have important information to tell you,” Simmons said. “I only want you to know about it.”

The President shrugged. He then grimaced, looking away to only fall off his chair onto the floor.

“Security,” Simmons said to his phone, “the President is ill. He’s passed out on the floor.”

Security personnel were soon in the room, one with phone in hand.

“He needs to be taken to this secret facility,” Simmons said handing a paper to the guy with the phone in hand.

“He has to go to the medical emergency,” the guy replied.

“No,” Simmons bellowed, “he’s ill. He told me about it, and he doesn’t want the media to find out. With his hospitalization I am now the acting President in charge. If you refuse to obey my order, then you’ll have to be fired.”

***

”She’s not waking up,” Dave told Dirk entering the RV.

“She was crying too much,” Dirk replied. “I had to giver her a little medicine to calm her down.”

“I can’t do this,” Dave said shaking his head. “She needs to be home with her mother and dad.”

“You’re right,” Dirk claimed to agree, “but telling the police last night would’ve implemented us as kidnappers. With all that news media, everyone around here would be taking revenge on us. Do you really want that?”

“What can we do?” Dave asked flipping his hands back and forth on each side of his chest.

“I already told you I know where to take her,” Dirk replied, “Come on, pick her up, it’s time to do it.”

When Dave picked the little girl up, Dirk covered her with a towel. He then waved his hand towards the door. Dave followed him to the blimp. Dirk guided it to Peter’s house, picked up the girl and led Dave down the stairs into the house.

“We leave her here and call the police,” Dirk said.

“Why don’t we just tell the police what happened?” Dave had to ask.

“See this,” Dirk said holding a pen up for Dave to see.

“It’s a pen,” Dave said leaning forward only to be squirted.

Dave slapped his forehead. Dirk punched him with a quick jab to the face. Dave stumbled back, started to punch back, but fell down to lie unconscious on the floor.

***

The small plane was hovering above the police building for it to land right beside Detective Dixon.

“I need help,” Jack pleaded after the plane landed and he had gotten out of it. “Lakeview police aren’t investigating fairly. They’re persuaded by the media.”

“It doesn’t add up for me,” Dixon replied. “There has to be a motive, but it’s out of character, even though it’s possible that circumstances drove them to it.”

“John said an RV was parked at the store looking the same as the one he was in,” Jack informed the detective. They’re not willing to investigate it. The store owner won’t tell me anything.”

“Step back over there,” Dixon said pointing at a screen.

Dixon reach for his phone as Jack went over to stand below the screen. After Dixon pushed buttons, a lady appeared on the screen saying hello.

“This is Detective Dixon,” he introduced himself. “I have a lead where your daughter might be. Could you provide me with a little more information?”

“Yes!” she replied open heartedly. “How can I help?”

“The suspect claims there was an RV parked in front of the store. Was there?”

She stared angrily while nodding.

“Do you know anything about it?” he asked.

“It broke down on the road near here.” She revealed. “The guys fixed it and one of them guided it back to Lakeview.”

“Thanks very much for that information,” Dixon told her. “I believe it’s going to help find your daughter.”

“I sure hope so,” she replied grimacing. “Good luck to you, and I don’t mean that scoundrel John Luck. He’s probably is just using that RV as a cover.”

Dixon waved goodbye.

“I think John needs to change his name,” he gestured while pushing more buttons on his phone.

“Hello Detective Dixon,” Bart Jones answered. “What now do you want?”

“Did you rent out an RV that had been broken down,” the detective asked.

“That’s affirmative,” Bart answered.

“Who did you rent it to?” Dixon asked.

“That’s confidential,” Bart replied. “You need a court order to get me to comply.”

“Thanks,” Dixon said waving goodbye. He then eyed Jack to tell him, “It adds up. Now, all you need to do is prove it, but it’s still a big mess.”

“It’d be nice to know who rented that RV,” Jack noted.

“I can legally inform you that one rented by Peter Moffert broke down there at Paisley.”

***

Nelly stroked the cue ball hard. It barely hit the twelve-ball cutting it nearly at a ninety degree angle. The cue ball continued on nearly at the same speed while the twelve-ball only trickled. The twelve-ball barely made it into the corner pocket, whereas the cue ball caromed off another ball into a side pocket.

“Nice shot,” Linda said with a fixed gaze. “You got robbed.”

“Yes, call the police,” Nelly joked. “Darn it, those cut shots are prone to scratch. I need to know where that cue ball is going before I shoot.”

“Didn’t John tell you how?” Linda asked.

“Yeah,’ but its difficult,” Nelly replied. “It’s a ninety degree reflection only without spin and the speed depends on what the angle is. Less than forty-five degrees the cue ball moves slower. More than forty five degrees the other ball moves slower.”

“Why didn’t you shoot another ball,” Linda asked.

“The Summer Lake tournament has different rules,” Nelly answered. “It’s a different game, as different eight-ball, nine-ball elements are added. Instead of pocketing most of the balls only to allow your opponent to win, you and your opponent pocket different balls in order. It’s either from one to eight or fifteen to eight.”

“Wouldn’t that take forever,” Linda asked.

“There’s a time limit,” Nelly noted. “Who’s ahead wins. If it is tied, whoever pockets their next ball wins.”

“I like nine-ball,” Linda said.

***

“I don’t believe John kidnapped that little girl,” Donald said sitting behind Jack in the small plane flying over the lake area of Summer Lake.

“I believe I can prove it,” Jack replied. “The police could be guilty of holding back information if they are in non-compliance with the quest of his lawyer. I have enough to bargain with.”

“Are you going to get him out on bail for him to play in that pool tournament?” Donald asked.

“I probably can and will bail him out,” Jack replied. “He will be wearing an ankle bracelet. It’s likely the police would rather

have him out in case he might lead them to the little girl, but it's not likely he'll be welcomed at the pool tournament."

"Nelly wants him to be in it," Donald noted.

"She now wants herself to be in it," Jack noted back.

"Well," Donald replied, "she should win it. She has days of experience playing with John."

"Yep," Jack replied eyeing the sky above him. "I have many years of experience, but they're not playing with John."

***

The Lake County sheriff eating a hamburger along with his fries and soda noticed the blue light on the screen. He pushed a button on his remote.

"Hello sheriff," a middle age man in suit and tie said. "I am Rudolf Hamilton. I need a search warrant and police assistance."

The sheriff pushed another button on the remote. Another middle age man in suit and tie appeared beside the other.

"Hello judge," the sheriff said. "The commander of NASA is requesting a search warrant."

"Continue," the judge said.

"Why do you need a search warrant?" the sheriff asked.

"I suspect Peter Moffert is up to something," Rudolf replied, "and I need to enter his residence."

"That's federally classified stuff," the judge noted. "I'm not authorized to give you permission."

"There is an Amber Alert for a missing child," Rudolf noted, "I received a tip that she could be at his house. I suspect Peter is somehow involved. We might find her there."

"How is that?" the judge asked.

"It's classified," Rudolf claimed, "but I have reliable sources providing me with credible information."

"What can you reveal to me?" the judge asked.

"The little girl isn't the only one missing," Rudolf revealed. There is a missing report from the Reno police regarding a man and his daughter. Bert Nelson and Peter Moffert both grew up in the Summer Lake area. We get the diamonds produced at the Summer Lake diamond battery grid. Peter has inherited part of it, and Bert was investigating some of Peter's activity. Bert is still missing. His daughter has John Luck as her lawyer and they both entered the pool tournament at Summer Lake. It's evident Peter is using them, and he could have used John Luck to abduct that child as a means of framing Bert."

"Permission for search warrant granted," the judge said.

"How are we supposed to help?" the sheriff asked.

"I'm here in Lakeview," Rudolf answered. "I need an escort to Peter's residence along with plenty of backup."

"You know," the sheriff replied, "we already have a suspect in custody."

“Of course I know,” Rudolf said. “It’s all over the news. You need to put an ankle bracelet on him and let him come with us.”

“Yeah,” the sheriff said, “his lawyer is also requesting that. It won’t look good. It needs to be kept secret, but for the child’s sake we’ve already agreed to do it.”

***

“Did you get enough practice?” Jack asked Nelly as they sat in his small plane.

“I made cookies for the tournament,” Nelly replied, “from something Peter snuck in. I didn’t get sick eating them, but you never know. I’m only going to eat them at Summer Lake.”

“You’re going to eat them,” Jack seemed to ask in awe.

“It’s time I did something right for a change,” she said. “If I eat them at the tournament and you or your wife keep a phone pointed at them, then when I pass out after eating one it’ll alert you with what’s going on. The proof will be inside me caught on camera.”

“That’s too much of a risk to take,” Jack advised.

The plane slowed to descend as it approached the RVs.

“Those two RVs look familiar,” she noted.

When the small plane hovered to land next to the RV John rented, she took notice of the license plate number of the other RV.

“That RV over there was rented by Peter Moffert,” she told Jack after they were out of the plane standing on the ground.

“It’s occupied by Dirk Banks.” Jack said showing her Dirk’s picture appearing on the screen of his phone. “Do you recognize him?”

“He’s the one who kidnapped me and tried to make me his prostitute,” she said loudly with wide eyes and mouth left open.

“He’s now staying in it,” Jack warned. “I warned you about that yesterday?”

“Yeah,” she replied, “but seeing him again just woke up my feelings I had locked up inside me.”

“Do you want to change course?” Jack asked.

“No,” she replied looking away, “it just reminds me of what I’m up against. It just alerts me to be more aware of it.”

“I have an idea,” Jack said.

“Like what?” she asked.

“You stay in my room at the resort while my wife and I stay here,” he offered.

“I’ll be okay,” she insisted. “I can handle it.”

“Actually,” Jack replied, “the RVs being the same indicates Dirk could be involved in another kidnapping. I being here could be better for John’s sake as well as that little girl’s.”

“Okay,” she said nodding, “I can’t argue with that.“

“It’s best he not see us together,” jack said watching the RV to be sure.

They got back into the plane. It rose to hover and to slowly fly up and land on the top of the building with pool rooms on its ground floor. When they got out of the plane, Jack reached back in for Nelly’s suitcase and carried it leading her to the room by way of an elevator reaching up above the roof.

Betty was watching television when Jack opened the door and stepped aside to follow Nelly on in.

“Hi!” Nelly said, “I’m Nelly Nelson.”

“Oh!” Betty said seeing Jack laying Nelly’s suitcase down on the floor, “you’re the prostitute.”

“No,” Jack frankly said, “she’s not. She’s going to stay here while we use her RV to explore more of the area.”

“You mean I get to do something too,” Betty said winking.

“Would you like to help me investigate?” Jack asked.

“I sure would,” she replied. “It’s about time.”

“She didn’t really mean what she said,” Jack faced Nelly to apologize. “She was just kidding.”

“I know,” Nelly said. “I do think she needs to get out more often for her to enjoy more of what life has to offer.”

***

The police van arrived at the house and parked beside the small blimp. John, Rudolf and a couple policemen got out of the van to walk up to the door. After no answer to Rudolf’s pushing the doorbell, he opened the door.

A policeman offered to go first down the stairs with gun in hand. John was next with the other policeman right behind him with gun in hand. Rudolf followed last.

The policemen pointed their guns at Dave and Bert sitting on the floor. John rushed over to the little girl lying on the floor.

“I want my mommy,” the little girl cried out.

“We’ve come to take you home,” John said consoling her. “You’ll be seeing her soon.”

“Why did you kidnap this little girl?” one policeman asked.

Bert and Dave both shrugged.

“Who are you?” the policeman asked more loudly.

They again shrugged.

“I believe they’ve been injected with memory poison, as I was,” John said. “I previously played a game of pool with the big guy near Las Vegas. I don’t know what he’s doing up here, but it looks like somebody set them up to be framed.”

“The other guy is Bert Nelson,” Rudolf said. “Although he is an old friend of Peter Moffert, he is also a journalist who’s been investigating him. I need to know what he found out. It’s highly classified and this can’t be leaked to the media.”

“The girl needs to be with her parents,” John said.

“I know,” Rudolf replied, “and I’m sure the police are going to take her straight home from here, but it’ll be better for us all if they claim they found her because of your confession.”

“Meanwhile,” John noted, “I’ll only be scrutinized by all the media to be revenged for something I didn’t do.”

“Good point,” Rudolf concurred, “they’ll get something out of you for sure. We can’t allow that.”

“What can I do, then?” John asked.

“Either go back to jail or stay here,” Rudolf quickly pointed out. “I need to know what Bert Nelson knows and I’m sure Peter wants to know what you know.”

Rudolf pointed at John’s ankle bracelet for John along with the police to take the hint.

“I’ll stay here,” John said after tightening his lips and eyeing Rudolf. “There’s plenty I need to know as well.”

Rudolf faced the police and waved his head as a policeman went over to pick up the little girl.

She gladly lifted her arms for him to pick her up. He carried her out following Rudolf and the other policeman while John sat only to wonder why he was to be alone with nothing else to do except to wait for Peter to arrive.

The wait was short. Part of the wall backed up as a sliding door. Peter rose from below standing in an elevator. He entered the room and raised his hand saying hello.

“You must be Peter,” John told him.

“Yes,” Peter confirmed. “Who are you? Why are you here?”

“I came to be in the pool tournament,” John explained. “I ate a cookie spiced with memory poison. I need to know what’s going on.”

“Do you know what this is?” Peter asked pointing the pen gun at John’s ankle bracelet and then crossing his lips with it.

When John nodded yes, Peter pointed at the elevator.

Peter followed John into the slim hallway. After It lowered and they walked away from it, it rose back up.

“Do you know much about physics?” Peter asked.

“I know the physics and geometry of shooting pool,” John answered. “Is there a pool table down here?”

“You must know,” Peter continued with his questioning,” a particle just stops to transfer momentum onto another particle of the same mass when it hits it straight on.”

John nodded.

“Do you know about entropy?” Peter asked.

“A little,” John replied shrugging.

“It’s a particular aspect of energy,” Peter explained. “It has to do with invisibility. Systems in a state of equilibrium are not able to internally change without outside influence. Two bricks of the same temperature do not exchange heat as work energy. It is stored energy instead of used energy.”

“I’m sure this place has lots of stored energy,” John replied. “What do you plan on doing with it?”

“Do you know how gravity works?” Peter asked.

“I know they’ve come up with this vacuum effect theory,” John replied, “but I’m not sure how it works.”

“Newton had trouble explaining how it could result from a distance,“ Peter explained. “How can a particle attract another particle changing its momentum without changing its own?”

John shrugged.

“It can’t,” Peter claimed. “The vacuum effect is more easily explainable.

“How can emitted energy for vacuum effect differ from the momentum of energy pushing in to replace it?” John asked back.

“It’s according to field theory,” Peter explained. “Different fields have different states of equilibrium. The energy emitted is moving through a field that’s relatively more invisible.”

I reckon I’m just here to learn physics,” John snarled.

“It’ll all come together when that tournament ends,” Peter calmly claimed.

“You’re just stalling,” John accused.

“What If I’m able to ignite a bomb big enough to destroy all of Earth,” Peter asked, “would you kill me to stop me?”

“Of course,” John answered.

“What if it’s already set to go off and I’m the only one who can stop it,” Peter asked, “what would you do?”

“I’d have to do something I never have,” John replied, “and I’d hate it, but I’d have to make it as painful as I could for you to suffer until you came to your senses.”

“Excellent answer,” Peter agreed, “but wouldn’t you want to discover how to stop it yourself?”

“Why do you want me to know?” John asked in turn.

“I just want more of a challenge,” he said. “It’s too easy.”

“Sorry,” John apologized, “this is not going anywhere.”

“Do you believe I can explain the cause of gravity and how mass is created?” Peter asked.

“I reckon you’re bored,” John replied. “There’s a whole lot that isn’t explainable, as how there can be existence itself along with knowing of it. How can there be a beginning and an ending of either time or space? How is substance and knowing possible at all?”

“You’re right,” Peter agreed, “but there is still a lot that can be explained, like the cause of gravity and how mass is created.”

“I reckon we’re going to be here awhile with nothing much to do,” John noted. “Okay, I’m curious, what do you know about it?”

“How did Einstein explain gravity? Peter asked.

“Spacetime curves somehow due to the presence of mass,” John answered, “but he didn’t explain how mass exists as such.”

“What’s the difference between a Pauli exclusive principle and Bose statistics?” Peter asked.

“It’s a difference between light and mass,” John answered. “Mass cannot occupy the same space, but light as wave action can superimpose.”

“Can you explain the Higgs Mechanism?” Peter asked.

“It’s how light somehow converts to mass,” John answered.

“Cannot mass convert back to light?” Peter asked.

“Of course it can,” John agreed.

“Okay,” Peter said, “suppose interaction of mass with itself results in its conversion back to light energy that is to gradually convert back to mass by interacting with other light. Because of them moving in opponent directions, opposite momenta cancel but also transform into a repulsive field of action needed for the vacuum effect. It’s a superimposing of invisible wave action that creates massive medium of repulsive action. Emitted radiation is gradually converted from opposite directions to the repulsive field to be recycled back as mass. Meanwhile, the vacuum from the emission of light spreads itself outward at light speed. It is as though particles within the invisible medium are hit with a no mass particle of negative momentum.”

“That makes sense,” John acknowledged.

“Do you know what the Hubble Constant is?” Peter asked.

“Yeah,” John said, “light from more distant stars is seen to be of less energy.”

“Not only that,” Peter added, “a speed change per distance in ratio to light speed equates as the ratio of gravity to electrical force.”

“That’s interesting,” John noted.

“Yeah,” Peter replied,” the theory proposed in the twenty first century was that of one of my ancestors, but his book was blocked by academic bias because of he being self educated and retired cannery worker, and a self published author who edited his own book. It was how he learned.”

“I’m sorry about that,” John apologized.

“You know,” Peter added, “there is a tremendous amount of energy potential in that medium. There is twice the action of twice as many waves of half as much wavelength. For an infinite number of waves of zero length there is infinite energy.”

“Yeah,” John agreed, “but the probability condition of the Heisenberg Uncertainty principle predicts a zero probability of an explosion of infinite magnitude being detected.”

“Yeah,” Peter agreed. “There would be no one left to detect it.”

***

Linda was in the bar room with her boyfriend Danny. They were watching the pool tournament on television.

"How'd he make that shot?" Danny asked.

"Do you want me to show you?" she asked back.

"Of course I do," he said. "I want to be good as you."

With cue stick in hand she led him over to the table where she placed the cue ball against another ball. With cue ball being behind the other ball, it was lined up for the other ball to hit the rail left of the side pocket.

"Where do I line up to pocket that ball in the side pocket," Linda asked.

After shrugging, he pointed his finger at the cue ball to hit it towards the left side of the side pocket.

"No," Linda said. "She lined up the cue stick for it to point slightly to the right of the side pocket. She stroked the cue stick with follow through on the cue ball. The other ball went straight into the side pocket.

"How'd you do that?" he asked.

"Didn't you see it?" she asked.

"Yeah!" he said after a pause. "You pushed them forward towards the left before they separated. That's good thinking."

"You can also stroke the cue stick for it to hit the cue ball at its right," she said, "and the spin will push the other ball left."

They sat back down to watch games playing. All four tables had been brought out of their closed rooms to be in the middle of the main room instead. They could pick which one to enlarge on the screen. After the half hour limit of the four games ended, four more games were to be played.

Nelly was to play on one of the tables. Her opponent being the favorite, as he had already won a previous tournament, she just focused on eating cookies anticipating that someone would be caught injecting memory poison into them.

Linda enlarged the part of the screen to focus where Nelly was waiting to play. She was eating a cookie. Her opponent was lagging for break. The cue bounced back from the other end of the table to about an eighth of an inch from the rail. Nelly went up to the table to stroke the cue ball. It came back and stopped at the rail. She had won the break.

"She sure likes those cookies," Danny noted.

"They're really good," Linda told him. "There's some in the kitchen. "Want some?"

"Yeah," he said. "When can I have them?"

"I'll go get them after the game," she said.

Nelly stood ready to break. The eight-ball was on the spot. The one-ball and the fifteen-ball were behind it. With eight-ball being neutral until being last to pocket, it was useable to pocket another ball.

After eating another cookie, Nelly stroked the cue ball. The eight-ball fell into a side pocket. Being neutral and legal to use, as for continuing on, it was spotted. The one-ball was close to a side pocket, but slightly blocked by the two-ball. Nelly lined up to stroke the cue stick slightly downward with follow through to hit the cue ball lightly with follow through at its deep lower right. The cue-ball-English was not only enough to pocket the one-ball; it also allowed the cue ball to bank back from the rail for better position to pocket the two-ball in the same pocket.

She used that perfect position to draw the cue ball back for an easy shot on the three-ball in a corner pocket. The four-ball was on the rail to the left of the corner pocket. There was also a high number ball against it to block it as a straight-in shot to the other corner pocket. Nelly stroked harder with low-left-English. The cue ball pocketed the three-ball caroming off it and hitting the high numbered ball.

The four-ball was closer to the corner pocket. The five, six and eight were not blocked. She only needed to stroke the cue ball by the right follow through with the right amount of force to maintain an easy run of the table. She succeeded in running the table from the break. She just defeated the favorite player to win the tournament. He was now out of it without having any chance at all to compete except for lagging for break.

"Oh!" Danny said. "She is really good."

"It must be those cookies," Linda said with a grin.

"Hurry," he said, "go get them."

***

The next day Nelly showed the win over the favorite to win the tournament was no fluke. She did not run the table, but she ate her cookies and shot with focus and excellent accuracy and control of the cue ball.

When she had one all rounds up to the last, her opponent turned out to be Dirk. She won the break, but there was no run of the table on the break. She had pocketed the eight-ball for it to be spouted, and she was then able to pocket the fifteen-ball, but not the fourteen-ball. It was blocked by Dirk's lower number balls.

Dirk nearly ran the table. He had only a six-ball, seven-ball and eight-ball left to pocket for the win. Two of her balls were blocking his seven-ball on an end rail. He played defense. He set the six-ball up by it just missing going into a corner pocket close to his seven-ball.

Nelly had an easy shot on her fourteen-ball, but one of her balls blocking Dirk's seven-ball was her thirteen-ball. By stroking the cue stick fast with full follow through on the lower left side of the cue ball, she pocketed the thirteen-ball and the cue ball spun off the rail with sufficient drawback to move to the other

end of the table and hit her thirteen-ball. It was a breakout, but in Dirk's favor. His seven-ball was blocking a straight in shot for her thirteen-ball in the same corner pocket. She had an idea. It was to draw back the cue ball. Its reverse spin put more forward spin on the thirteen-ball whereby the thirteen-ball followed the seven-ball into the corner pocket. She pocketed the rest of her balls and the eight-ball to win the tournament.

Dirk through his stick at her, just missing, and rushed out of the room.

***

The screen showed the Vice President at the White House. He stood up at the President's desk to begin his speech:

"I congratulate Nelly Nelson for winning a fine tournament at Summer Lake, Oregon. She just defeated Dirk Dixon, who is a very talented player. Unfortunately, however, I have something else to report that is much more important to all our lives.

"I was just informed of a very dangerous extortion attempt by a Peter Moffert. His ancestors helped develop what is now a giant-diamond-grid at Summer Lake fueled by Nuclear Waste. It is now big and powerful enough for its explosion being capable of destroying all of Earth.

"It cannot be stopped. He resides in a secret place with his hand on the trigger. He also helped develop a secret weapon in a laboratory in northern Nevada and has lots of followers who have been conned into protecting his operation at Summer Lake. We need to give him what he wants. As President, I will follow his orders in order to preserve our lives."

A regular newsman of the channel appeared on the screen in place of the Vice President:

"That is very terrible news. We do have further information from a journalist in Reno, Nevada. Here is Bert Nelson.

Bert Nelson suddenly appeared on the screens in front of a national audience:

"I have been investigating what Peter Moffert has been up to. He has a totally different version of what is happening. He is now ready to tell it."

The presence of Peter Moffert suddenly appeared in place of Bert Nelson:

"I do confess. I have lied. I do know of a secret weapon. It is of a poison bats became infected with near Summer Lake. I was working on a cure; someone working in the lab at that nuclear power plant in northern Nevada helped develop it as a weapon. My phone was somehow lost. I received a replacement. When I was accused of stealing and leaking classified information, I was suspicious of this fellow in the lab. I was able to switch phones. The one he had was my old one. It had recorded conversations

of him with the Vice President. It was him leaking that classified information.

"That guy wanted the same position I wanted on Mars. He wanted to be in charge of the colony. He got what he wanted; I got convicted. I contacted the Vice President and let him use me. I was a spy. I found out what was going on and I found a cure for that secret weapon, which has become a pen gun that injects a poison for memory loss. The cure and protection against it is now in cookies cooked by Nelly Nelson and is ready to be sold at the pool tournament.

"The President passed out and woke with anesthesia when he was at the White House. The Vice President was there. Proof will be found in the President's blood and with the event having been recorded.

"I have no intension of blowing up Earth. Diamonds should be sold to the government for the development of a grid equal to the one here at Summer Lake. Economic competition leads to division and war. There's no other reason both northern Nevada and eastern Oregon cannot be prosperous."

"He admitted it," the Vice President reappeared lashing out on the screen, "he admitted he spied on our government. That's criminal and punishable by law."

***

A new day with a brighter future had John and Nelly riding the horses to celebrate at the Christmas Valley Lodge. On their way they noticed a blimp following them. It finally passed them by. When they arrived at the resort, they could see the blimp on the ground in front of it.

"It must be another reporter," Nelly said as they unsaddled the horses to let them roam about.

"I wonder who they want to interview," John replied while walking beside Nelly into the Christmas Valley Inn.

"Need more salted cookies?" Kelly asked.

"You bet," Nelly replied.

"Linda and her boyfriend are in there practicing," Kelly said, "one of your opponents you defeated just showed up. He must want to get even."

Nelly shrugged as she led John into the bar room. She soon frowned seeing Dirk standing at the pool table beside Linda and Danny.

"You cheated," Dirk claimed, "taking medicine just to win a big prize. Those debits should be mine."

"I didn't know what Peter had in that salt," Nelly replied.

Dirk reached for a handgun and pointed it at Linda, saying," I'm taking these two with me. If the police even know about it, they're dead meat."

“What do you want?” Nelly suddenly asked with her hands pointing away from her chest.

“I want my money,” he replied.

“I don’t have it or my phone yet,” Nelly told him.

“Are you crazy?” John blurted out.

“Yeah,” Dirk replied, “and I have nothing to lose since I now have no life otherwise. . . Like I said, they’re dead meat even if you or anyone else just informs the police. If I get the money, I’ll release them somewhere when I get where the police won’t be able to find me.”

He waved and pointed the gun to where he wanted Nelly, John, and Kelly to step aside. When they obeyed, he pointed the gun at them and faced Linda and Danny yelling, “you two come with me. If you don’t, I’ll shoot all of you right here.”

Kelly stood in the doorway holding a bowl of cookies close to her chest and wide-eyed with her mouth wide open.

Dirk waved the gun towards the others. Kelly slowly walked over to stand beside them.

“We have to go,” Linda sadly told Danny. “He’s crazy. We’ll all die if we don’t.”

They led the way out of the resort.

“I have to go after him,” John said.

“How can you stop him from killing them?” Kelly cried out.

“The police already know,” John revealed. “I’m still wearing an ankle bracelet.”

“I sure hope they don’t do something stupid,” Kelly blurted out.

John rushed to the front door to see Dirk and his prisoners get into the blimp. When it floated up, another blimp landed in its place. Peter got out of it and started walking toward John.

“Tour friend Dirk Banks lost it,” John said.

“He has for awhile,” Peter replied. “What’s he up to now?”

“He’s taken two children hostage for Nelly Nelson’s money,” John informed him. “He threatened to kill them if he knows the police know. They know.”

Peter rushed back into his blimp. It rose to hover for about a minute. It came back down and Peter came back out of it.

“He’s going to the Lost Forest to hide out,” Peter said. “We could sneak over there on horseback.”

John nodded. They went to find the horses. When arriving at the trees, they got off the horses to go in slowly on foot. They were attempting to remain unnoticed.

The Lost Forest consisting mostly of large ponderosa pine and was plenty visible within. They spotted the blimp. As Peter circled around to approach from another direction, John snuck up slowly low to the ground and remaining as much as he could behind one tree after another.

Dirk was sitting with gun in hand and facing the children. Peter circled around for his arriving at John's backside of slowly crawling on the ground. Peter crawled up to be beside John. He tapped John's shoulder, pointed at his own mouth, and pointed at Dirk.

John nodded and then crawled to his left to hide behind a tree.

Peter got up on his feet and started walking towards Dirk, Linda and Danny faced him. Dirk turned around and stood up.

"What are you doing here you trader?" he asked.

"John was wearing an ankle bracelet," Peter replied while walking past Dirk to stand in front of Linda. "You told the police. It's just one more of your blunders."

"I should shoot you dead right now," Dirk said pointing the gun at Peter's chest."

"You need me," Peter said as John was sneaking up on Dirk.

"Why do I need a damn trader," Dirk replied. "You framed the Vice President."

"I have a secret place," Peter informed. "You can hide out there. No one will ever find you."

"There's no way I'll ever trust you again," Dirk said as John rushed up to Dirk's backside with enough force to push forward and slamming his arms around Dirk with enough force to lower the gun hand and trip Dirk to the ground. Peter pulled out a pen gun from his pocket, quickly came over and squirted Dirk in the head."

"Is that it?" John asked when Dirk passed out.

"It is for now," Peter replied. "He'll now be cured and will have to help cure others of their drug addictions."

"I'm sure glad I didn't have to kill him," John replied with a sigh of relied.

"You would've just put him out of his misery," Peter noted.

***

"It's nice of you to give me a ride in the RV," Nelly said.

"You now have a lot of debits," John noted. "What are you going to do with them?"

"There's an antique car at Lakeview," she recalled. "I know someone special who deserves it."

"You also deserve those debits," John advised. "You earned them."

"So does my teacher, even more," she acknowledged. "Do you now have a better plan for the future.

"Well," he said, "I wanted to be free to choose. For it to be successful, it needs commitment, as to surrender your freedom. I'm ready to commit."

"What are you going to commit to," she asked.

“I sure would like to commit to someone as nice as you If I only could,” he replied, “and I sue would like to have you?”

“You already do,” she said slightly tilting her head up with a smile. “What’s your plan?”

“Peter wants me to represent my dad’s law firm,” John said. “It’ll be for his development of land near the nuclear facility in northern Nevada. He also needs a nutritionist.”

“Sounds like a good plan,” she agreed.

They leaned towards each other and kissed.